

Israel assassinates Hamas leader

David Cohen
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An August 19 suicide bombing by an Islamic militant killed 20 Israelis and wounded more than 100. The action was carried out in a bus traveling from the Western Wall to the religious neighbourhood of Har Nof. The victims were ultra-Orthodox Jews, many of them children. Two buses were hit by the blast. The one on which the suicide bomber set off his explosive device was completely devastated, while the other traveling behind had its windows blown out.

The Bush administration immediately denounced the attack and its National Security Council spokesman Sean McCormack called upon the Palestinian Authority (PA) “to act to dismantle terrorist networks.”

The Israeli government of Ariel Sharon duly suspended talks with the Palestinian Authority, put on hold its plans to hand over Jericho and Qalqilyah to Palestinian control, and demanded that the PA clamp down on terrorist groups.

Then on August 21, an Israeli helicopter missile strike on a car in Gaza City killed senior Hamas militant leader Ismail Abu Shanab and two bodyguards. Hamas and Islamic Jihad responded by stating that they no longer felt bound by a three-month unilateral cease-fire they declared on June 29 and threatened retaliation.

Now Prime Minister Sharon’s security cabinet are said to have agreed in principle to resume the practice of “targeted killings” of militant Palestinian suspects.

This roughly is how the media has presented recent events in Israel and the Occupied Territories—first a Palestinian atrocity, then a response by the Israelis, after which the supposedly sincere efforts of the Bush administration to secure “peace” under its so-called “Road Map” are in danger of collapse. Everything is then said to depend on the readiness of the PA to curb the terrorist groups.

This official story, however, turns reality on its head. In truth, it has always been Sharon’s intention to escalate the conflict with the Palestinians and to do so

by recourse to provocations aimed at eliciting a terrorist action by Hamas or Islamic Jihad that can then be used to justify further and more severe repression by Israeli forces.

The claim that the security cabinet is “reanimating” its policy of targeted killings is a fraud. It has never abandoned the practice. The bus bombing was in fact carried out in retaliation for the August 14 killing of Islamic Jihad’s senior official Mohammed Sider during attempts by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) to arrest him in the West Bank city of Hebron.

And in June, Israel fired missiles at the car of top Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi, who escaped with minor injuries.

Now it has assassinated Shanab and his bodyguards, thus precipitating a declaration by the Islamic militant groups that their cease-fire is at an end—which was always the intended result of the actions of the IDF.

In this way, a stick is fashioned with which the Sharon government can beat the PA and drive it towards measures to suppress opposition to Israeli occupation, with the full support of the media.

The claim is then made that the US-backed Palestinian leadership has done nothing against the Islamic militant factions. The aim here is to justify the ongoing violation of the cease-fire by Israel and its continued repression of the Palestinians by portraying Sharon as responding to rather than instigating violence.

Typical is the ostensibly liberal Israeli daily *Haaretz*, which argues in its August 20 editorial that whereas Palestinian prime minister Mahmoud Abbas has correctly “denounced the terror attack in Jerusalem as an evil act that also harmed the national interests of his own people...during the last two months of the fragile cease-fire, despite US support and encouragement, Abbas did not prove that he is determined enough to translate that recognition in principle into the language

of practice.”

Haaretz goes on to complain, “No significant steps have been taken against Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists in Gaza, where the security forces are subordinate to Abbas and his security minister, Mohammed Dahlan. The terrorists train without interference, occasionally firing light weapons and mortars at Israeli targets, and sometimes even test launching their Qassam rockets in an attempt to increase their range and improve their accuracy. In the West Bank, as well, even though security responsibility has not been transferred in most of the cities to the Palestinian Authority, there has been no sign from the PA that it is preparing or intends to prepare to deal with the terror organisations.”

Or as the *Jerusalem Post* wrote in its editorial, “The Palestinian Authority, whatever that now means, must choose. It cannot have unity based on terror and found a Palestinian state.”

Whether it is the secular Fatah or the Islamic fundamentalists of Hamas, none of the existing Palestinian political tendencies are capable of liberating the Palestinians from Israeli oppression and occupation. The only way forward is a brave decision to make a genuine political appeal for unity between the Jewish and Arab working classes based on a socialist perspective elaborating a common defence of their social and democratic rights. The organic hostility of the Islamic reactionaries to the idea of Arab-Jewish unity finds its expression in terrorist bombings targeting Israeli innocents. But those Arabs and Jews who wish to stop the bloodbath must strive to build a class-based movement that cuts across national, ethnic and religious divisions rather than be sucked in by the propaganda of the media.



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