

on the Arab and international arenas. The most important sign if this change is the US decision to accept a dialogue with the PLO, which is a great victory for the uprising on the international scene. The US modified its absolute rejection of an international conference, although it prefers direct negotiations. It called on Israel to consider the idea of negotiations with the PLO and not to deal with the uprising as a matter of terrorism. These changes, brought about by the uprising, should be pursued until the needed change in the US position is achieved, i.e., until the US recognizes our people's right to self-determination and an independent state.

Forcing the US to change its position should be a major aim of the Palestinian political moves, based on escalation of the uprising, because the US position is the main international asset on which the Zionists rely in continuing their occupation of Palestinian land. While the intifada in the occupied territories works to undermine the pillars of the occupation, Palestinian diplomacy must intensify to make the desired change in US public opinion, and to urge the new administration to accept the legitimate rights of our people.

THE ISRAELI POSITION

As of now, the official Israeli position is based on the following no's: (1) no to the PLO; (2) no to an independent Palestinian state; (3) no to an international conference; (4) no to returning to the pre-1967 borders; (5) no to withdrawal from Jerusalem which is considered the eternal, indivisible capital of Israel; and (6) no to the Palestinian right of repatriation.

These six no's are apparent in the program of the coalition government and in the programs of the main parties. They constitute the main obstacle to any possible solution for the Palestinian question, especially since Israel has two main assets: direct occupation of Palestinian land, and unlimited US support for its intransigent policy. Up until now, these two factors have enabled Israel to bear the international pressure and isolation it faces. However, there is less understanding today for the Israeli political discourse than there was in the past, for this discourse is based on chauvinism and obstinance which are now outdated. It reminds of the worst cold war rhetoric and portends the escalation of tension and the possibility of an all-out military explosion. Thus, it no longer enjoys the support of all Jewish communities in the world or all of Israel's traditional friends. Although the six no's still constitute the essence of the official Israeli position, this should not obscure from view the effects which the uprising and the international and Arab reactions to it, have had on the Israeli scene.

The Israeli position on the intifada and the means for dealing with it has passed through several stages:

1. considering repression as the only means for dealing with the intifada and rejecting any political discussion;
2. continuing repression while searching for political outlets via Jordan and some Palestinians in the occupied territories, who are not affiliated to the PLO;
3. continuing repression and searching for a political outlet via Palestinians in the occupied territories, including followers of the PLO.

Still, we need more struggle to oblige Israel to accept the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and to sit with it at the international conference. Although the six no's still constitute the essence of the Israeli government's position, there is a new growing political current in Israel, not only among democratic Jewish forces, but also in the big

Zionist parties, especially the Labor Party. This trend realizes that sooner or later Israel will have to talk to the PLO, and that the intifada cannot be stopped by military means. Moreover, some who previously supported the Jordanian option now speak about a demilitarized Palestinian state with limited sovereignty. This shows the current of change that has started in Israel among groups which we by no means consider to be democratic forces or from the peace camp.

The appearance of such phenomena in Israel does not mean that the rightist and extremist camp has been weakened. Rather the strength of this camp is growing as shown by the results of the Knesset elections and the Israeli municipal elections. There are two contradictory phenomena in Israeli political life today: On the one hand, the rightist and extremist positions are growing and gaining strength; while on the other hand, there is also growth of the forces that call for talking with the PLO, and exhibit various degrees of willingness to accept a Palestinian state. The hesitant and inconsistent centrist forces pay the price of this polarization which was induced by the uprising and its international repercussions. The outcome of this polarization process will be determined by many factors, the most important of which are: our capability to continue, expand, escalate and consolidate the uprising, and to pursue our diplomatic and political battle without giving gratuitous concessions.

The Israeli government still refuses to sit with the PLO at the table of direct negotiations, so we can only imagine how long and difficult is the road we have to traverse before we can oblige Israel to accept negotiations with the PLO at an international conference, or to acknowledge our right to an independent state, withdraw to the 1967 borders including in Jerusalem, dismantle the settlements and last but not least, accept the right of the Palestinians to return to their homeland. We are still at the beginning of this long road, and we must not underestimate the difficulties we face, because this would spread harmful illusions and justify the logic of giving concessions without getting anything in return. This would weaken the alertness of our people and their willingness to fight a protracted war.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN DECLARING INDEPENDENCE AND ACHIEVING IT

In the light of the above-mentioned obstacles which widen the gap between declaring and achieving independence, especially the Israeli and US positions, we dare say that the declaration of the Palestinian state is a project that requires struggle. In order to actually establish the state, we had better notice the difference between declaring and achieving independence.

For precisely this reason, we noted from the very beginning the existence of two points of view concerning the intifada. The first counts on harvesting the political fruits of the uprising prematurely. Accordingly, the advocates of this viewpoint are ready to give gratuitous concessions. The other point of view sees the necessity of making political gains from the intifada, but at the same time, the advocates of this viewpoint are working to turn the uprising into a qualitative turning point in the process of Palestinian national struggle. Hence, we say that we are on the threshold of a new stage which had resulted from the stage of Palestinian armed struggle, without ending it or belittling its historical importance as some people imagine. We consider the uprising the legitimate offspring of the Palestinian armed struggle. Although the uprising is now the first among