

# Dogs of War

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Such terrifying dogs have not been seen since the Hound of the Baskervilles.

They have been bred by an ardent admirer of the late “Rabbi” Meir Kahane, who was branded by the Israeli Supreme Court as a fascist. Their task is to protect the settlements and attack Palestinians. They are settler-dogs, or, rather, dog-settlers.

All our TV stations have reported on them at length and lauded their effectiveness and ardor.

All in preparation for “September”.

SEPTEMBER IS not just the name of a month, the seventh in the old Roman calendar. It is the symbol of a terrible danger, an unspeakable existential menace.

In the next few weeks, the Palestinians will ask the UN to recognize the State of Palestine. They have already mustered a large majority in the General Assembly. After that, according to the official assessment of our army, all hell will break loose. Multitudes of Palestinians will rise, attack the “Separation” Wall, storm the settlements, confront the army, create chaos.

“The Palestinian Authority is planning a bloodbath,” Avigdor Lieberman cheerfully asserted. And when Lieberman predicts violence, it would be unwise to ignore him.

For months now, our army has been preparing for just such an eventuality. This week it announced that it is training the settlers, too, and telling them exactly when they are allowed to shoot to kill. Thus it confirms what we all know: that there is no clear distinction between the army and the settlers – many settlers are officers in the army, and many officers live in settlements. “The army defends all Israelis, wherever they are,” is the official line.

One of the scenarios the army is preparing for, it was stated, is for Palestinians shooting at soldiers and settlers “from inside the mass demonstrations”. That is an ominous statement. I have been at hundreds of demonstrations and never witnessed anyone shooting “from inside the demonstration”. Such a person would have to be insanely irresponsible, since he would expose all the people around him to deadly retaliation. But it is a handy pretext for shooting at non-violent protesters.

It sounds so ominous, because it has happened already in the past. After the first intifada, which was considered a Palestinian success story (and brought about the Oslo agreement), our army diligently prepared for the second one. The chosen instruments were sharpshooters.

The second (“al-Aqsa”) intifada started after the breakdown of the 2000 Camp David conference and Ariel Sharon’s deliberately provocative “visit” to the Temple Mount. The Palestinians held non-violent mass demonstrations. The army responded with selective killings. A sharpshooter accompanied by an officer would take position in the path of the protest, and the officer would point out selected targets – protesters who looked like “ringleaders”. They were killed.

This was highly effective. Soon the non-violent demonstrations ceased and were replaced by very violent (“terrorist”) actions. With those the army was back on familiar ground.

All in all, during the second intifada 4546 Palestinians were killed, of whom 882 were children, as against 1044 Israelis, 716 of them civilians, including 124 children.

I am afraid that the preparations for the third intifada, which is anticipated to start next month, are proceeding on the same lines. But the circumstances would be quite different. After the events in Egypt and Syria, Palestinian protesters may react differently this time, and the “bloodbath” may be much more severe. So will international and Arab reactions. I imagine posters condemning Binyamin al-Assad and Bashar Netanyahu.

But most Israelis are not worried. They believe that the entire scenario has been invented by Netanyahu as a trick to end the huge social protest movement that is rocking Israel. “The young protesters demand Social Justice and a Welfare State, like children demanding ice cream while disaster is lurking around the corner,” as one of the colonels (ret.) put it.

THE SETTLERS and their dogs loom large in the upcoming scenarios.

That is quite logical, since the settlers now play a pivotal role in the conflict. It is they who prevent any peace agreement, or even meaningful peace negotiations.

It is quite simple: any peace between Israel and the Palestinian people will necessarily be based on ceding the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip to the future State of Palestine. A world-wide consensus on this is now in place. The only question is where exactly the border will run, since there is also a consensus about minor mutually agreed swaps of territory.

This means that peace would necessarily entail the removal of a large number of settlements and the evacuation of the settlers throughout the West Bank.

The Settlers and their allies dominate the present Israeli government coalition. They object to giving up even one square inch of occupied territory of the country God has promised us. (Even settlers who do not believe in God do believe that God has promised us the land.) Because of this, there are no peace negotiations, no freeze on building activities in the settlements, no move of any kind towards peace.

The settlers went to their locations in the West Bank specifically for this purpose: to create “facts on the ground” that would prevent any possibility of the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. Therefore it is quite immaterial whether it is the settlers who prevent the return of the occupied territories for peace, or whether the government uses the settlers for this purpose. It comes to the same: the settlers block any peace effort.

As the Americans would put it: It’s the settlers, stupid.

SOME NICE Israelis are indeed playing stupid, or really are.

It is now the fashion in certain circles to “embrace” the settlers in the name of national unity. Jews should not quarrel among themselves, they say, drawing on ancient Ghetto wisdom. Settlers are people like us.

Prominent among those who say so is Shelly Yachimovitch, a member of the Knesset and one of six candidates for the chair(wo)manship of the moribund Labor Party. For years she has done a good job as an advocate of social justice, never wasting a word on peace, occupation, settlements, Palestine and such trifles. Now, as part of her campaign, she has come all out for loving the settlers. As she put it: “I certainly do not see the settlement enterprise as a sin and crime. At the time, it was completely consensual. It was the Labor Party which promoted the settlement in the territories. That is a fact, a historical fact.”

Some believe that Yachimovitch is only pretending to feel this way, in order to garner mainstream votes for a takeover of the party, and that she intends to merge what remains of the party with Kadima, where she would try to displace Tzipi Livni and perhaps even become Prime Minister.

Perhaps. But I have a lurking suspicion that she really believes what she is saying – and that is an awful thing to say about any politician, male or female, of course.

**BUT SERIOUSLY**, there is no way to embrace the settlers and fight for social justice at the same time. It just can’t be done, even though some of the leaders of the social protest movement advocate this on tactical grounds.

There can be no Israeli welfare state while the war goes on. The border incidents of the last two weeks show how easy it is to divert public opinion and silence the protests when the banner of security is unfurled. And how easy it is for the government to prolong any incident.

Sowing the fear of “September” is yet another example.

But the reasons for the impossibility of separating social justice from security go deeper. Serious social reforms need

money, lots of money. Even after reforming the tax system – more “progressive” direct taxes, less “regressive” indirect taxes – and breaking the cartels of the “tycoons”, tens of billion of dollars will be needed to rescue our schools, our hospitals and our social services.

These billions can only come from the military budget and the settlements. Huge sums are invested in the settlements – not just in heavily subsidized housing for the settlers, government salaries for many settlers (a far higher percentage than in the general population), but also for the infrastructure (roads, electricity and water supply etc.) and the large number of troops needed to defend them. The preparations for “September” show again how much this costs.

**BUT EVEN** this is not the full story. Beyond all these facts there is the main reason for the deformation of Israel: the conflict itself.

Because of the conflict, we are obliged to keep a huge military establishment. We pay for the armed forces, per capita, far more than the citizens of any Western country. Israel, a country of a mere 7.5 million people, maintains the fourth or fifth largest military establishment in the world. US military aid pays for only a small part of this.

Therefore, putting an end to the war is a necessary precondition for any real effort to turn Israel into a “Scandinavian” welfare state, with a maximum of social justice. The conflict is not just one item among many that must be considered. It is the main item.

You can love the settlers or hate them, oppose them or embrace them as much as you like – the fact remains that the settlements are by far the main obstacle to peace and the welfare state. Not just because of their cost, not just because of the pogroms their inhabitants carry out from time to time, not just because of the way they dominate the political system. But because of their very existence.

Unlike the hound of the Baskervilles, the dogs of the settlements are barking loudly. It is the sound of war.