

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?

Ghaleb Darabya

‘They Are Not Living As Human Beings’

Ghaleb Darabya represents the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority. He has worked for the Middle East Broadcasting Center in London, and hosted an English language program for the Palestine satellite channel. On March 17, he spoke at The Palestine Center in Washington.

... There is a lot of talk now going on about something called “The Disengagement Plan” ... or Sharon Plan, or vision to move the peace process forward—which is an equivalent to a unilateral peace, that he is trying to impose on the Palestinian people.

Always, I find myself really obliged, not only morally, as a Palestinian official, but as a human being, to talk to people about the suffering of our people in the Palestinian territories. ... Therefore, I will start my presentation by talking to you about the socio-economic humanitarian conditions. ... I find it unbearable and unbelievable: How could the international community just keep silent about what is going on inside the Palestinian territories?

First of all, I will give you just figures, that give you an insight into the conditions. And first, about home demolitions, which is very important in Palestine, because it is becoming a systematic policy that the Israeli occupation army is imposing on the Palestinian territories. When I tell you these figures, just imagine that ... your house is destroyed. For the Palestinian people, they live their whole lives just for the sake of building a shelter for their kids. They work an entire life, just to build a home. ...

In the past 14 months ... there was a complete destruction of about 5,135 homes, killing the hopes of 5,135 families inside the West Bank and Gaza; and more than 55,000 houses were partially destroyed inside the West Bank and Gaza. It has a tremendous psychological impact on the Palestinian families, of course. And you are only given sometimes from 2-5 minutes notice of leaving your house, because the bulldozer is just outside of your house, and it is just about to destroy your house. So you really have not time to take even your savings, sometimes, from that home.

Schools: There are about 320 schools in the Palestinian

territory that were hit and partially destroyed, just in the past 14 months. Plus, 43 schools that have actually closed completely and became military outposts for the Israeli Army.

Four hundred and twelve Palestinian police stations were systematically destroyed, destroying the capability of the Palestinian Authority to maintain law and order, and even to keep our criminals in prison. So there is a systematic policy since Sharon came into office, to destroy the capabilities of the Palestinian security apparatus, so it becomes unable to provide the Palestinian people with law and order.

Close to 1 million Palestinians’ trees were uprooted, just in the past 14 months. ... Each olive tree means history for them; and we are talking about 982,000 trees were uprooted in the past 14 months. Close to 1,000 lakes and water-reserve tanks were destroyed, and that has a huge impact on the Palestinian agricultural sector.

In terms of human loss, we are talking about close to 3,000 Palestinians killed. If you want to compare this number to the American population, we are talking about 260,000 Americans being killed in 14 months. This is how much, and how dramatic this is for a nation of 3 million. Out of this number, at least two-thirds of them are civilians; 534 of them are kids under the age of 18; 191 women; 103 patients died at checkpoints simply because they couldn’t reach a hospital, they could not reach a medical center to get treatment; 87 Palestinian mothers gave birth at a checkpoint, seeing their unborn children dying in front of their eyes, simply because they could not get to a hospital.

This is what the Palestinians are really faced with. ... The checkpoints—more than 670 checkpoints in the West Bank alone, and 30 in Gaza—these checkpoints became a systematic way of dehumanizing people, humiliating them. A journey of half an hour, takes up to 6-10 hours now in order just to cross from one point to another. Close to 40,000 Palestinians are injured, and around 20% of this 40,000 are disabled, with permanent disabilities. Twenty-nine medical aides were killed when they were providing medical help to Palestinian wounds.

60% Poverty, 70% Unemployment

I am going to shift now to the physical economic conditions that also have a great impact on the Palestinian nation. Figures I am giving you are all according to the UN, World Bank and UNRWA [UN Relief and Works Agency]. We are talking about a nation that has 60% of its population living under the absolute poverty line, as decided by the international community, at less than \$2.00 per day. This is 60% of the population.

The unemployment rate, a year ago, was close to 70%, but since the UN issued alerts about this, it dropped to 43%, due to the new programs of creating new jobs. So 43% of our workforce is unemployed. The indirect loss of the Palestinian economy just in the past 14 months: \$9.92 billion. And the direct loss is \$2.4 billion.

Whenever I am in Gaza or in Palestine, the best way of