

Moscow's peace of the dead

by Thierry Lalevée

On June 7, the Kremlin delivered a final deathblow to the past months of Middle East peace initiatives, and it took the form of a direct death threat to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. The threat was issued by Yevgenii Primakov, the director of the Oriental Institute in Moscow, not only a key channel of Soviet Middle East policymaking, but the most important policymaking institution of the KGB.

"Not everything that Arafat has done recently, benefitted the Palestinians," said Primakov in one of his rare interviews to the American press, preparing for his own visit to Washington at the end of the month.

A death threat, was the comment of intelligence analysts upon hearing the remarks, similar to the one delivered by Rostislav Ulyanovskii of the International Department of the Soviet Communist Party, who spoke of "dictatorial tendencies" in India a few weeks before the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

The death threat to Arafat is only possible because of the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Congress. State snubbed Jordan's King Hussein when he visited the United States in May, to state that Arafat was ready to abide by U.N. resolutions recognizing Israel. Then, a June 4 resolution opposing advanced arms sales to Jordan was introduced by Sens. Edward Kennedy and John Heinz (R-Pa.). These acts were Moscow's green light.

But only three weeks before Primakov spoke, on May 16, the Soviet ambassador to Jordan, Aleksander Zinchuk, had told *Al Sawt al Shaab* that Moscow looked at the Feb. 11 agreement between Arafat and Hussein positively. Who to believe? Primakov. He is the real Soviet authority on Middle Eastern affairs, with decades of experience in political destabilization. He has a power and authority far superior to any ambassador. Zinchuk, the diplomat, has to maintain ties with the Hashemite Kingdom, and so, he has to tell lies. Primakov, the so-called academician, can afford to tell the blunt truth, knowing that his particular position doesn't officially commit the Soviet government to anything, while the message he sends is nevertheless received with authority.

The real message has two levels: Countries and regimes will be spared, provided they recognize leadership of Moscow and its regional partner, Syria. Yasser Arafat does not, and is therefore condemned to death. Those associated with him may expect the same fate.

Underlining the difference between May 16 and June 7 is that, earlier, Moscow was confident that Syria and its stooges,

the Shi'ite militias of Al Amal, could deliver the "final solution" to the Palestinian problem with massacres in Palestinian camps in Beirut. By early June, Syria was to be the only "Palestinian" power, and Arafat left with no choice but to go to Canossa. Then, the Hussein/Arafat initiative was acceptable to Moscow.

However, by June 7, it had become obvious that the design was backfiring. As Ariel Sharon learned earlier, massacres are not so easy to pull off quietly. The Palestinians successfully resisted the Shi'ites for weeks, even forcing Syria's pet Palestinians to show solidarity. Now, Arafat's elimination has become Moscow's priority. The failure of King Hussein to distance himself from Arafat, places him, too, on the Kremlin's hit list.

Jordan: the front line

It is in Jordan that Moscow's ability to impose its policy in the region will be decided. On June 4, the Jordanian government announced that its security services had foiled a plotted coup against the King. Arrested as its leader was the unofficial chief of the Syrian Ba'ath Party's Jordanian section. On June 11, a Jordanian airliner was hijacked by the "Suicide Commandos Imam Musa Sadr," who threatened to blow up the plane unless all Palestinians left their camps. On June 12, the plane was blown up and seven Jordanian officers on board kidnapped. Hussein has no illusions about his northern neighbor, and made a point of discussing security matters with British Prime Minister Thatcher on June 7. But that, he may regret: Thatcher announced that she was "gloomy" about Hussein's peace initiative and his survival.

The Israelis also expressed worries. On June 5, Gen. Ehud Barak, chief of Israeli military intelligence, held an unusual background briefing for reporters to warn that Damascus would sabotage Hussein's policy at all costs, including assassinations of Arafat, Hussein, and their close associates, border skirmishes, and airspace violations. Damascus may also undertake "lightning attacks with limited aims" against Israeli forces, especially given its new ballistic missile capabilities.

Despite Barak's warning, observers point out that there are many in Israel around Yitzak Shamir and Ariel Sharon, and at the U.S. State Department, who would be more than happy if Hussein were to disappear. Barak's statements may be the cover for wetwork operations in Jordan to be blamed on Assad.

In fact, a State Department official stated on the front page of the *International Herald Tribune* on June 10 that his office's "biggest nightmare would be that the PLO [through Hussein] accepts all of Washington's conditions"! But envoy Richard Murphy will go to Amman in early July for talks with a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. Why? The State Department has its deal with Moscow already! State Department policy has no other aim but to give Libya and Syria more time to assert their regional supremacy. Murphy's trip can only be designed to postpone negotiations.