

Cheney Wants War; IDF Wants Peace With Syria

by Dean Andromidas

Unlike U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, who is working for regime change in Syria, the general staff of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) is enthusiastically supporting Syrian President Bashar Assad's calls for negotiating an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement.

Although Assad's overtures have been public knowledge for months, they are now getting more attention, because of the almost universal skepticism that anything positive will come out of the so-called peace summit being organized by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, which is supposed to be held in Annapolis, Md., "some time" this month. Optimists expect the results of Annapolis, aimed at furthering the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, will be no more than a good "photo op," while pessimists fear its failure will ignite another Palestinian intifada and new round of brutal bloodletting.

On Nov. 13, the Israeli daily *Yediot Ahronot's* senior security commentator, Ron Ben Yishai, reported that, under pressure from the senior commanders of the IDF's General Staff, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak has been pressuring Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to renew the peace talks with Syria, while the latter, mostly in deference to the Bush Administration, has refused Syrian peace overtures.

"In the 60th year of its existence, the State of Israel finally has to produce permanent borders that come with a clear return address that we can reach understandings with and finalize binding agreements with," Ben Yishai quotes one very senior security official as saying. "We can reach this state of affairs with Syria at this time; with the Palestinians, not yet." Such an agreement would positively affect the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "If we don't at least try to reach an agreement with Syria, we'll be doing ourselves a disservice."

The Golan Heights

In a reference to returning the Golan Heights to Syria, in return for peace, Yishai's source said, "All of us know what Syria wants and what previous Israeli governments agreed to give it. It's clear to me that if we have another war today, we'll win. But this war will cause terrible destruction and victims on both sides, and when it's over we'll sit down at the negotiation table with the Syrians and reach an agreement. So why should we join this march of folly? Why don't we try to enter negotiations at this point already in order to reach the same result we would be achieving after the war? In my estimate, today Syria is ready for such talks."



Ricardo Stuckert/Abr. O3



Presidential Press and Information Office

Syrian President Bashar Assad (left) is pushing for a peace agreement with Israel; Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is said to have discussed it with Russian President Putin in Moscow last month (right).

Ben Yishai writes that this position not only contradicts that of Olmert but also the Mossad, headed by Meir Dagan, a hardliner who had been appointed by former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. By contrast, the Shin Bet, the internal security service, and Military Intelligence support an opening to Syria. The latter's assessment is that while Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas would not be able to implement an agreement, Assad "is ready and willing to deliver the goods." The security services point to the fact that Assad has grown uneasy about Syria's alliance with Iran, and wants to see continued economic development in his country, which constitutes the main motive for the popular support of his regime among the Islamic radicals, and for this, Assad needs European and American investments. Thus, Ben Yishai writes, the security establishment has formulated a strategy that argues for "containment in the Palestinian arena and diplomatic initiative on the Syrian track."

While Barak and the defense establishment understand that Israel cannot afford to stay away from the Annapolis conference, "Israel must embark on negotiations with the Syrians. Initially this should be done surreptitiously, through mediators (such as Turkey, for example) and later openly."

These sources say this should start after Annapolis, by opening a back channel, perhaps through Turkey, which could lead to an international summit. The article points out that there have been media reports that talks are already underway, in preparation for convening such a conference in Moscow. In fact, President Abbas, according to Arab press reports, discussed the possibility of a Moscow conference with Rice. Furthermore, Israeli intelligence sources have told *EIR* that the idea for a Moscow conference has been discussed by all sides, including Russia, and in fact, came up during Olmert's talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin when the Israeli prime minister was in Moscow last month. These same sources confirmed that Turkey is deeply involved in efforts to mediate between Israel and Syria.

Yediot Ahronot also reported that Barak feels such negotiations could be part of a comprehensive peace initiative that Israel should make, after the U.S.-sponsored peace summit in Annapolis, at the center of which would be peace talks with Syria.

"Such a change may lead to good and unexpected results for Israel," Barak told his associates recently in a closed forum, according to *Yediot Ahronot*. "We must conduct extensive work which would determine all of

Israel's crucial interests in the region. We must examine this opposite Syria, opposite the Palestinians, opposite the Jordanians and opposite any other Arab countries. . . . Why not have an Israeli initiative?" Barak asked his aides. "Why shouldn't we stipulate our interests, what we want, what we are willing to give, and then launch our own peace plan as a starting point for negotiations?"

Commenting on the Barak statement, Lyndon LaRouche said, "That's the only way to save the Annapolis conference." Earlier this year LaRouche fully endorsed statements by both Assad and Israeli President Shimon Peres calling for Israeli-Syrian peace talks.

The Syrian Track in Iraq

At this point Syria is perhaps the most important player in any effort to stabilize the Southwest Asian region. Take, for example, Iraq, where intelligence sources report that all Iraqi factions, both government and insurgent, have been meeting in Damascus for discussions.

Reopening the Syrian track now is the only way an Israeli-Palestinian track will have any success. Palestinian President Abbas does not control the Gaza Strip, which is fully in the hands of Hamas, which Cheney wants to destroy through forcing the Palestinians into a civil war. This is a policy the Israeli military knows will only lead to terrorist activity targeting Israel, including the firing of homemade Palestinian Qassam rockets from Gaza into Israeli communities. The fact that Hamas leader Khalid Mashaal is based in Damascus, suggests that Syria could serve as a mediator in an effort to bring about a rapprochement between Hamas and Abbas's Fatah faction, which is essential in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Although this reality is denied by Cheney and the neocons, who want only perpetual wars in the region, a substantial faction within the Israeli security establishment sees that peace with Syria is crucial for Israel's long-term security.