

Sharon's Operation Rainbow: All Colors Are Blood-Red

by Dean Andromidas

Israeli tanks and helicopter gunships fired on thousands of unarmed Palestinian demonstrators protesting the Israeli attack on the Palestinian city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip on May 19, killing woman and children. The slaughter of unarmed demonstrators was just the most brutal incident in the military operation which the so-called Israeli "Defense" Forces (IDF) have given the Orwellian name of "Operation Rainbow"; but in this rainbow, every color is blood-red. A senior Israeli military source told the newspaper *Ma'ariv* that the troops "had been given orders to kill as many terrorists as possible." Among the "terrorists" killed were Ahmad Mughayer, 13, and his sister Asma, 16, who were shot dead when they went on the roof of their home to hang their laundry. Others killed during the demonstrations were Wallid Abu Khmer, 10, Mu-barak Al Hashash, 11, and Ahmad Abu Said, 14.

The operation aims at creating a sanitized no-man's land along the Gaza-Egyptian border, on the pretext of preventing arms smuggling; but in reality it means the destruction of hundreds, if not thousands, of Palestinian homes. Still ongoing as of this writing, Operation Rainbow promises to leave well over a hundred Palestinians dead and has already left hundreds wounded and thousands homeless, as the IDF has already destroyed over 100 houses in less than three days.

The Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* on May 21 revealed that Operation Rainbow was approved during the April 15 meeting between President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, at which Bush gave full support for Sharon's so-called "disengagement plan" from Gaza.

Uzi Benziman of *Ha'aretz* wrote, "When Ariel Sharon met with President George W. Bush in Washington last month and obtained his support for various elements of the disen-

agement plan, he also obtained an understanding for the possibility of widening the Philadelphi corridor—i.e., demolishing hundreds of houses—in order to thwart the smuggling of weapons from the Sinai into the Gaza Strip. An intimation of this also appears in the official wording of the disengagement plan, 'in the first stage, Israel will continue to maintain a military presence along the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt (the Philadelphi route). . . .'

In fact on May 14, three days before the operation was launched, Member of the Knesset (MK) of the Yahad party, Yissi Sarid, issued a warning that "the Israeli Defense Forces intend to demolish half of Rafah; Israel will be accused of war



An Israeli demonstrator compares the ongoing indiscriminate killing of civilian residents of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, by Sharon's military forces, with the refugee camp mass slaughter of Palestinians which Sharon oversaw in 1982. Then, he tried to hide it; this time it is public and produced unanimous Security Council condemnation.

crimes. The operation was planned with the tacit agreement of the United States.”

Benziman then revealed that Israeli Chief of Staff Moshe Ya’alon briefed the Israeli Cabinet on May 17, when he told the ministers that the IDF “had authorized some time ago to develop plans for widening the Philadelphi corridor, but that so far the political echelon had not decided to put any of them into action.” Obviously the “political echelon” in the White House gave the green light, since the very next day the operation was put into effect.

Universal Denunciation

“This is a war crime. This is genocide,” charged Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and called for the “sending of international forces” to protect the Palestinians.

The UN Security Council passed a resolution expressing “grave concern” about the attacks with a vote of 14 to 0, with the United States abstaining; while UN Secretary General Kofi Anan called on Israel “to halt military operations.”

The United Nations special human rights envoy, the South African law professor John Dugard, released a statement calling for an arms embargo against Israel. “These actions constitute war crimes . . . which violate both humanitarian law and international human rights law. The special rapporteur calls on the Security Council to take appropriate action to stop the violence, if necessary by imposition of a mandatory arms embargo.”

Speaking in the name of the European Union, Irish Foreign Minister Brian Cowen declared the attacks “completely disproportionate to any threat faced by the Israeli military and that Israeli forces showed a reckless disregard for human life.”

MK Avraham Burg (Labor) said, “It is completely unacceptable to continue baptising Gaza in blood, because when Gaza is drenched in blood, it will also be the blood of our children.”

MK Mohammed Barakeh (Hadash) termed the Rafah missile strike a “massacre” and called for international intervention. “This is not just a war crime, it is genocide. . . .”

Amnesty International Charges: War Crimes!

On May 18, while the Israeli military was destroying dozens of houses in the town of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, Amnesty International released a report entitled “Under the Rubble: House Demolition and Destruction of Land And Property,” which charges Israel with class A war crimes. The report condemns Israel’s demolition, in the last three and a half years, of 3,000 Palestinian homes, two homes a day, plus vast areas of Palestinian agricultural land, and called on Israel to halt all unlawful destruction of homes and land, including the expansion of Israeli settlements and the building of the wall in the Occupied Territories. The report also documents how this policy extends to Israel’s Arab citizens, in violation of international conventions of which Israel is a signatory.

The Israeli policy has left tens of thousands of men, women, and children homeless or without a livelihood. The report shows that planning and building policies in Israel are discriminatory, as Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are routinely denied building permits and face the threat of demolition of their homes.

The report shows that Israel’s military/security justification is so broad that almost no Palestinian/Israeli Arab property or plot of land is secure from destruction or seizure. Under the Israeli army’s interpretation of international humanitarian law—given the spread of Israeli settle-

ments, settlers’ roads, and army positions throughout the densely populated Gaza Strip next to Palestinian refugee camps, towns, and villages—virtually every building or stretch of land in the Gaza Strip could potentially be considered a threat and a target for military demolition. According to the United Nations, more than 2,000 homes in Gaza alone have been destroyed in the last three years, and 10% of the agricultural land. In the West Bank, almost 90% of Israel’s wall is being built on occupied territory and at least 600 homes have been destroyed.

In the period 2002-03, in Gaza, there has been an estimated 1,800 acres of agricultural land destroyed, including 226,000 trees. This destruction has included the ripping up of olive, citrus, date, and almond trees (pulled out by the roots, evidently to prevent them growing again), the bulldozing of electricity poles, and the filling in or smashing up of hundreds of wells, water pumps, and containers.

The current operation aims at adding hundreds more houses to the list. World Bank President James Wolfensohn on May 18 also denounced Israel’s mass destruction of Palestinian homes in the Gaza Strip. Speaking on the sidelines of a meeting of the World Economic Forum in Jordan, Wolfensohn told the Israeli daily *Ma’ariv*: “Israel’s military operations pertaining to the demolitions of thousands of homes in Rafah are reckless, and leaves tens of thousands of people without a roof over their heads. As a Jew, I am ashamed of this kind of treatment of people.”

The report is available at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/ENGMDE150402004?open&of=ENG-ISR>

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MK Azmi Bashara (Balad) said, "Sharon, [Defense Minister Shaul] Mofaz, and the Chief of Staff must stand trial at the International Court of Justice in the Hague for war crimes."

Protest demonstrations were held throughout the occupied West Bank, and the Israeli peace movement took to the streets on the day of the massacre, demonstrating in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem. More demonstrations were being planned.

Sharon's Beast-men Friends in Washington

While Sharon set Rafah ablaze, his beastman friends are on full mobilization in his support. On May 17-18, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), bastion of the right-wing Israeli lobby, held its annual meeting, featuring speeches by Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Tex.), Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), and President George W. Bush. DeLay and Hoyer announced that they are co-sponsoring a bill to codify into U.S. law, the letter that Bush delivered to Sharon on April 14, which gave Sharon the green light to annex Palestinian territories, and to deny the right of return to the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who have been driven out of their homes.

Bush, at the AIPAC event, called for the United States and Israel to stand together in the "war against terror." For this propaganda, Bush got 23 standing ovations, in a frenzy of "eye for an eye" blood-lust. As for the slaughter in Gaza, Bush would only say he was "troubled," but not troubled enough to stop Sharon.

Thousands Demonstrate Against Occupation

The bloody events in Gaza followed one of the largest Israel peace demonstrations of the decade. On May 15, over 150,000 Israelis gathered in Rabin Square in Tel Aviv. It was organized by a new coalition called Harov (Majority's Coalition), and aimed at representing the majority of Israelis who want an end to the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. Organizing under the slogan, "Leave Gaza and start talking," the coalition included the Labor, One Nation, and Yahad parties, Peace Now, the Geneva Accord peace initiative, the Kibbutz movement, the Forum of Bereaved Parents, and several youth groups and other peace organizations.

Addressing the rally, Labor Party leader Shimon Peres said, "Eighty percent of our people want peace; 1% is trying to block us from achieving that. The 1% won't succeed in returning us to wars, to the path of blood. . . . I say we need to negotiate with the Palestinians even under fire."

Yossi Beilin, chairman of the Yahad Party, and initiator of the Geneva Accord peace initiative, got the loudest applause when he told the crowd: "Those who have refused peace have tried everything, targeted killings which are not always very targeted; re-invading the West Bank and Gaza; destroying fields, groves, and houses; burning the fact of defeat into the other side's consciousness and doing it again and again and

again. The one thing which they did not try is to make peace. Those who say that there is no partner, are those who don't want to talk!"

Amir Peretz, the Chairman of the One Nation party as well as the Histadrut Labor Federation, said: "Gaza is not holy land, it is a cursed land, and people lose their humanity there. . . . We should end the cruel occupation, we should disengage from Gaza, but that is not all; we should re-engage with Israeli society, with the values of humanity and social justice."

Peace Now founder and Chairman Tzali Reshef declared, "We have not the slightest trust in Sharon. We know he wants to withdraw from Gaza in order to keep the West Bank. But we will force him to give up Gaza, we will force him to give up the West Bank. . . . Down with the rule of the settlers! We will not continue to sacrifice our sons for the sake of the settlers."

The tremendous crowds attest to the fact that the majority of Israelis would support a peace initiative, but Israeli political observers fear the continued weakness of the leadership of the peace camp. They particularly point to the role of Peres, who was instrumental in preventing the participation of the full spectrum of the peace camp among the speakers.

Commentator Akiva Eldar wrote in *Ha'aretz* on May 18, "The relevance of 150,000 demonstrators and the mass of supporters who stayed home depends on the belief in their power to go forth to millions of homes and market to them an alternative to the government's policy. This ability is not to be found in the hands of an 81-year-old statesman," an obvious reference to Peres, who, Eldar writes, would jump into a unity government with Sharon as soon as he gets the chance. He said, "The peace camp needs a leader who will not be deterred by threats from the Jewish settlers in the territories about a civil war, and will refrain from seeking that hidden consensus. . . ." He invokes the spirit of Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion: "In 1948, Ben Gurion empowered the Israeli Defense Forces to open fire on the Irgun arms ship *Altalena*, with Menachem Begin on board." This is a reference to Ben Gurion's decision to crack down on the Jewish extremists who refused to accept the UN-brokered armistice that ended the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Eldar then writes that anyone who expects the Palestinians to turn against their own people who refuse compromise, "cannot evade an *Altalena* of his own."

The Israeli officer who attacked the *Altalena* on the orders of Ben Gurion, was Yitzhak Rabin, who, as Prime Minister, signed the Oslo Accords of 1993, and who was slain by an Israeli extremist assassin in 1995.

It should be remembered that Ben Gurion acted against his fanatical right wing in response to the combined pressure of the Soviet Union and the United States. If Israel needs a new Ben Gurion, then the United States obviously needs the leadership of Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, who will exert that pressure.