

Bush Backing For Israel's Sharon Assailed At Durban

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The Bush Administration's failure to intervene to stop Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's continuing terror and assassination campaign against the Palestinian Authority now threatens to isolate the United States from the entire Arab world, and from a majority of developing nations as well.

This message was delivered, loud and clear, at the United Nations special conference on racism, in Durban, South Africa, which took place on Aug. 31 to Sept. 7.

After Palestinian and Arab delegations to the 700-person conference insisted on including a criticism of Israel's racist policies against the Palestinians in the final communiqué, the Israeli and American delegations officially walked out of the conference on Sept. 3.

A committee of delegates, led by the South African host government, was still attempting to craft a final compromise text that could be accepted by the United States, as this issue of *EIR* went to press. The European Union also threatened to walk out of the conference, if the criticism of Israel was not removed from the final communiqué, according to French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. "France and the European Union would seek a departure from this conference, which would mark a failure," Jospin told a cabinet meeting on Sept. 6, according to Associated Press.

But regardless of the final conference outcome, an unambiguous, sharp message has been delivered to the Bush White House: Either do something to stop the Sharon savagery, or face even further isolation from a majority of nations of the world, including an increasingly unified Arab world.

On Aug. 13, Lyndon LaRouche, a Democratic Presidential pre-candidate for 2004, had issued an open call for President George W. Bush to "change his mind quickly," or face precisely the kind of international outrage that surfaced at Durban. LaRouche warned in that statement, issued by his Presidential campaign committee, that unless President Bush

"uses his powers and influence in an appropriate way, there is presently nothing in sight which will prevent that general, spreading war in the Middle East which would lead, of necessity, to a new Masada—Israel's destruction by its own hands."

LaRouche concluded his statement with a direct question: "Does this President have the combination of advisors and ability to listen to them, which is required of him in this perilous situation?"

A Wake-Up Call For Bush

Sources close to the Bush Administration have told *EIR* that the President and his top White House aides were shocked at the virulence of the criticisms of the Israeli brutality and the American inaction.

In opening remarks before the conference, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan singled out the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians, noting that the horrible atrocities committed against the Jewish people did not justify silence in the face of Israel's "displacement, occupation, blockade, and now extra-judicial killings." Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, while harshly condemning Israel's racist violence, and the "American war machine" weapons being used in the atrocities, also invoked the "peace of the brave" that he had achieved with his "late partner," Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, as a model that could still be adopted to achieve a lasting peace.

The Bush Administration has not only backed off from pressuring Sharon to abandon the "pre-emptive assassination" policies and the other daily acts of military brutality inside the Palestinian territories. The President and others have pressured European and Russian government officials to back off from their own efforts to mediate the Mideast crisis, claiming that this might interfere with the nonexistent "ongoing U.S. efforts."

In August, German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer had attempted to organize a Berlin meeting between Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, but a widely publicized statement by President Bush, placing the blame for the peace impasse and continuing violence on Arafat and the Palestinian Authority, scotched that effort.

On Sept. 6, Sharon departed from Moscow, after two days of meetings with top Russian officials. On his departure, Sharon fumed that he would never negotiate peace with Arafat. While Sharon was in Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin consulted by phone with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and with Arafat. Putin announced that he would be sending his special envoy, Andrei Vdovin, back to the Middle East within days, amid widespread published reports that Putin is about to appoint former Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov to a top advisory post, possibly related to the Mideast crisis.

Washington sources expressed hope that the shock of the Durban renunciation of the Bush de facto support for Sharon's murder campaign—combined with the accelerating Russian and European Union moves to fill the void created by the Bush inaction—could shock the Administration into action.

At present, these sources report, Secretary of State Colin Powell has been overshadowed by White House chief political strategist Karl Rove, who has urged the President to avoid any conflict with the Israeli lobby, over fear that such a confrontation would weaken the Republican Party's chances of holding on to majority control of the U.S. House of Representatives in next year's mid-term elections. President Bush and Rove are known to be particularly fearful of an Israeli lobby mobilization to defeat Gov. Jeb Bush in his reelection bid in Florida.

This kind of grovelling in the face of blackmail by the Zionist lobby could lead to the outbreak of a religious war in the Middle East, that would soon engulf the entire planet, and certainly result in the destruction of Israel.

If the revolt against the Bush Mideast policy at Durban forces a change in the Administration's stance, back to a more interventionist policy, with a tougher approach toward Sharon, it is not yet too late to prevent such a catastrophic war from erupting.

Documentation:

The following are excerpts from the opening address on Aug. 31 by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to the World Conference Against Racism, in Durban, South Africa.

... One thing we can celebrate is the fact that racism is now universally condemned. Few people in the world today openly deny that human beings are born with equal rights.

But far too many people are still victimized because they

belong to a particular group—whether national, ethnic, religious, defined by gender or by descent.

Often this discrimination veils itself behind spurious pretexts. People are denied jobs ostensibly because they lack educational qualifications; or they are refused housing because there is a high crime rate in their community.

Yet these very facts, even when true, are often the result of discrimination. Injustice traps people in poverty, poverty becomes the pretext for injustice—and so new wrongs are piled on the old.

In many places people are maltreated, and denied protection, on the grounds that they are not citizens but unwanted immigrants. Yet often they have come to a new country to do work that is badly needed, or are present not by choice but as refugees from persecution in their own country. Such people have a special need for protection, and are entitled to it. . . .

A special responsibility falls on political leaders, who have accepted the task of representing a whole society. They are accountable to their fellow-citizens, but also—in a sense—accountable for them, and for the actions of their predecessors. We have seen, in recent decades, some striking examples of national leaders assuming this responsibility, acknowledging past wrongs and asking pardon from—or offering an apology to—the victims and their heirs.

Such gestures cannot right the wrongs of the past. They can sometimes help to free the present—and the future—from the shackles of the past.

But in any case, Mr. President, past wrongs must not distract us from present evils. Our aim must be to banish from this new century the hatred and prejudice that have disfigured previous centuries. . . .

Nowhere is that truer today than in the Middle East. The Jewish people have been victims of anti-Semitism in many parts of the world, and in Europe they were the target of the Holocaust—the ultimate abomination. This fact must never be forgotten, or diminished. It is understandable, therefore, that many Jews deeply resent any accusation of racism directed against the State of Israel—and all the more so when it coincides with indiscriminate and totally unacceptable attacks on innocent civilians.

Yet we cannot expect Palestinians to accept this as a reason why the wrongs done to them—displacement, occupation, blockade, and now extra-judicial killings—should be ignored, whatever label one uses to describe them.

But, my friends, mutual accusations are not the purpose of this conference. Our main objective must be to improve the lot of the victims.

Let us admit that all countries have issues of racism and discrimination to address. Rather than pick on any one country or region, let us aim to leave here with a commitment from every country to draw up and implement its own national plan to combat racism, in accordance with general principles that we will have agreed. . . .