

Land scammers feast on Middle East

by Jeffrey Steinberg

While most of the world's attention riveted on the mounting chaos inside the borders of the Russian empire, the situation in the eastern Mediterranean is moving rapidly from bad to worse, with the threat of war becoming more real with each passing day.

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin was in Washington on Jan. 18 to confer with senior Bush administration officials on prospects of reviving the so-called Baker Plan for holding elections among Arabs living in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Gaza Strip, and the eastern part of Jerusalem. Last month, a preliminary series of meetings took place between Baker, State Department Middle East negotiator Dennis Ross, and Israeli minister Eliyahu Rubinstein. At the end of those talks, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir issued a series of super-hardline statements, in effect rejecting the Bush administration's efforts to compromise its way through some kind of electoral process acceptable to the Israeli and Egyptian governments. Among the "concessions" reportedly floated by Ross and Baker was a U.S. announcement of its intention to move its embassy to the western part of Jerusalem, a move that would represent a major sop to the fanatic elements in the Likud coalition, typified by Ariel Sharon.

A senior Palestine Liberation Organization official was reportedly in Washington, D.C. throughout those secret consultations. After Shamir rejected the deal offered up to Minister Rubinstein, the PLO official was also summoned home. The very next day, PLO chairman Yasser Arafat made a surprise visit to Libya, where he gave a press conference with Muammar Qaddafi and reverted to his own hardball rhetoric, unheard in recent months.

This increasing polarization of the Israeli-Palestinian situation is reflective of other, more local events that are impelling the region in the direction of a bloody religious confrontation.

According to Egyptian sources, Arafat's desperation at the snail's pace of negotiations for elections is aggravated by the rapid growth of fundamentalism among the Arabs in the Israeli-occupied lands. Hamas, the fundamentalist organization that is the major rival to the PLO over leadership of the *Intifada* (the Palestinian uprising), is by some accounts now in control of the majority of Palestinian activists in the occupied territories. Despite secret links to both Israeli and Jordanian intelligence services, Hamas represents a genuine threat of war against Israel unless a meaningful solution—i.e., one grounded in economic development—is reached soon.

Russian Jews as cannon-fodder

Israel is meanwhile being driven on a similar confrontational course by a different set of events with their own logic. Prime Minister Shamir has made frequent references to the anticipated influx of over 1 million Russian Jewish emigrés over the next two years. He has made no bones about the fact that he wants these settlers to occupy the West Bank and Gaza. Such a move is viewed by many as being synonymous with the mass expulsion of the nearly 1.5 million Arabs now living in those areas. The cry, "Jordan is Palestine" is once again being heard everywhere in Israel.

Other reports from the region indicate that a new round of land grabs in the occupied territories and in the eastern part of Jerusalem are once again under way, with big bucks flowing from private Jewish interests in the United States, Canada, and Europe for that purpose. These lands would eventually be sold back to the Israeli government at a handsome profit for the land-grabbers—once the Arabs are expelled and the flood of Russian Jews steered to Gaza and the West Bank. As *EIR* has reported since 1983, the plans to make fabulous profits on West Bank real estate at the cost of tremendous loss of life, lead back to Henry Kissinger and his British business partners.

All of the above ingredients make for a most volatile mixture, almost sure to trigger a war at some point in the not too distant future unless thoughtful solutions are put into place.

When Presidents Bush and Gorbachov met at Malta Dec. 2-3, they reportedly discussed cooperation in reviving the stalled Baker Plan and the land-for-peace solution to the Israel-Palestine crisis. Since then, Moscow has reportedly pressed Syria to move back into the moderate Arab fold and to pressure Syrian-controlled Palestinian factions to give tacit support to Arafat. In return, the United States seems committed to giving Moscow equal billing at an international conference that would ratify the peace package worked out in the still-pending U.S.-Israel-Egypt foreign ministers' meeting.

But an alternative option is also reportedly being studied among the superpowers: If the "peace" talks break down, the "Jordan is Palestine" fallback, literally over the dead body of Jordan's King Hussein, is not to be ruled out. Palestinians linked to George Habash and other Syrian-backed radical factions staged bloody riots in Amman, Jordan several weeks ago, invoking images of the Black September slaughters in 1970.

Between Hamas, the Sharon-linked land-scam crowd in Israel, and in the North American and European Jewish communities, and the prospects for a revival of Syrian-backed Palestinian violence within the Eastern Mediterranean, the war danger emanating from the Middle East is far too great to be ignored. In January 1989, a prominent British intelligence hand predicted that, after a protracted period of Western appeasement of the Russians, events would take a rapid turn back toward confrontation.