

Israel Debates Madrid II Peace—Or Netanyahu War

by Dean Andromidas

Israel is now debating whether to take up the call of Yossi Beilin and Lyndon H. LaRouche for a Madrid II conference, and a comprehensive Middle East peace, or prepare for the next war. If the choice is war, then Likud Party chairman Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu, the agent of Vice President Dick Cheney and the synarchist financial powers that support them, will become Israel’s next Prime Minister—and possibly Israel’s last.

This debate will not be decided in Israel, but in Washington, where the LaRouche Political Action Committee has been mobilizing support for a Madrid II. A new Madrid conference was initially proposed by former Israeli Justice Minister Yossi Beilin, in an article in the Aug. 13 issue of *Ha’aretz*, entitled “The Morning After Commission.”

Speaking during an Aug. 20 conference call of the U.S. Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace, Beilin said, “The Bush Administration doesn’t believe in Mideast peace.” He added that he had thought his proposal for a return to Madrid would be attractive to George Bush given his poor political position, but “I’m not sure that he understands it.”

Israel could have had negotiations with Syria this year, Beilin reported, but Bush blocked it: “It’s the first time an Arab leader was ready to negotiate, and America said ‘no.’” Beilin said that given the political weakness of not only Bush but all the leaders in the region—including Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Syrian President Bashar Assad, Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, and Palestinian President Abu Mazen—they should “do something big enough which will serve the national interests and save their political lives” (see *Documentation*).

Beilin called on the “peace camp, wherever it is, Israel, Palestine, in other places, in the United States, to try to push for this big thing, and one of the options for such a big thing is to have a second Madrid conference. . . . My idea is that we should push for something like this so that Syria, Lebanon,

Palestinians, Israel, and of course America or the Quartet, will participate in such a conference, will launch bilateral talks between Israel and Syria, Israel and Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinians, and try to suggest that in a few months it could be possible to have peace treaties with our neighbors.” It is crucial, Beilin said, in the face of the gloomy situation to offer the people of the region and the world a path “away from this sadness, or darkness, into hope, and into light. This is the question.”

Also calling for peace was veteran Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery, leader of Gush Shalom. Avnery, in a conference call sponsored by the Progressive Democrats of America on Aug 17, declared that the U.S. needs a “complete change of policy in the Mideast.” The people in Israel know that something is wrong, that Israel didn’t “win” the war, and the peace movement has to turn this mood into an acceptance of a peace policy with Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinians, Avnery said (see accompanying article).

The calls for a Madrid II have sparked a major debate within the Israeli political establishment. David Kimche, former director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry and long-time advisor to Labor Party chairman Amir Peretz, called for Madrid II. In a commentary appearing in the *Jerusalem Post* on Aug. 19, Kimche quoted a senior Arab leader who told him that “The only way to prevent a nightmare is to go for a comprehensive peace process.” Kimche went on to say:

“A shrewd Lebanese politician with whom I have been speaking in the past few days is convinced that both Lebanese and Syrians would react favorably to the idea of a ‘Madrid II’ peace conference sponsored by the U.S., Europe, and Russia. The Syrians are desperately keen to emerge from their international isolation and to repair their faltering economy.

“Such a peace conference is achievable. It would need American initiative and international backing. For ‘Madrid One’ James Baker knocked the heads together of our region’s



Likud Party chairman Bibi Netanyahu, the smiling agent of Dick Cheney, is ready and waiting to lead Israel into another pointless, bloody war.



Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert holds to the Bush-Cheney line, despite other Israeli voices for sanity: Syria is the "single most aggressive member of the axis of evil. I am the last person who will say I want to negotiate with Syria."

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leaders to such an extent that both Hafez Assad and Yitzhak Shamir, neither of whom wanted the conference, came running to Madrid. Could the Americans pull it off again? My guess is that this time it would be much easier. It could be a coup for American policy in the Middle East. It could be a life saver for Lebanon. And for us, and that is what interests us the most, it could herald a whole new era in our checkered history with our neighbors.

"We should go for it, and do our utmost to persuade the Americans and others that 'Madrid II' could be the ideal sequence to that ugly war in the north."

Kimche, who also was an official in the Mossad, is an old-line Labor Party member in the tradition of the late Yitzhak Rabin, who, like Rabin, eventually saw the need for Israel to come to peace with its neighbors. He is among a group advising Amir Peretz to launch a diplomatic initiative, which has already resulted in Peretz making a public statement calling for diplomatic talks with Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinians. This call was transmitted to President Assad by Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos, who has been a keen advocate of peace, since he was the European Union's Middle East envoy.

Reopening the 'Syria File'

Two days later, on Aug. 21, Avi Dichter, the Israeli Police and Security Minister, who is a former head of the Shin Bet and member of the ruling Kadima Party, called negotiations with Syria and Lebanon "legitimate." "In return for a true peace with Syria or with Lebanon, over those issues that from the standpoint of the land have a history, which we know and the Syrians know and the Lebanese know, I think that what we did with Egypt and with Jordan is legitimate here as well," Dichter told Israeli Army Radio.

That means returning to the internationally recognized borders, he said. Holding talks with Syria is legitimate, and if a viable party exists on the other side, talks should take place

and "could be initiated via a third party." Dichter said that past failures should not rule out the land for peace strategy.

In effect reopening the "Syria file," Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni assigned her chief advisor, Yaakov Dayan, to draft a report on the feasibility of opening negotiations with Syria. Dayan has already met with Tel Aviv University Professor Iramar Rabinovich, who had headed the Syrian negotiating team under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Dayan was expected to meet with Gen. (res.) Uri Sagi, who had held the same post under Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Sagi was a vocal critic of the Lebanon war, and has called for reopening talks with Syria.

But Prime Minister Ehud Olmert threw cold water on the proposals the same day that Dichter made them. "I recommend not to get carried away with any false hopes," he said. "When Syria stops support for terror, when it stops giving missiles to terror organizations, then we will be happy to negotiate with them. We are not going into any adventure when terror is on their side. We're not going into negotiations until basic steps are taken which can be the basis for any negotiations." Sticking to the Bush Administration's rhetoric, Olmert called Syria the "single most aggressive member of the axis of evil. I am the last person who will say I want to negotiate with Syria."

Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres also tried to bury the proposal, claiming that he believes the Syrians are not serious. "The Syrians, if they are serious, should come and say 'we are interested in holding negotiations.' I don't see Assad doing this."

No Time for Illusions

There should be no illusions: If a Madrid II and a political settlement are rejected or sabotaged by Dick Cheney and the insane George W. Bush, then war will inevitably follow. Writing in the daily *Ha'aretz* on Aug. 21, Akiva Eldar, one of

Israel's leading political correspondents, warns, "It is Israel that will pay the price of America's simplistic policy of spurning" any attempt to hold talks with Syria. Eldar writes that the only way to get support from Syria in implementing the U.S. ceasefire in Lebanon is to have an offer "from the U.S. and/or Israel for the known price, the implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 of June 1967 (and the Arab League resolution of March 2002) in the Golan Heights."

Eldar warns: "The truth is that in the wake of the war with Lebanon, Israeli assessment sources too are recommending to the government that it immediately separate from the 'neither-peace-nor-war' doctrine in the Syrian arena. They are presenting two options to the leaders. One is accelerated peace talks with Syria (and Lebanon), the distancing of an Iranian-Syrian alliance from the Israeli border, and the cessation of support for the Palestinian resistance organizations. The other is an accelerated preemptive war against Syria, before Iran is equipped with a nuclear bomb and before Tehran completes the transformation of the Syrian army into a modern army rich in new types of weaponry.

"According to cautious assessments, this process will take no longer than two years. Unfortunately, in the foreseeable future, we will not have a government that is capable of conducting negotiations with Syria, and in the United States there is not a President who will do this for us. Therefore, keep the [bomb] shelters clean."

Unless Olmert is pushed to go for a Madrid II, it will be Bibi Netanyahu who will implement the doomsday "preemptive war." Olmert is besieged from all sides. First, there are the popular demands for his resignation, led by the reserve soldiers who are enraged by the debacle in which they were forced to serve, and by the bereaved parents of soldiers and civilians who were killed. Olmert's own party, Kadima, has been faced with one setback after another, including the indictment for sexual assault of his key ally Haim Ramon, who was forced to resign from his post as Justice Minister. Olmert himself is being investigated by the State Comptroller's office, for possible bribe taking, which could lead to an indictment—and an end to his political career.

With the sounds of early elections in the air, the recruitment drive by Olmert's Kadima Party has been a flop. There are only a few weeks to go before the party must file its membership list with the election commission, and Kadima has managed to recruit no more than 15,000 members. Many of the activists, especially the mayors of local communities who had helped get Kadima votes, are going back to their previous parties, especially Bibi's Likud. There is a real possibility that Kadima itself could break up, with many of its Knesset members returning "home" to the Likud and into the arms of Bibi.

The most immediate threat is the collapse of Olmert's coalition if the government's budget is defeated in the Knesset. Already a group of Knesset Labor Party members have announced that they would not support the budget because it

calls for the cutting of 2 billion shekels from social programs, in order to pay for the war.

Fascist Netanyahu Makes a Move

In the absence of a broad U.S. and internationally backed peace initiative, the Lebanon debacle is pushing the Israeli electorate to the right, and creating a climate favorable to Netanyahu. Israeli political observers not only see the Likud making gains, but see its chairman, Netanyahu, ending up in the Prime Minister's seat. Netanyahu and his synarchist backers see this very clearly, and have moved to try to capture the protest movement of reserve soldiers and bereaved parents, who have been demonstrating in front of Olmert's office to demand his resignation, along with that of Defense Minister Peretz and Chief of Staff Dan Halutz.

Israeli political sources point out that this movement is typical of the Israeli political milieu, where a protest movement mobilizes around a single issue and makes a narrow demand. The fact that the government could fall, with all that implies, is not taken into account. Nonetheless, the climate being created favors Netanyahu.

One source then commented on how interesting it was to see the first demonstration in Jerusalem of a group of "veterans of the 1948 war," who showed up to express their solidarity with the war. These veterans were led by none other than Daniel Doron, a key radical free-market economic advisor to Netanyahu. Although the source made it clear that Doron does not have any control over this movement, his presence demonstrated who is looking to manipulate it, and in what direction.

A look at Doron not only leads to Netanyahu, but directly to George Shultz. Doron is the director of the Israel Center for Social and Economic Progress, which he founded in 1983, as part of then-Secretary of State George Shultz's campaign demanding that Israel become a free-market paradise or face economic collapse. The cofounder and director of the center was the late Herbert Stein, who along with Stanley Fischer, now governor of the Bank of Israel, served as Shultz's personal economic hit men in 1983, when they forced Israel to adopt a package of radical free market reforms that led to the dismantling of Israel's social-welfare state.

The Center's Board of Governors includes Irving Kristol, the high priest of the neo-conservatives. Its United Kingdom Board of Governors includes the inventors of Thatcherism, Lord Harris of High Cross, of the Institute of Economic Affairs, and Lord Young of Graffham. Among the others is Sir Ronald Cohen, a venture capitalist who was one of the big financial supporters of Tony Blair and his neo-liberal economic policies. Cohen met with Ehud Olmert when the latter was deputy Prime Minister to Ariel Sharon.

This same political source said, "Look, Netanyahu is a fascist, and out of this climate he wants to build a fascist movement." Without a Madrid II, he underscored, the future of Israel does not look very bright.