

Sharon utilizes Ze'evi assassination as a pretext for Israeli war-drive

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Israel's outrage at the assassination of Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi is feigned in character, or at the very least hypocritical.

Not only is assassination, in official jargon "targeted killing"—the official policy and routine practice of the Zionist state, but behind closed doors the Likud government of Ariel Sharon must have been secretly pleased that Ze'evi was killed at this time. It has provided Israel the necessary pretext for defying US and European calls for a renewed effort to achieve a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians as a quid-pro-quo for Arab support for President Bush's war against Afghanistan.

Prior to Ze'evi's death, Sharon had been put on a back foot. He was forced to withdraw troops from Hebron as a gesture of his willingness to resume negotiations. Ze'evi and Infrastructure Minister Avigdor Lieberman's seven-seat National Union and Yisrael Beitenu bloc considered this unconscionable and had threatened to resign and even work to bring down Sharon's government.

As has become the norm, however, Sharon launched a further series of provocations, including the assassination of another two Palestinian activists last weekend. On October 16 he gave a speech aimed at rebutting Bush and British Prime Minister Blair's support for the eventual creation of a Palestinian state. Sharon said that any Palestinian state must fulfill "all of our security demands": "We are talking about a demilitarised state... a state where we will deploy [forces] on its external borders" and without any claim to East Jerusalem as it's capital.

The next day Ze'evi was assassinated. Sharon swiftly moved into action. His Security Cabinet issued an ultimatum to the Palestinian Authority to hand over those responsible for the murder "and outlaw the

terrorist organisations, their branches and their supporting infrastructure". If PA leader Yasser Arafat did not meet these demands, then Israel would "have no choice but to declare the Palestinian Authority an entity that supports terrorism and act accordingly," the Cabinet statement threatened. Sharon pledged to launch a "war to the finish against the terrorists... and those who sent them".

Sickeningly, right wingers queued up to compare Ze'evi's assassination with the terror bombing of the twin towers, with its appalling loss of thousands of innocent lives. One proclaimed, "We have now had our September 11".

The statement by Sharon's kitchen war cabinet directly blamed Arafat for the assassination, with some within the cabinet openly called for the PA to be targeted for revenge attacks. Arafat's police arrested three PFLP leaders and a number of activists, but this was dismissed by Israel which demanded the PA hand over suspects and everyone on its list of 108 alleged terrorists. Israeli Minister of Internal Security, Uzi Landau, told Channel 2 news that all those on the list presented to the PA would be executed by Israel.

The Israeli military moved in to the West Bank Thursday and the assassinations of activists and killing of civilians began. Fateh militia leader, Atef Abayat, and two others were killed in a car explosion near Bethlehem that day. A police sergeant and a member of Arafat's Force 17 security organisation were shot dead in Ramallah after Israeli tanks and bulldozers pushed into the town.

The worst atrocity took place in Jenin, where shots fired from a tank hit pupils at Ibrahimeen Primary School. Reham Ibrahim Nabil Ward (12) was struck by shrapnel in the chest and died instantly. A teacher and another four students were wounded, with one 12-year-

old girl in critical condition after being struck in the head. An ambulance dispatched to the school to assist those wounded was unable to reach the school for an hour due to intense Israeli shelling.

The PA has accused the Israeli government of planning to kill Arafat himself.

An aide to Arafat, Nabil Abu Rudeina, said, “The Palestinian Authority has discovered Israeli plans to assassinate President Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian leaders. It aims to destroy the Palestinian Authority and the peace process.” He continued, “We warn the Israeli government not to play with fire. Israel will pay a high price for any action [against Arafat].” Several hard-line Israeli Cabinet ministers have argued that Arafat must be either killed or expelled. On October 1, Israel’s Foreign Minister Shimon Peres publicly accused senior army officers of plotting to kill Arafat, even naming deputy chief of staff, Major-General Moshe Yaalon.

Ze’evi’s death was more than merely fortuitous, however. It, or something like it, was the predictable outcome of Israeli actions. The PFLP said the killing was to avenge the assassination of its 64-year-old political leader, Abu Ali Mustafa, who was blown to pieces in his Ramallah office by two Israeli helicopter missiles on August 27. Mustafa is just one of around 70 militants that have fallen victim to Israel’s policy of targeted killings that are aimed at wiping out the political leadership of the Palestinians. Such targeted killings have been utilized again and again by the Israeli right within the military and political elite as a means of destabilising international efforts towards securing a negotiated peace with the Palestinians.

All those western leaders who condemned the killing of Ze’evi are well aware of this political reality. But only one broke ranks to state the obvious. Danish Foreign Minister Mogens Lykketoft said on Wednesday that “Political murder in that area is not anything new” and includes “what is called Israel’s extrajudicial killing of Palestinian leaders”. A senior government official in Jerusalem labeled Lykketoft an anti-Semite, and said that he is “the most anti-Israel foreign minister in Europe.”

Given the virtual inevitability of some form of retaliation by Palestinian groups, the ability of the PFLP to be able to reach Ze’evi itself raises awkward questions. The first elected official to be killed by

Palestinians since the creation of the Jewish state in 1948 was amongst the most obvious of targets.

Ze’evi served in the Jewish underground forces in British-run Palestine, and fought in the 1948, 1956 and 1967 wars. After the 1967 war, he was promoted to major-general and led the hunt for PLO guerrillas in the occupied West Bank. He served as a security and intelligence adviser to then prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, between 1974 and 1977. His fascistic views made him a hate-figure for the Palestinians and Arab-Israelis. He called for Palestinians to be ethnically cleansed from the West Bank Gaza strip and for Arafat to be either deported or assassinated.

Yet the PFLP was able to send one or more agents to the east Jerusalem’s Hyatt hotel and pump him full of bullets right outside his 8th floor room. The assassins then made a clean getaway, leaving Ze’evi’s corpse to be found by his wife. No explanation has been offered of the extraordinary laxity demonstrated by the internal security agency, Shin Bet, other than to point to Ze’evi’s awkwardness and belief that he could protect himself with the submachine gun he always carried with him.



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