
Interview: Meir Pa'il



The economic challenge is the best reason to make peace

Meir Pa'il is a Member of the Knesset. One of Israel's leading military historians, he is well known for his groundbreaking proposal for a strategic defense of Israel from behind its 1967 borders. (See EIR, Jan. 31, 1984).

EIR: What are the main projects in the Marshall Plan?

Pa'il: They include oil pipelines, electricity grids, agricultural development, and knowledge in the medical field.

EIR: Minister Ya'acobi talks about nuclear energy plants in the Negev; what do you think?

Pa'il: I'm not against it! There are desert areas between Iraq and Jordan, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, in the Negev and in Syria, which could be sites. Nuclear plants could be used for desalinization and to provide energy for water pumping stations. Nuclear plants are not terrible; we wouldn't be building Chernobyls!

EIR: How do you view the Marshall Plan politically?

Pa'il: I would stress that in the ancient world, Mesopotamia [modern day Iraq] or Egypt, could have managed to develop their economies separately, with the Tigris-Euphrates and the Nile as water sources. In modern times, there is no hope in the Middle East, unless all countries join for development. We deserve to think about the European model, and to envision some kind of Marshall Plan. Even if there were not a hostile situation, even in peace, economic collaboration is a must. This is why everyone in the Middle East, from Iran to Libya and Egypt, and Turkey, all should think of themselves as parts of an economic unit.

The economic challenge of the Middle East is perhaps the best reason for making peace, an excellent cause for taking peace initiatives. When I think about the economic potential of the Middle East and am convinced that it won't work without peace, my sensitivity to this initiative grows. This is the reason I appreciate the prime minister's proposal very much. He's right in thinking that the Middle East is an excellent target for investment; it may even help Germany, France, and the United States to solve their unemployment crises. It's good for these nations; and for us, it's more than

"good," it's the only way out.

I want to stress that the interest in peace is not only for the Middle East but for the rest of the world. If the Soviets asked me, I'd say even they could take part. I'd tell Mr. Peres, "After criticizing you and your party since the Six Day War, for not taking initiatives for peace, I consider your Marshall Plan a positive development, because I think you will gradually come to the conclusion you must be ready to evacuate the occupied territories." If Mr. Peres would like to use this as a covert plan for a peace initiative, that's good, too.

EIR: What are the next steps that should be taken?

Pa'il: The main political challenge is to convince the United States not only to become the economic sponsor of the Marshall Plan, but the political sponsor of a peace initiative, too. This means convincing or educating the Israelis to be ready to evacuate the occupied territories. It's a difficult job, first to convince the United States, and get them to convince the Israelis! People like myself in Israel try to educate circles to take up our peace initiative; an initiative from the outside would be very fruitful.

EIR: How do you evaluate the fact, that Industry Minister Sharon and the Soviets attacked the Marshall Plan almost simultaneously?

Pa'il: From the Soviets' standpoint, a Middle East peace and Middle East economic development plan, sponsored only by the Americans and the West, with developing infrastructure even owned by forces in the West, would be considered "imperialist." As far as Sharon is concerned, he doesn't have a very deep understanding of the issues, but thinks that it won't work without a peace settlement—

EIR: —which he doesn't like—

Pa'il: —which he despises, because he knows Israel would have to evacuate the occupied territories. Maybe he's being manipulated by someone. For him, any step toward peace is negative, because he knows that it means evacuating the territories, which would be a disaster for him.

When we ratified the Camp David agreement in the Knesset, Sharon and Geula Cohen astonishingly voted with the Communists—what I call the “Soviet Church Communists”—against the accord. I tried to probe them, I said to their leader, “You, who call yourselves Marxist-Leninists, socialists, should be for peace, but you have problems with the Soviets. Okay, then abstain, but don’t vote against it, don’t vote with Moshe Arens and Geula Cohen.” He didn’t listen.

EIR: What do you think the Palestinians should do about the Marshall Plan?

Pa’il: They should be for it, all out. Whatever Palestinian entity, state or whatever comes into being, it wouldn’t be economically viable without open borders and excellent connections to Israel, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. After the establishment of peace, the Marshall Plan would be a form of economic rescue, to save them from poverty. The Palestinians don’t have the advantage Israel has, of being a bridgehead to Europe. If there is peace, I hope to see Israeli communities in Iraq, Syria, and Iran again; and Arab communities in Israel. Why not? I can envision something like a “United States of the Middle East.”

EIR: One of the major problems lying in the way of development is the massive debt both Israel and Egypt have. What do you think of their jointly renegotiating it, to release development resources?

Pa’il: It is an excellent idea. But the problem is, the peace process stopped after Sadat, because he and others thought that the Egypt-Israel axis would broaden to Jordan, Saudi Arabia and so on. Since this process has not continued, Egypt sees its economic-political cooperation with Israel as a disadvantage to them in the eyes of the Arab world. Who is to blame? We Israelis, Begin, Shamir and, at least until the Marshall Plan, also Peres.

The Taba issue is an excellent example of the delaying tactic that they have been using. Here is a piece of land, less than one square mile. The Israeli authorities are delaying; once the first step is taken towards Jordan and the Palestinians together, the economic renaissance between Israel and Egypt would continue between Jordan and Israel. If Syria were to join, so much the better. Here there is the other problem of the Israeli authorities and public opinion: Psychologically, the Israelis have been caught in a trap by these territories. Just imagine: There is an Egyptian pipeline from the Nile to El Arish, all along the Sinai northern coast. To build a continuing pipeline to Israel is not difficult, but for Egypt to do it, means that nation would be called a Quisling. We have water problems. Israel has just found deep water in the Negev Mountains, which could be used, mixed with Galilee waters. But waters from the Nile would be even better. Even disregarding the IMF problem, pipelines could be built, paid for with Israeli goods to Egypt.

Interview: Yitzhak Artzi

Goal: cooperation among enemies

Yitzhak Artzi is a Member of Knesset from the Independent Liberal Party.

EIR: What can you tell us about the Mideast Marshall Plan?

Artzi: The choice of the name is already indicative of the concept. The original Marshall Plan aimed at recovering the European economy torn by war, but its basis was cooperation among former enemies. This is the reason why Peres and his advisers took this notion.

EIR: What is its basic idea?

Artzi: Since oil prices are down, and the financial situation of European and American consumers is improved, an international fund should be set up to operate in the Middle East, as well as perhaps in the developing sector, to solve the basic problems of those countries. A body would be set up with the special assignment to help Middle East countries and develop development plans. The political thinking is to create an area of mutual interest *above* the reality of war, by creating areas

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of strong cooperation. This requires meetings, discussions, and direct contact; it means spreading knowledge of it among the masses. It could improve the climate between Israel and the Arab countries, and be a complement to efforts for peace. The idea is to disconnect the political effort from the economic one, to reach, through international agreement, a situation where two countries technically in a state of war, are cooperating in plans vital for their future.

EIR: What are some of the specific areas of cooperation considered?

Artzi: First is water. Israel has a water shortage, Syria is suffering, too. Nile water could be used for both. Also, the Yarmouk River in Jordan, whose resources are currently not