

Jordan, Israel advance peace through development

by Dean Andromidas

The current peace negotiations between Jordan and Israel have brought the question of peace through economic development to the center of the Middle East peace process. In the first direct talks between the two countries held on their own territory, which began on July 18 in the desert directly on the border between the two countries, Jordanian and Israeli diplomats and generals met in an air-conditioned tent not far from the Gulf of Aqaba. Two days later, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres became the first Israeli to fly into Jordan in 46 years. At a press conference with Jordanian Prime Minister Abdul-Salamal-Majali and U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Peres spoke of the economic possibilities that peace will bring, where "farmers replace soldiers and greenhouses replace army barracks."

In contrast, the opponents of peace on both sides struck back with the massive bombing of a Jewish community center in Argentina, which left over 20 dead, and riots in the Gaza Strip.

Contributing to the opening of direct negotiations between Jordan and Israel was a diplomatic effort by the Clinton administration. According to King Hussein, the United States promised to cancel nearly \$1 billion of Jordan's foreign debt. Christopher spent one week touring the region, where he spoke with Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, and Syrian leaders in an effort to push the peace process forward.

While this breakthrough with Jordan is good news, in order for it to be successful it must be coupled with a renewed drive for regional economic development projects, as originally outlined by Foreign Minister Peres in the agreements with the Palestine Liberation Organization, and along the lines of Lyndon LaRouche's Oasis Plan for Middle East peace through economic development. The failure to immediately begin implementing the economic development proj-

ects outlined in the Gaza-Jericho agreements, primarily because of the obstructionist tactics of the World Bank and its supporters in the region, has been the biggest obstacle to the peace process.

Ten joint projects proposed

An official Israeli government spokesman told the German weekly newspaper *Neue Solidarität*, "There are three key factors currently under negotiation: first, security; second, border demarcation; and third, joint cooperation in the areas of water, energy, and ecology." He said that once normal relations can be established between the two countries, "the sky is the limit" as to what can be done economically. According to Israeli government sources and Energy and Infrastructure Minister Moshe Shahal, Israel has proposed no fewer than 10 joint energy development projects including:

- The construction of canals between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea, as well as between the Dead Sea and Mediterranean Sea. The project would bring seawater to the Dead Sea, which is crucial for the continued exploitation of the sea for the production of potash and other natural resources by both countries. In addition, an 800-megawatt hydroelectric power plant could be constructed on the canal for power generation and water desalination.
- The integration of the electrical power grids among Jordan, Israel, and Egypt;
- The development of an integrated oil and gas pipeline network among Jordan, Israel, and Egypt;
- Construction of joint desalination projects utilizing gas, oil, and solar energy sources;
- Joint exploration and development of natural resources, particularly oil, gas, and mineral resources;
- Oil shale utilization for energy production, which

would enable joint development of the nearly 20 billion tons of oil shale deposits in the region.

Other projects under discussion include:

- Joint development of the Eilat-Aqaba region on the Gulf of Aqaba, including development of each countries' port and airport facilities. (Problematically, much of this is being discussed in the narrow and inadequate context of developing tourism.)

- A regional railroad from Istanbul to Cairo. Although at a very preliminary stage, Egypt has recently formally agreed to participate in the construction of a railroad from Cairo, through the Gaza Strip, to Tel Aviv.

- Construction of a road network linking Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Jordan, which would establish links between Jordan and the Mediterranean ports.

Although nuclear energy has not been part of the negotiations, the LaRouche Oasis Plan, which envisions the construction of nuclear power plants along such a canal, has been a topic of informal discussion among leading participants in the peace process.

While Jordan's King Hussein and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin are to hold their first public meeting on July 25 in Washington, a formal peace treaty is not expected to be signed. King Hussein has said that he would not sign a formal peace treaty unless he received approval from Syria, which has so far refused to engage in direct negotiations with Israel. Nonetheless, Jordan and Israel have been holding informal as well as formal negotiations for over a year and are said to have overcome most of the main obstacles that have prevented the signing of a peace treaty. These obstacles include a border dispute in the Jordan Valley, the allocation of water from the Yarmuk and Jordan rivers, and the question of Palestinian refugees who have been living in refugee camps for decades.

Rejectionists on both sides

The catastrophic bombing of the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina was a dramatic confirmation that the enemies of peace are active. In support of a statement by Peres charging that the bombing was an attack on the peace accords, Lyndon LaRouche, Jr., candidate for the U.S. Democratic Party presidential nomination, declared in a statement, "I wholeheartedly share the evaluation and sentiment of Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres that the carbombing of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association in Buenos Aires is an attack on the Mideast peace accords."

Although Israel and security experts have pointed the finger at Iran and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah for the bombing, there has been no confirmation. It is believed that Hezbollah carried out the bombing in retaliation for recent Israeli military strikes in southern Lebanon which killed over 20 Hezbollah guerrillas. In February 1992, the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires was the target of a massive carbomb that left over 20 dead, which was said to be in retaliation for the

killing of Hezbollah leader Abbas Mousawi.

In addition, the taking up of residence in Gaza by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat has not gone unmarred. On July 17, a massive riot at the Eretz border crossing between Israel and Jordan left two Palestinians dead and over 100 wounded. Palestinian police and Israeli soldiers were involved in shootouts which left 25 Palestinian police wounded. The riots were the result of insane border-crossing procedures which cause many hours in delays for Palestinians traveling to their jobs in Israel. The procedures are said to be the result of pressures by opponents of the peace accords within the military and security establishment.

Within a day of the riot, Hamas, an Islamic fundamentalist group which opposes the peace accord, took responsibility for killing an Israeli soldier in Gaza. Hamas is also accused of provocations during the Eretz riots. The provocation drew a quick response from Nabil Shaath, the Palestinian minister in charge of planning and international cooperation for the Palestinian National Authority. "We're now in a peace process in Gaza and Jericho and no one is permitted to carry out military operations, because these operations violate the agreement and thus will hit at the peace process," Shaath said. He nonetheless hit at the Israeli decisions to close the Gaza Strip: "Israel has no right to close the Gaza Strip every time a problem arises, and this violates the agreement."

In the past weeks, the radical settlers movement has become more and more extreme, as it becomes more and more isolated. While holding poorly attended demonstrations throughout the country, their most serious actions have been an occupation of government-owned houses in Hebron by radical settlers based in Kyrat Arba, the settlement where Baruch Goldstein, of Hebron massacre infamy, came from. Their activities are shifting rapidly from the settlements throughout the territories, to Jerusalem, where demonstrations are being held at the Dome of the Rock mosque, which radical right-wing Jewish groups refer to as the "Temple Mount," in reference to the site of the ancient second temple. This is aimed at intersecting the most sensitive political issue between Israelis and Palestinians, the status of Jerusalem. Israel claims Jerusalem as its "undivided and eternal capital," while Palestinians claim Arab East Jerusalem for their capital. Its final status must be resolved within five years of the signing of the Gaza-Jericho accord.

A confrontation is building up over the Dome of the Rock. This mosque is Islam's third holiest site, after Mecca and Medina. The mosque stands over the rock from which the Prophet Mohammed is said to have begun his journey to heaven. It is feared that the "Temple Mount" crazies will attempt a provocation against the site in an effort to create a regional crisis, if not a new war. These extremists are known to enjoy heavy funding from North America, Europe, and from circles within Israel associated with Ariel Sharon, architect of the disastrous 1982 Lebanon war and minister in the previous Likud government.