

Why did Bush give Israel a green light to assassinate Hamas leader Rantisi?

Chris Marsden
21 April 2004

The question that must be asked is not if, but why Washington gave either explicit or tacit approval for the April 17 assassination of Hamas leader Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi by an Israeli gunship.

In the face of vocal criticism from the Arab states, President Bush's National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice was obliged to deny having received advance warning of the assassination. But this is barely credible, given that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was in intensive discussions with Bush only three days earlier.

Even if the specific intent had not been made known, the US knew that such actions had taken place before and would take place again. Yet, Bush never warned Sharon against further assassinations or threatened him with serious consequences, as he could easily have done.

Instead, the US once again stood virtually alone in failing to issue so much as a formal condemnation of the assassination, stressing, as it did last month in relation to the killing of al-Rantisi's predecessor, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, that Israel had "a right to defend itself from terrorist attacks."

Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia justifiably concluded, "The Palestinian cabinet considers this terrorist Israeli campaign is a direct result of American encouragement and the complete bias of the American administration towards the Israeli government."

Rantisi's murder is only the first fruit of Washington's official backing of Sharon's proposal for "unilateral separation" from the Palestinians. Bush's endorsement of Sharon's scheme for the annexation of West Bank territories is a turning point in Middle Eastern and world affairs. It signals the abandonment of the attempt by Washington to portray itself as an "honest broker" in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. It can only mean an escalation of political tensions throughout the Middle East.

As Palestinian Authority negotiator Yasser Abed Rabbo warned, Bush's latest turn "has the potential to destroy

the whole foundation of the Middle East peace process."

This is undeniable. The US has endorsed demands that flout international law and cannot possibly be accepted by the Palestinians. Bush has supported the building of a security wall that slices into 55 to 60 percent of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. He has also backed Sharon in rejecting the internationally recognised right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes in Israel. The so-called Palestinian state envisioned by Washington, in so far as the US seriously supports such a development, is to consist of apartheid-style Bantustans that are not territorially contiguous, while Israel continues to control the "airspace, territorial waters and land passages" of both the West Bank and Gaza.

In line with this aggressive turn, the Israeli Defence Forces and Shin Bet are escalating their efforts to behead the leadership of the Palestinians. This terror campaign will not be confined to the West Bank and Gaza, or even to the initial target, Hamas.

Hamas's overall leader, Khaled Meshaal, is based in Damascus, and Israeli Cabinet Minister Gideon Ezra has warned, "The fate of Khaled Meshaal is the fate of Rantisi."

The clear implication of such statements is an attack on an Arab capital, which would be an unambiguous act of war.

Sharon has also made repeated threats against the life of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat. On April 4, he told the *Maariv* newspaper that both Arafat and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah were not safe. "Anyone who kills a Jew or harms an Israeli citizen, or sends people to kill Jews," he declared, "is a marked man. Period."

An attack on Nasrallah would mean a strike on Lebanon, and would constitute a belligerent act against Hezbollah's backers in both Syria and Iran.

The assassination of Arafat would have no other

purpose than to plunge the West Bank and Gaza into convulsive conflict, aimed at creating the pretext for brutal retaliation by Israel and the launching of a drive to liquidate any Palestinian presence in the occupied territories. As Uri Avnery of the Israeli peace movement Gush Shalom has warned, Sharon's "maximum plan is to turn all of the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River into a Jewish state, with no non-Jewish population." What the Israeli prime minister does today is nothing other than a step towards this final goal.

Given that all of this is well understood by Washington strategists and political advisers, why has the White House abandoned all attempts to restrain its stooge in Tel Aviv? In large part, it is a response to the deepening political crisis of the Bush administration.

The US occupation of Iraq was meant to be only the first act in a campaign to secure America's undisputed hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East and to assert global supremacy over its European and Japanese rivals. But things have not gone according to plan.

The US faces mounting resistance in Iraq, which is encouraging Washington's European rivals to assert their own interests in the region. It is simultaneously fuelling popular opposition at home, both to the continued occupation of Iraq and to the ongoing offensive against workers' living standards and democratic rights, increasing the chances that Bush might lose the November presidential election.

It would be entirely wrong to believe that the Republicans are inclined to back down in the face of their mounting difficulties. The domestic and foreign policy agenda of the Bush administration is shaped by the dictates of a semi-criminal financial oligarchy that has risen to the pinnacle of US society, and which will not tolerate a retreat by the White House.

There is every reason to conclude that powerful voices within the Bush administration not only welcome the destabilisation of the Middle East, but are working deliberately toward that end.

First, there is the political mileage to be gained from supporting Israel in what a pliant and pro-Zionist media will depict as Israel's own "war against terror."

Second, there is the possibility, if not likelihood, that the far-right clique around Vice President Dick Cheney and Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld have decided to encourage Sharon to provoke a war with Syria or Iran, just as they worked for months to engineer a war with Iraq. Both of these countries have been targeted as part of Bush's "axis of evil," and the advisers to the self-

proclaimed "war president" could well decide that the only way for him to be re-elected is to foment another war.

Finally, the Bush administration could conclude that an event closer to home is necessary, either to swing the election Bush's way, or prevent one from being held. It can by no means be ruled out that Bush's inner circle would seek to manufacture some sort of incident—one that would provide the administration with an opportunity to whip up once again the atmosphere of fear and patriotic sentiment they employed to drag the American people into two wars in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington.

In a television interview on Sunday, Condoleezza Rice warned that terrorists might try to take advantage of the November election. "I think we also have to take seriously that they might try during the cycle leading up to the election to do something," she said. Rice linked the terrorist threat with a barely veiled attack on those opposing the Iraq war, stating that the popular rejection of the pro-war Aznar government in Spain following the March 11 Madrid bombings could send "the wrong message."

A worsening situation in the Occupied Territories and the angry reaction of Hamas and other Islamist groups to Israeli targeted killings would provide the Bush administration with ample opportunities to engineer a terrorist outrage, or allow one to occur. Such a possibility cannot be excluded, given the fact that Bush came to power in a stolen election, has ruled ever since through provocation and deceit, and has refused to provide any explanation for its refusal to heed repeated warnings of an imminent Al Qaeda attack on the US in the months leading up to the attacks of September 11, 2001.

What makes the situation more dangerous still is that Bush and Sharon do not face a shred of opposition from the Democrats. The presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, Senator John Kerry, has followed his endorsement of Sharon's land grab by declaring that the killing of Rantisi was justified because Israel "has every right in the world to respond to any act of terror against it."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact