

Cheney Pushing To Escalate Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

by Dean Andromidas

The latest cycle of violence between Israelis and Palestinians threatens to spin out of control and throw the region into a new and more brutal military confrontation, leading to hundreds of casualties on both sides. On top of this, intra-Palestinian fighting threatens to erupt into civil war between the Fatah and Hamas, which could bring on a total collapse of the Palestinian National Authority.

Although it may be easy to blame hot-headed Israeli generals and Palestinian militants for the rapidly deteriorating situation, the real blame lies directly with Vice President Dick Cheney, and his drive for continuing war in Southwest Asia, including a danger of a June strike on Iran. The policy of the Bush Administration and the EU has been to cut hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to the Palestinian National Authority, cuts that mean mass starvation and Warsaw Ghetto-type conditions in the occupied West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip.

In an international webcast on Feb. 23, shortly after the Hamas election victory, Lyndon LaRouche warned that now was the time to launch a peace initiative, and not to declare war on Hamas. He answered a question about what U.S. policy should be toward the victorious Hamas, saying: “You do not want to start a fighting line on this. Crazy ‘Mrs. Booty’ Rice—the worst possible thing imaginable! You don’t want to start, dictate, ‘We don’t like you. We won’t give any money if you are there’—no, that’s only stupid politics! You say ‘Okay, now you’ve got the government. What do you want to *do*?’ You don’t shut off the money, you increase it! You give something to Israelis. You increase it.

“In other words, you redefine the geometry of the situation, so that you create the condition where people don’t shoot. Why? Because they’ve got something else they also want.”

LaRouche went on to say that redefining the geometry requires a policy of broad economic development centered on the region’s desperate need for water and infrastructure projects. “What you need for the whole area is nuclear power, to help us have enough water, and the prospect of a decent life. Then you have to somehow manage the situation, on the basis that you’re creating something positive in the area. And

on the basis of doing that, you can win more and more people to your side. . . . The basic problem is, LaRouche said, that the people are “hungry! They’re desperate! They’re hungry. They haven’t got anything. So, give them better conditions of life.”

The Bush Administration did the very opposite of what LaRouche proposed, and continued the policy of chaos and war throughout the region, as planned by Dick Cheney and his neo-con advisors.

In the week beginning June 9, the cycle of violence has left dozens of Palestinians killed or wounded, including two massacres in the Gaza Strip where an Israeli naval artillery shell struck the beachfront, wiping out an entire family, including children. This was followed within 48 hours by another massacre in the Gaza city of Rafah, where a helicopter gunship fired rockets at a truck carrying Palestinian militants, killing seven civilians and wounding dozens of others. Meanwhile, Palestinian militants have fired dozens of home-made Qassam rockets from Gaza into neighboring Israeli communities, wounding several people.

Rocket Attacks and Israeli Response

The targetted assassination of Hamas militant leader Abu Samhadana resulted in calls for the end to the *Hudna*, or cease-fire, during which most Palestinian militants have refrained from carrying out terror attacks for more than a year.

In response to the Qassam rocket firings into Israel by militants in Gaza, the Israelis have threatened to target Hamas government officials. On June 12, Tzachi Hanegbi, the Knesset member for the ruling Kadima party and head of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, declared that a “confrontation between Israel and Hamas is inevitable.” In a direct threat, Hanegbi warned that unless the rocket attacks stopped, Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyah would suffer the same fate as Hamas leaders Sheik Ahmed Yassin and Abdel-Aziz Rantisi, who were assassinated by Israel. At the same time, the Israeli Defense Force has let it be known that it “will go crazy” if Qassam rockets continue to be fired.

Meanwhile, armed clashes between Hamas and Fatah factions have left several Palestinians dead and dozens wounded.

LaRouche: Targetted Killings Are 'Nazi-like'

On June 9, Lyndon LaRouche was asked to give an assessment of the claims by George W. Bush, Tony Blair, and Donald Rumsfeld, that the death of Iraq-based al-Qaeda leader, Musb al-Zarqawi, was a "victory" in the war in Iraq. The questioner also pointed out that U.S. Congressman John Murtha (D-Pa.) has said that Iraq has moved to a full-scale civil war and U.S. troops must leave, and that Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) has called for withdrawal by the end of the year.

LaRouche replied: "I would make a very simple statement, in part, on this, though it requires more attention, of course. I would say, well, since we have an act of murder committed—and this was simply an act of murder, which settled absolutely nothing. Killing individuals does not settle issues of this type. Whether he was, or was not, a Shia agent or whatever, is irrelevant. That killing was a

Nazi-like act of murder, and that is what we've been protesting against in the United States, and talking about the barbaric acts, about some action organizations in military and operation sections in the CIA in the past. This is what we said we must not do. You do not go out and take out people for political reasons, because they're your enemy! Because what you do is you sow dragon's teeth. You spread the disease. You spread the conflict. We didn't *have* to do it. Somebody wanted to do it because they had a political ego trip they wanted to make. Period!

"Now, that is all the more reason for supporting Kerry's motion. Because the United States government under the present administration can't be trusted with anything that looks like war, or occupation of war. We've got to get the United States government out of that area, for the simple reason that one of these Congressmen will simply not say: The U.S. government under its present Presidency can not be trusted with the conduct of war, or the declaration of war. It's corrupt, we should have impeached it! And whatever happens to us, if we don't impeach it or get it out some way, we're guilty of everything it does."

It is not surprising that this latest round of violence began when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert returned from Washington, where he held a well-publicized meeting with President George W. Bush and spoke before Congress. Not well reported was his meetings with Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, both of whom support the most extreme Israeli positions, especially that of right-wing former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Revealing the intentions of Cheney's office towards Israel and Palestine, has been the "amen chorus" of neo-con think-tanks in the Cheney orbit, including the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), the Center for Security Policy, and the American Enterprise Institute, which are spewing out hysteria against the elected Hamas government, and against Israel's withdrawal from illegal settlements in the Palestinian territories.

Immediately on Olmert's return from the United States, a new round of Israeli military attacks on Palestinians began, including "targetted" assassinations that have killed numerous civilians.

Prisoners' Letter Vs. Unilateralism

Prior to his departure for Washington, the issuance of the "Prisoners' Letter," authored by imprisoned Fatah and Hamas leaders, laid out a common program for unity between the two organizations, which would have provided the basis for opening up negotiations. (See *EIR*, "Israelis See Palestinian Letter As Opening for Peace," June 9, 2006.)

Subsequently Palestinian President Abu Mazen convened

a national dialogue conference, bringing together all the Palestinian factions, where the prisoners' letter would serve as a basis for National unity. After the Hamas leadership balked at adopting the letter, Abu Mazen called for putting the letter before a referendum, to be held at the end of July. Although criticized by Hamas, Abu Mazen's call has strong support throughout the Palestinian population. It also had support from a former head of the Mossad, a former head of the Shin Bet, and other Israelis.

As soon as Olmert returned from Washington, however, he publicly attacked the prisoners' letter as representing nothing that could promote peace or provide a basis for negotiations. "The referendum is an internal game between one faction and the other," Olmert said. "It is meaningless in terms of the broad picture of chances towards some kind of dialogue between us and the Palestinians. It's meaningless."

Olmert also attacked Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) saying, "Mr. Abbas will not be able to get away by saying I forced a referendum that accepted a program which is far behind the basic principles that the international community has defined anyway."

It is surprising that Olmert has been able to make such uncompromising statements, after his convergence plan, calling for *unilateral* withdrawal from part of the West Bank *without negotiations* with the Palestinians, received a cool response during his recent official visits to Great Britain and France. Neither British Prime Minister Tony Blair nor French President Jacques Chirac would endorse Olmert's plan, and they called for a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians.

Expert Says Israeli Artillery Killed Civilians

After claims by the Israeli army that Israeli artillery fire was not the cause of the June 9 deaths of seven civilian Palestinians who were picnicking on a beach in Gaza, Human Rights Watch, a U.S.-based non-governmental organization, called for an independent investigation. The group said that "Israel should immediately launch an independent, impartial investigation," of the incident, with the inclusion of international experts. It also called on the Palestinian National Authority to allow the investigators onto the scene.

Marc Garlasco, a former battle damage assessment officer for the Pentagon, who is now with Human Rights Watch, was the first independent examiner to visit the site in Gaza last week, reported the *Irish Examiner*.

Garlasco said that after retrieving shrapnel from the car where two children were wounded from the blast, and examining craters on the beach, and photographic evidence of the victims who died, he was "convinced this was from an Israeli shell." Whether the shell was fired from artillery guns offshore, or had been buried in the sand, was not known, he said. There were numerous other offshore strikes that day, one shell landing just 100 meters from where the people were killed.

—Michele Steinberg

Although officially the Bush Administration has not endorsed Olmert's plan, despite the warm welcome given to the Israeli Prime Minister by President Bush, it has yet to be revealed what Dick Cheney thought of the plan after his meeting with Olmert. What is obvious to everyone, is that the Bush Administration will *not* do what is necessary to achieve a regional peace settlement, and so the conflict will continue.

Report: U.S. Policy Leading to Civil War

A new report released on June 13 by the International Crisis Group documents how the policy of cutting off funds to the Hamas-led Palestinian National Authority, implemented by the United States and backed by Israel and the Europeans, is driving the Palestinians into a civil war. The report further charges that instead of endeavoring to promote unity between Fatah and Hamas, in an effort to moderate Hamas's traditional hard-line positions, the United States has appeared to bolster Fatah against Hamas, a clear recipe for civil war.

"The U.S., Israel, and, to a lesser degree the European Union and other actors, are banking on financial pressure

and diplomatic boycott to ensure Hamas's experience in power comes to a rapid, unsuccessful end," the report states. "In so doing they have chosen to bolster one Palestinian faction against the other, thus exacerbating internal strife. However, punitive measures are likely to generate greater solidarity with Hamas, and prompt radicalism rather than pragmatism."

The Crisis Group's senior analyst, Mouin Rabbani, stated: "Taking the lead in defining the international communities' objectives, the U.S. appears intent on ensuring the new government fails. That's a dangerous path: If Hamas feels cheated of its right to govern, it is unlikely to go quietly."

The report was drafted under the direction of the Crisis Group's director for the Middle East, Robert Malley, who served in the Clinton Administration as a senior advisor on the Middle East.

"Starved of resources, confronting an increasingly hostile population, and unable to realize its agenda, Hamas may well fail. But with intra-Palestinian confrontation, heightened Israeli-Palestinian violence, and a collapse in Palestinian institutions, it will be hard to chalk up its failure as anybody's success," Malley warned. "The time now is for pragmatism," he said, "lest all emerge as losers."

Political figures within the region have been working to resolve the conflict among the Palestinians. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak continues to use his good offices to try to bring unity to the various factions. Jordanian King Abdullah, who recently met with President Bush, European leaders, and Prime Minister Olmert, said that Olmert's unilateral "convergence plan" is totally unacceptable. Mubarak and Abdullah have been joined by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, in efforts to break the financial siege against the Palestinian National Authority.

A senior European Middle East expert expressed a similar assessment, telling *EIR* that the United States and Europe are doing nothing to stop the escalating violence, as Palestinian and Israeli extremists move to prevent negotiating an agreement. On the one hand, he said, the Israeli establishment does not want to negotiate with the Palestinians; they want to build their wall and wait for a new Palestinian leadership to emerge. This will never happen, the source said. On the other hand, the leadership of Hamas, especially those living outside the territories, do not want to recognize the state of Israel because non-recognition is their *raison d'être*.

Praising the prisoners' letter, the source said it was a good initiative because it embarrassed both the Israeli and the Hamas extremists, who are, in fact, working along parallel lines. At the same time, he said, it bridged the differences between Fatah and Hamas, in order to open the way for Israeli-Palestinian talks.

Concurring with LaRouche, the source said that the real problem is the Bush Administration's policy and the fact that the Europeans are doing nothing. The only way to end the violence is to get both parties to the negotiating table.