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**Middle East Peace Prospects:
Strategies and Tactics**

by

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There is reason for hope. Arabs and Israelis have met face to face. They have started down the road to peace. President Bush and Secretary of State Baker, having brought the process this far, are to be congratulated. They deserve our support.

Yet lest hopes soar unreasonably high, dreams and reality must be kept in perspective. It is one thing to be positive, to take the high ground. It is quite another to be naive, to pretend that certain things do not exist. At the end of the day, reality brooks no illusions.

Reality in this case includes an array of Israeli Government strategies and tactics designed to avoid having to exchange land for peace. For example, only a few weeks prior to the peace conference, the Shamir Government adhered to its strategy of trying to prevent the meeting from occurring and, hence, the peace process from going forward.

Shamir's tactic: insistence not only on continuing a policy to which the UN, the U.S. and the rest of the world community has long been opposed -- that of settling Israelis on confiscated Arab land -- but also of asking for U.S. guarantees for a \$10 billion loan to do so.

President Bush was quick to inform Mr. Shamir that he was out of bounds. He did so in language that was clearer and more straightforward than that of any president since Eisenhower. In the aftermath of Israel's 1956 invasion of Egypt, Eisenhower, in effect, ordered Israel to withdraw.

Eisenhower informed Prime Minister Ben Gurion that the U.S. would not acquiesce in Israel's or any other country's acquisition of territory by force. Eisenhower took the high road. Israel withdrew.

President Bush has been equally firm in his opposition to Mr. Shamir's vow not to withdraw "from one inch" of conquered Palestinian and Syrian land. The response of Mr. Shamir and those Americans who lobby on his behalf has been to cry foul.

It was the same with Eisenhower. *Shamir's American supporters do not say that President Bush is wrong.* They complain, instead, that the President's remarks on the subject have been intemperate.

Reasonable Americans, however, have been perplexed as to why on a matter so central to the prospects for peace as the settlements, Shamir has been unwilling to cooperate. In a widely published public opinion survey, 86% of Americans polled disagreed with Shamir; they agreed with Bush.

Moreover, 40% of those polled said that the U.S. should *cease providing aid to Israel altogether*. Seldom, if ever, has there been such overwhelming public support for the Middle East policies of a U.S. president.

To Middle East specialists and the American public in general, President Bush's call for a 120-day delay in the consideration of the Israeli request is fully justified. Had the Shamir Government's tactics of delay and diversion been successful, the peace process, and the international effort to halt the settlements, would have suffered an enormous setback.

Such a setback would have served the strategic objectives of Mr. Shamir but not those of the United States or anyone else. One of Mr. Shamir's major goals has been to continue his government's *de facto* sovereignty over all of the Palestinians' land and water, including that of the extensive Arab sector of East Jerusalem. Such an objective precludes the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state -- the strategic goal of most Palestinians.

One of Mr. Shamir's additional and quite separate goals is to keep 100% of the territory and water that Israel has annexed in southern Syria. A *new Israeli colony in Syria's Golan Province was inaugurated on the very day that Israel sat down to talk peace with the Syrians in Madrid*. Such actions preclude the possibility of a just, durable, and comprehensive peace treaty with Syria -- a strategic objective of Syria and the United States.

Yet another of Mr. Shamir's goals involves Lebanon. As to whether his government will lift its control over southern Lebanon -- a strategic objective of Lebanon and the United States -- Mr. Shamir demands linkage. Lebanon, he insists, will not be allowed to restore its national sovereignty until and unless Syrian forces withdraw.

Yet Syria's forces were invited into Lebanon by, and have remained in the country through formal written agreement with, the Lebanese Government as well as the Arab League signatories to the 1989 Taif Accord, which the U.S. encouraged and continues to support. Israel's forces invaded. The infringement of Lebanon's sovereignty is by Israel, not Syria.

As with any strategy, the tactics will vary from issue to issue. They will also change in accordance with altered circumstances. In general, however, the Shamir Government's tactics aimed at the Bush Administration have remained fairly constant.

Whether the Israeli Government's goals have been to persuade the U.S. to cease its efforts to halt Israeli settlements, hasten Israeli withdrawal from Arab land, get Israel to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, or enlist meaningful Israeli cooperation on other issues relating to regional peace and security, Shamir's tactics have seldom wavered.

More often than not, the tactics have entailed doing whatever is necessary to cause the U.S. to grow weary. The objective: for the U.S., in its exhaustion, to give up its efforts to broker peace.

In the background has always been Mr. Shamir's greater goal, which is to avoid, if at all possible, returning *any* of the Palestinian and Syrian land that Israel has conquered. To this end, having failed to prevent the meetings in Madrid, one of his tactics from this point forward will be to string the peace process out for as long as he can.

That way, the Israeli Government would avoid having to apply the principle of national self-determination to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. That way, Israel would avoid having to withdraw from Syria.

A potentially useful tactic in pursuit of such goals, if it can be done, is to enmesh everyone in debates of a *legal* nature. Legal disputes are seldom resolved quickly. But even that approach is not free of pitfalls. It is likely that a legal resolution of the conflict would require Israel to return the Occupied Territories.

Hence, the Israeli Government needs backup tactics that, if necessary, would prevent the peace process from reaching the legal stage. This is one of the reasons why Mr. Shamir's Government remains opposed to UN involvement.

Shamir rightly fears the UN might be called upon to interpret, and thus likely reconfirm, its resolutions on the necessity of Israel's exchanging land for peace. The tactics for avoiding such an eventuality entail, among other things, tying up the participants in *procedural* matters.

Where such tactics have failed to wear the U.S. down, the Shamir Government, often simultaneously, has not hesitated to play the Arab side of the same coin. This has entailed doing whatever it takes to provoke Arabs into derailing the peace process.

In this way, Israel would avoid having to comply with the land for peace formula, as embraced in U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 of 1967 and 338 of 1983, the cornerstones of UN, U.S., and international policy regarding the conflict.

Were any of these tactics to succeed, the impact on the peace process would be obvious and ominous. At a minimum, the Shamir Government would be able to consolidate its hold on confiscated Arab land. It would be able to continue exploiting the Occupied Territories' dwindling water supplies.

The success of any of these tactics would prolong the existing situation. That situation is one in which the civil and human rights of the occupied Palestinians are systematically violated. It is one in which Israeli soldiers are able to continue to imprison and deport from their own land more and more Palestinian leaders, as well as southern Lebanese leaders, who resist such actions and policies.

Most significantly, especially among the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, perpetuation of the status quo would increase the level of dismay and despair among those who remain -- to the point where, realistically, they may have little choice but to give in and give up.

Since only the potential scope and modalities of Palestinian autonomy in municipal, civil, and social affairs, *but not national independence or control over land and water*, would be left to negotiate, the tacticians would have achieved their goal.

Reality brooks no illusions.

The consistency of the Israeli Government's tactics to persuade the U.S. to give up has been, and continues to be, remarkable. One tactic has been to confront Secretary of State Baker by opening one or more new settlements on confiscated Palestinian land almost every time he has visited Israel.

Other manifestations of stonewalling on the settlements issue include the Shamir Government's having first denied, but later acknowledged, that it had illegally used U.S. aid monies to allow Israeli settlers to occupy church-owned property in the Arab sector of East Jerusalem.

Last Spring, barely 24 hours after Shamir's promise to Secretary Baker that he would *not* use monies from a different \$400 million U.S.-backed loan guarantee to resettle emigres in the Occupied Territories, *he proceeded to do just that*. And this September, at the same time of the \$10 billion loan guarantee request, Shamir announced that he would continue to resettle Israelis on Palestinian land.

In response to the latter incident, analysts and media commentators across the country were stunned. They noted that in the more than 200-year history of the United States, never had a purported ally demonstrated such open defiance of and contempt for the U.S. Government, its principal benefactor in terms of security support, financial assistance, and diplomatic legitimacy.

The Bush Administration, no less than the Palestinians and Syrians, is infuriated by the Shamir Government's persistent and blatant violation of UN resolutions and international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, to which Israel is a signatory. The Convention specifically prohibits a power from expropriating the lands of an occupied people, from exploiting their natural resources, and from deporting its citizens.

As visitors to the Occupied Territories quickly notice, Palestinian and Syrian land is diminishing. Palestinian and Syrian orchards and vineyards are withering. Confiscated land and water for Israelis, however, are plentiful. And the number of Israeli colonists is increasing.

Yet despite such provocations, the Palestinians and Israel's Arab neighbors are adhering to their own strategic objective. They continue to participate in the peace process under joint U.S.-Soviet auspices, together with UN, European Community, Gulf Cooperation Council, and Egyptian observer missions.

The Shamir Government's tactics have, therefore, met with mixed results. On one hand, they have succeeded, for not an inch of Palestinian, southern Lebanese, or Syrian occupied land has been liberated. On the other, they have failed, for neither the Bush Administration nor the Arab side has yet shown any signs of succumbing to the Israeli ploy.

Even so, a potential time-bomb is ticking in the background. In January, the 120-day waiting period that President Bush stipulated in connection with the settlements-loan guarantee issue will end and the matter will be reexamined.

In preparation for that event, Mr. Shamir's American supporters show signs of gearing up for a showdown. Their hope is that the President, conscious of an election year having begun, will knuckle under.

Whether American support for President Bush's actions and policies on the issue then will be as strong as it is now, remains to be seen. Moreover, no one can say whether by then the peace process will still be under way.

What can be said is that most of the world's leaders, knowledgeable as they are of the direct link between progress on the settlements question and the prospects for peace, will be watching.

Not only are the hopes of the occupied Palestinians, Lebanese, and Syrians and the hopes of Israelis tied to the results of the peace talks, but so are those of a great many others. A settlement deemed satisfactory to the broadest number of Palestinians, Israelis, Lebanese, and Syrians would end one of this century's greatest travesties of justice.

A settlement would likely have a ripple effect of positive consequences reaching from one end of the region to the other. Few doubt that the voices of vision and reason among Arabs and Israelis would be strengthened, as would the stability of individual governments.

Israel would cease deporting Palestinian leaders, manifestations of political violence would diminish, and one of the regional rationales for acquiring weapons of mass destruction would have been tackled at its roots.

The ending of this oldest among the world's unresolved conflicts would yield still other dividends. With the greatly lessened need for sustained high levels of expenditure on defense by the parties to the conflict, additional funds would be available for development and other programs to help alleviate the misery of the region's poor.

A settlement would also help ensure more predictable access to and utilization of the Middle East's prodigious supplies of energy, on which the entire world depends for survival.

Ending the conflict would help more than anything else to make it politically possible to erect in the Gulf a credible mechanism of deterrence and defense aimed at preventing a recurrence of the breakdown in regional order that occurred on August 2, 1990.

Most significantly, a settlement would contribute, like no other single factor, to Middle East peace and security and, thereby, to the unleashing of the most creative and productive energies the region has ever known.

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