

Italy's First Republic, by Luca Mantovani, the spokesman for Berlusconi's Party, and U.S. diplomat Stanton Burnett. The book was only published in English, outside Italy, because the authors feared trouble from the "avenging judges." Their fears were well-founded, as Stefano Zurlo, a journalist who interviewed the American author of the book, was immediately sued for "defamation" by two of the Pool's magistrates, Gherardo Colombo and Francesco Greco. *EIR* will soon publish a review of the book, which, although very accurate in its description of the Clean Hands phenomenon, gives only very limited attention to the international dimension.

Michael Ledeen enters the fray

The most eerie intervention on the issue of Clean Hands, however, was an article in the *Wall Street Journal, Europe* by Michael Ledeen, an adviser to the U.S. National Security Council during the Reagan administration. Ledeen, known for his book promoting the concept of "Universal Fascism," and for his role as an intermediary with the Iranian government in the Iran-Contra affair, has been involved in many scandals, including that of Italy's Propaganda-2 lodge, the kidnapping and murder of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro, and the plot concerning Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

Ledeen's article, titled "Italy's Incomplete Purge," is a clear attempt to divert the explosive debate into petty localism, and to freeze the ferment provoked by the anti-Pool revolt. Ledeen argues that the manifestation of popular support for Berlusconi is due to the fact that the "purge" was not complete. The "left" has been spared, he complains. Thus, everything is reduced to a local "left vs. right" scenario. The danger that the latent revolt against the "Clean Hands International" would spill out of Italy, maybe even targetting the sinister Transparency International, is to be avoided, in Ledeen's view.

The elements for a real fight against this international conspiracy are all there. For example, certain high-level circles are debating the fact that Transparency International's "bible," the so-called *Source Book*, dedicates particular attention to the office of the independent counsel in the U.S. legal system. Clearly, what makes that office so attractive to TI, is that it constitute a form of very effective "legal" destabilization, through which—for the first time—the President and the highest offices of the U.S. government can be assaulted under a judicial cover.

Ledeen, while painting the Italian events as the result of a little domestic squabble, has very different ideas on the destabilization of the United States. In the July 20 issue of William Buckley's *National Review*, he wrote: "The punishment of the Clintons and their friends is desperately needed, because if we fail to root out corruption, our freedom is placed at risk. . . . The only way to demonstrate this is to bring them down and subject them to public humiliation. . . . Impeachment is the most dramatic and effective way to punish and humiliate Bill Clinton and put us back on the road to virtue."

Egypt, France initiate Mideast peace effort

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The "peace process" in the Middle East has long since not had anything to do with peace. Rather, as Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu has done everything in his power not only to sabotage further progress in Israeli-Palestinian talks, but to tear up the agreements signed by his predecessors at Oslo in 1993. Particularly in the wake of provocations mounted by Netanyahu's government—confiscating Palestinian lands and houses, expanding existing Jewish settlements and starting new ones, declaring the extension of the city limits of Jerusalem, etc., all in direct violation of the peace agreements—parties in the Arab world have recognized the imminent danger that the current situation could degenerate very rapidly into open war.

It has become obvious to all, that either the United States President exert the power he retains, to force through compliance with the agreements, including the "American initiative" for an Israeli partial withdrawal from 13.1% of the occupied territories on the West Bank, or war will result. The reluctance on the part of Washington to use the instruments of pressure it has, among them, withholding \$3 billion in aid to Israel, has thus become an obstacle to peace. Due to the unwillingness of the White House, to buck the lobbies inside the United States behind Netanyahu (especially the "Christian evangelical" fanatics of the Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell stripe, but also certain Hollywood-linked financial groups), the Israeli Prime Minister has maintained his position inside Israel, even despite significant domestic opposition.

Thus, the question, whether the peace process can be restarted, or, less euphemistically, whether war can be averted in the short term, is a question of whether President Clinton will act.

Due to what are perceived as insuperable internal constraints, the White House has engaged the assistance of America's leading ally in the Arab world, Egypt. Having signed a peace treaty with Israel at Camp David in 1978, Egypt is in a position to talk tough with the Israelis. Its relations with the Palestinian Authority and PA leader Yasser Arafat are excellent, and it has been increasingly upgrading and improving its contacts with those officially opposed to the current form of the peace process, such as Iran and Syria.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has taken the lead in denouncing Netanyahu, as the cause for the crisis. During a visit to Paris in May, in an interview with French TV Channel 5, he said that the Israeli government's policy is against peace.

“We have now reached almost a dead end in this danger,” he stated, “and what I fear most is that matters will be more complicated if the situation drags on like this. This will lead to grave consequences.”

Mubarak’s international conference

While in Paris, Mubarak held extensive talks with French President Jacques Chirac and others, in an effort to find a way to break the deadlock in the region. Mubarak proposed that an international conference be convened, to organize massive pressure on Israel. The idea, which had originally been suggested by Arafat, was for an Arab summit with additional participation, or, a revival of the Madrid conference launched in 1991.

Following their meetings, Mubarak and Chirac issued a call in which they said: “We reiterate our commitment to the peace process begun in Madrid,” on the basis of “honest implementation for the United Nations Security Council Resolutions No. 242, 338, 425, in addition to the principles that were agreed upon in Madrid, on top of which comes the land-for-peace principle.” In the text, they said, “This . . . should lead the Palestinians to establish their independent state and to have the right to self-determination. Moreover, we underscore the necessity of sincere and accurate implementation of the concluded agreements within the framework of Oslo.” Furthermore, they called for “refraining from taking unilateral measures that contradict with the agreements and principles, especially that related to settlement activities.” Emphasizing the “pressing need to resume negotiations on both the Syrian and Lebanese tracks,” they turned to the crucial aspect, which is the role of the United States: “We stress the responsibility shouldered by all international powers, particularly the United States, the European Union [EU], and the Russian Federation. Therefore, we call on these powers to painstakingly work to overcome obstacles hindering the resumption of the peace process at all tracks.” There followed the call for the conference per se, which “would maintain and confirm all existing principles and agreements.”

On July 29, the French press announced that the foreign ministers had hammered out a plan for the Franco-Egyptian initiative, and that a conference could be convened within a month. The conference would see the participation of “countries committed to save the peace in the Middle East,” including the United States, Russia, the EU, and several Arab states. Those directly involved in the negotiations, Syria, the Palestinian Authority, Israel, and Lebanon, would not attend the first round. It was specified that the initiative was being conducted “in a concerted fashion” with the United States, and was not to be seen as “competition” with the U.S. initiative, which both countries support.

Nonetheless, the initiative was immediately characterized as an independent step, taken “by Europe against the U.S.,” particularly in light of the fact that Chirac had been working overtime to reassert French presence in Lebanon, through his

recent visit there, and through his hosting the visit in Paris of Syrian President Hafez al Assad, in July. If there is good reason to suspect that the French position harbors ulterior motives, i.e., the desire to carve out a sphere of influence in the region, should the American initiative fail utterly, yet, there is no doubt that the intention of the Egyptian government is honest and well-informed.

The London *Financial Times*’s version was that Egypt and France “want the Americans to define more openly their own proposals and then pursue them more vigorously, even if this means a head-on confrontation with the Israeli government—which the Clinton administration has sought to avoid.” It is a “safety net to prevent the region being destabilized by the Israeli government’s continued refusal to hand over West Bank territory to the Palestinians as agreed in the Oslo Accord.”

The strategic dialogue with the United States

What has not been highlighted in the press accounts of the initiative, is the fact that Egypt and the United States have very significantly upgraded their relations, in the form of what the two governments have defined quite formally as a “strategic dialogue.” This leaves no doubt, that, at least as far as the Egyptian approach is concerned, the new conference is *not* aimed against Clinton.

It was on the occasion of the ten-day visit of Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa to Washington, in mid-July, that the two sides hammered out a strategic dialogue. In the “Egyptian-U.S. Joint Statement,” it is stated, “The strategic partnership shared by the Arab Republic of Egypt and the United States of America reflects our common and strong commitment to peace and to regional stability. Sharing a strategic outlook on issues affecting the Middle East and beyond, we have cooperated on numerous undertakings which have benefitted our two countries and advanced the cause of comprehensive and just peace, regional stability, and economic development and progress.” Primary among their concerns is the regional crisis: “Both countries have played leading roles in the Middle East in pursuit of a comprehensive and just peace, regional stability and welfare, and security for all. Given their steadfast commitment to these objectives and *to meet new challenges*, the United States and Egypt have *found it incumbent on them to engage more closely through the mechanism of the Strategic Dialogue, to further promote these shared objectives in the Middle East and to exchange assessments on how best to realize them*” (emphases added).

The Strategic Dialogue is presented: “In order to ensure similarly close coordination on political and diplomatic matters and *to draw public attention to this aspect of our strong bilateral relationship*, the governments of Egypt and the United States have agreed to establish a ‘Strategic Dialogue’ between the Department of State and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs” (emphasis added). Concretely, the dialogue will be

carried out through regular meetings at that level, alternating between Washington and Cairo for the venue. The text adds that mechanisms will be established to enhance cooperation in the military, economic, and commercial areas.

In light of these facts, the statements made by Moussa to various gatherings in Washington, and to the press, take on a different weight. Interviewed by BBC at the end of his trip, the Egyptian Foreign Minister explained that the conference his country proposed, should examine the reasons for the failure of the peace, and stress the principles of the 1991 Madrid conference (land-for-peace, and the UN resolutions). He said that the venue for the conference could be Cairo, Paris, or Washington, "as Cairo did not seek to isolate Washington's role in the peacemaking process," according to a release. Most importantly, "Moussa warned anew that Israeli intransigence was pushing the whole region into violence and chaos, saying that: The current situation and the failure of the peace process would replace negotiations with violence and terrorism," according to the Egyptian State Information Service. Moussa said that the United States should get tougher on Netanyahu: "If an Arab country were the one that rejected the U.S. proposals, it would be a subject for denunciation and condemnation.

But Netanyahu is getting away with it without being blamed," he said. And, in answer to a question by CNN, regarding Israel's "not being impressed" by the UN statement on Jerusalem, he said, "If Israel is not impressed by the UN Security Council action, is not impressed by the United States involvement, and is not impressed by Egypt's efforts to set into motion the peace process, then the consequences will really be very bad, because this is a serious challenge to international order."

What will happen now? If, as planned, such a conference comes into being within one month, it must be seized as the golden opportunity for the U.S. administration to exert political muscle, to force the rule of law on Israel. If this means, that such pressure will have the effect of bringing the Netanyahu government to a crisis, so much the better. President Mubarak has often noted, that that possible development would be more than welcome. If, on the other hand, Netanyahu stiffens his stance, challenging this broad coalition of forces, there will be no way that Washington can continue to tolerate it. There is no excuse now, for President Clinton to hesitate to take the political action he has thus far avoided.

Franco-Egyptian plan backs U.S. peace effort

Asked in an interview with the Paris daily *Le Monde* on July 29 whether the Franco-Egyptian initiative would be considered by the United States as a way to "short-circuit" U.S. attempts to force through peace, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said, "No. They are two separate things. The Franco-Egyptian project not only does not contradict the American initiative, but supports it. It treats only one aspect [of the peace process] relative to a new Israeli redeployment and a precise point of one of the phases of the peace process, whereas the French-Egyptian idea wants to save the process, by supporting the American initiative."

Regarding Israel's rejection of an international conference, Moussa replied that Israel was not even being invited to the first conference, and "it does not have a veto right over the wishes of Egypt . . . or France." Asked if Israel's refusal to attend the second conference would torpedo the plan, he said that they would "cross that bridge when we come to it." On the participants for the first conference, he said it still had to be defined, but "at the head will be the U.S., there will also be the Russian Federation, the European states, Arabs, Asians, Latin Americans."

Le Monde asked whether Moussa considered the situation urgent. He replied, "Yes, because of the degeneration of the process. The policy of Israel is simply unacceptable and it is increasingly being denounced. Israel is committing a tactical and strategic error by thinking it can impose its solution on the Arabs." He said that Netanyahu "must understand that no Arab party can accept a peace on Israel's conditions," and added that the Arabs want peace, but on the basis of the original principles.

Moussa criticized the current "talks" between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, because they do not deal with the U.S. initiative, which Arafat has accepted. Thus, they are "a vicious circle." On the "silence" of the United States, Moussa said, "We are all awaiting the American reaction to the unacceptable behavior of a small state like Israel toward a power like the U.S.A. But no one is ready to wait to the end of time. There is a limit to everything. Sooner or later, one drop will make the vase overflow." He said that although the United States says it will not change its proposal to accept Israeli conditions, it has indicated it thought Israel might be able to "persuade the Palestinians to accept their conditions." This, he said, Arafat will not do.

In conclusion, Moussa said, "If the Israeli attitude remains the same, it will make it necessary to review the process as a whole, because this policy is leading us to a catastrophe. All those who will have accepted [this state of affairs], will be held responsible."