

Inside the PLO:

Officials, Notables, and Revolutionaries

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Barry Rubin was a senior fellow at the Institute from 1988-1993 and a visiting fellow frequently thereafter. He passed at the age of 64 in February 2014.



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Executive Summary

Faced with pressure from the uprising leadership in the territories, by gains of rival Islamic and leftist groups and by Jordan's disengagement from the West Bank, Yasser Arafat is seeking approval for a Palestinian declaration of independence at the Algiers PNC meeting. But will the PLO actually achieve independence from the factors that have paralyzed it in the past?

In preparation for the PNC, the PLO has been engaged in an internal debate characterized by four lines of argument:

- A few PLO activists and some West Bankers are calling for a fundamental change involving recognition and negotiations with Israel.
- Elements in Fatah argue that something tangible must be achieved now, but not at the expense of unity. Tactics should be altered to extract maximum gain from the U.S., while retaining the long-term objective of destroying Israel.
- Others in Fatah, the PFLP and DFLP believe the PLO must protect its base of support by showing some movement toward ending the occupation. However, they maintain this only requires rhetorical adjustments aimed at shifting the blame for a lack of progress to others.
- Pro-Syrian groups and Islamic fundamentalists argue that open, violent armed struggle is the only path to redemption.

It appears that the third faction has prevailed and that the declaration of independence will be made in a way designed to suggest to the United States that the PLO has recognized Israel, to Palestinians in the territories that it is taking an initiative, and to the radicals and fundamentalists that is doing neither. In this case, the U.S. has no interest in relieving the pressure on the PLO. To accept the sparse progress made at the PNC as a maximum that can be expected would be a victory for the hard line forces which are holding back any further evolution.

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