

Mideast: peace on the horizon?

by the Editorial Board of
Middle East Insider

The decision of the Bush transition team and the outgoing Reagan administration to begin exploratory talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization, producing what one Israeli paper characterized as “an earthquake” in Israel, has

Middle East Insider seen as authoritative

Now entering its fourth year of publication, *EIR*'s weekly confidential newsletter *Middle East Insider*—with separate French and English editions—is fully recognized as an authoritative source of confidential information. Throughout 1988, *MEI* has been quoted countless times in the media of the Middle East, both in the Arab world and in Israel. Some weekly publications are renowned for reprinting *MEI* stories—without attribution.

Of *MEI*'s major scoops in 1988, here are a few:

- On April 11, *MEI* was the first publication to detail the Soviets' gameplan for the partition of Afghanistan, and ongoing work to build up Mazar e Sharif as an alternative capital to Kabul.

- On May 9, *MEI* was the first to expose the workings of “Tiny” Rowland's Lonrho in Southern Africa, and its connections to the political murder of RENAMO leaders.

More spectacular:

- Our June 27 special investigation into the assassination attempt against Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal was cited as having influenced the prime minister, and made the front page of some Turkish newspapers.

- Likewise, *MEI*'s July 11 warning of a terror wave in Greece, published 48 hours prior to the “City of Poros” massacre, created a scandal throughout the Greek news media. Three weeks later, the Greek government had to acknowledge *MEI*'s report of a Libyan connection to the massacre.

changed the very nature of the 40-year-old conflict in the Middle East. Although it is still too early to tell whether the long search for a durable peace settlement is about to succeed, a number of crucial facts point in this direction.

First and foremost, an undeniable change has occurred within the PLO over the past years, leading to the declarations made by PLO chairman Yasser Arafat in Geneva on Dec. 15 which fulfilled the longstanding conditions laid down by the United States for initiating dialogue with the PLO. In his speech to the U.N. General Assembly meeting extraordinarily in Geneva and in his subsequent English-language press conference, Arafat recognized the “right of all states, including the Palestinian and Israeli States” to exist within secure borders, endorsed resolutions 242 and 338 of the United Nations and formally renounced all forms of terrorism. In and of themselves these statements reflected the fact that the realists and the long-time advocates of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations within the PLO executive and the Palestine National Council, once a small minority within the PLO, now dominate the Palestinian camp. The courageous exploratory work during the 1970s of Palestinian peace camp activists such as Dr. Issam Sartawi or Said Hammani, who paid with their lives, assassinated by extremists within Arab camp for engaging in dialogue with Israelis, paved the way for this change in Palestinian thinking. The dramatic U.S. recognition of that change was a necessary step, a *sine qua non*, in stabilizing this policy in the PLO. Arafat's statements would not have been made had he not had firm commitments from Washington.

Also, longstanding American intelligence concerns about Soviet influence within the PLO were allayed by estimations of the inevitable impact that the U.S. move would have in Palestinian ranks as well as by consultations between Moscow and Washington on the Mideast, before and during Gorbachov's Dec. 7, 1988 trip to New York. In effect the United States committed itself to dealing with the PLO on condition that the U.S.S.R. reciprocate vis-à-vis Israel. Though the U.S. and U.S.S.R. remain in competition in the Mideast and do not see eye to eye on the sequence of steps leading to negotiations, it is expected that the Soviets will reopen diplomatic relations with Israel in 1989. This has been another longstanding precondition demanded by the United States for Soviet participation in Middle East peace talks.

Secondly, Washington and all major European capitals were convinced that the total political impasse in Israeli politics resulting from the Nov. 6 elections made a major U.S. political initiative necessary. The negotiations led by caretaker Prime Minister Shamir with fundamentalist religious parties only reenforced the view in Washington, and notably of the Bush transition team, that such an initiative was required.

By early 1988, leading U.S., Israeli, and European observers had become convinced that the deteriorating political, economic, and ideological situation in many Mideastern

LaRouche on dialogue with PLO

The following statement was released on Dec. 16 by 1988 Democratic presidential pre-candidate Lyndon Hermyle LaRouche, Jr.:

I am obliged, and also greatly pleased to have this occasion to congratulate the U.S. government and PLO Chairman Arafat on the actions which have led into the official discussions between the two parties.

This is a development for which I have hoped, and sought to bring about since my 1975 meetings with both leading Arabs and Israelis on this subject. All who have worked to bring this present development about, should consider themselves recipients of my personal gratitude on that account.

None of us familiar with the complexities of Israeli and Arab politics would dare to suggest that the long-sought goal of Middle East peace is assuredly in sight. However, until the dialogue between the U.S.A. and the

PLO began, the injustices and bloodshed in the Middle East would continue indefinitely.

Although I will respect any argument Israel submits to me respecting the security of Israel within its recognized borders, there is no rational basis for Israeli objections to U.S. official dialogue with representatives of the PLO.

There is never a need for peace negotiations except between forces which have been engaged in killing one another; the mere fact that PLO members have killed Israelis, and that Israelis have been killing and oppressing Palestinian Arabs, is not a rational argument against a peace process, but is rather the best possible argument for one to begin.

The fact that Israel's government lacks presently the political will and capacity to enter into such discussions, is no grounds for objecting to the U.S. entry into the talks. It has probably been the case all along, that just peace between Israel and the PLO would never occur without first steps in that direction by the nation which has spent the most to subsidize Israel's economy and existence, the United States.

We are tired of this bloodshed in the Middle East. Since the PLO has met all the preconditions for beginning the peace process, our government has rightly accepted its moral responsibility for taking the next logical step.

countries was leading toward a new, full-scale Mideast war. On April 11, 1988, the *Middle East Insider* reported "The changing nature of military forces in the Mideast is based on the generalization of CW warfare or CW [chemical warfare] capabilities and the availability of appropriate vectors. . . . Syria which remains Moscow's most important asset in the Arab world may be arming its Scud B missiles with CW warheads. The Soviet manned SS21 batteries in Syria are also CW capable and highly precise. . . . Missile launched CW represents a military threat greater to Israel than all of the Arab world's land armies. In the worst case scenario, the use by Syria of CW capabilities would unleash [Israeli use of] nuclear weapons in the Mideast."

Though it is too early to judge the short-term impact of the U.S. decision to dialogue with the PLO in Israel, in the long run it will reinforce the peace camp. According to opinion polls published in Israel prior to the Nov. 6 election, 50% of Israelis were willing to negotiate with the PLO if it were to recognize the state of Israel. This view is shared in the main by the leadership of the professional military establishment and is reflected in the growth of the Israeli Peace and Security Council, led by retired military and intelligence officials who advocate dialogue. Discreet back-channel talks between the PLO and Israeli leaders, including leading younger members of the Likud, reflect this. Israel's political

class in general is in shambles, however, and does not reflect this appropriately. In the view of Gen. Ezer Weizmann, a leading spokesman of the peace camp, the U.S. move will force Israel, sooner or later, to enter into talks.

The fragility of the situation is underscored by the irreducible opposition to peace by extremists in both camps. On the Israeli side, Gen. Zvi Gandhi's Molodet Party which advocates the wholesale transfer of Palestinians from the West Bank to Jordan, Gen. Ariel Sharon, and others, will inevitably seek to derail any peace talks. Syrian-controlled terrorist assets such as the PFLP-General Command of Ahmed Jibril will seek the same on their side.

The third major effect of the change has been to strengthen the moderates in the Arab world, notably Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia. Syria, two years ago a major political regional power and a forced interlocutor in any peace initiative, has been weakened by the combined effects of a deep and unresolved economic crisis, growing resistance in Lebanon, and the end of the Iran-Iraq war. Though Syria remains a major regional military power, it no longer has the political weight it used to. Prospects for a real peace now depend on whether a combination of forces appears in Israel to negotiate directly with the Palestinians and the Arab moderates. The failure to do so would stimulate the imposition of a solution from "above" by both superpowers.