

# TEACHING THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Revised second edition, November 1993

## PART III, LESSON FOUR: PALESTINIAN SITUATION AND PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM

---

### Teaching Strategy

There are four goals for this lesson: First, students should understand the conditions of Palestinian existence; specifically their population diaspora and the circumstances of occupation; as in Lesson Two, they will see how objective conditions produce political outcomes. Second, they should understand the role and impact of the PLO on Palestinian political developments. Because of long-standing US government hostility to Palestinian nationalism, there is a predisposition to see the PLO in negative, almost demonic terms. A more detached perspective will help students. Third, they should see how Palestinian perspectives on their own situation (and on their relationship with Israel and Israeli Jews) has evolved over the years. There is a tendency to think of Palestinians as having a common, ahistorical, unchanging perspective. By seeing the positions of 1948, 1964, 1974, and 1988 in context, this simplistic viewpoint will be changed; finally, there is a subtle goal of helping students overcome the Rhetoric Wars that have portrayed Palestinians in exceptional negative light. By seeing conditions, evolution, complexity, and human faces, students can be freed from the poisons of dehumanization and stereotyping.

1. Review information on population figures and where Palestinians live. Refer to maps. Point out especially how many live in Historic Palestine, on the border of Historic Palestine, and in more distant lands. (Remember that there are perhaps 50,000-100,000 Palestinian-Americans, many being professionals). It will be important for students to see that those *in the homeland* would think and act differently from those in exile. When Palestinian leadership shifts from Exile Leaders to Internal Leaders as a result of the Intifada, this will be a critical distinction. If students did not do the Pie Chart project earlier, this might be a good point to do it or some similar exercise.
2. There are three PLO positions included in the Student Lesson: the PLO Charter, the Democratic Secular State proposal of 1974, and the Two State Solution (Declaration of Independence). Like Lesson Two, this is a rather complex, text-based lesson. Break the class into teams who are supporters of one of the three positions. Teams will discuss their position among themselves and try to figure out the following: what are the key points that they support? Is their position compatible with the other two documents? How is their position preferable to other plans? Should they agree to modify their position? What in their plan do they not want to abandon, even if they must break ranks with others? Reassemble class. Have speakers explain their positions to others. Have students serve as a "PNC Conference" to discuss whether to accept the Two-State Proposal based on presentations.
3. A major goal of the lesson is to humanize the conflict. Use the profiles of six Palestinian families

to do this. Break the class into six groups, one for each family. Have families discuss which of the three main Palestinian positions they prefer and why. Reassemble the class and have designated speakers explain their perspectives. Have other students serve as a "PNC Conference," as above. (We will use the Palestinian families later; do this exercise if possible).

4. If you are inclined towards poetry, use the poem by Mahmoud Darwish, the most famous Palestinian poet. Darwish captures the feeling of the Palestinians that have been turned into faceless beings, treated by the world simply as a "problem" of "refugees" to be ignored or solved. He also captures the determination of the Palestinians to assert their identity and existence. Ask students what they think the author is trying to say. Ask whether they think he is violent. (He is not. The perception that he is can generate a discussion about the difference between militancy and violence).

## **Teacher Background**

In 1948, there were approximately 860,000 Palestinians in the Mandate inside the "green line." About 700,000 were driven out or fled. Recent Israeli research suggests the number who became refugees may have been higher--perhaps 800,000. Palestinians call the events of 1948 *Al Nakbah*--The Catastrophe.

The impact of exile on the Palestinians was devastating. They had lost their homeland and to many people they lost even the right to call themselves a people. There was a conscious effort by Israelis and their supporters to suggest that they were not even Palestinians but were Syrians or Jordanians who had just recently moved to Palestine for jobs but had no real attachment to the land (or right to live there). Arab leaders in other countries viewed them with suspicion since their relatively large numbers (especially in Jordan and Lebanon) threatened to overwhelm the local population. And the world community--which was committed to principles of international law--seemed oddly unwilling to enforce its resolutions in this particular situation. Some Palestinians began to think there was a conspiracy led by Jews to keep the international community from doing what was right. Others felt Arab leaders were under the control of Western powers and were not representing their own people.

The few Palestinians who remained behind under Israeli rule also suffered. During the war Israelis destroyed 394 Palestinian towns and villages and appropriated the land for Jewish use. After the war Palestinians suffered even more losses. The Israelis passed the "present absentee" law which held that anyone not physically on their property during the 1948 fighting would be considered suspect and hence would lose their land. Approximately 75,000 Palestinians lost their land through this law. Another 250 dunums were taken from the remaining Palestinians under this law (4 dunums = 1 acre), and additional villages were destroyed. Between 1949-53, 350 of 370 new Jewish settlements or towns were built on confiscated land. Those Palestinians remaining behind were kept under military rule until 1966, with restrictions on the right to move about, to work, to participate in politics. Those overseas at the time of the partition (visiting relatives or on vacation or business) were not allowed to return. Family separations were painful and a modest family reunification plan helped only a small proportion of the cases.

## **Political Evolution**

In the aftermath of 1948, Palestinians took two different paths. One group under the Grand Mufti Amin Husseini set up the "Gaza Government" that called for the reversal of the partition resolution and the creation of a Palestinian state in all of Palestine. He was prepared to grant full citizenship to Jews but not to create a Jewish government. ("Grand Mufti" was the religious title held by the chief Muslim leader in Jerusalem. Under the colonial system, the Mufti was a government official. Husseini was selected by the

British and was close to them until the 1930's when he split with Britain over the 1936 Palestinian uprising, fled into exile, and met Hitler during World War II. Husseini led his large Jerusalem family into violent confrontations with other families. He was very controversial and unpopular in some circles. His "government" had no real support and quickly disappeared. Faisal Husseini--the prominent and popular Jerusalem Palestinian leader known to be close to Arafat--is his nephew.

A second group--those living in exile in Jordan--aligned with King Abdullah and agreed to unite with Jordan into one country (this unification effectively applied only to the West Bank and East Jerusalem). The heads of the great Palestinian families (Dajani, Nashashibi, Nusseibeh) met in Jericho in 1949 with Abdullah and agreed to this unification. Some scholars believe the assassination of King Abdullah in 1951 in Jerusalem was in retaliation for this and other alleged Jordanian attempts to undermine Palestinian independence. (Anecdote: It was this unification that changed Transjordan into Jordan, shifted the country from an Emirate to a Kingdom, and changed Abdallah's title from Emir to King.) To Palestinian nationalists the unification was not legitimate and was never accepted. However, most Palestinians gladly accepted Jordanian passports and Jordanian payments for their work in education and other public service activities. The vote of the Arab League in 1974 to declare the PLO the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" was partially an effort to delegitimize the Jordanian annexation, but primarily to ratchet up the pressure on the Israelis and the US for more energetic efforts to make a peace that would advance the cause of the Palestinians. In 1988 King Hussein of Jordan repudiated any Jordanian claim to the West Bank.

Upon unification, all Palestinians in Jordan received full Jordanian citizenship. Palestinians today are very prominent in Jordanian business and government (especially the foreign service). King Hussein's third wife--who died in a tragic accident--was from a prominent Nablus family. Because the Palestinians are highly educated people, they have achieved prominence and success in many countries. And because many in the Gulf and elsewhere carry Jordanian passports, they often return their earnings to Jordan. These remittances have been a great boon to the Jordanian economy and have given Jordan a political significance well beyond what one would expect for a country with so few resources.

**Alert:** Ariel Sharon and other Israelis of the Revisionist tradition argue that because after World War I the League of Nations first used the term Palestine to include Jordan, and because a majority of Jordanian citizens are of Palestinian ancestry, this makes Jordan a Palestinian state. They suggest that Palestinians could move across the border, replace King Hussein, and have a Palestinian state. Palestinians do not accept this, nor do Jordanians, the American government, nor the world community. It is an argument with no standing outside certain circles who feel Israel should hold on to the territory occupied in 1967.

---

## **THE PALESTINIAN LIBERATION ORGANIZATION AND BEYOND**

In the 1950s various Arab leaders created Palestinian groups (political and/or military) that were essentially front organizations for their host countries. Each Arab leader wanted to capture the Palestinian cause for his own purpose. Damasus, Baghdad, and Cairo all did this. Few of these organizations ever developed mass followings. The most famous of these organizations was the Palestine Liberation Organization, created in 1964 by Nasser of Egypt. Since Nasser was the dominant Arab leader at the time, he persuaded the Arab League to endorse the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." He put a bombastic Syrian puppet --Ahmed Shuqayri--at its head. It was Shuqayri's boastful and irresponsible promise to drive the Israelis into the sea that is so often quoted.

In the early 1960s Palestinians began to form their own organizations. At the American University of Beirut, students with radical or leftist leanings emerged around George Habash, a Christian whose family had been forced from their home in Lydda in 1948. In Kuwait a group of engineers and other professionals--some educated at Egyptian universities--began to organize around Yasser Arafat. They started small--with newsletters and discussion documents affirming the right of Palestine to exist. By the mid-1960s guerrilla units based in Egypt began conducting operations from Sinai and Gaza. Others operated across the Jordanian border.

The 1967 war was a disaster for Arabs. Israel crushed all Arab armies in a week. It became obvious to Palestinians that if they were to have their own land, it would not be through the efforts of Arab leaders. They would have to do it themselves even though their position at the time was exceptionally weak.

In 1968 15,000 heavily-armed Israeli soldiers entered Jordan to destroy a Palestinian guerrilla center at Karameh, just below the city of Salt at the top of the rift. After a day of fierce battle, the position--under the leadership of Arafat's Al Fatah--held. The Palestinians had taken big losses but had stood against the Israeli army. Over half of Al Fatah guerrillas were dead (150 of 300 compared with under 30 Israeli dead) but Arafat was a hero and the battle of Karameh a legend. With two days, 5,000 young men joined Fatah. From this point on, Arafat was the dominant leader of the Palestinian nationalist movement.

In 1969 Arafat became chairman of the PLO and restructured it into an umbrella organization with membership open to all Palestinian groups. The PLO has a Parliament (the Palestine National Council) and an Executive Committee made up of representatives of the recognized Palestinian groups. While at various times Palestinian radicals have refused to cooperate with the PLO (they accuse it of being too willing to accommodate to Israel among other things) still the PLO has been a unifying organization. Members of the PNC include guerrilla and political groups, women's associations, students, writers and intellectuals, mayors and others expelled from the West Bank and Gaza, unions, and overseas Palestinians. While the military representatives are chosen by their leaders, other representatives are elected by their membership.

Students should understand how Palestinian thinking has evolved over the decades. It is a mistake to see Palestinian perspectives as somehow fixed in time. Three major positions reflecting two major shifts should be addressed. The first position is the PLO Charter; the second the Democratic Secular State proposal; the third the Algiers Declaration of 1988. *If you feel you do not have time to cover all three major Palestinian positions, then you should cover the Algiers Declaration, which represents the current official Palestinian position.*

---

## THE PLO CHARTER

The Charter was adopted in Jerusalem in 1964 at the time the PLO was created. It reflects Nasserist thinking about Arab nationalism, the primacy of the Arab states, and the confrontation with Israel as a central task. The Charter sees Zionism as a manifestation of western colonialism that "conspired and worked to displace" the Palestinians; it affirms that the Palestinian people have a right "to regain its homeland" and to the "right of self-defense" as guaranteed under international law. The various articles in the charter outline Palestinian thinking at the time.

1. Article 2 defines the boundaries of Palestine in terms of the Mandate and rejects partition. Jordan is not considered part of Palestine.
2. Arab Nationalism is a much-misunderstood concept. Non-Arabs often assume it means that all

Arabs should be unified into a single political system, and indeed there are some few who do believe so. But what Arab nationalists want more than unification is unity: the ability to act in concert, to play a positive role in history, to make their own judgments and decisions without being unduly influenced from outside. There is a belief that Arabs are a common people or nation with a common culture, a common history, and a common historical destiny. They are now divided and weak and controlled by outside powers. While not becoming one state, Arabs should become once again one people.

3. Articles 6 and 7 invite "Jews of Palestinian origin" to be Palestinians. It does not include Jewish immigrants from Europe or elsewhere, nor does it address the question of whether Jews overseas (America, Europe, etc.) can come in the future. Other versions of the Charter mention earlier dates. Arafat's "Gun and Olive Branch" Speech of 1974 offers citizenship to all Jews living in Palestine at the time, as does the Algiers Declaration of 1988.
4. Article 8: Education is the very center of Palestinian identity. Like Jews, Palestinians have always believed that education, consciousness, and study were the ways to maintain their identity and existence in diaspora. It is no accident that Palestinians are among the best educated of all Arab peoples. One of the major organizations of the PLO is the education department, which runs schools wherever there are Palestinians.
5. Article 18: It is a long-standing viewpoint in the Arab world that Jews are a religion but not a nationality. Many documents insist that they would guarantee full rights to Jews as individuals or as a faith, but not grant them separate political rights. It is of course political rights as a nationality that is the essence of Zionism. We might also note that many Israelis have a similar view of Palestinians: they can have rights as individuals but not the right to independent nationhood (self-determination).
6. Article 19: Israel is seen as the last European colony, an effort to place European settlers in the midst of Arab populations, to displace Arabs from their land, and to use colonial populations to dominate the region. Palestinians often cite Herzl as evidence of this conclusion.
7. Article 26: The foreign policy of the PLO has been to cooperate with all Arab governments, become entangled with none, break with none. Many Palestinians were critical in 1990 of the break with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia over the Gulf crisis. Arafat vigorously insisted he had not violated this tradition, had condemned the invasion of Kuwait, but he had equally condemned the introduction of Western armies into the Arab world and the war against Iraq. He felt his position was distorted by the western media to discredit the Palestinians.

The PLO Charter is sometimes called the PLO Covenant. This is a poor translation that should not be used since it connotes to some people a Biblical Sacredness that is not appropriate and can lead to misunderstandings. (One major Jewish organization recently published an article that said the "Covenant" was comparable in sacredness to the Torah in the Jewish tradition.) The word in Arabic is *Mithak*, a word used to describe the United Nations Charter or a non-aggression pact between two states. Charter is a more accurate and less inflammatory translation.

---

## **PALESTINIANS AFTER 1967**

After the 1967 the Palestinians moved into two directions: the mainstream under Arafat moved towards an accommodationist position involving implicit recognition of Israel and a willingness to negotiate; the

radical wing went in a nonaccommodationist direction, forming the Rejectionist Front, aligning themselves with the radical Arab states, and conducting violent attacks upon other Palestinians. In 1974, at Khartoum they linked themselves to the three no's: no peace, no recognition, no negotiation. The Rejection Front was made up of the PFLP, PFLP-GC, Arab Liberation Front, and the Popular Struggle Front. Most were backed by Libya, Iraq, or Syria.

The first official break was in 1974 when Yasser Arafat spoke to the United Nations and outlined what was called the "Democratic Secular State" proposal. It called for a united Palestine with a secular government that treated all citizens equally and included all Israelis and Palestinians. Arafat called it a "dream." That same year the PLO adopted a Political Program that called for a Palestinian "national authority" on "any part of Palestinian soil that is liberated." (While militants sometimes said the creation of such an "authority" would be the first stage in the defeat of Israel, that was not the position of the mainstream. Prominent Palestinians such as Arafat often added that once such an "authority" was created, they would carry on the struggle for a united Palestine "by peaceful means." Arafat said this might produce regional economic and political integration according to the Benelux Model that links independent states Belgium, Holland, and Luxemburg into an "open borders" arrangement). That seemed to hint at a two-state solution (i.e., an acceptance of Israel and Palestine living side by side).

The Rejectionists moved away from the consensus at this point and assassinated several accommodationists in the next few years. In 1977 the US and USSR issued a joint statement calling for "termination of the state of war and establishment of normal peaceful relations" between Israel and Arabs and "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people." It was endorsed by the Palestine National Council. Then in 1981 Soviet President Brezhnev's call for a Palestinian state and recognition of Israel was endorsed by PNC. The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon set back the peace process. The Intifada began in 1987 and in 1988 the PLO met in Algiers and officially accepted UN Resolution 181 which had authorized Jewish and Palestinian states in Palestine. The accommodationist had carried the day.

---

## A DEMOCRATIC SECULAR STATE

In September 1970 Fatah issued its proposal, "Towards a Democratic State in Palestine for Muslims, Christians and Jews." This proposal insisted that Palestine be united and that the Zionist state be dismantled but broke new ground in that it affirmed the right of Israelis to remain in Palestine. It repudiated previous anti-Semitic accusations (such as treating *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* seriously), and insisted that, while imperialism/Zionism was responsible for the exile of the Palestinians in 1948, the Jewish people were not. It affirmed that a united Palestine would be a champion of threatened Jews anywhere and would be "a home for all of us." This change, Fatah said, came because military victories in Karamah and elsewhere gave the Palestinians enough self-respect to back off from previous proposals.

"The Democratic, non-sectarian Palestine still lacks full clarity and elaboration, but this is the best that can be done at this stage of the arduous liberation struggle. The Palestinians have outgrown their bitterness and prejudice in a relatively short time through armed struggle. A few years ago, discussing this proposal would have been considered as a complete sell-out or high treason. Even today, some Arabs still find it very difficult to accept the proposed goal and secretly--or publicly--hope that it is nothing more than a tactical propaganda move. Well it is definitely not so. The Palestinian revolution is determined to fight for the creation of the new democratic and non-sectarian Palestine as the long-term ultimate goal of liberation. Annihilation of the Jews or of the Palestinian exiles and the creation of an exclusive racist or theocratic state in Palestine be it Jewish, Christian

or Muslim is totally unacceptable, unworkable and cannot last. The oppressed Palestinian masses will fight and make all needed sacrifices to demolish the oppressor exclusive state."

Arafat's November 1974 speech to the UN--commonly called the "Gun and Olive Branch Speech"--summarized the Palestinian perspective on the conflict: that Zionism was linked to colonialism, that it was philosophically racist, that it was anti-Semitic since it challenged the right of Jews to live in diaspora and discriminated against Palestinian Jews, that Zionists had conducted terrorism against the Palestinian people in driving them from their land, and that Israeli law discriminates against Palestinians and hence is racist. (In 1975 the UN passed a resolution on Zionism and Racism, discussed below.)

Shifting from the past, Arafat said the struggle had created "a new Palestinian individual" who was looking to the future. "For many years now, our people has been exposed to the ravages of war, destruction and dispersion. It has paid in the blood of its sons that which cannot ever be compensated. It has borne the burdens of occupation, dispersion, eviction and terror more uninterruptedly than any other people. And yet all this has made our people neither vindictive nor vengeful. Nor has it caused us to resort to the racism of our enemies. Nor have we lost the true method by which friend and foe are distinguished."

Arafat cited the experiences of Palestinian freedom fighters, then turned to two non-Muslim models: one Jewish, one Christian. All are revolutionaries in the cause of justice in Palestine. Ahud Adif, a Jewish revolutionary, "now languishes in a Zionist prison among his co-believers." Bishop Capucci, a Catholic freedom fighter, is under arrest so that, as he says, "all men may live on this land of peace in peace." (Capucci was later convicted of shipping arms, with questionable evidence, and deported.)

The speech offered the Democratic Secular State Proposal as an alternative to the Jewish state. The speech was received with hostility by the Israeli government, by Zionist organizations (who were very bitter at Secretary General Kurt Waldheim for his role in allowing Arafat to speak), and by the United States government. **Zionism and Racism:** In 1965, after debating the situation in South Africa the UN officially defined racism as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin." In 1975, it discussed Israeli occupation and concluded that the patterns were sufficiently similar to constitute a parallel. General Assembly Resolution 3379 determined that Zionism was "a form of racism." The Resolution passed with support from Soviet, Arab, and Islamic states over vigorous US opposition. Resolution 3379 was repealed in 1991 as a prelude to talks. Many Arab states voted against repeal. *Arguments Against 3379:* There were three of these. 1) The conclusion was offensive to those who saw Zionism as an affirmation of Jewish nationality and Jewish cultural revival. 2) Critics felt 3379 was an effort to delegitimize Israel in the eyes of the world community and under international law. 3) Israelis pointed out that Jews were of many races and backgrounds (including Ethiopians and others who are black). Hence, calling Zionism racist was logically inconsistent. *Arguments for 3379:* The arguments against 3379 are widely reported in the US since our government vigorously opposed the resolution. What is less well known are the arguments for 3379. Certain polemicists supported 3379 in an effort to score points on Israel. We can dismiss this as a part of the Rhetoric Wars, just as we can dismiss efforts to call everyone who supported the resolution anti-Semitic. The arguments for 3379 are: 1) Some observers see similarities between white domination in South Africa and Jewish domination in the Occupied Territories: ethnically restricted land ownership, detention without trial, limited procedural rights. Former Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban calls Israeli policies "apartheid." According to a survey by the American Jewish Committee (1991) 41% of American Jews say the word "racist" applies to Israel. 2) There is also the Historical Argument. In the 1500s Europeans began to conquer non-European peoples. In some places they replaced local populations with their own (US, Australia). Elsewhere they took colonies (India, Nigeria). In a third pattern Europeans moved in as residents side-by-side with locals. In Algeria, South Africa, and Israel, settlers came to see themselves as natives with full rights to the land. Nelson Mandela meant this when

he told Yasser Arafat in 1990 that both were fighting "a unique form of colonialism." (Note: both Mandela and Arafat affirm the right of immigrant populations to remain.) A historical model in which "racism" means Western domination of non-European peoples rather than skin color bigotry makes Jewish rule in Israel "racist." My advice: "racist" is a loaded word; analytic discussion might be easier using the term "discriminatory legislation." This topic is so inflammatory and so easily misunderstood that you would be wise to avoid it unless a student raises it.

---

## **TWO-STATE SOLUTION**

Just as the 1967 and 1973 wars had sparked reassessment among the Palestinians, the Intifada of 1987 also sparked reassessment. For the first time the Palestinians in Palestine had taken the lead in the liberation movement. Hundreds of Palestinian protesters lay dead, a large proportion of them youths. Their "martyrdom" was a major impulse for action. Earlier in the summer of 1988 the Unified Leadership of the Uprising had issued a public declaration calling upon Arab leaders to take some action that would advance the Palestinian cause. It was a powerful appeal, as if to say "with the blood of our children we have challenged the Israelis face-to-face. Now it is time for you to stop making speeches and do something realistic."

Present at Algiers were most Palestinian groups, even the militants who had boycotted the PLO for over a decade. The proposals before the PNC were revolutionary: accept UN Resolution 181 and the partition of Palestine, accept Israel as a permanent and legitimate entity, renounce terrorism (this was not new-- the PLO had renounced terrorism before, but never with the militants present), declare the existence of a Palestinian state, and call for open negotiations with Israel. The debate went on for days. By 85% to 15% the resolutions passed. The Intifada had reduced the militants to their numbers. Their veto power was gone. They spoke, they objected, they voted, they lost, they accepted defeat with a commitment not to resist with violence (as they had done with previous peace initiatives). They left mumbling that the Israelis did not want a settlement, and that the Americans could not be trusted, but they left without violence. Soon the US opened dialogue with the PLO (a dialogue broken off because of an incident when Palestinian guerrillas landed on a beach near Tel Aviv). Although Arafat greeted the landing (in which no Israelis were hurt) by a renunciation of terrorism, he declined to remove Abul Abbas (whose group had organized the landing) from the PLO Executive Committee until the next meeting of the PNC. This was not sufficient for the US.

In 1988 the Palestine National Council adopted two documents, A Declaration of Independence and a Political Program (a negotiating position and a statement of tactics on what to do next). The Declaration was intended to be a document For The Ages. It was written by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish.

---

## **COMMENTS ON THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE**

1. The Declaration begins with a statement of pride that the three great monotheistic religions began in Palestine and affirms that the Palestinian Arab people also began in that land. It notes the religious heritage of the land, mentioning Judaism and Christianity before mentioning Islam.
2. In 1947 the UN approved Resolution 181 partitioning Palestine. Resolution 181 led to a Jewish state and the exile of the Palestinian people, but today it can be the basis of a settlement. This is a significant passage. It roots the very legitimacy of the Palestinian state in 181, which also was the basis of the Jewish state. Accepting 181 accepts the partition of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Palestinian. It acknowledges the legitimacy of both (i.e., recognizes the right of

Israel to exist). It suggests that 181 be the basis of a settlement.

3. The Declaration praises Palestinian steadfastness in the face of suffering, exile, terrorism, expulsion, dispossession. The people held fast to their identity, embodied in the PLO. Then the Intifada created a new reality; the existence of the Palestinian people can no longer be denied.
  4. The Intifada has seen the mass participation of all groups: women, youths, Christians, Muslims. It has not been an uprising of the leaders. The Declaration affirms equal treatment for all and promises a democratic system. A big question is what will happen to the millions of refugees if a Palestinian state came into existence. Would they all return? The practical problems would be enormous. This hints that many would remain elsewhere, but Palestine would be their national home regardless of where they live. Such a resolution would not be unlike that of Jews, for whom Israel is a homeland wherever they live.
  5. The Declaration ends with a Sura (chapter) from the Koran. Arab culture--be it Islamic or Christian--is very religious. The Declaration begins with the Islamic invocation "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful."
- 

## THE POLITICAL PROGRAM

At Algiers, the PNC also adopted a Political Program, a negotiating position and a statement of what to do next. In some ways the Program is more important than the Declaration because it discusses practical issues and strategy. However, since this unit tries to focus upon long-term thinking by Jews and Palestinians rather than upon negotiating positions, its inclusion in the Student Section might require inclusion of current (and rapidly shifting) Israeli positions as well to provide balance. Since that would change the nature of the unit, it was not done. Still, since the Political Program was adopted along with the Declaration, it seems appropriate to include it in your section for informational purposes. For a discussion of the Palestinian negotiating position see Abu Iyad, "Lowering the Sword," in *Foreign Policy*, 1990. Abu Iyad was the Number Two man in the PLO before his assassination in 1991, most likely by agents of Iraq because of his open criticism of the invasion of Kuwait.

### The Political Program

The "Political Program" adopted at the same time as the Declaration is a set of proposals for what to do next. It outlines the PLO negotiating position.

The document praises those Jews who have been "calling for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories in order to allow the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination."

The Program affirms the position of the PLO which "foresees the end of the occupation and asserts the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, to return to their homeland and to their right to create an independent state."

The Program affirms "the necessity of holding an international conference for peace in the Middle East and of enabling the Palestinian people to obtain its national rights, with its right to self-determination and national independence on its territory in the forefront."

The Program asks that the UN "place the occupied Palestinian territory under international supervision"

until there can be a "settlement of regional disputes by peaceful means." It affirms "the determination of the Palestine Liberation Organization to reach a comprehensive, peaceful solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and its essence, the Palestinian cause, within the framework of the United Nations Charter" (and various resolutions) "in a manner that assures the right of the Palestinian Arab people to return, exercise self-determination, and establish its independent national state on its national territory, and creates arrangements of security and peace for all the states of the region."

How will these goals be achieved?

1. There should be an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations "with the participation of the permanent member states of the United Nations Security Council and all the parties to the struggle," the negotiations to be upon the basis of resolutions "242 and 338 and the assurance of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people....and the inadmissibility of seizing the lands of others by force or military invasion..."
2. There should be "Israeli withdrawal from all the Palestinian and Arab territories that it has occupied since 1967, including Arab Jerusalem."
3. The Jewish settlements must be removed; Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem must be reversed.
4. The refugee problems must be resolved according to UN resolutions, 194 being the major one.

The Program affirms "the privileged relationship between the two fraternal Jordanian and Palestinian peoples, and that the future relationship between the two states of Jordan and Palestine will be established on confederal bases and on the basis of the free and voluntary choice of the two fraternal peoples, consolidating the historical ties and common vital interests between them."

"The Palestine National Council renews its commitment to the United Nations resolutions that affirm the right of peoples to resist foreign occupation, colonialism, and racial discrimination and their right to struggle for their independence. It again declares its rejection of terror in all its forms, including state terror, confirming its commitment to its previous resolutions in this regard..." (several are then named).

The Program "expresses its appreciation for the role and courage of the Israeli peace forces..." and calls upon the American people to urge their government to support efforts at regional peace for "all its peoples, including the Palestinian people."

---

## COMMENTS ON THE POLITICAL PROGRAM

1. The Political Program is more polemical than the Declaration of Independence. There is a logic in this. When leaders are preparing to change policy, they typically wrap innovations in a cloud of tradition and reaffirmation to reassure those with doubts. The key to the document is not the militant rhetoric but the policy suggestions that are in it.
2. The Palestinians always feared the Israeli-American strategy of organizing one-on-one negotiations between Israel and Arab states. This would omit the Palestinians. The Camp David Accords were a prime example. Palestinians also feared a US brokered conference since they assumed the US would support Israel. They were also aware of the Israeli refusal to meet with them, a refusal they felt was rooted in denial of the right of the Palestinians to exist as a national people. When Resolution 242 referred to "refugees" and not to their "legitimate rights" the PLO

rejected it as inadequate. This Algiers Program specifies that the big powers would be at the talks, that it would be under UN auspices, that "all parties" would be present, and that Resolutions 242 and 338 would be the basis of negotiations along with "assurance of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people."

3. It was psychologically and politically impossible for Palestinians to acknowledge that they are agreeing to the permanent partition of Palestine, just as it would be for Jews to acknowledge that they must give up East Jerusalem to have peace. Statements have to be made indirectly to be palatable. This program means that the Palestinian state would be in the Occupied Territories and that traditionally Arab cities like Jaffa and Haifa would be yielded up to Israel. Needless to say, there are some Palestinians who consider this a betrayal.
4. The program speaks of a "confederal" relationship between Jordan and Palestine. This is another sensitive point. Palestine would be small with few resources and enormous social problems. Its viability would be facilitated if it were linked to a nearby state. The only options are Israel and Jordan. Militants do not want to affiliate with Jordan because of long-standing tensions between the two. They also fear that Jordan is a Western agent and that confederation implies a Western alliance for Palestine. The Program bites the bullet and affirms the "Jordanstine" idea.
5. The specific rejection of "terror in all its forms" was required of the PLO before the US would open up dialogue. The position of the PLO is that it had done that many times, but would do so once again.
6. The Program expresses concern at the rise of violence-prone elements in Israel and "expresses its appreciation for the role and courage of the Israeli peace forces in their resistance to and unmasking of their forces of fascism, racism and aggression, in their support for the struggle of our people and its heroic uprising, and their support for the right of our people to self-determination and the establishment of its independent state."
7. The document says the refugee problem must be resolved according to UN resolutions, specifically Resolution 194 of 1948. This resolution resolved "that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible." The US supported 194 and as late as 1992 affirmed that it still supported 194. While Israel was required to register its support of Resolution 194 prior to its admission to the UN, recent Israeli governments have been quite hostile to it.

## PALESTINIAN OPPOSITION TO THE PLO MAINSTREAM

What we have described above is the evolving Palestinian mainstream under PLO leadership. As in all political systems, there are opposition groups. Two of these are most significant, those on the socialist left and those on the Islamic right. The leftists often function within the PLO and the Islamists often function outside the PLO (although they sometimes cooperate). Those trying to discredit negotiations or Palestinians in general often take quotations from opposition leaders and suggest that this is the "true" Palestinian position. Make sure your students know the difference. **The Left Opposition.** The PLO mainstream under Arafat has a cluster of opposition groups on the left. The most important is the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). This organization was founded in the mid 1960s by George Habash and a other students, mostly from the American University of Beirut. Habash is a

Christian from Lydda (now called Lod). His family were among those expelled in 1948 by Israeli forces. Today his family house is an Israeli police station. Habash was trained as a medical doctor and is nicknamed Hakim, which means doctor. He has a charismatic personality and is a brilliant intellectual. For a time he ran a clinic in Jordan but soon entered politics. For a time in the 1960s and early 1970s the PFLP was one of the most radical of the Palestinian parties. It was Habash whose followers pressed for the Black September uprising of 1970.

Two key PFLP Lieutenants split off to form break-away groups: Naif Hawatmeh is another Christian who was an officer in the Jordanian army, He formed the DFLP (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, also called Popular Democratic Front). Hawatmeh has been the Loyal Opposition to Arafat over the years, often dissenting but reluctant to break entirely. He is often credited with first promoting the idea of "cantons" within Palestine that would allow Jews and Palestinians to live together in a federated state that would not necessarily involve elimination of a Jewish state. He is also credited in the early 1970s with the idea of creating a Palestinian "national authority" on "any land liberated," a phrase that implied less than the whole of Palestine and was seen as a staged accommodation with Israel.

A second dissenting Habash lieutenant, Ahmed Jibril, formed the militant PFLP-General Command, a group closely aligned with Syria. Jibril is hostile to the Algiers Declaration and has conducted frequent attacks on Israeli military positions. He has been accused of various bombings.

The PFLP was inspired by Leninist thinking. As they saw it, the powerful western industrial states created alliances with local regimes around the world. Those regimes (which would include both Arab states and Israel) may disagree among themselves and even go to war from time to time but fundamentally they share a convergence of interests. All want to maintain powerful military, bureaucratic regimes with governments that give the illusion of democracy but are not truly democratic. Some may use militant revolutionary rhetoric but this is merely to mobilize popular support. In fact, all would be threatened by a true revolution. The western powers, the Arab regimes, and the Zionist state in Palestine thus share common interests in their fear of true popular democracy.

Habash felt there should be organized revolution against Arab regimes to create a true revolutionary government somewhere in the Arab world, most likely in Jordan. The revolution could then spread out from that point. The Palestinians are the Arab people who feel most intensely the oppression of the international system and hence are the logical leaders of this revolution. Peace talks are merely an effort to work out an agreement among ruling elites to maintain their elite status. Arabs who join such talks are themselves part of the international bourgeoisie and would probably settle for a Palestine that was just another authoritarian state. A Palestine that came about through an international agreement would be oppressive, undemocratic, and symbolically independent but not much different from the other regimes in the region. It might even be linked to Israel in trade and diplomacy, since the elites of the two states would share common interests in maintaining their power. To Habash, Jews and Arabs are equally oppressed by their militarist authoritarian governments. The oppression will not end until both Zionist and Arab regimes are replaced with popular regimes.

**The Islamic Opposition:** There are three significant strains of Islamic militancy. (It is best to avoid the word Fundamentalist, which is nearly indefinable. Religiously, all Muslims are fundamentalists if by that we mean they adhere to certain fundamental doctrines such as the existence of only one God, the Koran as God's word, and Mohammed as God's prophet.) The first strains emerged in the 1930s in Egypt. An organization called the Muslim Brotherhood was committed to Egyptian independence from Britain. The Brotherhood worked closely with Egyptian officers to lead the revolution of 1952 against King Farouk. Many Palestinian leaders who studied in Egypt (such as Yasser Arafat) have friendly ties with the Brotherhood, which is found in Jordan and other countries. In 1948 the Brotherhood won respect by sending units to Jordan to fight for Palestinian independence. Today in many places the

Brotherhood has committed itself to conventional politics. For example it is represented in the Egyptian and Jordanian parliaments. In other places it is more militant.

A second strain of Islamic politics also comes from Egypt, and it is more aggressive than the Muslim Brotherhood. These are the groups that produced the assassins of President Anwar Sadat. They are committed to Islamic political revolution in Egypt, Palestine, and elsewhere. They feel that the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel shows exactly how corrupt the Egyptian regime is and how far it has gotten from the true teachings of the Islamic faith. They see the Egyptian government as serving American and Israeli interests. They are opposed to peace talks, which they feel are efforts by corrupt regimes (Arab, Jewish, Western) to work out an agreement that does not represent the interests of the common people. An Egyptian slogan about President Mubarak's role in the talks that began in Madrid in 1991 illustrates their perspective: "Mubarak sold Palestine at the auction in Madrid."

A third Islamic tendency was inspired by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini. The groups linked to this tendency are most commonly associated with the Shiite population of southern Lebanon. There are also some Palestinians who admire Khomeini, and are linked organizationally to Iran. Islamic Jihad ("Crusade" or "Struggle") is one.

The most prominent Palestinian Islamic group is HAMAS, which is an acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement. It has its base in Gaza but is also found in the West Bank. While several of its leaders are clergy, most are not and many are educated professionals. Like other Palestinian parties, it has militant youths associated with it. HAMAS was founded in the early 1970s as an outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood and quickly came to enjoy unwelcome Israeli support. Because the PLO is a secular organization some pious Muslims have always had doubts about it. The Israelis found it easy to give Islamic leaders permits and privileges they denied to those linked with the PLO and other secular nationalist parties. This generated tensions with PLO militants, who claim that HAMAS is an Israeli creation. By the 1990's there were frequent clashes between supporters of the two groups. (Note the parallel with what Britain did in India during World War II. They locked up the leaders of the secular Congress party but allowed leaders of the Muslim League to be free. When the war ended, Muslim leaders were prepared to push for Pakistani independence and Congress leaders were out of touch.)

Today HAMAS is particularly strong in Gaza. They share certain common views with Muslims around the world: that Islam means submission to the will of God and that God's will is outlined in the Koran and was directly revealed by God to Mohammed. They feel that those who stand up for God's Truth are often subjected to danger and are often martyred. Those who die for the sake of God's Truth will be blessed and will be welcomed into the Arms of God. Politically, they feel Palestine is a part of the Islamic world and should not have a sectarian Jewish government. Like other Muslim leaders, they feel Judaism is a sacred revealed religion and is not a national movement. To treat Judaism as a nationality or as a national faith is a heresy. Under Islamic law, Jews are a "People of the Book" who are protected and would be given special legal status under an Islamic state, but they should not be exclusive leaders. They feel there is a systematic effort to discredit, misrepresent, and humiliate Islam and make it appear irrational. They oppose the Madrid peace talks. Their goal is a united Palestine under God's Law, as outlined in the Koran. While the PLO has moved towards negotiations, HAMAS has moved towards militant resistance.

The advocates of an Islamic resurgence are very diverse in their organizational, political, and tactical characteristics but they have three perspectives in common:

First, they believe the Arab and Islamic peoples have been divided and factionalized and kept under Western control for several centuries. They have not been able to play an independent role in recent world history or to make a positive contribution to contemporary world civilization. They would like to

see the Arab people free from outside control and able to assert their own identity and make their own contribution to world civilization.

Second, they feel that the current Arab governments do not represent their own people. They see Arab regimes as authoritarian, undemocratic, and corrupt. Some are feudal regimes that should have passed into history decades ago. They are kept in power by western aid and arms. When their people rise up against them, western powers intervene to keep these regimes in power. (The most recent example would be the decision to nullify the results of Algeria's 1990 election, the first since independence in 1962. Military and political leaders arrested and detained leaders of the Islamic parties chosen by most voters in Algeria's first free election in decades.) Many Islamic leaders would like to remove or change these regimes. The militant, violence-prone groups in Egypt perhaps represent an extreme example.

Finally, they fear the corruption of the West. They watch American television shows such as Dallas, Cheers, and Miami Vice and conclude that American culture is post-religious, pagan, sexist, promiscuous, violent, drug and alcohol ridden, abusive of women and corrupt. They read that 25% of American children are born outside of marriage and they see pictures in American magazines of women dressed in sexually provocative ways. They believe the collapse of Western values and the family have produced western decline. They fear that such collapse will spread to their own civilization. (It is little known that many prominent Islamic revivalists have studied in the West, particularly the United States, and know our society well. They are not backward people who lack experience or cosmopolitan perspective).

Anthropologists say that when a culture is under attack, it sometimes tries to shelter women, hoping that if women--the transmitters of values--are protected then society and its values will survive. Arab culture is very protective of the rights of women. Muslims pride themselves in the fact that Koranic teachings on women provided them with economic and social rights that were not granted in the west for a thousand years. In most Arab countries women are fully represented in universities and the economy. (Saudi Arabia has its own customs and traditions which are not typical of the Arab world). Generally speaking, there is a traditionalism and modesty in Islamic and Arab culture (even among Arab Christians) that is different from northwest Europe, although patterns are similar to other Mediterranean countries, such as Spain, Italy, and Greece. Some Americans view these customs and values with hostility, seeing them as oppressive and unjust.

Public opinion polls show that Americans who are hostile to Arab and Islamic culture often cite the treatment of women. It might help your students if you would distinguish between cultural and political attitudes towards women. Arab culture is indeed more traditional and conservative than western culture. Women are expected to behave modestly and to refrain from sex until marriage. This produces an illegitimacy rate that is negligible. Also, since Islamic law is patrilocal, when divorces occur (as they do much less frequently than in our own culture), the judge is predisposed (but not required) to assign children to the family of the father rather than the family of the mother.

The other aspect of women's status has to do with the political dimension discussed above--the effort to shield women and maintain them in an imposed protected status. This means maintaining certain restrictions not universally found in Arab culture, such as having women stay out of the public eye or cover their faces. These developments--where they exist--are best understood politically rather than culturally. Also note that according to public opinion, women and men often share common perspectives on many of these issues.

---

# ISLAMIC VIEWS OF JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

The Islamic religious tradition is based on the assumption that there was an ultimate or complete truth which God knew and which was revealed to humans in successive stages by prophets. The Koran mentions by name 25 Jewish-Christian prophets including Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, and Jesus. These are also considered Islamic prophets. (The word Islam means to submit to God's Will. A Muslim is one who submits. When the Bible says Abraham submitted to God it has special meaning to a Muslim).

Mohammed is the last prophet and the greatest, the Seal of the Prophets, the one chosen to deliver the final revelation. In Islam, Christians and Jews are honored because they are People of the Book who worship the one true God and whose revelations advanced God's purpose. The Koran specifically recognizes the integrity of Jewish and Christian prophets and includes them among the prophets of Islam. If you visit a mosque, you may see stories of these prophets in children's classrooms.

Contrary to common American belief, Islam specifically prohibits forced conversions. ("There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error." Koran 2:256.) While early Arab rulers brought neighboring regions under their political control, they never forced their subjects to convert. Under traditional Islamic law, Christians and Jews were allowed to govern their internal affairs--marriage, divorce, inheritance--through the legal concept of a millet. The Sultan would appoint a prominent religious leader as official head of the religious community. These groups had their own judicial and governing bodies.

Islam does have theological disagreements with the other faiths. Muslims feel Christianity deviated from true monotheism by the doctrine of the Trinity. In a passage praising Jesus ("Isa" in Arabic) the Koran insists "There is no God but God." Judaism, they believe, deviated into sectarian politics. Since the Jewish prophets revealed universal truths, those Jews who think their religion gave them a separate national status are seen as incorrect. Palestinian documents often make this point, affirming their admiration of Judaism and promising protection of Jews but condemning Zionism.

---

## YASSER ARAFAT PROFILE

Yasser Arafat is the dominant leader of the Palestinian nationalist movement and has been so since the 1960s. You should know something about his life. He was born in 1929, most likely in Cairo. He was of a Jerusalem family and some biographies hint that he was born in Jerusalem. He was probably in Palestine in 1948 and was refugeed in that year. He was educated in Engineering at the University of Cairo where he made connections with the Muslim Brotherhood. He went to Kuwait in 1958 as an employee of the government and soon formed a successful engineering company.

In 1959 he began publishing *Our Palestine* with his friend Abu Jihad. Together they formed the political group called Fatah. On January 1, 1965 Fatah *fedayeen* (guerrillas or literally, those who sacrifice themselves) launched their first raids into Israel. Arafat himself led some of these raids and lived on the occupied West Bank during 1968. Arab governments (specifically Egypt and Syria) reacted with hostility to Fatah. Arafat was imprisoned in Syria for a time and has had bad relations with Syrian governments over the decades. But after the 1967 defeat of the Arab armies, the idea of a popular liberation war gained currency. The turning point was the Battle of Karameh in 1968, when Israeli units attacked a Palestinian position in the Jordan valley just below Salt, and the Palestinians held. Within days of the battle Fatah was inundated with 5,000 enthusiastic volunteers. Arafat and Fatah became the center of Palestinian nationalism and Arafat soon became head of the PLO, previously dominated by

Egypt's Nasser.

After 1973 Arafat moved away from a strategy of "Revolution Until Victory" towards the more conservative doctrine of "stages," implying that while Palestinians would look to the ultimate liberation and reunification of Palestine, stage one might be the recognition of Israel. In 1974 the Arab League recognized the PLO as the "sole legitimate spokesman of the Palestinian people" and a few weeks later Arafat spoke before the UN in its first full discussion of the Palestinian situation since 1952. Arafat's increasing willingness to acknowledge the reality of Israel led the opposition to form the Rejectionist Front.

Meanwhile in Lebanon, the civil war that began in 1975 escalated, with Syria turning against the Palestinians. By 1982 the Israeli invasion of Lebanon created a disaster for Palestinians. Israel tried to assassinate Arafat and once blew up an apartment where he was staying, killing 200. He was evacuated in 1982 by the Americans and again in 1984, when uprisings in his own ranks and Syrian opposition nearly cost him the leadership of the PLO. In 1985, Israel bombed his headquarters in Tunis, killing 73 persons and narrowly missing Arafat who had just left. In November, 1987 the meeting of the Arab League virtually ignored Palestine (focusing instead on the Iran-Iraq War). Observers began to speak of the end of his career.

The Intifada resurrected Arafat's credibility. The 1988 Algiers meeting of the PNC approved Arafat's accommodationist position and in November he was again before the UN, speaking of peace between Israel and a future Palestinian state. His effort to mediate with Iraq in 1990 after its invasion of Kuwait discredited him in the eyes of those who saw him as supportive of Saddam, but the opening of talks in Madrid after the war once again thrust the PLO into the center of international diplomacy.

Public opinion polls show that over 80% of Palestinians view Arafat as their leader. He is a hero to many Palestinians, even those who disagree with him. He is admired for his personal integrity, his indifference to personal wealth, his devotion to the Palestinian cause, his miraculous survival capacity.

Arafat's historic contribution is that he kept the Palestinian nationalist movement alive and together in one organization (even though dissident elements split away at various times). His weakness is exactly the same: he bent over backwards to keep the movement together, making compromises that appear weak, vacillating, inconsistent. His effort to maintain good ties with all Arab states makes him seem devoid of ideology. He also sticks by friends too long, often winking at their corruption.

The case of Abul Abbas is typical. After the Algiers meeting of 1988 Arafat allowed him to remain on the PLO Executive Committee even though he was clearly not willing to submit to PLO discipline on military issues. In 1989, Abul Abbas's inept, unauthorized attempt to attack Tel Aviv from the sea made it appear that his target was a tourist beach. Opponents of US talks with the PLO were able to use the incident to precipitate a diplomatic break and a termination of talks. (Abul Abbas was dropped from the Executive Committee at the next meeting of the PNC).

**US reaction:** While the US has often dealt with the PLO under the table, there has been a long-time suspicion of Arafat. In 1992, when Arafat's plane crashed in the Algerian desert and supporters feared for his life, the US refused to use its satellites to locate the plane. It was not until Arafat and Rabin met in September, 1993 that US ties with PLO and Arafat began to normalize.

**A Poem:** The most famous Palestinian poet is Mahmoud Darwish, who wrote the Palestinian Declaration of Independence. One of his most famous poems is called *Investigation*, written in 1964. It is in the Student Edition, page 63.

---

*cmenas@umich.edu*