

THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Revised second edition, November 1993

PART II, LESSON FOUR: THE PALESTINIAN SITUATION AND PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM

It is important to understand how Palestinian views have changed over the years. Keep in mind two points as your read. First, people respond to the circumstances in which they live. If you are rich, you see problems one way; if you are unemployed, you see them a second way; if you own a small shop, you see them a third way. We must understand the circumstances in which Palestinians live if we are to understand their positions and actions.

Second, there are about five million Palestinians. Like Americans, Mexicans, Canadians, and Israelis they disagree on political issues. They also change their minds as new circumstances develop. It is a mistake to think Palestinians have a common view that remains unchanged. As we will see, their view changed considerably over the years.

The Palestinian Situation

In 1948, there were approximately 860,000 Palestinians inside today's Israel. About 700,000 were driven out or fled during the fighting that followed the declaration of Israeli statehood. The Palestinian population of Jerusalem went from 75,000 to 3,500; of Jaffa from 70,000 to 3,600; of Haifa from 71,000 to 2,900; of Lydda-Ramle from 35,000 to 2,000; of Tiberias from 5,300 to zero. All refugees lost their property (about 800,000 acres were taken for Israeli use.). The 160,000 Palestinians still in Israel in 1949 when the fighting stopped lost another 250,000 acres. The Palestinians in Israel were left without resources or strong leaders.

Political Evolution

In the immediate aftermath of 1948, Palestinians took two different paths. One group under a leader named Amin Husseini called for the end of partition and the creation of a secular state in all of Palestine that would include Muslims, Jews, and Christians. A second group living in exile in Jordan agreed to unite the West Bank and East Jerusalem with Jordan to form one country under Jordanian leadership. This was done in 1949. Many Palestinians were so angry at this that they came to view Jordan as an enemy almost as much as Israel. No Arabs recognized the unification with Jordan as a permanent solution, nor did the US. By the early 1950's the Palestinian leaders seemed ineffective and unable to speak for their people.

THE PALESTINIAN LIBERATION ORGANIZATION AND BEYOND

In 1964 the Arab states created the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). While it was supposed to represent the Palestinians, it really represented the views of President Nasser of Egypt. Its first leader made wild and irresponsible threats to drive Israelis into the sea. He had little support among Palestinians for he was seen as a puppet of the Egyptians. In the 1960s Palestinian students began to form their own organizations independent of control by Arab governments (although the Syrians, Libyans, and Iraqis continued to fund and control particular groups). Yasser Arafat, an engineering student at the University of Cairo who started a successful engineering firm in Kuwait, founded an independent Palestinian-run party called Fatah. He is said to have the backing, for most of the recent past, of about 80% of the Palestinian people.

In the 1967 war, the Arab armies did very badly against Israel. Palestinians came to believe that if they were ever to have their land, they would have to do it themselves.

In March 1968, 15,000 heavily-armed Israeli soldiers entered Jordan to destroy a Palestinian guerrilla center at Karameh in the Jordan valley. After a day of fierce battle, the guerrillas--under the leadership of Arafat's Fatah--held. The Palestinians had taken big losses but had stood against the Israeli army. For them, this was a major achievement. Overnight, Arafat was a hero. From this point on, he was the principal leader of the Palestinian people.

In 1969 Arafat became chairman of the PLO and changed it into an umbrella organization with membership open to all Palestinian groups. It is headed by a parliament called the Palestine National Council. Members of the PNC are chosen by their respective groups: students, women, journalists, and military leaders. American Palestinians have four members.

Over the years the PLO has had three different formal positions on the Palestinian-Israeli problem. The first was called the PLO National Charter, adopted in 1964 when the PLO was under Egyptian control; the second was called the Democratic Secular State proposal of 1974; the third is the Palestinian Declaration of Independence of 1988, commonly called the two-state solution.

THE PLO CHARTER

The PLO Charter saw Israel as a creation of western colonialism that "conspired and worked to displace" the Palestinians; it says Palestine has a right "to regain its homeland" and the "right of self-defense." The Charter is organized into Articles. Some important ones are listed here.

Article 2: "Palestine with its boundaries at the time of the British Mandate is a regional indivisible unit."

Article 3: "The Palestinian Arab people has the legitimate right to its homeland and is an inseparable part of the Arab Nation. It shares the sufferings and aspirations of the Arab Nation and its struggle for freedom, sovereignty, progress and unity."

Article 12: "Arab unity and the liberation of Palestine are two complementary goals; each prepares for the attainment of the other. Arab unity leads to the liberation of Palestine, and the liberation of Palestine leads to Arab unity. Working for both must go side by side."

Article 13: "The destiny of the Arab Nation and even the essence of Arab existence are firmly tied to the destiny of the Palestine question. From this firm bond stems the effort and struggle of the Arab Nation to liberate Palestine. The people of Palestine assume a vanguard role in achieving this sacred national

goal."

Article 6: "Palestinians are those Arab citizens who were living normally in Palestine up to 1947, whether they remained or were expelled. Every child who was born to a Palestinian parent after this date whether in Palestine or outside is a Palestinian."

Article 7: "Jews of Palestinian origin are considered Palestinians if they are willing to live peacefully and loyally in Palestine."

Article 8: "Bringing up Palestinian youth in an Arab and nationalist manner is a fundamental national duty. All means of guidance, education and enlightenment should be utilized to introduce the youth to its homeland in a deep spiritual way that will constantly and firmly bind them together."

Article 15: Under Palestinian rule, "all the holy places would be safeguarded, and the free worship and visit to all will be guaranteed, without any discrimination of race, colour, tongue, or religion."

Article 16: "The liberation of Palestine, from an international viewpoint, is a defensive act necessitated by the demands of self-defense as stated in the charter of the United Nations."

Article 17: "The partitioning of Palestine in 1947 and the establishment of Israel are illegal and false regardless of the loss of time, because they were contrary to the wish of the Palestine people and its natural right to its homeland, and in violation of the basic principles embodied in the charter of the United Nations, foremost among which is the right to self-determination."

Article 18: "The Balfour Declaration, the Mandate system and all that has been based upon them are considered fraud. The claims of historic and spiritual ties between Jews and Palestine are not in agreement with the facts of history or with the true basis of statehood. Judaism because it is a divine religion is not a nationality with independent existence. Furthermore the Jews are not one people with an independent personality because they are citizens of the countries to which they belong."

Article 19: "Zionism is a colonialist movement in its inception, aggressive and expansionist in its goals, racist and segregationist in its configurations and fascist in its means and aims. Israel in its capacity as the spearhead of this destructive movement and the pillar for colonialism is a permanent source of tension and turmoil in the Middle East in particular and to the international community in general."

Article 26: The PLO "cooperates with all Arab governments...and does not interfere in the internal affairs of any Arab state."

Article 29. "This Charter cannot be amended except by two-third majority of the National Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization in a special session called for this purpose."

Analysis of the Charter:

The Charter says the creation of Israel was illegal because it did not win the consent of the Palestinian people. We will see below that at the Algiers Conference of 1988 the PLO in effect amended the Charter by an 85-15% vote to accept UN Resolution 181 of 1947 which partitioned Palestine and created Israel. Arafat said this vote made the PLO Charter "null and void" (although many Israelis insist that the charter represents the "real" Palestinian position).

Arab Nationalism does not mean all Arabs should have one government. It means Arabs should act

together, should be free of foreign control, should be able to shape their own destiny. It says the 170 million Arab people are divided and weak and controlled by outsiders. The PLO Charter supports Arab Nationalism but also Palestinian Nationalism. It sees the liberation of Palestine and the liberation of the Arab people as linked together.

Education is key to Palestinian identity; like Jews, Palestinians believe that education and study are ways to maintain their identity. It is no accident that they have become one of the most educated of all Arab peoples. A major organization of the PLO is the education department, which runs many schools.

Palestinians distinguish between terrorism--attacks on "soft" targets such as civilians--and resistance (attacks on Israeli military or other targets). The PLO has renounced terrorism but affirms the right to resist, noting that such a right is guaranteed in international law. Some militant groups insist on the right to hit any target.

DEMOCRATIC SECULAR STATE PROPOSAL OF 1974

After the 1967 War, the Palestinian mainstream under Arafat moved towards negotiation with Israel. (The radicals led by George Habash broke with him over this and formed a group called the Rejectionist Front. The Rejectionists aligned with the Soviet Union and radical Arab states, and endorsed the Three No's Policy of 1974: no peace, no negotiation, no recognition. They assassinated Palestinians they suspected of wanting to negotiate.) In 1974, Arafat spoke to the UN. He called for a united Palestine with a secular government that treated all citizens equally and included all Israelis and Palestinians. Arafat said this was his "dream." It is commonly called "The Gun and Olive Branch" speech.

Arafat said there was "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, 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...." And just as Palestinians deplore attacks on Palestinians "we deplore all those crimes committed against the Jews. We also deplore all the real discrimination suffered by them because of their faith."

Arafat talked of the struggle of Palestinian soldiers then named two fighters, one Jewish, one Christian. Both fight in the cause of justice. The Jewish revolutionary "now languishes in a Zionist prison among his co-believers." And a Catholic Bishop is under arrest so that "all men may live on this land of peace in peace."

Arafat spoke of his "dream" that all lovers of justice--Jew, Muslim, Christian--could live together in the new Palestine. "Why therefore should I not dream and hope? For is not revolution the making real of dreams and hopes? So let us work together that my dream may be fulfilled, that I may return with my people out of exile, there in Palestine to live with this Jewish freedom-fighter and his partners, with this Arab priest and his brothers, in one democratic State where Christian, Jew and Moslem live in justice, equality, fraternity and progress."

"In my formal capacity as Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and leader of the Palestinian revolution I proclaim before you that when we speak of our common hopes for the Palestine of tomorrow we include in our perspective all Jews now living in Palestine who choose to live with us there in peace and without discrimination...We offer them the most generous solution, that we might live

together in a framework of just peace in our democratic Palestine."

Arafat's ending gave the speech its name. Speaking to the world body, he said: "In my formal capacity as Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization and leader of the Palestinian revolution I appeal to you to accompany our people in its struggle to attain its right to self-determination...to aid our people's return to its homeland from an involuntary exile...I appeal to you to enable our people to establish national independent sovereignty over its own land. Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom-fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand. I repeat: do not let the olive branch fall from my hand. War flares up in Palestine, and yet it is in Palestine that peace will be born."

The speech rejected the idea of a Jewish state and did not guarantee the right of Jews living overseas (for example, in America) to go to Israel. The proposal was received with hostility by the Israeli government.

TWO-STATE SOLUTION OF 1988

Although many Palestinians, including some PLO leaders, had said for several years that they accepted a "two-state" solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it was not until 1988 that a clear official PLO declaration was made. In November the Palestinian National Council met in Algiers and made a revolutionary break with the past. Many Palestinians called it a "Historic Compromise." The Intifada had been going on for almost a year and over 236 Palestinians had been killed, many of them youths. For Palestinians, the fact that so many youths were dying was a powerful impulse to action. In speeches, the "martyrs" were commonly called "The Children of the Stones" (because they threw stones at Israeli soldiers). Most Palestinian groups were at Algiers, 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 state, and renounce terrorism. The debate went on for days. Finally, the resolutions passed by 85% to 15%. The militants were unhappy, but they accepted the result. The US soon opened dialogue with the PLO. This dialogue was broken off some months later when a militant group associated with the PLO attempted a failed raid on Tel Aviv. While this raid had not been authorized, the PLO was held responsible. Dialogue was not resumed until the fall of 1993.

At Algiers, the PLO also issued a Declaration of Independence. These are its main points:

"Palestine, the land of the three monotheistic religions, is where the Palestinian Arab people was born, on which it grew, developed and excelled. The Palestinian people was never separated from or diminished in its integral bond with Palestine. Thus the Palestinian Arab people ensured for itself an everlasting union between itself, its land and its history... The call went out from the Temple, Church and Mosque that to praise the Creator, to celebrate compassion and peace was indeed the message of Palestine."

The Declaration says international law is on the Palestinian side. Even as enemies created the "falsehood" that "Palestine is a land without a people" international bodies were proclaiming otherwise. The Charter of the League of Nations (1919) affirmed the right of Arab states including Palestine to their independence.

While UN Resolution 181 partitioned the homeland, and led to exile for Palestinians "...yet it is this Resolution that still provides those conditions of international legitimacy that ensure the right of the Palestinian Arab people to sovereignty" since it acknowledges that there should be a Palestinian state as

well as a Jewish state.

"Now at last the curtain has been dropped around a whole epoch of prevarication and negation. The Intifada has set siege to the mind of official Israel, which has for too long relied exclusively upon myth and terror to deny Palestinian existence altogether. Because of the Intifada and its revolutionary irreversible impulse, the history of Palestine has there arrived at a decisive juncture."

The PNC declared the existence of a Palestinian state:

"Now by virtue of natural, historical and legal rights, and the sacrifices of successive generations who gave of themselves in defense of the freedom and independence of their homeland;

"In pursuance of Resolutions adopted by Arab Summit Conferences and relying on the authority bestowed by international legitimacy as embodied in the Resolutions of the United Nations Organization since 1947;

"And in exercise of the Palestinian Arab people of its rights to self-determination, political independence and sovereignty over its territory,

"The Palestine National Council, in the name of God, and in the name of the Palestinian Arab people, hereby proclaims the establishment of the State of Palestine on our Palestinian territory with its capital Jerusalem

"The State of Palestine is the state of Palestinians wherever they may be. The state is for them to enjoy in it their collective national and cultural identity, theirs to pursue in it a complete equality of rights. In it will be safeguarded their political and religious convictions and their human dignity by means of parliamentary democratic system of governance, itself based on freedom of expression and the freedom to form parties. The rights of minorities will duly be respected by the majority, as minorities must abide by decisions of the majority. Governance will be based on principles of social justice, equality and non-discrimination in public rights of men or of women, on grounds of race, religion, color or sex, under the aegis of a constitution which ensures the rule of law and an independent judiciary. Thus shall these principles allow no departure from Palestine's age-old spiritual and civilization heritage of tolerance and religious coexistence."

"The State of Palestine herewith declares that it believes in the settlement of regional and international disputes by peaceful means, in accordance with the UN Charter and resolutions. Without prejudice to its natural right to defend its territorial integrity and independence, it therefore rejects the threat or use of force, violence and terrorism against its territorial integrity or political independence, as it also rejects their use against the territorial integrity of other states."

The Declaration ends with a Sura (chapter) from the Koran, emphasizing that all existence and power are in the hands of God.

"Say: 'O God, Master of the Kingdom,
Thou givest the Kingdom to whom Thou wilt,
and seizest the Kingdom from whom Thou wilt,
Thou exaltest whom Thou wilt, and Thou
abasest whom Thou wilt; in Thy hand
is the good; Thou art powerful over everything."

Who Opposes the PLO?

There are three main opponents to Yasser Arafat's PLO.

1. On the left various socialist groups think Arafat is too close to business and banking interests and too willing to negotiate with Israel or cooperate with America. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine is one of these. It is led by George Habash, a Christian doctor. It opposes any negotiations.
2. On the right some Islamic groups feel the PLO is too willing to cooperate with socialists and is too willing to negotiate with Israel. They feel there should be a united Palestine where Jews could live but which would not be governed by Jews. The largest of these groups is called HAMAS, the Islamic Resistance Movement.
3. Several Palestinian radicals have their own military organizations. Abu Nidal is one of these. He is bitterly and violently opposed to the PLO for what he sees as its moderate positions. He has carried out airplane bombings and attacks on civilians and has tried to assassinate Arafat. He opposes any negotiation with Israel. He is probably funded by Iraq.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES FOR LESSON FOUR

1. Where did Palestinians live after 1948? How many were left in Israel? To which countries did they go? With a compass (or a computer), make a pie chart of the Palestinian diaspora. Under the PLO Charter, what was promised to Jews of Palestinian origin? What was promised for all holy places?
2. . What or who are the following and why are they significant? FATAH, Amin Husseini, Karameh, Yasser Arafat.
3. The Algiers statement uses the term "self-determination." What does this mean and why is it important?
4. Imagine you are an Israeli who wants to live in peace with Palestinians. How would you react to the Palestinian Declaration of Independence?
5. Break into three Palestinian delegations. One supports the PLO Charter, one the Democratic Secular State proposal, one the Declaration of Independence. Each team should discuss among itself the reasons it supports its position, what advantages would come from its position, and what disadvantages. Teams may want to list their hopes and plans for the future on butcher paper or poster board. Then the teams should come together, explain their views to each other, and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the different positions.
6. Thought Question: Discuss the Koranic Sura (chapter) that is quoted in the Declaration. (a) Why do you think the Palestinians included a religious passage in their Declaration of Independence? (b) Does the Sura sound religious to you or political? (c) The Sura uses the word "abase." What does this mean? When Muslims pray they get down on their hands and knees and touch their heads to the ground. This is called abasement. Why do you think they do this? Do you do anything similar in your religion? (d) Do you think it appropriate for political leaders to quote

from religious texts in public meetings or documents? Can you think of any similar examples in America?

7. Thought Question: The Palestinian political program changed from the 1974 call for a united democratic, secular state to the 1988 call for two-states: one Jewish, one Palestinian. What factors do you think led to this change? In the meantime, what was happening to Israeli opinion?

Real People Face Real Problems

As you discuss these options, remember that people see things according to their circumstances: young people are different from their parents, the rich are different from the poor, farmers are different from city people, and those who have suffered personal loss are different from anyone else. Not all Palestinians had the same reaction to the Declaration of Independence. Below are profiles of six Palestinian families based on real cases. Break into six teams with each team representing one of the families. Discuss how you feel about the Declaration and the idea of a two-state solution and then explain why you feel that way to the other teams. Which of you would prefer the PLO Charter or the Democratic Secular State proposal? Which would be willing to accept Israeli and Palestinian states side-by-side? Which would be involved in acts of violence? Would any families just stay out of politics?

Mrs. Talhami, 53 years old, lives in a refugee camp in Lebanon. Most of her village fled together in 1948 and still live in the same corner of the camp. The camp is crowded and life is difficult but they are afraid if they move to nearby towns and break up the village the children will grow up without a sense of who they are. Each home is 30x30 feet, including the courtyard. Today 13 people live in Mrs. Talhami's house including one son, two daughters-in-law, and 9 grandchildren. Her oldest son was killed in an Israeli air raid in 1988. Mrs. Talhami cleans an office after hours. Because her son is unemployed her small income supports the whole family (with some help from the UN). All thirteen people sleep in two bedrooms. There is also a small kitchen which doubles as a bedroom at night. On the wall are pictures of Jerusalem and Yasser Arafat.

Mr. Nasser runs a hotel in East Jerusalem. In recent years his income has fallen nearly 50% as tourists avoid Jerusalem out of fear of the Intifada. He is angry that the Jerusalem city government granted tax rebates to Israeli hotel owners but not to Palestinians. Mr. Nasser's son has lost hope in the future and moved to Brazil.

Mr. Masri is from Nablus. He is a successful businessman in Jordan. His son has a college degree and works for the government. The family have a beautiful house in the suburbs. In his living room there is a picture of a smiling Mr. Masri shaking hands with King Hussein.

Ibrahim is 19. He is unemployed. His father is a farmer near Bethlehem. They grew olives on the farm and grazed sheep on the nearby hill that had been owned by the village for generations. In 1984 the Israeli government took the hill for a Jewish settlement claiming it was public land. Much of the village was impoverished by this. Recently, there have been violent clashes between Jewish settlers and the young men of the village. Ibrahim's brother was shot and is disabled; another brother is in detention although he was never charged with any crime. Ibrahim heard from another detainee that his brother had been tortured.

Mrs. Elias is a teacher in Chicago. Her parents left Gaza in 1974 to start life over in America. She is proud of being an American but is also proud of being Palestinian. Recently her 7-year old daughter came home from school crying because someone had called her a terrorist. The little girl wants to change her name from Jamele to Jennifer so people will not know she is an Arab. Mrs. Elias sends

money to her family in Gaza each month.

Mr. Ziad is an engineer. He lived for thirty years in Kuwait and owned a multi-million dollar construction company. After the Gulf war, Kuwait expelled almost all of the 350,000 Palestinians who lived and worked there. Mr. Ziad lost his home, his business, and most of his savings. He and his family now live in Jordan with his brother. He is unemployed.

Go on to [Lesson 5](#).

Go back to [Lesson 3](#).

cmenas@umich.edu