

Middle East Report by Nancy Coker

Too much rope, too few tugs

With Haig out, the Israeli opposition to war in Lebanon looks to Washington to curb Sharon and Begin.

Unless Washington does something in the coming days and weeks to curtail Israel's military adventure in Lebanon, the growing opposition inside Israel to Begin and Sharon will remain not much more than a good-sized, angrily vocal, but relatively powerless force.

Israeli sources confirm that a strong stance by the Reagan administration against Israel's genocide in Lebanon would lend leverage to the peace forces and to the Labour Party opposition.

"The behavior of the U.S. government during this crisis has been unbelievable," commented former Israeli Chief of Staff Gen. Mordechai Gur in an exclusive interview with *EIR* (see page 36). A Labour Party member of the Israeli Knesset, Gur has emerged as one of the more prominent figures in Israeli public life opposing the war.

"We had almost total freedom of action, and we never had that before from the United States," Gur said.

Gur's statements reflect the prevailing opinion in the Labour Party that it was Alexander Haig who connived with Sharon to push the Israeli armed forces into Lebanon. With Haig now out, Labour Party leaders are said to be looking impatiently to Washington to rein in Begin and Sharon.

Many Israelis fear that the carnage in Lebanon will leave an indelible mark of shame on the nation.

Others think Israel has gotten in over its head, and blame Sharon for lying to the Israeli population and government.

"There is a real breakdown of morale in Israel, both in the general population and the military," an aide to Begin recently stated. "People just don't like this war. Unlike past wars, it is not a defensive war, fought to ensure Israel's survival. It is also a bloody war. Those pictures of blown-up Lebanese kids have had a real effect on the Israeli psyche.

"Many, many Israelis, particularly in the north of the country [the area of Israel on whose behalf the war is supposedly being fought—N.C.] think the war has gone too far. Whole sections of reservists now on duty in Lebanon oppose the war, which is causing big problems. There is now a move to restore these people to civilian life," he said.

In the *Jerusalem Post*, military correspondent Hirsh Goodman reported on the disaffection among the 100,000 Israeli troops now stationed in Lebanon. "There are men and officers who no longer understand the war's goals," Goodman wrote. Government propaganda about the war is not believed by the soldiers, who listen to Radio Lebanon for news. "The army spokesman is less credible than ever before," Goodman noted.

According to a poll just commissioned by the *Jerusalem Post*,

while the majority of Israelis still supports the war—albeit many of them with reservations—most of the protests are coming from soldiers who, as witnesses to the holocaust in Lebanon, have not fallen for the lies about the war printed in the censored Israeli press.

On June 28, 30 officers on leave from the fighting held a demonstration in front of Begin's office in Jerusalem against Israel's butchery in Lebanon. Sgt. Eyal Ehrlich, the organizer of the demonstration, said the group represented the sentiments of "about 90 percent" of Israel's soldiers fighting in Lebanon. Another spokesman for the group, Capt. Ronen Bar-Shera, called Israel's slaughter of Lebanon's Palestinians "disgusting."

On July 3, 100,000 Israelis (according to police estimates; the *New York Times* claimed only 7,000) demonstrated in Tel Aviv, denouncing the war and demanding Sharon's resignation. It was one of the largest anti-war protests in Israel's history, and the first to take place during wartime.

From outside Israel, three leaders of the international Jewish community have thrown their weight behind the peace forces in Israel. In a statement issued July 3, Nahum Goldmann, former head of the World Jewish Congress; Philip Klutznick, former U.S. Secretary of Commerce and honorary president of the World Jewish Congress; and former French Prime Minister Pierre Mendes-France, called for Israel to end the Lebanon war and for mutual recognition by Israel and the PLO.

PLO leader Yasser Arafat greeted the statement as a "positive initiative toward a just and durable peace in the Middle East."