

Diplomatic paralysis greets Arafat's offer

by Thierry Lalevée

Jordan's King Hussein, commenting on the international diplomatic reaction to PLO chairman Yasser Arafat's recognition of the state of Israel, warned on Dec. 8 that any stalemate in the search for peace in the Middle East "will lead to a major war, which could unleash World War III." Indeed, while Washington fiddles with the transition to a Bush presidency, the time for decisive action is running out.

At a press conference in Stockholm on Dec. 7, after two days of talks with a delegation of American Jews led by Rita Hauser, the chairman of the International Committee for Peace in the Middle East, Arafat underlined the formal PLO recognition of Israel. The resolutions of the Palestinian National Council, taken in mid-November in Algiers, he explained, mean that the PLO recognizes "two states in Palestine: an Israeli state and a Palestinian state." Asked to repeat himself by bewildered journalists who expected him to remain diplomatic, and hence ambiguous, Arafat stressed again that the resolution of the PNC meant "recognition of the state of Israel."

Hence, more than 20 years after the takeover of the PLO by Arafat's Fatah faction, and the elaboration of the Palestinian Charter which called for the eradication of Israel, the PLO has finally and formally recognized the state of Israel. The timing of Arafat's declaration was no coincidence. It came two days before the first anniversary of the Palestine uprising in the Occupied Territories (the *Intifadah*) and some 10 days before Arafat is to address a special session of the United Nations, moved from New York to Geneva after U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz refused to grant the PLO leader a visa to address the world body in New York.

But he is deaf, who does not want to hear. Arafat's declaration was greeted by virulent denunciations from the Israeli leadership, from both from the Likud and Labor parties. For Yitzhak Shamir, who is currently trying to put together a new government, "Arafat can say whatever he wants. The PLO is committed to Israel's destruction." After an initial statement indicating that Washington would like to study

Arafat's declaration before taking a final decision, George Shultz pushed aside the PLO declaration as irrelevant, saying that there was still "no one to talk to in the Palestinian camp."

Everything is 'on hold'

The Israeli and American reactions have little to do with whatever Arafat or the PLO might say or can do. They stem from the fact that, in the interim period between the Reagan and Bush administrations, Washington has already decided upon its own agenda. Officially, the U.S. argues that, given the ongoing internal political crisis in Israel, there should be no external diplomatic initiative.

The same rationale seems to have convinced the West European countries at their Dec. 4 summit in Rhodes that it was unnecessary to send their foreign ministers to the upcoming Geneva U.N. session. Only the Greek foreign minister, representing the entirety of the European Community (EC), will be present; the other countries would be represented only by their ambassadors. The British government, which had earlier mooted a first official meeting between a representative of the PLO and a British cabinet minister, even if a junior one, decided on Dec. 5 to cancel the meeting. London's puzzling statement spoke of the "radicalization" of the PLO since the November PNC meeting. Arafat's personal spokesman, Abu Sharif, due to arrive in London, canceled his trip, including appearances at pro-PLO gatherings called to celebrate the *Intifadah*.

Though this sudden disinterest in the Middle East and the major steps taken by the PLO may be reversed after the EC countries further analyze Arafat's statement in Stockholm, it is Israel and the United States that are going to have to budge from their recalcitrant positions.

Putting aside Washington's public argument, there are two reasons for the U.S. foot-dragging. First, the incoming Bush administration has a different view on how to treat the Middle East powderkeg than does Shultz, and is not eager to inherit the consequences of any major moves by Shultz during the transition period. There is little credibility to Shultz's statements that he had not consulted Bush or Secretary of State-designate James Baker in denying Arafat a visa. It "just happened" to correspond to Bush's wishes: Shultz will catch all the blame for the unpopular move.

This ploy is accompanied by deliberately spread rumors to the effect that the administration of former CIA director Bush could be expected to be more "pro-Arab" than the previous administration. Lending credibility to such speculation, Henry Kissinger was quoted by the Nov. 29 *Jerusalem Post* as having stressed privately during a cocktail party in Italy that Israel should "withdraw from Gaza and Nablus. The next administration cannot be expected to be as soft toward Israel" as the previous one. In fact, Bush's Middle East guidelines, elaborated by his foreign policy adviser Dennis Ross of the Institute for Near East Studies in Washington, call for the United States to abandon any thought of an inter-

national peace conference, and just wait for the Israelis and the PLO to get together, if they want to.

But such benign passivity bears no relation to the actual pace of events. During a secluded seminar which was held at the end of November near Moscow by the Soviet foreign policy think tank IMEMO, a selected group of Soviet, American, and Israeli diplomats gathered to discuss the world's regional conflicts. The Americans and Soviets reportedly agreed that the key to the Middle East is not a solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, but, according to Israeli diplomat Gideon Raphael, to ensure a "de-stratification" (sic) of the conflict: "Let them stew in their juice and kill each other," as long as this does not threaten world peace. According to Raphael, the idea is that the Middle East conflict should be lowered from a strategic conflict to the level of the Sudanese or Sir Lankan ethnic riots—an endless and unsolvable crisis, which, however, does not involve either of the superpowers directly.

The Soviet-Israeli connection

A key step toward that goal, is for the Soviets to establish with Israel the same kind of relations it has with the Arab countries. Intelligence sources report that this is close to being achieved, since the orchestrated hijacking that took place in the Soviet Union on Dec. 1. Four people seized a busload of Soviet schoolchildren and their teachers in the Caucasus, then demanded and were given a Russian military transport plane, on which they flew to Israel. The four were seized by Israeli authorities at the Tel Aviv Airport and returned to the U.S.S.R. The Israeli daily *Haaretz* commented, "The hijacked Soviet plane fell like a gift from heaven on the stagnant diplomatic channel between Moscow and Jerusalem."

Most analysts believe that the hijacking was an elaborated diplomatic exercise whose aim was to justify Moscow's establishing of diplomatic relations with Israel. Not by chance, it followed a secret visit by Avraham Tamir, director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, to Moscow on Nov. 27. The visit was denounced by Israeli officials who claimed that they were "unaware" of it. Yet, they cannot claim that they were unaware of the fact that the Soviets had quietly allowed the Israeli consular delegation in Moscow to be upgraded, with Arie Levin, an Israeli diplomat with the rank of ambassador, replacing Consul Gordon Meron in mid-November. And who could protest when seeing Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze congratulating "Ambassador" Arie Levin for the cooperation between the two countries?

The Soviet-Israeli rapprochement may take some months still, and the Bush administration seems set on a timetable of doing nothing before February or March. The diplomatic ploys bear little relation to reality, as King Hussein pointed out. How long can a region filled with medium-range and even long-range missiles, equipped with nuclear or chemical warheads, be "de-stratified" and put on the back burner?

Burmese 'undesirable' tours Europe, Asia

by Our Special Correspondent

During October, Brang Seng, the leader of the guerrilla army known as the "Amiable Assassins" and head of the Kachin Independence Organization in Burma, made a remarkable, extended international tour, ending up in Europe. Brang, as Britain's *Observer* noted Oct. 30, is one of "the most wanted men in Burma," and for years was on the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service's "undesirables" list as a drug-runner, insurgent, and associate of communists.

EIR reported from Bangkok Sept. 30 that the Kachin minority group, unlike the much larger, strictly no-drugs Karen insurgents, controls 5-10% of Burmese opium production and also deals in jade and gold.

Brang himself purports to be a leader of the Burmese opposition to the military government, and during August of this year, called on resistance fighters united in the National Democratic Front to join in a nationwide military offensive against the armed forces.

On this tour—run in Europe, at least, by Amnesty International and a circle of "Burma hands"—Brang met with representatives of the governments of Japan, Pakistan, Italy, West Germany, Great Britain, and the Vatican. There was no official sponsor of the tour outside of the Kachins themselves, several sources said. He apparently "has lots of money," as one source said, "because, after all, they are at war, and these people always waste all kinds of money."

According to a source in Great Britain, Brang met with "prominent people" in Tokyo, including representatives of the Socialist Party, and government officials, some from the Foreign Ministry. In Pakistan, he met with Gen. Nawad Khan, and the leadership of the Muslim League and the Seven-Party Alliance of Afghan Mujahideen.

Those who organized it say that his tour of Europe was equally impressive. But there were very different accounts from a number of the West German government officials who encountered Brang, ranging from denials that he actually met with many of the people his friends claimed he did, to charges of outright fraud over the trick Brang used to put pressure on West German Chancellor Kohl to support the opposition in Burma. One source in the office of the West German national security adviser said that an important feature of Brang's operation is to "pretend that he has met half the government and half the opposition."

According to one intimate of Brang in Europe, the Kachin leader gave a press conference in Italy on "human rights issues" with Margherita Boniver, who is the international