

ly, the basic approach of the US from the beginning of the uprising was to give Israel time to deal with the uprising, i.e., to suppress it.

While some observers have chided Bush for having no foreign policy due to delays in presenting initiatives, this is pure naivety or a willfull cover-up when speaking of a president who has rejuvenated the input of the National Security Council and the CIA in the decision-making process after the fiascos of Irangate (in which Bush was, incidentally, deeply involved). More credible are those who forecast that the Bush administration will be more pragmatic and strategically oriented than its predecessor. In order to avoid such diplomatic non-starters as Shultz's ill-fated plan to abort the uprising in 1988, the Bush administration may rely more on behind-the-scenes diplomacy and promoting general trends rather than specific initiatives. A paper entitled «Building for Peace» is reported to be Bush's handbook on the Middle East. It was prepared by a group headed by former Democratic presidential candidate, Walter Mondale, and Lawrence Eagleburger, and published by the pro-Israeli Washington Institute for Near East Policy in 1988. Its central thesis is «conditioning the environment» by encouraging moderates, and it endorses four principles which don't depart in essence from Camp David. The US motivations in conducting a dialogue with the PLO can be analyzed in this context.

Thus, in lieu of a stated US initiative, we are witnessing the deliberately slow pace of the dialogue aiming to pressure the PLO, meanwhile working to get pro-US Arab regimes to do the same.

UNILATERAL PRESSURE

The US is seeking to pressure the PLO into modifying its policies radically whereby it would no longer be a revolutionary force leading the Palestinian people to realize their aims. Alternately, if the PLO resists this pressure, the US will try to discredit it, saying it is not ready for peace. This point is crucial for the US plan to succeed. Since it is clearly impossible to end the intifada, the US prefers to at least circumvent the PLO in order to select «suitable» Palestinian negotiators from the occupied territories, to liquidate the intifada politically. It is in this light that the

meetings between Palestinians who are considered PLO supporters and Israelis from Labor, Likud and other Zionist parties present a danger to the intifada's continuation. What is at stake here is the importance of the PLO's representation of the Palestinian people, which is at the same time a symbol of the unity of the Palestinian cause, and a guarantee against partial solutions that wouldn't fulfill minimum Palestinian rights. These meetings did not lead to any positive change in the Israeli position, but rather create illusions among the Palestinian right and confusion among the masses. As a result of internal discussions, these meetings were stopped in March based on agreement among Palestinians in the occupied territories and the PLO's public declaration of its intent to stop them. However, similar moves in the future would give the US an added lever in its attempts to pressure the PLO and abort the intifada.

Concerning the question of «terrorism,» the US position amounts to outright blackmail, for its definition of terrorism means not only spectacular operations on the international scene, but also any form of militant popular struggle. Pressuring the PLO to stop guerrilla warfare against the Zionist occupation from South Lebanon aims at relieving Israel of pressure on the northern front so it can turn the full force of its military against the masses of the uprising. Their struggle is the next target. This was the meaning of the US call for the PLO to refrain from all attacks on Israeli military and civilian targets if it wants to continue the dialogue. At the very least, the US aims to halt the escalation of the uprising, because it compounds Israel's problems now and, if continued, will force Israel to the negotiating table from a position of weakness in the future. Getting the PLO to renounce «terrorism» is thus not a formality to make it «acceptable» but a lever for getting the PLO to whittle down its aspirations and drop some Palestinian rights in return for promises that the US is not forced to deliver on, such as pressuring Israel to ease repression.

Though US criticism of Israel during the uprising has been unprecedented, it has still only touched the tip of the iceberg targeting the most blatant Israeli atrocities because these harm

Israel's international reputation. The results of Shamir's April visit to Washington D.C. show that the US has yet to contemplate any real pressure. All the US statements about «reducing tension» and «confidence-building measures» were revealed to be directed first and foremost at the PLO. Added to this, the US launched a campaign to block the State of Palestine from gaining admission to UN agencies, beginning with the World Health Organization (WHO).

Shamir's visit was prefaced by several seemingly keynote US statements. Baker had told Congress in mid-March that Israel might have to talk to the PLO or at least, as he later modified it, this should not be ruled out. As Shamir arrived in the US, Bush spoke of «security for Israel, the end of the occupation and achievement of Palestinian political rights» (*Guardian*, April 5th). Nonetheless, Bush gave qualified support to the plan presented by Shamir for electing Palestinians in the occupied territories to be negotiators, provided that these elections are «directly linked to a broader political process that includes negotiating and concluding an agreement on final status (of the territories)» as Bush said Shamir had assured him (*International Herald Tribune*, April 7th). Since Shamir's plan gives no more leeway for Palestinian demands than did Shultz's a year before, the US administration can be quite sure it won't lead to a broader peace process. Once again, the US appears to be helping the Israeli government to gain time, hoping it can suppress the uprising, or that the Palestinians will tire out. In the meantime, such plans aim mainly to create division within the PLO and between it and the people in the occupied territories.

In conclusion, the US-PLO dialogue, though a gain of the uprising, is one which must be used wisely in full awareness of the US aims. This means refraining from giving concessions that will not be reciprocated, while escalating the uprising to pressure the US to recognize the Palestinian people's rights. It is the intifada itself which brings the Palestinian people closer to exercising their rights to repatriation, self-determination and an independent state. The US will begin to recognize these rights as their inevitability becomes clear in the battlefield in occupied Palestine. ●