



by Joseph Shattan

Peace Terrorists

In early March, a series of deadly terrorist bombings killed 61 Israelis, bringing the death toll since Arafat and Rabin shook hands on the White House lawn two-and-a-half years ago to 213. This, in per capita terms, is equivalent to 10,000 Americans killed. Moreover, thanks to the "peace process," the PLO has acquired an army of 10,000 well-armed troops (disguised as police officers) who, as Arafat spokesman Marwan Barghout told the London *Independent*, "have been ordered to fire on Israeli soldiers if they try to enter territories under the Palestinian Authority's control." Add to that the fact that the first thing Arafat did after gaining control of areas vacated by the Israeli army was arrest or kill Palestinians accused of "collaborating" with the Zionist enemy, and it's no wonder many Israelis feel that the peace process has already irreparably damaged Israel's ability to defend itself against terrorism, and that the longer the process continues, the worse things will get. No wonder, too, that Israel's prime minister, the dovish Shimon Peres, is in deep political trouble.

But Peres is wedded to the "peace process," both for personal reasons—his political future depends on its continuation—and for "ideological" reasons. When the Labor Party came to power in Israel, about fifty years ago, its spokesmen claimed that Labor's socialist orientation was nothing less than an attempt to apply the teachings of the Hebrew Prophets to modern life. By now, however, every Israeli understands that Israel's massive and stifling bureaucracy is not exactly what Isaiah had in mind. Labor also used to claim that it alone embodied the "pioneering spirit" that made the desert bloom, but today, the legitimate heirs of that spirit—

the "settlers" living in harsh and dangerous circumstances on the West Bank and Golan Heights—are the very people Labor seeks to eliminate. The only thing Labor can reasonably claim as its own, then, is the "peace process," and Laborites like Peres cling to it for much the same reason that Democrats like Clinton cling to Big Government: Without it, they're nothing.

So what do you do if the process that defines you is bitterly resented by the voters, and an election is just a few months away? Well, if you're Shimon Peres, you call up your good friend Bill Clinton and make him an offer: "You help me with my Jews, and I'll help you with yours."

According to two well-known Israeli journalists, Uri Dann and Daniel Eisenberg, that is precisely what Peres did. "We have learned," they wrote in the March 14 *Jerusalem Post*, "that this grandiose operation"—they're referring to the "Anti-Terror Conference" held in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el Sheikh in the wake of the latest series of terrorist bombings—"was the brainchild of Peres... whose lifelong dream of being elected Prime Minister seems well-nigh shattered. Peres recruited President Clinton to ensure that world leaders would attend, assuring him that he would enhance the President's prestige by openly supporting his bid for re-election back home."

Clinton appears to have fully signed on to Peres's proposal. After attending an international conference involving leaders from twenty-seven nations that was hastily cobbled together at Peres's urging, Clinton visited Israel, bringing promises of renewed American largesse along with his patented "I share your pain" spiel. Although Clinton, for appearance's sake, did allow himself to be photographed with Peres's opponent, the Likud Party's Benjamin Netanyahu, angry Likud candidates insisted that both the conference

and the presidential visit were crude attempts to bolster Peres's standing at a time when Labor, for the first time since Rabin's assassination, was trailing in the polls. They were right. The message of Clinton's visit to Israeli voters was unmistakable: "Stick with Peres and the peace process, and you'll have the mighty United States of America in your corner; vote for opponents of the peace process like Netanyahu, and you're on your own."

According to all the canons of conventional diplomacy, this kind of blatant interference by one country in the internal affairs of another is definitely not kosher. But in the case of America and Israel, the prohibition against internal meddling has been violated so often as to be practically non-existent. Back in 1972, for example, Yitzhak Rabin, then a leading Israeli hawk as well as Israel's ambassador to the United States, barely troubled to conceal his support for Richard Nixon's reelection. Then in 1980, Ezer Weizmann, a leading Israeli dove and currently Israel's president, gave his blessings to Jimmy Carter's presidential aspirations. On the American side, former President Bush did his level best to topple Israel's conservative prime minister, Yitzhak Shamir, and elect Labor's candidate, Yitzhak Rabin. Bush made it quite clear that so long as Shamir remained in office, Israel would not receive the \$10 billion loan guarantee that it (wrongly) believed was necessary to help resettle Soviet Jewish immigrants. The Israeli voters got the message and elected Rabin, at which point the loan guarantee materialized.

Bush's motives for interfering in Israeli politics were transparent. To liberate Kuwait from the Iraqis and protect Saudi Arabia from Saddam Hussein's tanks, he had to place infidel American troops on

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sacred Islamic soil. This was a major affront to Saudi religious sensibilities, which could only be assuaged by a promise from Bush to promote the "peace process"—a euphemism for unilateral Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in the 1967 Six Day War. Since Shamir bitterly opposed Israeli withdrawal, he had to go.

In a sense, therefore, Iraq's Saddam Hussein is the real godfather of the current "peace process." His invasion of Kuwait set a process in motion that culminated in Shamir's defeat, Labor's victory, and Israel's subsequent withdrawal from most of the West Bank. Yet Saddam Hussein was pointedly excluded from the international anti-terrorism conference meant to bolster Peres and his policy of unilateral withdrawal. Somehow, that doesn't seem quite fair.

Another Arab leader not invited to the anti-terrorism conference was Libya's Muammar Qaddafi—but he, at least, was present in spirit. According to *Washington Post* columnist Jim Hoagland, the Movenpick hotel at Sharm el Sheikh, where the conference was held, was built with Libyan money. "[Egypt's President] Mubarak passed over a Hilton and other luxury hotels," Hoagland wrote, "to select the Swiss-managed Movenpick—despite the fact that the hotel had no conference facilities." In going out of his way to pick a Libyan-financed hotel to hold the conference, perhaps Mubarak wanted to let Qaddafi know that he shouldn't take any of its anti-terrorist rhetoric personally.

Besides Iraq and Libya, the only other Middle Eastern nation not invited to the Sharm el Sheikh parley was Iran. Indeed, in his remarks to the conference, Peres went so far as to call Iran the "spearhead" of international terrorism. Unfortunately, any possibility that the conference might be the prelude to a concerted international effort to isolate Iran was scotched by the Germans and French, who made it clear that all talk of isolating Iran by cutting off Europe's "critical dialogue"—and lucrative trade—with Tehran was strictly *verboten*.

Perhaps the most curious thing about the anti-terrorist conference was that Hamas, the Palestinian group responsible for the terrorist bombings in Israel, is funded by Saudi Arabia as well as Iran, and receives sanctuary from Syria—yet

both Saudi Arabia and Syria were invited to the conference. Moreover, the fact that Saudi Arabia actually accepted the invitation (Syria was otherwise engaged) was seen as yet another great breakthrough for the peace process. Imagine, the Saudi foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, actually condescended to sit at the same table as Peres! Next thing you know, they'll be establishing eye-contact!

From the Arab point of view, however, there was nothing incongruous about inviting sponsors of Hamas to the conference, since—as they saw it—the summit wasn't about fighting terrorism at all. Rather, it was about maintaining the peace process. The distinction is quite significant. An anti-terror conference has as its chief targets the Arabs and Iranians, on whom pressure must be brought to cease their thuggery. A pro-peace process summit has as its chief target the Israelis, on whom pressure must be brought to continue their unilateral withdrawals, despite the growing civilian death toll. It was with

the latter goal in mind that the Arabs came to the Sharm el Sheikh summit, which they insisted on calling "The Peacemakers' Conference" and not—as the Israelis did—"The Anti-Terror Conference." As Egyptian foreign minister Amr Moussa put it, the summit's main purpose was to assure the "continued momentum of the Arab-Israeli peace process on the basis of Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories and self-determination for the Palestinians."

All this—the phoniness of the international conference, the cynical attempt to wring political profit out of human tragedy, the inability even to agree on the conference's name—suggests that the new Middle East envisioned by Israeli doves like Shimon Peres has a great deal in common with the old one. But there is one difference: In the old Middle East, Israel was a self-reliant U.S. strategic asset; in the new Middle East, it is rapidly becoming just another U.S. welfare client, with all the symptoms of dependency, despondency, and demoralization that welfare induces. ☼

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Ping-Pong Diplomacy

Monday

Rush, rush, rush over to Disney for a meeting to pitch a show. I met a startlingly alert young fellow named Rick and told him my thoughts for shows.

"The best one," said I, "is about what people do all day. It would have various people like magazine editors, mergers and acquisitions dealers, short-order cooks, car salesmen, emergency room nurses, policemen in southwest Florida, and I would ask them about what they do all day. Then we would have some videotape of what they do. We would have one person per half-hour. It would be aimed at kids and young adults. Most of them have no idea of what adults do all day long on the job. This would show them what work actually is like. Plus, it would teach them that they definitely want to get as much education as they possibly can so they spend their days doing what law professors do instead of what hotel maids do."

Rick nodded enthusiastically and said he thought it was a good idea. He could not possibly have been more polite. But I really wonder if he will be able to push my idea through the various levels above him to get it done. Well, I will just keep on trucking. In Hollywood, pitching a story or a show is like getting nibbled to death by ducks, or so someone once said.

Then off to lunch at the Hard Rock Cafe with my brilliant friend Kayle, the world's premier researcher, a woman destined for greatness. She's resisted my entreaties to go to law school so far and has instead made herself into a successful freelance writer. Right now, she's a little upset about the man situation.

BENJAMIN J. STEIN is a writer, actor, economist, and lawyer living in Hollywood and Malibu.

"The men in L.A. are not really that interested in sex," she said. "They're definitely not interested in love. They're more interested in some kind of sick control game. They want to be able to have you in their power more than they want to have sex with you. They're like agents or producers arranging a deal more than the usual man on the make."

"Hmmm," I said. "Hmmm."

"It's really hard on a woman who wants to get married and have a family."

"Well, I guess it's also hard on people who want to be yachtsmen and live in Omaha," I said. "Or the Sahara Desert."

"You know that guy I was dating?" she went on. "That Greek guy?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, he suddenly decided that, because he had one grandfather who was from Finland, he was of pure Magyar stock. So he started going to some Hungarian-only dating service. He did this right after we broke up. And what do you think? He's now engaged—engaged, mind you, to the girl he met through the Budapest dating service or something. He's this big liberal in Hollywood, like one of the top business managers in town, always going to fund-raisers for the United Negro College Fund and stuff like that—but he has to be married to a pure Magyar."

After lunch I went over to Fidelity in Century City to buy some stock. Yes, I too have succumbed to stock market mania. My broker told me about other clients who are much richer than I am, which I do not like. Alas, there are a lot of them. The stock market boom is on in earnest 1929 style. Everyone talks about his profits. Total strangers tout you on issues with strange names. At the Fidelity office, women in curlers, towing screaming babies, are plunking down their

hard-earned money. Men with scraggly beards, soiled sweat shirts, and dirty feet in sandals are standing right behind them. It all screams of some kind of frothy peak.

Then back to pick up Tommy at school. For me, picking him up is like picking up your date for the Senior Prom when you have the best looking date in town and everyone knows it. He grabbed my arms and tried to twist them behind my back, and we wrestled for a few minutes, and then I carried him away to the car. "Daddy, tell me everything about the tanks that were used in the First World War," he said. "Daddy, tell me everything about the SR-71 Blackbird," he said. "Daddy, tell me everything you know about the F-14 Tomcat."

I really do not know much about these subjects, but I tell him what I know and he seems perfectly happy. He's also really interested in Richard Nixon and asks me about Richard Nixon more or less every hour. "Daddy, what was Nixon like in elementary school? What was Nixon like when you worked for him? Why do the kids in my class hate Nixon?"

"They don't understand," I always tell him. "They buy the classic liberal lies about him. They don't know he was the savior of Israel. If they knew what he had done for Israel, they, in a Jewish school, would love and worship Nixon. They would be ashamed of themselves for ever having felt any other way."

"Are they stupid, Daddy?" Tommy asked.

"Not at all," I said. "Misinformed, but not stupid. We have the chance to teach them."

Off to Morton's to meet a lawyer who might hire me to be an expert witness in a case. The case