
Israel's potential for anti-Sharon backlash

by Mark Burdman from Wiesbaden

While an atmosphere of strong on-the-surface "national unity" prevails in Israel, there exists an undercurrent of dismay and malaise, both at the atrocities committed during the misnamed "Operation Peace in Galilee" and at the heavy casualties Israeli forces are suffering as the conflict escalates. This undercurrent could at some point in the near future be transformed into a backlash against the war's architect, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon.

The backlash in turn could express itself in widespread demoralization and inchoate protest, as occurred in the United States during the Vietnam War, or it could result in an important reassessment of the entirety of Israeli policy. The direction anti-Sharon sentiment will take will depend in large part on the moral and political influence exercised on Israel from the United States and from Jewish communities abroad, particularly that of the United States.

Given the obvious growing importance of the armed forces in day-to-day Israeli life, the most significant barometer of the anti-Sharon potential is the report from authoritative intelligence sources of "extensive opposition to Sharon from within the army command itself," even among generals. These sources reveal that Sharon has been carrying out ferocious purges within the army chain of authority to attempt to nullify this development.

A European source told *EIR* June 21, "There is no question that there is growing dissatisfaction within the Israeli army," not only because of a belief that Sharon's strategy is going to far, but because the specific actions that Israeli units are being called upon to perform "violate the moral and ethical codes of Jewish culture."

In the same vein, another source underscored that because of the "growing militarization of Israeli society" under war conditions, the army's attitudes would ultimately be determining, and that it could be from within the army itself that a force might arise to block Sharon's extreme ambitions and call the whole war strategy into question.

In particular, experts familiar with the situation have drawn attention to political leaders of the rank of general within the opposition Labour Party, who could bolt from the "national unity" display and demand a shift in Israeli strategic thinking. Top Labourite Generals Bar-Lev and

Mordechai Gur had opposed the idea of an invasion in months past.

While Labour itself has given official support to the war (although at times disagreeing on its extent), certain Labour members of parliament have made outspoken comments about the ethical and strategic implications. Rabbi Menachem Cohen, a Knesset member, has, for example, warned of the "unnecessary shedding of blood," and has called for a commission of inquiry to be formed to investigate the war.

Israeli sources anticipate that a counterpole of opposition to Sharon could emerge in the short or medium term around President Yitzhak Navon, a Labour member who, in the words of one source, has "maintained some element of stature in the midst of a general political and moral collapse."

Navon is being touted as a possible candidate for the premiership in future years, a possibility that has Menachem Begin so worried he is trying to ram a bill through the parliament denying the right of any President to run for the premiership at a future time.

The "Navon option" might resonate among certain elements of the Israeli cabinet, particularly among the liberals in the ruling Likud coalition. Several cabinet members have been extremely uneasy over Sharon's mad escalation, but as of this writing, have been outflanked and quieted by Sharon's megalomaniac exertions.

'The worm may yet turn out to be a viper'

A broader potential is suggested by commentaries in the opposition press. A June 15 feature in the English-language *Jerusalem Post* expressed the view that rather than crush Palestinian opposition, Sharon would only ensure a dramatic new rash of Palestinian extremism in the future, while undercutting potential moderate Palestinian interlocutors for Israel. "It may seem churlish in the light of the Israeli defense force's dazzling military operation to look now for the worm in the apple," commentator David Bernstein wrote. "But it would also be well to consider that that worm may yet turn out to be a viper."

The centrist *Ha'aretz* Hebrew-language daily has likened Sharon's strategy to the genocidal British bombings of Dresden in 1945, attacking Begin in strong language for being drawn in by "Sharon's machinations," and warning that Israel is heading toward a confrontation with the U.S.S.R. The journal of the left-of-center Mapam party, *Al Hamishmar*, has gone still further, accusing Sharon of "bloody craziness," while the maverick *Bamerkhav*, the Hebrew-language counterpart of the provocative Paris-based *Israel and Palestine* magazine, has stated emphatically, "the aggression in Lebanon endangers the very existence of the State of Israel."

The most precise statements of reality have come

from the left end of the political spectrum and from independents who *in toto* represent a small component of Israeli society. The content of these statements has nonetheless been important. Tel Aviv University Professor of History Benjamin Cohen, for example, has accused Begin and Sharon of "Goebbels-like lies" and of bringing about the "dejudaization of the Jews" through their "veritable blitzkrieg" in Lebanon, in a letter appearing as a full-page advertisement in France's *Le Monde* on June 19. Cohen has formed a "Committee Against the War in Lebanon," and has appealed to American Jews to take a stand against Sharon's genocide, in an interview with *EIR*.

Alluding to Begin's frequent references to Hitler and the holocaust, Cohen told *EIR*: "Who is *now* committing the crime? Begin makes the comparison with a certain person. If you compare, Begin is more and more resembling someone whom I don't care to mention." Cohen made the same point even more forcefully about Ariel Sharon: "In an interview Sharon told it openly, that he had prepared the whole thing before he was brought into the government! . . . in terms of the PLO he used the Hebrew word *hashmada*, which means extermination; this is identical to the words used by the Nazis. . . ."

Six hundred and fifty representatives of Israeli universities, the military, and other institutions have signed a public petition against the war. In a press conference announcing this initiative, Hebrew University Professor Yoshayahu Leibowitz accused the government of "fabricating a pack of lies" and using "Orwellian" language in labeling the blitzkrieg action "Peace in Galilee." He called for immediate Israeli negotiations with the PLO.

During a trip to Paris, peace advocate Gen. Matti Peled charged that Israel's most recent actions were making of the country "the Mongols of the Middle East, spreading destruction and misery" throughout the region. His colleague, Uri Avneri, stated that the absence of a constitution in Israel gave Sharon a green light, since there were no constraints on his actions. Avneri's statement echoed this writer's prior call for the creation of an Israeli constitution as a necessary instrument to reverse the moral and political degeneration Israel has been undergoing.

However, Sharon's critics have not pinpointed the role of Great Britain in having set up this crisis, through allowing the "triggering" assassination attempt on Israeli Ambassador Argov in London. The critics have thus left untouched Britain's filthy role in manipulating Middle East factions toward war, and have not identified Sharon's real pedigree as a brutish agent of the Crown's neocolonialist wars of population-reduction in the developing sector. A constructive opposition to "Israel's Vietnam" will require pinpointing British responsibility for arranging the entire despicable affair.

European Jews are torn by Lebanon war

by Thierry Lalevée, from Wiesbaden

Relations between the state of Israel and the Jewish communities of Europe are being transformed as a result of Israel's invasion of Lebanon. What Israeli Prime Minister Begin and Defense Minister Sharon have done to Lebanon under the Hebrew code name of "Operation Purification" divided and traumatized European Jews, particularly those in France.

The fact that French Jews are leading the criticism of Israel has its own irony. Only a few years ago, the Begin government, finding French Jewry too passive, sought to mobilize them on Israel's behalf, directly financing new organizations such as "Jewish Renewal." A "radicalization" occurred, but not that sought by the Likud government.

Soon after the invasion began, Radio Jerusalem lambasted French Jewry not only for insufficient support of the invasion, but for showing active disapproval. Radio Jerusalem stated, "numerous cases have been noted where traditional supporters of Israel have been seen refusing to donate to Israel after prayers at the synagogue."

Eyewitnesses reported that fights broke out between the unconditional supporters of Israel and the "refuseniks." The occurrences were hushed up to avoid publicity, but the crisis was out in the open. Fights among Jews, an unprecedented phenomenon, grew to dramatic proportions. On June 15, several Jewish organizations, some of them known for their association with the Israeli peace movement, organized a demonstration of 500 in front of the Israeli embassy in Paris where Israeli Foreign Minister Shamir was speaking to the press.

The demonstration was assaulted by the "Jewish Renewal" group and the hardcore youth group of the Likud, the Betar, known for its thuggery. Demonstrators and attackers exchanged epithets of "anti-Semite" and "shameful Jew." Similar demonstrations were organized in front of the Israeli embassies in Bonn, West Germany and Vienna. On June 22 the Israeli ambassador to Bonn was prevented from speaking at a public event by a group of demonstrators composed primarily of German Jews. That this could happen at all was a sign, said German representatives, of a sweeping change in attitude toward Israel.

Most of the mainstream Jewish communities have