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Dialogue buys time for Israel

IN the territories the now two-year-old Intifada has proved remarkably resilient.

Despite escalating Zionist methods of increasingly brutal repression and endless killing, the young generation of Palestinians is clearly prepared to continue to challenge the Israeli occupiers in an ongoing struggle of wills. The level of sophistication and commitment of this new Palestinian generation has astounded most observers, including this one.

But in Tunis, and also in Cairo, the situation is far different.

After two years of the Intifada, the PLO has got bogged down in an endless series of "dialogues" and diplomatic double-talk.

For, the underlying reality has become that while the limited-to-Tunis US-PLO dialogue has given the PLO a bit of greater legitimacy; it has been far more beneficial to the Israelis and was always designed that way.

Through this Trojan Horse dialogue the Americans, with under-the-table Israeli govern-

ment didn't even know what Revisionist Zionist was and who Vladimir Jabotinsky was — even though Jabotinsky was Menachem Begin's mentor with Revisionist Zionist Begin's political philosophy, and even though they had just penned a historic deal with Jabotinsky's Revisionist heirs!

While the Israelis ever tighten the noose around the Intifada, and while the American political system constrains any likely further "concessions" to the Palestinians — witness the recent Congressional legislation and the American threat to stop payments to the UN — the "dialogue" drones on.

From this analyst's vantage point it was always meant to be this way in fact.

But at least in the beginning one could hope without being too self-delusive that others knew better, that something real was happening behind-the-scenes, that somehow, against most logical analysis and realpolitik assessments, a breakthrough might be coming.

A year ago, just after Secretary of State George Shultz

From



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announced the Tunis "dialogue" I wrote in this column that "the explosion of publicity surrounding Shultz's announcement ... is obfuscating the basic fact that what the Americans actually have given so far is rather little and all the extremely contentious issues that have made even dialogue between the Israeli political establishment, their American benefactors, and the PLO so excruciating difficult remain just as before."

What the Americans are mostly about with this Tunis dialogue is buying the Israelis more time to regain control, using the "dialogue" more for intelligence gathering than for diplomatic progress, and attempting to create the conditions for a Camp David II which could set the Palestinian cause back at least another decade, maybe even longer.

In that column, a year ago, I concluded with these thoughts:

"For the Palestinians to get real control of their now occupied state far more than crafty verbal diplomacy is going to be required. The basic levers of power and pressure, including

military capabilities, will have to be focused on by the PLO and the Arab world at the same time that the niceties of diplomatic dancing are engaged in....

"It was the youngsters of Palestine who made all this possible," I added. "And they will continue to have the primary role in making sure that the pressures which could conceivably be leading to a Palestinian state and a potential Israel-Palestinian peace are not let up."

Now, as the Intifada has entered the third year, the struggle escalates, the blood flows with greater abandon, the tools of repression become ever more sophisticated. Yet the new generation of Palestinians is proving itself remarkably able and willing to confront the Zionists with ever great courage and fortitude.

But in Tunis and Cairo the older generation of Palestinians is once again misunderstanding words for actions. And it is in these distant locales, not in occupied Palestine itself, where there is a growing danger that the struggle might again be lost.