

Shamir's trip aims at damage control

by Robert Greenberg

"Shamir would be thankful to come back empty-handed," stated a knowledgeable Israeli political observer on the eve of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's 10-day trip to the United States which began Feb. 16. The source was referring to the fact that, due to the continuing revelations concerning Israel's role in the Iran affair and the Jonathan Pollard espionage scandal, Shamir was coming to Washington very much on the defensive.

Even though Shamir was expected to sign a previously arranged treaty arrangement with the United States, which would give Israel, a non-NATO ally, an increased status as a trade and military partner, Shamir's main agenda was expected to be an attempt to repair the damage done by the Iran and Pollard revelations. It is from this position of weakness that Shamir is attempting to convince the United States to establish military bases in Haifa and the Negev. This would weld the United States and Israel together, increasing cooperation on intelligence and related matters, rather than severing such ties, as is currently threatened. One result hoped for by the Israelis, would be to defuse the Iran and Pollard scandals.

To accomplish this, as well as to sabotage any U.S. support for the peace initiatives of Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, and to prevent U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia and Jordan, Shamir was to have private meetings with key figures in the Israel lobby, including the Task Force for Israeli Independence, otherwise known as Project Independence.

Project Independence, which was inaugurated in 1985 by Minister of Industry and Commerce Ariel Sharon, was nothing more than a reworked version of what was called the Lansky Plan to turn Israel into a center for organized crime, notably weapons smuggling and money laundering. Among the leaders of the Project Independence task force are organized crime-connected figures in the United States such as Kenneth Bialkin, the former chairman of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and an attorney for fugitive Robert Vesco; Max Fisher of Detroit; and Edgar Bronfman of Canada, head of the World Jewish Congress and a friend of Soviet agent of influence Armand Hammer. It was with the collaboration and initiative of this group that affiliated Israeli factions helped initiate the Iran-Contra policy leading to the current crisis in Washington.

The main person said to be pushing Shamir to fight for

the U.S. basing plan, ironically, is Sharon, advocate of an Israeli deal with the Soviet Union. This is not so surprising in light of the fact that Sharon and his faction stand to lose the most if the pressure on Israel from the Iran and Pollard revelations continues.

Sharon on the hot seat

Israeli sources have reported that the expected indictment of Brig. Gen. Aviem Sella by U.S. Attorney Joseph Di-Genova, and the revocation of immunity from intelligence operative "Dirty Rafi" Eytan, former science attaché in Washington Josef Yagur, and former embassy secretary Irit Erb, prior to Shamir's trip, threw Sharon into a panic. Eytan is only one or two steps away from indictment himself, and an investigation of him would reveal a two-decade-long Israeli espionage operation against the United States, with Sharon at the center.

This operation can be traced back to the late 1960s, when the FBI investigated the Pennsylvania-based Nuclear Equipment and Materials Corporation (NUMEC) for illegally providing Israel with enriched uranium. Eytan's name surfaced at that time as the Mossad officer in charge of cells collecting scientific and technological intelligence in the United States. Since that time, and especially since the mid-1970s, Eytan, under Sharon's protection, has not only maintained these espionage operations, but, through his position as the head of the Terror against Terror unit, has built up terrorist groups such as the Jewish Defense League as a cover for professional assassinations and other dirty operations.

Ongoing investigations of the Pollard case also threaten to reveal longstanding Israeli capabilities inside the U.S. government such as that represented by NSC consultant Michael Ledeen, Defense Department officials Richard Perle and Steven Bryen, and State Department official Elliott Abrams.

Shamir has come up against a tremendous amount of opposition in the Pentagon, the intelligence community, and even the U.S. Congress. One indication of this is that despite his blustering before his arrival in Washington, that he would refuse to answer Congress's questions about Irangate, during his trip he changed his tune and agreed to answer detailed questions.

While Shamir is attempting this manipulation of the United States, his back-channel negotiations with the Soviets have continued unabated. It is no coincidence that during Shamir's trip to the United States, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov chose to signal his willingness to deal with Israel. According to a Feb. 19 article in the *New York Post*, Sharon mouthpiece Uri Dan reported that Gorbachov is telling his Arab allies that he plans to reestablish diplomatic ties with Israel. The article is being seen by U.S. intelligence community sources as a signal that an Israeli-Soviet dirty deal is on, and has only served to intensify their commitment to end this business once and for all.