

U.S. intervention needed to revive Mideast peace process

by Muriel Mirak Weissbach

Arab-Israeli relations are degenerating at such a rapid pace that nothing short of a miracle can restore them. That miracle is going to have to come from Washington, for the simple reason, that the fronts within the region, between Israel and Jordan, on the one side, and Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA), on the other, have hardened to such an extent that nothing but violence is to be expected. Furthermore, it is only the weight of the institution of the U.S. Presidency, which will suffice to thwart the sabotage of peace being directed from London.

Blame for the deterioration of relations, up until the point that a Jordanian soldier mowed down a group of Israeli schoolgirls on March 13, is to be placed squarely on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has done everything possible to fulfill his mandate to wreck the peace process, through political provocation, and on the international institutions, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which have systematically undermined the economic foundations for peace.

The most recent escalation of tensions began March 8, when the Netanyahu government announced the extent of its first phase (of three planned phases) withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. According to the Oslo agreements, Israel is supposed to withdraw from most of the West Bank and Gaza, except for areas around the Jewish settlements, which they are to maintain militarily, for security reasons. Instead, Netanyahu announced that the Israelis would end up leaving only 9% of the West Bank in their promised withdrawal. The PA, which controlled 3% completely in its Zone A, was to receive another 7%, which had been under joint control (Zone B), thus ending up with 10%. Furthermore, 2% of the total which has been under Israeli control (Zone C), was to become a mixed area (Zone B). Jenin, Nablus, Hebron, and the other cities under PA con-

trol, will be autonomous, but separated, because Israel maintains control over the countryside and roads.

Instead of effecting the much-reduced withdrawal from areas near Jenin and Halhool on March 7, Tel Aviv issued an ultimatum: The PA must shut down four offices in Jerusalem, which Israel claims are Palestinian government institutions, and the PA must stop protesting the planned Israeli settlements in Jabal Abu Ghneim (Har Homa), otherwise, Israel will not withdraw. Both moves are in blatant violation of the Oslo Accords: The Palestinian offices in Jerusalem (the Office for Small Projects, the Committee for the Wounded, the Welfare and Development Committee, and the Office of National Institutions), were there before 1993, and are not government institutions; the new Israeli settlements planned for Arab East Jerusalem, contravene the clause in the accords signed in 1993, which stipulates that no changes on the ground, no new settlements, should be built.

At the same time, precisely, the UN Security Council rejected a resolution of condemnation of Israel's settlements plan, because of a U.S. veto.

King Hussein responds

Jordan's King Hussein responded to the mounting provocations, with an unprecedented letter, addressed to Netanyahu, and published widely in the Israeli and Arabic press. In it, the king warned that further violations of the agreements would lead straight to violence. Netanyahu responded, claiming that the peace treaty signed in 1994 with Jordan had nothing to do with developments in relations between Israel and the PA—although no one knows better than the Israeli prime minister, that the Hashemite monarch is the historical custodian of the Islamic holy places in East Jerusalem, near where Netanyahu would like to build his settlements. King Hus-

sein's powerful *public* intervention shifted the balance, and it appeared that international support for forcing implementation of the accords would be organized, in Gaza on March 15, at a meeting of the international donors convoked by PA President Yasser Arafat.

Then, on March 13, as if in accordance with a script written to wreck this process, a Jordanian soldier opened fire on a group of Israeli schoolgirls. The violent act, whether the result of deliberate manipulation or the gesture of a deranged person, ignited the tinder box. While the Jordanian side tended to present it as the inevitable result of frustrations with Israeli provocations on the part of the local population, the Israelis laid the blame on the king. To add oil to the fire, Israeli officials and two journalists were quoted in the *Washington Post*, as saying that the king's letter had been a demonstration of the strain of "mental illness" supposedly running through the Hashemite dynasty. King Hussein's immediate decision, to break his itinerary and go back to Amman, before proceeding to Washington, was a well-meaning gesture of condolence to the victims' families. But, it also meant that the king would be postponing talks with President Clinton, talks which could have helped the U.S. administration coordinate a forceful intervention to bolster the Palestinians' position.

The U.S. overrode Israeli protests, and sent its consul general from Jerusalem to the conference in Gaza on March 15, to signal its willingness to pressure Tel Aviv. But no American gesture so far, not even a letter from President Clinton delivered by U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk to Netanyahu, has succeeded in budging the Israeli government. On March 17, as Netanyahu had defiantly announced following the shooting of the schoolgirls, the bulldozers started work in East Jerusalem. The Palestinians have promised violence.

The Jordanian government has responded energetically, but there is no reason to believe that its response will alter the picture. On March 18, Information Minister Marwan Muasher told journalists that King Hussein was continuing in his efforts to solve the crisis, and halt the construction of a Jewish settlement on Jabal Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem. "We regard Arab East Jerusalem as part of the Arab territories [which Israel] occupied in 1967," he said. "We regard the settlements as contradicting international law and the agreements signed between the Palestinians and Israel as well as [Jordan] and Israel, particularly the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty."

The most pointed Jordanian response came with the news on March 19, that King Hussein had dismissed the Kabariti government, and assigned Abdul Salam Majali to put together a new cabinet. Although the reasons given by the king for the change included complaints, that Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti had failed to effect the reforms of the judiciary and administration he had been commissioned to oversee, the timing indicated that the replacement had more to do with the crisis in the erstwhile peace process. Kabariti has been dubbed the first casualty of the crisis, and has been held indirectly responsible for the security lapse which led to the shooting incident.

By nominating Majali, the king has essentially said, it is back to square one. Majali was the leader of the Jordanian delegation at the 1991 Madrid peace conference, and it was his first government, formed in May 1994, which signed the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty in October. In his letter giving Majali the mandate again, the king listed the peace process, preparing legislative elections, and fulfilling the internal reforms as his tasks, in that order. The king reportedly hopes that Majali can improve relations with both the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Outside intervention is essential

Despite the laudable efforts expended by the Jordanian monarch, there is no way to reverse the momentum toward conflict, from within the region itself. Unless there is a forceful intervention from outside the area, whose populations are being swept up into a psychotic frenzy, there will be, as King Hussein correctly forecast, more violence. Thus, the urgency of a meeting between Hussein and Clinton, followed by decisive action. This means not only throwing Washington's institutional weight behind the Jordanian and Palestinian demands that the treaties as signed be respected, i.e., that a halt be imposed to Israeli settlements, if necessary through punitive measures, but also reversing the disastrous economic policy which has over years created the conditions for political conflict.

As *EIR* has repeatedly stressed, in 1993, and again in 1994, following a visit to Gaza, the policies being imposed then by the IMF and World Bank, on the partners to the Oslo peace agreement, would undermine any hope for peace, and lead to devastation of the fragile Palestinian economy. The IMF has just admitted the same, albeit without acknowledging its own responsibility. Its (misnamed) report, "Recent Economic Developments, Prospects, and Progress in Institution Building in the West Bank and Gaza Strip," was issued in early March by the Middle Eastern Department of the IMF in Washington.

The salient point made is that "Palestinian unemployment has nearly doubled and per capita income has shrunk by a fifth since the start of the Oslo peace process" in fall 1993 (see *EIR*, March 21, p. 9, for details). The IMF lays the blame on the Israeli blockade, which has cut Palestinian access to jobs inside Israel.

There is no doubt that the Israeli lockout of Palestinian workers has dealt a mortal blow to the economy. But it is also true that the new jobs which could have, and should have, been created for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians inside the West Bank and Gaza Strip, have been eliminated by the World Bank and IMF's stranglehold on the flow of funds. The World Bank, from the outset, vetoed any and all large infrastructure projects which would have meant employment and real economic growth, beginning with large-scale water projects which would provide the lifeline for the region's economy.