

China's Relations with the PLO

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Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Palestinian guerrilla organizations have always been close. The chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Yasser Arafat, was once quoted by the *Peking Review* as describing the People's Republic of China (PRC) as "the biggest influence in supporting our revolution and strengthening its perseverance."¹ His organization, Fatch, is on record as having said that "the Chinese people's support for the revolutionary cause of Palestine... [is] an important pillar of the Palestine revolution."² More radical Palestinian organizations such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) have sometimes been even more direct. PFLP leader George Habbash declared in 1970: "Our best friend is China. China wants Israel erased from the map because as long as Israel exists, there will remain an aggressive imperialist outpost on Arab soil."

For various reasons both China and the Palestinians have usually not emphasized the closeness of their relationship, and the extent of Chinese involvement with the Palestinians remains hazy to outside observers. But this involvement is clearly one of the most ignored facets of the Middle East political situation. Since 1965 the People's Republic of China has been the most consistent big power supporter of the Palestinian guerrilla

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¹ *Peking Review*, Vol. 13, No. 42, October 16, 1970. "Chairman Arafat Greet National Day," p. 22.

² *Peking Review*, Vol. 13, No. 13, March 27, 1970. "Delegation of Palestine Liberation Movement (Fatch) Arrives in Peking," p. 5.

³ Joseph D. Ben-Dak, "China in the Arab World," *Current History*, Vol. 59, September 1970, p. 149.

organizations, arming them, criticizing them, seeking to unify them and, despite fluctuations in the relationship, providing moral and material support. The PRC has supplied, and continues to provide, a meaningful percentage of the Palestinians' arms supplies. Without such aid, the PLO might not be the politically powerful organization it is today.

A chronology of Chinese relations with the Palestinian organizations can be divided into three periods: the beginning of the relationship in 1965 to the 1970-71 defeat in Jordan; the period of a cooling in Chinese commitment extending from 1971 through late 1974, and the more supportive relationship which continues from late 1974 to the present.

During this time the Palestinian resistance movement has gone through several profound changes, which have in their turn influenced relations with China. Chief among these was the rise to power of Fateh in 1968-69 as the most powerful Palestinian organization and controlling group of the PLO. Fateh's subsequent setback coincides with a decline in Chinese verbal commitment to the Palestinians, and probably a decline in material support as well. But during the years 1971 to 1974 Fateh evolved into a powerful political as well as military organization and as a result won back not only Chinese good graces, but third world approval on a rather larger scale.

Several generalizations can be made about Chinese involvement with the Palestinians, which have held true throughout the evolution of the Sino-Palestinian relationship:

1. Chinese support for the Palestinians has been considerably more significant and more consistent than is often realized. Until 1968, when limited Soviet support for the Palestinians began, the Chinese were the only major power to provide aid to the Palestinians and until the October 1973 war, Soviet aid was described by the Palestinians as "half-hearted."

2. Despite a backlog of strident propaganda, the Chinese would apparently not condemn a political compromise on Palestine if that compromise were brought about by Fateh. All PLO sources agree on this point.

3. China has consistently advised the Palestinians against international terrorism and has described such operations as PFLP airliner hijackings as "impulsive acts" inconsistent with the goals of a war of national liberation.

4. China has consistently supported unification under the most powerful fedayeen confederation, the PLO, despite the essentially conservative character of the mainstream of that organization, in contrast to its Marxist Palestinian components. The PRC favors Fateh over the PFLP and the DFLP (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, formerly known

as the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine or PDFLP). The PRC supports Fateh's moderate leadership over leftist elements within Fateh. Even PFLP sources privately acknowledge Chinese preferential treatment of Fateh.

5. Chinese support for the Palestinians is essentially pragmatic within a framework of what is best for China's international status. Despite ideological ingredients, Chinese foreign policy is by no means based purely on ideological or revolutionary principles. China has demonstrated to the Arabs that she drops unsuccessful movements such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and disengages herself from cumbersome relationships such as that with the Eritrean Liberation Front. Support for the Palestinians themselves has come most heavily when they are "up" politically and militarily.

6. China's Middle East policy — with the Palestine problem as its revolutionary focal point — is a facet of the Sino-Soviet conflict but although undercutting the Soviets where possible, the Chinese do not condition support for the Palestinians on anti-Soviet actions or attitudes by the Palestinians. There have been no known Chinese attempts to inspire anti-Soviet organizations among the Palestinians.

7. Despite heavy material and moral support and advice of a general and political nature, there is a lack of specific Chinese involvement or interference in Palestinian day-to-day and country-to-country activity. The Chinese principle seems to be the promotion of ideal goals such as "unity" and "people's revolutionary war" for which the Palestinians are usually left to work out the details themselves. This Chinese posture is best typified by the infrequent meetings between Chinese and Palestinian leaderships, in contrast to the regular consultations between Palestinians and representatives of the Soviet Union.

8. The Palestinians are understandably grateful to the Chinese but not always impressed by the Chinese model. They have adopted the revolutionary action normally associated with the Chinese example, but not its ideological content. The mainline Palestinian organizations are in no sense either Maoist or communist.

China's relationship with the Palestinians is based on several logical principles which complement Chinese foreign policy objectives. First, China is eager to demonstrate to the world, and the third world in particular, the viability and applicability of the Chinese revolutionary model.

Despite great differences, the Palestinian arena is the Arab world

situation which comes closest to fitting the Chinese experience of revolution against an imperialist invader. Not infrequently the New China News Agency observes that the Palestinians find the political and military works of Mao “an unlimited source of guidance in the struggle for the liberation of their land and return to their homes,”⁴ and “their powerful and indispensable ideological weapon in the struggle. . .”⁵ Works suggested to the Palestinians include “Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War,” and “Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan.”

The Palestine revolution, though not yet mature, represents to the Chinese the first national-democratic stage of revolution and they obviously hope that what they see as an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal national liberation movement can eventually be guided into a socialist revolution. *Broadsheet*, a British publication supportive of Chinese policy, has expressed this point clearly:

Today they [the Palestinians] represent the greatest hope for social change within the Arab world. Israel sees itself, and is often seen by others, as an advanced, progressive civilizing force in a backward Middle East, but it is the Palestinian guerrillas whose political role is the progressive one. China’s moral and material support for their cause is in keeping with the ideals of her own great revolution.⁶

Secondly, the Palestinians, in the Chinese view, could be seen as a possible “base” from which to influence Arab world events. This has been a luxury that China has so far been denied despite twenty years of somewhat erratic effort. Relations between China and the Arab states, though never close, had by the mid sixties deteriorated as Peking added misunderstandings with Cairo to disputes over control of the Afro-Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organization. China found herself after several years effort with little to show in the Arab world — no Marxist-Leninist parties, no Maoist revolutionary groups of any importance, no Arab Albania. The 1964 organization of the Palestine Liberation Organization by the first Arab Summit Conference was a timely opportunity. Palestine, a clearly emotional issue, gave China an opportunity to regain the initiative in the drive toward third world leadership.

⁴ *Survey of China Mainland Press*, No. 4183, May 22, 1968. (New China News Agency of May 15, 1968, “AAWB and AAJA Support Palestine People’s Liberation Struggle,” p. 23.)

⁵ *Peking Review*, Vol. 11, No. 11, March 15, 1968. “Defeating US-Israeli Aggressors Through Armed Struggle,” p. 37.

⁶ *Broadsheet*, Vol. 7, No. 10, October 1970. “The Middle East,” p. 2.

Two other reasons may be isolated for China's support for the Palestinians: China's desire to combat imperialism and her need to counter the influence of and weaken the Soviet Union. The Chinese utilization of the Palestinian question in an effort to outmanoeuvre the Soviet Union in the Middle East will be discussed later. As for imperialism, from the beginning China has sought to engender among the Arabs a feeling of identity with China in the anti-imperialist struggle. In a now famous statement to a PLO delegation visiting Peking in 1965, Mao Tse-tung said: "Imperialism is afraid of China and of the Arabs. Israel and Formosa are bases of imperialism in Asia. You are the gate of the great continent and we are the rear. They created Israel for you, and Formosa for us. Their goal is the same."⁷

From the Palestinian point of view, material support is not the only appeal of the Chinese connection. China is the only great power which supported the Palestinians in their rejection of such international statements about the Palestinians as Security Council resolutions 242 of 1967 and 338 of 1973. These resolutions, according to the Palestinians and the Chinese, seek to reduce the Palestine issue to "a refugee question," presuming it "could be written off by the offer of a sum of compensation."⁸ The Chinese believe, too, that "It is certain that the Palestinian people's rights cannot be restored through UN resolutions."⁹ China is also the only great power which has never publicly accepted the possibility of a political settlement on Palestine.

Thus, for the Palestinians two dominant factors in the Sino-Palestinian relationship are Palestinian frustration over inability to find redress for their grievances and a unity of views with China on certain basics of the Palestinian situation. Additionally, it has become increasingly evident since 1969 that the Palestinians value the Chinese connection as a pressure point by which to secure material support from the Soviet Union.

1. IDEOLOGY AND UNITY

A. *Ideology: Doctrine versus Tactics*

Observers of the Palestinian resistance movement have pointed to a similarity of revolutionary language between the Palestinians and Chinese to demonstrate similar beliefs or profound Chinese influence. The

⁷ *Arab World* (Beirut), "Mao Tse-tung Urges Arabs Boycott West," April 6, 1965.

⁸ *Peking Review*, Vol. 18, No. 2, January 10, 1975. "Ten Years of Armed Struggle," p. 19.

⁹ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, FE 4798/A4/2, January 8, 1975.

Palestinians speak, for example, of the forces of colonialism and imperialism; Fateh maintains: "We must mobilize the masses of the Arab world"; "In a popular war the human element is more important than arms," and "It is the Palestinian revolution that will transform the Arab world."¹⁰

However, these phrases cover profound differences. In general, for the Palestinian organizations, mobilization of the masses need not mean detailed political indoctrination as it does in China. The mainstream of the Palestine resistance movement is far from being a communist, communist-dominated or even communist-oriented movement.

Despite the Maoist dictum that politics must be in command, the most powerful guerrilla organization has deliberately avoided explicit definition of its ideology, though three enemies, imperialism, Zionism and Arab reaction, are often identified. Fateh opposes the formulation of a statement of socio-political ideology, saying, "We can adhere neither to classical theories nor to rigid idealistic concepts; they have no relevance to our situation."¹¹

Unlike the doctrinaire Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and its breakaway group, the even more ideologically leftist Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Fateh sees itself as a united front of Palestinians of all political doctrines. A strong leftist group within Fateh is kept under control by Arafat and other moderates, who place unity above ideology and obviously hope to use the left rather than alienate it.

Nor does Fateh hold to the Marxist doctrine of class struggle. Fateh's position is that the Palestinians are displaced persons, a class not studied by Marx, and therefore do not fit into the Marxist doctrinaire mould. Rather than try to identify a struggle or contradiction between the working class, the peasants and the bourgeoisie, Fateh hopes to provide the leadership under which all groups may find guidance in the central task of liberating the homeland. The Fateh argument is that "the Palestinian working class had emerged not out of the struggle against the Palestinian bourgeoisie, which was largely displaced and disintegrated after 1948, but out of the struggle against Zionism."¹²

Only two Palestinian organizations, the PFLP and the DFLP, can be

¹⁰ Hisham Sharabi, "Fateh Doctrine," Appendix III to "Palestine Guerrillas: Their Credibility and Effectiveness," *Middle East Forum*, Vol. XLVI, Nos. 2 and 3, 1970, p. 59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹² Mehmood Hussain, *The PLO: A Study in Ideology, Strategy and Tactics* (Delhi: University Press, 1975), p. 43.

regarded as doctrinaire Marxist groups. Fateh's somewhat moderate view of the Palestine revolution as a prelude to Arab world revolution is carried further by the PFLP and DFLP to a vision of the Palestine revolution as an integral part of the world revolutionary process, a position the Chinese endorse. Further, Fateh leadership is criticized by the PFLP and DFLP as bourgeois because Fateh emphasizes only national liberation whereas both the Marxist Palestinian groups call for both national liberation and class struggle.

Yet even in the case of the PFLP (and subsequently the DFLP) it was circumstances, not ideological inclination, which first paved the way for closer adherence to the Chinese line. Speaking of a 1961 radicalization of the Arab Nationalist Movement (Harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-'Arab), parent organization of both of them, a respected Arab world publication has remarked that a shift in emphasis bringing the ANM closer to the Chinese world view "was caused not so much by the attraction of Mao Tse-tung's thought as by frustration at the continued inability of the Arab regimes to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli problem."¹³

However, the PLO itself underwent a radicalization between 1965 and 1969 which, while it cannot be ascribed to Chinese influence, can be better understood if seen in a context of Chinese support. In 1969 Fateh, under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, took over PLO direction and the Palestinian National Charter was revised. The most significant amendment, insertion of Article Nine that "the armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine; it is, therefore, a strategy and not a tactic," is straight Maoism. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the Palestinians would not have arrived at this conclusion without Chinese help.

Whereas the first PLO chairman, Ahmad Shuqairi, had been appointed and therefore controlled by the Arab states, by 1969 Palestinians themselves were in control of the PLO, with China providing verbal support for the power shift. A PLO manipulated by Arab governments had demonstrably failed to bring back Palestine and the new PLO leadership was predisposed to more radical measures. By 1969 the PLO was not only in accord with the Chinese belief that armed struggle educates the masses and "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun"; it was capable of proving that armed struggle can only be learned through practice.

But while China provides arms to both the PFLP and the DFLP, it is realistic enough to see that neither organization is strong enough politically

¹³ *The Dragon and the Bear* (Beirut: An-Nahar Publications, 1973), p. 158.

to lead the Palestinians. Only Fateh comes close to representing the majority of Palestinians favouring armed struggle. Only the PLO, of which Fateh is the main movement, provides a potential for unifying the Palestinians and will, the Chinese hope, someday lead them in a true people's revolutionary war.

That the PRC does maintain separate relationships with various guerrilla organizations can be readily observed from the composition of Palestinian delegations to China. But evidence supports Fateh's insistence that the Chinese consider Fateh the backbone of the Palestinian revolution. Support for Fateh and the PLO as leaders of the Palestine revolution when Marxist Palestinian organizations are available, is an example of Chinese political pragmatism at its finest. The PFLP claim to understand China's position, one PFLP official saying recently that the People's Republic of China gives more arms to Fateh than to the PFLP because "aid is more important than ideology at this stage". However, both the Chinese action and this PFLP response may be seen as departures from "politics in command" and the PFLP has in the past criticized the Chinese for not giving them greater support.

But there are other reasons why China gives its main support to Fateh at the expense of the two Marxist organizations. Both the PFLP and the DFLP have serious problems so far as the Chinese are concerned: the DFLP is very pro-Soviet Union and the PFLP is closely associated with international terrorism. The PFLP is best known for having carried out some of the century's most spectacular acts of terrorism in cooperation with international revolutionary groups, the Lod airport massacre by the Japanese Red Army faction, the "Rengo Sekigun," being one example.

Chinese criticism of international terrorism is, on both ideological and tactical grounds, a position in accord with that of conservative PLO leadership since early 1974. However, the value of international terrorism was long debated in the PLO, and the PFLP was temporarily suspended from PLO membership in 1970 as a result of its airliner hijacking activities.

The PFLP is naturally reluctant to admit Chinese disapproval of acts of international terrorism and such disapproval is not well documented, as the Chinese seldom criticize the Palestinians publicly — though Huang Hua told the UN that the 1972 Black September massacre of Israeli athletes at Munich was "unfortunate" and added, "We have never been in favour of such adventurist acts of terrorism."¹⁴ One PFLP source insisted the

¹⁴ *Peking Review*, September 15, 1972, Vol. 15, No. 37. "Israeli Aggression Against Syria and Lebanon Condemned," p. 13 .

Chinese say only that each operation must be judged separately according to the three-part formula of 1) results expected; 2) political and material price; and 3) internal influence on the Palestinian organization. However, this source could give no satisfactory answer to the question of which, if any, PFLP international terrorist operations China has approved.

Thus, while doctrinally akin to Maoism, the Marxist Palestinian groups are far removed in tactics. The PFLP, the DFLP and even Fateh quote Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, Giap and Guevara, but Middle Eastern applications are far from the Chinese ideal. George Habbash had close contacts with both North Vietnam and North Korea for several years and is possibly more influenced by other Asian revolutions, and some even say the Cuban revolutionary experience, than he is by the Chinese.

B. *Unity: Instruction Through Praise*

As profound doctrinal discussions seem to be avoided by both sides in the Sino-Palestinian relationship, the major difficulty between the Palestinians and the Chinese has come over the problem of unity. The search for unity has been perhaps the single most driving force in the history of the Chinese Communist Party, and lack of unity in Palestinian ranks has been a theme upon which the Chinese have harped consistently — and with good reason.

In May 1971 Chou En-lai told a group of Arab journalists in China that “unity is the key to victory for the Palestinians.” He then offered the Chinese model: “We suggest — and hope — that Palestinian organizations merge in one genuine unity that will have only two organs: one for leading the armed struggle, and the other political, and that the PLO will become the main nucleus of the Palestinian people.”¹⁵ Members of that particular Palestinian group were said to have embarrassed the Chinese by quarrelling publicly over who was leader of the delegation.

As much as Fateh would like to see all groups unified under its leadership, it has been powerless to prevent the worse manifestations of disunity in the form of a multitude of organizations each claiming to have the correct method or doctrine for liberating Palestine. Fateh’s public answer has been to see the solution to Arab disunity and factionalism in the Arab-Israeli conflict. “[Fateh believes] talking of Arab unity before the liberation of Palestine is illusory. It therefore adopted the motto, ‘Liberation of Palestine is the road to unity’ as the correct revolutionary

¹⁵ *Arab World*, May 10, 1971. “Chou En-lai Advises Commandos to Unite.”

alternative to the motto 'Unity is the road to liberating Palestine.'"¹⁶ This position runs contrary to the tenets of Maoism, but the PLO would probably not be as politically popular as it is today if Fateh had followed closely the counsel of China on unity and international terrorism. It was Arafat's inability and at times unwillingness to control the radical Palestinian elements such as the PFLP squads and even the Black September Organization operations which forced world attention onto the Palestinian problem, and eventually by contrast presented Arafat and the mainline Fateh group as responsible moderates, leaders of a worthy cause.

As contacts between the Palestinians and the Chinese are relatively few and ideological distances are often great, China has developed an indirect but persistent method of telling the Palestinians the correct revolutionary line to follow. Outwardly, the Chinese maintain the principle that each revolution must rely on its own ideological strength and thus in 1965 Mao told the first Palestinian delegation to China: "Do not tell me that you have read this or that opinion in my books. You have your war, and we have ours. You must make the principles and ideology on which your war stands. Books obstruct the view if piled up in front of the eye."¹⁷ But while the most important ingredient in China's Palestine policy is pragmatism, what might be called "revolutionary praise" comes a close second. Revolutionary praise is the Chinese method of praise for success despite failure or shortcomings, and of claims of achievement of ideals which are, naturally, the very ideals the Chinese hope the Palestinians will strive after.

The apparent decision in 1971 that aid to the Palestinians would depend upon unity was an unusual case taken at the far extent of Chinese exasperation and at a time when China's own international future was in question. Usually Chinese advice to the Palestinians has taken the form of private and then public statements, the latter often declaring as fact what ought to be true. For example: "The Palestinian people under the leadership of al-Fateh and its military wing al-Assifa have set the path to liberate occupied Palestine through relying on the masses and resolutely meeting reactionary violence of the imperialists and Zionists with revolutionary violence."¹⁸

This statement was made in 1968 when disunity was such that it was not

¹⁶ Hussain, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹⁷ *Arab World*, April 6, 1965. "Mao Tse-tung Urges Arabs Boycott West."

¹⁸ *Survey of China Mainland Press*, No. 4197, June 13, 1968 (New China News Agency of June 8, 1968). "AAJA Reiterates Support to Arab Peoples' Struggle," p. 21.

clear whether Fateh could secure leadership of the Palestinian movement, when the masses were definitely not politicized and when revolution was chiefly characterized by emotion rather than ideology or pragmatism.

Such guidance through praise continues. Following the April 1972 Emergency Session of the Palestinian National Council in Cairo, the *Peking Review* said the conference "summed up the experience of the longterm struggle and reaffirmed the correct road to restoring national rights by thoroughly mobilizing the masses of the people and persisting in protracted armed struggle."¹⁹ But the semantic differences between Chinese and Palestinian definitions of "mobilizing the masses" are very great.

2. THE PROGRESSION OF THE RELATIONSHIP

The Chinese have been sympathetically aware of the Palestinians since the 1955 Third World conference at Bandung, when the Chinese delegation voted for the repatriation of Palestinian refugees. But not until Chou En-lai's 1963-64 African trip did Chinese pronouncements on the Middle East become definitely anti-Israel (a *People's Daily* article of January 27, 1964, may mark the first Chinese use of the term "Zionism") and not until formation of the PLO did China recognize the existence of "a Palestinian nation." In 1965 China became the first major power to accord diplomatic recognition to the fledgling PLO, at the same time making it the principal Arab world recipient of Chinese aid.

When the Beirut weekly *al-Hawadess* published news of a Chinese arms offer to the Palestinians in June 1965, the news "caused a heavy impact in Arab circles." The *Arab World* continued: "The tendency among Palestinian leaders is to accept the Chinese offer, because to neglect such a generous and stringless offer would be a crime... [China wants to participate in the] destruction of Israel which is regarded as imperialism's base in the Middle East."²⁰

PLO Chairman Ahmad Shuqairi was invited to China in 1965 and while there he stated, to the apparent surprise of several Arab governments, that a liberation movement would now be organized in the Arab world "on the lines of Mao Tse-tung's thought."²¹ There were immediate repercussions

¹⁹ *Peking Review*, Vol. 15, April 21, 1972. "New Achievements in Palestinian People's Revolutionary Cause," p. 12.

²⁰ *Arab World*, June 4, 1965. "Chinese Assistance Said Promised to PLO."

²¹ W. A. C. Adie, "China's Middle East Strategy," *The World Today*, Vol. 23, August 1967, p. 322.

in the Middle East. Typical right-wing criticism was expressed through Beirut's *al-Hayat*, which at that time took the Saudi Arabian editorial line. *Al-Hayat* argued that Israel was capitalizing on the PLO association with Peking "to spread word in international circles that Peking was turning the PLO into another Viet Cong in the Middle East." The newspaper continued: "the interest of the Palestine question dictates that it be kept away from ideological struggle in the world, especially the struggle between the Western and Eastern camps, and the struggle between China and the Soviet Union."²¹ Nor was nationalist criticism of the PLO's Chinese connection long in coming. Muhammad Hassanein Heykal, then editor of Cairo's authoritative *al-Abram*, later described President Nasser's disapproval of China's practice of people's revolutionary war:

Nasser was obliged, when he was talking to the guerrillas, to criticize the Chinese methods. He told them they were wrong because of several factors. In the first place, nowhere in the Middle East was the population dense enough for the guerrillas to move among the people... In the second place, Nasser told them, they had no real sanctuaries... He further annoyed the Chinese by taking Yasser Arafat to Moscow where he introduced the guerrilla leader to Kosygin, Brezhnev and Podgorny... This annoyed the Chinese because they wanted to have the monopoly of helping the liberation movements.²³

The Moscow introduction was to bear no fruit, however, for several years.

The Chinese vocally approved of the March 1968 Jordan Valley Battle of Karamah which, in its limited victory for the Arabs, demonstrated that Israeli forces were not invincible. More important, it was precipitated and fought by Palestinians under Fateh direction (albeit with heavy Jordanian army participation), thus infusing the guerrilla movement with new life. A world map published by China in 1968 and 1971 shows Palestine as one of the world's areas of "excellent revolutionary situations."

But in 1968 Fateh was not yet leader. Following the Battle of Karamah at least thirteen guerrilla groups vied for attention and members in Jordan. Doggedly, Arafat hung on to the twin principles of political compromise and no strict ideological dogma that have characterized the Palestinian movement under his leadership.

²² *Arab World*, June 17, 1965. "PLO's Association with Peking Criticized: Shuqairi Told to Stay out of International Conflicts."

²³ Mohammed Heikal, *Nasser: The Cairo Documents* (London: New English Library, 1972), p. 277.

Concurrent with the rise of Palestinian power arose the conflict with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, increasingly pressured by guerrilla claims and subjected to erosion of national authority by the presence of thousands of armed men who recognized no authority save their own. (A similar situation on a much smaller scale was temporarily settled in Lebanon by the 1969 "Cairo Accord," negotiated between the Lebanese and Arafat through the good offices of Egypt.) Chinese moral and material support for the Palestinians effectively encouraged them toward an open conflict with Jordan.

The period of most intense publicity concerning Chinese arming of the Palestinians was 1970, especially the weeks leading up to the Jordanian-Palestinian confrontation. Arms for the Palestinians were said to be furnished by the Chinese, the Soviets and the Czechs via Syria and Egypt by way of Iraqi battalions stationed near [on both sides of] the Jordanian border, thus escaping Jordanian government control.²⁴ Leftist fedayeen sources said: "The arms the commando movement has been receiving from Iraq are Chinese weapons that arrived at Arab ports adjacent to Iraq and Iraq's role is to allow these weapons to pass through Iraqi territory to commando centers in Jordan."²⁵ A Republic of China [Taiwan] publication claims that in October 1970 a mainland Chinese ship off-loaded over 100 boxes of weapons and ammunition in an Iraqi port and that the weapons were then shipped to the Palestinians in Jordan via Syria.²⁶

However, much of what happened in Jordan in 1970 is not clear and anti-Chinese scare propaganda predominates in some reports. For example, there was a report that some two weeks before the confrontation began, three planeloads of Chinese experts arrived in Damascus bringing large crates manifested as wares for the Chinese exhibit at the Damascus International Fair, but actually containing weapons for Palestinians in Jordan.²⁷ "An informed source" in Amman said in September 1970 that Albanian cargo planes with PRC arms for the Palestinians would land shortly on Palestinian air strips in Jordan.²⁸ Even planes from China itself were said to have landed at clandestine airstrips in Jordan. Such colourful

²⁴ Vick Vance and Pierre Lauer, *Hussein of Jordan: My War with Israel* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1969), p. 159.

²⁵ *Arab World*, October 5, 1970. "Chinese Arms to Commandos Pass Through Iraq?"

²⁶ Tsai Ching-lang, *Chinese Communists' Support to Palestinian Guerrilla Organizations* (Taipei), p. 14.

²⁷ Sevinc Carlson, "The Explosion of a Myth: China, the Soviet Union and the Middle East," *New Middle East*, No. 27, December 1970, p. 38.

²⁸ *Arab World*, September 11, 1970. "Chinese Arms."

and highly unlikely accounts were capped off by Jordanian reports (later discounted) of captured Chinese advisers to the Palestinians.

Yet despite the surrounding mythology, it remains true that China provided increasing amounts of arms to the Palestinian organizations between 1965 and 1970. Hani al-Hassan, special political adviser to Arafat, said in mid-1975 that between 1964 and 1970 the Palestinians fought with Chinese-made weapons, implying that the PRC was its exclusive supplier among the big powers.²⁹ Israeli intelligence has attached a value of \$5 million to Chinese weapons supplied to the Palestinians between 1965 and 1969.³⁰ China insists it is not an arms merchant and consequently has from the beginning given and never sold arms to the Palestinians.

Weapons supplied by China in the early days of the Palestinian connection consisted mainly of Soviet-made light weapons. Typical items were rifles, previously well used by the Chinese, hand grenades, mines and other explosives. However, in late 1970 the Palestinians announced they "had recently received modern and effective weapons from China."³¹ Factors in this change were both the growing power of the Palestinian movement, and more pointedly, the new weapons supplied to the Palestinians by the Soviet Union.

Several factors, however, require future clarification. Palestinian sources say today that the quality of Chinese weapons has always been the same and both Arab press and Palestinian sources are generally in agreement that Chinese weapons are inferior to Soviet weapons. The problem may be in part a myth related to Chinese copying of Soviet arms. Copying has had the additionally confusing result of making it impossible for observers to tell a Chinese from a Soviet weapon unless the weapon is actually handled and found to have Chinese markings.

Chinese aid also includes some military training, though there have been no confirmed reports of Chinese military advisers serving in areas bordering Israel. Personnel training, which has taken place in China, has been necessarily limited. But Palestinian leadership sources, while giving no figures, say this China training programme (which began in 1966 and picked up considerably after the 1967 war) is more extensive than generally

²⁹ *Arab World*, July 22, 1975. "Fateh Steps up anti-Israel Activity, Seeks Additional Assistance from Communist China," pp. 11-12.

³⁰ R. Medzini, "China and the Palestinians: A Developing Relationship?", *New Middle East*, No. 32, May 1971, p. 36.

³¹ *Arab Report and Record*, August 16-31, 1970. "Guerrillas 'Have Received Arms from China,'" pp. 487-88.

known and a substantial number of "hardcore fighters" have been trained in China. Non-advertisement of this fact is probably due to the Palestinians' political involvement with the Soviet Union.

Chinese non-supply of heavy weapons such as tanks and missiles is not due simply to a fondness for the weapons of guerrilla warfare, but is probably a diplomatic decision related to politics and logistics. However, some members of the PLO leadership claim "the Chinese give us everything we ask for; we have just never asked for tanks." The PFLP maintains that "The Chinese do not always give what you ask for, but you discuss with them and they give you what they think you need. They have no powerful intelligence service in the Middle East, but they know what to give us because we are comrades."

Not having strong ties to area governments, the Chinese have usually walked carefully in formulating their arms supply policy to the Palestinians. It would not take much persuasion for certain Arab governments to turn on the Chinese for arming the Palestinians in their midst. In 1966 a Chinese vessel was turned away from the ports of Latakia, Basra and Beirut before it was finally, after a wait of some weeks, allowed to offload an arms cargo for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, then under Egyptian control. In May 1969 a Kuwaiti newspaper, *al-Risala*, said that a ship loaded with Chinese weapons intended for the Palestinian organizations had been kept at sea for several weeks because no Arab state was willing to receive the consignment "for fear of annoying the Soviets."³² Eventually, the arms were allowed to land in Iraq. That same year, however, the Soviet Union persuaded Iraq to refuse another Chinese arms shipment intended for Fateh.³³ A Chinese arms shipment, said to have included several tanks for the Palestine Liberation Army, was reportedly seized by the Syrian government in July 1971.³⁴

But the Palestinian-Jordanian conflict was not just a peak era of Chinese arms support for the Palestinians. Chinese political support was particularly outspoken throughout 1970. In March, Vice-Premier Li Hsien-nien told a Fateh delegation to Peking:

Protracted struggles have made the Palestinian people and the people of all Arab countries understand ever better that perseverance in people's armed

³² Carlson, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

³³ Moshe Ma'oz, *Soviet and Chinese Relations with the Palestinian Guerrilla Organizations* (Jerusalem Papers on Peace Problems, The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, March 1974), p. 22.

³⁴ Hussain, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

struggle is the correct road for the Arab people to defeat the aggressors and win national liberation, and that only through armed struggle is it possible for them to defeat the US imperialist and Israeli aggressors, recover their lost territory and achieve genuine independence and liberation.³⁵

In April Arafat told Egypt's *al-Abram* he had met Premier Chou in China during March and Chou told him, "China supports the guerrillas with no limits and to the very end."³⁶ Also in March, a Chinese press delegation visited Fateh bases in Jordan.

In May, Chou wrote to Arafat that the Chinese government and people pledged consistent and unswerving support to the Palestinian guerrillas. The Chinese attacked the December 1969 US-sponsored Rogers plan for a Middle East settlement as "a Middle East Munich" and said China fully supports the Palestinians in their protracted armed struggle. In August 1970 the PLO Central Committee sent a special envoy, Husni Younis, to China, North Korea and North Vietnam in what seemed an assessment of support in the approaching Jordanian conflict. In August as well, Arafat met with the Chinese Chargé d'Affaires in Iraq who again reaffirmed China's "complete and unqualified support" for the Palestinian guerrilla movement.³⁷

On October 4, Arafat publicly acknowledged "the great assistance" given by China, "a country which has the greatest influence in support of our revolution and the firming up of its purpose."³⁸ Beirut's *al-Hurriya* quotes Fateh that a representative of that organization stood by Mao's side in October as he reviewed a Peking parade marking the 21st anniversary of the PRC.³⁹

But the Chinese were plainly disappointed by the Palestinian performance during that fateful September 1970, during which Radio Peking openly urged the Palestinians to continue their fight against Hussein "until final victory." Outgunned, outdisciplined and politically outmanoeuvred by the Jordanians, the Palestinians were forced back into a position of refugees in a host country. During these bloody events China announced that the Middle East situation had aroused its close attention,

³⁵ *Peking Review*, No. 13, March 27, 1970. "Delegation of Palestine National Liberation Movement (Fateh) Arrives in Peking," p. 4.

³⁶ *Arab Report and Record*, April 1-15, 1970, No. 7. "Arafat Back from Far East Tour," p. 229.

³⁷ *Arab World*, August 20, 1970. "China Reassures the Commandos."

³⁸ *Arab Report and Record*, October 1-15, 1970. "Chinese Support Acknowledged," p. 571.

³⁹ *Arab World*, October 12, 1970. "Fateh and China."

but never was there a hint of Chinese intervention. Nor is there evidence the Palestinians expected it.

The Chinese saw clearly enough what had happened: disunity and over-reaching had led to defeat. But in the manner of a wise parent, Chou cabled Arafat on October 22 that China was "pleased to see that the valiant Palestinian people have been victorious" and have "crushed the military attack backed by the reactionary Jordanian military authority which is supported by American imperialism." Chou concluded that, "We highly appreciate your revolutionary spirit, and... offer you warm congratulations."⁴⁰

But Fateh suffered a clear decline in full-time fighters between 1969 and 1972. The Jordanian disaster, which ended with final suppression operations by the Jordanian Army in northern Jordan in July 1971, was the beginning of a new era for the Palestinian resistance movement and of a second phase in Sino-Palestinian relations.

Forced to take stock, the Palestinians found their membership decimated and their leadership divided. In the Fateh movement, one faction endorsed the type of international terrorism which gave birth to the Black September Organization, while another, led by Arafat, opposed this and emphasized the need for a retreat to the relatively safe haven of southern Lebanon for re-organization of the movement and a continuation of operations against Israel. Unable consistently to control his own lieutenants, Arafat faced the greatest crisis up to that time of his revolutionary career. Among his problems was an apparent cutback or even termination of Chinese material support and an obvious reassessment of Chinese policy towards the Palestine resistance movement.

It has sometimes been argued that the infighting following the defeat in Jordan caused China to back off on its support. One Western diplomat, with several years experience in the Middle East, says that: "In 1971 and 1972, the serious dissensions in the Palestinian movement made it apparent to Chinese eyes that the Palestinian guerrilla movement was not a popular movement convertible to a party."

But phase two in the Sino-Palestinian relationship is also related to China's post-Cultural Revolution domestic unrest, leadership turmoil and foreign policy reformulation. Black September came during the crucial period when China was attempting to refurbish its Arab world image, live

⁴⁰ *Arab Report and Record*, October 16-31, 1970. "Chinese Premier Congratulates Arafat," p. 599.

down a reputation for eccentricity and re-emerge on the world stage with the expanded opportunities of United Nations membership. Arab world publications soon remarked on Chinese efforts to strengthen relationships with area governments:

The Chinese-guerrilla relationship declined for a while after Peking embarked on its policy of seeking international recognition and of detente with the western world. The Chinese Government then, in a policy switch, decided to maintain its relations more with established foreign governments than with revolutionary movements abroad.⁴¹

The first indication that Sino-Palestinian relations were not all they had been was a muting of Chinese public support for the guerrillas. The *Peking Review*, for example, shows a marked alteration in public Chinese support for the Palestinians. From a total of seventeen articles centered on the Palestinians in 1970 and an equal number in 1971, the *Peking Review* dropped to three articles in 1972, four in 1973 and five in 1974. Nor did even these few articles published in 1972-74 always mention the Palestine guerrilla organizations.

When questioned about fluctuating intensity in public support for the Palestinians, a Chinese diplomat in the Middle East said China's unspotted United Nations record of support for the Palestinian cause is the best gauge of China's position. He denounced article and press release counting as "an imperialist way of looking at things."

However, there were other indicators. Between 1971 and 1974 there was a lowering of status of delegations invited to Peking (where they were met by officials of lower rank); there were also fewer Chinese internal media references to the Palestinian guerrilla organizations and a decrease in the number of Palestinian events held in China.

Although the Palestinians continued to describe China as their main international friend, a public example of Chinese disapproval came in early February 1971 when the PLO spokesman in Amman, Ibrahim Bakr, said the guerrillas would cooperate with the Jordanian government in suppression of anti-Jordanian activity. The Chinese apparently considered this statement evidence of compromise and "Chinese media stopped publishing commando communiqués for ten days and then resumed, but without the usual comment and praise."⁴²

⁴¹ *Arab World*, July 22, 1975. "Relations with China."

⁴² *Arab World Weekly*, February 13, 1971. "Communist Chinese Comeback in the Arab World."

Arab journalists who visited Peking in early 1971 were told by Chou En-lai:

If we compare between our assistance to the people of Indochina and that to the Palestinian people, we would find that our aid to you has not reached the level of our aid to the peoples of Indochina. It is our hope to see all Palestinian organizations united against Zionism and Imperialism.⁴³

This very pointed linking of two factors in the Sino-Palestinian relationship came when Chinese dismay at Palestinian disarray had reached its height.

By 1972 Arab world publications were reporting that "China has made it a condition that an increase in its aid to the Palestinian commandos would depend on their achievement of unity."⁴⁴ However, no Palestinian leader has ever publicly confirmed this development in the Chinese relationship. One PFLP source even claims that the Chinese see the Rejection Front as "the left wing of the PLO," and denies the PRC has ever tried to force Palestinian unity by withholding arms.

Though China may have threatened dissident Palestinian groups with an arms cutback after 1970, the question remains whether aid to all Palestinian groups was indeed cut during the early 1970s. A PFLP official says that to his knowledge China has never withheld arms from the Rejectionist groups in an effort to force unity: "The Chinese say, 'It would be better if you did such and such,' but they do not follow up with arms reductions if their advice is not taken."

However, it seems unlikely the Chinese would have allowed an evident decrease in public support for the Palestinians without a corresponding lessening in actual arms promises and delivery. Chinese aid to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Eritrean Liberation Front largely ceased between 1971 and 1973 and has not been renewed. The Palestinians were clearly informed in 1970-71 that Chinese aid was predicated on unity and were probably told as well that aid would not be forthcoming in large quantities, or possibly any quantities at all, without it.

Despite this partially behind-the-scenes pressuring, the Chinese did continue to praise the idea of a Palestine resistance movement, even if mentioning it less often. In October 1971, the Chinese told a Fateh delegation to Peking that China would continue "absolute political and military support to the Palestinian revolution," and would treat the

⁴³ *Arab World*, May 24, 1971. "Chinese Advice."

⁴⁴ *Arab World*, June 22, 1972. "Palestinian Commandos."

Jordanian monarchy “on the same footing as the Zionist state.”⁴⁵ King Hussein’s March 1972 plan for a federated kingdom comprising east and west banks of the Jordan was soundly condemned by China as well as the Palestinian leadership.

Other evidence of interest continued, such as Palestinian delegations to Peking and a Palestine Week held in China in May 1971. In November 1971 Fateh said that an undisclosed number of Chinese youths had volunteered to join the Palestinian guerrilla organizations through an offer made to the PLO office in Peking. However, Fateh did not say if it had accepted this offer and no Chinese ever appeared in Palestinian fighting units.

The Palestinians were ecstatic over China’s entry to the United Nations. A spokesman for the PLO, which hailed the event, said “It provides the first opportunity of its kind for the Arab cause — and above all the Palestine cause — to be represented on the Security Council.”⁴⁶ *The Arab World* commented:

In a way this is correct. China at the Security Council will be the only power that opposes the Council’s 1967 resolution for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. Furthermore, Peking is on record as calling for the elimination of the State of Israel in Palestine and establishment in its place of a democratic Palestinian state to comprise Arabs and Jews alike. This is the very view of the Palestinian guerrilla movement.⁴⁷

However, China’s performance at the UN has been much more cautious than its Palestinian friends anticipated. Basically, China has used the world body as a platform for political pronouncements rather than as a vehicle for change. China has unfailingly supported the Palestinian position at the UN, but that support has come mainly as a “refusing to be party to,” rather than in active promotion of, measures to obtain Palestinian objectives. Thus China usually abstains from voting when the Palestinian question is debated, maintaining that the resolution in question is not strong enough. It is significant, however, that China has not yet used its power of veto against a resolution which it considers too weak, based on false premises or likely to further imperialist objectives.

China did, however, vote positively on both 1974 United Nations

⁴⁵ *Arab World*, October 27, 1971. “Commandos.”

⁴⁶ *Arab Report and Record*, October 16-31, 1971. “PLO Welcomes China’s Admission to UN,” p. 570.

⁴⁷ *Arab World Weekly*, October 30, 1971. “China at the UN.”

General Assembly resolutions relating to the Palestinians, one affirming “the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination without external interference and the right to national independence and sovereignty” and the second inviting PLO participation in General Assembly sessions and observer status at international conferences convened under General Assembly auspices.

However, despite setbacks, including cooler relations with China, the Palestine resistance movement continued to mature. At the Seventh Arab Summit Conference held in Rabat in October 1974, the PLO was recognized by the Arab states as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Speaking of the late 1974 appearance of Yasser Arafat before the UN General Assembly in New York, one PLO official indicated that he considered the visit a symbol of emerging “responsibility.”

It was this evidence of growing international acceptance, combined with a political maturity which allowed the PLO to renounce the use of international terrorism, which swayed Chinese opinion and took the Sino-Palestinian relationship into stage three. By the end of 1974 the Palestinian organizations had demonstrated to Chinese satisfaction that they were not going to fade into insignificance and were in fact successfully solving their problems.

The first high-level PLO delegation in two years arrived in Peking on August 29, 1974, led by Arafat's political adviser Hani al-Hassan. Although the invitation came from the Chinese Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CAFFC) and not from the Chinese government, al-Hassan held talks with Premier Chou and delivered to him a message from Arafat. Al-Hassan also met with Chou Chueh, Deputy Director of the West Asian and North African Affairs Department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, and with Chao Chun-cheng, Deputy Director of the Foreign Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of National Defence. World attention had etched the Palestinians into bold relief, and possibly China felt a need to strengthen and reconfirm the relationship. If a cut in aid did occur, it was probably during the al-Hassan visit that promises of renewal were given.

In November 1974 PFLP and DFLP delegations likewise arrived in China at the invitation of the CAFFC, though delegates were not received by officials of the rank Hani al-Hassan was invited to meet.

Another Fateh delegation visited China in April 1975 and was received by Vice-Foreign Minister Ho Ying. The Palestine News Agency, *Wafa*,

remarked in late May that Arafat had received a message from Premier Chou "marked by frankness, affection and support."⁴⁸

In June 1975 the Chinese ambassador to Lebanon, Hsu Ming, called on Hani al-Hassan in Beirut to review with him the international and Middle East situation and assure him of Peking's desire to increase support for the Palestinian revolution.⁴⁹ The visit came between rounds two and three of the Lebanese civil war and seems to be one of the few times China discussed the Lebanese crisis with Arabs of any sort.

In July 1975 a high level Fateh delegation led by Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), a member of Fateh's "Big Three," arrived in Peking. The delegation included a number of high-ranking al-'Asifa officers (Fateh's military branch), a composition remarked on in the Arab press as indicating that military rather than political matters were to be discussed. Al-Hassan, a member of the delegation, told the press that Chinese-Palestinian relations were to be raised to a new level. He said the delegation had gone to China for consultations with leaders of the Chinese Communist Party concerning an agreement reached in October 1974, though he did not disclose the nature of that agreement.⁵⁰

In China Abu Jihad had the right words ready to portray the current status of the Palestinian movement, describing it in Maoist terms and according to the Chinese model:

The most important point which has been proved on various fronts in the world is that armed struggle is the basic form of struggle... We have come to understand from our own experience that we must abide by national unity and Arab unity. We have strengthened armed struggle and political activities.⁵¹

The Fateh delegation returned to the Middle East via North Korea, and on his return Abu Jihad said leaders of both China and North Korea were in "complete agreement" on support for the Palestinian revolution and "demands of the Palestine revolution received a great deal of response from all the officials we met."⁵²

However, despite widespread press speculation in 1975, there has been no public indication since the July 1975 visit of a serious enhancement of

⁴⁸ *Arab Report and Record*, May 16-31, 1975, No. 10, p. 324.

⁴⁹ *Arab World*, June 6, 1975. "China and Commandos."

⁵⁰ *Arab World*, July 17, 1975. "Fateh's High-Ranking Delegation to Peking: Palestinian-Chinese Relationship Raised to New Level," pp. 3-4.

⁵¹ *Peking Review*, No. 30, July 25, 1975. "Palestine 'Al Fateh' Delegation," p. 4.

⁵² *Arab World*, August 1, 1975. "Fateh Delegation Back from Peking Visit."

Sino-Palestinian relations or of an increased level of armaments support, though the level of Chinese media support to the Palestinians has increased.

The timing of the PLO/Fateh delegation to China in April 1976 was significant. Farouq al-Qaddoumi, PLO Political Department Chief, was received by Vice-President Li Hsien-nien and Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua. Contrary to normal procedure, the Chinese initiated this visit, which closely followed Sino-Egyptian economic and armaments agreements. The Palestinian invitation undoubtedly reflected Chinese desires to both polish up its revolutionary credentials and to reassure the Palestinians of support despite enhanced relations with Egypt, then regarded by some Palestinians as having betrayed the Palestinian cause in the 1975 Sinai agreement with Israel. The April 1976 PLO delegation to Peking is said to have requested an increase in financial and military support from the Chinese. However, as will be seen, the Chinese maintained a surprising lack of involvement in events in Lebanon throughout the civil war.

In February 1977, Arafat himself visited Peking. Seen from the outside, the invitation appears almost a form of Chinese apology for not providing the Palestinians with even very convincing verbal support during the preceding months of tribulation. At the least, the Chinese wished to let the Palestinians know they continued to "support the Palestinian cause."

3. THE SINO-SOVIET CONFLICT AND THE PALESTINIANS

Although the Middle East is only one theatre in which the Sino-Soviet controversy is played out, the Palestinian question has provided the Chinese substantial material with which to heckle the Soviet Union. Conversely, the Soviet Union sees China's relative success with the Palestinians as a threat to Soviet interests in the Arab world.

China was not happy in 1968 about Soviet violation of its unique position as big power supporter of the Palestinian guerrillas. While the total international scene must be taken into account during any consideration of fluctuations in Chinese policy, the switch from Chinese description of the United States as "the enemy of all people,"⁵³ when entertaining a Palestinian delegation in 1965, to present emphasis on the Soviet Union as the most dangerous foe of the Arabs, must also be understood in the context of growing Chinese concern over Soviet influence among the Palestinians.

⁵³ *Arab World*, March 23, 1965. "Joint Chinese-Palestinian Communiqué."

PLO Executive Committee member Abdul-Jawad Salih, who led an April 1976 Palestinian National Front delegation to the Soviet Union, described Palestinian-Soviet relations as "strategic" and the USSR as a sincere ally.⁵⁴ A PFLP source even maintains that Soviet influence on the Palestinian movement is more important than Chinese influence because "the USSR is more interested militarily and politically in the area than is China." Other observers add that the Palestinians "moved to the front ranks of Chinese propaganda efforts, as the Chinese leaders intensify their efforts to discredit the USSR with the Arabs."⁵⁵ Support for the Palestinian organizations is definitely "an integral part of the Chinese deterrent system against the Soviet Union."⁵⁶

The Chinese have accused the Soviet Union of sabotaging the Arab oil embargo to "rake in fabulous profits,"⁵⁷ of transporting to the Middle East "outmoded weapons with new paint and new marks," and demanding "extortionate prices for them,"⁵⁸ of economic plundering of the Third World,⁵⁹ and of generally "attempting in a thousand and one ways to tie the hands of the Arab countries and peoples."⁶⁰

Chinese attacks have helped place the Soviet Union in the embarrassing position of having to engage in a typically Chinese political contradiction: support of a revolutionary movement while maintaining diplomatic relations with area governments, several of which feel threatened by enhanced Palestinian power. Not surprisingly, the attitude and actions of the Soviet Union toward the Palestinians have been "cautious, ambiguous and wavering."⁶¹

The Chinese publicize the fact that though the bulk of the aid they provide to the Palestinians goes directly to the guerrilla organizations, the

⁵⁴ *Falastin al-Thawra*, April 18, 1976. "Abdul-Jawad Salih: The Palestinian Revolution's Relations with the Soviet Union are Strategic" (Arabic).

⁵⁵ Deirdre Ryan, "The Decline of the Armed Struggle Tactic in Chinese Foreign Policy," *Current Scene*, Vol. X, No. 12, December 1972, p. 8.

⁵⁶ T. Rhee, "The Sino-Soviet Conflict and the Middle East," *New Outlook* (Tel Aviv), Vol. 13, No. 7, September - October 1970, p. 24.

⁵⁷ New China News Agency, No. 58, April 27, 1974. "Arab Countries Win Great Victory in Oil Battle."

⁵⁸ *Survey of China Mainland Press*, No. 5899, July 10, 1975. "Big Sale of Soviet, US Arms in Middle East," p. 93.

⁵⁹ *Peking Review*, April 26, 1974, No. 17. "How Soviet Revisionism Plunders the Third World Economically," pp. 23-24.

⁶⁰ *Survey of China Mainland Press*, No. 5479, October 23-26, 1973. "Jen-min Jih-pao Commentator Supports Egypt, Syria in their Resistance to Israeli Military Aggression," p. 32.

⁶¹ Carlson, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

Soviet Union has until recently provided all its aid to the Palestinians more diplomatically through the governments of Syria and Egypt. This emphasis on government-to-government relations naturally characterizes a big power with long-standing ties to area governments and much to lose if it indulges in "adventurism." Consequently, Radio Moscow declared as late as January 1969:

... All the attempts of imperialist propaganda to maintain that the center of gravity in the Arab-Israeli conflict has moved into the struggle of the Palestinian partisans are all the same naked demogogy: the main sides of the conflict can only be Israel and the Arab states.⁶²

In the late 1960's China was able to commit itself to the Palestinian cause because China did not have the global concerns of a great power such as the USSR. Nor did the Chinese have the Soviet fear that local war could escalate into general war. However, after the Cultural Revolution, China's increased diplomatic responsibility and position in the Arab East altered Chinese flexibility and contributed to restraint in Chinese dealings with the Palestinians.

Chinese wooing of the Palestinians is often regarded as having finally pushed the Soviet Union into support for the Palestinians. But another reason for Soviet fear of growing Chinese influence in the Middle East stems partly from the USSR's concern for its own areas of predominantly Muslim population and the possible impact upon them of China's success as an Asian world power with tens of millions of Muslims of its own, which argues in its propaganda that Soviet ethnic minorities are oppressed. As Geoffrey Wheeler has pointed out:

[China can] hardly be a formidable rival to Soviet influence in the Middle East. But the Russians appear to think otherwise, and to understand their point of view it is necessary to consider the Middle East as extending beyond the Persian and Afghan frontiers through the Muslim Soviet Republics to the predominantly Muslim part of Western China now known as the Sinkiang-Uygur Autonomous Region.⁶³

The Russian fear that the USSR will lose prestige to the Chinese in Muslim areas works, of course, in precisely the opposite direction to drive on the Chinese.

However, although a Soviet fear of Chinese presence in the Arab East certainly contributed to the eventual Soviet decision to aid the Palestinians,

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶³ Geoffrey Wheeler, "Soviet and Chinese Policies in the Middle East," *The World Today*, Vol. 17, February 1966, p. 77.

growing guerrilla power and popularity played an equal if not greater part in the Soviet decision. The Soviet Union is considerably less preoccupied with China than China is with the Soviet Union.

Until almost 1969 the Soviet Union practically ignored the Palestine guerrilla organizations, although some Soviet arms contributions to the Palestinians passed via Nasser in 1968. Arafat had visited Moscow in 1965, and the Soviet Union was not then willing to commit itself to any group of such an unknown future and quality as Fateh. The Chinese frequently chide the Soviet Union for failure to give early support to the Palestinian groups. Not until the 1967 war did the Soviet Union break diplomatic relations with Israel, and even then did not withdraw recognition.

Represented since 1965 by a permanent office in Peking, the PLO did not achieve a similar right in the Soviet Union until 1974 (and has yet to open an office there). Piqued by a chilly reception during a February 1970 visit to Moscow during which he met only members of the Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity and no important Soviet leaders, Yasser Arafat returned to the Middle East to speak pointedly of the "cold snow" in the Soviet Union.

There have been times (naturally played up by the Chinese) when the Palestinians have criticized the Soviet Union, either for public failure to go along with Palestinian positions or for Soviet support for the possibility of political settlement of the Palestinian problem. *Peking Review* reprinted a *Fateh* editorial in August 1970 entitled "Fateh Denounced Certain Big Powers for Plotting to Strangle the Palestinian Revolution." The editorial said in part:

The Soviet newspaper *Pravda* is very sensitive to any criticism. It becomes displeased even when we defend our views on the Palestine cause which are different from its views...

The Palestine cause is our own cause. Nobody else has the right to interfere in it. If one wants to take an internationalist stand, one should side with us or else keep silent; otherwise one should expect a reply if one knocks at the door.⁶⁴

The Chinese continue their efforts to point up such recurrent differences between the Palestinians and the Soviet Union. In a typical attack, Ho Ying told the Fateh delegation to Peking in July 1975: "That superpower which glibly professes to be a 'natural ally' of the Arab peoples, even goes to the length of supporting one faction while attacking another in a bid to disrupt

⁶⁴ *Peking Review*, Vol. 13, No. 32, August 21, 1970. "Fateh Denounces Certain Big Powers for Plotting to Strangle the Palestinian Revolution," p. 29.

the unity of the Palestinians and other Arab peoples and undermine their struggle.”⁶⁵

On the other hand, the Soviet Union has criticized the PFLP and the DFLP (in the period prior to its pro-Soviet stance) for following Maoism which, it says, “embarks them in adventurism resulting in setbacks.”⁶⁶ The PFLP is particularly sensitive about public criticism by the Soviet Union, which followed PFLP acts of international terrorism. PFLP sources express appreciation that “the Chinese are not critical in print of their friends.”

Soviet support for the post-1973 war Geneva Conference, to which the Palestinian organizations have not been invited, has been repeatedly identified by the Chinese as evidence of Soviet failure to recognize the Palestinians as indigenous people capable of looking after their own affairs and of representing themselves — this despite efforts by the Soviet Union to reconvene the Geneva Conference with Palestinian delegates. The People’s Republic of China has opposed the Geneva Conference in any form, with or without Palestinian representation, describing the conference as an attempt by the superpowers to throttle the Palestinian revolution.

While Palestinian leaders do not admit publicly that they can to a certain extent play on Sino-Soviet antagonisms, Arab politicians in general have done well at this game and the Palestinians are no exception. Not surprisingly, the Soviet Union was reported by the Palestinians to be more “forthcoming” with arms promises following the mid-1975 high level Fateh delegation to Peking.

The Palestinians are both attracted and amazed by the “no strings attached” nature of Chinese aid. Unlike the Soviet Union, China attaches no conditions to the use of arms it supplies and asks no political back-scratching in return. Palestinian sources describe Chinese aid as “wholly disinterested” and absolutely free. However, the same sources say Soviet weapons are usually free as well.

However, Palestinian leadership cannot fail to recognize its role in accepting Chinese arms as part of China’s efforts to embarrass the Soviet Union, and Sino-Soviet tension causes the Palestinians to walk carefully. Having to seek support from any available source is certainly a major reason that the PLO has played down its China connection. Not only the Soviet Union, but conservative Arab governments, such as that of Saudi Arabia which financially supports the PLO, would be disturbed if the extent to which

⁶⁵ *Survey of China Mainland Press*, No. 5804, July 18, 1975 (New China News Agency Release). “Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Fetes Palestine ‘Al Fateh’ Delegation,” p. 65.

⁶⁶ Hussein, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

the Middle East melange has linked them with China were widely publicized. The influence exerted by the Soviet Union on the leftist Arab states is also a factor the Palestinians must consider before offending the USSR — the 1969 arms blockade in Iraq being only one example of what could happen.

The Palestinians face the dilemma of having to avoid appearing to be aligned with either side in the Sino-Soviet dispute. An Arab world publication commented that Arafat's immediate trip to China following his March 1970 visit to the Soviet Union was in no way an attempt to blackmail Moscow, but was related to this Sino-Soviet tension. In both Moscow and Peking, the PLO spokesman stressed the "front character of the organization, the priority given to the task of defeating Israel rather than to ideological questions (at this stage) and the range of political opinions represented in the Palestinian guerrilla movement as a whole."⁶⁷

It seems clear, however, that the Palestinians have an agreement with the Chinese that the latter do not permit their problems with the Soviet Union to affect Chinese relations with the PLO. A western diplomat offers the opinion that "Palestinian leadership tends to dismiss the PRC anti-Soviet line as just a Chinese hangup. The Palestinians are pretty preoccupied with themselves." A PFLP source suggests that "the Chinese speak of their anti-Soviet ideas, but that's just a habit of theirs."

Although some Palestinians deny it is so, in reality the success of the Palestine resistance movement is much less important to the Chinese than is the disgrace of the Soviet Union in the Arab East. A recent proof is Peking's violent denunciation of the Kremlin's June 1976 assessment of the Lebanese civil war. Though Moscow criticized Syrian intervention (at a time when Palestinian leaders believed the Palestine revolution to be fighting for its life against Syrian designs), China ignored its cue to likewise support the Palestinians. Instead, Peking, unnerved by the Soviet Monroe Doctrine aspects of the statement, raised a hue and cry over Soviet "intervention" in Lebanon and did not comment on the Syrian incursion into Lebanon at all.

In September 1976 the New China News Agency said that the principal cause of the aggravation of the Lebanese conflict was "the savage interference of the two superpowers who are indulging in a new trial of strength in Lebanon," adding that the "contemptible attitude" of the USSR towards Lebanon "has abundantly demonstrated its adventurism and its feebleness."⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *The Dragon and the Bear*, p. 105.

⁶⁸ New China News Agency, quoted in *L'Orient-Le Jour*, September 29, 1976, "Pékin dénonce le rôle soviétique dans la crise libanaise."

In November 1976 China was still accusing Brezhnev of seeking “to incite the parties concerned in Lebanon to continue their strife and thus create instability there, which would enable the Soviet Union to fish in troubled waters.”⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

Several factors operate in the Arab East to limit Chinese activities and appeal among the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular. Islam and Arab nationalism do serve as primary defences against any widespread acceptance of Communist ideology. Moreover, the degree to which many modern Muslims identify themselves with western civilization cannot be overemphasized. The Middle East has traditionally turned west, not east. As opposed to the Far Eastern tradition, the culture of the Arab East is a part of the greater Christian-Islamic interaction and thus in addition to logistical and distance problems, the Chinese face cultural separation.

China’s greatest appeal is to members of the Middle East’s young radical elites, even if for the present, “China may not be able to communicate with the current political elite, which has its roots in the Western and Islamic world.”⁷⁰ But there is also the attraction of the “Vietnamese way” and the “Cuban way,” which compete for adherents among the more radical. The most unpredictable factor in the equation is China’s own evolving internal political situation and China’s pragmatic political approach.

Relations between the People’s Republic of China and the Middle Eastern states and groups after 1970 show that China is well prepared to withdraw support from any revolutionaries, regardless of previous commitments, if more viable options surface. There have already been three phases in the Sino-Palestinian relationship, and China’s pragmatic diplomatic approach indicates that the Palestinian connection depends on the complete Middle East picture as China sees it.

The Chinese withdrew support from the Eritrean Liberation Front in favour of establishing diplomatic relations with Ethiopia, and from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (formerly PFLOAG), presumably in order to improve relations with the United States and allow Iran to strengthen its anti-Soviet position in the Gulf. These policy changes serve as warning signals to the Palestinians, who cannot but remember Chinese statements mentioning their cause alongside others from which Chinese support has now

⁶⁹ *Peking Review*, Vol. 19, No. 45, November 5, 1976. “Round the World,” p. 47.

⁷⁰ Carlson, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

been withdrawn. For example, in April 1970 the *Peking Review* quoted the Algerian Ambassador to China: "The fact that the Fateh delegation and the delegation of the People's Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf are visiting China simultaneously provides the best proof of the stand of support taken by this great country."⁷¹

In April 1976, too, the agreements by China to provide certain military, technical and industrial assistance to Egypt in replacement of Soviet assistance have greatly strengthened Sino-Egyptian ties, suggesting that China may be more attracted to the idea of a major state ally in the area than to that of a guerrilla movement.

The extent to which Chinese arms supplies to the Palestinians actually fell off between 1972 and 1974 remains to be definitely answered by some future windfall of information. The public Palestinian position is that Chinese supplies did not diminish during those years, but the post-1970 Chinese diplomatic push into the Arab world with its concentration on gaining entry to the United Nations and good relations with Arab governments tends to support other indications that Chinese aid did at least diminish.

How much the level of Chinese supply to the Palestinians has actually picked up since the high level meetings of late 1974-75 is also not clear. A Western diplomat comments that "The Chinese have tended to lower their profile since 1971. They may not have lessened their basic diplomatic activities and material support to the Palestinians, but we don't hear so much about them any more. We don't feel so much the danger of a Chinese supported horde running amok in the Middle East."

A current indication of a softening of China's revolutionary policy in the Arab East has been China's surprising lack of involvement in the Lebanese civil war, in contrast to its publicized concern over events in Jordan in 1970. A civil conflict in which the Palestinian organizations were heavily involved would a few years ago have elicited emphatic Chinese comment. During the 1958 civil disturbances in Lebanon, China condemned the United States for its involvement and the Lebanese rightists for their position. In 1969, following more civil disturbances, the Chinese commented on "recent atrocities committed by the US imperialists in league with the Lebanese authorities in trying to put down the Palestinian guerrilla forces."⁷² By contrast, there is no

⁷¹ *Peking Review*, No. 14, April 3, 1970. "Palestine National Liberation Movement (Fateh) Delegation Ends Visit to China," p. 4.

⁷² *Peking Review*, No. 45, November 7, 1969. "Palestinian People's Armed Struggle and New Awakening of the Arab People," p. 20.

evidence of Chinese sponsorship for any group, including the Palestinians, in the Lebanese civil war.

Not until the January 1976 Syrian mediation and the incursion of the Palestine Liberation Army from Syria had brought what then appeared to be an end to the worst violence in Lebanese history did the Chinese comment openly on the Lebanese situation, describing it as “a religious conflict between Christians and Muslims” which “also involved the presence of Palestinian guerrillas in Lebanon.”⁷³ China’s description of the situation was quite different from that of the Palestinian organizations, which saw their future seriously menaced; but clearly the Chinese were uncertain what was going to happen in Lebanon and reserved their comments lest they damage their recently gained diplomatic position.

The probability of a Middle East settlement producing a Palestinian state is the Middle East’s most serious question. Despite Chinese support for people’s war and the denunciations of the cease-fires of both 1967 and 1973, behind the scenes China is known to be willing to support the moderate Palestinians in efforts to achieve a “peaceful settlement,” particularly in reference to a West Bank/Gaza state. According to one PLO official:

The Chinese normally say the Palestinian struggle should be based on our objective situation and we should not be under the influence of any state. They say, “If you want a state, go ahead and we will support you, whatever its form. But bear in mind that the United States and the Soviet Union are in agreement that you will not get an independent Palestinian state. However, whatever you want from us, we will give you.”

The PFLP appears to agree with this assessment, because “the Chinese are willing to do what the Palestinians think best. They wouldn’t vote for it, but they wouldn’t vote against it.”

Whether China would consider the Palestinians to have “sold out” if they accepted a West Bank state with agreement against attacks on Israel to secure more territory is another question. Yet indications are that Chinese pragmatism could stretch to swallow even a non-revolutionary Palestine if the benefit for China were a state with which it entertained good relations. An important indication of this possibility was deletion in 1974 and 1976 of “armed” from “struggle” in China’s United Nations statements on the Palestine issue. Should the Palestinians revert to Black September tactics or decrease in importance on the Arab political scene, it is fairly certain that China’s attitude toward them would cool.

⁷³ New China News Agency, Daily Bulletin 6520, No. 012925, January 30, 1976. “Agreement on Settlement of Conflict Reached in Lebanon.”

The uncertain state of Chinese relations with Israel is also visible to the Palestinians. Israel recognized the People's Republic of China in 1950 and although China did not reciprocate, there were prolonged contacts during the early fifties with a view to establishment of at least trade relations. These negotiations officially broke off after the 1955 Bandung Conference and China's present position is that, "from the very beginning we have refused to have any contact with the Israeli Zionists who persist in aggression."⁷⁴

Yet rumours of continued Chinese-Israeli contacts persist. In 1964, China announced it would respect Arab Boycott Office regulations by prohibiting blacklisted ships from entering Chinese waters.⁷⁵ However, *Israel's Foreign Trade: General Summary 1974*, contains the following trade figures (in \$1,000):⁷⁶

	<i>Exports to China</i>	<i>Imports from China</i>
1971	1,271	69
1972	7	81
1973	0	935
1974	0	1,017

China is said to have sought Israel's vote on seating China at the UN in exchange for a more favourable Chinese posture toward Israel. Beirut's *L'Orient-Le Jour* maintained in 1972 that "contacts established between the representative of the Israeli [leftist] Mapam party [Elie Ben Gal] in Paris and Chinese diplomats had never been interrupted, although this was denied by the Chinese ambassador in Paris."⁷⁷

In a speech reportedly given by Chinese Foreign Minister Chiao Kuan-hua in May 1975 for internal consumption, Chiao said, according to a Republic of China (Taipei) source: "In my personal opinion, it is better to have Israel than not. We should let it exist but not recognize it, put it aside for a while and review it again after a certain period of time."⁷⁸ The obvious meaning is that Israel serves as a foment of revolution in the Middle East. However, such statements indicate pragmatism and leave the door open for policy reformulations.

⁷⁴ Speech by Chiao Kuan-hua at United Nations General Assembly (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1974), p. 9.

⁷⁵ New China News Agency, May 1, 1964.

⁷⁶ Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, *Israel's Foreign Trade: General Summary, 1974*, special series, No. 498 (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 8-9.

⁷⁷ *Arab Report and Record*, February 16-29, 1972, p. 98.

⁷⁸ *Issues and Studies* (Taipei), "Speech by Chiao Kuan-hua, May 20, 1975," December 1975, p. 98.