

# Israel sets 'contingency plans' for Mideast war

by Dean Andromidas

Amid rising tensions in the Middle East, the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently announced a \$543 million increase in the defense budget. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) is also preparing contingency plans based on the assumption of an early outbreak of war. This planning includes a reassessment of Israel's nuclear deterrent policy.

The provocative policies of the Netanyahu government could rapidly transform these so-called contingency plans into reality, rapidly escalating into an international strategic crisis. The planning also comes at a time when Netanyahu has been trying to put those sharing his radical views at the head of the various branches of the Israeli security establishment, including the Mossad, the IDF, and the Shin Bet. Although his efforts in this direction have not been fully successful, the new IDF Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, is well known to be a hawk.

Amir Oren, a military commentator for the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, recently wrote that the IDF staff is drafting contingency war plans based on the perception that the suspension of the peace talks will continue, as "the grip of the Clinton administration weakens and the U.S. loses its power to push the Netanyahu government to make progress in the peace process."

## War on three fronts

Israel's ground forces are deployed in three territorial commands: north, central, and south. War plans for each of the three fronts are being drafted.

The northern command includes the Israeli self-proclaimed security zone, which stretches almost 20 kilometers into southern Lebanon and forms a continuous swath of territory with the Golan Heights, seized from Syria in the 1967 war. In the north, war plans are based on the perception that Syria could decide to undertake a military option, as its only means to regain the Golan Heights.

This perception is based, again, on the collapse of the peace process. Although the previous governments led by the assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and by his successor, Shimon Peres, entered preliminary negotiations with the government of Syrian President Hafez Assad, Netanyahu has made no credible efforts in this direction. War or peace with Syria is intimately intertwined with the situation

in Lebanon, where Syria maintains 35,000 troops and is pre-eminent in Lebanese domestic affairs. For the last two decades, Lebanon has had the tragic misfortune to have been a surrogate battlefield between Israel and Syria. Fighting between Israel and the armed factions in southern Lebanon, including Hezbollah and Amal, could rapidly escalate into war between Israel and Syria.

In late August, the situation in the security zone, which has been tense for the last several weeks, worsened dramatically when the IDF assassinated the Amal guerrilla movement's deputy commander. In response, Amal launched a Katyusha rocket attack into northern Israel, the first such attack since 1996.

Earlier, Uzi Landau, president of the Knesset (Parliament) committee on foreign affairs, and Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani called for bombing Lebanon's electricity grid and water resources in retaliation for Hezbollah attacks on Israeli military forces. Landau also called for blowing up Syrian jeeps in response to attacks. Moreover, Ariel Sharon, the architect of the disastrous 1982 invasion of Lebanon, and now Minister for Infrastructure, approved plans for the building of 5,000 new housing units on the Golan Heights. Given the fact that hundreds of new houses in the region, built several years ago, remain unsold, Syria, predictably, saw the move as a provocation.

On the central front, the IDF is making plans for a low-intensity conflict with the 35,000 armed Palestinian paramilitary police force based in Gaza and the West Bank. Such a conflict threatens war with Jordan and Iraq, which is precisely where the resulting massive flow of Palestinian refugees would be funnelled, in what would make the so-called "Jordan is Palestine" option a reality.

Here, the situation is the most explosive. Netanyahu's refusal to accept an American proposal for a second withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories, which has been on the table for almost six months, has led to such deep frustration throughout Palestinian society that it threatens Palestinian National Authority President Yasser Arafat's political, if not physical, survival.

Recent clashes between radical settlers and Palestinians have been met by Netanyahu with further provocations. In response to the murder of Israelis living in the most radical settlements in the West Bank cities of Nablus and Hebron, Netanyahu has authorized plans for the expansion of these settlements, an expansion that all previous governments had refused to authorize.

In this context, hostilities could be triggered on almost any pretext. For example, on Aug. 27, a bomb exploded in front of Tel Aviv's main synagogue, wounding 12 people. The national police chief called it a "terrorist attack," although no one has claimed responsibility. Netanyahu took the opportunity to attack the Palestinian Authority, and repeated his demand that the PA crack down on Muslim militants as a condition of moving forward the peace process. However,

Sheikh Amed Yassin, a leader of Hamas, the main Palestinian Islamic movement, told Reuters, "We don't know who carried it out. Maybe they were Jewish extremists who want to push Jews to more extremism." And PA peace negotiator Hassan Asfour said, "It is not unusual for Netanyahu's government to blame everything on Palestinians and the Arab world to hide its failure in the peace process."

In the south, contingencies for possible war with Egypt are being planned out. This, despite the fact that Israel and Egypt have had normalized relations for almost two decades. Egypt is also a close ally of the United States, receiving the largest amount of U.S. foreign aid after Israel. Israeli war planners envision the possibility that Egypt could decide to intervene in either of the first two war scenarios, turning the conflict into a general Middle East war.

### Netanyahu's strategic miscalculation

In commenting on these plans, Oren warns of the danger of serious miscalculation on the part of the military leadership and Netanyahu's government. He points out that the "new generation of soldiers and officers" does not have battle experience, as did the generation of officers who fought the October 1973 war. Oren admits that that earlier generation lacked the wisdom to prevent the so-called Yom Kippur War, but they at least had the capability to hold the line militarily until an international political settlement could be reached. The lack of battlefield competence among the new IDF generation, Oren says, makes the "lack of wisdom" to prevent a war even more potentially catastrophic.

Oren singles out Mofaz as a man who is seriously lacking in that wisdom. Oren points out that Mofaz was the commander of the Army division in 1994 that was "responsible for the slip-ups that enabled Baruch Goldstein to carry out mass murder," killing 50 at a Hebron mosque. Even more important, Oren writes, Mofaz, who, everyone knows, owes his career to Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, is incapable of politically influencing the government to prevent war.

As a nuclear power, any miscalculation in the conventional battlefield could lead to the introduction of nuclear weapons. Up until now, Israel has maintained what it calls "strategic vagueness," refusing to confirm or deny that it has nuclear weapons. But now, there are indications that this approach is being reassessed. In a recent workshop on Israeli security held under the auspices of the Ministry of Defense, Gen. Yitzhak Ben-Yisrael, head of the Armaments Research and Development Department, said that "if Israel's defense doctrine is deterrence, you can't deter anyone except by showing him your capability." He added that Israel "is not interested in announcing what we have because information like this feeds the public's fantasy about what we have." Nonetheless, according to a report in *Ha'aretz*, he said that this policy is now being reappraised, and that, although deterrence continues to be Israel's strategy, the development of a preemptive strike capability is also important.

## Italy remoralized by McDade-Murtha victory

by Umberto Pascali

The McDade-Murtha "Citizens Protection Act," passed as an appropriations amendment by the U.S. House of Representatives on Aug. 5, is rapidly becoming a household word in Italy. From the beginning, many Italian leaders have closely watched the bipartisan fight waged by Reps. Joseph McDade (R-Pa.) and John Murtha (D-Pa.) and the LaRouche movement against the Department of Justice (DOJ) permanent bureaucracy and Kenneth Starr's assault on the U.S. Presidency. Over the last five years, Italy has been similarly hit by the "Clean Hands" operation, which has decapitated the country of its leadership. Operation Clean Hands is connected to Prince Philip's Transparency International, which includes "former" International Monetary Fund and World Bank executives, and collaborates closely with IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus and World Bank President Sir James Wolfensohn. Its mission is to use corruption scandals to shred the fabric of a target nation's institutions (see *EIR*, Aug. 7, 1998).

The overwhelming vote (345-82) to pass the McDade-Murtha provisions has begun to remoralize those Italian forces who had been smashed by the "Clean Hands" magistrates. "If the U.S. can rebel against these pseudo-legal persecutions, so could we," said one Italian observer. A leading daily, Milan's *Il Giornale*, has launched an all-out campaign, including the publication of interviews with co-sponsors Murtha and McDade (see *Documentation*).

"It is lawful," *Il Giornale* wrote, "to find in Starr's doggedness, suggestive parallels with the methods that certain magistrates in Italy have used and still are using against political leaders. . . . Starr tried constantly to violate the principle of attorney-client confidentiality. He behaved like the captain in the *Caine Mutiny* who went insane. . . . What creates alarm (and the parallel with Italy also emerges, naturally) is that a man like Kenneth Starr suffers from a common disease, that is, the increasingly frequent criminalization of political debate."

*Il Giornale* underlines the connection between the supporters of the magistrate in the "Clean Hands" team — mainly the Milan State Attorney's office led by Saverio Borrelli — and politicians who gained from the "elimination by scandal" of the previous political leadership. *Il Giornale* points especially to Deputy Prime Minister Walter Veltroni, a key leader of the PDS (the former Italian Communist Party). Veltroni has organized official and confidential meetings with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, to set up a "Third Way" Interna-