
Interview: Abdul Whab Darawshe

Iraq is important for Mideast development

Abdul Whab Darawshe, chairman of the Democratic Arab Party and member of the Israeli Knesset in Jerusalem, was interviewed by Dean Andromidas by telephone on Oct. 19.

EIR: It is reported in the press that you have sent a letter to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein asking whether an Israeli delegation could visit Iraq. Could you explain your initiative?

Darawshe: I have sent a message to President Saddam Hussein asking him to allow an Arab Jewish delegation of Israeli peace-lovers, mainly Oriental Jews and Israeli Arabs from Israel, to be allowed to visit Iraq to meet him and the Iraqi government, and to try to make there a call for the whole world to put an end to the siege of Iraq, to allow Iraq to return back to the international family, and to put an end to the suffering of the Iraqi people.

The second goal is to give Iraq a chance to integrate itself into the peace process, because we believe that without Iraq, there will be no possibility for achieving a comprehensive and just and lasting settlement of peace in the area. So it is in Israeli interests, it is in Iraqi interests, it is in Arab interests, and also the interests of the whole world to put an end to the siege of Iraq and to allow Iraq to be part of the process of peaceful solution for the Middle East.

The recent events on the border between Iraq and Kuwait has shown that there is a need to deal with the Iraqi situation in a different way, because the lack of a peaceful settlement there will result in more violence and a danger of more wars. So, it is in the interest of the whole area and peace lovers all over the world to discuss this issue in a useful way to put an end to the siege and also to integrate Iraq into the peace process. In view of the fact that there are no territorial demands that the Iraqis have from Israel, such an integration is especially appropriate.

EIR: Has there been a response from Iraq?

Darawshe: I hope that they will deal with this question in a wise and realistic way, and realize that it will serve them also, as well as the whole area. Therefore, I hope that at some time we will get a positive answer.

EIR: There have been press reports of contacts between representatives of the Iraqi and Israeli governments, even on the ministerial level. Is there any truth to these reports?

Darawshe: I hope there was something like that, I think it

would be a wise issue to make such contacts, but I do not know exact information about it.

EIR: Has there been support for your initiative from the government and Israeli political circles?

Darawshe: I did not get a response directly, but I read in the media that the Foreign Ministry in Israel is not happy about this initiative. But I have gotten a very positive response from the Iraqi Jews, from the peace camp in Israel, including members of the Knesset, Jewish members, who are ready to participate in such a delegation.

EIR: Who in particular?

Darawshe: Ran Cohan, for instance, one from the Labor Party, and one from Maretz. They are Iraqi Jews, and they are ready to participate in such a delegation. There are also professors, academics, leaders of communities, mostly Oriental Jews. They are making contact with me, they are saying that Oriental Jews can play a positive role in peacemaking in this area. So they are waiting for a chance to express their attitude toward this issue, especially Iraqi Jews. Many of them are saying they are ready to participate in this delegation. More than 200 personalities, very distinguished leaders, including leaders of the Iraqi community and leaders of Oriental Jewish community. They feel that they have been neglected by the Israeli government, that it did not integrate them into the peace settlement. They are ready now to play a role; they want to play a role.

EIR: I understand that there are distinguished members of the Israeli cabinet who are Iraqi Jews.

Darawshe: Yes. Housing and Construction Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer and Moshe Shahal, who is both minister of energy and infrastructure, and minister of police. Both have asked me about the initiative, but they cannot participate by themselves because they are members of the cabinet.

EIR: Does Saddam Hussein have to go, before any progress can be made?

Darawshe: I think it is a silly attitude. The United States of America cannot decide for the Iraqi people who will be their President. It's an issue for the Iraqi people. They are responsible for their future. They can decide who is their leader. It is not an American decision. The Americans can decide who their President will be, so the Iraqis can, too. If any change is going to come to any country, it is going to come from the people of the same country. And no one can export changes to other countries. It is not a wise policy. I do not accept it.

EIR: It is said that policymakers in Israel see the new strategic threat from Iraq as its possible disintegration.

Darawshe: Israel has an interest to reach a peace treaty with Iraq. Israel doesn't ask Iraq for any Iraqi territory, Iraq doesn't ask Israel for any Israeli territory. Israel doesn't occu-

py any Iraqi territory, so they both can reach an agreement. Especially now. Remember, Iraq supported the Palestinians in their struggle against Israel, and now there is a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

EIR: There is also a very important economic dimension to achieving peace with Iraq, especially in the context of developing a regional infrastructure such as a port in Gaza, railroads, desalination plants. How important is the economic side of this?

Darawshe: There is a big importance, because Iraq is a rich country with great potential, it has a lot of oil; strategically, it has a very important status and position. It is a strong country militarily, and it has a large population of 15 million people. So it is very important for Iraq to take part in the peace process, and I believe Iraq can be very helpful for the Palestinian authority to build their infrastructure. I believe it is in the interest of peace-lovers all over the world that Iraq play a positive role instead of a role of hatred and military actions. And I believe that it can come if the world shows good will toward Iraq, that they put an end to the siege of Iraq and give it a chance to integrate into the peace process. Iraq can play a positive role in these issues.

EIR: Has there been any discussion on integrating Iraq into regional economic planning?

Darawshe: Till now I don't think they have begun to work on these issues, but I know that the big project that [Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon] Peres is talking about, building a Middle East common market, is to include Iraq. Because no Middle East common market can take place without including Iraq. Iraq is also holding a very important position against the fundamentalists of Iran, and they can defend the part of the Arab world near Iraq.

EIR: Where do you see the opposition coming from?

Darawshe: The Americans. And I think America is making a big mistake on this issue. It is better to give Iraq a chance to return to the international family as an ordinary country, and to put an end to the siege, and to allow them to export oil, and to improve the struggle to survive of the Iraqi people. Also to allow them to use their income to help other countries, and especially to help the Palestinians. I believe it is also in American interests to have peace in this area.

EIR: I read in the papers you have gone to Jordan in this effort.

Darawshe: I was in Jordan last week for six days leading a delegation of 64 Israeli Arabs. I was welcomed warmly by King Hussein, his government, and his people. We held meetings with the prime minister, the chairman of the parliament, and the majority of government ministers. I did not make it to the Iraqi embassy, because Iraq was busy that whole week with its own affairs; I did not want to push

myself, I wanted to allow the situation to settle. I did not push to go to the Iraqi embassy, although I did go to the Syrian embassy.

EIR: How does the Arab Israeli community see its role in the current peace process?

Darawshe: I always believe we could be the bridge of peace between our people and our country. A bridge for a comprehensive settlement, a bridge of understanding and cooperation in education and culture and economy.

EIR: Is there a possibility of your joining the coalition?

Darawshe: We want that, the problem is the prime minister is not yet ready for that because he is afraid of Israeli public opinion—they were not accustomed to Arabs being a part of government coalitions, especially Arabs who belong to national parties. It is a kind of discrimination on a national basis. We do not enjoy the same rights. Still, there is discrimination between Jews and those who are not Jews—Arabs and others. It is discrimination and the racist way. We fight and struggle against that. There has been some improvement in the last two years because the government relies on our votes in the Knesset, but still there's discrimination.

EIR: How do you see the effect of today's bus bombing in Tel Aviv?

Darawshe: Very sad, very brutal. I am very anxious about the influence of this cruel issue. I believe that those who killed the Israelis tried to kill the peace process. I called the government and I told them that they should continue the negotiations and not give them [the terrorists] a chance to succeed. I call them the Goldstein Arabs, because [Baruch] Goldstein is a Jew who killed the Palestinian Arabs, and those killers are the same. So I condemn any killing, whether it comes from Arabs or Jews. I think extremists feed off one another and they want to kill the opportunity for peace, but I believe that they will not succeed.

EIR: We feel that the biggest danger to the peace process is the World Bank and its refusal to release funds to the Palestinian Authority. How do you see that danger?

Darawshe: I believe that the donors, including the World Bank, if they do not help the Palestinians to build their infrastructure and to pay the salaries, they will kill the peace process. Because the lack of possibilities for the Palestinian authorities will prevent it from succeeding and achieving any achievements, and there will be a lot of frustrations among the Palestinians, which will lead to a bad situation. The only way to help the Palestinian authorities is to help them build their infrastructure and economy, to give a chance for the creation of jobs for Palestinian workers, and to pay the salaries of the officials. Without that I don't see how the Palestinian Authority can succeed. It means that the success of the whole peace process will be thrown into doubt.