

Ataturk or Chamberlain?

By Martin Sherman

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(June 17) - Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's declaration of a unilateral cease-fire underscores what has become increasingly apparent since his election victory: He has totally misconstrued the overwhelming mandate bestowed on him by the public.

Sharon swept into power by an unprecedented margin on the basis of his promise to restore the nation's sense of security, so severely eroded under the Barak administration. He defeated his opponent not because the public believed that he had somehow conceived an alternate peace proposal of such ingenuity and originality that it had eluded Barak, Beilin and Ben-Ami. He was not elected to press on with some variant of his predecessor's policy, albeit in a more demanding and assertive format.

That policy, in any form, was resoundingly repudiated at the ballot box. The mandate given Sharon and his government was unmistakable: to put an end to Palestinian violence against Israeli citizens - no matter on which side of the Green Line they happened to reside.

However, to date there have been few signs of fulfillment of this election promise or the proper discharge of the mandate received as a result of it.

The new government has been in power for well over three months, but there is little sign of any tangible improvement in the level of security for the man in the street. In fact, there are quite definite signs that it has deteriorated. The reason for this unfortunate state of affairs is unequivocally clear: the lack of political courage and commitment on the part of the present government to carry out its democratic duty to the voters. It appears that Sharon lacks the nerve, or the ability, to take the crucial step needed to enable him to fulfill his electoral pledge to the nation. To do this, he must break out of the intellectual straitjacket that the hitherto-prevailing norms regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict impose on Israeli policy and policy-makers.

The policy of restraint implemented by Sharon has achieved only one result. It has hardened Palestinian will, and increased Palestinian determination and daring. After months of low-intensity conflict, the Palestinian readiness to fight has passed the point of no return. The enmity toward Israel has reached such proportions that "surgical" strikes against specific targets - human or otherwise - can no longer be effective, whether they are carried out by bullets from a sniper's rifle, shells from a tank cannon, rockets from an assault helicopter, or laser-guided bombs from a warplane. The Palestinian's accumulated bitterness and hate is so intense that it is no longer possible to assuage their anger or erode their resolve to continue the violence

against Israel. And if it is no longer feasible to diminish the Palestinians' will to wage war, Israel must neutralize their ability to do so.

For these reasons, the policy of hitting selected targets has exhausted itself. The time has come to adopt a policy of non-selective coercion, in order to overwhelm the martial capabilities of the Palestinians and forcibly subdue any signs of resistance to Israeli authority. In other words, the Palestinians must be vanquished - militarily, politically and nationally.

Thus, two things are required: a) a massive invasion of the Palestinian-administered territories by regular IDF forces, under artillery and air cover if necessary, with the aim of disarming, disbanding, and deporting the Palestinian military and political apparatus established subsequent to the Oslo Accords; and b) a radical redefinition of the fundamental axioms regarding the political realities that will prevail after the violence subsides - in particular, the axiom of the inevitability of some Arab-administered political entity west of the Jordan River.

Sharon's real challenge as the leader of the Jewish nation lie in the latter sphere. It is a challenge that demands not only a refurbishing of Israel's public-relations efforts and a dramatic revision of the country's diplomatic service, including its organizational structure, the substantive content of the concepts it conveys, and the mode of their conveyance. It is challenge that calls for the comprehensive rehabilitation - or more precisely, the reinvention - of the idea, the conceptual rationale, and the moral justification of Jewish nationalism. This is a daunting task, but it is the only way in which Israel can generate for itself the freedom of action it requires to implement measures crucial to its national security and to the personal safety of its citizens.

Sharon now faces a decision of truly historic proportions. He can either choose to play the role of a Jewish Chamberlain, or of a Hebrew Ataturk. The choice is clear: either the slippery slide down the ignominious road of appeasement, or the assertive rebirth of the nationalism of a proud and ancient people.

Sharon's conduct hitherto leaves little room for optimism.

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