

Netanyahu pushes for Palestinian civil war

by Joseph Brewda

The murder of a Hamas terrorist on Israel's most wanted list on March 29, has set the stage for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to carry out a British scenario of provoking an inter-Palestinian bloodbath, and a new Mideast war. Hamas bombmaker Mohieddin Sharif was found dead in a car which exploded in Ramallah, on the West Bank, in what was first attributed to a premature explosion of a suicide bomb. But investigations by Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority police later found that Sharif had died of bullet wounds three hours before the blast. The bomb in the car in which Sharif's body was placed, was detonated by remote-control, in an apparent attempt to hide the cause of death.

Strategic considerations

Netanyahu's motive, and those of his British backers, is not simply to provoke a new Mideast crisis, but to use that crisis to overwhelm the White House with another emergency. As such, it is part of the sequence which includes the November 1997 and January 1998 "Iraq crises," and related efforts to drum up an "Iranian nuclear weapons" scare. The timing is dictated by the fact that President Bill Clinton must now act decisively to create a new international monetary system, as *EIR* has emphasized. The British fear that without such crises, Clinton might do just that, thereby destroying the financial basis of their power.

Sharif rose to the top of Israel's most wanted list for running a series of suicide bus bombings in spring 1996, in the aftermath of the Israeli murder of Hamas bombmaker Yahya Ayyash. Sharif's massacres, which killed over 60 people, paved the way for "strongman" Netanyahu's electoral victory that May, over Prime Minister Shimon Peres, the architect of the Oslo peace accords. Now, Sharif's murder will further aid Netanyahu.

Hamas Gaza leader Abdul Aziz Rantisi threatened more bombings in response to Sharif's murder. "They have to understand that Hamas is in the habit of taking revenge," he told Associated Press. "We remind the world of how we reacted to the martyrdom of Yahya Ayyash." Netanyahu routinely denied Israeli responsibility for the Sharif murder, and on April 3 threatened that "if there is a terrorist attack, we will hold the Palestinian Authority responsible," and, of course, "cancel" the Oslo Accords.

But Netanyahu and his backers are not simply trying to

destroy Oslo; they are also trying to provoke a Palestinian civil war. This has become more likely since Rantisi began raving, beginning on April 4 in statements to the *Jerusalem Post*, that the Palestinian Authority killed Sharif. He also said that the PA has threatened Hamas leaders that they would be killed, if Hamas carried out revenge attacks. Rantisi's charges were echoed in the April 9 issue of the London-based *Foreign Report*, which flatly asserted that Sharif was killed by the PA in a "cold-blooded and clumsy fashion," a line also being spread by former Shin Bet intelligence chief Yaakov Peri.

On April 6, PA Cabinet Secretary Tayeb Abdul Rahim released a statement on the PA investigation into the murder, charging that another Hamas faction had killed Sharif. On April 14, he told Palestinian TV that certain factions in the Hamas leadership have tried to cover up for the killing, to hide Israeli infiltration of their ranks.

As a result of such developments, Israel is now situated to provoke a Palestinian civil war, the Israeli daily *Haaretz* said on April 13. The deep, and rapidly growing lack of trust between Hamas and the PA, the paper predicts, could lead to the "inception of terrorism against the PA," somewhat like what Islamic terrorists carry out against the Egyptian government. "For the time being, Islamic terror may be a threat to Israel," *Haaretz* concluded, but "the possibility of its being directed at the PA" is now on the horizon.

Preventing peace

The assassination was also timed to destroy ongoing efforts by Saudi Arabia, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and other parties to organize Hamas to abandon terrorism and accept some form of truce with Israel. According to an April 13 *Jerusalem Post* report, Hamas leaders from throughout the world had gathered in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on March 23, to debate the future of their movement. Leaders from Hamas's external branches in Syria and Jordan demanded that it launch a new offensive against Israel. Hamas leaders from Gaza disagreed, and argued that terrorist attacks would only strengthen Netanyahu and provoke a crackdown. The murder of Sharif, six days after the meeting, strengthened those in Hamas demanding renewed terrorist attacks, and undermined those who know that terrorism plays into Netanyahu's hands.

This is not the first time that Netanyahu and British intelligence have intervened to tip the factional balance within Hamas, in favor of those demanding more bombings. For example, the Mossad hit attempt on Hamas Political Department chief Khalid Mishaaal, in Amman, Jordan, last September, took place two days after Netanyahu received a communiqué from Jordan's King Hussein, reporting that Hamas had agreed to accept the King's offices to mediate a truce between Hamas and Israel. Netanyahu's murder attempt against Mishaaal scuttled that effort, just as the murder of Sharif has undermined the more recent effort to bring Hamas into the peace process.