# DEVELOPMENTS AND SETBACKS IN THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT 1967-1971

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This paper attempts to describe the re-emergence of a Palestinian Arab national movement, the Palestinian resistance (al-Muqawama al-Filastiniya) during the years following the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967. Perspectives and concepts from comparative politics are employed to facilitate description and evaluation. An effort is made to assess the violence capabilities, structural development, and ideological trends of the movement in light of general theoretical considerations and also in the context of the politics of the Arab world. From the spring of 1968 until the fall of 1970, the guerrillas developed the capacity to carry out serious protracted violence against Israel. The guerrilla organizations themselves became more elaborate structurally and began to develop important political functions of a nation-building character. The movement was becoming more radical ideologically, a development which reinforced its overall cohesion although serious elite rivalries persisted. These developments increased the influence of the movement over Arab governments, but they also increased its threat potential, thus complicating the relationship. As far as the superpowers were concerned, the Palestinians injected an element of instability into the local political-military situation and a consequent additional risk of great-power confrontation. Thus, when Jordan and the United States moved to eliminate guerrilla activities from Jordan the Palestinians found they had no effective outside supporters.

The Palestinian guerrillas never constituted more than a minor threat to Israel's vital security. They were irregulars, fighting a hit-and-run war of harassment, the only type of active military activities possible for the Arabs, whose regular armies remained vastly inferior to the Israel army. Even during the period of most intense guerrilla activity the Israelis maintained that the impact was of only marginal military significance.[1] While public reporting of casualties may have been understated, Israel still maintained basic public security without a large standing commitment of troops. Casualty ratios remained in Israel's favour, although the margin of superiority was disputed.[2]

Even before Jordan's crackdown on the guerrillas the Jordan River cease-fire line was sealed off to a degree by means of electronic fences and surveillance. Guerrilla sources claimed that the efficacy of these measures was exaggerated.[3] On other fronts too the situation was annoying but not alarming. The Golan Heights of Syria remained the quietest sector, and the Israelis continued to build permanent settlements there. South of the Dead Sea there were periodic engagements, the most serious ones occurring in the vicinity of the potash works and the secret Dimona nuclear installation. Eilat experienced a handful of incidents, two of them involving sabotage by Arab frogmen, but the port remained fully active. At the other end of the country, the border with Lebanon became increasingly active. In terms of military threat, however, Israel's generals continued to regard the western front with Egypt a far greater menace than the eastern front with Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and the guerrillas, and their behaviour showed it. Israel's main line of defence, its generals said, was in the skies over Egypt.[4] In contrast, the eastern front presented no similar vital threat; the conventional Arab forces there were numerically inferior to a mobilized Israel Defence Force, they lacked even the pretence of air cover and adequate aircraft defence, and their overall co-ordination and leadership remained feeble. As for the guerrillas, in their prime they constituted *in toto* a force of less than 50,000 men, of whom a much smaller number were actually

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[1] Y. Harkabi, "Fedayeen Action and Arab Strategy," *Adelphi Papers*, Number 53 (December 1968), London: The Institute for Strategic Studies, p. 34.

[2] Hisham Sharabi, "Palestine Guerrillas: Their Credibility and Effectiveness," *Supplementary Papers* of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University (Washington, D.C., 1970), pp. 10-12, 46-47. After studying Israeli and Palestinian casualty figures, Sharabi suggests that "the ratio of Israeli monthly fatalities [on all fronts] must be considered close to, if not exceeding, those of the Palestinians." (p. 11).

[3] Sharabi, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-19.

[4] Hence the concern in Israel in March 1970 over the American decision to postpone supplying additional Phantom jet fighters, and over reports that the USSR was strengthening Egyptian air defences. See, e.g., James Feron, "Israeli Jets Seek to Foil SAM-3's," *The New York Times*, March 25, 1970, and Francis Ofner, "Missiles for Arabs Grate Israel," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 23, 1970, the latter reporting statements by Defence Minister Moshe Dayan and Foreign Minister Abba Eban.

front-line fighters, lightly armed.[5] Furthermore, the Israelis could count on these guerrillas being hindered in greater or lesser degree by the host countries, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. The guerrillas proved unable to diminish Israel's military superiority in the area.

Nevertheless, from 1968 through 1970 the Palestinians were able to apply important political and psychological pressure against Israel. There were numerous border incursions and a rash of terrorist acts against Israeli or "pro-Israeli" installations in Europe. There was the creation of an insurrectionary condition in Gaza and a sporadic guerrilla presence on the West Bank. And there was the development of linkages with the Palestinian Arab inhabitants of pre-1967 Israel.

## I. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The political emergence of the Palestinian resistance after 1967 was an event of revolutionary importance in the Arab world. It developed a degree of leadership, organization, and mass support quite superior to earlier efforts during the British Palestine Mandate and to those of other political movements in the Arab world. It developed a modest violence capability against Israel which the Israelis found politically intolerable. More significant, however, was the challenge it posed to the authority of all the Arab regimes in the confrontation zone with Israel, a challenge that was to precipitate a grievous setback in 1971.

It is not difficult in retrospect to explain the rise of Palestinian activism. There existed in the Arab states, and especially in the Palestinian Arab community, conditions more favourable to revolution than ever before. The Palestinian Arabs, their traditional society disrupted and their misery self-evident, were particularly mobilizable. If one could chart a relative deprivation curve for the Palestinians, it might well have corresponded to the hypothesis of Tocqueville and his modern interpreters: sufficient well-being, especially in education, among the dispersed Palestinians after their eviction from Palestine in 1948 to inspire a growing awareness of the injustice suffered. The disaster of 1967, suddenly lowering the level of well-being and renewing the injustice, served to precipitate a climate receptive to new leadership.[6]

No less important was the behaviour of Israel, which had come to function as a perpetual trauma in Arab politics. Israel now occupied, in addition to

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[5]  Sharabi, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

[6]  James C. Davies, following Tocqueville and Crane Brinton, presents such a thesis in "Toward a Theory of Revolution," *American Sociological Review*, XXVII (February 1962), pp. 5-19. See also Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1966), chapters 4 and 5.

all of Palestine, significant portions of Syria, Jordan and Egypt. This condition made it impossible for Arab leaders to put the question of Israel "on the back burner," as President Nasser did between the wars of 1956 and 1967. [7] A political culture inherently fragmented because of primordial culture divisions, external divisive forces, and uneven modernization, [8] had been subjected to a new Israeli intrusion. The success of Israel's aggressive stance was continually reaffirmed by new victories. To many Arabs non-violent alternatives appeared ever more naive.

Prior to 1967 a small number of groups had given expression to the latent Palestinian national feeling. Fateh (the Palestine Liberation Movement) was founded in the aftermath of the Suez War and comprised but a handful of members when it began its first armed incursions into Israel in 1965. Ahmed Shuqairy's Palestine Liberation Organization was originally an instrument of the Arab States and was far from a revolutionary fighting organization. It was, nevertheless, quite successful politically and administratively in laying the groundwork for the renewed Palestinian political identity. Shuqairy exploited the diplomatic status bestowed upon the PLO by the Arab summit conference of 1964, and he began to reorganize the dispersed Palestinian elite by convening the first Palestine National Council in Jerusalem in 1964. [9] After the June war, the PLO leadership was discredited but its apparatus remained to function as the executive "umbrella" for the movement as a whole.

By 1970 Fateh had emerged as the richest, most successful and structurally complex guerrilla movement. It gradually gained control of the Palestine National Congress and the PLO Executive Committee. By March 1970 in Jordan it had established itself as a state within a state "with an army, hospitals, social security system and tax collectors." [10] It was, however, unable to exercise complete hegemony over the activities of the commando groups created after 1967 from previous Palestinian organizations, [11] from other Arab

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[7] Kennett Love, *Suez: The Twice-Fought War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), pp. 83-84, 679-85.

[8] Three important theoretical statements are K.W. Deutsch, "Social Mobilization and Political Development," *American Political Science Review*, LV, 3 (September 1961), pp. 493-514; Clifford Geertz, "The Integration Revolution; Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in Geertz (ed.) *Old Societies and New States* (New York; Free Press, 1963), pp. 105-157; and Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

[9] The Council, consisting of some 115 representatives of important segments of Palestinian society and its major associations, was selected by the PLO executive committee annually, and functioned as a kind of constituent assembly of the Palestine diaspora. The PLO also began to develop a Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), mainly in Gaza, before the June war.

[10] Sharabi, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[11] The most important of these was the new guerrilla-style military unit called the Popular Liberation Forces which emerged when the old PLA reconstituted itself after asserting its independence from the PLO.

countries, [12] and from Palestinian circles of a generally Marxist-Leninist-Maoist orientation. [13] Although these last organizations were numerically and financially weak compared to the other groups, they were disproportionately influential because of the widespread appeal of their radical ideology. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Popular Democratic Front (PDFLP), in particular, placed heavy stress on political indoctrination, setting an example which Fateh increasingly emulated; and they sought to present the Palestinian problem in the context of Western imperialism. [14] Most important, the spectacular terror and sabotage operations of the PFLP strengthened the coherence and morale of the Palestinian movement generally.

An important step towards co-ordinating guerrilla activity was taken early in 1969 with Fateh's winning control of the PLO structure and with the establishment of the Palestine Armed Struggle Command (PASC) in Amman. The PASC too was dominated by Fateh and included all the major groups with the exception of the Popular Front. The latter group, led by George Habbash, refused to join for fear that the largely non-revolutionary leadership of Fateh jeopardized the cause. A year later, in February 1970, following another abortive attempt by the government of Jordan to restrict guerrilla activity, a new "umbrella" organization was announced, called the Unified Command for the Palestinian Resistance Movement (UC), and it included Habbash's Popular Front. Some Palestinian observers now began to speak of the formation of a Palestine National Front.

During its first two years of major activity, significant progress had been made towards consolidation and co-ordination among the guerrilla organizations. But in the light of the persistent and growing tensions between the resistance and the governments of Jordan and Lebanon, not to mention Israel, this progress was recognized to be insufficient. In June 1970 a new executive co-ordinating body appeared, the Central Committee of the PLO, embodying the old PLO Executive Committee and additional representatives from all the commando groups; and shortly thereafter a General Secretariat of the Central Committee was established. This new apparatus may have helped the guerrillas to hold their own as long as they did during the Jordanian army onslaught of September 1970, but it was clearly unable to supply enough

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[12] Syria, and later Iraq, sponsored their own Palestinian guerrilla forces, Sa'iqa and the Arab Liberation Front (ALF), respectively; the Kingdom of Jordan also sought without much success to develop guerrilla groups as a counter-weight to the independent Palestinian organizations.

[13] The trio of such organizations was formed by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) created in 1967, and two of its offshoots, the Popular Democratic Front (PDFLP), created in 1969 and the PFLP General Command, created in 1968.

[14] Gerard Chaliand, "The Palestinian Resistance Movement [in early 1969]," English translation of a report in Le Monde Diplomatique, March 1969 (Beirut: Fifth of June Society, 1969), pp. 20-30.

coherence to prevent the inexorable, near-fatal erosion of resistance capabilities that followed it. Even as the Eighth Palestine National Council was meeting in Cairo in July 1971 to carry out yet another executive reform, the Jordan army was preparing to liquidate the final guerrilla enclaves in North Jordan. While much co-ordination had been achieved and the proliferation of smaller groups eliminated, the leadership had been unable to agree on a common policy towards the Arab states; Fateh and the "moderates" attempted to work with regimes like those of Saudi Arabia and Jordan while the radical organizations, especially the PFLP, denounced them.

## II. Structure of the Palestinian Resistance Elite

If one could observe the Palestinian resistance elite from the perspective of a general model of elite structure, one might be better able to interpret the nation-building capabilities of the movement. A useful typology for structural comparison proposed by Louis J. Cantori [15] reformulates the distinction made by Michels and others between mass and elite parties to inquire whether parties are "penetrative" or "non-penetrative." The former type displays articulated party organization at all levels and areas of society. It also distinguishes between parties with traditional elites and modern elites at the middle lower levels of societies, and parties with only a national-level elite. Parties with penetrative organization are more likely to generate and utilize "grass-roots" support than those without it. Parties with modern elites at the national, middle, and lowest levels of society are more powerful agents of rational change than parties with a three-tiered traditional or only a national elite. Most potent, theoretically, are parties with both penetrative organization and a three-tiered modern elite.

There are two problems in trying to analyse the Palestinian resistance in terms of this paradigm. One is that there is no Palestinian nation with the attributes of territory and sovereignty. The Palestinians are distributed now mainly among four sovereign jurisdictions — Israel, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. The second problem is that there is a dearth of information on the elitè and organizational characteristics of the Palestinians.

Until the 1970-71 reverses in Jordan, Palestinian guerrilla organizations appeared to exist not only at the "national" level but also at the middle and lower levels of Palestinian society. One of the political advantages for the guerrillas was that there were no longer any powerful parties at the national

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[15] Louis J. Cantori, "Islam, Political Legitimacy and the Istiqlal Party of Morocco," presented at the African Studies Association, Montreal, Canada, October 1969, pp. 3-5. His formulation draws upon the work of Michels, Duverger, Hodgkin, and Zolberg, among others.

level; indeed, the national elite itself had been greatly attenuated by the experience of the diaspora. To a large extent the guerrilla groups did not simply penetrate a national elite but actually reconstituted it. Fateh had a network of political and military branches that appeared to engage all sectors of the Palestinian community; refugees, villagers and peasants, urban proletariat outside camps, middle-class professionals and business people, and the very well-to-do commercial elite. This was the case not just around Amman, but wherever there were Palestinians — throughout Jordan, in Syria, Lebanon and even among Palestine emigré communities in Europe and the Americas. The extent of elite development in these sectors varied a good deal. Early in 1970 Fateh, through its military wing Asifa, seemed particularly strong in the lower-class camp and non-camp population of Jordan and Syria, and, through its domination of the PLO, among the old "upper-class" national elite. The radical organizations — the PFLP and the PDFLP — seemed to be well organized in the camps, especially in Gaza and Lebanon, and within the professional and intellectual sectors generally. Jordan's liquidation of guerrilla and militia forces in late 1970 and 1971 was accompanied by massive security operations and purges of Palestinians in the cities and camps; these unquestionably uprooted or neutralized much of the resistance infra-structure.

The distribution of resistance cadres in the Palestinian communities under Israeli rule seemed confined mainly to Gaza. In the West Bank the Israelis made occasional efforts to cultivate the traditional notables, such as Sheikh Mohammed al-Jaabari of Hebron, as a barrier to resistance penetration. But there was enough guerrilla organization in the intermediate and lower strata to discourage significant collaboration by the notables. Much the same situation applied to the Palestinian Arab community of Israel itself: here it appeared at times that there were guerrilla or guerrilla-inspired groups among the urban middle-class professionals and in some villages.

There is little doubt that the resistance elites were modern rather than traditional in orientation. From all accounts, they were largely Western-educated, particularly through attendance at institutions of higher learning both in the Arab world and the West. There was a high proportion of professionals — school-teachers, engineers and doctors — in influential positions in the movement. Doctrinal and strategic statements, as well as commentaries on current affairs that emanated from the movement, were analytic, means-end oriented, as well as rhetorical and expressive. Although the soundness of their strategic doctrine has been questioned,[16] its authors would not seem to have held traditionalist world-views.[17]

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[16] Harkabi, op. cit., pp. 34-35.
[17] See e.g., Fateh's analyses of its crises with the Lebanon and Jordanian governments, Fateh, I, 4 (November 10, 1969) and II, 4 (February 15, 1970), respectively.

But while one could assert that the resistance elite was free of the parochial-primordial traditionalist perspectives of most earlier "national" leaders one could not go further to claim that its orientation to modernity was sufficient to produce an integrated set of political attitudes and priorities. For example undertones of sectarian tension were noticeable occasionally at the middle levels; and after the defeats in Jordan a prominent element in the radical critique directed at Fateh was that it had fallen increasingly under the influence of former Moslem Brothers. After the defeats in Jordan another theme in the radical critique gained more public attention — the charge that the PLO guerrilla leadership was too much a part of the old, regressive and declining liberal-bourgeois elite to lead the Palestinian revolution. And within the radical camp itself the doctrinal issue over the role of the petit-bourgeois class indicated that there was disagreement about which segments of Palestinian society could produce a properly modern revolutionary movement.

To what extent did these new elites penetrate the different levels of Palestinian society? The evidence from interviews indicates that the resistance movement specifically sought to do so; how well they succeeded is harder to say. The various groups differed in their emphasis on such a policy, with the radical Popular Front and Popular Democratic Front making the strongest effort. [18] Fateh, the largest but least "political" of the groups, began its activities in 1965 without the resources to activate the community: its "foco" strategy aimed at creating a climate for such penetration through initiating violence against the enemy. But after the battle at Karamah in March 1968 Fateh sought increasingly to articulate its organization at all levels. At the "national" level there was a proliferation of informational and propaganda activities. Notable among these was the Fateh radio, broadcasting from Cairo, which in addition to disseminating guerrilla communiqués presented educational programmes on Palestinian history and culture. Fateh also undertook educational and welfare programmes, mainly in Jordan, for guerrillas and their families. Refugee camps provided a favourable environment for penetration, so that groups with even limited resources like the PFLP and PDFLP made considerable progress. The resistance as a whole tried to move towards the Chinese and Vietnamese model of popular mobilization and away from organizational models hitherto known in the Arab world.

## III. COMPARISON WITH OTHER MOVEMENTS

Some insight into the potentialities and limitations of the Palestinian resistance may be gained by comparing it to other radical reform or nation-building movements. Among such organizations in the Arab world one might

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[18] Chaliand, op. cit., pp. 23, 28-30.

include parties such as the Wafd, the Destourian Socialist Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (PPS) and the Ba'th; and movements such as the Arab Nationalist Movement, the Moslem Brothers, and the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN). What might one expect to learn from such comparisons? On the theoretical level, according to some scholars, political parties are instruments of national political development. [19] If the Palestinian movement has attained the viability of a healthy nationalist party, its long-term significance may be greater than its initial performance indicates. Or alternatively, does the guerrilla movement exhibit the defects that contributed to the failings of several of these groups?

Compared to the organization of the Viet Cong the Palestinian resistance, even when at its strongest in early 1970, was inferior both in terms of elites and penetrativeness, [20] but it compared quite favourably to parties and movements in the Arab world.

It is instructive, first of all, to compare the guerrilla movement to Palestinian organizations before 1948. It would appear that until around 1933 there were no parties organizationally distinct from alliances of the religious, landed and commercial notables in Palestinian Arab politics. [21] Those notables were mainly cosmopolitan and Western-oriented, but not politically modern either in outlook or organization. But as the pressures of Jewish immigration created more tension, more elaborate parties did appear, such as the Istiqlal and several regional, middle-class parties. Families long influential in political affairs, notably the Husseinis and the Nashashibis, began to organize more formally. The Husseinis sponsored the Arab Palestine Party (*al-Hizb al-'Arabi al-Filastini*) and the Nashashibis sponsored the National Defence Party (*al-Hizb al-Difa al-Watani*): both, however, retained their traditional bases of support. Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti, exploited the influence of the Supreme Moslem Council to dominate the national movement and the smaller bourgeois parties that had arisen. Hajj Amin and his Arab Palestine Party controlled the Arab Higher Committee, a coalition of six parties that tried to co-ordinate the rebellion of 1936-39. [22] There is little evidence that these Palestinian organizations, either singly or together, had well-developed elites at the intermediate or lower levels, although given the small size of Palestine

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[19] Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), chapter 7.

[20] Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong* (Cambridge, Mass: The M.I.T. Press, 1966), chapters 6 and 12.

[21] John Marlowe, *The Seat of Pilate* (London: Cresset, 1959), pp. 130-31.

[22] Naji 'Alloush, *al-Muqawama al-'Arabiya fi Filastin 1917-1948*(Beirut: Palestine Liberation Organization Research Centre, 1967), pp. 63-100; Marlowe, *op. cit.*, chapter 9; Christopher Sykes, *Crossroads to Israel* (London: Collins, 1965), pp. 175-87; Sharabi, *Palestine and Israel* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), pp. 184-91.

and the extensiveness of the main families, there was probably some representation. As to the degree of organizational penetration or circulation, they do not seem to have possessed it to any significant degree. While the rebellion itself was widespread, involving thousands of fatalities and tying down a large British occupation force, it appears to have been a spontaneous and unco-ordinated peasant uprising. The post-1967 Palestinian resistance, despite all its structural weaknesses, would seem to represent a considerable advance over the earlier groupings in terms of the modernity and diffusion of its elites and its organizational articulation.

A list of the most structurally developed parties or movements elsewhere in the Arab world in the contemporary period would probably include the following: the Moroccan Istiqlal, the Algerian FLN, the Tunisian Neo-Destour, the Egyptian Wafd and Moslem Brotherhood, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (PPS), the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) and the Ba'th. The first four were movements for independence from colonial rule. The last four, with the qualified exception of the Moslem Brotherhood, were revolutionary, post-independence, trans-national movements, none of which has been conspicuously successful in achieving its goals. They all employed, and justified, violence as a means to their ends. The Palestinian resistance emerged both as a revolutionary independence movement and a movement with trans-national implications. If all these parties were operating in roughly similar political environments and facing similar problems, we might suppose that the Palestinian resistance would have had to match the best of them in terms of structural development even to approach its own goals, much less fulfil them: such a degree of development would be a necessary though hardly sufficient condition of success.

The following chart, based upon Cantori's categories, summarizes our comparisons.

| Elite | Organization | |
| | *Penetrative* | *Non-Penetrative* |
|---|---|---|
| Modern | Palestinian Resistance<br>FLN<br>Neo-Destour | PPS<br>Ba'th |
| Traditional | Istiqlal<br>MB | Wafd |
| None<br>(below the<br>national<br>level) | | ANM |

Relative to other major Arab protest movements, we classify the Palestinian resistance (in which we include the PLO, the Palestine National Council and the main guerrilla organizations) along with the FLN and Neo-Destour as possessing modern elites at the national, intermediate and local levels, and highly articulated (penetrative) organization. Parties with at least two features of advanced structural development include the Istiqlal and Moslem Brotherhood, with a penetrative (though traditional) elite at the sub-national levels, and the Ba'th and PPS, with a modern (though non-penetrative) elite at the sub-national levels. A party scoring at the "advanced" level on only one structural dimension is the Wafd, which is judged to have had elites (though traditional and non-penetrative) at the sub-national levels. None of the parties under consideration would seem to fall easily into the category of "penetrative but with only a national elite," although a case could be made for locating the Ba'th, the Syrian neo-Ba'th, the PPS or the ANM there. The Arab Nationalist Movement would seem to be the least-developed structurally of the group, having apparently only a national elite in the major cities of the Arab East. Modern though it is, we do not find evidence that it has penetrated Arab society structurally. On the other hand, the ANM has been known to be able to cause mass disturbances in several Arab countries (Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, South Yemen), and it maintained clandestine networks in Jordan and Gaza.

Cohesion in the FLN undoubtedly declined after independence, but at its height its effectiveness was unparalleled in the modern Arab world, despite its internal divisions. The Neo-Destour, according to some observers, [23] began to ossify in the late 1960's, but it still remained the most successful post-independence party in the Arab world. The Istiqlal, though suffering from the freeze on party politics in Morocco since 1965, developed a traditional base at the intermediate and local levels. [24] The elites of the Moslem Brotherhood, although characterized by traditional perspectives and fundamentalist religious values, were structurally well articulated, with the primary sub-national units being the branch and family. [25] If one considers the Ba'th as a pan-Arab party, with specific country commands, and within those regions local party elites in various cities and districts, then the party would seem to have possessed elites below the national level. [26] Despite this degree of articulation, the Ba'th's integration and influence in its various constituencies seems always to have been

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[23] E.g., Stuart Schaar, "A New Look at Tunisia," *Mid-East*, X, 1 (February 1970), p. 45.

[24] Cantori, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-12; although the solidity is expected to vary within the country.

[25] Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Moslem Brothers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), chapter 6 and pp. 195-200.

[26] Kamel S. Abu Jaber, *The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), pp. 139-46; Avraham Ben-Tzur, "The Neo-Ba'th Party of Syria," *Journal of Contemporary History*, III, 3 (1968), pp. 161-82, 166-69.

limited. If one considers the Ba'th, particularly since the emergence of the Syrian neo-Ba'th in February 1966, as a collection of separate parties, then the diffusion of elites is less clear although the lack of penetration would seem to have remained constant. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party presents a structural form similar to the Ba'th: at its height it possessed elites beyond the "national" level but had not mobilized a popular following. [27] While the Wafd maintained an infra-structure throughout Egypt, its sub-national activities seem to have been limited to promoting special interests except during election periods, and thus its penetration of Egyptian society was only sporadic. [28]

Of the two North African parties it most closely resembled, the situation of the Algerian FLN was closest to that of the Palestinians: both were struggling to displace an intruded, well-entrenched, technologically superior political community. Granted that important dissimilarities also existed — notably the existence in Israel of a completely mobilized population well over twice the size of the French population of Algeria, functioning in a smaller, more defensible and controllable territory — it may still be desirable to pursue the comparison. A detailed analysis in terms of performance is beyond the scope of this paper; it is possible, however, to comment on the first years of each revolution. According to Gallagher, the FLN had grown from a few hundred men in the autumn of 1954-55 to a trained army of 60,000, equipped with automatic weapons, in the spring of 1958. [29] The Palestinians, as indicated above, might have trained 30-50,000 men between 1965 and 1970. [30] While Sharabi cautions that not all trainees necessarily become regular combatants, it is not clear that Gallagher's figure refers only to combatants; and one may conclude that the *rates* of development are similar.

The trends in number of military operations also afford a means of comparison. If we juxtapose operations reported by Fateh with armed attack events in Algeria, coded at the Yale World Data Analysis Program from the New York Times Index, we discover that during the first two years of the respective uprisings Algerian armed attacks clearly exceeded Palestinian. In the third, fourth and fifth years (1957-1959) Algerian violence declined seriously but it rose again in 1961 and 1962, culminating in the Evian accords. Palestinian operations increased sharply during their third, fourth and fifth years (1967-1969) but then went into a similar though sharper decline in 1970-71 because of the Jordan problem. A conservative interpretation would

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[27] Michael W. Suleiman, *Political Parties in Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 100-103.

[28] Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society* (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 60; Jean and Simone Lacouture, *Egypt in Transition* (London: Methuen, 1958), pp. 240-44.

[29] Charles F. Gallagher, *The United States and North Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 106.

[30] Sharabi, "Palestine Guerrillas," *op. cit.*, p. 21.

suggest that the Palestinians were not markedly inferior in terms of violence capability to the Algerians at comparable stages of their respective insurgencies. One might therefore infer that the Palestinian resistance, like the Algerian, could survive a period of military suppression, other things equal. Of course other things were not exactly equal: the Palestinians faced more formidable foes and fighting conditions than did the Algerians. Gallagher notes that 60,000 FLN guerrillas were holding down half a million French troops four years after the insurgency began; but it seemed clear that neither the guerrillas nor all the Arab armies together were holding down more than 70,000 mobilized Israeli soldiers [31] at any given moment in the post-1967 crisis period, although 200,000 more Israelis could be mobilized on very short notice. Furthermore, the Palestinians had to face more formidable opposition in their "sanctuaries" than did the Algerians; and it was this Arab state opposition, not the Israelis, that led to the setback of 1971.

If our classifications are accurate, it would seem that the Palestinian resistance had some structural advantages over several of the most significant Arab parties and movements, and that it bore structural resemblance to two of the most successful of these groups: the Algerian FLN and the Tunisian Neo-Destour. The eastern Arab world had not produced a political movement as well-developed as the Palestinian resistance was until 1971. Needless to add, this unusual degree of structural development alone could not support a prediction of "success" for the Palestinians. All the organizations to which it may have been structurally superior failed to a large extent to achieve their aims in the fragmented political culture of the Arab East. Furthermore, the Palestinian guerrillas were not competing simply with other parties or movements but with established states — not only Israel, but also Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, and indirectly with the great powers.

## IV. IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICT: CONVENTIONAL VS. RADICAL PERSPECTIVES

The Palestinian resistance movement after 1967 was a nationalist uprising, not a social revolution. The dominant theme was recovery of the land and the re-establishment of a distinctively Palestinian community on it. But the radical elements in the movement sought to implant an ideology that would transcend local, parochial or liberal-bourgeois nationalism. The radical guerrillas tried to introduce modernity and democratic socialism in their attempt to avoid the errors of the past. Modernity meant a rational and programmatic strategy of liberation. Democratic socialism meant a redistribution of power, wealth, and opportunity for the disadvantaged classes, both Arab and Jewish. The rhetoric, values, and strategic doctrine of the Third World left became

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[31] Drew Middleton, "Israelis vs. Arabs..." *The New York Times*, March 24, 1970, p. 14.

increasingly evident, not only in the PFLP and PDFLP but also in Fateh itself and among younger Palestinian intellectuals generally.

The core of Palestinian resistance ideology was the return of all Palestinian Arabs outside Palestine to live in a secular, democratic state of Palestine with all of the present inhabitants, irrespective of their religion or cultural background, provided that these people consented to live peaceably in the new state. [32] It is true that this doctrine was never articulated fully or authoritatively for the movement as a whole. But those who seize upon the sloganistic character of Palestinian ideological goals to support accusations of irrationality or bad faith misunderstand the function of ideology, which, as Clifford Geertz puts it, is "to render otherwise incomprehensible social situations meaningful, [and] to so construe them as to make it possible to act purposefully within them..." [33]

The resistance movement used this formula to win wide support from the Palestinian and other Arab communities. It was simple and yet ambiguous enough to attract diverse and conflicting elements. As interpreted by the Fateh and PLO leadership, it differed little from the traditionalist and liberal-bourgeois Palestinian and Arab nationalist appeals of the Mandate era. But to others, notably in the PFLP and the PDFLP, it symbolized a radical populist ideological perspective whose most salient attributes were secularism, participation and social justice in the context of the national liberation revolution. [34] During the 1960's younger Arab intellectuals generally, not just Palestinians, were increasingly drawn to them as were the new elites of many developing countries. Secularism meant a political society free from the influence of traditional religious authorities — non-sectarian, not multi-sectarian. The reconstituted Palestine must be a society in which the adherents of all religions have equal civil status. Democratic participation meant a politics of popular representation and accountability, not a bourgeois parliamentary oligarchy or military clique. The opportunity for participation must be made available to hitherto excluded elements of society, such as the peasantry, the urban poor, and women. Social justice meant a redistribution of goods and opportunities in order to redress the historical social inequalities.

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[33] In January 1970 Palestinian leaders publicly urged the amendment of the section of the Palestine National Covenant including in the liberated state of Palestine only Jews living in Palestine before 1948 to include all Jews living there now as equal partners in a non-Zionist state. *Fateh*, II, 2 (January 19, 1970), p. 10. See also *The Economist*, March 7, 1970, p. 30.

[33] Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Culture System," In David Apter, ed. *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: Free Press, 1964), p. 64.

[34] But lest the differences between the radicals be overstressed, it is worth noting the lengthy statement by Fateh in January 1970. While deferring any explicit statement on the political-social-economic organization of liberated Palestine, it emphasized that a "democratic and progressive Palestine... rejects by elimination a theocratic, a feudalist, an aristocratic, an authoritarian or a racist-chauvinistic form of government..." It would provide equal opportunities in work, worship, education, political decision making, cultural and artistic expression. *Fateh*, II, 2 (January 19, 1970), p. 10.

Thus, in terms of substantive ideology there was widespread agreement within the resistance elite over the fundamental goal of a secular, democratic Palestine but there was also conflict over how such a society should be governed and its resources allocated. On this question, the radical Marxist vision of the PFLP and PDFLP challenged the comparatively liberal-pragmatic orientation of Fateh and the PLO.

In terms of instrumental doctrine one could discern a similar pattern of agreement and disagreement within the resistance elite. The resistance as a whole became committed to the principle of popular liberation struggle as the means to creating a secular democratic Palestine. This commitment was sealed when Fateh became the acknowledged voice of the Palestinian resistance after the battle of Karamah in March 1968, and it marked a distinct break with Palestinian elite thinking of the previous two decades. To a lesser degree it seemed also to differ from the relatively parochial and unstructured violence doctrine of the leadership in the 1936-1939 uprising. There was basic agreement between Fateh and the radical groups on the necessity for violence, but there was conflict over related questions such as indoctrination, activism and — most seriously — relations with Arab states.

It was in the adoption of violence as its strategic centrepiece that the resistance showed itself most radical and unified. The pragmatic leadership of Fateh accepted just as willingly as the radicals in the Popular and Demo-cratic Fronts the Maoist dictum that power grows out of the barrel of a gun. The Third World concept of peoples' liberation war, formerly only marginal in the political thought of the Arab East, was the keystone of the guerrillas' programme. The guerrillas read Mao, Giap and Guevara not necessarily out of agreement with their social goals but for their practical expertise. For Fateh in particular, radical social and military analysis was instrumental for attaining ends not altogether radical in themselves. Palestinian intellectuals found Frantz Fanon's analysis of the psychologically-liberating effects of violence relevant to their situation; and guerrilla training applied Fanon's insights. And as Palestinians looked back on that period in the brief history of the guerrilla movement when they were strong, they could find confirmation for Mao's dictum. The radical groups placed a higher priority on indoctrination and activism than did Fateh and the other organizations. Indoctrination and education must be carried out systematically among the Palestinians, the other Arabs and the Israelis. The Palestinians must be politicized — imbued with a "new mentality" that abjures self-pity and despair, so that they could participate in the common struggle. The other Arab masses must be persuaded to pressure their reluctant elites to support the Palestinian people's war. And the Israeli population — particularly the disadvantaged Arab Palestinians and Arab Jews — must be offered a preferable alternative to its present life in

the Zionist state. Activism stressed the development of individual and community capabilities, as opposed to the attitude of fatalism prevalent in the traditional sectors of Palestinian and Arab society. Among the activist traits which the guerrillas attempted to instil in themselves and in their children were the modern — indeed Western — virtues of achievement, self-reliance and leadership initiative. The guerrilla image that dramatically won the support of the Arab people was that of an individual who has taken his future into his own hands, who sacrifices personal advantages, who works as part of a team for a noble purpose.

The radicalization of Palestinian ideology, both in its substantive and instrumental aspects, was particularly dramatic within the liberal, American-educated professional elite, previously classifiable as "moderate" or "pro-Western." [35] In searching for an explanation, two factors seem to be important. One, of course, is the trauma of the 1967 war and the intransigence in postwar Israeli behaviour. This behaviour unquestionably forced many Palestinians into advocating radical counter-measures. The other factor was the realization by many younger Palestinians that non-radical politics failed to achieve national and social goals. The experience of the Palestinian community during the Mandate was to them sufficient evidence that the traditional elite had lacked vision, was naïve in terms of tactics, and thus was inadequate to the challenge of Zionism and British colonial power.

The liberal-democratic model had also failed in the Arab world. While independence was due in no small measure to the activities of the nationalist upper bourgeoisie, the post-independence parliamentary regimes in the Fertile Crescent and Egypt had been crippled because of their narrow base, their corruption and, ultimately, their instability. By the time of the 1967 war Lebanon was perhaps the only surviving liberal-democratic regime, and it was by no means free of the general defects of parliamentary systems in the Arab world. Parliamentary governments had given way increasingly to military regimes.

The modernizing military represented an alternative to liberal democracy. The ideals of pluralism, political freedom and electoral competition, to be realized through a process of bargaining and compromise, gave way to an emphasis upon reform, rectitude and development through rational hierarchical military decision-making. The regime of the Free Officers in Egypt was by far the most successful example of this military-reformist model, but in other countries such as Syria and Iraq it was disappointing, even in terms of basic stability. While these regimes had proclaimed support for the Palestine

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[35] Adel Daher, "Current Trends in Arab Intellectual Thought," The Rand Corporation/Resources for the Future, Research Paper RM-5979-FF, December 1969, esp. pp. 13-27.

cause, even the best of them had been impotent to resist, much less eradicate, Israeli injustice. Even apart from the Israeli question, many radicalized Palestinians and other Arabs came to feel that the military reformists hardly represented an ideal political order: their socialist revolution was more rhetorical than actual, their regimes more dictatorial than participatory. Radical populism, with its strategy of total political mobilization, thus had considerable appeal even beyond the Palestine conflict.

Ideology in developing nations often serves an integrating function, and this basically would seem to have been the case with the nascent Palestinian political community, notwithstanding the radical-versus-conventional conflict. The resistance as a whole found that a radical perspective rendered the Palestinian situation (in Geertz's terms) comprehensible and facilitated purposeful action. Ideological commitment also functioned to insulate the committed from alternative courses based on fundamentally different assumptions. In the Palestinian case, this tendency, one suspects, reinforced the linkages between elites and masses and reduced somewhat the divisive effects of primordial factionalism.

It would be incorrect, however, to state that a single radical ideology became implanted throughout the Palestinian political community; as we have observed, the ideological revolution met formidable opposition in the mainstream of the movement. The deepest divisions arose between those who favoured a complete socialist revolution in liberated Palestine and who saw Western imperialism generally rather than Zionism specifically as the enemy to be confronted, and those whose idea of the future Palestine was less explicitly revolutionary, who wished to direct their violence strictly against Zionist institutions and who were willing to enter into compromising alliances with non-radical, even reactionary elements in the Arab world for support. Within the community as a whole, it would seem that the younger generation and especially its better-educated elements identified itself with the first position, while the older generation was closer to the second. The militancy of some in the latter group was tempered with fatigue and an unwillingness to accept the imperialism theory; and among some there was still hope for a diplomatic solution and compromise, even though it would fall short of stated goals.

This ideological divergence was reflected in the different guerrilla groups. PLO leadership, both before and after the war, tended towards the "moderate" position: perhaps the age, the American or British education, and the successful business and professional status of many of these men and women accounts for it. The Fateh leadership too seemed to hold a less doctrinaire view, and a less elaborate conceptual framework for comprehending the Palestinian situation, in the immediate postwar period. The most authentic and significant of the radical groups was the PFLP. It insisted that the liberation of Palestine was

organically linked to the complete liberation of the entire Arab world and stressed the class aspects of the struggle. "The World Zionist Movement and Israel exist in organic unity with world imperialism," wrote George Habbash, but — following Mao Tse-tung — "there are enemies within the Arab and Palestinian communities in collusion with Zionism and imperialism, which can be identified by their class interests: the reactionary and big bourgeoisie classes." [36] Violence and terror will exacerbate the internal economic and cultural contradictions of Israel and lead to the PFLP goal of establishing "a progressive democratic structure in which the different racial and religious groups can co-exist." The PFLP suspicion of Fateh stemmed from the latter's original focus on Zionism in Palestine and its willingness to accept the support of non-"progressive" Arabs.

The PFLP's chief radical competitor was the much smaller PDFLP. It claimed to have a more correct Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the Palestine situation than the PFLP. The PDFLP came into existence in February 1969, when some important political cadres split off from the PFLP leadership. Its violence capabilities were low. It was more committed to international socialism and less to Arab nationalism than the PFLP. In terms of instrumental doctrine the differences were even sharper. According to the Popular Democratic Front itself, "The basic difference between the Democratic Front and the Popular Front is the refusal of the right-wing [Habbash] leadership of the PFLP to analyse critically the reasons and causes that led to the military defeat of June 1967, under the pretext of refusing to interfere in the internal affairs of the Arab states and the Arab regimes. In this sense the PFLP has a position not dissimilar to that of Fateh." [37] The PDFLP also accused the PFLP of accepting money from the Iraqi Ba'th Party and Egypt among others, while priding itself on being untainted by support from any Arab state. Spokesmen for the PFLP and Fateh noted a certain gap between the PDFLP's words and actions: for example, the PFLP, not the PDFLP, had been responsible for the significant attacks on Arab and Western imperialist interests outside Palestine; and the PDFLP, not the PFLP, had elected to join the Armed Struggle Command under Fateh's domination, while the PFLP remained outside, even though Fateh continued to prohibit such attacks. It was clear that ideological radicalization had not eliminated elite factionalism; without it, though, such factionalism might have been worse.

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[36] The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, "Theoretical Armament in the Battle of Liberation," translation of an article written by Dr. George Habbash and published in Al-Tali'a, Cairo, pp. 9-11. (Mimeographed, n.p., n.d.).

[37] "Middle East for Revolutionary Socialism," I, 1 (March 1970), a collection of Popular Democratic Front documents and news (London: mimeographed, n.d.), p. 6.

## V. The Setbacks of 1970-1971

In September 1970 the Jordan Army launched a massive counter-attack against the growing guerrilla power in the Kingdom. The guerrillas weathered the onslaught more successfully than their adversaries had predicted, but the number of civilian casualties ran to several thousand. In the following months, however, the guerrilla leadership acceded to royalist demands to dismantle the commando and militia organization in the cities; and by spring 1971 the guerrillas had been effectively penned up in the Jerash-Ajloun area of North Jordan. The thoroughness with which the Jordan army proceeded to eliminate the last strongholds in July 1971 caught the leadership off balance and removed the guerrillas as an effective force in Jordan for the immediate future. Nothing could more clearly indicate the desperate condition of the movement than the spectacle of *fedayeen* in flight across the Jordan River, surrendering to the Israelis to avoid extermination by the King's army. By the end of 1971 the resistance was not dead but its condition was critical. If it were to re-emerge as a significant force in the Middle East crisis it would have to do so in a different form.

What went wrong? The resistance leadership was consistently unable to make the necessary decisions that would protect its independence and integrity, and it misjudged the dynamics of Arab interstate politics in the Middle East crisis.

Despite their considerable progress in structural and ideological terms the Palestinians were unable to develop a sufficient degree of rational executive authority to confront their formidable adversaries. More important than the much-lamented divisions between resistance groups was the common failure to develop enough discipline and responsibility among the rank-and-file of commandos, militia and supporters. The leadership was unable to give this problem the highest priority that it required, given the preciously short "honeymoon period" of the resistance with Arab regimes. The guerrillas swaggering through Amman just before the September 1971 civil war seemed caught up by some primordial instinct for self-destruction. Instead of over-throwing Hussein they teased him; instead of establishing stronger links with non-Palestinian Arabs they frequently alienated them.

Fateh's strategy of co-operation with Arab governments was effective at first, as it bought time for the movement to establish itself. That this approach succeeded for as long as it did can be explained partly by the need for Israel's defeated neighbours to cultivate a morale-boosting distraction for their disillusioned citizens. But as the US peace initiative, launched in summer 1970, gained momentum these regimes had a new straw to grasp at and began to perceive the guerrillas as a serious liability rather than a benefit. Two decades of bitter experience should have taught the Palestinians that state interests take

precedence over national interests in the Arab world, yet they were still unable to act rationally in light of this knowledge. Fateh was stunned when President Nasser, pursuing the Rogers cease-fire initiative, closed the resistance radio stations in Cairo. Yasser Arafat thought until too late that he could share power in Jordan with King Hussein, and the leadership seemed so confused after the September showdown that it squandered the gains it had made in standing fast against the Jordanians. The mainstream leadership acted as if it were ignorant of the realities of politics, yet it had been repeatedly warned at the highest levels of the consequence of its behaviour.

In fairness to the leadership it must be stressed that the forces opposing the movement were in fact strong and pervasive. Certainly the United States, through its military assistance to Israel and Jordan, ensured that the main enemies of the Palestinians would maintain their superiority in armed strength. Israel's threats against Syria deterred any substantial assistance to the beleaguered Palestinians. Iranian pressures in the Persian Gulf deterred Iraq. Within the ranks of the guerrillas themselves, agents and provocateurs sapped the strength and credibility of the movement. An Ataturk or a Nasser might not have fared better in Arafat's place.

Nevertheless, there was a distinct gap betwen the leadership's understanding of the situation and its ability to act. The guerrilla and PLO leadership, while repudiating in general terms the traditional Palestinian leaders, had been unable to commit itself to a total and coherent radical strategy, nor had it severed the ties that bound it to regimes that could only tolerate it as a weak and non-radical movement, useful primarily for propaganda in the West. If the mainstream Palestinian leadership of this period showed a typical human weakness, it was not the conscious betrayal of ideals but rather a willingness to be co-opted into the company of the politically influential. The temptations of power and prestige dimmed the perceptions of danger that co-optation entailed.

## VI. The Resistance at the Crossroads

After the defeat in Jordan many observers felt that the Palestinians were finished as an effective political force. But the Palestinians still had powerful elements working in their behalf. First, Israel and the United States seemed prepared to maintain a status quo in the area that would keep alive the Palestinian issue and radicalism generally among the Arabs. Second, the Palestinians themselves seemed to have successfully resuscitated their national identity and the idea of organized struggle appeared to be firmly implanted in the younger generation.

Two contradictory tendencies were evident in the convulsions which the Palestinian movement experienced after the Jordan setbacks. From the outside there was pressure towards "domesticating" it and from the inside towards

"radicalizing" it. One of the few things that Arab governments were agreed upon, in one degree or another, was ensuring that the Palestinians be subservient to their military and political planning and control. While the neighbouring states protested against the severity of Jordan's suppression of the guerrillas, they all had curtailed freedom of guerrilla action to some degree. The Jordan setbacks required the guerrilla leadership to accede to more Arab state constraints than it may have felt desirable, given the need of the resistance to strengthen its legitimacy through armed struggle.

On the other hand, the same disasters of 1970-71 convinced many influential Palestinians of the necessity for going underground and waging a campaign of terror, assassination, and sabotage against Israel, Jordan, and American interests in the area.

Those who favoured a radical approach argued that:

(a) The resistance must go underground to preserve its independence from Arab governments, even "progressive" ones;

(b) Any other approach, such as a Palestinian entity on the West Bank, ultimately required acceptance of an unsatisfactory diplomatic settlement that would forever silence the Palestinian claim to independence and sovereignty in all or even part of Palestine;

(c) Jordan in the short run and Israel in the long run were vulnerable to internal disruption through terror and violence, while neither were vulnerable to conventional force because of their outside protectors; and the great powers would respect nothing but violence.

At the end of 1971 it was not certain that the Palestinian resistance could develop the cohesion to direct it either towards a domesticated or a radicalized position. In the Arab world it is not just regimes that are underdeveloped — so are liberation movements. The obstacles of particularism, distrust, fatalism, and sentimentality would not quickly disappear. Fortunately for the movement, there seemed to be emerging a type of objective self-criticism that avoided both naïve optimism and paralyzing despair.

After the 1967 war the Palestinians were able to fashion a new political identity and re-activate their just claims to self-determination in Palestine. Whether or not their goal of a secular, democratic, unitary state of Palestine was achievable, their emergence made it likely that Palestinian political claims in some form would be part of any future settlement. In the absence of a settlement, the likelihood of continued turmoil remained strong, with the possibilities of new suffering and peril for Israel, frustration and economic regression for the Arabs, further decimation of the Palestinian people, destruction of American interests, and continued risk of superpower confrontation.