

War, and a Big Piece Of the West Bank

by Dean Andromidas

Are Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his backers in Washington planning a strike against Iran—a move that would enable Sharon to ditch his so-called disengagement plan and tighten his hold on the West Bank? Any decision for a strike against Iran is unlikely to come from Sharon alone. That decision would come from the bunker in the White House where Vice President Dick Cheney might give Sharon a green light to create a major crisis, perhaps as a diversion from Washington's political and economic woes.

Certain events in the week of May 2 should raise some serious questions about whether the current uneasy calm in the Israel-Palestine situation will soon break out into a storm.

In the last week of April, Sharon announced that the implementation of his so-called disengagement plan will be postponed from July 25 to Aug. 18. The reason given is that July 25 would overlap with the Hebrew month of Av, which is the traditional mourning period for the destruction of the first and second Temples, which were located on the site of the al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem. This is a period when ultra-orthodox Jews are not supposed to move into a new home. Even Israel's deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres asked why this was not known in advance.

Although many found this excuse plausible, it soon became apparent that preparations for the evacuation of 7,500 settlers from the Gaza Strip were far from complete, and could lead to an even longer postponement. For weeks, there have been talks about security problems from settler extremists, and the "trauma" the evacuation will cause. But only now is it being revealed that there is not yet a decision on where to move 1,500 households. There are thousands of available homes, apartments, and farmsteads throughout Israel, but Sharon has acquiesced to the settlers' demand that they be moved in entire communities. This will require the construction of new housing complexes, costing hundreds of millions of dollars, at a time when the brutal austerity policies of Israeli Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have led to thousands of Israelis being thrown into the streets to live in tents.

In an interview in the daily *Ha'aretz* on April 21, Sharon declared that his disengagement plan will not be "Gaza first" but "Gaza last." He reiterated that after he removes no more than four small settlements of the 100 that exist throughout

the West Bank, there will be no more evacuations, and that housing construction in the settlements will continue. "There, we are building 1,000 apartments in Bitar Illit and hundreds of apartments in Ma'aleh Admumim," he said. He further declared that all the so-called "settlement blocks" will be made contiguous with Israel, making obvious his intentions to steal even more land on the West Bank.

In another provocation, Sharon's government approved the establishment of a university in the settlement of Ariel deep in the West Bank, a move that Sharon said was "to strengthen the settlement blocks." At a time when university students throughout Israel only a few weeks ago protested massive budget cuts, the new university will cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Even the Israeli Council of Higher Education denounced the plan.

As for the Palestinians, on May 2, Sharon attacked Palestinian President Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) when he told visiting U.S. Sen. Bill Frist, the Republican majority leader, and right-wing Democratic Sen. Joseph Lieberman: "Instead of working to disarm the terror organizations, he [Abu Mazen] is working to strengthen them. He is not willing to fight them and is not willing to dismantle their infrastructure." At the same time Sharon announced that Israel will not allow the United States or Russia to supply weapons to the unarmed Palestinian police.

Bunker Busters for Israel

On April 26, the U.S. Defense Department informed Congress of its decision to sell Israel no less than 100 bunker-buster bombs, thus immediately provoking fears that Israel was preparing to launch an attack on Iran's nuclear research facilities.

Despite repeated denials by the Israeli government, the question is, will Vice President Dick Cheney and his cabal of neo-cons give Sharon a green light to attack Iran as a diversion from their own political woes? A May 3 commentary by Aluf Benn, *Ha'aretz* diplomatic correspondent, entitled "In the Role of the Rottweiler," claims that Sharon has become the Bush Administration's "rottweiler" to be used against Iran, Syria, and Lebanon.

Benn writes: "At the very time that Israel is toning down its belligerent policies, the U.S. Administration is casting it in the role of the rottweiler. Washington is using Sharon's renowned image as an unscrupulous bully in an effort to intimidate the Iranians and put pressure on the Europeans. It is hard to otherwise explain the statements of Vice President Dick Cheney and others who are publicly warning of an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Their message is simple: If diplomacy fails, Sharon will run amok."

Benn goes on: "The Administration's announcement last week that it was supplying 100 bunker-buster bombs to Israel was the most blatant sign that America is likely to sanction an Israeli attack on the underground uranium enrichment facilities in Iran. For now, it's only a deterrent. . . .



Sharon and Cheney, in Jerusalem at a joint press briefing on March 19. Will Cheney give Sharon a green light to attack Iran?

But everyone is fully aware of the intended use of such armaments, which until today have not been supplied to any country outside the United States.”

Benn quotes a high-ranking political source that Israel “has to be prepared for any development, including the scenario of a conflict with Iran, but it must not jump in head first. . . . The solution must be an international one. . . . If this doesn’t work, it’s good to have a few smart bombs in storage. . . .”

Although agreeing that the announcement of the sale of the bunker busters to Israel was part of “psychological warfare” campaign against Iran, an Israeli military source told *EIR* that Israel already has bunker buster bombs of its own design. This same source said that there is no doubt that the U.S. and Israel have drafted plans for an attack, but “no decision has been made, and I hope that no decision will be made because it would be a disaster.”

A strike on Iran is a hotly debated issue inside Israel. On April 17, the Strategic Dialogue Center at Netanya College in Israel, sponsored a conference entitled, “Multi-Nuclear Middle East: Iran, the Bomb, and Israel.” The all-day conference brought together representatives of the full spectrum on the issue, from hardliners to those urging extreme caution about attacking Iran. The conference was organized by Dr. Reuvan Pedatzur, one of the directors of the center, and a well known commentator on strategic affairs for the Israeli daily *Ha’aretz*.

Among the speakers was Dr. Avner Cohen, author of the famous book *Israel and the Bomb*, who urged caution

against a hasty Israeli attack on Iran. He made it clear that Iran had several more significant steps to go before it could claim a nuclear capability.

Another speaker expressing caution was Uri Neeman, a former senior official of the Mossad, who in a speech entitled “Israel’s Options,” laid out the pitfalls of an Israeli attack on Iran.

By contrast Professor Maj. Gen. Yitzhak Ben Yisrael (ret.), former director of the Israeli Military Research and Development agency, said that although it would of course be better to have the U.S. take out Iran’s nuclear capability, if they failed to act, then Israel would have to do it.

Readers of *EIR* may remember Ben Yisrael as one of the authors of the infamous “Project Daniel,” which outlines how Israel has to have a nuclear second-

strike capability that could destroy “between ten to twenty city assets” throughout the Middle East; and that Israel should have a pre-emptive strike policy to prevent any country in the region, especially Iran, from going nuclear (*EIR*, June 18, 2004).

Ben Yisrael’s hard-line views were seconded by former commander of the Israeli Air Force, Maj. Gen. Eitan Ben Eliyahu (ret.), whose presentation specified what would be required for an Israeli strike against Iran. Although he said that it would be better for the U.S. to do it, he made it clear that Israel had the capability to do it alone, if the U.S. failed..

A military engagement with Iran would require a disengagement of the Bush Administration from Sharon’s disengagement plan, or at least its postponement. Thus it seems convenient that Israel’s Minister for Diaspora Affairs, Natan Sharansky, resigned on May 2 from Sharon’s government, in a move that the *Jerusalem Post* reports was a message to President George W. Bush to drop his support for Sharon’s so-called disengagement plan. The same daily reports that Sharansky will travel to the U.S. in June, where he is expected to meet Bush, and his close friend Vice President Dick Cheney.

Sharansky is a well-known Soviet dissident turned right-wing Israeli politician. His book, *The Case for Democracy*, not only was read by the President, but reportedly was the inspiration for Bush’s last inaugural address. Sharansky will try to convince Bush to link the disengagement with moves to “democratize” the Palestinian National Authority—and thereby never implement disengagement.