

Bush, Sharon Change The Rules of the Game

by Dean Andromidas

On April 17, within hours of his return from his love fest with President George W. Bush in Washington, Israel Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered the assassination of Abdel Aziz Rantisi, the leader of the Palestinian Hamas organization in the Gaza Strip. The "targeted assassination" confirmed that Sharon's disengagement plan, with the backing of the President of the United States, is merely a cover for Sharon's ongoing war against the Palestinians that promises to spread throughout the region.

While tens of thousands of Palestinians marched in Gaza during Rantisi's funeral, Sharon's government announced it will attack leaders of the Hamas who are living in Syria and Lebanon. On top of the list is Hamas political leader Khaled Mashal, who lives alternately in Damascus and Beirut. Sharon is seeking revenge because Mashal famously survived an assassination attempt in 1996, when the Mossad tried to kill him in Amman, Jordan. Mashal survived after Jordanian police captured his Mossad would-be assassins. Jordan's late King Hussein forced the then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Sharon, who was foreign minister at the time, to release Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. If Netanyahu and Sharon had not acquiesced to his demand, King Hussein had threatened to put the Mossad agents on public trial, facing execution.

Sharon has already gotten his revenge against Yassin, whom he had assassinated last month, and now has announced he is ready to bomb the residences of Hamas in Damascus, which would extend the conflict into Syria.

'Kisses from Bush'

Anyone who has any doubt that the Sharon-Bush meeting was nothing less than a lovefest, has merely to read the April 19 edition of the Israeli mass circulation daily *Ma'ariv*. In a feature entitled "Kisses from Bush," Ben Kaspi reveals what really transpired after Sharon's crony, Dov "Dooby" Weisglass, finished negotiating the drafting and exchanging of the letters in the White House.

"At the end of the day, after the meetings, lunch, ceremony, speeches, exchange of letters, jokes and embraces, Dooby Weisglass leaned over and placed two kisses on Condoleezza Rice's cheeks. George Bush watched enviously; 'What about me?' he asked an embarrassed Weisglass. And in true Texan style, he ruggled his head and planted a resounding kiss on Weisglass' bald patch."

This kiss of death for the peace process did not go unnoticed among Arab friends of the United States, who are rapidly becoming "ex-friends." It clearly signalled a change in the rules of the game. Bush's support for Sharon's actions have inflamed Arab public opinion throughout the region; the situation is far more dangerous now than President George W. Bush has become a full partner in Sharon's plans to dictate a settlement to the Palestinians. The infamous exchange of letters, during Sharon's April 14th meeting with Bush, fully endorsed Israel's "demographic realities," i.e. the illegal Jewish settlements, and dictated to the Palestinians that they will have no right to return to the homes they had prior to the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

These actions negated United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338; the letters have overthrown the international framework for a just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict that has been accepted by the entire world, except for Israel. Moreover, Bush's full backing of Sharon has made clear to long-term American allies in the region, most particularly Jordan and Egypt, that they could face the same future as Iraq, with an American policy that can only lead to perpetual war in the region.

Widespread Opposition to Pro-Sharon Tilt

The first to express open recognition of this change was Jordan's King Abdullah II, who, on April 18, announced he was not going to the White House for an official April 21 meeting with the President of the United States. The King, despite the fact that his country is highly dependent on U.S. aid, decided to stiff the President of the most powerful country on the planet rather than be overthrown by his own countrymen. An official statement from Amman stated that the meeting would not be held "until discussions and deliberations are concluded with officials in the American Administration to clarify the American position on the peace process and the final situation in the Palestinian territories, especially in light of the latest statements by officials in the American Administration." If the meeting takes place at all, it would not be until the beginning of May.

Jordan has made it clear that Sharon's so-called disengagement policy from Gaza, as well as his construction of the Berlin Wall of the Middle East on the West Bank, signals that Sharon is still committed to his old "Jordan is Palestine" policy. Sharon's intention to withdraw from the Gaza Strip, which neither the Arab world nor many Israelis believe he will carry out, is only being used as a cover to reinforce Israel's death grip on the West Bank.

Before King Abdullah's refusal to take the chance of being given a Texan kiss of death, he had already been in the United States, holding a series of public and private meetings where he made clear his, and the Arab people's, alarm with U.S. policy. Speaking at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, the King warned that U.S. Middle East policies are creating widespread animosity throughout the world. Refer-

ing to the the Arab public, the King said, "They turn on the TV and they see an Israeli tank in a tank battle with ordinary Palestinians. The program changes and they see an American tank facing Iraqis. This has created for the first time, that I have felt, in the Middle East . . . some sort of animosity that I never felt or heard about toward the United States. The feeling that is being felt toward the United States around the region and around the world is not a healthy one. At the end of the day, you're being held responsible, rightly or wrongly. As a friend of yours and as one who cares about many, many, people in this country, I am very, very worried about the perception toward America and Americans."

With respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Iraq, he said, "You have to go to the roots of these problems. Until we solve the Israeli-Palestinian [issue], the Israeli-Arab issue, then none of us will ever be safe."

Egypt, America's number one ally in the Arab world, has also expressed its alarm. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had the unfortunate experience of having met Bush only days before the latter's meeting with Sharon, thus exposing himself to the accusation of having zero influence over Bush Administration policies. After leaving the United States, Mubarak traveled first to Germany, where he met Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and later to Paris where he met President Jacques Chirac. Both leaders shared his alarm concerning Bush's actions, not only in terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also the escalation of violence in Iraq.

While in Paris, Mubarak gave an interview to the French daily *Le Monde*, in which he warned that "Today there is hatred of the Americans like never before in the region." He blamed the hatred on U.S. support for Ariel Sharon's policies, as well as the assassination of Hamas leader Abdel Azziz Rantisi.

"At the start [of the Iraq war], some considered the Americans were helping them. There was no hatred of the Americans. After what has happened in Iraq, there is unprecedented hatred and the Americans know it. People have a feeling of injustice. What's more, they see Sharon acting as he pleases, without Americans saying anything. He assassinates people who don't have the planes and helicopters that he has." He warned that the killing of Rantisi will have "serious consequences," and instability in Gaza and Iraq will not serve U.S. interests. "The despair and feeling of injustice are not going to be limited to our region alone. American and Israeli interests will not be safe, not only in our region but anywhere in the world."

At a press conference following his meeting with Chirac, Mubarak attacked Israel saying, "Israel has started a process of provocation" adding that "grave elements that have emerged in the last week present a risk to the peace process." As for Sharon's so-called disengagement plan, he said, "The situation is now even more serious as Israel is avoiding direct talks with the Palestinian Authority."

Chirac, for his part, stated, "I hope the Road Map [for a

Middle East peace] is still alive because if not, it would be extremely dangerous for 'peace.'"

A senior Israel peace activist told *EIR* that it is clear that both Mubarak and King Abdullah fear they will be overthrown as the Arab public's rage increases in the face of the killing of more and more Palestinians and Iraqis at the hands of the Israelis and Americans.

Bush Administration Remains Loyal to Sharon

Despite these statements of protest, Bush, in a press conference on April 21, reiterated his commitment to Sharon. He went so far as to say that the world owes Sharon a "thank you" for his empty promise to withdraw from Gaza. Bush attacked the Palestinian leadership, claiming it "has failed the people, year after year after year" by not preventing attacks against Israelis. Bush did not mention the thousands of Palestinian casualties.

Meanwhile in Malaysia, the 57 nation-strong Organization of the Islamic Conference held an emergency meeting on April 22. Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, in opening the conference, declared: "The situation in Palestine and Iraq has become extremely alarming. The latest developments are threatening the stability and integrity of both, as well as the peace and security of neighboring countries."

A draft statement drawn up at the meeting rejected Sharon's disengagement plan, declaring, "We are adamantly rejecting this unilateral plan which is opposed to international legitimacy and principles of the peace plan."

While the nations of the region can continue to protest and even show defiance, they are too weak to change U.S. and Israeli policy.

The fact that on April 21 Mordichai Vanunu, the famous Israeli nuclear whistle-blower, was released after serving an 18-year sentence, is a grim reminder that Sharon has at his finger tips the world's fifth-largest stockpile of nuclear weapons. U.S. Under Secretary of State for Arms control and International Security Affairs, John R. Bolton, was on an official visit to Israel at the same time Vanunu was released. Being a neo-con and a "Likudnik," he said nothing about Israel's weapons, but only those allegedly being developed by Iran, making it clear that the Bush Administration fully supports Israel on this question, too.

American Presidential Candidate Lyndon LaRouche has made a major focus of his campaign, throwing Vice President Cheney and his neo-con cronies out of Washington now; otherwise no one is safe.

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