

WHAT IS THE PLO?

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IN the past year, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has moved to the forefront of the international scene. The attention that it has attracted has, however, been highly selective. Although its armed activities and increasing international and Arab status have featured prominently in the world media, less attention has been devoted to the internal structure of the PLO and its relationship to the Palestinian community as a whole — political, social and cultural as well as military. It is perhaps surprising that the subject has been so neglected, since one of the related issues — the extent to which the PLO is representative of the Palestinian people — has sometimes been subject to controversy in the Western world.

The Palestine Liberation Organization is the general organizational framework within which all Palestinian organizations — commando groups, trade unions, professional associations, as well as prominent national figures — meet to work for the achievement of Palestinian national goals. Established in 1964, the PLO has experienced various organizational developments and change during a long period of transformation. It will be the purpose of this article to outline the history of this institutional development and to provide some insights into the PLO's present organizational structure.

1. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

After the 1948 war, the Palestinians were in the unusual situation of possessing a high level of national consciousness without the national and political institutions to embody it. Their national identity was a dominant theme of their everyday life. In the eyes of the majority of Palestinians, who found themselves suddenly uprooted from their normal rhythm of life and plunged into the situation of refugees in the surrounding countries, all the daily problems

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of survival — finding work, food or shelter — arose directly from the fact that they were Palestinians exiled by the Israelis from their homeland. At all levels of political and national socialization in this traumatic situation, Palestinian consciousness was retained and extended: Palestinians lived among other Palestinians in exile; they remembered Palestine through personal experience and through the accounts of families and relatives; they identified themselves as Palestinians with a common historical and contemporary experience and with a deep attachment to their land; if they were politically active, most were committed to parties working for the Palestinian cause.

Palestinian aspirations for the future on both political and personal levels crystallized in most cases into a single goal that received almost universal support in the community — that of the Return. This was, in fact, a right that was internationally acknowledged by annual United Nations resolutions passed with the approval even of Israel's major ally, the United States, but not implemented by Israel. As the director of the United Nations Relief and Work Agency, which supplies rations and education and health services in refugee camps, put it in 1964: "what is not in doubt is that their [the refugees'] longing to return home is intense and widespread... [they] express their feeling of embitterment at their long exile and at the failure of the international community, year after year, to implement the resolution so often reaffirmed."¹ And, in the following year: "From their standpoint, a nation has been obliterated and a population deprived of its birthright."² Palestinian songs, poetry and political pamphlets of the time all reflected these aspirations to return to Palestine.

Palestinian consciousness might be high; but partly because of the abnormal situation of dispersal in which Palestinians found themselves, their political organization was initially very limited. Their old, traditional leadership, comprising the Arab Higher Committee led by the Mufti of Jerusalem, had been discredited by the disasters of 1947-48. In the countries into which they had been exiled, the Palestinians were not able to fill the vacuum, due to the organizational difficulties arising from their being dispersed, and to their being subject to the laws and regulations of the countries where they had resettled, which had no interest in encouraging a separate national political organization among them.

Most Palestinians found themselves under the sovereignty of Jordan, which had annexed the West Bank, the largest and most important of the few areas

¹ UN Document A/5813, UNRWA *Report* for the period July 1, 1963 to June 30, 1964.

² UN Document A/6013, UNRWA *Report* for the period July 1, 1964 to June 30, 1965.

of Palestine remaining to the Arabs after the intervention and defeat of the Arab national armies in Palestine in 1948-49. Apart from this, the major remaining area of Palestine was the Gaza Strip, administered by the Egyptians as part of Palestine, but not annexed by them. An insignificant area of Palestine (al-Himma) was also administered by Syria. These territories covered about 21 percent of the original mandated territory. Concentrations of Palestinians were also found in Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria, and Israel.

The different areas in which Palestinians were located had a different effect on their freedom to conduct nationalist activities. In the case of Jordan, Palestinian aspirations were discouraged by the Hashemite regime, whose dynastic territorial interests in the West Bank clearly ran counter to aspirations for the recovery of all of Palestine followed by its establishment as an independent state. Political activities within Jordan were kept within the Hashemite framework; serious opposition, especially from pan-Arab groups, was repressed. In this respect there was a difference with the Gaza Strip, administered by Egypt, which was fully exposed to Arab nationalist ideas and where much Palestinian activism arose (e.g., the creation of al-Fateh). Elsewhere, Palestinian activism tended to be linked with one of the political trends that existed in the neighbouring countries, especially movements such as Nasserism, the Ba'ath or the Arab Nationalists' Movement. Most Palestinians saw the recovery of their homeland as dependent upon the achievement of Arab power through Arab unity; they therefore identified with pan-Arab parties, which they believed to be seriously committed to the Palestinian cause.

This attitude was not, however, held by all Palestinians or Arabs, and a change began to be evident in the 1960's. After the Israeli occupation of Sinai and the Gaza Strip in 1956, some Palestinian groups committed solely and exclusively to the liberation of Palestine emerged. It was in this period that al-Fateh was created, and that its newspaper *Filastinuna* began to be printed in Beirut, even though al-Fateh's first operation was not carried out until 1965. In 1961, too, Abdul-Karim Qassim of Iraq publicly committed himself to the establishment of a Palestinian entity, thereby converting it into an issue of inter-Arab politics. But the major reason for the upsurge of Palestinian political activity in the 1960's lay in two events that seemed to alter the political environment. The first was the break-up of the United Arab Republic, the union between Egypt and Syria that had marked the highpoint of pan-Arab nationalism to which Palestinian political activists had been committed. This shook their belief in the possibility of Arab unity, particularly when, following close on its heels came the attainment of independence by Algeria in 1962 after a long,

bitter and costly revolution. This seemed to indicate that Arab unity might not be a prerequisite for liberation and that a nation could struggle successfully against foreign settlers by relying mainly on its own resources. Hitherto oriented mainly towards the Arab states, certain Palestinians now began to emphasize self-reliance. Groups for the liberation of Palestine sprung up from among those Palestinians who had been politically active in some way or another in the Arab world; by 1965 about 40 such groups existed.³ There was clearly no absence of potential catalysts for the Palestinian feeling, pervasive through the entire community, that an injustice had been committed against them and must be redressed.

This upsurge of Palestinian feeling occurred at a time when the Arab-Israeli conflict was reviving over Israel's plans to divert part of the Jordan River. Nasser called on December 23, 1963 for a meeting of Arab kings and presidents, regardless of conflicts among them, to discuss Israeli plans for the diversion of the Jordan waters, saying that "the battle of the Jordan River is part of the battle of Palestine."⁴ It was at this, the First Arab Summit Conference of 1964, that the first steps were taken towards the creation of the PLO.

Previous discussions by the Arab League on the Palestine issue had generated resolutions that were not implemented. In its thirty-fourth session of March 4, 1959, for instance, a resolution had been passed by the Council of the Arab League, going so far as to provide for the creation of a Palestinian army in the Arab countries. In its next session on February 29, 1960, when the issue of this reorganization was discussed, the Arab League Council merely decided to resume the discussion at its next session. At the thirty-third session of April 1960, however, the subject was simply left in the air to be discussed at another extraordinary session — held in August 1960, which carried out the rather undemanding task of stressing the need to preserve the Palestinian character.⁵ The first significant resolutions on the subject were those of the First Arab Summit Conference mentioned above. It adopted, according to its own communiqué, "practical resolutions necessary to ward off the existing Zionist danger in the technical and defence fields and to organize the Palestinian people to enable them to carry out their role in liberating their home-

³ According to Ghassan Kanafani in the Palestine Supplement of *al-Muharrir*, December 30, 1965.

⁴ Gamal Abdel-Nasser, *Speeches and Press Interviews, January-December 1963* (Cairo: UAR Information Department, 1964), pp. 291-312.

⁵ League of Arab States, *Qararat Majlis Jam'iat al-Duwal al-'Arabiya al-Khassa bi-Qadaya Filastin munhu al-Dawra al-Ula, hatta al-Dawra al-Khamsin* [The Palestine Resolutions of the Council of the League of Arab States from the First to the Fiftieth Session], Cairo, 1970.

land and determining their destiny.”⁶ In February of that year, Ahmad Shuqairy, who had been appointed representative of Palestine at the Arab League by its Council in September 1963, toured Arab countries at the request of the Summit Conference,⁷ announcing that a Palestine National Council (also known as Assembly or Congress) would be summoned in Jerusalem in May 1964. It was at this meeting that the Palestine Liberation Organization was proclaimed.

2. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PLO

The first objective of Shuqairy in preparing for the National Council was to select members to serve as representatives of the Palestinian community. Preparatory committees and subcommittees set up by him were entrusted with the task of nominating and preparing the final list of members. When the Council met in May, its members were mainly Palestinian notables — usually elected Palestinian public officials and middle class professionals and businessmen. The elected officials included members of the Jordanian Parliament and that of the Gaza Strip, and mayors and presidents of urban and rural councils. The professionals consisted of categories as varied as clergymen, pharmacists, professors, lawyers, doctors, engineers, businessmen, bankers, and industrialists. To round out the Council, farmers, labour leaders, and representatives of refugee camps and women’s and students’ organizations were included. In all, 422 members sat in the Palestine National Council. If, like most parliaments, they were not equally representative of all social classes or categories (there were only twelve trade unionists and ten representatives of women’s organizations), they did reflect the geographical distribution of Palestinians rather precisely (Table 1).

The Council attracted criticism from some Palestinian quarters, mainly on the grounds that it was insufficiently revolutionary or activist. Shuqairy’s insistence that its members should act as individuals rather than as delegates of their organizations provoked controversy. Indicative of the doubts of revolutionary groupings as to the purpose of the Council was the statement by the Political Bureau of United Action of the Revolutionary Palestinian Forces (PBUARPF) on May 24, 1964 declaring that it would not stand in the way of the proposed Palestinian entity. The statement nevertheless expressed doubt that an official entity would succeed in isolation from the revolutionary organ-

⁶ UAR, Ministry of National Guidance, *Malaf Watha’iq Filastin* [Documents and Papers on the Palestine Question], Cairo, 1969, Vol. II, p. 1373.

⁷ *Al-Ahram*, January 18, 1964.

izations, and offered their help in transforming it into a truly revolutionary force. The PBUARPF consisted of a variety of Palestinian organizations: The Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), the Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Palestine, The Palestine National Liberation Movement (Fateh), the Bloc of Palestinian Commandos, The Arab Front for the Liberation of Palestine; and The Nationalist Front for Liberation.⁸ Their major fear was that the PLO would be used by Arab governments to contain the upsurge of Palestinian national feeling by institutionalizing it within the existing framework of Arab states, where the PLO would be subject to heavy pressure not to disrupt the existing Arab-Israeli status quo.

TABLE I
GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS REPRESENTED IN THE FIRST NATIONAL COUNCIL⁹

<i>Country</i>	<i>Palestinian Population</i>	<i>Number of Members</i>	<i>% of Congress Members</i>
Jordan (including West Bank)	1,570,000	212	50.2
Gaza Strip	364,000	46	10.9
Lebanon	240,000	29	6.8
Syria	155,000	20	4.7
Kuwait	140,000	20	4.7
Egypt	33,000	6	1.4
Saudi Arabia	20,000	none	0
Arab Gulf	15,000	8	1.8
Iraq	24,000	3	0.7
Libya	5,000	10	2.3
Algeria	unknown	17	4.2
Emigrants	unknown	3	0.7

Opposition came also from some ultra-traditional Palestinian sectors. The Arab Higher Committee for Palestine, which had led Palestinian resistance until 1948 under the ex-Mufti of Jerusalem, issued a statement on May 28, 1964 claiming that it had evidence that the aim of the proposed Palestinian entity was the liquidation of the Palestinian cause under the cover of a Palestinian body.¹⁰ The Committee called for free elections among the Palestinians¹¹

⁸ PBUARPF, Official Statement, May 24, 1964.

⁹ This table deals with the 374 members specifically selected to represent geographical areas. The remaining members represented non-geographical entities (e.g., trade unions).

¹⁰ Arab Higher Committee, *Filastin* (Beirut), no. 40, June 1, 1964.

¹¹ *Al-Hayat*, August 7, 1964.

(rather ironically, it should be noted, since the Committee itself had never been elected).

The Council, in its concluding session on June 1, 1964, adopted certain key resolutions creating an infrastructure that affected the Palestinian community in several fields: military, financial, political and administrative.¹² The Palestine Liberation Organization was officially proclaimed with the goal (not spelled out in any detail) of the liberation of Palestine. The National Council, which would meet regularly, became the ultimate sovereign body within it. A National Charter and Fundamental Law drawn up by Shuqairy were adopted as the basic constitution. A fifteen-man Executive Committee was appointed with autocratic power in it vested in Shuqairy himself as Chairman of the Committee and Spokesman of the Palestine National Council. Financially, it was agreed to set up a Palestine National Fund to draw contributions from all Palestinians. Militarily, a Palestine Liberation Army under the control of the PLO was created.

Despite these resolutions, the PLO continued to be criticized for being inadequately militant or revolutionary and too linked to the Arab states. George Habbash's Arab Nationalists' Movement, for instance, attacked the resolutions as having by-passed all proposals offered on effective military organization, and maintained that the PLO had not achieved the minimum acceptable to the Palestinian people.¹³

Thus, though the Palestinian organizations were generally in favour of organization of the Palestinian people, they differed on the structure and form of the proposed organization. While Shuqairy and the notables composing the PLO were only too aware of Arab official demands and pressures, the various Palestinian political groups tried to achieve an organizational formula involving a militance that went far beyond Arab official conceptions. Guerrilla activities carried out by them independently of the PLO began to take place with increased frequency in 1965 and 1966.

Between 1964 and 1967, the PLO established itself more firmly through diplomacy in the Arab world and in some international quarters. It represented Palestine at Arab Summit Conferences. In October 1964, it attended the Conference of Non-Aligned States in Cairo, which expressed support for "the complete reinstatement of the Arab people in Palestine in all their rights to their country as well as their inalienable right to self-determination."¹⁴ The

¹² Palestine Liberation Organization, *al-Mu'tamar al-Filastini al-Awwal*, p. 39. For a discussion of these institutions, see below, pp. 101-105.

¹³ *Al-Hurriya*, June 15, 1964.

¹⁴ *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, November 28 - December 5, 1964.

PLO's major concern at this time within the Arab world was the tension between itself and Jordan, which forbade PLO political, military and other mobilizational activities within its territories. As Jordan became polarized against the nationalist Arab states, the PLO moved to the support of the latter. In October 1966, its Executive Committee supported Syria in its quarrel with Jordan;¹⁵ after the Israeli raid on Samu'a in November, Shuqairy repeatedly called upon Hussein to cooperate with the PLO in the defence of Jordan against Israel,¹⁶ later announcing that its military wing, the Palestine Liberation Army, would enter Jordan, regardless of whether King Hussein wanted it to do so.¹⁷

The new militance — at least in rhetoric — was partly due to the links between the PLO and nationalist regimes; it was also a response to the activism and guerrilla activities against Israel already taking place from the rival independent and revolutionary Palestinian groups. Contacts occurred between the PLO and certain of these groups interested in playing a role within its framework. In a process encouraged by the PLO, early in 1966 various Palestinian groups met in Beirut in an attempt to unify Palestinian action; the outcome of these meetings — between the Palestinian branches of the Ba'ath Socialist Party and the Arab Nationalists' Movement among others — was the formation of the Preparatory Committee for United Palestinian Action.¹⁸ The Third Palestine National Council that met in May of that year called for the unity of revolutionary organizations within the framework of the PLO.¹⁹ (One notable outsider to all of these developments was the al-Fateh organization, which kept its distance from the PLO and called for united action “within Palestine,” and not in “offices.”)²⁰

On December 27, 1966, Shuqairy announced the replacement of the Executive Committee with a Revolutionary Council “to assume the responsibility of preparing the people for the war of liberation.” The names of members of the Council and their activities were kept secret, it was said, because some of them lived inside Jordan.²¹ But if such proposals were serious, they were soon overtaken by the events of the June War, as was Shuqairy himself. His bragg-

¹⁵ *Akhbar Filastin* (Gaza, PLO publication), October 24, 1966.

¹⁶ *Al-Ahram*, November 17, 1966; *al-Muharrir*, November 23, 1966.

¹⁷ *Al-Ahram*, November 30, 1966.

¹⁸ *Al-Ahrrar*, February 5, 1966.

¹⁹ Palestine Liberation Organization, *al-Dawra al-Thalitha lil-Majlis al-Watani al-Filastini* [The Third Session of the Palestine National Council], May 20-21, 1966, pp. 64-65.

²⁰ *Al-Ahrrar*, April 2, 1966.

²¹ *Al-Muharrir*, December 28, 1966.

docio during the period preceding the war, in contrast to the lack of concrete action undertaken by the PLO under his autocratic leadership, discredited him among Palestinians. On December 9, 1967, Fatch submitted a memorandum to the Conference of Arab Foreign Ministers in Cairo expressing its concern at the "misleading statements" of Shuqairy and demanding the closure of the Arab information media to him.²² The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (created out of the Arab Nationalists' Movement) and the General Union of Palestinian Students demanded his abdication.²³ On December 14, 1967, seven members of the PLO Executive Committee requested his resignation "because of the way you run the organization."²⁴ After a brief and unavailing attempt to rally support, Shuqairy resigned on December 24, 1967.²⁵

3. THE COMMANDOS COME TO POWER

The aftermath of the 1967 war created a new situation for the Palestinians. Israel now occupied the whole of Palestine and parts of Syria and Egypt and appeared to be pursuing an expansionist policy within them. Arab military activity against Israel, previously opposed by almost all Arab regimes, now appeared inevitable in order to regain at least these territories. This situation opened up new possibilities for the Palestinians, and especially those organizations outside the PLO that had already been carrying out guerrilla activities against Israel; they, at least, had not been tarnished by the defeat of the regular armies, and their different military tactics seemed to present a viable alternative to those of the Arab conventional armed forces. Israel dug in on the West Bank and in Gaza, and the support among the Palestinian community at large for the guerrillas increased rapidly as they began active resistance against the Israelis.

On the same day as Shuqairy submitted his resignation, the new leadership under Yahya Hammouda as Chairman issued a statement aiming to bring the PLO closer to the activist and guerrilla organizations. It stressed the need for an escalation and unification of armed struggle against Israel and for the mobilization of all nationalist forces to this end. The necessity for national unity among Palestinians as a whole was also emphasized with promises for the establishment of a new National Council and the institutional development of

²² G.K. Nasrallah (ed.), *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniya al-'Arabiya, 1967* [Palestine Arab Documents, 1967] Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1969, no. 697, p. 989.

²³ *Al-Hurriya*, December 18, 1967; *al-Ahram*, December 20, 1967.

²⁴ *Al-Muharrir*, December 19, 1967.

²⁵ *Al-Ahram*, December 25, 1967.

the PLO itself.²⁶ A subcommittee was formed to make contact with the Palestinian organizations.²⁷

These moves came too late for the traditional Palestinian leadership. On the initiative of Fateh, a meeting of commando organizations was held in Cairo on January 17-20, 1968, with the result that a Permanent Bureau was constituted from the eight organizations in attendance.²⁸ The meeting was boycotted by the PLO, which viewed itself as the framework within which all organizations should operate, and also by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which supported the PLO viewpoint. In an attempt to keep up with the commandos, the PLO created its own guerrilla unit, the Popular Liberation Forces, in March 1968. A meeting between the PLO, Fateh, and the PFLP in Beirut in the same month, however, finally resulted in an agreement that would give the commandos half of the seats in a new 100-seat National Council to be convoked, thereby recognizing the new realities of the prestige and support of the commando organizations among Palestinians.²⁹

The Battle of Karameh (March 1968) between the Palestinian commandos, helped by units of the Jordanian Army, and a large attacking Israeli force, dramatically increased the reputation of the commandos, while causing tension between the two largest groups, Fateh and the PFLP. The former accused the latter of withdrawing from the battlefield, although it was supposed to defend the northern part of Karameh.³⁰ Despite this, both organizations sat in a new National Council which met on July 17-18 in Cairo, with its members distributed as follows:

The Permanent Bureau	38
PFLP	10
PLA and Popular Liberation Forces	20
General Union of Palestinian Workers	1
General Union of Palestinian Students	1
General Union of Palestinian Women	1
Executive Committee and Independents	29
	100

²⁶ *Al-Ahram*, December 26, 1967.

²⁷ *Al-Nahar*, January 15, 1968.

²⁸ These were: Fateh, Sa'iqa (Vanguards of the War of Popular Liberation); Palestine Liberation Front; Action Organization for the Support of the Revolution; Front of the Palestinian Revolutionaries; the Palestinian Popular Front; the Organization of Palestinian Revolutionary Youth, the Commando Vanguards Organization. Fateh, *al-Kitab al-Sanawi, 1968* [Fateh Yearbook, 1968] Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, n. d., pp. 127-30.

²⁹ *Al-Hurriya*, April 8, 1968.

³⁰ Fateh, *al-Wihda al-Wataniya* [National Unity], May 21, 1968.

In this, its fourth session, the National Council demanded freedom of movement for commandos in the countries surrounding Israel, called for support for the PLA and its freedom from Arab influence, and rejected UN Security Council Resolution 242, which made no reference to Palestinians or Palestinian rights.³¹ Institutionally it introduced changes that did away with the autocratic role of the Chairman that had characterized the PLO under Shuqairy, and passed resolutions separating the legislative and executive branches and providing for the election of the Executive Committee, which in turn would elect the chairman. For the time being, however, the term of the previous Executive Committee was renewed.³²

The dominance of the commandos in the PLO had now become obvious. Military collaboration between themselves and the PLO was established by the creation of a Military Coordination Council in Amman in October which included the PLO, Fateh and Sa'iqqa,³³ and it was only a matter of time before formal leadership was also in their hands. The next session of the Palestine National Council was held in February 1969, and resulted in the election as Chairman of the new Executive Committee of Yasser Arafat, the leader of Fateh. The membership of the Council, now 105, was distributed as follows:

Fateh	33
PFLP	12
Sa'iqqa	12
Exec. Committee	12
PLA	5
Unions	3
Independents	28
	<hr/>
	105

The session reflected the tensions between the different organizations; it was boycotted by both the PLA and PFLP, who did not approve of the distribution of members; the former's share in particular had dropped substantially. At the same time, however, there was a movement towards military unification among the commando groups; the Armed Struggle Command was formed for this purpose by the Executive Committee in the same month.

By 1969 the basic structure and composition of the PLO as it exists today had

³¹ Palestine Liberation Organization, *al-Majlis al-Watani al-Filastini, min 10 ila 17 Tamouz, 1968* [The Palestine National Council, July 10-17, 1968].

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Al-Dustur*, November 21, 1968.

been established. The largest single component was al-Fateh (the Palestine Liberation Movement), the leading commando organization (whose members in the Council were, of course, mainly from the political wing of the organization, which contained volunteer activists from a wide cross-section of the Palestinian population). Other significant commando organizations were Sa'iqqa, (formed from the Palestinian branch of the Syrian Ba'th party): and the PFLP led by George Habbash (which was often only symbolically represented in the PLO due to its disagreements over policy with the leadership). Smaller groups represented within the PLO were the Democratic Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the PFLP-General Command (both offshoots of the PFLP). They were joined in 1969 by the pro-Iraqi Arab Liberation Front. Also seated in the National Council and the PLO were independents — the second largest single category of members, they were selected from the Palestine population by a committee of the National Council after extensive contacts within the Palestinian community. Finally, there were unions, whose number was slightly increased to ten seats in 1969.

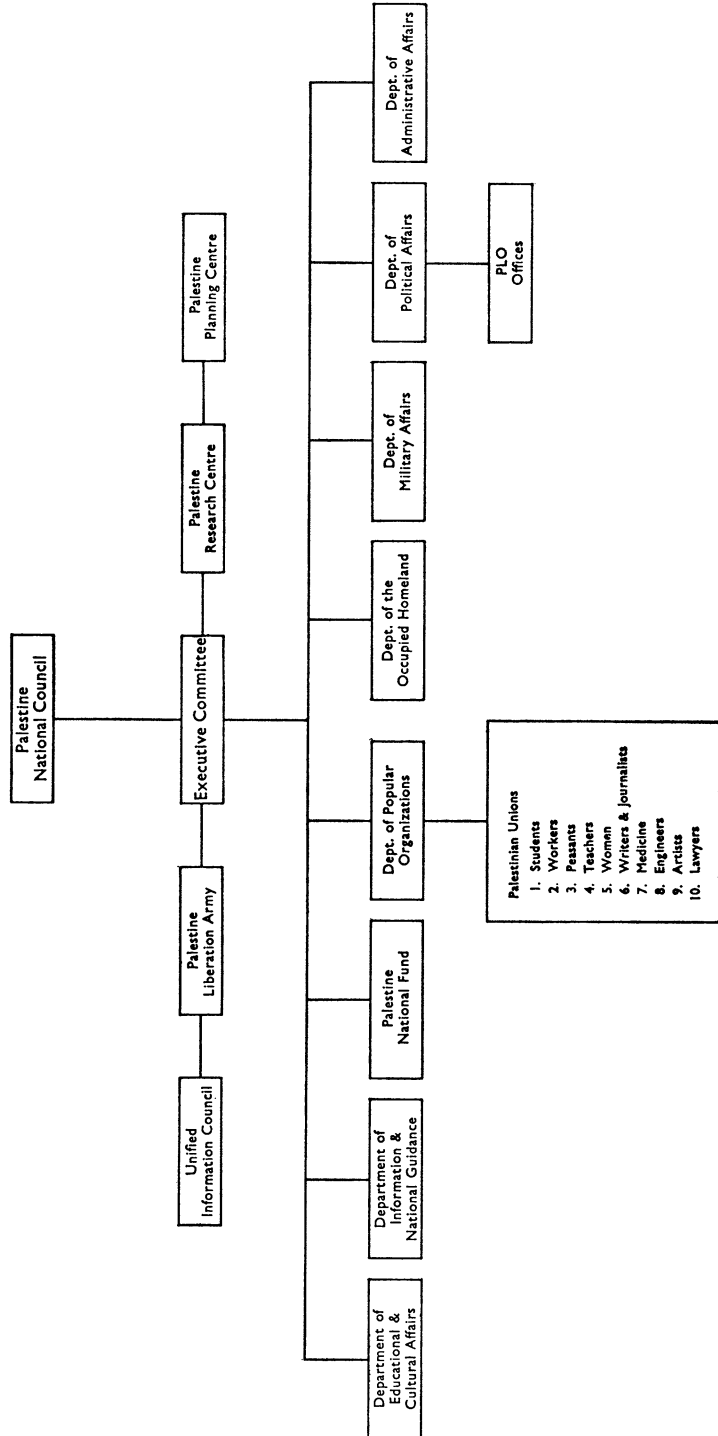
What is the institutional structure within which these groups operate? The PLO includes institutions working in many different fields: political, administrative, military, economic and social. It has attained a level of institutional development and sophistication that enables it to penetrate all sections of the Palestinian community. Possibly its most important asset is the legitimacy that it has acquired among Palestinians. It is the outgrowth of Palestinian opinion and activity in those areas where Palestinians have been most free to express themselves and to organize (i.e., outside Jordan and Israel); here, it simply has no Palestinian competitors. In these regions, there are no alternative Palestinian trends of any significance (e.g., pro-Jordanian), although there are some differences of nationalist opinion within the PLO. Within the Israeli-occupied territories, freedom of national organization is not, of course, allowed, but even here support for the PLO has been shown by the local population in the indirect ways possible under a foreign occupation: by regular strikes, petitions and demonstrations. Within Jordan itself before 1970, the PLO had extensive popular support, although the superior military capacity and repressive power of the Jordanian regime cut it off from this base in 1970-71.

4. MAJOR INSTITUTIONS OF THE PLO

The National Council

The most important of the institutions within the PLO is the National Council, the Palestinian equivalent of a parliament. Membership of it is

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART
OF THE PLO



nominated by a committee of the preceding Council, after wide-ranging consultations between it and the commando organizations, the Palestinian unions and professional organizations, and leading Palestinian individuals in all walks of life. The aim is to secure as representative a seating of Palestinian parties (i.e., the political wings of the commando movements) and individuals as possible.

Constitutionally, the Council is the supreme authority formulating policies and programmes for the PLO. Its term of office is restricted, being two years, but it is due to meet regularly in ordinary sessions upon the request of the Executive Committee or a quarter of its members. Between 1964 and 1967, the ordinary session was annual, but the fourth ordinary session of July 1968 resolved that ordinary sessions be held twice a year. Should the Chairman of the Committee fail to call the Council into session, the Council meets in the place and at the time specified at the request of its members or the request of the Executive Committee. The Council has a presidential office composed of the Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen, and a Secretary, all elected by the Council.

During its ordinary sessions, the Council considers the report of the Executive Committee on the achievements of the PLO and its organs; the report of the Palestine National Fund and the PLO budget; the recommendations of various Council committees; and any other issues submitted for consideration. Two-thirds of its membership form the quorum and decisions are taken by simple majority. So far, the Council has held ten ordinary and two extraordinary sessions. Membership in the first three sessions of these Councils was over 400, later reduced to 100-180 for purposes of efficiency.

The National Council in its eleventh session (January 6-12, 1973), created a Central Council from its own membership to follow up and implement its resolutions. This 21-man body is headed by the chairman of the National Council and its membership was distributed among commando organizations, unions and independents as follows: Fateh, 4 members, Sa'iqa, 2, PFLP, 2, DPFLP, 2, the Arab Liberation Front, 2, Unions, 6, and Independents, 5. The Committee serves consultative functions to the PLO leadership.

The Executive Committee

The National Council selects the Palestinian "Cabinet," the PLO Executive Committee,³⁴ from its own members. Committee members in turn elect the

³⁴ Between May 1970 and July 1971, to confront the emergency in relations with Jordan, the Executive Committee was subordinated to a Central Committee consisting of itself, the Chairman of the National Council, a leading delegate from each commando organization, three

Chairman. The Executive Committee is in permanent session and its members work on a full-time basis. It is responsible to the National Council collectively and individually for the execution of the policies, plans, and programmes drawn up by the National Council.

The number of members of the Committee was set by Article 14 of the Fundamental Law at a maximum of fifteen, including the Chairman. Each member has his own portfolio, like members of a Cabinet (e.g., foreign affairs, information, occupied territories, education and culture, defence, etc.)

The Executive Committee performs four major functions. It represents the Palestinian people officially; it supervises the various bodies of the PLO; it issues directives, draws up programmes, and takes decisions on the organization of the PLO, provided these do not contradict the National Charter; finally, it executes the financial policy of the PLO and prepares its budget. Generally speaking, it conducts all the PLO responsibilities in accordance with the general plans and resolutions passed by the National Council.

The Committee should submit its resignation to any new National Council. The Council may, however, re-elect the outgoing Committee. Within the Executive Committee, two-thirds of the members form a necessary quorum and decisions are taken by simple majority.

Since the Executive Committee is elected by and from within the National Council, it is usually representative of the structure of power obtaining in the Council itself.

The National Fund

The First National Council resolved that a Palestine National Fund be established to be managed by a board of directors constituted in accordance with a special law passed by the National Council. Revenues of the Fund come from the following sources: (1) a fixed tax levied on Palestinians by the Arab governments in whose countries they reside; (2) financial contributions by the Arab governments and peoples; (3) loans and contributions from Arab governments and friendly nations; (4) any additional source approved by the Council.

The Council elects the Chairman of the board of directors of the Palestine National Fund who automatically becomes a member of the Executive Committee. The members of the board of directors are appointed by the Executive

independent members of the Palestine National Council and the Commander-General of the PLA. The Central Committee was, however, replaced by the Executive Committee following a resolution of the ninth session of the National Council (July 7-13, 1971).

Committee, with a minimum number of eleven. The board of directors elects a deputy chairman and a secretary, and holds a three-year term of office.

The Palestine National Fund receives all revenues of and finances the PLO according to an annual budget prepared by the Executive Committee and approved by the National Council; it develops the Fund's revenues; and it supervises the expenditures of the PLO and its organs.

The Palestine Liberation Army

The PLO maintains a regular military force known as the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA). It was established in accordance with the resolutions of the First National Council which provided for the constitution of special military units in cooperation and coordination with the United Arab Command.³⁵ The PLO Executive Committee was to work towards the enrollment of Palestinians in Arab military colleges and institutions, the mobilization of all Palestinian capabilities, and the preparation of the Palestinians for a war of liberation. Moreover, it called for the formation of capable commando units,³⁶ though these did not come into existence until 1968. The political leadership of the PLO and the General Command of the PLA have experienced periods of tense relations,³⁷ in which the latter attempted to play a larger political role. But since the PLA is spread over different Arab countries and possesses no single area of operations and no mass support, it failed to dominate the PLO.

The PLA is made up of three contingents: the Ain Jalut Forces stationed in Egypt, the Qadisiyyah Forces based in Iraq (until June 1967 when they were moved to Jordan and Syria); and the Hittin Forces, the largest contingent, stationed in Syria. The PLA numbers 6000-10,000 men, mainly infantry. It participated in the September 1970 fighting between the Jordanian Army and the Palestine resistance movement on behalf of the latter and also fought in the October 1973 War on both the Syrian and Egyptian fronts.

The organizations that constitute the PLO have their own guerrilla units; these, however, operate autonomously and are controlled by their own organizations, not by the PLO itself. (The PLO's own guerrilla unit, the Popular Liberation Forces, founded in 1968, had only a short existence.)

³⁵ The Third National Council amended Article 22 of the Fundamental Law so that it provided for the formation of the Palestine Liberation Army with an independent command.

³⁶ *Al-Mu'tamar al-Filastini al-Awwal*, pp. 10, 54-55.

³⁷ For PLA criticism of the political leadership, see the publication by the General Command, *'Ala Tariq Tashih al-Masira al-Filastiniya* (Towards the Rectification of the Palestinian March) (Damascus: Al-Jumhuriya Printing House, 1971).

Social, Educational and Informational Bodies

The past five years have seen an increasing involvement of the PLO in the broad social and human concerns of the Palestinian people in exile. The institutions set up to deal with this are various; they concern trade union organization, medical aid, education and information.

Palestinian trade unions are democratic organizations, in which officials are elected by the membership. All unions are linked to the PLO in several ways. The unions are represented by delegates in the Palestine National Council, and are also engaged in day-to-day cooperation with the PLO. The PLO department for popular organizations, whose staff includes representatives of the unions, deals with the regular problems encountered by Palestinian workers and professionals. The PLO offers help to these unions in fields ranging from finance to intercession with Arab governments (e.g., on behalf of the right of Palestinian workers to work in Arab countries where they are refugees without work permits).

In the field of medical services, the major institution affiliated with the PLO is the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS), established in 1969. Its President, Dr. Mahmoud Hijazi, was the delegate who signed the agreements of the International Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions on behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The PRCS has participated in several international conferences and has branches in Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Egypt, Libya, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Morocco and Sudan and supporting societies in Sweden, France, Switzerland, Britain, and the USA.

The PRCS renders medical services to the Palestinian community, civilian and commando alike. It operates seven hospitals in Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, and several clinics in the border villages of South Lebanon. Each hospital has an operating room, X-ray section, laboratory, out-patient clinic and an emergency room. The PRCS also has four medical complexes in Syria and Lebanon, each with an outpatient clinic, dental clinic, laboratory, pharmacy and dressing room. It has organized twenty-five popular clinics in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Sudan. Each refugee camp in Syria and Lebanon has at least one of these.

Educationally, the PLO has organized an educational programme for Palestinian students in Kuwait. This programme was necessitated by the unusually large number of Palestinians of school age resident there as a result of the large influx of Palestinians into Kuwait following the 1967 war. The programme provides educational opportunities for 38 percent of school-age Palestinian children in the country, at considerable cost. The PLO Planning

Centre also has an educational section that has evolved a philosophy of Palestinian education and designed educational materials for Palestinian children. It organizes summer programmes and courses for Palestinian teachers, and has been building model kindergartens.

The PLO assumes responsibility for the welfare of the children of commandos killed in battle. The most significant of the organizations dedicated to this end is the Association of Workshops for the Children of Palestinian Martyrs, first established by Fateh in January 1970. It offers vocational training for orphans or children from fatherless families, but has the additional economic purpose of producing ready-made clothes, furniture and embroidery for the population of refugee camps at prices consistent with the very low income of these camps.

The PLO has a number of information offices and its own newspaper, *Filastin al-Thawra* (Palestine Revolution) and news agency (Wafa). It also operates a major institution for the documentation and study of the Palestine question. This is the PLO Research Centre, established in Beirut in 1965, which possesses a huge library and extensive archives. It has published over 300 books on the Palestine problem and issues an Arabic intellectual monthly journal, *Shu'un Filastiniya* (Palestine Affairs).

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most striking feature of the PLO in the last five years has been its ability to survive and develop in the face of massive attacks upon it. In Jordan in 1970, there was increasing tension between the PLO and the Hashemite regime.³⁸ In July of that year, when President Nasser's acceptance of a cease-fire and American peace initiatives left the PLO isolated as the only Arab force fighting against Israel, it proved possible for the regime, with American instigation and backing, to attack the PLO bases and, by July 1971,

³⁸ Some indication of the issues of conflict between the regime and the organizational and mobilizational requirements of the commandos is offered by the events of February 1970. On February 10, 1970 the Jordanian government announced an 11-point programme entitled "A United and Organized Society" which, among other measures, prevented Palestinian commandos from moving around with arms and prohibited all demonstrations, gatherings, meetings, and debating groups. It prevented all publications not in accordance with Jordanian law. It also demanded that all commando vehicles be registered with government officials.

These measures aroused tension and three days of bloody clashes after being rejected by the resistance movement. A meeting attended by all organizations on the eve of February 11, 1970 announced the establishment of a "United Command of Commando Action". This new Command was later superseded by the Central Committee established in May 1970, *supra*, note 34.

to put an end to the overt political and military presence of the PLO in Jordan. In Lebanon, too, there were clashes between the armed forces and the guerrillas in October 1969, that resulted in the Cairo Agreement of November in that year, which conferred official recognition of the PLO military presence in Lebanon. Clashes also broke out in May 1973, without bringing about radical changes in the situation.

Had the PLO been simply the military movement of a limited number of Palestinians it might not have survived. But its strong political roots among the Palestinian people, and in the Arab world, had made it too established and accepted for its elimination to be possible. When it came under attack, it attracted the active support of the Palestinian community and sympathizers throughout the Arab world, and this body of opinion constituted a powerful source of pressure on Arab governments. It has continued to retain this support, a factor which made possible the increased Arab and international status arising from its formal recognition as the representative of the Palestinian people in 1974.

Within the PLO, different trends of opinion exist.³⁹ These have not, however, led to internecine feuding. By emphasizing the need for the PLO to group under its umbrella all sectors (right and left-wing) of Palestinian opinion, the PLO has suffered the possible disadvantage of being a loosely rather than tightly controlled organization, but it has gained the advantage of thereby being more representative of Palestinian opinion and being able to count on support from it when under attack from outside.

The most pressing concern of the PLO since the October 1973 War has been relations with Arab regimes that are in favour of or amenable to moves for a peace settlement in the Middle East, especially Egypt and Syria. PLO policy has been defined in terms of the total liberation of Palestine; in 1969, at its sixth session, the Palestine National Council declared this goal to mean the establishment of a democratic state in all of Palestine, free from all forms of racial and religious discrimination. Following the 1973 war, when moves towards peace negotiations became more serious than ever before, the PLO was forced to define its attitude towards a settlement that would restore merely Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 by Israel. The result was a decision by the twelfth session of the National Council (June 1-9, 1974) to adopt a

³⁹ The PFLP, for instance, has often dissented from the policy of the PLO, which it considers to be insufficiently revolutionary. At present it is not willing to sit on the PLO Executive Committee, although it remains a member of the PLO itself, because it feels that the PLO is too conciliatory towards moves for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

ten-point transitional political programme, which stated that in the case of an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the PLO would accept the establishment of a national authority in these two parts of Palestine. Should these two parts come into its hands, then the highly developed infrastructure of the PLO will greatly facilitate its task of administering them.