

The Mideast Peace Deal That Was Killed by an Assassin's Bullet

by Dean Andromidas

Four days before an assassin took the life of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Palestinian and Israeli negotiators had completed a framework agreement that could have led to the establishment of a Palestinian state and the beginning of the end of the half-century of war between Israel and the Arab nations. The draft document, completed on Oct. 31, 1995, was revealed in the Sept. 18 issue of *Newsweek* magazine. Although it was not a final agreement, the murder of Rabin, four days later, was a dramatic demonstration of how close the Palestinians and Israelis must have been to ending their conflict.

Almost simultaneous with the publication of the document, Akram Hanieh, a confidant of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, who attended the Camp David talks in July, began publishing a seven-part series revealing details of those talks. Hanieh revealed that in response to proposals concerning the question of Palestinian sovereignty in East Jerusalem and the holy sites, Arafat told President William Clinton: "Do you want to attend my funeral? I will not relinquish Jerusalem and the holy places." Further underscoring the point, Arafat told Clinton that he would like to see his own grave as a place of pilgrimage, and not a place to be urinated on, by the Palestinian people.

At Camp David, Arafat, no doubt, had strong memories of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's assassination not long after the historic "Camp David I" Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement.

Given developments over the last few weeks, is a Middle East agreement possible? Are the differences only a question of "Arafat accepting the moment of truth," as the U.S. State Department and the Israeli government are telling the public? The positions of both sides can be quite close, but as long as the power of the institution of the United States Presidency is not prepared to exert its influence to bridge those differences, by offering a perspective of massive economic development for the region as a whole, no peace is possible. The differences will get no closer than the nine millimeters of an assassin's bullet.

The Beilin-Abu Mazen Document

Entitled the "Framework for the Conclusion of a Final Status Agreement Between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization," the document formulated days before Rabin

was assassinated, attempts to deal with all the outstanding issues, including Palestinian statehood, borders, Israeli settlements, refugees, as well as Jerusalem and the holy sites. A crucial addition to this is the question of development, management, and expansion of water resources, an area in which the United States could have played a most important role. It envisioned a final status agreement by no later than May 5, 1999.

The document was formulated between 1993, shortly after the signing of the Oslo Accords, and Oct. 31, 1995. The Israeli side was represented by Yossi Beilin, currently Israel's Justice Minister. Beilin, who is considered a protégé of Shimon Peres, was at the time number-two to Peres in the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Beilin was assisted by unofficial peace negotiators Ron Pundak and Yair Hirshfeld. On the Palestinian side, the negotiations were handled by Abu Mazen, also known as Mahmoud Abbas and Hasan Asfour. All had been involved in negotiating the Oslo Accords of September 1993.

Since 1995, much of the contents of the document has been filtered into the ongoing peace process, whose momentum never recovered from the assassination of one of its key architects, Yitzhak Rabin. While no one can say whether the document could have been successfully implemented, and whether it was officially approved, it is nonetheless important to review, if only to reflect on the fact that any attempt to implement it or to negotiate an improved agreement, was sabotaged by the atmosphere of terror created after the assassination of Rabin.

The 13-page document has various articles and annexes. Article I deals with the question of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. It declares: "The government of Israel shall extend its recognition to the independent state of Palestine within agreed and secure borders with its capital Al-Quds [East Jerusalem] upon its coming into being no later than May 5, 1999. Simultaneously the State of Palestine shall extend its recognition of the State of Israel within agreed and secure borders with its capital Yerushalayim [West Jerusalem]. Both sides continue to look favorably [on the] possibility of establishing a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation, to be agreed upon by the state of Palestine and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan."

Article II deals with the question of "secure recognized borders," which was described in maps which are not included

in the copy of the document published by *Newsweek*.

Article III deals with normalization of relations, and Article IV deals with the schedule of Israeli withdrawal and various security arrangements. Article V deals with the Israeli settlements, where the idea of exchange of territory would compensate the Palestinians if certain settlements were annexed to Israel, while other settlements would come under the sovereignty of the State of Palestine.

Article VI deals with Jerusalem and lays out a proposal, for two capitals in one city. East Jerusalem would come under Palestinian sovereignty and be known as Al-Quds and would be the capital of the State of Palestine, and West Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty and be recognized as its capital. Each would have a municipal government. Then, above this would be a "Joint Higher Municipal Council," with representation from both communities, the idea being to maintain an "open and undivided city with free and unimpeded access for people of all faiths and nationalities." The Old City would come under a type of dual sovereignty, where the "State of Palestine shall be granted extraterritorial sovereignty over the al Haram al-Sharif under the administration of the Al-Quds Awqaf. The present status quo regarding the right of access and prayer for all, will be secured." The Church of the Holy Sepulchre would be managed by the Palestinians.

Article VII deals with refugees. All Palestinian refugees would be able to return to the State of Palestine. The right of return to points within Israeli territory would be limited, because its implementation would be seen as "impracticable," while "their right to compensation and rehabilitation for moral and material losses" would be recognized. An "International Commission for Palestinian Refugees" would be created which would provide for material compensation, rehabilitation, and resettlement of all refugees.

The question of water is discussed in "Article IX: Water Resources." The first four sections of this article deal with the recognition of the importance of water to both sides. While section one declares, "The parties agree that they possess the same natural water resources essential for each nation's livelihood and survival," section four proposes, "The parties further agree to the following: a) the development of existing and new water resources to increase availability and minimize wastage; b) the prevention of contamination of water resources; c) the transfer of information and joint research and the review of potential for water enhancement." Section five calls for the preparation "as soon as possible, but not later than May 5, 1999, of an agreed-upon coordinated separate and joint water management plan for the joint aquifers that will guarantee optimal use and development of water resources for the benefit of the Israeli and Palestinian people." Section six calls for the "parties to agree to seek to extend their joint cooperation to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in particular with regard to the waters of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea and to seek to promote wider regional understanding on the exploitation and management of water re-

sources in the Middle East."

Although this document could be seen as the groundwork for a settlement, it would require the political backing of the Presidency of the United States, which has not been forthcoming. Worse, much of that authority has been surrendered to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and the State Department.

For example, the issue of Jerusalem: This is not an issue concerning the city's real estate that Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak can decide between themselves. The city's holy places are revered by three religions and cultures which represent large parts of the population of this planet. This concern is best addressed, as the Vatican has proposed, in the context of a special status, given international guarantees (see *EIR*, Aug. 4, 2000, p. 38).

More "practical" are the questions of refugees and water. The former has to take into account the political rights of refugees who reside outside the territory of Israel and Palestine, which includes Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. The latter two continue to be technically at war with Israel. These refugees number as many as 2-4 million persons. Unless massive resources are extended to the new Palestinian state, that state would become little better than a sovereign refugee camp under concentration camp-type conditions.

While the question of water holds the key to establishing political-economic cooperation throughout the region, it requires a commitment of resources which has yet to be even discussed. This is despite the fact that detailed proposals initiated by Lyndon H. LaRouche and other circles have been presented to all parties concerned.

While a well-informed Israeli source close to the Israel peace team expressed hope that the release of this proposed framework agreement drafted by Yossi Beilin and Abu Mazen could help the negotiating process, he cautioned that if an agreement is not reached by the end of September, then the situation will seriously deteriorate.

According to the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, the document was most likely released by the Clinton Administration itself. Commenting on the document, *Ha'aretz* correspondent Akiva Eldar wrote on Sept. 21:

"Looking back on the final stages of the Beilin-Abu Mazen initiative raises goosebumps: It is highly likely that the bullets fired by Yigal Amir five years ago buried a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians." Eldar reveals that that just days prior to Rabin's murder, Arafat saw the document as a basis for negotiations with the government of Israel.

Eldar then quotes from Beilin's recent book *Touching Peace*, where he states that the document had taken on "what had been postponed in Oslo. . . . Issues which we could not imagine reaching understandings over, were worked out in principle here. . . . We had in our hands a document with a complete solution, or almost complete, for the 28-year-old, or perhaps 100-year-old, conflict."



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat told President Clinton, concerning the issue of Palestinian sovereignty in East Jerusalem, "Do you want to attend my funeral? I will not relinquish Jerusalem and the holy places."

Eldar suggests that the document was written with specific formulations which they believed would have won Rabin's approval.

In his book, Beilin also writes that he had been in New York on Nov. 4, 1995, the day Rabin was killed. On his return, he immediately met with Shimon Peres, who had just stepped into the assassinated Prime Minister's post. Beilin wrote that Peres "didn't warmly embrace the plan."

According to Eldar, the document was seen by both Clinton and National Security Adviser Sandy Berger as the basis for talks. Contrary to the impression being given out by the State Department and the Israeli government, it is not Arafat who is intransigent. The problem lies with the Israeli side, on the one hand, and an absence of the type of economic and political initiative by the United States that would make an agreement workable, on the other. One well-informed source suggested that the document was released to put pressure on the Israeli side.

According to *Ha'aretz*, Arafat was offered less than the Beilin-Mazen document offered. The 1995 document envisioned only 4.5% of the West Bank being annexed by Israel, with an exchange of land elsewhere. But at Camp David, Arafat was asked to accept having over 10% of the West Bank annexed, which would create large Israeli settlement blocks, where 100,000 Palestinians live as well. The long debate on

Jerusalem overshadowed the fact that Arafat was being offered far less than what would have been possible if Rabin had not been assassinated.

The *Ha'aretz* article stated clearly the corner Arafat has been forced into: "From the Palestinians' perspective, their confirmation of the existence of the Beilin-Abu Mazen understandings reveals Arafat's concessions at a time when Barak is not budging from his positions on the main question—the borders of Palestine. He [Barak] did not even give up the enclave of Kiryat Arba, the extreme right-wing stronghold in the heart of the new state. Until now, Barak has also not been heard to say that he is willing to give the Palestinians authority in the Old City of Jerusalem. In contrast, he is repeatedly saying that he has no 'partner.' . . . And after all that, they expect Abu Mazen to stand behind his document."

Time Is Running Out

The coalition government of Prime Minister Barak, which lost its parliamentary majority shortly after the Camp David talks, remains intact at the moment only because the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) is in recess. The latter's return at the end of October will be a moment of truth for Barak. He will have three options. The first would be to form a new coalition that could muster a majority in the Knesset. So far, the most optimistic arithmetic will possibly give him 60 of the 120 seats in the Knesset. If that fails, he would have to either call new elections or form a national unity government with the right-wing Likud. If there is no peace agreement which Barak could present to the electorate, new elections could very well lead to a defeat for Barak. If he forms a national unity government, it would mean an end to the peace process.

The prospect of new elections has led to a highly dangerous political atmosphere in Israel. Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu (Likud), whose two-year premiership not only froze the peace process but almost led to more than one major Middle East conflict, is back on the scene. Although "Bibi" has been plagued with a corruption investigation for the past year, it is now being rumored that the case against him will be closed without prosecution, opening the way for his political comeback. Netanyahu has already been sounding out the leadership of his own Likud party as well as the right-wing religious parties.

In a new development, Israeli Chief of Staff Gen. Shaul Mofaz, a well-known hawk, created a scandal recently by openly criticizing Prime Minister Barak for the appointment of Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan as head of the National Security Council, and for cuts in the defense budget. The unprecedented outburst by Mofaz was broadly seen as his own attempt to establish a political name for himself, in preparation for stepping onto the political stage to become the new leader of the right wing.

A dramatic shift to the political right in Israel at a time when the next U.S. President could be George W. Bush or Al Gore, can only be seen with alarm.