

Leading Israelis Show Iraq War Opposition

by Dean Andromidas

Leading Israelis have come out publicly against the Bush Administration's determination to launch a war on Iraq, at a time when Israeli intelligence sources warn that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his generals are counting on a U.S. war, in order to expel the Palestinians from the West Bank. In recent weeks, Sharon and his ministers have kept a low profile, avoiding comments on Iraq so as not to complicate the White House efforts in mobilizing international support, nor have many public statements been made against the proposed war.

These same sources point to fears among circles within the military-security establishment, about the effect on Israel of launching war on Iraq. These circles see a war aggravating the Israeli conflict with the Palestinians; not to mention that Sharon will try to expel the Palestinians by launching a new regional war. There is also a growing concern that under such a strain, the deeply depressed Israeli economy will collapse, threatening to bring down Israeli state institutions.

Writing in the *Jerusalem Post* on Sept. 5, Prof. Shlomo Ben-Ami, former Foreign Minister in the government of Ehud Barak, attacked the Bush Administration's post-Sept. 11 policy, which he characterized as "dominated by a disproportionate . . . exaggeration of al-Qaeda" and an "obsession with Iraq." Ben-Ami's views are representative of much of the peace camp. "It is to be hoped that the Bush Administration will not be tempted to let itself be persuaded by its own rhetoric to launch an all-out offensive against Iraq; there would be no justification for it in the eyes of Arab regimes or their public," he wrote. "In 1990, the case was cut-and-dried: Iraq invaded a sovereign neighboring state, though even at that time, the coalition's attack sparked angry demonstrations throughout the Arab world. . . . Today, with no such clarity—there is no proof of nuclear weapons in Iraq. . . . The U.S. is obviously in no position to form a coalition with the nations of the Middle East. . . . [T]here is no doubt that an American offensive against Iraq will unleash anti-American and anti-Israeli feelings throughout the Arab world, on an apocalyptic scale."

"At such a time," Professor Ben-Ami concluded, "bin Laden and al-Qaeda will return, and fundamentalist Islam will become the driving force behind every frustrated and humiliated young Muslim. . . . An offensive against Iraq will give this process added momentum which will hit hard at the foundations of Arab nations too. The American experience in

Afghanistan, the single piece of reality to date in the war on terror, was not an overwhelming success, and it is doubtful whether it augurs well for further and more intricate adventures in Iraq."

Specifically, Ben-Ami warned that the attack on Iraq could lead to the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which could lead to an "existential threat to Israel."

Make a Grim Situation Worse

Another critic is Gen. (Res.) Danny Rothschild, president of the Council of Peace and Security, a group of 1,400 retired military, Mossad, and Shin Bet officers, established 14 years ago by Maj. Gen. (Res.) Aharon Yariv, with the view of using their professionalism and experience to address Israel's security policy. For six months, they and other groups have called for a unilateral disengagement from the Palestinian territories.

In an interview with *EIR*, General Rothschild expressed ambivalence toward the Bush Administration's intentions. "Saddam Hussein and Iraq, and Iran," he said, "are a threat to Israel. In a way, an existential threat. Although one has to deal with this threat, I question whether this is the way to do it and is this the time to do it. Should the United States go, without building a coalition of states, both in Europe and the Arab world, as they did in 1991? I am not sure they should. This is despite the fact that I would be happy to see someone dealing with Saddam Hussein." General Rothschild's views are without doubt shared by many in Israel, particularly in the political center, who see a new Iraq war as aggravating Israel's already unacceptable security situation in its conflict with the Palestinians.

Another remarkable criticism of the war appeared in the daily *Ha'aretz* on Sept. 24. Writing under the headline, "Waging War on Iraq Is Not Justified," Brig. Gen. (Res.) Aharon Levran cautioned, "What are we fighting for? That is a crucial question when going off to war, and certainly before initiating one. The Bush Administration has no solid grounds for waging war on Saddam Hussein, and the arguments about the variety of risks Saddam poses are exaggerated." Levran then, point for point, disputed the Bush Administration's pretexts.

"Despite his bombastic lying declarations," Levran wrote, "Saddam is well aware he was defeated. It is clear to him that he cannot take on the might of America, and it is no accident that he has folded now on the issue of nuclear weapons inspectors. . . . His limited aims are to protect Iraq and deter others from harming it, and—of course—to survive. . . . Saddam is striving to remove the burdensome economic sanctions and the humiliating inspection regime." Nonetheless, he knows his limitation. "A brutal and crafty despot, Saddam has proved to be careful and sane in his moves."

Levran discounts the nuclear threat. "Iraq today has no nuclear power, mainly because it has no fissile material like plutonium or enriched uranium. . . . This material was taken away from Iraq, and today it does not have the capabilities to

enrich uranium with centrifuges or in other ways. . . . It is doubtful that post-war Saddam is striving wholeheartedly to build a nuclear bomb, because the moment he approaches it, this will not go unnoticed in the United States, and he would be sentencing himself to an immediate liquidation attempt."

Although Iraq may have had chemical and biological weapons during the Gulf War, it "did not dare use those weapons," Levran wrote. As for launching such weapons, the Iraqi Air Force in 1991 "did not demonstrate any considerable attacking power—never mind after the war when it was very much weakened." And as for its missile threat, "there is no evidence that Iraq has many launchers and missiles, especially in the middle range. . . . There is also the question of whether they could be operated freely in western Iraq as they were in 1991. . . . It seems one may establish that the risks from Saddam Hussein are not so bad as they are made to appear."

‘Why Should Israel Pay?’

Demonstrating that he is no leftist, "realist" Levran sees the threat from Iran and the Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon as more acute. He concludes, "It is not desirable that the United States, so important to the free world, should pitch its power against a danger that is not first rate."

General Levran told *EIR* that this was the third such commentary he had written, the others having been published on May 13 and July 31. His motive, as he described it: "I am for just war. Our armed confrontation against the Palestinians is just, but this one, a war against Iraq, is not so justified." He said the war poses three dangers. First, the United States does not have an Iraqi equivalent of the Northern Alliance, as it did in Afghanistan, "so they will have to sacrifice people. That's OK in a just war, but this one is not so just." Second, it will distract from the U.S. war against terror since, Iraq is not involved in international terror. Third, there is the "involvement of Israel, and I don't like it. Why should Israel pay? It makes me furious." The general sees Israel in the same position as Great Britain; but, referring to Prime Minister Tony Blair's Iraq dossier, he said, "I saw Blair on CNN; I wasn't convinced."

Levran knows U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Paul Wolfowitz and Defense Policy Board Chairman Richard Perle personally, he said, "and I will tell you, I don't know why they are supporting this war." He believes that when the war goes sour, Perle's and Wolfowitz's role will throw blame on Israel.

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