

Hebron massacre deals heavy blow to peace

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

It became clear in the aftermath of the Feb. 25 massacre in Hebron, that there were many hands pulling the strings of mass murderer Baruch Goldstein and his accomplices, both in Israel and abroad, specifically in Britain and the United States. Whether or not those hands are chopped off will determine whether the PLO-Israeli negotiations will be resumed, or whether the process will be ended.

The policy behind the mosque massacre was enunciated in the London *Independent* by Conor Cruise O'Brien, the establishment mouthpiece who has consistently articulated British geopolitical doctrine, whether vis-à-vis Germany, the Balkans, or the Middle East, since 1989. In his March 4 commentary, O'Brien identified "two strategic" objectives in Goldstein's shoot-up: to destroy the peace process and to trigger expulsion of the Palestinians from the Occupied Territories. "The collapse of this agreement," he wrote, "the return of Fatah to terrorism, and some spectacular attacks on Jews could easily lead the government of Israel to resort to massive repression, leading to a massive flight of population, whether intended or not." Dismissing the Palestinians' belief that the international community would prevent such expulsions as a "mirage," O'Brien concluded, "the reality, I fear, is that Baruch Goldstein's sinister calculations were only too well founded and that his ghost, and all the other ghosts of Hebron, are now in charge of events."

O'Brien's scenario is all too precise. The Hebron massacre has altered the objective as well as subjective situation in the region decisively. The immediate effect of the coldblooded shooting of Muslims at prayer was to call into question the credibility of the partners to the peace process, starting with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. Ultimate responsibility for the attack

was laid at the doorstep of the Israeli government which, as Jordanian economist and political commentator Fahed Fanek told *EIR*, "was partial to the crime, at least by default." Fanek's argument, echoed throughout the Arab world, was that "though the Israelis decree curfews for the Palestinians, they do not do the same for the Israeli settlers," and thus "allow armed wolves to roam among the lambs." Fanek pointed out that the massacre occurred on a Friday, the day on which the "Israeli army guards stationed at the mosque are usually on special alert." More generally, as the Israelis are the occupying power in the territories, they are held responsible for the Palestinian inhabitants' security.

Fanek's viewpoint was bolstered by reports of survivors of the massacre, who testified that the attack was mounted not by one but by a group of Israelis who unloaded several rounds of ammunition without intervention on the part of the army guards. Yasser Arafat declared that 10-12 settlers were deployed, and that at least a part of the military must have been witting. The first report, issued on Feb. 25 and updated on March 2, by the Palestine Human Rights Information Center, said at least 50 people were killed inside the mosque and courtyard by gunfire and five more were killed the same day, three in Gaza and two who were trying to reach hospitals where wounded had been taken. Eyewitnesses interviewed by the PHRIC testified that Goldstein entered the mosque, walking past Israeli soldiers standing guard, and opened fire, changing the clip on his machine-gun at least twice. One reported that "people tried to run away but soldiers came into the mosque and used tear gas at the entrance and also opened fire at people. It was impossible to tell who was shot by the settler and who by the soldiers. It all happened at the same time." Another eyewitness reported that a second man,

placed behind Goldstein at the mosque door, also fired shots from an automatic weapon. The second assailant reportedly escaped before Goldstein was seized. This view was not only that of the Palestinian victims. An Israeli TV military correspondent, Alon Ben David, reported that Israeli soldiers entered the mosque and shot at "those who were attacking the Israeli," Goldstein. On March 8, an Israeli commander admitted that of the eight soldiers deployed to the site, five, for some reason, "arrived late" that day. Palestinian investigators are trying to gain access to material evidence at the hospital, e.g., bullets extracted from victims, to determine who and how many were shooting.

Burden of proof is on Rabin

Such charges placed the burden of proof on Rabin. Denouncing the mass murderer Goldstein in a Knesset speech Feb. 28, the Israeli prime minister embraced the "lone assassin" theory, and, by heaping praise on the military as an institution, seemed to rule out any complicity. Yet, as Arafat stressed, there exists a body within the Israeli military, similar to the Secret Army Organization (OAS) apparatus which tried to sabotage de Gaulle's disengagement from Algeria. Arafat pressed the Israeli government to adopt a Gaullist attitude and clean out *all those elements within the military, security, and police apparatus* which are contaminated. Otherwise the government itself, which has staked its mandate on its peace initiative, will lose all credibility as a negotiating partner and will be toppled. To regain credibility, it has no choice but to pull the string of the vast network, which ties the armed settlers to complicit military and political operatives, and through both, to the well-financed terror apparatus based in the United States. Rabin, who admitted the existence of this international nexus, is being urged to name the names from the ground level to the top political instigators, and rid the country of this menace. Minister for Absorption of Immigrants Yair Tzaban took a step in this direction by revealing that the killer groups among the settlers had received military training in New York State in July, at the hands of Israeli military reserve officers. He called on the U.S. government to take action, but at a March 8 press conference, the State Department spokesman could not answer questions on the issue.

If the Israeli government adopts the means it has at its disposal to purge and prosecute those responsible, persons whom Foreign Minister Shimon Peres did not hesitate to call "Nazis," it must as well face the task of disarming the settlers, a demand voiced by Arafat again after the massacre. If the Israeli state is responsible for the security of the settlers for such time that the settlements remain, there is no justification for tolerating a parallel, vigilante military force. Moreover, it is a fascist force, capable of becoming a Frankenstein monster in Israel. Ze'ev Sternhell, a Hebrew University expert on the origins of fascism, told *Libération* on March 9 that the Kahane movement was made up of "Jewish Nazis"

who, however, different from the German Nazis, have a "religious fanaticism" which would lead them to expel non-Jews from Israel and even prevent mixed marriages. This ideology led the rabbi eulogizing at Baruch Goldstein's funeral to state that "1 million Arabs are not worth a Jewish fingernail" and prompted Goldstein followers to flaunt their support for the mass murder, saying, "We are all Goldstein."

This ideology represents a poison which no civil society can tolerate. About 12% of the overall Israeli population, according to Sternhell's studies, embrace this ideology, with "active and passive sympathizers" reaching 25%. The mass demonstration organized in Tel Aviv on March 5, which saw Peace Now activists marching arm in arm with Israeli Arabs, called for dismantling the Kiryat Arba settlement in the interests of peace. To rid the country of the Nazis, "a little civil war" would be required, according to Sternhell.

Rabin was waffled so far. In the March 6 cabinet meeting, both he and Foreign Minister Peres overruled a motion, presented by a majority of ministers, to remove the Kiryat Arba settlers, even though, as Housing Minister Ben Eliezar stated, this move would be taken to protect the security of the settlers from possible reprisal. Rabin even invited the Tsomet party to join his coalition. Tsomet is led by Rafael Eitan, a former chief of staff, who made himself notorious with his 1983 characterization of Arabs as "cockroaches." Although nothing came of the proposal immediately, Rabin then approached the right-wing Shaas party with a similar offer, and on March 8, it was leaked that he was flirting with the Likud. Such moves indicate Rabin's somewhat desperate attempt to coopt part of the anti-peace opposition, perhaps in a Machiavellian ploy aimed at clipping their wings. Rabin is seen as betraying the psychological insecurity which gripped him in the 1967 war. While he goes on record as committed to continuing the peace process, he appears unwilling or unable to take those steps toward the settlers and settlements which are a precondition for negotiations. As Saeb Erakat, head of the Palestinian delegation at the bilateral talks in Washington, put it: "Rabin has to stop being hesitant. That part of him that wants peace must prevail over that part of him which does not want to give up the territories. It is his hour of truth."

Whatever the motives of Rabin's flirtation with the faction which endorses the policy, albeit not the methods, of Baruch Goldstein, it provoked furor even within his government's ranks. The Meretz party made known it would bolt from the coalition, should he bring in the Tsomet. The Palestinians are demanding that Rabin confront the security issue ruthlessly dealing with those political factions he has been ostentatiously wooing. It is now the consensus in the PLO, that unless the security issue is addressed effectively, there can be no more progress.

Palestinians in a Catch-22 position

According to the peace initiative signed in September, Palestinian security in the territories is to be handed over to

a Palestinian police force; yet, futile haggling over numbers of police have prevented any agreement, while the militant settlers have made known, contrary to stated government policy, that they intend to "shoot Palestinian police before they can be shot." As PLO economist Mohamed Nashashibi said, "No national authority, even if we were given the 20,000 Palestinian police we have demanded, could deal with 120,000 armed settlers."

Related to the settlers' disarmament, which the PLO executive had defined as a precondition for renewing talks, the underlying issue of disbanding the settlements in the Occupied Territories, which had been postponed to a later stage in the interim negotiations, must be moved up on the agenda. As Ghassam Khatib, a former PLO negotiator from East Jerusalem told *EIR*, "The massacre revealed the defects in the Cairo and Oslo agreements, which need to be reviewed for the sake of success of the interim agreement." He noted, "our conclusion is that any accord which does not guarantee a separation between the settlers and the Palestinians will not work, because all the settlers are opposed to the peace process." And, "If the Palestinians [in the police force] have weapons, this could lead to a situation like in Bosnia." The "time bomb" of the settlers, in Faisal Husseini's words, must be defused.

U.N. Resolution 465 of 1980 states that the settlements are illegal and should be disbanded. In this regard, six members of the executive committee of the PLO and a large number of national council members are requesting that the Oslo and Cairo accords be reviewed, such that the following priorities head the agenda: 1) Israeli withdrawal; 2) dismantlement of the settlements; and 3) inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Anti-Arafat factions strengthened

Unless these issues are resolved, Arafat will pay the price. The Hamas movement, which has been vying for hegemony among Palestinians in the territories, made massive political capital out of the massacre, establishing itself as the leading force in Hebron and elsewhere. Even in Jordan, whose government cut off peace talks (as did the Syrians and Lebanese), daily mass demonstrations have been channeling protest as much against the Israelis as against Arafat. Hamas locally, and the Group of Ten Syrian-based Palestinian organizations doctrinally opposed to the Gaza-Jericho accord, have played the massacre as proof that "there is no result of the peace negotiations" and that "resistance, including armed struggle, demonstrations and strikes" is the only strategy, in the words of Jordanian-based Hamas leader Mohamed Nazzal.

If Arafat is to keep any bargaining position whatsoever, he must show his ability to wrest concessions from the Israelis which will guarantee the security and economic well-being of the Palestinians. His executive body has already been reduced by defections, and there was the threat of an institu-

tionalized split between the PLO leadership in the Occupied Territories, which is more intransigent in its demands for protection of Palestinians on the ground, and the Tunis-based leadership directly involved in the talks. Unless Arafat can reverse the situation, such internal friction is destined to increase to the point that he may end up being the lone negotiator, representing no one. That would mean the end of the peace process.

The dangers on the ground are two: that the Hamas and other rejectionist movements of the Group of Ten will take up arms and retaliate, plunging the region into war, and that the Israeli extremists will launch another atrocity, bringing Israel itself to the brink of civil war.

Already, the Intifada has resumed in full force. Since the Feb. 25 massacre, daily riots have hit cities of the Occupied Territories (West Bank and Gaza). Casualties due to Israeli shooting of stone-throwing youths, have reached over 25, which means that half as many Palestinians have died since Hebron as in Goldstein's massacre. Demonstrations and rioting have become the daily fare on the other side of the "green line" within Israel proper, for the first time. These riots, led by Israeli Arabs in Lydda, Ramla, and Jaffa, have introduced a new factor, as Palestinians are burning down Israeli shops, confronting Israeli forces with a new form of protest within their borders. This is a recipe for civil war.

Subjectively, the Hebron massacre and its aftermath have dealt the death blow to whatever optimism remained among Palestinians in the territories regarding the prospects for a peaceful future and economic betterment. Despite concrete plans for vast infrastructure projects, as agreed upon in Oslo, virtually no money has flowed into the territories for development, due mainly to World Bank sabotage. The massacre in Hebron turned the entire peace process upside down, putting economic cooperation, the precondition for any accord, at the bottom of the list. Thus a population which, regardless of political preferences within the Palestinian camp, nurtured hopes that the agreements might bring rapid, visible improvement in their concentration-camp style living conditions, has been cruelly deluded. Bitterness, and rage have supplanted the hope that had been ignited. A.M. Rosenthal, a *New York Times* writer hostile to any Arab-Israeli peace, cynically rejected the very idea of "great technological and scientific cooperation to put deserts into joint bloom," referring to the economic protocols of the Oslo accords. On a higher plane, the Hebron massacre dashed hopes in precisely such a venture.

As *EIR* has documented, leading spokesmen both for the PLO and Jordan have endorsed the idea that the most advanced technologies available, such as nuclear-powered desalination, could be harnessed to define new parameters for the region's development. For Rosenthal, as for the immediate controllers of Baruch Goldstein, talk of desert gardens, particularly if for Arabs, should be put off "until another day, another century."