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U.S. Aim in "Peace Process": Liquidation of Palestinian struggle

by Richard Becker

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The front page of the Sept. 2, New York Times carried a photo of five men walking on a red carpet in the White House on their way to start the latest round of the Middle East peace talks. In the center was President Barack Obama, flanked on his right by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu, and on his left by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and King Abdullah of Jordan.

The latter four have something in common: Each receives hundreds of millions or billions of dollars annually from the former. All four of their governments are heavily dependent on U.S. support for their very existence, an important starting point in any assessment of the new negotiations.

Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton are seeking, they say, a two-state solution, a Palestinian state in a small fraction of Palestine alongside Israel. Their idea is to create a weak, disarmed and broken-up state side-by-side with and dominated in every respect by Israel, the world's fifth-ranked military power. The Pentagon and CIA have been providing the funding, training and arms for tens of thousands of Palestinian police, whose main task would be the suppression of any Palestinian organizations unwilling to accept this new form of colonial domination.

The U.S. and Israeli positions are adamantly opposed to the right of return for more than seven million Palestinian refugees, most of whom live in the surrounding countries.

In his opening speech, Obama again called the current situation unsustainable. U.S. leaders urgently want to reach some kind of settlement, not due to any concern for the plight of the Palestinian people, but because they recognize that the current situation is intensifying anger in the entire region against the U.S.

The real aim of Washington in these talks remains what it has been since the U.S. first openly entered into negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1991: the liquidation of the Palestinian struggle as part of a drive to pacify and dominate the Middle East as a whole.

In continuing disregard for the Palestinians' right of self-determination, the Obama administration decided who could and who could not represent the Palestinian people in the talks. Hamas, the governing party in Gaza and winner of the last election of the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council held in both the West Bank and Gaza, was excluded as were all Palestinian parties except Abbas's Fatah.

On the day the talks began, a press conference in Gaza City by 12 Palestinian organizations including Hamas, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Islamic Jihad, Popular Resistance Committees, Palestine People's Party and others denounced the Washington talks as a sham and announced their intention to intensify the resistance against Israeli occupation.

Renewed negotiations are taking place against a backdrop of the accelerated seizure of Palestinian land in the West Bank, a vast expansion of Israeli settlements and the continued blockade of Gaza. Today, there are more than 500,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank. The extreme right-wing Israeli government, which includes outright fascist elements, has intensified repression against Palestinians who make up 20 percent of the population inside the 1948 borders.

While organizations and leaders representing a majority of Palestinians were kept out, Mubarak and Abdullah presiding over police-state regimes in Egypt and Jordan—were brought in, mainly to apply pressure on the already pliable Abbas.

‘A net profit for the occupation’

While a target date of one year was agreed upon to reach a final agreement, there is a good chance that the new round of negotiations could quickly collapse, as has happened on a number of occasions over the past two decades.

The PA's Abbas has said that he will quit the talks if the current Israeli so-called freeze (really a slowdown at best) on settlement expansion ends, as it is scheduled to, on Sept. 26. Even during the 10 months that the freeze has been in effect, the Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes and confiscation of Palestinian land in the West Bank has continued relentlessly.

In Libya on Sept. 4, Abbas stated: "If the (Israeli) government extends the decision to stop the settlements [sic], we will continue the negotiations, and if it doesn't extend, we will leave these negotiations." This seemingly unequivocal statement must be taken with a grain of salt, as Abbas has been prone to capitulate to U.S. pressure in the past, including in agreeing to the new talks.

The current Israeli government is a coalition of right-wing forces, including the misnamed Labor Party. All three top officials—Prime Minister Netanyahu (Likud), Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman (Israel Our Home) and Defense Minister Ehud Barak (Labor) have made clear they oppose any extension of the freeze or even a slowdown in settlement expansion. The fascistic Lieberman said on Sept. 5 that a treaty "is a target that is not attainable within the next year and not within the next generation." Lieberman, the second-ranking official in the government, has never disguised his desire to drive all the Palestinians out of their homeland.

A second round of negotiations is set for Sept. 15 in Egypt.

A Sept. 2 press release by the PFLP quoted a statement issued by the PFLP's Political Bureau: "The White House meeting and gala dinner launching the direct bilateral negotiations brings to mind the same image of the White House lawn on Sept. 13, 1993 when the Oslo agreement was signed, with only a change in the actors and the extras surrounding them." The press release continued: the Oslo agreement, said the Front, ended in disaster for the Palestinian people on the ground, and these negotiations pose the same threats.

Jamil Mizher, a member of the PFLP's Central Committee, called the negotiations "a net profit for the [Israeli] occupation," saying that both the United States and Israel will combine to "blackmail the Palestinian side to make concessions on Jerusalem, our borders, and the refugees' right to return even as they refuse to end settlement building and reject all international law and resolutions."