

Options in the Middle East

Arrigo Levi

On December 14, 1988, just 17 days after declaring Yasser Arafat *persona non grata* as an accomplice of terrorists, the American government, with that swiftness in changing policies or in adapting them to new events that only great powers can afford, decided to establish relations with the PLO. In so doing, it proclaimed that the PLO had finally met the three American conditions: "total and absolute" renunciation of terrorism; acceptance of UN Resolutions 242 and 338; recognition of Israel's right to live "in peace and security." A turning point in the history of the Middle Eastern conflict was so reached. As a result, the number of possible scenarios for the future and the number of political options open to the parties of this historical confrontation, have been dramatically reduced; it could even be claimed with some reason that only one option remains, that of face to face negotiations between Israel and the PLO.

This may appear to be, at the time of writing this article (Christmas eve of 1988) a rash and risky judgement. Gone are the times when one could put the finishing touches on an essay on the Middle East months before publication, in full confidence that nothing much would happen to upset its conclusions. Now history is again on the move (and it may advance at a very fast pace and in unexpected directions) on the fateful stage of the Holy Land: holy, alas, to too many peoples and faiths. Today's impossibilities may well become tomorrow's obvious choices. History tells us that many categorical *jamaïs*, many proud *non possumus*, pronounced by great leaders of nations, can quickly be forgotten and end in the dustbin of history.

But no easy optimism is possible. What makes this particular conflict so much more dramatic than any other of our age is the fact that the very survival of the

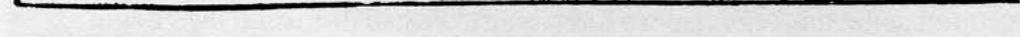
nations involved is at stake, or is felt to be at stake, by both parties, Arabs and Jews. The memory of the Holocaust hangs like a dark pall over the whole scene. This is no petty dispute about frontiers, economic interests or even national pride; neither is it a simple confrontation between right and wrong. This is a conflict between two rights, a situation that provides it with the classic dimension of tragedy.

One cannot speak lightly of the fears and hopes, of the dreams and hates, of the desire for peace and of the readiness for martyrdom of Israelis and Palestinians. The longing for freedom, independence and security which both peoples so strongly feel, is inspired by those great principles that the Western civilization (to which both Jews and Arabs gave fundamental contributions) has spread throughout the world, as the basic ideology of our times. It is with the greatest respect for both sides in the dispute that one must face the impossible task of trying to offer some thoughts on the present state of the conflict, hoping that they may help to identify the trail of peace which statesmen will hopefully follow. The trail is full of dangers; pursuing it will demand great skills and wisdom.

The two choices

Planning for the future requires learning from the past. I must ask my readers' indulgence if I shall occasionally refer to some past attempts, in which I happened to be involved, to offer advice about political choices to be made in approaching the Middle Eastern crisis. In a 1981 report which I co-authored with friends that are authorities on the subject,¹ the point was made that only two "principal approaches" could be imagined for the future of the Arab-Israeli dispute: indefinite continuation of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, leading to some form of annexation, or the pursuit of negotiations between all parties aiming at an eventual solution involving "return of territories as part of a peace agreement": such territory to be linked (as we thought) "confederally or federally to a Jordanian-Palestinian State." We believed at the time that a "transitional period of autonomy" might be possible as well as useful. We suggested that "a role for the PLO" in the negotiating process "be kept under active review in the light of its willingness or unwillingness to recognize Israel's right to exist."

Over a year after publication of our report, which anticipated what later came to be called the "Jordanian Option," the Reagan Peace Initiative of September



Let me take first what I shall call the Begin-Shamir strategy for the future. One may strongly disapprove of it, but it would be a mistake to underestimate the audacity and all-encompassing breadth of this strategy. Its starting point was an act of great political courage: peace with Egypt and full restitution of the Sinai. Shamir opposed it at the time, but Begin correctly identified it as the historical launchpad for his plans, whose aim was the achievement of his lifelong dream of a "greater Israel."

Creeping annexation

His next step, the "Lebanese Operation," was meant to provide Israel with the same degree of military security on its northern frontier (to be paid if necessary by granting Syria full control over most of Lebanon) that it had achieved on its southern frontier with Egypt. A fatal blow would be simultaneously dealt to the PLO and Arafat, expelled from their Lebanese sanctuaries and removed to a distant exile in the Maghreb. Conditions would then arise that would make the creeping annexation of the occupied territories possible, under cover of that transitional period of "administrative autonomy" which had been agreed upon at Camp David.

The danger of further bloodshed was not considered to be serious. The Palestinians of the occupied territories were expected to abandon, in despair, all their remaining hopes for independence; they could be expected to choose exile in increasing numbers, and they would accept, sooner or later, the Begin view that a Palestinian state already existed, called Jordan. Hussein, rather than Begin, could become the main target and enemy of the Palestinian movement.

The consistency of this strategy, as well as the reason for its failure up to now, must be fully understood if one wants to assess correctly the real possibilities that exist today for the future of the Middle East. In the above mentioned report to the Trilateral Commission (the "Peace in Galilee" operation had not yet occurred at the time, nor had we foreseen it), we had dismissed the "Begin strategy" in one paragraph. In it we had claimed that the "indefinite continuation" of Israeli occupation of the territories was "an untenable alternative," because it would increase the isolation of Egypt, would make the Arab world more united against Israel, and would strengthen Arab radicalism and weaken American influence in the Arab world. We also felt that "an indefinite occupation would not assure Israeli survival and security" because of the "increasing political, economic, and social costs of an occupation without

end”: such an approach would ultimately be “a prescription for war, not peace.” At the time, the Israeli Labour Party view already was that the annexation of the occupied territories, with their huge Arab population, would make it impossible for Israel to be both a democracy and a Jewish state: it would have to choose between one and the other. If Jewish, it could be no democracy, but just another South Africa; if democratic, it could not remain Jewish.

In 1983, in reassessing the validity of our report and of its suggestions,² I felt that I could only confirm with even greater conviction our negative views about the “Begin strategy.” I felt it had become clear that such an approach would not just be “a prescription for war” but did indeed require war as an indispensable and continuing instrument for achieving its goals. At the time (Mr. Begin had not yet retired), I felt that any chance of success for his strategy would require, among other things, “that Palestinian reactions [would] not provoke anything similar to a revolt of the population of the occupied territories.” After the Lebanese adventure, after Sabra and Chatila, it was clear that “violence, with its high human costs, was a necessary element of this strategy,” and that it would lead to “an ever increasing militarization of the State of Israel,” which “would be involved in various ways in more bloodshed.” And even if at such a price the Begin strategy succeeded, it would lead to the creation of, on the eastern frontier of Israel (an Israel still including a large proportion of restless arabs), a Palestinian-Jordanian state, whose national goal would inevitably be “an irredentist policy for the recovery of territories under Israeli rule and for helping its ‘oppressed brothers’ inside Israel,” this alien entity on Islamic territory. In conclusion, “the inevitable result would be the same as before forecast: more wars,” and wars that would find Israel in a dangerous condition of political isolation.

Arrigo Levi, former columnist for *Newsweek* (1972-1977), the *London Times* (1978-1981), and editor-in-chief of *La Stampa*, is presently an anchorman on Italian television and an editorial writer for *Il Corriere della Sera*. Among other books, he has co-authored (1981) the Report to the Trilateral Commission on the Middle East. He fought with the Israeli forces in the 1948 War of Independence.

War without end

Reconsidering these problems five years later, the impracticality of an occupation-annexation strategy seems to have been fully confirmed by events; and yet, such a strategy was supported in the 1988 election by a majority (though a slim one) of Israelis. The reasons for that (the social changes in Israeli society, the growth of a siege mentality after so many decades of emergency, the fear of the *intifadah*) are well known. But were the Israeli supporters of a tough line right or wrong? If one compares the present situation with the original Begin design, it seems clear that a number of key preconditions for success have not been achieved and have even become unattainable.

First, Israel's northern frontier remains insecure, and Syria has not been neutralized. Secondly, the failure of Israel's Lebanese adventure and the blow it dealt to the myth of Israel's invincibility, as well as the coming to the fore of a new Palestinian generation, have finally led to the *intifadah*, "the revolt of the population of the occupied territories," that has increased intolerably (to the world, if not yet to Israel) the human costs of occupation. Thirdly, the PLO, far from being removed from the political scene, has finally been recognized by the world as the sole representative of the Palestinian people: there is now a Palestinian representation at the UN, even if only with observer's status. The Israeli refusal to see all this looks increasingly futile, after America's about turn. Fourthly, the idea of a transitional period of Palestinian autonomy in the territories (as suggested by Reagan in 1982 and again by the Shultz peace plan of March, 1988) has become unrealistic. If this were the policy of a new Shamir-Peres coalition, it would mean doing too little, too late: its chances of success would be almost nil.

The alternative choice of a ferocious repression in the territories by an Israeli right-wing coalition government would raise the on-going conflict to levels unacceptable to the whole world, as well as to a large share of Israeli opinion (remember the mass demonstrations in Israel after Sabra and Chatila?), and might lead to outside intervention. No: the strategy of occupation-repression-annexation is no longer realistic. Would, perhaps, a new war between Israel and its neighbours make it credible? It doesn't seem likely. First, the war ought to be decisively won by Israel, under very difficult conditions (including an Arab revolt going on in the territories, and a much reduced support by America); the costs of such a war in human lives, in the age of the missiles,

would be simply incalculable. Can such a possibility really be taken into serious consideration by a rational mind? Surely not. And what assurance could there be that even an Israeli victory, leading to a further massive exodus of Palestinians, would do anything but remove by a few miles the Arab threat to Israel's existence? An Israel without allies, even if it were to occupy all the territory between the Jordan River and the sea, would remain the most insecure of all states. The Zionist dream, which inspired so many noble minds, would be transformed into an unending nightmare. And how could the great ethical values of Judaism possibly survive in such an eternal situation of mortal danger?

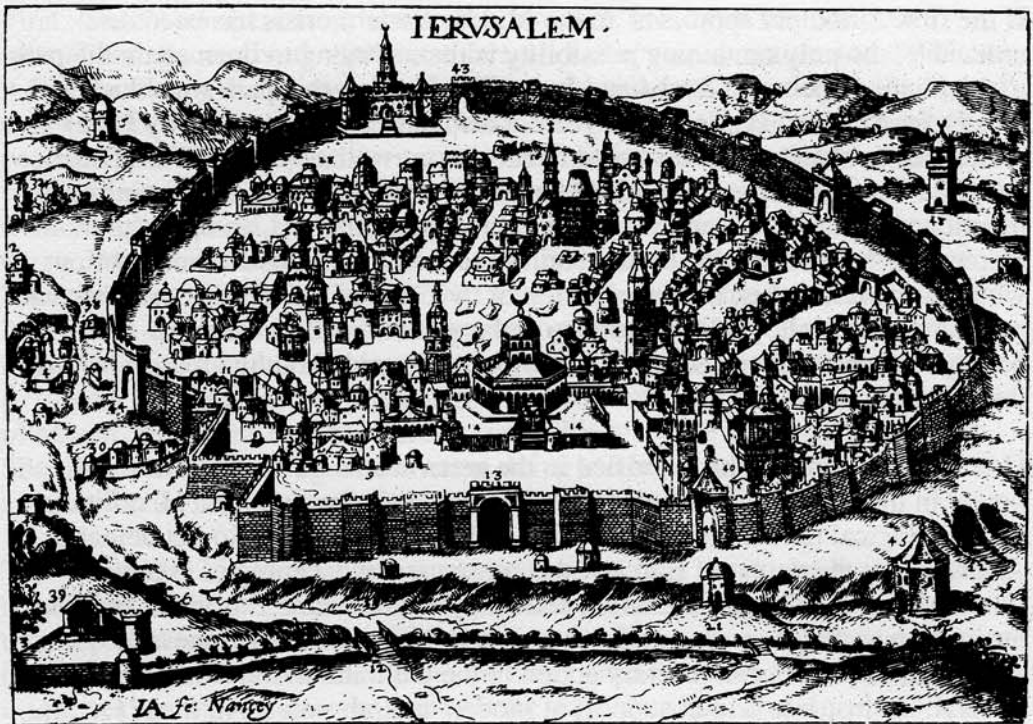
The path of moderation

If the first "principal approach" to the Middle Eastern crisis has become untenable, the only remaining possibility is that of trying to open again the path to negotiations between Arabs and Jews. For decades, this path was blocked mostly by Arab refusal; in recent years it also has been obstructed by Israel's reluctance to abandon the occupied territories, as well as by Israel's diffidence and fears toward its foes. But while Israel, for reasons which we have already mentioned, became less and less favourable to negotiations, an opposite trend among the Palestinians led to the relative weakening of those radical factions whose aim was, and is, the cancellation of the State of Israel from the map, and supporters of a policy of compromise and negotiations became more courageous and numerous. A few words must be said about the reason behind this development.

One basic reason is to be identified in the general change of the balance of power in the world, and in the Middle East in particular, in political, military and ideological terms: the general crisis of Communism; the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan; the defeat of Iran and the consequent weakening of Islamic fundamentalism; the determination shown by America and Europe in fighting terrorists and the governments that supported them; and the firmness of American and European military action in the Gulf and in the Middle East, in general, against Iran and in support of moderate Arab states. All these factors immensely contributed to the strengthening of the more moderate political forces in the Arab and Islamic worlds, and to the weakening of the "Front of Refusal," no longer encouraged by a Soviet Union which, under Gorbachev, has decided to abandon its traditional policy of support for revolutionary forces all over the world, and which looks for reconciliation with the West. It is only

against this drastically changed international background that the gradual shift of the PLO towards more moderate policies can be understood and explained.

Another fundamental factor for change was undoubtedly the *intifadah*. It not only provided, in front of world opinion, the final legitimization of the Palestinian national cause, but also seems to have had the same impact on the Palestinians' collective psychology as the Yom Kippur War had on Egypt. It has given back to the Palestinians a lost sense of national pride and identity and it has canceled to a large extent their deeply felt feelings of inferiority towards Israel, after so many lost wars. Neither the *intifadah*, nor the Yom Kippur War were defeats for Israel. In both cases, however, Israel was unable to defeat its enemies.



It remains open to various interpretations why the *intifadah* has - at least so far - strengthened the moderate factions, rather than the extremist. But it is a fact that thanks also to the *intifadah*, Arafat and the "moderate" leaders of the PLO found it easier to pursue with the necessary determination the path of

diplomacy, to the point of finally recognizing Israel (the idea that this might be just a ruse and a trap cannot be seriously considered). However, a word of caution may be necessary: one cannot make confident forecasts about the future effects of the *intifadah*, should this bloody conflict continue much longer and take a turn for the worse, under the effect of a deliberate increase of Israeli repression. It cannot be at all ruled out that it might lead to a renewed growth of extremism and radicalism among the Palestinians, should Arafat's "moderate" political choices prove sterile.

We must be keenly aware that the path of negotiations, which is at the present being pursued, is full of risks: present hopes for negotiations might easily vanish if we entered into a period of greater trouble and bloodshed (including possible terrorist acts of dubious origin). So far, however, Palestinian and Arab moderates appear to be definitely stronger and more determined; the momentous American recognition of the PLO ought to strengthen this trend.

Peace through give-and-take

The purpose of a "peace process" was, and is - as President Reagan said - reconciling "Israel's legitimate security concerns with the legitimate rights of the Palestinians," and satisfying their "yearning for a just solution of their claims." Reagan already said that military successes cannot by themselves "bring just and lasting peace to Israel and its neighbours" and that Israel "must make clear that the security for which it yearns can only be achieved through genuine peace, a peace requiring magnanimity, vision and courage." It is just as true today as it then was that at the root of the problem there is "the homelessness of the Palestinian people" and that only through a broad participation in the peace process by Jordanians and Palestinians will Israel be able "to rest confidently in the knowledge that its security and integrity will be respected by its neighbours." Again, it is equally true that "only the voluntary agreement of those parties most directly involved in the conflict can provide an enduring solution," and that "the final status of those [occupied] lands must be reached through the give-and-take of negotiations."

The peace process that followed (and which has never really been interrupted) was made possible, on the Israeli side, by the determination of the Labour Party and of its leader to look for a solution which would not imply Israel's "domination over another people," a domination that would be contradictory with the historical ideals of Zionism, a national movement of liberation that

cannot certainly plan any form of oppression over other nations. King Hussein's address to the Jordanian nation of February 19, 1986, technically a report of failure, actually tells us how near the target of an international conference was before it suddenly seemed to vanish, almost one year, exactly, after the basic Hussein-Arafat Accord of February 11, 1985. During those twelve months (King Hussein's account, while extremely precise in reporting Jordan's negotiations with the U.S. on one side and the with PLO on the other, does not raise the curtain of secrecy which still hides the Jordanian-Israeli side of the triangle), many concrete results were achieved which will provide a useful starting point for a renewed peace effort, whose initial task would be to identify and define the area of agreement still valid today.

But of course, a preliminary problem must be faced and solved: are there today, on all sides, national leaders who are ready to engage in such an exercise? At the present time, this is far from certain, particularly as far as the Israeli side is concerned, Premier Shamir being, as it has been pointed out, the only head of government in the world who does not accept Resolution 242 as a basis for negotiation. The fact that all the principal actors of this drama never seem to be present on the stage at the same time (if one enters the stage, he does so when the other has just left it) justifies the widespread doubts which lead some observers and well-meaning mediators to near despair as to the credibility and feasibility of the second "principal approach" to the conflict: isn't perhaps the idea of a "peace process" just as unrealistic as the other "principal approach," that of indefinite Israeli occupation and annexation of territories?

As President Reagan pointed out in his September, 1982, address, "the story of the search for peace and justice in the Middle East is a tragedy of opportunities missed." Will the new opportunity, rising out of Mr. Arafat's proclaimed denunciation of terrorism and recognition of Israel's right to exist as well as of Resolutions 242 and 338 as a basis for negotiation, also be missed? At the present time, this basic doubt cannot be dismissed. But let us assume that sooner or later all the actors of this tragedy will find themselves on the stage at the same time. The most relevant question to be asked would then be the following: which are the points and areas of agreement, and which are those of disagreement, on matters of procedure and substance, as a result of the negotiating efforts of recent years? And what basic changes have been introduced by the dramatic events of recent weeks, between the Algiers meeting of the Palestinian National Council and the UN Assembly session in Geneva?

The question of Palestinian "self-determination"

Problems of procedure cannot of course be separated from matters of substance. When the UN Assembly foolishly assumes that the calling of an international peace conference must be preceded by the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied territories, including Jerusalem, as well as by the dismantling of Israeli settlements in Gaza and the West Bank, it wants to anticipate and prejudge the very subject-matter of a negotiation between the parties. Of course, everybody knows that America, not to speak of Israel, would never support or permit such a one-sided *diktat*. It is well known that the meaning itself of Resolution 242 (whether it demands Israeli withdrawal "from territories" or from "*les territoires*") is doubtful.

It is highly unlikely that any American administration will be ready to go, on this point, beyond President Reagan's position, as defined in the already quoted statement of September, 1982. The relevant passage said the following: "it is the United States' position that - in return for peace - the withdrawal provision of Resolution 242 applies to all fronts, including the West Bank and Gaza. When the border is negotiated... our view on the extent to which Israel should be asked to give up territory will be heavily affected by the extent of true peace and normalization and the security arrangements offered in return. Finally, we remain convinced that Jerusalem must remain undivided; but its final status should be decided through negotiations." Add to that the Reagan statement that "America's commitment to the security of Israel is ironclad" (and there is no sign that it may become less so in the foreseeable future, with any administration), and you have what is still, on the whole, America's position today, including of course the view that America cannot "support annexation or permanent control by Israel" of the occupied territories.

Another point of disagreement between America, on one side, and the PLO and its supporters on the other, can still refer to the conditions of participation by the PLO in an international conference. As a matter of fact, the failure of the 1985-1986 attempt by Jordan and America to create the conditions for an international conference was due exactly to this point, which deserves, even today, clarification. As recounted later by King Hussein, Jordan's untiring efforts had convinced the U.S. administration to accept the idea of inviting (under certain conditions) the PLO as an independent participant in the planned international conference (instead of having PLO unofficial representatives included in a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation). This momentous change in

attitude was formalized in a "written commitment" by the U.S. government, dated January 25, 1986. It may still be useful to quote it in full. It said: "when it is clearly on the public record that the PLO has accepted Resolutions 242 and 338, is prepared to negotiate peace with Isreal, and has renounced terrorism, the United States accepts the fact that an invitation will be issued to the PLO to attend an international conference..." By so doing, the U.S. administration had already at that time gone far beyond the simple idea of establishing direct relations with the PLO, if and when the three famous "conditions" were fulfilled.

However, at the very moment King Hussein's patient mediation failed, Arafat suddenly presented a further demand, namely, "a statement indicating the agreement of the United States to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination within the context of a confederation between Jordan and Palestine." King Hussein felt that such a request was wrong and unjustified, since the right to self-determination "was a matter for the Jordanians and Palestinians" and that "no other party had anything to do with it."

He also felt that "the important thing was to achieve [Israeli] withdrawal first, then to proceed with what we [Jordanians and Palestinians] had agreed upon" in the February 11 agreement, i.e. confederation. Anyway, having communicated to the American negotiators Arafat's request, the king received, as a reply, a statement which said that while the U.S. "supports the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people as stated in the Reagan Peace Initiative" (which did not include recognition of a Palestinian state), it felt that "the PLO, like any other part, has the right to propose anything it wishes, including the right of self-determination, at the international conference." This was the breaking point, which led King Hussein (who sided with the American view) to declare that Jordan was "unable to continue to coordinate with the PLO leadership until such time as their word becomes their bond, characterised by commitment, credibility and constancy."

Two ideals, two risks

These somewhat lengthy quotes are meant to point out that intricate and difficult problems of procedure and substance still await solution. Important advances had indeed been made, quite some time ago, towards such solutions and this implies that compromises on the above mentioned points are surely not

beyond the capability of expert diplomacy. However, it cannot be expected that either on matters of procedure or on problems of substance success may arrive quickly, even between America and the PLO, even when negotiations between the two will begin in earnest, after the take-over by the new Bush administration.

Furthermore, these are relatively easy problems, if compared to the steps required to be taken by both sides, before an international conference can be called. Even more important and obscure is the question of Israeli policy under the new circumstances. Nobody knows, at the present time if, when, and how a lasting Israeli government will come into existence which may find politically acceptable a negotiation with the PLO on the problem of Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. At present, this would seem otherwise unthinkable if it weren't for the fact that the first Israeli reactions to America's recognition of the PLO could be considered the symptoms of a state of shock, i.e. of a condition that does not usually lead to rational thinking.



Again: is any sort of negotiation even imaginable, as long as the daily bloodshedding continues in the territories? How can this situation, which can at any time provoke much wider conflicts, be defused? And how can any form of political consultation of the Palestinians living in the occupied territories be even suggested, as long as the *intifadah* continues?

A more basic uncertainty looms behind all these questions, and other similar ones that could easily be added to this impressive list of problems. It is the following: how effective can America's pressure upon Israel be, even if the American Jewish community confirms its initial acceptance of President Reagan's decision to establish contacts with PLO? How far can Israel (any Israeli government) go in rejecting such pressures, without endangering the basic precondition of its security, namely America's "ironclad commitment" to Israel's survival? Some of the brave words pronounced, just after the shock of America's recognition of the PLO was known by Israeli official spokesmen in Jerusalem, cannot be taken too seriously. It is simply not true that Israel can go it alone as it did in the past, that it can "pay the price of isolation," if this is the price to be paid "for its just cause," as one of these spokesmen said.

Israel was indeed alone once, in the 1948 War of Independence, when an army made up of people who thought of themselves as the survivors of the Holocaust, armed with old guns and the courage of desperation, repelled the attacks of powerful armies, whose aim was "to throw the Jews into the Mediterranean." But such heroic times are distant; such a situation cannot be repeated. No state is secure in isolation today, Israel less than all others. Israel's Promised Land, as it has been written, is the Jewish State, not the territories; between *Eretz Israel* and *Medinat Israel* it is the State - not the Land - that comes first, as the embodiment of the Jewish national identity and of Zionist dreams. A Jewish State with friends and allies, and no "territories," is much safer than a Jewish State with the occupied territories, but no friends or allies. It is understandably difficult for the Israelis to trust those nations that were yesterday's persecutors or absent friends. It is even much more difficult to trust Arafat and the PLO, who still speak with too many voices. And yet, Israel cannot stand alone against the whole world and it is difficult to believe that when the time of decision comes, the Israelis will choose a hazardous, possibly fatal isolation in the world.

It would be foolish to try and present Arafat's turnabout to the Israelis as the beginning of a new chapter in history and the start of a golden age for all the

peoples of the Middle East. Indeed, no policy exists, or can be imagined, including that of a search for compromise and peaceful co-existence through territorial concessions, that does not involve serious risks for Israel. One cannot for one moment underestimate the depth of the Palestinians' hate for the State of Israel, or trust all that is being said from PLO sources, or ignore that the PLO still includes organizations which reject the policy of negotiation or accept it purely as a tactical move, necessary to acquire advantages which can later permit further gains: such gains that the dream of destroying Israel may become finally possible.

But all this is known, and not just to the Israelis, but to Israel's most steadfast friends and allies. Also, the greater these fears are, the more they apply to all other possible political choices of Israel, including that of "staying put," trying to use unlimited force to bring to an end the *intifadah*, even at the cost of vast bloodshed, even at the possible price of starting one more war! Risks are in any case unavoidable. Israel's ultimate choice is between two alternative sets of risks, as well as between two alternative visions of the aims and ideals of the great Zionist movement and of the identity and mission of the Jewish state: the youngest, as well as the oldest of all.

This is of course a problem which only the Israelis - the Jews who are citizens of the State of Israel - can solve and decide; it is, however, a problem about which the Diaspora Jews, more than anybody else in the world, have a right and duty to express their views, being themselves rightful representatives of Judaism. The legacy of Jewish history cannot be left only to ultra-Orthodox rabbis or to extreme nationalists: do not let us forget that the State of Israel itself was the creation of the whole Jewish people. Indeed, the contribution of extreme nationalists and ultra-Orthodox sects to Zionism was much less relevant than that of other, more modern and liberal representatives of the Jewish people, of Jewish tradition and ethical values.

The superpower and other friends

The problem must be finally broached of how Israel's best friends in the West can face up to their undeniable moral duty of guaranteeing the security of the Jewish State. What must they do to convince the Israelis that there is no other path to security but that of just concessions to the Palestinians, of compromise and withdrawal from territories?

The United States will of course continue to play a central role - tomorrow more than ever - in trying to bring all parties to the negotiating table, and to push them in the direction of reasonable compromises. In the coming months, the new Bush administration may find itself engaged in negotiations about the Middle East at a number of separate tables, with different partners: the PLO, Israel, the Arab countries, the Soviet Union.

To each one of these partners the U.S. can offer something important. It can offer Israel its "ironclad" security guarantee. It can offer the PLO and the new Palestinian State full international recognition and again security guarantees. It can offer reassurance to the moderate Arab rulers, whose interest in the stability of the Middle East, including a strong, peaceful and secure State of Israel, is obvious. Finally, the U.S. can offer the Soviet Union recognition of an active role on the Middle Eastern scene. America, the superpower (the only one extant?), has something to offer to all its negotiating partners, as nobody else has, in exchange for a readiness to accept compromises and to tone down their requests. Whether this will be enough to obtain, in particular, the consensus of an Israeli Government in negotiations with the PLO is still very much in doubt. Just as doubtful is America's capacity to convince Israel to "defuse" the explosive situation in the occupied territories through unilateral concessions, including, possibly, withdrawal from the hottest areas - as suggested, among others, by Henry Kissinger.

As a European, the writer of these notes must also wonder what Europe can do in order to support and strengthen American efforts for peace. Europe's political influence upon some of the main actors of this drama as shown, for instance, by Italy's good relations with both Jerusalem and the PLO, cannot be underestimated. But what can Europe offer of actual value to all parties concerned? Undoubtedly, generous economic help for the reconstruction and development of the whole area, and of a new Palestine in particular. What else? Some European "principal states," including Italy, France and Britain, have played useful military roles in recent years in some of the hottest areas of the Middle East. Could they play similar roles between Israel and Palestine? Europe's historical guilt towards the Jewish people is immeasurable, and Europe must find in its own conscience the words and acts that can help Israel regain that confidence in itself and in the world, which can allow it to show "magnanimity, vision and courage."

Some, if not all, of the questions and problems raised in our analysis seem to

be almost unanswerable. One can only hope that this be due to the fact that only a short while has lapsed since the shock produced by America's recognition of the PLO, and that the passing of time will make it easier for all people concerned to find some of the basic answers which at present are lacking. But one must also prepare for a period of trouble and confusion, made more dangerous by hates and fears rooted in a distant past and daily renewed by the shedding of blood.

And yet, one can also sense in all people involved - including those old and tough fighters, Shamir and Arafat - a genuine, heart-rending yearning for peace: the nostalgia for a better and safer world, where the life of individuals and the dreams of nations are no longer threatened by some inscrutable doom. Let me repeat it: we can confidently trust that neither Shamir nor Arafat wants a new war. Could they be ready to sacrifice, for the sake of peace, their dreams of greatness?

References

¹ - "The Middle East and the Trilateral Countries," a report to the Trilateral Commission by Garret Fitzgerald, Hideo Kitahara, Arrigo Levi and Joseph J. Sisco, 1981.

² - A. Levi: "The risks of peace and the logic of war," in *Dialogue*, Winter 1983.