

'Marshall Plan' must go full speed ahead

by Muriel Mirak

In the wake of Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres's surprise trip to Morocco, the momentum toward implementation of the Marshall Plan for Middle East development has taken on new acceleration and direction. If the breakthrough achieved at the Ifrane summit is followed by concrete steps towards bilateral economic projects, between Israel and Egypt, especially, new hope for a Middle East peace will be well founded.

The timing, manner, and content of the trip have earned Mr. Peres well-deserved praise, from both friend and foe inside the turbulent political process in Israel, and have provided him the political, as well as popular, support required to make further bold initiatives. Limiting knowledge of the planned trip to a small group of close collaborators, and a few selected media representatives, Peres had arrived in Morocco before the world knew about it. As soon as the news spread, that an Israeli prime minister had officially visited an Arab nation, with whom Israel has no peace treaty, the shock rippled through the country. Predictably, Peres's Labor Party colleagues hailed the step as "bold," and, as soon as a joint declaration had been signed, the visit was classified as a "breakthrough."

Not so predictable was the comment issued by Yitzak Shamir, Likud leader slated to take over the prime ministership in the fall. It was expected that Shamir would attack the trip, since he is renowned for having voted against the Camp David accords. But Shamir backed it, and vowed to "follow up" on the talks that Peres had started with Morocco. He was even quoted in an interview to the weekly *Monitin* as saying it would be worth it to allow autonomy to West Bank Palestinians, even if that meant risking the creation of a Palestinian state. Observers caught by surprise at this apparent turn-about, explained to *EIR*, that the Likud leader's statement was mere lip-service, intended to reassure especially Vice-President George Bush, in Israel at the time, that his government would keep the momentum toward peace. The only Israeli minister to denounce the visit was Ariel Sharon, who called the final communiqué "lacking in balance," and too heavily weighted in Morocco's favor.

This lonely, albeit impotent, protest against the visit in Israel only underlines the new political and psychological reality in the country. As one think-tanker in Shamir's camp begrudgingly acknowledged, "Shamir had to support the Peres-Hassan summit; it's become a question of 'national

consensus.'" Peres has created a climate of hope which no political leader, even of the Likud, dares to attack.

The question on the table is, what will Peres do next? Labor Party officials agree that the next step will be a full agreement with Egypt around the Taba territorial dispute. Right after Peres returned to Israel, his director general Tamir announced that the agreement would be initialed during Bush's visit. A delegation of Egyptian negotiators arrived in Jerusalem almost at once, and the accord was initialed. Although the Taba affair itself is practically contentless, any kind of formal agreement with Egypt is symbolically crucial, to pave the way for a Mubarak-Peres summit. That summit, according to Labor Party sources, will take place within August, and "then you'll see what will appear in the final joint communiqué!"

Race against time

Peres himself is "in a race against time," according to one journalist in Tel Aviv. He must accomplish as much as possible with his new and old Arab interlocutors, before he hands over power to Shamir, and he must render his achievements irreversible. As the same journalist put it, "The rotation agreement set a fire under everybody's ass," and that fire is not going to die out, but will begin to rage. Besides Peres's own pledge of further talks, the very momentum he has created is propelling him to move still faster. His Labor Party left wing is pushing him to make more concessions to Palestinian demands for self-determination, and the "dovish mainstream" of the party is discussing perhaps altering the party platform, so as to endorse self-determination. Peres supporters Weizmann and Gur officially declared that if the Palestinians were to renounce violence and recognize U.N. Resolution 242, they would be willing to start peace talks with PLO leader Yasser Arafat.

Although all these signals are promising, and have been warmly received by authoritative Palestinian spokesmen, the fundamental flaw in the open political debate sparked by Peres's historic trip, is the question of economic policy content.

As yet, no concrete information has emerged about how much Hassan and Peres discussed the Israeli prime minister's Marshall Plan, although individuals involved in the project agree that "economic relations must have played a central role in the talks." Nor is there any information yet on the economic-policy content of the upcoming summit with Mubarak. Yet this is the key issue, which will determine whether Peres succeeds in rendering his initiative irreversible. As Lyndon LaRouche stated in a press release following the Ifrane summit, no political solution *per se* can be found to the Arab-Israeli conflict, or to the so-called Palestinian question. Peaceful relations will depend on how much Israel and her Arab neighbors can concretely work together on infrastructural projects of mutual benefit, precisely the type of projects worked out for the Marshall Plan.