



A SECRET

Did this meeting happen?

BY IRVIN BAXTER JR.

Possibly held in an undisclosed location...

SHARON: George, I want to bring peace to the Middle East. I believe I am the only Israeli leader that can do it. But I need your help.

BUSH: Well, Arik, what do you have in

mind? Do you have a plan? Actually, that's a foolish question. You always have a plan. So... tell me about it.

SHARON: You know that Israel does not have a peace partner. Even Abbas keeps talking about returning four million Palestinian refugees to Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem. We know that would spell the end of the Jewish state, and they know that. Still they blindly repeat their impossible demands. The simple fact is - we don't have a partner

with whom we can make peace.

BUSH: I see your point, Arik, but your people won't be able to resist the continual terrorist attacks and suicide bombings forever. If there is no hope at the end of the tunnel, even the endurance of the Israeli people will begin to deteriorate. So, what's the alternative?

SHARON: George, I've been considering every possibility. First - what is the best deal Israel can hope to get? Next - what could the

international community swallow, and what will the U.S. support? If we can determine these things, then I think Israel can unilaterally move toward that solution, with or without Palestinian participation.

BUSH: I understand what you are saying. Since the U.S. is the world's only superpower and since we have the veto on the UN Security Council, we could take the bull by the horns and solve this problem once and for all—with or without the Palestinians. The key to winning the support of the international community is that the deal will have to be as fair as possible for both sides. So, how do we do it?

SHARON: There are four issues that are the main sticking points: One—the right of return for Palestinian refugees, Two—the final borders between us and the Palestinians, Three—the status of Jerusalem, and, Four—control of the Temple Mount.

If you and I can agree on a solution to these four things and then sell that solution to the international community, we can implement it—whether the Palestinians buy into it or not. They will have to go along to some degree since they can't exist without the support of the international community.

BUSH: I see where you're going, but this is a tall order.

SHARON: As you can see, it's really pretty simple. It's just not easy. If it were easy, it would have been done a long time ago. George, I think it all boils down to whether or not you and I have the guts to do it!

BUSH: I've been accused of a lot of things, but a lack of backbone has never been one of them. How do we proceed?

SHARON: The first thing we have

to the Palestinian controlled territory—not to Israel.

BUSH: It's a no-brainer. Any sensible person would understand the necessity of this position. I'm with you completely on this issue.

SHARON: Good. I believe the second issue is pretty clear as well.

2. THE FINAL BORDERS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS

SHARON: You know, George, it's going to be impossible for us to move the inhabitants of such major settlements as Ma'aleh Adumim, Har Homa and the Gush Etzion bloc. All of them are relatively close to Jerusalem. And let me remind you, no one was living on those lands when we captured that territory in the 1967 War. So, we didn't take anyone's home.

BUSH: Arik, you know that this is going to be a major problem with the Palestinians. Furthermore, UN Resolutions 242 & 338 call for Israel to trade land for peace. Consequently, most of the international community contends that it is illegal for Israel to keep one inch of the territory captured in the Six Days War.

SHARON: Neither of those resolutions say that we have to give back all of the land. They simply say that we should trade land for peace. If you'll remember George, we negotiated hard with the U.S. back then because we had no intentions of surrendering Jerusalem once it was in our hands.

BUSH: Of course, I remember. I'm simply saying that we're going to have a fight on our hands.

SHARON: I've got an idea that may help on this point. Why don't you give me a private letter acknowledging that it will not be possible for Israel to



▲ Map of Israel showing Gaza and West Bank

PLAN

to do is determine an acceptable solution for each of the four main issues. Let's take them one at a time.

1. THE RIGHT OF RETURN FOR PALESTINIAN REFUGEES TO ISRAEL PROPER

SHARON: Everybody knows that Israel cannot accept Palestinians back within her borders. It would be national suicide. However, we have no objection to refugees returning to the newly created Palestinian state. So, we will support the right of return, but only

withdraw from the areas where heavy Jewish populations exist? Then I will leak the letter to the press. Of course, the Palestinians will scream to high heaven at first, but, over time, they'll get use to the idea.

BUSH: You're asking me to stick my neck out pretty far, Arik.

SHARON: Do you realize what you're asking me to do? You're asking me to withdraw from land that was specifically promised to Israel by God through our father Abraham. The opposition of the religious faction in Is-

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- ⊗ The final borders between Israel and the Palestinians.
- ⊗ The status of Jerusalem.
- ⊗ Control of the Temple Mount.

rael is going to be vicious, and could even become violent. Remember, they killed Rabin when he moved to withdraw from part of the biblical Promised Land.

BUSH: You're right. You could be in real danger. I guess a letter is the least that I can do.

SHARON: While you're writing it, why don't you just include the first point concerning the refugees as well? When the Palestinians and the world community see that we have the backing of the world's only super power on these issues, they will realize that confrontation is futile.

BUSH: Okay, you can count on me. You'll receive your letter soon.

3. THE STATUS OF JERUSALEM

BUSH: Well Arik, that takes care of the easy issues. Now, what are we going to do about Jerusalem?

SHARON: George, no one wants to face the truth on this issue, and there are some things we just can't say publicly. But you know and I know that Jerusalem is not mentioned one time in the Koran. It's mentioned 700 times in our Jewish Bible.

BUSH: Really! I guess I didn't realize that.

than the Palestinians on this issue. You know that the United Nations still claims authority over Jerusalem. That's the reason they continue to refuse recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

SHARON: Nobody knows that better than we do! We are the only nation on earth that the UN refuses to recognize its capital. That's the reason all the nations of the world insist on locating their embassies to Israel in Tel Aviv, even though our seat of government is in Jerusalem. By the way George, didn't you promise to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem the first day of your inauguration?

BUSH: Yes Arik. I did that. But do you realize how much trouble I would cause if I made that move right now? The timing has just not been right, but I'm looking forward to the time when I can do that.

So how do we deal with Jerusalem?

SHARON: The first step of the "Roadmap for Peace" requires the Palestinians to disarm and dismantle all terrorist entities such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. Mahmoud Abbas is not going to do that. He can't do it without triggering a civil war. Furthermore, we don't believe he really wants to do

lateralism. Since we don't have a peace partner who can deliver on agreements that he makes, we will simply move toward a fair solution, implementing it unilaterally. As long as we have your support and hopefully the support of the international community, the Palestinians will have no choice but to go along.

BUSH: But Arik, you know the terrorist attacks will continue. How are you going to deal with that?

SHARON: We plan to build a security wall that will act as a barrier between the Palestinians and Israel. History has shown that we cannot co-exist with the Palestinians. We've been fighting with these people for the last 3,500 years.

BUSH: You intend to build a wall the entire length of Israel between you and the Palestinians?

SHARON: Absolutely. Someone has to stop the violence. I have concluded that this is the only way. It has been proven that we cannot agree on a solution to our conflict. Israel and the Palestinians are like a couple locked into an ill-fated marriage. We simply have irreconcilable differences. So we are going to divorce them, whether they want it

AP Photo/Shay Shmueli, Pool



▶ Israeli troops carry a Jewish settler out of the synagogue in the Gaza Strip settlement of Morag, Wednesday Aug. 17, 2005. Thousands of Israeli troops dragged sobbing Jewish settlers out of homes, synagogues and even a nursery school Wednesday and hauled them onto buses in a massive evacuation, fulfilling Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's promise to **withdraw from the Gaza Strip** after a 38-year occupation.

SHARON: Yes, and furthermore, the Arabs only want Jerusalem because they know that it means so much to us. Jerusalem has always been our capital, and it contains our number one holy site. You should have seen Jerusalem before Jews started going back there at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Arab population in Jerusalem was only 20,000 at that time.

George, the Muslims have their number one holy site in Mecca, and they have their number two holy site in Medina. They only claim Jerusalem as their number three holy site. Yet, we Jews can't even pray at our number one holy site, the place of our First and Second Temples, without being arrested.

BUSH: We've got problems with more

it. As long as the terrorist organizations exist, he can play the violence card, but blame it on somebody else.

We made it crystal clear, when we accepted the Roadmap, that we would not fulfill step two of the agreement unless the Palestinians took step one. Furthermore, we will not surrender control of Jerusalem under any condition. This has been our capital since the days of King David, and it has never been the capital of the Palestinians.

BUSH: But do you plan to live in a perpetual state of war just because the Palestinians refuse to disarm and dismantle the terrorist organizations? Can Israel hold up under those circumstances?

SHARON: The answer again will be uni-

or not. Then we are going to put a restraining order against them so that they can't hurt us any more.

BUSH: So that's what the planned security wall is all about?

SHARON: Exactly. We have to protect our people. We will build the wall, putting the Palestinians on one side and Israelis on the other.

BUSH: Do you think we can get the international community to accept this solution?

SHARON: I'm not sure. However, even if they don't, the United States can run interference for us. As long as you have the veto at the UN and as long as the U.S. is the world's most powerful military force, there won't be anything the world community can do about it.

BUSH: There will be many challenges to doing what you are suggesting. However, nobody else even has a plan. You have really thought all this out, haven't you Arik?

SHARON: Mr. President, I have no choice. My future existence and that of my nation depend upon it.

4. CONTROL OF THE TEMPLE MOUNT

BUSH: Do you realize the New Testament prophesies that the apocalyptic Battle of Armageddon will be fought over the Temple Mount?

SHARON: That's not just in the New Testament. It's in the Old Testament as well. What's your point?

BUSH: I'm simply saying that we had better be careful what we do on this issue. We certainly don't want to go down in history as the men who created the conditions that plunged the world into Armageddon. Do you know what I'm saying?

SHARON: When you're the prime minister of Israel, everything you do has the potential of throwing the world into Armageddon. I guess it just goes with the territory.

BUSH: So what are we going to do with the thirty-five acres that someday will blow up the world?

that the true site of the First and Second Temples was north of the Dome of the Rock.

BUSH: Are you telling me that Israel could build her Third Temple to the north of the Dome without disturbing the Muslim holy places?

SHARON: Exactly! We could build our temple, sharing the Temple Mount with the Muslims. If you will remember, President Clinton proposed the sharing of the Temple Mount during the Camp David negotiations in 2000.

BUSH: But wouldn't this create a sure flashpoint for future problems? Could Jews and Arabs actually share the same thirty-five acres without killing each other?

SHARON: I don't agree with Ehud Barak on very many things, but he did offer an interesting suggestion when this was being discussed back at Camp David. He purposed that the Temple Mount be placed under the authority of a United Nations peacekeeping force.

BUSH: Arik, this just might work! Then the newly built Jewish temple could indeed become a house of prayer for all nations. I like it!

SHARON: It will be vitally important that we don't disclose our plan. If the Arabs or the international community realize what we intend to do, they will move heaven and earth to block it.

Israel will grab the initiative. I intend to unilaterally withdraw our citizens from the Gaza Strip. Everyone knows that Israelis will not remain in Gaza once a final peace agreement is reached. Consequently, why not deal with it sooner, rather than later? This will remove one of the main sources of continuing friction between Palestinians and Israelis. It will also take stress off of the Israeli Army. Not having to protect 8,000 Jewish settlers living in the midst of 1.3 million Palestinians will be a tremendous relief for us.

This unilateral withdrawal will gain the applause of the international community. The world will finally realize that I am truly a man of peace. I really think this move could change the opinion of the international community toward me and toward Israel.

While we are withdrawing from Gaza, we will be building the planned security wall as fast as we can. The international community will not like it, since we will be taking in Jewish population centers that lie in former Arab-held territory. But they will be very reluctant to object too forcibly for fear that Israel will call a halt to the Gazan disengagement.

BUSH: What happens after the Gazan disengagement is completed? This may well provide an opportunity for the Quartet to get the "Roadmap for Peace" back on track.

SHARON: I'm sure the international community will try to revitalize the Roadmap. However, I don't think the Palestinians will ever disarm Hamas and the Al Aksa Brigade. If we can convince the Quartet to collaborate with Israel to reach peace unilaterally, there will be very little the Palestinians can do about it. Once our security wall is completed, terrorist attacks against Israel will become very difficult.

George, do you think you and Tony Blair can convince the world community to go along with this strategy?

BUSH: I think the world community is more open to cooperation in solving the Middle East problem than ever before. The proliferation of terrorism has provided an urgency that has never previously existed.

SHARON: If you can protect my back with the U.S. veto at the UN and if you will use your influence to obtain the cooperation of the international community, I believe that, between the two of us, we can succeed. If we don't act now, this conflict will drag on another fifty years. You and I are both men of action. I believe destiny has brought us to power for this historic time. We can do this!

BUSH: I'm with you. Let's roll! 🇮🇱



Israel's Dividing Wall

SHARON: Let's go back to our original premise. If we can formulate a solution that is perceived by the world community to be fair, then we can implement it unilaterally, even if the Palestinians and the right-wing Israelis object. What solution for the Temple Mount would be considered fair for all parties concerned?

BUSH: I'm listening.

SHARON: The rebirth of the nation of Israel will never be complete until we rebuild our temple on the Temple Mount. If we disturb the Dome of the Rock or the Al Aksa Mosque it will trigger World War III. However, I think there's a way to "have our cake and eat it too."

There is a belief held by many in Israel

SHARON: Well, I don't know whether I like it or not, but it may be the only thing that could possibly work.

BUSH: Arik, this is a brilliant strategy you have put together! This is the first peace strategy for the Middle East that I actually believe might have a chance to succeed.

SHARON: Thank you, George. Strategy has been my specialty since Israel's War of Independence in 1948. But after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, I decided it was time to move my skill from the military arena to the political. It does no good to win battles on the battlefield if you can't make the victories permanent by reaching political solutions.

BUSH: So how do we proceed to implement your strategy?