

Judging the Peace Process

Despite the progress made by the US in its diplomatic efforts, great doubt remains about a just and comprehensive peace being established in the Middle East. This is due to the bias of the Bush administration's proposals, as well as to Israel's rejectionism and arrogance.

by Ahmed Halaweh

On July 31st, at the end of the two-day summit with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, US President George Bush declared that the US and Soviet Union would co-sponsor the proposed Middle East peace conference to be held in October. He said that invitations would be sent to all parties concerned 10 days before the conference convened, adding that there is a «historic opportunity» for «a just and comprehensive peace» in the area, based on UN resolutions 242 and 338. Bush also announced that Secretary of State James Baker was returning to the region with the aim of bringing all parties to the conference. This is a strong indication that the Bush administration is determined to push forward in its efforts, especially after its success in obtaining the consent of the Arab states, in one way or another, to the US proposals.

Baker's previous five trips in fact succeeded in resolving two main issues that had blocked the «peace» process, namely the duration of the so-called regional conference and the role of the UN in such a conference. According to Bush's proposals, the UN would be represented by a silent observer who would «take notes, and can communicate with the participants and the sponsors...» (Associated Press, July 19th). The observer can also report to UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar. Concerning the other point, the US proposed that the conference could be reconvened only with the consent of all parties. Thus, Baker's August 1st return to the Middle East, his sixth shuttle since the end of the Gulf war, aimed to address the remaining problem, i.e. Palestinian representation at the conference, and to guarantee the Israeli government's attendance.

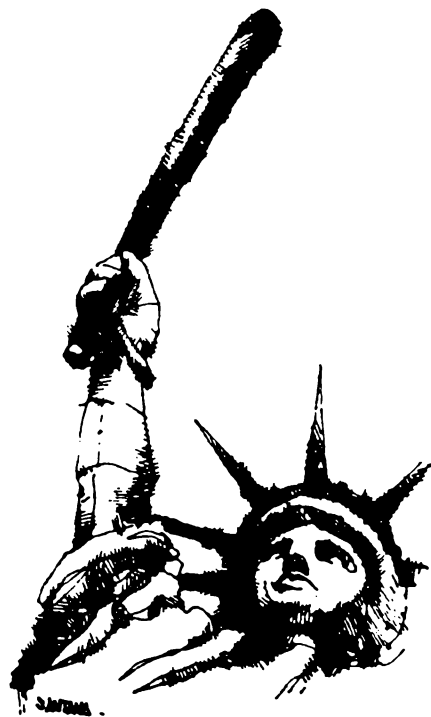
The day before the US-Soviet summit ended, Israel announced that it would not attend a Middle East conference unless it receives US guarantees about Palestinian participation. Previously the Israeli government had asked the Bush administration for clarifications about a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation: who

would lead it, how it would make decisions, who would speak for it at the opening session of the conference, and under which flag it would sit. But after meeting Baker upon his arrival in occupied Palestine on August 1st, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir announced that Israel would attend the conference on condition that Palestinians of East Jerusalem and in exile are not included in a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. Although Shamir only repeated the Israeli position of saying «no» by giving a conditional «yes,» Baker enthusiastically welcomed his position, describing it as a «significant development» that moves the peace process forward. In a strong indication of his support for the Israeli condition, Baker urged Faysel Husseini and Hanan Ashrawi, the Palestinians whom he met in Jerusalem, to reconsider the situation and accept the conference proposal without putting conditions. Baker issued an even more obvious warning as he was leaving for Jordan. After naming the parties that had agreed to attend the conference, he warned the Palestinians not to refuse and lose the opportunity of attending the conference; otherwise, they would be the sole losers.

It has become increasingly clear that Baker is saying that the «peace» process is advancing, with or without the Palestinians, heading toward its final end which both Bush and Baker repeatedly identify as a «just and comprehensive peace.» While the US administration tries to project that peace is at hand, one would ask: What sort of peace are the various parties aiming for, or ready to accept? However, if peace is not at hand, one would ask: Why not? To evaluate these two questions, it is necessary to analyze the motives of the respective parties and the conditions that determine their political maneuvers.

The US proposals and motives

Among the most destructive consequences of the Gulf war was the rapid shift in the balance of forces in favor of the imperialist, Zionist and reactionary camp; increased US ability to influence international and regional affairs; and an openly declared, official Arab tendency to follow the US plans in



the region. The other side of this dramatic change is the frustration and despair which swept the area as a result of the destruction of Iraq; the ongoing attacks and conspiracies against the Palestinian people in the occupied territories, Kuwait, Lebanon and some other Arab countries; and the increased fragmentation of the Arab world. These realities convinced Arab states that the wind favors the US and Israeli sails. Under these conditions, opportunities for a US-orchestrated settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem increased enormously.

For the US, it is a golden opportunity to move swiftly towards resolving the conflict and establishing reactionary stability in the area, motivated by a number of considerations. A prime consideration is that the US, as the leader of the imperialist camp, views the persistence of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a potential danger to the long-term interests of imperialism; the continuation of the conflict could lead to revolutionary upheaval in the whole area, not only threatening imperialist interests, but also undermining its natural alliance with Arab reaction. A related consideration is insuring that the reactionary Arab regimes remain in power, since they should secure imperialist domination of the region. More important, the strength of Zionism and Israel, the creator of the conflict, might be challenged, so that imperialism