

# LaRouche and Baker Call For Freeing Barghouti

by Dean Andromidas

After witnessing the deafening sounds of chanting, cheering, and gunfire on Nov. 12 as hundreds of thousands of Palestinians expressed an outpouring of emotion when the casket of Yasser Arafat was borne slowly through the surging sea of humanity to its temporary resting place on the West Bank, one must ask: Who can replace Arafat? Who can at once enjoy the popular support of the masses of Palestinians, while having the capability of leading his people to nationhood?

It is widely accepted that the only Palestinian capable of mobilizing the popular support necessary for anyone who could hope to replace the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, is Marwan Barghouti, leader of the West Bank Fatah. Far more important is that Barghouti is considered the only Palestinian leader who has the trust of the Palestinian population to safeguard their rights in the political negotiations which will now have to take place if war is to be averted.

But Barghouti is currently serving five life sentences in an Israeli prison on trumped up murder and terrorism charges.

Addressing a public event in Argentina via the Internet on Nov. 11, Lyndon LaRouche referred directly to the need to release Barghouti: “There is a man in an Israeli prison, who if [Israeli Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon wanted to, and if the United States would pressure Sharon to do it, could be pulled out of prison as a negotiating partner with Sharon, for bringing about, or negotiating, some kind of peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. If they did agree to acceptable terms, that would in a sense bring the crisis in the entire Southwest Asia, into some kind of order. . . . We are obviously going to work for that.”

On the same day, former Secretary of State under George Bush senior, James Baker III, in an appearance on the Larry King Show, declared, “There is now in Israel—in an Israeli prison, a man named Marwan Barghouti, who is one of the young guard of Palestinians, and if the Palestinians are going to make this work against the really hard-line elements, the Islamists and some of the people of Hamas, they’re going to have to have a coalition of the young guard and the old guard. And it would be really a very positive step in the right direction if Israel would release Marwan Barghouti, so that he could participate in bringing about this transition.”

Barghouti’s freedom is inseparable from a mobilization of the concert of nations, led by the United States and supported by Europe, as LaRouche has written, to “nail a killer

like Sharon to the table of constructive movement for peace with the Palestinians.”

Baker’s call for Barghouti’s release confirms LaRouche’s assessment that the alarm about the Bush Administration’s insane Southwest Asia policies reaches not only into the Democratic Party and the military security establishment, but deep into Republican Party circles as well.

Elections for the Presidency of the Palestinian National Authority are to be held on Jan. 9. The leading potential candidates include Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), former Palestinian Prime Minister and now chairman of the PLO, and Ahmed Qureia (Abu Ala), current Palestinian Prime Minister. Although Barghouti has yet to announce his intention to run, he is expected to make a decision within two weeks. The latest poll conducted by Bir Zeit University gave Barghouti a 51% popularity rating; Ismail Haniyah, the head of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, came in second with 28%, while Abu Mazen received only 1.6% and Abu Ala 1%. If “democracy” is to be exercised, Barghouti has to run.

### Who Is Marwan Barghouti?

At 45, Marwan Barghouti shares many of the attributes of Arafat when the latter founded Fatah in 1965, at the age of 36. He is young and is known as a fighter, with a broad base of support at the grassroots level. This contrasts sharply with Abu Mazen and Abu Ala, who not only are in their late 60s, but, more important, have little popular support within the Palestinian territories.

Barghouti was born in the West Bank village of Kobar, near Ramallah, on June 6, 1959, only to witness and suffer eight years later, exactly to the day, the ravages of the “Six-Day War” of 1967.

Like Arafat, Barghouti comes from an important Palestinian family. The extended Barghouti family or clan, based in the Ramallah region in the West Bank, is very well known for its broad political activism. There are Barghoutis who hold leading positions in the full spectrum of Palestinian politics, from the leaders of the Palestinian Communist Party, through the mainstream Fatah, and the leadership of Hamas.

At the age of 15, Barghouti joined Fatah, and in 1978, he was thrown into an Israeli prison, where he spent four and a half years as punishment for his resistance activities. Upon his release in 1983, he enrolled in Bir Zeit University, famous for both its academic qualifications and as a center of Palestinian political resistance activities. In 1985, Barghouti was arrested again and held for six months without charges, under administrative detention. Two years later, in 1987, he was “transferred” out of his homeland by the Israeli military for “inciting” rebellion. From Amman, Jordan, he played an important political role in organizing the Intifada, and eventually he became the intermediary between the Palestinian Liberation Organization outside, and the Fatah inside the Occupied Territories.

After the signing of the Oslo Accords, Barghouti returned



*Marwan Barghouti, who is serving five life sentences in an Israeli prison, is the only Palestinian who could hope to replace Arafat’s leadership role.*

to the West Bank in 1994, and he was elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council in 1996. A strong supporter of the peace process, he was involved in numerous dialogue groups, conferences, and other activities with his Israeli counterparts. In the 1990s, from his position as head of its West Bank branch, he endeavored to transform the Fatah from a resistance organization into a political party. This was in preparation for what should have been the formation of a Palestinian state, and the development of a civil society that could deal with corruption and carry out economic development of an independent state.

In 1998, after the massive expansion of Israeli settlements under the government of then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then-Infrastructure Minister Sharon, Barghouti led massive demonstrations throughout the West Bank against the ongoing occupation, as the peace process began to deteriorate further and further.

The failure of Camp David negotiations in 2000, and the blowing up of the entire peace process by Sharon’s infamous march onto the Al Haram Al Sharif/Temple Mount, provoked riots that led to the eruption of the Intifada. Barghouti became the very public face of the Intifada, and on Aug. 15, 2001, he became the target of an Israeli assassination attempt.

In an opinion column in the *Washington Post* on Jan. 15, 2002, Barghouti wrote: “The only way for the Israelis to have security is, quite simply, to end the 35-year-old Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. Israelis must abandon the myth that it is possible to have peace and occupation at the same

time, that peaceful coexistence is possible between slave and master. The lack of Israeli security is born of the lack of Palestinian freedom. Israel will have security only after the end of the occupation, not before.”

Barghouti was not only being seen more and more in front of the television cameras of CNN, but, more important, before thousands of demonstrating Palestinians, bolstering their resistance to the brutal occupation policies which Sharon hoped would crush their will to resist. Barghouti was becoming a powerful political leader, who, while being a strong militant, nonetheless was committed to establishing peace with Israel based on a two-state solution. For this he became a far bigger threat to Sharon than any suicide bomber.

On April 15, 2002, an elite Israeli special forces unit surrounded Barghouti's house in Ramallah and arrested him. Since that date, only his lawyer has been allowed to see him. Even his wife and four children have been denied access to him. Sharon wanted to throw him into an Israeli court and stage an international show trial. Barghouti was indicted for alleged complicity in no less than 37 attacks. The evidence was so slim that even the biased court threw out all but 5 of the charges. So biased was the court, in fact, that on the first day of the trial, one of the judges presiding over the trial, in open court, called Barghouti a murderous terrorist! Barghouti refused counsel on grounds that he did not recognize the authority of the court, because the entire proceeding was in violation of the Geneva Conventions, international law, and signed agreements between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority.

### Support for Freeing Barghouti

Those who claim that Barghouti must be released to avert a Palestinian civil war, fall victim to Israeli and neo-con propaganda. Sabri Jiryis, the director of the PLO's Institute of Palestinian Studies, and a former advisor to Arafat, dismissed fears of a Palestinian Civil War in an interview with the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* on Nov. 17: “You have nothing to worry about, and you having nothing to be happy about. The Palestinian regime has a very strong foundation. It was established over the course of decades, and it has rules of its own. You will never be privileged to see a Palestinian civil war. Forget it. You will never see conflicts that you can exploit to harm Palestinian interests.”

The point is, that Barghouti has to be released if a peace agreement is to be signed, not because he will go out and kill Hamas rejectionists, as Sharon would wish, but because he is capable of winning the trust of the Palestinian people.

Zachariah Zubeidi, the head of the militant Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in Jenin, on the West Bank, best expressed the problem in an interview with the London *Financial Times*, Nov. 16: “With Abu Amar [Arafat] I could be confident that I could handle resistance to the Israeli occupation knowing that he was taking care of the political work. Now I am uneasy.” He said he would accept Abu Mazen if he were freely

elected, “But if he subsequently goes back on our unalterable demands—a state on pre-1967 lines, its capital in Jerusalem, the right of return of refugees, and the release of prisoners—we will not recognize him.” Zubeidi added that he would have trust in Barghouti if he won the Presidential elections, and he would gladly lay down his arms if a just peace agreement were signed.

The 27-year-old Zubeidi, who is high on Sharon's hit list, denounced what was claimed to have been an attack on Abu Mazen at the Arafat mourning tent in the Gaza Strip, only the day before, where two bodyguards were killed.

In Israel itself, the death of Arafat sparked a debate on the possibility of Barghouti's release, and on Nov. 13, Israeli Interior Minister Avraham Poraz said that it would be possible to release Barghouti “under certain circumstances,” including a prisoner exchange, even if he has “blood on his hands.” This had been done in the past, including by Sharon himself, who earlier this year released two Lebanese who had killed Israelis, in a deal with the Lebanese militant organization Hezbollah, in return for freeing a captured Israeli military officer. Poraz, who is a member of the Shinui party, added that Israel could not prevent Barghouti from running in the elections from his prison cell.

Sharon and the other right-wing ministers in his government were very annoyed by Poraz's suggestion; nonetheless, Israeli Knesset (parliament) member Ran Cohen of the pro-peace Yehud-Meretz party said that if Barghouti is elected in the Palestinian elections, Israel would have to negotiate with him and thus would no longer be able to keep him in prison.

There are others in Israel who see the logic in releasing Barghouti, including certain military circles. But James Baker III's call for Barghouti's release has been virtually blacked out of the Israeli press. When briefed on the Baker statement, Dr. Ron Pundak, director of the Peres Center for Peace in Tel Aviv and one of the negotiators of the Oslo Accords, welcomed it as a very important indication that political circles in the United States are trying to get a change in U.S. policy, and hopefully get a real peace process going. Pundak recalled that he had also recently made the same suggestion as Baker, only to be viciously attacked by the Israeli right wing.

Similarly, Sa'd Nimr, director of the Campaign to Free Barghouti, when briefed on the statements by Lyndon LaRouche and James Baker III calling for the release of Barghouti, told *EIR*, “It is very encouraging to hear that American political figures have come out in support of Marwan Barghouti's release.”

Nimr went on to say that it was key for the United States to take action to give Prime Minister Sharon a “ladder in order to climb down the tree” he has put himself in, by labelling Barghouti a terrorist and putting him in prison.

Only the United States in concert with Europe can give Sharon a ladder, or strait-jacket, and to secure Barghouti's release. Moreover, even if he is released, only when offered a just peace could Barghouti hope to succeed.