

## The Grand-Master and His Dangerous Game

by

Dan Ben-David

---

It may never be possible to substantiate that gut feeling, but it is nearly impossible to shake it. We appear to taking part in a huge chess match being played by a grand-master so sophisticated that he doesn't even have to move each of the pieces by himself. In theory, everyone knows what is happening, everyone hollers in turn, everyone behaves as though only on behalf of themselves – and everything falls into place as though according to a master plan that only Arik could have woven. Everyone is seemingly a winner. Almost.

Anyone with eyes in his head could see for a long time that there was never any chance that 8,000 settlers could permanently remain among 1.3 million Arabs in Gaza. Even on the right-hand side of the political map there are enough people who know, deep in their hearts, that the continuation of this country as both Jewish and democratic requires the removal of all Israeli citizens from Gaza.

Even security considerations do not mandate leaving them there, but just the opposite. No one has any illusions that, in recognition of our departure, the Palestinians will let doves fly instead of mortar shells and Kassam rockets. Nonetheless, long gone are the pre-State days in which civilian settlements provided the country's only physical barrier in lieu of a large and powerful military force. Not only do the civilian settlements in Gaza not provide security, they dilute the country's existing defensive shield by siphoning off thousands of soldiers toward the dangerous – and pointless – protection of civilians who insist on being the next-door neighbors to Hamas, Jihad and the Al-Aksa Martyr's Brigades.

These are the facts. Everything else is just spin and tactics, ostensibly independent, utilized by the opposing sides of this national chess match. The Left competes with itself, not to mention with the Right, on who will give the evacuees more. Special thanks are due former finance minister Baiga Shohat from the Labor party for his contribution in the Knesset's finance committee toward the channeling of additional, unbudgeted, hundreds of millions of shekels from the incomes of taxpayers straight into the pockets of the evacuees.

According to a report prepared by a team headed by Professor Dani Tsiddon that included representatives from all of the relevant government bodies, the civilian portion of the evacuation cost alone reached NIS 4.5 billion. This amount was soon deemed insufficient for the 2,000 households, and the cabinet quickly voted to sweeten the compensation package further by handing the settlers scarce national beachfront parkland in Nitzanim at an additional cost estimated at NIS 1 billion. In other words, the civilian price tag alone that we will be paying averages NIS 2.75 million per family (\$611,000 to the uninitiated reader).

In the case of households headed by wage earners, the average compensation equals NIS 1.75 million (including Nitzanim). This, according to Tsiddon, is four times the value of property owned by similar wage-earner households within Israel's 1967 borders. The size of the windfall bestowed upon the evacuees interests our grand-master about as much as the depletion of rain-forests in Brazil, when compared to his intent on setting such an exorbitant price that will make all future leaders reticent of even contemplating any further evacuation of significant magnitude. So if elected officials from the Left want to take part in supplying the goodies to today's evacuees, all the better.

The murky orange wave that blockades roads and ATMs and threatens to destroy parts of the country's infrastructure is also faithfully playing out its designated role. The accurate assertion that initial parts of the decision-making process regarding the disengagement stink to high heaven makes it convenient for everyone to ignore (1) the facts described above, and (2)

that in the final analysis, the disengagement was legitimately approved by a large majority of Knesset members in the country's only sovereign parliament.

Ariel Sharon personally lit the fuse of resistance with his own actions – but how convenient it is (for someone intent on spending in the near future whatever it takes to build and populate the areas remaining in our hands) to show the rest of the world that all hell breaks loose when we have to evacuate only 3% of the entire settler population. It is no coincidence that the roads to Gaza and northern Samaria are still wide open to allow the influx of additional protestors.

In this perverse chess match, the real goal is obviously not Gaza. The higher the emotional and monetary toll, the better. The problem is that not all of the human pawns comprehend what the main objective really is – and as time passes, there are increasing signs that the disengagement may extract a human toll as well.

Over the past few decades, our grand-master has accumulated considerable experience in setting fires that we have repeatedly had to pay a huge price to put out. But this time he has cooked up a potentially dreadful conflagration that will make the settler slogan “Jews do not expel Jews” pale in comparison to what some Jews may do to other Jews – namely, to our children fulfilling their compulsory military duty – in the coming months.

The outcome may turn into a vicious boomerang that has the potential of turning into a public checkmate for the entire settler movement beyond the Green Line. Hence, it would be a good idea for those who raise and fertilize the Right's proliferating “wild weeds” (as they are glibly referred to in Hebrew, after they murder Palestinians, left-wing protestors and one duly-elected prime minister) to realize this in advance – before their weeds catch fire and leave behind only scorched earth.