

New Provocations by Sharon in the Works

by Dean Andromidas

Israeli police recently revealed the arrest of five Israeli fanatics who were planning to attack the al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem. The plot involved the launching of a Lau anti-tank missile at one of the mosques atop Islam's third most holy site—an attack that many fear could trigger a new religious war, if not World War III.

Although the Israel Shin Bet and police are conducting surveillance of hundreds of Jewish fanatics, their most serious target of investigation should be Prime Minister Ariel Sharon himself. The very networks that are plotting against the Temple Mount are those which have been supported by Sharon since the time of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Sharon has been the godfather of the illegal settlements since the final days of that war. For more than 35 years, these networks have enjoyed his support, and it is only since 2004, when Sharon announced his plan for disengagement from Gaza, that they have begun to attack him. Some experts have claimed that the threats to Sharon are only a feint, but an extremely dangerous one, inasmuch as it could be turned into a “live” operation by a rival right-wing faction.

Former Shin Bet Director Carmi Gilloon, writing in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, May 20, said that an attack on the Temple Mount site “can be a disaster for the existence of the State of Israel, and can bring total war between the Muslim world, Israel, and maybe against Jewish targets abroad.” But extremist settlers hope that just such an attack would unleash a war that would put an end to Sharon's so-called disengagement plan, which calls for evacuation of Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip.

It is an open secret in Israel that Sharon, himself, is looking to disengage from his disengagement plan. On May 9, Sharon officially announced that the disengagement would be postponed from July 25 to Aug. 18, in deference to a religious holiday. On the same day, Vice Premier Shimon Peres told the *Jerusalem Post* that the disengagement was not a “done deal.” While Sharon has declared “unequivocally” that this would be the last postponement, an opinion poll released by *Ha'aretz* on May 18, revealed that 37% of Israelis think Sharon will eventually announce yet another postponement, and only 35% believe that the disengagement will be carried out on schedule. Israeli commentators have also speculated that Sharon will call early elections, which would push the

disengagement date back by many months.

In September 2000, Sharon's march onto the al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount sparked the second Intifada, and drowned the Oslo Accords peace process in a river of blood, which has continued to flow for the last four years. Another provocation will open the floodgates of religious war, freeing Sharon from his own disengagement plan and the "painful" sacrifices he has always been so loathe to carry out.

At the same time, the religious strife provoked by an attack against al-Haram al-Sharif would explode regionwide, and would open the way for a new confrontation with Iran, involving Israeli strikes at Iran's nuclear research centers, which Sharon has been pushing since his April meeting with President Bush. Such a confrontation would have the support of Vice President Dick Cheney and his gang in the Bush Administration who are committed to a strike against Iran.

All Roads Lead to Sharon

A closer look at the security threats to the al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount reveals the hand of Sharon. There are two types of threats. The first involves Sharon's "squadristi"—vigilantes—among the extremist settlers and right-wing messianic religious fanatics. The second is the Sharon government's policy to illegally grab all the land in East Jerusalem which is now physically separated from the West Bank by his "Berlin Wall" of the Middle East. This is creating the same pressure-cooker of frustration among the Palestinians that existed in September 2000, which Sharon ignited with his infamous march of 1,000 Israeli police onto the Temple Mount.

For months, threats to Sharon's life by religious and settler extremists who oppose the Gaza withdrawal have been played up as evidence of Sharon's sincerity about giving up Gaza to the Palestinians. The reality is more complex. Extremists are using the withdrawal as a "Godsend" to build their forces, raise buckets of money, and accumulate weapons to defend their homes against forced evacuation. Some experts have claimed that the threats are just for show, but others warn that if Sharon is actually trying to manipulate the appearance of these threats to build his credibility in the United States, it is a dangerous game, and could provide a cover for a real "breakaway" assassination run by some of his rivals. It was, after all, these same extremist networks that assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.

At a public meeting held at the end of last year, Rabbi Yisrael Ariel of the Temple Institute, one of the key centers for the Temple Mount fanatics, said that Sharon should not be blamed for the disengagement because it was God's punishment for not building the Third Temple. He then gave the marching orders to build the Third Temple, quoting scriptures: "'And they shall make me a sanctuary and I will dwell in the midst of them.' Does anyone expect the Holy One to do the work for us? If we build Him a sanctuary, He will reside in our midst." The message is clear: when the Temple

is built there will be no disengagement.

Rabbi Ariel is the number-one fanatic among Sharon's "squadristi." He is a founder and leader of the Gush Emunim extremist settlers movement, and in the 1970s was number-two in the terrorist Kach organization, and the right-hand man of fascist Rabbi Meir Kahane. In 1982, Ariel was the rabbi at the Yeshiva in the settlement of Yamit, in the occupied Sinai, and he fought against Israeli soldiers who evacuated the settlement after the peace treaty was signed with Egypt.

Shortly after Rabbi Ariel made his speech in late 2004, the so-called Ravave movement was created. Linked to the terrorist Kach organization, the group has been trying to mobilize a march of 10,000 people to hold a demonstration on the Temple Mount. Although they have not been successful, the activities have served to tax the resources of the Israeli police to the point that it is feared that preparations by those capable of launching a serious attack could go undetected, leading to a catastrophe. Israel police commissioner Moshe Karadi on May 23 said that it will require no less than 5,000 Israeli police to protect the holy site, if threats continue.

A 'Professional' Capability

Commenting on the threats from right-wing fanatics, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak recently warned that a group of extremists, veterans of Israeli elite military units, could carry out an assassination of an Israeli Prime Minister, attack the Temple Mount, or massacre a group of Palestinians. According to a report in *Ha'aretz*, the fact that Barak is a good friend of Shin Bet director Avi Dichter (who was replaced at the end of May by Sharon loyalist Yuval Diskin), indicates that Barak knows what he is talking about.

Some of those arrested in the recent plot against al-Haram al-Sharif fit the profile identified by Barak, and are members of Sharon's "squadristi" gangs. The five arrested were members of the extremist Bratslav Hasidic movement, and they were to have committed suicide after firing their anti-tank missile at one of the mosques. One of the plotters, 21-year-old Avtalion Kadosh, told the Shin Bet that their goal was "to create a third intifada and a war with the Arab countries that would stop disengagement and lead to the transfer of the Arabs." Another extremist, Elio Chen of the settlement of Beiter, was to recruit Army veterans to show them how to operate the missile launcher. Amazingly, after being held by police for three weeks, the group was released, although limitations were put on their movements.

The Bratslav Hasidic movement, one of the most extreme messianic movements in Israel, is also one of Ariel Sharon's gangs. A study on the group by the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, titled "Mysticism and Insanity in the Work of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav," documents how crazy they are. The Bratslav followers are the "newly religious," the Jewish equivalent of "born-again Christians." Although it has its origins in 19th Century Eastern Europe and the Ukraine, its

operation in Israel is extremely nasty. The center of the Israeli operation is the Shuvu Banim Yeshiva in the Old City of Jerusalem, led by Rabbi Eliezer Berland. When Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated, Berland began to sing the verse from Psalm 136: "Give thanks to the Lord . . . to him which smote great kings. . . ."

Another key Bratslav rabbi is Eliezer Raphoel Brody, who precisely fits the profile outlined by Barak. Rabbi Brody served in the Israeli Army's elite special forces and participated in two wars and countless anti-terror operations. It was in 1982, while killing Palestinians in the streets of Beirut, that he "developed a burning spiritual thirst," according to his official biography.

Among Bratslav's leading members is Benny Ze'evi, the son of Rehavam Ze'evi, the slain leader of the fascist Moledet party, who called for "transfer" of all Palestinians from the "Land of Israel." According to a report on the group by the Center for the Protection of Democracy in Israel, "Shuvu Banim: Portrait of Perilous Extremism" (published in November 1999), Ze'evi has been able to purchase sophisticated surveillance and wire-tapping equipment for tens of thousands of dollars, with the knowledge of the Israeli police, and has a stock of stamps and seals of the Israel Defense Forces for use by the Shuvu Banim Yeshiva students and staff.

Many of the movement's recruits are "former" criminals who are organized in "modesty brigades," which are allegedly to enforce the Sabbath, but are nothing more than goon squads deployed to attack Arabs and other groups. The organization has links to the Rozenstein and Alperon crime families. One of the top Alperon crime bosses in Jerusalem, Moussa Alperon, is a Likud Party Central Committee member.

But the important connections of the Bratslav/Shuvu Banim group are to Ariel Sharon. In 1999, they were involved in a massive Likud membership drive organized by Ariel Sharon and his crony Ehud Olmert, which helped enable Sharon to become chairman of the Likud.

The Bratslav movement is one of several messianic religious groups that Sharon has deployed to take over properties in the Old City of Jerusalem, as well as East Jerusalem. The standard procedure is for the Israeli government to secretly buy properties, and then deploy the groups to terrorize the Palestinian tenants of the properties, who cannot legally be forced out of their homes, because of their "protected" status.

Stealing Jerusalem's 'Old City'

The second possible trigger for renewed Israeli-Palestinian religious war is Sharon's plan to steal East Jerusalem, another major feature of his visit to the United States in April, during which he sought the approval to build 3,500 new homes connecting Jerusalem to a large settlement in the occupied territories.

In recent weeks, a new facet of this emerged, with a con-

trovery over Greek Orthodox Church Patriarch Irineos, who is accused of selling a long-term lease to Church-owned properties in East Jerusalem to an unnamed Jewish investor. A closer look reveals that this, too, is part of Sharon's Jerusalem land grab, which, if not stopped, could lead to violence between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Greek Orthodox Church owns thousands of acres of land throughout the Holy Land, including the land where the Knesset and the residence of the President sit, and Sharon wants to get his hands on it. The story about the Irineos sale broke in the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv*, which is owned by Sharon's friend Jacob Nimrodi. The daily quoted from the lease, but has refused to release the name of the Jewish purchaser. The revelation led to an outcry among the Arab-Palestinian Greek Orthodox, who are outraged that this would put a very large and important property in the Old City under Jewish control.

According to press reports, the so-called Jewish businessman is most likely the Israeli government itself, using a front company based in the Bahamas to mask its actions. Sharon used the same tactic in 1990, to take over St. John's Hospice, which is close to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Old City. In that case, after the purchase of the long-term lease, Sharon's Temple Mount fanatics moved in and used violence and other means to force out the "protected tenants."

The Patriarch appears to have been set up. Sharon's government never liked Irineos, because of his links to the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, and the government refused to recognize his ascendancy to the Patriarchy almost three years ago. Recognition was extended only after the Patriarch gave his power-of-attorney to one Nikos Papadimas, a financial agent married to an Israeli. This same person, who fled the country and is now in hiding, has confirmed the sale, but has not identified the buyer. Nonetheless, even he claims that the Patriarch sold the lease in order to placate Sharon's government.

The Patriarch has denied all the charges, but already a majority of the Synod has called for his resignation.

On top of this, Sharon's government continues to seize the property of West Bank residents on the western side of the wall in Jerusalem, despite the fact that the Israeli Attorney General has ruled that this action was illegal. This is creating a pressure-cooker inside Palestinian East Jerusalem, similar to that of September 2000. If violence breaks out again, it will just play into the hands of Sharon.

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