

would lose its main partner in the region.

In as much as the persistence of the Arab-Israeli conflict poses a threat to the interests of imperialism, Israel and Arab reaction, any «peace» plan worked out by these parties would obviously be geared towards securing their interests. This includes securing official Arab recognition of Israel as a legitimate, permanent and integral part of the region, eliminating any resistance to it and pushing the Arab countries to normalize relations with it. The real meaning of this is liquidation of the Palestinian cause and imposing total surrender on the Arab nation. The rhetoric of Bush and Baker about a «just peace» and Washington's neutrality notwithstanding, the US «peace» proposals are no more and no less than a plan of liquidation - a revised version of Shamir's plan. Both say «no» to an international peace conference, «no» to a Palestinian state and «no» to the PLO. Both raise many questions about any Palestinian representation in the so-called regional conference. The US has reportedly agreed with Israel that only Palestinians from the occupied West Bank (excluding Jerusalem) and Gaza Strip can be represented at the conference.

With the objective of increasing pressure on the PLO, Baker visited

Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, urging their leaders to convince the PLO to accept the Israeli conditions concerning Palestinian representation at the conference. By convincing the Maghreb states to assent to the conference, Washington hopes to isolate the Palestinian people from their Arab environment, as an introduction to tightening the political blockade around them.

Excluding East Jerusalem Palestinians from the «peace» talks aims to reinforce the Israeli contention that Jerusalem as a whole is an integral part of the Zionist state, although the US has never officially recognized the Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967. Not only Jerusalem is targeted by the US-Israeli plan; all the occupied territories are. US intentions were further revealed when Israeli newspapers published excerpts from former US President Gerald Ford's 1975 letter to Yitzhak Rabin, who was then prime minister. The excerpt reads: «the US has not developed a final position on the borders. Should it do so, it will give great weight to Israel's position that any peace agreement with Syria must be predicated on Israel's remaining on the Golan Heights.» When asked about this, Baker indicated that Ford's promise would be honored by the Bush administration

(Associated Press, July 23rd).

While the Bush administration demands that the PLO and Arab states be more flexible and give more concessions, Israel continues to expand and accelerate the construction of Zionist settlements in the occupied territories. The latest reports are that it plans to set up nearly 4,000 prefabricated units in the next few months. In spite of this, all the US has done is to try to calm the Arab states and to trick them by gently rebuking Israel for the settlement activity, appealing to it not to build new settlements. It seems that Baker is ignoring his own testimony before the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on foreign operations on May 22nd, when he explained that «nothing has made my job of trying to find Arab and Palestinian partners for Israel more difficult than being greeted by a new settlement every time I arrive,» adding that he didn't «think that there is any bigger obstacle to peace than the settlement activity that continues not only unabated but at an enhanced pace» (*International Herald Tribune*, May 23rd).

In addition, the Arab demand for an international conference, as the suitable framework for resolving the Middle East crisis, was rejected by both the US and

