

# Israel's Netanyahu pushing new war

by Joseph Brewda

In his trip to the United States in the last week of September, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu proved to be preparing for a bloody showdown with the Palestinians, to be followed by a new Middle East war. In a deliberately provocative address to the UN General Assembly on Sept. 24, Netanyahu threatened Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat with war, if he were to even utter his intent to declare a Palestinian state upon the formally mandated completion of the Oslo peace accords on May 4, 1999.

Such a statement by Arafat, Netanyahu growled, "would constitute a fundamental violation of the Oslo Accords" that would "inevitably prompt unilateral response on our part." He added that a Palestinian state would necessarily be an intolerable threat to Israel, because it would become a "base for hostile forces." The "unilateral response" Netanyahu has considered, the Israeli press reports, is the formal annexation of Palestinian lands not yet under the control of the Palestinian Authority, and what would be a very bloody reentry of the Israeli Army into cities managed by the Palestinian Authority.

In the aftermath of Netanyahu's outbursts, Arafat did not declare his intent to form such a state, in his own address to the General Assembly on Sept. 28, although for weeks it had been widely expected that he would do so on that occasion. Moreover, on Sept. 27, meeting with Netanyahu for the first time in over a year, together with U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Arafat abruptly agreed to a new formula for the Oslo-mandated, second Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank. That withdrawal has already been delayed for one year. According to the proposal, Israel would withdraw from 13% of the West Bank—in which 3% of the 13% would be made into an Israeli-run "nature park."

As a result, the Palestinian Authority would go into the Oslo-mandated "final status talks" next spring with only 40% of the former Israeli Occupied Territories under its control—and not the 90% envisioned by Arafat and the late Israeli Prime Minister Gen. Yitzhak Rabin at the time the accords were signed in September 1993. In fact, it was because of Rabin's commitment to create a Palestinian state and to give most of the Occupied Territories to the Palestinians, that a section of the Israeli establishment had him killed in 1995, paving the way for Netanyahu to come to the Prime Minister's office the following year.

Netanyahu also refused to deny Israeli media reports during his U.S. visit, that he was planning to name Infrastructure Minister Gen. Ariel Sharon, the most bloodthirsty of his inner circle, as Foreign Minister (a post Netanyahu currently also holds). "I admire Ariel Sharon very much," he coyly told Israeli television. "He is one of the most talented and experienced people that Israel ever had."

Commenting on these humiliating developments, one well-placed Washington Mideast analyst warned that Arafat now faces the worst threat of assassination in recent years—not least because the mood on the Palestinian streets has returned to that of the 1980s "Intifada," the rock-throwing resistance to Israeli troops, as a result of Netanyahu's two years of sabotage of the Oslo Accords. Another high-ranking analyst formerly in the U.S. State Department, added that Netanyahu plans a new war with Syria in the aftermath of his planned showdown with the Palestinians, which he wants to undertake following what he hopes will be the near-term ouster of President Bill Clinton through the Israeli-orchestrated Monica Lewinsky affair.

Worry about the strategic implications of Netanyahu's madness, however, is shared by some circles in Israel. The Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* on Sept. 29 charged Netanyahu with "killing the Oslo agreement by uprooting the momentum of reconciliation and the peace between the two peoples in an absolute way, by putting them on a track of hostility and hatred." Similarly, *Ma'ariv*, the semi-official mouthpiece for Israeli military intelligence, warned Netanyahu that "Israel's only chance is between a Palestinian state established with an agreement, and a state formed amidst the storm of a violent uprising."

## Other provocations

Meanwhile, Netanyahu has escalated on other fronts, to pave the way for the upcoming Palestinian showdown and war. Most seriously, he has now come out supporting the Sharon-managed "Temple Mount" crazies who demand the demolition of Islam's holiest shrine in Jerusalem, the Al Aqsa Mosque, in order to rebuild Solomon's Temple on the site. The same groups provided the gunman who killed Rabin.

Speaking at an extraordinary meeting of 2,000 of the Temple Mount Faithful in Jerusalem on Sept. 15, which was officially greeted by a representative from the Prime Minister's office, Temple Mount leader Gershon Solomon proclaimed, "It is our duty to evict the Gentiles from Jerusalem so that the holy city becomes purely Jewish." He called for the audience to "rise to the Temple Mount and tear down the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. We do not want to hear any calls to prayer nor any church bells to toll for non-Jewish prayers in the land of the Jews." According to literature released to the press later that week, the group plans to move the "cornerstone" for the planned rebuilt Temple, to the mosque as early as Oct. 7.