

A new development in the balance of strength in the Middle East

Faik Warrad
CC First Secretary,
Jordanian Communist Party

About a year ago the Israeli military invaded Lebanon on a massive scale. Acting in "strategic alliance" with the USA, their intention was to heat up the international situation as a cover for achieving their expansionist designs. Although the invasion fell short of all the designs of its organizers, the USA and Israel made gains of no little consequence. It was as though an earthquake had hit the Middle East — the Arab liberation movement was dealt a painful blow. The effects of the aggression continue to be felt, complicating the situation in the region.

The intervention was a surprise for nobody. But this time, unlike the previous occasions when Israel launched an aggression, the Arab countries maintained a helpless silence for more than three months, and in some matters acted as direct accomplices of the aggressors. At the time many people asked in embarrassment: How could all this happen? What is the reason of such inactivity? There were other, justified questions: Why had the forces of the Arab liberation movement, which involves various classes, parties and currents, been unable to organize effective mass resistance to the interventionists and their allies, the U.S. imperialists? Why had they not acted against the stand of "aloof observers" adopted by the Arab states? Why was there massive condemnation of the aggression and solidarity with its victims throughout the world, even in Israel itself, while Arab solidarity was weak and pitiful?

We shall try to answer these questions by considering some important factors and circumstances that shed light on the matter.

During the past decade there has been a growth of the influence and strength of the right-wing reactionary forces in most of the Arab countries. This was seen most strikingly after Egypt, the largest state in the Arab world, signed the Camp David agreements, making a volte face and joining the imperialist-Zionist camp, while Iraq and Iran engaged in a bitter war of attrition that is bringing them nothing but ruin and eroding their resources.

Reactionary and right-wing regimes began moving closer and reinforcing their links to U.S. imperialism. U.S. military bases and strongpoints were built in a number of Arab

countries, while some others signed agreements with the USA on the formation of bilateral military commissions as a step toward a so-called strategic consensus based on anti-Sovietism.

In that same period there was a dramatic growth of oil revenues — to many hundreds of billions of dollars annually. Right-wing reaction thereby obtained huge resources for influencing the course of events in the region. Massive financial assistance and, where possible, bribery enabled it, in one form or another, to influence the posture and political line of different countries, organizations, parties and social forces.

On the domestic scene lavish spending and innumerable programs promoted the growth of bourgeois strata. The tendency toward embourgeoisification and the drive for wealth intensified not only in the oil-producing but also other Arab countries. The bureaucratic and parasitical bourgeoisie began to play a large role in countries with a national-patriotic regime. The interests of the neobourgeois strata dovetailed ever more closely with the interests of world capitalism. In this situation the objectives of the Israeli aggression proved to be consonant with the striving of influential right-wing and reactionary Arab circles to be rid of the hotbed of revolutionary ferment in Lebanon.

The regimes in the vast majority of Arab countries are continuing their policy of massive terror and, in some cases, brutal repression accompanied by bloodshed. There is a total absence of political and civil freedoms. The people are barred from any participation in deciding matters vital to them. The communist parties of these countries have warned time and again that the muzzling of democracy threatens the stability of internal fronts and undermines the ability to repulse aggression from without.

Some quarters are inclined to belittle the pernicious effects of terror and repression on the mass movement. Formally comparing the present state of the movement with the situation in the 1950s when, despite harassment, it was on the upgrade, the proponents of such views use the present decline as a pretext to

attack the forces and contingents of the Arab liberation movement. These people evidently do not understand that backed by petrodollars and the ambition to monopolize power these repressive actions are now of an incomparably greater magnitude and brutality than ever before.

The socio-economic structure of the Arab countries has recently undergone a change. In particular, the numerical strength of the working class has grown. However, in a situation of harassment and suppression of freedoms, including the freedom of trade union activity, against the background of mass emigration, bribery and corruption of some sections of the people, this has not yet led to any visible enhancement of the working class' role in socio-political life.

The policy of repression and suppression of freedoms pursued by the right-wing reactionary forces and their dictatorial methods of government have created the soil for wide-ranging ideological subversion and a more active implementation of the notorious policy of divide and rule. This is not confined to distortions of progressive ideas, to the smearing of and attacks on Arab-Soviet friendship. Fanaticism is fanned and ethnic, regional, religious-communal, tribal and other conflicts are kindled. Internecine bloodshed has been provoked and encouraged, and efforts have been made to subvert individual countries, movements and parties from within. A sense of cosmopolitanism and "attachment to the West" has been disseminated. This has undermined unity, demoralized the masses, young people and intellectuals, corrupted them spiritually, and led people to return to the times of glaring backwardness.

Such are the hallmarks of the situation in which the Israeli aggressor invaded Lebanon and resistance to it was organized. It is to this situation that the interventionists owe most of their successes.

The helpless silence of the right-wing reactionary and dictatorial regimes and the practical ineffectiveness of the Front for Steadfastness and Confrontation, generated among the Arab masses defeatist feelings, bitterness and disappointment. For the same reasons nothing was done to use the Soviet Union's willingness to help and support those who do not bow to the aggressor. Detachments of the Palestine Resistance and the Lebanese national-patriotic movement had to face a numerically superior enemy single-handed. In the fighting that lasted more than three months the Palestinian and Lebanese fighters displayed unparalleled courage and heroism. The just cause of the

Palestinian people had wide sympathy and support worldwide. The historic battle in Lebanon yielded quite a few instructive lessons.

The aggression in the Middle East gave shape to what is on the whole an extremely dangerous situation that holds out the threat of U.S. imperialism consolidating its domination, of Israel enlarging the scale of its expansion and of forcibly pushing through liquidationist, capitulationist solutions of the Palestinian problem. Early last September, U.S. President Reagan came out with an initiative for the "settlement of the Middle East conflict" that boiled down to an attempt to assert U.S. hegemony in the region and to knock an anti-Soviet military bloc together making out that the main pressing problem was that there was a "strategic threat" from the Soviet Union.

The U.S. imperialists want to be in full control of the affairs of the Middle East, to tailor them to their own interests and the interests of their Israeli ally. This is testified to by Reagan's refusal to recognize the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, to return to their homes and hearths, and create an independent state of their own under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The USA is trying to widen the framework of the Camp David agreements by bringing Lebanon and Jordan into them in one form or another, void the Palestine problem by imposing on the population of occupied Arab lands an "administrative autonomy" in association with Jordan, and set up a military base in Lebanon.

A few days after Reagan announced his initiative, the 12th Arab summit was held with PLO participation in the Moroccan city of Fez. The summit adopted an Arab plan for peace in the region. It contains realistic provisions that create the foundation for a just, sensible settlement of the Palestine problem. In many ways these provisions dovetail with the stand that has been consistently maintained by the USSR, and this paves the way for coordinating the efforts of Arab countries and the Soviet Union. However, the summit's decisions say nothing about what the Arabs should do if the USA and Israel reject this plan, and lack even a hint of the possibility, in this contingency, of taking steps that would clash with the interests of U.S. imperialism. Many people are quite rightly saying that in fact the leaders of most of the Arab states do not intend to abide by the position proclaimed at Fez, that they are inclined to approve the American initiative.

Furthermore, imperialism, Zionism and reaction are trying to sow discord, to split the Palestinian movement, the PLO itself, and ag-

gravate and erode Syrian-Palestinian relations. There is suspicious talk that the PLO should lay down its arms and confine itself to work among the people and to diplomatic activity. Also, attempts are made to lure it into the trap of the illusory "solutions" suggested by the Americans.

All this is evidence that the situation in the region is being inflamed, that there is a mounting threat to the cause of the Palestinian people. Under these conditions, the danger of our region being turned into the source of a war threat to world peace and to the friendly Soviet Union is becoming quite real and tangible. In this event the Middle East states would be not only a zone of imperialist-Zionist influence and exploitation but also the target of devastating retaliatory nuclear strikes if the imperialists venture to start a military adventure against the USSR, which is constantly extending to our peoples its hand in peace and good-neighborly friendship.

Counteraction to this serious and ever-growing danger is today the principal task of the Arab peoples, of their liberation movement. Success can only be achieved with the active and effective participation of the masses. To ensure such participation, democracy and civil rights must be upheld perseveringly and consistently. This is central to the multiform battles against imperialism, Zionism, reaction and aggression, for peace, liberation and social progress.

In the plans of imperialism and Zionism for domination and expansion in our region, an important role is assigned to Jordan and the Palestinian problem separately and together.

The U.S. President categorically rejects the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, rights that have been recognized by the international community, and insists, entirely in accordance with the Camp David line, on giving the inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip nothing more than "administrative autonomy" in association with Jordan. No provision is made for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all the territories occupied by them, and this opens the door to the spread of Israeli influence to Jordan.

On the other hand, Israel's rulers have time and again urged the settlement of the Palestinian problem within the framework of Jordan, the creation there of an "alternative homeland" for the Palestinians or even a "Palestinian state," and threatened that more hundreds of thousands of Palestinians would be exiles to that country. At the height of the aggression of Lebanon, when besieged Beirut was being methodically destroyed, this idea was repeated

by the then Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. To give effect to it, he went so far as to threaten that Jordan would be occupied.

At a plenary meeting in October 1982 our party's CC stated: "... the purpose of this constant repetition of the theme is to camouflage the process of liquidating the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to their land and homes, to justify the expansionist actions of the Israelis relative to Jordan, and give effect to the plan for building a 'Greater Israel' even behind the smokescreen of setting up a state for the Palestinians." Moreover, they aim to sow discord, to introduce a division in the relations between the Palestinians and the Jordanians, to undermine their patriotic unity, to paralyze their struggle for common interests, chiefly their resistance to expansionist encroachments directed equally against each of them.

The concrete historical conditions of the existence of both fraternal peoples — the Palestinian and the Jordanian — make it necessary to bear in mind some important factors and circumstances that decisively influence the relations between them, regardless of the plans and wishes of Reagan and Israel's rulers, of their expansionist ambitions.

After the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 the largest and most densely populated part of Palestine, the West Bank of the river Jordan, was incorporated in Jordan. It was then that the Gaza Strip came under Egyptian administration. As a result of the June 1967 aggression both these regions were occupied by the Israelis, and further hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were driven into Jordan. Since then Jordan has had the largest Palestinian community, numbering nearly 1,250,000 persons. The latter have Jordanian citizenship and live in the same conditions as their Jordanian brothers. The inhabitants of the occupied West Bank (750,000 persons) continue to have personal, public, economic, financial and administrative links to Jordan.

Thus, Palestinian-Jordanian ties remain objectively close to this day, and a common status is enjoyed by the two peoples, the people of Jordan and the bulk of the Palestinians. This objective reality constantly poses the question of the character and prospects of the relations between them. Internationally, as well as in the Arab world and in Jordan itself it is recognized that the Palestine Liberation Organization is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. But the situation in Jordan, the stand of its ruling circles, and the policies pursued by them directly and tangibly influence the struggle and destiny of this people. In turn, the state of the Palestinian problem profoundly and

directly affects Jordan's political and socio-economic position.

With this as their starting point, officials of the Jordanian government speak of, on the one hand, the "positive aspects" of the Reagan initiative and, on the other, of hypothetical plans for establishing, already now, "federal" or some similar relationship between the proposed Palestinian entity and Jordan. In the present situation we are opposed to such plans, holding that they are premature. The cart cannot be put before the horse. Israel continues to be in occupation of the lands of the Palestinians, to flout their national rights. A Palestinian state is as yet non-existent. The statements about its preconditional association with Jordan are used by Israel to further its expansionist designs, to retain and annex the occupied territories, and abolish the rights of the Palestinian people. As a result, the Palestinian problem remains unresolved and continues to be a potential trigger of future conflicts and wars. There remains the direct threat of Israeli expansion toward Jordan.

It is our party's view that in the present situation, when the central task is unquestionably to deliver the Palestinians from Israeli occupation and restore the rights usurped from them, Jordan should make a worthy contribution to this struggle and thereby honor its national and Arab duty. Every assistance must be given to the PLO to enable it to organize resistance to the Israeli occupationists from Jordanian territory. For our country, the successful outcome of the battles for the national rights of the Palestinians would be not only a victory of a fraternal people. It would also be a guarantee of the security of Jordan itself against Israeli expansion.

This is not the time for coming to agreement on how to build the relations between the future Palestinian state and Jordan. But it should not be overlooked that the objective position and interests of the Palestinian and Jordanian peoples require that these relations are given a special character. Hence, it is quite natural and logical that the decisions of the 16th session of the Palestine National Council (February 1983) speak of the prospect of a subsequent confederative union of two independent states, the Palestinian and the Jordanian. This approach coincides with the stand adopted by our party. Our CC's Political Report declares: "The termination of the occupation and the realization by the Palestinian people of their right to return to their homeland, to self-determination, and to the creation of their own independent state would mark the beginning of a new stage. At that stage the important problems would be

to strengthen and develop Palestinian-Jordanian relations on the basis of equality, for the welfare and in the interests of the two fraternal peoples, chiefly in the interests of the Jordanian and Palestinian working people under conditions of freedom, democracy and social progress."

The joint struggle of the Palestinian and Jordanian peoples and the special relations between them are threatened from two directions.

I have already spoken of the danger of forestalling events when, on the claim that the two peoples have vitally important common interests, some quarters are urging that the character and forms of future Jordanian-Palestinian relations should be defined already now. This is urged sometimes by officials of the Jordanian regime.

On the other hand, some Palestinian quarters, justifiably dissatisfied with the discriminatory practices in Jordan, the despotic methods of government and the impingement of democratic freedoms, and basing themselves on the legitimacy of the Palestinians' right to self-determination and the creation of an independent state of their own, call in advance for a total rupture with Jordan. They fan "regional" fanaticism and even try to split the working class in Jordan and its Communist Party on the principle of "national affiliation." Our party stresses that any tendencies toward fanatical sectarian insularity no matter who is at the back of them, play into the hands of imperialism, Zionism and reaction, helping them to enforce the policy of divide and rule. The CC Political Report notes: "Patriotic duty and true fidelity to the two fraternal peoples — the Palestinian and the Jordanian — call for a rebuff to these dangerous tendencies, whatever their color."

One way or another, all the plans of the U.S.-Israeli alliance are directed toward the attainment of Israel's aggressive expansionist ambitions, the spread of Zionist influence to Jordan, and the establishment of a U.S. monopoly over the implementation of the "peace process" and the "intermediary efforts" in the region. In the past few decades there have been five wars in the Middle East. The main cause was the impingement of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Can there be peace as long as these rights are usurped and the people of Palestine are denied justice and equality? The realistic way to a genuine, just peace in our region is indicated in the Soviet proposal for an international conference with the participation of all the interested sides, including the PLO, the USSR, and the USA.