

Sharon Orders a Massacre And Prepares for War

by Dean Andromidas

An Israel F-16 jet dropped a one-ton bomb on an apartment block in the Gaza Strip, killing 16 people, including 4 infants and 7 small children, and wounding 145 others on July 23. This massacre was ordered by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who called the operation “a great success.” It is the prelude to launching a larger war in the Middle East.

The Israeli “targetted assassination” of Hamas military leader Salah Shehadeh, the official reason for the attack, is nothing more than a pretext. Sharon’s aim, with the backing of a powerful faction in Washington led by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, is to launch a war in the Middle East that will not only target Iraq, but also pretty much all of the Arab governments, including the Palestinians, Syria, and even Jordan and Egypt. A strike against Iran’s nuclear reactor at Bushehr is also on the agenda.

A senior Israeli intelligence source said, that Sharon’s latest massacre got the green light from Washington. He pointed out that only hours before the attack, Sharon’s three closest aides were in Washington meeting U.S. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of State Colin Powell. These advisers included the chief of the Prime Minister’s office, Dov Weissglas, who is also Sharon’s personal attorney; Gen. Moshe Kaplinski, who is Sharon’s military adviser; and U.S.-Israeli businessman Arie Genger. Genger is Sharon’s link to his most important financial backer in the United States, the organized crime-linked Meshulam Riklis.

Intelligence circles are pointing to two factions among the hawks in the Bush Administration. One faction—headed by Wolfowitz, whom one source describes as “an Israeli secret agent”—wants both a war against Iraq and Sharon’s war against the Palestinians, Jordanians, and Syrians. The other

faction wants a war against Iraq, but without unleashing Sharon. With this latest assassination, the stage is set for a bloody retaliation by Hamas, which then acts as the pretext for Israel launching wide-ranging military operations. These sources are convinced that in the shadow of a U.S.-led attack on Iraq, Sharon will “ethnically cleanse” the West Bank and Gaza of Palestinians, and attack Syria, Jordan, and Egypt.

Timing Is Perfect

Sharon ordered the bombing in Gaza precisely at the point that strenuous international efforts were being made to organize an Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire. According to media reports and Arab sources, hours before the bombing, Hussein al-Sheikh, West Bank Secretary General of Fatah, the main faction in the Palestine Liberation Organization, had just approved the final draft of a declaration by Fatah’s militia, Tanzim, for an unconditional, unilateral cease-fire. The draft was also approved by Marwin Barghouti, the Tanzim leader who is currently sitting in an Israeli jail. Hours before the Shehadeh’s death, Hamas spiritual leader Ahmed Yassin announced that he was prepared to negotiate a cease-fire. Shehadeh, as commander of the military wing of Hamas, would have been the one to implement it.

The efforts toward a cease-fire were confirmed by a statement from the Russian Foreign Ministry, which said that the air strike came “precisely at a time when the official representatives of Israel and the Palestinian Authority had renewed their dialogue on security issues.” European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana gave a similar assessment, saying, “There were indications as well that a possible end to the suicide bombings could be reached.”



Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (center) and U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (left), at the Pentagon in 2001. Sharon's assassination of Hamas military leader Salah Shehadeh is backed by a Pentagon grouping that wants war not only against Iraq, but against most of the Arab world as well.

An editorial in the July 24 Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* made this very point: "The timing of the operation also raises questions. There were indications in recent days that for the first time in many months, there was a chance for progress toward a ceasefire. There was a flurry of political activity in Washington, New York, and European capitals as well as locally, with representatives of the Palestinian Authority. According to some reports, there was reason to hope that Fatah was planning to issue a unilateral declaration of an end to the terror attacks. There was also progress toward an understanding between Fatah and the rejectionists, under which the latter would also cease their fire. . . . In that light, there is no choice but to question the wisdom of the approval given by the Prime Minister and the Defense Minister to an assassination, when the circumstances of the mission itself and the wider political circumstances would inevitably dash those efforts toward peace."

In that issue of *Ha'aretz*, Gideon Samet made the same point, but more strongly: "The facts are accumulating and threatening. Despite media spins and lies, Sharon has no intention of moving toward any tangible agreement with the Palestinians. He approved Shehadeh's assassination after a rather unusual statement by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin . . . about readiness [brokered by the Saudis] to cease attacking Israel if it leaves the West Bank cities."

Sharon 'Plunged Us Into Bestiality'

Sharon ordered the attack, in order to perpetrate a massacre, just like he ordered the Lebanese Phalangist

militia into the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon in 1982 to massacre thousands of helpless refugees, according to Israeli commentator Ari Shavit, writing in the July 25 *Ha'aretz*.

Shavit wrote that the bombing "was not a successful military operation (as the Prime Minister claimed); nor was it a mistaken military operation (as some commentators argued). On July 23, 2002, just after midnight, the State of Israel deployed an F-16 fighter airplane and a one-ton bomb in order to carry out the first terrorist attack it has perpetrated in years." Shavit, who is no peacenik, wrote, that the bombing was an act of terror, because it "was the result of a direct, deliberate, and conscious decision by the Prime Minister of Israel to drop a one-ton bomb on a residential neighborhood." Shavit concludes that this attack "raises serious questions about the mental world of the man who is in charge of our fate. This week, Sharon plunged us deep down the slippery slope of bestiality. He sullied the justice of our war and blurred beyond recognition the moral image of the country he was called upon to protect."

This issue was also brought up by Haim Ramon, a member of the Israeli Knesset (parliament), chairman of its Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, and a contender for leadership of the Labor Party. He laid blame directly on the government. "The central error was that we used weaponry that anyone involved in the decision-making process should have known could harm innocent people living in the area. . . . I have no doubt that it knew of the risks of carrying out the operation using a one-ton bomb at the time that it made

the decision, and despite this it took the risk.”

Zehava Gal-On, the pro-peace Meretz party faction leader, was more blunt. “A nation cannot behave like a terrorist organization; it cannot employ techniques of a terrorist organization. There must be certain standards informing our actions,” he said. “What is the wisdom here? At the very moment that it appeared that we were on the very brink of a chance for reaching something of a cease-fire, or diplomatic activity, we always go back to this experience—just when there is a period of calm, we liquidate.”

Ahmed Tibi, an Israeli-Arab member of the Knesset and sometime adviser to Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, told news agencies that President George Bush is “morally responsible” for the air strike.

The Palestinian reaction was dramatic, with 100,000 people—10% of the entire population of the Gaza Strip—attending the funerals of the 17 victims. The chants included, “The blood of martyrs will not be lost,” and “The Palestinian people will avenge these crimes.” Hamas spokesman Abel Aziz Al Rantissi warned, “Hamas’ retaliation will come very soon, and there won’t be only just one. . . . After this crime, even Israelis in their homes will be the target of our operations.” This is what Sharon wants, because a chance for a cease-fire is now nowhere in sight.

War on Three Fronts

It would be a mistake to think the Shehadeh atrocity was aimed only at sabotaging yet another effort to end the conflict. Sharon is preparing for the U.S. attack on Iraq, which will be his opportunity to launch a three-front war against the Palestinians and Jordan to the east, Syria in the north, and Egypt in the south. The Israeli Army is fully deployed in the West Bank, where it has occupied all the major cities. From here, Sharon can destroy the Jordanian regime, simply by pushing the Palestinians across the Jordan River.

By inflaming the situation in the Gaza Strip, Sharon hopes to attack the area with full military force, as he has done in the West Bank. He already tried this, following Operation Defensive Shield last April, but was prevented at the time by U.S. and European pressure. Whenever the next Hamas attack is launched from Gaza, he will have the pretext to attack. Such a build-up and attack would clearly be seen as a threat by Egypt.

Meanwhile, to the north, Sharon is preparing to strike against Syria. The July 21 London *Sunday Times* reports that Israel has warned Syria that it will strike military targets within Syria the next time Hezbollah attacks Israel from Lebanon. According to this report, three warnings have been delivered to Syria, the latest by Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, who asked Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to deliver it to Syrian President Bashar Assad. Former head of Israeli military intelligence Maj. Gen. Amos Malka (Res.) was quoted, warning, “Sooner rather than later we’ll be engaged in a conflict with Syria, unless Syria

changes its attitude. . . . I’m not sure he [Assad] reads the geopolitical map correctly, and he’s taking unnecessary risks.”

The Israelis are planning an attack directly across the occupied Golan Heights for the first time since the end of the 1973 war, which would be an unequivocal declaration of war. It is planning air strikes to destroy a brigade in southern Syria which contains some 100 tanks. This would be followed by an artillery assault and perhaps a few days of occupation with helicopter-borne special forces.

That same week, the United States warned Israel to discontinue its over-flights of Lebanese territory, which have provoked Hezbollah anti-aircraft fire.

Sharon knows that Israel cannot sustain the war of attrition which the conflict with the Palestinians has become. He thinks his only hope is for a 1967-type six-day war, but this time with nuclear weapons. Whereas anything else would lead to a collapse of Israel, a nuclear Middle East war would obviously lead to the destruction of Israel as well.

Sharon’s primary base of support is not in Israel, but in the increasingly powerful war coalition in the United States, whose policy goes way beyond a “regime change” in Iraq; rather, their policy envisions a “Clash of Civilizations.” This is being led by the warhawks in the Bush Administration, as represented by Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz, with political backing by Republicans led by Sen. John McCain (Ariz.) and nominal Democrats such as Sen. Joe Lieberman (Conn.). On the ground this support is being provided by the so-called “Christian Zionists,” who make up the coalition of Christian fundamentalists and right-wing American Zionists.

The Christian Coalition of America, one of the main umbrella groups of the Christian fundamentalists, is mobilizing for a massive demonstration in Washington in support of Sharon. Planned for Oct. 17, organizers say they expect 100,000 demonstrators. The demonstration is obviously intended to intimidate Congress on the eve of the Congressional elections in November. This same organization mobilized a demonstration last April that numbered 100-200,000. They are circulating a flier in thousands of churches across the United States calling on the Bush Administration to “allow Israel to fight its war on terrorism the way we fought ours in Afghanistan”

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