
Interview: Hanna Siniora

Palestinian editor sees breakthrough

by Muriel Mirak

Hanna Siniora, editor-in-chief of the Palestinian daily *Al Fajr* newspaper, in an interview to *EIR*, characterized the recent meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Morocco's King Hassan as "tantamount to an electric shock delivered to a patient who has died of a heart attack. The patient," he continued, "is in the intensive care unit, but the prognosis is good."

Siniora, who has been nominated in the past to represent the Palestinians in a joint delegation with Jordan in peace talks with Israel, said the meeting provided "mobility, after six months in which there had been no action at all." He stressed that further moves toward peace must include PLO participation, and welcomed Hassan's convocation of an Arab summit, because "it is necessary for Arab leaders now to sit down and formulate their positions" in light of the Hassan-Peres meeting.

"Although the Saudis have not explicitly commented on the meeting," he said, "they televised Hassan's speech in full, and had been consulted before Peres went to Morocco."

Commenting on the next steps to be taken in Israel, Siniora said he believed that Peres would hand over the premiership to the Likud bloc head and deputy prime minister, Yitzak Shamir, in October as agreed, to show his "good faith." He predicted, however, that a government crisis would follow Shamir's taking power, and that in probable general elections, Peres would win at least two more seats in the Knesset (Parliament). This additional electoral support would come from Sephardic Jews, particularly from Morocco.

Al Fajr, which Siniora edits, is the Palestinian daily published in Jerusalem and circulated on the West Bank and throughout the Middle East. In relation to his nomination to represent the Palestinians in joint delegations with Jordan in peace talks, he is considered close to Yasser Arafat in the moderate wing of the PLO.

Mr. Siniora gave *EIR* the following interview on July 25, from Jerusalem.

EIR: What is your evaluation of the Peres-Hassan meeting?

Siniora: It was a bold step on the part of both Hassan and Peres. King Hassan has taken the greater risk. I have compared the peace process to a person who has died, and needs an electric shock to be revived. This meeting was comparable to a shock given someone who has had a heart attack; the patient is still in the intensive care ward, but the prognosis is good. The important thing is, this meeting introduced mobility into the situation. No action has been taken over the last six months.

Now, in order to achieve a breakthrough what is necessary is the proper venue; we need an international conference (under the auspices of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council) with all parties to the conflict present. Without a PLO presence, there is no possibility for peace.

EIR: What do you think of Hassan's statements after the meeting?

Siniora: When Hassan spoke of a "failure," he was referring to the fact that the PLO's participation has not been accepted yet, and that the Israelis have not agreed to total withdrawal from the occupied territories. . . . But up to this moment, there had been a stall; now there is mobility.

EIR: What about Hassan's convoking an Arab summit?

Siniora: This coincides with the PLO's demand, and indeed, there is urgent need for such a meeting. I believe it is a great necessity for Arab leaders to sit together and formulate their positions now.

EIR: Some of the Arab nations have expressed their approval or condemnation of the meeting. Saudi Arabia thus far has said nothing. What is your evaluation of the Saudis' position?

Siniora: They seem to be sitting on the sidelines, but they televised the entirety of King Hassan's speech. You could say they are working behind the scenes. I think they were consulted and knew everything. Egypt, of course, has been outspoken in its support of the meeting.

EIR: What do you think will be the next step for Israel to take?

Siniora: That will happen after the rotation [of Prime Minister Peres and Yitzak Shamir]. But after the rotation of the premiership in the fall, Peres will have a better chance when elections come around. In the last elections, the Labour Party got 18% of the votes cast by Sephardic Jews of Moroccan origin; this time, Peres the Labour Party's mandates in the Knesset by two.

EIR: But are you sure there will be the rotation, and elections?

Siniora: Peres will keep his promise and let Shamir in. Then, early next year, the government coalition could fall apart, leading to elections.