

Revive Mideast Peace Process with Water, Economic Growth

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach and Paolo Raimondi

The collapse of the Camp David talks between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, should not come as a surprise. Anyone who knows anything about the stumbling-block issues—the status of Jerusalem and the right of Palestinian refugees to return there—knows that the alternatives as presented through the mediation of President Bill Clinton, were unacceptable as well as unworkable. It was a classic case of fallacy of composition, whereby the very nature of the “solutions” presented, doomed the process of negotiations. Indeed, had Arafat buckled under pressures to accept Israeli sovereignty over East Jerusalem, the slated Palestinian capital, this would have led not to peace, but to war, and rather quickly. At the same time, had Barak agreed to full Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem, and the right of all Palestinian refugees to return, as prescribed by international law, he would have been welcomed on return to Israel by an assassin’s bullet, perhaps, or at least, the end of his minority government.

Thus, with the breakdown of the talks, at least this round, the worst-case scenario has been avoided. The best one can say, is that the process is still open. It was reported by both sides that they would continue talks, on a lower level, as of July 30. Arafat’s credibility has been maintained, indeed his stature has been enhanced, by his refusal to sell out Palestinian interests, and he enjoys complete support from the leadership of the Arab and Islamic world. Barak, for his part, faces a polarized situation inside Israel: The majority of the population supports peace, while the political parties are split, leaving Barak with a minority government, and facing no-confidence votes, and perhaps the perspective of early elections. Without a broad mandate for pursuing peace talks further, there is no way the Israeli Prime Minister can take the steps,

such as giving up claims on East Jerusalem, which will be necessary. The Israeli right wing, which is ideologically committed to Jerusalem as the “undivided, eternal capital of Israel,” issued death threats against Barak, should he make such “concessions,” and their co-thinkers inside the United States exerted massive pressure on Barak as well as Clinton, a factor which contributed to torpedoing the talks.

Change the Parameters

The point is, that the talks were vitiated from the start. As *EIR* has stressed, since the 1993 Oslo Accords were signed, there is no way that the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, and those of Israel, can be satisfied, unless the parameters of the peace talks are radically changed. As the Oslo treaty specified in its annexes, peace can be achieved to the extent that massive economic development takes place, through great infrastructure projects, undertaken as a cooperative effort. Such a development program must be geared to solving the single most important economic problem—the scarcity of water—by mass application of desalination. The most efficient means for powering desalination plants, is nuclear energy; the introduction of nuclear technology would at the same time revolutionize the economies.

Such an economic approach, which was in part contemplated in the 1993 Oslo annexes, would create the conditions for a growing economy, which is a precondition for the viability of a Palestinian state: How can a state function, if it does not have the economic means to provide for the general welfare of its population? Right now, the West Bank, which should be returned to Palestinian sovereignty, and Gaza, are threatened by the lack of water, as underground aquifers have been used up. The sovereignty of the Palestinian state depends, as well,



President Clinton meets with Prime Minister Barak (left) and Palestinian Chairman Arafat on July 25, just before the Camp David talks collapsed.

on a viable economy, whose policy reins are firmly in the hands of the state authorities. Most important, for hundreds of thousands—or millions—of Palestinian refugees, currently in camps in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, to exercise their right to return to their homeland, there must be basic economic infrastructure. The case of Bosnia-Herzegovina is relevant, as refugees returned to a situation of utter lack of infrastructure, and experienced poverty, alleviated only partially by the contributions of humanitarian aid organizations. To allow up to 4 million Palestinian refugees to return, massive developments of basic infrastructure—homes, schools, transportation, water, and energy—must be provided. Even the thorniest question, that of Jerusalem, has an economic dimension.

Had President Clinton, therefore, opened the Camp David talks with a proposal for such development, emphatically including desalination on a mass scale, he would have created the economic context within which the issues of Jerusalem and the right to return, could be faced. This is *not to say that the solutions would have followed automatically*; but, without such an approach, any formal solution would have been undetermined.

Instead, the economic issues, including water, were relegated to parallel discussions in working groups. Reportedly, progress was made, including on plans to build three desalination plants; if true, all the better. However, the high-level discussions focussed exclusively on Jerusalem and the right to return, as if they were isolated issues. The failure was pre-programmed.

One positive by-product of the talks, is that, despite the loudly proclaimed press blackout, various compromise formulas, all unacceptable, were floated, as if trial balloons, and the response from both the Arab and Israeli side, was unambiguous, though differentiated. It was clear for the entire world to see, that Arafat could not give up East Jerusalem,

nor the right to return, and that a serious political fight must be conducted and won in Israel, for any government to relinquish its claim on East Jerusalem and be content with West Jerusalem. Once the idea had surfaced in the talks, a debate broke out in Israel, in which, for the first time, the “taboo” topic was openly debated, and personalities close to Barak, such as Jossi Beilin, openly discussed certain options.

The Jerusalem Issue

Jerusalem is a most complex issue, which has to be approached from three sides, to consider the political events which have led to the current situation: the religious dimension, and its international, strategic implications; and the historical background.

The current status of Jerusalem, is illegal. In the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Israel occupied the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In 1980, Israel moved unilaterally to annex Arab East Jerusalem. This move was condemned at the time by the international community, and every administrative, juridical, and legal measure imposed by Israel on the city, was declared null and void, in several United Nations meetings. Two Security Council resolutions, 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) laid the basis for reestablishing legality. In the Oslo peace agreement of 1993, it was explicitly stated, that the aim of the negotiations was to establish interim Palestinian bodies for a five-year transitional period, “leading to a permanent settlement based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.” The former demanded “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict,” as well as “termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.” It also affirmed the need “for achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem.” Res-

Rothschild Calls for Mideast Desalination

In a letter to the editor of the London *Times* published on July 19, French banker Edmond de Rothschild calls for water desalination as crucial for a Middle East settlement. (He does not mention the nuclear desalination aspect, which is a vital component of Lyndon LaRouche's "Oasis Plan.")

Rothschild writes: "None of us can predict the outcome of the current Camp David negotiations but one thing is certain: The water problem in the Middle East can only get worse. . . . The time is now opportune for a major feasibility study . . . to pipe Mediterranean water to the Qattara depression in Egypt to generate power and provide desalinated water from underground aquifers for agriculture."

Rothschild writes that he had advanced such a proposal in 1967, and subsequently had had approval from "the late prime minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, Mr. Shimon Peres, Baroness Thatcher, and Tony Blair, among others, under which a pipeline might be run from Aqaba and Eilat on the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, to generate power. It would supply all Jordan's electricity needs, as well as the energy required for a desalination plant on the Dead Sea and three others at Eilat, Aqaba, and in the Gaza Strip. This would provide water to the whole region."

Rothschild proposes that the Qattara project could be financed along with the yearly overhaul of the Aswan Dam, as a quid pro quo for Egypt, if the latter allowed a portion of the area around El Arish to be leased for the resettlement of Palestinian refugees.

olution 338 called for cease-fire negotiations, aimed at "establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East."

At the time of Resolution 242 and 338, the power which had lost the West Bank and East Jerusalem was the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which had controlled both since the 1948 war. In 1947, the United Nations had approved the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state, and declared a special status for Jerusalem, as a *corpus separatum*, or an international city. After the 1948 war, Jordan had control over East Jerusalem, and maintained it until 1967.

In July 1988, Jordanian King Hussein declared that Jordan would disengage from the West Bank legally and administratively in order to "help liberate the occupied Palestinian land," turning over responsibility to the Palestine Liberation Organization. Following the Palestinian uprisings, known as the Inti-

fada, of the late 1980s, Israel acquiesced to negotiations. In the Madrid 1991 peace conference, the PLO participated as part of a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation. The Madrid conference was conducted on the basis of the "land-for-peace" formula, whereby Israel would give back occupied lands, in exchange for a peace agreement. In 1993, following secret, direct bilateral negotiations in Oslo, an agreement was struck between Israel and the PLO, which laid out the parameters for peace, including the economic annexes.

The problem lay not in the text of the treaty, but in implementation. While enemies of the peace process mobilized terrorist capabilities against it, the World Bank moved in to take over control of the economic policy, thus dashing any promise of development. At the same time, the Israeli government moved to change the situation on the ground, by massively expanding Israeli settlements on the West Bank and in and around Jerusalem. Despite repeated UN sessions which protested the process, Israel persevered in building settlements even in East Jerusalem, the part slated to be given back to Palestinian sovereignty. This altered the demographic composition of the city significantly.

In March 1999, Ariel Sharon, who was then Israeli Foreign Minister, convoked the ambassadors to Israel, to announce to them that Israel considered the 1947 UN resolution on the status of Jerusalem as an international city to be "null and void." "Resolution 181 on Jerusalem not being a part of Israel," he said, "is null and void. Jerusalem will stay forever the capital of the Jewish people and of the state of Israel." Sharon reiterated that Jerusalem had been "the capital of the Jewish people for 3,000 years, and of the Jewish state for 51 years."

At the current juncture, it is not only a question of forcing through implementation of total Israeli withdrawal from occupied East Jerusalem, but it is also a question of dealing with the Jewish settlements there (and elsewhere) which have been built up in the interim, in defiance of all agreements struck.

The Old City

The most difficult question to solve regarding East Jerusalem, is the Old City. The Old City is made up of four parts: the Christian quarter in the northeastern district, the Armenian quarter in the southwestern part, the Jewish quarter in the southeastern part, and the Muslim quarter in the eastern part. In each quarter, there are numerous sites revered as holy by the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religions. The Christian quarter hosts the Via Dolorosa, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which houses the sites of Golgatha, the Tomb, the Basilica, the corridor between Basilica and the Tomb, and the Crypt of the Cross. This church, and the holy places generally, are under the responsibility of the patriarchs of the Armenian, Latin, and Greek Orthodox churches. In the Christian quarter, there are a very large number of churches of all denominations, including the Russian (and other) orthodox churches, Protestant churches (Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Lu-



Burning the midnight oil at Camp David, July 19: President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak.

theran), and Monophysites (the Copts, Syrians, and Ethiopians). In addition, are monasteries, schools, and orders, founded at the time of the Crusades.

The Armenian quarter contains the Saint James church and the site of the Armenian Patriarchate; the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem is considered the successor to St. James, who was the brother of Christ, who founded the church and is buried there.

The most important shrine in the Jewish quarter, which also houses numerous synagogues and schools, is the Wailing Wall, the major place of prayer, since the destruction of the Second Temple. The wall on the other side, is the Western Wall of the Al-Haram e-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary, also known as the Temple Mount), which is in the Muslim quarter.

The Temple Mount is a huge rectangular complex, which includes Al Qubbat al-Sakhra (the Dome of the Rock), built in the 7th century, and containing the Holy Rock, or Rock of the Foundation. According to Jewish belief, the rock is the place where Abraham offered to sacrifice Isaac, and also the site of Solomon's temple. For the Muslims, the rock is the place from which the prophet Mohammad ascended to heaven. Also in the compound is the Al Masjid Al-Aqsa Al Mubarak (The "Furthermost" Blessed Mosque), capable of accommodating 5,000 worshippers. There are numerous domes, fountains, and minarets inside the enclosure, as well as other mosques.

Finally, outside the Old City, are several sites, including Mount Zion, sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. For the Jews, it is the site of David's Tomb, as well as the location of the Ark of the Covenant, before the first temple was built. For the Christians, it is the site of the Last Supper, and the location of the tomb of St. Stephen.

Without further detail, it is clear, that East Jerusalem is absolutely unique in character, as throughout history the three Abrahamic religions have traced their development, and constructed holy sites. Thus, while East Jerusalem should become the capital of a Palestinian state, there must be measures taken, to guarantee the right to worship for all. The fact that the Wailing Wall is the same as the Western Wall of the Temple Mount, is what the most extremist Israelis have seized upon, to insist on keeping control over the city.

Significantly, the leaders of the Christian community made clear during the Camp David talks, that they supported the Palestinian claim. On July 24, representatives of the Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Armenian Orthodox churches met at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate with members of the Palestin-

ian Authority to say they wanted international guarantees on the future of Jerusalem. The delegation, headed by the Latin Patriarch, Michael Sabah, met with Faisal Hussein, who holds the Jerusalem portfolio for the Palestine Liberation Organization; Ziyad Abu Zayad, who is minister for Jerusalem for the Palestinian Authority; Ahmed Hashem Zraiyer, chairman of the Jerusalem committee in the Palestinian Legislative Council; and Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, spokeswoman for the Palestinian Authority.

The Patriarchs declared that they opposed the division of the Old City, and reiterated their proposal that the city be given a special status, backed by international guarantees, that would ensure access to the holy places of all three monotheistic religions. Later, the same leaders declared that they wanted to be represented at the Camp David talks.

On July 23, Pope John Paul II had called for the internationalization of the Old City, urging the leaders at the Washington summit "not to overlook the importance of the spiritual dimension of the city of Jerusalem." Speaking from the window of his summer villa outside of Rome, the Pope said, "The Holy See continues to maintain that only a special statute, internationally guaranteed, can effectively preserve the most sacred areas of the Holy city." He said that he hoped that the leaders at the summit "are always driven by a desire for respect and for justice for all and for reaching a just and lasting peace."

In response, Hassan Abdel Rahman, Palestine Liberation Organization representative in Washington, said, "This is a sign from the Pope, which is the highest Christian authority in this world, that he is denying the claim of Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem."

The Vatican on Jerusalem

The approach presented by the Holy See, which has gained international support, is crucial to determining the future of peace, or war, for the entire region. The Vatican position can be summarized, with reference to a speech delivered in Washington, D.C., on March 10, 1999, by His Excellency Monsignor Jean-Louis Tauran, Secretary for the relations with states in the Secretariat of State, who reiterated in detail the Vatican position.

“The Holy land, as the Popes love to call the Middle East, should be a sort of workshop for inter-religious dialogue, with Jerusalem, the Holy City par excellence, as its symbol. This explains why, and with what perseverance and intensity, since 1947, the Popes have made themselves the defenders of the preservation of the unique and sacred character of that city. Still today two peoples claim sovereignty over Jerusalem, and the faithful of three religions, both on the spot and throughout the world, look to it as their spiritual home. A political solution has certainly to be found within the framework of bilateral negotiations, but without forgetting, for all that, the sacred reality which the city enshrines. So it is that the Holy See, which has no direct technical competence or ambition whatsoever to intervene in the territorial dispute dividing the two peoples, certainly cannot fail to concern itself with the safeguarding of the sacred and cultural dimension of the Holy Places of the three religions. In its view, this is a universal cause which therefore requires that the entire international community should act as guarantor. The Holy See therefore strictly favors ‘a special internationally guaranteed statute’ for the most sacred areas on the city, in order in the future to preserve and protect the identity of the Holy City in its entirety and in every aspect:

- the historical, material, religious, and cultural characteristics;

- the equality of rights and treatment for those belonging to the three religious communities, in the context of the freedom of their spiritual, cultural, civic, and economic activities;

- the rights of freedom of religion and worship for all, and of access to the shrines for residents and pilgrims alike, whether from the Holy Land itself or from other parts of the world;

“All this supposes also that these shrines might always remain at the center of living and active religious communities, where these communities and their individual members have the possibility of fully enjoying their basic human rights and of maintaining their cultural identity.

“The request of the Holy See regards, first and foremost, the most religiously significant part of the city, namely the Old City. But such a formula would have to be extended to other shrines outside the Old City and beyond Greater Jerusalem, in Israel and as well as in the West Bank.”

More broadly, Monsignor Tauran, who after the Pope and the Secretary of State represents the highest position authorized to speak on these matters, summarized the viewpoint of the Holy See on the Middle East. First, he said, the model

which the Popes sought to safeguard and to promote at the time was that of Lebanon. “The National Pact of 1943 established that from then onwards Christians, Jews, and Muslims would enjoy the same rights and without any discrimination be able to assume public office within a democracy, where the most differing cultures come together into a melting-pot of East and West and where the monotheistic religions meet each other in harmony, making of that land more than a mere country, but rather a ‘message,’ to use an expression so dear to Pope John Paul II. . . . The second approach of the action of the Holy See has been constantly to assert the principles of international law, which is applicable in all circumstances and to which all are subject. This proclamation of the law has been strictly maintained by the Holy See, which frequently found itself alone, but because of his quality as a ‘moral power’ certainly could not be dispensed from proclaiming:

- respect for persons whatsoever their beliefs;
- freedom of conscience and religion;
- the right of people to self-determination;
- rejection of war and terrorism as the solution to differences between the states.

“. . . The Holy See’s third choice in contributing to the stability of the Middle East is nothing less than the promotion of inter-religious dialogue with the Jews and Muslims.”

In this context, it is relevant to note that the Holy See never accepted the military occupations as a *fait accompli*, in the Middle East or elsewhere in the world. On May 1996, for example, the Secretariat of State, reiterated this principle. “The part of the City (Jerusalem) militarily occupied in 1967 and subsequently annexed and declared the capital of the State of Israel, is occupied territories, and all Israeli measures which [express] the power of a belligerent occupant under international law are therefore null and void. In particular the same position was expressed, and is still expressed, by Resolution 478 of the United Nations Security Council, adopted on Aug. 20, 1980, which declared the Israeli ‘basic law’ concerning Jerusalem to be ‘null and void.’ . . .”

The approach elaborated by the Holy See provides the guidelines for solving the critical question of the status of Jerusalem. International law must be reestablished, through the return of East Jerusalem to the Palestinians, and a “special internationally guaranteed status” could be articulated, to protect the religious shrines in the Old City and more generally. Beyond the legal mechanisms which will be forged, however, the underlying guarantee for durable peace, must spring from a new mutual respect between Palestinians and Israelis, which can grow through cooperative efforts to generate economic and social progress.

As for the presumed difficulties in having Israel and the new Palestinian state with their capitals in West and East Jerusalem, respectively, one should reflect on the historic example of the Vatican state, which coexists in the capital of Italy, Rome. To be sure, the case of Jerusalem is different, but if one conceptualizes it as a “workshop for inter-religious dialogue,” it is not insoluble.