

The pain of disengagement

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By Robbie Friedmann

Much ink has been devoted to the disengagement and Fox News even carried it live without commercial interruptions. International media coverage treated this as the "first" evacuation, unknowingly (or purposefully) ignoring the painful evacuation of Yamit (and elsewhere in the Sinai) in 1982. The current disengagement is not only painful to those evacuated and to those evacuating, but it has interjected dangerous narratives not widely seen in Israel prior to 2005. The combined police and military forces have shown unprecedented restraint and carried out their mission far better and quicker than expected.

Historians and politicians will argue the wisdom of the "unilateral" disengagement. Some argue that terrorism is a constant and hence it is better to realign in more defensible borders. If that is the case one wonders why policy makers did not think about that prior to settling Jews in those areas. Others argue that Israel cannot retain its democratic and Jewish character by controlling close to 2 million Arabs in Gaza. If that is the case what will happen in Israel 30-40 years from now when the current 20% Arab minority will become 50% of the population? One element remains clear: The Arabs see the disengagement as their victory and Abu Mazen already declared that his goal is Jerusalem. In that sense the withdrawal is nothing short of rewarding terrorism and hence signifies (and there is widespread agreement on that) the expected continued onslaught of terror against Israel.

Israeli existence depends on how well it can defend itself from external security threats. Internally four points of friction can make or break Israeli society: 1) the gap between rich and poor, 2) the ethnic tension between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, 3) the tension between Israeli Arabs and Jews, and most important, 4) the synagogue-state relations and particularly the friction between orthodox and secular Jews. The disengagement last week illustrated how serious this friction is and not only because numerous teenagers (who were not even residents of Gush Katif) defied the evacuation order and resisted passively, but resorted to violent behavior that endangered life and hurt dozens of security personnel.

Even if the disengagement is rooted in an erroneous decision, once it was approved by the Government, the Knesset, Supreme Court, the Attorney General and then withstood 3 no-confidence motions, it becomes the law of the land. If that law is not respected, a democracy has little chance to survive. Common to both violent and non-violent resistance was the invoking of holocaust symbolism and of communal and religious narratives that Israel will have to grapple with for many years to overcome the damaging rifts that emerged to the surface.

The slogan that a "Jew does not evict a Jew" challenges the state's authority and treats Jews as if they live in a community and not in a country of our own. Jews obey the laws of the land when they live under gentile rule but not when we have our own country? The call to officers to disobey orders (and listen to Rabbis' instructions) rekindles false messianic movements that historically were fraught with danger and it challenges the country's lawful stature. In the one

and only Jewish state a Jewish officer will arrest a Jewish criminal and a Jewish state can make decisions on eminent domain. Sadly it was a Jew (Amir) who murdered a Jew (Rabin) and someone will find the sophistry to explain why that needn't be condemned.

Those mimicking ghetto Jews raising their hands in "surrender," those protesting "deportations" and those shouting at soldiers that they are "Nazis," committed a grave moral sin against their very own brothers. Is the disengagement painful? Of course. Should it be protested? Of course. But those evacuated are not "surrendering" to a brute force, they are not being transported to gas chambers, and Israeli security officers (police and military) are not Nazis. This dangerous rhetoric has got to stop and means have to be found for legitimate and legal protest.

Israel is to face even bigger challenges than the disengagement. For modern Zionism the challenge of establishing Israel was accomplished. The challenge of making it work for ALL Jews (and the non-Jewish minority) is the one to overcome. We have seen "Reality TV" this week; now a great many new scripts and new dialogues have to be written so we can learn to live despite our differences. The first script that should be adopted should be taken directly from our rich Biblical and Talmudic heritage: Obey the law. That is the biggest equalizer.