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## The Emergence of the Palestinians since 1948

### Part Two: The Palestinians after the creation of Israel

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*This paper explores the role of Yasser Arafat and the PLO in the emergence of the Palestinian people as a political force after the defeat of the 1967 war. It examines the factionalism that beleaguered the Palestinian resistance or fedayeen groups and explains how Arafat and the PLO were able to unite these divergent groups behind a common cause. It highlights the role of Arafat and the PLO in the achievement of political legitimacy for the Palestinian people on the international stage.*

#### Introduction

Part one of this paper concluded with a discussion on 'semantics'. It stressed that semantics still play a part in the Arab-Israeli conflict. It referred to the debate which is still being conducted in some circles about the terms 'occupied' and 'disputed' with regard to the territory gained by Israel after the 1967 war. It was in fact Menachem Begin the leader of the Likud party, who took office in May 1977, who publicly challenged the use of the term 'occupied territories':

*There are not occupied territories. You've used this expression for ten years, but from May 1977, I hope you'll start using the word liberated territories. A Jew has every right to settle these liberated territories of the Jewish land'... When a reporter asked the Prime Minister-designate whether his Government would annex the territories, he replied: 'We don't use the word annexation. You annex foreign land, not your own country.' Would Israeli law be extended to the West Bank, asked another, a little wiser in the language of the new Zionism. 'You used the words West Bank,' Begin chided. 'Say Judea and Samaria. Use them always.' The semantics were clear enough (Silver, 1984:160).*

Irrespective of Begin's political position on the land captured by Israel as a result of the 'Six Day War', the fact remains that the occupation of that land did have significant long term repercussions for Israel. For it resulted in a new generation of Palestinians born under 'occupation' who would become the future leaders of the 'Intifada' or Palestinian uprising of 1987. The 1967 war was a watershed in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict for it created an awareness among the Palestinian people that they would have to take the liberation of their homeland into their own hands. This realisation led to a change in the leadership of the peak representative body of the Palestinians, the Palestine Liberation Organisation or PLO.

The aim of this section of the discussion is to show how the change in the leadership of the PLO in 1968-1969 helped to change the world's perception of the Palestinian people from 'refugees' and a 'humanitarian problem', to being recognised as a politically separate and distinct group of people: 'the Palestinians', with legitimate rights and land claims.

Yasser Arafat will be discussed but only in relation to the effect his leadership had on bringing the Palestinian cause to the forefront of world affairs. This section is not in any way intended as a biography of Yasser Arafat nor a detailed critique of his leadership amongst the Palestinian people at the present time. But what needs to be stressed here is that one cannot treat Yasser Arafat as someone frozen in time nor the PLO as a monolithic organisation which has not changed. Much of the critique of Arafat in recent times centres around what he has become and it has ignored or forgotten what he was. In other words Arafat cannot be assessed in a vacuum but he needs to be examined in the context of his

time. He is a man who has held the leadership of the PLO from 1969 till the present day. Over the last thirty years the whole climate of the Middle East has changed as has Arafat. This paper is in no way an apology for Arafat but so many recent assessments of the man fall into the trap of judging his contribution to the Palestinians' quest for statehood on his present performance as part of the Palestinian Authority and not over the last thirty years. Possibly a new man is needed for a new era to steer the Palestinian people to autonomy. But history has shown, even within Israeli circles, that a person such as Theodor Herzl was needed with the skill and ability to lobby the world leaders. This had to be done in order to lay the foundation upon which a Jewish state could be built, before a more pragmatic person such as a Chaim Weizman could build it.

This section will examine how Arafat did just that, how he laid the foundations upon which a Palestinian state could be built in the future by changing the international status of the PLO and with it the status of the Palestinian people. It will begin with an examination of the results of the 1948 war in order to explain the very poor and disadvantaged position the Palestinians found themselves in 1948 and what a major task it was to pull them out of the catastrophe into a better political position.

### The Results of the 1948 War

Nineteen forty eight was certainly an important date, changing the status of the Palestinians. But what happened to the Palestinians after 1948?

How did the Palestinians become so invisible? They outnumbered the Jews in Palestine eight to one in 1917... The Palestinians were still twice the Jewish population in 1948 when their territory was partitioned... How were they forgotten and made to disappear (Buch, 1973: 19).

The Palestinians dispersed into refugee camps amongst the Arab nations, some stayed in Israel:

According to Benny Morris, in his analysis of the Palestinian refugee problem, the British estimated in February 1949 that about 320,000 Palestinians moved into, or already resided in, the eastern section of Palestine, which was controlled by the Arab Legion, and Transjordan. Approximately 210,000 were in camps in the Gaza region, 100,000 went into Lebanon, and 75,000 to Syria. Some refugees went to Egypt and others to Iraq. Some 150,000 remained within the Jewish state (Bickerton & Klausner, 1995: 99).

Did they go voluntarily or were they pushed out by terrorism employed by the Jewish Agency through such groups as the Haganah? The Israelis argue that the Arab Higher Committee advised the Arabs to leave their homes and villages saying they would return after Palestine had been liberated. It needs to be stressed here that this is not some trivial point of debate, there is in fact a lot at stake for both sides. By insisting that the Palestinians left of their own accord, Israel is not required to agree to repatriation or any compensation. Although evidence proving either case is inconclusive there are Israeli documents that suggest that there was a plan called, 'Plan Dalet' and a policy in place to rid the land of as many Palestinian Arabs as possible. Weizmann talks about the 'miraculous cleansing of the land' with regard to the departure of the Palestinians (Bickerton & Klausner, 1995: 101). 'By the first truce in mid-June 1948, over 250,000 Palestinians had fled, and this exodus had reached 300,000 by July' (Bickerton & Klausner, 1995: 101). Some interesting research on this issue was conducted in the 1950s by Walid Khalidi and Erskine Childers, who, after examining the American and British monitoring records of all Middle East broadcasts throughout 1948, found that: 'There was not a single order, or appeal, or suggestion about evacuation from Palestine from any Arab radio station, inside or outside Palestine, in 1948. There is repeated monitored record of Arab appeals, even flat orders, to the civilians of Palestine to stay put' (Gilmour, 1997: 67).

Having fled either voluntarily or by force, the Palestinian Arabs' plight was basically ignored by the West and the other Arab nations who had their own agenda and were mainly concerned with their own interests. 'Until 1967 the national existence of the Palestinian Arab people was simply denied. They were seen as unfortunate refugees, homeless largely by their own action, and at most in need of resettlement-when seen at all' (Rodinson, 1973: 19). Another writer (Bickerton & Klausner, 1995: 99) suggests that it suited both Israel and the Arab states to ignore the refugee problem as it did the United States and the United Nations. 'Complaints against the Arab countries were that they had not fulfilled their obligations to the Palestinians, had manipulated them and used their problem as a

stratagem in their own rivalries while showing indifference to the refugees' suffering' (Schiff & Rothstein, 1972: 8).

Nasser and the pan-Arab movement advocated that Palestine would be liberated after broader Arab interests had been addressed. For in the decade after the war the Palestinians were not viewed as a separate political entity either by the Arabs or the Jews. Ian Bickerton (Bickerton & Klausner, 1995: 99) explains that:

the plight of the displaced Palestinian Arabs was considered by all parties concerned as a humanitarian issue to be resolved within the context of the relationship between Israel and the existing Arab states. Arab leaders certainly did not see the Palestinians as a separate political/national group, nor did most of the refugees define themselves in such terms. Egypt kept a tight reign on the Gaza Strip, and Jordan annexed the Old City of Jerusalem and the West Bank of the Jordan River. No manifestations of Palestinian nationalism were allowed.

The Palestinians emerged from the rubble of 1948 refusing to lend legitimacy to the actions of the West by not accepting the existence of Israel and what they perceived as the partition of their land: 'we Palestinians cannot accept a piece of our own land as charity from another country' (Adams, 1981: 98). Politically and strategically they paid a heavy price. They lost the war with Israel in 1948 and were defeated again in 1967 and have continued to be defeated. All of their territory has been and is still occupied by Israel. In a CBS documentary, 'The Palestinians', correspondent Bill McLaughlin commented that the Palestinians have been 'ignored by the West and used by the East ... [and] have been the consistent loser in the four wars fought in their name this century' (Shaheen, 1981: 98). Edward Said (1995: 414) maintains that '[m]ore than most people, Palestinians have been the victims of abuses by every government — Arab and non-Arab — in whose jurisdiction they have lived'.

### The Growth of Palestinian Nationalism

Residing in refugee camps, the Palestinians engaged in much political activity in the decade after 1948. They formed themselves into guerrilla groups; irregular forces who made attacks on Israeli-border settlements. They mined roads, blew up pipelines, bridges and murdered Israeli civilians:

[R]aids into Israel by individuals and unorganised groups of Arab refugees from Jordan, Syria, and the Gaza Strip were frequent after the cessation of hostilities in 1949. These incursions reflected, among other things, the artificiality or uncertainty of the armistice line, which although considered temporary had crossed over into Israel to reclaim possessions, harvest their crops, steal, smuggle, and sometimes to kill Jews (Bickerton & Klausner, 1995: 120).

There were several raids from the Egyptian borders into Israel in the mid 1950s and although minor, they were seen as provocative by Israel which retaliated often with massive military force. In February 1955 the Israelis launched an assault on an Egyptian military post in Gaza, killing thirty-eight and wounding thirty-one (Bickerton & Klausner, 1995:121). Nasser claimed that he set up commando training camps for the refugees in response to this attack. These recruits from the refugee camps became referred to as *fedayeen* (those who sacrifice themselves) (Schiff & Rothstein, 1972: 19). And from 1955 onwards the *fedayeen* were involved in activities such as sabotage, spying and murder as part of a broader strategy of resistance. This included the economic boycott of Israel with Egypt refusing to allow Israeli ships to use the Suez Canal between September and November 1955.

Zeev Schiff and Raphael Rothstein (1972: 11) describe the *fedayeen* as 'the first significant expression of the new Palestinian nationalism'. They further argue that it was the actions of the *fedayeen* groups that moved the Palestinian issue from its marginal position in the post-1948 years to the position of prominence it occupied after 1967. Alain Gresch refers to what occurred among the Palestinian Arabs in the late 1950s in the refugee camps, in the Gaza strip and the West Bank, as a 'renaissance' or 'rebirth' — first culturally and then politically — of the Palestinian movement. For up until the 1960s the Palestinian national movement that developed after the 1948 war was dependent heavily on, and was controlled by, the other Arab nations. 'It was not until the ... creation of the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1964 and the development of Yasser Arafat's Fatah that there began to be any evolution in Palestinian political thought' (Gresch, 1985: 2).

Ian Bickerton (Bickerton & Klausner, 1995: 160) explains how the Israelis in part were responsible for promoting the growth of the PLO after 1967 because of their 'failure to foster an indigenous leadership that would be acceptable to the Palestinians. By working through traditional elites and leaders and expelling nationalist leaders, they were partially responsible for the growing influence and success of the PLO not only in the occupied territories but on the world stage'. Jamal R. Nassar (1991: 19) argues that inter-Arab rivalries also aided the growth and importance of the PLO:

Inter-Arab rivalries crystallized almost immediately after the creation of Israel in 1948. They were intensified in 1956-1957 between Egypt and Iraq over the Baghdad Pact issue. The Arab leaders' mistrust and suspicion of each other peaked in 1961, when Syria seceded from the union with Egypt. The war in Yemen further divided the Arabs into "progressive" and "conservative" camps and the conflicting Ba'ath political rivalries of Syria and Iraq led to a further deterioration of the situation.

### The Creation of the PLO

The creation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation by Egypt's President Nasser in 1964 was an attempt at control. The organisation was formed to take command of all the *fedayeen* groups. The hegemony of Egypt over a unified Arab nation was at stake here:

As the leader of the Arab world, the Egyptian president feared that the fedayeen would eventually drag Egypt into another war with Israel—something Nasser wished to avoid... Nasser was also concerned lest Syria dictate the tone of the Palestinian struggle and Egypt suffer a decline in prestige among Arab and Palestinian nationalists (Schiff & Rothstein, 1972: 61).

It was at a conference held in Cairo on 13-16 January 1964, convened by Nasser to deal with Israel's plan to divert the waters of the Jordan River for its own use, that the PLO was formed. The PLO was to be a type of umbrella organisation, a co-ordinating body for all the politically diverse Palestinian resistance or *fedayeen* groups.

Under direction from Nasser the Palestinian representative on the Arab League, a lawyer, Ahmad Shuqairy from Acre region of Palestine set about creating the PLO. He was to tour the capitals of the Arab states to select members to serve as representatives of the Palestinian community. Shuqairy was considered Nasser's man and supported the Egyptian position. He served as PLO chairman until his resignation in December 1967 after the disastrous defeat of the six day war. Thus the PLO was aptly referred to 'the Palestinian branch of Nasserism with Shuqairy as its nominal head but President Nasser its real leader' (Yodfat & Anon-Ohanna, 1981: 22). The newly formed PLO was not an independent body representing Palestinian interests but was to a large extent under the control of the Egyptian government. The formation of the PLO did not manage to control all *fedayeen* activity, as groups such as Fatah had not as yet been absorbed into the organisation. Thus Fatah still managed to conduct its own independent raids upon Israel from Gaza. This annoyed Nasser who found the activities of Fatah a challenge to his authority and sought to curtail its activities and influence.

King Hussein of Jordan was not at all keen on the creation of the PLO, and objected strongly. He had a lot to lose and felt that it would place him under pressure in his own country. For 'the establishment of the PLO ... had put Hussein on the alert against the Palestinian threat' (Schiff & Rothstein, 1972: 62). He certainly did not want the PLO to operate from his territory. Jamal Nasser (1991: 19-20) explains that when the Arab leaders were discussing the nature and goal of the proposed Palestinian organisation, 'King Hussein ... feared the phrase, "Palestinian entity", because more than half of the population of his kingdom were Palestinians. The West Bank of Jordan was Palestinian land, and if "entity" meant an eventual state, he stood to lose a major chunk of his kingdom'. This preoccupation with the wording of the document that heralded the establishment of the PLO, indicates clearly that even in the very early stages in the struggle to 'liberate' Palestine the Arab leaders were concerned with curtailing any idea of an independent Palestinian state.

The founding conference of the Palestine National Council was held in May and June 1964 respectively, in Jerusalem. On 1 June 1964 the PLO declared its resolutions. Its goal was the liberation of Palestine. The National Council would be the sovereign body of the Organisation and would meet regularly. A

National Charter and Fundamental Law was drawn up by Shuqairy and was adopted as the basic constitution. It declared that 'Palestine is an Arab homeland', and that Arab unity and the liberation of Palestine were complementary aims. Also an intention was proclaimed to 'forge a Palestinian consciousness' in the present generation. 'It condemned Zionism as imperialist, racist and fascist' (Becker, 1984: 39):

And the Covenant specifically denied that the PLO had sovereignty over the West Bank of Jordan (annexed by the Hashemite monarchy), Gaza (taken under Egyptian administration) or the al-Hamma region (annexed by Syria). So the territory over which sovereignty was claimed proved to be the territory of the State of Israel, no more no less (Becker, 1984: 39-40).

A fifteen man Executive Committee was appointed and Shuqairy was elected Chairman and spokesman of the Palestine National Council. A Palestine National Fund was to be set up to draw contributions from all Palestinians and there was to be a Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) under the control of the PLO but under the command of the military chiefs in the various Arab states where it was formed. The headquarters of the organisation was to be in Jerusalem with branches to be opened in other Arab cities and offices all over the world to disseminate propaganda. The Arab states made sure that the power and control of the PLO specifically in regard to the PLA was in their hands. '[T]he PLO appointments, organization, training and activities were decided by the Arab League and in fact by Egypt. This situation changed later, after the [Fatah]... took over control of the PLO in 1968' (Yodfat & Anon-Ohanna, 1981: 22).

Not all Arabs were pleased with the PLO's formation — particularly the more radical revolutionary organisations in existence at the time. The Syrians also were not pleased with Egypt's initiative — particularly the nationalist and socialist Ba'athist ('Revival') Party which had come to power in 1963 with a *coup d'état*. 'Their dream also was of a united Arab nation, but under their own hegemony. The Palestinian issue was useful to them as it was to Egypt' (Becker, 1984: 41). In 1964 the Syrians began to build up a rival Palestinian organisation of their own. Agents were sent by the head of Army Intelligence to the refugee camps in Lebanon to recruit Palestinians to train as *fedayeen*. One such group had already been formed by eight men: Yasser Arafat, Salah Khalaf, Khalil al-Hassan, Farouq Qaddoumi, Zuhayr al-Alami, Kamal Adwan and Muhammad Yusef. The group was called 'al-Fatih' or 'Fatah', 'the conquest', the word being made up from the initials in reverse order of *Harakat al-Tahriri al-Filastini* — the Movement for the Liberation of Palestine.

There is much debate as to where and when al-Fatah was established. Some sources suggest that Fatah's origins lie in Gaza towards the end of the 1950s when Yasser Arafat was a student at Cairo University. Others maintain it was formed in 1957 in Kuwait where Arafat was working as an engineer, and still others suggest it was set up in Beirut after Arafat left Kuwait with the assistance of the Syrian intelligence forces. It is difficult to ascertain Fatah's actual date of formation, as some sources suggest it was set up sometime in the 1950s, others in 1964. Others claim that 'the official founding of Fatah is usually dated from the beginning publication of *Filastinuna* ("Our Palestine") in 1959' (Amos II, 1980:56). Yodfat and Anon-Ohanna try to explain why these inconsistencies exist in the information about Fatah:

The origins of Fatah are obscured because of its leadership's tendency to imbue the group with an aura of romantic mystery. The best available information indicates that first attempts to organize Fatah took place in the Gaza Strip following its short-lived capture by Israel in the Sinai campaign of November, 1956. Many of Fatah's leaders come from Gaza, and others have close family ties to this arid, densely populated region, which until the Six-Day War was under Egyptian control (1972: 56-57).

Arafat's origin is also clouded in mystery. Arafat maintains that he was born in Jerusalem. It has been suggested that this is because he wished to enhance his image by being identified more closely with the Palestinians in Palestine. In reality he was born in Cairo either in 1929 or 1931 for even the year of his birth is not agreed upon in many sources. An explanation for this discrepancy in the information about Arafat and the PLO lies in the conspiratorial and clandestine style of its operation which would actively discourage the release of information about the organisation or its leader for security reasons thus making it a difficult group to document.

Fatah was very different from Nasser's PLO, for instead of using a conventional army, it promoted guerrilla warfare to be carried out by its military arm, *al-'Asifa* (the Storm):

The creation of *al-'Asifa* coincides with a period of extensive Syrian influence on Fatah, and the Syrians are generally considered to be the prime movers behind the development of Fatah's military capability... The Syrian-Fatah cooperation was the result of a coalescence of interests. The Syrians wanted to realize their commitment to a war of popular liberation without directly risking Israeli reprisals (Amos II, 1981: 56-57).

Thus in its early years Fatah was given Syrian army backing with the supply of arms and training under the control of Syrian Army Intelligence. 'For the Syrians had an interest in provoking clashes between Jordan and Israel and used Fatah to that end' (Yodfat & Anon-Ohanna, 1981: 23). However Fatah's growing power and independence was seen as a threat by the Syrians who promoted an alternative group to challenge Fatah.

This group was called the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) and was in the service of Syria's intelligence, gathering information for them. It was a small group, established in 1959 by Ahmad Jibril, a former officer of the Syrian army, and Ahmad Za'rour, a former Jordanian officer, with the aim of waging a guerrilla war against Israel. However there was little co-ordination between Fatah and the PLF although there was some initial contact. For '[a]s early as 1965, contacts between Jibril's group and Fatah were made, and some exchange of funds and military training took place. This early cooperation seems to have been superseded in September 1966 when the Ba'athist regime in Syria began to sponsor Jibril in an effort to oppose Fatah's growing prominence' (Quandt, 1973: 60). By August 1967 Fatah and the Syrian Ba'ath decided to follow their own independent paths.

Fatah and still more the PLF through their operations in Israel sharpened the tensions in the area prior to the 1967 war and tried to push the Arab states into open war with Israel. However in reality the PLO and the activities of the *fedayeen* groups had little impact on the events of the Six Day War. Although they increased the tensions in the region at the time, they were neither directly the 'cause' nor the 'excuse' for the Six Day War.

### The 1967 or Six Day War

The 'traditional' version of the events leading to the 1967 war, accepted in the West at the time and by others today, maintains that the inflammatory rhetoric directed against Israel from President Nasser of Egypt and the aggressiveness of Syria provoked the 1967 Israeli attack. Israel, the argument runs, had no choice but to respond to these threats. It was a case of attack or be attacked. Israel's hand was forced and they needed to respond to protect their borders which they felt were indefensible.

Recent historiography into the 1967 war by 'revisionist' historians such as Noam Chomsky, however, has repudiated this version of events. Rather than the scenario of a defenceless Israel threatened by Arab aggressiveness, what has been revealed by contemporary historians is that the Israeli government was involved in secret negotiations with the USA to secure tacit agreement to Israel's preemptive attack on the Egyptian and Syrian airfields. Israel had learnt from the 1956 Suez crisis that without American approval they would be forced to return hard won territory. Israeli foreign policy was dictated by what Brecher refers to as 'Holocaust syndrome': the widely shared perception in Israel manipulated by its leaders, that 'Israel's very survival was at stake in every situation' (Brecher, 1975: 331-37). Although the Israeli leaders promoted this fear in the population to gain popular support for their military aims, the Israeli generals involved in 1967 war have been quoted since as saying that no such threat existed to Israel. General Mattityahu Peled, one of the architects of the Israeli victory in 1967 admitted in 1972 that:

There is no reason ... to hide the fact that since 1949 no one dared or more precisely, no one was able, to threaten the very existence of Israel... I am sure that our General Staff never told the government that the Egyptian military threat represented any danger to Israel or that we were unable to crush Nasser's army, which, with unheard-of foolishness, had exposed itself to the devastating might of our army... To claim that the Egyptian forces concentrated on our borders were capable of threatening Israel's existence not only insults the intelligence of anyone capable

of analysing this kind of situation, but is an insult to Zahal [the Israeli army] (Hirst, 1984: 210-11).

This fact was also confirmed by General Rabin a few months after the 1967 war: 'I do not believe that Nasser wanted war. The two divisions he sent into the Sinai on May 14 would not have been enough to unleash an offensive against Israel. He knew it and we knew it' (*Le Monde*, 29 February 1968).

Israel had several reasons for needing a war, although they may not have wanted one. A war proved to be strategically beneficial at the time in terms of boosting Israel's flagging economy which was at an all time low with 10 per cent unemployment. Furthermore the war provided Israel with more defensible frontiers and the achievement of their dream of 'Eretz Israel', incorporating the West Bank or Judea and Samaria.

### The Effects of the Six Day War

For the newly formed PLO the 1967 war, or Six Day War as it came to be known, presented a major turning point in the Arab-Israeli crisis. It 'radically changed Israeli/Arab relationships at the core and led to a strategic reassessment by all sides (including, of course the Palestinian)' (Amos II, 1980: 268). For it was a very significant event for the Palestinians, in particular in terms of their country and their leadership. The 1967 war with Israel resulted not only in the loss of the remaining land set out for the Palestinians in the partition plan of Palestine, but also in the loss of prestige for Egyptian President Nasser. After the 1956 Suez Canal crisis Nasser had successfully nationalised the canal and removed the last vestiges of colonial influence on Arab soil by its defeat of Britain and France. By 1958 Nasser had become the most prestigious and influential leader in the Arab world, a 'symbol of resistance to colonialism, imperialism, and Zionism' (Bickerton & Klausner, 1995: 138). However Nasser's loss of status was as spectacular as the loss of the 1967 war against Israel. The demise of Nasser's leadership and the Pan-Arab cause enabled new Palestinian leaders to emerge and take charge of the liberation of their homeland without alliance to other Arab causes or countries.

Although the Palestinians did not play a significant part in the 1967 war, it, more than any other event, convinced them that the liberation of Palestine lay in their own hands. A new, more energetic leadership emerged out of both the refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon, and the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, which was 'more fully committed to an armed struggle' (Bickerton & Pearson, 1996: 135). The repercussions of the change of leadership and tactics by the Palestinian people were felt across the Arab states, for, '[a]s Palestinian power grew, so did Arab fears. In some cases the Palestinians became a state within a state, which led to military confrontations with some Arab regimes... Confrontations with Arab states strengthened Palestinian nationalism as a distinct force in the region' (Nasser, 1991: 21-22).

However it was Israel's occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem that directly aided the growth of Palestinian nationalism and with it the emergence of the Palestinians as a political force in the region. 'With 1.3 million Palestinians under Israeli control in Gaza and on the West Bank, the Palestinian problem became Israel's problem' (Bickerton & Klausner, 1995: 150), creating the preconditions for the *Intifada* or Palestinian Uprising of 1987:

If Palestinian nationalism was nascent or held in check before 1967 when the Palestinians lived under Arab governments, it grew into an authentic manifestation of the desire of Palestinian Arabs for self-determination as the years passed. Many Palestinian groups representing Palestinian interests came into being. They differed on strategy and tactics and the order in which their various enemies — reactionary Arab regimes, and Israel — should be overcome, but the significant growth of Palestinian national aspirations and the world recognition that was gained for a variety of reasons, especially by a reorganized PLO led after 1968 by Yasser Arafat are undeniable (Bickerton & Klausner, 1995: 150).

### The Change in the Leadership of the PLO

The reorganisation of the PLO in 1968 occurred because of a total lack of faith in the PLO leadership of Shuqairy and the pan-Arab leadership of Nasser. Their methods of dealing with the Israelis had been totally discredited. The PLO had been primarily led by old guard Palestinian nationalists who

did not have popular armed struggle as part of its program. 'Instead, a conventionally trained and equipped army was assembled and stationed in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. The June 1967 defeat discredited not only the Arab regimes but also the PLO...' (Quandt, 1973: 50). Conventional warfare and Arab leadership was seen to have failed. For this reason in 1968 armed organisations particularly Fatah were able to influence and change the PLO Covenant. They wanted and got greater stress placed on the word 'Palestinian' rather than 'Arab' nationality (*wataniyya* rather than *qawmiyya*). And spoke of 'Palestinian revolution' and 'armed struggle' as 'the only way to liberate Palestine' which definitely did not appear in the original text of 1964 (Yodfat & Anon-Ohanna, 1981: 48-49). This change of strategy was reported in July 1968 in the Egyptian weekly *Ruz al-Yusuf*, which summed up al-Fatah's political thinking:

All the views and theories come out of the rifle's barrel. As the rifle is the outer image of Al-Fatah, the bullet is the ideology. Violence is the sure way, and the aim — liberation — is indisputable. That is the simple political view, which stems from a long chain of experiments: theories, views, talks, and speeches have gained [us] nothing during the [last] twenty years (Yodfat & Anon-Ohanna, 1981: 45).

Furthermore, before Fatah took over the leadership of the PLO in 1968, disunity had plagued the Palestinian resistance groups. In the 1950s and 1960s many young Palestinians were greatly divided in their political thinking. Both Christians and Muslim Palestinians were members of organisations of 'all shades of the ideological spectrum' (Quandt, 1973: 49). They were also geographically dispersed. Some were members of the Muslim Brotherhood while others supported the Syrian Social Nationalist party (SSNP) or the Arab Ba'ath Socialist party or the Arab Nationalist movement (ANM). Some had supported Nasser's leadership of the Arab world particularly after 1956 while others saw the Jordanian regime as the voice of the Palestinian people. There were no united goals or ideologies as Palestinian society was ideologically and organisationally fragmented. For '[e]ach of these militant factions was also strongly opposed to the others' (Quandt, 1973: 49-50).

The division and in-fighting between the various *fedayeen* organisations led to major splits within the parties and the formation of countless splinter and fringe groups. These groups were set up by rival Arab states to counter the influence of each other's organisation, while some were also set up as terrorist 'fronts' by the so called moderate groups that did not want to be publicly and politically associated with guerrilla activity. Groups such as 'Black September' (named after the September 1970 civil war in Jordan) have been said to be covers for Fatah. Black September reportedly conducted several terrorist actions for which Fatah 'did not wish to be responsible' (Yodfat & Anon-Ohanna, 1981: 146). As well, the 'Eagles of the Palestinian Revolution' (considered a cover for 'al-Sa'iqa', on which more shortly) conducted an attack on the Egyptian Embassy in Ankara in July 1979 (Yodfat, 1981: 146). Each of the countless groups that came into existence wanted to take control of the Palestinian cause to further their own particular agendas — often at the expense of the Palestinians. Being funded by a particular Arab state made it difficult for most of them to operate independently.

The 'Vanguards of the Popular War' commonly known as 'al-Sa'iqa' was established by the Syrian Ba'ath regime in 1968 to push the Syrian line of 'a Palestinian state as part of a united Arab world under Syria's leadership. The group's leader apparently 'denied the very existence of a separate Palestinian people' (Yodfat & Anon-Ohanna, 1981: 143). Its membership certainly reflected their leader's attitude, being made up mainly of non-Palestinians such as Iraqis, Lebanese and Jordanians, while the Arab Liberation Front (ALF) was set up by the Iraqi Ba'ath regime in 1969 to counter the influence and power of the Syrian-controlled *al-Sa'iqa*, which was second in size only to Fatah. The Iraqis also wanted to use the Arab Liberation Front or ALF to knock Fatah out of the political arena. They closed Fatah's offices in Iraq and encouraged rivalry between Fatah and the 'Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine' or PFLP.

The division that plagued the Palestinians before the creation of Israel during the mandate period continued well into the 1960s. The history of the PFLP, established in 1966, reflects the factionalism that beleaguered the Palestinian resistance groups during this time. The PFLP, headed by Georges Habash, was one of the most powerful groups after Fatah under the PLO umbrella. This group was leftist and Marxist in orientation aligning itself with other terrorist organisations such as the Japanese

Red Army, the German Bader-Meinhoff group and the IRA. They believed in world-wide revolution and rejected any political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. They were pro-Arab rather than pro-Palestinian in their outlook, stressing that 'the long term aim to be not establishment of a Palestinian State but the consummation of Arab unity' (Yodfat & Anon-Ohanna, 1981: 25), even though they refused to have anything to do with countries they considered to be 'Arab reactionaries' such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan. They preferred to get their support and funding from Iraq and had ties with South Yemen.

In 1969, however, this group split because of a leadership struggle within its ranks between the Left and the Right factions. The Left leader, Na'if Hawatimah, a non-Palestinian Christian from Trans-Jordan, took his followers with him and formed a new organisation called 'Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine' or DFLP. This group called for the overthrow of 'reactionary' Arab regimes and those more moderately supportive of Moscow such as Egypt, Iraq and Algeria. It required its members to study the works of Lenin and advocated a 'democratic state' in Palestine as a strategic aim. In 1974 because of a decision to stop terrorist attacks outside the Middle East yet another split occurred in the PFLP. This was led by Wadi' Haddad who headed PFLP foreign operations and disagreed with the decision. Deciding to continue with these activities he formed the PFLP-Wadi' Haddad Group which conducted such attacks as the hijacking of an Air France plane to Entebbe in June 1976.

This political climate produced massive obstacles to the creation of a viable Palestinian organisation representing the political rights of the Palestinian people. 'The Egyptian scholar Muhammed Anis has attributed the lack of unity within the Resistance to both ideological splits and to the "traditional nature of Palestinian society and its inclination towards clannishness" (Anis, 1970: 2-8). Nevertheless, Fatah and Arafat succeeded in winning the power battle among the *fedayeen*. This, of course, was not an easy task. The PLA had to be appeased and incorporated under the mantle of the PLO. The Palestinian Liberation Army under the influence of Syria had refused to accept the appointment of 'Abd ar-Razzaq Yahya as commander-in-chief, seriously weakening the PLO. The other, more radical, groups had to be pacified. Fatah gained a lot of respect and power by acting as a mediator between the various *fedayeen* groups. '[I]n February 1969, Fatah set about trying to bring some degree of unity to the badly fragmented commando movement. The persistent splits within the PFLP had erupted in open violence during January and February 1969, and Fatah helped serve as a mediator in settling the dispute' (Quandt, 1973: 71).

Fatah under Arafat's leadership was eventually able to unite the Palestinian resistance groups. This was because Fatah fundamentally differed from other Palestinian resistance groups as it chose not to adopt a strong ideological position thus appealing to all Palestinians — unlike Nasser's PLO, which was involved in inter-Arab affairs. Elaborating more fully on the reasons for Fatah's success, one observer explains that:

First, Fatah has been led by a small but relatively cohesive group of nationalists, several of whom have worked together for over a decade. Second, Fatah has developed a broad, nationalist appeal that can encompass supporters and recruits from nearly all ideological perspectives. Third, Fatah has declared its intention of avoiding inter-Arab quarrels, thus allowing it to receive aid and arms from Arab regimes as diverse as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Algeria, Syria, and Egypt. Finally, the simplicity of Fatah's nationalist political goals makes them understandable to the large mass of poorly educated Palestinians. By contrast, other groups have often engaged in highly sophisticated ideological debates that have little meaning to most potential recruits (Quandt, 1973: 55).

Fatah also gained a lot of prestige and popularity among Palestinians because of its successful raids on Israel from Gaza throughout the 1960s. Shuqairy, the head of the PLO, felt his position was being threatened by the success of the guerrilla activities of Arafat and Fatah. Even the Israelis could see that Fatah was 'potentially a very serious threat [for] they threatened to attract attention and support, especially from young Palestinians in the camps, away from Nasser's client PLO' (Bickerton & Pearson, 1996: 129) to themselves. And 'Nasser was forced to find a way of wresting the limelight away from Arafat and Fatah' (Schiff & Rothstein, 1972: 65). In February 1965, mines were placed on the Israeli border by Fatah agents. Fatah's border raids into Israel from Gaza angered Nasser.

'Palestinians suspected of membership in Fatah were kept under watch by Egypt's secret police as early as 1965' (Schiff & Rothstein, 1972: 63-64). Lebanon was also worried about having Fatah guerrillas operating from its territory.

Yet King Hussein of Jordan was alarmed the most by Fatah and *fedayeen* activity operating from his soil. 'Hussein in 1965 probably feared Fatah more than Israel. His opposition took the form of intensive security and intelligence measures. The *mukthars*, or elders, of border villages were ordered to notify authorities of the identity of anyone crossing the border to Israel' (Schiff & Rothstein, 1972: 63). This was because he feared that Fatah's increasing popularity among Palestinians could undermine his own regime. By 1970 there was outright confrontation between Hussein and the PLO. After the 1967 war, PLO operations were moved to Jordan. Hijacking of planes to Jordan by the more radical factions within the PLO such as the PFLP and DFLP put Hussein under pressure from within and without. The PLO had formed what has been referred to as a 'state within a state' in Jordan by building up the infrastructure necessary for the eventual formation of a Palestinian state. For the PLO was not simply an umbrella organisation for guerrilla activity; it also provided support in other areas that concerned Palestinians such as health, welfare, education, as the Jews had done before them, during the mandate period in Palestine. This political situation was seen as an attack on Jordanian sovereignty by Hussein. By September 1970 the relations between the PLO and Hussein had deteriorated so badly that fighting broke out between the Jordanian army — mainly made up of Bedouin troops — and Palestinian organisations. The situation was compounded when Syria sent an armed brigade and its own PLA Brigade to assist the PLO. However the Syrians were forced to retreat by the Jordanian army and the Israelis, who concentrated their forces near the border to discourage Syria from further involvement. The PLO was routed out of Jordan losing its territorial base and regrouping in Lebanon. This event was referred to as 'Black September', leading to the formation of the radical terrorist Palestinian organisation of the same name mentioned earlier. The destruction of the PLO base in Jordan pleased the Israelis who had earlier tried to destroy the Fatah headquarters at the Jordanian town of Karameh. In 1982 they were successful, however, in destroying the PLO's last territorial base in Lebanon.

Fatah was able to gain great propaganda value from the victory at the East Bank Jordanian town of Karameh in March 1968. Arafat himself gained great kudos from his ability to evade capture, imbuing him with legendary qualities. Andrew Gowers and Tony Walker in their biography of Arafat describe what happened at Karameh as 'one of his boldest pieces of political theatre' (1990: 77). Although it was the Jordanian army not Fatah that forced the Israelis to withdraw, Fatah gained great political mileage out of the event, with Arafat proclaiming: 'We will make Karameh the second Leningrad' (Gowers & Walker, 1990: 77). His biographers comment:

In the Arab world, Karameh detonated a sudden explosion of support for the fedayeen. Palestinian and other Arab volunteers flocked to join the resistance, and Fatah, in particular, was overwhelmed: within 48 hours of the battle it received 5000 applications, many more than it could handle. The columns of Arab newspapers were full of wildly exaggerated tales of Palestinian heroism, and speculation swirled around the role of a shadowy guerrilla leader known only by his *nom de guerre*, Abu Ammar (Gowers & Walker, 1990: 79).

Arafat's takeover of the PLO leadership in 1968 changed the political climate in the Middle East forever. After 20 years of being ignored by Israel, the West and the Arab states, the Palestinian refugees became visible again. The terrorist activities of the PLO from 1968 onwards ensured that the Palestinian cause was placed on the forefront of world affairs. Although the terrorist activities of the 1970s attracted adverse publicity world-wide for Arafat and the PLO, they achieved their objective. Terror secured little international sympathy for the PLO, however it did establish its cause as 'the quest of a victimized people for national self-determination, rather than a neglected refugee problem as it had hitherto been widely regarded'. One commentator adds: 'There is no escaping the analogy with Zionism in the late forties' (Lucas, 1974: 437).

There are many similarities between the Zionists of pre-state Israel, that is those members of the Jewish Agency in Palestine who fought with the British and Arabs to achieve a Jewish State before and after World War II and the PLO. The Zionists' use of terrorist tactics has been extensively

documented and among the future prime ministers of Israel were terrorist leaders of the various Jewish factions such as the Irgun and Stern groups. These men, such as Begin and Shamir, have been honoured as Jewish heroes with no stigma attached to their deeds, yet:

The record is long and bloody, as in the case of most nationalist movements; in the single month of July 1938, for example, the Irgun killed 76 Arabs with bombs in market places and the like. The official history of the Irgun makes little pretense that these actions were retaliatory, as is often alleged... The record is generally suppressed in the U.S., where cynics refer to terror and intimidation as an *invention* of the PLO (Chomsky, 1983: 165).

This idea that the PLO discovered terrorism is of course a fallacy. The PLO certainly did commit sabotage and terrorist attacks like others before them and since. Faced with the prospect of not having an official army, government, state or any representation and ignored by the West and their own Arab brothers few options were left open to them. As one Israeli dove noted in *Ha'aretz*: 'the Palestinians are the Jews of our era, a small, hunted people, defenseless, standing alone against the best weapons, helpless ... the whole world is against them' (Chomsky, 1993: 164).

However their political position was beginning to change by the mid-1970s, through the leadership of Arafat and the PLO. By 1974 the Arab states themselves were forced to acknowledge formally at the Arab summit meeting in Rabat, Morocco, that the PLO was the 'sole legitimate' representative of Palestinians. At the same time the world and the international media were also starting to redefine the Palestinians from 'terrorists' and 'refugees' to a national group with legitimate land rights. Reflecting this change in the international status of the PLO was the decision to invite Arafat to address the United Nations General Assembly in November 1974, where the PLO was accorded 'observer' status. This was a great diplomatic coup for it enabled the PLO to open offices in many countries. By the end of 1979, 106 states had given it some type of recognition, particularly in countries in the 'Third World bloc' (Yodfat & Anon-Ohanna, 1981: 37). Thus the political direction of the PLO was starting to change, moving from terrorism to diplomacy having realised that this was the way forward in legitimising their claims. 'For after vicious terrorist attacks in Israel in the early 1970s, PLO tactics began to change'. Cooley observes that 'During 1974 [and in fact, thereafter] there was a strong tendency by Arafat's PLO leadership, al-Fatah, to curb cross-border activity', though this did not prevent "wildcat actions" by other groups in the PLO' (Cooley, 1979: 33).

Israel was also becoming aware of the change in the international status of the PLO. Legitimacy and respectability were being conferred upon it being no longer simply regarded as a 'mere handful of men killing and butchering' (Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1981: 2). This preoccupied the Israeli government so much that a research report on the very topic was written by the Institute of Jewish Affairs in December 1981 containing the following opening remark:

Like it or not, the Palestine Liberation Organization is often judged to be moving towards moderation and respectability — in spite of its unchanged National Covenant and the continued militant statements of its leaders. This is largely a result of its campaign to achieve world-wide diplomatic recognition. PLO spokesmen use its international status as a way of refuting the charge that the PLO is a terrorist organization (Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1981: 1).

Yasser Arafat's campaign for international recognition of the PLO and Palestinian rights did in fact succeed in placing the organisation in a better position internationally. By October 1981 Arafat was engaged in a tour of not only Moscow and Greece, but the Far East as well which brought him major diplomatic successes. In Moscow Yasser Arafat was able to meet with the Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev and was informed 'that the PLO mission in Moscow had been granted official diplomatic status' (Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1981: 2). In Greece, socialist Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu officially recognised the PLO as 'sole representative' of Palestinians and offered to upgrade the PLO's office in Athens (Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1981: 2). During Arafat's tour of China and Vietnam he also spoke with Japan's Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki and Foreign Minister Sunao Sonoda. The meeting with Japan was very significant because it was 'a departure from previous Japanese Middle East policy which closely followed the USA's lead' (Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1981: 2). However the most important visit was the one to Moscow. In an interview broadcast on the *Voice of Palestine* on 30 October 1981 Arafat explained the significance of this meeting:

I consider this visit the most important visit I have ever made to the Soviet Union. What happened in Moscow is the main event of the year for the Palestinian people... The recognition of our office in Moscow as a fully fledged diplomatic mission is a message addressed to the whole world by the other superpower — I am not saying the first or the second. This means that the Palestinian people have fully asserted their existence and cause on the political and international map (Institute of Jewish Affairs: 2).

### Yasser Arafat and the Development of Palestinian Nationalism

Yasser Arafat without a doubt had a profound impact on bringing the cause of the Palestinians to the forefront of world affairs and of uniting a very politically diverse group of people behind the common goal of the liberation of Palestine and the establishment of a homeland for Palestinians. This was no small feat when one considers the forces that were at play to deny the Palestinians their existence. The reorganised PLO with their new chairman, Arafat, was able to attract fierce loyalty from Palestinians in the Diaspora, resulting in 'Palestinians perceiving themselves as members of a Palestinian rather than Arab "umma" or nation. In the process, they came to be seen as a potential threat to Arab regimes. Palestinian nationalism has become so strong that Palestinian loyalty to the PLO often far exceeds their loyalty to the states in which they live or even to the Arab Umma' (Nassar, 1991: 21).

Yasser Arafat more than any other person helped his people to emerge from the world of the powerless with no representation, and dependency on Arab states to a group of people with a governing body, with political representation through the PLO and clout. Palestinians not only had the Israelis to contend with but also the Arab states themselves, the international media, till well into the late 1970s and the abandonment by their own traditional leaders who fled in 1947 leaving them without direction or support. Thus one would have to agree with Alan Hart's (1984: 550) assessment of Arafat:

Without Arafat I strongly suspect that the Arab regimes would have captured the Palestinian card, and would then have used their influence to require the Palestinians to accept whatever crumbs the Jewish State and its American ally were prepared to offer them from Israel's table... Arafat's greatest contribution to the Palestinian struggle (and also the peace process) was, and is, his insistence on the independence of Palestinian decision-making ... even at the price of confrontation with Arab regimes that wanted to possess and play the Palestinian card for their own ends... If he had been seen as an agent or puppet of the Arab regimes, insisting on compromise to protect their interests at the expense of the Palestinians, he would not have been listened to and would probably have been assassinated.

The West and Israelis had long been aware of how 'powerful' Arafat had become and tried to discredit him by presenting him as the embodiment of evil: 'According to the official Israeli view, the PLO is nothing but a "syndicate of murderers", and its leader a man with "bottomless hate in his heart", who would try to finish the job started by Adolf Hitler if he was given the opportunity. That is more or less the story as it has been told to the people of Israel and the world by successive Israeli governments and their apologists' (Hart, 1984: 13). There is no doubt that the strong influence and authority wielded by Arafat and the PLO has greatly concerned the Israelis for they have certainly tried to cast doubt upon their credibility. '[E]ach time Arafat made a political move in the direction of compromise, the Israelis replied with bullets and bombs. The more Arafat demonstrated the seriousness of his wish for a political and compromise settlement, the more determined the Israelis became to destroy the P.L.O. as a political force' (Hart, 1983: 17). For what the Israelis have feared the most was not a 'terrorist organisation' which they could easily dismiss but a 'political' PLO with legitimate claims that might be taken seriously by the West. Sir Brian Urquhart (Hart, 1984: 17), for many years the Under Secretary-General of the United Nations, often referred to as 'Mr Middle East', also highlights this point:

The Israelis are brilliant at creating myths and then getting the rest of the world to accept them as truth. There is a great myth that the Israelis are frightened of the P.L.O. as a military force. They are not. They can handle the P.L.O. as a military outfit with both hands strapped behind their backs. What the Israelis are really frightened of is a political P.L.O.

So concerned have they been about the political power and respectability that the PLO and their leader, Arafat, have gained, as the official representatives of Palestinians, that former Israeli Defence Force commander in Gaza, Zvi Poley, was quoted as saying in an interview that, ' Hamas was set up by us, in the mid-1980s, as a competitive movement to the PLO' (Robinson, 1997: 177). A member of the Jordanian delegation to the Washington peace talks with President Bush also commented that 'Israel created Hamas'. Surprised, Bush turned to advisor Denis Ross and asked if this were true. Ross replied simply 'yes' (Robinson, 1997: 177).

Upon gaining office Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was also involved in casting aspersions upon Arafat's ability to lead by insisting that he would not renew the peace initiative undertaken by Rabin unless Arafat stopped the Hamas bombing. Netanyahu claimed that if Arafat could not control Hamas, then either he was not really the leader of Palestinians, rather Hamas was in charge, or that Arafat condoned the violence. Either way Netanyahu and the Israeli government refused for a long time to have anything to do with Arafat, citing the behaviour of Hamas as the cause. They effectively played the 'terrorist card' used by successive Israeli governments, to avoid any direct negotiations with the Palestinians. As David Krivine puts it in a letter to the *Economist*: 'the one group we won't talk with, it is true, is the PLO — but not because they are nasty people. The obstacle is the subject on the agenda. It can only be the creation of a Palestinian state on the West Bank, and that we can't agree to' (Krivine, 1982).

It has not only been Israel but also the Arab States that have seen Arafat and the PLO as a threat to their power base and to the realisation of their own personal goals and desires for the creation of a united Arab nation with their country in control and have tried to get rid of him. The Syrians saw Palestine as part of their southern territory. 'To many Syrians, Arafat seems ... [a] threat, an upstart and an impostor who came out of nowhere to challenge age-old claims to leadership of the Arab world. Until recently, historic Palestine was regarded as merely a small corner of what was once Greater Syria; Arafat's efforts to unify the Arab world behind the Palestinian cause imperiled the dreams of Syrian leaders to restore Damascus as the capital of that world' (Wallach & Wallach, 1991: xix). While the Iraqi Ba'ath regime wanted Palestine included in their sphere of influence, not Syria's. Egypt's President Sadat feared that the creation of an independent Palestinian state 'might become a destabilizing factor in the area and a soviet base' (Yodfat & Arnon-Ohanna, 1981: 38). Although the Hashemite regime was prepared to say that 'Palestine is Jordan' and offer the Palestinians Jordanian citizenship, they avoided recognising them officially as a separate people for they and Arafat were seen as a threat to the Jordanian leadership, making up over half of the population in the state: 'To many Jordanians also, Arafat is a danger, a symbol of the divided loyalties among Jordan's Palestinian majority' (Wallach & Wallach, 1991: xix).

Arafat's popularity has waned among his own people since his signing of the *Declaration of Principles* on 13 September 1993. '[T]o more radical Palestinians and Moslem fundamentalists, Arafat seems corrupt and deceitful, a once-proud revolutionary who has renounced the armed struggle for the duplicity of diplomacy and connived with the West to accept the permanence of a colonial implant. For them, Israel itself is the daily reminder that a Jewish state, even a secular one, has no place in the Middle East; unlike Arafat, these Arabs have not given up the struggle to liberate all the land which was once part of historic Palestine (Wallach & Wallach, 1991: xix). Edward Said, a member of the Palestine National Council in 1988, also virulently criticises Arafat for the signing of the *Declaration of Principles*. Said feels that this agreement offers very little to Palestinians except more concessions on the Palestinians' part and more Israeli control. He sees the documents as vague and lacking in specific definitions of key terms such as 'limited autonomy'. Indeed, what does this term mean? 'There is no such thing as partial independence or limited autonomy. Without political independence there is neither sovereignty nor real freedom, and certainly not equality with an Israeli Jewish state that destroyed Palestine in 1948' (Said, 1995: 419-20). He feels it is time for Arafat to go, for he is out of touch with the feelings of the ordinary Palestinians in the Occupied Territories:

In Gaza and elsewhere, local leaders resign from the PLO, and its cadres grow more disaffected. No one has anything but complaints about Arafat's leadership: numerous petitions, mission, and articles in the press have kept up a constant pressure on Arafat to reform, change his autocratic

ways, open up the decision-making process to talent and proven ability... It could not be clearer that the traditional PLO hierarchy, including Fatah and its associated parties, as well as its creatures in the Occupied Territories and elsewhere, should step aside... No leadership can expect forever to be in sole control of money and political authority... How long can Arafat simply assert his prerogative to be in exclusive control of building contracts, foreign aid, lucrative appointment? (Said, 1995: 414-15).

However, even given this latest division of opinion on Arafat and the PLO, what cannot be denied is his and the PLO's importance in development of Palestinian nationalism. Successive Israeli governments would not have put the time, effort and funding into alternative organisations, in order to challenge the PLO's leadership of Palestinians, had the PLO and Arafat not been effective in gaining world wide sympathy and support for the Palestinian cause. For the emergence of Palestinians since 1948 has been intimately connected with the development of Palestinian nationalism and the role of Yasser Arafat. Arafat may not have liberated any territory, his Palestinian Authority, may be a far cry from the independent Palestinian state proposed by the PLO covenant but he 'inspired and directed the regeneration of Palestinian nationalism' (Hart, 1984: 548) and with it, the emergence of Palestinians.

### Conclusion

The story of the emergence of the Palestinian people is the story of how and why the Palestinian Arabs took the liberation of their land into their own hands. It is the story of how Palestinians themselves became a political force with indigenous leaders rather than the traditional leadership that had ruled them for centuries. The Palestinian notables and major families who wielded traditional power prior to 1948 abandoned the *fellaheen* or Palestinian peasants in the 1948 war with Israel. They fled to Cairo, Damascus, Beirut and the West, leaving the villagers without leadership, support and direction. The Palestinians left the villages, dispersing into adjoining Arab countries and refugee camps, to the Gaza Strip and West Bank and into East Jerusalem. They remained in the refugee camps and for the next 20 years were ignored by the West and used by the East as pawns in the battle for Palestine. Their need to return to their homes after the 1948 war was denied by Israel. Although their continued presence in refugee camps was meant to act as a thorn in the side of Israel and to jolt the West into taking action, in reality they became invisible.

Under the leadership of Egypt and Nasser their needs were subordinated to the good of the pan-Arab cause. 'Nasser's dream was of a united Arab world under the Hegemony of Egypt. Israel impeded Arab unity by occupying "Arab land". To avenge the 1948 defeat and destroy Israel was a sacred goal' (Becker, 1984: 35). Thus the return of Palestine was promised after the Arab countries achieved the liberation of the land. This did not eventuate. Forming themselves into *fedayeen*, the Palestinians launched surprise attacks across the border on Israel. In Cairo in 1964, Nasser tried to control these groups by forming the PLO as a co-ordinating body under the auspices of the Arab League. The military disaster of the Six Day War in 1967 put an end to Egyptian power and Nasser's prestige in the region. It heralded a new age in Arab-Israeli relations.

The Palestinians — rather than the other Arab states — took control of the *fedayeen* groups. One particular group, al-Fatah, gained prominence and Yasser Arafat, a member of this faction, was made PLO Chairman in 1969. The PLO became independent of Egypt and in 1974 became acknowledged by the Arab nations and internationally as the official representative body of the Palestine people. This recognition was achieved through the guerrilla war that the Palestine people themselves launched. The PLO forced the concerns of their people onto the international stage and onto the world political agenda. In a sense one could argue that the Palestinian people took control of their future and asserted a new and vigorous national identity not simply aligned with the Arab world.

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