

Mideast talks must solve water resource shortage

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The news that peace talks between Israel and Syria would commence in Washington the week of Dec. 14, was greeted with legitimate optimism by President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. "Peace has long been within our sight," Clinton said. "Today it is within our grasp and we must seize it."

There are reasons to be optimistic, foremost among them, the fact that the entire arrangement has been handled by the White House, not the U.S. State Department. Barak is to travel to Washington with a small delegation that will include Foreign Minister David Levy, his Chief of Cabinet, Danny Yatom, and the head of the negotiations team, Uris Saguy. The Syrian side will be headed by Foreign Minister Farouk Shara, rather than President Hafez al-Assad, who is believed to be in poor health. The affair is to be coordinated by the White House staff, and following separate meetings of the delegations with President Clinton, National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, they will meet together.

There has been much speculation about the Golan Heights, which Israel occupied in the 1967 war, and which Syria demands be returned. What no one is discussing openly, however, is the real issue underlying the Golan Heights: *water*. Unless this issue is tackled from the standpoint of economic development criteria, nothing will be accomplished. Barak may well achieve what he says is his aim, to replicate the "Jordanian model" with Syria. This means that he hopes to have, first, an agreement on a "declaration of principles," in effect an agreement to end the state of war that has existed between the two countries. This would have repercussions on the Lebanese track, in that Syria has supported the Hezbollah movement in the south of Lebanon, which has been waging the war.

And, the two sides may well agree on the non-negotiable

issues: Israel would make national security demands, which include early warning stations on the ground, and Syria would demand a return to 1967 borders.

But here, the vital issue of water would emerge. The cease-fire line is different from the line drawn in 1947 in the United Nation's partition plan, which included a thin strip of land along part of the coast of Lake Tiberias, inside Israel. Syria has not recognized this as a border, as Syria has not recognized the existence of Israel. After the 1948 war, the cease-fire line showed Syria bordering on Lake Tiberias on the northeast. In 1967, Israel occupied the Golan Heights, thus depriving Syria of its access to the lake and its precious waters.

Thus, defining the borders will be a major point of conflict. No matter how that conflict may be solved, if at all, any mere territorial agreement, even including a water-sharing agreement (like the one Israel signed with Jordan in 1994) will be worth very little, since the water available is simply not enough.

The strategic role of water

It has become commonplace to state that the next wars in the region (indeed in the world) will be fought over water, not oil. This may be true enough, but it is also the case that water has played an important role in the wars that have already been fought in the Middle East. Furthermore, every remaining issue to be settled in the peace process relates directly or indirectly to water.

While the many wars in the Mideast during this century have been sparked as a result of British-orchestrated geopolitics, it is economic issues, including the issue of water, that have allowed festering conflicts to be brought to the boiling point. As *EIR* has long emphasized, without an economic recovery program for the region—dubbed by Lyndon

LaRouche "The Oasis Plan"—no durable peace is possible. The potential for such a program emerged as part of the Oslo Accords, and during later summit meetings in Casablanca and Amman; but it was always blocked by opposition from the British, the U.S. State Department, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. Now, the opportunity again exists for a breakthrough to be made.

A careful look at a map, makes obvious that the 1967 war, in which Israel occupied the West Bank and Golan Heights, was a war fought in significant part over water. The water distribution system of Israel, the National Water Carrier, which services its coastal cities and as well as its settlements in the Occupied Territories, takes 20% of its supply from ground water from the western part of the Occupied Territories, another 20% comes from Israeli coastal ground water, and the rest from Lake Tiberias, as well as water from the eastern side of the Occupied Territories, which is from the Jordan River. The water for Lake Tiberias, Israel pumped out of the Yarmuk River. Prior to the 1967 War, Israel had taken 80% of its water through drilling and wells. After the war, it accessed the new sources, and issued laws preventing Arabs from drilling wells. In the last days of the 1967 War, Israel also destroyed a dam on the Yarmuk, which Syria and Jordan were building together. Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights, meant that a plan developed in 1964 by Syria and Lebanon, to re-route the Jordan waters into the Yarmuk, and onto Jordanian territory, was definitively killed. Arab sources say that 67% of Israel's yearly water supply is taken from areas outside the 1948 borders, 35% from the West Bank and 22% from the Golan Heights.

Israel's control over southern Lebanon also means securing possible access to water sources from the Litani River. Israel's deepest penetration into Lebanon in 1982, would have given it access to most of the Litani River. In this context, if one considers Israel's strategic support for the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) of John Garang, who is fighting against the Khartoum government, it becomes obvious that control over the southern part of the country would include control over the flow of the precious Nile River waters. And, Israel's military alliance with Turkey, carries with it the possibility of sharing some of Turkey's vast water resources.

Considering these facts, one can better appreciate what lurks behind the most radical Zionist claim to a "Greater Israel," which would stretch "from the Nile to the Euphrates."

As a result of the wars in the region, and the takeover of water sources, there has been a deterioration of water supplies to the non-Israeli populations. Jordan, which signed a peace treaty in 1994 containing clauses on sharing the water from the Jordan and Yarmuk rivers, is going through the greatest water crisis of its modern history. The combination of Israel's water expropriation policies, the increased water need in Jordan due to the influx of 300,000 refugees from the Gulf War, and severe drought over the past years, has left Jordan dry.

The Palestinians are experiencing severe deprivation.

Compared to the 1,000 cubic meters per person of water which the Israeli settlers enjoy each year, the 1 million-strong Arab population, had 137 cubic meters per person, back in 1993. Now the situation has gotten worse. Gaza is dependent on ground water, which is increasingly saline. Diseases linked to dirty water are twice as frequent there as in the other territories that had been occupied in 1967.

The issue is not limited to Israel. Disputes over water continue to characterize relations between Turkey, and Iraq and Syria. Without water, none of the nations in the region can survive. Israel has sought to ensure its water requirements by military fiat. Yet even the water sources it has taken over would not satisfy the needs of its growing population. On Nov. 21, Israeli state radio reported that Foreign Minister Levy had urged Prime Minister Barak to import water from Turkey. Levy said that the water crisis had reached dangerous proportions and was threatening agriculture. The level of the main reservoir on Lake Tiberias had dropped to record 50-year lows.

Thus, if there is to be peace, there must be adequate water supplies for all the peoples of the region, and on an equitable basis.

According to a plan drawn up in 1953 under the Eisenhower administration, the river waters were to be shared, but the quotas were not respected. Were a similar plan to be set up today, considering the water available and the requirements of each population, it would become evident, that there is not enough water to satisfy those requirements.

Where is the water to come from?

One proposal, made years ago, by the Turkish government, has been to build a pipeline from Turkey, to pump water from the Ceyhan and Seyhan rivers near Adana, or from the Ataturk Dam, and re-route it, away from its course into the sea, through pipelines through Syria, to Israel and the Arabian peninsula, with branch lines taking water to Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. Syria would perhaps agree to the transit, if the Golan Heights were returned. But this approach is an expensive one, estimated seven years ago to cost \$21 billion. It would transport water, but would otherwise not change the technological level of the economies in the region.

A crash program for nuclear desalination

Looking at the rivers and lakes is missing the forest for the trees. The most abundant supply of water, which no one is talking about, is sea water, of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, to start with. One is reminded of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's ballad, the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," who, lost at sea, is dying of thirst. "Water, water everywhere, and nor any drop to drink," is his lament.

With desalination, all the water, everywhere, becomes many drops to drink.

The most efficient, technologically advanced, and equitable way of solving the water crisis, is to build nuclear-powered water desalination plants throughout the area, to provide access to fresh water to every urban and agricultural area. As

LaRouche proposed decades ago, canals between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea, and from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea, should be dug. Along these canals, floating nuclear plants, high-temperature, gas-cooled reactors, should be placed, to produce the highest energy yield. With four nuclear modules, each 350 megawatts, a dual purpose desalination electricity plant would provide power for a multi-effect distillation system. This could provide a volume of fresh water of 401,500 cubic meters per day, and 466 megawatts net electrical power output.

Such an “island” of four nuclear modules, as the nuclear engineers call them, could provide 145.6 million cubic meters per year. Just four of these islands, would provide 650 million cubic meters. Twenty plants, half of them lining the new canals, would provide 2,920 million cubic meters of water per year, which would more than double the available water for Israel, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. The availability of abundant fresh water, would make it possible to develop around each of these nuclear islands, new urban centers, with agricultural and industrial production.

Desalination technology is nothing new to the region. Saudi Arabia, a country which is largely desert, has become the world’s biggest producer of desalinated water, producing 520 million gallons per day, from 25 stations, which covers 70% of the potable water in the Kingdom. On Nov. 15, as reported by the Saudi Information Ministry, the governor of the Saline Water Conversion Corporation, Dr. Fahad Balghunem, announced that three new desalination plants are under construction in al-Khobar, Jubail, and al-Shoaia, and five delivery systems, which will bring the total length of water pipelines up to 4,155 kilometers, serviced by 29 pumping stations. His corporation is studying the possibility of installing “20 more plants, with a daily production capacity of 2.6 million cubic meters of water, in addition to 12 water delivery station projects, with a total length of 2,640 km.”

There is no reason why this could not be done elsewhere in the Middle East as well; indeed, there is no reason why it could not have been done in 1993, when the Oslo Accords had been signed. The most promising aspect of the Oslo agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, was, in fact, the economic annexes, which spelled out areas of cooperation, focussed on water development. In those annexes, not only bilateral water development plans were laid out, but also, a regional perspective, which explicitly included the Dead Sea-Mediterranean Canal, and explicitly identified desalination as the means to create new water sources.

The program—the only economically viable approach—did not go through at the time, due to the objections posed by the World Bank. If this perspective were introduced into the Israeli-Syrian talks, as well as those between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, and later with Lebanon, it would radically redefine the parameters of the conflict around water, solving it once and for all. If President Clinton were to facilitate such an approach, he could fully justify his expressed optimism.

Israel

Iran-Contra returns to haunt George Bush

by Dean Andromidas

Israeli police have discovered secret documents concerning the Iran-Contra affair in the home of a man accused of being hired as a hit-man for Ofer Nimrodi. Ofer Nimrodi is the son of the arms dealer Ya’acov Nimrodi, who had been a key player in the Iran-Contra affair, and served as the Israeli intermediary between U.S. representatives—in particular National Security Council consultant Michael Ledeen—and the Iranian regime. It was the senior Nimrodi who brokered the first round of the arms-for-hostages deals which were at the center of the Iran-Contra affair, which broke out in public in 1986.

The key man at the center of Irangate was not, of course, Oliver North or Nimrodi, but former U.S. President George Bush, who as Vice President in the Reagan administration, headed the Special Situation Group in the National Security Council. It was under Bush’s direction that the NSC staff apparatus became literally a parallel secret government that ran the illegal Contra supply operation, and hatched the idea of selling weapons to Iran in return for securing the freedom of American hostages, and then illegally transferring the proceeds earned in the transactions to fund the Contra supply operation. Bush later told the world that he was “out of the loop” on this affair, and escaped prosecution following a secret campaign of death and intimidation which has been detailed in the October 1996 *EIR Special Report*, “George Bush and the 12333 Serial Murder Ring.”

Bush very much ‘in the loop’

According to Israeli press reports, the documents that were found by Israeli police included a report detailing financial irregularities concerning the various arms deals. According to the daily *Ha’aretz* on Dec. 6, the report was a censored version of a secret document written by Raphael Vardi, that not only detailed the financial irregularities, but also detailed the fact that then-Vice President Bush was well informed on the entire operation. The censored version, omits mention of Bush “so as not to injure his reputation,” according to the Israeli daily. This censored report was given by the Israeli government to the Congressional committee which investigated Irangate in 1987.

Israeli authorities believe that there is at least an indirect connection between these documents and the ongoing criminal case being pursued against Ofer and Ya’acov Nimrodi,