

tinians, who comprise almost 50% of its population. Sharon then secured the release from an Israeli prison of Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Yassin, supposedly in order to appease King Hussein.

Dagan's appointment has come under fire because of his pronounced affiliation to the Likud and the fact that he ran Sharon's election campaign for prime minister. Said Labor Party Secretary General Ophir Pines-Paz: "Dagan is clearly a Likud man who is deeply entrenched in political life and was active in Sharon's campaign team. Even if he is skilled, appointing a political man to head the Mossad is a severe blow to such an independent, apolitical organization."

## Sharon Threatens War Against Lebanon, Syria

by Dean Andromidas

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is threatening to launch a war against Lebanon and Syria in the event that the Bush Administration's plans to attack Iraq are thwarted. The flash-point for this conflict is Israel's bellicose opposition to a project by Lebanon to pump water from the Wassani River to villages in the south. On Sept. 10, Sharon said that if Lebanon refused to stop the project, Israel would consider it a "pretext for war."

Although "water wars" have been on the agenda for the Middle East for the last decade, this conflict has nothing to do with water. According to Israeli intelligence sources, Sharon is desperate to get a regional war started as soon as possible, in order to complete his destruction of the Palestinian Authority. "Sharon has been counting on a U.S. attack on Iraq so he could expel the Palestinians across the Jordan, and so he could turn around and wipe out Syria," one source said. Iraq's offer to allow UN weapons inspectors could block that, and so Sharon is putting pressure on the Syrian front. Threatening to attack Lebanon and Syria, using a water dispute with Lebanon, is just a pretext. The source said that if Bush doesn't attack Iraq soon, Sharon could attack Syria, in order to force the issue.

### Desalination Is the Solution

The Lebanese began the Wassani River project many months ago, in order to supply water to villages that had been denied access to the water during the 22-year Israeli occupation. The Israeli claim that this violates international agreements is spurious, since there simply are none, while Israel is technically in a state of war with Lebanon and Syria. The Israeli claim that the Wassani is a key source for Lake

Tiberias also stretches the imagination. The Wassani, which is nothing more than a stream, is a tributary of the Hisbani River, which it enters within Lebanon's own territory. The latter, in turn, flows into the upper Jordan, the main source of water for Lake Tiberias, whence Israel draws much of its water.

Declaring his nation's rights to the water, Lebanese President Emile Lahoud said: "Israel's exploitation of the spring during its 22-year occupation of south Lebanon does not mean, in any way, that this de facto situation should continue by force. . . . Israel does not want to believe that its occupation of south Lebanon is over."

The Lebanese government has demanded that the issue be brought before the five permanent members of the UN Security Council—U.K., Canada, U.S., France, and Russia—in order to prevent Israel from resorting to military action.

Israel's claim, that the 3 million cubic meters of water which the Lebanese plan to withdraw poses an "existential threat" to its water resources, drew ridicule from some Israeli commentators, who point out that abundant water could be supplied to Israel by desalination. Aviad Kleinberg of the daily *Ha'aretz* wrote on Sept. 18 that Israel and the Palestinian Authority will require 800 billion cubic meters of water annually, which could be supplied through desalination at the cost of \$480 million. If just Israel's needs were considered, it could cost as little as \$170 million. "This is much less expensive than war," wrote Kleinberg. "It would make it possible to conduct rational negotiations over a settlement. . . . Why, then, has nothing been done for decades? Is it because it is easy for decision-makers to keep us in a constant state of existential threat? Is it because the option of war is always less frightening than the option of peace?"

### International Maneuvers

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, in a Sept. 14 meeting at the United Nations, told Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov that Lebanon is "dangerously provoking Israel." In Washington he discussed the issue with Vice President Dick Cheney, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, and Secretary of State Colin Powell. The Bush Administration dispatched two State Department water experts to examine the project. After discussing the issue with Peres, Secretary Powell declared, "We don't want to see a new crisis developing over the diversion of water out of the river."

Peres kept up the pressure by turning the issue against Syria and its allies in the Lebanon-based Islamic group, Hezbollah. He told Israel Radio: "There is one power in Lebanon that is trying to destroy everything and that is Hezbollah. It is a force that does not always obey the government. We also don't know where Syria stands on this issue."

The head of Israel's national water authority Mekorot, Reserve Maj. Gen. Uri Saguy, who happens to have recently retired as chief of military intelligence, has also called for action.