

REPORT ON ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

A Bimonthly Publication of the Foundation for Middle East Peace

Volume 9 Number 4

July-August 1999

NEWS

"Palestinians will have to lower their expectations about what Barak will do on settlements," said one of Barak's closest advisers in late June. Inclusion of the National Religious Party in the new Israeli government, and Barak's decision to award the housing and construction ministry to the party, lessen the prospect of a new direction in Israel's policy of settlement expansion.

A group of Palestinian academics and political figures meeting with Israelis in Sweden in mid-June put restrictions on settlements at the top of their list of issues requiring the immediate attention of the Barak government. There is a better chance, however, that Barak will choose to release a few score Palestinian prisoners.

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BARAK'S ELECTION PORTENDS MODIFICATIONS IN ISRAEL'S FOREIGN POLICY

The election of Ehud Barak opens a new chapter in Israel's approach to settlement expansion and the implementation of the Oslo and Wye accords reached by previous Israeli governments.

Barak views these issues in ways reminiscent of his predecessors Yitzhak Rabin and Benjamin Netanyahu. He shares Rabin's strategic vision of the need and ability of Israel to resolve the Palestinian question in a way that mirrors Israel's overwhelming power and preserves its vital security and national interests—settlements included.

"It is up to us," he explained in a September 1996 interview in *Ha'aretz*, "to prevent the development of a situa-

tion in which the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians becomes a vital symbol of the clash between Islam and Western culture, between North and South, between the haves and have-nots."

The conflict, he believes, can be solved, and Israel's power should be employed to create an architecture for peace rather than a rationale for inaction. In Barak's view, rapprochement with the Palestinians, on terms that Israel has the ability to impose, is a clear-cut security interest.

Notwithstanding Barak's essential sympathy with the views of his political

OSLO, *continued on page 5*

BARAK'S STRATEGIC VIEWS SHAPE POLICIES TOWARD SETTLEMENTS

by Geoffrey Aronson

Ehud Barak's overwhelming victory against Benjamin Netanyahu signifies more than a change in Israel's governing regime. The government that will lead Israel into the new millennium has a view of Israel's place in the world—and in particular the nature of agreements possible with Syria and the Palestinians—different from that of the defeated prime minister. The change, in style and substance, that Barak intends to introduce in Israeli policy offers both advantages and challenges to the international community in general and to the Arab world in particular and will

color his policies toward settlement expansion.

Much has been made of Barak's relationship with Yitzhak Rabin, the slain prime minister of Israel who began the road of real diplomatic engagement with the Palestinians at Oslo in September 1993 and who gave substance to negotiations with Syria and Jordan begun at Madrid in October 1991. Rabin was Barak's political mentor, appointing Barak, the recently retired chief of staff, to a cabinet position in his government.

Like Rabin, Barak's guiding vision is

STRATEGY, *continued on page 6*

TO OUR READERS

The election of Ehud Barak as prime minister of Israel opens yet another chapter in the unfolding history of relations between Israel and Palestine. Barak has been both a warrior and diplomat—devoting a lifetime of public service at senior levels to making war against the Palestinians and making peace with them.

His tenure promises to be markedly different from his immediate predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu, if only because Barak does not have to be convinced that the Palestinian Authority is a strategic partner. He understands that a rapprochement with the Palestinians, if it can be consummated, will be a net security gain for Israel.

Yet he has always been wary of the Oslo process, principally because of concerns about the relationship between the timetable for Israeli redeployments and final-status talks. Within the Labor party

he now leads, Barak has been the most forceful advocate of playing the card of withdrawal of Israeli forces from territory in the West Bank principally as part of a final-status agreement. His desire to postpone redeployments outlined in the Oslo II accords and reaffirmed at Wy Plantation will be unwelcome news to both U.S. and Palestinian officials.

It took both the PA and the Clinton administration many months to recalibrate their diplomacy in the aftermath of Netanyahu's election. Notwithstanding his commitment to the process, Ehud Barak promises to be a tougher negotiator than any prime minister Israel has fielded since the Oslo process began.



BARAK INHERITS THOUSANDS OF SETTLEMENT HOUSES UNDER CONSTRUCTION

According to Peace Now, more than 10,000 housing units are being readied for occupancy in West Bank and Gaza Strip settlements, enough to increase the settler population in these areas by 40,000, or 20 percent. Many of the already completed units can be expected to be occupied during the summer months.

Region	Unoccupied but Completed Dwelling Units	Units Under Construction
West Bank	2,989	6,546
Gaza Strip	725	152
Total	3,714	6,698

Source: Peace Now Settlement Watch, "Occupied Territories Population and Housing Report," May 1999.

"We are worried about the intentions of this new government. During its campaign, the Labor Party said funds would be for schools, not settlements. To bring into the government parties that support settlement makes us wonder about the intentions of this government."

PLO official Faisal Husseini
Ha'aretz, June 1, 1999

"Representatives of Barak came to me. . . . I said that if Barak could publicly promise that no Yesha community would be evacuated, I would support him. But the representatives could not promise me such a thing, and this tells me clearly what Barak's plans are."

Settlement leader Israel Harel
Arutz 7, May 10, 1999

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CLINTON LETTER TO ARAFAT CRITICIZES SETTLEMENTS

U.S. policy since the August 1992 summit between Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and U.S. president George Bush has provided for the expansion of settlements due to “natural growth”—a term that entered the U.S. diplomatic lexicon in March 1993 when Edward Djerejian, assistant secretary of state for the Middle East, testified before the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on the Middle East.

“There is some allowance [in U.S. policy] for—I wouldn’t use the word “expansion” but certainly continuing some activity—construction activities in existing settlements. And that’s basically in terms of natural growth and basic, immediate needs in those settlements,” explained Djerejian.

Along with this formulation, the Clinton administration has maintained that settlement expansion is a “complicating factor” in negotiations. In the deliberations preceding Clinton’s April 26, 1999, letter to PA chairman Yasser Arafat, Palestinian negotiators attempted without success to obtain U.S. support for a settlement freeze in return for their agreement to postpone a declaration of Palestinian independence.

Nevertheless, the Clinton letter does alter U.S. rhetoric on settlements and may signal a change in policy.

According to Israeli columnist Akiva Eldar, writing in *Ha’aretz* on May 10, Aaron Miller, the long-serving deputy of special Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, has said that the United States made it clear to Israel that “the settlements are worse than destructive.”

Some days earlier, a U.S. embassy spokesman in Tel Aviv declared that Netanyahu “told us at all levels and on many occasions that as a matter of policy, there would be no new settlements and no expansion of settlements.”

The latter commitment had never been noted before, and it is unlikely that if it had been made it would have remained secret for long. In any case, the Netanyahu government never restricted settlement expansion according to these principles.

A spokesman for Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon noted that Sharon, in a meeting with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on April 9 in Washington, denied that Israel had violated any agreement.

“Israel has not built any new settlements, and the growth in settlements is not an obstacle to peace, but rather the opposite—it contributes to peace,” said the spokesman. He also stressed that settlements were not a “unilateral act” of the kind prohibited by the Oslo accords and that all settlement expansion is occurring on state land.

It is not clear that, in the wake of the April 26 letter, the Clinton administration has disavowed its support for natural growth of settlements or how this support is to be reconciled with the president’s most recent characterization of settlement-related activities.

It is also unclear whether U.S. opposition to settlement expansion is restricted only to expansion beyond what one U.S. spokesman described as the “continuous periphery” of existing construction. U.S.-Israeli discussions in 1997 about a “time out” in settlement expansion and restricting “significant” expansion focused on winning Israel’s agreement to concentrate expansion near existing locations. Israel’s adoption of such a policy was viewed as a means of restricting some

settlement activity. If such an agreement was in fact consummated, it also would have indicated a U.S. stamp of approval to settlement expansion in areas contiguous to existing settlement—where almost all expansion is taking place. ♦

Dear Mr. Chairman,

Clearly, the Oslo process has not made the kind of progress we would have hoped to see.

I am asking that you continue to rely on the peace process as the way to fulfill the aspirations of your people. Indeed, negotiations are the only realistic way to fulfill those aspirations.

In this context, and in the spirit of my remarks in Gaza, we support the aspirations of the Palestinian people to determine their own future on their own land. As I said in Gaza, I believe Palestinians should live free today, tomorrow and forever.

The objective of the negotiating process is the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, including land for peace, and all other agreements under the Oslo process.

For these negotiations to succeed, it is vital that the environment in which they occur be credible, serious, and fair. The United States knows how destructive settlement activities, land confiscations, and house demolitions are to the pursuit of Palestinian-Israeli peace. In this regard, we will continue to exert maximum efforts to have both parties avoid unilateral steps or actions designed to change the status of the West Bank and Gaza or to prejudge or preempt issues reserved for permanent status negotiations.

Excerpts from an April 26, 1999, letter from President Bill Clinton to Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat

West Bank Hilltop Settlements and Land Confiscations - June 1999

LEGEND

- Palestinian Autonomous Area (Area A; Full Civil and Security Control)
- Palestinian Autonomous Area (Area B; Full Civil Control, Joint Isr. / Pal. Security Control)
- Area C; Israeli Civil and Security Control
- Outline of Areas claimed by Israel as State land 1967 - 1998
- Larger contiguous Areas expropriated by Israel as State land since the Wye Memorandum November 1998
- Israeli Settlement
- Settlement Expansion Site after the Wye Memorandum
- Settlement Expansion Site established Winter-Spring 1999
- Network of Israeli (re)constructed and scheduled thoroughfares

▲ SETTLEMENT SITES SINCE Nov. 1998

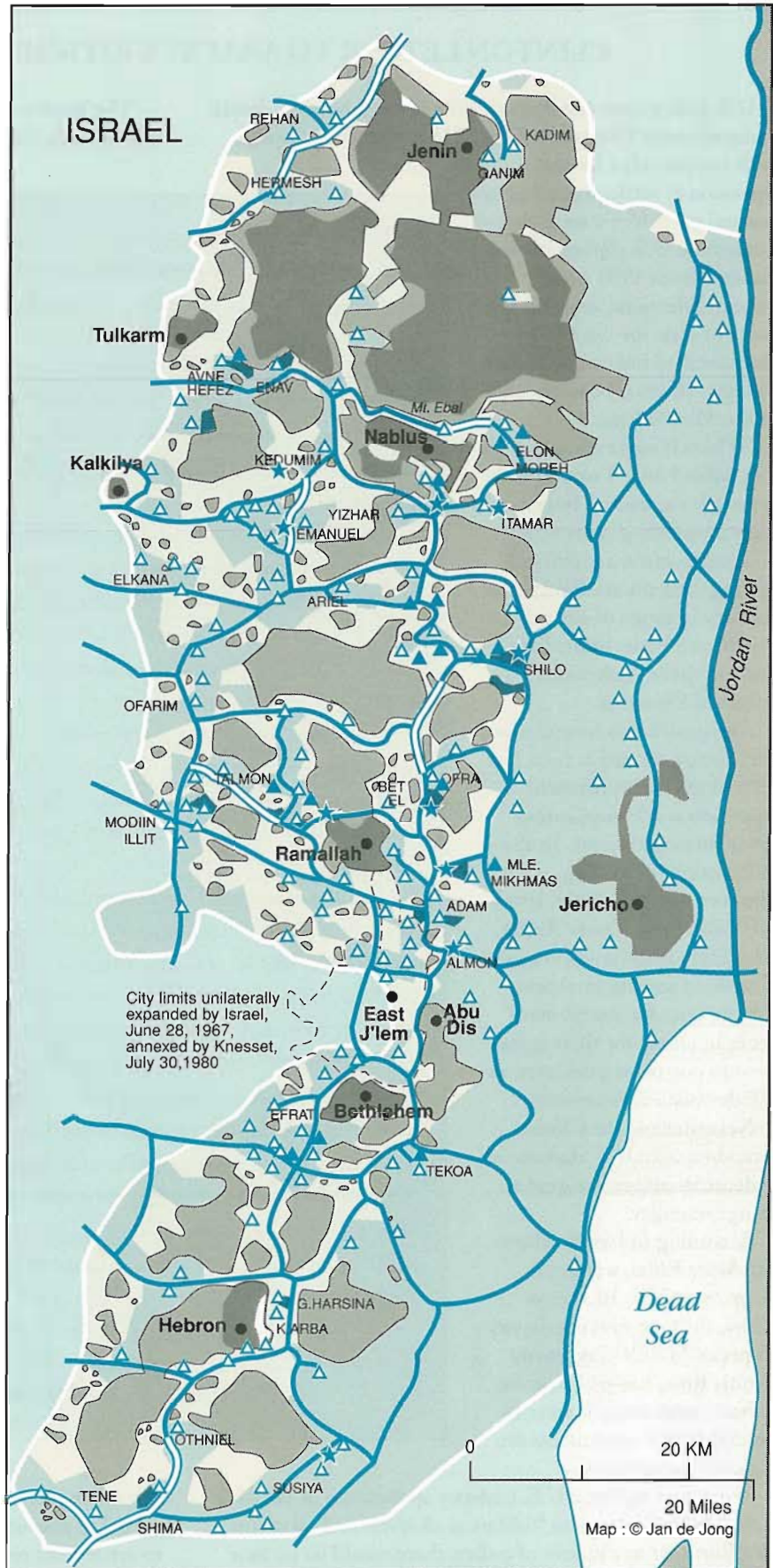
- 1 - Site North of Avne Hefez
- 2 - Site East of Brakha
- 3 - Site Southwest of Elon Moreh
- 4 - Site Southeast of Elon Moreh
- 5 - Rachelim
- 6 - Site North of Eli
- 7 - Site South of Ma'ale Levona
- 8 - Site South of Eli
- 9 - Site South of Shilo/ Shvut Rachel
- 10 - Site East of Shilo
- 11 - Giv'at Zit Ra'anana (Talmon)
- 12 - Giv'at Horesh (Talmon)
- 13 - Mizpe Dany (Ma'ale Mikhmas)
- 14 - Giv'at Ha'ish (East of Alon Shvut)
- 15 - Site North of Efrata
- 16 - Site North of Nokdim

★ SETTLEMENT SITES SINCE March 1999

- 17 - Site near Kedumim
- 18 - Site South of Brakha
- 19 - Site near Kedumim
- 20 - Additional site near Ofra
- 21 - Additional Site near Mle. Mikhmas
- 22 - Construction Site near Ramallah
- 23 - Signpost west of Almon
- 24 - Additional Site near Shilo
- 25 - Additional Sites around Itamar
- 26 - Site near Emanuel
- 27 - Sites Southeast of Hebron

== BYPASS TRAJECTORIES ANNOUNCED SINCE March 1999

- Tene - Eshkolot - Shima - Othniel Road
- Naaleh - Dolev - Beituniya Road
- Widening Road 60 Ofra - Shilo
- Emanuel - Kedumim Road
- Salim - Rehana - Hermesh Road
- Elon Moreh - Mount Ebal Road



mentor, Rabin, the new prime minister has always viewed the Oslo process with a far greater degree of skepticism than almost all of his colleagues in the Labor party. As minister of interior in Rabin's cabinet, Barak abstained in the Knesset vote on the Oslo II accords held barely one month before Rabin's assassination in October 1995. His primary concerns related to the accord's security provisions, which he thought too lax, and its timetable, which he believed would place too much territory in Palestinian hands before final-status talks commenced and which, he argued, should be extended.

Questions about Oslo

"It would be best if more time were allowed between the phases in the redeployment scheme," he explained in January 1997, "so that there would be a real trial period to see how things work out. I would like to see as many as three years between each phase." The three redeployments of the Israel Defense Force (IDF) in the West Bank agreed to in the Oslo II accords were to have been completed by September 1997. The first redeployment outlined in Oslo II, which was supposed to have begun in September 1996, was implemented only in November 1998. Yossi Beilin, Oslo's architect, described Barak's position as "a serious mistake which is likely to harm Israel and the peace process."

Unlike his Labor colleagues, Barak has always taken pains to keep Palestinian Authority chairman Yasser Arafat at arm's length. Even as chief of staff, Barak left the task of relations with Arafat to his deputy, Amnon Shahak, now a leader of the Center Party. As foreign minister from November 1995 to June 1996, Barak met with Arafat only three times, all of them at conferences abroad. After his election as Labor party chairman in June 1997, he met with Arafat only after meeting with Egyptian, Jordanian, U.S., and European leaders.

Like Israeli leaders before him, Barak is prepared to countenance the creation of an independent Palestinian state—although he prefers a Palestinian confederation with Jordan. Indeed, some form of Palestinian self-determination is viewed by Barak as an essential *Israeli* interest if Israel is to maintain its existing political institutions and Jewish majority. No matter what this Palestinian entity is called, its sovereign powers must be circumscribed according to Israeli security and settlement-related demands.

"An absolutely sovereign Palestinian state will very much complicate the chances for an agreement," Barak has noted. "It will not produce an existential threat to Israel but rather create a threat of irredentism, among other problems.

"The issue of two states for two people is not so simple. Two real states west of the Jordan River is a problem. In my opinion, our demand must be for a Palestinian entity that is less than a state, and we must hope that over time, in a natural fashion, that this entity will form a confederation with Jordan."

The weak state that Barak envisages will also be hobbled

by his view of the need for "separation" between the two countries. His support for this policy stands in contrast to the conventional Likud view and policies pursued by Labor governments, which opposed the re-creation of a border between Israel and the occupied territories, including the prohibition of the movement of Arab labor into Israel.

"Only physical separation from the Palestinians will give us both personal and national security, but in no way will we withdraw to the 1967 border," he explained. "Bet El and Ofra will be ours forever. Ramallah and Nablus will forever belong to the Palestinians."

Barak, while insisting that Israel maintain the strategic and settlement benefits resulting from its continuing linkage to the occupied territories, is determined to enforce a more permanent exclusion of Palestinians across the border into Israel, a policy he once described as "bringing to zero the number of Palestinian laborers entering Israel."

Barak and the Land of Israel

The prism through which Barak views the West Bank and Gaza Strip is also colored by his identification with Israel's Jewish and Zionist heritage. Barak himself resides in the Israeli town of Kochav Ya'ir, in a house only 50 meters from the Green Line. When he looks out his window at the hills rising in the east, he sees, by his own admission, the Land of Israel, not Palestine.

"There is no meaning to our identity and to all that we are here without the connection to Shilo and to Tekoa, to Bet El and to Efrat," he has explained.

"When I say that we should not settle on another hill near Efrat or Bet El, I don't say it because we do not have such a right, or that we stole something there from someone. Just the opposite. We have a complete right to settle there. We didn't steal anything from anyone. We have deep ties with these places. So when I suggest to weigh withdrawing from a certain hilltop it is because I want to increase the chances of creating a stable equilibrium between us and the Palestinians that will protect both of our vital interests."

Most settlers, he believes, are not outside of Israel's national consensus. This belief in the settlers' inclusion distinguishes him from Rabin, whose confrontations with settlers from Gush Emmunim created a permanent disaffection between himself and them. Barak avers the language of exclusion. The exceptions are "a small radical group, sitting in Tel Rumeida and El David, and a few other places. But the overwhelming majority are people with whom I personally share a political identification."

Settlements, under his administration, will not be "dried out." On a February 1999 visit to Alfe Menache, a settlement near the Green Line, Barak declared, "This place here is at the center of one of the big settlement blocs that will be under Israeli sovereignty as part of the permanent agreement. We have clear red lines. Yitzhar and Tel Rumeida are one

not an ideology, but an overriding attention to maximizing Israel's security—both regionally and in the international arena. Barak believes that the two areas are linked—that agreements enhancing Israel's security vis-à-vis its former antagonists in the Arab world will benefit Israel's relations with the international community at large. For Barak, the “international community” means more than simply the United States; but rehabilitating the relationship with Washington, a relationship that soured during the later months of Netanyahu's tenure, is one of Barak's first foreign policy priorities.

His victory, in turn, offers obvious benefits to Washington, in style if not necessarily in substance. A Barak government, even if no less militant on Arab-Israeli issues than its predecessors, will nonetheless present its policies to Washington in a more diplomatically astute fashion, precluding the kind of wrangling that characterized Netanyahu's relations with the Clinton administration. It will not be long before the Israeli prime minister, once again, is a more welcome guest at the White House than the chairman of the Palestinian Authority.

More than Rabin, and certainly to a greater degree than Netanyahu, Barak's vision of the world extends beyond the parochial or U.S. dimension. Barak's election raises “very high expectations internationally,” explained Alon Liel, a former Israeli ambassador to South Africa and Turkey who is also an adviser to Barak on strategic affairs, “and we will try to meet some of them. Reviving the Syrian channel and reestablishing credibility with the Palestinians are not only of great importance themselves, they are also important for changing the atmosphere towards Israel in the Middle East and the world.”

Security as Ideology

Barak is what the Israelis call a “security-ist.” He views the Golan Heights and the West Bank, for example, primarily through the prism of a modern-day general—comfortable commanding an army equipped with the latest in laser-guided munitions, intermediate range missiles, and nuclear warheads—rather than through that of a biblical scholar or sentimentalist. And, like Rabin, he has a realistic appreciation of Israel's overwhelming military power and the opportunities that this power presents to create an architecture of relations in the region advantageous to Israel.

“Because we do not know what challenges await us around the corner,” Barak said in a 1996 interview, “in the next seven or eight years, we must take advantage of the moment in order to try to stabilize our immediate region so that when we confront those new challenges, we will not face them as well as the conflict closer to home.”

Unlike Netanyahu, he will not fret, even as a negotiating tactic, over the military threat posed by Palestinian sovereignty. Yet Barak will not be reticent in making extraordinary demands for Syria's and Palestine's military enfeeblement a central element of his negotiating strategy.

As Barak surveys the region, he will not attempt to resuscitate the widely discredited effort led by Shimon Peres to craft a “New Middle East.” Peres' views “are not exactly those of Barak,” noted Liel. “His view is less ambitious. Who are we to impose our vision on the region?”

“We have learned a lot in the last five or six years. We have lost some of the desire to change and to educate the region—there is almost nothing left of this. We do not want to teach anybody anything. We have no regional ambitions.”

Suspicious of Israeli intentions will no doubt remain in Arab capitals, but in Ankara there is bound to be disappointment with Barak's view, which encouraged Netanyahu's efforts to establish a bilateral strategic partnership.

“We know the Turkish thinking,” explained Liel, “and it does not resemble ours.”

Rationale for Rapprochement

For Barak, like his predecessors, Iran, Iraq, and Libya remain enemies of the Jewish state. The nonconventional weapons programs to Israel's east are viewed as a strategic threat. Yet, according to Liel, “If we remove the threats closer to us—Syria and the Palestinians—things will gradually look different in our conflict with the outer circle.”

Barak will be challenged to distinguish himself from Netanyahu in the conduct of relations on the Syrian front. Despite a productive back channel opened to the Assad regime, Netanyahu saw no value in making territorial concessions to Syria. For Barak, the depth of Israeli withdrawal from the Golan is linked to the extent of peace and normalization that Syria is prepared to offer. He has promised to remove Israeli troops from south Lebanon in a year, something that can only be done in coordination with Damascus.

“Israel is interested strategically in getting out of Lebanon and in peace with Syria,” noted Liel. “Barak will do his best to resume negotiations with Syria.”

The long-standing Syrian demand that negotiations resume where they left off in January 1996 at the Wye Plantation talks may, however, still prove to be an obstacle to an open renewal of talks. Barak does not accept the Syrian view that there is an a priori Israeli agreement to withdraw to the June 1967 boundary. Nonetheless he is prepared to undertake a review of the dialogue in order to reestablish ties and resume negotiations.

Together with initiatives on Syria and Lebanon, reestablishing a productive dialogue with the Palestinians is at the top of the list of Barak's regional priorities. Barak, according to one Palestinian who maintains intimate contact with Israeli officials, “has embarked on the road to Damascus, but he has not yet had a change of heart.”

Palestinians are not celebrating his election. “There is no deep and warm contact with the Palestinians,” Liel acknowledged. “We have to build bridges.” Barak believes that, “on a historical level, the suffering of the Palestinian people that we

thing, but Alfe Menache, the Etzion Bloc, Ariel, Nirit, the corridor, the Jordan Valley settlements, and many more places are part of the State of Israel, now and in the permanent agreement.”

Barak’s preferred policy expression is that “most of the settlers will remain under Israeli sovereignty. I specifically did not say all of the settlements.” His chief complaint against the settlement policies of former prime minister Netanyahu was that they were tactically inept.

Heart and Brains

“To redeem the Land of Israel, you need both heart and brains,” Barak explained in an October 1997 interview.

“Look back and think how the 150,000 [Israeli] settlers in East Jerusalem came to live there. It was not by a government that just talks, talks, and defers action to the next generations. No! That [Labor] government brought 150,000 people to live in Jerusalem without any provocative actions.”

In contrast, Barak cited Netanyahu’s efforts to inaugurate construction at Har Homa and Ras al-Amud. Barak never opposed construction at either site in East Jerusalem.

“The Rabin government and then the Peres government decided that there should be construction on Har Homa,” he said in the October interview. “All that was left was the when and how. The Har Homa construction was designed to add housing units in Jerusalem and to strengthen Israel’s hold on Jerusalem. The way this government has been doing it, the opposite has happened. We are weakening Israel’s hold on Jerusalem. I said at the very outset what we should do: Invite every television network in the world—[the Netanyahu] government is very adept at doing this—to the inauguration of the East Jerusalem sewage project. People who live there are under our sovereignty. Then I would take

them to see a [Palestinian] housing project—and there is one south of Ras al-Amud. I am familiar with these projects from my term as minister of interior. This project should be carried out, because there are people living there. Then I would start Har Homa. The Arabs would not applaud, they would criticize us, but honest people around the world would say that this is one serious government, a serious municipality, one that cares for its people, one that builds. We would have had a neighborhood in Har Homa without all this international commotion.

“I am not just saying this. The Labor governments built and settled people. There are over 150,000 residents beyond the 1967 borders in Jerusalem. We should use our brains when doing this. Brains is the key word.

“What happened with the Netanyahu government? It did the opposite. It banged its head against the wall. The moment the thing was done as a declarative, political act rather than as a housing project for East Jerusalem Palestinians and Jews, every government in the world was forced to voice its stand on the issue of Jerusalem. And it is a known fact that their stands are closer to the Palestinians’ than to ours.”

True to Labor party tradition, and unlike Netanyahu, Barak says he prefers to draft principles, not maps.

“The principles are: broad, united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty; no return to the 1967 borders; no foreign army west of the Jordan River; most of the Judea and Samaria settlers—not even most of the settlements—to remain under our sovereignty in the permanent arrangement; a defense and settlement presence in the Jordan Rift Valley.

“These principles will create an extended corridor, large blocs, and an ‘expanded Allon plan,’ which is a basis for permanent-status negotiations. As for the borders, it would naturally make no sense to draw them prematurely. The borders will be determined in the permanent-status talks.” ♦

STRATEGY, *continued from page 7*

caused them is smaller than the justice of our cause.” The source of Israel’s identity, Barak asserts, cannot be understood without reference to Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

Barak is a reluctant champion of Oslo. Rabin and Peres kept the Oslo dialogue secret from then chief of staff Barak for fear that he would scuttle it. As minister of interior in Rabin’s cabinet, he abstained from the cabinet vote on the Oslo II accords. Almost alone among top government officials, Barak took care never to be photographed in PA chairman Yasser Arafat’s presence. Within the Labor party he has been the most vocal proponent of slowing down and extending the timetable for withdrawal outlined in Oslo II.

Barak is, however, anxious to improve Israel’s relations with the PA. He views Arafat and the PA as strategic partners in the effort to establish productive relations, and he does not oppose Palestinian sovereignty under Israeli tutelage.

His view of the territorial division of the occupied territories is squarely within the broad Israeli consensus—a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty, no withdrawal to the June 1967 borders, no foreign or Palestinian army west of the Jordan River, and the annexation of large settlement blocks to Israel throughout the West Bank. Yet he feels no particular enthusiasm for the diplomatic framework created by Netanyahu. Barak will try to refashion diplomacy with the Palestinians according to his own preferences. A first casualty may well be the West Bank redeployments agreed to at the Wye talks in October 1998.

“The key issue,” explained Liel, “is to start the final-status talks and try to create movement. We have to hear from the Palestinians whether the route they took with Netanyahu is the route they want to take with us. I think the [Wye agreement] should be completed but I want to hear from the Palestinians. Maybe [final-status talks] can proceed simultaneously with Wye.” ♦

RUBIN: SETTLEMENT EXPANSION INCONSISTENT WITH ISRAELI PROMISES

The following excerpts are from the daily press briefing at the U.S. Department of State on Wednesday, April 28, 1999. The briefer was Department spokesman James P. Rubin.

Mr. Rubin: The Secretary did meet with the Defense Minister yesterday. She made clear that we will reinvigorate the Middle East peace process following the Israeli elections. At least we're prepared to do so through the implementation of the Wye agreement and the accelerated permanent status negotiations. She also made clear that the United States is strongly opposed to both unilateral actions and declarations, which are counter-productive to the peace process.

In particular, she raised ongoing settlement activities. She said they were contrary to what the United States Government had been told by the government of Israel, and made that very clear that this expansion beyond the periphery was inconsistent with what we had been told by the Israeli Government.

Question: Can you be more specific about what it is the Israeli Government is doing that is contrary to what they told you they would do?

Mr. Rubin: They are acting and expanding settlement activity beyond contiguous areas, inconsistent with their commitments or their words to us. They've said they would not do that repeatedly. Our assessment of the settlement activity is such that they are acting inconsistent with those statements.

Question: Their explanation has generally been they're just expanding existing settlements. So you're saying that, in fact, you do not accept that statement; that you see them building

fresh settlements that are not contiguous?

Mr. Rubin: I didn't use that word, and I would urge you not to put that word in my mouth. What I said is they're acting inconsistent with their statement that they would not expand, that their settlement activity would not go beyond contiguous areas. That is our view—that it has.

Question: Can you say where it has?

Mr. Rubin: I don't have any specific information available to me right now. We believe that the Israeli Government is acting inconsistent with its statements to us, to not allow settlement activity to go beyond contiguous areas; that is our view. I'm not going to get into every settlement involved and every activity involved and every particular case in which the government may or may not have taken the first step. We do believe the Israeli Government is in a position to follow through on what it says to us, and it did not do so in this case. That is a matter of deep concern to us—especially in a case where the activity itself is so destructive to the peace process.

Question: The Defense Minister had said that it was the act of individual settlers, and not something that they viewed as breaking any sort of unilateral action.

Mr. Rubin: Look, the reality is that if the Israeli Government makes statements to us, that is very important to us, given the close friendship that we have with them. We believe that to the extent that individuals may be acting in such cases, that the government can stop those activities so that they are in conformity with the statements that have been made to us. ♦

"I live in Kochav Ya'ir, fifty meters from the Green Line. When I open my eyes in the morning and look to the east, I see hills and mountains. It is the Land of Israel. We do not disagree on the connection to the Land of Israel, or to the holy sites in which the People of Israel came into being, or to the places where our nation's spirit was created. I remember who it was that placed a stone under his head at Beit El and what happened later that night, and I also remember who herded the sheep in the fields of Efrat. The question is not the connection. The disagreement concerns the political acts that are required, what needs to be done to ensure the people's existence, security, and spiritual well-being."

Ehud Barak to students in the West Bank settlement of Ofra, May 12, 1998

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