

The Palestinian Question and the Middle East Conflict

It is now well over a year since the October war, which led to a pronounced alteration of the balance of forces in the Middle East. The ceasefire agreement and the disengagement agreements which followed gave hope that the conflict might at long last be on the road to solution. But then the process bogged down. The stalemate was renewed and today there exists a serious danger of the outbreak of a new war, threatening world peace. It is important to understand why this state of affairs persists, especially in the light of one major development during the past year which has contributed greatly toward bringing matters to a head.

Specifically, the Palestine question has been catapulted into the center of the stage as the central issue in the Middle East conflict, without whose resolution the achievement of a durable peace is impossible. With this has come the widespread acceptance of the Palestine Liberation Organization, headed by Yasir Arafat, as the one legitimate representative of the Palestinian Arab people. These developments were climaxed by the decisions of the Arab summit conference in Rabat at the close of October, and especially by the actions of the UN General Assembly in mid-November. We propose in the following pages to deal with the significance and consequences of these developments.

The UN Actions

On October 14, 1974 the UN General Assembly decided to put the Palestine question on its agenda as a separate point and to invite the PLO to participate as the representative of the Palestinian Arab people. The vote was 105 in favor to 4 opposed, with 20 abstentions. The 4 opposing votes were those of Israel, the United States, Bolivia and Costa Rica.

This vote registered, first, there is almost universal recognition of the central role which the solution of the Palestine question—fulfillment of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian Arabs—plays in the resolution of the Middle East conflict. It registered, second, that there is almost universal recognition that the authentic representative—the *only* authentic representative—of the Palestinian Arabs is the PLO.

Almost universal recognition. For Israel and the United States, stand-

ing virtually alone, repudiated the action of the General Assembly *in toto*; they were, in fact, enraged by it. In anticipation of the opening of the UN debate on November 13, a Zionist-sponsored protest demonstration was held in New York on November 4. Israeli and Zionist leaders, political and labor figures and others who spoke spared no words in their denunciations of the UN, which was accused of abandoning the principles on which it was founded by giving a platform to "terrorists" and "murderers." The Jewish Defense League, in its characteristic fascist manner, publicly threatened the assassination of Arafat.

To its great disgrace the *Morning Freiheit* joined in the hue and cry. An editorial published on November 6, headed "An Historic Demonstration at the UN against Terror," stated: "It was a demonstration against admitting into the UN the leaders of the PLO headed by Yasir Arafat, which continues its terror against Israeli civilians and is bent on destroying Israel as a Jewish state."

Such was the lynching bee organized against the PLO—and against the UN General Assembly. But it was not the UN whose behavior was disgraceful. On the contrary, it was the Israeli leaders and their supporters, the organizers of the demonstration, who deserve condemnation. For this was not a demonstration against terrorism, against the destruction of the State of Israel. It was, as we shall show, a demonstration against the national rights of the Palestinian Arabs and against the Arab states which uphold these rights. It was a chauvinist, anti-Arab demonstration.

There were a few relatively sober voices in Jewish circles—but only a few. At the demonstration an organization called *Breira*, whose sponsors are largely Zionist, and which challenges the Zionist establishment on certain questions, distributed a leaflet saying that "it is precisely because of our concern for Israel that we question whether the 'Rally Against Terror' . . . has reflected a reasoned consideration by American Jews of Israel's best interests." The leaflet notes that peace and Israel's future hinge on "affirming the legitimate human and national aspirations of the Palestinian people, with whom the Israelis must eventually find a way to live." It calls upon the Israeli government to affirm "its willingness to talk to the full range of Palestinian leadership."

Also, in striking contrast to the *Morning Freiheit* and its supporters, the United Jewish People's Order of Canada, a progressive organization, greeted the invitation of the PLO to the UN as a step toward peace, stating: "Many available facts demonstrate that the decision . . . is not a decision directed against Israel. It is in fact in the interest of peace in the Middle East, a peace without which there is no future

for Israel." (*Canadian Tribune*, November 13, 1974.)

It is such groups which recognize the real significance of the UN's action.

Arafat's Speech

Arafat's presentation of the PLO position before the General Assembly, as expected, held little comfort for the Zionist zealots and their supporters. He castigated Zionism and its aggression. He branded it as an instrument of imperialism, of settler colonialism at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs. The General Assembly in 1947, he charged, "partitioned what it had no right to divide—an indivisible homeland." The State of Israel, he said, proceeded to occupy 81 per cent of Palestine, uprooting a million Arabs and replacing them with Jewish settlers and settlements. And herein, he concluded, lie the roots of the Palestine question.

Driven from their own land, denied their national rights, the Palestinian Arab people, Arafat declared, had always dreamed of return. Compelled to resort to armed struggle, they gave birth in the PLO to a movement which crystallized and matured "and grew enough to accommodate political and social struggle in addition to armed struggle." He upheld the legitimacy of the PLO as the authentic representative of the Palestinian Arab people and spoke, as its leader, of his hope and dream "that I should return with my people out of exile, there in Palestine to live in justice, equality and fraternity . . . in one democratic state where Christian, Jew and Moslem live in justice and equality."

Arafat rejected the label of "terrorist." We must distinguish, he said, between the revolutionary and the terrorist. One who fights in a just cause "cannot possibly be called terrorist." On the contrary, he contended, it is the Zionists who are guilty of terrorism, of the killing and injury of untold numbers of Arab civilians over the years of Israel's existence.

Such is the essence of Arafat's plea to the UN. There are parts of it with which we are in distinct disagreement, and we shall speak of these. But it is *basically* an appeal for the national rights of the Palestinian Arab people, for their right to self-determination, which must be supported without qualification. Needless to say, however, in Israeli government circles and among Zionists and their supporters in this country, the speech evoked only the harshest criticism and the severest condemnation.

The General Assembly concluded the discussion by adopting two resolutions. The first, approved 89-8 with 37 abstentions, affirmed the right of the Palestinian Arab people to self-determination,

to national independence and sovereignty, also "the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted." The second, adopted 95-17 with 19 abstentions, conferred observer status in the General Assembly on the PLO.

The appearance of the PLO at the UN and the adoption of these resolutions, following upon the unanimous recognition of the PLO by the Arab summit conference at Rabat, represent a great victory for the cause of Palestinian Arab liberation and a turning point in the Middle East conflict. They also demonstrate the new character of the UN and its independence from the U.S. domination of the past.

For the Rabin government the alternatives are now more sharply posed than ever: either negotiate in Geneva with the Arab states and the PLO or precipitate another war. In the face of this, Rabin and others have stated most emphatically that under no circumstances will they recognize or negotiate with the PLO. Information Minister Aharon Yariv, who had earlier made a slight gesture toward the PLO, declared that the only place he and Arafat would meet would be on the battlefield. And Yosef Tekoah, speaking at the UN, avowed that: "Israel will not permit the establishment of a PLO authority in any part of Palestine. The PLO will not be forced on the Palestinian Arabs. It will not be tolerated by the Jews of Israel."

What are the arguments of the Israeli leaders against acceptance of the PLO? It is worth examining them in some detail.

Palestine and Jordan

"The Palestinian Arabs already have a state." It is, in the words of Tekoah in his UN speech, "the Palestinian Arab state of Jordan." Says Tekoah:

Geographically and ethnically Jordan is Palestine. Historically both the West and East Banks of the Jordan River are parts of the Land of Israel or Palestine under the British Mandate until Jordan and then Israel became independent. . . .

Indeed, the vast majority of Palestinian refugees never left Palestine but moved, as a result of the 1948 and 1967 wars, from one part of the country to another.

But this is, first of all, a crude piece of sophistry. The "independence" of Jordan to which Tekoah refers begins with the action of Britain in 1922 of separating Transjordan from the Palestine Mandate, of which it had been a part, and setting it up as a separate mandate. This action the Zionists strongly protested at the time, contending that Transjordan was part of the territory promised by the Balfour Declaration as a Jewish homeland. In 1946 Britain relinquished the mandate

over Transjordan and it became an independent kingdom. Now it is fashionable in certain Zionist circles to refer to this as the actual partition of Palestine, establishing Transjordan (later Jordan) as the Palestinian Arab state, and to claim that the partition was completed with the subsequent establishment of the state of Israel. Therefore, it is argued, there are no grounds for a "second partition" and the creation of a "third Palestinian state."

This is an out-and-out fraud, designed to conceal reality and cloak annexationism. When the British in 1947 announced their intention to give up the Palestine Mandate, this did not include Transjordan. And when the UN took up the "Palestine question" that year, this also did not include Transjordan. It was this remaining territory, *exclusive of Transjordan*, which the UN partitioned into Jewish and Arab states. This, then, was *the* Palestinian Arab state, created by the UN together with Israel and having no less legitimacy than the latter. And *this* was the partition which the Jewish Agency accepted.

As we know, the Arab state never saw the light of day. The territories allotted to it were absorbed by the warring states, the major part by Israel, the West Bank by Jordan, the Gaza Strip by Egypt. It is on a part of these territories—specifically the West Bank and the Gaza Strip—that it is now proposed to set up an independent Palestinian Arab state. This the Palestinian Arab people have every right to do, and spurious arguments that they have already "chosen" the "Palestinian Arab state of Jordan" are intended only to deny them the right of self-determination.

Furthermore, Tekoah's hypocritical assertion that most Palestinian refugees have merely moved from one part of Palestine to another serves only to cover up the fact that the Arab populations of the Palestinian Arab territories taken over by Israel in 1948 have been reduced to the status of refugees who for more than a quarter of a century have not been permitted to return to their homes which, as Arafat charged, have been turned over to Jewish settlers. Added to these are the large number of refugees who fled the West Bank in 1967 and who also are not permitted to return.

The fact that the Palestinian Arabs rejected partition in 1947 does not deprive them of their national rights. Nor does the Israeli government have the right to exercise self-determination on their behalf by assigning them to Jordan.

Who Represents the Palestinians?

"The PLO speaks for no one but itself." According to Tekoah: "The PLO did not emerge from within the Palestinian community. It is not representative of the Palestinian community. It is a creation of the

Arab governments themselves . . . as an instrument for waging terror against Israel."

Rabbi Israel Miller, Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and a notorious anti-Soviet "crusader," states in a letter to the *New York Times* (October 20, 1974):

Out of an estimated two million Palestinians, more than 60 per cent are citizens of Jordan. Who gave the PLO the right to represent them? Not King Hussein, who stoutly insists that he speaks for his Palestinian citizens. Who gave the PLO the right to represent the others? Not the Palestinians who live in refugee camps in Lebanon or who have built new lives for themselves in Syria, in Kuwait, in Saudi Arabia; the PLO has never won an election, nor even held one. It is the UN itself that by its craven surrender to political expediency conferred authority on the PLO to represent the Palestinians.

But on the very same day on which Tekoah held forth, there were mass demonstrations of students and schoolchildren in Nablus in the West Bank in support of the PLO, and the Nablus shopkeepers staged a general strike. These were followed by similar actions in other West Bank areas including East Jerusalem. The demonstrations were dispersed by club-wielding Israeli police. In the course of these attacks a teenage girl was killed, scores were wounded and there were more than 50 arrests. The occupation authorities also deported five public figures to the East Bank, among them the well-known scholar Dr. Hanna Nasser, president of Bir Zeit College, charging them with inciting demonstrations and being members of hostile organizations. (See the *New York Times*, November 14, 17, 19, 22, 1974.)

Such actions did not begin on November 13, however; they have been carried on for some time in the face of mass arrests, torture and brutal repression by the Israeli occupiers. In a series of articles in the leading French newspaper *Le Monde*, (March 8-11, 1974), its Middle East editor Eric Rouleau writes:

In the weeks that followed the [October] war, the disorders, demonstrations and attacks (including one that took the life of the military governor of Nablus, Col. Segev) were bitterly repressed by more "preventive" arrests, the December 10 expulsion to Jordan of ten prominent individuals, and the dynamiting of houses belonging to "suspects." The authorities have not, however, been able to check the nationalist movement, which has taken an unprecedented jump since the October war.

The most characteristic development in this area is *the nearly unanimous support for the Palestine Liberation Organization*. One after the other, the Muslim Council of Jerusalem, the representatives of the established organizations, most of the mayors and "notables" (many of whom were supposed to be loyal partisans of King Hussein) said that from now on they would consider Yasir Arafat's *fedayeen* movement as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." (Emphasis added.)

Clearly, there can be little doubt as to who speaks for the Arab people of the West Bank—and, for that matter, of the Gaza Strip. And unfortunately for the wishful thinking of Rabbi Miller, in the summit meeting in Rabat King Hussein acknowledged that not he but the PLO speaks for the Palestinian Arabs, in the East Bank as well as the West Bank, and withdrew in its favor. Nor is there any doubt about the support of the 200,000 and more Palestinian Arabs in Lebanon for the PLO; indeed, this is what underlies the ceaseless attacks on refugee camps in Lebanon by the Israeli military forces.

In short, it is the PLO and the PLO alone which represents the Palestinian Arabs. There is no other authentic representative—not Hussein and certainly not the handful of Arab collaborators in the West Bank on whom the Israeli rulers pin their hopes of establishing a puppet government. It is the recognition of this cardinal fact that accounts for the acceptance of the PLO by all 20 Arab states and by a host of other governments—indeed, by the 105 states which voted to invite the PLO to the UN General Assembly. And it is this cardinal fact which the Israeli ruling circles and their supporters are seeking—in vain—to obliterate.

The Palestinian State and Israel

"The central objective of the PLO is the destruction of the State of Israel." It is contended that this is the real meaning of the call for a unitary Palestinian state in which Jews, Christians and Moslems live in equality, and that the demand to establish a Palestinian authority on all territories relinquished by Israel is admittedly only a first step toward this goal. In the words of Israeli Foreign Minister Yigal Allon, speaking before the UN, it is impossible to recognize and negotiate with the PLO because "they aspire to liquidate a member state of the UNO."

To be sure, the proposal for a single Palestinian state is not one which we can accept. As the Israeli Arab Communist leader Emile Touma puts it:

Revolutionary forces all over the world, the Communist Party of Israel among them, regard this program both as unprincipled, because it negates the right of the Jewish people in this country to self-determination, and as impractical under the present conditions in the world and in the region. Moreover, not only do the countries of the world recognize Israel and subscribe to its right of sovereign existence, but the Arab countries in their Algerian summit implied recognition of Israel in deciding to attend the Geneva Conference and reach a durable peace with Israel. ("The Palestine Question: Heart of the Middle East Conflict," *Jewish Affairs*, March-April 1974.)

In short, no solution of the Middle East conflict is possible which is not based on full recognition of the right to self-determination of *both* the Palestinian Arab and Israeli peoples.

But the position of the Rabin regime is, first of all, divorced from reality. PLO policy is dealt with as if it were eternally fixed and unchangeable. Israeli spokesmen habitually quote PLO statements and documents of 1968 or even earlier as evidence of the PLO's stand today, despite the fact that there has been a pronounced shift in its position in recent years toward greater political realism. A decisive step in this process was the decision of the PLO's leading body, the Palestine National Council, at its meeting last June, to seek inclusion in the Geneva negotiations. This action constitutes an abandonment of previous calls for the establishment of a single Palestinian state through armed force and a *de facto* recognition of the existence of Israel. For one does not negotiate with a state whose right to existence one repudiates. In fact, those extremist groups which *do* demand the destruction of Israel, led by George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, have rejected *all* negotiations and have withdrawn from the PLO.

What is it proposed to negotiate? The establishment of an independent Palestinian Arab state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, *existing side by side with Israel on the basis of a negotiated agreement*. From this it would follow that if a unified Palestinian state is eventually to materialize, it would do so as a binational state, as a *voluntary* union based on friendship and equality of the two peoples. This is in fact the direction in which the thinking of Arafat and other PLO leaders has been moving, as is indicated by a number of recent statements. Illustrative is the following declaration by Said Hamamini, PLO representative in London:

We are well aware of the fact that a state in partnership can be

constructed only if and when the two parties genuinely want it and are prepared to work for it. Past decades of enmity do not provide a good ground for an immediate realization of a state in partnership.

I believe that the first step towards that should be a mutual recognition between the two respective parties. The Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs should recognize one another as peoples with all the rights to which a people is entitled. This recognition should be followed by the realization of the Palestinian Arab entity through a Palestinian state, a fully-fledged member-state of the United Nations. (London *Times*, December 17, 1973.)

True, Arafat in his UN speech did not explicitly recognize the right of existence of Israel. True, he continued to call for a single Palestinian state as the ultimate goal. But although there is no change of *formal* position there is little doubt as to the direction in which Arafat and other PLO leaders are moving. The important thing is that future Palestinian-Israeli relations are *subject to negotiation*—provided that the Rabin government is willing to negotiate. And the fact that the PLO makes an unacceptable demand cannot be made a pretext for not negotiating. As Meir Vilner, general secretary of the Communist Party of Israel, puts it:

First of all, if any program which is unacceptable to one side should prevent negotiations with the other, then the Israeli government and the Israeli Knesset are entirely unfit for any negotiations. The Knesset adopted, almost unanimously (with the opposition of the MKs of the Communist Party of Israel) a resolution which states that “the historical right of the Jewish people to Eretz Israel (the entire historic Palestine—Ed.) is indisputable.”

Thereby the Knesset determined that it is their aim to take possession of the whole country, that they want to liquidate the right of a people whose right to an independent state was recognized as long ago as November 29, 1947 by the UN General Assembly.

Moreover, the nationalists and annexationists have a short memory: When the Jewish Agency was recognized as the representative of the Jewish population of the country, before the establishment of the State of Israel, what was its political program? This was the Biltmore Program adopted by the Zionist organizations in their congress, headed by David Ben-Gurion, in the Biltmore Hotel in New York, and stating as its aim “to turn Eretz Israel (the whole of Palestine) into a Jewish state.”

In spite of this, the UN recognized the Jewish Agency as the representative of the Jewish population. (*Information Bulletin*, CPI, Mid-October 1974.)

Vilner argues—and correctly—that “if today the realistic forces within the Palestinian national movement are strengthening,” if they “are ready to take the road toward establishing a Palestinian national authority not in place of Israel but at her side . . . and if they are ready to participate in the peace conference in Geneva,” then far from rejecting negotiations, “Israeli statesmen with any sense of realism and political understanding ought to welcome this.”

And finally, it must be noted that even if the PLO concept of a unitary Palestinian state is rejected, the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state in the West Bank and the Gaza strip is no more than a first step toward the solution of the problem of self-determination. Such a state, with its small, divided territory and meager economic resources, has serious problems of economic viability to cope with. Second, the establishment of such a state leaves unresolved the future of the rest of the Palestinian population—in the East Bank, in Lebanon, in Israel and elsewhere. And most important, it leaves the problem of the refugees yet to be resolved on the basis of their right to return to their homes or receive compensation for their property. The process of self-determination would therefore have to continue beyond this initial step, within the framework of the coexistence of the Palestinian Arab state and the State of Israel.

Who Are the Terrorists?

“The PLO is a gang of terrorists and murderers.” Not only is every hijacking, every terrorist act anywhere in the world attributed to the PLO, but the responsibility is laid specifically at the door of Al Fatah and of Arafat himself. Says Tekoah concerning Arafat: “This is . . . the man who continues to serve as commander of Fatah-Black September, the gangster who received \$5 million from President Qaddafi of Libya as a prize for the slaughter of Israeli sportsmen at the Olympic Games, the criminal who personally directed the murder of diplomats in Khartum.” With such people, it is maintained, one can have no traffic whatever.

But these allegations are made without the slightest substantiation. They are simply reiterated endlessly as if they were self-evident truths, despite the repeated statements of Arafat rejecting hijackings and such actions as those at Munich and Khartum as methods of struggle. And they continue in the face of the PLO’s arrest of 26 Palestinians allegedly involved in the recent hijacking of a British jetliner in which a German businessman was murdered and its demand for custody of the four hijackers, to be brought with the others to public trial.

Nor is it correct to label Arafat and his associates “terrorists” and

"murderers" on the grounds of the guerrilla attacks in several localities in Israel during the past number of months. To be sure, acts of individual terror directed against innocent civilians cannot be condoned, whatever their motivation and regardless of who takes responsibility for them. Such acts do grave damage to the very cause in whose name they are committed and they must be unequivocally condemned. In fact, they have been repeatedly denounced by the Communist parties of Israel and the Arab states.

However, it must be recognized, first, that the struggle of the Palestinian Arab people for their national rights is a just struggle, one which they have every right to wage by all legitimate means, including armed force. All pertinent questions must be judged within this context. Second, terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians have in the main been conducted by extremist groups outside the PLO or at odds with the main PLO groups supporting Arafat. Moreover, there is good reason to suspect that on more than one occasion they have been outright provocations. And the Israeli authorities, at Maalot and elsewhere, have themselves displayed a readiness to sacrifice the lives of Israeli women and children for the sake of building up the "terrorist" scare.

Finally, if acts of terrorism can be offered as a reason for refusing to negotiate, then the Palestinian Arabs have far more justification for refusing than does the Israeli government. This government is guilty of almost daily bombings and shellings of villages and refugee camps in Lebanon with infinitely greater numbers of civilian casualties than in all the attacks on Israeli territory taken together. It is guilty of armed incursions into Lebanese territory with the blowing up of houses and the illegal taking of prisoners. It is guilty of officially ordered assassinations of guerrilla leaders on Lebanese territory and of an officially ordered hijacking of a Lebanese plane. It is guilty of the use of napalm against Arab civilian populations and of the bombings of factories and schools in Egypt with hundreds of civilian deaths. It has committed all these crimes, moreover, not in the name of national liberation but in a drive to annex Arab territories and to wipe out the Palestinian Arab liberation movement.

To sum up, what is involved is recognition of the right of the Palestinian Arab people to self-determination and of the existence of a national liberation movement which is accepted by the Palestinian people as its representative. This does not mean acceptance of the entire program of the PLO. And agreement to negotiate with the PLO does not mean commitment to accept its program in advance, any more than the PLO's willingness to negotiate obligates it to accept the program of the Israeli government. It is this essential fact which

is being obscured—and we think deliberately.

A Pretext for Annexation

“Terrorism” is but a *pretext* for refusing to negotiate with the PLO, just as is the allegation that the PLO seeks the destruction of Israel. The real reason for the self-righteous insistence that there can be no relations with the PLO is the Israeli government’s aim of annexing all or most of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as other occupied territories. Though there has been a change in government, this expansionist aim has never been given up, nor has the illusion that it can be attained through military force.

The process of creeping annexation continues without letup. A master plan for the Golan Heights has been announced, calling for the establishment of five new agricultural settlements and a sizeable town within the next ten years. (*Jerusalem Post*, November 10, 1974.) In addition, existing settlements are being fortified as part of a regional defense system. On the Mediterranean coast just south of the Gaza Strip, construction is under way of the Israeli settlement of Yamit, whose initial settlers will be Soviet and U.S. immigrants. (*Jerusalem Post*, November 8, 1974). And in the West Bank the sale of land to Israeli purchasers and the process of settlement goes on without fanfare, while Jerusalem has already been converted to a virtual Jewish fortress by surrounding it with a ring of apartment buildings and other structures on adjacent West Bank territory.

Despite its protestations that it wishes to negotiate the return of West Bank territory with Hussein, it is clear that the Rabin government has no serious intention of evacuating the West Bank. It has sought instead, with Kissinger’s help, to press Hussein into acceptance of an arrangement in which Israeli control is retained. Thus, Hussein is reported in the *New York Times* (October 31, 1974) to have told the Rabat conference that in his discussions with Kissinger he was asked to accept the idea of re-establishment of Jordanian civil administration in parts of the West Bank while continuing Israeli military control, and of maintaining a series of Israeli settlements along the Jordan River as a “security border.” Hussein described these proposals as “humiliating.”

Rabin and his cohorts no longer speak of negotiating peace but speak instead of “territorial concessions” in return for a state of “non-belligerency.” By this they mean the return of some pieces of territory in exchange for agreement by the Arab states concerned to accept the permanent retention by Israel of the remaining territories—in essence a freezing of the *status quo* with some minor changes. Toward

this end they have maneuvered, with the diligent assistance of Kissinger, to put off the Geneva negotiations endlessly and instead to institute separate, "step-by-step" negotiations with each Arab state.

Now the issue of PLO participation in Geneva has become a particularly convenient pretext for refusal to agree to renewal of the negotiations. Thus, the *New York Times* (December 12, 1974) reports: "Foreign Minister Yigal Allon of Israel said today that his country would use its veto to prevent the Palestine Liberation Organization from taking part in the Geneva conference on the Middle East if it ever is reconvened."

Israel and the U.S.

This persistent adherence of the Israeli ruling circles to their policy of aggression and expansion has led to a growing dependence on U.S. imperialism and especially on U.S. arms. Since the October war, Congress has voted to supply Israel with some \$2.8 billion worth of armaments, more than half of it in grants or credits. With this, Israel has become more and more closely tied to U.S. policy in the Middle East. That policy continues to be based on doing everything possible to maintain Israeli military superiority; however, the changed relationship of forces in the Middle East, and in particular the changed relationship between the oil monopolies and the oil-producing countries, has led to U.S. pressure on the Israeli government to make some limited concessions to the Arab states.

Like the Rabin government Kissinger hoped through his shuttle diplomacy to bring about some partial solutions which would leave the *status quo* basically unchanged. He relied especially on the hope of bringing Sadat under U.S. influence and arriving at a separate agreement with Egypt. His bilateral negotiations scored some initial successes in the form of the disengagement agreements and won him the reputation of a "miracle worker." But this was achieved by ignoring the key issues of Jordan and the Palestinian Arabs, which have now come to the center of the stage and have compelled him to confront them.

The pressures on Sadat for Arab unity proved to be greater than the State Department's blandishments and this emerged very sharply in the Rabat summit conference. Not only did the conference act unanimously to "affirm the rights of the Palestinian people to establish an independent national authority, under Palestine Liberation Organization leadership, as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people on any liberated Palestinian territory." It also voted unanimously to "invite Jordan, Egypt, Syria and the Palestine Liberation

Organization to work out a formula governing their relations in the light of these decisions and in order to implement them." This invitation, which was accepted, calls for concerted action by the four as parties to the Geneva negotiations. It means that negotiations are to be conducted with the Arab states jointly and with the inclusion of the PLO. And it means that negotiations must be based on full implementation of Resolution 242 and assurance of the national rights of the Palestinian Arabs.

These actions were a severe blow not only to the Israeli ruling circles but also to Kissinger's schemes. And to this blow was added the impact of the recognition of the PLO by the UN General Assembly soon afterward. They are still maneuvering, of course, for a separate partial agreement with Sadat. But their hopes of accomplishing this have been seriously diminished. The upshot is that the Palestine question can no longer be filed away for future reference; it must be tackled now. The period of "equilibrium," of endless stalemate, is over. The Rabin government is confronted with the necessity to negotiate seriously with Egypt, Syria, Jordan *and the PLO*. The only alternative is to pave the way to a new war—a war which could all too easily reach catastrophic proportions.

But the Rabin government is evidently prepared, for the sake of its bankrupt policy, to plunge Israel, the Middle East, perhaps the whole world, into such a war. Real peace with the Arabs, it is said, is impossible. The Arab states are motivated only by an insane desire to destroy Israel and their support of the PLO proves it beyond doubt. And the UN action only offers further proof that the whole world is against Israel. Her one friend is the United States. Therefore there is no alternative but war. Whether in six months or a year, war is imminent. Thus the Israeli people, still reeling under the blows of the October war and facing the prospects of economic disaster, are being told to prepare for a new and much worse bloodbath. More, there is growing talk of pre-emptive war. And in mid-November a wave of tension and foreboding was set off by a partial mobilization of Israeli reserves. The situation is an explosive one.

An immediate outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Syria has been averted by Syria's agreement to accept the presence of the UN forces for another six months, achieved through the intervention of UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim. But this, in Waldheim's view, is a one-time concession which will not be renewed without further Israeli withdrawals. Waldheim is convinced that a new war may well break out by next spring or early summer unless there is serious progress in negotiations. (*New York Times*, November 29, 1974.)

The same sense of doom pervades U.S. government circles. Lawrence Mosher, writing from Washington in the *National Observer* of December 7, 1974, reports, "We can see no indication that American diplomacy can cope with what's now happening in the Middle East," an informed U.S. official admits. "Events are galloping ahead too fast. No one here knows what to do. No sober analyst would predict anything else but another war, most probably within six months."

The Real Roadblock to Peace

But the roadblock to peace and the danger of a new war do not stem from the policies of the Arab states or the PLO. The Arab states have made very clear their readiness to recognize the existence of Israel as a sovereign state and to negotiate peace with her if she withdraws from the conquered territories and acknowledges the rights of the Palestinian Arabs. The insistence of Israeli leaders that this only cloaks the aim of destroying Israel is without foundation. Even observers favorably inclined toward the Israeli government have maintained that the existence of Israel is not the issue. Assistant Secretary of State Joseph J. Sisco, in his speech at the celebration of Israel's 25th anniversary in Washington, D.C. on May 7, 1973, said: "Since 1967, while there are still Arab voices calling for the disappearance of Israel, there are many others in the Arab world who now perceive their national interest as compatible with the existence of a sovereign Israel, though within the former armistice lines. I believe that for most Arabs, Israel's existence is no longer the principal issue, and this idea is a major positive element in the Middle East today."

The well-known journalist Georgie Anne Geyer, writing in *The Progressive* of August 1973, states: "What most observers have missed is the fact that, since the 1967 war, what is at stake is no longer the existence of Israel. The major Arab states are now willing to accept and recognize this, and Israel's military power is such that there is no question of its hegemony in the area. (This was, of course, before the October war—H.L.) What is at stake now is Israel's conquests. . . ." And she adds: "The United States is now in the position of defending these conquests." In so doing, it is sowing hatred for itself in the Middle East and the seeds of endless war.

We repeat: the charges of Israel's leaders that the Arab states are plotting to destroy Israel, using the proposed Palestinian Arab state as their spearhead, are without foundation. They are but a cloak for the Israeli government's own annexationist designs.

The existence of Israel has in fact never really been the issue. The real source of conflict has always been the aggressive policies of

Israel's rulers and their alliances with imperialist powers against the national liberation struggles of the Arab peoples. It is, as Ms. Geyer says, Israel's conquests and the U.S. defense of these conquests that lie at the root of today's war danger.

Nor is the Soviet Union in any way a threat to Israel's existence. The Soviet government has at all times pursued a firm, principled policy in the Middle East. It has joined with the Arab states in insisting on full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories as a necessary condition for peace and has opposed all maneuvering for "partial solutions" which leave matters basically unchanged. It has recognized the PLO as the authentic representative of the Palestinian Arab people and has fully upheld the justness of their cause. Its influence in the Arab world is built on solid foundations.

At the same time, however, while condemning Israeli government policies, the Soviet Union has gone out of its way to make it clear that it defends Israel's right to exist as a sovereign state. This is spelled out in Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's speech to the current session of the UN General Assembly in these words:

Certain persons try to present the Soviet Union's position as a one-sided stand which meets only the interests of the Arab states. Yes, we support and will continue supporting the Arabs' lawful demands. But it would be wrong to see in our position only this aspect of the matter. When we strive to insure that lands acquired by force should not become a premium to the aggressor, this demand by its meaning goes beyond the limits of the Middle East. It reflects intolerance to aggression in general. So, this is a matter of major international principle, a matter of consistency of policy.

Moreover, the Soviet Union is in favor of Israel existing and developing as an independent sovereign state. We have declared this many times and reiterate it again. The progress in the Middle East settlement, a real, not an illusory one, will create preconditions for the development of the Soviet Union's relations with all states in the Middle East, Israel included. (*Pravda*, September 25, 1974.)

There is a sure road to a lasting peace in the Middle East—the only road. It lies in the speedy resumption of the Geneva negotiations, with the inclusion of the PLO, as the Arab states and the Soviet Union have demanded. It lies in the full implementation of the cease-fire resolution and in respecting the rights of the Palestinian Arabs. It lies in the fulfillment by the United States of its responsibility, as one of the sponsors of that resolution, for the as-

surance of its implementation and an end to the present maneuvering to prevent it.

What is required is the abandonment by the Israeli ruling circles of their present suicidal path. It is the path of those who learn nothing, who persist in following a policy whose utter bankruptcy is becoming increasingly apparent to all sensible people, a policy which leads only to sure disaster for the Israeli people.

But in its efforts to peddle this policy to the Israeli people the Rabin regime is finding fewer and fewer takers as the people increasingly feel its effects on their own backs. There are rising movements for a change of policy, movements which are creating growing dissensions and divisions within the main political parties—and these movements will continue to grow and to become more unified and more vocal.

In the United States, too, voices of questioning and dissent continue to mount in spite of all efforts by the leading forces of Zionism to contain them. What is essential is to give organized expression to them, to develop them into effective instruments of pressure on the U.S. government to change its own Middle East policy and so to compel the Israeli government to change its path.

While the clouds of war in the Middle East have grown darker, the possibilities of avoiding war and safeguarding world peace have in fact been strengthened by recent developments if these are properly utilized.

Of key importance is the advancement of U.S.-Soviet detente and coordination of the efforts of the two governments. It was joint action which made the cease-fire agreement possible; it is joint action which will assure its being carried out. The joint Soviet-U.S. statement at Vladivostok, in stressing the importance of the Geneva Conference and the need for its speediest resumption, contributes to this. But it is here in the United States that the struggle must be waged to bring to fruition the cooperation of the two countries toward this end.