

lasted for over 25 minutes, and the IDF rescue party did not arrive for 28 minutes, long after the gunman had fled the scene. This failure would raise alarm bells for any commander who considered his army professional and motivated.

Sharon's response to his own failure to protect the lives of Israelis was to call for more punishment of the Palestinian people. Speaking in the Knesset (parliament), he told journalists that the Palestinians "must be dealt a heavy blow, which will come from every direction. Anyone wishing to conduct negotiations with the Palestinians must first hit them hard. . . . If it is not made clear to them that they are overpowered, we will be unable to return to negotiations."

Sharon's security cabinet, which only rubberstamps what he and his generals decide, approved "continuous military operations," the first of which was a return to the refugee camps, this time simply to fire tank shells indiscriminately into the camp. Other, more deadly retaliations were carried out against Gaza Strip refugee camps, and throughout the West Bank. The bloodletting and brutality on both sides has only increased.

This carnage can be stopped only with the active intervention of the Presidency of the United States. In addition, there is also increasing resistance within Israel, to the war policy of Sharon and the IDF generals. In the midst of this most brutal of weeks, a new Israeli peace organization was formed, called "The Seventh Day Movement," which is calling for full withdrawal from the territories occupied in the Six-Day War in June 1967. It is an outgrowth of the famous Four Mothers Movement, which was launched in 1997, and called for the withdrawal from southern Lebanon, a goal that was eventually achieved. The new movement, which has generated a great deal of excitement in peace circles, hopes to become bigger and much more effective, especially now that the peace movement has started to reemerge from its many months of demoralization.

Nonetheless, the most significant development continues to be the "Combatants Letter 2002," signed by 314—as of this writing—reserve soldiers and officers, declaring their refusal to commit war crimes by serving in the occupied territories. Over 25% of the Israeli population now support their right to resist.

Michael Ben-Yair, who served as Attorney General under slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, wrote a commentary in strong support of the soldiers' right to break the law by refusing to serve in the territories. Ben-Yair wrote, "In their eyes, the occupation regime is evil and military service in the occupied territories is evil. In their eyes, military service in the occupied territories, which places soldiers in situations forcing them to commit immoral acts, is evil, and according to their conscience they cannot be party to such acts. Thus, their refusal to serve is an act of conscience that is justified and recognized in every democratic regime. History's verdict will be that their refusal was the act that restored our moral backbone."

## Egypt Urges Bush To Restrain Israel's Sharon

by William Jones

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, on a visit to the United States on March 4-6, urged the Bush Administration to intervene directly into the rapidly deteriorating Middle East situation before it is too late. But, President George Bush's response is proceeding very slowly.

After the ferment generated by the peace proposal by Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah, which appeared in the Feb. 17 *New York Times*, proposing Arab nations be willing to normalize relations with Israel in return for Israel's withdrawal to its 1967 borders, the Egyptian President hoped to use his visit to bring the necessary weight of the United States to bear behind this new initiative. In addition, President Mubarak has offered to sponsor an Israeli-Palestinian summit at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

Speaking at a joint appearance with President Mubarak at the White House on March 5 after their meeting, President Bush gave his most unqualified endorsement to date of the Abdullah proposal, and of President Mubarak's proposal, but without indicating any action the administration might take to pressure Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to come to the negotiating table. "Our government supports efforts to create and lay out a vision for a more peaceful tomorrow," Bush said. "And so I appreciate the efforts of both [Saudi and Egyptian] leaders, and I applaud those efforts of those willing to explore the opportunity."

Bush also reiterated his support for the creation of a Palestinian state. "My country has set forth a goal, which I stated last November at the United Nations: We're committed to two states—Israel and Palestine—living peacefully together within secure and recognized borders," he said. "We stand ready to return General Zinni to the region, when appropriate."

### Sharon's Sabotage

At the same time, President Bush intoned the administration mantra that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat has to do more to stem the violence. "The United States also believes that this goal is only possible if there is a maximum effort to end violence throughout the region, starting with Palestinian efforts to stop attacks against Israelis." The administration seems not to have realized that such demands, in light of Sharon's war against Arafat, have really lost any meaning. This was underlined by Nabil Osman, the

chairman of the Egyptian State Information Service, in a briefing to journalists just prior to Mubarak's visit. "Sharon is destroying the Palestinian infrastructure. He has destroyed the airport and the buildings of the Palestinian security apparatus. He's denying Arafat any chance of stopping the violence," Dr. Osman said. "They have also destroyed the radio facilities, making it impossible for Arafat to even talk to his people."

It was left to Mubarak to point out the obvious in the press conference with Bush. "As the Palestinians are being asked to exert more effort to bring down the level of violence, the Israeli government should understand that the use of military power and unilateral measures against the Palestinian population, the closure of roads, the siege of towns and villages, the demolition of houses, the collective punishment that makes progress more difficult, should stop." Mubarak's view did not go totally unheeded by the administration, as reflected in testimony given the following day by Secretary of State Colin Powell before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce and Justice: "Prime Minister Sharon has to take a hard look at his policies to see whether they will work. If you declare war against the Palestinians thinking that you can solve the problem by seeing how many Palestinians can be killed, I don't know that that leads us anywhere."

On March 7, President Bush went further. Speaking to reporters in the Rose Garden, together with Vice President Richard Cheney, Bush announced that he was sending his envoy Gen. Anthony Zinni (ret.) back to the region "to work with Israel and the Palestinians to begin implementing the [CIA head George] Tenet work plan, so that the parties can renew their efforts for a broader peace." While reiterating his call on Arafat for "maximum effort," he also directed a message to Sharon. "As we move forward, I'm counting on all parties in the region, Prime Minister Sharon included, to do everything they can to make these efforts a success."

The Egyptian President also used his short time in the United States to take his case to an American public that has been inundated for months by incessant news programs about the "Islamic threat." Speaking to CNN's Wolf Blitzer on March 4, Mubarak said, "Look, I made this initiative, and I asked the Prime Minister of Israel to come to Sharm el-Sheikh at that time. On condition that I could invite Arafat [whom Sharon is keeping under house arrest in Ramallah], not to solve the problem but to give an impression to both parties, to the people on both sides, to the people in the Arab world that there is a window of hope, we have to work on it." Sharon had declined the invitation, Mubarak explained, but had asked him to arrange a second meeting with Crown Prince Abdullah, to better understand the Saudi proposal. Mubarak said he did indeed pass the message on to the Saudi Crown Prince, but told Blitzer, "I don't think that Crown Prince Abdullah, the country with the holy places, will be able to meet with Sharon unless there is peace."

On March 5, Mubarak spoke to a luncheon sponsored by the Middle East Institute and the New York Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Here he underlined the seriousness of armed fighting between Israel and the Palestinian Authority: "This complicated situation, which has lasted now about 18 months without any interval, is terrible, and needs some effort to break the cycle of violence," Mubarak said. "Otherwise, more escalation, more losses, and I am afraid the whole area will be in trouble. . . . We have to break the vicious cycle, and sit and exchange views with the help of the United States and Egypt and other countries. There is no other way out," he warned.

Mubarak also spoke to American Jewish leaders, and with members of Congress, on March 6.

President Mubarak told the CFR luncheon that Arafat is "the only figure now among the Palestinians, those who are living in the West Bank and Gaza and those that are outside—the only figure who had the support of all these people. If Arafat disappeared, for one reason or another, I tell you, it would be a state of disorder. It is very difficult to find a leader who will have the responsibility to sign any agreement whatsoever in the future. So I think we have to work with Arafat until we reach an agreement and start implementing. After that, the Palestinian people should say they want to change this or that, it belongs to them. But Arafat now—we cannot deny this—he's an important figure to the Palestinians."

The Egyptian President was also eager to short-circuit any attempts by Sharon to "cut a deal" with the Arab countries behind Arafat's back. As Nabil Osman underlined in his meeting with reporters on March 1, "No Arab leader will negotiate on the part of Arafat."

### **Warning: No Attack on Iraq**

The largely unspoken, but clearly important backdrop of the Mubarak discussions with Bush, was the steady drumbeat toward U.S. military action against Iraq. When former National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, at the CFR luncheon, asked if he would support U.S. military action against Iraq, Mubarak side-stepped the issue. "You're asking me what I'm going to tell George Bush, the President," Mubarak joked. "And all I'm going to tell him about Iraq, I think better to tell you now and take the plane and go back home right away." Nevertheless, in an interview with CNN on March 4, Mubarak did indicate his concerns. "We urge the Iraqis to comply with the Security Council resolution to avoid any escalation," he said. The danger of a Clash of Civilizations conflict sweeping through the entire area of the Middle East and Central Asia seemed to be uppermost on his mind. "I think we shouldn't open so many fronts at this period of time," the Egyptian President continued, "because this is all in one area. It will have its bad effect on all of us, so we have to be very careful."

As one Israeli official indicated to *EIR*, any United States-led military action against Iraq "will look like a vendetta in the Arab world."