

## Global Affairs Commentary

### **Thank You Mr. Sharon**

By Sam Bahour

*Editor's Note: This commentary is part of an FPIF series of essays by non-U.S. analysts. See <http://www.fpif.org/outside/> for more perspectives from Outside the U.S.*

The *Jerusalem Post* website reported, "IAF [Israeli Air Force] F-16 warplanes may have dropped munitions as large as 250 kilograms on their targets" (5/18/2001). Among these targets were a Ministry building, police stations, a TV station, and a prison—all in civilian neighborhoods in several Palestinian cities under Israeli military occupation for the past 34 years. The warped justification for Israel's latest war crime is that it is a response to yet another Palestinian suicide bomber, who hours earlier took the lives of seven Israeli citizens in a shopping center in the Israeli City of Natanya.

The thundering roar of Israel's U.S.-made F-16 warplane was still in the air when I jumped from my computer to our front porch to identify where the latest bombs fell. My wife rushed to check on our two daughters, Areen, 7, and Nadine, 1, who were both napping at the time—luckily. My family was not in any immediate danger; the targets were about one kilometer away. However, what I found on the street in front of our house was revealing.

Not knowing if the single blast was the end of this latest Israeli terror raid, six neighborhood children who were playing ball in the street on this quiet Friday started running toward their homes. These were kids from about six to twelve years old. As they ran, one started to chant, "We shall sacrifice for the sake for Palestine," the others replied in chorus as the rumbling sound of the Israeli warplane faded into the horizon.

In the minutes to follow, we made and received no less than a dozen phone calls. The frantic

routine of rushing to check if any friends or family members had been killed or injured, in this now daily event, has returned the Palestinian society to a dynamic that the Oslo peace accords had slowly eroded—a sense of national community and a culture of resistance to Israeli occupation.

To this, we owe Israel and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, in specific, a thank you. Since the Oslo peace accords, nearly ten years ago, Palestinian society was rushing to assimilate into the global trends of free nations—individualism, focusing on trade and business, redefining civil society from a resistance culture to a state building culture, creating national institutions, etc. At one point, one could even say that many Palestinians, and even more Israelis, were feeling that Israeli occupation had ended. Many were convinced that both sides, Israelis and Palestinians, had proceeded past the point-of-no-return and that time was the only factor before full peace, stability, and security was available for both peoples.

Then, thanks to hawkish war criminal Ariel Sharon, things changed overnight. As Sharon provoked Palestinians with his infamous visit to the Dome of the Rock in the Israeli occupied Old City of East Jerusalem, Palestinians started to revert to that which characterized Palestinian society ever since the first Intifada in 1987. A culture of resistance to Israeli occupation is taking root, once again. But this time the culture is multi-faceted.

There are those Palestinians who have brushed shoulders with the racist Israeli occupation in

its rawest form—poverty, displacement, imprisonment, torture, land confiscation, deportations, closures, unemployment, political assassinations, and the list goes on. Many of these defiant souls can be found at today's flashpoints using any meager tools available to them to resist occupation. Others, sadly, have equated life under Israeli occupation to death and have chosen to take the lives of innocent Israelis as well as their own. This is tragic but real. Yet other Palestinians, despite Israel's continued terror bombing campaign, are engaged in building the emerging State of Palestine and refuse to stop building the foundations of a viable, independent, and democratic country.

Instead of a normal life, Israel has now successfully exposed Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to the same military might that our brethren in Lebanon have become so accustomed to. Instead of youngsters memorizing sport and music celebrities, Palestinian children can now tell if gunfire is from a 500mm or 800mm machine gun or if an air raid was from an F-16 warplane or helicopter gunship. For this lesson,

Palestinian parents will never forgive Israel.

Mr. Sharon and the Israeli government are to be thanked for revealing the real Israel to the world. An Israel that is not only not ready for peace, but also invites a return to a struggle of existence, instead of pursuing an era of co-existence.

From the United Nations Human Rights High Commissioner Mary Robinson's Report, to the U.S.-led Mitchell Committee Report, to Rene Kosirnik of the International Committee of the Red Cross who this week stated, "the policy of settlement as such in humanitarian law is a war crime," Israeli occupation is being squarely blamed for the point the Palestinians and Israelis have reached.

The world is witnessing Israel blunder in an attempt to politically dodge multiple international commissions that are condemning this most recent state terror campaign. Orchestrated by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, Israel grasps to solve the conflict by inventing new political jargon and by engaging well-designed public relations blitzes, instead of facing its

core international obligation of ending occupation. The truth is becoming harder to hide with every passing Israeli warplane. The world has spoken—Israeli occupation is the source of contention and must end, illegal Israeli settlements must end, imprisonment of Palestinian political prisoners must end. There is no other way.

Mr. Sharon has returned the Palestinian society to a culture of resistance. Soon, he will move the international community to a new culture of responsibility toward protecting Palestinian civilians and realizing a negotiated solution to the conflict based on peace with justice. In the meantime, a new generation of Palestinians will learn and live the meaning of Intifada while the State of Palestine continues to be built amongst the backdrop of Israeli bombings.

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