

The Situation in the Middle East Is Even Worse Than It Looks

by Dean Andromidas

The situation in the Middle East is far closer to an all-out war than most people—including key policymakers in Washington and other world capitals—wish to admit. As we go to press, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has yet to form a government, but nonetheless, the confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians continues to escalate. Caretaker Prime Minister Ehud Barak has escalated the tactic of assassination by helicopter gunships, to eliminate Palestinian security officials. Despite an appeal by the European Union (EU), Barak has ordered a tightening of the political and economic blockade which Israel has imposed on the Palestinian-controlled areas since the Al Aqsa *Intifada* (uprising) began at the end of September. This, in turn, has fuelled fears that the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) faces an early collapse, if the disastrous economic and social conditions caused by the blockade continue.

A collapse of the PNA, and, therefore, of the government of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, would leave the region in chaos, and would hand over the Palestinian streets to the most radical and intransigent elements. Already, Hamas, the militant opposition to Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), is taking responsibility for a growing number of attacks within Israel itself, including the Feb. 14 attack on a bus stop that killed eight Israelis. The overall death toll will soon top 400.

The Bush Administration's "stepping back" from direct involvement in peace talks, promises to return Palestinian-Israeli negotiations into simply a "zero-sum game" of bargaining over limited resources, which is guaranteed only to lead to war.

Without the perspective put forward by Lyndon LaRouche, based on the Treaty of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years War in 1648, coupled with a program of regional economic development based on the creation of new water resources and infrastructure networks, no negotiated settlement will ever be possible. But given the degeneration of the political dynamic in the region itself, such an approach will have to come from outside—from Europe, for example.

Meanwhile, in the United States, more calls are being heard within the Bush Administration for eliminating Iraq's President Saddam Hussein, threatening to launch a new Gulf War. With such a policy, the Bush Administration would find a willing partner in Sharon.

Sharon Seeks Help from His American Friends

Sharon has moved immediately to synchronize his policies with the worst elements in the United States. The Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* on Feb. 13 wrote that Sharon has moved to revive Israel's links with American Jewry as "Israel's influence peddler in Washington." These are the same organizations that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin all but shunned before his murder, and whom he warned not to interfere in Israel's efforts to forge a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

Predictably, the first representative of American Jewry with whom Sharon met was Abe Foxman, director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, who was in Jerusalem on Feb. 12. Foxman, after a meeting with Sharon in Jerusalem, was quoted saying that Sharon "places great importance on American Jewry as a central instrument of Israeli policy. . . . He'll move to enhance relations with American Jewry."

At the same time, Malcolm Hoenlein, director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, was in Jerusalem praising Sharon "as someone who defines himself first as a Jew and then as an Israeli." Hoenlein and the chairman of the Conference, Ron Lauder, were sharply criticized by many of the Conference's member organizations for attending a political demonstration in Jerusalem last January, which was seen as a support rally for Sharon. Such support for Sharon is not surprising, because Lauder, the heir to the Estée Lauder cosmetics empire, is a big financial supporter of both Sharon and Israeli right-wing former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Sharon also dispatched his three key "America handlers" to Washington, for discussions with the Bush Administration, as well as in Congress. Included in the trio were Moshe Arens and Zalmon Shoval, both former Ambassadors to Washington, and Dore Gold, former Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations. Arens, who is good friends with Henry Kissinger, is credited with transforming Netanyahu from a furniture salesman into an Israeli politician, while Gold is another Netanyahu groupie.

Building a War Cabinet

As of this writing, indications are that Sharon's plans to build a national unity government, comprised of his right-wing Likud Party and the ousted Labor Party, will go forward.



Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

There should be no illusions that such a government could “stay the hand” of the extremist Sharon. It is a government that will be prepared to wage war. The total collapse of the peace process, and the continued Al Aqsa *Intifada*, ensure such an eventuality.

A senior military intelligence source warned, that under the Sharon government, the violence is going to increase and the situation will deteriorate. He told *EIR* that, once in office, “Sharon is sure to go on the offensive against the violence. What he will do, will not be much different than what Barak would have done if he won the elections.”

The source also pointed to a deteriorating internal situation in the Palestinian camp, and that “Arafat cannot fully control the violence. He is afraid to give the order, for fear that it won’t be obeyed.” When asked whether there were any hope of negotiations, he replied, “No one is talking about anything. There will be no discussions until the Palestinians stop the violence, but the Palestinians have suffered so much over the past four months, they want something to show for it. . . . But Sharon is not going to give them anything. That’s where the situation stands, it can only get worse.”

Under the proposed national unity government, Barak is expected to drop his promise to resign from all his political positions, and accept Sharon’s offer as defense minister. La-

bor Party leader and former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who is one of the major supporters of a national unity government, has been offered the post of foreign minister. Other Labor Party figures are lining up for another four to six portfolios that Labor has been promised in a unity agreement.

This haste to embrace Sharon, the “Butcher of Lebanon,” is based on the illusion that Israel will get through the next two years through crisis management, and a series of interim agreements with the Palestinians.

A senior source in Israel’s peace camp told *EIR*, “Yes, there is a mad dash for a unity government. . . . All the old stuff is coming out: ‘Peres will manipulate Sharon,’ ‘Sharon will change.’ The problem is, they think that they can have a policy of interim agreements over the next two years, but this is nothing but dreams in Spain, as we say; it’s all words disconnected from reality.”

The ascension of Sharon as prime minister, and Barak and Peres at his left hand and his right, has predictably thrown the peace camp into disarray. Already, two senior members of the Labor Party’s peace wing, Uzi Baram, a founder of the party, and Elie Goldschmidt, who ran Barak’s election campaign, have resigned their Knesset (Parliament) seats, and left the party, doing so out of disgust with the Israeli political establishment.

A leading member of Peace Now told *EIR*, “The Labor Party is deluding itself. Ariel Sharon’s old instincts will prevail, he has more patience than the others. He has been waiting for this moment for 50 years. He will pour money into the settlements, calling it ‘natural growth’; Labor will be unable to deal with the security situation and simply give way to Sharon.” Also alarming, the source said, was the demoralization within the peace movement. He pointed out that a recent poll of the voters from the strongly pro-peace Meretz party, showed that 74% no longer believe a peace agreement is possible with the Palestinians. He also said that the idea now circulating in the peace camp is “unilateral withdrawal.” But this will solve nothing, because the securing of 200,000 inhabitants of the settlements scattered throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would mean seizing over half of these occupied territories.

The expected return of Barak is calculated to cut short a revolt in the left wing of the Labor Party led by Barak’s former Justice Minister Yossi Beilin, one of the framers of the Oslo Accords, and Avraham Burg, the Speaker of the Knesset.

Beilin denounced the scramble by senior Labor Party leaders to form a unity government, saying that they are willing “to sell the soul of the Labor Party and kill any hope of peace” in order to become ministers in the new government.

Beilin had hoped to split nine other members of the Knesset from the Labor Party to form another faction in the Knesset, or even combine with Meretz to form a new social democratic-oriented party. At the same time, Burg had hoped to mount a leadership fight within Labor, putting himself forward as candidate. If Barak was to enter the unity government, this is seen as undercutting any effort in this direction.

When Will Sharon Show His Real Face?

In mid-February, the world was offered Sharon's very special logic of peace. Commenting on a request by the EU that Israel should ease the economic sanctions against the Palestinian Authority, because they constitute collective punishment, Sharon replied, "I don't believe in collective punishment, but how can I lift the closure when the violence continues?"

When will Sharon drop the peace mask he donned when he began campaigning for Prime Minister? A brief look at his biography might answer the question.

In 1981, during the funeral of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who had just been gunned down by Islamic militants, U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig spoke with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Haig, fearing that the Sadat assassination was only the beginning of a radicalization that threatened to spread throughout the Arab world, asked Begin to begin implementing the clauses of the 1979 Camp David treaty calling upon Israel to begin the process of ending its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Sharon, who had just become defense minister and responsible for the occupation, took on the role of peacemaker with the Palestinians. According to a commentary in the Feb. 9, 2001 *Ha'aretz*, Sharon was effusive: "We shall continue with the peace process! There is a positive change in the air, a feeling that we can live together in mutual respect. We will change our roadblock policies! Residents of the territories hurrying to work will not have to wait in long lines of cars anymore. Anyone in the territories who is willing to talk, will find an open door and an attentive ear." Several roadblocks were removed, and Sharon even offered to relocate some Palestinian refugees inside Israel to relieve the congestion in the refugee camps. He promised to draft a "plan" that would solve these problems. The press gave favorable coverage, and the Reagan Administration seemed pleased.

But, while holding off presenting his "plan" to the cabinet, Sharon continued to issue orders to seize more land in the territories and establish more settlements, in direct contradiction to the Camp David agreements and promises made to Washington.

Also, the negotiations with the PLO were not part of Sharon's peace plan. Discussing Sharon's role in this early period, military affairs commentator Ze'ev Schiff, wrote in the Feb. 9 *Ha'aretz* about how, in the middle of this euphoria and in one of the many positive articles then circulating on Sharon, *Ha'aretz* had reported that he was, at the same time, planning "to take action against the PLO in Lebanon in order to influence events in Jordan, so that it [Jordan] would eventually become the Palestinian state. That was the plan behind the positive headlines" of 1981.

Shortly afterward, the "real Sharon" showed his face, engineering the 1982 war against Lebanon, and carrying out the massacres of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

Palestinians Know Who The Enemies of Peace Are

by Carl Osgood

Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, spokeswoman for Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat, warned, during a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 14, that conditions in Gaza and the West Bank are the worst she has ever seen, in the aftermath of Ariel Sharon's invasion of the Temple Mount/Al Haram Al Sharif, in Jerusalem on Sept. 28, 2000, which sparked the Palestinian uprising, known as the Al Aqsa *Intifada*.

The theme underlying Ashrawi's remarks was how the Palestinians have been victimized for decades by the occupation of their lands by the Israelis, and then are blamed for the violence that is the lawful result of an occupying Israeli army, and the illegal settlements, in Palestinian territory. She also pointed to these factors as the reason for the past decade's political instability inside Israel, which has gone through six governments since 1990.

"One of the basic problems," Ashrawi said, "is the fact that every Israeli government has declared its commitment to peace and at the same time sought to impose a unilateral version of peace as designed by Israel," an approach which has undermined "the requirements for peace." Also, she said, the domination of the peace process in recent years by the United States has in effect shut out other participants, especially the United Nations and the European Union.

Ashrawi blamed Sharon for his Sept. 28 provocation. However, all this did was "ignite" what she described as a "powderkeg" that resulted from the loss of confidence in the peace process, and in the Israelis, because there was no correspondence between what was being negotiated and the facts on the ground, over the many preceding weeks. Sharon and his extremist backers "somehow managed to reap the rewards, the fruits of their own acts of provocation and violence, undermining the possibilities for peace."

"I think there is one sure way of stopping the violence," Ashrawi said. "Remove Israeli tanks, Israeli gunships, Israeli checkpoints from Palestinian territory, lift the state of siege, issue orders to the Israeli army to stop its policies of assassination and willful and deliberate and cold-blooded murder. . . . We are not on Israel's land: Israel is on Palestinian land."

Ashrawi rejected calls that Arafat make a statement that all violence must stop, following the incident in Tel Aviv that morning, in which a bus rammed into a bus stop, killing eight Israelis. "Can Arafat tell the Israeli army to withdraw and to stop shooting and stop killing and to lift the siege?" she asked.