

## Bush Will Get a Mideast War, But Not the One He Wants

by Dean Andromidas

As if slamming his fist on the table, demanding obedience from the world, the administration of President George W. Bush ordered the Feb. 16 joint British-American bombing of Iraq, hitting targets near Baghdad. If Bush seeks a new Middle East crisis as a show of force, in the midst of the deepening economic and financial crisis now engulfing the world, he will get a war, but not the one he is planning. While Bush may be hoping to clean up the unfinished business left by his father, in fact, he is simply rearranging a Middle East stage, already set for war. But this would be a much more dangerous religious war, that could light a conflagration spreading from the Middle East, deep into Central Asia.

Speaking on CNN on the day of the attack, Lawrence Eagleburger, former Secretary of State in the George I administration, dispelled the idea that the attack had anything to do with Saddam Hussein representing a current threat in the region. Eagleburger said Iraq was hit because the current Bush Administration intends to complete the "unfinished war" begun by Bush senior.

But worse than an attempt to simply even the score, the attack is the opening phase of a much nastier and more dangerous military escalation being planned for the region by the new "Bush Team." It must be seen against the background of the formation of a government in Israel, under the leadership of ultra-warhawk Ariel Sharon, a government that has abandoned any commitment to an Oslo-type peace process linked to regional economic development. Such a government is programmed, not simply to contain the ongoing Palestinian Al-Aqsa Intifada, but to prosecute military actions against Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and/or Iran. Unlike previous Israeli governments, the Sharon regime no longer views its neighbors as potential partners for peace, but hostile enemies.

Such an Israeli government is likely to serve the Bush

team's view, that the main threat in the Mideast comes from Iran, due not only to its middle-range ballistic missiles, but, more importantly, because of its increasing economic, political, and military cooperation with Russia. Furthermore, Iran's developing reconciliation with its old enemy Iraq, as well as with Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf States, is seen as threatening the Anglo-American geopolitical interests in the region.

In an interview with the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) Feb. 14, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld spilled the beans on U.S. intentions, when he recalled the 1981 Israeli bombing of Iraq's Osiris nuclear facility: "We were very fortunate that the Israelis went in . . . and took out their nuclear capability." In a further provocation, Israel has accused Iran of using the Lebanese guerrilla group Hezbollah as a proxy to launch attacks along the Israeli-Lebanese border, and in support of Palestinian militants, thus casting Iran as an immediate threat to Israel.

### China Target

The accusation by the Pentagon, and later the State Department, that China is assisting in constructing a fiber-optic network to link up with Iraq's air defense system, whether true or not, is clearly calculated to target China. This fits in well with the anti-China hawks in the Bush Administration, including Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. On the other hand, if true, the report demonstrates how vulnerable U.S. military capabilities are, especially if the U.S. fails to win support from the Arab states. In fact, the military after-action reports following the Feb. 16 bombing of Iraq, indicated that only eight of the 20 targets were actually damaged in the attacks.

Since the bombing, the Administration has leaked various

policy schemes, including one for so-called “smart sanctions,” supposedly aimed at targetting the Saddam regime, and not the “Iraqi people.” But, as the Administration knows, none of these schemes are acceptable to Iraq, nor to almost any other concerned nation.

A senior Israeli intelligence source scoffed: “No European, no Russian, no one will accept any of these proposals, because no one in their right mind is going to give the U.S. exclusive diplomatic control of Iraq, and therefore the region. It is yet another crude attempt by Bush to tell the world that only the U.S. — not Europe, not Russia or anybody else — will lead the world. But none of this will work. Look at the collapse of the Nasdaq, the U.S. is no longer the superpower it thinks it is, so why should they all obey.”

The bombing attacks on Iraq drew fire as well from French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, who called the attacks “illegal.” At the same time, Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Jacques Chirac, after conferring by telephone, agreed to cooperate in the United Nations Security Council, to ensure that a diplomatic, and not a military solution, is followed.

## **Mideast Governments Destabilized**

The most serious miscalculation, however, was the failure of the Clinton-led peace effort to adopt the LaRouche’s “Oasis Plan” perspective. LaRouche proposed to unify Arabs and Israelis through economic cooperation focussed on development of water resources. The collapse of the Oslo peace process has left the region seriously polarized, with the U.S. viewed by the Palestinians and the Arab states as the unequivocal supporter of Israel.

At the same time, growing rage of the Palestinian Al Qsa Intifada has had a profound impact on public opinion throughout the Arab world, threatening to destabilize every country in the region. Furthermore, the Arab countries view the Anglo-American anti-Iraq sanctions in the same light as the Israeli repression of the Intifada. These factors will make it impossible to rebuild George I’s anti-Iraq coalition.

On the eve of Secretary of State Colin Powell’s official tour of the region, which begins on Feb. 24, thousands of Lebanese students tried to storm the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and had to be forced back by riot police and water cannons.

Even Kuwaiti Foreign Secretary and former Ambassador to Washington, Sheikh Sabah al-Salim al-Sabah, distanced his government from the bombing raids, demurring in diplomatese, that Kuwait does not interfere into the internal affairs of other countries. The statement was made on the eve of the arrival in Kuwait, of former U.S. President Sir George Bush himself and Colin Powell, for the 10th anniversary celebrations of the liberation of Kuwait in the Gulf War.

The most remarkable criticism came from Egypt, which is the second-largest recipient of American military and economic aid in the region, after Israel. An editorial in the official



*What George I began, George II wanted to finish, beginning to bomb Baghdad in the first month of his administration. The war he will get, is not the one he has planned.*

daily, *Al-Ahram*, charges, “The U.S. Administration has proven, through these outrages, and unjustified aggression, that it does not care about the international Arab public opinion, that calls for lifting the unjust economic sanctions imposed on Iraq.” The editorial went on to accuse the Bush Administration of using the bombings to sabotage Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak’s efforts to reconcile Iraq with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, in preparation for the sanctions issue to be taken up at the Arab summit.

In an effort to galvanize Arab unity, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has moved to upgrade the Cairo-based Arab League, through the nomination of current Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa for Secretary General. Known to have firm Arab nationalist credentials, Moussa promises to breathe new life into the organization, which represents 22 Arab countries.

Should Ariel Sharon fail to form a unity government in Israel, the danger of war will not diminish; it will be put on a shorter fuse. Sharon is prepared to form a coalition of the rightwing and ultra-Orthodox religious parties, an option that has been dubbed the “Aswan-Tehran” coalition because of statements made by the leaders of the Sharon-allied National Union-Yisrael Beiteinu Party. During the election campaign, one of its leaders, Avigdor Lieberman, who was also the right-hand man of former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, publicly declared that Israel should be prepared to bomb the Aswan Dam; Lieberman’s party co-leader, Rehavam Ze’evi, in a similar statement, declared that Israel should be prepared to bomb Tehran.