

Arabs Are Ready For Madrid II Summit

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

“It’s either Clean Break or Madrid II,” said a top Continental European strategic analyst, in discussion with *EIR*, regarding the crises ripping through Southwest Asia—from Afghanistan to Iraq, from Palestine to Lebanon and Iran. In short, the alternative for the region is either the continuation of the permanent war policy embraced by the Bush-Cheney neocon madmen, as applied to the region in the 1996 “Clean Break” doctrine, or a comprehensive peace between Israel and its Arab and Muslim neighbors, through an international peace conference, modelled on the Madrid conference of 1991 (see *EIR*, “The Treaty of Westphalia Approach to Middle East Peace,” Aug. 25, 2006).

Following the endorsement issued by Lyndon LaRouche, for a proposal for such a “Madrid II” by Israeli peace advocate Yossi Beilin, the question was: How will the Arabs respond? The LaRouche movement circulated the proposal and LaRouche’s endorsement widely, and received indications from several high-level Arab spokesmen, that, indeed, if an international conference is convoked, with the support of the United States and Russia, the Arab world will welcome it as a long-sought opportunity for durable, comprehensive peace in the region.

All sides concur that Syria is the key to any such peace agreement. Syria, together with Iran, is seen as the nation with the greatest influence over the Hezbollah forces in neighboring Lebanon; it hosts a number of Palestinian organizations known as the “rejectionist front,” for their resistance to Israeli occupation; and its land, the Golan Heights, has been occupied, and annexed, by Israel through previous wars. Syria also is the temporary home for hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees, who lost their homes in 1948, as well as more than that amount of Iraqi refugees who have fled their war-torn homeland since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion and occupation. Thus, all the problems to be solved by a peace conference, are represented in Syria.

The other key nation is Iran, for similar, as well as different reasons. Thus, without Syria’s participation and Iran’s agreement, no regional settlement would be thinkable.

Syria’s response to the idea of a Madrid II, in the words of Prof. Seyyed Mohammad Selim of the University of Cairo, would be an unequivocal “Yes!” He pointed out that the Syrians have repeatedly reached out to Israel for talks, but that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and company had repeatedly said no. He said that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad



SANA

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad: “We are convinced that the true path to peace is via negotiations. . . .”

had issued a “clear statement for the resumption of talks,” but that it had been ignored.

The “clear statement” by the Syrian President was contained in an Aug. 15 speech which had been not only ignored but willfully misinterpreted, even to the point that German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier cancelled a visit to Damascus, after having been briefed (evidently inadequately) on the text. What Assad had said in the speech, was that Syria, and the Arab world, had opted for peace, *if* there were negotiating partners with the same intent. Speaking to the Association of Arab Journalists, he said, “When we say that we have chosen peace as our strategy, it does not mean we gave up other options. On the contrary, we are convinced that the true path to peace is via negotiations, but if this path is not possible—resistance is the only way. Not necessarily an armed resistance but a cultural and political resistance as well. The goal of the resistance is not war but rather peace. It therefore does not contradict the peace and is necessary in the current state of affairs, he continued, adding that “Peace would involve Israel returning occupied lands to their owners and restoring their rights.” Assad blamed the U.S. administration for the failure of the peace process, “an administration that adopts the principle of pre-emptive war that is absolutely contradictory to the principle of peace.”



United Nations

Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, Emir of the state of Qatar: "There is a large chance for peace now after . . . the war between Lebanon and Israel."

Responses from Syria to the idea of a comprehensive peace, came in the form of interventions by LaRouche representatives, hosted by Syrian media. For example, this author was interviewed on Syrian Satellite TV, the national television channel, on Aug. 9, regarding the aims and personalities behind the war in Lebanon. On Aug. 21, the website of the Syrian think-tank Data and Strategic Studies posted LaRouche's endorsement of Beilin's proposal. And on Aug. 23, a senior Syrian diplomat confirmed to *EIR* that there was momentum towards such a discussion. "Something is moving," said Dr. Hussein Omran, the Syrian Ambassador to Germany. Asked about Syria's response to the Beilin proposal for a Madrid conference, he said: "Our position is very clear. Peace means returning the Golan Heights, within a comprehensive solution. This means applying all the UN resolutions, and respecting the principles." He could not give details about what was "moving," as delicate diplomatic contacts are being made. Dr. Omran reiterated that "all [the nations in the region] are for peace." Similarly, a Lebanese source, when asked about Syria's response to a Madrid II-style initiative, told this author, "If Madrid II leads to progress towards peace, then not only Syria, but all Arab parties will support it."

The Psychological Factor

The outcome of the Lebanese war has been crucial in shifting the attitude of the Arab world, towards peace—on condition that the United States and Israel are willing. In discussion with leading Arab figures, from Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, this news service noted an important subjective change in Arab thinking, as a result of the Israeli defeat in Lebanon. Said one Lebanese source, "For 60 years, we have been hit by Israel, we could do nothing, and the rest of the world sat back and looked on without doing anything. Now, things have changed." The aims of the United States and Israel in the Lebanon war were not attained, and therefore, in his view, the U.S.—even the Bush-Cheney Administration—would be forced to change policy.

An Egyptian source echoed this view, pointing out that, for the first time, Israel did not achieve its war aims in a war against the Arabs; there is a new direction, a new era opened up in the Arab world. The fact that Hezbollah succeeded in defeating Israel's declared war aims, has created a situation where Israel may be forced to realize that it is only through negotiations, not military might, that peace may be achieved—as evidenced in Beilin's approach.

This view was officially expressed by the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani (a friend of the U.S. government), during a visit to Lebanon on Aug. 22. As he put it, "The Lebanese people and its resistance were able to achieve the first Arab victory, which we have missed for several years. . . . There is a large chance for peace now, after . . . the war between Lebanon and Israel." His argument, which is reflected in many Arab commentaries, is: "The Israelis used to be able to dominate Arabs with military might, but this is no longer possible after what happened in Southern Lebanon."

The Superpowers Must Weigh In

The 1991 Madrid conference came about as a joint initiative of the United States and the Soviet Union. All sides agree today that for a Madrid II to come into being, Washington and Moscow must take the initiative. Although there has been no official move in this direction, important signals have issued from Moscow indicating that Russia may itself launch such an initiative. Russian Ambassador to the UN Vitali Churkin, on Aug. 22, delivered a speech reflecting the impact of the debate about Madrid II. During a Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, Churkin stressed that "joint efforts by the international community are needed to prevent its escalation and to establish appropriate conditions for progress in the political settlement process in the region." Expressing satisfaction with the progress made in deploying the Lebanese army to the South, Churkin said, however, "We must not lose sight of what is taking place in Palestinian-Israeli relations. . . . Israel has not ended its use of force in the Palestinian Authority, which has led to an increasing number of victims amongst the civilian population." He harshly criticized Israel's having arrested Palestinian leaders, adding, "Such developments once again confirm that it is impossible to fully resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict if a solution cannot be found to its root cause—the Palestinian problem."

Churkin concluded by insisting that all the problems had to be dealt with as a package. "Russia, through its contacts with parties in the Arab-Israeli conflict, with members of the Quartet of international mediators, countries of the region, the Arab League, continues to actively support effective collective efforts by the international community to achieve lasting progress on a Middle East settlement in all its dimensions, and on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the Madrid principles, the principle of land for peace,

the provisions of the Road Map, and the Arab peace initiative of 2002.”

In a telephone discussion Aug. 24 with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Russian President Vladimir Putin also discussed the need for a Madrid-style approach. According to a Kremlin release, the two discussed “normalizing the situation in Lebanon as well as steps taken by the international community for a *broader Middle East settlement*.”

Frenetic Diplomacy

Actors in the region have been engaged in a flurry of diplomatic activity, all pointing to the possibility that a Madrid II process may be in the offing. The diplomatic moves centered on Syria and Iran. Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul, during a visit to Damascus for talks with the leadership on Aug. 23, expressed unusual optimism about the prospects for a regional peace. “I would like to express with great pleasure that what I heard from the President was very promising for the future,” he told reporters, after talks with Syrian President Assad, Vice President Farouk al-Sharaa, and Foreign Minister Walid Moallem. “There is now a great opportunity to activate the peace process in the region, and I heard that from President Assad, al-Sharaa, and Muallem,” he said. “We find that after each crisis, there is a chance for peace.”

Muallem travelled after that to Finland to meet with the government currently holding the rotating chairmanship of the European Union, after which Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja left for talks in Berlin and Paris. At the same time, the EU foreign ministers were to meet on the Lebanese crisis and the region as a whole.

The visit by the Qatari Emir, noted above, is also significant, as he handed an invitation, from Syrian President Assad to Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, for a meeting on the crisis.

Iran is also, at least indirectly, involved in the process. Aside from an unusual, three-hour meeting between Foreign Minister Manochour Mottaki and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Cairo, Iran has entered center stage in the strategic considerations of world powers, like Russia, China, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In response to Iran’s answer to the UN “5+1” proposal (the five permanent Security Council members plus Germany) on its nuclear energy program, Russia and China expressed their agreement with Tehran’s suggestion that negotiations on unresolved issues be started. At the same time, Britain’s prestigious Royal Institute for International Affairs, or Chatham House, issued a lengthy report on Iran, with a scathing critique of failed U.S. policy in Iraq, and a sober recommendation that any military option against Iran be shelved—*permanently*.

These moves signal the growing awareness on the part of such circles, that Iran must be part of any regional equation for peace. The enormous task on the agenda is to convince powers in the United States that this must be the case—a task LaRouche has taken up.