

Sharon's Hit-Men Kill in Damascus, In Countdown to Neo-Cons' New War

by Dean Andromidas

In the early morning of Sept. 26, a bomb exploded in the car of Din al-Sheikh Khalil, in Damascus, killing the Palestinian Hamas operative. Khalil was the latest victim of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's "terror against terror." But make no mistake: The Khalil assassination was not in "revenge," after Palestinian militants killed five Israeli military officers and border policemen a few days just prior to the murder of Khalil. That hit took many weeks to plan and prepare, and has to be seen as part of the pre-war operations to set the stage for an attack on Syria and Iran, either by Israel alone or in tandem with the United States. The only question is, will it be a pre-election "October surprise," or will it take place afterward?

U.S. statesman Lyndon LaRouche warned that if President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney are re-elected, a new war will immediately follow. Fully agreeing with LaRouche's assessment, a senior Israeli intelligence source said: "If Bush wins the election, he will immediately launch a war against Syria and Iran. He will do it, because of the economic crisis which is already here. As you know, this is the way they respond when hit with an economic crisis."

There is nothing Syria and Iran can do to placate Sharon and the neo-cons' determination to go to war; only a United States purged of the Bush-Cheney regime, will stop it. Khalil's assassination occurred despite the fact that Syria made several major concessions after the UN Security Council passed a U.S.-sponsored resolution on Sept. 2, demanding that Syria withdraw its troops from Lebanon. In the week prior to the assassination, Syria agreed to tighten the security at its border with Iraq, after meeting with a U.S. delegation that included Assistant Secretary of State William Burns and Assistant Secretary of Defense Peter Rodman. Syria also agreed to collaborate with Washington in investigating money flows to terrorist organizations, and announced that it would begin the rotation of Syrian troops out of Lebanon. Just prior to the assassination, even Secretary of State Colin Powell called Syria's recent dismantling of military camps in the hills above Beirut, a "positive step."

American intelligence sources report that Washington

issued no criticism of Israel following the hit, because the neo-cons in the administration were opposed to the State Department's diplomatic efforts to resolve differences.

Speaking at the UN General Assembly, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Shara made a not so oblique attack on the neo-cons, charging that Israel, through the "Israel Lobby," the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, and the neo-cons were responsible for "inciting Americans, first, and then the West to wage endless wars in the Middle East to underscore [its claim] that the Arab-Israeli conflict is not the core of the problems in the region." He went on to say, that certain think-tanks are "diverting the attention of the world, and camouflage the settlement activities in the occupied Arab territories that have continued unabated, while continuing to build the racist segregation wall, and diminishing the importance of state terror perpetrated by Israel on a daily basis."

He also said that "Israel bears an important share of responsibility for intensifying and worsening the American predicament in Iraq by avoiding the resumption of the peace process, despite the hand extended in peace by the Palestinians, Syria, and Lebanon." This is a "major cause of the rejection of American policies in the broader Middle East," he concluded.

Sharon and his generals are systematically preparing for an attack on Syria and Iran. First they are fanning the flames of Palestinian resistance and terror attacks, only to make groundless accusations that Syria and Iran are behind "Palestinian terror," thus creating a pretext for retaliation against both countries. On Aug. 31, after a brutal Palestinian suicide bus bombing, Israeli Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon threatened Syria and Iran, declaring: "Anyone who is responsible for terrorism against us should not sleep quietly. We will deal with all those that support terror, at every level—people in the Palestinian Authority, people in Hezbollah in Lebanon, people in the terrorist headquarters in Damascus, which operate with Syria's permission; and also the financial support and weaponry that is transferred to the organizations under Iran's auspices."

This statement, according to Jonathan Ariel, senior editor

for the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv*, was coordinated with the Bush Administration's, prior to the suicide bombing! It was meant to coincide with the U.S. anti-Syrian UN resolution.

The assassination of Khalil came amidst efforts by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's security chief, Omar Sulliman, to negotiate a cease-fire from all the Palestinian factions, including Hamas. A source told *EIR*: "It is clear that [Mossad chief Meir] Dagan is the author of this assassination, but the Mossad does not have the capability to carry out such a hit by itself. It would need the aid of an Arab intelligence service. . . . It could have been done by Lebanese Maronite networks, which Israel has used in its assassinations in Lebanon. But, my educated guess would be that the hit was designed to sabotage the efforts of Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Sulliman. The Palestinian factions within the occupied territories are against such a cease-fire while the leadership outside is for it, including the one who was assassinated in Damascus." The source said this is typical for Sharon, who always kills the moderates. Furthermore the Israeli military and Mossad are against Egypt having any role in Palestinian-Israeli relations. In fact, Israel has dusted off its contingency war plans against Egypt, in case an attack on Syria would provoke a Egyptian military response.

In an interview with the Sept. 29 Israeli mass circulation daily *Yediot Ahronot*, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, a leading hawk, declared that Israel will use all means necessary to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, saying: "All options for preventing this will be considered. The important thing is to stop the current Iranian regime reaching the nuclear option." He then added, "The question is what comes first, nuclear ability or regime change?"

Also on Sept. 29, the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* published a commentary with the headline, "Waiting to Bomb Iran," in which senior diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote, that unlike the 1981 Israeli bombing of Iraq's nuclear reactor, which was kept secret until the attack was under way, an Israeli attack on Iran is being openly discussed in all the international media. Benn acknowledged that Israel has been leaking the information as part of its psychological warfare campaign. The result is that the international community has put greater pressure on Iran to end its nuclear program, but it also has produced the effect that the "West, doubtful about the success of the diplomatic effort, prefers to have Israel act in their place," said Benn.

Benn warned: "Sharon is disturbed by the growing acceptance, particularly by Europe, of Iran's impending membership in the nuclear club. Meanwhile he is carefully walking on the edge, and is exploiting his tough guy image to arouse international attention. But neither should we forget that the present political-military leadership—Sharon, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, [Chief of Staff Moshe] Ya'alon, [Deputy Chief of Staff Dan] Halutz—has few inhibitions about exercising military might. Operations that were once

considered taboo, such as attacks on Damascus, now seem self evident.

"A possible attack on Iran will be much more complex and risky, and therefore we would do well not to ignore the threats, and to conduct a public debate on the question of whether this course of action is desirable for Israel."

Military Preparations

Earlier in September, the Bush Administration informed Congress that it has approved the sale of 5,000 "smart bombs," including 500 one-ton "bunker busters" capable of penetrating concrete walls 2 meters thick.

These new bombs will be mated with the Israeli Air Force's newly acquired F-15I long-range strike aircraft, which are capable of flying to Iran and back without refueling. The bombs would be able to penetrate the concrete walls protecting Iran's nuclear reactor at Bushehr, and the underground nuclear facilities where Iran allegedly houses its nuclear weapons program. These bombs are standoff-type weapons that can be fired from a significant distance from their target and the anti-aircraft batteries that protect them.

Other military preparations would have had to include the launch of its Ofek 6 surveillance satellite, had it not failed. The Ofek satellites, with their powerful cameras are essential for locating bombing targets for Israeli aircraft or missiles. The launch, almost two years ahead of schedule, could have been an attempt to intimidate Iran; if so, it failed. But, another reason would have been to expand the amount of time Iran is under Israeli satellite surveillance from the two or three hours with one satellite, to five or six hours. Another possibility could have been to have the second satellite passing over Syria, to gather information on potential targets in preparation for a future attack.

In yet another step towards war, regional intelligence sources pointed out that Jordan's King Abullah II removed the Commander of the Royal Jordanian Air Force. The commander was the King's brother Prince Feisal, who was replaced by his deputy. Should Israel strike against Iran, they would have to overfly Jordan, as they did in 1981 when they attacked the Iraqi Osirak nuclear reactor. Once over Jordan, Israel's F-15s would only have to contend with the limited air defense capabilities of Iran. The sources suggested that the Bush Administration would put tremendous pressure on the King to allow the overflights, and thought that the change in command could be related to this pressure.

Israeli intelligence sources warned that the Israeli hawks are more eager to strike Iran and Syria than the even the U.S. neo-cons. Although the increasingly disastrous situation in Iraq, according to the source, could stay the hand of the Bush Administration, it does not deter the Israeli hawks. Even if Bush is defeated in November, a Kerry Administration would have to act decisively to prevent an Israeli attack on Iran. This is an assessment fully in line with that of LaRouche.