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Our World: Lame ducks and sitting ducks

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Last November 26, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert ordered the IDF to withdraw its forces from Gaza. Sounding oddly triumphant, Olmert announced that he had reached a cease-fire with the Palestinians. The strangeness of his statement became apparent when just hours later Sderot absorbed yet another bombardment of rockets from Gaza.

And as the IDF grudgingly withdrew its forces mid-mission, the Palestinians established the rules that they and Olmert have followed ever since. They attack Israel and prepare for war, and Israel helps them by giving them money, negotiating with them and taking no steps to defend itself or its citizens.

The strange agreement was announced three days before US President George W. Bush snubbed Olmert when he demurred from either visiting Israel or visiting with Olmert during his trip to Amman, Jordan. In the four months since Olmert forced the IDF to stand down, the IDF, the Shin Bet, and even the media have warned both Olmert and the public that Syrian, Iranian and Lebanese-Hizbullah trainers, engineers, commanders and advanced anti-air and anti-tank missiles have been brought into Gaza.

The foreign terror masters and their Palestinian counterparts have used the respite that Olmert provided them to build what Shin Bet Director Yuval Diskin has referred to as "warrens" of tunnels and fortifications along Gaza's borders with Egypt and with Israel. Like Hizbullah in Lebanon, operating from these fortifications, the Palestinians will be able to attack IDF ground forces and aircraft when they are finally permitted to defend southern Israel from attack.

So thanks to Olmert's unilateral cease-fire, the Palestinians have upgraded their capabilities. Whereas before Israel withdrew its forces and civilians from Gaza in August and September 2005, the Palestinians operated as low-level terrorist cells, today they field bona fide terror armies that are capable of conducting coordinated, multi-layered operations.

YET THE Palestinians' avid preparations for war are apparently irrelevant to all concerned. In the past week alone, we have seen the US, Israel and the Arab world in the throes of a diplomatic frenzy that would make it seem as though the coming war was nothing but a joke.

Last Wednesday, Jordan's King Abdullah addressed a joint session of the US Congress. Abdullah came to the US at an interesting moment in the history of his own kingdom. The same day that Abdullah told US lawmakers that Israel is the source of all the misfortunes in the world, or as he put it, "The wellspring of regional division, the source of resentment and frustration far beyond, is the denial of justice and peace in Palestine," his state prosecutor announced the arrest of three al-Qaida terrorists. The men were arrested for plotting to assassinate Bush during his visit to Amman on November 29 and for plotting to bomb the US embassy in Amman.

What is interesting about the announcement, coming as it did the day that Abdullah spoke to the Congress and ate a private dinner with the president, is that it shows the mendacity of Abdullah's contention.

Israel is not responsible for the fact that Jordan has a huge problem with al-Qaida. Moreover, with a population that is more than 70 percent Palestinian, the monarch of the Hashemite kingdom would do well to look in the mirror before declaring that the lack of Palestinian statehood has anything to do with Israel.

ACCORDING to Israel's Channel 2, Abdullah built on his "Blame the Jews" theme to great effect during his private dinner with the president. Bush was reportedly convinced by his Jordanian guest that the world will be a better, safer place if the US abandons its demand that the PA destroy the terror cells and armies operating in its territory before it commences pressure on Israel to surrender Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem to Hamas-Fatah.

Abdullah's success has had immediate significance on the ground. Just four days after the monarch's visit to Washington, Olmert announced that he is going to ignore the situation on the ground in the PA and conduct negotiations on Israeli withdrawals from Judea and Samaria with Abbas. At Sunday's cabinet meeting Olmert repeated his praise for the so-called "Saudi plan," or, alternatively, the "Arab peace initiative."

That initiative calls for Israeli surrender of Judea, Samaria, the Golan Heights and Jerusalem; Israeli acceptance of blame for the Arab world's refusal to accept the right of the Jewish people to national sovereignty; and Israeli acceptance of millions of foreign-born, hostile Arabs within its truncated borders. After Israel makes these suicidal concessions the Arab peace initiative states that the Arab world will be willing to recognize a defunct and defenseless Arab-majority State of Israel.

OLMERT AND Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni have repeatedly stated that at its meeting later in the month in Riyadh the Arab League will moderate the plan. But Jordan's Foreign Minister Abdullah Khatib said Sunday that there would be no changes of any kind made in the plan.

Hours after Olmert praised the Arab plan for Israel's destruction, he met with PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. Olmert's office tried to put a positive spin on the meeting by loudly repeating Abbas's empty pledge to work to bring about the release of IDF Cpl. Gilad Schalit, who has been held hostage by Palestinian terrorists in Gaza since June.

But the fact of the matter is that the content of the Olmert-Abbas meeting represented nothing less than an Israeli diplomatic capitulation to Hamas. This capitulation is no less dangerous to Israel's national security than Olmert's acquiescence to Hamas's military transformation of Gaza into a mini-Lebanon, replete with Iranian and Syrian military advisers.

Under orders from Bush, Olmert agreed Sunday to abandon Israel's demand that the PA fight terror and expunge all terror elements from its midst as a necessary precondition for further Israeli concessions. For their part, the Palestinians responded to Olmert's query regarding how they had used the \$100 million that Israel gave them by demanding more money.

And while Olmert was happy to lie to the public and claim that Abbas had agreed to end the rocket attacks on the Western Negev, he knows full well that he won't. Indeed, the only thing that was announced about the meeting that was true is that Olmert has agreed to negotiate with the Palestinians and the Arabs on the basis of the Arab initiative, which is based on the proposition that Israel essentially has no right to exist.

SPEAKING on Israel Radio on Monday morning, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said that Israel and the US are working in pure harmony in formulating their policies regarding the Palestinians, as well as Syria. And this is

no doubt true. Both Israel and the US are pretending that it is possible to make a distinction between Abbas and Hamas, even though in the aftermath of last month's agreement between Fatah and Hamas in Mecca Abbas now acts at the pleasure of Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal.

Perhaps the only bright spot for Israeli diplomacy since the onset of the Palestinian jihad in 2000 has been the US and European willingness to make a distinction between the Fatah terror group and the Hamas terror group.

It is true that Fatah, which receives at least 40 percent of its finances from Iran and has killed more Israelis over the past seven years than Hamas, is unworthy of the international legitimacy it has enjoyed. But in refusing to directly fund and support Hamas, the US, Israel and Europe were at least agreed that some Palestinian terror groups were beyond the pale.

This Israeli diplomatic asset was destroyed by a combination of Arab perfidy and Israeli incompetence in the aftermath of last month's Mecca agreement. In Mecca, Abbas agreed to a Hamas takeover of the PA. He agreed to become a Hamas figurehead whose main task is to restore Western funding of the Hamas-led PA.

Rather than point this out and so wrest away Fatah's international legitimacy, Israel has allowed Fatah to do Hamas's bidding and act as a conduit toward the international legitimization of the jihadist movement.

PERHAPS what is most interesting about the diplomatic maneuvering taking place today is that all four main actors carrying it out are advancing aims inimical to their national or organizational interests. Israel and the US's security interests, like those of Jordan, are harmed rather than advanced by the empowerment of Hamas. As for Abbas, Fatah's fiduciary interests are harmed by the transfer of power to Hamas.

So why are these men behaving as they are?

The answer to that apparently is to be found in a characteristic shared by Bush, Olmert, Abdullah and Abbas. All of them lead without the support of their people. All of the men, in engaging in near-manic diplomatic wrangling, are advancing the aims of neither peace nor security. They act as they do not because they believe in what they are doing - indeed, none of them could possibly believe in what he is doing. Rather, they are doing this because they want us to ignore the fact that in Bush's and Olmert's cases they are lame ducks, and in Abdullah's and Abbas's cases, they are sitting ducks.

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