

Hobeika Assassination: Sharon's Bloody Message

by Dean Andromidas

The hand of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in the Jan. 24 assassination of Lebanese former Christian militia leader Elie Hobeika is clear. The assassination occurred within hours of a hearing before a Belgian appeals court, which announced a final decision would be made March 6 on whether the war crimes investigation of Sharon, conducted by a Brussels prosecutor, can go forward. Hobeika had just announced his confirmed intention to be a crucial witness against Sharon. However, this assassination was not simply "tampering with a witness." It is a clear message by Sharon and those who stand behind him, that they will not be denied in their plans for a new Middle East war, despite the clash of civilizations it will ignite.

On Jan. 22, two days before the assassination, Sharon and his generals held a closed forum. According to the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* on Jan. 24, several potential war scenarios were discussed, one of which envisioned "an all-out war, that would begin with an attack by Hezbollah rockets, combined with a wave of Palestinian attacks." Israel would respond in Lebanon and against Syrian air defenses, and would invade the Palestinian Authority to "make order." Such a war would be modelled after the U.S. campaigns in Kosovo and Afghanistan, using massive Israeli air attacks." Envisioning the possibility of "Syrian Scud missile attacks, Israel could respond with heavy bombardment of missile sites and infrastructure in Syria."

A few hours after this meeting, Israeli military posts along the Israeli-Lebanon border were the target of anti-tank rocket attacks by the Hezbollah. The Israelis immediately responded by deploying F-16 jets to target Hezbollah positions. The incident did not escalate further. The Israelis claimed the attack was unprovoked; yet, the next day, the United States warned Israel not to conduct military flights over Lebanese territory. This warning was in reference to the fact, that despite Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon last July, its F-16 bombers routinely conduct overflights, often creating sonic booms to terrorize Lebanese cities.

Hobeika was killed in Christian East Beirut by a powerful car-bomb. It was the first killing of a Lebanese who fought in the civil war since the announcement of an amnesty over a decade ago. A London-based Lebanese source pointed out,



The "convenient" assassination of Lebanese former Phalangist militia leader Elie Hobeika, is being laid at Israel's door: It prevents him from testifying against Ariel Sharon.

"You have to understand, there has not been a killing like this in over a decade, not even at the lowest level. No one is going to grieve for Hobeika, but—you know, I don't believe in conspiracies, but this time it is clear to me that it was the Israelis." Such assassinations have not occurred for the simple reason that the "law of revenge" would rekindle the bloody civil war which destroyed much of Lebanon throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

The group that claimed responsibility for the assassination was the "Lebanese for a Free and Independent Lebanon," a group not previously heard of. It accused Hobeika of being a Syrian agent and a traitor. Fitting in with Sharon's war plans, the second part of the statement is a direct threat to Syrian President Bashar Assad. It was a warning that he would suffer the same fate as Hobeika if "he set foot in Lebanon before removing all of his troops." Assad is expected to attend a Beirut meeting soon, and he is not expected to remove the 30,000 Syrian troops prior to his arrival.

While no one has heard of this group, one wonders whether it is linked to the so-called "Government of Lebanon in Exile," whose office address is 59 King George Street, in the center of Jerusalem. Its spokesman, Nagi N. Najjar, recently penned an article denouncing the Belgian government for allowing its prosecutors to investigate allegations that Sharon was responsible for war crimes, because of his role in the massacres in the Sabra and Chatila Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon in 1982. Najjar claims that the camps were simply "training centers for terrorists." The "government" which Najjar represents is, no doubt, made up of remnants of the so-called South Lebanon Army, which was the mercenary force the Israeli Army created, financed, and armed throughout its 20-year occupation of southern Lebanon. It is the one Lebanese group that did not sign on to the official Lebanese amnesty.

This “government” is also supported by the so-called United States Committee for a Free Lebanon, founded by Lebanese-American and Wall Street “venture capitalist” Ziad K. Abdelnour. According to its official website, the committee’s “Golden Circle” of those who have lent “invaluable support” to its cause, include the leading war-mongers inside and outside the Bush Administration. This includes Douglas Feith, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense for Policy, and Richard Perle, of the ultra-right-wing American Enterprise Institute, a good friend of the leader of the Bush Administration’s war faction, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. Among many others are right-wingers Daniel Pipes, Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), and Iran-Contra player and former National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane. All are self-proclaimed friends of Sharon.

Tampering With a Witness

On Jan. 23, less than 24 hours before Hobeika’s assassination, a Belgian appeals court heard final arguments by Sharon’s attorneys demanding that the investigation of their client be terminated. As the accompanying interview with Michael Verhaeghe, one of the attorneys representing the Palestinian victims in the case, indicates, the hearing did not seem to go well for Sharon.

Following the Hobeika assassination, Verhaeghe and his colleagues issued a statement, saying, “The elimination of a key protagonist, who had offered to assist with the enquiry, appears as an evident attempt to undermine the case” (see below).

In 1982, Hobeika was the head of intelligence for the Christian Phalangist militia. It was his unit which took part in the Sabra and Chatila massacre. In his checkered career, he went from an Israeli protégé to a politician who served in the Lebanese government in the 1990s. On July 18, 2001, a few weeks after filing the case against Sharon in Belgium, Hobeika, in a press conference, declared his willingness to go to Brussels to testify. “I openly declare that I am very satisfied that the Sabra and Chatila case has been brought to Belgium, perhaps giving me the first opportunity in 19 years to tell the truth and defend myself and my reputation . . . and get cleared of this accusation.”

As he was making this declaration, a formal request by the attorneys representing the Palestinian plaintiffs was made to the investigative prosecutor, calling for Hobeika to be invited to testify. The only reason he was not called to Belgium last year, was that the investigation was suspended, while the appeals process was being carried out. That process has now ended, with the Jan. 23 hearing.

On Jan. 23, Hobeika met with two Belgian Senators, Josy Dubie and Vincent van Quickenbourne, who were on a fact-finding tour in their capacities as members of the Belgian Sabra and Chatila Committee. Hobeika reiterated his intention to come to Belgium and testify in the trial. Less than 24 hours later, he was dead.

Afghanistan Confronts Economic Disaster, Chaos, and Geopolitics

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Three and a half months after the first bombs were dropped on Afghanistan, the stated war aims are far from being reached. The Osama bin Laden/al-Qaeda terrorist networks, though neutralized and disbanded, have not been eliminated; nor have their leaders been located—much less apprehended. The country, which was given a ready-made interim government through an international conference in Bonn, Germany, is not stabilized; despite the presence of international peacekeepers, rival warlords are in outright conflict, and security conditions outside the capital are not adequate for the distribution of humanitarian aid, urgently needed. UN deputy special envoy Francesco Vendrell has said that 30,000 foreign troops would be required to establish security in the major cities.

At the same time, American and other Western military forces are moving in with astonishing rapidity to secure bases, not only in Afghanistan, but in all of Central Asia. This is an ominous development if seen through the eyes of Russia, India, and China, whose leading political and military figures are asking themselves, whether perhaps there is another agenda, than what was officially drawn up in Washington. Especially in Moscow, according to a leading strategist at Moscow’s U.S.A.-Canada Institute, who spoke to *EIR* on Jan. 11, there is a growing feeling in his country that Russia has been “betrayed and double-crossed,” by the United States and Britain.

Afghanistan Ungoverned

The government of Interim Prime Minister Hamid Karzai, which had been shaped at the Bonn conference, and took power on Dec. 22, is powerless. This was demonstrated most cruelly on Jan. 10, when it was reported that seven Taliban officials (including the former justice minister and defense minister) had surrendered in Kandahar, and then been promptly released by the governor, Gul Agha. They were handed over neither to the Karzai government, nor to the United States, which wanted them. Jalal Khan, a close associate of Gul Agha, said that they had been released after recognizing the Karzai government, and promising to stay out of politics. “Those men who have surrendered are our brothers, and we have allowed them to live in a peaceful manner. They