

Will Cheney Flash Sharon 'Green' To Kill Arafat?

by Dean Andromidas

Israel Prime Minister Ariel Sharon let it be announced clearly on April 6, that he will kill Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. This would put off any Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement for years and could blow up the entire Middle East. Only the American President could stay Sharon's hand. Not only has this not been done, but on April 14, Sharon will be the special White House guest of President George W. Bush.

On March 23, an Israeli rocket attack killed Hamas spiritual leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin, signaling Sharon's declaration of war on Islam. Hours later, Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defense Forces, Lt. General Moshe Ya'alon threatened both Arafat and Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. Ya'alon declared that both should understand "that their turn is drawing near."

The consequences of assassinating Arafat are clear. The killing of Nasrallah is also dangerous since it could force Hezbollah to retaliate across Israel's northern border. Israel has already threatened to attack Syria or even Iran—both of whom support Hezbollah—if the latter attacks Israel.

Sharon heightened this threat by repeating it in interviews he granted to all leading Israeli daily papers on the occasion of the Passover holiday. Asked in *Ha'aretz* of April 6 whether he agreed with Ya'alon's threats, Sharon replied: "I wouldn't suggest that either of them feel immune," adding "I wouldn't advise any insurance company to give them coverage." Asked when this could happen, he said, "No one is safe. Anyone who sends someone to kill Jews is a marked man."

Ha'aretz published the above quotes in a short preview on April 2, prompting U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to warn Israel against targeting Arafat. He declared "Our position on such questions is very well known. We are opposed, and we have made that very clear to the government of Israel."

Undeterred by State Department

The April 3 London *Daily Telegraph* commented on Armitage's warning: "The remarks by Mr. Armitage were a fairly mild shot across the bow for Mr. Sharon, by Washington standards. Not only is he below cabinet rank, but Mr. Sharon has made no secret of his belief that he can sidestep the foreign policy bureaucrats at the State Department, dealing instead directly with the White House, as well as his supporters in Congress and the Pentagon."

When he deals with the White House, Sharon talks to

Bush, but more importantly, to Vice President Dick Cheney, who clearly gave Israel the green light for the assassination of Yassin. Not intimidated by Armitage, Sharon repeated the threat even more clearly in the mass circulation Israeli daily, *Ma'ariv* on April 6, which asked: "Is the promise you gave President Bush regarding Arafat's safety still in effect?" Sharon replied: "In the past I accepted that obligation, not to harm him physically. That was during the time he was still greeted with red carpets worldwide . . . Today, everyone knows just how harmful he is. As long as Arafat maintains control of the Palestinian security forces in complete contradiction to the road map, [Palestinian Prime Minister] Abu Ala cannot even transfer a single security officer from one end of the street to another."

When asked: "So why does Israel not assassinate him?", Sharon replied: "I wouldn't advise Arafat to view himself as having an insurance policy. He doesn't. We heard what the chief of staff and defense minister said about that. They expressed themselves clearly." *Maariv* pointed out that they said one *should not rule out* the possibility of assassinating him. The paper asked, "Aren't you countermanding them?" Sharon replied: "No."

At the White House on April 14, Sharon is expected to be given full support for his so-called "disengagement plan" from Gaza. Palestinians see the plan as Sharon's "Gaza only" plan, to be followed by the annexation of almost half of the West Bank, and the destruction of the Palestinian National Authority.

Even in Israel, there is skepticism on Sharon's plan. *Ma'ariv* commentator Ben Caspit writes that many Israelis believe Sharon's disengagement is in reality the implementation of his "historic map," withdrawing from Gaza and annexing most of the West Bank, and letting the Palestinians live in bantustans on less than half of the West Bank.

Sharon confirmed this to Israel's largest circulation daily, *Yediot Aharonot*, April 6, where he called his disengagement plan "a critical blow" to the Palestinian hopes for an independent state. "In the unilateral process, there is no Palestinian state. The situation could continue for many years." Sharon added that withdrawal from Gaza will not begin until well after the United States elections in November, or even later.

In return for this, Sharon is expecting a reward from the Bush Administration. On top of his list would be a statement, issued by the White House, declaring that Israel will not have to withdraw to the so-called 1967 border. Such a statement would throw out of the window the UN Security Council resolutions, including Number 242, which have been the cornerstones of Middle East policy of the United States and international community.

Sharon is faced with the possibility of being indicted, thus ending his political career. In addition, Cheney and the financial interests that back him, are faced with an unrushing systemic financial collapse that could hit even before the November elections. Sharon and Cheney could very well want

to blow up the region, creating a major international crisis behind which they can hope to save themselves. Sharon, without doubt, will meet Cheney while in America. Will Cheney give him the green light to kill Arafat?