

## Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

### Behind Ariel Sharon's power play

*Many Israelis fear that the unprincipled Defense Minister will be the next Prime Minister.*

Israel's ultra-extremist Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, backed up by the Israeli mafia and U.S.-based organized-crime figures Meyer Lansky and Meshulam Riklis, is making a power play for strong-man rule in Israel.

Sharon, who aspires to be the next Prime Minister of Israel, is said by his confidants to be awaiting the demise of ailing Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Sharon already heads up a "pre-emptive strike faction" in Israel of equally extremist military and political figures who are pushing for an unprovoked military strike into Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.

To facilitate his designs, Sharon is undertaking a reorganization of the Israeli defense apparatus, eliminating all civilian input and putting decision-making directly into his hands and the hands of his cronies in the Israeli armed forces.

At the same time, Sharon is moving to completely militarize the Israeli economy by giving the go-ahead to an ultra-expensive plan for manufacturing Israel's own jet fighter, the Lavie, despite the fact that the Israeli economy is bankrupt.

Sharon justifies the Lavie decision by stressing the importance of Israel's acquiring "independence" through developing an independent arms-producing capability. Given Israel's precarious economic situation—inflation is officially

pegged at 127 percent—the Lavie project will only hasten Israel's transformation into a "banana republic" where real economic activity is replaced by arms production and organized crime-run drug and gambling operations.

Sharon's tactics have drawn serious protest from more responsible elements in the Israeli community. Numerous top-level officials in the Defense Ministry, including Director-General Yosef Maayan, have quit in response to Sharon's efforts to place the Defense Ministry under the aegis of his factioneers in the armed forces. For the first time in Israel's history, defense-ministry personnel have conducted work stoppages and limited strike actions to protest Sharon's policies.

"The issue is that Sharon wants to run the Defense Ministry as his own very private feudal fief, in which his liegemen can be appointed at will," charged a recent *Jerusalem Post* op-ed. Sharon "poses a peril to Israel's democratic regime," the writer, Meir Merhav, concluded.

"What in fact Sharon has done, under the guise of reform, is circumvent the checks and balances which control the military in a democracy," another *Jerusalem Post* editorialist asserted.

Opposition to Sharon's power play emerged late last year when Sharon suddenly appointed 35-year-old Arie Genger, an Israeli-

American living in New York, as his special assistant in charge of military exports, with jurisdiction over research and development, international contacts, and other sensitive areas. Never before had any one person in Israel had so much power over so diverse a field, including the military industries, the defense ministry, and the army.

The public outcry over the Genger appointment stemmed partially from the fact that Genger, an American citizen, was not qualified for the job, having lived outside Israel for the last 16 years.

What others found more worrisome was Genger's shady background and his questionable connections to the Meshulam Riklis empire. Riklis, who is, according to Israeli sources, reputed to be tied to organized crime kingpin Meyer Lansky, picked up Genger years ago, making him director of Riklis's Rapid America Corporation and other enterprises.

Because of the widespread opposition in Israel to the Genger appointment, Sharon was forced to back down. Genger, however, is expected to be slipped into the position once the storm has subsided, Israeli sources report.

Genger is currently working for the Israeli mafia-linked Economic Coordination Minister Yaacov Meridor, "with much the same duties as Sharon would have given him," according to the sources.

Why did Sharon go out on a limb with Genger? "Because Riklis owns Sharon," said one Israeli. "And Sharon owes Riklis. It is a sordid relationship.

"At least Begin has some principles," the sources continued. "Sharon, however, has none. And that is why he is so dangerous."