

A New Sykes-Picot Tragedy Or Mideast Peace?

by Dean Andromidas

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak was asked by the *Washington Post*'s Lally Weymouth, in an interview published Jan. 26, "Do you think that the Syrian track should be pursued?" He replied, "I think that we have shown . . . a respect for Syria, its interests and its leaders. We expect from them to do the same regarding Israel. If this basic kind of element will be there, I think a Syrian track is . . . potentially positive." Weymouth went on: "I thought the U.S. has opposed Israel negotiating with Syria." Barak replied, "I think they realized in recent years that we understand the Syrian issue better."

Lyndon LaRouche has insisted, since last Autumn, that a negotiated Israeli-Syrian peace is attainable in the near term, and is indispensable to unlock the potential for Israeli-Palestinian peace, and change the dynamic of the region from war to peace. Yet, since the November 2007 Annapolis conference, there has been no progress on the Israeli-Syrian peace front, because the Bush Administration refuses to back such an initiative, a refusal that plays directly into the hands of British gamemasters who are orchestrating global mayhem in the midst of international financial collapse. In the last weeks, the stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks has led to an escalation of violence, while in Lebanon, the renewed violence has rekindled fears of civil war, like that which ravaged Lebanon in the 1970s and '80s. Meanwhile, despite desire for peace on both sides, war between Israel and Syria is not being ruled out.

Pointing to a British hand, LaRouche, in a recent comment on the situation, cautioned that most players in the region *still* do not understand the British role in creating and managing the chaos. They do not understand that "the British *do not like to fight wars*," said LaRouche. "The British want

to set up two opponents to fight and destroy each other." That is what is going on in Lebanon, Iran, and elsewhere in Southwest Asia, he said.

Blair: Her Majesty's High Commissioner

LaRouche has underscored that the British run the Middle East, just as they have since the infamous Sykes-Picot agreement of World War I, in which Britain and France divided the defeated Ottoman Empire between them. Today, as then, they have a High Commissioner for the region—this time in the person of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. From his position as special envoy of the so-called Quartet of Middle East mediators (the United Nations, European Union, the United States, and Russia), Blair is in a hands-on position to influence war and peace in the region.

The crucial role he played in initiating the disastrous Iraq War makes Blair a dubious "peace" negotiator. As envoy to the Quartet, he is under no formal oversight, as he would be as a United Nations envoy. Nonetheless, he has an enormous expense account, paid out of the millions of dollars in economic aid which keeps the Palestinian National Authority and its impoverished population on life support. While Palestinians are suffering the ravages of occupation, including unemployment, malnutrition, and the daily fear of death, the "Quartet Blair Mission," as it is described in the lease, has rented no fewer than ten rooms in the American Colony Hotel, the only five-star hotel in East Jerusalem, at the annual cost of \$1,334,082. This is in addition to Blair's rented townhouse office in a swank section of London.

Questions are being asked: Who *does* Blair work for? The Quartet, which has been dysfunctional since its formation? Or the two major financial institutions which have just hired him



UN/Evan Schneider

Tony Blair (left), given his leading role in starting the Iraq War, is a peculiar choice as "Israel-Palestine peace envoy" for the so-called Quartet. Here, he is meeting with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon at the UN on Sept. 23, 2007.

as a consultant, JPMorgan Chase and Zürich Financial Services, the Swiss insurance corporation from which he reportedly receives £500,000 per year?

By his actions, or lack thereof, he is serving the same British gamemasters who provoked the Iraq War. As economic aid czar for the Palestinians, Blair has accomplished nothing, at a time when all sane observers agree that improving the everyday living conditions of Palestinians is a key factor in creating the preconditions for peace.

The only way the process can go forward politically is to secure a rapprochement between Fatah and Hamas, and *dropping the British policy of fostering civil war* between the two Palestinian factions. The civil war scenario has been the policy implemented by U.S. Deputy National Security Advisor Elliott Abrams, since Hamas won the election in January 2006.

According to a Jan. 23 *Times* of London report, Abed Rabbo, chief Palestinian negotiator, gave Blair a "5% chance" of success, because Blair refuses to use what is seen as his enormous prestige to pressure Israel. One Palestinian businessman told the *Times* that Blair has done nothing to press Israel to lift the roadblocks in the Palestinian territories, or to stop Israel denying the Palestinians access to Israel's sea and air ports. Instead, Blair has several pet projects for which he is trying to raise billions, including industrial parks which would do nothing for the Palestinians.

"He is talking about industrial parks, and none of these are

going to work from our own past experiences, because that industrial park is going to be inside Palestinian territory and goods need to move in and out," said businessman Abdull Malik al-Jaber. "It looks good in front of the international media to say that we have raised \$7 billion in Paris. The question is, how many jobs is it going to create each month in Palestine? His mandate is to help the Palestinian economy, and there is no way on earth you can help the Palestinians' economy without removing the obstacles."

A Modern Warsaw Ghetto

Blair has done nothing to pressure the Israelis to lift the siege they have imposed on the 21st Century's Warsaw Ghetto, also known as the Gaza Strip. Nor has he tried to convince the Israelis to allow cement to enter, for the completion of a desperately needed sewage treatment plant. Failure to complete the plant within the next three months will have disastrous consequences for Gaza's already meager and polluted water supply. In fact, neither Blair nor any of his team have stepped foot in Gaza since Blair took his position.

Blair's failure directly contributed to the breakout of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, who crashed down the wall separating the Gaza Strip from Egypt, at the end of January. Some 700,000 Palestinians crossed over into Egypt in search of food, fuel, and other supplies that they have been unable to purchase because of the Israeli siege. The siege has almost collapsed the United Nations Works and Relief Agency's food distribution operation, which supplies food to almost half of Gaza's 1.5 million people. The Warsaw Ghetto-type conditions have spread outrage in the Arab population throughout the region, especially in Egypt, where the Muslim Brotherhood has strong ties to Hamas. The latter had conducted a mobilization in support of the suffering Palestinians in Egypt itself, which forced the Egyptian authorities to allow the breaking down of the wall.

Any chance for a peace agreement requires a rapprochement between Fatah and Hamas, but this remains deadlocked. As LaRouche said last November, and reiterated on Jan. 30, the road to such an agreement is best negotiated through Damascus, where the greatest possibility for a settlement exists. Since almost every detail of an Israel-Syria agreement is widely known, and has largely been worked out, LaRouche said that an Israeli-Syrian accord would create the context for progress on the overall peace front. "You need to take a step," said LaRouche, "and this is the best chance."

Growing Tensions in Lebanon

Almost the same day that Ehud Barak told the *Washington Post* that Israel was ready for peace talks, the worst incident of violence in Lebanon since the end of the civil war left eight civilians dead and 29 wounded on Jan. 26. The massacre took place in south Beirut, a political base for the Hezbollah and Amal opposition parties. Riots began when a member of the Shi'ite Amal movement was shot dead, during a demonstration protesting inflation in energy prices and the cut-off of electricity. Police reports indicated that several of those killed were victims of snipers posted atop surrounding buildings. This violence came only two days after the assassination by car-bomb of a senior Lebanese police intelligence officer.

A well-informed Beirut-based intelligence source said that the killing of the eight demonstrators appeared to have been an attempt to implicate the Lebanese Army in firing on Shi'ite protesters. Given the sectarian nature of the Lebanese political system—divided among the Shi'ite community, mostly represented by Hezbollah and Amal, and the Christian and Sunni Muslim communities—any undermining of the neutrality of the Lebanese Army, which represents all sectors, could be a prelude to civil war. Hezbollah has demanded an investigation to see whether the Army was responsible for the shootings, and if not, who was. The source reported that Hezbollah does not believe the Army was to blame. Its leader, Gen. Michel Sleiman, had been endorsed as a unity Presidential candidate by both government and opposition circles, because of his reputation for fairness.

This provocation comes while there is a stalemate in the government crisis in Lebanon, where both the ruling coalition and the opposition must elect a new President and agree on a new power-sharing arrangement. In early December 2007, the Lebanese factions were very close to agreeing on the election of Sleiman, reported Lebanese sources, but that deal is on the verge of falling apart, threatening to leave a dangerous vacuum. The source mentioned above, reports that the failure to elect Sleiman is directly linked to the visit of White House envoys David Welsh from the State Department, and Cheneyman Elliott Abrams. These two reportedly told the government coalition of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and the March

14 movement, to stall the vote on forming a government for several months—at which time events would be “more favorable” to them.

On Jan. 15, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of Hezbollah, delivered a speech in which he referenced the intervention by the U.S. officials, and questioned whether they were referring to an attack on Iran or Syria, or were scheming to get Israel to attack Hezbollah in south Lebanon. He warned that after Israel's failed war against Lebanon in July 2006, its leaders would have to think “a thousand times” before an attack, which this time would surely include an attack on Syria.

Nightmare Scenarios

Political crises in Lebanon, Palestinian-Israeli violence, and tensions along the Egyptian-Israeli border have served historically as tinder for Mideast conflagrations. The release in Israel, the week of Jan. 21, of the long-awaited report of the Winograd Commission, which investigated the Israeli government and military performance in the Lebanon War, revealed just how disastrous that war was.

“Israel embarked on a prolonged war that it initiated, which ended without a clear Israeli victory from a military standpoint,” retired Justice Eliyahu Winograd, chairman of the commission, told a press conference. “A quasi-military organization withstood the strongest army in the Middle East for weeks. Hezbollah rocket fire on the Israeli homefront continued throughout the war, and the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] failed to provide an effective defense. Daily life was disrupted, residents left their homes and entered bomb shelters. These results had far-reaching consequences for us and our enemies.” The panel found “severe failures and faults in the decision-making process, both in the political echelon and the military echelon.”

Tom Segev of the Israeli daily *Ha'aertz*, a historian and commentator, commented on the commission report that, “the main question that should have been the focus of discussion was whether this war was essential. Or if it was not essential, then it was superfluous. There are no other types of war.”

As for the military failings, Segev wrote that the commission failed to answer or even consider, “To what extent have 40 years of occupation affected the ability of the Israeli Defense Forces to protect the country? Or, in other words, does the IDF train its soldiers to fight, or does it mainly teach them to oppress the Palestinian population?”

All experts agree that the next Israeli-Lebanese war would see Israel attacking Syria, whose conventional missile arsenal can strike anywhere in Israel.

These nightmare scenarios would all disappear if a Syrian-Israeli peace process were initiated. There is a widespread consensus that a Syrian-Israeli peace, brokered by the good offices of the United States Presidency, could be negotiated within weeks.

“Who Is Sparking A Religious War in the Mideast?”

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