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## Beyond Afghanistan

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# Syria, Lebanon, Iraq May Be Next Targets

by Dean Andromidas

Since the assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi on Oct. 17, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his generals have moved one step further toward provoking general warfare in the Middle East. The Israeli military has been conducting attacks on the Palestinian-held territory of the West Bank, attacks which politically threaten to collapse the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, Israeli defense officials have threatened Syria with military strikes if it does not stop Lebanese Hezbollah guerrillas from carrying out attacks along Israel's border with Lebanon. These actions are aimed at dragging the United States into a wider anti-Arab war in the Middle East, a war targetting Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon.

Sharon's provocation must be seen in the context of the ongoing campaign in Washington by those who want to extend the "war against international terrorism" into a "Clash of Civilizations." Those leading this drumbeat, for a wider war against Iraq and Syria, since the Sept. 11 attacks, are precisely the friends of Sharon and his generals. They include U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage.

Ze'evi's assassination should be assessed from this strategic standpoint. In an Oct. 20 statement, U.S. 2004 Democratic Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon H. LaRouche outlined the context and the characteristic features of Ze'evi's assassination. LaRouche emphasized that it would be irresponsible to "exclude the strong evidence suggesting that on the list of suspects in seeking out the authorship of the assassination, could be the Israeli military itself. . . . Qualified security specialists are compelled to ask whether Ze'evi was killed as a substitute for the Sharon who was already a candidate for assassination by the most desperate faction of the Israeli military command."

LaRouche pointed out that those who benefitted from Ze'evi's assassination were "none other than that section of the Israeli military command which is determined to bully the Bush Administration into allowing, or even conducting full-scale attacks on Syria and Iraq."

### Sharon Spits In Bush's Eye

Within hours of Ze'evi's assassination, Sharon ordered an Israeli military assault on Palestinian territory, unprecedented in its scale and brutality. Attacking all the major Pales-

tinian-held cities in the West Bank, including Ramallah, Nablus, and Bethlehem, the assault destroyed municipal buildings and the homes of Palestinian families linked to "terrorists," some of whom had already been assassinated by Israeli forces. More than 40 Palestinians, including women and children, were killed in the first week of operations. More than ten of those victims were killed after President George Bush told Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, on Oct. 23, that Israeli troops must withdraw "as quickly as possible" from Palestinian territory. Later the same day, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said that Israel should withdraw "immediately."

The obvious concern of the Bush Administration was stated by U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who told Peres during their meeting on Oct. 22, "The more the situation escalates, the more our ability to maintain the coalition against terror with Arab states is eroded."

Sharon's opposite intent is also obvious. If the Arab states abandon the U.S. "coalition," the administration will not "reward" the Arabs with a Palestinian state and the return of the Golan Heights to Syria, but will rather have to fight Israel's war against the Arabs. For Sharon's supporters in Washington, if the Arabs are forced to abandon the United States, then there is nothing to stop their policy of a "Clash of Civilizations."

As of this writing, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have not withdrawn from Palestinian territory. But even should Sharon eventually "capitulate" to the U.S. demand to pull out, it will change very little. Commentator Gideon Samat, in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, wrote that Sharon "does not want a settlement and will use any reason on which he can lay his hands or tongue. . . . His revulsion for a real settlement is greater than that of the Palestinian leader. Arafat went to top-level talks with former Prime Minister Ehud Barak. He rejected his proposals but was prepared to discuss them. Sharon has not even come close to this threshold." Samat concludes that Sharon is "pushing the country . . . toward another disaster."

A senior Israeli intelligence source expressed to *EIR* his amazement at how Sharon has "spit in the face" of the Bush Administration's demands, yet the administration continues to play soft with Sharon. "If this continues, the region will be slowly moving to a disaster of major proportions," he said. The IDF's operation, even should it soon be withdrawn, remains an obvious prelude to the eventual reoccupation of the West Bank and the crushing of the Palestinian Authority. If not now, it could occur at the next opportunity.

### U.S. Threatens Syria

Ever since Sept. 11, elements within the American intelligence community—typified by former CIA chief James Woolsey—and among such as the Bush Administration's Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz, have been pushing for a military attack against Iraq. Also, since late August, and



*U.S. Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld (left) and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. The Sharon government has thumbed its nose at Bush Administration requests to pull its troops out of Palestinian-controlled areas.*

especially since Sept. 11, senior figures in the administration, most explicitly Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, have issued warnings and threats against the government in Damascus for allegedly protecting or colluding with terrorist groups. These are precisely those in the administration who maintain strong ties to Sharon and his generals.

It is well known that if the United States attacks Syria or Iraq, Arab support for the United States will evaporate. It should be remembered that the President's father would have been unable to organize a pan-Arab coalition against Iraq in 1991, without the support of Syria. An attack on Syria is an attack on that nation's allies, and Iran and Saudi Arabia as well. An attack on Iraq, could spark popular unrest that could lead to a collapse of the Egyptian and Jordanian governments.

A senior British military source indicated to *EIR* that the Anglo-American war in Afghanistan is only the "initial phase" of the so-called "war against terrorism." "I don't think we are being told what is really happening militarily, in and around Afghanistan," the source said. "I think it is a 'blind,' for action being planned in the Middle East, against Syria, and conceivably Iraq."

According to this source, "there have been regular reconnaissance flights over Syria recently. Syria is becoming a foremost concern, given developments in Lebanon—the Hezbollah—and the PFLP." In Lebanon, where Hezbollah is based, the Syrian government exerts major influence, and some 20,000 Syrian troops are stationed there. The PFLP maintains a headquarters in Damascus.

The Ze'evi's assassination has given Sharon and his generals the perfect pretext to play their part in bringing about a

"Clash of Civilizations." Since Sept. 11, Sharon's government has been busy doing everything possible to have Arafat declared as in the same league as Osama bin Laden, and to have the ruling Syrian Ba'ath party declared the Taliban of the Middle East.

### **The IDF's Mad Logic**

On the morning of Oct. 23, IDF Deputy Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon warned of mounting tensions between Israel and Syria and Lebanon, as well as Iran. On Israeli Radio, Ya'alon said, "Lebanon has recently turned into a potential launching platform for Iranian-made rockets." He said that Syria is at "a point from which [Damascus] could move toward an agreement or, alternatively, return to conflict."

As if on cue, Hezbollah guerrillas in southern Lebanon launched

anti-tank rockets at two Israeli military outposts along the Israeli-Lebanese border in the area of the disputed Shaaba farms.

On the same day, Ahmed Jibril, leader of the PFLP-General Command (a splitoff from the PFLP), told Danish radio that Ze'evi's assassination was justified, because he was a criminal. Jibril went further, saying that Prime Minister Sharon, Infrastructure Minister Avigdor Lieberman, Interior Minister Nathan Sharansky, and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu should also be assassinated.

At an Israeli military base along the Lebanese border, Israeli Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer threatened to attack Syria if the Hezbollah attacks Israeli positions along the border. "There is no guarantee that Hezbollah won't continue" its attacks, Ben-Eliezer said. "Hezbollah has become one of the world's primary terror threats." He said that he had sent a message to the U.S. administration: "We told them that we think the Syrians—and apparently Hezbollah—have not been paying attention to American pronouncements and warnings. Syria is a state containing 20 terrorist organizations, including the leadership of Islamic Jihad. Syria is now also a member of the UN Security Council. There is nothing more cynical than that." Directly threatening Syria, Ben-Eliezer continued, "The fact that yesterday we attacked Hezbollah does not mean we have absolved Syria. It does not mean that we do not know that without Syria's backing this sort of action could not have taken place."

IDF Chief of Staff Shaul Mofaz, speaking before the Knesset (parliament) Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, displayed typical IDF logic, thundering that if Hezbollah

attacks Israeli positions along the border, the IDF will exact a “heavy price” from the Hezbollah right then and there, in order to keep the situation from escalating!

The Bush Administration seemed to get the message. U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Vincent Battle reportedly delivered a warning to the government in Beirut, that Israel is preparing to attack Syrian military positions and installations in Lebanon, in response to a Hezbollah attack along the Israeli border. Battle warned Lebanon not to allow the situation to escalate along the border.

Ambassador Battle’s statement followed comments by

President Bush on Oct. 23, during his meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Peres, in which Bush said that the United States views Hezbollah as a terrorist group with “global reach.”

A Bush Administration official was quoted by the *Jerusalem Post* as saying, “The President said very clearly that Hezbollah is one of those terrorist organizations that qualifies within his scenarios of global reach.” The term “global reach” is apparently the term that the administration has applied to organizations it considers in the same category as Osama bin Laden.

## Israel Buried Reagan Peace Plan In Blood

The possibility of an Israeli “breakaway ally” war provocation, ostensibly triggered by the assassination of Israeli Gen. Rechavam Ze’evi, had been under active consideration by the Sharon government and leading circles within the Israeli Defense Forces, prior to the Ze’evi murder. On Oct. 12, days before Ze’evi’s assassination, in response to news coverage of a Bush Administration peace plan to formally recognize a Palestinian state, Cabinet minister Dan Nevah warned: “All history shows that when the Americans put a plan on the table, like the famous Reagan plan, the programs did not achieve their aims.” Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s personal spokesman, Raanan Gissin, seconded the Nevah threat, declaring days later, “The United States will never submit to Israel by surprise a plan for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The United States has never imposed a plan that both sides have not accepted.”

Nevah’s scornful denunciation of the “Reagan plan” could not have constituted a more direct, violent threat against President Bush’s revitalized peace efforts.

On Sept. 1, 1982, President Ronald Reagan launched a Mideast peace initiative. The President declared, “The war in Lebanon has demonstrated . . . [that] first the military losses of the PLO have not diminished the yearning of the Palestinian people for a just solution of their claims; and second, while Israel’s military successes in Lebanon have demonstrated that its armed forces are second to none in the region, they alone cannot bring just and lasting peace to Israel and her neighbors.” Reagan went on to call for direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and the Arab states of the region, for the “transfer of territory” in exchange for peace, and he declared that the “final status of Jerusalem” should be “decided through negotiations.”

That initiative, far less ambitious than the past decade’s Oslo and related proposals, was immediately sabotaged by Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon, and by the massacres of unarmed Palestinians, including women and children, at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps near Beirut.

On Sept. 18, 1982, the morning after the Sabra and Shatilla massacres, President Reagan addressed the American people, and held Israel responsible for the mass killings: “All people of decency,” he declared, “must share our outrage and revulsion of the murders, which included women and children. . . . We [had been] assured that Israeli forces would not enter west Beirut. We also understood that following withdrawal, Lebanese Army units would establish control over that city. We were thwarted in this effort by the Israeli occupation that took place beginning Wednesday. . . . We strongly opposed Israel’s move into west Beirut . . . for fear it would provoke further fighting.”

Then-Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon has recently been accused in a Belgian court of war crimes, for his role in the Sabra and Shatila mass murders, and one former Reagan special envoy to Lebanon, Morris Draper, has told BBC’s Panorama that Sharon was a pivotal figure in that act of genocide against unarmed civilians.

President Reagan continued the peace efforts, until the Spring of 1983, when two terrorist attacks—the car-bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks near the Lebanese capital—forced him to withdraw American peacekeepers from Lebanon.

Israeli military forces refused to leave Lebanon (they finally withdrew in 1999, after a 20-year occupation). At the time of the Embassy and Marine barracks bombings, there were widespread reports that the Israeli intelligence services had known in advance about the attacks, but neglected to inform the United States.

—Michele and Jeffrey Steinberg