

Israel at a Crossroads: War in Gaza, Or LaRouche Plan for Peace with Syria

by Dean Andromidas

A solid majority of Israelis—64%, according to a recent poll—want their government to hold direct talks with Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic group, to negotiate a cease-fire and prisoner exchange. At the same time, there is widespread support among Israelis for starting peace talks with Syria. Leading Israeli commentator Ari Shavit expressed this, in the daily *Ha'aretz* Feb. 22, where he wrote, “peace with Syria might light a torch of hope and create a meaningful strategic turning point” in a region so tense that any spark, like a major terror attack, could ignite a new war.

These sentiments clash sharply with the policy of the Israeli government as well as its so-called “friends,” including the Bush Administration and the European Union, which have refused to support such talks with either Hamas or Syria. Their refusal plays directly into the hands of the powerful British financial interests that have launched a policy of international chaos, igniting conflicts across an arc of crisis that stretches from Kenya in Africa, through the Middle East, deep into Pakistan, and the rest of Asia.

In contrast, American statesman Lyndon LaRouche has forcefully called for American and international support to start Syrian-Israeli peace talks. The establishment of a peace process between Syria and Israel would have a positive, moderating effect on Palestinian militants, and would help bring together the two warring Palestinian factions: Hamas, and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’s Fatah. It would also serve to resolve the political crisis between the Lebanese governing coalition and its opposition.

A shift now to the Syrian-Israel peace track is more important than ever, in the face of the growing realization that the so-called Mideast peace initiative launched by the Bush Administration in Annapolis, Md., has become a failure.

Back-Channel Probes

A series of meetings and statements by various regional players suggests that with the unraveling of Annapolis, other options are being sought along lines similar to those proposed by LaRouche.

Former Secretary of State Zbigniew Brzezinski, for example, led a delegation from the Rand Corporation to Damascus, where it met with Syrian President Bashar Assad and other officials. Brzezinski was quoted in the Syrian media as saying that the “talks dealt with recent regional developments affirming that both sides have a common desire to achieve sta-

bility in the region, which would benefit both its people and the United States.”

Brzezinski is a key member of the Iraq Study Group, led by former Secretary of State James Baker III, which proposed stabilizing Iraq and the region by opening talks with both Syria and Iran, while at the same time, promoting peace between the Palestinians and Israel. Although Brzezinski is a foreign policy advisor to Democratic Presidential candidate Barack Obama, the delegation also included Iranian-American businessman Hassan Nemazee, who is a member of Hillary Clinton’s campaign committee.

A senior Middle East intelligence source told *EIR* that Brzezinski’s trip could be seen as a fact-finding mission by Democratic Party circles, as well as by Republicans close to Baker, who are concerned with formulating a post-Bush policy for the region. And as LaRouche has stressed, a strong U.S.-Syrian relationship would be necessary to rescue the region from the disastrous policies of Bush and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

It did not go unnoticed that the same day the Brzezinski-led delegation was in Damascus, the Bush Administration slapped a new round of sanctions against Syria for alleged support of terrorism.

Another group of international policy-makers, the Club of Monaco, held a conference on Middle East policy in Doha, Qatar, on Feb. 23-24. Founded in 2002, this organization is comprised of leading political, economic, and diplomatic figures from Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, and the United States. Club members include former Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti; former French Prime Minister Michel Rocard; former Secretary General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros Ghali; former Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami; Israeli Knesset member (Meretz Party) Yossi Beilin, who was a negotiator of the Oslo Accords; current Palestinian negotiator Yasser Abed Rabbo; and former U.S. Under Secretary of State for Middle East Affairs Edward Djeridian, who is currently director of the James Baker Institute at Rice University. Also present at the conference was former Russian Prime Minister and Middle East expert, Yevgeny Primakov.

Intelligence sources have told *EIR* that both the Hamas and Syrian questions were discussed on the sidelines of the conference. These sources pointed out that because Qatar enjoys a special relationship with Hamas, it is an ideal venue to make unofficial contact with the organization or its interlocu-



Aviel Luz

Knesset member Yossi Beilin, in Qatar, discussed the possibility of an Israeli cease-fire with Hamas.

tors. The Club of Monaco has held conferences in the past, the sources said, where there were participants who could accurately represent the views of Hamas.

In Qatar, Yossi Beilin held talks on the question of Hamas with Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jasssem bin Jabor al-Thani, who told Beilin that he would be willing to help broker a cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas. According to a report in *Ha'aretz*, al-Thani told Beilin, "You are making a big mistake if you think you can reach an agreement with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas without including Hamas in the talks."

Abbas "will not be able to sign an agreement without Hamas's consent," al-Thani said. "The possibility of separating Hamas and Abbas is an illusion." He called for reviving the Saudi-brokered Mecca agreement that could serve to bring Hamas and Fatah together.

In reply, Beilin said that he himself would talk to Hamas, but that he could not speak to them in the name of the Israeli government.

Openings with Syria

On the Syrian question, it should be noted that within days of the conference, the Saudi newspaper *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* reported Feb. 27 that Syrian President Assad was ready to meet Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in Moscow to discuss a peace agreement. The only precondition, the paper said, would be for Olmert to follow commitments made by former Israeli leader Yitzhak Rabin, who pledged that Israel would withdraw from the Golan Heights.

Beilin revealed that his fellow conference participant, Yevgeni Primakov, who now heads Russia's Commerce and Industry Chamber, had discussed such a possibility with Assad in Damascus in November 2007. Although Beilin said

that he had personally informed the Israeli leadership of the Syrian President's position, he did not disclose the government's response. Beilin called on the Israeli leadership to take Syria's proposal seriously: "It is the first time Bashar al-Assad has announced his readiness to meet with Olmert to discuss a deal on comprehensive and stable peace," Beilin said.

While Beilin was in Doha, former Israeli Foreign Ministry director-general Alon Liel was in Washington, lobbying for Israel-Syrian peace talks. Between 2004 and 2006, Liel conducted unofficial talks with Syrian-American businessman Ibrahim Suleiman. "I'm sure the bottleneck is here in this city," Liel is quoted as saying. The *Jerusalem Post* reported Feb. 24 that Liel said this during a speech to the Middle East Institute, referring to the Bush Administration's anti-Syrian policy. Liel asserted that if the United States reversed its position, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert "will jump at" the opportunity to hold talks with Syria.

Peace talks require U.S. participation, Liel said, otherwise they will not occur. He lamented: "It's the first time in the history of the country [Israel] that we have an enemy country saying it wants to talk, on record and in every diplomatic channel, and we say no. It's not our national policy. This is an American policy we were dragged into."

A New War on the Horizon

Without a Syria-Israeli peace process, a new war is on the horizon. Already the failure of the Bush Administration to move on any of the promises it made at the Annapolis peace conference has led to threats by the Saudis and the entire Arab League to withdraw the Arab initiative for peace with Israel, first put forward in 2002 and reiterated at the Annapolis conference.

Speaking in Cairo, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal, who played a leading role at the Annapolis summit, said, "It is unbelievable that we keep blaming the weak part in the equation, which is the Palestinian people, with all the suffering they live under while ignoring what Israel does by expanding settlements, tightening the siege, humiliating the Palestinians, and carrying out mass punishments against them." He warned that the issue will be taken up at the Arab League Summit to be held in Damascus this month. If no progress is made, Faisal said, the initiative would be withdrawn. He added rather ominously, that "other means" could be sought for dealing with the conflict.

Israel is also seeking "other means," which include a major military operation into the Gaza Strip, on the scale of the Israeli-Lebanon War of 2006. According to numerous media reports in mid-February, Israel would not make the same "mistakes" as during the Lebanon war, but would launch a massive ground offensive that would occupy the entire Gaza Strip, overthrow the Hamas government, and remain there until an international force, like NATO, deployed peacekeepers.

The Israelis are considering this option, knowing full well that it could lead to a conflict with Lebanon and Syria, as well as with the West Bank-based Palestinian National Authority.