

PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM FROM 1917 TO 1989:

FOUR STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

By

GABRIELLA LOUISE KING

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Department of POLITICAL SCIENCE

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the development of Palestinian nationalism in the twentieth century by dividing it into four periods. In each of these four periods anti-colonial nationalism and Arab nationalism are applied to the Palestinian case. Special attention is paid to the Palestinian vision of Zionism, the role of the Arab states in Palestinian politics, the vision of a future Palestinian state and how it was to be achieved.

In the early twentieth century, Palestinian national feelings were stirred as opposition was organized against Zionist immigration and British rule. Both the Zionists and the British were considered to be motivated by colonial aims in the stirring phase. The second period in the development of Palestinian nationalism, which was clearly a pan-Arab period, took shape soon after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 at which time the success of pan-Arabism was believed to be the best way to achieve an independent Palestinian state.

The third phase in the evolution of Palestinian nationalism, which is dealt with in chapter two, is marked by the defeat of the Arab states in the June war of 1967, at which time pan-Arabism lost much of its appeal. This defeat marked the rise of a

new Palestine Liberation Organization and although there were a variety of groups and ideologies within the organization, it is possible to make some generalizations about Palestinian nationalism in this period. The PLO attempted to reduce the role of the Arab states in Palestinian affairs, they expressed Marxist ideas and a militant line, and the organization continued to see Israel as a colonial settlement that was to be eliminated.

Finally, this thesis characterises the fourth period in the evolution of Palestinian nationalism as a gradual process of change that occurred throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It involved an eventual acceptance of Israel and a partition of Palestine, thus rejecting the anti-colonial ideas that had been at the centre of the movement since the stirring phase. This thesis concludes by suggesting that these changes are likely to make it difficult for the PLO to maintain its fragile unity.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	11
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: From Anti-colonialism to Pan-Arabism	6
Nationalism: Anti-colonialism and Pan-Arabism	9
Anti-colonialism in Mandate Palestine: the Stirring Phase	15
Palestinian Nationalism and Nasser's Pan-Arabism	28
Chapter 2: The PLO and the Palestinian Revolution	33
The Internal Structure of the PLO: Fatah, the Marxists and the Arab puppets	36
Chapter 3: The Politics of Compromise	47
Moderates, Rejectionists and the Ten Point Plan	52
Attempts at Moderation in the 1980s: the Post Beirut Area, the Intifada and the Nineteenth PNC	61
Conclusion	72
Bibliography	75

## INTRODUCTION

The Palestine Liberation Organization, as the modern day expression of Palestinian nationalism, has traditionally expressed objectives that have challenged Israel's existence. As an umbrella organization, the PLO is made up of a variety of groups that express various policies towards Israel and a future Palestinian state. When the commando groups came to dominate the PLO after the June 1967 war, the covenant of 1964 was revised to express their more militant line. At this time, all of the commando groups agreed that the partition of Palestine which occurred in 1947 was illegitimate and the covenant expressed their belief that colonialism would only come to an end in Palestine when Israel was replaced by a unified Palestinian state.

The Palestinian national movement has always seen Zionism as a colonial movement and has therefore refused to compromise with it. From the time of the British mandate, Palestinian organizations were opposed to the Zionists' plan for a homeland in Palestine and Zionist immigrants were viewed as colonialists. When the state of Israel was established, Palestinians insisted that Israel was a creation of foreign imperialists which would

eventually be defeated by the Palestinians with the assistance of the Arab states. After the Arab defeat in 1967, the commando groups took hold of the PLO, reducing the role of the Arab states in Palestinian affairs, but still claiming that all of Palestine would be liberated from Zionism.

Palestinian organizations from the time of the Balfour Declaration have been influenced by pan-Arab and anti-colonial ideas. However, the Palestinian national movement has at the same time experienced considerable variations in its objectives and strategies. The most recent change which took place in 1988 was a two state solution adopted by the Palestine National Council at its nineteenth meeting and it marked a fundamental change in PLO policy. By accepting Resolution 242 (1) and by calling for an international conference based on this resolution, the PLO formally accepted a partition of Palestine.(2)

This thesis will look at the development of Palestinian nationalism since the time of the British Mandate. More specifically, it attempts to construct a typology of Palestinian

1. Security Council Resolution 242 calls for a "termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries..." It also calls for "a just settlement of the refugee problem."
2. When questioned after the PNC meeting, Yasser Arafat made recognition of Israel explicit: "The PNC accepted two states, a Palestinian state and a Jewish state, Israel." see "PLO Leader Recognizes Israel's Right to Exist" Globe and Mail (December 8 1988):1.

nationalism by dividing it into four clearly distinguishable periods. In the first period Palestinians at the time of the British mandate were stirred out of their apathy as they organized opposition to Zionism. Zionism was equated with colonialism and Palestinian organizations argued that the Zionist claims to land were illegitimate. They objected to the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine and did not consider a partition of the land to be a fair outcome of the dispute. After the creation of Israel and the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Arabs from Palestine, pan-Arabism was believed to be the most effective way to regain Palestinian rights. It was felt that elimination of Israel with the aid of the Arab countries was the only just settlement to the conflict because Israel represented the success of Western colonialism in the Arab world. The 1967 war marked the beginning of a third phase in Palestinian nationalism at which time commando groups gained control of the PLO and tried to remove themselves from Arab control as much as possible. The commando groups all agreed on the common goal of liberating Palestine through the armed struggle and replacing Israel and the occupied West Bank and Gaza with a unified Palestinian state. But as the PLO suffered a number of defeats in the 1970's and 1980's, moderates began to emerge within the organization, questioning PLO goals. As steps were taken from within the PLO towards pragmatism the PLO gradually shifted the nature of Palestinian nationalism from refusal to a compromise that accepted Israel's existence.

In order to examine the changing nature of Palestinian nationalism, this thesis will be divided into three chapters. Chapter one will look at the early twentieth century until the 1967 war. This section will provide a historical background to the development of Palestinian nationalism and it will be divided into two distinct periods: pre-1948 and 1948-1967. The pre-1948 period will discuss Palestinian organizations, their demands for territory, how they were to be obtained and what their strengths and weaknesses were. This chapter will also look at the twenty year period before the 1967 war when pan-Arab unity was believed to be the best way to liberate Palestine.

Chapter two will look into the organization of the Palestinian national movement under the PLO. It will discuss the organization of the PLO, the variety of groups within the organization, their ideologies and their vision of a future Palestinian state. It will also briefly discuss the PLO's relationship with the Arab states in the post-1967 period.

While there have been changes in the Palestinian movement that make it possible to divide it into distinct periods, at the same time the basic demand for an independent Palestinian state in all of Mandate Palestine has been a consistent policy which was only formally dropped at the nineteenth meeting of the Palestine National Council. Chapter three will look at how PLO policies gradually evolved to their most recent phase which proposes a compromise with Israel. Finally, this thesis will conclude with some thoughts on the possible difficulties that the

PLO may now face as a result of the new policies that it adopted at the nineteenth PNC.

## CHAPTER ONE

### FROM ANTI-COLONIALISM TO PAN-ARABISM

In the first half of the twentieth century, when Zionists were making plans for a Jewish national home in Palestine, the Palestinian Arabs made efforts to organize opposition to the Zionist plan. Palestinians attempted to prevent the Zionist aims in two ways, by appealing to other Arabs for support and by creating their own organizations to voice their opposition. The main goals of the Arabs in this period remained quite consistent. There was opposition to the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine and to any partition of the land. The objective was to establish a state ruled by native Palestinians.

During World War 1, as the Ottoman Turks' grip over Arab lands that had been under their loose control for about four centuries was weakening, Britain sought an alliance with the Arabs. An exchange of letters between Sir Henry McMahon, Britain's High Commissioner in Egypt and the Sudan, and the Sharif of Mecca occurred from 1915 to 1916. In the Husayn-McMahon correspondence an agreement was made in which Britain promised Sharif Husayn assistance in creating independent Arab governments if Husayn proclaimed an Arab revolt against the Ottomans. The Arabs in greater Syria, including Palestinian Arabs, had high expectations

as they anticipated independence after the war.

But regardless of what was said in the Husayn-McMahon correspondence, on November 2 1917 British Foreign Secretary Sir Arthur Balfour in a letter to Lord Rothschild of the Zionist Federation pledged to provide for the Jewish people a homeland in Palestine. The letter assured the Zionist federation of the following:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine (3)

In promising the Arabs independence in the Husayn-McMahon correspondence while at the same time promising the Jewish people that Britain would use their best endeavours to achieve a Jewish homeland in Palestine, Britain had entered into two agreements that were incompatible.

The Balfour Declaration was to have a huge effect on the Arabs of Palestine because the Arabs were not given the independence that they expected after the war. Instead, Arab territories were divided and administered by the mandate system of the League of Nations. Britain was given the mandate for Palestine and included the Balfour Declaration in its mandate. Once Palestine

3. cited in United Nations, The Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem Part 1 (New York: United Nations Publication, 1984), 9.

was separated from the rest of Syria and placed under British administration, the Palestinians were faced with increased Zionist immigration. This made their situation very different from that of their Arab neighbours.

Before Britain was given the mandate for Palestine in 1920, President Woodrow Wilson proposed at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 that a commission be sent to Syria, including Palestine, to determine the wishes of the people. The King Crane Commission, as it was known, was sent to the area although the British and French declined to send representatives. The Commission found that the the people of Palestine generally agreed that if foreign tutelage was to come they would prefer it from the United States and there was a general fear of Zionism. The Commission stated that:

If the principle [of self-determination] is to rule, and so the wishes of Palestine's population are to be decisive as to what is to be done with Palestine, then it is to be remembered that the non-Jewish population of Palestine - nearly nine-tenths of the whole - are emphatically against the entire Zionist programme. The tables show that there was no one thing upon which the population of Palestine were more agreed than upon this. To subject a people so minded to unlimited Jewish immigration, and to steady financial and social pressure to surrender the land, would be a gross violation of the principles just quoted...(4)

Although the commission reported that the Arabs were opposed to Zionism and the Balfour Declaration, the Allied powers agreed to grant the Palestine mandate to Britain and included the Balfour

4. cited in Ibid., 28.

Declaration in the mandate. Because the Balfour Declaration was included in the mandate for Palestine, this mandate was unlike others which were to assist the native populations in developing independent governments.

The mandate system that was set up in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations established the need for undeveloped areas to be advanced under the "tutelage...of advanced nations" (5) so that these less developed territories might be able to govern themselves in the future. President Woodrow Wilson insisted that the right to self-determination that was valued in the West should also apply to the non-Western world, and in accordance with this principle the Covenant stated that "the wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of a Mandatory." (6)

The right to national self-determination as embodied in the Covenant of the League of Nations is generally believed to be an idea that became popular in the West after the French Revolution. The French Revolution marked the birth of the modern era and it brought with it the ideas of liberty, equality, fraternity and progress. With national self-determination as the basis of political order, the people were to rule in place of kings. Nationalism is therefore generally considered to be a European phenomenon which eventually spread around the world and had

5. cited in Ibid., 21.

6. cited in Ibid., 29.

universal appeal.

Nationalism is a complex idea and is thus difficult to define. An attempt to list the factors that are required in the formation of a nation proves futile. Although factors such as language, culture and religion could be considered important in the formation of a nation, none of these factors on their own could be deemed sufficient. Hans Kohn insists that the most essential element in the formation of a nation is a living and active corporate will, as he simply states that "nationality is formed by the decision to form a nationality." (7) While a definition of the nation may be difficult, a more specific explanation of a nation could be as follows:

A nation is a group of people who wish to live together in a given territory which they perceive to be uniquely their own; they have a sense of pride in a shared past (which may or may not be based on fact) and they dream of a shared future. A nation usually possesses unifying characteristics such as a common language, culture or religion. A national group fears foreign motives and resents foreign rule, since foreigners are unable to understand or appreciate the nation's accomplishments and its purpose in history.

National feelings are often activated by a perceived foreign threat as nationalism teaches people that foreign rule is an insult to their human dignity. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries people under colonial rule learned that their treatment was wrong according to Western principles and they expected that things would be better if they could govern themselves.

7. Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1944), 15.

Nationalism, therefore, is quite frequently a reaction to foreign intervention, and in fact, as K.R. Minogue argues, "nationalism cannot be purely a struggle of internal factions within a country." (8)

One of the main forms of nationalism is anti-colonial nationalism. Nehru described nationalism in colonized countries as "essentially an anti-feeling" that grew "on hatred and anger against other national groups, and especially against the foreign rulers of a subject country." (9) Nationalism in colonized countries is a way of organizing political opposition to alien governments in an effort to bring colonialism to an end.

Colonial rulers can contribute significantly to the rousing of national feelings among colonized people. Colonization sparks the desire to protect ones life-style from foreigners whose policies may threaten traditions and alter social structures. For example, religious differences between rulers and the ruled may inspire protests against the colonialist power who does not respect or understand the religious beliefs of the natives. Under these circumstances colonized people become opposed to foreign rule and suspicious of foreign motives. Thus colonial governments, in an indirect manner, assist in the development of nationalism in the colony. The natives are able to unite against what they perceive

8. K.R.Minogue, Nationalism (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1967), 26.

9. cited in Boyd Shafer, Faces of Nationalism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc., 1972), 279.

to be a common threat where they may have otherwise been divided.

The typical anti-colonial movement may be generalized in the following manner. As European colonialists settled in Asia and Africa, rivalry eventually grew between the Europeans and the natives as the natives grew to resent being treated as second class citizens. As the natives, usually the traditional elite, came in closer contact with Western ideas, they learned of the right to self-determination that is valued in the West and they demanded equal treatment. Humiliated by foreign rule, national movements in the developing world demanded independence. A fear of losing what is valued by them mixed with the resentment of being treated as second class citizens helped to stir a colonized people out of their apathy.

With high expectations of life without colonial rulers, the native population will settle for nothing less than a total withdrawal of the colonial power. It is believed that only a complete withdrawal can bring a complete end to colonial oppression. Any settlement that would require the compromise of one's land is considered unacceptable because the relationship between a nation and its territory is central. "In the ideology of almost every nation...its historical territory is looked upon almost as a living personality which cannot be partitioned without destroying it altogether." (10) Nationalism emphasises a

10. Frederick Hertz, *Nationality in History and Politics* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1945), 151.

continuity with the past and this continuity is especially important when it comes to territory.(11)

Arab nationalism, with its strong anti-colonial elements, attempted to overcome the political partition of Arab territory that occurred after World War 1. Pan-Arabists believed that Arabs constituted one nation and therefore should not have been separated by political boundaries. Because Arabs share a number of characteristics that are commonly believed to group people together, Arab nationalists argue that

Arab unity, as such, is an end in itself for it reflects the community of language, culture, experiences and aspiration which all Arabs share despite political boundaries. It is a positive movement in the sense that it aspires to attain the same norm of life which the Arab people had shared in the past and which was only interrupted after World War 1, when Arab lands were divided by European powers against the will of their peoples. (12)

Arab nationalists only opposed Ottoman rule in the early twentieth century after the Turks made attempts at tightening their control over the Arabs. Islam had originally given the Ottoman rulers legitimacy among the majority of Arabs, this being a result of Muslim beliefs that originated with the prophet Muhammed. The prophet proclaimed the establishment of the Muslim ummah, or nation, in Medina and the Muslims considered themselves

11. R.J. Johnson, David B Knight and Eleonore Kofman (eds.), National Self-Determination and Political Geography (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1988), 24.

12. cited in Louis Snyder, The Dynamics of Nationalism (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company Inc., 1964), 313.

to be a community distinct from all other peoples. As a result

as long as the Ottoman Empire was seen to embody the Islamic faith there was little opposition to it. The break-up of an Islamic power into a number of smaller units would have been regarded as retrograde. (13)

However, Arab nationalists began to protest Ottoman rule in the early twentieth century when Ottoman policies began to take on a Turkish flavour. Turkish reforms that included such things as an official language reflected the growth of national feelings among the Turks. As the Young Turks attempted a greater centralization of power, Arabs took counter-measures. Because there had always been a close historical development between Arab culture and Islam, one of the central rallying points for the Arabs against the Turks was Islam. The proclamation issued by the Sherif of Mecca in 1916 which sparked an Arab revolt, for example, accused the Turks of indifference to Islam. The Arabs claimed that the Turks had usurped the Caliphate and that it could appertain only to an Arab, preferably from Muhammad's tribe, the Quraysh.

The factors that unified the Arabs were their language, their culture, and their common historical experience. Arabic was an especially important force unifying Arabs as it was the language of the Koran and the Mosque. It was generally believed that foreign influence was responsible for the degeneration of

13. John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 120.

the Arab nation so that Arab nationalism became a way of protesting foreign influence and imperialism, first against the Ottoman Empire and then against the European powers.

Many Arabs felt that foreign rule was a corrupting influence in the Arab world and they were therefore opposed to the mandate system imposed on them and the European domination that it brought with it. Arab opposition to foreign rule that was promoted by the British and the French in the early twentieth century soon became anti-British and anti-French. The European rulers were worse than the Ottomans, however, because they had a different religion and a different culture.

The Zionist plan to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine was one of the main factors that contributed to the development of a national movement among Palestinians. In the early twentieth century opposition to Zionist immigrants stirred national feelings and intensified feelings of unity among Palestinian Arabs. The mandate years marked the first stage in the development of Palestinian nationalism, a phase that may best be labelled as the stirring phase. Palestinians began to develop a perception of their land as being uniquely their own and they expressed a fear of Zionist motives. They considered Zionist immigration and Zionist claims to a homeland in Palestine to be illegitimate and they developed their own image of how Palestine was to be governed. Palestinian organizations, maximalist in their demands, expressed opposition to Zionism and the British Mandate.

As a result of their attitudes towards Britain and the Zionists in the pre-1948 period, Palestinian organizations refused any settlement that required a surrender of land to the Jewish immigrants. Palestinians perceived both the British and the Zionists as colonialists so they refused to cooperate with either of them. Because many of the Jewish immigrants came from Europe they were seen as colonialists not much different from the British. As many Palestinian Arabs saw it, their land had been passed from the hands of the Ottomans to the British, with the British making plans to pass it on to another group of colonialists, the Zionists.

Jewish claims to land in Palestine were generally considered to be motivated by colonial aims, not national ones. Palestinian organizations did not differentiate between Western colonialism in Asia and Africa, for example, and Zionism. Because the Zionists were viewed as colonialists, it was felt that a complete abolition of their plans for a national home was necessary before Palestinians could exercise their legitimate rights.

However, as a settler nationalism, the Zionists' goal was for Jews to migrate to Palestine and establish a state where Jews could live permanently. Because the objective of the Zionist movement was for the Jews to acquire a national home of their own by returning to the Holy Land, making Hebrew their official language, and establishing sovereignty over the land, Zionism differed from other national movements. Its aim was to free the

Jews by allowing them to move to another country, Palestine.

There was, however, some ambiguity over what territory was to be included in the Jewish state. Although the Jordan River has often served as a political division, historically Palestine and Eretz Israel had various borders and many Zionists expected that parts of the East Bank would be included in a Jewish state. At the thirteenth Zionist Congress in 1923 for example, the Congress passed the following resolution:

Recognizing that eastern and western Palestine are in reality and de facto one unit historically, geographically, and economically, the Congress expresses its expectation that the future of Transjordan shall be determined in accordance with the legitimate demands of the Jewish people. (14)

Adding to this confusion, in 1920 Britain called the entire area on both sides of the river the "mandate for Palestine." But by 1921 the mandate was divided into two parts along the river. The Zionists, however, were to later argue that the east side of the Jordan river was made an Arab Palestinian state with the west side being left for the Jews to establish their own state. But those on the west side of the Jordan River, Palestinian Arabs, were developing national aims of their own and were clearly unwilling to accept the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. These two nationalisms were bound to collide as they struggled for the same territory, both claiming to have legit-

14Pipes, Daniel and Adam Garfinkle, "Is Jordan Palestine?" Commentary (October 1988): 37.

imate historical ties to the land.

As a result of the perceived threat of Zionism, Palestinians Arabs were able to organize and cooperate where they may not have been able to otherwise. For example, the Palestinians, unlike the Zionists, lacked religious unity, which was compounded by economic disunity. Although the Muslims made up the majority of the population, they were mainly peasants living in rural areas. The Christians on the other hand were mainly city dwellers and although they were a minority many of them held jobs in influential sectors of society such as government, commerce and education. Because of their religious differences, Christians saw little appeal in pan-Islam while Muslims accused Christians of being less critical of the British.(15) However, Muslims and Christians agreed in their opposition to Zionism and together they joined committees that opposed it. Middle class Christians did not want competition from Jewish immigrants in professions and skilled trades while the Muslim peasants did not want to compete over rural land.

But divisions also existed between influential families in Palestine which were not as easily overcome. There were a few powerful families in Palestine in the early twentieth century who were competing for control amongst themselves. The two most notable families were the Husaynis and the Nashashibis. Members of the Husayni family traditionally held positions of influence in

15. Ann Mosely Lesch, Arab Politics in Palestine 1917-1939 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 60-61.

the municipality of Jerusalem, most notably as mayor. The Husaynis generally had the support of the well-established families in Palestine. The Nashashibis, on the other hand, had the support of the rising middle class. But while a traditional rivalry between these two families prevented the formation of a common front for much of the mandate years, there was little difference in the national goals of both groups.

Although the division of Arab territories by the mandate system caused each group of Arabs, including Palestinian Arabs, to concentrate on the issues created by their own mandate, the Palestinians believed that their conflict was an Arab problem and they therefore appealed to Arabs in neighbouring countries for support. In an attempt to attract support from members of the same ethnic group, Palestinians sent missions to various Arab countries. They also tried to get the support of Muslims around the world, insisting that the problems facing the Palestinians should concern all Muslims because Jerusalem was the third holiest city in Islam.

Muslims and Arabs in cooperation with Palestinians did demonstrate and form committees in opposition to Zionism. When Lord Balfour visited Damascus in 1925 for example, there were violent demonstrations. Pan-Arab meetings, such as those that took place in Damascus in 1937 and Cairo in 1938, stressed opposition to any partition of Palestine. But while most Arabs may have given the Palestinians their sympathy, they had little political clout so that their protests were of little value.

The fragmentation of the Arab world contributed significantly to the development of a Palestinian national movement under the British Mandate. Because of their different circumstances, Palestinians developed an identity separate from other Arabs. However, the role of other Arabs in the Palestine question always remained important. What eventually developed in Palestine was a separate Palestinian nationality alongside Arab nationalism.

By the 1920's, Palestinian opposition began to take on an organized structure. The Arab Executive, which was active from 1920 to 1934, was the first significant organization expressing Palestinian national aims. The organization used mainly peaceful means to express its opposition to Zionism and British rule. It sent numerous letters to the British government demanding that Palestine not be treated as a colony and that the goals of the Balfour Declaration be abandoned. The Arab Executive insisted that the Balfour Declaration "was made without our being consulted and we cannot accept it as deciding our destinies." (16)

At a meeting of the Third Arab Congress at Haifa in 1921 the demands that were typical of the mandate years were outlined. The Congress demanded that no compromise be made in favour of a Jewish home in Palestine and it expressed the desire for Palestine to remain Arab. The committee's five basic demands were

16. cited in Ibid., 79.

as follows: 1) a government was to be elected by the native population in Palestine; 2) there was to be an abolition of the Jewish national home principle; 3) Jewish immigration was to end until a government was elected which could decide immigration policy; 4) Palestine was to be governed by Ottoman law rather than British law; and 5) Palestine was not to be separated from its neighbouring Arab states. (17) The demands and grievances outlined in this document are remarkably consistent with the basic demands of Palestinian organizations throughout the mandate years.

In the 1920's organized objection to Zionism and British rule was generally peaceful. But as Zionist immigration increased so to did frustration among the Arabs. Palestinian organizations felt especially dissatisfied because they were not recognized by the British. The Arab Executive (1920-1934) and later the Arab Higher Committee (1936-1937), were not considered to be representative of the Arab population by the British because they were not elected representatives. In addition, for an Arab organization to be considered representative by the British, it could not issue resolutions contrary to the mandate, including the Balfour Declaration. (18) Quite clearly, Arab organizations could not meet this requirement.

By the late 1920s small outbreaks of violence were becoming

17. William Quandt, *The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 14-16.

18. *Ibid.*, 21.

more frequent and in the next two decades violence climaxed. With the Nazi rise to power in Germany in 1933, many Jews fleeing persecution went to Palestine. The sudden increase in immigration sparked riots as the Arabs became concerned that they would soon become a minority in Palestine. Small guerrilla groups harassed Jewish settlements and acts of sabotage and guerrilla activities were used by both the Zionists and the Arabs.

By the 1930s six main Palestinian political organizations had developed, the most powerful of which were dominated by the Nashashibis and the Husaynis. Haj al-Amin al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem, was the most popular national leader in Palestine at this time. When the Arab Higher Committee was formed in 1936 all six political parties joined and Haj al-Amin al-Husayni became the Committee's president.

In 1936 a general strike was successfully organized by the Arab Higher Committee to protest Zionist immigration and to demand a national government. As stated by the Arab Higher Committee, the strike was "to continue...until the British government changes its present policy in a fundamental manner, the beginning of which is the stoppage of Jewish immigration." (19) The organization and continuation of the general strike is generally viewed as one of the most unified expressions of Palestinian opposition to Jewish immigration during the mandate years. The

19. cited in W.F. Abboushi, *The Unmaking of Palestine* (Kent: Whitstable Litho Ltd., 1985), 92.

strike brought virtually all Arab business and transport to a full stop. While Arabs in government positions did not strike for fear that they would loose their jobs to the Zionists, they contributed ten percent of their salaries to the strikers. The peasants also continued to work so that they could provide food to the strikers.

However, the general strike proved to be unsuccessful in many ways. It lasted for six months during which time the Jews became more self-sufficient by developing those industries that the Arabs had brought to a halt. In addition the British government refused to suspend the immigration of Jews during the strike and actually increased immigration quotas.

The chaotic situation that surrounded the strike prompted the British to send a commission, known as the Peel Commission, to investigate the outbreaks of violence. Speaking before the commission Haj al-Amin al-Husayni outlined four requests: 1) that Britain abandon its plans for a Jewish home in Palestine; 2) that Jewish immigration come to a halt; 3) that the sale of Arab land to Jews be prohibited; and 4) that the question of Palestine be dealt with in the same manner as other Arab territories has been dealt with. The Commission, commenting on the position of the Arabs over the future of Palestine quite accurately observed that their demands had "not shifted by an inch" since 1920. (20)

The Peel Commission suggested that Palestine be partitioned

20. cited in Ibid., 117.

so that Britain could meet its conflicting obligations. The Commission stated:

Manifestly the problem cannot be solved by giving either the Arabs or the Jews all they want. The answer to the question 'Which of them in the end will govern Palestine?' must surely be Neither...  
...Partition seems to offer at least a chance of ultimate peace. We can see none in any other plan.(21)

But the Arabs rejected any partition of Palestine due to their belief that the Zionists did not have legitimate claims to Palestinian land. After a closer examination of the plan the British government also concluded that the plan was impractical.

In the following years Arab attacks on Jewish settlements increased throughout the countryside and a full scale rebellion seemed to be evolving. The British government took severe measures, practising collective punishment, detaining suspects and declaring the Arab Higher Committee unlawful. The British arrested Palestinian national leaders, and many members of the Arab Higher Committee, including President Haj al-Amin al-Husayni, fled the country. But even after the British implemented such measures violence continued, although the Arabs were now without effective leadership and organization.

In 1939, on the verge of war, Britain issued a White Paper that was the most agreeable proposal that the Arabs had seen in some years. The paper allowed for the immigration of 75,000 Jews

21. cited in United Nations, The Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem Part 1, 57.

over five years, after which time immigration would end. Jews and Arabs were to share a role in government according to the size of their population. The paper said that Palestine would become independent in ten years time as long as the British government was satisfied that "adequate provision had been made for...the special position in Palestine of the Jewish National Home." (22) The paper also said that independence would be granted as long as Arab-Jewish relations had developed to a point "as would make good government possible." (23)

Since the British White Paper was clearly the best offer that the Arabs had seen, some Arabs considered accepting the plan. However, many did not trust the British and were suspicious of the conditions that were to be met prior to independence. Palestinian organizations did not believe that the British were a trustworthy ally and because some of the aspects of the paper were vague, the Arabs hesitated to accept it. The British were perceived to be a close ally of the Zionists because it appeared as though the Zionists had a great deal of influence in London. In the end both the Arabs and the Zionists rejected the White Paper.

Violence in Palestine continued as the British attempted to implement the White Paper. The British tried, unsuccessfully to maintain order in Palestine, and they made attempts at limiting

22. cited in Abboushi, *The Unmaking of Palestine*, 163.

23. cited in *Ibid.*, 162.

land purchases and immigration. However, the Arabs complained that the policies were ineffective and the Zionists criticised them as contrary to the Balfour Declaration and the mandate.

Throughout the Second World War all diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the differences between the Zionists and the Arabs failed. While the Zionists called for an independent Jewish state, the Arabs wanted to prevent a partition of Palestine. World War Two intensified the problem because in its aftermath, many Jews fleeing Europe sought refuge in Palestine. Britain, finding the situation in the mandated territory impossible, took the problem to the United Nations in 1947. The General Assembly, through resolution 181 (1947), voted for the creation of an Arab and a Jewish state in Palestine. The Zionists were happy with the partition plan, although some wanted more land. The Arabs on the other hand challenged the legality of the resolution and they made it clear that they were going to try to prevent a partition.

The question of how the UN was going to enforce its resolution became problematic. When the British troops left Palestine on May 14 1948, amongst much fighting, the state of Israel was established. Although the armies of five Arab countries came to the assistance of the Palestinians on the following day, the Israelis proved to be much more powerful and better organized. The result was a large scale exodus of Palestinians, many of whom fled to neighbouring Arab countries.

In this first phase in the evolution of Palestinian nationalism a number of facts are noteworthy. Palestinians developed an image of their separate identity, not only from British and the Zionists but also from their Arab neighbours. The mandate years can best be described as a stirring phase, when national feelings were developed in reaction to the Zionist immigrants who seemed to be threatening the lifestyle that the Palestinian Arabs wished to preserve. Palestinian organizations had holistic goals in the stirring phase. They called for Palestinian self-government, the stoppage of Jewish immigration and an abolition of the Zionist plan for a Jewish home in Palestine. The traditional Palestinian society was moved out of its apathy.

The major weakness of the Palestinian national movement in the stirring phase was the failure to realize both their limitations and the strength of their opponents. Palestinian nationals faced a dilemma, they were unwilling to cooperate with the British because they were seen as colonialists, but if they wished to weaken the Zionist plan for a homeland in Palestine, cooperation with the British would probably have been the best way of accomplishing this. The refusal to compromise, regardless of how legitimate they felt their claims to be, resulted in missed opportunities such as the White Paper of 1939, which was the most favourable offer that the British presented to the Arabs during the mandate years. In addition, Arab confrontation with the British resulted in strong British counter measures such as the steps that were taken in response to the uprisings of the

late 1930's. British policies brought chaos to the Palestinian national movement as it was left exhausted and unable to regain effective organization. In the end the Palestinians were not able to avoid the establishment of the state of Israel and the exile of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

Because the majority of Palestinian refugees went to neighbouring Arab countries, for the next two decades the Palestine problem was to be primarily an Arab problem. The period between 1948 and 1967 was a stagnant and inactive time for Palestinian organized opposition to Israel, at which time Arab politicians dominated Palestinian politics.

Pan-Arab unity had always been a factor in Palestinian politics, but between 1948 and 1967 many Palestinians believed that their return to Palestine depended purely upon the achievements of Arab unity. As in the first period of Palestinian nationalism, in the the post-1948 period Israel continued to be seen as a colonial state and the Palestinians felt that they had a right to regain all of mandate Palestine. But in the post-1948 period Arab unity was felt to be the best way to eliminate "colonial" Israel and the most significant spokesman of pan-Arabism in this period was the charismatic leader of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Nasser's thoughts on Arab unity and the situation of the Arab people was expressed in his book Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution. In this book Nasser expressed great grief over the weakness of the Arabs. Mentally paralysed for centuries,

the Arabs had been dominated by foreigners and had been "robbed ... of all sense of strength and honour." (24) Over the centuries, Nasser argued, foreign rule suppressed the Arabs and made them feel inferior. Foreign states such as Britain, France and the United States behave in a superior and insulting manner towards the Arabs, draining the Arabs of their pride and dignity. Nasser called Western imperialism "the great force that is imposing a murderous, invisible siege upon the whole region." (25)

In order that the Arabs might be awakened from their slumber, they were to unite and achieve national dignity. Nasser believed that when the Arabs were unified and strong they would gain a feeling of national pride and would then have respect for themselves and their civilization. Unification of the Arabs was possible not only because they shared a common culture, language and history, but also because they had a common desire to rid themselves of foreign humiliation. Arab unity would be strong enough to bring foreign exploitation to an end and give the Arabs a sense of pride.

Nasser believed that Egypt had a special role to play in the struggle against foreign oppression because of its special location in Africa, in the Arab world and in the Islamic world. Nasser envisioned three circles surrounding Egypt which made Egypt's role in the struggle against imperialism central. The

24. Gamal Abdul Nasser, *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1955), 63.

25. *Ibid.*, 103.

first circle was the Arab circle, which, according to Nasser, was the most important one to Egyptians as it was the one that was closest to them. Egyptians were tied to the Arab world because of their common history and civilization and Nasser believed that the Arabs had great potential, this being a result of their unity, the strategic situation of their territory and their oil. The second circle was the African circle, in which Egypt, as a part of Africa had a responsibility to help Africans struggle against white imperialists. The third circle was the Islamic circle, in which all Muslims were included. Nasser believed that the pilgrimage to Mecca could be developed into an institution that would unify all Muslims, insisting that it was "an institution of great political power." (26) Mecca could become the meeting place for an Islamic world parliament where mutual cooperation among Muslims could be established from year to year.

Because he believed that Egypt's role was that of leader against imperialism in the Arab world, it was only obvious that Nasser would consider Egypt to be an important actor in the Palestinian problem. Nasser elevated the Palestinian question to the centre of Arab politics because it included two elements that he wished to promote; pan-Arabism and anti-colonialism. Israel was a symbol of Western power over Arab lands, as it was created and protected by the West. Speaking on the issue of Palestine, Nasser argued that

26. Ibid., 112.

The imperialists intended this territory to be a barrier dividing the Arab East from the Arab West, and a constant drain on the energy of the Arab nation, diverting it from positive construction. (27)

The establishment of the state of Israel was, for the Arabs, a constant reminder of their weakness and their inability to control their land and their destiny. What was needed to regain Palestine was Arab unity.

Because Egypt was to lead the Arab nation, Nasser felt that he had a legitimate right to lead the Palestinians and many Palestinians, feeling victimized by the West and imperialism, were attracted to Nasser's progressive and anti-colonial ideas. Nasser was important to Palestinians because he called for Arab unity and excited a Palestinian audience in his calls for the rights of the Palestinians, what he called the "sacred cause." To Palestinians pan-Arabism was seen to be the best means to achieve the sought after end, a Palestinian state in all of mandate Palestine.

In 1964 at the First Arab Summit Conference, President Nasser initiated the creation of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The PLO was manipulated by Arab states and this was justified on the grounds that the liberation of Palestine was part of a larger goal of liberating the entire Arab world from imperialism. However, when the Arab states suffered a humiliating

27. cited in Aaron David Miller, The Arab States and the Palestine Question, (New York: Praeger), 61.

defeat in 1967, pan-Arabism was discredited as the best way to achieve an independent Palestinian state and Palestinian organizations that called for independent Palestinian leadership took over in place of pan-Arabism.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PLO AND THE PALESTINIAN REVOLUTION

After the defeat of the Arab states in the Six Days War, Israel occupied all of Mandate Palestine and many Palestinians became disillusioned over the possibility of pan-Arab unity achieving a Palestinian homeland. From 1948 to 1967 Palestinians played a secondary role in the struggle against Israel but after 1967 a number of groups expressed resentment towards Arab domination and the desire to minimize Arab influence in Palestinian affairs.

The most prominent critic of pan-Arabism in the post-1967 period was Yasser Arafat, leader of the commando group al-Fatah. Fatah leaders boldly called for the non-intervention of the Arab states in the internal affairs of the Palestinians. The old PLO was criticised as being insufficiently revolutionary and too close to the Arab states. As a direct attack on Nasser's ideas, a Fatah spokesman stated that Fatah refused "...the confiscation of the Palestinian self and its melting in the wider circle, the

circle of [Arab] nationalism. (28) Fatah emphasized the central role that Palestinians were to play in the struggle against Israel and the group insisted that Palestinians had the right to construct their own independent politics.

In the post-1967 period the commando groups gained control of the PLO expressing Marxist ideas and a militant policy towards Israel. The defeat of the Arab armies marked the beginning of a new phase in Palestinian nationalism at which time the commando groups tried to remove themselves as much as possible from Arab control. The armed struggle was seen as the best way to liberate Palestine from the Zionist occupiers and the Palestinian struggle was seen in the same framework as Vietnam, Algeria and black Africa. In the late 1960's Yasser Arafat expressed the feeling of the commando groups when he said: "We have believed that the only way to return to our homes and land is the armed struggle. We believe in this theory without any complications, and this is our aim and our hope." (29)

The PLO covenant of 1968, a revised version of the 1964 covenant, reflected this increased militancy. The revised covenant differs from the earlier covenant in that it emphasizes the importance of the armed struggle, insisting that the "armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine. Thus it is an

28. cited in Muhammad Muslih, "Moderates and Rejectionists Within the Palestine Liberation Organization," Middle East Journal (Spring 1976): 129.

29. cited in "Stuff of Arab Legends," New York Times (September 26 1970), A2.

overall strategy, not merely a tactical phase." (30) The document repudiates the existence of Israel completely and insists that all of Palestine must be restored to the Palestinian people so that they might exercise their right to self-determination. The PLO covenant contains a strong indictment of Zionism and it links the Palestinian struggle for liberation with the struggle of all oppressed peoples:

Zionism is a political movement organically associated with international imperialism and antagonistic to all actions for liberation and to progressive movements in the world. It is racist and fanatic in its nature, aggressive, expansionist and colonialist in its aim, and fascist in its method. (31)

The PLO covenant is consistent with the tradition of past Palestinian organizations as Article 20 declares the Balfour Declaration, the British mandate as well as all of their consequences, to be null and void.(32) The covenant insists on the Palestinians' right to their historic homeland and it asserts that any partition of Palestine is unacceptable. Article 19 states that "The partition of Palestine, which took place in 1947, and the establishment of Israel, are fundamentally invalid, however long they last" (33) Once Zionism was eliminated it was believed that Palestinians would be able to return to Palestine and exercise their right to self-determination.

30.Yehoshafat Harkabi, *The Palestinian Covenant and Its Meaning* (London: Mitchel Co Ltd., 1979), 114.

31. Ibid., 123.

32. Ibid., 122.

33. Ibid., 122.

The covenant serves as a unifying force tying together all of the groups in the PLO. The main policy making bodies in the organization consist of the National Council, the Central Council and the Executive Committee. Membership of the Palestine National Council has varied over the years numbering anywhere from 200 to over 400 persons who are chosen from the Palestinian community around the world. The PNC functions as a "parliament in exile" and its members are of three categories; militant organizations such as Fatah , popular associations such as unions, and independents. The Central Council was established in the early 1970's as an intermediary between the PNC and the Executive Committee. The Central Council meets about once every three months and is made up of approximately forty members including all of the members of the Executive Committee and other members elected by the PNC. The Executive Committee is made up of fourteen persons and a chairman and it is responsible for implementing the policies adopted by the PNC. Since 1969 Yasser Arafat has been the chairman of the Executive Committee.

By far the largest and most influential group in the PLO is al-Fatah under the leadership of Yasser Arafat. Although the group was established in the 1950's when pan-Arabism was at its strongest, Fatah has always emphasized the central role that Palestinians were to play in their struggle. Fatah leaders saw the Palestinian struggle as a war of liberation against colonialism and foreign oppression insisting that "[a]ll we want is to

liberate our homeland from this foreign occupation." (34) The Jews of Israel were seen in the same light as the French in Algeria, for example.

Fatah's success can be largely attributed to the fact that the group has no clear cut ideology, as it defines itself merely as "a national liberation movement struggling against imperialism and Zionism." (35) Unlike many other groups within the PLO, Fatah shies away from ideology. In fact, Yasser Arafat has insisted that

since it is our conviction that the Palestinian must dedicate himself above all to the Palestinian struggle, we require that candidates for membership sever all ties with any party formations. (36)

It is the group's nebulous character which allows a variety of factions that are often opposing each other to coexist within it. As one member remarked, "Ideologically, Fatah is a wide super-highway with few stop signs." (37)

Fatah rejected the pan-Arab ideas that had been so important in Palestinian politics before the 1967 war, and the group's rise to power came at a time when many Palestinians felt a need to

34. Abdullah Schleifer, "Al Fatah Speaks; A Conversation with 'Abu Amar," Evergreen Review (July 1968): 85.

35. Johnathan Randal, "PLO's Armed Struggle Rhetoric," Washington Post (March 2 1980), 1.

36. cited in Abdullad Scheifer, "Al Fatah Speaks: A Conversation With Abu 'Amar," : 84.

37. cited in Johnathan Randal, "PLO's Armed Struggle Rhetoric," : 1.

assert their independence in determining their own future. The turning point for Fatah occurred in March of 1968 when the group fought with the assistance of the Jordanian army against Israeli troops at Karamah. The "victory" for Fatah at Karamah raised the morale of many Palestinians, as well as many Arabs throughout the Middle East, who until then felt that the Israeli army was invincible. Within two days of the battle 5000 recruits were inspired to join the fedayeen ranks, swelling Fatah membership and making it the most popular and powerful group in the organization.

Fatah's popularity is a result of its leadership, its diffuse of ideology and its wide range of support. For many years Arafat has had a commanding grip on the PLO and Arafat's control over Fatah displays stability unknown to any other PLO group. Because the group receives a wide range of support from a number of Arab states including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and ~~private~~ Palestinians, it has been able to avoid complete dependence on any single Arab state. However, Fatah has to be careful not to offend the Arab states in its calls for independence, as it has often been charged with abandoning Arab interests.

Although Fatah has been the most significant group in the PLO in the post-1967 era, other groups are also influential so that Fatah is by no means free to set PLO policy. There are six main groups in the PLO. A number of groups express Marxist ideas and while Fatah attempts to minimize the role of the Arab states in the PLO, many groups assign an important role to the

Arab states in the struggle for Palestine. (38)

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine is the most credible alternative to Fatah because the group has notable support in the Palestinian community. The PFLP views the Palestinian struggle in Marxist terms and it criticises Fatah as being a collection of Palestinian bourgeois. George Habash, the leader of the group, identifies the enemies of the Palestinian struggle to be world Zionism, imperialism and Arab reactionary regimes. After the 1967 defeat Habash was quite critical of the Arab states, claiming that:

The Arab armies have failed the Palestinians three times now: in 1936 they gave us hollow promises; in 1948 they entered the war against Israel and lost half of Palestine; and in 1967 they again entered the war against Israel and lost the other half of Palestine. (39)

George Habash believes that the Palestinians cannot achieve their objectives until social and political revolutions occur in most of the Arab world. The group has insisted that there is to be no dealing with the enemy and although the PFLP is quite

38. The six major groups within the PLO are Fatah, (nationalist, independentist), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Marxist), Sa'iqa (pro-Syrian pan-Arabist), the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Marxist), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (Marxist), and the Arab Liberation Front (pro-Iraqi pan-Arabist). Smaller resistance groups within the PLO are the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (pro-Syrian), which has never had a seat on the Executive Committee and the Palestine Liberation Front (pro-Iraqi), which had a seat in 1983. The Communist party was given a seat on the Executive Committee in 1987.

39. John W Amos, Palestinian Resistance: Organization of a Nationalist Movement (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980), 77.

critical of "imperialistic" Arab states, the group is willing to associate with "non-reactionary" regimes such as Libya, South Yeman and Algeria. The PFLP was formed in 1967 by combining three smaller groups. Two of these three groups, the Heroes of Return and the National Front for the Liberation of Palestine, were closely affiliated with the Marxist Arab nationalist movement. Because the PFLP's heritage is in the Arab national movement, the group believes that a social revolution in much of the Arab world is needed before Palestinians can restore their rights.

Quite on the contrary to Fatah, which sees no value in describing the shape and detail of Palestine after its liberation, the PFLP bases its struggle on a Marxist ideology and as a result of its idealism the group seems quite inflexible. While Fatah has not described the type of society that it wishes to create in class terms, the PFLP is quite concerned with the social context of the revolution. Although Fatah seems to be relatively flexible in this respect, the PFLP appears to be so constrained by Marxism and the pan-Arab revolution that it is unwilling to alter its platform for a more pragmatic, progressive and moderate policy. The Popular Front's idealism is clearly represented in the following statement made by a PFLP representative:

The future state of Palestine after the liberation will be run according to Marxist-Leninist principles. There will be a Marxist-Leninist party and the PFLP will be the leader of the revolution. This fight for the liberation of Palestine will take another 20 to 30 years, and after the revolution everything will be different. Not only will Palestine be free from Zionism, but Lebanon and Jordan will be free from reaction, and Syria and Iraq from petit bourgeoisie. They will be transformed in a

truly socialist sense and united. Palestine will be part of a Marxist-Leninist Arabia. (40)

The PFLP is not the only group in the PLO that is committed to a Marxist ideology. Two smaller groups which came about as a result of a split in the PFLP are the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command. The PDFLP (or DFLP) split from the PFLP because it saw the PFLP as too right wing. The DFLP takes its Marxism very seriously and is probably the most left of all of the groups within the PLO. Similar to the PFLP, the DFLP believes that Palestine will be liberated after a revolution occurs in the rest of the Arab world. "The victory of the Palestine liberation movement over the Zionist enemy" a DFLP spokesman stated, "depends on victory over imperialism in the Arab region." (41) But while it is radical in its ideology, the DFLP enjoys support in Palestinian community and has a relatively moderate attitude towards Israelis, frequently leading the PLO in moderating its policies towards Israel.

The other spin-off of the PFLP, is the PFLP-GC, a group that does not have significant influence over PLO policies. The PFLP-GC is probably the most militant group in the organization as it has traditionally been opposed to any political settlement of the conflict. The leader of the group, Ahmad Jibril, is a Palestin-

40. William B Quandt, *The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 108.

41. Riad N El-Rayyes and Dunia Nahas, *Guerrillas for Palestine* (Beirut: An-Nahar Press Services, 1974), 39.

ian officer from the Syrian army who often rejects PNC decisions and wishes to concentrate on the armed struggle. While the group is critical of the commando groups that affiliate themselves with Arab countries, the group itself receives aid from Syria and Libya. A PFLP-GC spokesman has complained that "The resistance movement has become a testing ground for the various Arab regimes." (42) The PFLP-GC's criticisms are by no means inaccurate.

Pan-Arabism has always played a significant role in Palestinian politics and in the post-1967 era the Arab states continued to support the PLO. Even though pan-Arabism had lost much of its appeal after the Arab defeat in 1967, the PLO could not operate outside of Arab influence, because the organization could not very well accept the support of the Arab states while at the same time refusing their guidance. As a result, the Arab states were able to use support for the PLO to pursue their own interests. Arab influence is clearly demonstrated by the fact that groups directly under the control of the Arab states are able to affect PLO policy and even the leaders of the most influential group, Fatah, act carefully so as not to insult the Arab states in their calls for independence.

Many of the Arab states would like to alter the goals of the PLO so that they could correspond with their own. The threat that a strong and united movement would pose to the Arab states has

42. Ibid., 44.

motivated Arab rulers to limit the unity and independence of the movement. Arab influence has helped to prevent any single group from determining the policies of the organization, so that while Arab support has kept the PLO alive, pan-Arab rhetoric has also made it possible for the Arab states to justify their meddlesome politics and to restrain PLO policy makers.

There are a few groups within the PLO that are puppets of Arab states, created by Arab states to protect their own interests. Sa'iqa, a Syrian puppet, was created in the 1960's out of Palestinians in the Syrian Ba'th party. In the liberation of Palestine Sa'iqa members argue that a revolution in the Arab world is necessary and they believe that the revolution will result in a new Arab society that will be socialist. A Sa'iqa representative has insisted that "neither the Palestinians alone nor any part of the resistance movement are entitled to determine on their own a solution for the fate of Palestine after victory."

(43) But Sa'iqa's ties to Syria have often made its policies unpopular among Palestinians, as in 1976 when Sa'iqa supported Syrian military intervention against the PLO in Lebanon.

Another Arab puppet in the PLO is the Arab Liberation Front, and as its name makes clear, the group is more concerned with the Arab rather than the Palestinian nature of the struggle. At the time of its creation an ALF statement declared that the struggle was becoming too exclusively Palestinian oriented. The ALF

43. cited in William Quandt, *Palestinian Nationalism: Its Political and Military Dimensions*, 69.

follows the policies of the Iraqi Ba'ath party and it was created in an effort to counter Syrian influence in the PLO. However, the ALF is much less influential than the Syrian puppet Sa'iga. A notably high number of its members are not Palestinians and ALF has a weak representation in the occupied territories and the refugee camps.

A few generalizations can be made about the direction that the Palestinian movement took after the 1967 defeat. As an internal look at the PLO demonstrates, the PLO houses a variety of ideological beliefs and the majority of groups within the PLO see the struggle for Palestine in a socialist context. After 1967 all of the commando groups were able to agree on two things; the goal of an independent Palestinian state and the armed struggle as the best way to achieve this goal. But beyond agreement on these two ideas, the various groups within the PLO were quite divided in their ideology and their support.

The most influential group within the PLO, Fatah, emphasizes the importance of Palestinian independence in their own affairs and most of the groups in the PLO have spoken out against colonialism and Arab reactionary regimes. But even though Arab influence was reduced significantly after 1967, the PLO was by no means independent of the Arab states because they depended on the Arabs for finances and a territorial base due to the fact that Israel occupied all of mandate Palestine. While the various groups disagreed on the role of the Arab states in the Palestinian struggle, all of the groups did agree on the fragmentation of

the Arab world. The Marxists attempted to overcome this fragmentation with a social revolution in the Arab world, while Fatah wished to be independent of Arab politics. So while 1967 marked a change in the direction of the Palestinian movement, there was also some continuity in the movement in the post-1967 period. Regardless of how much some of the commando groups may have wanted to be self-reliant, in the post-1967 period the Arab states continued to be important actors in Palestinian affairs.

As with earlier organizations, the PLO called for an end to Zionist rule in Palestine so that Palestinians could exercise their right to self-determination. They linked the Palestinian struggle with the struggle of all oppressed peoples of the world. The Zionists were perceived as having colonial aims in the stirring phase, and later the state of Israel was viewed as a colonial occupation. In spite of Israel's permanence and international support, the commando groups felt that they would eventually be successful in defeating Israel.

However, the goal of destroying the state of Israel and establishing an independent Palestinian state in all of mandate Palestine via the armed struggle was unrealistic in that it required capabilities much beyond the organization's resources. While the PLO had gained some independence and was sure of their basic goal and how it was to be obtained, the organization was unaware of its limitations. Gradually, changes did occur that took Israel's permanence and the limits of Arab support into account and these changes eventually began to alter some of the

fundamentals of the Palestinian national movement. Pan-Arabism was to become even more painfully disillusioning and burdensome and some groups in the PLO began to adopt attitudes that contradicted the PLO's position that Israel was a colonial settlement that must eventually be defeated.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE POLITICS OF COMPROMISE

After the 1967 war, all of the Palestinian commando groups agreed that the Arab world in its present state was too divided for pan-Arabism to succeed. The PLO, nevertheless, remained influenced by Arab states and many of the commando groups assigned an important role to the Arab states in the struggle to regain Palestine. However, in the decades after 1967, the fragmentation of the Arab world made the possibility for a pan-Arab revolution less realistic. Similarly, the reality of Israel's existence gradually led the PLO to question its policy that perceived Israel as a colonial settlement that was to be eliminated.

The highly idealistic PLO that expressed its goals in the covenant of 1968 demanded the destruction of the state of Israel by means of the armed struggle. However, this goal has gradually been toned down so that the covenant has been violated by several of the PLO's official and unofficial policies. A number of factors have led some groups to conclude that Israel cannot be defeated militarily and that a political solution that accepts Israel's existence could perhaps bring better results. The

"moderates" led by Yasser Arafat, have expressed a willingness to consider coexistence with Israel and in fact Yasser Arafat has said on many occasions that he would be willing to set up a Palestinian state in any territory: "[e]ven just in Jericho, if that were all they would give me." (44) This increased pragmatism, which contrasts with Palestinian organizations which have traditionally adopted an all or nothing policy, has gradually shifted the nature of Palestinian nationalism from refusal to compromise. In the final phase of Palestinian nationalism a policy of coexistence with Israel has evolved, being formalized at the nineteenth meeting of the PNC. By altering its policies the moderates were to face severe criticism from within the PLO as they challenged some of the ideological foundations that have been at the centre of the movement since the stirring phase.

One of the PLO's first steps at moderation was with regards to the Jews of Israel. The original PLO under Ahmad Shugairy called for the destruction of Israel and its inhabitants and the PLO covenant of 1968 stated that only "Jews who were normally resident in Palestine up to the beginning of the Zionist invasion are Palestinians." (45) Because the Jews were believed to be colonialists, it was felt that colonialism could only come to an end when the Jewish immigrants left Palestine. However, PLO positions continued to change until provisions were made for the

44. cited in Helena Cobban, *The Palestine Liberation Organization: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 18.

45. Yehoshafat Harkabi, *The Palestinian Covenant*, 120.

rights of Jews, Christians and Muslims in a future Palestinian state. At the fifth PNC meeting in February of 1969 the PNC accepted the idea of a secular democratic state and in 1970 Yasser Arafat said there could be

a democratic, non-Zionist, secular state where we would all live in peace and equality as we did for thousands of years. If the Zionists would accept this principle, we could share power on a democratic basis. We would not insist on having an Arab majority. (46)

This was a significant step because the PLO accepted the right of those people who they believed had established a state in Palestine by conquest, to remain in Palestine with equal rights after liberation.

Statements were never made, however, that accepted Israel's existence or suggested a partition of Palestine. Allowing the Jews to remain in a future Palestinian state was one thing, but accepting a partition of the land that they felt was uniquely their own was quite another. In the early 1970's Fatah, generally believed to be the most pragmatic group in the PLO, was still rejecting the idea of a West Bank state alongside Israel and a Fatah spokesman insisted that "[t]he condition, sine qua non of the new Palestine involves the destruction of the political, economic and military foundations of the chauvinist racist

46. "Palestine: A Case of Right v. Right," Time Magazine (December 21 1970), 18.

colonial state." (47) A policy of moderation and acceptance of the state of Israel was considered to be nothing short of national treason by the commando groups because this would mean accepting a colonial state, a compromise that a national liberation movement which saw its struggle in the same context as Algeria and black Africa, could theoretically never consider.

Since the armed struggle was believed to be the best way to mobilize the masses and to liberate Palestine from Zionism, the PLO required a territorial base near Israel from which to carry out its struggle. Guerrilla groups such as Fatah had used Jordanian territory for this purpose in the late 1960's. PLO raids into Israel brought harsh Israeli retaliation into Jordan, often at Jordan's expense. When the PLO's presence in Jordan, which had literally developed into a state within a state, began to threaten the stability of the Jordanian regime, King Hussein moved to suppress PLO operations, making it clear that he would no longer tolerate PLO military raids from his territory. September of 1970, "Black September" as it has come to be known by Palestinians, involved a battle between the PLO and the Jordanian army. The battle destroyed the PLO's most significant base of operations against Israel. In so doing, Black September had a dramatic effect on the PLO, as it confirmed the PLO's vulnerability due to its dependence on the Arab states, whose support was clearly limited.

47. cited in Irene Gendzier "The Palestinian Revolution, the Jews, and Other Matters," New Middle East (January 1971), 40.

The PLO, in need of a territorial base as a substitute for Jordan, established itself in Lebanon and the weakness of the Lebanese government prevented a confrontation similar to Black September. However, the need for a secure base was a serious concern among PLO officials, and when the Arab states failed to liberate any Arab territory in the October War of 1973, the likelihood of the armed struggle achieving the long term goal of a secular state in all of Palestine was being questioned by some of the groups within the PLO.

After the October War President Sadat of Egypt began to doubt the value of the armed struggle and he expressed support for a political solution to the conflict. Because Egypt played a significant role in PLO politics, Sadat was able to influence PLO positions. He seemed willing to resolve the conflict with Israel and in 1975 Sadat signed an agreement in which he promised not to use force against Israel. In the years following the October War efforts were made by Sadat to have an international peace conference which was to include the confrontation states and the PLO. The purpose of the conference, Sadat said, would be "to discuss the final solution and lasting peace in order to carry out UN resolutions which are linked to one another, ie. a return to the 1967 borders and the establishment of a Palestinian state." (48) Sadat was willing to accept Israel's existence as well as a Palestinian state in the occupied territories and he

48. cited in Moshe Shemesh, *The Palestinian Entity 1959-1974* (London: Frank Cass, 1988), 275.

wanted the PLO to adopt a more realistic goal, rather than pursuing its all or nothing policy.

Setbacks such as Black September and the Arab defeat in 1973 made the more pragmatic officials in the PLO question their all or nothing policies and they became increasingly aware of the limitations of Arab support. Groups such as Fatah and the Democratic Front began to speak of a political settlement to the conflict. However, moderation within the PLO ranks was to proceed gradually and ambiguously, because while the armed struggle may not have been the best way to liberate Palestine, it was the best way to maintain internal cohesion in the PLO, and while an elimination of Israel may have been unrealistic, it was still considered by most groups in the PLO to be the only fair outcome of the conflict.

The leader of the Popular Democratic front for the Liberation of Palestine, Naif Hawatmeh, was the first to propose the idea of Palestinian national authority on the West Bank and Gaza and he did so as early as 1973. In a statement he made in the Soviet Union, Hawatmeh reaffirmed "the absolute right of the Palestinian people in the West Bank of Jordan and the Gaza Strip to determine their own future." (49) The DFLP was heavily criticised for its suggestion. Criticism came from Arab nationalists in the Arab Liberation Front, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the General Command. But Hawatmeh was not

49. cited in Alain Gresh, *The PLO: The Struggle Within* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1988), 139.

persuaded by those who accused him of betraying the Arab cause because he believed that the need for a Palestinian homeland should take priority over pan-Arab ideas and he believed that the PLO should realize the limits of Arab support:

Yes we are Arabs: but we are, at the same time, Palestinians. Just as every Arab people has full right to an independent national existence, so the Palestinian people too has a full right to an independent national existence. (50)

While the proposed idea of national authority in the occupied territories was flatly rejected by several groups in the PLO, Fatah, Sa'iqa and DFLP believed that it was in the PLO's best interest to adopt this policy. Fatah emphasized the need for a secure Palestinian territory, as Salah Khalaf, one of the original leaders of Fatah, argued that "until we achieve the strategic aim we need a safe base, whose fate should not be similar to the one in Jordan." (51) At the twelfth meeting of the PNC in June of 1974 Fatah, Sa'iqa and the DFLP succeeded in having a phased plan adopted. The plan was known as the ten point plan and although it stressed that national authority in the occupied territories was to be merely a transitional program, it was significant in that it was the first time that the PNC had ever considered a partition of Palestine. The plan called for "a Palestinian national authority in any Palestinian areas liberated

50. cited in Ibid., 140.

51. cited in Moshe Shemesh, The Palestinian Entity, 289.

from Israeli control." (52)

The PNC ten point plan was sufficiently vague to be adopted by an overwhelming majority in the PNC, as only four of the 187 members rejected the plan. There was, however, some opposition to the plan. George Habash was especially outspoken about the ten point plan or anything that implied recognition of Israel and he argued that the realization of a secular democratic Palestinian state could only come about as a result of the armed struggle. Habash pleaded with the supporters of this plan who, in his view, had abandoned the principles of their struggle:

Have we realized that this state will be squeezed between Israel on the one side and the reactionary Jordanian regime on the other? Have we realized that this state would be the result of an Arab and international gift? This solution will be the "final solution" to the Middle East problem.

Habash continued, arguing that

An essential contradiction will exist between the state and the Palestinian masses from the 1948 areas whose vital questions will not be solved by this state. (53)

Habash believed that if the PLO wished to be consistent in liberating Palestine through an armed struggle, then an interim political solution would be futile. Habash and those that supported him felt that the principles of the covenant should not be

52. cited in Helena Cobban, "The PLO in the mid-1980's: between the Gun and the Olive Branch," International Journal 38 no. 4 (Autumn 1983), 643.

53. cited in Alain Gresh, The PLO: The Struggle Within, 148.

compromised to achieve part of Palestine and the all or nothing strategy would bring better results in the long run. Because the PFLP is rigid in its ideology, it has found it difficult to alter its policies towards more realistic and progressive goals and as further attempts at moderation were made by Fatah, opposition was voiced by Habash. In effect, the two leaders, Arafat and Habash, were debating two forms of Palestinian nationalism. Arafat was pushing for a compromise while Habash wanted to pursue traditional holistic goals. But regardless of Habash's opposition to the ten point plan, Fatah and Arafat were moving towards altering some of the PLO's traditional policies.

In reaction to Yasser Arafat's own personal interpretation of the ten point plan, in which he seemed to overlook the transitional nature of the plan, (54) a number of groups expressed opposition to Arafat, arguing that his political strategy was bound to fail. The PFLP believed that Arafat was compromising the principles of the movement and its leaders insisted that his political strategy will not succeed in attracting concessions from Israel. The PFLP-GC believed that a policy that suggested anything less than the liberation of all of Palestine was, for the liberation movement, a "defeatist solution". (55) Together,

54. Shortly after the twelfth meeting of the PNC, for example, Arafat announced: "Now, at the present stage of the struggle and in the conditions that have taken shape in the Middle East, we have decided to set up an independent Palestinian authority in any liberated part of the territory." cited in "Yasser Arafat on the Problems of the Palestine Movement," New Times (August 1974), 11.

55. cited in Alain Gresh, The PLO: The Struggle Within, 164.

in September of 1974, the PFLP, the PFLP-GC, the ALF and a small group, the Front of the Palestine Popular Struggle, formed the Central Council of the Rejection Front, on the grounds that the PLO was deviating from its proper course. The creation of the Front formalized a partition in the PLO that was to persist throughout the 1970's and 1980's. A division existed between those that were willing to consider a political solution to the conflict and were satisfied with a West Bank state and those who supported the armed struggle, held to the covenant and wished to liberate all of Palestine from its "colonial occupiers."

While the reaction from within the PLO to Arafat's interpretation of the ten point plan was problematic, the reaction from many parts of the world community to the PLO's slight moderation in policy was generally positive. After the adoption of the ten point plan the Arab states appeared to be more comfortable with the PLO's plans for a Palestinian homeland and at the Rabat conference in November of 1974 the PLO was given full authority by the Arab leaders as well as backing from them to form their own state. Although King Hussein was reluctant to accept the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians, a resolution was passed at the Arab Summit which asserted

the Palestinian people's right to establish its own independent national authority under the leadership of the PLO-the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people-in all liberated Palestinian territory." (56)

56. cited in Ibid., 179.

A further victory came for the PLO when Yasser Arafat was invited to speak at the General Assembly of the United Nations in November of 1974. In Arafat's speech to the General Assembly he expressed the PLO's traditional policy when he spoke of the PLO's dream of a secular democratic state. "The Palestine of tomorrow will include all Jews living there who choose to remain to live in peace and without discrimination." (57) In his speech Arafat made a clear distinction between the Jew and the Zionist, insisting that Zionism was racist and imperialist. "The Palestinian revolution is not aimed at the Jew but at racist Zionism and aggression. The goal of the struggle is for Jew, Christian and Moslem to live in equality." (58) Instead of giving any hint of a partition plan or of any compromise with Israel, Arafat argued that the UN partitioned in 1947 a territory that it had no right to divide. The policies that Arafat expressed at the UN, rejecting a West Bank state and equating Zionism with colonialism, were policies that could keep the fragile PLO united. The twelfth PNC had given Arafat enough flexibility to express the PLO's traditional line at the UN.

After the question of Palestine was discussed at the United Nations, resolution 3236 was passed which recognized "the right of the Palestinian people to regain its rights by all means in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the

57. "Question of Palestine," UN Monthly Chronicle (December 1974), 82.

58. Ibid., 81.

United Nations." (59) In addition the PLO was given observer status at the UN. But while the PLO had achieved international recognition, this recognition was mainly from third world and socialist countries. The PLO lacked support in the Western world; most notably, it lacked American recognition.

Difficulties in judging the intentions of PLO policies were a result of internal struggles and conflicting statements. The "moderates", the name given to those groups who were shifting their policy to political action rather than military, were aware that the PLO had never been a serious threat to Israel's stability and they believed in the need to question the success of the armed struggle. They were bitterly opposed by the Rejection Front and the leader of the Rejectionists, George Habash, called the moderates "Arab deviationists" who had been misnamed moderates. Habash labelled the moderates rightists and argued that "[t]his current is captive of its class affiliations." (60)

The Rejection Front's accusations that the moderates were abandoning their obligations to the Arab world and compromising the principles of the revolution, were unable to reverse PLO policies. In 1977 ALF and PFLP-GC rejoined the Executive Committee. However, tensions were to persist in the PLO's internal structure between those who wished to moderate their policy and

59. cited in J.R. Gainsborough, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Brookfield: Gower, 1986), 191.

60. "George Habash: The Future of the Palestinian National Movement," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Summer 1985), 5-7.

those who did not. The underlying conflict was based on whether the PLO should consider accepting Israel's existence and what type of strategy would be the most successful in achieving a Palestinian state.

In 1977 and 1978, the PLO suffered serious setbacks. In November of 1977 President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt travelled to Israel and spoke in the Knesset about Arab-Israeli peace. There were many angry reactions throughout the Arab world to Sadat's visit because it was seen as a willingness on Sadat's part to desert the Arabs, especially the Palestinians, and negotiate a separate peace with Israel. By taking steps towards unilateral peace and by going to Jerusalem, the PLO felt that Sadat had abandoned them and had enhanced Israel's claims to Jerusalem.

In March of 1978 Israel invaded southern Lebanon, the country in which the PLO had built its most extensive infrastructure since its evacuation from Jordan in 1970. As Menachem Begin stated, Israel's goal was to "cut off the evil arm of terrorism." (61) While the operation may have succeeded in dispersing PLO troops in Lebanon, it failed in achieving its objective of eliminating the PLO and the organization continued to use Lebanese territory for its operations against Israel.

In yet a further blow to the PLO, in September of 1978 Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel. The PLO was distanced from one

61. cited in Bernard Gwertzman, "US Seeks Pullout by Israeli Troops," New York Times (March 18 1978), 1.

of its most valuable allies and the Arab world isolated Egypt for its move. Although the Camp David agreement referred to Palestinian rights and called for Palestinian participation in a settlement, the PLO saw it as a huge defeat because the organization believed that Sadat had no right to negotiate for the Palestinians and he had made too many concessions, receiving only ambiguous guarantees for the Palestinians in return. The agreement also made the possibility of a future Arab-Israeli war to regain Palestine unlikely, since without Egypt an Arab defeat was insured. Remarking on the Camp David agreement, Hawatmeh pointed out that the failure of the moderates in the PLO to extract concessions from Israel could work to the benefit of the Rejectionists. "Sadat's cowardice and Israel's obstinate refusal to contemplate a compromise... are driving us ineluctably towards the positions of our opponents in the Rejection Front." (62)

In failing to eliminate PLO activities in Lebanon to their satisfaction, Israel launched a full scale invasion of Lebanon in June of 1982, the objective this time being to "get rid of the PLO once and for all." (63) Between 1971 and 1982 the PLO had built a significant presence in Lebanon and it had close relations with the Palestinian refugees. But Israel's invasion all the way to Beirut succeeded in forcing the PLO to evacuate Lebanon, dispersing it across nine Arab countries. The forced evacuation of Lebanon was a huge blow to the PLO because it had

62. cited in Alain Gresh, *The PLO: The Struggle Within*, 215.

63. cited in Abdullah Frangi, *The PLO and Palestine* (Frankfurt: Zed Books Ltd., 1983), 198.

been given considerable political freedom in that country. The PLO had lost yet another border state from which it could conduct its operations. Since the PLO had previously lost Jordan as a place of operations, and because the Egypt would not allow the PLO to conduct raids into Israel from its territory, the PLO became dangerously dependent on Syria, dangerously because President Hafez el-Assad did not agree with Arafat on a number of PLO policies, most notably Arafat's calls for non-intervention in PLO affairs.

The moderates in the PLO ranks believed that the war in Lebanon was a final indication that the military struggle was no longer a sensible option. While the PLO may have been comfortable waiting for the liberation of Palestine before it was evacuated from Beirut, after the Lebanon war this policy of waiting no longer seemed rational. The PLO was now dispersed across the Arab world so that the armed struggle had in practice been eliminated. This was a serious problem because while the moderates may have been well aware that the armed struggle could not bring about a collapse of Israel, the armed struggle remained the best way to maintain unity in the PLO. As a result, after their evacuation of Lebanon, the PLO was to face the challenge of how it was to preserve itself as a national liberation movement.

The post-Beirut era displayed the most extensive efforts on the part of the moderates to abandon past policies and to consider other ways which the PLO could achieve an independent Palestinian state. When Yasser Arafat was re-elected unanimously

at the PNC meeting in 1983, PNC resolutions were sufficiently ambiguous to allow him room to maneuver. For example, the PNC did not reject the Reagan plan which called for peace on the basis of resolution 242. Although the plan did not favour an independent Palestinian state and did not allow the PLO to participate in negotiations, the PNC called the plan inadequate. In addition, the PNC accepted the Fez plan. The Fez plan, adopted by the Arab states and the PLO in September of 1982, called for the right of all states in the region, including an independent Palestinian state, to live in peace.

Arafat made a number of political moves in an effort to improve the PLO's desperate situation. Arafat's diplomacy included, for example, a written statement to an American congressman expressing a willingness to abide by "all the United Nations resolutions concerning Palestine." (64) This implied recognition of resolutions that the PLO had always rejected, including 181 of 1947 (partition), as well as 242 of 1967. Arafat also expressed a willingness to formally accept Resolution 242, knowing that this would have placed an enormous burden on Israel. However, Arafat was not willing to take this risk without getting anything in return, knowing too that this recognition would have placed an enormous burden on the PLO, possibly causing another split in the organization.

64. cited in Eric Rouleau, "The Future of the PLO," Foreign Affairs (Fall 1983), 146.

In further efforts at improving the PLO's situation, contacts with Egypt were renewed, and in 1983 Arafat met with Israeli peace activists, a move that the rejectionists called "national treason." (65) While the disgust that the rejectionists expressed towards diplomacy may not have surprised Arafat, a more significant repudiation of Arafat's moves occurred within his own group. In April of 1983 Fatah's Central Committee rejected Arafat's proposed agreement with King Hussein of Jordan which was based on Reagan's plan to accept Resolution 242 and a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation in peace talks.

Just as attempts at moderating PLO policies had split the PLO in 1974, a group of rejectionists emerged from within the PLO in reaction to Arafat's new attempts at moderation. This time however, Arafat had to face opposition from within his own group. Fatah's dissidents, sponsored by Syria and Libya, spoke out against Arafat's authoritarian style of leadership and they demanded a more equal distribution of power. The dissidents were opposed to the ten point plan of 1974, they were opposed to the Reagan plan and the Fez plan and they wanted to break off relations with conservative Arab regimes such as Jordan and Egypt. They wished to resume the armed struggle, adhere to the covenant that Arafat had violated on numerous occasions and improve relations with non-reactionary regimes such as Syria, Libya and South Yemen. The dissidents within Fatah along with the

65. cited in Emile Sahliyah, *The PLO After the Lebanon War* (London: Westview Press, 1986), 105.

PFLP-GC and Sa'iqā called for an end to Arafat's practice of diplomacy without PLO approval. They believed that time was on their side, making a compromise unnecessarily.

Two alliances were formed in opposition to Arafat's policies. One was made up of the PFLP-GC, Sa'iqā, the dissidents from Fatah and the Popular Struggle Front who formed the Palestine National Salvation Front. The National Salvation Front, rejecting a political solution to the conflict and rejecting any recognition of Israel, preferred the military option and they had no desire to negotiate with "imperialists." A second coalition, the Democratic Alliance, was made up of the PFLP, the DFLP and the Communists and they agreed with the National Salvation Front in their opposition to Arafat. However, the members of the Democratic Alliance were "loyalists" because they criticised Arafat's leadership but were loyal to the PLO. Although both the Democratic Alliance and the National Salvation Front challenged Arafat's leadership, Arafat was able to minimize the role of the rebels and he succeeded in portraying them as clients of Syria. Clearly lacking the support that Arafat enjoyed, (66) those in opposi-

66. Fatah and Arafat are well known to have considerable support among Palestinians in the occupied territories. Although polls taken under the circumstances that exist in the West Bank always risk inaccuracy, numerous polls indicate majority support for Arafat and Fatah. For example, a poll sponsored by the newspaper Al-Fajr, Newsday and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in September 1986, at the time when Arafat's leadership was being challenged, found that when Palestinians in the occupied territories were asked to choose their preferred leader from among Yasser Arafat, George Habash, Abu Musa, Ahmad Jibril, Naif Hawatmeh, as well as others, seventy-nine percent chose Arafat, while just over five percent chose Habash. See "Poll Results," Al-Fajr (September 12 1986), 1.

tion to his leadership were unable to create a credible alternative to him and they were left politically bankrupt.

In April of 1987 the PNC met for the first time since 1984 and although Sa'iqa and the PFLP-GC, the two groups most closely affiliated with Syria, did not attend the meeting, the PFLP and the DFLP did attend. The communists, who have accepted the principle of a West Bank state since 1974, were given a seat on the Executive Committee and the PNC called for relations with "democratic forces in Israel" that were against "Israeli occupation and expansion." (67) The PNC meeting also declared Arafat's accord with King Hussein, which called for a confederation with Jordan, to be null and void and it restated its opposition to Resolution 242. Thus the PNC moderated its policies slightly, by allowing for negotiations with Israelis, but at the same time it adhered to its tradition of rejecting Resolution 242. The fragile PLO had been reunited.

Nineteen eighty-seven was also the year that the Intifada began in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Intifada attracted world attention to the Palestinian problem, creating an opportunity that Arafat and the PLO could not afford to miss. The PLO was originally surprised by the Intifada and it forced the organization to come up with a clear program that West Bankers would find acceptable. In failing to achieve this the PLO could very well have been forced to stand back while West Bank leaders

67. cited in Walid Khalidi, "Towards Peace in the Holy Land," Foreign Affairs (Spring 1988), 786.

became the spokesmen for Palestinians in the occupied territories.

The Intifada also demonstrated that there has been an increased radicalization of the Palestinian population in the territories. The Islamic group Hamas, for example, which organizes strikes and demonstrations of its own, is opposed to any compromise with Israel. Hamas is unwilling to accept a two state solution and it calls for a liberation of Palestine through the armed struggle. The group's popularity has made a division within the Palestinian community evident. This division seems to exist between the secular Palestinian nationalists and the Islamic activists, and it makes any PLO attempt at setting a peace process in motion even more difficult.

The PLO, attempting to change the political balance in its favour and forced to make a concrete statement about its policy towards Israel, met in November of 1988 and passed a number of resolutions in an effort to speed up the negotiating process. The nineteenth PNC meeting brought to a climax what had been a gradual process of moderation over a number of years as several resolutions were passed at this meeting in opposition to long standing PLO policies. The PNC renounced the use of terrorism, excluding the year long uprising, and the Council voted 253 in favour, 46 against with 10 abstentions to accept Resolution 242, thus making recognition of Israel implicit. The acceptance of Resolution 242 was a major achievement for the moderates in the PLO because traditionally the PLO has been strongly opposed to

the resolution, formally rejecting it up to the eighteenth PNC in 1987. Arafat and the moderates quite clearly initiated one of the greatest risks to the unity of the PLO since the birth of the organization.

However, this relatively bold move on the part of the moderates was not made without serious objections, as some groups clearly stated their opposition to the PNC's new policy. For example, the PFLP-GC boycotted the PNC session and condemned the results. Ahmed Jibril, the leader of the group, said "[t]his is a black day in our history. Only force can give the Arabs their rights." (68) While the leader of the PFLP was not as vigorous in his criticism of the new policy, George Habash also expressed reservations about accepting Resolution 242, arguing that the PLO was making too many concessions too soon. Habash felt that it was unwise to recognize Israel or to accept Resolution 242 prior to an international peace conference. However, Habash also stated that the PFLP had every intention of remaining in the PLO regardless of the outcome of the meeting and after the meeting he was bold enough to state that he was sure that "the politics of moderation would bring better results than the politics of principle." (69) Habash's pursual of the "politics of principle", as one PNC member noted, appeared to be in the past, because those who supported his position were clearly in the

68. John Bierman, "A Major New Step," Macleans (November 28 1988), 24.

69. Ibid., 24.

minority: "There was a sad nostalgia for what he represented, since in effect by voting against him we were taking leave of the past as embodied in his defiant gestures." (70)

The PNC had not only voted against what Habash had stood for, but it had also voted in favour of changing some of its most cherished principles, as the Council formally contradicted its covenant with regards to all the passages that dealt with the partition of Palestine and Palestinian statehood. The PNC implicitly accepted Israel, the state that was formed by the colonial settlers that Palestinian organizations had been opposed to since the formation of their demands in the stirring phase. The PNC had, in effect, officially rejected pan-Arabism and it had abandoned its anti-colonial policies towards Israel, accepting the existence of a Jewish state in Mandate Palestine. The PLO formalized what had been a trend towards moderation over several years.

Yasser Arafat repeated the new policy of his organization at the General Assembly in Geneva on December 13 1988. At this meeting Arafat reminded the Assembly of the PLO's dream of a secular democratic state in all of Palestine that he spoke of at his first appearance before the General Assembly in 1974. However, Arafat said that the PLO had become aware of the gap between reality and the dream of this state. Although his speech was in many ways ambiguous, Arafat spoke of the equality

70. Edward Said, "Arafat's Agenda," *New Statesman and Society* (December 2 1988), 27.

of the two parties in the conflict and he called for Israel's withdrawal from all Arab territories it occupied in 1967. With respect to the United Nations partition plan of 1947 Arafat did not express opposition to the plan itself, but rather, he was critical of the fact that it had only resulted in the creation of a Jewish state, Israel, although it called for the establishment of two states in Palestine. He insisted that the objectives of the entire resolution should be met and a Palestinian state should be created with the assistance of the United Nations.

In view of our belief in (the) international legitimacy and the vital role of the United Nations... actions (should) be undertaken to place our occupied Palestinian land under temporary United Nations supervision, and... international forces (should) be deployed there to protect our people and, at the same time, to supervise the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from our country. (7/11)

Arafat said that the PLO was eager to settle the conflict within the framework of an international conference for peace based on Resolutions 242 and 338.

In the General Assembly 104 members recognized the PNC's declaration of a Palestinian state which was made at the nineteenth meeting of the PNC and at the United Nations the official title of the Palestinian delegation was changed from the "PLO" to the "State of Palestine." An additional international reward occurred in response to Arafat's press conference on December 14

71. State of Palestine: Address of Mr. Yasser Arafat (Ottawa: Palestine Information Office, 1988), 10.

1988, at which he clearly stated that the PLO accepted Israel's existence and rejected the use of terrorism. As a result, the US government announced that it would be willing to open a dialogue with the PLO. Thus, by moderating its stand the PLO has once again gained increased recognition of its objectives.

While the PLO appears to be entering a new phase in its development, it is quite likely that the organization will have to face some internal problems in the future. The PLO is far from a united movement and just as a moderation in policies threatened the unity of the organization in 1974 and 1983, the new changes may once again threaten the unity of the PLO. The moderates are by no means free to set PLO policy and if the new initiatives prove to have little positive effect, groups that only reluctantly accepted the new policies may declare them a failure and abandon them for the traditional rejectionist line.

As Yasser Arafat takes further steps towards changing PLO policy, by declaring the PLO covenant "null and void", (72) for example, his initiatives may very well result in increased opposition to him and further splits in the PLO. What seems to be certain is that the traditional rejectionists will continue to oppose the diplomatic efforts that Arafat has made. However, it is highly unlikely that the PFLP-GC and Sa'iqā will be able to gain enough support to have their policies formally implemented. These groups lack support in the occupied territories and the

72. cited in James Markham, "France Receives Arafat," Herald Tribune (May 3 1989), 1.

camps and they are seen as puppets of Syria and Libya, two states that have demonstrated their limited support for Palestinians on many occasions. So while opposition to the new policies and to Arafat will continue, it is unlikely that the rejectionists will be seen as a viable alternative to Fatah and Arafat. The greatest success for the hard liners in the future is most likely to be their consistent ability to force the PLO to make ambiguous statements about its policies. Arafat will have to continue to be careful in the future when he speaks for his fragile organization.

## CONCLUSION

A study of the evolution of Palestinian nationalism reveals that the movement developed from rejection to compromise. In the past holistic goals were pursued and any alternative that involved a compromise with the Zionists was out of the question. The Palestine Liberation Organization inherited a tradition from past Palestinian organizations that perceived Jewish claims to land in Palestine to be inspired by colonial aims. As a result of this perception, a compromise that involved a surrender of land was always considered to be a violation of Palestinian rights. Equally so, a partition of Palestinian territory that the Palestinian Arabs felt was their own and distinctively Arab, was from the time of the British mandate, considered to be impossible.

In the 1970's and 1980's the PLO gradually adopted a policy of compromise and coexistence with Israel. In 1969 the PLO altered its policies to allow Jews who were willing to accept equal rights with Christians and Moslems to remain in Palestine after liberation. As the PLO suffered a number of serious defeats such as Black September, Egypt's peace treaty with Israel and Israel's invasion of Lebanon, Israel's permanence and the limits

of Arab support became increasingly apparent. It became clear to the pragmatic groups in the organization that the PLO's idea of a secular democratic state in all of Palestine was, under the existing circumstances, unlikely to be achieved in the near future and the moderates in the PLO believed that the organization had to adapt to this reality. A former PFLP rejectionist who converted to Fatah expressed the position of the moderates in the following way:

If the Israelis would accept the idea of living together with equal rights with Palestinians then we would form one big state, a more viable one probably. But since the Israelis have expressed clearly that they don't want that, the only realistic thing to do to attain peace is to have a two state solution. (73)

At the nineteenth meeting of the PNC the moderates succeeded in having a policy of compromise formally accepted. Even one of the traditional rejectionists, George Habash, expressed a willingness to try out the PLO's new policy.

It has been possible to divide the evolution of the Palestinian national movement into four basic periods. Under the British mandate traditional Palestinian society organized opposition to the British mandate and Zionist plans for a homeland in Palestine. From 1948 to 1967 Palestinians believed that Arab unity would help them regain Palestine. After the defeat of the Arab states in the Six Days War, Palestinian

73cited in Scott Macleod, "The New PLO," The New York Review of Books (April 13 1989), 44.

nationalism took on a modernizing character and the objective was for a secular democratic state in all of Palestine with equal rights for Jews, Christians and Moslems. The commando groups gained control of the PLO, expressing a militant line towards Israel and a desire to minimize Arab influence in Palestinian politics. But throughout the 1970's and 1980's the armed struggle began to lose its appeal to some groups in the PLO and each time these groups were able to moderate PLO policies, the organization was "rewarded" by the international community. In the final period in the development of Palestinian nationalism, the moderates in the PLO have altered PLO policies and made concessions that violate their traditional beliefs in an effort to preserve the organization and further its goals. However, if the moderates are to succeed in having their policies maintained, numerous obstacles remain. Opposition from groups such as the PFLP-GC and Sa'iqā is evident and the revival of Islamic fundamentalism among Palestinians in the occupied territories could prove to be a serious challenge for the PLO.

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