

# A Taste of Things To Come in Mideast

by Dean Andromidas

Critics of the Bush Administration's mad drive for war against Iraq have warned that an unprovoked attack would lead to a major anti-American backlash, even chaos in the Middle East. Developments in the past weeks are signs that the doomsayers could prove correct.

On Oct. 8, two Kuwaiti attackers, reportedly Muslim extremists, infiltrated a military training area on the island of Failaka where an American military exercise was in progress, killing one American soldier and wounding two others. Both attackers were killed. Less than a week later, shots were fired at U.S. military personnel at a training area in northwest Kuwait. Although no one was killed, the Kuwaitis ordered the huge area off-limits to all civilians. Since the headquarters of the U.S. Army's component of the Central Command (Centcom) is based at Kuwait's Camp Doha, the need for good security for American personnel in Kuwait cannot be underestimated. Any attack on Iraq will be launched from here. Its importance is enhanced by the fact that Saudi Arabia has ruled out having the U.S. use its territory as a base of operations against Iraq (including the huge Prince Sultan Air Base), and Turkey has expressed serious reservations as well.

In Qatar, government forces, with the aid of U.S. military personnel, are said to have crushed a coup plot on Oct. 12. According to a report in the Lebanese *Al-Kifah al-Arabi* daily, 140 military and civilians were arrested, including members of the royal family, activists of Islamic organizations, and several Qatari army officers of Yemeni and Pakistani origin. More than half of the Qatari military and security forces are foreign nationals. Qatar has become the one of the principal operations centers in the Persian Gulf for the U.S. Central Command, whose Air Force component is based here. America has spent over \$1.4 billion in the last year, developing its bases on Qatar. The coup attempt is said to have caused the postponement of a major U.S. military exercise running from November to December. That exercise is said to be crucial to an assault on Iraq, because it would include the operations headquarters of the Central Command and the U.S. Fifth Corps, whose troops are expected to form the spearhead of any attack on Iraq.

In Bahrain, the base of the Fifth Fleet, a recent election—the country's first in 30 years—revealed the potential of instability in this Sultanate. In a state where there has been friction between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, the Shi'ite opposition parties boycotted the elections. The key opposition figure,

Sheikh Ali Salman, refused to stand for office, and four leading parties in all have boycotted. The low, 53% voter turnout was called a "negative development" by analyst Jassim Hussein, quoted by Reuters on Oct. 25.

## Assassination in Jordan

The most shocking sign of the destabilization of the region was the assassination of the State Department's USAID diplomat Lawrence Foley in Amman, Jordan on Oct. 28. The murder occurs at a time when Jordan, under tremendous pressure to back a U.S. war drive, finds itself between a rock and a hard place. If it backs the war, it would face widespread revolt among a population with strong sympathies for Iraq, and the prospect that hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees would be forced across its borders by the Israel military. It is widely feared in Jordan, and publicly discussed in Israel, that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would take the opportunity to launch his "final solution": to "transfer" the West Bank, Gaza, and Israeli Palestinians to Jordan.

Although no credible group has claimed responsibility, a leading Middle East expert said the assassination should serve as a "wake-up call" for the Bush Administration, with respect to an attack on Iraq. A Swiss-based security expert with years of experience in the Mideast, warned that Foley was not a random American target, but the assassination was more ominous: that Foley, rather than being simply a USAID "employee," was most likely an American intelligence operative, whose murder could have resulted from the "intelligence war" now taking place in the region ahead of a U.S. attack on Iraq. He compared the situation to the violent chaos that reigned in the region from 1975-85, among the Israeli, American, British, European, and Arab intelligence services.

The details of the transfer and "ethnic cleansing" of the Palestinian population, in the shadow of an assault on Iraq, are already taking shape. The fascist settlers movement, under the eye of the Israeli military, has begun the process. Already, 150 inhabitants of the West Bank village of Yanun—most of the village—have been forced to flee their homes in October, because of attacks by settlers, particularly upon Palestinians harvesting their olives. One Palestinian has been killed, but no arrests have been made. Military commentator Ze'ev Schiff, writing in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* on Oct. 30, warned that the army must stop the settlers' attacks, because, "Even if they won't admit it, it can be seen as laying the groundwork for transfer, not by the state, but by a group of settlers."

Former Chief Rabbi of Israel Mordechai Eliahu made a ruling justifying such attacks, saying, "The fruit from the trees planted by Gentiles on land inherited by the people of Israel, does not belong to the Gentiles. At most, they can get a tithe from it." Schiff warns that if this "rape of the Jewish religion" is allowed to continue, "Israelis are also contributing to the destruction of the rule of law in the [Palestinian] territories," and providing justification for full-fledged international military intervention in the territories.