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**DOUBLE JEOPARDY:
PLO STRATEGY TOWARD ISRAEL
AND JORDAN**

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Israel. Considering the large Palestinian population there, and the openly proclaimed PLO hostility towards Jordan at the time when the “strategy of phases” was initially formulated, PLO designs on the East Bank were not concealed.

Indeed, the “strategy of phases” explicitly rendered the effective continuation of the struggle against Israel conditional upon the destabilization of the regime on the East Bank. While, for tactical reasons, PLO resolutions since 1974 have not clearly reiterated designs against Jordan, distrust and hostility still lurk beneath the surface. As Henry Kissinger noted in his memoirs:

A Palestinian state could be formed only at the expense of Jordan’s previous position in Palestine ... and indeed its genesis would mark the opening of a struggle over the very existence of the Hashemite state *east* of the Jordan River [emphasis in source]. Leaders of the PLO had avowed frequently enough that the blood feud with Hussein was even deeper than that with Israel. And Hussein could count on little support from his fellow Arabs.¹³

¹³ Henry A. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982, p. 748.

III. THE “STRATEGY OF PHASES,” THE BALANCE OF FORCES AND FACTIONAL DISCORD

By 1974, PLO strategy toward Israel and Jordan had undergone an evolution since outlined in the PLO’s 1968 charter. While adhering to the ultimate strategic objectives of the PLO, the Ten Point Program of 1974 included a significant departure from the charter. The charter had regarded armed struggle as the *only* way to liberate Palestine; the Ten Point Program endorsed “struggle by all means,” only “chief of which” was “armed struggle.” The PLO thus paved the way for politics, diplomacy, and negotiations as legitimate means for attaining its objectives.

The “strategy of phases” and the acceptance of nonviolent alternatives rested on the assumption that the October War had introduced far-reaching changes in the regional and even the international balance of forces, in both cases to Israel’s detriment. On the regional level, Israel’s military supremacy was perceived to be diminishing; in the international arena, Arab oil power was beginning to have a marked effect, precisely in those Western industrialized nations which had been Israel’s traditional supporters.

The resolutions of 1974 were also adopted under the impact of the first Geneva Conference of December 1973, which suggested that the Arab-Israeli conflict was entering a new phase – subsequently known as the “peace process.” For the mainstream of the PLO, it was clear that there could be no greater historical defeat than a settlement of the Palestinian question from which it would be excluded. *Any* settlement between Israel and Jordan, and possibly Egypt, could seal the political fate of the majority of the Palestinian people on both banks of the river. It would deny the PLO its fundamental *raison d’être* – the right to determine the fate of the Palestinians as it saw fit. In such circumstances, the PLO could well be destined to become an historical obscurity.

The PLO, therefore, had to demonstrate a measure of political flexibility and finesse; it had to gain access, on its own terms, to any peace process; and it had to constrain Jordan from operating independently. Its most consequential achievement in this respect was gaining recognition by the Arab League, meeting in Rabat, Morocco in October 1974, as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.” Jordan was thus disqualified as a legitimate, independent negotiator for the West Bank, while the PLO became the recognized organizational incarnation of the struggle for Palestine.

In 1977, the resolutions of the 13th PNC reaffirmed the PLO's desire to "participate independently and on an equal footing in all the conferences and international forums concerned with the Palestine issue and the Arab-Zionist conflict, with a view to achieving our inalienable national rights as approved by the UN General Assembly in 1974, namely in Resolution 3236." The PNC went on to declare that any Palestinian settlement "made in the absence of this people will be completely null and void."¹⁴

The PLO had set its own basis for participation in the peace process, rejecting Resolution 242 because it "ignores the Palestinian people and their firm rights."¹⁵ Resolution 3236 of the General Assembly was acceptable since it neither made any reference to Israel nor to the rights of Middle Eastern states to secure and recognized boundaries. It endorsed the Palestinian people's rights to self-determination at least four times, and included the following:

The General Assembly ... Recalling its relevant resolutions which affirm the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination,

1. *Reaffirms* the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in Palestine, including:

(a) The right to self-determination without external [for the PLO that meant particularly Jordanian] interference;

(b) The right to national independence and sovereignty;

2. *Reaffirms* also the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted, and calls for their return;

4. *Recognizes* that the Palestinian people is a principal party in the establishment of a just and durable peace in the Middle East;

7. *Requests* the Secretary-General to establish contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization on all matters concerning the question of Palestine.¹⁶

¹⁴ Text of PNC resolutions in I. Altman, "The Palestine Liberation Organization" in C. Legum and H. Shaked, eds., *The Middle East Contemporary Survey (MECS)*, vol. I, 1976-77, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1978, p. 203-207.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Text of resolution in John N. Moore, ed., *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Readings and Documents* (Abridged and Revised Edition), Princeton University Press, 1977, p. 1204.

Conflict within the PLO

However, the “strategy of phases” and the potential for engagement in diplomacy aroused deep-rooted internal discord in the PLO. The new policy was considerably more complex and sophisticated than the relatively simple and straightforward advocacy of armed struggle to the bitter end. It ignited ferocious internal debate and factional conflict over the extremely problematic inter-relationships between diplomacy and the regional balance of forces; between politics and armed struggle; and between strategy and tactics.

The more radical factions of the PLO, most prominently the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), led by George Habash, consistently expressed the view that the balance of forces had to be altered still further in the Arabs’ favor in order for PLO diplomatic action to be effective. They argued that the October War had not sufficiently eroded Israel’s edge, and that negotiations, while Israel still enjoyed regional supremacy, could very well lead to historical concessions and a “capitulationist” settlement. Such developments would thwart the “strategy of phases” instead of furthering it. Thus, at the behest of the more radical factions, the Ten Point Program of 1974 stipulated that the establishment of a Palestinian state on part of Palestine required “the creation of further change in the balance of forces in favour of our people and its struggle,” lest the PLO be forced into historical reconciliation with Israel as the political price for such a state.

Arafat’s continued pursuit of PLO involvement in a political process (through participation in any international conference) provoked the formation, in September 1974, of “The Front of Palestinian Forces Rejecting Capitulationist Settlements,” more commonly known as the “Rejectionist Front.”¹⁷ The composition of the rejectionist opposition has changed over time, but its anti-Arafat views have remained more or less the same, and were expounded with particular ferocity after the 1982 war in Lebanon.

Rather than force PLO capitulation, the Arafat majority believed that cautiously executed diplomacy could improve the unfavorable balance of forces. Such diplomacy included recognition of the key role of the U.S. and the vital importance of Jordan.

¹⁷ Altman, *op. cit.*, p. 181-182.

The Pursuit of Diplomacy

For Arafat, gaining U.S. recognition of the PLO and of Palestinian rights to self-determination would drive a wedge between the U.S. and Israel and set the peace process on an entirely new course. It would ensure the PLO's role as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" and would shift the focus of diplomacy away from the necessity of recognizing Israel to the need for implementing Palestinian national rights – *inter alia* undermining Resolution 242 as the basis for the negotiations.

The other essential facet of mainstream diplomacy focused on Jordan. While the PLO's major asset was its inter-Arab and Palestinian legitimacy, its major weakness was its lack of direct control over its main constituency – the Palestinians on both banks of the river. Jordan's situation was quite the reverse. Its major weakness was its lack of legitimacy to deal with the Palestinian question, but its main asset was its control over the Palestinians on the East Bank and its access to the West Bank. In the perception of the mainstream, the PLO had to establish some mode of cooperation with Jordan to ensure that Husayn could not exploit its weakness and forge ahead independently in any potential peace process. Jordan, on the other hand, was receptive to coordination with the PLO in order to shore up its sagging legitimacy. Thus, the peace process established the basis for mainstream PLO-Jordanian coordination, even if only as another phase in the historical struggle between them. In effect, tactical coordination was designed by both sides as a vehicle to undermine the other.

To the PLO rejectionists, the diplomatic feelers put out to America and Jordan were the ultimate proof that Arafat was sliding down the slippery slope of "capitulation." The U.S. and Jordan were part of the enemy camp and any relationship with them was bound to extract unfavorable concessions. The rejectionists' dogmatism precluded dealings with the U.S., Israel's main supporter, and while they agreed that coordination with Jordan was essential, they demanded that the Hashemite regime first be overthrown.

Arafat's diplomacy made some important gains for the PLO in the UN, Europe and, to a lesser extent, America. Having already recognized the PLO and Palestinian rights, the UN General Assembly in 1975 passed the resolution determining that Zionism was a form of racism. To the PLO, this was a significant achievement in the overall effort to de-legitimize Israel, which was an essential corollary to the pursuit of international recognition of Palestinian rights. As the 1987 PNC stated, it is the PLO's intention to do all it

could to expose the “Zionist racism exercised in our occupied homeland” and to thwart the “Zionist-imperialist move to cancel [the 1975] resolution.”¹⁸

Meanwhile, with the advent of the Carter Administration in January 1977, there was greater interest in finding ways and means to incorporate the PLO into the peace process. And in Europe, the EEC Heads of Government issued the Venice declaration in June 1980, which supported the inclusion of the PLO in future negotiations and recognized the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination, albeit within the framework of an overall peace settlement. The mainstream could now point to the fact that the PLO had indeed made progress toward being recognized as a factor to be reckoned with in the peace process. But with equal justification, the rejectionists could show that the price for the PLO’s full acceptance by both the U.S. and the Europeans was still that it endorse Resolution 242 and recognize Israel’s right to exist.

Important regional developments in the late 1970s and early 1980s tended to widen the gulf between the perceptions of the mainstream and the rejectionists. The Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement, the decline of Arab oil power, and the Iran-Iraq war were all extremely negative developments in respect to the PLO perception of the regional balance of forces. Instead of the gradual erosion of Israeli superiority that was expected to result from the 1973 war, the regional balance had actually shifted in Israel’s favor, at least during the first postwar decade. For the rejectionists, these developments made diplomacy even less desirable than before; they could point to the peace treaty as the ultimate vindication of their argument that negotiation meant “capitulation.” Armed struggle continued to be seen by the rejectionists as the only legitimate way to liberate Palestine.

For the mainstream, however, armed struggle had been subordinated to political strategy. As Khalid al-Hasan stated, “in the absence of an Arab military option, the role of [Palestinian armed struggle] has fallen back from the vanguard role in the liberation activity, to the role of preserving the vitality of the Palestinian cause...”¹⁹

The liberation of Palestine was thus perceived not necessarily as a military act, but rather as a political process with a military component. Armed struggle was neither an alternative nor an impediment to the peace process;

¹⁸ Text of PNC resolutions in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Summer 1987, p. 196-201.

¹⁹ Khalid al-Hasan, “The Options Open to the PLO,” part I, *al-Anba*, October 20, 1986.

rather, it was a reminder to the U.S. and Israel not to ignore the PLO, but rather to accept it as a party to any settlement, on its own terms.

All these regional trends heightened the potential for inter-factional disputes within the PLO. That potential was realized when the war in Lebanon and its ramifications created the political setting for the most intensive internal strife the PLO has ever experienced.

IV. THE WAR IN LEBANON AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS²⁰

The loss of the PLO's autonomous base in Lebanon in the wake of the Israeli invasion of 1982 was yet another turning point in its history. This setback severely exacerbated internal PLO differences and had far-reaching ramifications for its policy toward Jordan and the peace process.

Since its establishment in 1964, the PLO has suffered from two fundamental deficiencies. First, it never directly controlled the population whose political fate it sought to determine. Most Palestinians have been, and are still, under the control of either Jordan or Israel, both countries with little or no sympathy for the PLO or its political objectives. Second, and closely related to the first, the PLO has always been heavily dependent on Arab states for political, diplomatic, economic and military support, and has therefore consistently had to battle to avoid becoming totally subservient to any single Arab regime. As a result, a territorial stronghold was crucial for the preservation of even a measure of political independence. It enabled the organization to function as a viable, relevant and authentically Palestinian factor on the Middle East stage.

The necessary preconditions for the establishment of an effective territorial stronghold were that the host country have a large Palestinian population (from which to draw recruits and support); a long border with Israel (from which military operations could be staged); and a weak central government (to allow for PLO political and operational autonomy).

By virtue of geography and demography, Jordan was ideal for a PLO territorial stronghold. But Jordan did not meet the third requirement, having a rather strong central government. Thus, when it came to open conflict between the PLO and Jordan in 1970-71, the PLO "state within a state" was smashed by the Jordanian army. As a result, the PLO was forced to settle for Lebanon. Though undoubtedly a poor second in comparison to Jordan, Lebanon was the only territorial alternative available to the PLO. When it was lost as a result of the Lebanon War, the PLO had only two alternatives: either obtain new political assets to compensate for that loss or try to return to Lebanon once again.

²⁰ This section is based largely on my earlier article, "The Impact of Defeat," *IDF Journal*, vol. II, no. 1, May 1984, p. 40-44.

After the 1982 setback, the PLO became increasingly exposed to the domineering policies of Syria and faced a serious threat to its cherished independent power of decision. In the wake of the evacuation of Beirut, though some of the PLO combatants were dispersed in various Arab countries from South Yemen to Algeria, the vast majority were concentrated in Syria and in the Syrian-controlled areas of the Beqaa Valley and Tripoli in eastern and northern Lebanon. At the end of 1982, the PLO faced the threat of total Syrian domination and the possible loss of its political role as the independent, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

The danger to the PLO's status was further compounded when, in the immediate aftermath of its military and political defeat in Lebanon, President Reagan issued his September 1982 plan for a Middle East settlement. The Reagan Plan ignored the PLO, explicitly opposed the idea of an independent Palestinian state, and accorded the major Arab role in solving the Palestine question to Jordan, the PLO's historical rival. The PLO was therefore not only faced with a very severe reduction in its room for maneuver because of Syrian pressure, but also with a political challenge that it had to face with far fewer political assets at its disposal.

Having been defeated in Lebanon and confronted with the Reagan Plan, it was essential for the PLO to demonstrate that it was still a viable political force to be reckoned with in Middle East affairs. It had to preserve its political independence, its national unity, and its status as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." Failure to maintain any one of these could have paved the way for the PLO's disintegration and for Syrian or, alternatively, Jordanian control of the Palestinian destiny.

Open Conflict with Syria

Though all PLO factions agreed on the broad guidelines for action, they differed sharply on tactics. Arafat and his followers opted for political flexibility in order to minimize the potential damage of an independent move by Jordan. On the one hand, this strategy called for cooperation with Jordan and even for diplomatic feelers to be put out towards Egypt's Husni Mubarak. On the other hand, it required Arafat to distance himself from Syria. While this aroused considerable opposition within the PLO, it particularly angered the Syrians themselves, who feared that Arafat was sliding into an undesirable political settlement with Israel. Even after the failure of the negotiations between Arafat and Husayn in April 1983, the Syrians and their supporters within the PLO were still not sure that Arafat could be trusted. While they attempted to thwart Arafat's diplomacy, Jordan and Egypt were

still pressuring him to join a U.S.-inspired peace process. The conflicting external and internal pressures tore the PLO apart.

In May 1983, a Syrian-supported rebellion erupted within the ranks of Arafat's own organization, al-Fath. Though Arafat showed considerable staying power, after more than six months of intermittent fighting he and his supporters were forced out of the Beqaa in eastern Lebanon, then bottled up in the vicinity of Tripoli, and finally, in December 1983, forced to leave Tripoli as well.

Militarily, Arafat and the forces loyal to him were no match for the Syrian-backed rebels. Politically, however, the rebels were no match for Arafat. He continued to enjoy widespread support in the governing institutions of al-Fath and the PLO, within the rank-and-file of the Palestinian community, and in the Arab and international arenas as well. More than any other individual, Arafat was viewed by Palestinian loyalists as the symbol of the Palestinian struggle and national movement; the rebels could convincingly be portrayed as Syrian stooges.

For their part, the Syrians and the rebels were unable to provide a credible alternative to Arafat. Not a single leader of stature within the veteran leadership of al-Fath joined the rebel ranks. Even figures who were known in the past to have been critical of Arafat and on good terms with Syria – Salah Khalaf and Faruq al-Qaddumi, for example – remained loyal to Arafat and to the concept of “independent Palestinian decision.” Moreover, the two most important PLO factions after al-Fath, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) plus the smaller Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), did not side with the rebels either. While they were supportive of the rebels' demands for reforms and collective leadership, which they themselves had been advocating for a long time, they wanted them to be implemented by Arafat. Though acceptance of these reforms would have allowed them more influence, they nevertheless opposed the methods adopted by the rebels. They feared that internecine fighting and reliance on external forces would not only erode the independence of the PLO, but would also lead to a politically destructive split if Arafat's leadership were effectively undermined.

The fact that only three small Syrian-controlled factions – the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), al-Sa'iqa, and the Palestine Popular Struggle Front (PPSF) – lent their full support to the al-Fath dissidents confirmed the image of the rebellion as a Syrian-promoted phenomenon. Arafat's leadership remained intact. Neither his leadership

nor the representative status of the PLO had been seriously affected. This was, of course, of crucial relevance to the peace process.

Post-Lebanon Strategy

After the Lebanon war and the challenge to his leadership, Arafat faced three alternatives:

1. To further shatter internal PLO unity and formulate a policy in cooperation with Jordan and Egypt, and, by extension, the U.S.;
2. To re-establish PLO unity, restore a dialogue with Syria and remain outside the U.S.-sponsored political process;
3. To avoid, as he had done so often in the past, any clear-cut decision either way and to continue a delicate balancing act between the first two alternatives – flirting with the political process, while avoiding any historical concessions to Jordan, Israel, or America. This would be accompanied by an effort to shift the peace process away from U.S. domination and Resolution 242, by including the USSR and establishing Palestinian self-determination as the focus for the future negotiation. At this stage, the main aim would be to gain time for time's sake, with the hope of favorable changes later on.

In the aftermath of the Lebanon war, Arafat developed what he himself has called his “yes and no” policy. This description was particularly characteristic of the mainstream PLO attitude towards the Reagan Plan of September 1982 and the resolutions of the Fez Arab Summit held shortly thereafter. Arafat's camp found some positive elements in the Reagan Plan, such as its recognition of the Palestinian problem as a political rather than just a humanitarian issue and its firm opposition to Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza and to Jewish settlements there. But these positive signs were offset by its negative aspects – non-recognition of the PLO, of the Palestinians' right to exercise self-determination, and of the refugees' right to return to their former homes. Moreover, the Reagan Plan clearly rejected the idea of an independent Palestinian state.

However, Arafat could take comfort in the resolutions of the second Fez summit, which reaffirmed the PLO's status as the “sole legitimate representative” of the Palestinian people and supported the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Arafat and his associates believed it was

essential to ensure that the next stage of the political process be guided by the Fez proposals. This required exploiting the momentum of the Reagan initiative to maximize potential gains for the PLO and minimize those for Jordan. It also meant coordinating PLO tactics with Jordan to try to shift the Reagan Plan closer to the Fez proposals; making sure that Husayn adhered to the Fez proposals and did not embark on an independent initiative; and gaining entry to any political process that might take shape. Cooperation with Jordan, moreover, could facilitate involvement in the political process in a way that would not oblige the PLO to deal directly with the recognition of Israel.²¹

By basing his diplomacy on the Fez resolutions, Arafat further fuelled internal PLO discord since all of the smaller factions, except the DFLP, had rejected them. The critics – within al-Fath, the PFLP, the PLF and the Syrian-controlled factions – continued to argue that the seventh clause of the Fez resolutions, which called upon the Security Council to “guarantee peace, for all the states of the region, including the independent Palestinian state,” was an implicit recognition of Israel and, as such, unacceptable. Furthermore, the resolutions abandoned the military option and their reference to the right to compensation for refugees who did not wish to return to Palestine was seen as yet another concession, undermining the unqualified right of the refugees to return.

Habash maintained that the Fez resolutions were “a great step towards complete surrender” by some Arab regimes in their attempt to find common ground with Reagan’s initiative. The Fez Plan, he said, ought not to be judged solely by its provisions – some of which, he acknowledged, were positive – but by the purpose and the interpretations given to the plan by some Arab states. Jordan, for instance, could use the resolutions as a cover for its own political aims and “drag the PLO into tacit recognition of Israel.”

While opponents argued that the Fez Plan would serve as a bridge to the Reagan Plan, supporters maintained that it was a way to confront it. They argued that Fez upheld the fundamental Palestinian rights of self-determination and statehood, reaffirmed the PLO’s representative status, and were not tantamount to recognition of Israel. The resolutions could be viewed as calling for an end to the state of war, as Khalid al-Hasan explained, but no more than that. What would happen afterward was a matter for the sovereign Palestinian state to decide. The guarantee for the security of the states of the

²¹ For sources see A. Susser, “The Palestine Liberation Organization,” *MECS*, vol. VII, 1982-83, p. 280.

area was to be a Security Council commitment, not a commitment by the PLO itself. This was the farthest the PLO could go; there would be no further concessions. As Salah Khalaf put it, no one could drag the PLO where it did not wish to go.²²

Thus, a rather peculiar PLO ambivalence developed towards the Fez resolutions. Those who accepted them claimed that the resolutions did not recognize Israel, while those who rejected them charged that they did. The bottom line, however, was that nobody in the PLO was prepared to recognize Israel.

The essence of Arafat's approach was expounded at the 16th PNC held in Algiers in February 1983. Arafat warned that if the PLO did not recognize the desire of the West Bank Palestinians for a political settlement, it could lose its influence over them. Even Habash argued that the PLO needed flexibility and diplomacy in order to mobilize the support of the Palestinian people and world public opinion.

Shortly before the conclusion of the PNC, Arafat appeared before a closed session of the Council's Political Committee where he made an emotional appeal to the radicals to agree to a "logical and reasonable" response to the Reagan and Fez Plans. He cautioned them to cease trying to outbid him; by doing so, they were only arranging the "funeral of the Palestinian people."

The PLO, he argued, had been weakened by the war and had lost its independent haven. If it now behaved unreasonably, the world would abandon and forget it. The PLO, he urged, should avoid closing any doors and adopt a flexible "yes and no" position (*la'am* in Arabic, a combination of *la*, "no," and *na'am*, "yes").²³

The final statement of the 16th PNC strongly reflected the "*la'am* factor." The Fez summit resolutions were endorsed, but as the "minimum for political movement by the Arab states which must be integrated with military action with all its requirements in order to alter the balance of forces in favor of the struggle and Palestinian Arab rights." The Council also stressed that its

²² *Ibid.*, p. 287-288.

²³ The Palestinian national poet, Mahmud Darwish, was reported to have said of Arafat's preference for ambivalence that in drafting a single sentence, he could hold an angel in his right hand and the devil in his left. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

understanding of these resolutions did not conflict with the adherence to the political program and resolutions of the PNC.

The Reagan Plan, as it stood, was rejected; but the rejection was less than absolute. Salah Khalaf told American correspondents that if Reagan added recognition of the Palestinians' right to self-determination, "things could change completely." Coupled with the fact that the PNC did not close the door to contacts with Jordan, these positions left Arafat with room for political maneuver. But there was to be no question of authorizing Jordan to speak for the Palestinians, of endorsing Resolution 242, or of recognizing Israel.²⁴

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 290-291, 297.

V. THE PLO, JORDAN AND THE TIME FACTOR

To a large extent, the PLO's across-the-board refusal to recognize Israel was founded on the widely held belief that, despite the short-term negative results of the Lebanon war, time was on the Arab side in the conflict with Israel. Concessions of historical consequence were therefore unnecessary. But Arafat and those close to him, such as Khalid al-Hasan, had to concede that the Arabs had no immediate, credible military option and that, in the short term, time was, in fact, on Israel's side. To them, this was the beginning of the "Israeli era" (*al-asr al-Israili*).²⁵ Yet their awareness of Israel's settlement activities in the West Bank and their sympathy with the suffering of the population under occupation did not convince them to accept the argument put forward by Jordan and prominent West Bankers that the PLO must make concessions in the framework of the Reagan Plan because time was working against them.

Arafat and other PLO spokesmen repeatedly stated that they would not yield to such "ideological terrorism" and "liquidate the issue, the revolution and the PLO, under the burden of time and U.S. mercy" in order to "become realistic." Realism did not mean "raising the white flag." The "Israeli era" was a passing phase, they argued, during which the Palestinians had to avoid becoming subservient to Israel.²⁶ Arafat recalled that when the Israelis withdrew from Sinai in 1982 they had destroyed their settlements. "When they are driven out of the occupied territories they will take all their garbage with them," he said. He urged the Palestinians under occupation to be wary of blackmail and not to fear the Israelis.²⁷

Accordingly, Arafat, other al-Fath spokesmen, and the PLO as a whole, repeatedly expressed their belief in the ultimate triumph over Israel, provided they made wise use of time and prevented capitulation in this interim phase

²⁵ Khalid al-Hasan to *al-Anba*, November 2, 1982, January 24, 28, 1983; Arafat to *al-Nahar al-Arabi wal-Duwali*, December 20-26, 1982.

²⁶ Arafat on R. Monte Carlo, November 12, 1982, cited in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), November 16, 1982; Salah Khalaf to *al-Watan*, March 21, 1983 and *al-Qabas*, March 25, 1983; Mahmud Abbas to *al-Mawqif al-Arabi*, April 18, 1983.

²⁷ *al-Mustaqbal*, December 4, 1982 and April 9, 1983.

of Israeli supremacy.²⁸ In a nutshell, PLO perceptions of time were predicated on three, interrelated preconditions:

1. The preservation of Palestinian national consciousness and of the PLO as the organizational incarnation of the Palestinian entity;
2. The prevention of any Israeli-Jordanian settlement that would marginalize or exclude the PLO;
3. The continued pursuit of Israel's domestic disintegration and its international delegitimization.

The war in Lebanon did not alter the PLO's view of Israel's short-term superiority but long-term vulnerability. On the contrary, all strata of the PLO portrayed the war as a vindication of their belief in the armed struggle and their perception of the time factor. Once again, the war underscored Israeli sensitivities to its own casualties, and, therefore, Israel's inability to engage in protracted military conflict. Israeli society was deeply divided by the war and the cracks in its fabric were evident even in the military establishment – the very core of Israeli strength. For the PLO, the Arabs' obvious manpower advantage over Israel would be significant in the long run.²⁹

Arafat thought he heard voices of reason emerging in Israel, with some saying they were beginning to realize that Israel could not rely solely on the fluctuating factor of military power. Israel, Arafat said, could dominate the region for a period of time, but because its power was "imported" it was liable to change. He noted that the Americans had heavily armed South Vietnam which had, in the end, faltered. The Lebanon war, he said, showed that Israel could be beaten. Israel had concentrated most of its forces in Lebanon against the militarily inferior forces of the PLO; if the full Arab military potential had been unleashed against Israel, it would have been defeated. Arafat

²⁸ Arafat to *al-Nahar al-Arabi wal-Duwali*, December 20-26, 1982; Salah Khalaf to *al-Watan*, March 24, 1983; Mahmud Abbas to *al-Mawqif al-Arabi*, April 18, 1983; Khalid al-Hasan to *al-Mawqif al-Arabi*, April 25, 1983.

²⁹ Khalid al-Hasan to *al-Anba*, January 28, 1983; Na'if Hawatima, "The Requirements of the Revolution after the Invasion of Lebanon and the Heroic Battle of Beirut," *Shu'un Filastiniyya*, February 1983, p. 17; Khalil al-Wazir to *al-Qabas*, February 4, 1983 and *al-Hawadith*, March 18, 1983.

Israel. Considering the large Palestinian population there, and the openly proclaimed PLO hostility towards Jordan at the time when the “strategy of phases” was initially formulated, PLO designs on the East Bank were not concealed.

Indeed, the “strategy of phases” explicitly rendered the effective continuation of the struggle against Israel conditional upon the destabilization of the regime on the East Bank. While, for tactical reasons, PLO resolutions since 1974 have not clearly reiterated designs against Jordan, distrust and hostility still lurk beneath the surface. As Henry Kissinger noted in his memoirs:

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¹³ Henry A. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982, p. 748.

III. THE "STRATEGY OF PHASES," THE BALANCE OF FORCES AND FACTIONAL DISCORD

By 1974, PLO strategy toward Israel and Jordan had undergone an evolution since outlined in the PLO's 1968 charter. While adhering to the ultimate strategic objectives of the PLO, the Ten Point Program of 1974 included a significant departure from the charter. The charter had regarded armed struggle as the *only* way to liberate Palestine; the Ten Point Program endorsed "struggle by all means," only "chief of which" was "armed struggle." The PLO thus paved the way for politics, diplomacy, and negotiations as legitimate means for attaining its objectives.

The "strategy of phases" and the acceptance of nonviolent alternatives rested on the assumption that the October War had introduced far-reaching changes in the regional and even the international balance of forces, in both cases to Israel's detriment. On the regional level, Israel's military supremacy was perceived to be diminishing; in the international arena, Arab oil power was beginning to have a marked effect, precisely in those Western industrialized nations which had been Israel's traditional supporters.

The resolutions of 1974 were also adopted under the impact of the first Geneva Conference of December 1973, which suggested that the Arab-Israeli conflict was entering a new phase – subsequently known as the "peace process." For the mainstream of the PLO, it was clear that there could be no greater historical defeat than a settlement of the Palestinian question from which it would be excluded. *Any* settlement between Israel and Jordan, and possibly Egypt, could seal the political fate of the majority of the Palestinian people on both banks of the river. It would deny the PLO its fundamental *raison d'être* – the right to determine the fate of the Palestinians as it saw fit. In such circumstances, the PLO could well be destined to become an historical obscurity.

The PLO, therefore, had to demonstrate a measure of political flexibility and finesse; it had to gain access, on its own terms, to any peace process; and it had to constrain Jordan from operating independently. Its most consequential achievement in this respect was gaining recognition by the Arab League, meeting in Rabat, Morocco in October 1974, as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." Jordan was thus disqualified as a legitimate, independent negotiator for the West Bank, while the PLO became the recognized organizational incarnation of the struggle for Palestine.

In 1977, the resolutions of the 13th PNC reaffirmed the PLO's desire to "participate independently and on an equal footing in all the conferences and international forums concerned with the Palestine issue and the Arab-Zionist conflict, with a view to achieving our inalienable national rights as approved by the UN General Assembly in 1974, namely in Resolution 3236." The PNC went on to declare that any Palestinian settlement "made in the absence of this people will be completely null and void."¹⁴

The PLO had set its own basis for participation in the peace process, rejecting Resolution 242 because it "ignores the Palestinian people and their firm rights."¹⁵ Resolution 3236 of the General Assembly was acceptable since it neither made any reference to Israel nor to the rights of Middle Eastern states to secure and recognized boundaries. It endorsed the Palestinian people's rights to self-determination at least four times, and included the following:

The General Assembly ... Recalling its relevant resolutions which affirm the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination,

1. *Reaffirms* the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in Palestine, including:

(a) The right to self-determination without external [for the PLO that meant particularly Jordanian] interference;

(b) The right to national independence and sovereignty;

2. *Reaffirms* also the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted, and calls for their return;

4. *Recognizes* that the Palestinian people is a principal party in the establishment of a just and durable peace in the Middle East;

7. *Requests* the Secretary-General to establish contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organization on all matters concerning the question of Palestine.¹⁶

¹⁴ Text of PNC resolutions in I. Altman, "The Palestine Liberation Organization" in C. Legum and H. Shaked, eds., *The Middle East Contemporary Survey (MECS)*, vol. I, 1976-77, New York: Holmes and Meier, 1978, p. 203-207.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Text of resolution in John N. Moore, ed., *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: Readings and Documents* (Abridged and Revised Edition), Princeton University Press, 1977, p. 1204.

Conflict within the PLO

However, the “strategy of phases” and the potential for engagement in diplomacy aroused deep-rooted internal discord in the PLO. The new policy was considerably more complex and sophisticated than the relatively simple and straightforward advocacy of armed struggle to the bitter end. It ignited ferocious internal debate and factional conflict over the extremely problematic inter-relationships between diplomacy and the regional balance of forces; between politics and armed struggle; and between strategy and tactics.

The more radical factions of the PLO, most prominently the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), led by George Habash, consistently expressed the view that the balance of forces had to be altered still further in the Arabs’ favor in order for PLO diplomatic action to be effective. They argued that the October War had not sufficiently eroded Israel’s edge, and that negotiations, while Israel still enjoyed regional supremacy, could very well lead to historical concessions and a “capitulationist” settlement. Such developments would thwart the “strategy of phases” instead of furthering it. Thus, at the behest of the more radical factions, the Ten Point Program of 1974 stipulated that the establishment of a Palestinian state on part of Palestine required “the creation of further change in the balance of forces in favour of our people and its struggle,” lest the PLO be forced into historical reconciliation with Israel as the political price for such a state.

Arafat’s continued pursuit of PLO involvement in a political process (through participation in any international conference) provoked the formation, in September 1974, of “The Front of Palestinian Forces Rejecting Capitulationist Settlements,” more commonly known as the “Rejectionist Front.”¹⁷ The composition of the rejectionist opposition has changed over time, but its anti-Arafat views have remained more or less the same, and were expounded with particular ferocity after the 1982 war in Lebanon.

Rather than force PLO capitulation, the Arafat majority believed that cautiously executed diplomacy could improve the unfavorable balance of forces. Such diplomacy included recognition of the key role of the U.S. and the vital importance of Jordan.

¹⁷ Altman, *op. cit.*, p. 181-182.

The Pursuit of Diplomacy

For Arafat, gaining U.S. recognition of the PLO and of Palestinian rights to self-determination would drive a wedge between the U.S. and Israel and set the peace process on an entirely new course. It would ensure the PLO's role as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" and would shift the focus of diplomacy away from the necessity of recognizing Israel to the need for implementing Palestinian national rights – *inter alia* undermining Resolution 242 as the basis for the negotiations.

The other essential facet of mainstream diplomacy focused on Jordan. While the PLO's major asset was its inter-Arab and Palestinian legitimacy, its major weakness was its lack of direct control over its main constituency – the Palestinians on both banks of the river. Jordan's situation was quite the reverse. Its major weakness was its lack of legitimacy to deal with the Palestinian question, but its main asset was its control over the Palestinians on the East Bank and its access to the West Bank. In the perception of the mainstream, the PLO had to establish some mode of cooperation with Jordan to ensure that Husayn could not exploit its weakness and forge ahead independently in any potential peace process. Jordan, on the other hand, was receptive to coordination with the PLO in order to shore up its sagging legitimacy. Thus, the peace process established the basis for mainstream PLO-Jordanian coordination, even if only as another phase in the historical struggle between them. In effect, tactical coordination was designed by both sides as a vehicle to undermine the other.

To the PLO rejectionists, the diplomatic feelers put out to America and Jordan were the ultimate proof that Arafat was sliding down the slippery slope of "capitulation." The U.S. and Jordan were part of the enemy camp and any relationship with them was bound to extract unfavorable concessions. The rejectionists' dogmatism precluded dealings with the U.S., Israel's main supporter, and while they agreed that coordination with Jordan was essential, they demanded that the Hashemite regime first be overthrown.

Arafat's diplomacy made some important gains for the PLO in the UN, Europe and, to a lesser extent, America. Having already recognized the PLO and Palestinian rights, the UN General Assembly in 1975 passed the resolution determining that Zionism was a form of racism. To the PLO, this was a significant achievement in the overall effort to de-legitimize Israel, which was an essential corollary to the pursuit of international recognition of Palestinian rights. As the 1987 PNC stated, it is the PLO's intention to do all it

could to expose the “Zionist racism exercised in our occupied homeland” and to thwart the “Zionist-imperialist move to cancel [the 1975] resolution.”¹⁸

Meanwhile, with the advent of the Carter Administration in January 1977, there was greater interest in finding ways and means to incorporate the PLO into the peace process. And in Europe, the EEC Heads of Government issued the Venice declaration in June 1980, which supported the inclusion of the PLO in future negotiations and recognized the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination, albeit within the framework of an overall peace settlement. The mainstream could now point to the fact that the PLO had indeed made progress toward being recognized as a factor to be reckoned with in the peace process. But with equal justification, the rejectionists could show that the price for the PLO’s full acceptance by both the U.S. and the Europeans was still that it endorse Resolution 242 and recognize Israel’s right to exist.

Important regional developments in the late 1970s and early 1980s tended to widen the gulf between the perceptions of the mainstream and the rejectionists. The Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement, the decline of Arab oil power, and the Iran-Iraq war were all extremely negative developments in respect to the PLO perception of the regional balance of forces. Instead of the gradual erosion of Israeli superiority that was expected to result from the 1973 war, the regional balance had actually shifted in Israel’s favor, at least during the first postwar decade. For the rejectionists, these developments made diplomacy even less desirable than before; they could point to the peace treaty as the ultimate vindication of their argument that negotiation meant “capitulation.” Armed struggle continued to be seen by the rejectionists as the only legitimate way to liberate Palestine.

For the mainstream, however, armed struggle had been subordinated to political strategy. As Khalid al-Hasan stated, “in the absence of an Arab military option, the role of [Palestinian armed struggle] has fallen back from the vanguard role in the liberation activity, to the role of preserving the vitality of the Palestinian cause...”¹⁹

The liberation of Palestine was thus perceived not necessarily as a military act, but rather as a political process with a military component. Armed struggle was neither an alternative nor an impediment to the peace process;

¹⁸ Text of PNC resolutions in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Summer 1987, p. 196-201.

¹⁹ Khalid al-Hasan, “The Options Open to the PLO,” part I, *al-Anba*, October 20, 1986.

rather, it was a reminder to the U.S. and Israel not to ignore the PLO, but rather to accept it as a party to any settlement, on its own terms.

All these regional trends heightened the potential for inter-factional disputes within the PLO. That potential was realized when the war in Lebanon and its ramifications created the political setting for the most intensive internal strife the PLO has ever experienced.

IV. THE WAR IN LEBANON AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS²⁰

The loss of the PLO's autonomous base in Lebanon in the wake of the Israeli invasion of 1982 was yet another turning point in its history. This setback severely exacerbated internal PLO differences and had far-reaching ramifications for its policy toward Jordan and the peace process.

Since its establishment in 1964, the PLO has suffered from two fundamental deficiencies. First, it never directly controlled the population whose political fate it sought to determine. Most Palestinians have been, and are still, under the control of either Jordan or Israel, both countries with little or no sympathy for the PLO or its political objectives. Second, and closely related to the first, the PLO has always been heavily dependent on Arab states for political, diplomatic, economic and military support, and has therefore consistently had to battle to avoid becoming totally subservient to any single Arab regime. As a result, a territorial stronghold was crucial for the preservation of even a measure of political independence. It enabled the organization to function as a viable, relevant and authentically Palestinian factor on the Middle East stage.

The necessary preconditions for the establishment of an effective territorial stronghold were that the host country have a large Palestinian population (from which to draw recruits and support); a long border with Israel (from which military operations could be staged); and a weak central government (to allow for PLO political and operational autonomy).

By virtue of geography and demography, Jordan was ideal for a PLO territorial stronghold. But Jordan did not meet the third requirement, having a rather strong central government. Thus, when it came to open conflict between the PLO and Jordan in 1970-71, the PLO "state within a state" was smashed by the Jordanian army. As a result, the PLO was forced to settle for Lebanon. Though undoubtedly a poor second in comparison to Jordan, Lebanon was the only territorial alternative available to the PLO. When it was lost as a result of the Lebanon War, the PLO had only two alternatives: either obtain new political assets to compensate for that loss or try to return to Lebanon once again.

²⁰ This section is based largely on my earlier article, "The Impact of Defeat," *IDF Journal*, vol. II, no. 1, May 1984, p. 40-44.

After the 1982 setback, the PLO became increasingly exposed to the domineering policies of Syria and faced a serious threat to its cherished independent power of decision. In the wake of the evacuation of Beirut, though some of the PLO combatants were dispersed in various Arab countries from South Yemen to Algeria, the vast majority were concentrated in Syria and in the Syrian-controlled areas of the Beqaa Valley and Tripoli in eastern and northern Lebanon. At the end of 1982, the PLO faced the threat of total Syrian domination and the possible loss of its political role as the independent, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

The danger to the PLO's status was further compounded when, in the immediate aftermath of its military and political defeat in Lebanon, President Reagan issued his September 1982 plan for a Middle East settlement. The Reagan Plan ignored the PLO, explicitly opposed the idea of an independent Palestinian state, and accorded the major Arab role in solving the Palestine question to Jordan, the PLO's historical rival. The PLO was therefore not only faced with a very severe reduction in its room for maneuver because of Syrian pressure, but also with a political challenge that it had to face with far fewer political assets at its disposal.

Having been defeated in Lebanon and confronted with the Reagan Plan, it was essential for the PLO to demonstrate that it was still a viable political force to be reckoned with in Middle East affairs. It had to preserve its political independence, its national unity, and its status as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." Failure to maintain any one of these could have paved the way for the PLO's disintegration and for Syrian or, alternatively, Jordanian control of the Palestinian destiny.

Open Conflict with Syria

Though all PLO factions agreed on the broad guidelines for action, they differed sharply on tactics. Arafat and his followers opted for political flexibility in order to minimize the potential damage of an independent move by Jordan. On the one hand, this strategy called for cooperation with Jordan and even for diplomatic feelers to be put out towards Egypt's Husni Mubarak. On the other hand, it required Arafat to distance himself from Syria. While this aroused considerable opposition within the PLO, it particularly angered the Syrians themselves, who feared that Arafat was sliding into an undesirable political settlement with Israel. Even after the failure of the negotiations between Arafat and Husayn in April 1983, the Syrians and their supporters within the PLO were still not sure that Arafat could be trusted. While they attempted to thwart Arafat's diplomacy, Jordan and Egypt were

still pressuring him to join a U.S.-inspired peace process. The conflicting external and internal pressures tore the PLO apart.

In May 1983, a Syrian-supported rebellion erupted within the ranks of Arafat's own organization, al-Fath. Though Arafat showed considerable staying power, after more than six months of intermittent fighting he and his supporters were forced out of the Beqaa in eastern Lebanon, then bottled up in the vicinity of Tripoli, and finally, in December 1983, forced to leave Tripoli as well.

Militarily, Arafat and the forces loyal to him were no match for the Syrian-backed rebels. Politically, however, the rebels were no match for Arafat. He continued to enjoy widespread support in the governing institutions of al-Fath and the PLO, within the rank-and-file of the Palestinian community, and in the Arab and international arenas as well. More than any other individual, Arafat was viewed by Palestinian loyalists as the symbol of the Palestinian struggle and national movement; the rebels could convincingly be portrayed as Syrian stooges.

For their part, the Syrians and the rebels were unable to provide a credible alternative to Arafat. Not a single leader of stature within the veteran leadership of al-Fath joined the rebel ranks. Even figures who were known in the past to have been critical of Arafat and on good terms with Syria – Salah Khalaf and Faruq al-Qaddumi, for example – remained loyal to Arafat and to the concept of “independent Palestinian decision.” Moreover, the two most important PLO factions after al-Fath, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) plus the smaller Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), did not side with the rebels either. While they were supportive of the rebels' demands for reforms and collective leadership, which they themselves had been advocating for a long time, they wanted them to be implemented by Arafat. Though acceptance of these reforms would have allowed them more influence, they nevertheless opposed the methods adopted by the rebels. They feared that internecine fighting and reliance on external forces would not only erode the independence of the PLO, but would also lead to a politically destructive split if Arafat's leadership were effectively undermined.

The fact that only three small Syrian-controlled factions – the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), al-Sa'iqa, and the Palestine Popular Struggle Front (PPSF) – lent their full support to the al-Fath dissidents confirmed the image of the rebellion as a Syrian-promoted phenomenon. Arafat's leadership remained intact. Neither his leadership

nor the representative status of the PLO had been seriously affected. This was, of course, of crucial relevance to the peace process.

Post-Lebanon Strategy

After the Lebanon war and the challenge to his leadership, Arafat faced three alternatives:

1. To further shatter internal PLO unity and formulate a policy in cooperation with Jordan and Egypt, and, by extension, the U.S.;
2. To re-establish PLO unity, restore a dialogue with Syria and remain outside the U.S.-sponsored political process;
3. To avoid, as he had done so often in the past, any clear-cut decision either way and to continue a delicate balancing act between the first two alternatives – flirting with the political process, while avoiding any historical concessions to Jordan, Israel, or America. This would be accompanied by an effort to shift the peace process away from U.S. domination and Resolution 242, by including the USSR and establishing Palestinian self-determination as the focus for the future negotiation. At this stage, the main aim would be to gain time for time's sake, with the hope of favorable changes later on.

In the aftermath of the Lebanon war, Arafat developed what he himself has called his “yes and no” policy. This description was particularly characteristic of the mainstream PLO attitude towards the Reagan Plan of September 1982 and the resolutions of the Fez Arab Summit held shortly thereafter. Arafat's camp found some positive elements in the Reagan Plan, such as its recognition of the Palestinian problem as a political rather than just a humanitarian issue and its firm opposition to Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza and to Jewish settlements there. But these positive signs were offset by its negative aspects – non-recognition of the PLO, of the Palestinians' right to exercise self-determination, and of the refugees' right to return to their former homes. Moreover, the Reagan Plan clearly rejected the idea of an independent Palestinian state.

However, Arafat could take comfort in the resolutions of the second Fez summit, which reaffirmed the PLO's status as the “sole legitimate representative” of the Palestinian people and supported the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Arafat and his associates believed it was

essential to ensure that the next stage of the political process be guided by the Fez proposals. This required exploiting the momentum of the Reagan initiative to maximize potential gains for the PLO and minimize those for Jordan. It also meant coordinating PLO tactics with Jordan to try to shift the Reagan Plan closer to the Fez proposals; making sure that Husayn adhered to the Fez proposals and did not embark on an independent initiative; and gaining entry to any political process that might take shape. Cooperation with Jordan, moreover, could facilitate involvement in the political process in a way that would not oblige the PLO to deal directly with the recognition of Israel.²¹

By basing his diplomacy on the Fez resolutions, Arafat further fuelled internal PLO discord since all of the smaller factions, except the DFLP, had rejected them. The critics – within al-Fath, the PFLP, the PLF and the Syrian-controlled factions – continued to argue that the seventh clause of the Fez resolutions, which called upon the Security Council to “guarantee peace, for all the states of the region, including the independent Palestinian state,” was an implicit recognition of Israel and, as such, unacceptable. Furthermore, the resolutions abandoned the military option and their reference to the right to compensation for refugees who did not wish to return to Palestine was seen as yet another concession, undermining the unqualified right of the refugees to return.

Habash maintained that the Fez resolutions were “a great step towards complete surrender” by some Arab regimes in their attempt to find common ground with Reagan’s initiative. The Fez Plan, he said, ought not to be judged solely by its provisions – some of which, he acknowledged, were positive – but by the purpose and the interpretations given to the plan by some Arab states. Jordan, for instance, could use the resolutions as a cover for its own political aims and “drag the PLO into tacit recognition of Israel.”

While opponents argued that the Fez Plan would serve as a bridge to the Reagan Plan, supporters maintained that it was a way to confront it. They argued that Fez upheld the fundamental Palestinian rights of self-determination and statehood, reaffirmed the PLO’s representative status, and were not tantamount to recognition of Israel. The resolutions could be viewed as calling for an end to the state of war, as Khalid al-Hasan explained, but no more than that. What would happen afterward was a matter for the sovereign Palestinian state to decide. The guarantee for the security of the states of the

²¹ For sources see A. Susser, “The Palestine Liberation Organization,” *MECS*, vol. VII, 1982-83, p. 280.

area was to be a Security Council commitment, not a commitment by the PLO itself. This was the farthest the PLO could go; there would be no further concessions. As Salah Khalaf put it, no one could drag the PLO where it did not wish to go.²²

Thus, a rather peculiar PLO ambivalence developed towards the Fez resolutions. Those who accepted them claimed that the resolutions did not recognize Israel, while those who rejected them charged that they did. The bottom line, however, was that nobody in the PLO was prepared to recognize Israel.

The essence of Arafat's approach was expounded at the 16th PNC held in Algiers in February 1983. Arafat warned that if the PLO did not recognize the desire of the West Bank Palestinians for a political settlement, it could lose its influence over them. Even Habash argued that the PLO needed flexibility and diplomacy in order to mobilize the support of the Palestinian people and world public opinion.

Shortly before the conclusion of the PNC, Arafat appeared before a closed session of the Council's Political Committee where he made an emotional appeal to the radicals to agree to a "logical and reasonable" response to the Reagan and Fez Plans. He cautioned them to cease trying to outbid him; by doing so, they were only arranging the "funeral of the Palestinian people."

The PLO, he argued, had been weakened by the war and had lost its independent haven. If it now behaved unreasonably, the world would abandon and forget it. The PLO, he urged, should avoid closing any doors and adopt a flexible "yes and no" position (*la'am* in Arabic, a combination of *la*, "no," and *na'am*, "yes").²³

The final statement of the 16th PNC strongly reflected the "*la'am* factor." The Fez summit resolutions were endorsed, but as the "minimum for political movement by the Arab states which must be integrated with military action with all its requirements in order to alter the balance of forces in favor of the struggle and Palestinian Arab rights." The Council also stressed that its

²² *Ibid.*, p. 287-288.

²³ The Palestinian national poet, Mahmud Darwish, was reported to have said of Arafat's preference for ambivalence that in drafting a single sentence, he could hold an angel in his right hand and the devil in his left. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

understanding of these resolutions did not conflict with the adherence to the political program and resolutions of the PNC.

The Reagan Plan, as it stood, was rejected; but the rejection was less than absolute. Salah Khalaf told American correspondents that if Reagan added recognition of the Palestinians' right to self-determination, "things could change completely." Coupled with the fact that the PNC did not close the door to contacts with Jordan, these positions left Arafat with room for political maneuver. But there was to be no question of authorizing Jordan to speak for the Palestinians, of endorsing Resolution 242, or of recognizing Israel.²⁴

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 290-291, 297.

V. THE PLO, JORDAN AND THE TIME FACTOR

To a large extent, the PLO's across-the-board refusal to recognize Israel was founded on the widely held belief that, despite the short-term negative results of the Lebanon war, time was on the Arab side in the conflict with Israel. Concessions of historical consequence were therefore unnecessary. But Arafat and those close to him, such as Khalid al-Hasan, had to concede that the Arabs had no immediate, credible military option and that, in the short term, time was, in fact, on Israel's side. To them, this was the beginning of the "Israeli era" (*al-asr al-Israili*).²⁵ Yet their awareness of Israel's settlement activities in the West Bank and their sympathy with the suffering of the population under occupation did not convince them to accept the argument put forward by Jordan and prominent West Bankers that the PLO must make concessions in the framework of the Reagan Plan because time was working against them.

Arafat and other PLO spokesmen repeatedly stated that they would not yield to such "ideological terrorism" and "liquidate the issue, the revolution and the PLO, under the burden of time and U.S. mercy" in order to "become realistic." Realism did not mean "raising the white flag." The "Israeli era" was a passing phase, they argued, during which the Palestinians had to avoid becoming subservient to Israel.²⁶ Arafat recalled that when the Israelis withdrew from Sinai in 1982 they had destroyed their settlements. "When they are driven out of the occupied territories they will take all their garbage with them," he said. He urged the Palestinians under occupation to be wary of blackmail and not to fear the Israelis.²⁷

Accordingly, Arafat, other al-Fath spokesmen, and the PLO as a whole, repeatedly expressed their belief in the ultimate triumph over Israel, provided they made wise use of time and prevented capitulation in this interim phase

²⁵ Khalid al-Hasan to *al-Anba*, November 2, 1982, January 24, 28, 1983; Arafat to *al-Nahar al-Arabi wal-Duwali*, December 20-26, 1982.

²⁶ Arafat on R. Monte Carlo, November 12, 1982, cited in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), November 16, 1982; Salah Khalaf to *al-Watan*, March 21, 1983 and *al-Qabas*, March 25, 1983; Mahmud Abbas to *al-Mawqif al-Arabi*, April 18, 1983.

²⁷ *al-Mustaqbal*, December 4, 1982 and April 9, 1983.

of Israeli supremacy.²⁸ In a nutshell, PLO perceptions of time were predicated on three, interrelated preconditions:

1. The preservation of Palestinian national consciousness and of the PLO as the organizational incarnation of the Palestinian entity;
2. The prevention of any Israeli-Jordanian settlement that would marginalize or exclude the PLO;
3. The continued pursuit of Israel's domestic disintegration and its international delegitimization.

The war in Lebanon did not alter the PLO's view of Israel's short-term superiority but long-term vulnerability. On the contrary, all strata of the PLO portrayed the war as a vindication of their belief in the armed struggle and their perception of the time factor. Once again, the war underscored Israeli sensitivities to its own casualties, and, therefore, Israel's inability to engage in protracted military conflict. Israeli society was deeply divided by the war and the cracks in its fabric were evident even in the military establishment – the very core of Israeli strength. For the PLO, the Arabs' obvious manpower advantage over Israel would be significant in the long run.²⁹

Arafat thought he heard voices of reason emerging in Israel, with some saying they were beginning to realize that Israel could not rely solely on the fluctuating factor of military power. Israel, Arafat said, could dominate the region for a period of time, but because its power was "imported" it was liable to change. He noted that the Americans had heavily armed South Vietnam which had, in the end, faltered. The Lebanon war, he said, showed that Israel could be beaten. Israel had concentrated most of its forces in Lebanon against the militarily inferior forces of the PLO; if the full Arab military potential had been unleashed against Israel, it would have been defeated. Arafat

²⁸ Arafat to *al-Nahar al-Arabi wal-Duwali*, December 20-26, 1982; Salah Khalaf to *al-Watan*, March 24, 1983; Mahmud Abbas to *al-Mawqif al-Arabi*, April 18, 1983; Khalid al-Hasan to *al-Mawqif al-Arabi*, April 25, 1983.

²⁹ Khalid al-Hasan to *al-Anba*, January 28, 1983; Na'if Hawatima, "The Requirements of the Revolution after the Invasion of Lebanon and the Heroic Battle of Beirut," *Shu'un Filastiniyya*, February 1983, p. 17; Khalil al-Wazir to *al-Qabas*, February 4, 1983 and *al-Hawadith*, March 18, 1983.

maintained that the only ingredient missing from an Arab victory was the political will to unleash the Arabs' military capability.³⁰

Time as an Arab Asset

Since the state of Arab disarray and feebleness could not have been worse, there was hope only for eventual improvement, which would usher in the inevitable change in the regional balance of forces.³¹ Arafat repeatedly reminded his audience that the Middle East had been occupied in the past by Crusaders, Tartars, Portuguese, French and British; all had left. The Zionists would go, too, "because this land is Arab and will remain Arab."³² Arafat argued that the situation on the West Bank should be viewed from a historical, rather than a geographical perspective:

From a geographical and demographical perspective, Israel [has] engulfed the West Bank, and all but overwhelmed its Arab-Islamic identity. But a historical and political perspective leads to a completely different inference, based on the assumption that the situation is the outcome of an imbalance of power between [the] Arabs and Israel in favor of the latter. If the Arabs and Muslims can correct that imbalance and exploit it in their favor, all that has been based on illegitimacy – all that Israel has established in the occupied territories – will be equally false and void.³³

Upon resumption of the PLO dialogue with Husayn in 1984, Arafat was confronted with an appeal from a delegation of West Bankers to make concessions and cooperate with Jordan before it was "too late." Members of the delegation had apparently inferred that the PLO was giving priority to its own organizational interests rather than to the urgency of achieving Israeli withdrawal.

³⁰ R. Doha, October 19, 1982, cited in FBIS, October 20, 1982; *al-Musawwar*, December 31, 1982; *al-Ayyam*, March 9, 1983.

³¹ Faruq al-Qaddumi to *al-Dustur* (London), December 13, 1982; Salah Khalaf to *Afrique-Asie*, January 31-February 13, 1983 and *al-Watan*, March 24, 1983.

³² R. Aden, January 26, 1983, cited in FBIS, January 27, 1983; Voice of Palestine (Baghdad), March 31, 1983, cited in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, April 4, 1983.

³³ *Arabia*, *The Islamic World Review*, August 1984.

Arafat replied to them with an example he took from the leaders of the Algerian revolution. When the Algerian leaders were asked to decide between “the land and independence or the Liberation Front,” they replied that “independence and the land were the Liberation Front,” Arafat said. The PLO, he added, was itself the Palestinian identity, rights and land, and it would spare no effort to liberate the land.

In the meantime, however, the PLO had made important gains, transforming the Palestinian issue from merely a number in UNRWA files into the main issue of the Middle East. As for Jewish settlements, Arafat took a historical viewpoint based on the belief in the ultimate superiority of the Arabs in the conflict with Israel. He noted that “Zionism is immigration and it is colonization. Colonization is one of the basic obstacles to the march of peace but I wish to recall what was built by the French settlers in Algeria and the Rhodesians in Zimbabwe. What has become of these settlements?” he asked.³⁴

Mahmud Abbas,³⁵ a Fath member of the PLO Executive Committee, dismissed “the extortionist talk” about the land having been lost. He said that stepped-up Israeli settlement activity should not push the PLO to accept an undesirable solution. Settlement was *de facto* occupation, just like the occupation of the territories in 1948. The PLO would never recognize it.³⁶ In the meantime, the PLO counseled “just patience, patience.”³⁷ Hani al-Hasan, Khalid’s brother and also an advisor to Arafat, appealed to the people of the occupied territories “not [to] let [their] patience run out.” Quoting the Prophet Muhammad, he said that “between victory and defeat [was] an hour’s patience.”³⁸

³⁴ *al-Bayadir al-Siyasi*, March 17, 1984.

³⁵ Mahmud Abbas should not to be confused with “Abu al-Abbas” (Muhammad Abbas), leader of the Palestinian Liberation Front and best known for his role in the pirating of the *Achille Lauro*.

³⁶ Mahmud Abbas on Voice of Palestine (Baghdad), March 16, 1984, cited in FBIS, March 20, 1984.

³⁷ Khalil al-Wazir on Voice of Palestine (Algiers), December 26, 1983, cited in FBIS, December 28, 1983; Hani al-Hasan on Voice of Palestine (Algiers), May 22, 1984, cited in FBIS, May 24, 1984.

³⁸ Voice of Palestine (Baghdad), July 28, 1984, cited in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, August 1, 1984.

Israel's difficulties offered encouragement for the PLO view that in the long term, time was on the Arab side.³⁹ Mahmud Abbas asserted that Israel's survival depended on immigration, but its severe economic crisis, compounded by the war of attrition against the Israeli forces in South Lebanon, was bound to increase emigration and reduce immigration. Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, the official PLO spokesman, claimed that northern Palestine had become the "soft underbelly of the Zionist entity,"⁴⁰ given its majority Arab population.

Abd al-Rahman's statement is indicative of the ever-growing importance that the PLO has attached to the Arabs of Israel since the early 1970s. PNC resolutions have invariably referred to the Palestinians in the "areas occupied in 1948" and the necessity of enhancing their identity as an integral part of the Palestinian people.⁴¹ An article in the Fath-controlled PLO organ *Filastin al-Thawra* highlighted the rapidly growing Arab population of Nazareth, for example, and concluded that this gave Nazareth "great struggle potential."⁴²

Though convinced that time was on its side, the Fath leadership did not believe in political passivity. Khalid al-Hasan repeatedly criticized the more radical PLO factions, likening them to historians buried in the past or philosophers caught up in thoughts of the distant future. In neither case were they sufficiently realistic to be good politicians. This related particularly to the rejectionists' condemnation of relations with Egypt and Jordan.⁴³ According to Khalid al-Hasan, the benefits of history and philosophy were helpful only as a guide to deal with reality – so as not to deviate from the PLO's final objectives.⁴⁴

³⁹ Others in the Arab world shared the PLO's perceptions of time. In a recent book, Egypt's Chief of Staff during the October War, Lt. General Saad ad-Din al-Shazly, appeals to the Arabs not to despair, because "the future is on their side." See Shazly, *The Arab Military Option*, San Francisco: American Mideast Research, 1986, p. 196.

⁴⁰ *Filastin al-Thawra*, February 25, 1984; *al-Dustur*, Amman, May 7, 1984.

⁴¹ Texts of resolutions of 16th and 17th PNC's in PLO pamphlet *The Political Statement Issued by the 16th Session of the PNC and Shu'un Filastiniyya*, November-December 1984, p. 166-171.

⁴² *Filastin al-Thawra*, July 27, 1985.

⁴³ *al-Hawadith*, May 25, 1984; *al-Jazira*, July 14, 1984.

⁴⁴ *al-Sayyad*, August 8, 1984.

He argued that the “historical perception” (*al-fahm al-tarikhi*) of the conflict, that is Israel’s ultimate demise, was no substitute for the “political perception” (*al-fahm al-siyasi*), which required a realistic approach to the problems at hand. In the view of the Fath leadership, the strategic objective remained the establishment of a democratic state on all the land of Palestine.⁴⁵ Moreover, until such time as this state was established, there could be no final settlement of the Palestinian question. It was clear, however, that this strategy could not be implemented in a single step but would have to be the result of a phased process.⁴⁶ The problem with the more radical factions, therefore, was not related to the ultimate objective of liberation, but rather to the tactics of achieving this goal.⁴⁷

Khalid al-Hasan was especially critical of the dogmatism of the radicals, which, he argued, did not take sufficient account of the constraints and imperatives that derived from a realistic appraisal of the situation. Their lack of realism left no room for a practical policy designed to achieve the ultimate objective; indeed, it had in the past allowed the “dictatorship of the minority” to impose impractical and basically propagandistic decisions on the PLO.⁴⁸

Realism v. Pragmatism

Policy, he argued, was a function of alternating interests rather than rigid principles; political maneuvering, deception (*khud'a*), an indirect approach, and a “strategy of phases” were all integral and flexible facets of the struggle. The rigid principles of “revolutionary purity” were rooted in a lack of self-confidence that prevented the radicals from employing the “noisy tactic to achieve the sound objective.” This created a mode of thinking whereby the ultimate goal of liberation was perceived as a definitive program of action *in and of itself*, rather than as a guide for a more flexible, phased program. If the military option was impractical and an interim objective could be attained by negotiation, then negotiation should be attempted – provided it did not involve unacceptable concessions that might subvert or preclude the ultimate

⁴⁵ Khalid al-Hasan, *The Jordanian-Palestinian Agreement*, p. 81.

⁴⁶ Hani al-Hasan to *al-Sayyad*, April 15, 1985.

⁴⁷ Khalid al-Hasan to *al-Hawadith*, October 12, 1984.

⁴⁸ Khalid al-Hasan, *The Jordanian-Palestinian Agreement*, p. 26-27, 30-31.

objective.⁴⁹ al-Hasan suggested that in its struggle for the support of world public opinion, the PLO should adopt “language that was not very revolutionary ... [language that] your allies could uphold in the camp of your enemies.”⁵⁰ But he hastened to add that he did not believe that there was even “one Palestinian who would agree to say that Israel had the right to exist on the land of Palestine.”⁵¹

The PLO’s relationship with Jordan, al-Hasan argued, also ought to be based on realistic calculations rather than the simple rejection of the “reactionary and rightist” character of the Hashemite regime. With no viable Arab military option, the PLO could not allow the ever-growing Israeli entrenchment in the occupied territories to continue unabated. During the period of coordination with Husayn, when there was still some hope of the PLO having its way with Jordan and America, al-Hasan argued that there was no choice but to participate in some form of negotiating process to achieve interim objectives and to forestall the demoralization of the population in the occupied territories. He warned that such despondency could promote the emergence of a local leadership that might be prepared, out of sheer desperation, to negotiate on terms that would undermine the long-term objectives of the Palestinian national movement, as expounded by the PLO.⁵²

It was imperative for the PLO to conduct itself in such a manner that would prevent a settlement of the Palestinian question without PLO participation. Therefore it was incumbent upon the PLO to ensure what Khalid al-Hasan called its “vital survival” (*al-biqa al-hayawi*), by maintaining its status as a regional factor that had to be reckoned with.⁵³ If that could be done, then time was bound to work in its favor.

In general terms, “the path of history” was in the Palestinians’ favor. After all, in the PLO’s view Israel was “an American-European imperialist, economic and military project that does not possess the requirements of

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 44-47, 51-52, 54-56, 63; Khalid al-Hasan to *al-Hawadith*, October 12, 1984 and *al-Anba*, July 30, 1985.

⁵⁰ *al-Anba*, January 27, 1983.

⁵¹ *al-Anba*, January 28, 1983.

⁵² Khalid al-Hasan, *The Jordanian-Palestinian Agreement*, p. 128-129.

⁵³ Khalid al-Hasan, “The Options Open to the PLO,” part III, *al-Anba*, October 22, 1986.

survival, except by both external economic and military support. Were these lacking it would naturally disappear.” As al-Hasan argued:

the perpetuation of Zionism in Israel, together with the perpetuation of the interplay and growth of the factors of suicide and self-destruction that exist in its nature, and the factors of life and growing intrinsic power that confront it in the Arab and Palestinian reality, will lead, in the end, to the military destruction of Israel in a collective bloodbath ... This bloodbath would be the first of its kind in the history of the Muslim and Christian Arabs with the Jews in the Arab world. Something of that kind should not happen if it is possible that it should not happen, and for that reason the Palestinians see that one of the aims of their struggle is to liberate the Jews in Israel from Zionism, ideologically and institutionally.⁵⁴

The PLO's 'Auxiliary Option'

After the breakdown of coordination with Jordan, al-Hasan concluded that the Arabs' situation was lamentably impotent and that they were clearly incapable of dealing with Israel effectively, either by military means or through a process of negotiation.⁵⁵ There was, however, the “other auxiliary option,” which was entirely an outgrowth of the PLO's prevalent perception of Israel and of the time factor:

Everyone [in the Arab world] says that the Zionist entity is artificial; that the Jews are not a people; that contradictions of origin and culture [between Israelis] are in full swing; that the survival of the Zionist entity is dependent on American policy and power; and that the Achilles heel of the enemy is its limited number of people, the decrease in immigration and the increase in emigration and the Zionist fear of the natural increase of the Arab population.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, “The Future of Peace.”

⁵⁵ Khalid al-Hasan, “The Options Open to the PLO,” parts I and II, *al-Anba*, October 20-21, 1986.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, part II, *al-Anba*, October 21, 1986.

It was for these reasons, al-Hasan explained, that the Israelis were bent on ridding themselves of the Arab population, particularly in the West Bank and Gaza, whether by partial withdrawal in agreement with Jordan or by expulsion. Nevertheless, he was convinced that “despite all this [Israeli] planning, which was being quietly prepared for implementation ... the Zionist entity, founded on Zionist philosophy, was bound to disappear. The future would inevitably work in favor of the establishment of the democratic Palestinian state.”⁵⁷

It was, however, incumbent upon the Arabs not to just wait it out, but to be more diligent in their study of Israeli society and its inherent vulnerabilities. The “auxiliary option” had to be pursued by promoting action “inside all of Palestine, along with the option of Arab-Palestinian action outside [of Palestine] and without refraining from *fida’i* action inside [Palestine].”⁵⁸

The pursuit of the “auxiliary option” included:

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

The democratic Palestinian state is a euphemism for the dissolution of Israel. It is noteworthy that al-Hasan does not refer to the “secular” democratic state, a term hardly ever used in Arabic and never in the resolutions of the PNC, but one that is primarily employed for foreign consumption. In a society in which religious affiliation is still the most genuine and fundamental form of grass-roots group identity, the term “secular” has little meaning and is, therefore, of dubious political significance. In his series of articles in *al-Anba*, al-Hasan was not at all “secular” or reassuring to his non-Muslim compatriots when he described the Arab world as being united by “one history, one civilization, one culture and one religion (*din wahid*).” (*al-Anba*, October 20, 1986.)

As secularism is hardly ever invoked in Arabic, it is not surprising that the notion of a “secular” state has not taken root among the Palestinian people themselves. The poll taken in the West Bank and Gaza by the pro-Fath East Jerusalem daily *al-Fajr*, in conjunction with *Newsday* of New York and an Australian TV network, was as revealing about popular sentiment for the PLO as it was concerning grass-roots perceptions of the future Palestinian state. No less than 56.1 per cent of the people polled supported either “a state based on Islamic law” or “a state based on Arab nationalism and Islam.” Another 21.2 percent supported a “democratic Palestinian” state, but only 10.4 per cent supported “a democratic secular” Palestinian state. (See full text of poll results in *al-Fajr* [English edition], September 12, 1986.) The figure of 10.4 percent reflects the approximate size of the Palestinian Christian minority. One may assume, without hard evidence, however, that many or most of the 10.4 percent were Christians or Marxists, and possibly both. One conclusion from the polling data is that the PLO’s most ardent supporters in the West are avid advocates of the “secular” democratic state, at a time when the great majority of Palestinians are not.

⁵⁸ Khalid al-Hasan, “The Options Open to the PLO,” part II, *al-Anba*, October 21, 1986.

The exploitation of all the elements of self-destruction inside the Zionist entity by all available means; seeking the basic assistance of our people in all of occupied Palestine in a manner that would enable them to cooperate with those Jews who have begun to realize the dangers of Zionism for Judaism in the world and for the Jews inside the Zionist entity; paying special attention to the Arab Jews (*al-Yahud al-Arab*) [i.e., Jews from Arab countries] on the grounds that their cultural identity is contradictory to European and American Zionism which was created by imperialism and European racist thought, with the aim of using the Jews as an instrument of imperialist interests.⁵⁹

The “auxiliary option” was to be founded on the exploitation of the demographic factor. Its full potential could only be reached by forestalling Israeli plans for Arab emigration and by preventing an Israeli-Jordanian solution. This, in turn, required economic aid to the territories to enable the population to remain on the land without having to emigrate or seek employment in the Israeli economy. But the aid plan could not be implemented unilaterally by Jordan. al-Hasan warned that recognition of the demographic threat to Israel had induced the Labor Party, the U.S., and the EEC, to raise

the standard of living of our people in the [West] Bank and Gaza, through exclusively created capitalist economic institutions linked to the U.S. and the Zionist economy, with the aim of obtaining a moderate Palestinian leadership (!) that would accept (?) negotiations (!) [punctuated as in source] with the Zionist enemy in a Jordanian delegation and under U.S. auspices. Their negotiations would conclude with the implementation of the Zionist plan for the territories and the population.⁶⁰

The demographic challenge had to be harnessed to serve the Palestinian cause rather than to promote bilateral “capitulationist” negotiations. According to the PLO, for that to happen:

- (a) It was impermissible for the legitimate Palestinian leadership to recognize the right of the Zionist entity to exist, as this would mean ... bestowing the only legally valid legitimacy upon the

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, part III, October 22, 1986.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

existence of the entity, as well as the abolition of the right of the Palestinian people as a people with its natural national rights in its homeland.

(b) We cannot detach the auxiliary option from the option of national [pan-Arab] struggle which alone is capable of being decisive ... For this reason we have referred to the [other] option as auxiliary, but it is an option that must be pursued.⁶¹

At the same time, the Palestinians had to realize that both superpowers supported the existence of Israel in secure and recognized boundaries. Therefore the “establishment of the democratic Palestinian state in all of Palestine was not one of the objectives of the present phase, or of the following phase.”⁶² In the interim, the PLO had to “raise the slogan of vital survival for the PLO and the Palestinian struggle and preserve all the political achievements of the struggle that have been realized by the Palestinian people from 1965 [the emergence of Fath] until now, in the Palestinian, Arab and international arenas.”⁶³

The mainstream PLO view about time, Israel, and the organization’s survival is, of course, debatable. It is not at all certain whether or not time really is on the PLO’s side. Israel and Jewish nationalism could prove to be considerably more resilient or, conversely, the PLO (and Palestinian nationalism) may prove to be less sustainable than the PLO leadership would like to believe.

But such speculation obscures the political relevance of PLO perceptions of time. What is of crucial importance is not their prophetic quality, but their immediate political ramifications. They are the single most important factor that constrains the leadership from accepting historical compromise and reconciliation with Israel. However lamentable in PLO eyes the Arab predicament may be at present, the PLO believes the future is bound to bring positive and far-reaching change. Concessions of historical consequence are therefore not only ideologically repugnant, but also politically unnecessary. One can argue that even if the leadership itself does not fully believe in these prognostications, which is unlikely, disseminating such views can serve to

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

justify other motivations for rejecting historical compromise. And it can encourage Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to do likewise.

Jordan's Emphasis on Urgency

As on so many other issues, the PLO perceptions of time are not shared by Jordan. Indeed, they are diametrically opposed, as are their political ramifications. Since the rise of the Likud to power in Israel in 1977, and particularly after the appointment of Ariel Sharon as Israel's Defense Minister in 1981, Jordan's attitude towards Israel has undergone change. The rising strength of the right wing in Israeli politics has brought to the fore Israeli exponents of the "Jordan is Palestine" theory. They regard Husayn's Jordan not as Israel's natural partner in settling the Palestinian question, as is the firm belief of the Labor party, but rather the obstacle to such a solution. As a result, they advocate the "Palestinization" of Jordan.

The Jordanians, therefore, perceive a right-wing government in Israel as a serious threat. In their view, it would probably pave the way for the formal or practical annexation of the West Bank and Gaza, which, the Jordanians fear, might be coupled with an act of "demographic aggression," whereby Israel would hope to solve its demographic problems by expelling a large number of Palestinians to Jordan.⁶⁴ In the Jordanian perspective, therefore, time is not on the Arabs' side.

Israel, according to Husayn, would rapidly approach a serious dilemma if it did not give up the occupied territories. On the one hand, if it granted citizenship to the Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza, it would lose its Jewish character; on the other hand, if it did not, it would lose its democratic character and be forced to adopt the *apartheid* model of South Africa. Israel might therefore resolve the dilemma by evicting the inhabitants to Jordan. This third option, Husayn has said, was gaining ground in Israel, "coloring the current Israeli political vision with an extremist, right-wing hue."⁶⁵ According to one of Husayn's close advisers, the Jordanians were "very worried about these demographics."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Crown Prince Hasan to *Le Figaro*, May 22, 1984

⁶⁵ Husayn speech on February 19, 1986, official Arabic text, Jordan Ministry of Information, p. 16-21.

⁶⁶ *New York Times*, July 14, 1986; *Wall Street Journal*, July 16, 1986.

The PLO has a similar appraisal of possible Israeli actions, but it does not feel immediately threatened by such a scenario. The expulsion of Palestinians would probably cause Israel irreparable political damage but it would hardly affect the PLO establishment, whether in Lebanon, Tunisia, Iraq or elsewhere. For Jordan, however, the immediate consequences could be catastrophic. A mass influx of Palestinians would expose Jordan to the extreme socio-economic pressure of disgruntled refugees, might destabilize the Hashemite monarchy, and could transform Jordan into the "alternative homeland" for the Palestinians, in line with the argument put forward by some Israeli leaders that Jordan was, in fact, the Palestinian state.⁶⁷

Apart from the demographic threat, Jordanians also believe that lack of progress in the peace process could lead to a war in which Jordan had little to gain and much to lose. They seem to be genuinely concerned that a continued stalemate would eventually degenerate into a war between extremists on both sides.⁶⁸ Therefore, in the interests of their own survival, they view a settlement that would facilitate Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank as an urgent imperative.

Husayn has long argued for the urgency of progress towards a settlement. The formation of Israel's National Unity Government in the summer of 1984 reinforced that sense of urgency, because there would only be two years of a Labor-held premiership, after which the government was to be led by the Likud. In Jordan's view, the transfer of power to the Likud would indicate that time had indeed run out. It was, as Husayn said, "the eleventh hour."⁶⁹

Jordanian and PLO Perceptions of Israeli Politics

For Jordan, then, a Labor-led government in Israel was a window of opportunity. But for the PLO, a government led by Shimon Peres was not regarded as an opportunity; it was perceived as a serious potential threat.

With the approach of the 1984 parliamentary elections in Israel, there were increased expressions of anxiety in the Fath leadership that a Labor

⁶⁷ *al-Ray*, December 20, 1982; *Jerusalem Star*, August 11-17, 1983; Crown Prince Hasan in *Jordan Times*, December 12, 1983; King Husayn in *The Observer*, May 13, 1984.

⁶⁸ Crown Prince Hasan, "Return to Geneva," *Foreign Policy*, no. 57, Winter 1984-85.

⁶⁹ Jordan TV, May 4, 1985, cited in FBIS, May 6, 1985; *The Guardian Weekly*, December 15, 1985.

Party victory in Israel could pave the way for an Israeli-Jordanian settlement on the basis of the Labor Party's "Jordanian option." Salah Khalaf, one of the more radical members of the Fath Central Committee, warned that the "Jordanian option" could lead to the elimination of the PLO.⁷⁰ And Arafat argued that in a Labor Party era, the PLO would face "political threats" no less dangerous than "the massacres perpetrated by the Likud Government against the Palestinian people."⁷¹

The possibility that the Labor Party would come to power in Israel – coupled with the re-election of President Reagan in the U.S. – was viewed as a particularly ominous combination that would produce considerable pressure on Husayn to accept the "Jordanian option."⁷² The PLO, therefore, expressed the hope that a Palestinian-Jordanian agreement could be reached and turned into a "practical and responsible stand that would foil the enemy's evil intentions and entrench the formula of understanding and cohesion between the Palestinian and Jordanian peoples and their two leaderships."⁷³ The Fath Central Committee welcomed a Soviet announcement issued just after the elections in Israel that reiterated Moscow's support for an international conference on the Middle East. Not only did the announcement conform with the PNC and Fez summit resolutions, but its timing represented a "protective attack against the expected hostile initiatives by the Labor Party and against the U.S. Middle East policy."⁷⁴

It was widely maintained in the Fath leadership, and in the PLO in general, that there was no essential difference between Labor and Likud. They only differed in tactics and, if anything, Labor was the more dangerous of the two.⁷⁵ The Labor Party had a better international image, but, according to Arafat, was "no more than the Likud covered in attractive slogans, with the

⁷⁰ *Filastin al-Thawra*, June 9, 1984.

⁷¹ Gulf News Agency, May 30, 1984, cited in FBIS, May 31, 1984.

⁷² Salah Khalaf to *al-Tadamun*, August 5, 1984.

⁷³ Voice of Palestine (Baghdad), July 9, 1984, cited in FBIS, July 11, 1984.

⁷⁴ Voice of Palestine (San'a), August 7, 1984, cited in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, August 10, 1984.

⁷⁵ Mahmud Abbas in *al-Dustur*, Amman, July 17, 1984.

same iron fist covered in silk.” This was “simply make-up to beautify Israel’s face and make it acceptable to the world and the Socialist International.”⁷⁶

The Fath leadership clearly rejected any Jordanian-Israeli settlement, even if it entailed at least partial Israeli withdrawal and an arrest of the annexation process. The desire of the Fath leadership to cooperate with Jordan in the political process was more a function of the fear of a political process dominated by Jordan than a decision that they had to pursue the course of settlement before it was “too late.” The PLO was playing for time; Husayn felt he had none to waste.

⁷⁶ Kuwaiti News Agency, July 28, 1984, cited in FBIS, July 30, 1984.

VI. THE AMMAN ACCORD AND THE PROBLEM OF SELF-DETERMINATION⁷⁷

Motivated by totally different perceptions of time and completely disharmonious agendas and objectives, Jordan and the PLO entered negotiations for an agreement on political cooperation. Jordan was essentially oriented towards rapid progress in the peace process, while the PLO's policy was primarily pre-emptive. Indeed, the PLO's perception of time was partly predicated on Jordan's pre-emption.

The first round of negotiations between Husayn and Arafat, following the publication of the Reagan Plan, ended in failure in April 1983, Husayn was unsuccessful in his efforts to induce Arafat to accept Resolution 242, the essential U.S. requirement for recognition of the PLO. Eric Rouleau, a seasoned observer of PLO affairs, noted that Arafat conducted this initial round of negotiations "in order not to be marginalized, in order not to become irrelevant ... But it didn't work."⁷⁸ Eventually, though, it did.

In January 1984, Husayn revived the Jordanian parliament, which also represented the West Bank; in September 1984, he resumed diplomatic relations with Egypt; and two months later, he hosted the PNC in Amman. These were all central components of a Jordanian policy designed to pave the way for adding momentum to the Middle East peace process. Jordan's eagerness to extricate the peace process from its relative stagnation made it imperative for the PLO leadership to coordinate policy with Jordan. Therefore, the PLO leadership was unwilling to categorically reject the proposals made by Husayn to the PNC, even though they contained elements that were unacceptable.

Arafat and his close associates believed that relations with Jordan and Egypt were crucially important in order to forestall a settlement of the Palestinian question that might exclude the PLO. After the expulsion from Lebanon, it was important for the PLO to prevent a "new Camp David," by preventing Egypt's agreement to follow through with the autonomy framework of the Camp David Accords as well as Jordan's acceptance of the

⁷⁷ This section has been adapted from forthcoming chapters on the PLO and Jordan that I have written for the *Middle East Contemporary Survey*.

⁷⁸ *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Winter 1984.

notion of a separate deal with Israel.⁷⁹ Jordan was the gateway to the West Bank as Egypt was the gateway to the Gaza Strip.⁸⁰ Given the desire to establish a presence on the East Bank and influence the large number of Palestinians on the West Bank, Jordan was clearly the more important of the two. Political influence in these areas was deemed necessary to maintain the allegiance of the Palestinians, and to forestall any effort by Husayn to declare himself to be the representative of the Palestinian people.⁸¹ Agreement with Jordan was also required to counter the contention that the West Bank was Jordan's responsibility, thereby forcing the international community – especially the U.S. – to come to terms with the PLO.⁸²

The agreement eventually concluded between Husayn and Arafat on February 11, 1985 was the culmination of arduous negotiations which often teetered on the verge of breakdown. Sensing that the PLO may have been satisfied to prolong the negotiations indefinitely so as to prevent Husayn from taking any independent initiative, the Jordanians applied considerable pressure on the PLO leadership to reach an early agreement. Husayn, however, still preferred a joint initiative and needed the PLO as much as the PLO needed Jordan.

Since the PLO's major asset was its recognized representative status, it was crucially important for Arafat to constrain Husayn from building a political momentum that might eventually undermine the PLO with the help of cooperative West Bankers. On the other hand, Husayn's lack of legitimacy to independently negotiate a Palestinian settlement required cooperation with Arafat to enhance Jordan's negotiating role. Essentially, Husayn's plan was to create a Jordanian-PLO partnership in representing the Palestinians that would effectively erode the PLO's status as the "sole" legitimate representative of the Palestinians. These two historical rivals were thus entering a phase of cooperation designed to constrain, co-opt or neutralize one another. In that respect, both were successful and their "cooperation" came to naught.

⁷⁹ *Filastin al-Thawra*, March 9, 1985; Hani al-Hasan to *al-Anba*, August 20, 1985 and *al-Ray al-Amm*, October 27, 1985.

⁸⁰ *Filastin al-Thawra*, December 1, 1984.

⁸¹ *al-Talia al-Arabiyya*, January 28, 1985; Khalil al-Wazir to *al-Moudjahid* (Algiers), May 12, 1985; Hani al-Hasan to *al-Ray al-Amm*, October 27, 1985; Khalid al-Hasan, *The Jordanian-Palestinian Agreement*, p. 103.

⁸² Khalid al-Hasan to *al-Anba*, July 30, 1985.

When finally reached, the Amman Accord only papered over fundamental differences between Jordan and the PLO. The agreement upheld the principle of land in exchange for peace in accordance with all UN resolutions, including those of the Security Council; it called for the exercise of the Palestinians' right to self-determination within the framework of a confederation between Jordan and a future Palestinian state; and it supported negotiations for a settlement within the framework of an international conference.⁸³ The differences between Jordan and the PLO continued to revolve around three main issues: Resolution 242; the future relationship between Jordan and Palestine; and the exact nature of the international conference and PLO representation in it.

Opposing Interpretations of the Amman Accord

When Jordan announced that an agreement had been reached between Husayn and Arafat on "the formula for the joint Jordanian-Palestinian move for attaining a just and peaceful solution to the Palestinian cause," the PLO was quick to point out that the agreement did "not in any way mean complete unanimity," but also that "differences [did] not mean rupture."⁸⁴ The PLO was in no hurry; it did not believe a peace process would be conducive to the achievement of the organization's minimal objective, an independent Palestinian state. As long as the balance of forces remained in Israel's favor, the PLO felt no such achievement was possible and consequently saw no need to rush into negotiations in which Jordan might require the PLO to accept Resolution 242.⁸⁵ But since a rupture with Jordan at this juncture was also undesirable, the agreement was eventually approved (with certain reservations) by the PLO Executive Committee and by the Central Committee of al-Fath.

Even after a spate of "clarifications," Jordanian and PLO interpretations of the various parts of the agreement diverged markedly. The agreement's wording endorsing the principle of "land in exchange for peace" in accordance with the resolutions of the UN, "including the resolutions of the Security Council," was deliberately vague. It did not specify whether the PLO had recognized Security Council Resolution 242, the acceptance of which had

⁸³ For full text of the agreement, see appendix.

⁸⁴ Voice of Palestine (Baghdad), February 12, 1985, cited in FBIS, February 13, 1985.

⁸⁵ See the editorial in *Filastin al-Thawra*, February 9, 1985.

maintained that the only ingredient missing from an Arab victory was the political will to unleash the Arabs' military capability.³⁰

Time as an Arab Asset

Since the state of Arab disarray and feebleness could not have been worse, there was hope only for eventual improvement, which would usher in the inevitable change in the regional balance of forces.³¹ Arafat repeatedly reminded his audience that the Middle East had been occupied in the past by Crusaders, Tartars, Portuguese, French and British; all had left. The Zionists would go, too, "because this land is Arab and will remain Arab."³² Arafat argued that the situation on the West Bank should be viewed from a historical, rather than a geographical perspective:

From a geographical and demographical perspective, Israel [has] engulfed the West Bank, and all but overwhelmed its Arab-Islamic identity. But a historical and political perspective leads to a completely different inference, based on the assumption that the situation is the outcome of an imbalance of power between [the] Arabs and Israel in favor of the latter. If the Arabs and Muslims can correct that imbalance and exploit it in their favor, all that has been based on illegitimacy – all that Israel has established in the occupied territories – will be equally false and void.³³

Upon resumption of the PLO dialogue with Husayn in 1984, Arafat was confronted with an appeal from a delegation of West Bankers to make concessions and cooperate with Jordan before it was "too late." Members of the delegation had apparently inferred that the PLO was giving priority to its own organizational interests rather than to the urgency of achieving Israeli withdrawal.

³⁰ R. Doha, October 19, 1982, cited in FBIS, October 20, 1982; *al-Musawwar*, December 31, 1982; *al-Ayyam*, March 9, 1983.

³¹ Faruq al-Qaddumi to *al-Dustur* (London), December 13, 1982; Salah Khalaf to *Afrique-Asie*, January 31-February 13, 1983 and *al-Watan*, March 24, 1983.

³² R. Aden, January 26, 1983, cited in FBIS, January 27, 1983; Voice of Palestine (Baghdad), March 31, 1983, cited in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, April 4, 1983.

³³ *Arabia, The Islamic World Review*, August 1984.

Arafat replied to them with an example he took from the leaders of the Algerian revolution. When the Algerian leaders were asked to decide between “the land and independence or the Liberation Front,” they replied that “independence and the land were the Liberation Front,” Arafat said. The PLO, he added, was itself the Palestinian identity, rights and land, and it would spare no effort to liberate the land.

In the meantime, however, the PLO had made important gains, transforming the Palestinian issue from merely a number in UNRWA files into the main issue of the Middle East. As for Jewish settlements, Arafat took a historical viewpoint based on the belief in the ultimate superiority of the Arabs in the conflict with Israel. He noted that “Zionism is immigration and it is colonization. Colonization is one of the basic obstacles to the march of peace but I wish to recall what was built by the French settlers in Algeria and the Rhodesians in Zimbabwe. What has become of these settlements?” he asked.³⁴

Mahmud Abbas,³⁵ a Fath member of the PLO Executive Committee, dismissed “the extortionist talk” about the land having been lost. He said that stepped-up Israeli settlement activity should not push the PLO to accept an undesirable solution. Settlement was *de facto* occupation, just like the occupation of the territories in 1948. The PLO would never recognize it.³⁶ In the meantime, the PLO counseled “just patience, patience.”³⁷ Hani al-Hasan, Khalid’s brother and also an advisor to Arafat, appealed to the people of the occupied territories “not [to] let [their] patience run out.” Quoting the Prophet Muhammad, he said that “between victory and defeat [was] an hour’s patience.”³⁸

³⁴ *al-Bayadir al-Siyasi*, March 17, 1984.

³⁵ Mahmud Abbas should not to be confused with “Abu al-Abbas” (Muhammad Abbas), leader of the Palestinian Liberation Front and best known for his role in the pirating of the *Achille Lauro*.

³⁶ Mahmud Abbas on Voice of Palestine (Baghdad), March 16, 1984, cited in FBIS, March 20, 1984.

³⁷ Khalil al-Wazir on Voice of Palestine (Algiers), December 26, 1983, cited in FBIS, December 28, 1983; Hani al-Hasan on Voice of Palestine (Algiers), May 22, 1984, cited in FBIS, May 24, 1984.

³⁸ Voice of Palestine (Baghdad), July 28, 1984, cited in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, August 1, 1984.

Israel's difficulties offered encouragement for the PLO view that in the long term, time was on the Arab side.³⁹ Mahmud Abbas asserted that Israel's survival depended on immigration, but its severe economic crisis, compounded by the war of attrition against the Israeli forces in South Lebanon, was bound to increase emigration and reduce immigration. Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, the official PLO spokesman, claimed that northern Palestine had become the "soft underbelly of the Zionist entity,"⁴⁰ given its majority Arab population.

Abd al-Rahman's statement is indicative of the ever-growing importance that the PLO has attached to the Arabs of Israel since the early 1970s. PNC resolutions have invariably referred to the Palestinians in the "areas occupied in 1948" and the necessity of enhancing their identity as an integral part of the Palestinian people.⁴¹ An article in the Fath-controlled PLO organ *Filastin al-Thawra* highlighted the rapidly growing Arab population of Nazareth, for example, and concluded that this gave Nazareth "great struggle potential."⁴²

Though convinced that time was on its side, the Fath leadership did not believe in political passivity. Khalid al-Hasan repeatedly criticized the more radical PLO factions, likening them to historians buried in the past or philosophers caught up in thoughts of the distant future. In neither case were they sufficiently realistic to be good politicians. This related particularly to the rejectionists' condemnation of relations with Egypt and Jordan.⁴³ According to Khalid al-Hasan, the benefits of history and philosophy were helpful only as a guide to deal with reality – so as not to deviate from the PLO's final objectives.⁴⁴

³⁹ Others in the Arab world shared the PLO's perceptions of time. In a recent book, Egypt's Chief of Staff during the October War, Lt. General Saad ad-Din al-Shazly, appeals to the Arabs not to despair, because "the future is on their side." See Shazly, *The Arab Military Option*, San Francisco: American Mideast Research, 1986, p. 196.

⁴⁰ *Filastin al-Thawra*, February 25, 1984; *al-Dustur*, Amman, May 7, 1984.

⁴¹ Texts of resolutions of 16th and 17th PNC's in PLO pamphlet *The Political Statement Issued by the 16th Session of the PNC* and *Shu'un Filastiniyya*, November-December 1984, p. 166-171.

⁴² *Filastin al-Thawra*, July 27, 1985.

⁴³ *al-Hawadith*, May 25, 1984; *al-Jazira*, July 14, 1984.

⁴⁴ *al-Sayyad*, August 8, 1984.

He argued that the “historical perception” (*al-fahm al-tarikhi*) of the conflict, that is Israel’s ultimate demise, was no substitute for the “political perception” (*al-fahm al-siyasi*), which required a realistic approach to the problems at hand. In the view of the Fath leadership, the strategic objective remained the establishment of a democratic state on all the land of Palestine.⁴⁵ Moreover, until such time as this state was established, there could be no final settlement of the Palestinian question. It was clear, however, that this strategy could not be implemented in a single step but would have to be the result of a phased process.⁴⁶ The problem with the more radical factions, therefore, was not related to the ultimate objective of liberation, but rather to the tactics of achieving this goal.⁴⁷

Khalid al-Hasan was especially critical of the dogmatism of the radicals, which, he argued, did not take sufficient account of the constraints and imperatives that derived from a realistic appraisal of the situation. Their lack of realism left no room for a practical policy designed to achieve the ultimate objective; indeed, it had in the past allowed the “dictatorship of the minority” to impose impractical and basically propagandistic decisions on the PLO.⁴⁸

Realism v. Pragmatism

Policy, he argued, was a function of alternating interests rather than rigid principles; political maneuvering, deception (*khud'a*), an indirect approach, and a “strategy of phases” were all integral and flexible facets of the struggle. The rigid principles of “revolutionary purity” were rooted in a lack of self-confidence that prevented the radicals from employing the “noisy tactic to achieve the sound objective.” This created a mode of thinking whereby the ultimate goal of liberation was perceived as a definitive program of action *in and of itself*, rather than as a guide for a more flexible, phased program. If the military option was impractical and an interim objective could be attained by negotiation, then negotiation should be attempted – provided it did not involve unacceptable concessions that might subvert or preclude the ultimate

⁴⁵ Khalid al-Hasan, *The Jordanian-Palestinian Agreement*, p. 81.

⁴⁶ Hani al-Hasan to *al-Sayyad*, April 15, 1985.

⁴⁷ Khalid al-Hasan to *al-Hawadith*, October 12, 1984.

⁴⁸ Khalid al-Hasan, *The Jordanian-Palestinian Agreement*, p. 26-27, 30-31.

objective.⁴⁹ al-Hasan suggested that in its struggle for the support of world public opinion, the PLO should adopt “language that was not very revolutionary ... [language that] your allies could uphold in the camp of your enemies.”⁵⁰ But he hastened to add that he did not believe that there was even “one Palestinian who would agree to say that Israel had the right to exist on the land of Palestine.”⁵¹

The PLO’s relationship with Jordan, al-Hasan argued, also ought to be based on realistic calculations rather than the simple rejection of the “reactionary and rightist” character of the Hashemite regime. With no viable Arab military option, the PLO could not allow the ever-growing Israeli entrenchment in the occupied territories to continue unabated. During the period of coordination with Husayn, when there was still some hope of the PLO having its way with Jordan and America, al-Hasan argued that there was no choice but to participate in some form of negotiating process to achieve interim objectives and to forestall the demoralization of the population in the occupied territories. He warned that such despondency could promote the emergence of a local leadership that might be prepared, out of sheer desperation, to negotiate on terms that would undermine the long-term objectives of the Palestinian national movement, as expounded by the PLO.⁵²

It was imperative for the PLO to conduct itself in such a manner that would prevent a settlement of the Palestinian question without PLO participation. Therefore it was incumbent upon the PLO to ensure what Khalid al-Hasan called its “vital survival” (*al-biqa al-hayawi*), by maintaining its status as a regional factor that had to be reckoned with.⁵³ If that could be done, then time was bound to work in its favor.

In general terms, “the path of history” was in the Palestinians’ favor. After all, in the PLO’s view Israel was “an American-European imperialist, economic and military project that does not possess the requirements of

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 44-47, 51-52, 54-56, 63; Khalid al-Hasan to *al-Hawadith*, October 12, 1984 and *al-Anba*, July 30, 1985.

⁵⁰ *al-Anba*, January 27, 1983.

⁵¹ *al-Anba*, January 28, 1983.

⁵² Khalid al-Hasan, *The Jordanian-Palestinian Agreement*, p. 128-129.

⁵³ Khalid al-Hasan, “The Options Open to the PLO,” part III, *al-Anba*, October 22, 1986.

survival, except by both external economic and military support. Were these lacking it would naturally disappear.” As al-Hasan argued:

the perpetuation of Zionism in Israel, together with the perpetuation of the interplay and growth of the factors of suicide and self-destruction that exist in its nature, and the factors of life and growing intrinsic power that confront it in the Arab and Palestinian reality, will lead, in the end, to the military destruction of Israel in a collective bloodbath ... This bloodbath would be the first of its kind in the history of the Muslim and Christian Arabs with the Jews in the Arab world. Something of that kind should not happen if it is possible that it should not happen, and for that reason the Palestinians see that one of the aims of their struggle is to liberate the Jews in Israel from Zionism, ideologically and institutionally.⁵⁴

The PLO's 'Auxiliary Option'

After the breakdown of coordination with Jordan, al-Hasan concluded that the Arabs' situation was lamentably impotent and that they were clearly incapable of dealing with Israel effectively, either by military means or through a process of negotiation.⁵⁵ There was, however, the “other auxiliary option,” which was entirely an outgrowth of the PLO's prevalent perception of Israel and of the time factor:

Everyone [in the Arab world] says that the Zionist entity is artificial; that the Jews are not a people; that contradictions of origin and culture [between Israelis] are in full swing; that the survival of the Zionist entity is dependent on American policy and power; and that the Achilles heel of the enemy is its limited number of people, the decrease in immigration and the increase in emigration and the Zionist fear of the natural increase of the Arab population.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, “The Future of Peace.”

⁵⁵ Khalid al-Hasan, “The Options Open to the PLO,” parts I and II, *al-Anba*, October 20-21, 1986.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, part II, *al-Anba*, October 21, 1986.

It was for these reasons, al-Hasan explained, that the Israelis were bent on ridding themselves of the Arab population, particularly in the West Bank and Gaza, whether by partial withdrawal in agreement with Jordan or by expulsion. Nevertheless, he was convinced that “despite all this [Israeli] planning, which was being quietly prepared for implementation ... the Zionist entity, founded on Zionist philosophy, was bound to disappear. The future would inevitably work in favor of the establishment of the democratic Palestinian state.”⁵⁷

It was, however, incumbent upon the Arabs not to just wait it out, but to be more diligent in their study of Israeli society and its inherent vulnerabilities. The “auxiliary option” had to be pursued by promoting action “inside all of Palestine, along with the option of Arab-Palestinian action outside [of Palestine] and without refraining from *fida’i* action inside [Palestine].”⁵⁸

The pursuit of the “auxiliary option” included:

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

The democratic Palestinian state is a euphemism for the dissolution of Israel. It is noteworthy that al-Hasan does not refer to the “secular” democratic state, a term hardly ever used in Arabic and never in the resolutions of the PNC, but one that is primarily employed for foreign consumption. In a society in which religious affiliation is still the most genuine and fundamental form of grass-roots group identity, the term “secular” has little meaning and is, therefore, of dubious political significance. In his series of articles in *al-Anba*, al-Hasan was not at all “secular” or reassuring to his non-Muslim compatriots when he described the Arab world as being united by “one history, one civilization, one culture and one religion (*din wahid*).” (*al-Anba*, October 20, 1986.)

As secularism is hardly ever invoked in Arabic, it is not surprising that the notion of a “secular” state has not taken root among the Palestinian people themselves. The poll taken in the West Bank and Gaza by the pro-Fath East Jerusalem daily *al-Fajr*, in conjunction with *Newsday* of New York and an Australian TV network, was as revealing about popular sentiment for the PLO as it was concerning grass-roots perceptions of the future Palestinian state. No less than 56.1 per cent of the people polled supported either “a state based on Islamic law” or “a state based on Arab nationalism and Islam.” Another 21.2 percent supported a “democratic Palestinian” state, but only 10.4 per cent supported “a democratic secular” Palestinian state. (See full text of poll results in *al-Fajr* [English edition], September 12, 1986.) The figure of 10.4 percent reflects the approximate size of the Palestinian Christian minority. One may assume, without hard evidence, however, that many or most of the 10.4 percent were Christians or Marxists, and possibly both. One conclusion from the polling data is that the PLO’s most ardent supporters in the West are avid advocates of the “secular” democratic state, at a time when the great majority of Palestinians are not.

⁵⁸ Khalid al-Hasan, “The Options Open to the PLO,” part II, *al-Anba*, October 21, 1986.

The exploitation of all the elements of self-destruction inside the Zionist entity by all available means; seeking the basic assistance of our people in all of occupied Palestine in a manner that would enable them to cooperate with those Jews who have begun to realize the dangers of Zionism for Judaism in the world and for the Jews inside the Zionist entity; paying special attention to the Arab Jews (*al-Yahud al-Arab*) [i.e., Jews from Arab countries] on the grounds that their cultural identity is contradictory to European and American Zionism which was created by imperialism and European racist thought, with the aim of using the Jews as an instrument of imperialist interests.⁵⁹

The “auxiliary option” was to be founded on the exploitation of the demographic factor. Its full potential could only be reached by forestalling Israeli plans for Arab emigration and by preventing an Israeli-Jordanian solution. This, in turn, required economic aid to the territories to enable the population to remain on the land without having to emigrate or seek employment in the Israeli economy. But the aid plan could not be implemented unilaterally by Jordan. al-Hasan warned that recognition of the demographic threat to Israel had induced the Labor Party, the U.S., and the EEC, to raise

the standard of living of our people in the [West] Bank and Gaza, through exclusively created capitalist economic institutions linked to the U.S. and the Zionist economy, with the aim of obtaining a moderate Palestinian leadership (!) that would accept (?) negotiations (!) [punctuated as in source] with the Zionist enemy in a Jordanian delegation and under U.S. auspices. Their negotiations would conclude with the implementation of the Zionist plan for the territories and the population.⁶⁰

The demographic challenge had to be harnessed to serve the Palestinian cause rather than to promote bilateral “capitulationist” negotiations. According to the PLO, for that to happen:

- (a) It was impermissible for the legitimate Palestinian leadership to recognize the right of the Zionist entity to exist, as this would mean ... bestowing the only legally valid legitimacy upon the

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, part III, October 22, 1986.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

existence of the entity, as well as the abolition of the right of the Palestinian people as a people with its natural national rights in its homeland.

(b) We cannot detach the auxiliary option from the option of national [pan-Arab] struggle which alone is capable of being decisive ... For this reason we have referred to the [other] option as auxiliary, but it is an option that must be pursued.⁶¹

At the same time, the Palestinians had to realize that both superpowers supported the existence of Israel in secure and recognized boundaries. Therefore the “establishment of the democratic Palestinian state in all of Palestine was not one of the objectives of the present phase, or of the following phase.”⁶² In the interim, the PLO had to “raise the slogan of vital survival for the PLO and the Palestinian struggle and preserve all the political achievements of the struggle that have been realized by the Palestinian people from 1965 [the emergence of Fath] until now, in the Palestinian, Arab and international arenas.”⁶³

The mainstream PLO view about time, Israel, and the organization’s survival is, of course, debatable. It is not at all certain whether or not time really is on the PLO’s side. Israel and Jewish nationalism could prove to be considerably more resilient or, conversely, the PLO (and Palestinian nationalism) may prove to be less sustainable than the PLO leadership would like to believe.

But such speculation obscures the political relevance of PLO perceptions of time. What is of crucial importance is not their prophetic quality, but their immediate political ramifications. They are the single most important factor that constrains the leadership from accepting historical compromise and reconciliation with Israel. However lamentable in PLO eyes the Arab predicament may be at present, the PLO believes the future is bound to bring positive and far-reaching change. Concessions of historical consequence are therefore not only ideologically repugnant, but also politically unnecessary. One can argue that even if the leadership itself does not fully believe in these prognostications, which is unlikely, disseminating such views can serve to

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

justify other motivations for rejecting historical compromise. And it can encourage Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to do likewise.

Jordan's Emphasis on Urgency

As on so many other issues, the PLO perceptions of time are not shared by Jordan. Indeed, they are diametrically opposed, as are their political ramifications. Since the rise of the Likud to power in Israel in 1977, and particularly after the appointment of Ariel Sharon as Israel's Defense Minister in 1981, Jordan's attitude towards Israel has undergone change. The rising strength of the right wing in Israeli politics has brought to the fore Israeli exponents of the "Jordan is Palestine" theory. They regard Husayn's Jordan not as Israel's natural partner in settling the Palestinian question, as is the firm belief of the Labor party, but rather the obstacle to such a solution. As a result, they advocate the "Palestinization" of Jordan.

The Jordanians, therefore, perceive a right-wing government in Israel as a serious threat. In their view, it would probably pave the way for the formal or practical annexation of the West Bank and Gaza, which, the Jordanians fear, might be coupled with an act of "demographic aggression," whereby Israel would hope to solve its demographic problems by expelling a large number of Palestinians to Jordan.⁶⁴ In the Jordanian perspective, therefore, time is not on the Arabs' side.

Israel, according to Husayn, would rapidly approach a serious dilemma if it did not give up the occupied territories. On the one hand, if it granted citizenship to the Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza, it would lose its Jewish character; on the other hand, if it did not, it would lose its democratic character and be forced to adopt the *apartheid* model of South Africa. Israel might therefore resolve the dilemma by evicting the inhabitants to Jordan. This third option, Husayn has said, was gaining ground in Israel, "coloring the current Israeli political vision with an extremist, right-wing hue."⁶⁵ According to one of Husayn's close advisers, the Jordanians were "very worried about these demographics."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Crown Prince Hasan to *Le Figaro*, May 22, 1984

⁶⁵ Husayn speech on February 19, 1986, official Arabic text, Jordan Ministry of Information, p. 16-21.

⁶⁶ *New York Times*, July 14, 1986; *Wall Street Journal*, July 16, 1986.

The PLO has a similar appraisal of possible Israeli actions, but it does not feel immediately threatened by such a scenario. The expulsion of Palestinians would probably cause Israel irreparable political damage but it would hardly affect the PLO establishment, whether in Lebanon, Tunisia, Iraq or elsewhere. For Jordan, however, the immediate consequences could be catastrophic. A mass influx of Palestinians would expose Jordan to the extreme socio-economic pressure of disgruntled refugees, might destabilize the Hashemite monarchy, and could transform Jordan into the "alternative homeland" for the Palestinians, in line with the argument put forward by some Israeli leaders that Jordan was, in fact, the Palestinian state.⁶⁷

Apart from the demographic threat, Jordanians also believe that lack of progress in the peace process could lead to a war in which Jordan had little to gain and much to lose. They seem to be genuinely concerned that a continued stalemate would eventually degenerate into a war between extremists on both sides.⁶⁸ Therefore, in the interests of their own survival, they view a settlement that would facilitate Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank as an urgent imperative.

Husayn has long argued for the urgency of progress towards a settlement. The formation of Israel's National Unity Government in the summer of 1984 reinforced that sense of urgency, because there would only be two years of a Labor-held premiership, after which the government was to be led by the Likud. In Jordan's view, the transfer of power to the Likud would indicate that time had indeed run out. It was, as Husayn said, "the eleventh hour."⁶⁹

Jordanian and PLO Perceptions of Israeli Politics

For Jordan, then, a Labor-led government in Israel was a window of opportunity. But for the PLO, a government led by Shimon Peres was not regarded as an opportunity; it was perceived as a serious potential threat.

With the approach of the 1984 parliamentary elections in Israel, there were increased expressions of anxiety in the Fath leadership that a Labor

⁶⁷ *al-Ray*, December 20, 1982; *Jerusalem Star*, August 11-17, 1983; Crown Prince Hasan in *Jordan Times*, December 12, 1983; King Husayn in *The Observer*, May 13, 1984.

⁶⁸ Crown Prince Hasan, "Return to Geneva," *Foreign Policy*, no. 57, Winter 1984-85.

⁶⁹ Jordan TV, May 4, 1985, cited in FBIS, May 6, 1985; *The Guardian Weekly*, December 15, 1985.

Party victory in Israel could pave the way for an Israeli-Jordanian settlement on the basis of the Labor Party's "Jordanian option." Salah Khalaf, one of the more radical members of the Fath Central Committee, warned that the "Jordanian option" could lead to the elimination of the PLO.⁷⁰ And Arafat argued that in a Labor Party era, the PLO would face "political threats" no less dangerous than "the massacres perpetrated by the Likud Government against the Palestinian people."⁷¹

The possibility that the Labor Party would come to power in Israel – coupled with the re-election of President Reagan in the U.S. – was viewed as a particularly ominous combination that would produce considerable pressure on Husayn to accept the "Jordanian option."⁷² The PLO, therefore, expressed the hope that a Palestinian-Jordanian agreement could be reached and turned into a "practical and responsible stand that would foil the enemy's evil intentions and entrench the formula of understanding and cohesion between the Palestinian and Jordanian peoples and their two leaderships."⁷³ The Fath Central Committee welcomed a Soviet announcement issued just after the elections in Israel that reiterated Moscow's support for an international conference on the Middle East. Not only did the announcement conform with the PNC and Fez summit resolutions, but its timing represented a "protective attack against the expected hostile initiatives by the Labor Party and against the U.S. Middle East policy."⁷⁴

It was widely maintained in the Fath leadership, and in the PLO in general, that there was no essential difference between Labor and Likud. They only differed in tactics and, if anything, Labor was the more dangerous of the two.⁷⁵ The Labor Party had a better international image, but, according to Arafat, was "no more than the Likud covered in attractive slogans, with the

⁷⁰ *Filastin al-Thawra*, June 9, 1984.

⁷¹ Gulf News Agency, May 30, 1984, cited in FBIS, May 31, 1984.

⁷² Salah Khalaf to *al-Tadamun*, August 5, 1984.

⁷³ Voice of Palestine (Baghdad), July 9, 1984, cited in FBIS, July 11, 1984.

⁷⁴ Voice of Palestine (San'a), August 7, 1984, cited in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, August 10, 1984.

⁷⁵ Mahmud Abbas in *al-Dustur*, Amman, July 17, 1984.

same iron fist covered in silk.” This was “simply make-up to beautify Israel’s face and make it acceptable to the world and the Socialist International.”⁷⁶

The Fath leadership clearly rejected any Jordanian-Israeli settlement, even if it entailed at least partial Israeli withdrawal and an arrest of the annexation process. The desire of the Fath leadership to cooperate with Jordan in the political process was more a function of the fear of a political process dominated by Jordan than a decision that they had to pursue the course of settlement before it was “too late.” The PLO was playing for time; Husayn felt he had none to waste.

⁷⁶ Kuwaiti News Agency, July 28, 1984, cited in FBIS, July 30, 1984.

VI. THE AMMAN ACCORD AND THE PROBLEM OF SELF-DETERMINATION⁷⁷

Motivated by totally different perceptions of time and completely disharmonious agendas and objectives, Jordan and the PLO entered negotiations for an agreement on political cooperation. Jordan was essentially oriented towards rapid progress in the peace process, while the PLO's policy was primarily pre-emptive. Indeed, the PLO's perception of time was partly predicated on Jordan's pre-emption.

The first round of negotiations between Husayn and Arafat, following the publication of the Reagan Plan, ended in failure in April 1983, Husayn was unsuccessful in his efforts to induce Arafat to accept Resolution 242, the essential U.S. requirement for recognition of the PLO. Eric Rouleau, a seasoned observer of PLO affairs, noted that Arafat conducted this initial round of negotiations "in order not to be marginalized, in order not to become irrelevant ... But it didn't work."⁷⁸ Eventually, though, it did.

In January 1984, Husayn revived the Jordanian parliament, which also represented the West Bank; in September 1984, he resumed diplomatic relations with Egypt; and two months later, he hosted the PNC in Amman. These were all central components of a Jordanian policy designed to pave the way for adding momentum to the Middle East peace process. Jordan's eagerness to extricate the peace process from its relative stagnation made it imperative for the PLO leadership to coordinate policy with Jordan. Therefore, the PLO leadership was unwilling to categorically reject the proposals made by Husayn to the PNC, even though they contained elements that were unacceptable.

Arafat and his close associates believed that relations with Jordan and Egypt were crucially important in order to forestall a settlement of the Palestinian question that might exclude the PLO. After the expulsion from Lebanon, it was important for the PLO to prevent a "new Camp David," by preventing Egypt's agreement to follow through with the autonomy framework of the Camp David Accords as well as Jordan's acceptance of the

⁷⁷ This section has been adapted from forthcoming chapters on the PLO and Jordan that I have written for the *Middle East Contemporary Survey*.

⁷⁸ *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Winter 1984.

notion of a separate deal with Israel.⁷⁹ Jordan was the gateway to the West Bank as Egypt was the gateway to the Gaza Strip.⁸⁰ Given the desire to establish a presence on the East Bank and influence the large number of Palestinians on the West Bank, Jordan was clearly the more important of the two. Political influence in these areas was deemed necessary to maintain the allegiance of the Palestinians, and to forestall any effort by Husayn to declare himself to be the representative of the Palestinian people.⁸¹ Agreement with Jordan was also required to counter the contention that the West Bank was Jordan's responsibility, thereby forcing the international community – especially the U.S. – to come to terms with the PLO.⁸²

The agreement eventually concluded between Husayn and Arafat on February 11, 1985 was the culmination of arduous negotiations which often teetered on the verge of breakdown. Sensing that the PLO may have been satisfied to prolong the negotiations indefinitely so as to prevent Husayn from taking any independent initiative, the Jordanians applied considerable pressure on the PLO leadership to reach an early agreement. Husayn, however, still preferred a joint initiative and needed the PLO as much as the PLO needed Jordan.

Since the PLO's major asset was its recognized representative status, it was crucially important for Arafat to constrain Husayn from building a political momentum that might eventually undermine the PLO with the help of cooperative West Bankers. On the other hand, Husayn's lack of legitimacy to independently negotiate a Palestinian settlement required cooperation with Arafat to enhance Jordan's negotiating role. Essentially, Husayn's plan was to create a Jordanian-PLO partnership in representing the Palestinians that would effectively erode the PLO's status as the "sole" legitimate representative of the Palestinians. These two historical rivals were thus entering a phase of cooperation designed to constrain, co-opt or neutralize one another. In that respect, both were successful and their "cooperation" came to naught.

⁷⁹ *Filastin al-Thawra*, March 9, 1985; Hani al-Hasan to *al-Anba*, August 20, 1985 and *al-Ray al-Amm*, October 27, 1985.

⁸⁰ *Filastin al-Thawra*, December 1, 1984.

⁸¹ *al-Talia al-Arabiyya*, January 28, 1985; Khalil al-Wazir to *al-Moudjahid* (Algiers), May 12, 1985; Hani al-Hasan to *al-Ray al-Amm*, October 27, 1985; Khalid al-Hasan, *The Jordanian-Palestinian Agreement*, p. 103.

⁸² Khalid al-Hasan to *al-Anba*, July 30, 1985.

When finally reached, the Amman Accord only papered over fundamental differences between Jordan and the PLO. The agreement upheld the principle of land in exchange for peace in accordance with all UN resolutions, including those of the Security Council; it called for the exercise of the Palestinians' right to self-determination within the framework of a confederation between Jordan and a future Palestinian state; and it supported negotiations for a settlement within the framework of an international conference.⁸³ The differences between Jordan and the PLO continued to revolve around three main issues: Resolution 242; the future relationship between Jordan and Palestine; and the exact nature of the international conference and PLO representation in it.

Opposing Interpretations of the Amman Accord

When Jordan announced that an agreement had been reached between Husayn and Arafat on "the formula for the joint Jordanian-Palestinian move for attaining a just and peaceful solution to the Palestinian cause," the PLO was quick to point out that the agreement did "not in any way mean complete unanimity," but also that "differences [did] not mean rupture."⁸⁴ The PLO was in no hurry; it did not believe a peace process would be conducive to the achievement of the organization's minimal objective, an independent Palestinian state. As long as the balance of forces remained in Israel's favor, the PLO felt no such achievement was possible and consequently saw no need to rush into negotiations in which Jordan might require the PLO to accept Resolution 242.⁸⁵ But since a rupture with Jordan at this juncture was also undesirable, the agreement was eventually approved (with certain reservations) by the PLO Executive Committee and by the Central Committee of al-Fath.

Even after a spate of "clarifications," Jordanian and PLO interpretations of the various parts of the agreement diverged markedly. The agreement's wording endorsing the principle of "land in exchange for peace" in accordance with the resolutions of the UN, "including the resolutions of the Security Council," was deliberately vague. It did not specify whether the PLO had recognized Security Council Resolution 242, the acceptance of which had

⁸³ For full text of the agreement, see appendix.

⁸⁴ Voice of Palestine (Baghdad), February 12, 1985, cited in FBIS, February 13, 1985.

⁸⁵ See the editorial in *Filastin al-Thawra*, February 9, 1985.

APPENDIX

THE JORDANIAN-PLO ACCORD OF FEBRUARY 11, 1985

Proceeding from the spirit of the Fez summit resolutions, as agreed upon by the Arab [world] and the resolutions of the UN relating to the Palestine problem;

In accordance with international legitimacy, and proceeding from the mutual understanding to establish a special relationship between the Jordanian and Palestinian people;

The Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization have agreed to march together towards the realization of a just and peaceful settlement of the Middle East problem and to put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Arab occupied territories, including Jerusalem, in accordance with the following principles:

1. Land in exchange for peace, as laid down in the resolutions of the United Nations, including the resolutions of the Security Council;
2. The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. The Palestinians will exercise their inalienable right to self-determination when the Jordanians and the Palestinians will be able to realize this within the framework of an Arab confederal union, which [they] intend to have established between the two states of Jordan and Palestine (*dawlatay al-Urdunn wa-Filastin*);
3. The solution of the Palestinian refugee problem in accordance with the resolutions of the UN;
4. The solution of the Palestinian problem in all its aspects;
5. On this basis, the peace negotiations will be held within the framework of an international conference that will be attended by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and the other parties to the conflict, including the PLO, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, in a joint delegation (a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation).*

Source: Original Arabic text as published in *Sawt al-Sha'b*, February 24, 1985.

* Words in parentheses did not appear in the PLO version of text.

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