

Will Sharon Be Stopped From Wrecking Road Map?

by Dean Andromidas

Israel's special operations assassination of Hamas leader Abdullah Qawasme in Hebron came only hours before U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's June 21 address to the Middle East conference of the World Economic Forum in Jordan. Needless to say, the atmosphere it created was as if the Israeli special operation team had burst into the conference hall itself. Powell once again expressed "regret" that the attack could undermine the implementation of the Road Map for a Middle East peace, and that it "was a matter of concern."

The Road Map's "Quartet"—Powell and representatives from Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations—met on the sidelines of the conference. They issued a much firmer statement, expressing "deep concern," and calling on Israel to "respect international humanitarian law." U.S. Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche's reaction to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's latest provocation against the peace effort, was that until President George W. Bush spells out personally, to Sharon, irreversible consequences of his actions, Sharon will not be deterred from continuing sabotage of the Road Map.

At his early June summit with Palestinian Prime Minister Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) and Sharon at Aqaba, Jordan, Bush gave his support to several crucial points of implementation, in order to get the Road Map moving. He supported, as a first step toward dismantling militant networks, a cease-fire agreement, in which the Palestinian militant groups, particularly Hamas, would agree to cease all attacks against Israeli targets. He demanded an easing of living conditions of the Palestinians, and the removal of the Israeli settlers' "outposts" and settlements established over the last two years, with a freeze on new settlements. During June, Sharon has systematically sabotaged all these conditions.

Palestinian Cease-Fire or Civil War

On the afternoon of June 25, Palestinian negotiators announced that Hamas and other militant groups were about to sign a three-month cease-fire agreement, as a result of negotiations mediated by representatives of Egypt. Within not hours this time, but minutes, an Israeli helicopter launched missiles at a car whose passengers included a Hamas militant. Although the latter escaped, two others were killed, including a

woman. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) followed up with mass arrests in the city of Hebron. For Sharon, a cease-fire agreement among the Palestinian factions would cut off his ability to keep military conflict going and prevent the formation of a Palestinian state—the demise of his dream for a Greater Israel.

On the day before the above events, the *Jerusalem Post* published an interview with Abu Shanak, who is among the top five leaders of Hamas. Shanak, for the first time ever, declared that Hamas would support a two-state solution to the conflict. "What is the point in speaking in rhetoric?" the Hamas leader asked. "Let's be frank, we cannot destroy Israel. The practical solution is for us to have a state along side Israel. . . . When we build a Palestinian state, we will not need these militias; all the needs for attack [against Israel] will stop. Everything will change into a civil life. . . . [The future Palestinian state] is not one that is to take place of Israel . . . but one that lives with it."

When asked whether Hamas would agree to a cease-fire, Shanak replied, "In fact, Hamas wants to make a strong public declaration of cease-fire if Israel will allow it to happen." He said that Israel has consistently and thoroughly torpedoed each of the four cease-fire attempts to date.

Commenting on the significance of a cease-fire, a senior Israeli peace activist, who knows many of the Palestinian leadership personally, told *EIR* that Abu Mazen is acting intelligently by endeavoring to integrate the political leadership of the opposition groups such as Hamas into the Palestinian National Authority. This is the only way to bring the violence under control. Hamas and other militant groups have to be seen in the context of a "popular insurrection," the Israeli activist said. "You don't deal with this by killing the militants, like Sharon is demanding, but by offering something that satisfies their legitimate demands."

By contrast, at the announcement of the possible cease-fire, an official of Sharon's government told *Ha'aretz*, "We are not interested in the talk about a cease-fire or *hudna*." The official reiterated Israel's demand that the Palestinians crush Hamas, an action they know Abu Mazen will not, and cannot do.

Palestinian minister in charge of security, Mohammed Dahlan, quoted in a June 20 Agence France Press story, charged that "We were actually getting close to an agreement with Hamas but because the Israeli army rejects the idea that there can be an internal agreement (among Palestinians), they hit [Hamas leader Abdel Aziz] Rantisi. As long as they keep saying they are at war, then they will find justifications for mistakes like killing children and women, which create so much anger on the streets and make this whole Road Map map process harder."

"Sharon is giving them political cover," Dahlan charged. "The army is using the politicians as camouflage to destroy the peace process. No one will force us into a conflict with Hamas. Those who do not want a truce are Sharon and the

Israeli army, and some leaders in Hamas. What do they want? They want to maintain the status quo because they have an interest in maintaining the status quo. I told Sharon this: ‘Convince me you want peace. I understand that Hamas does not need a truce, assuming they don’t want peace. And you?’ He was silent. He didn’t like the comparison.”

Palestinian Prisoners Key

During the Aqaba summit, Abu Mazen discussed with both Bush and Sharon the need to release Palestinian prisoners, which number over 10,000. According to a report in *Ha’aretz* on June 24, he told Bush and Sharon, “The prisons are the election district for a campaign of calm in the Palestinian territories.” Bush reportedly told Sharon, “Look how you can profit from this; holding onto the prisoners only creates tension.”

Sharon’s response came several days later, following the assassination of Abdullah Qawasmeh, when the IDF conducted a mass arrest of 160 Hamas activists, most of whom have nothing to do with terrorist actions. Palestinian cabinet minister Yasser Abed Rabbo told Reuters that the action was an act of “Israeli madness. These arrests are an attempt to sabotage the understanding with Hamas. Israel does not want a cease-fire.”

Israeli peace activists emphasize that it is crucial to release these prisoners, who are being held under extremely harsh conditions. One pointed out that over the past two and a half years, hundreds of senior militants and political leaders have been killed by Israel, and thousands have been arrested. Those in prison still manage to coordinate operations in the field, while the field operatives have become ever younger and more radical. Only the senior operatives now in prison have the ability to get these young fanatics under control in order to stop the violence. This assessment was confirmed by the fact that the ongoing cease-fire talks are being coordinated with Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti, who is sitting in an Israeli jail. Barghouti is the top leader of the Fatah, the Palestinian faction loyal to President Yasser Arafat. A strong supporter of the Oslo Accords, he is one of the toughest of the Palestinian leaders, and is second only to Arafat in popularity. Barghouti has managed to win the support for a truce by Hamas operatives who are imprisoned with him, which has proved key to the talks.

The Israeli source pointed out that Barghouti’s release would give Abu Mazen tremendous credibility with his people, and this is why Sharon keeps him in jail.

Phony Dismantlement of Outposts

Under the Road Map, Sharon must dismantle over 100 “illegal outposts” and settlements established since he came to power. These outposts—some no more than a few caravans—nonetheless represent the takeover of thousands of hectares of Palestinian land. Over the past two years, many

have evolved into real settlements, complete with the necessary infrastructure. Sharon has been conducting a “dog and pony show”: For every outpost dismantled, another goes up. In fact, on June 24, a new outpost was established and named “Ariel” in his honor. Sharon himself reportedly told a Cabinet meeting that Israel should keep building in the settlements, but should “keep quiet” about it. He is the father of the outpost movement, from his term as infrastructure minister in the mid-1990s.

The day after Sharon’s government accepted the Road Map in May, Sharon met Zeev Hever, also known as Zambish. Hever is a top leader of the Yesha Council representing the settlements, and is said to be Sharon’s top man in the occupied territories. Nothing happens in the territories without his approval; he meets several times a week with Sharon, and it is Hever who is coordinating the establishment of new outposts.

On June 23, the Rabbis’ Association for the People and Land of Israel, which was set up after the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993, met after having been dormant for some years. They issued a harsh messianic denunciation of the Road Map: “The terrible act of evacuating outposts is liable to lead to an all-out plan of uprooting settlements. The government is under Biblical prohibition against evacuating any outpost or settlement.” Hever, who most likely organized the event, was also present.

The statements of these Rabbis sounded far more fanatical than Hamas, and all of them are on the Israeli State payroll. Former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, Mordechai Eliyahu warned, “No one in the world, from the drawers of water and hewers of stone to prime ministers, has the right to give up one grain of the land of Israel. The Holy One, blessed be He, gave us the land of Israel. There is holiness to every single grain.” Hever himself said, “We have decided to struggle against this. We are asking you to do all you can to enlist people for this cause”.

Israeli Labor Party Knesset member Avraham Burg charged that the group’s ruling was “an invitation to assassination.” Burg has demanded the convening of the Knesset Constitution and Justice Committee to discuss the matter.

The Rabbis’ call followed another by a member of the Knesset, Yehile Hazan, who on June 19 declared, “We will demand from all citizens of Israel to come and settle wherever they want, whether it’s legal or illegal. For us it doesn’t matter.” Not only is Hazan a member of Sharon’s own Likud party, but, prior to entering the Knesset, he headed Sharon’s West Bank office.

In 1991, when President Bush’s father was U.S. President, he ordered the freezing of \$10 billion in loan guarantees to Israel, because Sharon, the housing minister in the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, was building in the occupied territories on a massive scale, in direct violation of a U.S.-Israeli agreement. Will George W. Bush do the same?