

Israeli Officers See No Threat From Syria

by Michele Steinberg

Well-placed Israeli sources in Israel and New York have told *EIR* that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, Sharon's top henchman in the drive for a "Greater Israel" war with Lebanon and Syria, deliberately provoked the Jan. 19 incident in which one Israeli soldier was killed and another wounded. Rockets fired by the Hezbollah guerrilla group hit the soldiers—who were illegally operating a bulldozer *inside Lebanese territory*. The motive for the provocation: to save Sharon's political hide. Sharon has feared for months that he and one or both of his sons will be indicted in a massive corruption scandal that came to a head on Jan. 20 (see accompanying article).

The provocation was clear. On Jan. 19, Israel first sent jet fighters over Lebanese airspace, where they broke the sound barrier. A few hours later, claiming they were clearing landmines along the border fence, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) sent a military bulldozer to the Lebanese side of the border. Seeing the bulldozer clearly within Lebanon, the Lebanese Hezbollah, predictably, fired an anti-tank rocket, killing the soldier operating the bulldozer and wounding

another soldier. Then, the Israelis cried that they had been attacked! After a meeting of the Security Cabinet, Defense Minister Mofaz accused Syria of being responsible for the attack on the Israelis. Israeli northern commander Gen. Benny Ganz lied that the bulldozer was operating short of the border, and blamed Syria and Lebanon, warning that they “should be worried.”

Sharon’s closest advisor and direct channel to the right-wing Zionist Lobby in New York, Dore Gold, said, “The Hezbollah attack on the IDF position illustrates the duplicity of the Syrian regime, which talks peace to the *New York Times* and backs Hezbollah attacks in violation of United Nations resolutions.”

On Jan. 20, “in retaliation,” Sharon sent Israeli jets to bomb two Hezbollah camps in southern Lebanon. The IDF issued a statement asserting that “Israel considers Syria directly responsible for any terror activity emanating from Lebanon.” It warned of further retaliations if “terror organizations attempt to escalate the situation.” But all of these statements by Sharon’s inner circle were falsehoods.

Nonetheless, the hapless U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, who continues to appear a victim of White House slavishness to the Sharon’s mafiosi, immediately commented that “once again,” Hezbollah “caused this need for a response,” and hoped that “the Syrians” understand that they had better not support Hezbollah.

Israelis Expose Lies

One source close to military circles in Israel told *EIR* that it is obvious from the retaliation, that Sharon is facing major internal opposition to his schemes against Syria. For one thing, said the source, Sharon had wanted to retaliate against Syria, but was blocked from doing so; and had to settle for hits in southern Lebanon.

Another source with decades of experience in the Middle East commented that world opinion is on the side of Syria, which has refused to respond to Israel’s provocations in a ham-handed way. Instead, Syria has pursued initiatives at the United Nations—such as the recent resolution to the UN Security Council to make Israel a signator to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the ban on biological weapons, in order to make the Middle East a “weapons of mass destruction free zone.”

Additionally, the outrageous—but calculated—provocation by Sharon and Mofaz comes while Syrian President Bashar Assad, in coordination with other Middle Eastern leaders, and with significant support from U.S. political forces including former President Bill Clinton, is pressing Israel to restart peace negotiations. President Assad even had support from within Israel, whose President, Moshe Katzav, invited him to Israel to explore talks.

Knowing the Assad peace offer is gaining support, Sharon has sent Mofaz to Washington in several recent secret trips, where he has “informed” National Security Advisor Condo-

leezza Rice that the Israelis reserve the right, and have a plan, to “move against Syria at any time.” But even in Washington, Sharon and Mofaz no longer have a clear path to war.

Sharon’s lies are running into trouble from within the Israeli establishment and population as well.

A senior Israeli intelligence source told *EIR* that the latest incident on the Lebanese side of the border, was the “most obvious provocation” yet by Sharon, comparing it to the “old script” which the Israelis carried out in the months before the 1967 war. They sent tractors into the demilitarized zones, knowing that the Syrians would fire artillery at the tractors. This, in turn, was used as a justification to launch air attacks against Syria. So convinced were the Syrians and the Egyptians by these antics in 1967, that Israel was preparing for a war against Syria, that Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser decided to begin a troop build-up in the Sinai. This led to the “pre-emptive” attack by the Israelis, and the rest is history, said the source, noting that Sharon was very much part of that entire scenario and now appears to be re-enacting it quite closely.

There is high-level opposition in the ranks of the active-duty Israeli officers corps against Sharon’s hope for a war against Lebanon and Syria. Shortly before the Jan. 19 incident, Lt. Gen. Moseh Ya’alon, the Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff, had told a television interviewer that renewing talks with Syria was “definitely worth investigating and discussing.” Brigadier Gen. Yair Golan, who commands the Galilee Division responsible for the sector in the Northern border area, told Israeli radio on Jan. 20, the day of the retaliatory strikes, that the IDF bulldozer was *clearly* on Lebanese territory—a violation of international law.

Even the usually pro-Sharon *Jerusalem Post* reported on Jan. 20, a quote from an “senior military officer from the Northern Command Army” saying, “It was naïveté on our part to think that we could neutralize the minefields in such a blatant and noisy way. . . . We could have saved the price of a human life in this incident.”

The officer echoes the growing sentiment, now being expressed by parents, wives, and siblings of young soldiers, that these men are dying in needless provocations in the occupied territories—and now in foreign invasions. Such widespread opposition to Sharon’s line conforms with *EIR*’s Nov. 7, 2003 article, “U.S., Israeli Militaries Caution on Syrian War,” where *EIR* reported that top Israeli brass opposed a war with Syria, according to *Ha’aretz* military specialist, Amir Oren.

Sharon’s U.S. Connection

But Sharon and Mofaz, both fascists in the tradition of the late Mussolini-admirer Vladimir Jabotinsky, are depending on their “ace in the hole,” Vice President Dick Cheney, whose pro-Likud staff—the “real National Security Council”—includes neo-conservative David Wurmser, co-author of two think-tank war plans against Syria.