

LaRouche Backs Peres on Peace Talks With Syria

by Dean Andromidas

On hearing of Israeli President Shimon Peres's call for Israeli-Syrian peace talks Sept. 18, Lyndon LaRouche gave it his full backing, adding, "Isn't it time for a war-proof design for nuclear desalination? Isn't Syria a likely partner for Israel for such an agreement?"

On Sept. 26, LaRouche added: "I think that the time has come for Peres to do something like what he has proposed—negotiations with Syria—and that Peres is ideal for this purpose. I fully support Shimon Peres's proposal. I understand that there are a lot of problems around it, but we've got to get something started now. We have to start someplace. It's obvious that Syria will be willing to cooperate, not as a patsy, but in the sense of getting into discussion. So—let's do it. The key thing here—forget about making a package deal. You have a package in mind, we'll get to that, but don't start with the package.

"The key to breaking this thing . . . is the Israel-Syria negotiations. No other condition. . . . The idea that you get this guy, this guy, this guy together. No! You want to make this the personal pride of a faction in Israel and a faction in Syria. Make it their personal baby, and they will make it work. When you try to get too many people involved in it and too many conditions—'this here deal'—no! No 'this here deal.' Just take Peres's thing in my name. I'm backing Peres personally.

"After this deal is made, it opens up the door for other things. Trying to get too many things in there, agreement of too many parties on a big deal, is the mistake. What I did as a proposal some years ago, was right. But, to get action now, you have got to have something exceptional. And Syria and Israel are an exceptional proposition. And Shimon Peres is exactly the guy to do it. . . .

"It's necessary not to get everyone in on the act, because

you won't get an agreement. What you want to do is demonstrate that the basis for agreement exists between Israel and Syria on the idea of peace between them, which we would hope would be spread throughout the region—to inspire others. Let's not waste this opportunity by trying to make it too complicated.

"Peres is reliable for this. He's really the only figure in Israel who has any credibility for this kind of operation. Others may come in and become credible, but he's the one who has the credibility now. I'm confident that he does have the credibility, and that he has a better understanding than many other people do. Give the guy a chance to win. Let him go ahead and get something. We do not have to dictate what he has to accomplish. I understand that he understands, that something has to be done in this direction, to get off this damned stalemate. And it's in the vital interests of both Syria and Israel."

The Peres initiative came out publicly on Sept. 18, when he told a group of foreign reporters at his Jerusalem office: "The nervousness in relations between ourselves and Syria is over. We are ready to negotiate directly." Hours earlier, the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* reported that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had said that he is prepared, under the right circumstance, to begin peace talks with Syria "with no preconditions." Olmert was speaking with Russian journalists at the time, who had asked him about U.S. opposition to Syrian participation in the upcoming Middle East peace conference in Washington.

A Time of High Tension

The talk of peace with Syria comes at a time of high tension in the region, which is bracing for what is seen as an in-

evitable U.S. attack on Iran, with possible Israeli participation. Then, on Sept. 6, the tensions rose, when Israeli warplanes allegedly penetrated deep into Syria, triggering fears of an Israel-Syria war.

Syria denounced the overflights as a “flagrant aggressive act,” but the Israeli government neither confirmed nor denied the event, and continues to keep an ironclad silence. The Syrian government said it would “retain the right to respond in an appropriate way,” and in the face of Israeli silence, gave this report on the events: Israeli aircraft had penetrated Syrian airspace along the Syrian-Turkish border where they were intercepted and confronted by Syrian anti-aircraft fire near Deir Ezzor, a town near the Turkish border. The Israeli planes then retreated at high speed, breaking the sound barrier, and jettisoning munitions and their extra fuel tanks, one of which landed on Turkish territory.

A look at a map strongly suggests that the flight path of the Israeli aircraft was vectored for a strike on Iran, a suggestion shared by intelligence sources.

In contrast, the British *Sunday Times* and *Jane’s Defense Weekly*, along with neo-conservatives such as former U.S. envoy to the UN John Bolton, spewed outrageous claims that the Israelis were targeting secret nuclear weapons—or missile bases—backed by the Iranians or the North Koreans. This disinformation was obviously intended to raise tensions between Israel and Syria, and propagandize for a U.S. and/or Israeli strike against Iran.

But another Israeli initiative—an apparent attempt to defuse the tensions created by the Israeli overflights—came, when well-known Israeli commentator Ron Ben Yishai, who writes for Israel’s largest daily *Yedioth Ahronoth*, filed a report from the Turkish border town Deir Ezzor, where the Israeli planes reportedly met Syrian fire. Ben Yishai interviewed local residents who said they heard Israeli war planes break the sound barrier on Sept. 6, but had seen no bombs. A photo showed Ben Yishai standing in front of a sign at the Dair Ezzor Research Center, an agricultural research institute which was presumably the site described by Western media as anything from a secret North Korean-backed nuclear facility to an Iranian-backed missile facility.

Confirming the Syrian report on what had happened, one resident said, “There were a few Israeli planes here that



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

U.S. Embassy, Tel Aviv/Matty Stern

President Shimon Peres at a press conference with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Jerusalem on Sept. 20. Peres is the only figure in Israel, LaRouche said, who has the credibility to successfully negotiate an agreement with Syria. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (above, right) has called many times for reopening of negotiations with Israel.

made supersonic booms over the city and maybe even dropped something. We didn’t hear any explosions on the ground.”

Ben Yishai also visited Damascus and the Syrian-controlled side of the Golan Heights. Since Syria is considered an “enemy country,” his visit had to have had the approval of the highest levels of the Israeli government—and obviously, also high-level approval from the Syrians. It is also notable that the owner of *Yedioth Ahronoth* is said to be a good friend of Shimon Peres.

But this fact-finding mission was blacked out by the Western media. And instead, the day after Ben Yishai’s report on Sept. 26, neo-con John Bolton continued, and intensified, the drumbeat for war, with another claim that Israel had bombed a Syrian nuclear or missile facility backed by North Korea.

The Real Name for Peace Is Water

Despite these tensions, and the crude war-party propaganda, the reality is that, as LaRouche notes, the time is ripe for peace. Syrian President Bashar Assad has been calling on Israel for months to open negotiations. In an Israeli-Syria conflict, neither side could win a war worth calling a victory. It would be even worse for Israel than the 2006 Lebanon War, where, despite a massive bombing campaign against Lebanon, the militant group Hezbollah was able to rain rockets over half of Israel. Syria has rockets that could hit anywhere in Israel.

Until now, the Bush-Cheney Administration has *blocked* Syrian-Israeli peace talks, but a strong lobby of retired U.S. military officers, diplomats, intelligence officers, politicians, and peace activists has been pushing the Israeli government to open talks. These circles know that peace talks with Syria would strongly complement peace talks with the Palestinians, who are now deeply divided between Hamas and Fatah.

LaRouche hit the mark when he recommended the one substantive issue that can be addressed: freshwater, and the prospects of nuclear-powered desalination as the only means of expanding the overall supply. In fact, all the countries in the region have initiated efforts to acquire nuclear power reactors for electricity and desalination—especially Israel, Egypt, and Jordan—the three countries that made peace agreements with one another long ago.

In August, Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben Eliezer announced that Israel intends to build a nuclear power reactor to generate electricity, and for water desalination (it would be Israel's first civilian nuclear power plant). He said that Israeli would consider a joint project with a neighboring country. The major obstacle is that Israel has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), *and* it is a undeclared nuclear power with, allegedly, 200 weapons. Israel is reportedly approaching the Nuclear Suppliers Group of the International Atomic Energy Agency about an exemption from NSG technology controls. But, this would only be possible in the context of successful regional peace talks.

Also in August, Jordan announced through its Committee for Nuclear Strategy, its intention to build a nuclear power station by 2015, and have 30% of Jordan's power needs provided by nuclear energy by 2030. Jordan also has uranium resources that could be exploited.

Then there is Egypt, which in 2006, announced the completion of a feasibility study to establish a nuclear power station for electricity and desalination at El Dabaa on the Mediterranean coast. By 2015, it hopes to have completed the construction of a 1,000-megawatt reactor.

Syria, which has a chronic electricity shortage, has been considering a nuclear power reactor for the last decade. In 2003, it was in serious discussions with Russia for a \$2 billion dollar reactor for power generation and desalination. But the plans were shelved by Russia because of the Bush Administration's aggressive policy against Russia-Iran nuclear cooperation, and the Bush-Cheney hostility to Syria as well.

These projects could now be integrated into a regional program, as proposed in LaRouche's "Oasis Plan" for regional development, in the fields of transport infrastructure and nuclear power generation for electricity and desalination. It has been three decades since LaRouche made this proposal; the time is more ripe than ever to carry it out.