

'Clean Break' Fuels The 'Other' Mideast War

by Dean Andromidas

Despite global focus on an invasion of Iraq, the “other Middle East war”—between Israel and the Palestinians—continues to rage, bringing catastrophic results on both people, and fuelling the global Clash of Civilizations war sought by the “get Iraq” warhawks. More than 200 people have been killed in February and March. Following a Palestinian suicide bombing on March 5, that killed 16 Israelis on a bus in Haifa, Palestinian Minister Saeb Erekat declared, “We urge President George W. Bush to reshift his focus from war on Iraq, to helping the Palestinians and Israelis break this vicious cycle.”

Also on March 5, Germany, Russia, and France concluded their powerful joint statement against an Iraq war with the demand for “publishing and implementing the roadmap” on a Palestinian state. The roadmap, drawn up by Russia, the European Union, the United States, and the UN, includes a timetable for critical measures, such as the closing down of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories, and pulling back the Israeli Defense Forces to the September 2000 lines. Its publication is again being held up by the Bush Administration. The same “chicken-hawks” now in the forefront of the administration’s drive for an Iraq war, are the supporters of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s and his generals’ brutal policies against Palestinians; in fact, these chicken-hawks helped to draft those policies.

The international press, including in Israel, is just now coming out with the story first exposed in *EIR* six months ago, that the Bush Administration’s hard line parallels what has become notorious as the “Clean Break” policy, crafted in 1996 by men who are now in the White House, but were writing it then for newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. (See “The Pollard Affair Never Ended!” *EIR*, Sept. 20, 2002.) Entitled “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm,” the policy paper was authored by Richard Perle (now chairman of the Defense Policy Board advising U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld), Douglas Feith (now Undersecretary of Defense for Policy), and David Wurmser (now special assistant to Undersecretary of State John Bolton).

In 1996, from the safety of the Washington offices of the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies (IASPS), Perle, Feith, and Wurmser called for “removing

Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq—an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right,” as well as for regime change in Syria and Iran. Further, they wrote: “Israel has no obligations under the Oslo Agreements if the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] does not fulfill its obligations. If the PLO cannot comply with these minimal standards [to be determined by Israel and the United States], then it can be neither a hope for the future nor a proper interlocutor for the present. To be prepared for this, Israel may want to cultivate alternatives to Arafat’s base of power.”

First by setting up Hamas as an alternative to the PLO, and then by holding Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat—while under Israeli siege—responsible for Hamas operations, Sharon staged Israel’s “clean break” with Oslo, and blame it on the PLO. The Likud agents in Washington ensured support from George W. Bush.

While regime change in Iraq has yet to be implemented, the Clean Breakers’ proposal for a change in Israel’s relations with the Palestinians has been fully embraced with highest enthusiasm by Sharon and his generals. Those who think a war on Iraq will transform the Middle East, should take a close look at the results of the Clean Break policy in Israel and the Palestinian territories. It has not only failed in “Securing the Realm,” but is leading to the highest death rates since the 1948 Israeli-Arab war. Moreover, what Clean Break is achieving—which its authors intended all along—is to turn Israel into the hand grenade that will bring a explode a Clash of Civilizations war throughout the Middle East.

Sharon Escalates Military Operations

Since November, Sharon’s generals have taken full advantage of the world’s distraction with Iraq, to expand Israeli military operations against the West Bank cities of Nablus and Hebron, and the Gaza Strip. Since November, more than 350 Palestinians—children, women, old men—have been killed; nearly 200 Palestinians have been killed in the last two months, as the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) has relaxed its rules of engagement to allow tanks to fire exploding shells in order to disperse groups of youngsters armed with nothing more than stones. Whereas in the first year of the conflict, Israel refrained from demolishing the homes of militants’ families, now, no day passes without a Palestinian home being destroyed. In early March, the Israeli military crushed to death a pregnant mother of 11, and a deaf grandmother, who were not warned of the demolition orders.

Since November, the IDF has targetted the Gaza Strip, to wipe out the “terrorist infrastructure.” The Gaza Strip is the home of Hamas, officially Israel’s military operations target. Yet, not one terrorist attack inside Israel has been staged from Gaza, for the simple reason that a fence surrounds the entire area. The only Palestinian attacks have been against the settlements, which house fewer than 6,000 Israelis, yet occupy over

one-third of the Gaza Strip. Most of these terrorist attacks are with home-made rockets, which have yet to take one Israeli victim.

Several times a week, the IDF makes raids involving as many as 100 tanks, backed by helicopter gunships, that strike deep into the center of impoverished refugee camps. Each raid, lasting up to 48 hours, leaves dozens of Palestinians dead.

Nablus, home to more than 100,000 Palestinians, has been the target of one continuous military operation since April 2002, because the Israel military defined it as the “capital of terrorism.” For nearly a year now, the city has been under siege, and put under 190 days of curfew, 110 of them consecutive. These are lockdown curfews, in which residents can be shot on sight if they leave their homes. For nearly a year now, 300 houses in Nablus have been destroyed, 350 people have been killed, and 1,000 seriously injured, according to the Israeli daily, *Ha’aretz*.

In November, the Israeli military opened an operation against Hebron, the largest city in the West Bank, letting it have “its turn”—since every other major West Bank city had already been attacked. Until then, nearly every terrorist attack in Hebron—the burial site of Abraham, the father of the three “Abrahamic” religions—were carried out by the fascist Jewish settlers living in the tiny settlement in the middle of the city, who are constantly attacking Palestinians.

Sharon’s attack on Hebron is another perfect example of how he and his generals create terrorism. According to a recent issue of *Ha’aretz*, Sharon’s operation has radicalized all residents in and around the city. In the last four months, “The statistics speak for themselves: seven fatal attacks and 25 dead Israelis, including seven civilians (and the commander of the Israeli Hebron brigade), since Nov. 15. Moreover, a suicide bomber from Hebron killed 17 Israelis in Haifa last week.”

Poverty as a Weapon of Mass Destruction

On March 5, the World Bank issued a report, detailing the horrendous collapse of the Palestinian Authority economy and impoverishment of the Palestinian people. Laying the blame directly on Israeli economic warfare, the World Bank states, “The proximate cause of the Palestinian economic crisis is closure—[Israel’s] imposition of restrictions on the movement of Palestinian goods and people across borders and within the West Bank and Gaza.”

The report continues: “Using a poverty line of \$2 per day, the World Bank estimated that 21% of the Palestinian population were poor on the eve of the Intifada (October 2000), a number that increased to about 60% by December 2002. . . . The numbers of the poor have tripled, from 637,000 to just under 2 million. The poor are also getting poorer. In 1998, the average daily consumption of a poor person was equivalent to \$1.47 per day. This has now slipped to \$1.32.

More than 75% of the population of the Gaza Strip are now poor (less than \$2 day).”

In the Palestinian Authority, states the World Bank, “The Gross National Income in 2002 mounted to 40% less than in 2000. . . . Real per-capital incomes are now only half of their September 2000 level. Unemployment stands at 53% of the workforce.” Palestinian sources report that real unemployment is much higher. The World Bank report revealed that physical damage from Israeli military operations has jumped from \$305 million at the end of 2001, to \$728 million by the end of August 2002. Between June 2000 and June 2002, Palestinian exports declined 45% in value, and imports contracted by a third.

While strongly criticizing Israel, the World Bank gives high marks to the Palestinian Authority. “A year ago, many observers feared that the Palestinian economy was on the brink of collapse. Although battered, the economy still functions. One key reason is that the Palestinian Authority still operates.” Despite the Israeli-imposed curfews and closures and periodic violence and severe hardships, the P.A.’s ministries of health and education, and its municipalities continue to carry out their work: “These institutions continue to do their jobs thanks to the commitment of thousands of Palestinians who work in schools, clinics, and municipal services departments.”

This picture of President Yasser Arafat’s P.A., contrasts sharply with the U.S. and Israeli propaganda of widespread corruption, and also testifies to the fact that Sharon has failed to crush the Palestinian spirit.

Peace Process Serves Security Better

In a letter in the March 8 issue of the London *Guardian*, 51 members of both the House of Commons and House of Lords signed an appeal to the United States and Britain, to address the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as key to Middle East peace. The letter, taking its starting-point directly from the March 5 Haifa suicide bombing, underscores that “until then, there had not been a single suicide attack since Jan. 5 and not one single Israeli civilian killed since Jan. 12. In the same period, Israel has killed over 154 Palestinians. In February alone, Israel killed 79 and to date over 29 Palestinians have been killed in March. What message did this deliver to Palestinians? Would Israeli security have been better served by resuming the peace process and offering hope to the Palestinians, instead of continuing the use of lethal force against them?”

“A possible war with Iraq is no excuse to delay the peace process or to allow Ariel Sharon to deepen the occupation by military onslaughts and the expansion of illegal settlements, all in violation of UN resolutions. There is surely a moral imperative for the U.S. and U.K. to make resolving this conflict a priority for themselves and the UN. They must insist that Israel adhere to its obligations under the Geneva

Conventions and UN resolutions. A viable and sovereign Palestinian state, living in peace and security with Israel, is the key to solving the long-standing problems in the Middle East.”

Among the 51 MPs who signed are John Austin, Joint Chair of the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding; Colin Breed, Liberal Democratic Party defense spokesman; Nicholas Soames, Chairman of Conservative Middle East Council; Jean Corsten, Chair, parliamentary Labour Party; and Ann Clwyd, Chair, all-party human rights group.

Also on March 8, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher told Israeli radio, that President Hosni Mubarak had withdrawn his invitation to Sharon to visit Egypt. Maher said that Sharon has done nothing to show that he is prepared to work for peace. The move was no doubt also a snub at the Bush Administration. Three days prior to this announcement, Mubarak’s government had organized a demonstration of 500,000 against a war on Iraq.

Within Israel, opposition leader and Labor Party Chairman Amram Mitzna, clearly laid the blame for the March 5 bombing on Sharon’s “Greater Israel” policies. On the day of that attack, Mitzna told Israeli Radio, “We’re a state without borders, and the result is that the border can be found in every home, yard, and bus, instead of the border being between us and terror.” He then said that Israel must make the concessions necessary for peace: “We must let go of the illusions, of controlling the lives of 3.5 million Palestinians against their will, of continuing to live normally while we are there [in the Palestinian territories], and of the Greater Israel. There are so many illusions, that if we don’t separate from them, the spilling of blood will continue.” He called for Israelis to make “a genuine and serious attempt to decide for ourselves what is in our interests.”

Ha’aretz commentator Yoel Marcus, on March 11, ruthlessly attacked Ariel Sharon’s policy of having Palestinian militants assassinated: “The desire for revenge is the fuel that feeds and fattens terror. The higher up on the ladder, the more famous the dead man, the greater the lust to avenge his death. . . . The [March 8] assassination of [Hamas leader Ibrahim] Maqadme is bound to bring in its wake another round of revenge attacks. Will terror stop now that he’s dead? The fact is, our responses only increase the hatred and brutality of the attacks. For every terror boss mowed down, another one pops up. . . . With our excessive retaliation, rolling through their streets with tanks and blowing up their houses, we are not wiping out terrorist infrastructure. Because terrorist infrastructure starts with motivation, with the popular support of the people. . . . The harder we crack down, the more terror will grow. The more ‘we win,’ the more support Hamas will enjoy. . . . We already control their capital city, basically all of the West Bank, but terror continues to gnaw away at our country, and it will never be exterminated without a political solution.”

Region’s Rejection of War Shows in Tehran

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

While the world’s television channels worked overtime with film footage of American GIs kissing their wives and children before being moved overseas to the Persian Gulf, and on-site reports of troops maneuvering in Kuwait’s desert sands, very little attention was paid to deployments of quite another sort into the Persian Gulf. There has been a steady stream of intellectuals, regional studies experts, and high-ranking diplomats to the region, in an expanding effort to prevent war from breaking out.

In addition to the groups of peace activists and political envoys converging on Baghdad to manifest their opposition to the war, there has also been a steady stream of visitors to Tehran, capital of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iranian government figures have been engaged in a diplomatic race against time, in visits to regional capitals as well as abroad, to shift the balance away from military confrontation.

An important event in this process was the 13th International Conference on “The Persian Gulf in the Light of Global Changes and Developments,” held on March 4-5 in Tehran by the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), the think-tank of the foreign ministry. *EIR*’s editorial board was represented by this author as an invited speaker. During the conference, the imminent danger of war hung over the capital like a dark cloud; though some speakers pessimistically resigned themselves to examining “postwar” scenarios, the conference hosts and the vast majority of the participants focussed on preventing a war, and the catastrophic consequences a new conflict would provoke.

Iran Proposes National Reconciliation

In his remarks to the opening session, Iranian Foreign Minister Dr. Kamal Kharrazi pointed to the preparations for “another disastrous war” in the region, and called on the experts and academics convened to find ways for a coalition to prevent this “preventive war.” Kharrazi questioned the notion that this were a “just war” to free the oppressed people of Iraq, as claimed by the war party. He said he did not believe it was just, and noted hesitation on the part of the warmongers. If it were a just war for freedom, he said, why do they not apologize for their actions of the past? (This referred to U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s assistance to Iraq against Iran in the 1980-1988 war.) Why now Iraq? Therefore, he concluded, there must be another aim, which must be identified.