# Palestinian Representation and the Struggle for Statehood

Ammar Hijazi

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# Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own original work.

Ammar Hijazi
31 May 2010, New York, USA

# Acknowledgments

*To my parents who taught me how to love my homeland and take pride in being a Palestinian; to my wife for her boundless love, patience and support. I am also grateful to my colleagues at work; Ambassador Riyad Mansour for his support and understanding; my dear friend Feda Abdelahdi for her support and assistance; thanks too to my dear colleagues Nadya, Yussef, and Somaia for their support and encouragement. Last but not least, my gratitude goes to Ambassador Victor Camilleri, my mentor, for his valued advice and comments, which gave me the guidance, encouragement and enthusiasm to accomplish this important achievement.*

# Dedication

*To those who dedicated their lives and sacrificed selflessly for Palestine's freedom*

# Abstract

Palestinian national identity evolved as Palestinians came under the rule of a colonial power with an agenda whose aim contradicted their very existence as a nation. Quickly, Palestinian political activists realized that forming a uniting and unified representative body that could engage the international and regional players was a political and practical requirement for the achievement of their national aspirations. But with the formation of the first Palestinian representative body, the struggle for independence began and with it, the crucial battle for recognition.

Palestinian representation was greatly and negatively affected by competing regional and international players. These influences often translated into the potent danger of fragmentation. Hence achieving political independence for Palestinian representation was a crucial victory of evolved political thought. It also opened the door to regional and international recognition.

International powers have manipulated this issue several times in order to crush Palestinian aspirations and debilitate the efforts towards achieving statehood. This manipulation is easiest at times of internal division as it enables opponents of Palestinian aspirations to stunt efforts leading to their achievement. Hence, the onus of preserving Palestinian representation lies squarely on Palestinians as failing this strategic responsibility could indefinitely set back the national aspirations.

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# Forming a National Identity

Palestinian political activism began as the British mandate over Palestine started. The two were clearly heading on a collision course, as the interests and goals of both sides were diametrically opposite one another. Starting 1919, Palestinians understood the imminent threat posed by the British mandate and the Zionist project it unconditionally supported and endorsed.

This period also marked the early formations of the Palestinian national identity. As a people, Palestinians had the shared elements a people; united in its culture, history, heritage, and common identity. Yet until the late 1910's, Palestinians saw themselves in the wider context of Arab identity. This is in part because Palestine, despite its unique national identity, was always ruled as part of the Arab and Muslim spheres of rule at the time.

Palestinian political activism started sailing in very rough waters. The region as a whole was being reshaped by the new colonial powers; i.e. the British Empire and later on the French. The victors of World War I negotiated how and where to exercise their influence. New regional and international alliances were also being formed and it was difficult for this fledgling Palestinian national movement to catch up. There were joint interests between key players like the Al Saud and Hashemite families and the new world powers. But in Palestine, the new political formations had very limited regional and almost no international political experience, as they were still struggling to form a cohesive representative body.

*World Powers: Spreading Control through Appeasement, Political Maneuver*

To secure control over what it considered a strategically significant region, Britain sent out conflicting messages to the Arab and Zionist audiences, in effect buying time through appeasement of the interested players.

The British promises to the Arabs through the Hussein-MacMahon correspondence of 14 July 1915 preceded the now infamous Balfour Declaration[1] to the Zionist movement of 1917 and the Sykes-Picot agreement[2] with the French of May 1916, which were both implemented. In these two cases, the parties concerned enjoyed the advantage of political maneuverability, pressure, and experience – something the Arabs were unable to compete with collectively or individually. The course of events proved this beyond doubt.

*Facing Challenges with Limited Means, Experience*

To face these rising challenges, Palestinians tried to form political coalitions and representative bodies that could address their local needs and launch regional and international efforts to achieve their national aspirations. A number of bodies, Clubs, and parties were formed by Palestinian community leaders but many quickly withered away. The widest representation and strongest influence was captured by the Mu'tamar Al-Arabi

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[1]  *The Balfour Declaration (dated 2 November 1917) was a formal statement of policy by the British government made in a letter from Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Walter Rothschild stating that: His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors 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, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country (Wikipedia, 2010).*

[2]  *The Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916 was a secret agreement between the governments of the UK and France, with the assent of Imperial Russia, defining their respective spheres of influence and control in Western Asia after the expected downfall of the Ottoman Empire during World War I* (Wikipedia, 2010).

Al-Filistini (The Palestinian Arab Congress) because its position reflected the wider Palestinian national consensus.

The Palestinian Arab Congress (PAC) convened in Jerusalem early 1919, following the unveiling of the Balfour Declaration to the Zionist movement and the Sykes-Picot agreement between Britain and France. In the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917, the British government said it "view[ed] with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" and the Sykes-Picot agreement contradicted what Britain had promised the Arabs at large in the Hussein-MacMahon correspondence.[3] Hence, the Congress can be considered as the first internationally-motivated Palestinian political mobilization. It also came shortly after the beginning of the British occupation of Palestine.

Palestinian Muslim and Christian notables wanted the Congress to be a uniting political structure that represents the people and their political aspirations. During its 9-year lifespan, the Congress convened seven sessions in response to political developments. This Congress was also attempting to formulate the processes and laws that represent the majority of Palestinians.

In its first session, the Congress sent a memorandum to the Paris peace conference in which the Palestinians refused the Balfour Declaration and Zionist claims to Palestine as well as rejected all ideas or proposals of separation from Syria (Nafi, 1998).

At the time, a majority of the Congress supported the Syria incorporation policy, which was a reflection of the Palestinian perception of national identity at the time. Politicians pushing for unity with Syria believed such an alliance was vitally important as it provided Palestine with a regional back bone and ensured its political and regional depth. This was

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[3] From 14 July 1915 to 30 January 1916, Britain pledged that Palestine was included in the areas it was committed to see independent in the future (Ingrams, 1973).

also a position of practical significance as an Arab government was already established in Syria. There were also voices calling for Palestinian independence, albeit under British "protection". They did not form a sizeable voice though.

The backdrop of the Congress was an Allied Powers meeting in Paris, France, which culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, setting the stage for the formation of the League of Nations. The British banned a Palestinian delegation from the first Congress to attend the Conference, although it allowed a delegation from the Zionist movement to attend. Insisting on engaging the Paris Peace Conference, the Congress sent the Paris Conference a memorandum on 3 February 1919 (Ayyad, 1999).

This memorandum marks the first attempt by a Palestinian representative body to politically engage the international front. The Congress made a sincere effort to communicate and find a common language with an outside world that was already exhibiting hostility towards Palestinians. It requested independence using the language of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's principles, particularly his support for the right of self-determination of peoples previously subject to Turkey, like the Palestinians (Little, 2003).

But this gesture was an incomplete effort to forge an alliance of ideas and it fell far short of a political maneuver capable of maturing into a more effective step on a tactical or strategic level. This was partly due to the insufficient experience and political immaturity of Palestinian representatives.

### Fading Hopes, False Promises

The Paris Peace Conference set up what was later called the Crane-King Commission, charged with studying conditions in the Turkish Empire with reference to possible mandates. But Britain and France stalled the Commission's, putting an embargo on its conclusions for three years (UNISPAL, 1919).

The commission recommended preserving the unity of Syria, placing it under one Mandatory Power, and making Emir Feisal head of the new united Syrian State. With regard to Palestine, the commission recommended serious modification to the Zionist program for Palestine, which it described as "extreme" (UNISPAL, 1919).

These recommendations could be seen as a diplomatic gain of the early Palestinian diplomatic efforts as they reflected the spirit of the petition the first Palestinian Congress had sent to the Paris Conference.

But Palestinian hopes of independence in uniting with Syria under King Faisal soon faded. Following the San Remo Conference, the French invaded Syria and toppled the newly proclaimed nationalist government on 23 July 1920.

This invasion was facilitated by the American retreat from the region and world stage at large. Hence, Britain and France snubbed earlier pledges and prepared to place the Sykes-Picot plan into effect by September 1919 (Boyle, 2001). The partitioning of the region was reaffirmed in the London Conference of February 1920 and the San Remo Conference of April 1920.

The San Remo Conference was particularly important. Aside from reaffirming the Balfour Declaration, it referred to Palestinians as 'non-Jewish communities' while urging the establishment of proper Jewish representation.

These major developments had a direct effect on the unfolding situation in Palestine, where the exposure of the Balfour Declaration and increased Jewish migration were fast fuelling heightened Palestinian tensions and frustrations.

In late April 1920, large-scale popular riots erupted across Palestine. It was the first significant expression of public frustration with British rule and its encouragement of mass Jewish migration to Palestine. The public had concluded that Western powers had nothing but contempt towards their aspirations (Nafi, 1998).

The Palestinian interpretation of the Balfour Declaration and Sykes-Picot agreement was correct; British and other Western powers had reneged on earlier promises to Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular. Palestinians felt betrayed.

Following the disturbances, the British appointed a military committee of enquiry, known as the Palin commission, in May 1920. It was one of many inquiry commissions to follow. Ironically, their conclusions regarding the dangers of the Zionist project and the frustration of Palestinians were not taken into account (Huneidi, 2001).

By May 1920, the Muslim Christian Association in Palestine attempted to hold the second Palestine Arab Congress in order to formulate a position towards this San Remo resolution. But the British banned it, citing fears the Congress could lead to disturbances like the ones that took place in April.

Convening on 13 December 1920 in Haifa, the third Palestine Arab Congress was a qualitative development in Palestinian political thinking. The congress formed an Executive Committee (as a quasi government), which remained in control of the Palestinian political movement from 1920 to 1935 (Musliah, 1989). The Committee elected Musa Kazim Al-Husseini, a prominent Palestinian figure and the former mayor of Jerusalem, as President.

The British refused to recognize that the Congress represented the Palestinian people or grant it any status. Using various pretexts, the British clearly attempted to strip the Congress of any legitimacy and undermine this fledgling Palestinian political entity. The British

colonial power wanted to maintain absolute control over Palestinians and hence wanted to prevent the possibility of Palestinians having elected or chosen representatives (Gerner, 1994). Britain was intent on keeping Palestinians without a voice, which the Congress represented.

Aside from consistently denying any representative body the Palestinian people designed recognition, the British tried to create alternative bodies. Those were conditioned on the Palestinians' acceptance of the mandate and were carefully designed by British authorities to ensure control, including appointments and veto power to the British Commissioner General (UNISPAL, 1922).

This was a serious challenge for Palestinians. The British were effective; managing to stifle the prospect of the creation of any Palestinian entity. Some Western countries helped Britain to that end. Help also came from some regional leaders, who were more interested in securing their rule over parts of Greater Syria.

### First Palestinian International Diplomatic Initiative

The insensitivity British authorities displayed towards Palestinian aspirations did not change in subsequent years despite Palestinian public displays of opposition. The British also continued to ignore all Palestinian calls to halt their destructive policies, particularly that of Zionist colonization. Consequently, there were more disturbances, wider in sphere and more extreme in nature than those that took place in 1920.

With such backdrop, the Forth Congress convened in May 1921. The Congress decided to dispatch a delegation to London to convey the Palestinian position directly to the British government in London. The Congress also dispatched delegations on tours of modern-day Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, the Vatican and Switzerland to garner support from the Muslim and Christian worlds against the Zionist colonization of their land as well as what they

viewed as unacceptable claims and myths to Palestine by the Zionist movement (Ayyad, 1999).

This was the first practical Palestinian diplomatic initiatives to change the policies of the superpowers. The delegation received the expressed sympathy of the Vatican then three members of the same delegation were then dispatched to Geneva, Switzerland. There, they presented the Palestinian position before the League of Nations, particularly their protest against the inclusion of the Balfour Declaration in the draft Mandate. The delegations were also engaged in a public diplomacy campaign, both in London and Geneva (Kayyali, 1978).

In London, the British Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill refused to meet the Palestinian delegation. Instead, the delegation engaged the reluctant Secretary with a series of letters from 21 February to 23 June 1922, which requested that the British government "*revise their present policy in Palestine, end the Zionist con-dominium, and put a stop to all alien immigration*" (UNISPAL, 1922). Additionally, the letters detailed the Palestinian response to certain articles in the proposed draft of the "Palestine Order", particularly those dealing with the governing body. Finally, the Palestinian delegation stated that their ultimate aim was "*to lay in Palestine the foundation of a stable Government that would command the respect of the inhabitants and guarantee peace and prosperity to all*" (UNISPAL, 1922).

But the British government maintained its refusal to recognize that the delegation represented the Palestinian people. The British Colonial Office also insisted that no negotiations would be held with the delegation, except on the basis of the Balfour Declaration (UNISPAL, 1922).

The uncompromising British position was made final on 3 June 1922, with the publication of the "*British Policy in Palestine*", also known as the Churchill White Paper. In it, Britain outlined its policy henceforth towards Palestine, maintaining its policy of ignoring

the stated will of the Palestinian People. The Paper considered the Balfour Declaration unchangeable and supported an intensification of Jewish migration (UNISPAL, 1922). Not surprisingly, Palestinians considered the White Paper an indication of British contempt and hostility towards the will and demands of the Palestinian people.

### *League of Nations Formalizes Hegemony*

Adding insult to injury, the League of Nations approved the British-drafted Palestine Mandate on 24 July 1922 (Wilson, 1990). This undoubtedly set the foundations for claims of rights by the Zionist movement in Palestine and stripped the Palestinians of their rights.

Immediately following the London visit, the Palestine Arab Congress convened its Fifth session in Nablus late August 1922. The Congress called for the abolition of the Balfour Declaration, rejected the British Mandate, Churchill's White Paper and the Palestine Order. The Congress also decided to boycott the Legislative Council elections, called for in the Order. This policy of non-cooperation with the mandate succeeded in securing a widespread boycott of the British-devised Legislative elections (Huneidi, 2001). The Congress's position also discouraged Palestinian nominees from serving in the British-devised Advisory Council.

These successful steps marked the beginning of the Palestinian national political struggle. Moreover, the Congress' position as the Palestinians' first representative body was strengthened as its policies won public support and adherence.

By November 1922, the Palestine Arab Congress-Executive Committee mobilized its efforts to confront the dramatic developments taking place at the international and regional levels. The Committee dispatched a delegation to Turkey then Lausanne, where a Peace Conference was forthcoming. But the delegation was denied the opportunity to appear before the Lausanne Conference. Meanwhile, the Turks were occupied with retaining their own independence and never touched on the mandate territories (Huneidi, 2001).

The delegation presented convincing arguments to defend its positions during its encounters with the British authorities and others. Yet, the end result was devastating for Palestinians, as the League of Nations formally endorsed the British-formulated Mandate of Palestine, which disregarded the Palestinians' rightful aspirations.

In many ways, this was the Palestinian political leadership's crash course in *real politic*; confronting Palestinians with the international political reality of the time, where the power of interests outweighed convincing arguments in reaching a decision of international proportions like that on Palestine. In many ways, this frustrating reality remained constant until present day, where Palestinians continue searching for the means to enable them to influence international players that hold the key to Palestinian independence.

One could easily argue that Palestinian political leaders should have reached the conclusion that the British authorities were neither interested nor committed to entertaining or fulfilling the rights of the Palestinian People. Evidence of this British intention was readily available in the successive steps and statements of policy made until this time.

Yet, Palestinian leaders then did not manifest an understanding that diplomacy alone cannot yield desired results if it is not backed by influence on the course of events. In other words, Palestinian efforts until this time lacked teeth and it was left to the Palestinian public's whims to express outrage or opposition towards British actions, without any direction from a set and clear plan of any strategic value. This reduced Palestinian diplomacy to oratory exchanges rather than effective action.

### *Divide et Impera* (Divide and Rule)

The British encouraged division within Palestinian society, using contradictory promises to opposing leaders, power money, and all other means to guarantee the success of their project in Palestine, which would in turn ensure maintaining their dominance in the Middle

East. In pursuing this goal, the British authorities established parties and bodies that would collaborate with their policies or at least facilitate their rule. Additionally, they also capitalized on family rivalries, which had plagued the Palestinian society since the Ottoman era.

This rivalry undoubtedly compounded an already difficult situation. It also allowed the British to forgo their responsibilities under the pretext of continued inter-Palestinian disagreement. These rivalries translated into contradictory positions towards key developments, weakening Palestinian standing.

The split in Palestinian society was also extended from family rivalries to bitter competition between opposing parties, which plunged the entire country in an unhealthy atmosphere of hostility. Politicians were consumed by trading accusations of collaboration with the British and more dangerously with the Zionist movement. This in turn wasted precious time and energy the Palestinians could not afford to lose.

### Third Arab Delegation to London

In June 1923, the Sixth Arab Palestinian Congress dispatched the third delegation to London, headed by Musa Kazim Al-Husseini (Kayyali, 1978). The decision was prompted by the formation of a British Cabinet sub-committee on Palestine, tasked to review the British policies in Palestine.

The delegation planned to meet British politicians, parliamentarians and journalists. But again, the British Cabinet Sub-committee on Palestine refused to meet or recognize the Palestinian delegation (Humeidi, 2001). The Sub-committee also decided to continue endorsing the Balfour Declaration, greatly disappointing the Palestinian leadership (Kayyali, 1978).

After their visit to London, the Third Delegation went to the United States, where the members tried to lobby for the Palestinian cause and struggle against Zionism (Hassassian, 1990). But British policy towards Palestine was already set in stone, dooming these diplomatic efforts by Palestinian representatives to failure (Kayyali, 1978).

And as Palestinian diplomatic efforts were frustrated by this pre-determined British policy, the public and political mood began shifting towards more radical approaches.

# Uprising and Revolt

The mid to late 1920's was marked with strikes and tension between the Palestinians, the British and Zionists. In this atmosphere, the Seventh Palestinian Arab Congress convened in Jerusalem between 20 and 27 June 1928.

The Congress adopted several resolutions focusing on the demand for the establishment of a National Government under the existing Mandate system (Kayyali, 1978). The key development in this Congress though was the establishment of a new 48-member Executive Committee that united previously bitterly rival Palestinian national movements, like the Arab National Party lead by the Nashashibis and the Muslim Christian Association lead by the Husseinis. This coalition crucially important as it presented a unified and uniting representative body that could aptly confront the challenges, unlike the preceding 4 years (Katz, 2009). Regrettably, this coalition did not last for long as the political rivalry would again surface during the 1930's.

By August 1928, tensions in Jerusalem peaked into confrontations when Zionists attempted to change the 'status quo' of the Al-Buraq Wall [western wall of Al Aqsa Compound] (Hassassian, 1990). Haj Amin Al-Husseini and other Muslim Palestinian leaders responded with a counter campaign.

The British authorities formed a commission to investigate the Western Wall incidents (British Government Cmd. 3530, 1930). Recognizing Palestinian fears, the Shaw Commission warned that the absence of any measure of self-government would aggravate the difficulties facing the British administration and hence recommended the exclusion of the Balfour Declaration from the mandate (Pappe, 2006).

From a Palestinian perspective, these recommendations were considered a major achievement of the Palestinian uprising, especially that the recommendations included the most vital demands for Palestinians concerning Jewish immigration and peasant eviction (Thomas, 1999). Nonetheless, these recommendations were not respected for long as the British Government negated them soon after.

In May 1930, another Commission was formed to investigate yet another round of tensions. The Hope-Simpson Commission made it amply clear that further colonizing Palestine for the sake of the Zionist enterprise could only be achieved at the detriment of the Palestinians. It also warned that the British policies contravened the provisions of article 6 of the mandate (UNISPAL, 1930).

### *Review of the British policy in Palestine*

Acting on the reports of the Shaw and Hope Simpson Commissions and in order to control the mounting tensions in Palestine, the British government issued a statement of policy towards Palestine, later known as the "Passfield White Paper". This paper was considered a review of the British policy in Palestine, which was previously set by the "Churchill White Paper" of 1922. Unlike the Churchill paper, which afforded the establishment of a Jewish State first priority, the Passfield White Paper reflected, to a large extent, the recommendations made by both inquiry commissions (Farsoun and Aruri, 2006). Still, this Paper ignored the Palestinians' principal concerns regarding the establishment of a

"Jewish homeland" in Palestine and the issue of self-rule by sticking to older policies that had already been rejected (UNISPAL, 1930).

### *Short-lived Victories*

There were other cases during this period where Commissions advanced recommendations in line with demands made by Palestinian representatives. In January 1930, the League of Nations set up an independent Commission to investigate claims to Al-Buraq Wall.

By the end of said year, the Commission confirmed that the Wall was an integral part of Al-Haram Al-Sharif Compound and that the ownership of the Wall as well as its surroundings was Moslem. It further recommended "*that the present status quo of the Wall and of its immediate surroundings shall, as far as possible, be preserved*" (Western Wall International Commission report, 1930 p.60).

This victory was short-lived though. The Zionist Agency formed an alliance with top members of the British and US Jewish communities as well as British opposition politicians. Together, they waged a campaign on the British government to rescind the policy statement on Palestine (Cleveland, 2004).

Finally, this political pressure forced the government of Prime Minister Ramsay McDonald to renounce the statement of policy on Palestine (Farsoun and Aruri, 2006). This quick reversal was a reflection of the deep influence the Zionist movement had and a factor in added British hostility towards Palestinians. Indeed, these factors directly contributed to accelerating what became an unavoidable clash between the Zionists and British authorities with the Palestinians.

By 1931, Palestinians had lost patience with Britain's policies and unlimited support to the Zionist project in Palestine. And while the Palestinian people's relationship with the

British began quickly deteriorating, the British-Zionist alliance was further consolidated. The British began arming Jewish settlers, allowing the Zionist movement to form underground militias, like the Irgun, between 1930 and 1931.

This strategic and military alliance was a source of grave concern for the Palestinian leadership. In a letter to the British High Commissioner, dated 29 June 1931, the President of the Arab Executive Committee, expressed outrage towards the British arming of Jewish settlers.

After the British rescinded the Passfield Paper, the Executive Committee issued a pamphlet, which rejected both the White Paper and the Black Letter (Ayyad, 1999). The General Palestinian Congress then convened in Nablus by mid-September 1931. During the Congress, leaders and members agreed that the strategy so far adopted by the Palestinian nation had proven itself impotent. Hence, the Congress agreed to adopt other strategies, including negotiation with the British on the basis of the demand for the independence of Palestine. The Congress also decided Palestinians should utilize all political and economic means to accomplish independence.

With such conclusions and with continued political deadlock, the clear beginnings of a militant, anti-imperial popular movement among Arabs in the Palestine Mandate began springing (Kimmerling and Migdal, 2003).

### *From Dialogue to Discord*

The rise in anti-British sentiments took different forms; from civil disobedience to military attacks. Palestinians formed several resistance groups and started armed resistance to undermine the Zionist project and in many ways distance themselves from the more politically cautious notable leadership (Kedourie, 1982).

Other international developments, like the world economic crisis (1929 to 1932) compounded the already strained economic situation, caused by the Zionist settlers. The Zionist movement exploited the threat Hitler's regime presented to German Jews, thus forcing them to migrate to Palestine (Neuman, 2005). Consequently, Palestinians came under a great deal of added financial pressure. This situation constituted a fertile environment for more violence (Kedourie, 1982).

*The Palestinian political scene*

At this critical juncture and while the Zionist-British alliance flourished, the Palestinian political scene was weak. The traditional leadership was rapidly losing ground to a host of diverse political parties and resistance movements. But these parties lacked a uniting political umbrella, especially after the death of Musa Kathem Al-Husseini and the dissolution of the Arab Executive Committee in August 1934 (Kimmerling and Migdal, 2003).

By October 1935, six political parties had emerged in Palestine (Abu Mowar, 2006). The formation of these political parties presented a new line of thinking in the Palestinian political scene. The parties also reflected the growing divide along family and class lines within the national movement. But while they filled the void left by the gradual decline of the traditional leadership, their fierce competition with the Executive Committee undermined Palestinian representation, ultimately leading to its termination. But this was no victory as this competition fragmented Palestinian national effort for independence and undermined their representation, causing more confusion. Hence, the Committee that had commanded Palestinian struggle between 1919 and 1928, confronted British colonialism and Zionist immigration to Palestine and called for independence, was over.

There was still a positive side to this; the competing party programs contributed to an increase in public awareness at a very critical period. More importantly, they were instrumental in the breakout of the General Strike of 1936 and the formation of the Arab Higher Committee (Ayyad, 1999).

### *Zionists Outmaneuver Britain*

Between 1930 and 1936, the British Administration established elected municipal councils, and later, a largely appointed Legislative Council, in an attempt to defuse tensions rising from feelings of alienation. But in November 1935, Palestinian parties joined forces and addressed British authorities, demanding the establishment of a democratic government; the prohibition of land transfer to Jews and a complete cessation of Jewish immigration with the view of forming an expert body to determine the absorption capacity of the country (Abu Nowar, 2006).

In February 1936, Britain proposed that Palestinians adopt the new draft constitution for Palestine, which was proposed in December 1935 by the British High Commissioner, as a first step towards political government. In addition, the British authority also agreed to enact laws restricting Jewish migration and land sale to Jews (Abu Nowar, 2006).

But the Palestinian reaction was almost irrelevant as the Zionist Congress almost immediately "... expressed its categorical rejection of the scheme" (Palestine Royal Commission, 1937, p. 91). And its lobby managed to thwart this initiative through its unhindered access to the highest political levels in London as well its widespread propaganda (Abu Nowar, 2006).

Parallel to this political development, an armed Palestinian resistance movement against the British authorities was forming.

The surrounding circumstances at this period were the main catalyst of the 1936 revolt, which lasted for 3 years during which over 5000 Palestinians were killed (Khalidi, 1998). The clash was unavoidable. Palestinians felt the door to a peaceful resolution had been shut and that they must put an end to the outcome of this devastating British-Zionist collaboration or else risk their demise as a people; fears that later proved warranted.

The situation boiled over in 1936, when the Palestinian population decided to take matters in their own hands. The revolt became the "longest sustained protest" Palestinians carried since the British control over Palestine (Gerner, 1994). It also constituted the sturdiest Palestinian attempt to confront the British policies and the Zionist enterprise in Palestine, becoming a comprehensive rebellion by July 1936 and lasting until 1939 (Kanafani, 1972).

This propelled political leaders, who were lagging behind the revolt, into action. On April 25 1936, the Palestinian political leadership formed an umbrella national organization to coordinate between the political parties, called the Arab Higher Committee (AHC). Finally, all Palestinian political parties were united under the banner of a single representative body (Mattar, 1992).

The AHC was an advanced version of the "Palestinian Arab Executive Committee" and included in its ranks an alliance between traditional notables and emerging middle class urban activists (Swedenburg, 2003). Although this alliance was precarious, it secured national support for the strike (Nafi, 1998). "*These organizations made a serious contribution toward crystallizing the early ideological lines of the Palestinian national movement and its arguments for the existence of a Palestinian people with a right to a Palestinian homeland*" (Ghanem, 2002, p.7).

The AHC oversaw and managed the general strike, starting 26 April 1936 (Abu Nowar, 2006). Through the strike, the AHC demanded an end to Jewish immigration and land sale as well as independence (Swedenburg, 2003).

The revolt was divided in two phases. The first phase was known as the "Six Months Strike", which included widespread demonstrations, strikes, non-payment of taxes, and other forms of civil disobedience (Gerner, 1994). The Second phase was accompanied by attacks on Jewish settlers and property as well as British forces (Swedenburg, 2003).

The British countered by launching a campaign against Palestinian civilians, unprecedented in its brutality. By 30 September 1936, twenty thousand British troops poured into Palestine and a martial law decree was issued (Khalidi, 2006). The crackdown cost over 800 Palestinian lives in addition to nearly 38 British forces and 80 Jews in the first six month of the strike (Cleveland, 2000).

### Arab Intervention Subdues first phase of the Revolt

Alongside the tough countermeasures applied on the Palestinian population, the British exerted pressure on the AHC by agency of its regional Arab allies: Amir Abdullah of Transjordan, King Ghazi of Iraq, and King Abdul Aziz Iben Saud of Saudi Arabia (Swedenburg, 2003). Britain asked its Arab allies to mediate an end to the revolt with the AHC without promising any concessions, particularly on the issue of Jewish immigration.

Some Arab governments competed to show who enjoyed more influence on Palestinians. Their pressures to bring the revolution to an end weakened the internal Palestinian front (Kedourie and Haim, 1982). Also, due to opposing alliances, this pressure widened the gap between the Husseinis and Nashashibis, which had been bridged during the early days of the rebellion (Abu Nuwar, 2006).

Emissaries from Arab Governments repeatedly visited Palestine to bring an end to the revolt. On 9 October 1936 an appeal from the Kings and Princes of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Trans-Jordan and Yemen, was sent to the Palestinian people through the AHC requesting them to end the strike (Abu Nowar, 2006).

The AHC accepted the collective Arab appeal and acted on it instantly. On Monday 12 October 1936, the AHC circulated a statement calling for an end to the general strike and giving Arab mediation a chance (Kedourie and Haim, 1982). This was with the understanding that the Arab kings and Princes would intervene with the British on behalf of Palestinians and that the British would act in good faith to work out new solutions (Swedenburg, 2003).

The Publication of the Peel Commission recommendations in July 1937 prompted the second phase of the revolt as Palestinians opposed the establishment of a Jewish state on their land, which the Commission recommended. The Peel Commission was the first to also recommend the partition of Palestine. The AHC immediately rejected the plan and appealed for Arab and Muslim support. The AHC also sent a correspondence to the League of Nations reflecting this position and demanded the replacement of the British Mandate with an independent Palestinian state. Petitions were also communicated from all parts of Palestine calling for protest.

To bring these protests to an end, the British formed another "technical" commission, known as the "Woodhead Commission" to examine the practicability of partition. In August 1938, the Commission concluded that the plan was unworkable and warned implementation would entail mass population transfers (UNISPAL, 1947).

A critical look at this revolt begs the question of whether it was a valid strategic choice for Palestinians or rather a way to vent frustration towards British authorities and their

Zionist project. Despite appearances, Palestinian representation was fractured and easily influenced by regional powers that manipulated the Palestinian question for their benefit. And while the revolt was a heroic confrontation of a merciless colonial project, it did not serve the Palestinians' long-term goals of independence and self-determination. In the short term, the Palestinian revolt managed to amend British policy towards Palestine, a victory embodied in the White Paper of 1939. But in the long run, it had no effect for this policy change was temporary and dictated by the elevated threats the British faced in Europe with the rise of Nazi Germany. In the end, this Palestinian revolt and the sacrifice it entailed did not change the ultimate outcome, when the decisive moment arrived in 1948.

### The U.S. Factor

The Zionist movement secured US support through the influential American Jewish community. This support was more properly formalized with the public endorsement of what became known as the "Baltimore Program" in May 1942. In that program, the Zionist movement formally and publicly declared for the first time its real aim to create a Jewish state in Palestine.

This program was officially introduced to Britain and the United States, with US President Henry Truman lending it his full support despite British reservations. To maintain cooperation, the US and Britain formed a joint Committee of inquiry to investigate the situation in Palestine. In April 1946, the Committee's conclusions negated all recommendations of the 1939 White Paper.

The Palestinian reaction was predictable. The Arab Higher Committee rejected the recommendations of the Anglo-American Committee and declared a general strike on 3 May 1946 (Kaufman, 1991).

Britain and the Zionist movement were mending fences, pushing the US to take a drastic step that would maintain its new influence in the region. On 4 October 1946, the American President declared his support for a "Jewish state", angering Arab states (Nachmani, 1987). King Saud accused President Truman of contradicting his previous promises to consult with all parties prior to taking positions concerning Palestine (Benson, 1997). But this statement emboldened the Zionist movement's position towards the British.

By 1947, the Zionist movement refused anything short of the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, while Palestinians, represented by the AHC also refused any proposal advocating partition and demanded a united Palestine with an Arab majority. These uncompromising positions, irrespective of their legitimacy, lead Britain to recognize that the predicament it had essentially created in Palestine was far beyond its abilities to rectify.

When Britain decided to relinquish Palestine to the United Nations in 1947, it was well aware that the Zionist movement was well established and equipped while Palestinians were still healing from the effects of British brutality during the years of the revolt.

### *Fighting, and Losing to the Odds*

Throughout the mandate, the Zionist movement was consistently able to alter the balance in its favour and maintain Britain's full collaboration with their project, especially given that the mandate incorporated the Belfour Declaration. It masterfully exploited all elements of strength at its disposal, the most important of which were influential Jewish communities in Europe. It also exploited the racist attitude colonial powers had towards the peoples of the region, including Palestinians, to form ties that extended far beyond politics and interests to culture and history.

Effectively, Zionists monopolized influence over the course of events through these tools, ensuring Palestinians remained voiceless and in the dark. Undermining Palestinian

representation became a standing Western policy, aimed at ensuring the continued success of the Zionist Project. Adding to such overwhelming odds was the Palestinian representatives' inability to maintain unity or fend off outside intervention.

## *"The Question of Palestine" is born at the UN*

The UN inherited the Question of Palestine in April 1947, when Britain referred it to the organization without the consent of the Palestinian people. In a letter, the British representative requested the "*Secretary General of the UN to place the question of Palestine on the Agenda of the General Assembly to make recommendations, under Article 10 of the Charter, concerning the future government of Palestine*" (UNISPAL, 1947).

At the same time, the Arab delegations of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia sent identical letters to Trygve Lie, then Secretary-General of the UN, requesting to place "*the termination of the mandate over Palestine and the declaration of its independence*" on the agenda of the General Assembly's First Special Session (UNISPAL, 1947). But this Arab attempt was thwarted and the British proposal was placed on the General Assembly agenda, despite strong Arab objections. This was a reflection of things was to come. When the First Committee set up a "Special Committee on Palestine", the Arab proposal to have an independent Palestinian state for all its inhabitants was replaced by the vaguely drafted and proposed reference: Question of Palestine (UNISPAL, 1947).

Allowing the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people to appear before the UN was very controversial. It started with a Polish-Czechoslovakian proposal to only invite the Jewish Agency to appear before the UN General Assembly. A series of similar draft resolutions at the General Committee and General Assembly followed, mostly giving the Jewish Agency primacy while referring to Palestinians as "others".

The Arab Higher Committee (AHC) sent a cable to the General Assembly during these deliberations in which it stated that as the representative of the Palestinian people, it had chosen a delegation to speak on its behalf before the special session (UN Year Book, 1947). But this request was largely ignored.

General Assembly resolution A/RES/104 (S-1) granted the "Jewish Agency for Palestine" hearing. But the request of the AHC was deferred to the First Committee as "other requests" for decision. In other words, the issue of Palestinian representation, vis-à-vis the AHC delegation, was given inferior status, almost disregarded.

The AHC then withdrew its request for the hearing due to what it considered extreme discrimination shown by the Assembly resolution (UN Year Book, 1946-47). But after the British representative recognized that the AHC was "representative of the Arab population of Palestine", the First Committee granted the Jewish Agency and AHC a hearing during debate on the Question of Palestine (UN Year Book, 1946-47). But the AHC was concerned with formal recognition of legitimacy. So, upon the AHC's insistence, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on 7 May 1947 affirming the AHC's right to participate.

On 9 May 1947, AHC representative Henry Cattan presented the First Committee with the Palestinian people's case for independence based on historical and legal grounds. He also contested the Balfour Declaration as violating article 22 of the League of Nations' Covenant

and the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination (UN Year Book, 1947). Concluding, Cattan urged the adoption of the principles of the UN Charter to resolving the issue, which he said would hence be by recognizing the independence of Palestine.

On 15 May 1947, the General Assembly decided to establish a Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). UNSCOP was given the "*widest powers to ascertain and record facts and to investigate all questions and issues relevant to the problem of Palestine*" (UN Year Book, 1948). But UNSCOP's composition was problematic as it excluded Arab states and mainly consisted of countries that sympathized with the Zionist project in Palestine. Arab States opposed creating UNSCOP on the grounds its mandate ignored mentioning the independence of Palestine and the principles of the Charter.

Britain and the Jewish Agency both appointed liaison officers while the AHC refused to deal with UNSCOP. The AHC rejected UNSCOP's mandate and contested its composition as being suspicious (UN Year Book, 1946-47). It also successfully called for a boycott of UNSCOP.

In the end, UNSCOP was unable to agree on recommendations, consequently presenting two sets of differing proposals. What was termed as a "majority plan" proposed the partition of Palestine into two independent States with economic union after a transitional period of two years under the supervision of the United Kingdom, with the city of Jerusalem placed under International Trusteeship. Another plan proposed an independent Palestine as a federated State with Jerusalem as its capital, following a transitional period not exceeding three years. The two plans were presented to the General Assembly in September 1947.

The AHC, which had refused to co-operate with UNSCOP, decided to fight in the Assembly. The dangers were now even more fundamental; Palestine would attain independence as a unified entity or be partitioned.

The US was hoping to replace Britain as the new power in the region and saw in a Jewish State an ally that would support American interests in this important region. This agenda was also pushed by senior advisors to US President Hary Truman (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007). For its part, the USSR was looking for an end to British presence in the region and believed the Jewish state, with the majority of its population coming from the Soviet Union and Poland, would be an ally to the USSR in the region (Cattan, 1988). Driven by these motives, the US and USSR exercised immense pressure on other members during the subsequent intense General Assembly debate. On 29 November 1947, these pressures secured the two thirds majority required for the adoption of the Partition resolution. All concerted Arab efforts to interrupt the vote or defer the Question to the International Court of Justice failed.

The Partition resolution itself reflected how much world powers favoured the Zionist project in Palestine as well as the influence of the Zionist organization on world affairs. While the failure of Palestinians and Arab was a translation of their state of powerlessness. They had no real chance at changing the course of events at the UN as their collective efforts yielded no influence on this international setting. The situation was unevenly tilted towards the newly emerging powers that employed their great influence over the UN and its course of action. Additionally, most Arab Member States were newly independent, subject to considerable influence from their former colonial powers.

Arab and Muslim members as well as several other countries rejected the resolution for it represented a dangerous international precedent never to be repeated. Arab states also declared they would not be bound by the GA recommendation as they considered this resolution to run contrary to the Charter.

Following the adoption of the Partition resolution, incidents on the ground intensified. It also became obvious that a full confrontation between Palestinians and Zionists was fast-approaching. Meanwhile, the British watched on, confining themselves to the areas their forces were deployed in while the rest of the country plunged into chaos.

On 1 April 1948, the Security Council urged taking steps to arrange a truce in Palestine and requested the convening of a Special Session of the GA to further consider the Question of the future government of Palestine. "*This marked the first time that the Security Council, invoking Article 20 of the Charter, had taken the initiative in convening an Assembly session*" (UN Year Book 1948, p.257). Representatives of the AHC and the Jewish Agency for Palestine participated in this special session.

The AHC argued that "*the partition scheme could never be carried out peaceably without the consent of the majority of the population of Palestine*". It also questioned why, in light of such a predictable outcome, "*the Assembly had endorsed this plan under circumstances unworthy of the UN*" (UN Year Book 1948, p.261).

In light of the deteriorating situation on the ground, the US introduced a new proposal for a temporary period of Trusteeship, which would provide essential governmental functions on behalf of a Government of Palestine. The Arab states welcomed the American proposal, provided it was intended to lead to the independence of Palestine as a single, democratic state in which the legitimate rights of the different sectors of citizens would be safeguarded (UN Year Book, 1948). But, in light of their gains on the ground, the Zionist movement refused the US proposal off hand (Pappé, 2007).

By that time, Zionist militias had put into action a pre-devised plan that successfully expelled over a quarter million Palestinians and secured the capture of major urban centres

by the end of April. Only then did the Arab League declare it would intervene and only once the British Mandate was over (Pappé, 2007).

Nonetheless, Great Britain announced it would terminate the Mandate on 15 May 1948, several months before the time proposed in the UN plan.

### The Palestinian Catastrophe and exodus

Although Palestinians saw the imminent and fast-approaching danger, they were far from prepared. Also, the AHC did not set a strategy. Instead, it organized poorly coordinated calls for reactions to developments on the ground. Yet the balance of power was not to the Palestinians' advantage and studies point that *Israel had enough troops to handle the Arab armies and to continue cleansing the land* (Pappé, 2007).

On the political front, most Arab countries that dispatched troops into Palestine in 1948 were under direct British influence and control including Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Some countries had even reached agreements with the Zionist movement, stipulating the intention to annex Palestinian Territory to their country. This was most evident in the aspirations of Jordan's king Abdullah to annex parts of Palestine allocated to the Arab state in the partition resolution to his kingdom (Shalaim, 2001). Equally, the Egyptian Royal Court attempted to contact the Zionist movement, offering recognition in exchange for territorial gains (Shalaim, 2001).

Relations amongst Arab rulers were also replete with mistrust. There was a deep split between the Hashemite bloc (Jordan and Iraq) and the anti-Hashemite bloc (Saudi Arabia and Egypt). In fact, the "*Arab coalition was one of the most divided, disorganized, and ramshackle coalitions in the entire history of warfare*" (Rogan and Shlaim, 2007 pp.81-82). Indeed, this led the Arab legion's (Jordanian troops) English Commander in Chief, Glubb pasha, to call the war in Palestine a 'Phony war' (Pappé, 2007).

Additionally, on several occasions, Arabs frustrated the modest Palestinian efforts to establish a Palestinian government that would fill the political and military vacuum resulting from the British exit. Haj Amin Al-Husseini argued against sending regular Arab forces into Palestine, perhaps due to fear of the Jordanian king's ambitions; asking instead for financial and arms support for the Palestinians (Pappé, 2007). Those were promised to him but delivered only in negligible amounts. He also pleaded with the Arab League on several occasions for support in setting up a government under the control of the AHC, for the appointment of Palestinian military governors, and for financial aid.[4] But the opponents of the Mufti, namely the Jordanian and Iraqi monarchy, refused these suggestions (Mattar, 1992). Other Arab regimes were afraid to upset the British.

At no stage during the war in Palestine did the uncoordinated Arab armies outnumber or even match the well armed and equipped Zionist militias. King Abdullah of Jordan, who was appointed to lead the Arab troops, used this position to undermine the military plan prepared by the Arab League's military experts (McDowall, 1990).

And despite their best efforts, Palestinians were unprepared to face these immense challenges and their leadership was excluded from the Arab preparations to the war as well. Haj Amin Al-Husseini was unhappy with this alienation from the military effort and formed what was known as Jaysh Aljihad Almuqadas (Holy War Army), headed by Abd Al-Qader Al-Husseini, which was able to secure some successes in the early days of the war (McDowall, 1990).

Until the last day of their withdrawal, the British army intervened several times, whether militarily or by means of negotiations, against the Palestinians (Tal, 2004). And Arab failures

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[4] At Aley in October 1947, at Cairo in December 1947 and in February 1984

and betrayals had equally devastating effect on Palestinians, their status, aspiration and future; effects they continue to suffer to date.

By the end of 1949, nearly half the Palestinian population was turned into refugees. This was also a reflection of the Palestinian failure to understand the shifting variables around them as Palestinian leaders failed to prepare themselves and the public for this great challenge, which should have been predictable very early on in the mandate. The great majority of Palestinian refugees were completely dispossessed, impoverished and not in a position to provide for themselves or their families. In short, the face of Palestine changed forever following this catastrophe.

*Erasing Palestine*

Under the auspices of the UN, the Arab states of Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria and the interim Israeli government signed the armistice agreement on January 1949, ending the war. But the agreement did not legalize the armistice lines of 1948, which far exceeded the land allotted to Israel in the partition plan.

But the commencement of armistice negotiations was politically significant as they served another severe blow to the Palestinians leadership's representation of their people. Once again, Palestinians were excluded from these negotiations and their requests to join the armistice negotiations were rejected (McDowall, 1990).

Once Arab governments signed the agreements, they took steps to contain the possible fallout of the Palestine War domestically and regionally (Sayigh, 1997). One of these many steps was marginalizing the Palestinian leadership and weakening its presence on the ground in what was left of Palestine; mainly by disarming and dismantling all remaining Palestinian guerrilla formations and incorporating the willing remaining members as

auxiliaries in the regular armies (Rogan and Shlaim, 2007). In fact, these steps began even before the war ended.

The Jordanian king, in control of the West Bank, also began paving the ground to the annexation of the territory to Trans-Jordan (McDowall, 1990). Fearing full Hashemite control over Palestine, the Egyptians pressed for the Political Committee in the Arab League to accept the outstanding request of the AHC to establish a Palestine Government.

On 22 September 1948, the AHC called for a meeting in Gaza in which it declared the establishment of the "All Palestine Government". Haj Amin Al-Husseini defied Egyptian directives not to enter Palestine and reached Gaza, where the people gave him a hero's welcome. Though Haj Amin was later forced to return to Cairo accompanied by security guards, this was a significant step. On 30 September, a 30-constituent Assembly was established under the name of the "Palestine National Council" and Haj Amin was appointed as the President of the Council (Morris, 1999).

Despite British rejection, Cairo took the lead in extending diplomatic recognition to the new Palestinian government; a move all Arab governments then followed with the exception of Trans-Jordan (Maddy-Weitzman, 1993). But this recognition resulted neither in real support nor recognition of the government's authority over the fate of its people.

King Abdullah viewed the declaration of the 'All Palestine Government' as a direct challenge to his own authority (Maddy-Weitzman, 1993). Hence, he refused to recognize it (Bovis, 1971). So, to complete his annexation of the West Bank and in so doing erase the Palestinian identity, King Abdullah organized a Conference in Jericho to legitimize the annexation of the West Bank and Jerusalem to his Kingdom. By April 1950, the West Bank was brought under full Jordanian control, a month after King Abdallah ordered the removal of the word Palestine from all maps and official statements.

Among the recommendations in the UN-appointed mediator Count Folk Bernadotte was that the character of Arab Palestine should be decided by the Arab states, in consultation with the Palestinian inhabitants (UN Year Book, 1949). Count Bernadotte's proposals were published on 29 September 1948, following his assassination in Jerusalem on 17 September 1948 by Zionist militias. They were subsequently endorsed by Britain and the US, although US President Hary Truman retracted his country's position on 28 October 1948 (Bovis, 1971).

Following the discussion of Bernadotte's report, the UN General Assembly established the Conciliation Commission. The Commission convened a conference in Lausanne, Switzerland, in April 1949, where Arab States held separate talks with Israel, subsequently leading to the signing of separate protocols, agreeing to use the partition resolution's boundaries as a "basis for discussions with the Commission".

But once again, Palestinians were excluded from the Conciliation Commission efforts and conferences. But this absence was neither the product of innocent chance nor a rejectionist Palestinian attitude. Rather, it reflected how the international system as a whole had taken a determined decision to ignore and alienate the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian People. To fulfill its mandate, the Conciliation Commission should have invited the Palestinian side to attend the conference and to have its interests represented. Instead, limiting the invites to Arab states, whose interests and agendas were already clear, was a cynical exploitation of circumstances that ultimately produced one result: shutting international doors to Palestinian representation as well as the denial of the Palestinians' character as a political unit with legitimate aspirations. In a sense, this attitude de facto omitted previous UN resolutions regarding Palestinian rights from international political discourse.

But while Palestinians were politically ignored and alienated, the international system was opening one door after another to Israel. Nearly the same hour Israel signed the Lausanne protocols, an important development took place in Lake Success, US with the adoption of resolution 273 (III) on 11 May 1949, which admitted Israel as a member of the UN. Ironically, the first Israeli application for admission to the UN on 29 November 1948 was postponed by the Security Council on the basis that Israel was violating the Council's resolutions. And although nothing had changed from the time of the first application, Israel was still granted membership at the UN half a year afterwards.

Soon after however, the Israeli delegation demanded that the international frontiers of Mandatory Palestine be considered the frontiers of Israel, with one provisional and temporary exception, namely, the central area of Palestine, then under Jordanian military authority (Hadawi, 1998).

From that point on, the Question of Palestine was treated as a humanitarian question while the political elements of this issue were completely ignored or sidelined. On 8 December 1949, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 302 (IV), which established the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to carry out direct relief and works programs for Palestine refugees. This Agency began its operations on 1 May 1950 and the General Assembly has repeatedly renewed its mandate ever since. The proud Palestinian people were turned into refugees, seeking aid at the doors of those who contributed to the catastrophe that befell them.

# The Early Beginnings

Following the Palestinian people's *Al-Nakba* [catastrophe], their national representation became virtually absent in the international and regional arenas. The All Palestine Government practically seized to exist in a short period and all matters related to Palestinian affairs were dealt with by Arab governments, which closely and strictly monitored Palestinian political activism. Any action that was perceived to be diverting from the official Arab positions was harshly suppressed. But in many ways, the waning of pre-Nakba representation presented conditions that caused new seeds of Palestinian activism to bud and bloom underground.

With the failure of the Arab armies in Palestine in the background, political activism peaked in Arab countries and was dominated by the secular pan-Arab nationalism (Farsoun and Zacharia, 1998). But key players in the region, particularly Egypt, Syria and Iraq underwent enormous political changes during this period, including the overthrow of monarchies and military coup *coup d'état*s. This kept the most potentially capable Arab countries busy with internal affairs and power struggles for a long period of time. While the issues of Arab unity, colonialism and liberating Palestine continued to dominate Arab debate and political activities, this did not improve conditions for Palestinians. Meanwhile, Israel was entrenching its grip over the areas it occupied by force, forging strategic alliances with Western powers, and increasingly shared these powers' interests in the region (Cattan, 1998).

As discussed, the period following Al-Nakba was marked with internal turmoil in key Arab countries. Concluding that such turmoil could divert attention from the issue of Palestine, Palestinians became heavily involved in politics, engaging parties of all leanings (Hart, 1989).

Pan-Arab groups were fertile recruiting grounds for Palestinians and it was in universities that most of these movements flourished. For example, the Arab Nationalist Movement was founded by George Habash, who later established the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Farsoun and Zacharia, 1998). But this activism came at a price, as Arab regimes did not accept any challenge to their absolute power or agenda. "*In responding to such pan-Arabist appeals, especially those of the Nasserists and Ba'athists, which were politically in opposition to established Western-dependent, conservative or liberal regimes (as in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and even Syria at the time) Palestinians more readily earned the enmity of the Arab*" (Farsoun & Zacharia, 1998, P.177).

The Muslim Brotherhood umbrella also attracted its fair share of Palestinians, including Yasser Arafat, though he was not an active member (Aburish, 2004). There were also other prominent figures like Khalil Al-Wazir and Salah Khalaf, who later on became prominent leaders of the Palestinian national movement (Hart, 1989).

Yet, with rise of more popular leaders like Gamal Abdel Nasser, the wider Palestinian public still pinned their hope on the Arab regimes' empty rhetoric and promises. They believed promises of liberation and repatriation of refugees to their homes. This was in sharp contrast to the emerging Palestinian political leaders, who blamed the loss of Palestine on Arab betrayal and weakness, and believed that Palestine would only be recovered through Palestinian national activism. Hence, many of them began discrete efforts to organize

Palestinian political and military formations that would act independently of the regimes' control (Hart, 1998).

At this stage, Cairo saw heated debate among the emerging Palestinian leaders. They wanted to form a Palestinian movement that is not linked to any Arab regime or party and that does not intervene in the internal politics of Arab countries, focusing instead exclusively on the Palestinian question.

### From Activism to Representation

Inspired by the Algerian revolution that started in 1954, the group started preparing to launch an underground armed Palestinian revolution to avoid the expected harsh response from the intelligence agencies closely monitoring them. They formed their first cell in 1957.

At this stage, communication was paramount to spreading this new and daring idea. So, to reach out to Palestinians scattered in the Arab world and inside Palestine, they called themselves 'Fateh'[5]. In 1959, they published a magazine in Fateh's name, called *Our Palestine: the Call for Life*. The magazine was a highly successful networking and public advocacy tool as it later proved to have played a crucial role in garnering support for the rising movement and managed to produce a network of supporters for its idea.

Upon the declaration of Algerian independence in 1962, Arafat traveled to Algiers to participate in the nation's independence celebrations (Hart, 1998). As a result, "*on the 23rd of the month of September 1963, the Algerian Presidency issued a decision allowing the Palestine Office in Algiers to undertake its general activities to serve the Palestinian cause*" (Hamzah, 1989, p. 204).

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[5] Palestinian National Liberation Movement.

The permission granted to Fateh marked the first formal recognition of a Palestinian entity that could represent its people and work to further its cause.

This Office was of central importance to Fateh and later on the Palestine Liberation Organization as Algeria had become an example for other liberation movements throughout the world. Algiers was always crowded with official and popular international delegations from across the globe that would visit this Arab capital to share experiences and express support to the newly independent State. Naturally, this provided Mr. Al-Wazir, who headed the office, with a unique and golden opportunity to establish a wide network of new contacts and relationships with other governments and liberation movements across the globe (Hamzah, 1989).

With such political advances, Fatah leaders debated, quite passionately, on the need to officially launch the movement through armed attacks. Finally, the movement launched its first attack on 31 December 1964 and first military communiqué, which was the first of almost forty to follow that year.

By mid-June, Fateh was engaging regional and international players. On 17 June 1965, Fateh addressed an open memorandum to the United Nations Secretary General U Tant, requesting that their first Fateh guerrilla fighter captured by Israel, Mahmoud Hijazi, be considered a prisoner of war (Cobban, 1984). The movement also communicated with the Third Arab League Summit, criticizing the hostile measures of Arab governments towards its members.

These declarations brought much attention to Fateh as they signaled that a new player was emerging in the region. They also outlined the movement's policies and views towards liberating Palestine. Fateh challenged the Arab regimes' way of dealing with the question of Palestine, accusing them at best with complicity and inaction. This marked the real

beginning of the Palestinian struggle for liberation and self-determination began and with it, the Palestinians' political struggle to regain the world's recognition of the identity, history, and heritage they had been denied and have preserved for more than 62 years now, despite all odds.

Prior to gaining recognition of Palestinian rights on the international level, the Palestinian Liberation movement bore the daunting task of proving to respective states that it truly represented the Palestinian people. Until that time, there was an intentional disregard for Palestinians as a unified political unit with a common identity and aspirations and having a single leadership. In effect, part of the liberation movement's success on the diplomatic front was its ability to revive a sense of national identity within the scattered Palestinian populations, uniting them under one flag and in the name of one identity, the Palestinian people. This granted the modern Palestinian revolution the legitimacy and power to extract Arab and international recognition in the years and decades to come.

### Attempts to circumvent Palestinian aspirations

Arab governments became increasingly aware of the popular sentiments growing among Palestinians, which called for the liberation of Palestine away from their control (Abdel Rahman, 1987). They feared Palestinian frustration with Arab inaction could lead to unrest. Arab regimes particularly feared the ramifications of individual armed attacks that began taking place against Israeli targets without those governments' explicit authorization. Consequently, Arab governments saw it fit to take the initiative in forming what would be perceived as an independent Palestinian political entity.

The first initiative to establish an independent Palestinian entity was proposed by the United Arab Republic[6] during a session of the Arab League foreign ministers in Casablanca in September 1959. As Arab League decisions are adopted by consensus, Jordan's persistently adamant refusal to establish this entity repeatedly delayed the decision. Instead, an expert committee was established to put in place plans for Arab policies regarding the Palestinian question.

This committee recommended resuming support to the All Palestine Government (Al-Shuqeiri, 1971). The Arab League then appointed Mr. Ahmad Al-Shuqeiri as head of the All-Palestine Government and its representative to the Arab League.

Inter-Arab relations were extremely fragile at that stage. The war in Yemen between Cairo, Sana'a and Riyadh was at its peak. The squabbling between Damascus and Cairo was also in full swing while Amman was at odds with both. The dispute between Morocco and Algeria was becoming more serious, with Cairo also party to the growing conflict (Al-Shuqeiri, 1971).

In this context, President Nasser secured the convening of the First Arab Summit to discuss Israel's diversion of River Jordan waters and the Palestinian issue on 13 January 1964.

When the Arab Kings and Presidents started arriving at Cairo, Al–Shuqeiri campaigned for the Birth of a Palestinian entity (Al-Shuqeiri, 1971). The response to this initiative was mixed. While most countries welcomed the proposal, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Jordan initially objected (Abdel Rahman, 1987). Al-Shuqeiri exerted serious efforts to convince the late King Hussein that his fears were unfounded, arguing that the proposed entity would not

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[6] A union between Egypt and Syria that began in 1958 and existed until 1961.

be a sovereign government nor would it attempt to seize control of the West Bank. He even forced himself on the closed meetings of the Heads of States and managed to officially propose the establishment of a Palestinian entity (Al-Shuqeiri 1971).

Following that session, The Arab Summit decided "*to request from Mr. Ahmed Al-Shuqeiri representative of Palestine to the League of Arab States to continue consultations with Member States and the Palestinian people to build the appropriate administrative structure for the organization of the Palestinian people in order to enable it to play its role in the liberation of their homeland and self-determination*" (Al-Shuqeiri, 1971, p.67). This conclusion gave birth to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), albeit with a vague mandate. Al-Shuqeiri then embarked on establishing this Palestinian entity.

The first Palestinian National Council was convened in Jerusalem on 28 May 1964. Estimates on the total number of participants vary between 350 and 398. Concluding the first the session on 2 June 1964, Al-Shuqeiri declared the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organisation [PLO] "as *a representative of the Palestinian People and leader of its struggle to liberate its country*" (Abdel Rahman, 1987, p. 76).

The PLO was founded on the principle of forming a secular Palestinian state on the entire land of historical Palestine and rejecting the legitimacy of the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state on Palestinian land; a position in line with the Arab rejection of the partition resolution (181 II). However, the PLO's stance did not exclude the possibility of allowing those Israeli citizens to become Palestinian citizens in the state they aimed to establish.

This Palestinian political entity started its journey without complete independence from the Arab states and despite opposition from some Arab countries and Palestinian figures. Yet, the PLO managed to launch its diplomatic activities while building its own institutions; those included military training camps, a national fund, a radio station and a research centre.

The PLO also began opening representative offices in Arab countries. However, these offices did not constitute recognition on the part of Arab governments of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian People. Instead, the nature of these PLO offices was limited to overseeing the status of Palestinians residing in those countries. But by 1966, the PLO had opened representative offices in nearly all Arab countries as well as Beijing and Belgrade in addition to a Press Office in New York.

The PLO's first activity on the multilateral level was its attendance as an observer in the Non-Aligned Movement [NAM] Summit, held in Cairo in 1964 (Abdel Rahman, 1987). The attendance of this Summit is considered the first step the PLO took on the road to international recognition. Although the PLO attended as a guest in this Summit, its presence constituted a declaration to the world community that a political entity representing Palestine and its People was finally born.

During the Summit, the PLO initiated contact with NAM members, the majority of which were newly independent states from the developing world. This is why the Palestinian cause found plenty of sympathetic ears at the NAM Summit, as the majority of members were still healing from the wounds of foreign colonization.

At the conclusion of the Cairo NAM Summit, members issued the Cairo Declaration, which contained clauses expressing support to the Palestinian People's struggle for independence and self-determination.

In September of 1964, the Ambassadors Committee of NAM invited the PLO to join NAM's Second Summit, which was held in Cairo in October 1964, as an observer. Later on in 1973, NAM's Fourth Summit, held in Algeria, formally recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People. "*In the same year, the Organization of African Unity recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization (which is the only recognition that*

*the Organization of African Unity afforded to an organization [working] outside its borders"* (Al-Khatib, 1985, p.65).

China was the first non-Arab country to allow the Palestinian flag to fly over a Representative Office in its capital, Beijing in 1965 (Abdel Rahman, 1987). The office enjoyed full diplomatic status, even though some Arab countries still had not recognized the PLO as the official representative of the Palestinian People.

### 1967 defeat and its ramifications

In 1967, Israel launched a war on Egypt, Syria and Jordan, in which all Arab armies were swiftly defeated by Israel in six days. The war ended with Israel occupying the remainder of historical Palestine as well as the Syrian Golan Heights and Egyptian Sinai Peninsula, sending shockwaves across the Arab world.  Seeing their regular armies defeated and humiliated as well as unable to protect the holiest of Arab Muslim and Christian sights (particularly in Jerusalem and Bethlehem), the Palestinian public turned to their liberation movements for hope.

This war resulted in emptying Palestine even more from its native population as the majority of Palestinians were now in exile. From that point onwards, the majority of the Palestinian People were refugees or descendants of refugees.

In response to the new crisis, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 242 on 22 November 1967, which would become instrumental in future debates on the resolution of the conflict in the Middle East. Israel rejected the resolution, arguing that issues like withdrawal and refugees could only be settled through direct negotiations with the Arab States and the conclusion of a comprehensive peace treaty.  This resolution was also rejected by the PLO as it failed to recognize the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and only referred to the Palestinian question as a refugee problem.

And while anger was growing at Arab governments for their 1967 defeat, movements like Fateh and others represented hope for the frustrated public; movements promising to regain the squandered Arab dignity and land. This popularity was precipitated by the victory of Palestinian liberation movements and factions over the Israeli army in March 1968. That brief yet violent clash, which occurred when Israeli forces invaded Al-Karamah village near the Jordanian-Palestinian borders, served as a bright example for Palestinian and Arab bravery, especially since the participating Palestinian fighters were far fewer and less equipped than the invading Israeli forces.

Meanwhile, the PLO was quickly losing credibility and popularity among the Palestinian public, who viewed it as part of the defeated and impotent Arab regimes. The PLO was turning into a semi-Arab regime, tied by the same political and military limitations. This had direct repercussions on the PLO's ability to represent its people. That is why the period between 1967 and 1969 was marked by internal confusion within the PLO and negligible diplomatic activity.

During this time, the PLO began initiating contacts with Palestinian liberation movements, especially Fateh and PFLP, which were the most prominent and credible Palestinian liberation movements at the time. By July 1968, the fourth PNC adopted a new Palestinian Charter/Covenant, with the active participation of Fateh and PFLP.

The convening of the fifth PNC in February 1969 was a turning point. The new Executive Committee contained a majority from the Palestinian liberation movements. Yasser Arafat (Fateh's spokesperson at the time) was elected as the head of the PLO Executive Committee (making him the PLO Chairman) while Yehya Hamoudeh was elected as the President of the PNC.

The decisions of the Fifth PNC revolutionized the PLO and official Palestinian representation. Joining these liberation movements under the sole umbrella of the PLO strengthened the organization's credibility and empowered it with the sort of independence from Arab governments it lacked before.

In increasingly large numbers, Palestinians joined the numerous Palestinian liberation movements and factions forming during those years including Fateh, PFLP and DFLP. These factions had gained legitimacy and credibility among the Palestinian public due to their armed struggle, a fundamental demand of the Palestinian People at the time.

It can be said that with the fifth PNC, the Palestinian People gained a new independent political entity that combined political presence with the ability to act effectively on the ground. Consequently, this newly founded strength solidified the PLO's ability to act on the diplomatic level, especially after combining the PLO's diplomatic relations with those that the liberation movements had been able to forge with various countries. Palestinian now had a united and representative voice.

Following these drastic changes within the PLO, Arab regimes became increasingly worried about the role and strength this organization was gaining on the Arab and international levels. Having joined the numerous Palestinian liberation movements and factions under one umbrella, the PLO's legitimacy and presence (physical and otherwise) became impossible to contest, especially on the issue of representing the Palestinian people. Also, since these groups espoused different, sometimes clashing ideologies (as Palestinian groups within the PLO umbrella span from the right to the far left of the political spectrum), the PLO's political positions became increasingly independent from the Arab regimes. The PLO was asserting its independence and requesting support from Arab regimes that had previously expected the PLO to be under their wing.

This newly found antagonism between the PLO and Arab governments was sharply felt and later violently played out in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which housed the largest Palestinian refugee population outside Palestine. The ruling family in Jordan, which still enjoyed aspects of civil administration rights in the West Bank, felt increasingly threatened by the PLO and its independent stances. Based mainly in Jordan at the time, the PLO naturally enjoyed wide public support, which the Jordanian Monarchy felt threatened the very authority it had in the country. Consequently, it is important to note, details notwithstanding, that the violent armed confrontation between the Jordanian Monarch and the PLO in 1970 and 1971 was within this context.

During the clashes, Jordan asserted its power with ruthless brutally, which finally exiled the PLO from Jordan in 1971. The PLO lost an important field of operations and a sizeable Palestinian population that owed it unchallenged loyalty and support. Consequently, the diplomatic and political successes that the PLO achieved after this bloody chapter in Jordan also represented a victory of the independent Palestinian position and set the stage for Palestinians' ownership of their fate and future. As such, it allowed the PLO to advance its political and diplomatic goals without being challenged by a competing Arab regime that wanted to preserve its role as the custodian of the Palestinian cause.

The presence of the PLO or any resistance movement outside its country/borders is a source of trouble. No matter how much the PLO tried to avoid military clashes with any Arab government, it was often faced with a situation in which it had to defend its own existence. Thus, the PLO ended up being involved in many clashes and internal conflicts, which greatly weakened the PLO and diverted it from its main goal, the liberation of Palestine. I agree with the opinion that the PLO committed some mistakes. However, it must be said that none of these mistakes were serious enough to justify paying the dear price exacted on the PLO and Palestinian civilians in 1970 in Jordan (which wanted to avert Israeli

retaliation) and later on (between 1975 and 1982) in Lebanon (whose phalangists were allied with Israel to achieve their civil war goals, including driving out the Palestinians from Lebanon) as well as Syria (which wanted unconditional and unquestioning obedience from the PLO in exchange for its support)..

These clashes and military showdowns greatly weakened the PLO, which had to start from scratch several times after each round. They consumed a lot of valuable time, which would have been far better spent in activities related to the shared cause of liberating the occupied land. These clashes also strained PLO relations with many Arab countries and diminished the Arab public's support to the organization on many occasions.

### Political Maturity

The early 1970's saw Palestinian politics mature, with Palestinian leaders discussing options to resolving the Palestinian issue, including the idea of creating a single secular democratic state over historical Palestine where European Jews and Palestinians would peacefully coexist as citizens of one state. The PLO had become more acutely aware of the importance of gaining international support to advancing its goals. Hence, its formulation of a concise political program was the organization's attempt to communicate clearly with the world and engage countries, based on this program, in a dialogue and/or relation that could advance it. This is why the eighth PNC, which convened in Cairo between 28 February and 5 March 1971, adopted the political program discussed above. This program was a revolutionary departure from traditional positions of Arab regimes, endorsing the concepts of democracy and coexistence (Gresh, 1988).

When the 1973 war broke, the PLO leadership decided to partake in the effort, believing such involvement would undoubtedly have political rewards (Abu Shreef, 2005). So the PLO contributed, in some cases effectively, on the Egyptian, Lebanese and Syrian fronts. The

leadership's assessment was correct. Following the war, Arab regimes were left with no choice but to recognize this organization for what it had grown to be, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People. The PLO's efforts to preserve its political independence were asserted and its wide public support was undeniable. The Arab Summit convening in Algeria in November 1973 recognized the PLO's role and granted it recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People, despite strong Jordanian reservations.

The PLO then received similar recognition from the Non-Aligned Movement, and rapidly expanded its links with the socialist countries in the following months.

The 1973 war offered the PLO a historic opportunity while challenging the organization to an unprecedented and difficult internal discussion about its goals and political program. With its newly gained recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People, the PLO had an opportunity to participate in peace efforts while taking advantage of the demonstrated Arab military, political and financial power to achieve political gains. At the same time, joining the regional political system and engaging in negotiations with Israel would necessarily require a radical departure from the goals and slogans Palestinian liberation movements raised since 1948.

On 8 June 1974, the twelfth PNC session met in Cairo and saw debate about the essence of the organization; its history and purpose. At this point, revolutionary ideals were confronted by real politic, putting Palestinian representatives at a historic crossroad (Sayigh, 2000). The PNC then adopted a new political ten-point program, which was the result of long internal negotiations between PLO Palestinian factions. This program committed the PLO to establishing a 'national authority' when the circumstances allow (Sayigh, 2000).

Ironically, the adoption of the ten-point program won the PLO's representative status a new push during the Arab League meeting in Rabat in October 1974. In that Summit, the PLO was not only unanimously and finally recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People, its ten-point program was also adopted by the Arab states.

Reaching this decision required a tremendous amount of work, clashes, and sometimes armed confrontations, exacting a heavy price on the PLO and its liberation movements. Yet, this historic recognition allowed the PLO to gain more momentum in its diplomatic and political activities as it now enjoyed the support of the Arab League and was unchallenged internationally for the representation of the Palestinian People. More importantly though, this recognition posed a dilemma for Israel, which until then had refused to even recognize the existence of a Palestinian People, let alone their liberation organization.

This particular success provided also enabled the PLO with something Palestinians did not have since the Nakba; Palestinian representation was genuine and authentically Palestinian, able to represent the people's issues and interests without ulterior motives.

In perspective, the period between 1964 and 1974 saw the PLO confronting many challenges on the Arab and international levels. Those challenges focused mainly on being recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People. For despite its initial gains, which helped earn it international recognition, the PLO had been previously drawn back by the lack of recognition. Now, those chains were broken.

As discussed above, Arab governments wanted the PLO under their control since its establishment. Yet, despite the PLO's continuous attempts to balance the Arab governments' varying interests vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue, Arab "problems" and conflicting agendas continued to negatively affect the PLO's efforts.

Jordan was a key player in the Palestinian issue, as it had the largest Palestinian refugee population in the Middle East. Consequently, the PLO was concerned with the effects of its clash with the Jordanian Monarch, given Jordan's objections to the Rabat Summit recognition, as this would have a direct bearing on Palestinian representation. The PLO feared that parties refusing to deal with the Palestinians could now bypass them and talk to Jordan under the pretext that it still retained civil authority over the West Bank, which only ended in 1988 with King Hussein's declaration of disengagement.

*PLO on the international stage*

On the eve of the 1973 war, the non-aligned movement, having taken note of the Arab League recognition of the PLO also recognized the organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People. The Organization of Islamic Conference was more forthcoming towards the PLO than the Arab League as it awarded the PLO full membership in February 1974, eight months before the Rabat Summit.

The recognition of intergovernmental organizations like NAM and OIC was particularly significant for the PLO as they naturally reflected on the bilateral relation the PLO developed with their member-states. The membership of these organizations was mostly newly independent and developing countries who identified with the plight of a people fighting against colonialism. More importantly perhaps, their membership spanned the globe, opening an unprecedented horizon to Palestinian representation; spreading the PLO's wings to Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.

When the PLO was established, doors to the Soviet Union (USSR) and the United States of America seemed tightly shut in front of the Palestinian issue and its proponents. In fact, one of the very few issues that American and Soviet leaders seemed to agree on, even at the height of the Cold War, was the way with which to treat the Question of Palestine – inside

and outside the hallways of the United Nations. Nonetheless, the PLO managed to use the strong relationships that some Arab countries had with the USSR during that period, especially Egypt, to begin a relationship with the USSR. But this relationship did not break any new grounds with regards to substance and political positions, as the USSR continued to adopt positions similar to those of the United States, albeit differing with the US in recognizing the PLO and the legitimacy of its resistance against Israeli occupation at a later stage.

The European stance towards the establishment and legitimacy of the PLO and its demands went through a number of phases. Western European countries received the establishment of the PLO with full opposition and negligence. This opposition was primarily based on the historical, cultural, political, and strategic relations with Israel (Arab Research and Studies Institute, 1993). However, this initial stance eventually evolved from outright rejection to very cautious relations.

Overall, Western European countries were late in recognizing the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian People and as such were late in allowing for any real diplomatic or political engagement with the PLO. It was not until the year 1980 that EEC members adopted the Venice declaration, which affirmed that the PLO should be *"associated with"* Middle East peace negotiations and recognized the Palestinian People's right to self-determination (Cobban, 1984).

The peak of Palestinian representation and diplomatic success was reached in the period between 1974 and 1984. During this decade, the PLO gained new Arab and international grounds and achieved unprecedented recognition of its status and legitimacy of its goals.

The first major step was on 14 October 1974, when the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted resolution 3210 (XXIX). This resolution clearly recognized that the

Palestinian people as a principle party to the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and invited the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian People to participate in the deliberations of the General Assembly on the Question of Palestine in plenary meetings. Accordingly, Mr. Yasser Arafat addressed the General Assembly on 13 November 1974, where he was accorded the respect due to a head of state.

With the exception of the ceremonial occasion when Pope Paul VI addressed the General Assembly, Arafat is considered the first representative of a non-state entity to address the assembly (Palestine Mission to the UN, no date/a).

Arafat's historic address to the United Nations presented the PLO's position towards all issues on the General Assembly agenda. Additionally, Mr. Arafat signaled the PLO's willingness to reach a peaceful settlement to the conflict, although the PLO had yet to recognize Security Council resolution 242. Instead, Arafat outlined the PLO's vision for a one-state solution in which Palestinians and Israelis could coexist as citizens of one secular state, Palestine.

Following this diplomatic victory, the Palestinian issue was a permanent item on the agenda of the UN General Assembly sessions. Dozens of resolutions supporting and asserting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian People were adopted from that date on.

*Perspective*

The period between 1974 and 1984 was overwhelmed with very important developments vis-à-vis Palestinian diplomacy. Internally, the PLO was better prepared to engage in diplomacy, after having consolidated a clearer political agenda, which was crucial to winning international support. Also, the PLO's proposed secular state where Muslims, Christians, and Jews could live in peace as citizens of one country was a clear indication of

the PLO's move towards endorsing more internationally acceptable solutions to the Middle East conflict.

The PLO's ten-point program was also instrumental in clarifying the Palestinian position, especially to states and publics sympathetic to the Palestinian plight though apprehensive from the PLO's previously unclear agenda. These policy declarations also helped give the PLO and its member factions a political character, rather than the purely militaristic character they had gained during the mid sixties to early seventies. Further, this international engagement helped the PLO expose and discredit Israeli and American claims regarding its fictitious intentions to "throw Jews in the sea".

Along with its success, the PLO also suffered a number of severe blows during the said period, many of which threatened its very existence. The most prominent related events were its unplanned slip into the Lebanese Civil War, the confrontation with the Syrian army following its intervention in Lebanon, the first Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1978, and last but not least the war with Israel in 1981 as well as the 1982 Israeli invasion, which pushed the PLO out of Lebanon. Despite these numerous and almost fatal crises and their tremendous cost in terms of Palestinian lives as well as the overwhelming destruction throughout Lebanon and its Palestinian refugee camps, these crises forced the international community to pay greater attention to the core issue in the Middle East, i.e. the Question of Palestine.

The world could not dispute that there was a People whose problem was at the heart of instability in the volatile region of the Middle East. These crises also shook the international community into the realization that without resolving this core issue, this region that is of such strategic significance to all major world powers would remain embroiled in bloody conflicts.

Simultaneously, Israel was gravely concerned and sometimes livid, with the successes the PLO was able to accomplish on the international diplomatic front. So much so that starting the early 1970's, Israel adopted a systematic policy of military escalation against the PLO during this said period, including the assassination of the PLO's most prominent and moderate political and diplomatic personalities.

# Peace efforts: a trend of continuous undermining

The Middle East was never short of peace initiatives. Rather, the region was always short of the political will to implement any of them. Israeli intransigence was often rewarded by the United States with additional concessions. Meanwhile, the US would pressure the other parties while Israel enjoyed a free hand to undermine most of the initiatives, either by starting a war or through illegal actions.

Following the 1967 Israeli war, Israel refused to adhere to Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which demanded withdrawal to the pre-5 June boarders. But in light of Egypt and Jordan's acceptance of the resolution, then US secretary of state William P. Rogers presented an initiative on 9 December 1969, based on the principles embodied in resolution 242. This statement, dubbed the Rogers plan, sought Israel's withdrawal to the internationally recognized border while suggesting minor modifications for 'mutual security'. The plan also proposed a solution for the Palestinian refugee problem. The Rogers plan surprised Israeli leaders, who considered this initiative to be evidence of U.S.—USSR cooperation on the imposition of a settlement. This is why while presenting her new government to the Knesset on 15 December, Golda Meir launched the first of many offensives against the Rogers plan (Shliam, 2001). Israel then resorted to escalation on the Egyptian front, launching air strikes deep inside Egypt and over Cairo.

The Rogers Plan was modified on 19 June 1970, excluding reference to refugees and boarders and referring only to a three-month ceasefire, followed by a public endorsement of 242 and cooperation with the United Nations mission, known as the Jarring mission. But this was not enough to bring Israel to accept the Plan (Shlaim, 2001). So, "[o]*n 24 July, Nixon sent a letter to Meir in which he stated explicitly that the final boundaries must be agreed between the parties themselves by means of negotiations under the auspices of Ambassador Jarring; that the United States would nor exert pressure on Israel to accept a solution to the refugee problem that would fundamentally alter its Jewish character or endanger its security; and that not a single Israeli soldier would have to be withdrawn from the cease-fire lines until a peace agreement satisfactory to Israel had been reached. The letter represented the virtual abandonment of the first Rogers plan. In some quarters it was hailed as a second Belfour Declaration*" (Shlaim 2001, p.296).

Resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967 enshrined the principle that establishing a just and lasting peace in the Middle East had to be based on Israel's withdrawal from the territories it occupied in 1967 as well as the right of states to live within secure border. Further, the resolution affirmed the need to reach a just settlement to the refugee problem (United Nations, 1967).

From a United Nations' perspective, Security Council resolution 242 (1967) should have established a framework for peace in the Middle East. However, the resolution did not explicitly address the Question of Palestine, limiting its reference to the issue by addressing "the refugee problem". That is why early efforts to use the resolution as means to end the conflict, including those of four permanent members of the Security Council and ten distinguished leaders of Africa all failed (Hadawi, 1989). It must be noted though that all these discussions and mediation efforts excluded Palestinians from the process.

*Exclusionist efforts*

Initial American peace efforts in the region were mired by the US's tacit endorsement of Israel's refusal to recognize the Palestinian People, their rights, or legitimate representatives. Hence, all US peace initiatives willfully excluded the Palestinian side.

Seventeen days into the 1973 war, the US and USSR worked jointly at the UN Security Council to adopt resolution 338 (1973). The resolution called for an immediate ceasefire, and an immediate implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) as well as a call for the immediate launch of negotiations between the parties concerned.

Aware of the momentum building for a peace conference following the 1973 war, President Anwar Sadat asked PLO representatives whether Palestinians would attend such a peace conference. The Palestinian leadership decided to withhold its response until receiving a formal invitation (Cobban 1984). But Palestinian readiness was of almost no consequence, as circumstances would prove in the following months.

The US Secretary of State at the time was Henry Kissinger. One of the cornerstones of his diplomatic policy was based on establishing a US monopoly over the conflict and its resolution, in effect excluding the Soviets and Europeans from any meaningful role in the region. Kissinger wanted this monopoly to also maintain the long-standing exclusion of Palestinians and their leadership from any political process (Cobban, 1984). He succeeded. On 21 December 1973, the Peace Conference on the Middle East convened in Geneva for a day. Only Egypt, Jordan, and Israel attended.

After surviving Watergate, Kissinger concluded the Sinai II agreement between Egypt and Israel on 4 September 1975, which allowed for an Israeli withdrawal in exchange for Israeli access to the Suez Canal. But Israel secured other very significant gains from this

agreement, including U.S. economic and military guarantees (Cobban, 1984). Israel also received American assurances that the US boycott of the PLO would remain until it recognizes Israel and endorses UN resolution 242; this in addition to promising Israel a veto on the participation of the PLO in any subsequent talks (Cobban, 1984).

At the UN, there were strong objections to this American pledge. Members called for the participation of the PLO in all negotiations on the Middle East held under United Nations auspices. These calls were unheeded.

### *New diplomatic initiative*

In 1976, the PLO further consolidated its representative strength by becoming a full member of the Arab League (Europa, 2003). It's a step Palestinians wanted to boost their international standing.

In January 1977, Jimmy Carter was sworn in as US President and immediately began his Administration's peace efforts, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) (Sayigh and Shlaim, 1997). This approach injected some hope that engaging the PLO was near.

From the onset, Carter engaged Arab states and also called for a Palestinian "homeland" within the framework of Jordan "or by other means", considering this the goal of regional peace efforts (Europa, 2003). These calls were soon after echoed in Europe.

By then, Yasser Arafat believed that the PLO had to reconcile its program with what was internationally possible, i.e. the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 242 (Abu Shreef, 2005). After a stormy debate, the thirteenth PNC adopted in March 1977 a policy declaration endorsing the diplomatic approach. This position was clearer than the PLO's ten-point program of 1974 (Cobann, 1984).

The US State Department responded by June with caution: "*the peace foreseen, to be durable, must also deal with the Palestinian issue. In this connection, the [U.S.] President has spoken of the need for a homeland for the Palestinians whose exact nature should be negotiated between the parties*" (cited in Quandt 1986, p.73). The Palestinian leadership responded by dispatching a private letter, through an intermediary, to the White House on 26 July. The letter expressed the organization's willingness to 'live in peace with Israel' but asked for an American commitment to an independent Palestinian state. Maintaining earlier US pledges to Israel, Carter responded by saying that for Palestinians to earn a place at the eventual peace talks, they had to renounce their stated aim of destroying Israel (Sayigh, 2000).

But Carter's cautious approach was soon confronted with Israeli defiance. Arab governments also disagreed on the party that should represent the Palestinians; a position that contradicted previous Arab League decisions.

In August 1977, President Sadat promised the visiting US Secretary of State to convince the PLO to recognize Israel. He also pledged to have the Egyptian Minister of Defense represent Palestinians in the Peace Conference if his efforts don't succeed. President Carter then implicitly stated that Israel's recognition of the PLO might be a determining factor in whether the Geneva conference would take place in 1977. It's noteworthy that during this period, Carter frequently used the terms PLO and Palestinians almost interchangeably (Quandt, 1986).

US Secretary of State Vance also told the NSC the PLO might be willing to accept resolution 242(1967) as the basis of negotiations and the emergence of a Palestinian state in the Occupied Territory after a transitional period. With such assessment, Carter decided to accommodate concerns the PLO relayed to his Secretary of State through the Egyptians regarding resolution 242(1967), particularly concerning the issue of Palestinian self-

determination. The US State Department officially declared that the Palestinian question could not be ignored and had to be resolved in the context of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace agreement, which would involve Palestinian representatives (Sayigh, 2000).

Chairman Arafat immediately confirmed the PLO would accept UNSCR 242, with suitable modifications. But Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Began, responded by announcing new settlement construction in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and launching military assaults on South Lebanon, where PLO forces were based (Sayigh, 2000).

By October 1977, the US and USSR were in agreement on Carter's political approach, which began openly talking about "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people". However, the US Administration soon after abandoned its attempts to involve the PLO in the political process because of the mounting domestic pressure (Quandt, 1986).

But Egyptian President Anwar Sadat decided to push ahead and opted for unilateral action, visiting Jerusalem on 1 November 1977 (Quandt, 1986). Developments thereafter lead to the Camp David Talks in September 1978 that lasted for twelve days. The result was Israel's withdrawal from Sinai and the establishment of normalized relations, which was formalized on 26 March 1979, when Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty in Washington D.C. (Europa, 2003).

Arab states and the PLO rejected the agreements and vowed to combat them. This signaled Egypt's exit from Arab politics for some years, during which the PLO had to reposition itself and re-work its Arab alliances, including reconciling with Jordan (Abu Shreef, 2005).

Recent historical and political biographies suggest that the late Yasser Arafat was willing to relinquish important bargaining chips, including the recognition of UN resolution 242, in return for a firm commitment to place Palestinian statehood on the negotiating agenda.

However, international circumstances at the time were inopportune as US Administrations refrained from offering such a commitment (Abu Sharif, 2005). The window of opportunity was not to open again until the convening of the Madrid peace conference in October 1991, on the eve of the formal dissolution of the USSR.

## *Change in European policy*

By the late 1970's, Western European countries departed from their usual alignment with US positions and became increasingly vocal towards Israeli policies. Recognizing the centrality of the Palestinian issue and the PLO's role, the late Yasser Arafat was invited to meet several EC heads of State, King Juan Carlos of Spain. The PLO also began gaining official recognition from several EC capitals.

There were also modest though unsuccessful American attempts in the US to change the PLO boycott policy. In September 1979, US Ambassador to the UN, Andrew Young, met with the PLO Observer, Zahdi Labib Terzi. But Young was quickly forced to resign following scathing protest from the Israeli Government. Upon departing, Young said Washington's refusal to engage the PLO was ridiculous (Europa, 2003).

## *From Fahd plan to Reagan confusion*

The Reagan Administration hailed a new era in Middle East politics, mired by conflict. The attitude of this ideologically pro-Israel Administration was clearly evident and worrisome; more so when the new President appeared to reverse existing US policy by declaring Israeli settlements were 'not illegal' (Europa, 2003).

Still, Arab governments continued their engagement efforts. The Saudi Crown Prince Fahd announced an eight-point peace calling for an end to Israel's occupation of Arab territories occupied in 1967; the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their land in return for recognition.

But the plan received mixed Arab reviews and the PLO leadership was concerned it did not address the issue of Palestinian representation. This is why the 1981 Arab Summit in Morocco failed to adopt the Plan as it was presented.

The Following year, diplomatic efforts gave way to war and Israel, with American backing, assaulted then invaded Lebanon in July 1982, causing the death, injury, and displacement of hundreds of thousands of Lebanese and Palestinian civilians. An Arab capital was under Israeli siege and the PLO was left with no choice but to exit its last base on the frontline with Israel. The exit agreement was reached through US mediator Philip Habib, who was the first American envoy to engage the PLO (Cobban, 1984).

As the PLO leadership departed from Beirut in September 1982, US President Ronald Reagan proposed a self-government Palestinian authority for a transitional five-year period in the West Bank and Gaza during which Israel would freeze settlement activity. The US President also said the final status, including the fate of Jerusalem, must be decided by negotiations in the context of self-government by the Palestinians in association with Jordan, saying this offered the best chance for a durable, just and lasting peace. But Reagan allowed for Israel to adjust the borders based on its security assessment and said this proposal was based on United Nations Security Council resolution 242 (1967) (Cattan, 1988).

The Reagan Administration presented Arab states and Israel with an advance copy of the plan in which it reiterated its long-standing policy towards the PLO; the US would only engage the PLO when it recognized Israel's right to exist as well as Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The US also made clear it opposed the dismantlement of Israeli settlements during the proposed transitional period (Cattan, 1988).

Still, Israel immediately and unequivocally rejected the Reagan Plan. In contrast, the Palestinian leadership's initial response was cautious, welcoming the rejection of Israel's

claim of sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza and the call for a settlement freeze while rejecting other provision.

The twelfth Arab League Summit was held that month in Fez, Morocco. With few exceptions, Arab states attempted to maintain the momentum initiated by the Reagan Plan. The Arabs adopted what they declared to be the minimum requirements for peace in the region. The eight-point plan as it was called was based on the Fahd Plan, but it distinctly referred to the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

With both the Reagan and Fez plans now on the table, Moscow also got engaged. On September 15, Leonid Brezhnev announced the Soviet Union's 'six-point peace plan'. While it mostly repeated previous Soviet proposals, the plan focused on the commonalities between the Fez and Soviet plans (Marantz and Stein, 1985).

The official Palestinian response to these diplomatic endeavors came in the political program of the sixteenth PNC meeting, held in Algeria in February 1983. It rejected Reagan's plan on the basis that it does not provide a just and lasting solution of the conflict (Cattan, 1988).

### Battles for the independent national decision

In 1982 and 1983, the PLO was torn by inner conflicts due to the direct intervention and backing of Syria and Libya. Inter-factional fighting erupted and Arafat's own Fateh movement faced its most serious sabotage attempt, with senior members carrying out a Syrian-backed armed mutiny. To respond to this violent intervention, Chairman Arafat flew to Cairo, effectively ending the Arab boycott of Egypt, which had been in place since the Camp David Accords (Europa, 2003). By resorting to Egypt, Arafat wanted to balance the spheres of power in the region and tip the balance in the Palestinians' favor. The PLO

Chairman sought refuge with the champion of political dialogue, Egypt, hoping to open a political horizon for his cause (Abu Sharif, 2005).

### *Intifada and declaration of independence*

In December 1987, the Palestinian population still living under Israel's military occupation erupted in protest. The first Intifada, as it became known, was the largest and longest popular uprising against Israeli occupation. And Israel's military repression brought the PLO once again to centre stage in international politics.

The PLO capitalized effectively on the first Intifada through a successful international public relations campaign. Additionally, the PLO saw in the world attention and condemnation of Israeli human rights violations an opportunity to reassert its willingness to reach a negotiated settlement.

On 15 November 1988, Chairman Yasser Arafat declared to the Palestinian National Council convening in Algiers, the "independence of Palestine". The declaration was truly historic and ushered in a new political era. That's because the declaration showed acceptance of the relevant Security Council resolutions, including 242 and 338, as a basis for solving the conflict.

Eighty-four countries recognized the State of Palestine in 1988 alone. The number later grew to 104 while and several EC members raised Palestinian diplomatic representation. The PLO also scored political gains at the UN as it elevated its representative status at the international body, laying all contest over legitimacy to rest. In 1989, and despite fervent US opposition, this time on procedural grounds, the Security Council overwhelmingly voted in favor of granting the PLO the right to address the Security Council on an equal footing with member states (Sayigh, 1999).

The declaration of independence created momentum at a time of no political horizon in the region. This declaration was the PLO's attempt at overcoming the obstacles impeding any kind of dialogue between it and the United States, the region's most powerful player.

*From denial to limited dialogue: PLO-US relations*

At the time of the declaration of independence, the American political campaign against the PLO was at its peak. The US attempted to close down the PLO Permanent Representative Mission to the UN and refused to grant Chairman Arafat a visa to the UN when he was invited to address the UN General Assembly. In response, the General Assembly, adopted resolution 43/49; it transferred the deliberations on the Question of Palestine to UN Headquarters Geneva, from 13 to 15 December 1988 (United Nations, 1988). This was an unprecedented move since the United Nations took possession of its permanent Headquarters in New York.

The international message was clear and increasingly, the US found itself alone with Israel in trying to sidestep serious engagement with Palestinian representatives in the context of peace efforts. That year, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly adopted two resolutions supporting the participation of the PLO in an international peace conference on equal footing with other concerned parties (resolution 43/176) and endorsing the PNC's proclamation of the State of Palestine. On both occasions, only Israel and the US voted against these resolutions (UN Yearbook, 1988). It was a political victory for the PLO.

Arafat's address to the UN General Assembly on 13 December 1988 was an important juncture. Meanwhile, Swedish Foreign Minister Steven Anderson mediated between the PLO and the US Administration, resulting in Arafat taking a bold step on 14 December (Sayigh, 1999). In a press conference, he declared:

*In my speech ... yesterday, it was clear that we mean our people's rights to free and national independence, according to resolution 181, and the right of all parties concerned in the Middle East conflict to exist in peace and security and, as I have mentioned, including the State of Palestine, Israel and other neighbours, according to resolutions 242 and 338… As for terrorism, I renounced it yesterday in no uncertain terms and yet I repeat for the record that we totally and absolutely renounce all forms of terrorism, including individual, group and state terrorism (cited in UNISPAL, 1990).*

The American President reciprocated this step almost immediately with a statement;

*The Palestine Liberation Organization today issued a statement in which it accepted United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, recognized Israel's right to exist, and renounced terrorism. These have long been our conditions for a substantive dialogue. They have been met. Therefore, I have authorized the State Department to enter into a substantive dialogue with PLO representatives… The initiation of a dialogue between the United States and PLO representatives is an important step in the peace process, the more so because it represents the serious evolution of Palestinian thinking toward realistic and pragmatic positions on the key issues (cited in UNISPAL, 1990).*

US Secretary of State George Shultz appointed the American Ambassador to Tunisia to begin official dialogue with the PLO, represented by Yasser Abed Rabbo, a Member of the PLO Executive Committee (Sayigh, 1999).

### Madrid: An incomplete step

The PLO's opposition to the US-led multinational assault on Iraq following its invasion to Kuwait in 1990 was a highly costly decision, resulting in political isolation in the Arab

world and in the cutting off of funds from the Arab Gulf states. But, following the multi-national forces' decisive victory, the US embarked on a diplomatic initiative to hold a regional peace conference, sponsored by the US and USSR.

In a speech to Congress on 6 April 1991, United States President George W. Bush Sr. introduced a peace initiative for the Middle East conflict, based on the now familiar principles to which all players, including the PLO, had by then agreed to. Those were the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338; the principle of land for peace, acceptance of the Palestinian people's legitimate rights, and ensuring peace and security for Israel (Arab Research and Studies Institute, 1993).

The PLO responded positively and indicated it would attend the peace conference. In mid-July, Syria also accepted the initiative and it was followed by Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon (Europa, 2003).

But despite making this important headway, the PLO was isolated and pressured on all fronts. Its last military bases in Southern Lebanon had been crushed by a Syrian offensive earlier that year and its relations with Arab countries were still sour following the first Gulf War.

### PLO Reclaims Peace Initiative

On 18 October 1991, invitations were extended to all related parties in the Middle East with the exception of the PLO. Instead, Mr. Faisal Al-Husseini, a prominent Palestinian figure from Jerusalem, was invited to attend the Conference, heading a delegation of Palestinian "representatives". This apparent retraction of American engagement was propagated by the rightwing Israeli government's threat to derail the conference should the PLO attend.

Wanting to maintain the momentum, the PLO leadership agreed with Mr. Al-Husseini on a delegation of 14 Palestinian figures, headed by Dr. Haidar Abdel Shafi. The group attended the Conference as part of the Jordanian delegation and not as a separate Palestinian delegation, even though Palestinian delegates were seated alongside their Jordanian counterparts and were tabled for a speech like the rest of the delegations. The PLO also dispatched a team from Tunis to Madrid, which stayed in close contact with the conference delegation (Abu Shreef, 2005).

This was a significant moment, albeit negative, in Palestinian representation as it signaled a considerable diplomatic retreat for the PLO. The fact that Arab governments attending did not object to this treatment of the PLO, was also cause for concern, though indicative of the negative PLO-Arab relations at the time.

Denying the Palestinians an independent delegation was partially remedied when bilateral negotiations between the parties began in Washington in December 1991. During the first round of negotiations, the Palestinians asked to be a separate team and to conduct talks with the Israelis as such.

More importantly, from the onset of the Madrid process, the Palestinian delegation made it quite clear that the PLO was its reference, even though it was formally excluded from the Conference. The Washington talks soon proved frustrating because of the foot-dragging and evasive tactics of the Shamir Government.

### PLO Leaders in the White House

The fall of the Shamir government following the election victory of the Labor Party, headed by Ishaq Rabin, provided a much-need window of opportunity for the needed breakthrough. Secret talks began in Oslo between the PLO and Israel, resulting in the signing

of the Declaration of Principles (DoP) on 23 September 1993 in the White House Rose Garden.

The PLO emerged as the unchallenged and principal partner in Middle East peacemaking. The PLO and Israel were now partners in the historic, and American-sponsored, "peace of the brave". Israel had not only recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian People but also recognized Palestinians' legitimate rights and aspirations.

But the DoP also contained many loopholes and vaguely-worded clauses, which in many cases entertained Israel's perception of security and conception of the conflict (Pappé 2004). Implementation required further negotiating, which concluded in the signing of the Cairo agreement on 4 May 1994 (Europa, 2003). This importantly allowed the PLO to establish a Palestinian self-rule government for the first time in modern history. But difficulties were apparent from the beginning of the process and the divergence of interpretation of the signed agreements between the sides quickly became apparent.

Though signing of the DoP improved Palestinian political and diplomatic standing internationally, it also introduced new complications. The DoP and subsequent agreements stipulated that the National Authority could not establish any foreign relations with other countries. Consequently, while the Palestine National Authority (PNA) formed a Ministry responsible for duties similar to those of a Foreign Ministry, the PLO's Political Department in Tunisia remained the party officially responsible for Palestinian diplomatic relations. This situation often produced confusion and even tension within the Palestinian diplomatic "machine".

The Palestine National Authority (PNA) was set up in 1994 with many of the institutions and authorities of a sovereign state. Adding to this image was the appointment of representatives, at the ambassadorial level, to work in PNA-Administered areas.

During the five-year interim period, Israel neglected or ignored many of the commitments it signed on to and persisted in its illegal practices, creating times of tension. Ordinary Palestinians did not see a tangible change to their lives; in many cases, they got more complicated (Europa, 2003).

The continued construction and expansion of illegal Israeli settlement was one of the most daunting violations to principles of the Oslo Peace process. It's a violation the Palestinians constantly objected to. Addressing European lawmakers in Strasbourg in April 1994, Arafat warned, *the Israeli settlements have always been a major obstacle on the road of peace... Today, and I say it with regret, they have become an alternative to peace. Peace cannot be achieved . . . as long as these extremist hotbeds lie at every corner of the road* (cited in LA Times, 1994).

The assassination of Itzhak Rabin on 4 November 1995 and the election of Binyamin Netanyahu in 1996 impeded the implementation of signed agreements. The attacks on civilians by Hamas and Islamic Jihad in response to Israeli attacks provided the Netanyahu government with pretexts to delay the implementation of signed agreements and enact harsh measures against the population.

A stale peace process and the continuous undermining of internationally-funded development projects sowed public frustration. Moreover, PNA governance shortcomings eroded the PLO's domestic popularity and credibility. The PNA's adherence to controversial commitments in signed agreements was particularly damaging in light of Israel's continuous infractions. It didn't take long for groups, namely movements directly opposing the PLO's

approach and negotiation agenda, to challenge the PNA's legitimacy and rally popular support.

This challenge peaked in the late 1990's and early 2000, during which the US Administration insisted on holding final status peace talks between the parties. But the summit failed after disagreement on the status of Jerusalem unraveled the talks. Immediately following the Summit, the Clinton Administration and Israel blamed the Palestinian side for refusing a supposed generous offer. This campaign mainly pointed to President Arafat as the culprit (Swisher, 2004).

Efforts by different players to defuse the mounting tensions failed. The breaking point came on 28 September 2000 with the now notorious visit of Ariel Sharon, then Israeli opposition leader, to the Harm Al Sharif Compound with hundreds of Israeli soldiers.

The rules of the game changed from that point on. Israel launched an unparalleled campaign of death and destruction, targeting the infrastructure of Palestinian life and governance. The Clinton Administration was in its final months and efforts to change the course of events were largely ineffective, including various rounds of negotiations.

*From negotiation to Confrontation and Siege*

The suicide attacks of September 11 2001 jolted a then-low-key American President, George Bush Jr., into a blind war. His confrontational foreign policy of 'with us or against us', subjected all international issues to the Bush Administration's prism of security paranoia, confrontation, and dictations.

And the unfettered support expressed by the Bush Administration to the Israeli government, lead by Ariel Sharon, was only further consolidated.

*When President Bush assumed his position, he was determined not to repeat what he considered to be mistakes of President Clinton. He refused to deal with [President] Arafat] and refrained from appoint a permanent envoy to the region. He also did not participate in efforts aimed at stopping the violence between Palestinians and Israelis* (Albright 2007, p.130).

Political discourse retreated; giving way to a security-oriented approach that sidelined Palestinian representation and ignored the importance of the political track. The US Administration dispatched security officials rather than political figures to the area.

Recent media revelations have exposed that the Israeli government had a military, not political, plan all along, which the Bush Administration supported. Israel's General Meir Dagan drew a plan, dubbed the 'Dagan Plan', aimed at the destruction of the Oslo Accords and the isolation of the Palestinian President domestically and internationally.

*The Bush Administration was in all likelihood familiar with the Dagan Plan and did nothing to block its implementation. There were close consultations between US and Israeli military and intelligence officials. In turn, CIA Director George Tenet, had been put in charge of so-called "peace negotiations". The hidden agenda was to stall the stalled the peace process and implement the Dagan Plan. In July 2001, an updated Dagan plan dubbed "Operation Justified Vengeance" was formally presented by the Israeli Defense Force to the government* (Global Research, 2006).

This campaign peaked in 2002, when Israeli tanks stormed the Presidential Compound and laid siege to the late Yasser Arafat. Until the untimely death of Yasser Arafat, all Palestinian political and diplomatic efforts focused on breaking the siege laid on the

Palestinian President and people. There was no political process and the Palestinian leadership was pushed into the uncomfortable and almost helpless corner of self-defense.

# Palestinian Diplomacy in a changing International Dynamics and the future ahead

The Question of Palestine was borne out of an intricate web of complicated regional and international factors that made of it a unique conflict; one which perhaps cannot be compared to others in the region or time in history. The lines separating ally from foe were obscure from the beginning. Public rhetoric was not an indication of policy, no matter how impassioned, and promises of help were only intended for public appeasement.

The Question of Palestine was presented as a search for a solution for two peoples and was quickly exposed for what it was; an international drive to obliterate a nation so that another could take its place. This drive was put most bluntly by Arthur Balfour, who said, *Zionism is rooted in old traditions, current needs, and future hopes of far more significance than the desires and wants of 700,000 Arabs who now live in the Holy Land* (cited in Albright, 2006, p.120). Consequently, the Palestinian sentiment that they faced an existential threat was not an exaggeration. The threat was real, aggressive, and imminent for decades.

Unlike other peoples confronting a colonial occupation, Palestinians were scattered across the region as homeless refugees whose national identity was willfully denied and whose aspirations were wished away by major powers. This concerted efforts to unravel the Palestinian national identity made of Palestinian representation a crucial and essential element of the nation's existence and struggle for its rights. The Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbass has recently reflected on his belief that the struggle to create an internationally recognized Palestinian representative body that aptly unified and lead Palestinians was one in the same with the colossal task of preserving a national identity despite the circumstances of dispossession, geography and geopolitics (Yakhlof, 2009).

Additionally, creating and preserving Palestinian representation came with added burdens. For political struggle was not its exclusive task; rather, the PLO had to act as a government in exile, able to provide for and employ a scattered and oppressed people despite the odds. This added task, which was a huge responsibility, exhausted a lot of effort and political capitol the Palestinian leadership could have used in the political track otherwise.

Palestinian representation confronted tremendous dangers, sometimes from the closest and most unlikely sources. Hence, protecting Palestinian representation was a constant task for Palestinian leaders, who exerted much effort and blood to secure that goal. It is a battle that continues to this day and one that constantly undermines the Palestinian effort to reach the ultimate goal: independence. Consequently, I believe any examination of Palestinian representation and diplomacy without keen attention to this important factor would be incomplete and perhaps misrepresentative. That is because since 1948, all regional and international efforts to undermine Palestinian representation were aimed at the heart of the Question of Palestine and motivated by a policy that seeks to perpetuate the conflict lest it

dissipate. Such an approach should have been counter-intuitive as a resolution required the acknowledgment and fulfillment of the rights of the oppressed in this conflict, which though regional in appearance has always been part of an international equation.

In this regard, the 1969 Palestine National Council is an important juncture for Palestinian. It marks the Palestinians' first step towards having a Palestinian entity lead by a home-grown agenda that resists the overwhelming pressures of regional powers whose pursuance of other interests undermined Palestinian aspirations at the time. And though Arab regimes opposed the establishment of the PLO from the very beginning, it was only after this step in 1969 that the struggle to preserve this Palestinian representative body became part en parcel of the Palestinian struggle for statehood.

Defeat of Palestinian representation seemed certain at many junctures. In some cases, Palestinian representation came close to its demise at the hands of Arab regimes, like Jordan in 1970. In others, Israel almost succeeded in terminating the Palestinian political entity; like in its invasion of Lebanon in 1982. On other occasions, Palestinian representation faced the gravest threat of all; an attack from within, backed by regional powers – the showdown of 1983 in Tripoli, Lebanon is a stark example. In fact, at this point in time, Palestinians are in another dark chapter of internal strife, one that is being exploited for the same cynical reasons. Certain Palestinian players are enjoying financial and political backing from regional powers as they seek to undermine Palestinian representation once again and attempt to create a new body altogether.

The crucial importance of Palestinian representation has dictated many decisions in years to follow. The PLO's repeated exists from various Arab countries and later on, the engagement in the Madrid peace process, was driven by this goal of self-preservation.

At times, Palestinians succeeded in capitalizing on circumstance to preserve representation and achieve recognition. Securing Arab League recognition in 1973 and 1974 of the PLO's nature as the sole representative of Palestinians is an example; it's a step that built momentum on the international arena. But there were also shortcomings, which proved politically costly to Palestinians. The unwilling engagement in the Lebanese civil war and the management of the Iraq-Kuwait crisis of 1990 are strong examples of such shortfalls.

But starting 1993, i.e. following the signing of the Declaration of Principles, the Palestinian political system underwent many changes and turbulences, many of which undermined its own strength and viability. With the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the shortcomings of official Palestinian conduct created a widening divide between the leadership and the wider public. The full-thrust engagement in day-to-day governance in addition to corruption, mismanagement, and the lack of progress on the peace track alienated the Palestinian representative body [PLO] and diverted attention towards the fledgling, yet limited, national authority.

Moreover, the PLO did not protect its own institutions and instead seemingly melted in the limited self-rule body created in the Occupied Territory. In effect, the negligence of Palestinian leaders and institutions gradually stripped the PLO of its all-encompassing representative nature and prevented the customary and necessary renewal of its decision-making bodies. This is most significant as the PNA represents and serves Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, while the PLO's institutions serve and represent Palestinians around the world. Consequently, ordinary Palestinians became increasingly confused about the ultimate national goal and the tools used to achieve it.

A clear example was the amendment of the PLO Charter in 1996 and 1998 at the behest of Israeli demands and to demonstrate goodwill to the Clinton Administration. In 1996, the Palestine National Council adopted a resolution to amend the PLO Charter and exclude any articles that contradicted with the organization's post-Oslo commitments. But this did not suffice for the Netanyahu government, which conditioned implementing the Wye River Agreement on a public display of this position. In December 1998, the Palestine National Council annulled the articles in question as Bill Clinton, who was visiting Gaza, watched on and applauded before addressing the Council. The raise of hand vote was also broadcast live on Israeli TV, as a sign of goodwill (CNN, 1998).

While this annulment was logical in 1996, its public repeat in 1998 was domestically controversial and only helped undermine the PLO. Also, Palestinians did not require that Israel take any similar legal step to demonstrate its commitment to ending the occupation. Such a demand, even if it were unanswered, would have demonstrated balance and strength. Instead, the unconditional acceptance undermined the PLO's credibility and institutions.

Another example of confusion in political effort was the Palestinian 'threat' to unilaterally declare statehood in September 1999. In the spring of 1999, the Palestine Central Council empowered Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to declare a state by September 1999, the effective end-date of the interim period, as outlined in the Oslo Accords. Yasser Arafat went on a 50-nation tour attempting to gain support (Europa, 2003). But in the end, immense pressure from the US and other important international players made the PLO back down. A Palestinian state was not declared.

What is problematic here is the reflection of weakness and confusion. Palestinians did not prepare enough to make such a bold statement. Consequently, reneging on such a big promise undermined the credibility of Palestinian representation at home. Additionally,

using the threat of declaring statehood as a strategy was miscalculated. Hence, it sent a negative international message about the cohesiveness and seriousness of Palestinian political work.

Palestinian shortcomings in the post-Oslo era were also exploited to undermine the legitimacy of Palestinian representation. In 1996, Israel and some in the international community began campaigning against Palestinian governance shortcomings, particularly issues of corruption and nepotism combated by Palestinian civil society and elected officials. However, this public diplomacy campaign turned into an international black-mail tool by 2002, after the failure of the Camp David II Summit and the eruption of the second Palestinian Intifada broke.

At that juncture, the United States adopted the Israeli government's position that meaningful dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis was contingent upon the restructuring and change of Palestinian leaders and institutions. In effect, the Bush and Sharon agendas met on the point of averting a final peace deal that would result in Palestinian statehood by considering the late Yasser Arafat 'irrelevant' and an 'obstacle to peace'. The significance of this political position is not the person of Yasser Arafat, who was at the time the elected and popular Palestinian leader. Rather, it was the repeat of a tactic Palestinians thought had long gone. The Bush Administration and Israel attempted to undermine Palestinian representation and dictate its composition. In effect, Palestinians were being told that their leaders had to be amenable to the Occupying Power and its international sponsor.

Regrettably, Arab regimes had turned their back on the PLO and its leader. Finally, Palestinians acquiesced, changing of the Basic Law in 2003 to allow for the introduction of the Prime Minister post. The Palestinians had hoped this amendment and the appointment

of a Prime Minister acceptable to the West would end their political isolation. Instead, it was used as tool to pick and choose which Palestinian representative to deal with and which post the US-lead international community would award recognition. At the time, this amendment further undermined Palestinian representation domestically and internationally and sowed internal conflict.

But even after the death of Yasser Arafat, the US and Israel continued to directly undermine Palestinian representation.

> *Mahmoud Abbas, the architect of the Oslo Accord's and the PLO's champion of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue succeed Yasser Arafat as President. But despite the overwhelming expression of international support to Abbas when he was elected, the Bush Administration and Israel demanded of the Palestinian President measures he could not accept. This only served to further undermine his political program of a negotiated settlement* (Albright, 2006, p. 132).

This trend to undermine the political settlement program was most evident during Israel's unilateral exit from the Gaza Strip in August 2005. Ariel Sharon's government refused to negotiate or coordinate the exit with the PNA, giving credence to claims this exit was the consequence of armed conflict by other factions, namely Hamas and Islamic Jihad. And while the unilateral exit did not legally constitute an end to the Israeli occupation, as it became quickly apparent that Gaza came under siege, this unilateral exit served a severe blow to the PNA's image.

The Palestinians' shortcomings in preserving the PLO also had a direct and highly significant effect on Palestinian diplomacy, especially after the break of the second Intifada. At that point, PLO institutions had become so weak and ineffective; they failed to meet the grave challenges posed by the Intifada and Israel's unmatched military and political

aggressions. Palestinian diplomacy was in disarray, unable to neither communicate the Palestinian position in unison nor achieve any advances in rallying international support. Perhaps the clearest exception to this state of diplomatic confusion was Palestinian diplomacy at the United Nations, which was in direct contact and coordination with the most senior tier of Palestinian leadership.

The United Nations constituted the safe haven to which Palestinians resorted when the new order of politics failed them. As early as 1997, Palestinians went to the United Nations to seek an end to the unabated and illegal expansion of settlements in the Occupied Territory.

After failing to push the UN Security Council into action, Palestinian diplomacy secured the convening of a Special Emergency Session of the UN General Assembly on 25 April 1997 for the first time in fifteen years. While the resolution adopted in the session, ES-10/2, was largely ignored by Israel, this step was politically significant. Convening the Special Emergency Session was the result of direct political confrontation with the American Administration. Furthermore, it was an overwhelming vote of international support to the Palestinian position on the matter. In a way, it delivered a clear message of strength, albeit legal and moral rather effective power.

Another example of the effectiveness of Palestinian political and diplomatic tactics was the convening of the International Court of Justice to deliberate on the legality of Israel's Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. This legal and political victory came at a time of immense international pressure and isolation, lead by the Bush Administration. Peace talks had been suspended for three years and the US Administration had given Israel carte blanche to employ its supreme military power against the PNA as well as to lay effective and political siege to the late President, Yasser Arafat. Meanwhile, Israel

was pushing ahead with its planned construction of the Wall, de facto annexing large chunks of Palestinian land and effectively ending the prospect of a two-state solution.

In this political and at a time when even the support of Arab governments was waning, Palestinian diplomacy convened the Tenth Emergency Special Session for the fourteenth time on 8 December 2003 and asked the ICJ to urgently render its opinion on the legal consequences of the Wall. This political and diplomatic victory was the result of months of hard work and lobbying as well as sternness in resisting the overwhelming international pressure against such a move. On 9 July 2004, the ICJ delivered its historic ruling; pronouncing that the Wall and settlement regime were illegal and that Israel not only had to dismantle them but also compensate the Palestinians for their losses.

But there were other occasions when Palestinian diplomacy faltered at the UN, succumbing to pressures and wasting an opportunity to add to the accumulated legal and political gain. On 9 February 1999, Palestinians secured the convening of the Tenth Emergency Special Session of the UN General Assembly and adoption of resolution A/RES/ES – 10/6, which called on the High Contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to convene in July. The Palestinian agenda at the time was to push the High Contracting Parties to enforce the Fourth Geneva Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

However, the Conference convened on 15 July 1999, only to adjourn shortly after. In a brief statement, the Conference declared:

*Taking into consideration the improved atmosphere in the Middle East as a*
*whole, the Conference was adjourned on the understanding that it will convene*

*again in the light of consultations on the development of the humanitarian situation in the field* (UNISPAL, 1999).

Effectively, Palestinian diplomacy caved in to the forceful wish of the American Administration, which saw in the conference a supposed disruption to the negotiation track. This was a grave error in judgment and it was a reflection of the confusion Palestinian diplomacy suffered as a result of putting the negotiation track at such a supreme placement. This case represents how Palestinian diplomacy often deviated, and was driven by the process rather than the end goal. The order of priorities was brought on its head following the Oslo process. The US mediator repeatedly often circumvented the long-standing Palestinian utilization of UN bodies to establish a legal and political foundation that protects Palestinian rights regardless of international political circumstances. The process of peace, rather the end-goal of sovereignty became the focal point. And this lapse of judgment is of great significance.

In 2001, Palestinian representation was cornered by Israeli military aggression and American alienation. Nonetheless, it succeeded in calling for a Conference of the High Contracting Parties to discuss the then deteriorating situation on the ground. And while Palestinian efforts entrenched an international recognition of the applicability of the Convention to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, it was unable to secure enforcement mechanisms that could have prevented much bloodshed. In this context, resorting to the multilateral sphere came to be an indication of crisis for Palestinians, not part of a strategy.

A issue of debate sure to continue for some time is the contradiction between the politics of peace and combating occupation. Many developments in the past seventeen years suggest that indeed, the contradiction sometimes existed and that the Palestinian approach could have been far-better managed. An examination of past events clearly demonstrates that

Palestinian action is strongest and most effective, politically, at the multi-lateral level. This is natural, given the gains Palestinian representation achieved on that front; it's also logical, given the historic and strategic alliance between Israel and the United States, irrespective of the Administration in office.

In 2001, Saudi Arabia presented once again a peace initiative, which the Arab League adopted as theirs in the Beirut Summit of 28 March 2001. The Plan was strong in its simplicity; offering Israel peace treaties, recognition and normal ties with the Arab world in exchange for an end to Israel's occupation of all Arab territories occupied in 1967.

But Israel responded by military escalation and effectively began the siege on the Palestinian President, who immediately supported the Arab Peace Plan. The plan was set aside for a while, while the situation on the ground continued to deteriorate.

But Palestinians realized this plan was a prized political tool and insisted that it become one of the references of subsequent peace efforts. During an Extraordinary Session of the Organization of Islamic Conference of Foreign Minister in April 2002, the OIC endorsed the Arab Peace Initiative (OIC , 2002). And on 8 December 2005, the OIC adopted the Plan as a prerequisite to normalized relations with Israel.

Despite the Israeli intransigence and political deadlock, these endorsements were a political victory for Palestinians. Now, the realization of their rights was key to peace between Israel and 57 states around the world; it's a political card Palestinians would used repeatedly from that point on.

When US President George W. Bush presented an initiative, called the Roadmap, in 2002, Palestinians endorsed it without conditions while Israel expressed 14 reservations. The roadmap offered a detailed plan for interim measures that would gradually end military

confrontation on the ground and defuse tensions. It also presented a vision for the final status arrangement, adopting the Arab Peace Initiative as one of its references.

Palestinians endorsed the plan unconditionally as tactic to end the political isolation the Bush Administration had imposed on the Palestinian issue and its representation. Domestically, acceptance implied Palestinian endorsement to the security-perspective the Roadmap offered in its initial phase; it was perceived as caving in to the US bullying. Nonetheless, the Roadmap was enshrined in UN Security Council 1515 on 19 November 2003.

The Roadmap was presented by a US-formed coalition that came to be known as the Quartet. Composed of the US, European Union, Russian Federation, and the UN, the Quartet came to be an international tool of pressure and mobilization. This body came to be in 2002, when the PLO was most isolated. Accepting its composition was another lapse in judgment as Palestinians should have never accepted the United Nations, represented by its Secretary General, to be part of this US-controlled body, especially because the UN is not a sovereign state. Through multi-lateral action, Palestinians could have prevented such UN involvement with a body that in some ways replaced it vis-à-vis the Middle East conflict.

These factors and events affected Palestinian representation as they gave credence to new Palestinian voices questioning this representation. And while such internal struggles occurred in the past, they previously emanated from groups that enjoyed military strength far-exceeding their popular support. However, with the peace process faltering, these voices had gained a sizeable popular base, making Palestinian representation more vulnerable. This vulnerability increased with each set back the peace program and track suffered while popularity of the opposing camp only increased. Ultimately, this was one of the main causes to the sweeping election victory Hamas claimed in the 2006 Legislative elections.

The UN's Quartet membership became more morally, politically, and legally problematic in 2006. Following the Hamas victory in legislative elections and the formation of a Hamas government, the Quartet decided to impose stringent sanctions on the PNA. The Quartet conditioned vitally needed aid on a change in the political position of the Hamas movement. This was a cynical move to coerce political change, even though the Quartet knew full well the PLO was solely responsible for the negotiation effort. At this point, the UN became a party to one of the most stringent forms of international sanctions, applied for the first time against an occupied people. In June 2006, John Dugard, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, warned:

> *The image of both the EU and the UN has suffered substantially among Palestinians as a result of the Quartet's apparent support for economic isolation, under the direction of the United States. Their credibility and impartiality are seriously questioned by Palestinians. However, they remain the bodies most likely to achieve peace and promote human rights in the region. In these circumstances both bodies should seriously consider whether it is in the best interests of peace and human rights in the region for them to seek to find a peaceful solution through the medium of the Quartet* (UNHCR, 2006).

Regrettably, this warning was not heeded. The sanctions continued, crippling the economy and harshly affecting the quality of life for Palestine's most vulnerable. Most ironically, the sanctions regime crippled the PNA and bankrupted its employees, which for years had constituted the popular and political foundations of the political process. This while Hamas, which the Quartet said was to blame for the sanctions, did not suffer. To date, the Palestinian economy continues to reel from its consequences.

The sanctions were humiliating for Palestinians, who were punished for the outcome of democratic and transparent elections. Western calls for democracy were now perceived as hollow and hypocritical. In the end, the sanctions only further fueled the existing domestic tensions and further undermined Palestinian representation, pushing the Palestinian society into the abyss of inner-conflict and bloodshed. The mistrust was further entrenched by the declared positions of Quartet members. This included the dissemination of false inferences about Fateh and the PNA Presidency receiving US arms, in preparation for a showdown with Hamas. And while the Hamas coup d'etat may not have been caused by these circumstances, the fact that they cultivated an atmosphere of distrust and animosity is undeniable.

The devastating Palestinian division since June 2007 constitutes the most serious threat to Palestinian representation that it has ever confronted. Never before had Palestinian representation been so boldly, militarily, and politically contested. And never before had Arab and regional interferences had almost supreme control over the fate of this devastating strife.

Since the Hamas coup, the movement has employed all political, public, and media tools to present an alternative to the internationally recognized legitimate representative of the Palestinian People. And while these efforts, which have been tacitly or overtly supported by some Arab and other regimes, have so far failed, they remain the greatest challenge confronting Palestinian representation.

It's a situation that has been repeatedly and cynically exploited by Israel, which uses the Palestinian division as an excuse slip out of final status negotiations. The division is also a mortal weakness that many international parties have also exploited as a pressure tool to coerce the Palestinian representatives into costly and counterproductive leniency, especially

in relation to the Palestinian leadership's long-standing demands on issues like Israel's continuing illegal settlement activity.

And yet, despite this unparalleled danger and long list of political misjudgments, the Palestinian political approach has managed to shine hope onto an otherwise gloomy picture. For Palestinian division has shaken Palestinian representation into shifting gears; prompting a change of political strategy and a re-adjustment of national priorities.

The peace track had turned into a trap, holding the Palestinian system hostage to the whims of its powerful sponsors, who literally held the key to the system's demise. Hence, the track had to be changed, albeit the final destination remained the same: Palestinian self-determination and statehood.

The new Palestinian strategy of state-building, popular resistance and negotiations has proven to be a uniting formula domestically. This, despite the controversial nature of holding negotiations with the current Netanyahu government, which is undoubtedly the most pro-settler and rightwing government Israel has known for decades. Through the government's 2-year state-building plan, Palestinian representation has won international recognition for its seriousness about building the properly functioning institutions of a state, removing any expressed or alleged concerns in this regard. Also, the endorsement of popular, non-violent resistance against Israel's illegal construction of the Wall and settlements as a legitimate and positive part of a national strategy of liberation has won international support and admiration.

Requiring that the international community adopt clear criterion regarding the conflict's resolution that is deeply rooted in international law has turned a new chapter. It is a

reflection of a new evolution for Palestinian representation. And this evolution has begun to yield concrete political results.

In December 2009, the European Union issued the clearest statement of position to date, supporting the establishment of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, including East Jerusalem. More recently in March 2010, the Quartet issued a stern statement condemning Israeli settlement construction in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem as illegal and sounded its support for Palestinian statehood in no uncertain terms. These statements were also followed by another on behalf of major donors (AHLC), backing the PNA's two-year state-building plan, in effect rejecting Israel's hostility towards it and its objectives. Effectively, the world has endorsed and adopted the Palestinian-drawn two-year timeframe for Palestinian statehood.

The road ahead though remains long, unpredictable, and overshadowed by uncertainty. For the first time, an American Administration considers the establishment of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State to be one of its national security interests and priorities. However, this fundamental development in US policy has not translated into a qualitative change of approach on the political track; not yet anyhow. The insistence that Palestinians and Israelis begin negotiations on the final status issues offers hope though other elements in the wider Palestinian picture remain unpredictable.

Almost a century after national activism first bloomed, Palestinian representation has evolved to be in harmony with changing international developments. This change is now proactively engaging international powers and affecting the way their influence plays out in the region. Perhaps the modest yet important victory Palestinian representatives can take comfort in is the international realization that time is running out on the prospect of peace and that a solution that fulfills the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians must be reached

sooner rather than later. After the trials, tribulations, and setbacks, Palestinian representation has now come full circle, taking initiative the world is now reacting to.

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