

Terror campaign launched in response to Israeli-Palestinian agreement

by Dean Andromidas

In the Egyptian Red Sea resort town of Sharm el Sheikh on the evening of Sept. 4, Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak signed the Wye implementation agreement, whose aim is to get the peace process back on track. Within 48 hours, two car-bombs exploded in the Israeli cities of Tiberias and Haifa, and a man was shot dead as he assaulted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. This swift response against the first breakthrough in the peace process since the defeat of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, underscores the determination of the British-American-Commonwealth forces to sabotage any efforts to establish peace in the region.

The terrorist incidents in Israel and Egypt point to a security situation outside the control of both governments. In the Egyptian incident especially, a potential trail to the author of these incidents leads directly to Great Britain, the world center of international terrorism.

Although the only ones killed in the two car-bombings were the three occupants of the cars, there were enough explosives in each car to have caused tremendous carnage, had the bombs exploded in densely populated areas. Moreover, those killed, along with seven others who were subsequently arrested, were Arab-Israeli citizens. Except for a few isolated incidents, members of the Arab-Israeli community have not hitherto been involved in sophisticated terrorist operations. Given the fact that 1 million of Israel's 6 million citizens are of Arab origin, the incident has shocked the Israeli public.

Security and intelligence specialists have pointed to several unusual aspects of the bombings. First, the fact that the cars blew up within 20 minutes of each other—apparently prematurely, because no bystanders were killed—is viewed as an unusual coincidence, to say the least. As of this writing, neither Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic movement which rejects the peace process, nor its Ezzidin Al-Qassam military wing, have taken responsibility for the bombings. Moreover, all of Hamas's various factions are under tremendous pressure not to engage in terrorism. For example, the West Bank faction is finding it impossible to operate clandestinely

because of the tight cooperation between the security services of the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli services, and the CIA. In Gaza, Hamas is maintaining a low political profile, and in some areas is cooperating with the Palestinian Authority. The Hamas factions based in Syria and Jordan are under pressure from both the Syrian government, which is maneuvering to reopen peace talks with Israel, and the Jordanian government, which has just closed down several Hamas offices and issued arrest warrants for several of its leaders.

These circumstances lead to the hypothesis that the planning for the car-bombings would have had to have occurred within Israel itself, and most likely was directed from outside the region. The other implication is that the operation could have been aided by rogue elements within the Israeli security establishment itself. While some of the would-be bombers are suspected to have links with Hamas, those links would have been known by the Israeli security services. In this respect, according to press reports, one of those killed in the bombing, Nazal Kraim, had been arrested in 1994 because his Israeli identity card was found on the body of a Palestinian killed in a terrorist attack. At the time, Kraim was merely questioned and released.

A possible link to Britain could be revealed, if it turns out that the families of the suicide bombers, as has happened in other cases, receive financial support from so-called welfare organizations based in Great Britain. Although such links have not yet been revealed in this case, experts do not discount the possibility.

Despite the apparent failure of the bombings, one of its purposes was achieved: that of creating an atmosphere of fear and paranoia within Israel. Those killed and arrested had been members or had links to the Islamic Movement, a legally constituted political and welfare organization which enjoys support among the Arab-Israeli population, and is represented in the Israeli Knesset (parliament). The official spokesman of the Islamic Movement released a statement condemning the suicide attacks, declaring that such action is opposed to the principles of the movement and its policies.



Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak with President Clinton, and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat. No sooner was the ink dry on the new agreement for implementation of the Wye accords, than a new outbreak of terrorism was detonated, by those who will do anything to prevent peace in the Middle East.

Leaders of the community which the bombers were from, were even more emphatic in their denunciation of the terrorist incidents.

Nonetheless, the Israeli right wing has been quick to exploit the situation, especially now that the Barak government has been actively promoting Arab-Israeli political leaders in important cabinet posts and in Knesset committees. The right-wing Likud, whose leader is now the lunatic Ariel Sharon, has attacked these moves, and has played into the debate initiated in late August, when the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the Israeli security services are forbidden to use all forms of torture in interrogating suspected terrorists. The Israeli right wing thus invokes the sick logic: "It is either them or us," or, "If you can't trust the Arabs we have been living with relatively peacefully for 50 years, how can we trust the Palestinians?" Government leaders and the press have made an effort to play down, or have even denounced these tendencies.

The attempt on Mubarak

On Sept. 6, less than 48 hours after presiding over the signing of the Sharm el Sheikh agreement, Egyptian President Mubarak was attacked by an assailant armed with a sharp object. Although officially described as an attack by a deranged individual with no political affiliations, the act cannot be dismissed so simply. Mubarak has been playing a crucial role in bringing together Barak and Arafat to con-

clude the agreement and give some momentum to the peace process. He is also playing a similar role in attempts to bring Syria and Israel to the negotiating table, a role which is especially important because the Egypt-Israel 1979 peace agreement, which led to the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all of Egyptian territory, is the model for an Israeli-Syrian agreement on the Golan Heights. If Egypt were to be destabilized, it would be a serious setback to peace.

Security experts say that the assailant did not "come out of nowhere." They point out that he had a criminal record, and had exhibited similar behavior in incidents in which he targetted the Governor of Port Said, where the attack took place.

The swift reaction by President Mubarak's security detail to shoot the assailant, points to the unusually high level of security alert around the Egyptian President. A similar incident happened in Israel, when Israeli Prime Minister Barak's security detail shot out the tires of a car whose driver failed to stop at a road-block near the Prime Minister's residence. Security around Barak has been on a very high level since his election, and he is known to wear a bullet-proof vest at all times.

A trail leading to London has come to light in this case. Yasser Al-Serri, chairman of the London Islamic Observation Center for "human rights" and one of the leaders of the Islamic terrorist group who is facing a death sentence in Egypt for the assassination attempt against former Prime

Minister Atif Sidqi, told the Qatari Al-Jazeera television station on Sept. 6 that the attempt against Mubarak “was a revolutionary act by a member of the Islamist community in Egypt against the tyrant and dictator Mubarak.” When told that the assailant was not a member of any Islamist group, Al-Serri answered that “all the Egyptian people are Islamists,” who have no other choice but to carry arms against the “tyranny of Mubarak.”

Mubarak has spearheaded the attack on Great Britain as the leading supporter of Islamic terrorism, particularly since the Nov. 17, 1997 massacre of some 60 tourists at the Luxor temple site.

The Sharm el Sheikh agreement

Officially named the “Memorandum on the Implementation, Time-Line of Outstanding Commitments of Agreements Signed and Resumption of Permanent Status Negotiations,” the Sharm el Sheikh agreement lays out a very tight timetable for bringing the entire peace process to an earlier conclusion. While setting a timetable for implementing the long-delayed Wye agreement, which had been negotiated and signed, but never implemented, by the previous, Netanyahu government, it also set a target date of Sept. 13, 2000 for the completion of the final status agreement and, presumably, the establishment of a Palestinian state.

The agreement has a variety of potentially explosive political implications for both sides. The question of a Palestinian state is no longer the issue, but rather, what that state will be in terms of its territorial extent and its political sovereignty. In this context, the issues of the Jewish settlements, Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, and the status of Jerusalem and of refugees are of tremendous importance, and each represents a potential for conflict.

Key to solving these issues is not merely an honest “give and take,” but the overriding necessity for an economic development policy that aims at reconstruction of the entire region. Among the most important outstanding questions is the fate of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who have been living in camps in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon since 1948. Justice demands that they be allowed to return to a Palestinian state. Justice also demands that they have an economic future. Current unemployment levels in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are approaching 50%. Also, an adequate supply of freshwater is a strategic issue for the region as a whole. There is an overall deficit throughout the region, where all countries are drawing on water reserves that cannot be replaced.

These issues have not been directly addressed by these agreements, and represent the Achilles’ heel of the peace process.

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