

'Who knows what would go on in the minds of Shamir and Rabin in such a situation. And who knows what would be American involvement. The question is would the US tell Israel to go ahead and we'll protect you? I don't know. I admit I cannot read clearly the American position.'

Interview with Mattiyahu Peled

With nukes, Israelis talk of attacks

By Mark A. Bruzonsky
Special Correspondent

• You no longer hold public position, you're no longer in the Knesset, you've been through all that's completely independent now, so you're the perfect guy in a position to say: "Things are likely to evolve in the following way..." What do you think is ahead?

■ I think that the so-called Shamir Plan, I believe is a very cleverly done anti-Palestinian document, one of the most dangerous that I have ever seen. And I'm not sure that this was not done under American influence.

• Of course. But why did Arafat fall into the trap?

■ Well I don't think he really fell. Rather than saying "No", he said "Yes" with a lot of qualifications. But I think the moment is coming when all pretenses will be dropped and it will be clear that this is an anti-Palestinian programme.

There are no Palestinians who are ready to participate and co-operate, and Israel, with the backing of the US, will be seen as the party which does not want a solution.

Here in Israel if you've noticed, everyone except us (Note: Peled is referring to those associated with his own small political movement and maybe the Communists) supports Shamir. Which means that when the chips will be down there will be



terrible, much greater.

• What more can they do?

■ Oh, much more. Today you have may be one of two people killed a day, you can have two or three hundred killed a day. They can really make them pay a terrible price.

• And do you think this is what's coming?

■ It is likely. If the Palestinians renounce the proposals then this is likely.

• And the Israeli excuse will be that well we offered them...

■ Yes, we offered them a plan and they rejected everything.

• Do you think they might start demolishing refugee camps?

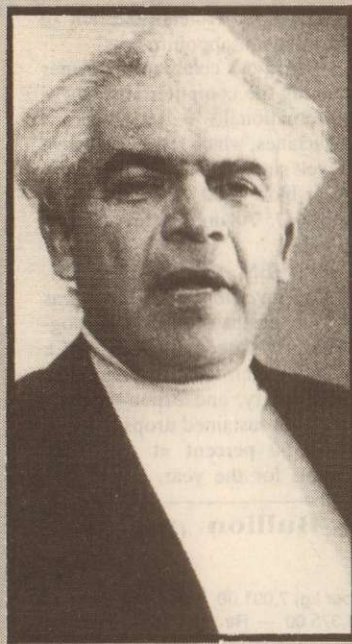
■ I don't know what they will do for sure. But the policy will be to let the Palestinians realise that they are going to pay a terrible price. Rabin in fact has said this but not in so many words. He said "if they don't accept the plan they will pay a price which they've never expected, that they've never dreamed of."

Recently there was an interview with Dan Meridor, the new justice minister—a young, very sympathetic Likudnik. He was asked about a statement made by Arafat saying the peace initiative might not continue. And he, Meridor, said, "we are happy, we are very glad, it means that we are succeeding, we are achieving our goals." They want to see the PLO radicalised once more. But then there will be the danger of another war...with Syria, may be Jordan will join in...I don't think Egypt, but Egypt will certainly...

• But Egypt might, it could...

■ It could, but I don't think it is likely because of their own internal politics and their ties with the US. But in any case, if there is another war it will be worse than anything anyone has seen anywhere in the world, except may be Japan at the end of World War II.

• Don't Shamir and his people know



MATTI Peled is one of the most astute commentators on the Israeli scene who has himself undergone a startling political evolution. He was an Israeli General serving on the Army General Staff in the 1960s. And he then served as the first Military Governor of Gaza when Israel's occupation began after the 1967 war.

But today Peled is one of the most outspoken advocates of Israeli-PLO negotiations and a Palestinian State, and argued vehemently for a historic settlement between Israel and the Palestinian people back at home.

and then there is no reason for a civil war.

• So the real goal of the Shamir Plan is to force Arafat to abandon his peace initiative, and to end the American dancing with the Palestinians?

■ Yes, and I propose to you to get a copy of Dan Meridor's comments when he was asked to comment about Arafat's statement that he may go back to more violent methods and so on and Meridor said, "well then it means we've achieved our goal".

• So that's the first purpose. And you believe the Palestinians will—even though some Arab and others will try to hold them back—then play the role they've played before in raising the political temperature in this region so that sooner or later war will break out.

■ Yes, this is the great danger.

• And when that tension is raised, and the Israelis can make an excuse, you're predicting, I know you can't be sure, but you're suggesting its likely that they will make a first strike against military targets...I assume that's what you are talking about.

■ No, I'm talking about towns, major towns...Damascus...

• And they expect the world to accept this?

■ I think they expect the world to accept. But I don't think that they are sure that this is what they are going to do. They want everybody to think that this is possible, and therefore everybody will try to keep the pressure on the Arabs to back off, not to run into a conflict and give Israel a free hand with the Palestinians.

• So, using the nuclear weapons as blackmail?

■ Right, right.

• And yet, if it looked like war might break out, Israel would have to strike first because of the chemical weapons, because of the missiles.

• And do what? He's going to start military attacks? He's going to start hijacking again? What's he going to do?

■ I think that if he announces at a certain point that the talks failed, that nothing came out of it, that all his openings were turned down, then he won't have to do anything, things will develop of their own. Raids will be resumed into Israel. The Intifada will become much more vigorous. Israeli reactions will be terrible. And the goal will go on.

• But this will only give the Israelis the excuse to do exactly what they want to do to the Palestinians.

■ Right, right, right. But I said the only retaliation that the Palestinians have is to threaten the whole Mid-east, to threaten that the whole Mid-east will be dragged into another war.

• Except this one is not a war of tanks in the desert. You realise what you've predicted. You're predicting the possibility, even the likelihood, of a nuclear attack on Arab capitals.

■ Yes...and since everybody understands that the Israelis can, international pressures (will be brought) on the Arabs at the last minute to abandon the Palestinians and let the Israelis do whatever they want with the Palestinians, rather than having the whole of the Mid-east plunged...

• No, but if the Arab world is perceived to have been covered by the Israelis and the Americans, then what happens to the



Time is running out for Castro

By Jacqueline Tillman

ON Monday, New Year's Day, Fidel Castro marks 31 years as Cuba's "maximum leader". In a year that has seen the demise of so many communist dictators — Honecker, Zhivkov, Ceausescu — it will be interesting to see how much longer Castro can last.

Today's world is quite perilous for Stalinists, and all indicators point to eventual upheaval in Cuba. Castro has managed to survive some dicey situations in the past. What is different now is that serious problems are occurring simultaneously and the regime is in crisis.

At least 15 dissident groups — with agenda ranging from human rights to support for glasnost and perestroika and freedom of religion — exist in Cuba today. Most were formed last year, when Cuba's human-rights situation was under scrutiny by the UN Human Rights Commission and Castro was forced to lessen his repression. UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar is expected to issue a new report on human rights in Cuba in February.

Dissidence

The emergence of internal dissidence in Cuba has been spurred along by the USIA's Radio Marti programme, which began broadcasting in 1985. It is hard to overstate the degree of censorship that exists in Cuba. Even such Soviet publications as *Sputnik* and *Moscow News* are banned. Radio Marti has provided the Cuban people objective news about international developments and the internal situation.

A new programme, TV Marti, is scheduled to begin its testing programme in early 1990. Cubans, who have not seen uncensored images for 31 years, will be able to see for themselves the breathtaking visual pictures from Berlin, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Poland. Castro has become in-



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a very solid support for the plan against the Palestinians who reject it.

● Which is exactly what Shamir wants...

■ Yes, it's exactly what Shamir wants. And what the US wants also. Although "here, I sometimes read some signals which—though I don't know if I read them correctly—like the Baker speech at AIPAC...

● I don't think you should read much into that; it's just a bit of a feint to keep everyone confused a bit and off balance and hoping a bit...

■ OK. Anyhow this (the Shamir Plan) will force the PLO to abandon the new posture and it will mean a renewal of violent confrontation.

● What can they do?

■ The Palestinians can do a lot. They can bring about another war between the Arab world and Israel.

● You think Yasser Arafat will try that again, after we've already seen all that he's willing to concede?

■ Well, you see, if he openly and formally renounces the new postures—and he will have every cause for doing that—then he can still create such a terrible situation which can—I'm not sure if it will—create terrible tension with the possible consequence of another war.

● Which may be what Shamir wants. Then he can push the Palestinians into Jordan.

■ I think that's what Shamir and the others learned from the invasion of Lebanon is that they cannot push the Palestinians into Jordan. They just can't, they would have done it in Lebanon...

● But that's all before the Intifada.

■ No, no. I don't believe that this is a realistic possibility. But what they can do is really suppress the Palestinians. The price for continuing the resistance will be

that?

■ (Pause). They know that, but I'm sure that they have illusions. I think they are relying on atomic weapons. They can even neutralise... You see, if Israel launches an atomic weapon...

● But that's unthinkable!

■ It is very thinkable. They were on the point of using them in 1973. And they can think that if they launch an atomic bomb the only danger is Soviet retaliation. And the Soviets, under the present circumstances, who knows what they would do. And in any case why would Israel develop a missile with a range of 1100 kilometres? The Soviet reacted very nervously about this as it can reach Soviet missile bases, also.

● But this would mean the end of Israel!

■ That's what I'm saying.

■ It would mean the holocaust of the Jews.

■ Well, it may. But who knows what would go on in the minds of Shamir and Rabin in such a situation. And who knows what would be the American involvement. The question is would the US tell Israel to go ahead and we'll protect you? I don't know. I admit I cannot read clearly the American position.

● You've told me that the likelihood is that Arafat will have to renounce his efforts, that the Israelis are working for the re-radicalisation of the PLO...

■ Right, right.

● that Syria and Jordan can be pulled into the conflict, or that tension can be raised to the point where Israel will be ready to strike and not with conventional weapons. You're practically saying that the Shamir government is readying a nuclear attack against the Arabs.

■ I think that they would like the Arabs to think that this is possible in order to frighten off any intention on the part of the Arab governments to be dragged into such a conflict.

● But this is very risky and might not always work.

■ Yes, and there's another point which I keep stressing and I talked about it in the Knesset several times but I don't think people have been impressed.

The Arabs don't have nuclear weapons, but they have chemical weapons, and as far as Israel is concerned it's the same. And therefore, Israelis shouldn't run away with the illusion that we only have weapons of mass destruction. The Arabs also have weapons of mass destruction. This is, therefore, a very dangerous game.

And from all I can see this is the kind of brinkmanship Israel is likely to push everybody towards.

● With what eventual goal?

■ With the goal, eventually, if Israel is one hundred percent successful, that the Arabs renounce the Palestinians claims

In recent years Peled has taught Arabic literature at Tel Aviv University. But he is much better known as a former Knesset member who founded, along with Palestinians, the Progressive List For Peace, a non-Zionist movement that brings together Israelis and Palestinians in a unique coalition.

Peled is today an independent personality of remarkable experience and insight who is free to speak his mind without the usual constraints of career and image. He is free to "Speak Out".

This interview was recently conducted with Matti Peled in the garden at the American Colony Hotel in the occupied West Jerusalem.

and say OK you retain the occupied territories and just give the Palestinians local autonomy and we'll live with that.

● But that's not possible, I think. The best such an Israeli strategy can achieve is cowering the Arabs for a period of time.

■ Yes, OK, if they get 10 or 15 years like this they will feel that they have achieved everything.

● But they'll have to turn this into a truly fascist state to do it.

■ Only fascist in the sense of an apartheid state...

● Not just apartheid. I read Amos Oz's recent speech. People like him are practically ready for a civil war. (Amos Oz is one of Israel's best-known writers, often associated with the Peace Now Movement).

■ If the government decides on withdrawing from the occupied territories, or from a part of the occupied territories, the settlers and their backers will resist, then there will be a civil war. But if the Palestinians again become "terrorists" not even Amos Oz will expect the Israelis to withdraw from the occupied territories

I think the only way to pressure Israel is to reach a joint position with the Soviet Union, as they did in 1956. Israel would not be able to resist a joint US-Soviet position.

■ Well...I guess so...What would really happen is that the cabinet will try a way to threaten everybody, with terrible consequences in case there is war, so that pressure will be built on the Arab side to back off.

● Is there any realistic likelihood in your view that the other course could still take place, that the Israeli government and the PLO could find themselves in negotiations for the two-state solution...or is this just an academic concept at this point?

■ I must say at the beginning, that when the talks between the PLO and the US got started, I hoped that it might lead to such a result. But soon I realised that the US is simply representing the Israeli side in these talks without PLO. They put a lot of pressure on the PLO, and they don't put any pressure on Israel. They seem to accept the Israeli position that some local Palestinians should negotiate with Israel and enter into an agreement which would give the Palestinians some kind of local autonomy and this will be the new situation for the next half century or so.

● And what do you think the PLO should do about this now?

■ I think exactly what they are doing, they should reject it.

● They reject it one day, and then Nabil Shaath comes to the US and says "well yes with only this condition, and this condition..."

■ Oh yes, but quite frankly these are impossible conditions.

● OK, but why are they even going through what has become a charade and meeting with Ambassador Pellatreau.

■ Well, just in order that there be the impression that they are not the ones who turned down the chance of a settlement. But when they say that one condition is that there should be a final goal and another condition is that elections shall be under UN inspection, and yet another condition that Israeli forces will withdraw from the occupied territories. These are impossible conditions, this is as good as saying no.

They would like it to be seen that it is the Israelis and the Americans that are responsible. I don't think there is anything wrong in that. They would like the blame, as far as public opinion is concerned, on the Israelis and on the Americans.

● Do you have confidence in the political understanding of Chairman Arafat and Nabil Shaath?

■ Well, I spoke with some knowledgeable Palestinians who said very clearly that if Arafat will not draw the consequences from what has been going on for the last half year he will be deposed, he will be pushed out.

● What are the consequences?

■ Calling their bluff.



I propose you to get a copy of Dan Meridor's comments when he was asked to comment about Arafat's statement that he may go back to more violent methods

credibility and legitimacy of the regimes friendly to the West, especially America. And what happens to the legitimacy of Camp David for the Egyptians still trying to tell their people that they started the path of real peace...

■ But you see, what I think we should now expect from the Israelis is that they will push to the very limits of this brinkmanship hoping, and perhaps with justification, that in the final analysis the Palestinians will be abandoned.

● If you could talk with George Bush and had just 10 minutes, what would you tell him.

■ I think the only way to pressure Israel is to reach a joint position with the Soviet Union, as they did in 1956. Israel would not be able to resist a joint US-Soviet position.

And I think the best way to pressure Israel is to agree to instruct the Secretary-General of the UN to convene the peace conference on the Middle East and send invitations to all parties concerned. Israel will not be able to stay out, they will have to come. This will be, I think, the most elegant and the most effective pressure. Here is a peace conference agreed to by the Security Council unanimously and he's issuing invitations, including to the PLO of course, and Israel cannot stay out. They will continue, of course, the best they can, to impede the process, to put obstacles, but they will have to attend.

● So they'll attend. And they'll delay and delay...

■ Once the peace conference is started and talks do begin and everybody else seems to agree on certain things, with Israel staying alone without US support, without anyone's support they can survive this for some time, but not for a long time.

creasingly hysterical in his denunciations of TV Marti because he correctly assesses the danger to his continuation in power that these powerful images will represent.

The democratic revolution sweeping Eastern Europe is likely to pose economic problems for Cuba, as well as the obvious political ones, since the new regimes are likely to halt the old barter-credit trading practices. Hungary, for example, sells trucks, buses and other transportation vehicles to Cuba. The Hungarians have recently informed the Cubans that future business transactions will be conducted with hard currency only.

Implications

The political implications of Noriega's ouster from Panama for Castro are large. Certain to be affected are the joint Cuban-Panamanian narco-trafficking enterprises and Cuba's money-laundering operations in Panamanian banks. Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega is now Castro's only remaining hemispheric ally, and Ortega has always benefitted far more than Castro from that relationship.

The most interesting question is how the Soviet Union will deal with Castro in the near future. The Soviet Union pays Cuba approximately \$5 billion to \$7 billion a year for a variety of services it receives from Castro.

Before Gorbachev, it was unthinkable that the Soviet would ever consider a lessening of their commitment to Cuba. But there is some evidence that the Soviets are reviewing this commitment.

For one thing, the Bush administration has linked Soviet activity in Cuba to the Soviet-American relationship.

Police states like Castro's rely on the military and secret police to maintain power. Will the armed forces permit itself to be the bloody instrument of Castro's longevity?

The Cuban people won't save him. A while ago a small riot broke out in a theatre in Havana when a group of Cubans started singing a popular song "El hombre es loco" (the man is crazy) when a film clip of Castro appeared on the screen.

Jacqueline Tillman was the National Security Council's Director for Latin America from 1984 to 1988. She is now executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation.

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