

Is Sharon Preparing A New Hebron Massacre?

by Dean Andromidas

Israeli security sources fear Israeli extremists are preparing a massacre of Palestinian worshippers at the mosque housing the “Tomb of the Patriarchs” in the West Bank city of Hebron—a repeat of the Feb. 25, 1994 killing of some 30 Palestinian worshippers by a fanatical settler, Dr. Baruch Goldstein. If it occurs now, with the Bush Administration mobilizing for war against Iraq, it could be the “hand grenade” igniting—not the surgical “regime change” envisioned by the Bush Administration—a new “Thirty Years War” conflagration throughout the Mideast.

Senior intelligence sources warn of conflicting, as well as converging interests between Sharon and the Bush Administration in an Iraq war. Some in Washington want to control the entire region for imperial interests, but Sharon needs a war to facilitate the expulsion of the Palestinians from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, into Jordan. His aims would collapse the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and pose a direct threat to Syria and Egypt. He is not interested in Arab “coalitions” or Arab endorsements for “regime change” in Baghdad.

A bloody provocation in Hebron (the burial site of Abraham), or at Jerusalem’s al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount over the next weeks, would be a repeat of Israel’s actions during the build-up to the 1991 Gulf War. On Oct. 8, 1990, two months after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, major riots were provoked on the al-Haram al-Sharif, when Israeli extremists of the Temple Mount Faithful attempted to place a cornerstone for the new “Temple of Solomon” on the grounds of al-Aqsa Mosque. In a brutal reaction to the ensuing, predictable counter-demonstrations, Israeli police used automatic assault rifles to kill 19 Palestinians. The move was widely seen as a pretext to hurry the attack on Iraq.

No Blue Skies Over Hebron

Veteran Israeli commentator Amir Oren reported that sources within the military-security establishment have warned of the danger that a Baruch Goldstein-type attack in Hebron could be expected during the month of Ramadan in November. Writing in *Ha’aretz* Oct. 7, Oren reported that a meeting of the relevant security chiefs will be held within a week to deliberate on such a possibility. “The circumstances, are potential revenge acts by settlers for murderous attacks by Palestinians. The venue, again, is the Tomb of the Patriarchs; the time, at high risk, is next month, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. The Shin Bet [domestic intelligence] is already aware of the threat, while sources in the Shai [po-

lice] district said this week that [regional police] Commander [Eli] Zamir and the commander of the IDF’s [Israeli Defense Forces] Hebron Brigade Col. Dror Weinberg, are scheduled to meet to consider the concern about a possible new Goldstein. Something of that concern has already been made known to Weinberg, and perhaps also to his superiors in the IDF.”

Indicating that his sources doubt that Israel’s highest security authorities are prepared to act on these warnings, Oren wrote, “Awareness of a potential attack being plotted by Israelis is not a guarantee that it can be successfully thwarted.” He revealed that the potential terrorist “squad is thought to use a vehicle, possibly a commercial vehicle, with Israeli license plates (which may be switched back for withdrawal), which easily gets through IDF checkpoints on the way back into Israel. For some reason, no one has bothered to order the soldiers at the checkpoints to take down license numbers of all the vehicles leaving the territories in the predawn hours when the traffic is very light.” Oren pointed out that no one in the relevant security position during Goldstein’s 1994 attack was disciplined or held responsible for negligence, because then-IDF Chief of Staff and later Prime Minister Ehud Barak officially declared the attack “a ‘bolt out of the blue’ that was so unexpected that no one should be held responsible for the consequences.”

But today, there are no blue skies over Hebron. Two years of bloody Palestinian-Israeli conflict have brought the city once more under complete Israeli occupation. A repeat massacre could only happen with the direct complicity of the Israeli military; its high command is completely controlled by the most extremist military elements, beginning with IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya’alon, who enjoys good relations with the extremist settlers. The current head of Central Command, with overall responsibility for the West Bank, including Hebron, is Maj. Gen. Moshe Kaplinski, who, only a few weeks ago, was Sharon’s personal military adviser. Intelligence sources say Sharon’s generals are more extreme than he, and that the military is in fact calling the shots.

Oren left his readers with a rather enigmatic anecdote: While the sons of Palestinians assassinated by Israeli security forces are never allowed into Israel proper, for fear they might take revenge, this does not hold for Israeli terrorists like Goldstein. Goldstein’s son has just been enrolled in the Israeli Air Force pilot training school, where the government will invest \$2.5 million to train him. Oren concludes that “in another three and a half or four years, if he excels, he will be able to fly an F-15-I, known as ‘Bolt’ in the Air Force, and head into the clear blue sky on a bombing mission.”

Most Israelis know that in the 1980s, an active duty fighter pilot was arrested for plotting to crash a small airplane, loaded with explosives, in a suicide attack on the al-Aqsa Mosque.

Invasion of Gaza ‘A Matter of Time’

Even if a Hebron attack is not carried out, the brutal military assaults on densely populated Palestinian communities

in the Gaza Strip over the past four weeks may very soon lead to the major explosion Sharon's generals need to carry out the expulsion of the Palestinians. On Oct. 7, the IDF killed 14 Palestinians in Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip. After the death toll was known, a Bush National Security Council spokesman said, "Israel has the right to defend itself."

This was not an isolated attack. In 30 days since Sept. 5, the IDF has launched no fewer than 16 battalion-level military assaults involving tanks, helicopter gunships, and F-16 bombers. Conducted under the pretext of "neutralizing the terrorist nests," these bloody attacks have left dozens killed and hundreds wounded.

The Khan Younis assault was only typical of all the others. In the first stage of the operation, just after midnight on Oct. 7, with no precipitating incident, tanks entered the Amal neighborhood and began firing artillery shells at residences. Later that day, Israeli troops fired machine guns into Nasser Hospital, just as hundreds of people were gathering to find out the fate of their relatives who had been shot during the fight. Then as the tanks withdrew, an Apache helicopter fired missiles into a marketplace. Among those killed were a 50-year-old Palestinian woman and four boys aged 17 and younger.

Sharon declared the operation "vital to prevent terrorist attacks launched from this area." Other officials called it "obligatory" and "very important."

Ignoring the Bush Administration complaint that it was "deeply troubled," Israeli reportedly told the United States that an Israeli invasion of Gaza "is a matter of statistics and time," because as attacks on settlements occur, "Israel will be forced to act."

Predictably, a Hamas spokesman declared that it "promises to respond to the massacre," and called on "all the Palestinian factions to unite in armed resistance to kill all the Zionists who came from America or Russia and are not innocent." The Palestinian Authority issued a statement that "Ariel Sharon is exploiting the American attack on Iraq to conduct vengeance campaigns against Palestinians," and called for international forces to be deployed in the territories.

The September siege and near destruction of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat's West Bank headquarters in Ramallah was only the most dramatic of the brutal operations carried out on the West Bank over the past weeks, despite lack of Palestinian suicide bombings in that period. Over 100 Palestinians have been killed in the last two months, while hundreds are being arrested each week. International human rights groups report that at least 10,000 Palestinians, most arrested in August and September, remain in Israeli prison camps under conditions that violate the Geneva Conventions. Over 30 houses of the families of those accused of terrorism have been demolished in the last month alone.

Red Cross International Committee President Jacob Keltenberg met with Sharon, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, and Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer on Oct. 6, to tell them point-blank that they are violating the Geneva Conven-

tions and international law.

The brutality "paid off" for the IDF on Oct. 10, when a Palestinian suicide bomber killed one Israeli and injured 16 others at a bus stop near Tel Aviv.

Sharon to Meet Bush

An Israeli veteran of the peace camp commented that Sharon knows Israel will never crush the will of the Palestinians by military means; but, Sharon benefits from the extremism and despair created within the Israeli population. While the extremists will support the expulsion of the Palestinians, those in despair will do nothing to stop it.

On Oct. 16, Sharon will meet President Bush in Washington for the seventh time as Prime Minister, more than any other head of state or government. According to Israeli press reports, he will discuss various scenarios—mainly, a possibility that Iraq will send chemical or biological weapons against Israel. *Ha'aretz's* Aluf Benn wrote on Oct. 7, "A senior diplomatic source estimated that the U.S. will propose an 'umbrella' and announce it will regard a non-conventional attack on Israel as an attack on itself, and respond accordingly. Sharon will have no choice but to agree to leave Iraq to the Americans. But this problem is more complicated. What if the Palestinians, or the Hezbollah, take advantage of the situation to launch a provocation? What if the horror-scenario of the mega-attack is realized? The administration is demanding that Israel prevent escalation with the Palestinians and on the northern border."

Benn wrote that the principal purpose of the meeting is to negotiate "how much freedom of action Sharon has regarding the Palestinians while the Americans prepare for war—and during it."

The Bush Administration will no doubt give Sharon most of the leeway he wants. Benn wrote, "The Bush Administration does not want to deal with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. . . . The administration demands that Israel take 'humanitarian steps,' like transferring money to the Palestinians, but doesn't demand withdrawal from the Palestinian cities. . . . In the White House they're waiting for Saddam to disappear, and then they'll rearrange the Middle East. And to the end of days, the Israelis and Palestinians will fight, and Sharon will ask Bush for the freedom to smash the final remnants of the Oslo Accords."

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