

How Sharon moved to wreck U.S. Lebanon plan

by Robert Dreyfuss, Middle East Editor

As Israeli troops and armored personnel carriers rumbled northward toward Beirut this week, a foreign correspondent in Lebanon asked an Israeli soldier if Israeli forces intended to enter the Lebanese capital. Referring to Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, the soldier responded, "Go ask the crazy fat man."

The soldier's comment reflected the reality of the crisis in Lebanon, in which, after a campaign of barbaric atrocities that has left 37,000 Palestinians and Lebanese killed or wounded, eight Israeli armored divisions and the Israeli navy and air force remain poised as we go to press to carry out a genocidal strike into the city of Beirut. Sharon, the architect of the slaughter in Lebanon, is reported—despite intense American pressures and regardless of the risk of U.S.-Soviet confrontation—to be bent on his Final Solution, the destruction of the Lebanese capital.

However, with the firing of Sharon's ally Alexander Haig, the Reagan administration has begun to develop a tentative policy for stabilizing the crisis in Lebanon and reversing the consequences of Israel's invasion. Further, there are some indications that the White House is considering a broader strategy aimed at resolving "once and for all"—as Mr. Reagan said June 30—the Palestinian issue, possibly in the context of an accord between the United States and the Soviet Union.

That is precisely what Sharon and the British are committed to preventing.

The war in Lebanon began on June 6 as a jointly run project of the Israeli government, Haig's Department of State, and the London Foreign Office. As *EIR* has

documented (see Special Report, June 29), the object of the war was not to destroy the Palestine Liberation Organization (although the genocide against the PLO and the Palestinians is intentional), but to eliminate American influence in the Middle East and replace it with a neo-colonial Anglo-French presence. Part of the deal would be to establish some sort of understanding between Moscow and the Anglo-French forces toward a "New Yalta" in the area.

With every mile the Israeli forces advanced, the prestige and credibility of the United States eroded. As the battle of Beirut neared, and as Haig seemingly endorsed each new Israeli atrocity, international and domestic pressure built against Haig.

Within minutes of Haig's resignation, Israel had agreed to a ceasefire in Lebanon. The White House began to take direct charge of Middle East policy. By July 2, President Reagan had decided to offer to send a brigade of U.S. marines to Lebanon's capital as part of a complex and highly sensitive plan for resolving the crisis. In several world capitals, American diplomats worked out details of the arrangement, whose central feature seemed to be to evacuate the PLO's fighters under an American military umbrella.

Sharon leak undermines U.S. proposals

But on July 6, Israeli radio suddenly leaked the details of the top-secret U.S. proposal, reportedly basing their information in part on the work of deep-cover espionage agents inside the White House communications system. Furthermore, according to CIA sources,

the British Foreign Office was also enraged that Washington had not consulted with London.

The Israeli leak, masterminded by Sharon, had the calculated effect of undermining the delicate talks and forcing PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat to denounce publicly a plan that he had accepted privately. At the same time, Israeli troops tightened their stranglehold over Beirut, cutting off supplies of food, fuel, medicine, water, and electricity to over 600,000 civilians. And, in a move designed to provoke Moscow to take action against the American plan, Israeli artillery heavily damaged the Soviet Embassy in Beirut on July 7.

According to the *Jerusalem Post*, Sharon leaked the details of the American plan "hoping to scuttle talks on the package deal." Saab Salam, the former Lebanese Prime Minister who is representing the PLO in the negotiations, added, "Sharon is totally intent on his military plan. He wants the extermination of the PLO and thousands of people in Beirut." Many times, Salam said, Sharon has sabotaged the talks by adding extraneous conditions.

But, in the opinion of many sources, the Reagan plan "would represent a total defeat for Sharon's objectives in Lebanon." Not only would it preserve the political character of the PLO, but it would go a long way toward restoring American credibility in the region.

Although the American government has issued what most observers report to be a near-ultimatum to the Israelis not to enter Beirut, many analysts are convinced that Sharon, Menachem Begin, and Israel's military are crazed enough to risk everything by an attack on the city. Such an attack would have catastrophic consequences for the Arab world, including a possible overthrow of the Saudi Arabian government, and leading almost certainly to a U.S.-Soviet showdown in which Moscow would hold most of the cards.

On the other hand, unless Israel is prepared to take that ultimate gamble, it may soon find itself in an untenable situation in Lebanon. Its expenses in maintaining 100,000 troops there are enormous, given Israel's budget, and without entering Beirut Israel cannot obtain its primary objectives. As a result, said a White House official, "You might say that it is not the PLO that is trapped, but the Israelis. They might need our help just to get out of Lebanon." Such a debacle, in fact, might lead to a political crisis in Israel that could at least force the ouster of the fascist Sharon.

Concerning the American plan for Lebanon, Caspar Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense, said that the idea of sending American troops to Lebanon is "only one of 12 or 25 pieces of a very delicate agreement," which would include assistance to the 6,000 or so PLO guerrillas that would leave Lebanon. Weinberger also declared that Israel was wrong in invading Lebanon and had damaged U.S. interests, and he condemned the casual-

ties caused by Israel's attack. And, in a hint that the U.S. government might support a move to topple Begin, Weinberger said that the U.S. government makes a distinction between the state of Israel and any particular government.

Moscow and the Vatican

Two important elements of the crisis which have not been fully evaluated are the roles of the Soviet Union and Pope John Paul II's Vatican.

The Soviet Union has played, throughout the entire war, a behind-the-scenes role that has not been of a single mind. On the one hand, Moscow has seemed to be seeking to take advantage of the precipitous decline in American influence among the Arabs, with political support against Israel and military backing for Syria. Arab leaders such as King Hussein of Jordan and the PLO's Farouq Kaddoumi have been in Moscow, and the U.S.S.R. has also given support to the Arab radicals such as Libya and the PLO's terrorist wing. In addition, at least 30 Soviet transport planes and six cargo ships have moved into Syria's Latakia port with tanks and other heavy equipment.

On the other hand, however, the Soviet Union has been careful not to respond to Israeli provocations in a way that would preclude the possibility of some sort of U.S.-Soviet entente over the Middle East. A letter to Reagan from Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev on July 8, according to TASS, while warning Reagan that any use of American troops in Lebanon would mean that the U.S.S.R. "would build its policy with due consideration of this fact," did not attack the U.S. policy. Instead, it urged Reagan to do "everything . . . to end the bloodshed in Lebanon, to halt the barbaric extermination by the Israeli troops of the Lebanese and Palestinian" people, in face of which "not a single honorable person on earth can remain indifferent."

According to some sources, the use of American forces in Lebanon might be balanced by the dispatch of a Soviet military brigade to Syria, as the basis for a U.S.-Soviet accord. A Washington analyst said that while the State Department is supporting the Israeli position and the Defense Department seeks to build up a U.S.-Arab military alliance, the White House instead is considering the possibility of a joint approach with the U.S.S.R. In a July 6 interview, Arafat called for the restoration of the 1977 U.S.-Soviet joint statement on the Middle East.

The Vatican role is also growing in Lebanon. In an article in *L'Unità*, an Italian Communist daily, it was reported that the Vatican had increased its cooperation with the Reagan administration concerning the war in Lebanon, supporting a plan to maintain the integrity of Lebanon under a sovereign government to be led by moderate Christian Raymond Eddé, a longtime opponent of both Israel and Syria, who now lives in Paris.