

Sharon threatens to kill Arafat

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Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon this week made a clear threat to assassinate Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in an interview to mark the Jewish New Year holiday.

Sharon reiterated an earlier threat to expel Arafat from the Palestinian territories at a “convenient” time. But he went on to stress that he saw no difference between Arafat and Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who was assassinated by Israel in March, and Abdel-Aziz al-Rantissi, who was killed the following month.

He told the Israeli press, “We took action against Ahmed Yassin and Abdelaziz Rantisi and a few other murderers when we thought the time was right. On the matter of Arafat we will operate in the same way, when we find the convenient and suitable time. One needs to find the time and to do what has to be done.”

Sharon subsequently insisted that he was referring only to Arafat’s exclusion. In April, Sharon, referring to Arafat, had stated that whoever kills Jews or orders their deaths “is a marked man”—again stressing after the event that he was referring to exclusion. But no serious observer will interpret this lumping together of the Palestinian Authority president with Yassin and Rantisi as a reference only to the timing of an expulsion. As the Palestinian Authority’s chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat, insisted, “These kind of threats are very serious and are preparing the ground for a physical attack on President Arafat. We are holding Israel entirely responsible for these threats and warn them not to carry them out.”

Sharon’s comments show that he intended “to kill President Arafat and to push the Palestinian people toward chaos,” Erekat added.

Washington has pointedly refused to condemn Israel’s policy of targeted assassinations. And Sharon’s threat again did not elicit even a formal rebuke from the White House—or any other major world capital.

The US and European media barely noted his comments. And even when Sharon’s remarks were reported, their significance was minimised. He was described as seeking to reassure his opponents on the far right that his plan to withdraw 7,500 Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip, and a small number from just four settlements on the much larger and more populous West Bank, signalled no letup in Israel’s bloody suppression of the Palestinians.

This is certainly the case, but there is no reason to believe that Sharon was making a verbal threat that he does not intend to honour. Indeed, Sharon has been unable to contain himself in the past few days from making open declarations that he intends to finally crush the Palestinians—and even do his best to stir up a wider Middle Eastern war.

Following his remarks on Arafat, he told the *Yediot Ahronot* newspaper that his government does not intend to honour the US-backed “road map” to peace in the Middle East once it has completed the so-called unilateral “disengagement” from Gaza.

“It is very possible that, after the evacuation, there will be a long period when nothing else happens,” Sharon said. As long as there was no significant shift in the Palestinian leadership and policy, Israel would “continue its war on terrorism, and will stay in the territories [of the West Bank] that will remain after the implementation of disengagement.”

It was impossible to say whether this could signal *decades* of stalemate, he said.

Erekat made an appeal for the US, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia—the “quartet” who drew up the “road map” envisioning a truncated Palestinian state by 2005—to insist on the imposition of its instructions to end Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

“Sharon’s intention is to destroy the road map and to dictate his long-term interim solution of Gaza as a

prison and 40 percent of the West Bank within walls,” he said.

But Sharon’s open declaration that the road map was dead in the water has again met with silence.

The Israeli premier has also indicated that he intends to resume hostilities with Syria at some point, and that Iran too may be subject to an Israeli provocation.

He told the daily *Ha’aretz* that there was “no possibility” of returning to previous peace proposals with Syria, and that he had in fact rejected an overture by White House envoy Elliott Abrams for Israel to renew talks with Syria last year. It would be “very dangerous” for Israel to resume talks at the point where they broke off in 2000, before he took office, he said, when Israel at that time had agreed to cede parts of the Golan Heights seized from Syria in the 1967 War.

“I don’t think we can answer Syrian demands regarding borders and water issues,” he said. “These discussions held under several prime ministers were definitely very dangerous for Israel,” he said.

Sharon said that after he had rejected Abrams’s suggestion of talks with Syria, the idea “was immediately dropped from the agenda and they [the Americans] do not bring it up any more.”

In additional remarks, Sharon also declared that Iran represents “a very great danger” to Israel, “due to its efforts to acquire nuclear weapons and means of launching them.”

To emphasise his bloody intentions, Israeli forces killed 10 Palestinians, including a young girl, in one of the bloodiest days seen on the West Bank in recent years.

Sharon heads an embattled and deeply unpopular regime, yet he still feels able to make the most bellicose statements threatening actions illegal under international law while continuing to bloodily suppress the captive Palestinian masses. By any criteria, it is Israel that is acting as the most dangerous rogue state in the Middle East and Sharon who is the most notorious of war criminals—and one who regularly flouts the authority of the UN.

That he can do so confirms that he has the full backing and support of Washington, both for his plans to permanently annex most of the West Bank and his efforts to whip up hostilities with Syria and Iran. As far as the Bush administration is concerned, Sharon is “our war-criminal”—a man who is eminently useful in

helping further America’s own predatory designs in the Middle East region.



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