

Madrid +15 Conference Calls for Immediate Mideast Peace Negotiations

by Dean Andromidas

Yossi Beilin, chairman of Israel's Meretz party and architect of the Oslo Peace Accords, called last August for the convening of a Madrid II peace conference as the only solution to ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and ending the war in Iraq. Beilin's call soon received the warm endorsement of American statesman Lyndon H. LaRouche. This month, some of the original Madrid conference organizers took steps toward the goal of an official Madrid II.

On Jan. 11-12, delegations gathered in Madrid to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the Madrid Mideast Peace conference of 1991. Entitled Madrid+15, the conference was sponsored by the Foreign Ministries of Spain, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, whose Foreign Ministers attended the conference. Delegations attended from Israel, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinian National Authority, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Russia. Other participants included representatives from the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the European Union (EU), and the United Nations.

Although the conference was unofficial, many of the

participants were former government ministers, or actively serving parliamentarians and government officials, and would be candidates for attending an official Madrid II conference.

The concluding document of Madrid+15 called for a revival of the "Spirit of Madrid." The "participants discouraged interim agreements as a negotiated destination, and called for an immediate return to negotiations towards a final and expedient comprehensive regional agreement. . . ." It goes on to say that many participants made calls "to convene an official international peace conference for the region of the Middle East, in the spirit of Madrid."

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton, in a letter read at the conference, declared that the conflict in the region "requires assertive leadership in the region, and from Europe and the United States. . . . For many years the people of the Middle East have been denied normal lives. Every passing day without peace threatens to further radicalize the region and engulf it in another deadly conflagration. Every passing day endangers the very possibility of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute."

James Baker III, former Secretary of State under President George H.W. Bush, and a convener of the 1991 Madrid conference, issued a statement saying the conference "could not be more timely."

Mikhail Gorbachov, former President of the Soviet Union, and also a convener of the 1991 Madrid Peace conference, called for reviving the Madrid approach. He contrasted sharply the first Gulf War, when there was a broad international coalition operating under a United Nations mandate, with the Bush Administration's disastrous war in Iraq.

"The new war in Iraq", wrote Gorbachov, "has produced tragic consequences for the civil population and introduced the uncertainty for the future of this state. It has provided a sharp political division in the international community . . . the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is heading towards a dead end. . . . As a result of the recent events, new conflicts were added to former unresolved problems. . . ."

Gorbachov then warned: "The drama of the Middle East fraught with the gravest consequences and capable of turning into a global political and humanitarian catastrophe, should serve as a stimulus for the world community, urging it to mobilize its resources of solidarity, responsibility, and intel-



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Some of the members of a large Israeli delegation which attended the conference in Madrid are, from left: Dalia Rabin; Shlomo Ben Ami (former Minister of Public Security and Foreign Minister, until the election of Ariel Sharon, under whom he refused to serve); Dan Meridor (former Finance and Justice Minister); and Moshe Shachal (former Cabinet Minister and Member of the Knesset).



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The Madrid+15 conference attracted a roster of high-level attendees, including, from left: Irina Donovna Zvyagelskaya and Andrei Gratchev (Russia); Prince Abdul Aziz al-Saud (Saudi Arabia); Abdul Rahman bin Hamad al-Attiya (Secretary-General, Gulf Cooperation Council); Amr Moussa (Secretary General, Arab League); Benita Ferrero-Waldner (Austrian diplomat, European Commissioner); Álvaro de Soto (Peruvian diplomat, senior UN official); and Dan Kurtzer (former U.S. Ambassador to Israel and Egypt).

lectual courage in order to prevent the disastrous degradation of the situation.”

Ben Ami: ‘Put a Peace Plan on the Table’

Former Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami, a veteran of Madrid I, said, “My expectations start with the very existence of this meeting, which brings back all the original delegations. This conveys the message that we can meet even in troubled times. . . . We know that with the Palestinians [the meeting point] lies somewhere between the Clinton peace parameters and the Arab peace initiative; and with the Syrians, it is somewhere between the international border and the 1967 borders. . . . I personally have lost any hope that peace can be reached by bilateral negotiations. I don’t believe this is possible. . . . So what needs to be done is to have these kinds of international envelopes which would put a peace plan on the table. This peace plan will act in sort of reverse engineering. We start from the end—this is the plan—and go backwards to see how to implement it.”

The large Israeli delegation represented almost the full spectrum from left to right, including former Likud ministers Dan Meridor and Roni Milo, and Labor Party Knesset members Colette Avital, Ophir Pines Paz, and Moshe Shahal. Dalia Rabin Pelosoff, the daughter of slain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and chairperson of the Yitzhak Rabin Center for Israeli studies, also attended.

Former Palestinian negotiator and veteran of Madrid I, Hanan Ashrawi, told conference participants, “We must create a coalition of the willing; it is time for peace, not for war.”

The Palestinian delegation included, among others, Palestinian Legislative Council members Mustafa Barghourti and Ziad Abu Amir; former minister and negotiator Nabil Shaath; and former Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, who had led the Palestinian delegation during the Oslo Accords of 1993.

Syria was represented by the legal counselor to President Bashar al-Assad and the Foreign Ministry, Riad Daudi, and Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Bushra Kanafani.

Baker-Hamilton Report Underlined

That a major fight in the United States was occurring because the Bush Administration had rejected the Baker-Hamilton Report, which called for a new Middle East policy, certainly did not go unnoticed at the conference.

Amir Moussa, Secretary General of the Arab League and another veteran of Madrid I, declared in his presentation to the conference: “I firmly believe that the comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict will produce a much better regional environment conducive to coping more successfully with crisis and tensions. In this respect, I underline here the pertinent and inspiring recommendations of

the Baker-Hamilton report.”

Hans Blix, the former international weapons inspector, attended the conference as a member of the Swedish delegation. He spoke on the question of weapons of mass destruction, especially tension over the question of Iran’s nuclear ambitions. He openly criticized the Bush Administration’s policy of threatening Iran, “including messages that all options are on the table.”

Although there was no official representation from the U.S. government, the American delegation was comprised of several senior retired state department and government officials including Daniel Kurtzer, former U.S. Ambassador to Egypt and Israel; Samuel Lewis, another former U.S. Ambassador to Israel who is now chairman of the Middle East Advisory Board of the organization Search for Common Ground, which helped organize the conference; Robert Malley, former National Security Council member in the Clinton Administration and now director of the Middle East and North Africa Program, of the International Crisis Group, another organizer of the conference; and Nicholas Veliotos and Theodore Kattouf, both former senior State Department officials.

Conference participant Yossi Ben Ari, of Israel (see interview) said the conference was no mere ceremonial commemoration of Madrid I, but is expected to pull together a steering committee or core group which will draft a comprehensive peace plan for the Middle East with the aim of presenting it to President George W. Bush and the U.S. Congress. It was clearly the hope of many of the participants to see the convening of a Madrid II as soon as possible.