

Will Sharon Be Cheney's Hand Grenade vs. Iran?

by Dean Andromidas

American Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche warned on July 17 that Vice President Dick Cheney's "chicken-hawks" could soon unleash a military confrontation with Iran, unless stopped by being put out of office. LaRouche described Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as Cheney's potential "hand grenade" in launching a pre-emptive strike on Iran's nuclear complex, a repeat of Israel's 1981 attack on Iraq's Osirak reactor—but this time, the use of nuclear weapons could not be ruled out.

In the days following LaRouche assessment, Sharon's government erupted publicly on the matter of Iran's Shihab-3 ballistic missile, claiming it poses a major threat to the security of Israel. On July 21, speaking at the Knesset (parliament), Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz warned, "I believe that adding the ability of the Shihab-3 and of the other versions that the Iranians are developing, with their strong desire for non-conventional capability—in other words nuclear capability—is both a threat and danger. We're taking all steps necessary to counter the threat as much as possible." Mofaz warned, "Israel has the necessary means to respond defensively, as well as deterrent capability. The Shihab-3 and other projects reveal that Iran is eager to achieve non-conventional and even nuclear capability, but Israel is prepared."

The next day, a "senior intelligence official" told the daily *Ha'aretz* that although the chances of Iran firing a missile at Israel are low "for now," its announcement that it recently tested the Shihab-3 "should set off warning bells." He went on, "A new element has been added to the Iranians' ability to threaten Israel." Dragging in the Palestinians, the official continued, "We shouldn't ignore, either, the statement attributed to spiritual leader Ali Khamenei, that the missile is part of the answer to the Palestinian problem."

Meanwhile Israel Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, speaking in Brussels before the European Union foreign ministers' meeting, declared that Iran "is today the biggest strategic threat to stability and peace in the Middle East and, indeed, to Europe." He then urged the Europeans to insure that Iran doesn't acquire nuclear weapons. "Any mistake or miscalculation in this matter will have disastrous effects for us all," Shalom said.

Israel: Nuclear Rogue State

By July 24, Shalom was in Washington where he met Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and National Secu-

rity Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and repeated his attack on Iran and Syria.

The ostensible reason for these attacks, was Iran's test of the Shihab-3, but that had been reported in *Ha'aretz* as much as three weeks earlier, on July 4. Although the missile has a range of 1,300 kilometers (810 miles), making it theoretically capable of reaching Israel, and even parts of Europe, its radius of accuracy is over 3 kilometers, making it of questionable utility, even with a nuclear warhead. Such a missile fired at Tel Aviv might very well hit the headquarters of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat at Ramallah. Furthermore, with a payload of 400 kilograms, it would require a highly advanced miniature nuclear warhead, which is far beyond Iran's technical capability to produce.

Israeli military commentator Ze'ev Schiff cast doubt on all this hype. On July 23, Schiff wrote in *Ha'aretz* that there is nothing new, since "for ten years, every test of the missile has been tracked from here." Schiff went on, "In deterring a country like Iran, where the leadership defines itself as an enemy of Israel, the determining factor is Israel's strategic arm. Israel does not need to use threats, like the Ayatollahs. Tehran and other places know this arm exists. The irony is that the Treasury is now a greater threat to this arm than Tehran," referring to planned cuts in Israel's huge defense budget.

When Schiff speaks of the "strategic arm," he is using the accepted code-word for Israel's nuclear arsenal, which, after the United States, Russia, Great Britain, and France, is the fifth-largest in the world. This includes its own "strategic triad" with up to 300 warheads that can be delivered by missiles, aircraft, and submarines. Israel's known intercontinental ballistic missiles have a range that can reach targets, not only anywhere in the Middle East, but also in Europe, Russia, Asia, and Africa. Since it also has rockets that can launch satellites into a geostationary orbit, they can even reach the continental United States. All of this capability is hidden behind Israel's official policy of "strategic ambiguity," which neither confirms nor denies possessing such weapons.

In reality, Israel is every bit the rogue state that Iran, Syria, and Libya are accused of being. It has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and its nuclear facilities are closed to international inspections.

Israel's verbal assault on Iran is coordinated with Cheney's crew in Washington, who are dangerously careening on a flight forward, with escalating political pressure catalyzed by LaRouche's campaign to force Cheney out of the government. The London *Guardian* revealed on July 17, that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's notorious Office of Special Plans, which cooked up bogus intelligence in support of the drive for war against Iraq, has been coordinating its activities with an "ad hoc intelligence operation inside Sharon's office in Israel, specifically to bypass the Mossad," Isra-

el's intelligence service. This "ad hoc" operation is believed to include Sharon's Bureau Chief Dov Weisglas, and selected Israeli military officers who share his views, including Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon, and Ari Genger, the Israeli-American businessman who serves as Sharon's link to organized-crime circles in the United States. Weisglas is also Sharon's private attorney, and fellow-suspect in several criminal investigations targeting Sharon's campaign financing. Weisglas has made innumerable secret and public visits to Washington in the past year, always meeting Cheney, who is Sharon's biggest supporter in the Bush Administration. This channel provided cooked-up intelligence on Iraq, and now on Iran and Syria.

Sharon May Ignore the Mossad

Chief of Staff Ya'alon was in Washington in the beginning of July, where he met Cheney, Rumsfeld, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, and White House officials including Condoleezza Rice. *Ha'aretz* reported that he spoke to them about Iran's threat to Israel and passed on dubious intelligence claiming that Saddam Hussein had hidden his weapons of mass destruction in Syria. This latter assertion dovetailed with an attempt by Undersecretary of State John Bolton, one of the top Administration chicken-hawks, to deliver a fraudulent report to Congress, claiming that Syria had a nuclear and biological weapons program which threatens the peace of the region. Bolton never delivered the report because of the direct intervention of the CIA, which released a 35-page memo debunking all of Bolton's assertions.

A senior German expert on Iran, with links to German military intelligence, warned that the warhawks in Washington are determined to attack Iran. "My assessment is that Iraq was just a prelude to an attack on Iran. Iran has always been seen by the United States as the enemy," the source said. "There is no doubt that the Bush Administration is working for a regime change in Iran." This expert agreed with LaRouche's assessment on the danger of an Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear facilities: "The Israeli government's stated policy has been to say they will never allow the Bushehr nuclear reactor complex to come on line." He did not rule out Israel using nuclear weapons: "I cannot completely exclude such a possibility. If they could prepare world public opinion for such a strike, they would do it."

LaRouche has also warned that an Israeli nuclear attack on Iran would lead to Israel's own destruction. This is known to many inside Israel's military intelligence establishment, but it is also known that Sharon could ignore their advice.

A senior Israeli strategist told *EIR* that Sharon has exaggerated the threat from Iran. He said, "Iran has no nukes, but even if it did, Iran is not really dangerous to anybody, including Israel. Almost all of the key countries within range of this missile, including Israel, can hit back massively, if attacked." Senior Israeli military intelligence officials have

said publicly that “Israel has nothing to worry about, since we have the Arrow [anti-ballistic] missile.”

“The problem,” the Israeli strategist continued, “is that it is very much like Sharon to go around the intelligence services.” He explained how in 1981, as Minister of Defense, Sharon created the “National Security Unit” in his office, as a parallel intelligence and operational organization to go around the official hierarchy of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), and push for a war of conquest against Lebanon, which otherwise would have found little support within the Israeli political-military establishment. The concept of this National Security Unit bears striking resemblance to Rumsfeld’s Office of Special Plans.

The source warned, “There are signs he is doing this now, and this is ominous. . . . The neo-cons have been weakened by the deterioration of the situation in Iraq. Bush himself, and his advisors for his re-election, do not want another war before November 2004. And the American population is certainly not for a new war now.” However, he went on, “I am haunted by thinking that what happened in Vietnam, could now recur, in lapsed time. When the Americans got into a morass in Vietnam, Nixon and Kissinger became desperate, and started the bombing of Cambodia, extending the war. I know Cheney, I know Wolfowitz, and they are both crazy enough to start new wars now, whether against Iran, or North Korea, or Syria; they are crazy enough to start bombing everybody, if they feel desperate enough”.

‘Road Map’ Is Also Sharon’s Target

On June 7, 1981, Israel bombed Iraq’s Osirak nuclear reactor. Although Prime Minister and acting Defense Minister Menachem Begin approved the strike, the most ardent supporter of that operation was Ariel Sharon. Israel claimed the reactor represented the core of the Iraqi nuclear weapons program, and that its destruction was an act of self-defense. In reality, Iraq’s nuclear weapons program was then in an embryonic phase, at best. The bombing’s real purpose was to bring the Middle East to the brink of war, in order to preempt a Middle East peace initiative which the new Reagan Administration was about to unveil. Israel bombed the reactor knowing that they had friends in high places in the Reagan Administration, including Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz; these same friends find themselves in even more powerful positions in today’s Bush Administration.

When Sharon assumed the position of defense minister in 1982, he utilized his National Security Unit (NSU), not only to lay the basis for the war in Lebanon, but also to organize a similar attack on Pakistan’s Kahuta nuclear reactor. In 1982, Israel approached the Indian government to seek landing and refueling rights for Israeli bombers, so they could launch an attack on Kahuta. The Israeli proposal raised alarm-bells in the Indian government, which justifiably feared such a strike would lead to a major India-Pakistan crisis, if not an all-out

war. India made clear that it would not tolerate such an action. Sharon’s scheme was dropped, and the NSU was dismantled by his successor, Moshe Arens.

As Defense Minister, Sharon had to resort to scheming, but now that he is Prime Minister, he is in total command. The best assessment of the danger was given by the former head of Sharon’s old National Security Unit, retired Maj. Gen. Avraham Tamir, the same man whom he had deployed on a secret mission to Pakistan in 1982. Tamir has now adopted very dovish positions, and has been involved in several peace efforts between the Palestinians and Israel.

On Feb. 6, 2002, when the United States was trying to get the ill-fated Mitchell Peace Plan off the ground, Tamir gave an interview to *Ha’aretz*, warning that Sharon’s policies gave him “a sense of *déjà vu*,” reminding him of Sharon’s infamously brutal attacks on the Palestinians in the 1950s when he headed Israel’s first “death squad,” the 101 Battalion. “There are elements that have returned, but in the past there was always political control, so he didn’t get everything he wanted.” Tamir went on to say that in the past, hotheads like Army Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan were restrained by prime ministers like David Ben-Gurion. “Now the problem is that above the army is a Prime Minister who should be supervised by political control. . . . Now he [Sharon] is the captain. And for the first time, there are no restraints. Some things he stops because he doesn’t want a deterioration, and some he creates himself.”

Tamir said that the only thing that can restrain Sharon is the United States, but even this is not certain. To prove the point, he recounted the famous meeting in 1982, between Sharon and then-U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig, where the latter reportedly gave Sharon an “amber” light to attack Lebanon. But Tamir, who was in that meeting, said that in reality, Haig did not approve Sharon’s plan. “Haig said he understood that we could not avoid a limited operation, but he did not give a green light for an operation that would roll all the way to Beirut.” Tamir says Sharon is doing the same thing now. The United States wants a peace process, but Sharon is making demands that prevent any renewal of political negotiations.

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