
In Memoriam

Ezer Weizman: From Hawk to Peace Advocate

by Dean Andromidas

With the death of former President Ezer Weizman on April 24, Israel has lost one of its key advocates for peace between Israel and its neighbors. It is important to reflect on Weizman's role, not to eulogize him, but to show that success in achieving peace in the region requires leadership. Lyndon LaRouche once commented that Weizman was a "tough guy," who saw the wisdom of an ecumenical approach to peace, the necessity of negotiating with one's enemy if one wishes to have peace. Weizman's approach contrasts sharply with that of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, whose so-called disengagement plan, if it ever takes place, is a unilateral move that promises to prolong the conflict even longer. Weizman saw the necessity to negotiate a real peace agreement premised on the same principles as those of the Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years' War in Europe in 1648.

In a 1989 interview to *EIR* (March 17, 1989), Weizman said his role was to be "controversial" and if possible a "detonator" in an effort to push his government onto the road of peace negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The granting of the interview in itself detonated strong reactions internationally. At the time, he was a Minister of Science and Technology, the only dove among hawks. Led by the right-wing Likud party, the government included Yitzhak Shamir as Prime Minister; Moshe Ahrens, the mentor of current Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as Foreign Minister; and Ariel Sharon as Minister of Defense. Moreover, it was a time when *EIR* founder Lyndon H. LaRouche had just been unjustly imprisoned, because he was seen as a threat to the policies of the George H.W. Bush Administration.

Peace Agreement With Egypt

An ardent Zionist and one of the founders and former commanders of the Israeli Air Force, Weizman as a political leader was able to make the journey from hawk, to leading advocate for peace. Born in Tel Aviv in 1924, Weizman joined the British Air Force during World War II, after which he joined the Etzel underground movement, and later, the military Haganah. Serving in the Air Force in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, he subsequently fought in the 1956 war against Egypt; became commander of the Air Force in 1958; and, as deputy chief of staff, pushed for launching the 1967 war.

Leaving the military in 1969, he entered politics joining the Herut party, the forerunner of the Likud.

In 1977, he showed a different form of leadership than when he was a military commander. After Egyptian President Anwar Sadat made his historic visit to Israel, Weizman became the leader of the peace faction within the government of the ultra-hardline Prime Minister Menachem Begin. At the time, Sharon and the hawks sought to undermine the process that eventually led to the Camp David peace agreement between Israeli and Egypt. Weizman, who the same year would travel to Cairo, forged a strong relationship with Sadat, while threatening a government crisis in order to push his colleagues to make the concessions necessary for an accord with Egypt.

It was a time when Sharon was busy setting up "security" settlements in the Sinai and the West Bank, which Weizman opposed, calling them a "distortion of Zionism."

Speaking about the importance of peace with Egypt, Weizman told *EIR*, in the 1989 interview, that in the last "40 years, we have achieved one important thing, peace with Egypt. . . . For 10 years, we have had peace with Egypt, which is an extremely important, almost unbelievable achievement, not appreciated by most Israelis." This peace has led to "a more common feeling that we have to come . . . to a peaceful coexistence with the Arab world. With all the mistakes that the Arabs made, and all the mistakes that we have made, look at what we achieved in 1978 and 1979, since the arrival of Sadat in Jerusalem. Sadat was a great man, and his policies are being continued by his successor, President Mubarak. . . . When people tell me, Mubarak is going back to the Arab world, I tell them, 'Where do you want him to go, to Scandinavia? He is the Arab world!' Peace with Egypt is the most important achievement of the past 40 years!"

For Weizman, the peace with Egypt was to be the stepping-stone to peace with what would become a Palestinian state, as well as all the Arab states. But no sooner was the peace agreement signed, than the hawks, led by Sharon, began to procrastinate on implementing the treaty's clauses that called for creating Palestinian autonomy in the occupied territories, which would lead to the creation of a Palestinian state. In 1980, hoping to create a government crisis that would force Begin to act on Israel's responsibilities, Weizman resigned. The rest is history: Sadat was assassinated, Sharon launched the Lebanon war in 1982, and the autonomy clauses were never implemented.

Opening to the Palestinians

In 1984, as head of the centrist Yahad (Together) party, he re-entered politics and brought his party into the national unity government in which Shimon Peres of the Labor Party was Prime Minister and the Likud's Shamir was the Foreign Minister. For Weizman, the primary task was to get out of Lebanon and to open up negotiations with the Palestinians. To his disappointment, Peres refused to negotiate with the PLO. Nonetheless in 1988, Weizman met, on his own initia-



Egyptian President Anwar Sadat (left) greets President Ezer Weizman, as Prime Minister Menachem Begin looks on, Sept. 7, 1978.

tive, with envoys of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, at a time when it was illegal. Shamir was enraged, but because of the restraints of the coalition he led, he could not fire Weizman.

Asked by *EIR* whether he would negotiate with Arafat, he said, "I would invite Arafat for talks. I would say: 'Look, you fought me and I fought you, but I think it is time to sit down and talk. You recognized [UN] Resolution 242; you recognized me; I recognize you. I am willing to meet wherever you want and I'll talk to you like I talked to Sadat.' . . . I would definitely invite him, were I Prime Minister. It could be that it is because of this that I am *not* Prime Minister. . . . Eventually, a Prime Minister will wake up one day and realize that he has to take this step." Four years later, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, did "wake up," and in 1993, signed the Oslo Accords.

Weizman saw that the only future for Israel was to achieve peace with its neighbors, and that this would have to be premised on economic cooperation and development. In the interview he said, "What are the economic foundations throughout the whole world, but cooperation? I want to see a Benelux-type system here. I want to go back to the years when I was a youngster, when I used to go with my father to Beirut, Damascus, Cairo. I was never in Baghdad, but he used to go to Baghdad. Anyone who thinks that Israel can exist on its own, without communications and economic links with Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, and so forth, is wrong. I do not want to only sell vegetables to Bonn.

"There will be a Palestinian state; they will have an agreement with Jordan, and they will have an agreement with us. . . . They can live happily as well."

In 1993, Weizman had joined the Labor Party and become President of Israel at the very moment that the Oslo Accords

were signed. But these were only "interim" agreements, and Weizman did not think much of interim agreements, wanting to have well-defined peace treaties instead. With the assassination of Rabin in 1995, and the coming to power of Netanyahu, once more with Sharon in his Cabinet, Weizman would see these "interim" agreements collapse. Although as President, he enjoyed no real political power, he nonetheless continued to be "controversial." So in 1996, when Netanyahu was trashing the Oslo Accords, Weizman invited Palestinian President Arafat to his official residence in Jerusalem. This was only the second time that Arafat had been to Israel, and Netanyahu was enraged.

In 1998, in an unprecedented move for an Israeli President, Weizman gave a press conference calling on Netanyahu to hold early elections, and the next day gave an interview to Israeli television where he lashed out: "I have reached my red line. I am not willing to help Netanyahu any longer. It is impossible that ev-

eryone is angry at us—the U.S., Europe, President Mubarak, King Hussein—and only we are right. The peace process is not going anywhere, and no one should try and tell me otherwise." He told the newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* the same day, that "Bibi [Netanyahu] lives in a state of euphoria, in his own world, cut off from reality. The nation does not know where the Prime Minister is leading it. He is dumbfounded and wrong."

In 1999, when Ehud Barak became Prime Minister, Weizman continued to use his position as President to support the peace process in any way he could.

Current Prime Minister Sharon gave the eulogy at Weizman's funeral, like the mafia boss who attends the funeral of the man he had just ordered to be "rubbed out." Indeed Sharon, who did not want a "controversial" President who could serve as a focal point of opposition, was responsible for forcing Weizman to resign, just at the time Sharon came to power in 2000. The operation involved Yaacob Nimrodi, publisher of the daily *Ma'ariv*, and the former Mossad agent who made his fortune as one of the key Iran-Contra arms dealers (see *EIR*, Feb. 4, 2000). Nimrodi is an old crony of Sharon's, and reportedly stole documents from the offices of Weizman's attorney, which were then used to run a press campaign alleging Weizman had inappropriately accepted a large amount of money from a political supporter. Nimrodi was even accused of threatening Weizman that he would "eliminate" him. In July 2000, Weizman chose to resign, rather than be dragged through a long legal process while holding the office of the Presidency.

With his death, Israel lost a soldier, statesman, and peace advocate whose qualities are sorely needed by Israel, now more than ever.