

# Towards Coexistence: An Analysis of the Resolutions of the Palestine National Council

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When on 14 December 1988 Yasir Arafat recognized Israel, accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242, and renounced terrorism, leading the United States to open a dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the media were abuzz with speculation concerning his motives. Even commentators who pointed out that Arafat was in fact restating the PLO decisions taken a month earlier at the nineteenth Palestine National Council (PNC) in Algiers often suggested that the “shift” was too abrupt to be credible, that it was a tactic aimed at securing the dialogue rather than a reflection of true policy. The fact that the Palestine National Charter of 1968 had not been formally renounced was repeatedly cited as evidence that, whatever public postures may be adopted, the PLO and its leaders remained at bottom committed to Israel’s destruction. This evaluation continues to dominate official Israeli thinking and still appears frequently on the editorial pages of major U.S. newspapers.

In fact, the momentous decisions taken at the nineteenth PNC, which enabled Arafat to pursue his course of action, were the product of a gradual evolution that had been taking place over many years. There should be no need for speculation here, for the organization’s long march to the two-state solution definitively embraced in Algiers is a matter of public record, spelled out in a continuous chain of resolutions extending over a

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period of two decades that had been formulated at successive PNCs subsequent to the promulgation of the National Charter of 1964 and the amended National Charter of 1968. Documents issued by the PNCs—both the Charters and the resolutions—represent the official policy of the PLO and hence of the Palestinian people. An analysis of these texts thus reveals the unfolding changes in Palestinian political thinking.



Given the increasing—if in some quarters grudging—acceptance that the PLO represents the Palestinian people, it might seem unnecessary to dwell on this issue unduly. Nonetheless, a few words may be in order. The available evidence indicates that the organization enjoys strong popular support and that it articulates political demands endorsed by a large majority of the Palestinian people. This has been borne out by every poll, formal and informal, carried out in the occupied territories. A major poll conducted by the Jerusalem weekly *al-Fajr* and the American newspaper *Newsday* in 1986, for example, showed that a full 93.5 percent of the West Bank and Gaza Palestinians supported the PLO and that 78.8 percent supported PLO chairman Yasir Arafat.<sup>1</sup> Since the beginning of the intifada in December 1987, both the Unified National Command of the Uprising (UNCU) and the political leaders in the West Bank and Gaza have repeatedly stressed their loyalty to the organization. Internationally, more than 100 states formally recognize the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The United States implicitly acknowledged this when it opened the dialogue in December 1988, and State Department officials have frequently recognized informally that the PLO represents the Palestinian people. Even Israeli Military Intelligence conceded this fact in a report published in March 1989.<sup>2</sup>

The PLO derives its popular support and legitimacy through its struggle to attain the national political rights of the Palestinian people and through its role as the articulator of Palestinian nationalism. Of immense importance, too, have been the cultural, social, and economic services it has rendered to the Palestinians of the diaspora. Working through a multiplicity of organizational sub-units both political and service-oriented, the PLO has made great efforts to rebuild a society that had been shattered politically, culturally, and economically. Indeed, a large part of the PLO's resources over the years have been devoted not to military activities but to creating a vast network of socioeconomic organizations.<sup>3</sup>

The PLO has been virtually synonymous with Palestinian nationalism at least since 1969, when effective control of the organization passed from the Arab states, under whose Arab League auspices it had been created in

1964, to the Palestinians themselves, and more particularly to the founders of Fateh who have comprised the core of its leadership ever since. But even before this important change gave the organization autonomy of decision, the PLO was the only body that could claim to represent the Palestinian people at large. As such, it enjoyed wide support even during the pre-1969 period despite its shortcomings.

### *The PNC*

The Palestine National Council is the highest body of the PLO. As the PLO's quasi-parliament, it defines the organization's policies and programs; indeed, it was the PNC that in effect created the PLO when it adopted at its first meeting in May-June 1964 the Fundamental Law, setting out the distribution of powers among the various bodies of the PLO.

Since its first session in 1964, the PNC has gone through a number of changes in terms of composition and functions. According to the PLO's Fundamental Law, the Council in principle is to meet once a year, though this has not been strictly observed; it may also hold emergency sessions when it deems necessary. Because of the geographical dispersal of the Palestinians and the restrictive political environments in which they operate, elections to this quasi-parliament have never been held, but the membership represents a broad cross section of the Palestinian people living in the diaspora as well as those under Israeli occupation. Membership has ranged from 150 to over 400; at present, it includes about 410 members. Since 1969, when political power in the PLO became concentrated in the hands of the political-commando organizations, the PNC membership has represented the proportional strength of these organizations as well as of the various mass movements and associations (trade unions, women's, teachers, and students associations, various professional unions, and so on). It also reflects the relative size of the Palestinian communities in the diaspora and includes large numbers of "independents," or Palestinians not affiliated with any of the political-commando organizations. Fateh has always had more delegates to the PNC than any other group except the independents owing to its political and military preponderance. And because many independents favor Fateh's more centrist and non-ideological approach, they tend to shift the balance of forces even more decisively in Fateh's—and Arafat's—favor. It is for this reason that the smaller leftist/Marxist organizations such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine

(DFLP), the pro-Syrian Sa'iqah, and so on, have been unable to constitute an effective counterweight to the Fateh/independent coalition. Not only are their constituencies much smaller than Fateh's, but the political differences among them tend to keep them at odds with each other and even to force some of them to side with Fateh in return for political protection.



Because of the constraints imposed by the dispersal of the Palestinian people and the absence of a territorially based central authority, there is no alternative to the PNC. It is the only Palestinian body in which the politics of consensus on a pluralistic basis prevail. Given the very nature of the PNC, the political resolutions (or programs) it formulates are the result of intense debate and consultation among the delegates and represent the widest common denominator among the Palestinians, including diverse PLO groups.

Moreover, while the political resolutions of the PNC are addressed both to the Palestinian people and to the outside world, they are by no means propaganda either for Western or for domestic Palestinian consumption. Rather, they are a frank expression of the PLO's inner dialogue and thus an important barometer of the actual thinking of the Palestinian movement.

PNC resolutions are binding on the PLO Executive Committee—which is elected by the PNC and which functions as the Palestinian movement's cabinet—until the subsequent PNC meeting issues new resolutions that may amend and supersede those hitherto in force. Thus, once adopted, the resolutions become a point of reference and a legitimizing instrument for policies pursued by the PLO leadership, as was the case when Arafat referred to the nineteenth PNC as the basis for his declarations in Geneva in December 1988.

The focus of this study will be the political resolutions of the PNC that deal with overall Palestinian strategy vis-à-vis the core conflict. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the PNC deliberations and resolutions cover the broad spectrum of Palestinian concerns: the political resolutions per se generally account for no more than 40 to 50 percent of the resolutions as a whole, the others addressing social, cultural, military, and other matters. Moreover, a large body of the political resolutions themselves address tactical matters relating to the immediate conjuncture of forces and events, that is, with the facts on the ground. Thus, an examination of the political resolutions over the years yields an account of the vicissitudes of PLO relations in Jordan, the evolving situation in Lebanon,

the organization's changing ties with Egypt, the fallout from the 1983 rebellion within Fateh, and so on. Many of the resolutions that concern such crises will be left out of this account, and the tactical issues reflecting changing relations with various Arab states will be dealt with primarily insofar as they have bearing on the movement's overall strategy and the means adopted to further it.

Before proceeding further, a word should be said about the relationship between the PNC resolutions and the National Charters of 1964 and 1968—all documents formulated and adopted by the PNC. The 1968 National Charter, which clearly supersedes that of 1964, formulates Palestinian rights in *optimal* terms. It is at once legalistic, utopian, and ideological, a kind of manifesto of Palestinian beliefs and what the Palestinian movement would like to achieve. The resolutions, on the other hand, are a formulation of the *program of action* in light of the realities on the ground—local, regional, and international. From the legal standpoint, the resolutions do not supersede the Charter and cannot of themselves rescind it. But in practice, they cumulatively reveal the unmistakable trend away from the maximalist, utopian terms of the National Charter towards an evolving cognizance of what is possible and what is not. With successive PNCs, the gap between the theoretical and the action-policies of the PLO continued to grow. By the time of the nineteenth PNC in November 1988 in Algiers, and particularly the Declaration of Independence, the National Charter was to all intents and purposes, though not in specific terms, rescinded by the PNC, if only because of the diametrical opposition between the basic premises of the Declaration of Independence (e.g., the partition of Palestine as the objective and peaceful negotiation as the means of achieving it) and the basic premises of the National Charter (e.g., the total liberation of Palestine as the objective and armed struggle as the exclusive means of achieving it). In essence, then, Arafat was correct when, during his visit to Paris in May 1989, he pronounced the National Charter "*caduc*," or "lapsed," though in theory it is still operative.

Technically speaking, for the Charter to be amended, two-thirds of the PNC members must vote to do so in a special session convened especially for this purpose. The Palestinian leadership believes that it has given all the concessions in this regard that it can give without reciprocity from the Israeli government. The implication is that the Charter will be legally amended or altogether rescinded within the context of a final Israeli-Palestinian settlement.



On the basis of a careful and sequential reading of the political resolutions of PNCs one through nineteen, with particular reference to *objectives* and *means*, three major stages can be identified which provide a convenient framework for discussion. These are as follows: (1) the “total liberation” phase, from 1964 through 1968; (2) the secular democratic state phase, from 1969 through 1973; and (3) the two-state solution phase. This last itself underwent a gradual but steady evolution, beginning somewhat tentatively in 1974 and culminating in the explicitly spelled-out acceptance of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, not as a transitional stage but as a *point finale*. This evolution in the framing of goals parallels an evolution in the specification of the *means* for achieving them, from exclusive reliance on armed struggle, to partial reliance on diplomacy in conjunction with armed struggle, to equal reliance on the two, to the elevation of diplomatic effort at the expense of military effort (including direct contact with Israeli groups and individuals), to insistence on participation in a Middle East peace conference and readiness to open a direct dialogue with the Israeli government.

### *The Total Liberation Phase: The First Four PNCs (1964-1968)*

During the first four years of the PLO’s existence, from its creation in 1964 through 1968, the Palestinian movement remained totally under the impact of what the Palestinians call *al-Nakba*—the Catastrophe—the creation of Israel by force of arms in 77 percent of what had been Palestine, and the displacement of some two-thirds of the Palestinian people to Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, the Egyptian-administered Gaza Strip, and the West Bank later annexed by Transjordan.

The Palestinians’ overriding preoccupation with what had befallen them is clearly reflected in the two documents that dominate this phase—the National Charter of 1964, formulated by the first PNC, and the amended National Charter of 1968, drawn up by the fourth PNC—as well as in the resolutions of the second and third PNCs that came in between. All of these documents emphasize the *total liberation* of Palestine, “the recovery of the usurped homeland *in its entirety*” (preamble of the 1964 Charter; emphasis added). Palestine is defined within the “boundaries that existed during the British Mandate;” it “constitutes *an indivisible territorial unit*” (article 2 of the 1964 and 1968 Charters; emphasis added). Palestinian insistence on total liberation was mandated not only

by the sense of injustice concerning what had happened, but more pragmatically, by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Palestinians lived in the diaspora, thus requiring a solution that would permit their return to their lands. During this phase, then, any suggestion of the partition of Palestine (declared “null and void” in article 17 of the 1964 Charter and in article 19 of the 1968 Charter) is summarily rejected. Thus, when Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba proposed in 1965 that the Palestinians accept partition as “a lesser evil” than the evil of dispossession, he was branded with “high treason against the Palestinian cause” (resolution 1.A of the second PNC).

The 1964 and 1968 National Charters, which bracket this phase, are continually depicted as aggressive documents, yet in Palestinian eyes they were defensive. This is explicitly stated: “the liberation of Palestine is a defensive act necessitated by the requirements of self-defense” as prescribed in the Charter of the United Nations (articles 16 and 18 in the 1964 and 1968 Charters, respectively). For the Palestinians, the National Charters were a response to the ideological premises of Zionism deriving from the Basle program of 1897, which they perceived as the delegitimization of Palestinian rights in Palestine. For them, Zionism was “aggressive and expansionist in its goals,” a “constant source of threat,” an “imperialist invasion” that led to the creation of Israel at the expense of the Palestinians; indeed, given the facts of demography and land ownership in Palestine prior to 1948, one can say without risk of misstatement that the dispossession and eviction of the Palestinian people was the *sine qua non* for the creation and development of the Jewish state.<sup>4</sup> Repeated references to the Palestinians’ “right” to recover their land or to return to it likewise indicate this defensive nature. Contrary to the assertions of some commentators, it is not vengeance and hatred that characterizes the documents, but an enormous sense of loss: surely there is a different nuance in calling for “liberation of the homeland,” “recovery of the land”—phrases that recur repeatedly throughout both Charters—and the oft-cited call for the “destruction of Israel,” which in fact appears nowhere in either text. What one does find are three statements, all in the amended National Charter of 1968: that the Arabs must “repel the Zionist and imperialist invasion from the greater Arab homeland and liquidate the Zionist presence in Palestine” (article 15), that the “elimination of the Zionist and imperialist presence in the country [would] lead to the establishment of peace in the Middle East” (article 22), and that the “requirements of right and justice require all nations . . . to consider Zionism an illegal movement and to outlaw its presence and activities” (article 23). These

statements show an unquestionable escalation not unrelated to the fact that the amended document was adopted in the wake of the conquest of the remaining 23 percent of Palestinian territory and the expulsion across the Jordan of a further 250,000 refugees.

It should be noted as well that there are no calls for the elimination of Jews, although both Charters state that the Jews are not “one people having an independent identity. They are rather citizens of the countries to which they belong” (articles 18 and 20 of the 1964 and 1968 Charters, respectively). Concerning the position of Jews in the Palestine to be liberated, the 1964 Charter stipulates that “Jews who are of Palestinian origin shall be considered Palestinians if they are willing to live peacefully and loyally in Palestine” (article 7), “Palestinian” being defined in article 6 as those who “normally resided in Palestine until 1947.” The 1968 Charter, written after the 1967 war had brought what remained of historic Palestine under Israeli control, shows a regression in this regard; article 6 states that “the Jews who had resided normally in Palestine *until the beginning of the Zionist invasion* shall be considered Palestinians” (emphasis added).

It has been suggested that this first phase represents in essence a rejection of history, an effort to turn back the clock—a charge that Zionists would be hard pressed to claim as an exclusively Palestinian preoccupation. Notwithstanding, the Palestinians during this first phase wanted to “restore the legitimate situation to Palestine” (article 16, 1964 Charter); “The Balfour Declaration and the instrument of the Mandate, with all their attending consequences, are null and void” (article 18, 1964 Charter; article 20, 1968 Charter). The partitioning of Palestine and the establishment of Israel are likewise declared null and void (articles 17 and 19 in Charters 1964 and 1968 respectively). To an extent, then, this phase represents an exercise in wishful thinking, an outright rejection of the present reality and a refusal to work within it. It is a call for the restoration of the status quo ante, in which, were the usual norms of proportional representation observed, the Palestinians would automatically recover their legitimate rights, including their right to self-determination.



The first four PNCs show a great unity regarding objectives, all being centered on the total liberation of Palestine, but an important shift in *means* occurs as of the fourth PNC. Whereas the first three imply that the conventional Arab armies are the instrument of liberation, the fourth not only adopts the principle of armed struggle but shifts the agent of liberation away from the Arab states to the Palestinians themselves.



In fact, the 1964 National Charter and the resolutions of the second and third PNCs include few specific directives as to how the liberation of Palestine is to be achieved: only 3 of the 29 articles in the 1964 Charter contain any reference to means at all, and then only in the vaguest terms. Article 12 states that “Arab unity and the liberation of Palestine are two complementary goals: each prepares the way for the attainment of the other.” Article 13 says the Palestinian people shall play “the vanguard role in the realization of this sacred national goal,” and article 14 stipulates that the liberation of Palestine is a “national duty, full responsibility for which rests upon the entire Arab nation” which must “mobilize all its military, material, and spiritual resources in order to liberate Palestine.” These same ideas are echoed in the second and third PNCs, although the third is slightly more explicit, declaring that the liberation of Palestine can only be achieved through military engagement (resolution 1).

With the fourth PNC, however, the means become not merely explicit but a central part of the program. Article 9 of the 1968 National Charter stipulates that “*armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine*” (emphasis added). The Palestinians are called upon to “work for an armed popular revolution for the liberation of their country and their return to it.” Article 10 states that “commando action constitutes the nucleus of the Palestinian popular war of liberation.” The concept of armed struggle recurs more than ten times in the 1968 Charter in an emphatic and uncompromising tone. Meanwhile, the new stress on Palestinian self-reliance is reflected in the fact that the principles of Palestinian self-determination and national sovereignty over a totally liberated Palestine is underscored at least eight times in the 1968 Charter, and in the use of the word “Palestinian” rather than “Arab”: the “Arab homeland” of the 1964 Charter, for example, becomes in 1968 the “homeland of the Palestinian Arab people.” It is true that the 1968 Charter still carries many references to Arab unity and cooperation, but the emphasis is different. Article 12 states, for example: “The Palestinian Arab people believe in Arab unity. In order to play their role in attaining it, *they must, at this stage of their national struggle, preserve their Palestinian identity and its components*. They must also strengthen their self-awareness, and oppose all schemes that may dissolve or weaken their identity” (emphasis added). Palestinian self-reliance thus becomes a means to an end.

The escalation in revolutionary language and the primacy ascribed to armed struggle in the amended National Charter adopted by the fourth PNC was determined by two interrelated factors: the strategically relevant political developments, and the institutional changes within the

PLO. Indeed, the fourth PNC was held just over a year after the crushing defeat of the Arab armies in the 1967 war discredited conventional warfare as the means of liberating Palestine. At the same time, the 1967 debacle gave new credibility to the concept of guerrilla warfare called for by the commando organizations<sup>5</sup> which had been challenging the PLO leadership since the mid-1960s. It was only a matter of time before they would gain ascendancy within the organization.

The PLO, as mentioned earlier, had been set up by the Arab states under the auspices of the Arab League in what could be seen as a somewhat cynical move aimed less at fighting Israel than at creating a facade behind which their own inaction would be effectively concealed.<sup>6</sup> Hence their aversion to any activity that could lead to confrontation with Israel and threaten the regional status quo. This orientation was enhanced by the PLO's first leadership under Ahmad al-Shuqayri, carefully hand-picked by Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasir. Shuqayri was a conservative of upper class origins with long experience in the power centers of the status quo oriented Arab states, and most of the other PLO leaders were of similar backgrounds. The absence of armed struggle from the 1964 Charter and the resolutions of the first three PNCs, as well as the fact that article 24 of the 1964 Charter stated that the PLO would not have any administrative control over the West Bank and Gaza, show the extent of the PLO's readiness in those days to defer to Arab official demands and wishes.

The growing influence of Fateh had begun to challenge the PLO leadership as of the second PNC in May 1965, when it used that forum to criticize the organization's lack of "revolutionary zeal." By the time the third PNC was held a year later, guerrilla actions against Israel were proving an embarrassment to what the commando organizations called the "fighters inside offices" of the PLO. The statement in the third PNC's political program that "freedom of Palestinian action is a *sine qua non* for waging the battle of liberation" (li) reflects the influence of the commando movement even then, as does the reference, for the first time, to "revolutionary" groups, action, and leadership. With the debacle of the June 1967 war, Shuqayri's personalized and uncreative rule was totally discredited. At the fourth PNC in July 1968, the commando organizations were represented for the first time. With Fateh holding half the seats in the new Council, they gained control of the organization.

The new leadership, dominated by Fateh's inner circle that had coalesced in the late 1950s out of student organizations in Cairo and Kuwait, argued for Palestinian self-reliance and independence from the Arab re-

gimes. The newly constituted PLO that emerged from the fourth PNC stressed the need to build the sociopolitical institutions of a reinvigorated Palestinian national movement. On another front, it sought to escalate the strategy of armed struggle by planning for a popular uprising within the occupied territories and by launching guerrilla attacks from Lebanon and across Israel's new frontiers along the Jordan.<sup>7</sup> The strategy of self-reliance and the language of revolution and armed struggle adopted by the organization at a time when the Arab governments had come to see the need for a diplomatic settlement go a long way toward explaining the Palestinian encounter with the Jordanian army in 1970-71 and the Syrian army in 1976 and 1983. But by the same token, the continuity of its leadership—which has remained in place to this day—strengthened its ability to survive the overwhelming assaults of external foes bent on its destruction.

The triumph of the guerrilla organizations led by Fateh was due not merely to the appeal among the Palestinian masses of the strategy of armed struggle following the defeat of the Arab armies. Fateh's Palestinian nationalism carried the day because it was in keeping with the far-reaching changes that swept the entire Arab world as a result of the 1967 debacle: pan-Arabism as the ideology that for well over a decade had been virtually the defining characteristic of Arab and Palestinian politics was in retreat; the state system was being consolidated. Most Palestinians had wholeheartedly subscribed to the pan-Arabist proposition that Arab unity was the road to the liberation of Palestine. They had spontaneously entrusted their cause to the Arab leaders, particularly Egyptian president Gamal Abd al-Nasir. The 1967 war had proved them wrong. With the fourth PNC, the ascendance of Palestinian nationalism was complete, with all that implied in terms of strategy and tactics.

### *The Secular Democratic State Phase: Fifth Through Eleventh PNCs*

The second phase, from 1969 through 1973, was characterized by a shift of objective. While the liberation of all Palestine remained the ultimate goal, the vision of the state that was to emerge from liberation underwent a significant change, from a primarily Arab state to one that would be shared with *all* Jews resident in Palestine if they renounced Zionism. There was no longer any stipulation, as there had been in the two National Charters, concerning the Jews' length of residence in Palestine.

Thus, the fifth PNC in February 1969 introduced for the first time in a collective, official Palestinian document the idea of establishing a “free democratic society in Palestine encompassing all Palestinians, including Muslims, Christians, and Jews . . . and rescuing Palestine from the hegemony of International Zionism.” Seven months later, the sixth PNC reiterated the same idea but replaced the term “society” with that of “state.” The other PNCs of the period elaborated on the idea: the eighth (February/March 1971), for example, specified that “all those who wish to live in peace shall enjoy the same rights and duties,” while the eleventh (January 1973) called for the establishment of a “democratic society where all citizens can live in equality, justice, and fraternity” and which would be “opposed to all forms of prejudice on the basis of race, color, and creed.” Thus, the concept of the secular democratic state provided a clear answer to the question of the future of the Jews in a liberated Palestine and eliminated the earlier ambiguity that surrounded this issue.

To understand the strategy behind the adoption of the secular state idea, it must be recalled that the PLO was a national movement whose adherents lived primarily outside Israel. The diaspora Palestinians—a large portion of the Palestinian people as a whole—had their homes and roots in the three-quarters of Palestine that had been captured by the Jewish forces in 1948 and thus felt they had little to gain from anything less than a total return. But the Palestine of 1969 was not the same as the Palestine of 1948, and a formula had to be found for dealing with the Jewish population that was there. The concept of a non-sectarian, democratic state was the PLO’s answer to this challenge. From today’s perspective, the democratic state could appear extremist and maximalist, but to the Palestinians at the time it represented a formidable concession. For the first time, they declared themselves prepared to *share* their homeland, which they considered to be wholly theirs by *right*, with the Jews, the vast majority of whom had come recently to Palestine as immigrants and who were perceived to have displaced them. Moreover, by adopting the concept of a secular democratic state, the Palestinians were attempting in their own fashion to reach out to all the Jews who were by that time already established on Palestinian soil.

In line with this phase’s twin goals of total liberation and the establishment of a secular, democratic state on all of Palestine, “partial” or “capitulationist solutions” continued to be vigorously rejected. These included UN Security Council Resolution 242, the Soviet peace plan of December 1969 (which was based on 242 and which called for a phased Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 and for a “just

solution of the refugee problem”) and the Rogers Plan of December 1969 (likewise based on the land-for-peace formula embodied in 242). All these were summarily rejected at the emergency session of August 1970 on the grounds that they entailed “recognition of the legitimacy of the occupying enemy.” Yet another plan, King Hussein’s “united Arab Kingdom Plan” unveiled in March 1972, proposed the creation of a federated state on both banks of the Jordan in the event that Israel withdrew from the occupied territories. The tenth PNC was convened the following month specifically to counter it.

Similarly, there was uncompromising rejection of the idea of establishing a Palestinian state on Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in 1967. In the political programs of the emergency session of August 1970 (which condemned any “partitioning of the country”), as well as of the eighth (February 1971), ninth (July 1971), and eleventh (January 1973) sessions, the word used to describe such a state was *duwaylah* (ministate), a diminutive and disparaging form of *dawlah* (state). There is no doubt that this position was in harmony with the prevailing political preference of the Palestinians at the time. When the well-known Egyptian writer and journalist Ahmad Baha al-Din proposed the creation of a Palestinian state in the occupied territories in late 1967, his call received no support from the Palestinians.<sup>8</sup> Some considered the suggestion premature, arguing that neither the Palestinians nor the Arab states were yet ready for such a step. The more pressing goal was the “elimination of the consequences of aggression,” otherwise stated, the return to Arab sovereignty of the Arab lands conquered by Israel in June 1967.

The secular democratic state remained the goal of the PLO until 1974, when the organization made its first steps towards the two-state solution at the twelfth PNC. Even then, the secular democratic state was not clearly and explicitly renounced, and some continued to cherish it as an ideal, a “noble dream”—which in fact is how Arafat characterized it as early as November 1974 in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly. In that speech, which reinforced the movement away from the democratic secular state as a programmatic objective already foreshadowed in twelfth PNC, he also made clear that the realization of this “dream” was contingent upon Jewish consent and cooperation. It is in this form that the secular democratic state idea has survived to the present in some circles—as a kind of utopian vision not at odds with the two-state solution but which looks to a day when Israel and an eventual Palestinian state would decide to merge through a process of *mutual consent*. Even for its adherents, then, it has ceased to be a programmatic “goal” in

the concrete sense it had been during the PLO's "secular democratic state phase" and has been relegated to the status of a "preferred outcome" that may or may not be realizable.



In the late sixties and early seventies, of course, the democratic secular state was the concrete goal set by the PLO. With respect to the *means* posited for achieving it, the PNCs of this second phase maintained the emphasis on "armed struggle" and "popular war." There was, however, a vague reference to "other forms of struggle" in the sixth PNC program. And in the eighth PNC program (February/March 1971), armed struggle was posited as the "*principal* form of struggle for the liberation of Palestine" (emphasis added). This subtle change, the use of "principal" instead of "sole," contained the seeds of the PLO's embrace of diplomacy in the phase to come.

Meanwhile, disagreement over means between the mainstream Fateh and the more radical movements such as George Habash's PFLP and Nayef Hawatmeh's DFLP became acute during this period. These organizations, frustrated by the limits imposed on their activities by the Arab host countries, began to believe that the only solution to the dilemma was a popular revolution that would overthrow the existing Arab regimes and replace them with ones sympathetic to the Palestinian revolution: hence, George Habash's famous slogan to the effect that "the road to the liberation of Palestine runs through Amman." This stance inevitably led to an escalating confrontation, notably with Jordan, in which Fateh was somewhat reluctantly dragged along. With increasing calls by the radical groups for the "liberation of Jordan" from the "Hashemite regime that was in collusion with Israel," the relationship between the PLO and Jordan deteriorated dramatically, culminating in King Hussein's liquidation of the commando presence in Jordan in 1970-71 and in his United Arab Kingdom Plan the following year which effectively ignored the PLO. This conflict occupied a prominent place in PNC sessions six through eleven, with the language of the resolutions concerning Hussein escalating to the Final Communiqué of the tenth PNC in April 1972, which went beyond the usual attacks and actually called for his overthrow.\*

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\*Henry Kissinger claimed in his memoirs that the PLO went so far as to solicit U.S. support in its attempt to overthrow King Hussein, first approaching the American government in mid-1973, and reiterating the position in a secret meeting with an official U.S. representative in Rabat, Morocco, in November of that year. See Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1982), pp. 624-29.

It should be noted that although this “secular democratic state” phase was consistent in its rejection of a Palestinian state in only part of Palestinian territory, there was at the very end of this phase an unprecedented interest shown in the occupied territories. Thus, the political program of the eleventh PNC (January 1973) shows a noticeable increase in the PLO’s involvement in the politics of the West Bank and Gaza. Almost the entire first section of the program, “In the Palestinian Arena,” was taken up with the need to adopt concrete measures to “mobilize the masses” in the West Bank and Gaza and to build up economic and cultural institutions that would enhance the people’s ability “to stay put on the land” (section I.7). It was as a direct result of this PNC that the Palestine National Front was established in August 1970 with the express purpose of coordinating and spearheading nationalist resistance in the occupied territories<sup>9</sup>—a role it played with significant success until the late 1970s. This new emphasis was to prove significant, and unfolded with more coherence in the following phase, thus signalling the PLO’s movement towards accommodating the political priorities of its constituency in the occupied territories. Ultimately, this development had a profound impact on the overall strategy of the PLO.

### *The Two-State Solution Phase (Twelfth - Nineteenth PNC, June 1974 - November 1988)*

It was in July of 1974, less than a year after the October 1973 war opened new hopes for a comprehensive Middle East settlement, that the PLO embarked irrevocably on the road towards pragmatism that culminated in the November 1988 declaration of a Palestinian state in the occupied territories and the definitive acceptance of a two-state solution. The years between were marked by far-reaching events—the Lebanese civil war, Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem, the Camp David accords, the Israeli-Egyptian separate peace, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the outbreak of the intifada. These events were accompanied by the ebb and flow of the Palestinian movement—the formation of the Rejection Front and the PFLP’s temporary withdrawal from the PLO Executive Committee, a hardening of attitudes following the Sadat visit, the rebellion and defection of the Abu Musa faction of Fateh in 1983, and so on. But throughout this long and complex period, the march towards the two-state solution was relatively stable and steady.

The twelfth PNC in June 1974 marked a turning point of major significance in Palestinian political thought. It was this council that issued the ten-point program first calling for the establishment of the “people’s national, independent, and fighting authority on every part of Palestinian land to be liberated.” It is true that the resolution made no mention of a “state” but only of the vague concept of an “authority.” It is also true that the resolution specified that the “people’s national authority” was a transitional stage, and that the ultimate goal remained unchanged. Thus, point 4 of the program stated that “any liberation step taken is taken in the pursuit of the *realization of the PLO strategy for the establishment of the Palestinian democratic state* as stipulated in the previous resolutions of the PNC” (emphasis added), while point 8 noted that “the Palestinian national authority, after its establishment, shall struggle for the unity of the front-line states for the sake of *completing the liberation of all Palestinian soil. . .*” (emphasis added). Point 3, meanwhile, reiterates that the “PLO shall struggle against any plan for the establishment of a Palestinian entity, the price of which is recognition, conciliation, secure borders, renunciation of national rights. . . .”

Still, even with these qualifiers, the twelfth PNC represents a remarkable break with the past, given the repeated and vociferous rejections of the “ministate” and the principle of partition, even as an interim stage, in earlier PNCs. The twelfth PNC thus set the stage for far-reaching changes in the years that lay ahead, initiating the policy shift towards coexistence with Israel. The change was halting and cautious, the language heralding it often ambiguous in the interests of achieving consensus among the disparate groups forming the PLO. Indeed, the programs of PNCs twelve through eighteen can be described as programs of creative ambiguity, with the degree of vagueness concerning ultimate objectives diminishing gradually, but not altogether disappearing, until the nineteenth program in November 1988.

A number of factors contributed to the elaboration of the ministate idea that was introduced in germ form in the twelfth PNC. The need for the Palestinians to stake a clear claim to the occupied territories was brought home by King Hussein’s March 1972 announcement of the United Arab Kingdom plan comprising the East and West Banks of the Jordan River in the event of Israeli withdrawal. Moreover, by 1974, there was widespread recognition among the Palestinian leadership that whatever the intellectual and emotional appeal the democratic secular state idea might enjoy in some quarters, it had received little political sup-



port from either the most pro-Palestinian Israeli circles, or internationally from the traditional supporters of the Palestinian movement.

The idea of a ministate in the occupied territories was also a nod to the wishes of the West Bank and Gaza Palestinians who strongly supported it and who were becoming an increasingly important part of the PLO constituency.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the tentativeness in the language of the resolution (the use of the word "authority" rather than "state") and the addition of the hawkish term "fighting" to modify "authority" were intended to enable the PLO hardliners, who were not ready to concede even a square inch of Palestinian territory, to subscribe to the resolutions. The program was in fact adopted by all the commando groups, including the PFLP, the PFLP-General Command, the Arab Liberation Front (ALF), and the DFLP. But although these groups adopted the resolution, they subsequently formed the "Rejection Front" on the grounds that the ministate would lead to an abandonment of armed struggle and to coexistence with Israel.

Neither the formation of the Rejection Front nor the PFLP's withdrawal in protest from the PLO Executive Committee in September 1974 led to any retreat from the position articulated at the twelfth PNC session, however. On the contrary, the thirteenth PNC in March 1977 went even further than the twelfth: the call for an "independent national state on their own land" became explicit, albeit with the proviso that there could be no state at the "expense of our people's inalienable rights." Moreover, for the first time since 1968 there was not a single reference to "total liberation." Nor did the return of Habash's PFLP (which had boycotted the thirteenth PNC) to the fourteenth PNC as a result of the closing of ranks following Sadat's trip to Jerusalem and the signing of the Camp David accords halt the trend. Thus, the fourteenth PNC reaffirmed the 15-point program of the thirteenth and emphasized the Palestinians' right to establish "their independent state on their soil," and the fifteenth PNC (April 1981) called for "the establishment of their independent state on the soil of their homeland under the leadership of the PLO."

Except for a passing mention in the fourteenth PNC to the Palestinian right to a *democratic* state on the *whole* of their national soil (but note that the reference is to the "right" to such a state rather than a call for its realization), there was no further mention from this time forward either to total liberation or to the concept of a secular, democratic state. The absence of such references, together with the explicit endorsement of the UN resolutions relevant to the Palestine question in the thirteenth, four-

teenth, and the fifteenth PNCs, suggest a willingness to accept an independent Palestinian state in parts of Palestine.

A further indication of change in this phase is the PNC's treatment of UN Security Council Resolution 242. Earlier PNCs had repudiated the resolution in keeping with their rejection of "all solutions which do not postulate the total liberation of Palestine, and all proposals whose aim is the liquidation of internationalization of the Palestine cause" (1968 Charter). The fifth PNC (February 1969), for example, explicitly rejected 242 as a "*peaceful* and capitulationist" solution "that conflicts with the full right of the Palestinian people to their homeland" (emphasis added), while the emergency session of August 1970 rejected it on the basis of its consequences, one of which would be "opening negotiations with the occupying imperialist Zionist enemy." As recently as the eleventh PNC, resolution 242 had been included among the "maneuvers and plots," "liquidationist plans," and "partial settlements" that "consecrate Zionist usurpation and lead to the liquidation of the Palestinian national cause." In contrast, the first clause of the twelfth PNC rejects 242 only because it "obscures the national and pan-Arab rights of our people, and deals with the cause of our people as a refugee problem"—in other words, not because it embodied the principle of peaceful settlement or recognized Israel, but because it did not accommodate the political aspirations of the Palestinians. The thirteenth through eighteenth PNCs, when they explicitly rejected 242, did so in similar terms.

The PNC's evolving response to the various peace plans throughout this period provides further evidence of the PLO's growing readiness to come to terms with Israel. Thus, the fifteenth PNC "welcomes" the February 1981 Brezhnev Plan, which called for an all-party framework for a Middle East peace conference and for the establishment of a Palestinian state. The fact that the PNC welcomed a plan which not only stressed the need to "ensure the security and sovereignty of all states of the region, *including Israel*" (emphasis added) but further explicitly mentioned Israel's borders as the 1949-67 armistice lines,<sup>11</sup> suggests a clear scaling back of Palestinian demands. By the sixteenth PNC in February 1983, the "welcome" of the Soviet proposals had become "appreciation and support." The sixteenth PNC also affirmed "its adherence to the . . . principles of the UN charter, and resolutions that affirm the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in order to establish a *just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East*" (emphasis added).

A similar evolution can be seen in the PNC's response to the Fez peace plan of September 1982, itself based on an earlier plan by Saudi

Arabia's Crown Prince Fahd, from which the PLO leadership was not altogether alien. The Fez Plan called for the creation of a Palestinian state and for Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied in 1967, so that while borders were not explicitly delineated a state limited to the West Bank and Gaza was clearly implied. The plan also called for international security guarantees and for recognizing "all states in the region," (an implicit recognition of Israel) and made favorable reference in its preamble to the 1965 Bourguiba Plan advocating partition which had been so roundly condemned at the second PNC.

When the Fez Plan was discussed at the sixteenth PNC, the various organizations of the PLO were divided, with Fateh in favor and Sa'iqah, the PFLP, the PFLP-GC, and the Palestine Popular Struggle Front (PPSF) opposed. Arafat won over the DFLP and the PFLP, but because of the division the response of the sixteenth PNC was muted: the Fez Plan was accepted merely as the "minimum for the political activity of the Arab states," which should be "complemented by military action. . . .to rectify the balance of power in favor of struggle and of Palestinian and Arab rights." But even this less than wholehearted acceptance is significant, especially since all the factions, including the Rejection Front, participated in the Council and unity was maintained. By the time of the eighteenth PNC in April 1987, the status of the Fez Plan had been elevated to that of a "framework for Arab action at the international level to achieve a solution to the Palestine question and to regain the occupied Arab territories." By accepting the Fez Plan as a framework for a solution to the Palestine question, the PLO was in effect accepting Israel and the two-state solution. The Reagan Plan, on the other hand, was "rejected as a sound basis for a just and permanent solution of the Palestine question " because, among other reasons, "it denies the establishment of an independent Palestinian state."

Another important advance on the road to pragmatism was a new attitude towards Jordan starting with the sixteenth PNC, the first to state clearly that "future relations with Jordan should be on the basis of a confederation between two independent states."<sup>12</sup> This idea was clearly an effort to address concerns about possible Palestinian radicalism even while preserving the independence and sovereignty of a future Palestinian state. It can be viewed as well as a concession both to Tel Aviv and Washington, given King Hussein's acceptability as a negotiating partner, and to Egypt, which had been encouraging the confederation idea and which had become a strategic PLO ally in the wake of Israel's invasion of Lebanon. The large Palestinian population in East Bank, many with relatives

and property in the occupied territories, was another factor in favor of endorsing confederation. At all events, the idea of confederation with Jordan was explicitly reiterated in all subsequent PNCs despite the collapse of the joint PLO-Jordanian initiative in February 1986.



Concerning the means of achieving the evolving goal of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, the phase that opened in 1974 with the twelfth PNC is most accurately characterized by a decreasing emphasis on armed struggle and a correspondingly greater and more specific focus on diplomacy. Thus, while the twelfth PNC mentions the PLO's readiness to "struggle by every means, foremost of which is armed struggle," subsequent sessions maintain armed struggle not as the guiding strategy but as an equal partner of diplomatic activity. Although virtually all the sessions affirm not merely the continuation of armed struggle, but even its "advancement and escalation against the Zionist occupation," starting from the thirteenth PNC it is always mentioned "in conjunction with various forms of political and mass struggle" or alongside "all other forms of political and mass struggle." Moreover, no details or modalities are spelled out concerning armed struggle, whereas increasing space is devoted to the various other forms, notably diplomacy. Finally, during this period the word "struggle" is sometimes used without its modifying adjective "armed," leading some Palestinian critics to refer ironically to the "unarmed struggle" (*al-kifah al-mushallah*) that had come to characterize the movement.

Indeed, whatever lip service continued to be paid to armed struggle, it was clear that throughout this period diplomacy was the favored means for achieving Palestinian goals. In addition to the positive response to various peace plans recognizing Israel and providing for its security (such as the Brezhnev Plan mentioned above), increasing attention was paid to strengthening relations with international forces in a position to help the Palestinian cause. Thus, the fifteenth PNC stressed the importance of "securing wider recognition for the PLO . . . expressed its conviction that it is the right and duty of the Palestinian revolution to continue its political and diplomatic moves and activities at the international level, including the countries of Western Europe." Peace talks and the United Nations were likewise given more attention. Clause 15A of the thirteenth PNC affirmed the "PLO's right to participate, independently and on an equal footing, in all international conferences, forums, and efforts relating to the Palestine question and the Arab-Zionist conflict." This point was reiterated and amplified in succeeding PNCs, until the seventeenth specifically stated for the first time that the "appropriate framework" for a solu-

tion to the Palestine problem was “the convening of an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations, in consultation with the Security Council and others, and with the participation of all the concerned parties, on an equal footing, including the PLO. This conference must be held on the basis of UN resolutions relevant to the Palestine question.” The eighteenth PNC repeated this stance in slightly more detail, and to further its implementation endorsed “the proposal to form a preparatory committee or ‘initiative committee.’” The nineteenth PNC went even further; it dropped any reference to armed struggle, so that international diplomacy became the only publicly endorsed means for achieving Palestinian goals.

In line with Palestinian efforts to strengthen ties with international forces, the PNCs during this phase focused for the first time on relations with Jewish groups. Thus, the thirteenth PNC clearly endorsed in clause 14 the idea of establishing ties and relations of coordination with “Jewish democratic and progressive forces. . . . which are struggling against the ideology and practice of Zionism.” By the eighteenth PNC, ten years later, this formulation had become “enhancing relations with *Israeli* democratic forces that support the Palestinian people’s struggle. . . .” (emphasis added), and not simply with “Jewish forces” as in previous programs.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the trend to place greater and more detailed emphasis on the occupied territories as a central ingredient of PLO strategy and as an aspect of the movement towards the two-state solution intensified during this period. This emphasis, which became increasingly specific from the thirteenth PNC on, was expressed in the form of support for the political work of the Palestine National Front in the occupied territories, support for various committees, trade unions, and economic projects, the establishment of a fund to support steadfastness, and other concrete financial and political measures.



Thus, from the twelfth PNC in 1974 onwards, the Palestinians had been moving steadily towards accommodation and compromise. By the time the eighteenth PNC was held in April 1987, most of the elements were in place: already contained in the PNC’s embrace of the Fez Plan was implicit recognition of Israel, in effect an acceptance of the two-state solution. The desirability of confederation with Jordan in a Palestinian state was clearly spelled out; the preference for peaceful means in reaching a solution was manifest in the very specific call for an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations on the basis of UN resolutions relevant to the Palestine question. Yet the Council had

stopped short of the explicit, unambiguous statement of these positions that had some chance of breaking the stalemate in the quest of Middle East peace.

This policy of moving ahead while holding back, of proposing vaguely and waiting for a response from the other side, became impossible with the events of 1987-88. The November 1987 Arab Summit conference in Amman came as a rude shock to the Palestinians, not only because of the somewhat offhanded treatment of Arafat at the hands of the Arab leaders but because, for the first time in Arab summit history, the Arab-Israeli conflict was virtually ignored. Not only, then, was the Palestine problem ignored in the international arena, it did not even command the attention of the Arab "brothers."

But although the summit brought home the need for an innovative Palestinian diplomatic initiative to reactivate the Palestinian case, the PLO would perhaps not have acted as decisively as it did had it not been for the outbreak of the intifada. Scarcely a month after the Amman summit, the uprising exploded all the equations of the situation and catapulted the priorities of the West Bank and Gaza Palestinians to the top of the PLO agenda: not to act would have risked losing influence in the occupied territories. King Hussein's disengagement from the West Bank the following July, creating a political vacuum in the occupied territories that could invite Israeli annexation, further forced the PLO's hand. It was thus that, pressed by these external forces, the Palestinians were galvanized to cut through their internal ambiguities and to move definitively beyond the struggle between what they believed as *just* and what they realized was *possible*. The difficult task of making clearcut choices fell to the Palestine National Council convened for November 1988 in Algiers, which forever changed the face of Palestinian politics.

The nineteenth PNC adopted two documents—the Political Program and the Declaration of Independence—which, together with Arafat's statements in Geneva a month later, finalize the evolution of the PLO's peace strategy. In terms of ends and means these three documents are clear and concise. They contain important departures from the preceding programs and, although they all convey the same message, they do so using different idioms. Thus, while the nineteenth PNC program outlines the objectives of the Palestinian people and the means for achieving them, the Declaration is a solemn and hopeful affirmation of Palestinian principles and aspirations couched in the formal style befitting such an occasion. The significance of Arafat's statement, meanwhile, is that by clarifying the points considered to remain ambiguous by Washington, it

led to the initiation of a “substantive dialogue” between the PLO and the United States government.

Together, then, the Political Program of the nineteenth PNC, the Declaration of Independence, and Arafat’s statement, comprise a single political platform. The ideas put forth in them, marking a departure from the old tactic of ambiguity, are the culmination of the Palestinian peace strategy, embodying with unprecedented clarity the consistency and continuity of PLO grand strategy since it started to move toward peaceful accommodation with an Israel within pre-1967 borders.

The main ideas of the three texts can be summarized as follows:

1. UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 are accepted as the “basis” for convening an international peace conference on the Middle East and the Palestine question. This is the most novel point in the PNC program. Arafat’s statement further spells out that the PLO accepts “resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for negotiations *with Israel* within the framework of the international conference” (emphasis added).
2. The General Assembly partition resolution 181 of 1947, the rejection of which was at the very core of the Palestine National Charters, is not merely endorsed in the Declaration of Independence, but cited as a *source of legitimacy* of the Palestine State.
3. Israel is unambiguously recognized not only as a *de facto* entity but as a legitimate state in the PNC’s clear endorsement of the UN General Assembly Resolution 181, which partitions Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state: by grounding the legitimacy of the Palestinian state in this resolution, the PLO by the same token recognizes the legitimacy of the Jewish state. Arafat’s statement goes a step further in clarifying previously adopted positions. It talks about the “right of all parties concerned in the Middle East conflict to exist in peace and security, and, as I have mentioned, including the State of Palestine, *Israel* and other neighbors, according to the resolution [*sic*] 242 and 338” (emphasis added).
4. A State of Palestine, with its capital at East Jerusalem is declared on the basis of the United Nations resolution. Although the boundaries of the state are not explicitly spelled out, it is evident that the Palestinian state will be confined to the West Bank and Gaza from section 2, clause b of the PNC Political Program, which calls for “Israel’s withdrawal from all the Palestinian and Arab territories which it has occupied *since 1967*, including Arab Jerusalem” (emphasis added). This suggests that the PLO has adopted the *principle* of partition rather than the territorial details of UN resolution 181 of 1947. In other words, the borders of the Palestinian state will include only the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza, i.e., about 23 percent of

Mandatory Palestine. As is evident in overall thrust of the three texts, partition along these geographic lines will be a final settlement.

5. Diplomacy and peaceful settlement with Israel itself are unambiguously chosen as the means to achieve Palestinian goals. The references to resolutions 181, 242, 338, and other UN resolutions, together with the emphasis on an international peace conference and the total absence of any reference to armed struggle are clear indications of the displacement of diplomacy over military means.

6. Terrorism in all its forms—individual, group, and state—is emphatically rejected. This rejection, affirmed earlier in the Cairo Declaration of 7 November 1985, is explicitly stated in the political program; Arafat in his Geneva statement “renounces” it. However, the PNC Political Program affirms the “right of peoples to resist foreign occupation colonialism, and racial discrimination, and their right to struggle for their independence,” while Arafat’s statement stresses that “neither Arafat, nor any[one else] for that matter, can stop the intifada, the uprising,” which will come to an end only when the national aims of the Palestinians are realized. Like all national liberation movements throughout history, the PLO was unwilling to give up the right to resistance to occupation.

Thus, the resolutions of the PNC demonstrate a fundamental change in the grand strategy of the PLO, reflecting a sea change Palestinian politics in general. The consistent evolution of the Palestinian peace strategy, as manifested in the PNC resolutions, indicates that the change is neither transient nor tactical, but a soberly conceived attempt at achieving a peaceful and final settlement with an Israel in its pre-1967 borders. From insisting on regaining all of Palestine to emphasizing an independent state on part of Palestine as a final goal, and from espousing armed struggle exclusively to focusing on diplomacy, the PLO has shown its readiness to negotiate peace.

Because the PNC is the highest policymaking institution of the PLO, and because its resolutions, representing the broadest Palestinian consensus, are accepted as binding guidelines for the PLO Executive Committee, the policies that it recommends are not a fiat decreed by a dominant leader or group but the by-product of an intensive bargaining process involving all Palestinian groups and political opinions. To be sure, no compromise settlement will have unanimous Palestinian support given the pluralist nature of the Palestinian polity. Some Palestinian groups continue to call for unswerving commitment to the National Charter, but these are not at the center of Palestinian power and decisionmaking. No



political community—least of all Israel—is without divisions, socioeconomic disparities, and rejectionists within its ranks.

In the final analysis, what matters is the general trend of thought that shapes the world view of a community. Among the Palestinians, the trend has indisputably been towards pragmatism and coexistence, towards the reshaping of their goals. The Palestinians have made formidable concessions. They have progressively, through twenty-five years of struggle, recognized not merely the existence but the *legitimacy* of a state responsible for the dispossession and eviction of the overwhelming majority of their population. They have renounced forever their claims to over two-thirds of their homeland where, on the eve of Israel's creation, they constituted two-thirds of the population and owned over ninety percent of the land. Through the successive PNCs expressing the views of the great majority of the people, they have expressed their willingness to accept a state on a mere 23 percent of their ancestral soil. They have unambiguously declared themselves ready to come to terms, to live in peace.

The ball is now in Israel's court.

### *Resolutions of the Palestine National Council\**

First	Jerusalem	28 May–2 June 1964	
Second	Cairo	31 May–4 June 1965	
Third	Gaza	20–24 May 1966	
Fourth	Cairo	10–17 July 1968	Int'l Docs. 1968, pp. 399-403
Fifth	Cairo	1–4 February 1969	Int'l Docs. 1969, pp. 589-90
Sixth	Cairo	1–6 September 1969	Int'l Docs. 1969, pp. 778-80
Seventh	Cairo	30 May–4 June 1970	Int'l Docs. 1970, pp. 827-28
Emergency Session	Amman	28 August 1970	Int'l Docs. 1970, pp. 895-89
Eighth	Cairo	28 February–5 March 1971	Int'l Docs. 1971, pp. 396-99
Ninth	Cairo	7–13 July 1971	Int'l Docs. 1971, pp. 503-504
Tenth	Cairo	6–12 April 1972	JPS 1, no.4, pp. 177-80
Eleventh	Cairo	6–12 January 1973	JPS 2, no.3, pp. 169-73
Twelfth	Cairo	1–9 June 1974	JPS 3, no.4, pp. 224-26
Thirteenth	Cairo	12–20 March 1977	JPS 6, no.3, pp. 188-97
Fourteenth	Damascus	15–23 January 1979	JPS 8, no.3, pp. 165-69
Fifteenth	Damascus	11–19 April 1981	JPS 10, no.4, pp. 182-87
Sixteenth	Algiers	14–22 February 1983	JPS 12, no.3, pp. 250-54
Seventeenth	Amman	22–28 November 1984	JPS 14, no.2, pp. 257-59
Eighteenth	Algiers	20–25 April 1987	JPS 16, no.4, pp. 196-204
Nineteenth	Algiers	12–15 November 1988	JPS 18, no.2, pp. 213-23

\* The resolutions of the first three PNCs have not been published in English. The texts of the fourth through ninth PNCs, including texts of the 1968 Charter and Constitution of the PLO, are published in *The International Documents on Palestine* series, published annually by the Institute for Palestine Studies and Kuwait University for 1967-1981. Texts of PNCs ten through nineteen are printed in *JPS*.



1. The findings of the poll, which was co-sponsored by the East Jerusalem daily *al-Fajr*, the American newspaper *Newsday*, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, were published in the *Jerusalem Post, International Edition*, 13-20 September 1986.
2. *New York Times*, 21 March 1989; see also the *Jerusalem Post, International Edition*, no. 1,440, 11 June 1988.
3. For relevant details see Laurie A. Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World: Institution Building and the Search for State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 1-40; Cheryl Rubenberg, *The Palestine Liberation Organization: Its Institutional Infrastructure* (Belmont, MA: Institute of Arab Studies, 1983); Asad Abdul-Rahman and Rashid Hamid, "The Palestine Liberation Organization: Past, Present, and Future" (paper presented at the First United Nations Seminar on the Question of Palestine, 14-18 July 1980; United Nations Publication 168); Rashid Hamid, "What is the PLO?" *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. IV, no. 4 (Summer 1975), pp. 90-109.
4. For works on this subject based on recently declassified Israeli archival material, see: Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987); Tom Sege, *1949: The First Israelis* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Avi Shlaim, *Collusion* Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). See also the special issue of the *Journal of Palestine Studies* on the same subject, vol. XVIII, no. 1, Autumn 1988.
5. For background information see Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); William B. Quandt, Fuad Jabber, and Ann Mosely Lesch, *The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Isa al-Shu'aybi, *Al-Kiyaniyyah al-Filastiniyyah: al-Wa'i, al-Dhati wa al-Tatawwur al-Mu'assasati* [Palestinian Statism: Entity Consciousness and Institutional Development] (Beirut: PLO Research Center, 1979).
6. For an elaboration of this point, see Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 1114-117.
7. See Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World*, chapter 4.
8. Ahmad Baha' al-Din, *Iqtirah Dawlat Filastin* [The Suggestion of a State of Palestine] (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'ah, 1968).
9. For details on this organization, see Emile Sahliyeh, *In Search of Leadership: West Bank Politics Since 1967* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1988), pp. 42-69.
10. See Helena Cobban, "Palestinian Peace Plans," in Willard A. Beling (ed.), *Mid-*

- dle East Peace Plans* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), pp. 43-44.
11. See Galia Golan, *The Soviet Union and the Palestine Liberation Organization* (New York: Praeger, 1980), pp. 51-112; Gaila Golan, "Gorbachev's Middle East Strategy" *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 66, no. 1, Fall 1987, pp. 45-46.
  12. For details on PLO-Jordanian relations, see Sahliyeh, *In Search of Leadership*, pp. 98-112, 170-175 and Arthur R. Day, *East Bank/West Bank: Jordan and the Prospects for Peace* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1986), pp. 112-141.
  13. In this period, particularly from December 1976 to May 1977, numerous meetings took place between members of the central core of Fateh and avowed Zionist personalities, including a number of Israelis. In late 1974, arrangements were made for a meeting between Arafat and Nahum Goldman, the presi-

dent of the World Zionist Organization at the time. Because of the strong pressure of the Israeli government the meeting never took place. For an account of these contacts, which produced nothing, mainly as a result of the Israeli government's intransigence and the debilitating effect of the Lebanese civil war on the PLO, see Alain Gresh, *The PLO: The Struggle Within* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1985), pp. 195-199, and the monthly Paris journal *Israel et Palestine* for the months extending from December 1977 to February 1978, as well as the French daily *Le Monde* of 6 and 11 January 1977. More detailed accounts can be found in Seth Tillman, *The United States in the Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 213 ff., Noam Chomsky's articles in *New Politics* (Winter 1975-76, Winter 1978-79), and his book *Towards a New Cold War* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), chapters 9 and 13.