

SHARON WILL CONTINUE TO ATTACK

« *In the long run, the elimination of Yassin may have been a tremendous step toward peace* ». This is what the Wall Street Journal wrote on March 23rd, 2004 after the assassination of the spiritual leader of Hamas. Though much has been said about the assassination, it is necessary that we come back to it as the whole environment has now changed. In a long, hate-filled article that was indifferent and insulting towards the Palestinian people, the Wall Street Journal –why not call it simply the Wall Journal- stood by Israeli PM Ariel Sharon. It defended what the rest of the world –with the exception of the US- condemned as an extra-judicial killing. “*Not only are extra-judicial killings contrary to international law, they undermine the concept of the rule of law which is a key element in the fight against terrorism*”, European Union Foreign Ministers declared. “*An extremely stupid action universally condemned, but by the US, this killing is a big escalation in the conflict which in addition will spill over into the international arena*” said Britain’s FT. It concluded by saying: *The assassination campaign will encourage terror, not counter it*”. Palestinian PM Ahmed Qurei described the assassination as “*a crazy and very dangerous act*; He added: “*Yassin was known for his moderation and he was controlling Hamas*”. The WSJ doesn’t care because for it, “*in order to succeed, Israel must be able to deny Hamas the ability to claim victory for the withdrawal (from the Gaza strip). Otherwise, it would raise Hamas’s standing among ordinary Palestinians*” and its cover page led the way: “*Targeting of leaders signals plan to unilaterally define future Palestinian state*”. But the choice is not between full success or total destruction and Sharon is doubly wrong: firstly because the withdrawal issue is different from the question of knowing who will hold the reins in the ‘liberated’ Gaza strip; secondly because contrary to what Israeli Army Chief of Staff Moshe Yaalon declared, the assassination of Sh. Yassin will do little to harm Hamas in that part of Occupied Palestine. As long as Hamas is able to collect and distribute millions of dollars worth of aid to the Palestinian people –it has distributed \$200 million in aid since the start of the Intifada- it may be worth trying to consider the group as an unavoidable interlocutor.

Yet, this tragic event should also be seen through the spectrum of other related issues. One of them concerns the position of the Bush Administration. White House Spokesman Scott McClellan declared: “*We are deeply troubled by this morning’s action in Gaza*”. An assassination when carried out by the Israelis using US-provided aircraft is an ‘action’ but when committed by Palestinians is an ‘act of terrorism’. Besides, the Bush Administration is only ‘troubled’. Wonder what would have to take place in order for it to be appalled. The crucial point is that “*the US alone has real influence with Israel. But it has forfeited its credibility in the Arab world because of its willingness to endorse almost anything Israel does*”. The US however cares little and Arab money continues to flow in their country. A few Arab governments have indeed been accused of mouthing their disapproval while continuing diplomatic business with Israel. Hearts are bleeding in Palestine but it is business as usual elsewhere. Another issue concerns the way Israel is increasingly perceived outside the region, notably in Europe. “*Israel lost nearly all its friends*” writes staunch Alexandre Adler in the French daily Le Figaro, stopping short of explaining why. The WSJ considers that “*the beginning of the current round of conflict can be accurately traced back to January 2001 when Yasser Arafat rejected the Clinton/Barak offer*”. The truth however is much different: Israel began losing many friends after the 1967 war when despite two United Nations resolutions, it started defying international law, occupying lands illegally and sending civilians into refugees camps and jails. Sharon and his friends in the Likud believe that they have been smart enough to portray any opposition to their criminal policies as a condemnation of Israel itself. Many analysts including the most professional researchers have had to defend themselves these past few years against the infamous accusation of ‘anti-Semitism’ simply because they dared to oppose Sharon’s policy. Pascal Boniface, director of the Institute for International and Strategic Relations (IRIS) has written a fascinating book entitled “*Can we criticise Israel?*”. The conclusions are alarming for all those who love freedom.

It seems that the ‘exceptionalism’ of the ultra Zionist community should be accepted as a whole without any discussion. This is precisely the kind of behaviour that feeds anti-Semitism. An Israeli writer Erfal Sivan said that “*by qualifying non ultra-Zionist positions as ‘anti-Semitic’, the French Jewish community institutions become themselves a vector of violence*”. A former Israeli Ambassador to France said of the community, before leaving France: “*If I am worried, it is because I have been able to assess the radical deviance which threatens your Community*”. Yet, Sharon and his friends will continue their attacks against whoever doesn’t share their views, especially in France where it is essential to them that the country be sidelined in order to prevent it from playing any role in the Middle East. Even though everything that had to be said on Sharon was actually said, why should one keep quiet in front of the continued use of force as the only instrument of policy, in the face of daily humiliations, torture and deaths? At this point, one could only agree with a former French Jewish Community leader who urged his French compatriots “*not to criticise the Jews for what they are but for what they do*”. No more, no less.

Luc Debievre, April 9th, 2004