

Israel who proceeded to reduce it to a powerless, one – day conference with the sole function of paving the way for more humiliating versions of the Camp David accords.

In the final analysis, the revived Baker – Shamir proposals are part of a Zionist – imperialist plan intended to liquidate the Palestinian cause and subjugate the Arab states. Washington chose precisely this time to push its plans because it believes that the regional conditions are ripe for enforcing such proposals, presenting a favorable opportunity for decisive destruction of the Palestinian and Arab masses' will to resist and fight for liberation. Yet, in spite of the changes sweeping the area, the ongoing US «peace» efforts, the numerous shuttles, meetings, statements and counterstatements, there is no reason to believe that the Arab – Israeli conflict is heading towards «a just and comprehensive solution,» in view of the nature of the US proposals and intentions, and the Israeli position which defies the world community, international law, the UN Charter and resolutions and even the US.

Israel's concept of peace

It is not true that Israel is against settling the Arab – Israeli conflict. Under the new conditions that resulted from the Gulf War, Israel would be the main regional beneficiary from resolving the conflict, especially if the Arab regimes continue giving concession after concession. Israel would benefit from an end to the war of attrition which saps its human, economic and military resources. Solving the conflict also holds out the prospects of economic expansion whereby Israel could benefit from access to the markets of the region. A new situation would be created wherein Israel could attain the leading regional position capable of influencing developments on the military, economic and political levels. Since the Palestinian people are the antithesis of Zionism's existence in Palestine, the only way to resolve the conflict from the Israeli point of view is to liquidate the Palestinian cause and eliminate its influence in the region.

From this angle, one can understand Israel's objection to independent Palestinian participation in the proposed regional conference. While Israel seeks a settlement of the conflict in order to fulfill its Zionist aims, which essentially contradict the concept of peace, it seeks the liquidation of the Palestinians' legitimate rights and national cause. The apparent contradiction between peace and liquidation is not a contradiction at all in Zionist terms. If there is any contradiction involved, it is the one

between Israel's calls for peace and normalization with the Arab states on the one hand, and the essence of Zionism's inherent expansionism on the other.

The big question remains: Does Israel intend to withdraw from the occupied territories in order to contribute to a peaceful settlement? The decisive answer has been given by many Israeli officials who, time and again, have said that they will not yield any portion, not even one inch of the West Bank, Gaza Strip or Golan Heights. In answer to a question about the possibilities of trading land for peace, Shamir clarified: «I do not believe in territorial compromise. Our country is very small.» He added, «I believe with all my heart and soul that we are eternally tied to this homeland. Peace and security go together. Security, and a territory, a homeland – it all goes together. That is our belief, that is the belief of the party I belong to and in my opinion, that is the feeling of a large majority of the Jewish nation» (*International Herald Tribune*, July 25th).

Although Shamir's statement is nothing new, it confirms Israel's position that the pre-June 1967 frontiers no longer exist. If the Arab side demands Israeli withdrawal to these frontiers, Israel will not discuss anything because, in Shamir's eyes, Israel is not occupying any territory and the «land of Israel» is a single territorial unit. In other words, Shamir demands that the Arabs surrender and recognize Israel's «right» to have both occupied land and peace. Guided by the same position, Israel opposed the convening of an international peace conference and even UN involvement in the proposed regional conference, claiming that the UN is biased and not deserving of confidence, despite the fact that Israeli statehood was declared on the basis of a UN resolution and the international body immediately recognized the new state.

Israel, in fact, realizes the falsity of its arguments about the UN. Its accusations aim to delegitimize the UN as a party to peace talks, and to block any move towards a comprehensive settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, which demand Israeli withdrawal from the 1967 occupied territories. In addition to being an attempt to escape implementation of the UN resolutions concerned, Israel's objection is also a real insult to the UN.

Aiming to block any territorial concessions, Israeli Housing Minister Ariel Sharon criticized Shamir for his cooperation with the US «peace»

efforts, and called for expanding settlement activity in the occupied territories, as the best way to rule out Israeli concessions in «peace» talks. In Sharon's words: «We have to fight against this loss of direction and create facts that are the Zionist answer... We will continue to settle, we will continue to build» (Associated Press, July 26th).

In fact, Shamir and Sharon concur totally on the importance of settlement activity as the way to create facts that will in turn dictate the terms of any negotiations. When President Husni Mubarak of Egypt proposed suspending the Arab boycott in exchange for a halt to settlement activity in the occupied territories, a statement issued by Shamir's office rejected the idea out of hand, saying there was «no connection between the two things» (Associated Press, July 18th).

The official Arab position

As a result, it seems that what the US administration and the Arab states are calling a solution based on the principle of «land for peace» is in reality based on the Zionist logic of «peace for peace.» Moreover, in the prevailing conditions, the so – called regional conference is no more than a regional reconciliation with the sole function of legitimizing the Zionist state (in its expanded form) and normalizing relations between it and the Arab states. There are two main reasons for evaluating the nature of the proposed conference in this way: The first is deterioration of the official Arab position, and the second is the US role in the «peace» process.

In the light of successive Arab concessions, there is no doubt that the Arab – Israeli conflict is entering a very critical stage. If not confronted, the dangers of this stage can have catastrophic effects on the future of the Palestinian and Arab people's struggle for national independence and social progress. These dangers basically stem from the fact that there is a sea change in Arab attitudes not only towards the US, but also towards Israel, whose encroachments have been resisted by the Arab masses since its establishment. It is a serious and unprecedented phenomenon to see the majority of the Arab states backing the US plan, the essence of which is liquidating the Palestinian cause and subjugating the Arab masses. This is the first time that so many Arab states take such a dangerous step towards accepting the Zionist entity and normalizing relations with it. If one has to give a precise description of this change, one can only say that it is a turnaround in Arab political concepts.

This turnaround inevitably leads to