

# No Room for Detours On Mideast 'Road Map'

by William Jones

The release of the "road map" for Mideast peace on April 30 offers the potential for a change in the disastrous policy direction of the Bush Administration, which is currently dominated by the war faction. The road map, designed by the "Quartet" of the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations, lays out the stages of negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, leading to a final settlement, in the three-year time-frame President Bush announced in his Rose Garden speech on June 24, 2001. In the first phase, the parties must begin direct negotiations, with the Palestinian Authority reestablishing a security force to prevent the continuation of terrorist activities. As security is established, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) should begin to withdraw from the territories it has occupied since Sept. 28, 2000. In addition, the Israelis must cease all settlement activity and dismantle settlements set up since March 2001. This phase is to be accomplished by June 2003.

The second phase begins with Palestinian elections, after which the Quartet will convene an international conference in consultation with the parties, aimed at supporting Palestinian economic recovery and leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders. The conference would also restore the relations that Israel had with some Arab states prior to the most recent Intifada. Phase II is to be concluded by December 2003.

Phase III would involve another international conference, at the beginning of 2004. It would ratify the provisional borders of the Palestinian state, and begin the process of resolving the final status issues—i.e., the status and number of refugees returning, the status of Jerusalem, and the final issues of settlements. It would also proceed to a resolution of the Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria conflicts, and foresee establishment of full normal relations between Israel and Arab states. The final status issues, according to the proposed Bush timetable, are to be fully resolved by 2005.

The issuance of the "road map" in the immediate aftermath of the Iraq War recalls Israeli-Palestinian relations in the 1990s. It was after the first Gulf War of President George Herbert Walker Bush, that his Administration took the initiative in October 1991, to convene the Madrid Conference. It brought together the Palestinians and the Israelis—for the first time—to discuss the possibilities for peace between Israel and its neighbors, in the center of which lay the resolution of the Palestinian problem. Although Madrid created two other bilateral tracks—an Israeli-Lebanese and an Israeli-Syrian

track—progress on the other two were always contingent on progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

By 1993, this was going nowhere fast. Chairman Yasser Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization leadership had been excluded from the Palestinian delegation. Secondly, what Madrid envisioned fell far short of the nation-state long desired by the Palestinians living on the West Bank and Gaza. Sensing the futility of these talks, then-Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres gave approval to a number of Labor Party intellectuals to initiate private discussions with PLO representatives, still designated by the Israeli media as a "terrorist organization." Talks were held surreptitiously in Oslo, Norway.

By late Summer in 1993, the Oslo talks had borne fruit, and a preliminary agreement had been reached. The new Clinton government was informed, and agreed to put its full backing behind them. On Sept. 10, 1993, Israel and the PLO exchanged letters of mutual recognition; and on Sept. 13, 1993, Abu Mazen and Shimon Peres initialed, in a ceremony at the White House, a "Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements," with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat looking on. The Declaration called for Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho, the election of a Palestinian Council, negotiations for future withdrawals, and a permanent resolution in five years.

## The Economic Nexus

The months following the signing of the Declaration of Principles focussed on the need for economic development to cement any lasting accommodation between the two parties; large-scale investment in infrastructure, particularly energy and water projects. The United States and Europeans made a combined effort to establish financial mechanisms independent of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. In fact, the Madrid conference had set up fora to deal with the broader regional issues, including the all-important issue of economic development. In 1994, a major conference was held in Casablanca to discuss economic implementation, leading to the establishment of a Bank for Economic Cooperation and Development in the Middle East and North Africa, the MENA Bank, which was intended as a source for the needed infrastructural project.

In an October 1994 interview with this author in Tel Aviv, Oded Eran, the Deputy Director General for economic affairs in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, explained, "We think that such a bank is an excellent idea for at least two major reasons. One, the creation of such a bank will be a political signal of great importance to the region itself that there is a new era of cooperation. Secondly, this sort of bank could serve as a forum in which macro-economic issues of the region are discussed, whether these be development issues, trade issues, or monetary issues. Thirdly, some of the existing international or multilateral mechanisms, such as the World Bank, cannot provide all of the answers to the development needs."

In 1995, Lyndon LaRouche's program for development

of Mideast water resources, dating from 1976, was re-issued and published as the "Oasis Plan for the Middle East." This was widely circulated among diplomats in the United States, Europe, and in the Middle East.

The development bank, however, was a hard-sell in the U.S. Congress. Since Israel's Yitzhak Rabin government had accepted the Oslo Accord, the Likud party supporters of "Greater Israel" mobilized of their "amen corner" in Congress to sabotage the plans. Both the development bank and the water projects were quickly relegated to the sidelines. And the "free marketeers" in the Clinton White House, trying to placate the Congressional opposition, tried to transform the "development bank" into a merchant bank, operating on "market principles." The economic issues, more broadly, were downgraded into "secondary issues."

Discussions continued and an interim agreement was signed on Sept. 28, 1995, which provided for elections for the 88-seat Palestinian Assembly, the release of Israeli-held prisoners, and a phased withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank cities. The IDF withdrew from the West Bank cities by the end of 1995, and the Palestinian Assembly was elected on Jan. 20, 1996, and sworn in on March 7, 1996. According to this Taba Agreement (Oslo II), the final status issues, including Jerusalem, refugees, water, and the settlements, were to be concluded by October 1999, by which time the occupation was to be over.

But then on Nov. 4, 1995, a Jewish extremist, Yigal Amir, shot and killed Yitzhak Rabin, as he was leaving an election rally sponsored by Peace Now in Tel Aviv. Amir had tried twice before to kill Rabin, and there was much suspicion that there was collusion by the Shin Beth, the internal Israeli security forces. Rabin's death effectively eliminated the Israeli "partner" to the Oslo agreements. In 1996, the Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu was elected as Prime Minister. Under Netanyahu, peace made no progress whatsoever. The Taba Accords were never carried out, and settlements continued unabated on the West Bank. Netanyahu, under pressure from the Clinton Administration, made another agreement at a summit at the Wye River Plantation in Maryland, which renegotiated the second IDF redeployment (from those areas under joint Israeli and Palestinian control) into two phases, only one of which was ever carried out.

The election of Labor Party candidate Ehud Barak in 1999 led to an added push by both Clinton and Barak to clinch a deal, with Arafat embracing all the issues, including Jerusalem, return of refugees, and the settlements; but the political time-tables of the two created serious problems. While Barak went into the agreement with significant concessions, they by no means resolved all the outstanding issues, including the most sensitive issue: the status of Jerusalem, which both parties viewed as their religious and political capital. For his own election purposes, Barak needed an agreement "locked in" by Arafat's acceptance of the entire package. Under those conditions, Arafat had to decline. In spite of a previous agreement between the parties that no one would be held to blame, if

a deal could not be made, President Clinton foolishly blamed Arafat publicly for failure of the talks, thereby beginning the "elimination" of Arafat from the process.

With the election of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2000, the peace process went into a tailspin, with acceleration of new settlements, increased violence, and a de facto re-occupation of most of those areas from which Israeli troops had withdrawn. On Nov. 10, 2000, President George W. Bush, in a speech to the United Nations, called for the first time for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

During the following months, the Sharon government intense lobbying helped to prevent any motion. Nevertheless, President Bush, in a Rose Garden speech on June 24, 2002, announced that he was committed to move forward on Mideast peace negotiations leading to a conclusion of final status issues within three years. With the strong criticism against the Iraq war in the Muslim world, President Bush also found it necessary to reiterate, on March 14, that he was preparing to issue the road map. At that point, he also made it clear that the "Palestinian leadership reform" he was calling for, meant the total "sidelining" of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. Advisors to Vice President Dick Cheney had long been demanding that Arafat be taken out of the peace process. The Palestinian leadership had little choice: After turbulent negotiations, Abu Mazen was named Palestinian Prime Minister.

President Bush is going to have to lean hard on Sharon, if the peace process is to go anywhere. Further, the "Greater Israel" fanatics around U.S. Reps. Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) and Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) are already mobilizing their church groupies to stop all talk of a road map, and to blackmail Bush with the pull-out of Christian fundamentalist support for the 2004 elections. And the chicken-hawks over in Rummy's Pentagon policy shop will probably try to start a new war, to divert the whole process. Will President Bush, recently playing his tough-guy image to the hilt, be tough enough to take on this array of forces?