

Andreotti Confronts Rice

If the Italian government rejoins ranks, this will offer one important instrument to the Vatican efforts; as usual in the past, all resources of Italian diplomacy will add a “second leg” to the Vatican ones. An indication of the new course came on Feb. 19, at the foreign policy debate in the Italian Senate, where Berlusconi’s government accepted an amendment presented by Sen. Giulio Andreotti, committing the government to seek a Parliament vote on decisions on the Iraq issue to be taken by the UN Security Council.

Former Prime Minister Andreotti, who is very close to the Vatican, addressed Condoleezza Rice’s interview with the Italian magazine *Panorama* on Feb. 3, in which Rice had compared what she called the Pope’s current “inaction,” with appeasement towards Hitler. Rice’s statements were seen as an endorsement of the well-known slander against Pope Pius XII. In a rare exercise of directness, Andreotti blasted Rice’s statements: “You cannot call a disrupter those who, like the Pope, due to his magisterium, speak out compromisingly for peace. There has been a bestial statement—allow me to use this term—by the U.S. National Security Advisor, who said that the Vatican is behaving as usual: It is acting as it did with Hitler.”

Whatever the course of the events will be in the next two weeks, the Pope and his collaborators are ready to undertake any step, including a direct approach with George W. Bush. On Feb. 22, the Pope received British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who had been publicly criticized just the day before by the leaders of both the Catholic and the Anglican Churches in Britain. The aim of their meeting was to explore possible differences between Blair and Bush, and also to better understand what really is on Bush’s mind, through his staunchest ally. After the meeting, it was leaked that the Pope is considering a letter to Bush to be delivered by Cardinal Etchegaray. Another option, a visit to Baghdad by Kofi Annan, needs U.S. approval. Cardinal Etchegaray has already been sent to Haiti, on a “stand-by” mission, ready to fly to Washington should a meeting with Bush or Colin Powell be organized.

Eventually, the Pope is ready to undertake a new trip. Where? To Central Asia, his collaborators say, indicating that Iraq is not the issue, but rather the “Great Game” for the control of the Eurasian continent. That is where the next front is, and there one must concentrate efforts to prevent a Clash of Civilizations. In the meantime, the Pope has launched another spectacular action: He called for a day of fasting, for March 5, which is also Ash Wednesday, “for the cause of peace, especially in the Middle East.” The Pope addressed his call to all believers in God: “It is a duty for all believers, whatever the religion to which they belong, to proclaim that we will never be able to be happy, [if we are set] one against another. . . . Never can the future of humanity be ensured by terrorism and the logic of war.”

Reporting the Pope’s call, the Vatican daily *Osservatore Romano* ran on its front page, twice, the word “never” in giant letters: “NEVER Terrorism and NEVER War”

Sharon Forms New War Government in Israel

by Dean Andromidas

The death of former Israeli Ambassador Shlomo Argov on Feb. 23, was a poignant reminder of how dangerous Israel’s current prime minister is. It was the attempted assassination of Argov on June 3, 1982 which gave Ariel Sharon the pretext to launch the bloody war in Lebanon.

Argov was left paralyzed and bedridden for the rest of his life when an assassin from the Abu Nidal terrorist organization shot him in the head. Months after the attack, as it became clear that Sharon had deceived the Israeli government in invading Lebanon, Argov, from his hospital bed, denounced the fact that his shooting was used as an excuse for the invasion of Lebanon. “Israel cannot get entangled in experiments or hopeless military adventures,” Argov said. “If those who initiated this war in Lebanon had envisioned the scope of this adventure, it could have saved the lives of hundreds of our best young people.”

On the day Argov died, Sharon signed agreements to form a new government coalition that promises to be even more brutal than his previous one. It is a government he will not have to deceive, if he wishes to be “entangled in experiments or hopeless military adventures.”

The Most Extremist Elements

The new coalition includes Sharon’s Likud, the National Religious Party (NRP), and the National Union. The latter two are considered the “settlers’ parties,” representing the most fascist and extremist elements within the settlers’ movement. The fourth partner is the Shinui party, which claims to be a “secular” party; it gave up all of its principles to jump into Sharon’s cabinet. Sharon and his supporters among the war party in Washington had hoped to re-establish the “unity government” with the Labor Party; but its chairman, Amram Mitzna, refused to be a figleaf for Sharon’s war plans.

The Prime Minister’s spin-doctors claim he has formed a “center-right” coalition, with the NRP and National Union on his right, the Shinui on his left, and himself in the center. In reality, this government is the furthest right in more than a decade.

The NRP was founded as a relatively moderate religious Zionist party, but in the last decades it has become a Messianic extremist party. It is led by the fascist Effi Eitam, a retired brigadier general who has a reputation for his brutality against the Palestinians, and who hopes to become Israel’s new Benito Mussolini. Eitam is infamous for his proposal that the Sinai, which is part of Egypt, become the new Palestinian



Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and two of his coalition partners: NRP party leader and would-be Mussolini of Israel, Effi Eitam (inset, top); and Shinui party leader Yosef Lapid (inset, bottom). Sharon has formed a government that will ensure that a peace process will be impossible.

state. By giving the NRP the Housing and Construction Ministry and the Welfare Ministry, Sharon has made it clear that he will be expanding the settlements as fast as he can.

The National Union is even more extreme than the NRP. It comprises three smaller parties, the most important being Moledet and Yisrael Beitenu. The former is led by Rabbi Benny Elon, considered to be among those responsible for the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin—Amir Yigal, Rabin's assassin, claims he was inspired by the preachings of Elon and other extremist rabbis. Moledet's official policy is "transfer" for the Palestinians—not to the Sinai as Eitam suggests, but to Jordan. It is a policy that parallels Sharon's plan for ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian lands. Prior to leading Moledet, Elon was the chief rabbi at the infamous Ateret Cohanim Yeshiva. Its goal is to destroy the mosques on the al-Haram al-Sharif, in the center of Jerusalem and Islam's third-most holy site, in order to rebuild Solomon's Temple. It is widely recognized that if this project were to be successful, it could set off World War III.

Yisrael Beitenu is led by the rotund Avigdor Lieberman, who once said that the solution for securing Israel's right to exist would be to "bomb Cairo and Tehran." Lieberman is a Russian emigré who counts among his good friends and financial supporters Russian Mafiya bosses Michel Chernoy and Gregori Lerner. The latter was recently released from an Israeli prison, where he served seven years after pleading guilty to a \$70 million bank fraud. Lieberman is considered a loyalist of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for whom he served as Cabinet secretary. Lieberman left the Likud and formed his Russian emigré party in order to build support for Netanyahu in the Russian community. Living in

one of the West Bank settlements, he is militantly opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state.

The Shinui party is led by Yosef "Tommy" Lapid, who is considered a right-wing opportunist. Shinui went from being a marginal party with five Knesset (parliament) seats to becoming the third-largest party with 15. Lapid was a former TV personality and cookbook author who founded the party because of his hatred for the ultra-orthodox religious parties, many of whose members are Sephardic Jews. Exposing his own racism, Lapid often says he hates "Levantine culture," be it Jewish or Arab. Shinui is a party of lawyers, accountants, and the upper middle class, with a platform calling for secular reforms and separation of religion and state. Although Lapid vowed never to join a government

with a religious party, he entered the government with Sharon and Eitam in return for five Cabinet seats. Lapid has proven he will do everything Sharon asks him to do.

The militant right-wing of the Likud has been enormously strengthened now that the party has in the last elections gone from 19 to 40 seats in the 120-seat Knesset. Moreover, thanks to Sharon's son Omri, it is filled with Israeli mafia bosses, whose strong-arm tactics and recruitment of criminals and other corrupt elements helped double the number of Likud members. Meanwhile, Netanyahu's supporters have also been strengthened. Well aware of Netanyahu's popularity among the chicken-hawks in the Bush Administration, Sharon has given Bibi's faction some of the top Cabinet posts: Netanyahu was named finance minister, and he will be responsible for economic talks with the United States. Silvan Shalom has been given the Foreign Ministry. Yisrael Katz, who is twice the size of Sharon, has been named agriculture minister, a post very important for the settlements. Sharon also named Bibi supporter Tzachi Hanegbi as public security minister. Hanegbi has a reputation as one of the most corrupt members of the party, and he has come under police investigation more than once. By putting him in charge of the Israeli police, Sharon hopes Hanegbi will sabotage the six police investigations being conducted against himself and other Likud members.

Another figure Sharon has promoted is Nathan Sharansky, the Russian refusenik. After his Russian emigré party, Yisrael b'Aliya, won only two Knesset seats in the last election, Sharansky brought the party into the Likud. For Sharon, Sharansky has two very important connections. One, is to the Russian Mafiya and business tycoons who wield considerable influ-

ence in Russia. The other, more important one, is Sharansky's connection to U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, whose door is always open when he travels to Washington.

Peace Process Is Impossible

The Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* declared in a Feb. 28 editorial that Sharon formed a government that would ensure that a peace process would be impossible. "All the declarations about a Palestinian state are meaningless beside the appointment of NRP Chairman Effi Eitam as housing and construction minister. In the past Eitam has voiced vehement opposition even to the evacuation of illegal settlement outposts. . . . The agreements with NRP and National Union should serve as a clear sign that Sharon's goal is not to get out of the territories in order to resume talks with the Palestinians. The alliance with Shinui has no power to hide the new government's true face. It is a government without diplomatic tidings, resting on a coalition with the ideological right to whom any idea of compromise is foreign. All the rest is nothing but transparent camouflage."

In the four weeks Sharon spent forming this new government, the Israeli military killed no fewer than 56 Palestinians, including women, children, and old men. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat charged that those responsible for the murder of Yitzhak Rabin are in Sharon's new government.

Despite heavy pressure to form a unity government with Sharon, Labor Party Chairman Amram Mitzna kept his electoral promise and refused to enter the government. Mitzna had held three meetings with Sharon, in which Sharon was said to have "promised" everything Mitzna was asking for. But when Mitzna demanded a written agreement, Sharon refused, making it clear that he was lying through his teeth.

Mitzna told a meeting of the Labor Party's executive council on Feb. 23, "I have no doubt that the prime minister prefers agreements between him and Effi Eitam. The National Religious Party's positions are more appropriate for him. That's no surprise. In his second term, Sharon won't make any historical breakthrough like [Prime Minister Menachem] Begin [who signed a peace treaty with Egypt]. . . . Those who intend to reach a peace agreement must make clear how they intend to do so. They cannot hide behind promises for 'painful concessions' that nobody knows how painful they will be. Those who plan to make peace should have preferred a coalition with the Labor Party and not the NRP."

"As for Shinui," Mitzna said, "in their passion to hook up with Sharon and his government, Shinui didn't even take time out for a breath. If the speed Shinui was driving into the Sharon government was measured, they would have been arrested for speeding."

According to one of his senior advisers, Mitzna is determined to keep his electoral promises, including the one to revive a Rabin-like peace policy through negotiations with the Palestinians, in effect a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, and to address the economic crisis. Nonethe-

less, Mitzna has become the target of a major operation within the Labor Party to oust him as leader. This opposition is led by Shimon Peres, who apparently will do anything, including destroying the Labor Party itself, to get back into Sharon's government. In the previous government Peres served as Sharon's foreign minister, covering for his brutal policies.

Peres is getting his orders from the same Washington circles as is Sharon. During the elections, Peres met with Mark Rich, a convicted fraudster linked to the Russian Mafiya. Rich's attorney, Lewis Libby, is the chief of staff for Vice President Cheney. Peres also met with American billionaire Michael Steinhardt, who is one of the chief financial backers of Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.). Their message to Peres, and Sharon, was to form an unity government and do everything possible to destroy Mitzna.

For the last four weeks, Peres has been holding secret negotiations with Sharon through Peres' attorney, Ram Caspi. The Caspi family have long been cronies of Peres, and the Caspi law firm, one of Israel's most prominent, is represented in the United States by Kenneth Bialkin. Bialkin is a former chairman of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and is the attorney for the same circle of billionaires to which Steinhardt and Rich belong. When Jonathan Pollard was arrested in 1985 for spying for Israel, Caspi was part of the "damage control" team that went to the United States.

Caspi is also the attorney for Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, the number-two man in the Labor Party, who has been cooperating with Peres to undermine Mitzna. Ben-Eliezer was defense minister in Sharon's last government and is responsible for the bloody military operations ordered by Sharon. Peres, Ben-Eliezer, and several other Labor Party leaders who had been ministers in Sharon's previous government, are all conspiring to oust Mitzna. Some say they are doing this in cooperation with Sharon.

Israel's Political and Economic Collapse

A senior adviser to Mitzna told *EIR* that without the Labor Party, Sharon's government could fall within a year. According to the latest poll, no less than 62.6% of Israelis believe the government will not last more than two years, and only 19.1% think the government will serve out its full four-year term.

Under Sharon, Israel faces political and economic collapse. If Sharon launches a regional war under the shadow of a U.S. war against Iraq, Israel is finished. Even if a war is forestalled, Israel's economy continues to collapse. The same poll showed that 46.8% of Israelis believe that Sharon will fail to solve the economic crisis.

Sharon's government has no solution for the economic crisis. Only hours before Sharon presented his new government to the Knesset, a 48-year-old Israeli farmer killed himself because he could not pay his debts. He was not the first farmer to commit suicide, and he will not be the last.