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YES TO TALKS - WITH THE PLO!

As soon as the curfew was lifted in the Occupied Territories, the Intifada resumed with full force: demonstrations, riots, confrontations with the army, youths shot to death, house demolitions, detentions, deportations... Severe new restrictions on the employment of Palestinians in Israel left a large part of the population unemployed; the economic crisis is compounded by the loss of remittances from Palestinian workers in the Gulf states.

Palestinian desperation is growing; on March 9, a Palestinian stabbed to death four Israeli women in Jerusalem. After capture, he told the police: *I wanted to send a message to Baker.*

On the following day, U.S. Secretary of State James Baker arrived in Jerusalem on the first of what seems to be a long series of visits. The Bush administration's handling of other Middle East issues - such as the Kurds in Iraq - gives little grounds for confidence in its ability or willingness to solve the Israeli-Palestinian/Israeli-Arab conflict. Baker's efforts are reminiscent of similar initiatives by his predecessors - Rogers, Kissinger, Schultz - most of which came to naught. And yet - as with these previous initiatives - the Baker visits arouse great attention, hopes, intensive discussions and heated debates everywhere in the Middle East.

After a month of efforts, Baker got Yitzchak Shamir to accept the idea of a peace conference jointly chaired by the United States and the Soviet Union, an idea which Shamir had rejected for years. Shamir does insist - and Baker agrees - to call it "a regional conference" rather than an international one.

However, this and other diplomatic stunts cannot

obscure the main issue: *will the Palestinians be included in the negotiations, and (if so) what (if anything) will be offered to them?*

Since the outbreak of the Gulf war, tentative proposals of all kinds were tried, designed to circumvent this problem: negotiations between Israel and the Gulf states, bypassing everybody else (but are the Gulf states *that* grateful to the United States?); a "Syrian Camp David", involving Israeli withdrawal from the Golan heights, in return for a tacit Syrian acceptance of continued Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (but large parts of the Israeli establishment don't want to give up the Golan with its Israeli settlements). The old idea of "a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation" has been exhumed. Curiously, Yasser Arafat and King Hussein of Jordan took a very similar position during the Gulf war - but this position is making the first "discredited" and the second - more wellcome than ever in diplomatic circles.

All of these ideas leave out the most essential points. The Arab rulers - however little they may care for the Palestinians - are unlikely to openly abandon the Palestinian cause and incur further unpopularity with their own people - after the problems involved in their supporting the United States against Iraq.

A peace conference is unlikely to open without a Palestinian delegation - and there is no sign of "non-PLO Palestinians" appearing anywhere. Without a written authorization from PLO headquarters, no Palestinian would even meet Baker in Jerusalem, for an unofficial discussion. Much less would they come to a conference to negotiate a binding agreement.

No peace without the PLO!

The following is the text of a resolution adopted by the ICIPP executive, published in Ha'aretz on February 15.

Sooner or later the smoke of war will clear. Then, it will be plain to see that nothing has changed in the fundamental facts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, two peoples live and will continue to live. Until peace is achieved between the peoples, life in this land will continue to be hell for all its inhabitants.

There can be no peace without negotiations between the government of Israel, elected by the citizens of Israel, and the Palestinian leadership, defined by the Palestinians themselves and by nobody else.

As long as the Palestinians place their confidence in the PLO - and by all indications, such is the case, particularly now - the PLO will continue to be the representative of the Palestinian people.

Any negotiations or "peace process" which does not take these facts into account is foredoomed to failure.

Meetings in Europe

Thus, in any conceivable peace conference, the PLO will be represented, officially or unofficially. Therefore, it is in Israel's basic interest that the PLO will be represented in as official and binding a way as possible; that both the Palestinians under occupation and those in exile will be represented; and that Yasser Arafat – the only leader whose authority is accepted by the whole Palestinian people – will commit that authority to the peace agreement achieved. Only in this way can a lasting peace be achieved, a peace in which Palestinians will have confidence and which they will have no reason to repudiate.

Such a peace is in the true and vital interest of Israel – and that is what more and more Israelis feel*, though the present government of Israel, locked in the dream of "Greater Israel", denies every chance for such a solution. Such a peace is not necessarily in what the Bush administration regards as the interest of the United States. Neither Baker nor any other representative of a government can be relied upon to take care that peace in the Middle East will be achieved.

The constant pressure and maximum mobilization of all peace seekers, in and outside the region, are absolutely vital. In the case of the Kurds, it was public opinion – outraged at their being massacred and oppressed – which forced the world's diplomats to change their agendas. The same can be true for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The editor

** An opinion poll was conducted at the end of January 1991 – when Iraqi scud attacks on Israel were at their peak – by the Tel-Aviv University Faculty of Social Sciences and published on March 26. One of the results was that 44.7% of those asked declared themselves in favour of Israeli negotiations with the PLO. It was less than the 53.5% result of a similar poll of December 1990, but one has to take into account that, at the time of this war-time poll, the peace movement was almost completely inactive, and a major propaganda campaign was waged around the theme that the PLO had "disqualified itself" and was "no longer (sic!) a fit partner for any negotiations". The results definitely indicate that the idea of negotiations with the PLO is underrepresented in the Knesset.*

■ The group of members of the European Parliament who initiated the European peace initiative in December 1990, held their third meeting on March 24, in Brussels. The session was called to hear evidence on the Gulf War and to evaluate its consequences. ICIPP member Matti Peled was among the Israelis invited to attend the meeting – together with Adv. Felicia Langer and Hagar Rublef. Among the testimonies presented were those of the Director of the Algerian Red Crescent and of a spokesman for the Iraqi Kurdish Front.

The data collected by the Algerian Red Crescent have in the meantime been corroborated by other sources and show the extent of civilian casualties and the damage to the civil infrastructure caused by the coalition forces fighting in Iraq.

The statements of the Kurds, presented in writing by Jala Talabani, who did not attend the meeting, stressed the plight of the Kurdish people, describing the terrible cruelty perpetrated by the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein. It called upon the international community to show interest in the Kurdish grievances and support the Kurdish goal of "peaceful settlement of the Kurdish national problem". Though not specified in the written statement, it was explained that such a settlement would consist of establishing autonomous Kurdish regions in each one of the countries with a Kurdish population. It was noticed that the Kurdish statement, though calling upon the international community to be concerned with the Kurdish problem, does not call for an International Peace Conference on the Middle East.

Dr. John Cox presented data collected by "The Environmental Protection Bulletin" in England. The extent of damages to the environment caused by both the Iraqis and the coalition forces was shown to be far greater than could have been predicted. Eliminating these catastrophic consequences would require a very long time and the mobilization of all the resources the international community could muster. The situation points to the urgent need of the international community to consider measures to protect the environment against similar acts of destruction in the future.

The plight of the Palestinians was described by the PLO representative in Brussels, Mr. Shawki Armali*. The effects of the Gulf war on the Israeli-Palestinian

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conflict were described by the Israeli participants.

Interesting information was given on the activities of RITA (Resisters Inside The Army) which provides information and counsel to those wishing to resist service against their conscience, and was active in connection with the Gulf crisis.

** PLO representative in Belgium, Shawki Armali is from Shfaramer in the Gallilee. He happens to be the relative of one of Israel's most popular football players, Zahi Armali of the Holon-team – and the first Arab who played in the Israeli national team. Zahi Armali was recently interviewed by the local Shtey Ariem (March 29) and was asked how it is to be a Palestinian in the Israeli football scene. Zahi explained that he does face racist insults from time to time, but for him as long as it is part of the general aggression of the football game everything is okay. Once, however, a fan of the other team insulted him after the game was over. Armali told him: You are not so young; you could be my father. How come you behave so unwise? The man went off in shame.*

In Brussels, Shawki Armali confessed to Matti Peled that he was, indeed, a little bit proud of Zahi.

■ During February and March, TOI-editor Adam Keller toured Holland, Germany, Italy and Britain, participating in numerous public meetings organised by local peace groups. The idea was to further the exchange of thoughts between the Israeli and the European anti-war movements. The need for it had gained a special urgency since the slogan of "solidarity with Israel" was being exploited in an utterly distasteful way by the propaganda machine on behalf of the war.

Keller met with members of a variety of political parties and currents: with MPs from the German Social Democrats and the British and Dutch Labour Parties, as well as left groups and grass-roots activists in these parties; with Greens, Anarchists, Pacifists; the formerly-Communist parties of Italy and Germany; the Jewish Martin Buber group in Rome and the Association for Jewish-Palestinian Dialogue in Amsterdam; and also with Christian peace activists, including Catholics, Lutherans and the Italian Waldensians.

There were three appearances with PLO members: with Muhammad Masri of the PLO office in Rome, and his colleague Ali Rashid in Turin; and with Leila Shaheed, PLO representative in Holland. At all three meetings, the PLO speakers reiterated their organization's continued commitment to peace negotiations with Israel. At the Amsterdam meeting, Keller and Shaheed shared the platform with MP Ad Melkert, the Dutch Labor Party's Middle East expert. His participation was significant, since his party holds senior positions in the Dutch cabinet and shares in defining the Middle East policies of both the Socialist International and the European Community.

It is to be hoped that the international peace movement will remain mobilised for peace in the Middle East – now that the Gulf war has taken place – and tackle such issues as peace talks between Israel and

the PLO, regional demilitarization, or the plight of the Kurds.

Concerning the Kurds

Seldom were Israelis so united as in their sympathy for the suffering Kurds. Of course the way solidarity was expressed showed all the political differences still intact. The peace movement emphasizes the right to self-determination of all peoples, Kurds as well as Palestinians. In contrast, the right-wing regards the Kurds as a proof that "Israel must be strong, in order not to share the Kurds' fate". For them, the Kurdish tragedy has the special merit of distracting world attention from the Palestinians.

The government policy has traditionally been to support the Iraqi Kurds – a policy motivated by anti-Iraqi rather than by pro-Kurdish considerations. (The Kurds of Turkey – a country with which Israel seeks an alliance – never profited from the Israeli government's pro-Kurdish stand.)

The most convincing solidarity was shown by the Kurdish Jewish community – which numbers about 100,000 people who came to Israel in the 1950s, mainly from Iraq and Iran. They took the initiative of organising a campaign to collect food and clothing and send them to the Kurdish refugees on the Iraqi-Turkish border.

On the morning of April 9, it was the Kurdish community that organised a demonstration in front of the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem where Secretary of State James Baker was holding talks. Hundreds of demonstrators were wearing the clothes of Kurdish mountaineers; on traditional instruments old Kurdish dirges were played. For the television camera they explained that their ancestors had lived among the Kurds for hundreds of years free of the persecutions which Jews in other countries suffered. The demonstration was joined by members of the dovish Ratz, Mapam and Shinuy parties – as well as by the extreme right "Kach" movement, who used the opportunity to denounce the idea of "giving up territory under the pressure of treacherous America."

The U.S. embassy in Tel-Aviv was the scene of a demonstration on April 4, when the Tel-Aviv University's student union (Labor Party-dominated) organised a picket with signs reading STOP THE GENOCIDE!

On April 7, members of Israelis against the Gulf War stood in front of the same U.S. embassy with the twin slogan: WHAT DO THE KUWAYTIS HAVE, WHICH THE KURDS DON'T? and WHAT DO THE KUWAYTIS HAVE, WHICH THE PALESTINIANS DON'T?

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Chronicles

■ On February 24, as American forces in the Gulf started their land offensive, the Israeli government's Land Authority started an offensive of its own, destroying two huts near the Arab village of Kalansawa. The huts, built "without a permit", served as the homes of Bedouin families who had come to Kalansawa in 1979, after their original homes in the Negev were demolished to make place for an Israeli Air Force base.

On March 2, fifteen members of Mapam – mostly of nearby kibbutzim – arrived on the scene. Led by Knesset Member Hsein Fares, the group erected new huts. They called upon the government not to demolish these, and declared their willingness to repeat the act again and again, if necessary.

■ Such Israeli Jews as opposed the Gulf war were able to demonstrate and freely disseminate their views. However, in cases of opposition to the war among Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, the authorities made extensive use of laws defining "sedition" and "identification with a terrorist" in very broad terms.

Dozens of people were arrested for distributing leaflets, for writing slogans, for singing songs, for having "forbidden decorations" on the walls of their houses, or for wearing the like around their neck – with shapes and colours denoting Palestinian nationalism.

The police took special interest in the preaching at churches and mosques, with several preachers arrested. One of them, Sheikh Mohammad 'Asi of Jdeidi was held, beaten and humiliated by the police and threatened with the rape of his wife before his eyes – all this because of a sermon.

According to the police he had incited people against the state and against Zionism and urged them to support the Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein. According to the Sheik himself he had called for peace and protested against all wars, and stated that the guilty parties were the UN Security Council and America.

Further information is available

in the bulletins published by: HRA (The Arab Association for Human Rights) P.O.Box 215, Nazareth 16101, Israel; phone 06-56192, fax 06-564934.

WOFPP (Women's Organization for Political prisoners) P.O.Box 31811, Tel-Aviv; phone/fax 03-5286050.

■ In its zeal to settle Jews in the Occupied Territories, the Israeli government decided to locate the new Jerusalem cemetery in the West Bank, thus transforming all Jerusalemites into settlers – at least after death.

On March 13, 1991, the Peace Now movement succeeded in obtaining a temporary injunction, stopping work on the new cemetery until a further hearing.

The Supreme Court accepted the contention of the movement's lawyers that Peace Now, by virtue of being a public movement which supports peace with the Palestinian people on the basis of giving back the West Bank territories occupied by the IDF has a legal standing in the matter. This precedent may prove helpful in further Supreme Court appeals.

■ In kibbutzim a new interpretation is given to the traditional Passover ceremonies: the dividing of the matza (unleavened bread) is held to symbolise the partition of Eretz Yisrael/Palestine, while the bowl of salt water represents the tears of the Palestinians, enduring a new kind of slavery as cheap labor for the Israeli economy.

Source for this information: Rabbi Yitzhak Peretz, Minister of Immigrant Absorption. In the time before Passover, there was a big government drive under the slogan *have a new immigrant at your seder*. Peretz refused, however, to let those innocent souls who know nothing of Judaism be corrupted by the kibbutzniks blasphemous travesty of Jewish tradition!

The kibbutz movement's spokesperson commented: *This kind of "political" ceremonies is only enacted in a small number of recently-established kibbutzim affiliated to Mapam.*

■ In a women's demonstration in Haifa to mark March 8, the inter-

national Women's Day, many slogans calling for Israeli-Palestinian peace were carried, together with placards dealing with the recently-ended Gulf war, which – among other things – had the effect of many Israeli women losing their jobs, due to the school closure.

The women marched through the streets of Haifa, held a rally near the Town Hall (with Labor mayor Aryeh Gur'el showing up to express his support) and finally joined the weekly Women in Black vigil.

■ On March 10, the mayors of 42 Arab towns and villages in Israel held a demonstration at the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem, to protest the government's discrimination of their municipalities.

The Interior Ministry budgets allocated to Arab towns amount to only 795 Shekels per capita, where Jewish towns receive 1320 Shekels; a similar discrimination exists in the budgets of other government ministries as well. Many Arab municipalities, starved for funds, are at the brink of collapse, unable to pay their employees and requiring urgent government help which is not forthcoming.

Maxim Levy, Mayor of Lydda and head of the Israeli Mayors' Association, also participated and expressed full support for the Arab mayors' demands. Levy is a member of the Likud and a brother of foreign Minister David Levy. He got his position in the Mayors' Association thanks to his good relations with the Arab mayors' block, which holds the balance between Likud and Labor.

■ Also on March 10, dozens of demonstrators picketed the same Prime Minister's Office. The demonstrators, members of different left-wing parties, called upon Prime Minister Shamir to start an Israeli peace initiative without waiting for the intervention of visiting U.S. Secretary of State James Baker.

■ On March 12, a vigil – organised by the Women and Peace Coalition – took place opposite the U.S. consulate in West Jerusalem, where Baker was holding a meeting with a Palestinian delegation headed by Feisal Hussein. The women expres-

sed support for Israeli-Palestinian peace and called upon Baker to recognise the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians.

■ On the morning of March 26, a violent confrontation took place outside the gates of Eyal prison, where Rabbi Moshe Levinger, notorious leader of the Hebron settlers, ended his second prison term in less than a year. Levinger's supporters clashed with a group of Mapam demonstrators, who protested the lightness of Levinger's punishment.

Levinger had been convicted of breaking into a Palestinian home, beating up a boy and a girl, and insulting an Israeli soldier who had tried to stop him. For all these, Levinger got four months' imprisonment - true, only one month less than what he got earlier this year after killing a Palestinian. Of this, he actually served only two and a half months, with his sentence reduced for *good behaviour*.

On the same day of Levinger's release, the religious peace organization *Oz Leshalom* protested the rabbi's habit of posing for press photographers with a gun in his hand - *living with the sword* being the heritage of Esau, the incarnation of evil (according to the sages) - and *not the heritage of the Jewish people's Patriarch Jacob*.

■ On the evening of March 27, members of the Jewish-Arab student movement *Campus* picketed the Jerusalem residence of Prime Minister Shamir, to protest the deportation orders issued against (again) four Gazans. The carried signs reading: NO TO THE POLICY OF APARTHEID and DEPORTATION: THE FIRST STEP ON THE ROAD TO GENOCIDE.

■ From information leaked by dissident government officials and published by left-wing Knesset members, it has become clear that Housing Minister Ariel Sharon has embarked on a major new settlement drive in the Occupied Territories. It has been conclusively proved that many of the new houses are intended for Soviet Jewish immigrants, contrary to the official government policy (and in flagrant contradiction with promises to the U.S. government).

More details come from Peace Now's "settlement monitoring team" whose members range the Occupied Territories, discovering new construction sites and changed road signs; resurrected Biblical place-names are to be the names of super-modern new settlements on confiscated Palestinian land.

On April 12, members of the dovish Mapam, Ratz and Shinuy parties arrived at the site of *Revava*, a new settlement due to be officially inaugurated soon. The demonstrators climbed upon the bulldozers, holding signs reading: *Sharon - we won't let you kill the chances for peace!* Among the demonstrators were Soviet immigrants, holding signs in Russian: *Sharon - we will not be your pawns!*

At the time of writing, more protests at this and other sites are being planned. Peace Now prepares a major anti-settlement campaign.

■ On March 14, Mapam Knesset Member Ya'ir Tzaban and the party's secretary-general Elazar Granot met in Cairo with Yasser Arafat's adviser. Nabil Sha'at - the first such meeting since the Gulf war. On their return, Granot told the Israeli press that he had been reassured of the PLO's continuing commitment to the idea of a peaceful solution through negotiations.

■ On April 13, a delegation of prominent Palestinians, including Feisal Hussein, Rasan Hatib and Asad El-Asad participated in a meeting held by Israelis against the Gulf war in a public hall at the Jewish-Arab community of Neve Shalom.

Asked about the Palestinian position with regard to the Kurds, Hussein stated: *As sons of the Palestinian people - a people which experienced suffering, national oppression and the denial of its rights - we stand with all other peoples who suffer in a similar way. We support the Kurdish people in their struggle to realise their rights in Iraq, as well as in the other countries where they live: Iran, Turkey, Syria and the Soviet Union.*

Israelis against the Gulf war will continue to exist, despite the end

of the war. Operating now under the name DAI! (Enough!), the group will concentrate on opposing the oppression of the Palestinians, and promoting the idea of negotiations with the PLO.

Contact: POB 23649, Tel-Aviv.

Doves after the war

The international media seem to have conveyed the idea that the Israeli peace movement has turned its back on the Palestinians. Reality is always a bit more complicated.

It is true that some peace activists have succumbed to the view that the PLO is no longer a fit partner for dialogue. Ratz KM Yossi Sarid - notorious for his talent to draw the attention of the media - has even made a demand for the replacement of PLO Chairman Arafat (accompanied by an *ad hominem* campaign, including sexual innuendos).

However, it seems that - as in the period immediately following the invasion of Kuwait (see *TOI-43, p.2*) - Sarid's rightward-leaning positions are rejected by the great majority of the peace movement. KM Uzi Bar'am, former Secretary-General - and one of the leading doves - of the Labour Party, wrote in an open letter to Sarid:

Neither you nor me can nominate a leader for the Palestinian people. We did not even succeed in changing the Prime Minister of Israel (...) I never felt any particular sympathy for Arafat, but I am not willing to let the bloodshed continue for another twenty years, until an Israeli De Klerk recognises the Palestinian Mandela. (Ha'aretz, 20.2.'91).

In general, the doves have increased their strength inside the Labor Party. Former Energy Minister Moshe Shahal, a possible contender for the party leadership at next year's Labour Party congress, has come out in support for a peace involving an independent Palestinian state.

An unlikely recruit to the ranks of the Labor doves is Yosef Ginosar, a former operative of the Shabak (security service) and a former associate of Ariel Sharon.

Having but recently joined Labor, Ginosar is energetically touring the party branches, speaking in favour of the creation of a Palestinian state. He often cites his long experience with interrogating Palestinian detainees – as proof that a solution by force is not possible (*Hadashot*, 29.3.'91).

On March 10, a resolution drafted by the doves, calling for recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination, won an unprecedented 40% support from the members of the Labor Party bureau. But Shimon Peres and Yitzchak Rabin, the party's two rival leaders, remain united against it.

Within the army

● Danny Endwalder, aged 27, air force reservist, religious, was ordered in August 1990 to serve as a guard over Palestinian prisoners in Ansar-3 (officially 'Ketziot Detention Center'). He was imprisoned for one week; at the conclusion was given the order again – and refused again; was imprisoned for two weeks, and then refused the order for the third time and got 28 days; altogether he was taken out of his civilian life, in 1990, for 49 consecutive days.

After half a year, in March 1991, Endwalder got the same call-up order again; he refused for the fourth time, and got two weeks. This time the case got some press attention. At the end of the two weeks, his commanding officer told him: "You are lucky. I would send you with the biggest pleasure to prison again, but my superiors won't have it; they ordered me to leave you alone."

● Adi Lekser, reserve sergeant from the town Hod Ha'sharon, aged 32, was ordered on March 21 to perform military service in Ramallah on the West Bank, refused and got 35 days' imprisonment. He already served 28 days imprisonment in July 1990, for the same offence.

● Yanay Lev-Or, 22 year old, reserve sergeant in the paratroopers, married and father of two, member of Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'emek, refused on March 24 to serve in Gaza and got 28 days.

● On Friday April 5, the last Passover holiday, more than a hundred supporters of the Yesh G'vul refusers' support group spread along entrances to the Gaza Strip. At the Erez and Nahal-Oz roadblocks signs were placed reading STOP! BORDER AHEAD! and to passing drivers forms were distributed with a text in Hebrew and Arabic: *You are now leaving the territory of Israel and entering the territory of Palestine. Travelers should be in possession of a valid passport as well as the required visa. Have a good journey!*

Later, the demonstrators held a rally centering on the demand for Israeli *exodus* from the Occupied Territories; all this day's speakers also referred to the struggle of the Kurds.

● On the following day, April 5, a smaller group went to the North to climb the mountain overlooking 'Kele Shesh' – the Athlit military prison – where their imprisoned comrades were held. The shouts of support were heard. There also was an answer: some of the prisoners – it was too far away to recognize anybody – succeeded to make the word "Shalom" visible, put together with towels and sheets.

Contact: Yesh G'vul, POB 4172
Tel-Aviv 61041
phone: 03-5032007 (*Chanoch Livneh*)
or: 03-5462683 (*Gay Levi*).

● On March 24, *Yediot Aharonot* reported that discontent was spreading among soldiers of a reserve unit, engaged in patrolling the streets of El-Bireh in the West Bank. They claim that this is their fifth consecutive period of service in the Occupied Territories since the beginning of the Intifada, and that during their previous term of service – at Al Bureij Refugee camp in the Gaza Strip – the army chief of staff visited them in person and promised them that they would have some break from occupation duty.

Military sources told the paper that the chief of staff had promised only to look into the matter, and that "due to manpower difficulties, it was regrettably impossible to accede to the soldiers' request."

Torture exposed

On February 27, the last day of the Gulf war, soldiers arrived at the Ramallah clinic of 48-year old urological surgeon Dr. Mamdouh Al-Aker and took him off; he was not even given time to leave some urgent instructions regarding the continued treatment of his patients.

For the following three weeks, he was not allowed to see his lawyer or family members, and nothing was known of his fate.

During recent years, Dr. Al-Aker became good friends with many in the Israeli peace movement (where he was admired for his great knowledge of especially Jewish history).

His concerned Israeli and Palestinian friends started a campaign for his release, coordinated by The Twenty-First Year, in whose meetings he had participated; individuals and organizations in different countries were mobilised to send telegrams to the Israeli government. When he was finally permitted to see his lawyer – after an appeal to the Supreme Court – an all too well-known story came out.

According to the findings of human rights organizations B'tzlem and The Association of Israeli and Palestinian Physicians, Al-Aker was denied sleep for sixty hours, held several days with his hands tied and his head covered by a sack. For several more days he was in a narrow cell, nicknamed *the coffin* by the interrogators, where he could neither stand, sit, or lie, but only stay in a contorted intermediate position. (*Hadashot*, 29.3.'91).

After this revelation, the campaign to release Dr. Al-Aker was redoubled, with a team of Israeli and Palestinian lawyers pressing for the exact reason of the detention. The military authorities claimed that Dr. Al-Aker "had drafted a leaflet for the Intifada leadership". After a stormy session at the Ramallah military court, it turned out that this was the truth – but not the whole truth: Dr. Al-Aker did write a leaflet, which was printed clandestinely and distributed widely despite the curfew –

but the leaflets consisted solely of medical advice to the population, giving practical information on how to keep basic hygiene during the prolonged curfew and take care themselves of light medical problems.

Legally, this was still a serious criminal offence, since the Intifada leadership is an illegal organization; but politically the case became very embarrassing for the government, particularly after it came to the attention of the visiting U.S. Secretary of State Baker, who asked questions. On April 9, Dr Al-Aker was freed.

● For several years already most Palestinians who fell into the hands of the Shabak (security service) report treatments very similar to the one meted out to Dr. Mamdouh Al-Aker: prolonged periods in the "coffin", and being left with an (often stinking) sack over the head, with the hands tied. Other repeated features were denial of food and sleep, being left wet and cold for hours, humiliations, sexual threats (female prisoners are threatened with being raped; male ones – with the rape of their mothers, sisters or wives). There have also been many reports of beating – often: in ways which hurt but don't leave traces.

Reports of such treatment had been filtering out, with growing frequency, before and especially during the Intifada. However, in Israel they were mostly published in the low-circulation publications of peace groups. Therefore, the B'tzelem report released on March 21 constituted a breakthrough.

B'tzelem – initiated by Ratz Knesset Member Dedi Zucker – has built up a good reputation for the thorough process of investigation and verification involved in preparing their reports; and it has good access to the Israeli and foreign media. Its report on the Shabak methods of interrogation is based on the testimonies of 41 Palestinians, who were asked detailed questions, with the testimonies checked for internal inconsistencies and compared with each other; the final version was released only after the researchers were reasonably certain of its verity.

The report received wide coverage

in the media, including the government-controlled television. The *Ha'ir* and *Kol Ha'ir* newspapers published extensive excerpts; and it provoked a stormy debate in the Knesset.

The head of the Shabak – an institution usually avoiding any kind of publicity – felt obliged to arrange for himself newspaper interviews (though keeping his name secret). He defended the Shabak – "the country's defence against terrorism" – but did not even try to refute the report.

An English translation of the report may be obtained from: *B'tzelem, 18 Keren Hayesod St., Jerusalem.*

Palestinian Workers

The volunteers of Kav La'oved (Workers' Hotline) are engaged in giving support and legal help to individual workers who were wronged and who, for one reason or another, do not receive (enough) help from the Histadrut Labor Federation.

In the first place Kav La'oved was set up to assist Palestinians from the Occupied Territories employed in Israel – and monitor their general situation (see also *TOI-43, p.10 and 11*). These days they also deal with other cases – Arab citizens of Israel and unregistered Soviet Jewish immigrants who fell prey to the practices at the bottom of the market during economic crisis. A large part of the Palestinians are now being deprived of even that...

During the total curfew imposed in the Occupied Territories during the Gulf war, Palestinians were simply not able to go to work – and after the war was over, new regulations came into effect preventing many from returning to their old jobs in Israel – or finding new ones.

Opportunities of finding work in the Occupied Territories themselves are extremely limited. The Israeli authorities consider protection of the Israeli industry a valid reason for restrictions on local industrial development (one of these restrictions forbidding enterprises with more than four workers!).

Since the war, soldiers and policemen at the roadblocks on the entries to Israel now turn back all Palestinians who have no valid work permit. To obtain such a permit, the workers have to pay a sum which varies from 100 to 6000 NIS (\$2700) – the exact price depending on the mood of the official who happens to deal with the case – and must show that they have no outstanding debts for income and municipal taxes.

Palestinians must also be over thirty and married with children, in order to get a permit, and are no longer allowed to enter Israel in private vehicles (which means that the employers have to organize their transportation).

At the same time, the employers are discouraged from employing them in the following ways: they may not hire Palestinians for night work, they may not employ less than ten of them; they are offered subsidies of 1000 NIS (\$450) monthly for each new Israeli worker hired, while they would have to pay 500 NIS for every Palestinian. (After intervention of Kav La'oved the latter measure was dropped.)

The Shabak (security services) seeks to exploit the extreme misery of the Palestinians for their own purposes: from time to time Palestinians are offered a work permit in exchange for becoming collaborators. Of this practice Kav La'oved volunteers are now collecting testimonies to be presented to the press.

All this belongs to the less well-known part of what it means to live under occupation. Moshe Arens, who as Defence Minister is responsible for the measures driving the occupied Palestinians to despair, does not seem to know what they imply. In an interview to the Jerusalem Post, (April 1), Arens attributes the recent outbursts of anti-Jewish violence to "the violent mentality of the Arabs."

The following are five of the cases described in the Kav La'oved's January-February and March bulletins.

■ On January 24, 1991 Maazan Abdiat of East Jerusalem was laid off from his job at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. According to his boss he had been absent

from work for seven days. In fact, he was absent four days, with the outbreak of the war – as were all Israeli workers. On the following three days he could not reach work since there was no transportation.

Maazan had worked there for three years and has been commended by his supervisor, who states that he is responsible and committed. Kav La'oved sent an urgent telegram to his employer demanding that the lay-off be revoked.

Workers employed there informed Kav La'oved that the lay-off was enforced in order to make room for a new immigrant. If the lay-off is not revoked, the employer will be taken to court.

■ Three new immigrants from Russia, who were employed by renovation contractor Aryeh Blumefeld of Haifa, were deprived of three days' wages. Their jobs had previously been held by workers from the Territories who were now prohibited from leaving their homes. The contractor cheated the new immigrants the same way he had been cheating the Palestinians. A legal suit will be filed against him.

■ Ovadya Ashuel, a renovation contractor, owed Abed Kader a thousand Shekels. Despite repeated requests the money was not paid. After Kav La'oved intervened and threatened a legal suit, Ashuel paid the outstanding debt.

■ Twenty-three workers who were employed by the Tel-Aviv municipality through a contractor, were awarded – in a compromise agreement which was validated as a verdict of the Labor Court – 80% of withheld wages. Furthermore, the contractor was forced to make payment in accordance with the minimum wage prescribed by law, not according to what he had originally paid them – which was only half. The workers were represented by Kav La'oved.

■ Seven Israeli-Palestinian workers who were laid off by the Grand Beach Hotel in October 1990 got 175% of the compensation prescribed by law, (*calculated at one month's salary for every year they have worked*) in arbitration by a Histadrut commission. The reason for the enlarged compensation was

that they had been laid off only because they were Arabs. They were represented by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) and assisted by Kav La'oved volunteers.

At the time of their dismissal, three Palestinians from the territories were also fired. The Histadrut arbitration commission did not deal with their complaint and Kav La'oved has decided to take action on their behalf.

Further information is available from: Kav La'oved, 78 Allenby St., P.O.Box 2139, Tel-Aviv 61022; phone: 03-663754

Curfew running

After the first week of the war, life in Israel proper gradually went back to normal, in spite of the continuing Scud attacks – but the whole of the Palestinian population in the Occupied Territories remained under curfew during the entire Gulf War. More than million and a half people were effectively imprisoned in their homes enduring extreme hardships.

It took some time before full realisation of the Palestinians' plight seeped through. The first Israeli groups to act were human rights organizations, such as the Association of Israeli and Palestinian Physicians, (AIPPHR), and the respectable human rights watch B'tzelem (*see TOI-45, p.8*). The facts exposed in a serious of reports and press conferences included the denial of medical treatment to the population under curfew, leading in some cases to the death of Palestinian patients. Also mentioned was the detention of thousands of inhabitants, accused of curfew-breaking and tried in "assembly-line" trials.

Several appeals to the Supreme Court were lodged; for example, lawyers of the Jerusalem Center for Defence of the Individual lodged an appeal in the name of an inhabitant of Batir village, who was prevented by the soldiers from going to work despite having a valid work permit issued by the military government.

Special concern arose over the growing lack of foodstuffs in the

Occupied Territories; this situation was aggravated by the fact that, even where food was available, many of the poorer inhabitants – after weeks of enforced unemployment – simply did not have money to buy it.

The Committee Against Starvation has grown out of a petition, published in *Ha'artez* on February 5, with the short text: END THE CURFEW – END THE SHAMEFUL HUNGER! (*see TOI-45, p.8*).

This group – together with the Arab Mayors' Committee, representing the Palestinians with Israeli citizenship – started to collect donations of food, especially milk powder for babies, and send convoys to the Occupied Territories.

At first, these convoys were sent in secret, through side-roads not guarded by the army, and arrived in several towns and refugee camps. In the middle of February it was decided to add a different method: convoys setting out openly, with advance notice in the press, to draw public attention and enable sympathising Israelis to join in.

The first such convoy set out from Jerusalem on the afternoon of February 15, arriving at the entrance to Al-Amari Refugee Camp. There however, the activists' cars were stopped by the army, which did not let them go in and distribute the food. (A truck with food did get to the camp later, without publicity.)

On the following day, February 16, several dozen peace activists gathered at the meeting place in front of Tel-Aviv's main post office. In spite of attempts by right-wingers to block their way, they set out for the Gaza Strip. They were stopped at the Erez roadblock at the Gaza Strip entrance; there ensued long negotiations.

The military officers demanded to take charge of the food and distribute it through military government channels. The convoy organisers replied that they would give the food only to representatives of the Red Cross or UNWRA (the United Nations relief organization taking care of refugees).

While the negotiations went on, soldiers surrounded the Gaza homes of several UNWRA officials, preventing them from traveling to the

Erez check point. Nevertheless, one UNWRA official did succeed in arriving on the spot, with a truck; after telephone consultations with their superiors, the officers permitted UNWRA to take the food, which later was distributed in the refugee camps.

On February 20, members of AIPPHR set out with baby food – bought with money donated by a Jewish organization in the United States – to Balata Refugee Camp. The army succeeded in preventing them from reaching their goal. AIPPHR complained to the Minister of Defence demanding an explanation why it is prohibited to bring food to people in dire need of it – and who are under his custody.

With the cease fire agreement in the Gulf on February 28, Israeli authorities were quick to decree that gas masks be put in the cupboard, and all other war precautions were declared obsolete as well. Until midnight, Tel-Avivians went dancing in the street – but in the Occupied Territories, the curfew was kept up for another week.

On March 1, some 50 Israelis participated in a convoy which set out from Jerusalem. Its original goal was the Dheisheh Refugee Camp, but big military forces turned it back. Instead of returning to Jerusalem, however, the demonstrators arrived at the town of Beit-Sahur, where they managed to offload some two tons of food before soldiers arrived and ordered them out of town.

The soldiers' arrival did prevent the Israeli activists from visiting the parents of Salam Musaleh, a boy who was shot to death *inside his home* on the previous week, when an Israeli living in a neighboring settlement opened fire on the house during curfew (the curfew applied to Palestinians only).

On March 2, another convoy – organised, this time, by the Women and Peace Network – was blocked at the entrance to the Jazalun Refugee camp, in the Ramallah area. They held a protest vigil at the military checkpost. Later, girls from the camp arrived to meet the women; they managed to bring a lot of the food inside.

The curfew in most of the Occupied Territories was lifted during the first week of March. However, it was immediately re-imposed in several areas where demonstrations and riots broke out as soon as the people were released. On March 16, a convoy organised by the Coordinating Committee of the Haifa Peace Groups reached the Nablus area, and the food it brought was distributed with the help of local trade-unionists.

Measles

Their traditional way of life placed Bedouins in special problems during the Gulf war. In tents it was hardly possible to have “a safe room” in case of chemical warfare – and Bedouins who do want to build houses encounter many problems. The government does not allow them to build in agricultural areas, and the Bedouins don't want to live in towns where they could only make a living by becoming part of the cheap labor force.

Thus, by now, nearly half of the Negev Bedouin community is living in settlements that are not officially recognized by the authorities. When it comes to destroying these “illegal houses” the government is overzealous: two were destroyed in the period of the war – in spite of the inhabitants' plea *to wait with destroying them until the war will be over* (sic!).

These unofficial settlements do not receive the basic health services that the state is due to provide to its citizens. While housing some 45,000 people, they lack sewage systems, in-door plumbing (and in many cases running water), organized health services, paved roads, electricity, telephones, etc. Such conditions, together with the intense overcrowding of the inhabitants, create a fertile ground for the spreading of epidemic diseases.

In February, it turned out that the real danger for the Bedouins was not poison gas but measles. A measles epidemic broke out among them. Israelis usually regard measles as a practically-extinct sickness, given the efficient system of in-

noculations. It turned out, however, that this system is less efficient where is most needed. More than 160 Bedouins were hospitalised, and six died – five babies and the mother of one of them.

Thanks to the insistent efforts of the Association for Bedouin Rights, the measles epidemic penetrated into the Israeli press (which published, at the time, hardly anything but war news). It aroused a storm of criticism. Mapam's Knesset members took up the issue and a doctor and three nurses, all members of Mapam Kibbutz Lahav, volunteered to carry out the belated Bedouin immunization.

Even then, there were many bureaucratic delays, and two more babies had to die before the epidemic was under control.

Contact: Association for Support & Defence of Bedouin Rights in Israel, P.O.Box 5212, Beersheba 84224.

Peace pilgrimage

by Toma Shick

Several dozens of the Gulf peace team volunteers – who after January 27 were evacuated from their peace camp at the Iraqi-Saudi border – are since then working in Amman, organising medical supplies convoys for Iraq. Among them, the plan for a “Jerusalem peace pilgrimage” came up. At noon on Sunday, March 31, fourteen members, mostly from European countries, arrived in the West Bank through the Allenby Bridge border crossing – to be joined by Palestinian and Israeli peace activists. Toma Shick went with them.

The IDF, the Jerusalem National Police Headquarters and the Jericho Police Commander had all been informed about the project, in advance and in writing. All the details had been given and also the beliefs and intentions of the group had been formulated as clearly as possible:

Genuine and lasting peace in this region cannot be achieved without a just solution of the Israeli-Palestinian question. The choice of our present project reflects that belief.

Existing U.N. resolutions already provide a viable framework for the

peaceful resolution of this question. We appeal for the speedy implementation of these resolutions, including the convening of an international conference on peace in the Middle East involving all concerned parties on an equal footing.

We deplore human rights violations and all acts of violence connected with this dispute, and we urge that they cease forthwith.

We are all committed to nonviolent and respectful behaviour during this walk through strife-torn territory. Our passage through the West Bank will be silent. Our planned activities on the way include fasting, holding vigils and other symbolic expressions of good will and human solidarity.

None of the authorities informed made any comment.

After arrival on March 31, the group was welcomed at Aquabat Al-Jaber Refugee Camp. There was a lunch, in spite of the Ramadan fast, and a ceremony in which, among others, the prominent Palestinian journalist Hanna Siniora took part.

Before the "pilgrims" had a chance to set out, the IDF arrived. Two armed officers in a civilian jeep, representing the military government's "civilian administration", stated that they had not been informed about the project and would not allow it to take place.

In a three-hours negotiations' session, the officers spoke very politely with the group's Indian spokesperson Bela Batia - but insisted that the march could not start without a written permit from the military governor. The ongoing argument was about how such a permit could be obtained and why none of the authorities previously informed had indicated its being required.

A Palestinian woman who intended to join the pilgrimage was addressed in a slightly different manner: she had her ID-card confiscated and was threatened with imprisonment, while the other participants were warned not to act on her behalf because they would only make things worse for her. (Some did, however, succeed in making telephone calls and consulting a Jerusalem lawyer.)

Meanwhile, registration of the

participants according to their passports started. The present writer showed his Israeli ID-card. The discovery of my being an Israeli - an Israeli from Tel-Aviv, 'one of them', who had understood every Hebrew word - caused some consternation. *Why did you not say so? You could have helped us!*

There occurred a sudden change in their attitude, either because of my being a compatriot, or because together with my ID-card I always carry my membership-card of ACRI (Association for Civil Rights in Israel). Whatever the reason, the Palestinian woman's ID-card was soon back in her hands, and a permit to start the walk was produced on the spot - albeit a conditional one. The conditions were not to go on the highroad, and to reach the lodging site not more than half an hour after 6.00 P.M., the beginning of curfew time.

It was clear to both sides that the last condition was unfulfillable. Indeed, the group did not reach the Abu Kayis Bedouin encampment before 9.00, and not before two more harassments took place on the 10 kilometres-long route. In both cases, higher IDF officers asked the same questions - *who are you, what do you want, what is it all about* - and were neither satisfied with the written answer quoted above or impressed by our newly acquired "permit".

We arrived at the Bedouin camp in total darkness but - thanks to our escort - with our way lighted by jeeps. An IDF jeep guarded the camp all night, and at 10.00 P.M. the highest commander in the region paid us a visit. He did not leave any doubts regarding his attitude: *You are here illegally, without a permit; only I can give you a valid permit, and I won't.*

On the following morning, after a moony night in the open air on Bedouin mattresses, the "protective military" ordered three cabs and sent the marchers directly to Jerusalem, making sure that they wouldn't leave the vehicles before reaching the Holy City. The march continued on the outskirts of East Jerusalem, which is under police rather than military jurisdiction. From the police, for a change,

there was no interference. After all, different laws prevail in Israel - to which East Jerusalem is officially annexed - than in the so-called "administered" or "liberated" occupied territories.

Contact: *Gulf Peace Team Amman, PO Box 925182 Amman, Jordan*

Consul

Dany Chamitzer is a former combat pilot of the Israeli Air Force. He told Chadashot (April 4) the following:

During the War of Attrition (1968-1970. ed) I was regularly piloting a reconnaissance helicopter above the Suez Canal. In my unit there was a story circulating about Ran Peker, a senior officer.

In 1967 Peker and several other air force officers had taken a car and went to see the newly conquered territories. They stopped an Arab car and had some kind of argument with its occupants, and they just took the Arabs behind a hill and killed them.

The source of the story was Peker himself; in air force parties he was from time to time telling it - as an anecdote to be proud of. The story was disturbed me, especially since Peker was rising up in the air force hierarchy.

I tried to get journalists interested, but that was not easy, until I got to Amir Oren of the *Monitin* monthly. For 12 years Oren and me have been investigating the affair trying to find more evidence, but we met with all kinds of pressures and there were even threats against us. In 1980, when Peker was going to be appointed deputy commander of the air force, we decided to publish.

Then Prime Minister Begin and Defence Minister Weitzmann called Peker and put him to the choice: resigning from the air force or facing investigation. He chose to leave. Soon after, I also found myself outside the air force!

Chamitzer works today as an employee of the Israeli radio. Ran Peker started a diplomatic career and a year ago was appointed Israeli Consul in Los Angeles.

The weapon of dialogue

The Labour Party-affiliated daily Davar published on March 31 an interview with Afif Safieh, the new PLO representative in Britain, conducted by Beate Zilversmidt. The following is an excerpt.

Q: What do you have to say to the Israeli public? Gradually, more and more Israelis started to consider peace with the Palestinians and negotiations with the PLO – but the Palestinians' siding with Iraq, and their cheering at the Scuds, worked like a cold shower.

A: I understand the Israeli reaction when they saw that an important segment of the Palestinian society welcomed the Scud missiles. Yet, the Israelis have also to understand something. Seen through Palestinian eyes, Israeli voters since 1948, elected successive Israeli governments that deny Palestinian existence, Palestinian rights and Palestinian suffering, which was at least as traumatising for us. One society expressed its feeling through its voting patterns, and its voting behaviour, while the other expressed itself by clapping hands.

It is high time that Israelis try for once to see our bilateral relations through Palestinian eyes. We Palestinians have had the lives of four generations of our people destroyed or disrupted by the process in which the state of Israel emerged. Israel was supposed to be an answer to the Jewish question, and as a result we the Palestinians are the question today.

Israel could only succeed with the Palestinians paying an enormous human price. We are that particular people that had inevitably to pay a high price for Israeli statehood. This is why we expect Jews and Israelis today to take responsibility, and to be the most supportive advocates for a Palestinian state besides Israel. Palestinians have become almost unreasonably reasonable by accepting the two-state idea as the only way out of the vicious circle of confrontation in our unhappy, yet unavoidable coexistence. But the Israelis should know that this is our minimax demand, in the sense that it is the maximum we can offer, and the minimum we want and can accept.

Both Palestinians and Israelis have a reason to regret the opportunities lost between 1988 and 1990. I have had the privilege to be with Yasser Arafat in Strasbourg when he addressed the European parliament. As you might remember he then said: *I extend my hand in peace*, hoping that an Israeli de Gaulle will seize it. One has to admit that not only no Israeli de Gaulle emerged, but also no de Klerk.

Today, with the end of the Gulf War the Americans have no one single concrete reason not to be extremely demanding vis a vis their Israeli ally. They waged a devastating war to domesticate an expansionist Iraq. The world and their Arab allies expect them to discipline that other regional misbehaving actor, Israel. Europe is expected, too, to operate the linkage between aid and advise. The world expects the USA to reconcile its power and its principles, and self-determination is one of the corner stones of American

political philosophy and ideology.

Up to 1988 I used to call the two-state solution a mutually unacceptable solution which needed to be elegantly imposed on the regional actors. I thought that the concept of "mutually unacceptable" carried much potential taking into consideration the psychology of the belligerents. Knowing that the other side does not like it either, makes the two-state solution less unattractive. Unfortunately, a solid majority of Israelis believe today that with the massive arrivals of Soviet Jews and Soviet non-Jews the status-quo in the occupied territories is both affordable and desirable.

The historical opportunity for Israel is that today Palestinian nationalism as such is ready to conclude and to achieve a lasting durable peace through a historical compromise.

Q: But many in Israel don't believe that. They believe that Palestinians will never really want peace with the Israeli people.

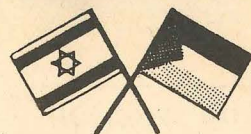
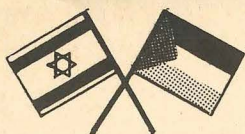
A: The Palestinians have evolved from demanding absolute justice to just demanding possible justice. And once the Palestinians will obtain their state, they will become a status quo actor, totally mobilised in the process of state building and the preservation of the constellation that has been reached through negotiations. Our enlightened national interest will dictate that there should be no more military provocations because it will constitute an invitation for Israeli re-occupation. I want the Israelis to know about the deep Palestinian feeling and desire for a return to a life of normalty, to a sort of banalised existence – to no more making first page headlines. We have to move beyond the dialogue of arms, and adopt the arms of dialogue as our exclusive vehicle of communication and confrontation.

The war in the Gulf and the Scud delivery have proved that security is not obtained by territorial aggrandisement but by regional acceptance. Territorial acquisitions or territorial rectifications will not provide any added security by giving added strategic depth. The situation is that there is either a people too many, or there is a state missing, which needs to be created. Only a satisfactory Palestinian solution can be the key to regional acceptance and stability.

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and tragedies of the insurgent peoples notwithstanding. And all this – to enable a corrupt family of princes to go on exploiting the riches of a land, the population of which was never asked for its opinion? It is not at all sure that – if given the choice – the majority of the Kuwaytis would have preferred further subjection to the whims of their unsatiable princes over being part of Iraq.

Two statements made before the war will be well remembered when the dust settled down. One made by Cyrus Vance at the Congress hearings: *The United States never really understood the Middle East*; the other – by General Schwartzkopf a few weeks before the war: *It would be easy to destroy Iraq but quite impossible to predict the consequences*. Both statements now seem to be models of perspicacity – so much lacking in the higher echelons of the Administration.



What kind of war?

by Major General (ret.) Matti Peled

It should not be surprising if, come elections time, and just before attempting to cash in on his exploits in the Gulf, President Bush would find himself obliged to answer some very pertinent questions concerning the war his generals conducted in the Gulf. What kind of war was it? What were its aims and were they met? Why was it necessary at all to launch that war in the first place? And once launched, was it waged in a manner equal to its proclaimed motives?

To begin with, the build up of the American force in Saudi Arabia was initially explained as being in compliance with the wishes of that oil-rich country. But as is well known by now, Saudi Arabia only reluctantly agreed to that measure being ostensibly taken in its defence. Then, the Iraqi Army was described as a threateningly competent fighting force requiring a massive force to counter it both in defence and attack. Thus, eight years of close observation of the poor performance of this army in fighting in Iran must have led the American intelligence services to an utterly mistaken conclusion. Because the performance of the Iraqi army in that war had shown beyond doubt that it was completely ineffective in the offensive and rather mediocre in the defensive. Or perhaps more credit should be given to the American intelligence. Should the misleading information it disseminated on Iraqi effectiveness be taken, not as a reflection on its ability to assess an opponent, but rather as a ploy meant to justify the nature of the military action to be taken against the Iraqis?

Operation "Desert Storm" started with a month long systematic "strategic bombardment" of the whole of Iraq. The concept of strategic bombing is founded on the idea that in a prolonged war the industrial infrastructure of the enemy should be deprived of its capability to replenish the enemy's depleted equipment and thus render the troops, in due course, unable to fight effectively. The concept has repeatedly been proven fallacious: the Second World War, Korea and Vietnam stand out as glaring examples. Except for demolishing a lot of houses and causing the civilian population a lot of misery, its main goal was never attained. But in Iraq the concept had no shred of validity, because Iraq had no real industrial infrastructure to support its armed forces. Its military equipment came, during the years it fought Iran, from the industrial countries of Europe and America. And also, no one really expected this war to go on for years!

Another argument to justify the "strategic bombing" of Iraq was that it would hamper the movement of reinforcements from the North to the frontline in the South. But the fact is that the Iraqi high command once more displayed its inadequacy – which was so obvious during the war in Iran – by concentrating all its available forces in the southern front, leaving

practically no strategic reserves to speak of in case the need arose. And as for the daily supplies required by the forces, these could very well be destroyed from the air at the distribution points up front, especially if less air power had been wasted on the senseless destruction of the civil infrastructure of the country.

It must be assumed that the American high command was fully aware of the military realities and knew very well that "strategic bombing" of Iraq was senseless, unless the destruction of the country was in itself an independent political goal, regardless of any military justification. The only decision taken according to truly professional military criteria was to halt the operation once the Iraqi army was defeated, at the end of the first 100 hours of the land offensive. At that point it became entirely clear that the legend about the effectiveness of the Iraqi army was sheer bluff and that – had the tremendous American airpower been directed entirely against the troops in the frontline, rather than on the Iraqi heartland – the Iraqi army would have disintegrated much sooner, probably after two weeks of air attacks.

In memory of Dr. Isam Sartawi, the late Palestinian peace activist, the **Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace** will hold a symposium on the theme:

The Gulf War and the Palestinian problem

Participants will include Uri Avnery, Ibrahim Kara'in, Yossi Amitay, Haim Bar'am, Lufti Mash'ur, Dr. Miryam Mara'i, Dr. Matti Peled and Adv. Darwish Nasser.

The symposium will take place on April 27, 1991, at Kibbutz Har'el. For details, call 03-5565804.

But the most important question remains: why did the US decide to turn what was basically a political crisis, quite amenable to political and economic treatment, into a military one? If we are still to hold that a war is meant to further the political goals of a nation, then the American goal must be gleaned from the political outcome of the war. But here we find nothing but muddled thinking and total chaos on the ground.

When President Bush indicated that he would welcome an overthrow of Saddam Hussein, he must have had in mind something like the Chilean scene, where a group of officers can be easily persuaded to lead a coup. The complexity of an Iraq – consisting of a Sunite minority ruling over a Shiite majority and disgruntled Kurds awaiting anxiously an opportunity to realize their dream of autonomy – must have been completely incomprehensible to him. So we now are witnessing an American President fearing a takeover by the Shiites which would make Iran predominant among the "northern tier" countries, and completely bewildered to find the Kurds on the point of, if allowed, disrupting the whole regional system as established since the end of the First World War. Thus Saddam Hussein appears to be the known devil much preferred to an unknown one, the dashed hopes

(Continued on page 11)