‘FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA?: HONOUR, IDENTITY AND POLITICS IN HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISM

N. T. Anders Strindberg

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of St. Andrews

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‘From the River to the Sea?’
Honour, Identity and Politics in Historical and Contemporary Palestinian Rejectionism

N. T. Anders Strindberg

Thesis submitted for the degree of
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in the Department of International Relations,
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ABSTRACT
The present thesis seeks to understand and explain the rhetoric and behaviour of the rejectionist ‘current’ within the Palestinian national movement. It proceeds from the view that extant scholarship, primarily from within the fields of terrorism and security studies, has profoundly misunderstood rejectionist speech and behaviour by ignoring the explanatory capacity of Emic—the research subject’s perception—as well as the influence of the sociocultural milieu within which rejectionism exists. The thesis proceeds to set up a ‘socioculturally sensitive’ analytical framework drawn from social identity theory, a heuristic, non-reductionist model for understanding group interaction and conflict. Emphasizing cultural norms and cues identified by anthropologists as salient in the eastern Mediterranean, the thesis suggests that the social value of honour, patron-client dynamics and a firmly entrenched group orientation must be significant elements of a model for understanding rejectionist behaviour. The main analytical narrative suggests that for reasons derived from ideology, patron-client relations and group dynamics, what has distinguished the rejectionists from the mainstream have been a qualitatively different set of preconditions for, and objectives of diplomatic negotiations. To the main rejectionist factions the goal of liberating Palestine has always been inextricably intertwined with the goal of restoring national honour; one without the other has been impossible and to claim otherwise would mean a depletion of factional and personal honour. To the rejectionists, there has never been any question of deviating from the fundamental goals—national recognition, repatriation, self-determination and independent statehood, not even for tactical reasons. This ‘higher standard’ likely derives from their structurally and politically subordinate position within the national movement, and the need to creatively enhance their own social status and appeal.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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St Andrews, September 2001
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Declarations

1. I, Nils Tage Anders Strindberg, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 90,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

date .......... signature of candidate

2. I was admitted as a research student in September 1997 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in September 1998; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out at the University of St Andrews between 1997 and 2001.

date .......... signature of candidate

3. I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.D. at the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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<tr>
<td>ALF</td>
<td>Arab Liberation Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANM</td>
<td>Arab Nationalists' Movement</td>
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<td>APF</td>
<td>Alliance of Palestinian Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRC</td>
<td>Fateh Revolutionary Council (a.k.a. the Abu Nidal Organization)</td>
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<td>DFLP</td>
<td>Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (until 1974 known as PDFLP, Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine)</td>
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<td>DOP</td>
<td>Declaration of Principles</td>
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<td>Hamas</td>
<td>Harakat al-Muqawwama al-Islamiyya (&quot;The Islamic Resistance Movement&quot;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDF</td>
<td>Israeli Defence Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>Lebanese Forces</td>
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<td>MB</td>
<td>Muslim Brotherhood</td>
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<td>MIJ</td>
<td>Movement of Islamic Jihad in Palestine</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NIF</td>
<td>National and Islamic Forces</td>
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<td>PA</td>
<td>Palestinian Authority</td>
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<td>PCP</td>
<td>Palestinian Communist Party (later PPP, Palestinian People's Party)</td>
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<td>PFLP</td>
<td>Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine</td>
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<td>PLA</td>
<td>Palestine Liberation Army</td>
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<td>PLF</td>
<td>Palestine Liberation Front</td>
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<td>PLO</td>
<td>Palestinian Liberation Organization</td>
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<td>PNA</td>
<td>Palestinian National Authority</td>
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<td>Palestinian National Council</td>
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<td>PPSF</td>
<td>Palestinian Popular Struggle Front</td>
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<td>PRCP</td>
<td>Palestinian Revolutionary Communist Party</td>
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<td>RF</td>
<td>Rejection Front</td>
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<td>TFRO</td>
<td>Ten Forces Resistance Organization</td>
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<td>UNGAR</td>
<td>United Nations General Assembly Resolution</td>
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: WHY RE-EXAMINE REJECTIONISM?

Inferiors revolt in order that they may be equal and equals that they may be superior. Such is the state of mind that creates revolutions. Aristotle

We fight, get beat, rise and fight again. Nathanael Greene

PROLOGUE
In an interview in late 1999, PFLP central committee member Leila Khaled remarked:

The Oslo strategy will not achieve our goals, [it will achieve] only autonomy... The Palestinians have struggled for a large part of this century, and in many ways, to achieve their goals. Autonomy is not that goal. Also, the [Palestinian] Authority is undemocratic and corrupt, and the economic and social situation is very difficult. This is an important context for envisaging the eruption of violence; these are factors that point to violence. Of course I cannot tell how or when, but a new intifada will erupt, as Oslo will inevitably fail.

A year later, the so-called al-Aqsa intifada erupted, in part a reaction against the Israeli authorities' high-handed way of dealing with the Palestinian leadership and people, in part an outcome of the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions in the Palestinian Authority (PA) administered areas, and the increasingly brazen corruption and human rights abuses by the PA itself. As a political event, the new intifada was a watershed in many ways, releasing pent up popular pressure and channelling it into a viable political force. The submissive despondency of the people of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was transformed into popular struggle, which in turn forced the PA and its various security apparata to engage in something resembling armed struggle—albeit limited and vain—against Israel for the first time.

1 Politics, Bk. V
2 Letter to Chevalier de la Luzerne, June 22, 1781.
The intifada also precipitated zealous political work by a range of Palestinian and other organizations aimed at bringing international pressure to bear on Israeli policy and practices. After years of descent into political inertia, the cumulative tragedies of the intifada somehow regenerated Palestinian politics.

As for internal Palestinian affairs, one largely overlooked effect of the intifada was that it afforded several of the Damascus-based rejectionist organizations the opportunity to reinsert themselves into the mainstream of Palestinian politics, in some cases stronger and bolder than they were when in 1993 they severed relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)/PA leadership and created the Alliance of Palestinian Forces (APF). The alliance’s ten founding members were the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP); the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP); the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC); Fateh-Intifada; Sa‘īqa; the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF); the Palestinian Liberation Front (PLF); the Palestinian Revolutionary Communist Party (PRCP); the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas); and the Movement of Islamic Jihad in Palestine (MIJ).

The al-Aqsa intifada revealed the depth and extent of popular Palestinian anger, frustration and humiliation at the hands of not only the Israelis but, more importantly, the Palestinian Authority (PA). Yasir Arafat was caught unawares by the uprising, but quickly determined to harness its strength to gain a better position in negotiations with Israel. Knowing that a considerable proportion of the discontent was this time directed against him and the PA, he reached out to the ten rejectionist factions, urging them to unite with him in directing the increasingly armed struggle-oriented uprising.

The rejectionists—who have opposed the Oslo process and denied the legitimacy of the PA since 1993—saw the eruption of the intifada and Arafat’s request for support as a vindication of their political position. Oslo had not

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3 Leila Khaled, October 23, 1999.
4 For an overview of the despondency and angst preceding the intifada, see Sara Roy, ‘The Crisis Within: The Struggle for Palestinian Society,’ Critique, No. 17 (Fall 2000), pp. 5-30.
led to historic reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis, or to a lasting and equitable peace settlement. The rejectionists now had the opportunity to return to political centre-stage with their heads held high and their honour and integrity intact. Shortly after the outbreak of the intifada, several of the rejectionist factions joined forces with Arafat in directing the popular struggle through the National and Islamic Forces (NIF), an interfactional ‘crisis management forum,’ which increasingly became an opportunity to engage the enemy, as well as reinserting the politics of rejectionism into the PLO/PA based system. “Oslo is now dead,” said one rejectionist leader in Damascus, “and it is imperative that we work within a joint national leadership to confront Israeli aggression.”

The rejectionist factions, from their offices in Damascus, had made clear their solidarity with the popular effort in Palestine from its earliest stages, and unceasingly sought to organize political and financial support for it from among the close to one million Palestinian refugees in Syria and Lebanon. This included lobbying for Syrian support for the effort. They employed their printed and electronic media to further the cause of the intifada, both garnering support for it internationally as well as seeking to morally sustain it. Within three weeks of the uprising’s eruption, however, the rejectionist coalition was paralysed by divisions and rendered defunct. Four of its members—PFLP-GC, Hamas, MIJ and Sa’iqa—joined with Fateh in the NIF. Four others—Fateh-Intifada, PPSF, PLF and the PRCP—persisted in their refusal to deal with Arafat, and suspended cooperation with the four that did join. The PFLP and DFLP had stood outside the formal structures of the rejectionist alliance for some time, and were already practicing limited cooperation with Arafat’s Fateh; they too joined the NIF.

With the eruption of the intifada, yet another chapter in rejectionist history was brought to an end. Nonetheless, understanding what has propelled rejectionism as a political current within Palestinian politics—from its early days until the present—remains an important task in understanding the dynamics of the Palestinian national movement as a whole. Moreover, understanding the political and organizational developments that have taken place specifically within post-Oslo rejectionism may hold significant insights

into the present and future and trajectory of Palestinian politics. These, then, are the two primary objectives of the present thesis.

OSLO AND THE PATH OF RESISTANCE

In late August 1993, the rumours that had lingered for months about secret peace negotiations between Israel and the PLO were finally confirmed. The PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat, through the 'Oslo back channel' and with the complicity of less than a dozen close associates, committed the entire PLO to a framework for negotiated, binational settlement with Israel. On September 9, Arafat wrote to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, stating that the PLO affirms that those articles of the Palestinian Covenant which deny Israel's right to exist, and the provisions of the Covenant which are inconsistent with the commitments of this letter are now inoperative and no longer valid. Consequently, the PLO undertakes to submit to the Palestinian National Council for formal approval the necessary changes in regard to the Palestinian Covenant.

Rabin responded by declaring that "in light of the PLO commitments included in your letter, the Government of Israel has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and commence negotiations with the PLO within the Middle East peace process." Four days later the two leaders met in Washington, DC, for the ceremonial signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP), radically and irreversibly changing the face of Palestinian politics.

The DOP made provisions for an initial Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area, followed by a five-year transition period in which the administrative duties in these areas would be transferred onto a Palestinian authority. A permanent Palestinian administrative body was to be elected after two years, and be responsible for tax collection, schooling, social services, policing and the court system, while the Israelis would remain in control of external defence, as well as public order among the occupied territories' Israeli residents. A joint liaison committee would oversee the implementation of the agreement. "Permanent status

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7 Letter from Yasser Arafat to Prime Minister Rabin, dated 9 September 1993.
8 Letter from Prime Minister Rabin to Yasser Arafat, dated 9 September 1993.
negotiations” would commence within two years, covering the thorniest “remaining issues, including: Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with other neighbours, and other issues of common interest.”

An international choir of benevolent observers sang the praises of ‘the advent of peace in Palestine,’ prematurely, yet loudly enough to drown out those giving voice to a whole range of local and regional concerns and criticisms of the DOP. To its critics, as Yezid Sayigh has noted, the Oslo deal meant that

Israel had imposed its terms entirely... it had done so with Palestinian acquiescence, the PLO having moreover made a series of unilateral concessions and renunciations for which there was no meaningful Israeli recompense. The PLO leadership had revealed its incompetence and transformed itself from a national liberation movement into a small-town government in the occupied territories, an enforcer of Israeli policy with no real autonomous power of its own. Ultimately, for its critics the [DOP] represented no more than a ‘Palestinian Versailles’, an instrument of abject and self-denying surrender.10

The reaction from the ranks of the Palestinian military-political factions other than Arafat’s own Fateh was initial disbelief followed by fury.11 They shared in the above-mentioned general criticisms of the DOP, arguing that far from restoring national rights and land to the Palestinian people—these being the longstanding core objectives of the Palestinian national movement—Arafat had managed to institutionalize the subordination of his own people’s prerogatives and interests to those of Israel. Importantly, they also saw the Oslo back channel as a reprehensibly deceitful and dishonourable manoeuvre; without any authorization or debate Arafat had used that channel to commit the entire PLO to new means and objectives, signing away the right of all Palestinian factions to demand comprehensive

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9 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (Israel Information Service, 1993), articles V, III, VI, XV; annexes II and III.
11 The DOP caused a minor rebellion inside Fateh in Lebanon, whereby the disruptive commander of Fateh’s militia forces, Colonel Munir Maqdah, attacked Fateh offices and killed two Fateh cadres.
satisfaction from Israel for historical transgressions. In a desperate attempt to salvage his own political future, they believed, Arafat had bartered away the prerogatives of the Palestinian people and that of the various factions, allowing himself to be co-opted by the enemy. The PFLP-GC lambasted Arafat as a “Palestinian Petain,” and the front page of Fateh-Intifada’s biweekly magazine, Fateh—the editorials of which had anticipated a secret deal for some time—declared “The traitor has given in: He sold Palestine.”

Connected to the political unpalatability of the DOP, there was also an important sociocultural trigger for the opposition’s fury. In secretly negotiating and concluding the Oslo deal, Arafat threw down a sociocultural gauntlet within the national movement. Understood within the behavioural parameters provided by eastern Mediterranean social norms and cues, Arafat’s behaviour not only challenged the agendas and objectives of the other factions, but brought into question their social status and standing within the national movement. He dishonoured them by his deception, by his failure to consult with peers, and by his preference for dealing with the ‘enemy other’ to save the PLO in its time of crisis, rather than with his own ingroup of fellow Palestinian strugglers.

To the opposition factions, Oslo thus represented not only a politically disastrous path, but also an affront to their factional honour. The leaders of all the factions considered themselves the representatives of the Palestinian people just as Arafat did—a self-perception nurtured by the PLO’s erstwhile preference for decision-making based on consensual rather than majoritarian procedures. Combatants from all the factions of the national movement had struggled against Israel for decades, and scores had lost their lives in combat. Oppositional cadres and leaders had committed their lives to the liberation of Palestine, and the factions were integral parts of the Palestinian national movement. On his path to the White House lawn, Arafat simply ignored them. For sociocultural as well as political reasons, the factions had no option but to respond to Oslo forcefully and demonstratively, or accept a loss of face, humiliation and dishonour.

Politically, Maqdah’s manoeuvres were of no consequence however, and he was soon brought back to the fold by a generous increase in salary.

The response came in the form of the APF, a ten-member assembly of factions intended to coordinate its members' efforts at rejecting and thwarting the Oslo process. The APF's members were a motley crew in terms of ideology, size and importance, as well as in terms of organizational characteristics and leading personalities. The PFLP, DFLP and PRCP represented a Marxist-Leninist political perspective, while the PFLP-GC, Fateh-Intifada, Sa'iqa, PPSF and PLF all espoused a more particularistic and narrow Palestinian nationalism. Hamas and MIJ, in addition, brought Islamism into the alliance. Internal friction thus seemed inevitable even to the members themselves, yet the overriding concern around which they all felt compelled to rally was public and demonstrative opposition to the Oslo deal. The alliance's first statement asserted that "the present PLO leadership does not represent the Palestinian people, nor does it express its views or aspirations,"14 taking up the gauntlet, counterchallenging Arafat and, thus, redeeming their bruised honour. "As a front, [the alliance] will not abandon the armed struggle program," explained Jibril, "and we are still in a state of war with the Zionist existence on the land of Palestine. This struggle and fighting will continue until we return to our homeland from which we were expelled 44 years ago."15

From that point onwards, the new alliance consistently and consciously promoted itself as the militant voice of the disaffected, the steadfast defender of national unity and honour, whose right to all forms of struggle, including armed struggle, could never be signed away by a disgraced individual or party. In the event, the APF was soon eclipsed by the rising fortunes of the PA and never stood a chance of creating an internationally acceptable alternative leadership as it had hoped. The PA's rapid development into both centre and framework for post-Oslo Palestinian politics was ensured by the efforts of the international community, in particular by Israeli and US determination to cultivate an acceptable partner in the peace process.

With its collective headquarters in Damascus, the political disadvantages stemming from the APF's embargo on transactions with the

14 Declaration of the Alliance of Palestinian Forces, Damascus, 6 January 1994.
15 Interview with Ahmad Jibril, Al-Quds Palestinian Arab Radio, October 21, 1993.
PLO/PA leadership was partially offset, or so it was hoped, by preferential access to the 2.2 million refugees resident in Syria and Lebanon. Not only were these refugees those whose dreams and aspirations were most immediately and brutally trampled by the Oslo deal, but all the opposition factions enjoyed good relations with the Syrian government and had extensive political and social infrastructures stretching across Syria and Lebanon. Importantly, due to the long-standing animosity between Damascus and Arafat’s Fateh, all of Syria—and Lebanon north of the ‘Awali River where Syria is in effective control—were off-limits to overt and organized Arafatist activity. Out of concern over Arafat’s abandonment of the refugees, as well as tactical necessity, the refugee communities were envisaged as the primary constituency—or, perhaps better, instrument—for the rejectionist anti-Oslo effort.

Post-Oslo commitment to armed struggle has been problematic in practical terms, and the impression that they are not serious about implementing their rhetoric is widespread even among their own sympathizers. The objective and structural constraints under which the APF operates, however, has allowed them to obfuscate and get away with their inactivity to a perplexing degree. Syria’s well-known disapproval of cross-border raids, an adverse post-Cold War ideological climate, Arafat’s collusion with the CIA and Mossad to ‘crush the resistance’ (especially after the 1998 Wye River agreement), heavy fortifications at the Israeli border, a lack of funds and equipment—all these have been offered as explanations for armed inactivity. On the other hand, the alliance has been able to refer to, for instance, Hamas and MIJ armed attacks on Israeli targets, and the PFLP-GC’s and Fateh-Intifada’s ‘strategic partnership’ with the Lebanese resistance movement Hizb’Allah, demonstrating that even in the face of overwhelming adversity the alliance has not remained idle.

BLIND SPOTS AND “MUG-SHOT ORIENTALISM”

Historically, the vast majority of academic and other literature on the Palestinian national movement has emphasized the role, structures and ideological development of Fateh—whether as a separate faction or by virtue of its dominant position within the PLO—while the rejectionist trend has by
and large been assigned the role of the 'insignificant other.' Since Oslo, in addition, there has been an intense and growing scholarly interest in the humanitarian, legal and socioeconomic dilemmas facing the Palestinian 
refugees in the post-Oslo period, while interest in exile-based Palestinian 
politics has been virtually non-existent. Similar to the situation prior to 1973, 
Western scholarly discourse has again come to conceptualize the 
Palestinians outside Palestine as 'refugees' rather than as a people; as 
humanitarian wretches rather than politically relevant constituencies 
capable of interacting with, and responding to active political elites. This 
change in researchers' perceptions has been brought on by the fact that the 
centre of Palestinian politics has shifted from the 'outside' to the PA-centric 
political system 'inside,' which in turn has precipitated a preoccupation with 
studies of evolving political frameworks and institutions. These studies, 
while useful, have unfortunately been attended by the implication that 
'outside politics' is no longer important—out of sight, out of mind.

Most scholarly efforts into 'the Palestine problem' since Oslo have 
focused on developments inside Palestine, and the only academic fields to 
have expressed an enduring interest in the APF are security and terrorism 
studies. Notoriously prejudiced by their firm cognitive links to Western state 
security establishments, and deploying analytical frameworks desperately 
lacking in contextual acuity, these disciplines have produced a range of 
derisory accounts of the APF. Thus far, therefore, when post-Oslo 
rejectionism has not been ignored it has been thoroughly misrepresented.

The Received View
The suggestion that the APF has been a political player of any significance 
defies the received view of its being a collective of failed terrorists and 
ideological has-beens, whose post-Oslo inability to put their militant rhetoric 
into practice has all but nominally relegated them to the dustbin of history. 
This thesis will argue, however, that the alliance has been neither idle, nor 
insignificant. Its determined commitment in the patently impracticable 
rhetoric of armed struggle has served as a socioculturally embedded defence 
mechanism against the PLO/PA leadership's challenge to their social status. 
It gradually became a way for the APF to try to tap into and manipulate
Palestinian national consciousness through the use of culturally and politically resonant symbolism. Once the opposition factions had collectively responded to Arafat's challenge by joining together in the APF, the new alliance sought to compete with the PLO/PA leadership for the ability to construct collective norms and guidelines among the refugee communities in Lebanon and Syria. Their tactical aim was to foreclose the possibility of non-militant expressions of Palestinianness, while their strategic objective was to lessen Arafat's appeal and offset the PLO/PA leadership's 'defeatism.'

These claims beg a critical question: How is it possible that extant scholarship on post-Oslo Palestinian politics has so profoundly overlooked and misunderstood the APF? After all, the bulk of its activities has not been clandestine. The organizations have published and propagandized widely. They have public offices throughout Syria, Lebanon, and elsewhere, where one can access leaders and cadres. A host of first-rate scholars have studies and published on post-Oslo Palestinian politics—so why has the APF nonetheless been so misread?

One reason is the manifest lack of scholarly interest in post-Oslo, exile-based Palestinian politics in general—and in rejectionism in particular. This reduction of interest has derived from what may be termed the hypothesis of comprehensive transformation. An implied conceptual attitude rather than a tangible theory, this is the notion that the Oslo accords precipitated a close to complete systemic overhaul of Palestinian politics. A quarter of a century of exile-based, PLO-led militant struggle was suddenly supplanted by a territorially defined, PA-centric political system that both expressed and framed a new set of Palestinian aspirations. While issues such as national identity, institution building and state formation within the new political system are of obvious interest and importance, it does not follow that the diaspora and the exile-based political organizations have ceased to be relevant to the trajectory of Palestinian politics.

Barry Rubin has perhaps most clearly articulated the received view of the "transitional era between the revolutionary movement and the achievement of an independent state" that supposedly began with the Oslo
accords. He argues that the extensive and complex post-Oslo transformation "undergone by the Palestinian leadership and people" prompted them to proceed from "a revolutionary movement toward a state trying to meet the needs of over 2.5 million citizens." The leadership's prior "dependence on violence" was replaced by "responsibility for stopping Palestinian terrorism against Israel." Similarly, the people's "dream of total victory" gave way to "a new goal of creating a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with its capital in east Jerusalem." In addition, Rubin argues that the Palestinian leadership and people together underwent a transformation from "dispersed exile to restoration in its claimed homeland."

That the Palestinian national movement underwent some of its most dramatic changes ever as a result of the Oslo accords—including a crucial displacement of its centre of political gravity—is indisputably true. That the PLO/PA leadership undertook a series of new political initiatives and U-turns that directly impacted on the lives of Palestinians in the occupied territories and beyond is also correct. However, to suggest that "the Palestinian people" experienced a physical, psychological, and attitudinal transformation such as that described by Rubin is patently spurious: By 1995 some 4.6 million Palestinians, out of a total of some 7.7 million, remained in exile. They were outside the PA's control and excluded by the boundaries of the PA-centric system. They had no new social or economic infrastructures, no new PA-induced political goals, nor any new hope or confidence. They were, as Jamil Hillal has noted,

excluded from their innate right to participate in general elections [within the new PA-centric system] which would inevitably affect their

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19 Salman Abu Sitta, The Right of Return: Sacred, Legal, and Possible Too (London and Kuwait City: Palestine Return Centre, 1996); accessed 13/07/00 on www.prc.org.uk/webpages/books-e/a-s/as-cover.html
political future; and they were excluded, as communities, from taking part in the negotiations concerning as vital an issue as the right to return, which was left to the ‘final status’ stage of the [PA-Israel] negotiations. The fact that the PLO, represented by the Palestine National Council (PNC) and the Central Council, was no longer active or effective made Palestinian communities in the diaspora feel that their interests and aspirations had no venue or forum.  

Although the PLO formally remained the diaspora’s political leadership, it was left to dwindle into obscurity due to its administrators’ preoccupation with constructing the new institutions of the PA. The PLO/PA leadership developed an official nationalist discourse in order to legitimize these new institutions, a discourse that reneged on earlier commitments to armed struggle and resistance, and by implication also nullified previous commitments to the refugees’ right of return to their homes inside what is now Israel. Thus, even though the official PLO/PA discourse has always sought to appear inclusive of the diaspora, the reality of its activities and commitments has been to signal that the politically relevant Palestinian communities are now those inside the West Bank and Gaza.

Oslo thus transformed politics for a certain section of the Palestinian people—those living in the occupied territories—and the advent of a proto-state elevated them to the status of proto-citizens. The flipside of this development was that those not benefiting from these developments were, conversely, deprived—of dreams, political aspirations and social status. The gain of the residents of the PA administered areas was the diaspora’s loss as the latter’s relevance as a primary social constituency within the Palestinian political system was all but erased.

Yezid Sayigh, in his seminal history of the Palestinian national movement, has framed Oslo’s transformational impact differently—and more credibly—by placing it within the PLO’s decision-making structures. The accord, he argues, brought about a phase in which

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21 For a comprehensive analysis of the PLO/PA leadership’s emerging official nationalist discourse, and the problems it has faced, see Helena Lindholm-Schulz, The Reconstruction of Palestinian
the discourse of total liberation, the strategies and tactics of armed struggle, and the accompanying organizational instruments and institutional forms had been displaced. The PLO accords with Israel were arguably the outcome of a deep crisis of leadership, strategy, and mode of politics, but by the same token they signalled ‘the end of the era of the fasa’il—the guerrilla groups based in exile—and the start of a new one, in which the centre of national politics, primary social constituency, and statist institutions were based in one and the same location, the occupied territories.22

Sayigh correctly observes that there was no room for the rhetoric and symbolism of armed struggle and total liberation within the new PA-centric political system, nor for the tactics of the exile-based guerrillas; their displacement was enforced by the emergent official nationalist discourse. Furthermore, PLO factions other than Fateh had long since had their political influence circumscribed by a combination of their own ineffectiveness and Arafat’s Machiavellian use of his position as chairman, while secular factions not affiliated to the PLO had been denied any real significance in Palestinian affairs since the mid-1980s. The Islamists had popular appeal, but as far as power within the emergent institutional structures went, their rejection of Oslo put them in much the same political position as the other oppositionists. In addition, all significant forces opposing PLO/PA policy declared both the new system and its leadership illegitimate, and imposed an embargo on transactions with it. This, in effect, meant cutting themselves off from the structures within which they could exercise direct political influence.

The Systemic Contraction and Palestinian Identities

Palestinian politics was ‘transformed’ and ‘normalized’ through what Sayigh has called “the effective abandonment of the Palestinian diaspora.”23 The ‘transformation of Palestinian politics’ is thus better thought of as a ‘systemic contraction,’ a narrowing of boundaries leading to the exclusion of a majority of the Palestinian people. Once thought of as the crucial mass base from

Nationalism: Between Revolution and Statehood (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999)

23 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 660.
which the Palestinian revolution drew its strength, the diaspora in general—and the refugees in neighbouring Arab lands in particular—ceased being treated as politically relevant communities after Oslo—by the PLO/PA leadership, and by Western policy makers and scholars alike. They reverted to their pre-1973 status as mere humanitarian charity cases and second class Palestinians.

It follows that the Oslo ‘transformation’ did not affect Palestinian politics uniformly across the board. Rubin’s claims hold true for only a section of the Palestinian population and, similarly, Sayigh’s analysis applies only to a section of the Palestinian political elite, albeit the dominant one. Among the refugees in Syria and Lebanon—where the fasa’il dominated the political landscape, Arafatist activity was effectively proscribed, and PLO/PA institution building had little positive resonance—politics and political identities looked set to evolve very differently compared to the occupied territories.

The sheer number of Palestinians excluded from the new order, in conjunction with the activity among them of more than a dozen rejectionist factions suggests that the post-Oslo systemic contraction did not precipitate an end to the relevance of exile-based politics. In the Lebanese and Syrian arenas, the fasa’il, their tactics, and eventually their objectives evolved as a consequence of Oslo, but did not disappear.

After Oslo, debates about the future and content of the national ideal ensued among the Palestinian communities. Lindholm-Schulz, in what is one of the most perceptive and theoretically significant accounts of post-Oslo identity politics inside the contracted, PA-centric system has characterized its strains thus:

The most important internal tensions were perceptions of who were the ‘better’ Palestinians, who had the right to define national identity. The new dispute, then, was about who was the better struggler. Was it Fateh, the movement which first introduced the political path of ‘resistance’ and ‘struggle’, and the historical legitimacy of which in this sense remained spotless? Or was it Hamas, which had recently entered the road of struggle, but on the other hand was not ready to give it up for poor compromises? Was it the activists in the ‘interior’, who triumphed in their ‘glorious’ intifada, enabling a new vision of pride and dignity and who suffered in Israeli prisons and through
martyrdom? Or was it the 'outside'—the community still in exile—who led the struggle for decades in miserable circumstances and who suffered the 'exile', the longing and the dispersal? Was it the PNA, the ex-exile who always represented the privileged strata with privileged lives in Arab or European capitals or in relative wealth in the 'inside', who had taken on the lead in the 'new struggle' of building and construction? Or was it the opposition, who refused half measures and insisted on the rightfulness of a legitimate struggle of resistance? In this very struggle, new social boundaries were drawn and created...24

These were questions open for debate also among the refugee communities, but there, the political dynamics and climate were markedly different. The various rejectionist factions had their most significant pockets of support in the refugee camps. Syrian authority north of the 'Awali River restricted activities by Arafat loyalists, and in the southern camps the frustration of being so near, yet so far from home was felt most acutely. Many of those refugees who sympathized with no particular rejectionist faction, and even many supporters of Arafat's Fateh, by and large shared the APF's perception of the Oslo accord as a monumental betrayal.25 “[F]or those still outside the West Bank and Gaza Strip,” Rubin concedes in what amounts to a considerable understatement, “the peace agreements triggered more anxiety than celebration.”26

These facts on the ground suggested to the APF leaders that their response to the PLO leadership was not intellectually isolated but grounded in the realities of refugee existence. The Palestinian people generally, but the refugee communities in particular, were thought to share in the shame and desperation brought upon the opposition factions by Arafat's Oslo manoeuvres, and were thus considered an available and mobilizable social constituency. There was an inherent contradiction in this strategy, however, as concentrating efforts in one community exacerbated the risk of creating distinct Palestinian nationalisms. National consciousness, explains Eric Hobsbawm, “develops unevenly among the social groupings and regions of a country” and “[n]ational identification and what it is believed to imply can

25 While there are no available opinion polls to confirm this, several UN and aid workers have relayed this perception in discussions with the author. This is also the author's own distinct impression after numerous research visits to the refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria.
change and shift in time, even in the course of quite short periods.” The rejectionist leaders, for the most part 1948 refugees themselves, recognized that Oslo decisively sharpened the divide between ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ Palestinians. They were anxious that this would cause an irreparable fragmentation of the nation and destroy the last hopes of a comprehensive return to Palestine, thereby relegating the Palestinian people— and them, their leaders— to continued deprivation and historical ignominy. Their refusal to partake in ‘mainstream’ politics under the auspices of the PLO/PA leadership nevertheless consigned them to a balancing act, in which safeguarding the concepts of struggle and resistance within the framework of a PLO-based political order on the ‘outside’ would interfere with the nurturing of a new PA-induced nationalism ‘inside.’

The APF sought to contrast the PLO/PA leadership’s betrayal of them and the refugees, and its disloyalty to the deeply rooted ideals of resistance and liberation, with its own espousal of steadfastness and resistance in the face of the new systemic changes. In so doing the APF attempted to demonstrate that it was the embodiment of ‘true Palestinianess.’ The APF factions’ rhetoric and symbolism thus continued to elevate armed struggle and total liberation, not because they considered these viable courses of action but because they were antithetical to the platform of the PLO/PA leadership.

Lindholm-Shultz has observed that “[i]t is precisely the process or project of creating homogeneity which renders differences more important.” The diaspora communities could not be homogenized to fit into the new PA-centric order, and the post-revolutionary discourse intended to legitimize it could therefore not encompass them. In fact, the continued and unresolved plight of Palestinian refugees in neighbouring Arab lands served as living proof that the PA-centric political system was an abject

26 Rubin, The Transformation of Palestinian Politics, p. 156.
28 The centrality of armed struggle in the construction of a Palestinian national consciousness is a central thesis in Yezid Sayigh’s Armed Struggle and the Search for State.
failure measured against the goals set out in the Palestinian National Covenant. Far from being restored to their homeland, as Rubin suggests, the majority of the Palestinian people had their remaining dreams of return shattered as they found themselves not only expelled from Palestine, but also excluded from the emerging post-Oslo political system. Walker Connor has descriptively referred to such divisive state-building processes as the "nation-destroying" project.30

As the PLO/PA leadership became a propagator of official nationalism it lost its grip on the legitimizing symbolism through which it previously sustained its hegemony within the national movement; herein lay the window of political opportunity for the rejectionists. The APF's member factions appropriated and monopolized the symbolism of struggle and resistance and deployed these in their project to restore factional and national honour and, thereby, social status, while attempting to build a militant support base among the refugees that could disquiet the PLO/PA leadership and discourage negotiated concessions on crucial issues. They sought to keep the PLO/PA leadership in check while at the same time demonstratively avoiding direct transactions with it. Effectively denying itself access to the West Bank and Gaza Strip through its own rejection of the new system—with the exception of the unilateral activities of the PFLP, DFLP, Hamas and MIJ—the APF's only collectively accessible social constituencies in this struggle were the refugee communities, primarily those in Syria and Lebanon. Headquartered in Damascus, the APF has been considered remote and inaccessible, working on the margins of Palestinian politics. If the centre of politics is taken to be Ramallah, then Damascus is indeed a marginal and isolated place. If, on the other hand, the centre of one's political activity is in exile among the Palestinian refugees in Syria and Lebanon, Damascus immediately appears more central.

The Spectre of Palestinian 'Terrorism'

Scholarly preoccupation with developments inside Palestine has caused these developments in exile-based Palestinian politics to pass virtually

unnoticed. The APF’s representatives have obviously never advertized themselves as anything but a bastion of militant struggle, honour bound to carry on the struggle against Israel and Palestinian ‘liquidationism’; the project of restoring honour has been implicit, and its use of rhetoric in order to manipulate political identities officially denied. Added to the sporadic military attacks unilaterally carried out by some of the alliance’s constituent organizations, the official posturing of the APF has compelled some observers’ attention and served as the foundation for the charge that the alliance has been nothing more than a terrorist cabal. The persistent depiction of APF efforts as, essentially, Syrian and Iranian-backed terrorism has pushed the study of the alliance and its constituent members into the field of terrorism studies, which in turn is a little more than a hub for the perpetuation of this account. If the present thesis aims to redress the general neglect of post-Oslo rejectionism by legitimate scholarship, it also needs to confront the vilifications produced within terrorism studies.

Terrorism studies’ general absence of cogent theoretical approaches has converged with an inherent hostility towards its research subjects, damaging scholarly understanding of the APF and its constituent members. Focus on terrorism has reduced all other aspects of rejectionist activity to peripheral and suspect distractions and ‘support activities.’ Within terrorism studies, the APF’s militant rhetoric and symbolism, and its irreconcilable posturing towards Israel and the PLO/PA, have been taken at face value rather than contextualized and approached as instances of socioculturally meaningful communication. The alliance’s close ties to Syria and Iran—both ‘anti-Western rogue states’—have simply made matters worse, and the common notion that the APF organizations have been either unable or unwilling to innovate and evolve politically in the post-Oslo period has further buttressed these gross misrepresentations.

32 The notion of ideological rigour leading to rejectionist decline is the central hypothesis in Harold M. Cubert, The PFLP’s Changing Role in the Middle East (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 1997). This doctoral dissertation-turned-book is firmly entrenched in the field of ‘terrorism studies’ and illustrates the full range of shortcomings identified above. See also Barry Rubin, The Transformation
As a consequence, a crude one-dimensional picture of Palestinian politics has gained widespread currency in the West, in which the PLO/PA leadership is thought to champion the process of peace against the onslaught of terrorists and fanatics whose barbarism forces them to take refuge in exile. The miraculous rehabilitation of Yasser Arafat from 'arch-terrorist' to Nobel peace price winner has stood in sharp contrast against the seemingly wanton carnage of Hamas and MIJ, and the political inflexibility of ideological sticks-in-the-mud such as PFLP and PFLP-GC—all members of the APF.

Ilana Kass and Bard O'Neill's *The Deadly Embrace*, a comparative study of Palestinian and Israeli rejectionism and the only extant academic book to deal at length with the APF provide an illustration of this distorted view. Apart from this one volume and one article, the APF has received no scholarly treatment exceeding throwaway statements or, at most, the odd paragraph in books and articles dealing with other aspects of Palestinian politics. Kass and O'Neill situate their study within “a framework for analysis of terrorism and insurgency which has been extensively used by analysts and practitioners in both the Western national security community and academia,” refusing point blank to acknowledge the significance of non-violent rejectionist activity. Issues pertaining to identity politics, nationalist discourse, sociopolitical dynamics in the diaspora, cultural determinants and so forth are not approached. Narrowly focusing on the ‘terrorist threat’ to the peace process, the authors ignore the APF's inter-organizational dynamics and even fail to see its location in exile as meaningful. Citing Centre for Palestine Research (CPR) opinion polls taken in the West Bank and Gaza as evidence of rejectionist political marginality, the authors indicate their

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34 Anders Strindberg, 'The Damascus-based Alliance of Palestinian Forces: A Primer,' *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 29, 115 (Spring 2000), pp. 60-76.
unawareness of both the geographic and political context of post-Oslo rejectionism.\textsuperscript{36}

In the case of Hamas, Saul Mishal and Avraham Sela have lucidly argued that violence has been an intermittently employed tactical instrument among many others, not a defining organizational feature.\textsuperscript{37} This hypothesis can easily be extended also to the other APF factions—in so far as they have at all engaged in acts of violence. In fact, while Hamas and MIJ have carried out numerous armed attacks against Israeli targets since Oslo, there is no evidence of a single such attack by at least four of the other APF factions—PLF, PPSF, PRCP, and Sa‘iqa—in the same period. When held up against the backdrop of other APF activities—social and educational work, propagandizing, and so forth—‘terrorism’ has in fact been a rare occurrence that cannot plausibly be posited as a defining feature of the APF project.

‘Terrorism studies’ has brought agenda driven and intensely hostile frameworks to bear on its studies of post-Oslo Palestinian rejectionism, but by default these studies have come to constitute academic ‘orthodoxy’ on the subject. The work of these “mug-shot orientalists”\textsuperscript{38}—scholars combining threat assessment and intelligence/law enforcement concerns with stereotypes of supposed Arab and Islamic characteristics—has thus served little purpose other than to malign the APF and, importantly, its Syrian and Iranian benefactors, ensuring their continued status as terrorists beyond the pale of dialogue and reason. It has given academic credibility to a view of the conflict between the PLO/PA leadership and the opposition as, essentially, a struggle between good and evil; between the ‘reformed terrorists’ who have seen the errs of their ways and made amends, and the ‘unrepentant terrorists’ who persist in their anti-Israeli, anti-Western wickedness. Captives of their own hermeneutic of crisis management, terrorism scholars have analysed rejectionist activities within frameworks based on models of

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., pp. 257-8.
\textsuperscript{38} The phrase was coined by Helena Cobban. See her review of Harold Cubert, The PFLP's Changing Role in the Middle East (London: Frank Cass, 1997), in Journal of Palestine Studies, XXVII, no. 3 (Spring 1998), Issue 107, pp. 107-8.
regional security, terrorism or insurgency, forcing a continuous revalidation and perpetuation of the APF’s terrorist image.

REJECTIONISM DEFINED
In spite of scholars’ frequent use of the term ‘rejectionism, it is a curious fact that in the secondary literature consulted for this thesis, no author seems ever to have attempted a rigorous definition. Over the years the term has acquired connotations rather than definitions, and often the literature is not even clear on what rejectionism is supposed to reject. One of the term's connotations is 'militant rejection of Israel,' as exemplified by the Palestinian and Arab position in the wake of the 1967 war: “no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it...”39 According to this view, 'rejectionism' simply implies rejection of the Jewish state’s right to exist, and the significant other towards whom rejectionist actions, symbolism, and rhetoric are thought to be projected is Israel. Another connotation is the refusal of factions within the Palestinian national movement to acquiesce in its own leadership’s attempts to alter or moderate the means and goals of the struggle. In this sense, the term implies rejection first and foremost of forces within the Palestinian movement, and only secondarily of Israel.

Whether rejectionism focuses primarily on Israel or on perceived deviants within the Palestinian movement is no mere hair-splitting exercise. Its external focus determines whom it considers its interlocutor, for whose attention displays of defiance and militancy are staged—with whom rejectionists seek to communicate.40 This in turn determines the crucial issue of establishing within which relational context we should analyse and interpret their activities. After all, threatening to mobilize the refugees of southern Lebanon and “march on Palestine,” as PFLP-GC secretary general

40 Throughout this thesis, ‘communication’ is treated as a process through which one party seeks to affect the behaviour or state of mind of another, rather than the mere production and exchange of meanings. Thus, it follows what has been called the “process school” of communication rather than the semiotics approach. See Philip F. Esler, Galatians (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 5-9. See also C. Shannon and W. Weaver, The Mathematical Theory of Communication (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1949); Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics (London: Fontana, 1974, [1915]).
Ahmad Jibril did in April 2000, takes on different meanings depending on whether the message is intended for Ramallah or Tel Aviv.41

The literature suggests that the former connotation is more common, that rejectionism is about rejection of diplomacy as a tool for dealing with Israel, propelled by the refusal to accept any other means than armed struggle as efficacious in the liberation of all of Palestine, from the river Jordan to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. For instance, a prominent encyclopaedia of Middle East politics defines “rejectionist” as an

Informal description of a group of Arab states and Palestinian groups that coalesced in the wake of the October 1973 War to propound a hard line of opposition to any Arab-Israeli peacemaking, whether direct, or internationally mediated...42

Most scholars appear to subscribe to this analysis of rejectionism, viewing it as an outwardly unified, Israel-focused phenomenon, the internal dynamics of which is largely irrelevant. For instance, Kass and O'Neill suggest that the phenomenon hinges upon the “struggle against political settlement and territorial compromise on religious/ideological grounds,”43 adding that “Palestinian rejectionism is as old as the Zionist movement. Its essence is not just the refusal to accept particular tacit or formal agreements with Israel, but a denial of the very idea of a Jewish state.”44 To be sure, rejectionist rhetoric and symbolism have always highlighted irreconcilability towards, and confrontation with ‘the Zionist enemy,’ and done so in a highly demonstrative manner. Few political phenomena should be taken at face value, however.

This thesis contends that rejectionism as a political current revolves around a continuous effort to frustrate ‘deviationist tendencies’ on the part of the PLO/PA leadership, and that its pattern of manifesting itself in sporadic and demonstrative ‘bursts’ of militant symbolism has its roots in a struggle within the national movement. This struggle has run parallel with the national struggle against Israel. It has sought to achieve two main

41 Al-Safir, April 8, 2000.
43 Ilana Kass and Bard O'Neill, The Deadly Embrace, preface.
objectives: the construction of positive social identities for the structurally subordinate PLO factions, and the defence of factional and national honour against perceived challenges from the PLO leadership. At its core, then, rejectionist politics has not 'been about' violence and destruction but, rather, a struggle against the PLO/PA leadership for social status, attended by symbolic speech and behaviour conditioned by the prevailing background expectancies and cultural milieu within which this struggle has taken place.

To say that rejectionism is part of an internal Palestinian struggle for social status is not to deny that at least some of its adherents have been, not only vehement but also consistently sincere in their unwillingness to acknowledge Israel's right to exist. This issue, however, has been secondary to the raison d'être of every major rejectionist assembly—the 1974 Front for Rejecting Capitulationist Settlements (better known as the Rejection Front, RF), the 1985 Palestinian National Salvation Front (PNSF) and the APF. Looking at rejectionism as 'rejection of Israel' misses the point. Israel has been a 'backdrop,' an external variable against which the rejectionists have publicly and demonstratively contrasted their own politics of 'honour and steadfastness' against the PLO/PA leaderships 'shameful liquidationism'; this contrast has served a purpose in the internal struggle for social status. In fact, as the main narrative of this thesis will demonstrate, rejection of diplomacy, negotiation and co-existence with Israel has not been a constant for several of the major rejectionist factions. What has been a constant, however, has been the perceived necessity to guard against challenges to their social status from the PLO/PA leadership.

DEMystifying the 'Rejectionist Current'

It is intensely human to react to treachery and deceit—real or perceived—with anger and disappointment, and to translate such emotions into action. Our particular social and cultural contexts frame and affect cognition and agency, however, issuing in the countless particular patterns of speech and behaviour with which human beings across the globe perceive, internalize, react to and deal with situations at hand; these patterns are part and parcel of cultural differentiation. Failure to take cultural differentiation seriously

44 Ibid., p. 213.
results in ethnocentracity, the belief that the rest of the world is like us or, at any rate, ought to be. When appreciated and accounted for in a balanced manner, however, social and cultural specificity can add significant dimensions to the study of human relations and interactions—politics being one category thereof—resulting in new and sometimes unexpected insights. “Cultures,” after all, “are maps of meaning through which the world is made intelligible.”

There has always been more to rejectionist politics than the received wisdoms of political science and Middle East studies have recognized. Its isolation from the PLO, and later PLO/PA framework has been mistaken for utter marginality, its closeness to external actors such as Syria, Iraq, Libya and Iran has been thought an indicator of rogue state minionhood and its militant rhetoric and symbolism have been considered mere signs of irrational extremism. This thesis proceeds from the viewpoint that what seem like determined efforts at ignoring and stereotyping Palestinian rejectionism should be replaced by attempts to understand it on its own terms and within its own context. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to disinter the historical and contemporary manifestations of the rejectionist current from the graveyard of ‘received wisdoms’ by reinterpreting its rhetoric, symbolism and behaviour within a previously neglected sociocultural framework.

There are a number of obviously important catalysts of, and motors for political action, such as ideological concerns, power rivalries, economic interests, rational choices and intergroup and interpersonal dynamics. Whatever these catalysts and motors may be, their specific expressions in practical politics are socioculturally contingent. In fact, not even state-level Realpolitik—that most abstracted and universalized of political concepts—can ever be played out in a vacuum, but is always given specific expression in and through social and cultural environments. In this context it is important to acknowledge, then, the boundedness of human cognition and agency, including principles of rationality. In micro-level political research it is inadequate to simply refer to a formal rational actor model, psychological

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model or economic-structural model of political behaviour because the catalysts, features and effects of cogency and agency within these models are inextricably tied to contingent background expectancies within the actor's sociocultural context. The acknowledgment that politics cannot be fruitfully treated as a universal science, but should instead be viewed as a mode of socially conditioned communication, may prove effective in addressing and understanding the trajectory of rejectionist assemblies. Thus, this thesis' basic contention is that when rejectionist rhetoric, behaviour, statements, speeches and activities are framed within relevant sociocultural explanatory contexts, it can be understood as meaningful, purposive and considered, rather than merely extremist and irrational. Principles of power politics, intergroup conflict and rational agency fall into place.

It should be mentioned at this point that in holding up the APF against a sociocultural backdrop, the thesis is obliged to level substantial criticism against customary 'political culture theorizing.' Generally, these essentialist efforts have not only been singularly unhelpful in illuminating political phenomena, but moreover managed to stigmatize balanced and legitimate deployment of cultural variables in political research. In contradistinction to such efforts—and this is a vital point—the present thesis does not seek to construct and apply a 'cultural model' for how politics in the eastern Mediterranean may work, nor is it trying to extrapolate the elements of such a model from the specific case of the APF. Rather, the present thesis is limited to holding up a specific set of cultural norms or cues—identified by anthropological research as salient features of social interaction in the eastern Mediterranean—to a specific social phenomenon, in order to re-examine and reinterpret its dynamics and meanings. In so doing, it endeavours to uncover purpose and meaning where, currently, scholars acknowledge very little of either one. The thesis claims neither immutability for cultural 'crucibles,' nor their capacity to comprehensively determine speech and behaviour, simply their salience in understanding political behaviour.

This thesis is intended as a further instalment in our cumulative understanding of the Palestinian national movement. While its focus is firmly political, its conceptual and methodological approaches may be
thought of as political anthropology, the study of a particular set of political
dynamics within a particular sociocultural setting. While anthropology has
traditionally centred on the study of pre-industrial societies it has recently
branched out to offer fruitful, if not uncontroversial insights into the social
affairs of modern societies.\textsuperscript{46} The approach of the present thesis is
interdisciplinary, and it is hoped that a synthesis of political, sociological and
anthropological models for understanding human behaviour can offer
valuable insights into issues previously neglected and misunderstood. Within
anthropology there exists a useful notion called “practical relativism” defined
as the “suspension of inquiry into the divine or objective truth of particular
customs.”\textsuperscript{47} It is reminiscent of Edmund Husserl’s concept of \textit{epoché},
suspension of judgment, and has been described as a “practical attitude
adopted in the face of fieldwork encounters.”\textsuperscript{48} Having noted how previous
examinations of the APF have suffered from their dogmatic hostility towards
the research subject, it is perhaps obvious that this thesis strives to stand
above condemnation and prescription, to suspend judgment. “I endeavour to
have no conviction, and so my dear brother regards me as lacking
conviction,” wrote Ernst Jünger, and continued:

\begin{quote}
‘Being free of conviction’ would, of course, be the better term. I set
great store not by conviction but by a free disposition of myself. Thus,
I am at someone’s disposal to the extent that I am challenged, whether
to love or to war. I value not the conviction but the man. \textit{Je regarde et
je garde}.\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

\textbf{CONTEXT AND CULTURE}

There is today widespread scholarly acceptance throughout the social science
disciplines that research on social and political phenomena must somehow

\textsuperscript{46} See, for instance, J. McIver Weatherford, \textit{Tribes on the Hill} (New York: Rawson and Wade, 1981);


\textsuperscript{49} Ernst Jünger, \textit{Eumeswil}, p. 160.
be done ‘in context,’ that is, analysed with reference to internal or external features that can ‘give sense’ to them. The implications of context and contextualization for political science and international relations have not been adequately problematized, however.

Both context and culture are notoriously difficult concepts. Roy Dilley tells us that even within anthropology—the social science discipline that not only deals most intimately with issues of culture, but where context has the most prominent function—“the [contextualization] process has been seen as unproblematic.” He continues:

We should appeal, conventional wisdom has it, to features and characteristics surrounding a phenomenon in order to illuminate it and to understand or give sense to it. The idea is that anthropologists who interpret social and cultural phenomena do so with reference, therefore, to something called ‘context’. This apparently simple notion that it is context that gives form to our interpretations raises important questions about what a context is, how it is defined and selected, and by whom. 50

Present contexts for studying the APF, as indicated above, range from ill fitting to phoney. They nevertheless share the characteristic of being entirely constructed and imposed by the Etic, the social scientific researcher, with little or no reference to the way the Emic, the research subject, perceives its milieu, speech and action, and with even less reference to the perceptions of, and impact on social groups in its immediate environment. 51 Not surprisingly, then, extant scholarly approaches to rejectionism have failed to make sense of it, seemingly because they have refrained from addressing exactly its human and sociocultural dimensions; this, again, quite likely stems form the profound lack of field research that is the hallmark of writings on the APF factions.

Viewed always as a political and security threat, the sociocultural embeddedness of pre and post-Oslo rejectionist rhetoric and behaviour has never been addressed. Even in that part of post-Oslo Palestinian politics that

has interested scholars—West Bank and Gaza Strip institution building and identity formation—the linkage between the cultural and the political has been largely ignored. Researching Palestinian society has—with some notable exceptions—been the preserve of political scientists and sociologists, rather than individuals with anthropological aptitudes and inclinations. One can but hypothesize as to the reasons for political scientists’ avoidance of culture: Palestinian and Arab writers may take their own cultural cues for granted and therefore omit mentioning them in their political analyses. Alternatively they may not wish to appeal to cultural ‘particularism’, thereby giving credence to the quasi-racist notions of ‘the Arab mind’ that riddle political culture theorizing. Western writers are likely to want to avoid being branded as ‘orientalists’ by stressing the explanatory value of culture, a conscious or subconscious reaffirmation of the unfortunate fact that Western intellectual traditions tend to view ‘difference’ as ‘deviance,’ according it normative dimensions to be evaluated relative to an accepted norm.52

The present thesis is written from the general viewpoint that political speech and behaviour can be ‘given sense’ only when located on a ‘cultural map,’ which—although fluid and transient—allow us to find our way through the norms, cues and idiosyncrasies of a given place at a given time. Much, or perhaps even most of the worlds political behavioural patterns may be easily recognizable to the Etic researcher, but there are cases were the researcher’s own sociocultural frames of reference are simply inadequate. For Western scholars, the rejectionist trend—and perhaps more so than ever the post-Oslo APF—appear to have been such cases.

Rejectionism’s particular cultural location and contextual frames may be found within the ambient eastern Mediterranean or circum-Mediterranean cultural sphere. Drawing on anthropological research in the region, the present thesis posits a number of cultural ‘crucibles’ as salient variables within its analytical framework. These include honour as a pivotal social value, the centrality of patron-client dynamics and a firmly entrenched group orientation. The analytical framework, in turn, is provided by social identity theory, a heuristic, non-reductionist model for understanding group

52 For Western approaches to ‘the problem of difference,’ see, for instance, Charles Taylor, The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
interaction and conflict. Social identity theory emphasizes the significance of
the subject’s hermeneutic situation and the importance of understanding
group rhetoric and collective behaviour as at least in part aimed at sustaining
group member’s internally constructed social identity. It also gives careful
consideration to the context in which a cohesive group consciousness is
installed in the minds and hearts of the members. Importantly, rather than
forcing the subject into externally constructed and ill fitting analytical
frameworks, social identity theory offers a means of integrating insights from
a variety of analytical models within an intercultural framework that rests
ultimately on the research subjects’ own perception of their sociocultural and
political milieu.

In essence, when processed through what might be termed a
'socioculturally sensitive model of intergroup relations,' the rejectionist trend
can be understood as not only as an important part of the social, intellectual
and tactical dialectic within the national movement, but as a considered and
consistent political current. The positive (that is, constructive) content of
rejectionism has heretofore gone largely unnoticed by scholars and policy
makers alike, yet has shaped the intellectual and political position of the
national movement as a whole and contributed to its tactical regeneration,
progress and survival.

STRUCTURE AND HYPOTHESES
Chapter two comprises a review and critique of the limited extant scholarly
research on the APF and post-Oslo Palestinian exile politics, as well as an
overview of literature on pre-Oslo rejectionism. The chapter goes on to
outline a theoretical and methodological framework, the central components
of which are borrowed from anthropology and sociology, exploring the
concepts of context, culture and group identity/interaction, and
incorporating these into a balanced framework for analysis of the rejectionist
phenomenon.

Chapter three supplies a history of the Palestinian national movement
between 1948 and 1973, focusing in particular on how early ideological and
organizational rivalries laid the foundation for the more or less permanent
'rejectionist-mainstream' fault line that followed after the October War. The
main purpose of this chapter, which is based largely on secondary sources, is to adumbrate the context for the following chapter.

Chapter four re-examines the historical trajectory of rejectionist politics after 1973, demonstrating the efficacy of the theoretical model and the appropriateness of conceptualizing rejectionism as a socially and politically contingent 'corrective movement' (to borrow a phrase from the Syrian political dictionary). By examining historical rejectionist endeavours within the theoretical framework constructed for this thesis, it is hoped that new light may be shed on 'old facts.' The chapter argues that the three major rejectionist assemblies—the RF, PNSF and APF—all revolved around the fulfilment of two objectives. First, the assertion of a positive social identity by the structurally subordinate opposition within the Palestinian national movement by thwarting specific political manoeuvres by the PLO leadership perceived to run counter to the aims set out in the Palestinian National Charter. Second, to demonstratively and vigorously 'counter-challenge' the PLO leadership, which in each instance had acted in a way perceived to shame the opposition and the Palestinian people generally. The chapter furthermore argues that these assemblies were not always or primarily motivated by wholesale rejection of peace and diplomacy, but that the mechanisms of the challenge-response game attending the honour-shame dichotomy within eastern Mediterranean cultures made it socially imperative for the rejectionists to be seen to confront peace altogether. In fact, the formation of each assembly was preceded by discreet but clear peace overtures by leading rejectionist factions, but these were rendered void and obsolete by the need to demonstratively distance the rejectionist factions from 'Arafatist' policies.

The same chapter also suggests that the 1983 rebellion within the ranks of Fateh, which led to the split between 'Fateh-Arafat' and Abu Musa's Fateh-Intifada, was a far more significant development for the long-term trajectory of rejectionism than the subsequent creation of the interfactional PNSF. Not only did the events surrounding the split tie the rejectionist current almost inextricably to Syria, but, at its core, Fateh-Intifada is an institutionalization of rejectionism. For existential reasons—which again are linked to the honour-shame dichotomy and the struggle for a positive social
identity—Fateh-Intifada can never accept reconciliation with the ‘mainstream’ of the national movement. Because it is a significant political force within Palestinian politics in Syria, and a well-endowed organization in terms of finances and infrastructure, Fateh-Intifada’s very existence has become an important impetus for the perpetuation of rejectionism.

Chapter five goes on to examine in detail the political work of the APF factions from 1994 and onwards. It explores the alliance’s lack of military capabilities and its extensive, Damascus-based information and propaganda network, arguing that collective military action was never on its agenda. The various factions’ awareness of their own limited capabilities prompted them not to entertain the military option for any other purposes than symbolic politics. Instead, the APF sought to use a variety of instruments to manipulate and control Palestinian national identity among the refugees, in direct competition with the PLO/PA leadership, and to shore up the increasingly negative social identities of its member factions. Relying chiefly on primary sources collected during a series of seven field trips to Syria, Lebanon and Jordan between 1998 and 2001, the chapter argues that the APF attempted to fill its symbolically charged, militant defiance of the PLO/PA leadership with positive content by tapping into—in a generative sense—Palestinian national consciousness. Manipulation of the refugee communities’ public discourse and the management of its meanings and perceptions—aimed at strengthening the militancy that has become entrenched in Palestinian national identity over the last several decades—was the APF’s sole collective purpose.

This ties in with the above mentioned twin objectives of rejectionist assemblies: Rather than signifying delusional belief in the possibility of liberating Palestine from the river to the sea—or fanatical intent to launch collective armed struggle no matter what the cost and outcome—the alliance’s patently impracticable rhetoric has been an instrument in its practice of political struggle. Its ‘tactical objective’ has been to foreclose the possibility of the refugees’ imagining non-militant and non-radical expressions of Palestinianness; its ‘strategic aim’ has been to shut out Arafat from the realm of the politically acceptable, thereby minimizing his popular appeal and ability to do further damage to the goals of the national
movement as they perceived them. Their project necessitated projecting an image of themselves as principled advocates of national honour, steadfastness, sacrifice and armed struggle.

Chapter five also shows how each faction has had different stakes in the 'honour-restoration project,' and thus approached the management of meanings and perceptions with different levels of enthusiasm and success; the APF was set up to coordinate efforts, not direct and regiment them. Thus, the alliance has never been a monolith and understanding the situation, agenda and instruments of each factional part is crucial in understanding the development of the collective whole. Moreover, due to differing abilities and capabilities, different ideologies and modes of interaction with constituents and the PLO/PA leadership, each faction incrementally developed and entrenched its own role-conception and identity, bringing the APF as a collective to the point of fragmentation shortly prior to the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada. The analytical narrative ends with events in July, 2001.

Chapter six ties together the theoretical and empirical elements of the thesis, drawing on observations made within the analytical narratives of chapters four and five. It concludes that without thinking seriously about the issues of context and culture, political science is likely to continue to misinterpret micro-level social phenomena such as rejectionism.
CHAPTER II
TOWARDS A BALANCED ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world... This disclosure of ‘who’ in contradistinction to ‘what’ somebody is—his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings—is implicit in everything somebody says and does.  

Hannah Arendt

SUMMARY INTRODUCTION

Seeking to recontextualize rejectionism within an explanatory framework comprising significant elements of culture, ideology and intergroup-dynamics, the present chapter sets out by exploring some ways in which context and contextualization have been problematized in neighbouring disciplines, primarily in anthropology. It examines some insights arrived at and their implications for the present thesis, suggesting that the articulation of a contextual framework should first and foremost be seen as facilitating a new mode of knowledge; offering a new perception of a phenomenon rather than a definitive and objectively determinable setting. The most that can be said about articulating a ‘correct’ context is that optimal interpretation of a social phenomenon is achieved when there is some congruence between the researcher’s cognitive framework and that of the research subject, ideally established through conversation and dialogue.

The chapter proceeds by discussing the issue of culture, arguing that its utility as context in political research derives from its being an ever-evolving arena within which agents’ speech and behaviour are ascribed immediate meaning. Culture signifies the particular and distinctive, the community-at-hand that shares, negotiates and transforms assumptions and norms. In group-oriented and collectivist cultures, such as those located around the shores of the eastern Mediterranean, the influence of cultural determinants may be stronger than in atomistic, individualist cultures such

as those on either side of the North Atlantic. An outline of social identity theory and its attendant models for understanding intergroup conflict is followed by a discussion of the salient features of rejectionism’s cultural referential context, most significantly the honour-shame dichotomy, patron-client dynamics and pronounced collectivism. A final section seeks to adumbrate a macro-political framework within which to situate the Palestinian national movement, making particular use of Michael Barnett’s insightful use of constructivist theory.²

CONTEXT AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

By situating analyses of the APF within defective analytical frameworks, extant scholarship has misinterpreted its speech and behaviour, and as a consequence misrepresented their agendas and objectives. The factions’ activities have been examined within contextual frameworks that have been either ill fitting, such as those referring to regional security and balance of power issues, or specious, such as frameworks for studying terrorism and insurgency. As mentioned previously, this thesis submits that an appropriate and fruitful contextual framework can be constructed by taking seriously the research subjects’ own perceptions in combination with an emphasis on salient features of the ambient culture. What, then, underlies this assertion?

Political science and international relations have not spent much time problematizing the issues of context and contextualization. It is the forte of both these disciplines to formulate and apply macro-level models and paradigms capable of explaining political behaviour and processes across social and cultural boundaries. The focus is thus set at a high level of abstraction, and micro-level idiosyncrasies are important primarily because of what they tell us about the whole, through their ability to validate or correct paradigmatic models. Because of this instrumental approach to social and cultural specificity, international relations paradigms—such as realism, neo-realism, pluralism and so forth—are clearly inadequate for micro-level social research. They, quite literally, take social phenomena out of context in

order to study and/or establish universal features of human behaviour, viewing agency and cogency across a range of sociopolitical variability.

Terrorism studies, which does engage in micro-level commentary, makes use of similar paradigmatic approaches. ‘Terrorism’ is viewed as having essential behavioural, psychological, social and/or organizational qualities that are extrapolated from, and transcend their socioculturally specific instances. This is an approach that is loosely analogous to Lévi-Strauss’ anthropological work on myth, which removes the processes of oral accounts from their preformative contexts in order to establish pan-cultural features of the “savage mind.”3 Dilley’s description of Lévi-Strauss’ efforts could easily be transposed onto terrorism studies:

The specificity of local cultural contexts becomes the object of his generalizing project that seeks certain kinds of symbolic phenomena in particular localities, seen simply as moulds which give shape to fundamental principles.4

The central manoeuvre here is not so much taking phenomena out of context, but to deny that context as relevant to the alleged ‘essence’ of the social phenomenon under investigation.

Context and its correlative activity, interpretation, are concepts that are generally invoked as part of an analytical strategy that stands in contradistinction to universal, formal and generalizing tendencies. When context is brought into play, the emphasis is invariably on the local, unique and particular rather than the global and broadly applicable.5 In political science this is considered an appropriate approach for case studies, which can then go on to take their place in generalized or generalizing theoretical schemes. However, micro-level study of political dynamics is usually the remit of sociology and anthropology; in the latter, context and contextualization have long been centrally important concepts. These disciplines have benefited from, and contributed to the debate about context

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4 Roy Dilley, The Problem of Context, p. 21

5 Ibid. pp. 6, 39-40 (n. 8).
in other disciplines, including philosophy, linguistics, literary criticism and history. As the conceptual perspective of the present thesis has already been identified as substantially influenced by anthropology, the present discussion serves as a ‘trans-disciplinary excursion’ aimed at considering various perspectives on context and contextualization produced in these neighbouring disciplines, and examine what their relevance for the present thesis may be.

**Context in the Humanities**

The act of interpreting the significance and meaning of social phenomena has been described as “creating connections.” Roy Dilley has suggested that

> A phenomenon is connected to its surroundings; contexts are sets of connections construed as relevant to someone, to something or to a particular problem, and this process yields an explanation, a sense, an interpretation for the object so connected.

Context has been further described by Scharfstein, a philosopher, as “that which environs the object of interest and helps by its relevance to explain it.” Another philosopher, Culler, has noted “the unboundedness of context.” the infinite regression involved in the contextualizing enterprise which leads to limitless inclusion and, thus, conceptual emptiness. Scharfstein, again, has similarly observed that “the attempt to be thorough in understanding context leads to total contextualization, in which everything becomes the context of everything else.”

Exacerbating the *problematique* of infinite regression is the problem of ‘contextual direction,’ as scholars working within philosophy of language have identified three distinct spheres of context. First, *the external context*, which is created by making a connection between one domain of phenomena (say, language) and another (the world). On this view, language can be

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ascribed meaning insofar as it relates to or describes ‘objective reality.’ Second, the internal context, which is created by making a connection not with things outside the object of inquiry, but internal to it. Here, meaning involves connections and significant relations within language itself.\footnote{For usage and further explanation of these terms, see M. Hobart, ‘Meaning or Moaning? An Ethnographic Note on a Little Understood Tribe,’ in D. Parkin (ed.), Semantic Anthropology (London et alibi: Academic Press, 1982), pp. 39-64; Sándor G. J. Hervey, ‘Context: The Ghost in the Machine,’ in Roy Dilley, pp. 61-72.}

Third, the mental or psychological context,\footnote{The term “psychological context” was first used in C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism (London; Kegan Paul, Trench and Trubner, 1938 [1923]).} which involves focusing attention on the minds of the individual agents whose particular use of language we study, their intentions and inner states.\footnote{See R. L. Gregory (ed.) The Oxford Companion to the Mind (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 450-54.} “The mind, it could be suggested, becomes a particular kind of context that environs the object of study...”\footnote{Roy Dilley, The Problem of Context, p. 13}

These originally philosophical distinctions have had repercussions throughout the contextualization debate; in anthropology, they are roughly the content of universalism, contextualism and psychologism, distinct models for interpreting and understanding behaviour and custom. For our immediate purposes, these three contextual spheres could be considered analogous to interpreting rejectionist speech and action with reference to its significant other, the PLO leadership; with reference to its internal inter and intrafractional processes; or with reference to the psychology of the rejectionist leaderships. As will be demonstrated in the narratives of the following chapters, each of these contextual spheres have been relevant, and appreciating their interconnection is a crucial part of understanding rejectionism.

In linguistics, J. L. Austin has further developed the notion of context as setting, seeking to shift the focus from analysis of words and sentences to conceive of language as a mode of action, investigating “how people use words to accomplish action.”\footnote{C. Goodwin and A. Duranti, ‘Rethinking Context: An Introduction,’ in C. Goodwin and A. Duranti, Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon (1992), p. 17; cf J. Culler, On Deconstruction, pp. 110-34.} Setting, “a set of recognized conventions,” gives certain words and sentences particular meaning, such as ‘I do’ at a
marriage ceremony.\textsuperscript{16} This is reminiscent of Habermas' concept of 'lifeworld', the immediate environment of an individual person in which individuals ideally can find recognition for the validity of their communication.\textsuperscript{17} On this view, the creation of rejectionist assemblies could be seen as attempts to establish political spheres in which the discourse of each part is affirmed and validated by others within a political whole. A similar view could be expressed of state patronage, which tends to involve the creation of a 'discursive universe' in which the parties come together to validate and reinforce each other's speech and behaviour. As the discussion of patronage that follows below will demonstrate, this does not necessitate espousal of identical ideologies or political objectives by patron and client, merely that they are mutually bolstered and intellectually comforted by common discursive parameters.

Goodwin and Duranti, on the other hand, argue for an interactionist view of context, which places the social person on centre stage and reflects a view of language and interaction as context. Their basic premise is "the capacity of human beings to dynamically reshape the context that provides organization for their actions within the interaction itself."\textsuperscript{18} Context is both constitutive of social action and itself the product of social action; "it is both a generative principle and a resulting outcome."\textsuperscript{19} This view has distinct parallels also in sociology and political science, where symbolic interactionism\textsuperscript{20} and constructivism\textsuperscript{21} have become many researchers' stock-in-trade. Goodwin and Duranti furthermore argue that the definition and

\textsuperscript{16} Roy Dilley, \textit{The Problem of Context}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 20.
\textsuperscript{19} Roy Dilley, \textit{The Problem of Context}, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{20} For a foundational text in this field, see Herbert Blumer, \textit{Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method} (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969)
deployment of context is also part of actors' strategies wherein “individual participants can actively attempt to shape context in ways that further their own interests.”

Context can thus be analysed as “an interactively constituted mode of practice,” which implies that the research subjects too are interested in the use of context to create effects and outcomes. On this view, the rejectionist trend in general and the APF in particular could be seen as not only trying to manipulate their own context through politically charged rhetoric and symbolism, but also contributing to the creation of a new and continuously evolving context in which their activities and rhetoric can better resonate and be sustained.

The notion of historical context is generally neglected in philosophy, linguistics and (most glaringly) politics and international relations. It was first developed in the work of R. G. Collingwood, who came to believe that the historian's task was to inwardly relive the actions of historical agents “in the spirit of imaginative sympathy, with a view to rendering intelligible their behaviour and the products of human endeavour.”

Collingwood’s view of the interpretative enterprise was influenced by, and largely analogous to Weber’s concept of Verstehen (understanding), as contrasted with—but also complemented by—the ‘Durkheimian’ project of Erklärung, explanation. Verstehen and Erklärung are distinct approaches to sociological method; the former is a method of inquiry aimed largely at reconstructing meanings from the subject’s point of view, asking how the subject understands itself and its actions and, thus, placing an emphasis on the explanatory capacity of the Emic. Erklärung, by contrast, places the explanatory emphasis on the Etic by ascribing greater significance to the formal and abstract models of social scientific knowledge relative to Emic perceptions of its actions and place in the world.

A proper balance between Emic and Etic perspectives is difficult to achieve. Hobart has described how too much knowledge can be brought to bear on study of a phenomenon at the expense of local exegesis.

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22 A. Goodwin and C. Duranti, Rethinking Context, p. 6.
23 A. Goodwin and C. Duranti, Rethinking Context, p. 22.
25 Mark Hobart, ‘As They Like It: Overinterpretation and Hyporeality in Bali’ in Roy Dilley. The Problem of Context, pp. 105-144.
similar vein, Holy has argued that “we are much more aware of context in practice than in theory,” that is, when during fieldwork we find ourselves visitors within the subject’s contextual frame, thus experiencing it first hand.26 Although Verstehen and Erklärung were once considered polar opposites, both Collingwood and Weber have argued that social scientific inquiry must incorporate elements of both in order to be fruitful.27

Bronislaw Malinowski pioneered the treatment of context within social anthropology,28 and the practice of cultural contextualization became rooted at the heart of the discipline largely due to his work. Malinowski coined the phrase “context of situation”29 in order to address the pragmatic circumstances in which “the context of words,” language, as a mode of action, was used and articulated. He argued that “the meaning of a word must always be gathered... from an analysis of its functions, with reference to the given culture.”30 In his later writings Malinowski restated the “context of situation” as “the context of culture,” arguing that textual translation must take place against the “cultural background of society.”31

Malinowski’s cultural context, then, include both the general setting and the immediate situation in which a word is used, and in which, for our purposes, action takes place. Both the immediate and general ‘contextual spheres’ are of great importance in this thesis' efforts at understanding the dynamics and trajectory of rejectionism: Statements concerning issues such as armed struggle, the legitimacy of the PLO/PA leadership, peace with Israel and relations with patrons must be interpreted within an immediate political setting—intergroup relations, internal factional dynamics, events and developments in the direct environment—as well as within their more general sociocultural milieu.

29 Malinowski, ‘The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages,’ p. 53
30 Ibid., p. 309.
Towards a Relevant Context for the Study of Rejectionism

While the preceding discussion may have articulated a sense of what kind of activity is involved in articulating an analytical context, we have still not found any solution to the difficult problem of how to determine a 'correct' context for the purposes of this thesis. A possible answer can be found by looking at another philosophical problem, that of the so called 'hermeneutic circle.' An enduring problem within the field of hermeneutics—which is concerned with the interpretation of texts and human understanding—has been explained thus:

We understand the meaning of an individual word by seeing it in reference to the whole sentence; and reciprocally, the sentence's meaning as a whole is dependent on the meaning of the individual words. By extension, an individual concept derives its meaning from the context or horizon within which it stands; yet the horizon is made up of the very elements to which it gives meaning.

Accordingly, Honderich has suggested that “comprehension can only come about through a tacit foreknowledge that alerts us to salient features of the text which would otherwise escape notice.” Transferring this problematique to social anthropology, Dilley restates it by suggesting that “...interpretation in context require the pre-interpretation of the relevant context, that in turn informs the subsequent interpretation.” This view is embraced and applied by Holy and Stuchlik's work on native folk models, which embody “common-sense knowledge necessary for any competent social interaction.”

In relation to the present thesis, we do appear equipped to say something about the appropriateness of interpretative processes, if not about their specific parameters. It seems that the notion of encounter between the Etic and Emic—between the researcher and the rejectionist research

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33 Ibid., p. 87.
subjects—is crucial to the ability of the former to interpret and understand the meaning of the speech and behaviour of the latter; to make connections relevant not only to a research agenda but to on-the-ground realities, and to internal features of these organizations that may be obscured without first-hand contact. In particular, the implications of the ‘hermeneutic circle’ is that in order to know which are the relevant connections to make as regards a research subject’s rhetoric and behaviour, we need to first have some understanding about its relevant milieu and setting, which in turn requires us to have some prior understanding of the subject’s rhetoric and behaviour. In asking how such pre-understanding can be achieved in practice, two features emerge as prerequisites for a relevant contextualization effort.

First, absorption of anthropological literature. Initial secondary source knowledge of a political phenomenon such as the APF should not be based on political and historical literature only (as is often the case), but must rest on a familiarity with social and cultural cues and norms, which are often subtle and unarticulated. Combining political and anthropological literature affords the researcher an understanding of both the general and immediate settings in which political speech and behaviour arise and are deployed. Because cultural norms and cues lie outside the normal remit of political science they are often overlooked; this makes them no less important. The issue of culture as context is returned to in the following section. Suffice it for the moment to note that cultural context, as conceptualized by Malinowski, imputes meaning to our speech and behaviour; following Goodwin and Duranti it may also be deployed by Emic agents as a vehicle for their political endeavours.

Second, primary encounters resulting in conversation and constructive dialogue are essential to political contextualization. The need for field research is well established within political science and international relations, but ‘encounter’ and ‘dialogue’ are still largely alien concepts. Encounter goes beyond field research and interviews, signifying an attitude towards the research enterprise that, once adopted, becomes also the methodology. It implies a willingness to intellectually cross cultural and
political boundaries in order to establish a mutually respectful dialogue. Respect is not meant in the sense of deference but, rather, as willingness to suspend ethnocentric judgment, enabling the notion of “practical relativism” mentioned in the preceding chapter. Such encounters are fruitful when they centre on creating constructive dialogues, allowing the research subject to communicate relevant concerns and opinions, and the researcher to take those concerns seriously and to incorporate them as an integral part of any explanation. ‘Pre-understanding’ is thus an evolving achievement, as is understanding, and the two should ideally enrich each other in a continuous feedback loop.

Sperber and Wilson, however, have challenged the notion that mutual knowledge or pre-understanding is the essence of context. They propose that the concept of ‘relevance’ instead be placed on centre stage. It is, they claim, the intention to be relevant on the part of the speaker and the imputation of relevance on the part of the hearer that allow meanings to be generated; “It is relevance which is treated as a given, and context which is treated as a variable.” Sperber thus suggests a view of “meaning as recognized intention,” which, consequently, makes the relevant context the psychological state and shared background expectancies of the speaker and his/her audience. ‘Background expectancies’ have been defined as cognitive mechanisms by which individuals “typify their experience and make it comprehensible”; “intersubjective norms which are shared by members of a socio-cultural milieu.” This is a valuable insight for our purposes, in that the recognition and ascription of meaning inhere precisely in the cultural and social sphere, which can only be known to the political scientist through the above mentioned absorption of political and anthropological literature, plus encounter and dialogue.

“Relevance,” states Dilley, “can be linked to the diverse purposes, interests, reasons and concerns of interpreters who invoke contexts as

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38 B. A. Scharfstein, The Dilemma of Context, p. 189
legitimizing devices of the meanings they make. Indeed a relevant context for one interpreter might be irrelevant for another." Culler similarly suggests that "The meanings we determine are generally sufficient for our purposes." The problem of indeterminacy does not stop activities and endeavours in other fields with similar problems, such as mathematics and the 'hard sciences.' Contextualization generates new accounts that can be discussed, opposed, added to, altered, improved, or discarded. Determinacy, in fact, would stop academic debate while indeterminacy generates new views, new ideas, and new thought. Positing a context, then, is the articulation of a particular mode of knowledge and a set of connections relevant to one's present project. Dilley concurs:

There can be no definitive conclusion to the problem of context, only a heightened sense of awareness about the articulations and connections that we ourselves make in the process of anthropological contextualization... A frame implies a disjunction; it excludes as much as it includes. This process of inclusion and exclusion is a process of power. It is our sense of relevance, driven by our theoretical outlooks and practical dispositions towards the world, that defines where these frames are to be placed. Moreover, to sharpen our own sense of the way we fabricate contexts in the processes of our own analyses might help us to become aware, in turn, of the interpretative practices and contextualizing moves used by others situated elsewhere and outside the academy.

CULTURE AS POLITICAL CONTEXT

In all cases where substate groups, such as those in the APF, originate in a nation other than that of the researcher, and even in cases where they do not, it is inevitable that the issue of culture—in particular the cultural difference between the investigator and his or her research subject—assumes a critical significance. There is a growing literature on intercultural communication, which models the difficulties and processes involved. Within political

41 Roy Dilley. The Problem of Context, p. 17.
42 J. Culler, On Deconstruction, p. 133.
science and international relations, however, attempts at introducing culture as a behavioural determinant have ranged from unproductive to counterproductive. ‘Political culture theorizing’ has lacked in utility because of its close presuppositional linkages to political science theory and international relations paradigms more generally; globalizing and universalizing tendencies have led to postulation of ‘cultural spheres’ on far too large a scale to be meaningful, or else sought to essentialize the concept of culture based on determinist assumptions about its nature and content, leading to cultural stereotyping. Johannes Fabian has noted that conversation based on mutuality and respect—prerequisites for encounters and dialogue—is impossible within a cognitive model that fixes on difference and exoticism. To be sure, political culture theories have tended to homogenize and reify ‘the cultural other’ by reducing human agency and cogency to objects, rather than subjects of inquiry. In Western intellectual traditions, it is part of the definition of an object that it can neither speak, nor think or know; thus, the cultural other has had nothing to say, and dialogue between Etic and Emic has been superfluous or even impossible.

In 1977, the noted political culture theorist Gabriel Ben-Dor observed that political culture theorizing came into vogue within Middle East and Islamic studies in the 1950s and 60s due to the explanatory inadequacy of earlier structuralist approaches. Ben-Dor himself believed that the common Arab and Islamic heritage from Morocco to the Persian Gulf suggested the utility of the Islamic nation as a unit of analysis. Studies of this unit, he suggested, would be able to yield unchanging political precepts if only scholars ceased concentrating on issues “temporary and particular rather than the lasting and general.” Ben-Dor thus provides an illustration of the approach Lisa Anderson criticized when she noted that

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45 Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilizations hypothesis is, arguably, an instance of this kind of political culture theorizing. See Samuel P. Huntington, ‘The Clash of Civilizations,’ Foreign Affairs (Summer 1993), pp. 22-49; ‘The West Unique, Not Universal,’ Foreign Affairs (November/December 1993), pp. 29-46; ‘If Not Civilizations, What?’, ibid., pp. 186-94. For possibly the most comprehensive critique of the invention and use of macro-cultures, see Edward Said, Orientalism.


48 Ibid., p. 52.
...the implicit (and sometimes explicit) assumption that attitudes and beliefs born in the desert in the era of the Prophet are timeless, unchanging, and overwhelmingly powerful... is a reflection of an inability to think critically about change.49

Determinist and essentialist accounts have also been versatile tools in the hands of those who have sought to create blanket stereotypes of ‘outgroups,’ the Arab and Islamic ‘incapacity’ for democracy being a case in point. Note for instance Elie Kedourie’s remark that “... there is nothing in the political traditions of the Arab world—which are the political traditions of Islam—which might make familiar, or indeed intelligible, the organizing ideas of constitutional and representative government.”50 David Pryce-Jones’ assertion that “at present, an Arab democrat is not even an idealization, but a contradiction in terms” is a further example.51 It is nothing short of puzzling that such conceptualizations of culture survive within political science and international relations to this day.52

In anthropology, by contrast, such ideas were largely discarded in the 1960s—just as they were being discovered by political scientists—having been in vogue since the early days of the twentieth century. Towards the late nineteenth century, Franz Boas had suggested that culture should be thought of as an “integrated spiritual totality,” a proposition that was subsequently developed into the idea of culture as a “systematically harmonized whole” comprising “a shared and stable system of beliefs, knowledge, values, or sets of practices.”53 On this view, cultures have objective reality over and above individual agency and cogency, which fitted well with Durkheim’s idea that the object of the social sciences was “the social fact.”54 For the past several decades, however, anthropologists have tended to view culture as an ongoing and creative process through which people continuously incorporate and

52 For more recent arguments based on essentialist political culture reasoning, see, for instance, Jean Leca, ‘Opposition in the Middle East and North Africa’, Government and Opposition, vol. 32, no. 4 (1997).
53 Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, Social and Cultural Anthropology, p. 93.
transform new and foreign elements into their cognitive systems. As "structures with symbolic meaning", culture may be understood "to consist of a shared system of mental representations,"55 "of elements which are defined and differentiated in a particular society as representing reality—the total reality of life within which human beings live and die."56 The focus of anthropology, then, is the diversity of ways in which human beings establish and live their social lives in groups; each culture pertains to a specific, historically contingent way of life, which is "expressed through its specific ensemble of artifacts, institutions and patterns of behaviour."57

In every human culture, then, there are sets of behaviours, some of which are (more or less) predictable and regular and thus capable of being accounted for in generalized and, admittedly, stereotypical patterns. These are social norms or cues that help members of a culture to know how to interact with one another and with strangers, but they do not imply that we are in some way "cultural dopes who act unconsciously in accordance to underlying structures of shared symbolic meaning"58; they do not acquire the status of social law, which would bring us back to the view of culture that inheres in political culture theories.59 Rather, to talk of sociocultural norms and cues entails only the observation that whenever we speak and act in life, we do so from within a context of cultural conditioning, from an inculturated sense of how and why we function as human beings and relate to one another, the roles we adopt and the values by which we are motivated. It follows that speech and behaviour arising within a particular cultural setting is best understood when analysed with reference to that context.60

Ingold has correctly pointed out that when a fieldworker investigates cultural parameters, "what we do not find are neatly bounded and mutually exclusive bodies of thought and custom, perfectly shared by all who subscribe to them, and in which their lives and worlds are fully

55 Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, Social and Cultural Anthropology, p. 95.
57 Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, Social and Cultural Anthropology, p. 93.
58 Ibid., p. 96.
60 Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, Social and Cultural Anthropology, p. 93.
encapsulated.”\(^6^1\) It must be emphasized that the present thesis is not trying to construct a model for ‘understanding the eastern Mediterranean mind,’ nor is it making a claim about social norms followed by any and all members of that cultural sphere. Instead, the thesis is holding up a particular social phenomenon to scrutiny against the background of a particular set of social cues, identified by anthropologists as salient in the ambient culture, arguing that they can be useful in better understanding that particular phenomenon. Any more ambitious a use of cultural contexts for political research is likely not useful.

In recent years there has been a great deal of research done to develop a taxonomy of national cultures.\(^6^2\) Most useful for our purposes is the line of investigation begun in 1980 by Geert Hofstede, who analysed 100,000 questionnaires filled out by the employees of a particular multi-national in fifty countries around the world.\(^6^3\) On the basis of his survey data he was able to isolate a set of five variables used for characterizing national cultures. These were (a) the respective significance of the individual and the group; (b) the differences in social roles between men and women; (c) the manner of dealing with inequality; (d) the degree of tolerance for the unknown; and (e) the trade-off between long and short-term gratification of needs. While Hofstede’s study has limitations (due primarily to the nature of its target group) it has been well received as a ‘quantitative validation’ for other more specific and/or theoretically based studies, and its utility has been demonstrated and validated in more recent research.\(^6^4\)

Subsequent work has shown that the most important of Hofstede’s variables was his allocation of every culture to some point on a continuum from pronounced individualism at one end to strong group-orientation,


\(^6^2\) One example is the collection of hundreds of world cultures included in the Cross-Cultural Coding Centre at the University of Pittsburgh. For use made of this taxonomy, see George P. Murdoch. Theories of Illness: A World Survey (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980).


collectivism, at the other. By individualism Hofstede means a social condition where ties between individuals are weak, while collectivism implies individual integration into strong, cohesive groups, which provide protection in exchange for loyalty. Individualist cultures—found on both sides of the north Atlantic, but most pronounced in North America—emphasize interpersonal competition, individual achievement, enterprise and innovativeness, and easy separation from kin and other groups, while collectivist ones prefer collective achievements, close ties with ingroup members and a disinclination to diverge from established ways. Markedly individualistic cultures are atypical in the world, with collectivist attitudes being far more common.

Over the last several decades anthropologists working in the Mediterranean region, including the Levant, have developed a general understanding of circum-Mediterranean and eastern Mediterranean cultures that has allowed them to identify a number of their salient features. These include, most pre-eminently, the status of honour as the pivotal social value (with its rough opposite being shame), the importance of patron-client relations, and a pronounced collectivism. Early researchers in this area included Peristiany, Pitt-Rivers, Campbell, and Bourdieu. More recent research in the region has reflected the above-mentioned shift in researchers’ perception of culture, and as a consequence tended towards less deterministic and essentialist accounts. While previous ascriptions of

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65 Ibid. This continuum does not preclude exceptions to the basic pattern, and must also be understood as a generalization, that is, a statement that allows for exceptions but does not specify them.
66 The individualistic sense of self which characterizes North Atlantic cultures is so distinctive, in fact, that it has even been possible for philosopher Charles Taylor to chart its historical development over the last few centuries; see The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity (op. cit.).
immutability to cultural traits have been substantially revised, however, the general parameters of the earlier research have not been overturned, and the recent application of such findings in classical studies\textsuperscript{72} and biblical research\textsuperscript{73} may illustrate the historical depth and resilience of these eastern Mediterranean sociocultural norms and cues.

We are here talking about culture at a fairly high level of generality, which allows for exceptions and local variations as we move in to examine data closely. This thesis suggests that by taking into account an aggregate of the honour-shame dichotomy, patron-client dynamics and a pronounced group-orientation, we are able to better understand the political efforts of the rejectionist current; behaviour that may otherwise seem extremist and erratic can be ascribed both meaning and reason within a larger project and framework. This larger project, then, has been their morally and ethically grounded commitment to the liberation of Palestine, and the return of Palestinians to their homeland.

Singling out three sociocultural features that condition political behaviour within a larger ethical framework may seem a textbook example of cultural essentialism, of adopting the very position so vehemently condemned above. However, as already stated, it is important to note that the rejectionists are not considered to be `locked in' to, nor are their actions comprehensively determined by, these cultural crucibles. This thesis assumes that culture is a “network of polyvalent practices, texts, and images generating meaning,”\textsuperscript{74} rather than a closed, contained system capable of being determined, or determining individuals and groups, in all essentials. If it were otherwise, the creativity and innovative agency herein ascribed to the rejectionist assemblies would be utterly impossible.


\textsuperscript{74} Lisa Wedeen, \textit{Ambiguities of Domination}, p. 25.
CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL IDENTITIES

Before looking more closely at the issues of honour and patronage it is necessary to say something about how and why human beings adopt characteristics as part of collectives, that is, construct social identities. This, then, is related to the issue of group orientation. "Palestinian identity and nationalism," argues Lindholm-Schulz, "are constantly constructed and re-created in the very meeting point between external and internal factors, in the intersection where structures, processes, and actors convene." A substantial body of work dealing with various theoretical, historical, and political aspects of Palestinian national identity has accumulated over recent years. Excellent contributions include those of Rashid Khalidi, Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, Muhammad Muslih, Helena Lindholm-Schulz, Glenn E. Robinson, and Rosemary Sayigh.

In examining rejectionism's expressions of eastern Mediterranean cultural norms and cues, this thesis draws on the theoretical framework provided by social identity theory, a heuristic model of the way human identity develops in and between groups through interaction and communication. As a non-reductionist theory of group behaviour, social identity theory emphasizes the significance of the subject's hermeneutic situation, the group members' internally constructed social identity, and the cultural context in which a cohesive group consciousness is installed in the

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75 Lindholm-Schulz, The Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism, p. 2.
78 Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1997).
minds and hearts of its members. Social identity theory has not previously been applied in the context of Palestinian politics but bears some similarities to constructivism, which has been applied and is returned to below. As has been suggested above, framing a well-known but little-understood social phenomenon within 'fresh' theoretical parameters may yield significant new insights.

It is unnecessary for our present purposes to attempt a rigorous definition of a group: the simplest, and perhaps the ultimate, statement that can be made about a group is that it is a body of people who consider that they are a group. Nevertheless, in describing the experience of belonging to a group it is helpful to follow Henri Tajfel, the originator of social identity theory, in differentiating three components. First, a cognitive component (in the sense of the knowledge that one belongs to a group); second, an evaluative component (in the sense that the notion of the group and/or one's membership of it may have a positive or negative connotation); and third, an emotional component (in the sense that the cognitive and evaluative aspects of the group and one's membership of it may be accompanied by emotions—such as love, loathing etc.—directed towards one's own group and towards others which stand in certain relationships to it).83

Tajfel defines 'social identity' as that part of an individual's self-concept deriving from his or her knowledge of membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.84 The extent to which group membership contributes to a sense of self varies depending upon the level of group orientation present in the ambient culture. As noted above, anthropologists have suggested that the eastern Mediterranean region offers fertile soil for strongly entrenched group behaviour.85

Social identity theory adopts a distinctive position in relation to the continuing problem of the relationship between the individual and the group. Its central idea is that being categorized as members of certain groups

83 Henri Tajfel, Differentiation between Social Groups, p. 28.
84 Henri Tajfel, 'La catégorisation sociale,' p. 31.
provides an important part of the self-concept of individuals. To an extent, we learn who we are from the groups to which we belong, and in becoming members of a group we redefine who we are. Moreover, since we internalize our group memberships as part of our self-concept, it follows that any value associated with those groups will have implications for our feelings of self-worth. From this perspective the critical question is how, that is, through which psychological processes, are societal and group-specific norms and cues (such as those attending the honour-shame dialectic) able to install themselves in the minds and hearts of individuals, and to affect their speech and behaviour.

**Understanding Social Conflict**

What makes social identity theory particularly pertinent to the present study is its attendant models for understanding intergroup relations and conflict (schematically illustrated in fig. 1.2). Group dynamics are strongly affected by whether a comparative or non-comparative ethos or ideology permeates the group. Again, social competitiveness is part of the delineation of the agonistic cultures of the eastern Mediterranean. “The coexistence of the pivotal nature of honour and the limited good provides a strong stimulus to the development of ideologies and occasions of intergroup comparison.”

Groups need to provide their members with a positive social identity—establish a positively valued distinctiveness from other groups—in order to maintain their existence. This group consciousness can operate on a number of levels (e.g. Palestinian, refugee, PFLP member, etc.). Within these groups, normative evaluations define acceptable and unacceptable attitudes and behaviour for group members, thus maintaining and enhancing group identity. These norms, and the politicization of these norms, are supplied by group elites. “Without the discontents,” argues Seton-Watson, “there

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would have been no movements; but without the nationalist elites the movements would not have been nationalist.”

**SOCIAL MOBILITY**
(Exit from group is possible)

- Defection of a few members
- Defection en masse

**SOCIAL CHANGE**
(Exit is difficult or impossible)

**SOCIAL CREATIVITY**
(Change in actual relationship is impossible)

- Comparison with outgroup on a new dimension
- Redefinition of existing comparison

**SOCIAL COMPETITION**
(Change possible)

- Comparison with different outgroup

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Figure 2.1 Intergroup conflict within the social identity theory framework; after Tajfel in Philip Esler, Galatians p. 55

“In all (or most) national/nationalist movements... there are competing nationalist discourses, informed by relations of dominance and power.” When a group finds itself in a position where it has a lower social status than another group with which it interacts, its ability to make a positive contribution to its members’ social identities is diminished. In such situations, two broad responses are open to those group members who are unhappy with their negatively charged social identities.

One response is **social mobility**, which occurs when individuals leave their group to join the other. The feasibility of this option depends on the permeability of intergroup boundaries, external constraints (e.g. negative evaluations of one’s ideological tradition in the group to which access is sought), and internal constraints (e.g. disapproval of splitters).

The second response is **social change**, an attempt at a positive revaluation of the ingroup in relation to the dominant outgroup. This response assumes impermeability of intergroup boundaries and

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91 Helena Lindholm-Schulz, The Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism, p. 4.

92 Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams, Social Identities, p. 54.
overpowering internal and external constraints. Change, then, can be brought about through social creativity or social competition, or a combination of both.  

**Social creativity** entails redefining and altering the premises of the comparative or competitive situation, and seems to be an appropriate response when the negative balance cannot be redressed. This may involve the redefinition of the value of some existing comparison, turning a weakness into strength (e.g. ‘we are not in control of the national movement, but this leaves us unfettered by imperialism to truly struggle for the masses’). It may furthermore entail the proposition that true positive values are per definition the antithesis of those espoused by the outgroup. This, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, is exemplified by the ‘bursts’ of militancy following the establishment of every rejectionist assembly. Finally, while not immediately applicable to the present thesis, an ingroup may fix its gaze on some outgroup other than the dominant one, seeking to bring about a more favourable comparative situation.

**Social competition** refers to the efforts by the subordinate group to improve its actual social status vis-à-vis the dominant group. Esler has suggested that direct competition of this sort presupposes that an alternative arrangement is possible and that the comparative relationship is thus unstable. It seems, however, that all that is needed is a perception of that possibility in the subordinate group, causing them to undertake the competitive venture. In any case, “any threat to the distinctively superior position of a group implies a potential loss of positive comparisons and possible negative comparisons, which must be guarded against.” Herein lies the key to rejectionist behaviour.

**Social Identity and the Alliance of Palestinian Forces**

The dishonour brought upon the opposition factions by Arafat’s manoeuvres in connection with the DOP diminished their social status and, thus, their ability to supply members with a positive social identity. By issuing a counterchallenge and setting up the APF, a process of social creativity and

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93 Philip F. Esler, *Galatians*, p. 52.
94 Ibid., p. 54.
competition according to the pattern suggested by social identity theory was set in motion. These mechanisms have prompted the genesis of every rejectionist assembly. As the rejectionist assemblies have gone on to compete with the PLO/PA leadership for social status, popular support and, ultimately, for the ability to define Palestinianness, they have found themselves in a dynamic competitive relationship that has prompted them to continuously revaluate and redefine their sense of purpose. Social identity theory thus gives us a behavioural model within which to analyse the rejectionists' struggle for factional and national honour. Specific behavioural and ideological adjustments have come about as a result of changes in group-identity and role conception, which in turn have hinged on the dynamics of group interaction.

Through its symbolism and rhetoric, the APF has been in constant interaction with the PLO/PA, challenging its hegemony by entering into social competition in the belief that a change in the balance of social status is possible. Seeing participation in the post-Oslo political order as shameful, the APF has also resorted to social creativity, seeking to alter the content of the refugees' self-concepts, making them anathematic to the positions of the PLO/PA, and thus affect their long-term political loyalties.

The APF enterprise has been profoundly affected by its internal intergroup dynamics, with dominant groups such as Hamas and the PFLP being the targets of efforts at social change by smaller groups, whose membership has enjoyed a relatively marginal social status and political influence within the alliance. The processes of interfactional competition, on the one hand, and the dynamics of the alliance's collective relationship with the PLO/PA, on the other, have impacted on each other in a continuous feedback loop; alterations in one relationship have enabled changes in the other.

Overpowering external and internal constraints have effectively prohibited individual members' social mobility between the various factions. Nevertheless, there has been some degree of factional mobility between the APF and the PLO/PA camp. Arafat has continuously tried to poach the factions to side with the PLO/PA, offering its leaders political positions and

95 Henri Tajfel and J. C. Turner, 'An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,' p. 45.
generous subsidies, which would lead to improved social status for their members within the PA's official discursive universe. Indeed, largely because it was attracted by the social status benefits of being in the PLO/PA camp, the DFLP defected from the APF in 1997. Nonetheless, disapproval of splitters has been extremely strong as joining the Arafat camp has been seen as not merely a sell-out, but an act of dishonouring oneself and the APF collective. The attacks on DFLP offices and supporters in 1999 served to shame the DFLP by violating its physical space (returned to below).

Added to the relationships that obtain between the alliance's factions, and between the alliance and the PLO/PA, is the relationship between the factions and their primary social constituents, the refugee communities of Syria and Lebanon. None of the factions have attained large individual followings among the refugees as a result of the APF effort. While this could be taken to indicate their abject failure, it must be understood that the factions have sought to communicate to rather than with their constituents, to produce discourse rather than engage in dialogue. Their activities have thus been primarily intended to garner support for their collective interpretation of Palestinianness and of the purpose of Palestinian politics, not to gain members. In fact, the ossified organizational hierarchies of all of the fasa'il have lead to a reluctance to recruit. Seeing themselves as well-situated pressure groups with the power to affect popular discourse, the APF factions have striven for collective 'mass sympathy' rather than mass membership. This point is illustrated by the dynamics of interfactional patronage and its resultant 'altruism': When two of the smallest factions—PRCP and PLF—ran out of funds in the mid-90s, the PFLP put their leaders and cadres on the payroll. When the PFLP partially withdrew from the alliance shortly thereafter, Fateh-Intifada picked up the bill. Rather than trying to absorb the members of the smaller factions and so enhance their own positions, the larger groups have seen it as imperative that as broad a front as possible continue to exist within the discursive universe of rejectionism. While the PRCP and PLF are of very little consequence as individual factions, their participation in the APF collective has given them a symbolic significance that allows them to transcend their ideological
marginality and historical idiosyncrasies. APF membership in itself boosts their social status.

Dialogues are sites of norm creation and historical change. While the factions may have intended to produce meanings without engaging in dialogue, they have in fact been engaged in a dynamic process of interaction with the refugee communities. Through political rallies, humanitarian work, educational activities, and so forth, they have not only been able to affect, but also been affected. They have gauged the repercussions of their own activities, the effects of the policies of the PLO/PA leadership, and the impact of Syrian, Lebanese, and other external actors’ involvement. This has resulted in an incremental revaluation and redefinition of factional identity and role-conception within the APF collective, leading to political divergence and, ultimately, fragmentation.

HONOUR AND SHAME IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Honour is a claim to worth that is socially acknowledged, and is traditionally defined in terms of the social outcomes of the confluence of power, gender status and religion. Put differently, honour is “the value of a person in his or her own eyes... plus that person’s value in the eyes of his or her social group.” In a society where the value of honour is a central concern, there is a constant dialectic between the idealized norms of socially sanctioned speech and behaviour, and the way in which an individual seek to reproduce those norms. When a person perceives that his or her actions do in fact reproduce those idealized norms he or she expects the other members of that society to acknowledge this fact. Such an acknowledgement is a ‘grant of honour,’ or, as Malina tells us,

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97 Bruce J. Malina, The New Testament World, p. 30. Power is the ability to exercise control over the behaviour of others, a symbolic reality not to be confused with physical force. Gender status entails to sets of duties derived from biological gender differentiation. Religion entails the attitude one must have, and the behaviour one is expected to follow relative to those who control one’s existence; Malina, p. 31. For comprehensive discussions of honour in the eastern Mediterranean, see J. G. Peristiany (ed.) Honour and Shame; see also David D. Gilmore (ed.), Honour and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1987); ‘Anthropology in the Mediterranean Area,’ Annual Review of Anthropology, vol. 11 (1982), pp. 175-205.
a grant of reputation. To honour a person is to acknowledge publicly that his or her actions conform with social oughts. Honour as a pivotal value in a society implies a chosen way of conduct undertaken with a view to and because of entitlement to certain social treatment in return. Other people not only say that a person is honourable; they also treat that person in the way that honourable persons are treated.\footnote{Ibid., p. 32-3.}

Honour can be individual or collective, the latter pertaining to a social ‘ingroup’ such as a family, clan, tribe or (more relevant to this thesis) political or military organizations. Even nations are considered to posses honour, by virtue of being ‘kinship writ large.’ Just as the head and face is symbolic of personal honour (which is why bowing, taking one’s hat off, slapping someone in the face, etc, are symbolically meaningful actions) the person who heads a social group or organization is symbolic of that group’s collective honour. He is accorded honour and reverence by ingroup members, and is in turn responsible for that group’s collective honour relative to outsiders. In the case of the rejectionist factions, the devotion and reverence accorded, for instance, to George Habash and Abu Musa within their respective organizations—the PFLP and Fateh-Intifada—could easily appear absurd to outsiders. Habash is known to PFLP members as ‘the sage of the revolution’ (al-hakim al-thawra) and is even directly addressed as ‘sage’ (hakim). Such deference—quite bizarre to individuals whose socialization experiences have taken place within individualist cultures with little or no emphasis on collective honour—must be understood with reference to the social display and recognition of honour.

\section*{Challenge and Response}

The challenge and response ‘game’ is the social process whereby honour is acquired, challenged, protected or lost. The constancy and pervasiveness of this process in eastern Mediterranean cultures have caused anthropologists to refer to them as ‘agonistic cultures’, from the Greek ayov, meaning contest between equals. These are cultures where virtually every instance of social interaction outside the immediate family is seen as a contest for honour.\footnote{Ibid., p. 37.}
The essence of the challenge and response game lies in communication between individuals or groups that are (or consider themselves to be) each other's social equals. These communications are necessarily public as honour is a socially acknowledged claim to status, and all attempts to alter or maintain that status must be socially evaluated. Challenge and response is a process that has at least three elements. First, a *challenge* consisting of some action or utterance on the part of the challenger. Second, a *perception* of that message by both the individual or

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101 See ibid., pp. 34-7.
group against which the challenge is directed, as well as by the public at large. Third, the response by the receiving individual/group together with the evaluation of that reaction by the public; even non-action will be socially interpreted as a sort of response meriting a grant of honour or its withdrawal (see the schematic overview in fig. 2.2).

Physical space, be it one's body, territory or property, is a repository of honour. Physical affronts and violence symbolise the breaking of social and personal/intergroup boundaries, leading to resentment,

the psychological state of feeling distressed and anxious because the expectations and demands of the ego are not acknowledged by the actual treatment a person receives at the hands of others... In brief, others refuse to recognize my honour and prestige, and their physical effrontery symbols that refusal.102

This kind of challenge requires a response that seeks to evict the challenger from the usurped physical space, thus delivering satisfaction. Failure to redress the balance and restore the status quo ante may mean leaving one's honour in a state of desecration, thus rendering oneself socially dishonoured and dishonourable. On the other hand—and this point must be emphasized—the mere attempt to restore one's honour, even if ultimately unsuccessful, may constitute the restoration of one's honour, the public reassertion of oneself as a person of honour, valour and standing. In all of this, as noted earlier, the publicity of the challenge, response and result is essential.

Honour, Shame and the Palestinian National Movement
These observations have consequences for our interpretation of the raison d'être and behaviour of the Palestinian national movement on a number of levels, first of all with reference to the nakbah of 1948. The displacement of over 750,000 Palestinian Arabs from their homes and homeland must be understood not only as a disaster in its humanitarian and political consequences, but also in terms of its impact on the victims' sense of self-worth. The nakbah was an event that symbolized Zionist contempt for the Palestinians' social status by taking away their physical space, consigning

102 Ibid., p. 40.
them to the ignominy of exile and homelessness. The Arab refusal to accept the 1947 partition plan, as well as the hyperbole and posturing attending the Arab states’ unsuccessful attempt to respond militarily to the Zionist challenge, was as much an attempt to preserve honour as was the actual campaign. The Palestinians themselves, however, were defenceless and, as an emergent national community, found themselves at the mercy of other players for their most basic social and political needs. Their conceptualization as ‘refugees’ rather than a people proper in UNGAR 194 underscored their imposed social inferiority relative to both Israelis and other Arabs. Restoring physical space and national honour through resistance and struggle against imposed sociopolitical subordination thus became an important motor for the emergence of modern Palestinian national identity.

The emergence of the fasa’il, the political guerrilla groups, a decade later constituted concrete attempts to restore Palestinian collective honour. “To declare Palestinian identity no longer means that one is a ‘refugee’ or second-class citizen. Rather, it is a declaration that arouses pride because the Palestinian has become the fida‘i or revolutionary who bears arms.”\(^\text{103}\) The destruction of Israel was from the outset an integral part of the national movement’s response to the Zionist challenge; viewed within the framework of the challenge-response game, total opposition to Israel’s existence was a sociocultural imperative. This is not to deny the political and ideological principles, nor the full range of human emotions involved. The honour-shame dialectic is, as noted above, nothing more than a culturally contingent manner in which to frame such emotions and passions, and the ideological principles involved were (often explicitly) conceived of as serving the end of “restoring the nation.”\(^\text{104}\) Accordingly, the language in which the various Palestinian organizations have presented their strategic objectives has been a fusion of ideological accounts with references to concepts that all serve the restoration of honour—return, independence, statehood and justice. Such references have never been mere throwaway phrases, although researchers


\(^{104}\) This expression has been used repeatedly by Palestinian rejectionists leaders and cadres in conversations and interviews with the author.
have often treated them as such; within terrorism studies, scholars have tended to see this symbolic language as mere self-rationalization of immoral crimes,\textsuperscript{105} or else as semantic devices whereby more sinister intentions and rationales are obscured.\textsuperscript{106} Nonetheless, caving into the ‘reality’ of Zionist occupation would enforce the collective dishonour brought upon the Palestinians in 1948, and would moreover bring collective and individual shame on the factions and persons who dared contemplate it. Resistance, total liberation and return have thus been sociocultural, as well as political imperatives.

The honour-shame dichotomy has also been crucial as regards the intergroup relations internal to the Palestinian national movement. While the honour restoration project has been an integral, even foundational rationale for almost every major faction within the movement, different ideologies, patrons, personalities and organizational dynamics have led to diverging approaches to the optimal way in which to realize that restitution. Moreover, the different organizations have arisen out of distinct ideological concepts, the proponents of each wanting to demonstrate that their tactics and strategies are the optimal ones. Within each group, subsequent internal socialization experiences—the internal construction of social realities—have given rise to diverging notions of what exactly is the minimum requirement for satisfaction of national honour and what are the best ways to attain it.

Chapter four analyses the history of the rejectionist current within the Palestinian national movement with reference to its conception of national, factional and individual honour. It argues that a combination of maximalist patrons (very much concerned with their own social status, power and honour), revolutionary ideologies and structural subordination within the national movement, compounded by inherently antagonistic intergroup relations \textit{vis-à-vis} Arafat’s Fateh movement, caused the rejectionist factions


to place their conception of the acceptable minimum requirement for satisfaction at a much higher level than the PLO/PA leadership. Several of the rejectionist factions, if one is prepared to listen to and take seriously their own statements and accounts, are not now, nor were they in the past inherently opposed to peace and diplomacy as a tool for conflict resolution. They have differed from the PLO/PA leadership in their analyses of the utility of particular diplomatic instruments (such as the Geneva conference, the Reagan plan and Oslo), and of diplomacy that is not backed up by military force—but not of diplomacy per se. They differed on the issue of necessary prerequisites for participating in diplomatic negotiation. They also differed on the question of how to use diplomacy and to what end. These were qualitative differences that, ultimately, were connected to their views of the restoration of national honour; not wanting to be perceived by the Palestinian people as selling out and dishonouring them, as well as themselves.

PATRONS AND CLIENTS IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

The necessity to get satisfaction for the dishonour of 1948 has been an important motor for the Palestinian national movement as a whole from the 1960s until the present; differences in perceptions of the implications of restoring honour has been an important catalyst for the rejectionist-mainstream dialectic. Related to the honour concept, a further salient feature of eastern Mediterranean social affairs with a profound impact on Palestinian interfactional relations lies in the region’s entrenched patron-client dynamics. Not only have many or most of the factions within the national movement, at one point in time or another, found themselves clients of states in the region, but the national movement’s larger factions have acted as patrons of the smaller ones. Thus, because of the relevance to the present thesis of patronage and clientilism on several levels, this is an issue that requires close examination. Unfortunately, like culture generally, patron-client relations have given rise to a number of spurious analytical models within Middle East studies, which have then been put to dubious uses. A brief overview and critique of what patronage and clientilism are
generally considered to entail is therefore necessary before we can articulate a positive understanding of the concept.

Political science and international relations are no strangers to patron-client dynamics. East Germany, Syria, Iraq and Cuba under Castro were but a few clients of the Soviet Union, just as Chile, Israel, Indonesia and Cuba under Batista have been clients of the United States. In the context of Cold War superpower rivalry, patronage and clientilism were issues of global significance, and thus became areas of intense scholarly examination. This global perspective issued forth into a view of 'the patron-client dynamic' as a matter of universalizable, functional power politics based on rational choice; it was, after all, an integral part of the global balance of power, supposedly determined by pure reason and rationalism. Clients—an overarching category of actors extrapolated from a wide range of cases—were essentialized into actors that “have attached themselves to [powerful patrons] for reasons of ambition or in order to use them to protect or extend some particular interest.”

A patron, in turn, was considered an actor that protects and assists less powerful ones, expecting them to reciprocate by sustaining the patron's political hegemony. It is “a two-way process—patron and client both need each other—and... it is also something that has to be worked at, attended to, over time.”

In a patron-client relationship, both states normally expect to gain: although the patron gives up economic or military goods, its benefits may include access to new markets for its exports and a broader international political coalition (or, perhaps, a narrower coalition for its primary adversary). [...] The client's costs in such a relationship are often rather small. In fact, the smaller member of the patron-client often has a bargaining advantage because of its ability to turn to another patron if it is unsatisfied with its current level of support.

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The Middle East regional political system has offered fertile ground for scholarly studies in which patron-client relations have been central. The literature evidences the specious assumption, however, that just as the superpowers entered into rational choice-based, instrumental patron-client relations with the Middle Eastern state actors, so these links were replicated on a micro-level in the bonds between regional states and substate organizations, including those within the Palestinian national movement. Thus, conceptual models constructed for analyses of interstate politics were transferred to substate level. Although they continue to be deployed by scholars, these models' total divorce from sociocultural realities and contingencies render them inherently unable to offer meaningful understanding of substate level patron-client dynamics.

The alternative to such universalized abstraction can be found in equally dissatisfying political culture theorizing, which typically tends to examine Arab states' domestic patron-client relations with reference to patriarchy within traditional kinship-based social ingroups, the *asabiyya*. To be sure, the historical depth and persistence of *asabiyya* dynamics have served to entrench patronage and clientilism throughout the eastern Mediterranean, but this observation is a far cry from arguing that it forms the basis for a deterministic model of political behaviour. A representative

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112 Question marks attend game theories' and rational choice models' applicability also to international politics. See Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, ch. 1.


114 For the significance of these concepts within the Hellenistic cultural sphere see, for instance, J. K. Campbell, *Honour, Family and Patronage*.

115 These quasi-racist models of cultural essentialism have an interesting dual use. Partly they are deployed to demonstrate how Arab and Islamic tradition render those within its sway hostile to democracy and democratization, partly they reinforce and legitimize the arguments of Arab neo-traditionalists—primarily the Emirs of the Persian Gulf—that democratic governance is not the 'arab
example of such a model, however, can be found in the work of Olivier Roy, who has distinguished between three types of substate patron-client relations in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{116} First, the “purely instrumental and temporary. This is built up around one man invested with a certain power and does not survive after he loses this position.” Second is the traditional \textit{asabiyya} model, which “precedes the setting up of a state society and which then dominates the field of politics.” The third type is the ‘modern solidarity group,’ “which did not exist prior to the state or rather which only acquired cohesion from the existence of the state. Such a body is formed in a modern political situation and functions thereafter as a ‘solidarity group’ according to modes of inter-personal relations identical to those of the traditional \textit{asabiyya}, namely endogamy, patronage, nepotism.” After correctly observing that the first type is ephemeral and has no sociological reality, Roy goes on to argue that the dynamics and functions of the latter two types are “identical” because Arab politics, quite simply, is about \textit{asabiyya} dynamics; he approvingly quotes Seurat’s remark that “The modern state in the Machrek is an \textit{asabiyya} which has been successful.”\textsuperscript{117}

In Roy’s approach, the sociocultural heritage of which the \textit{asabiyya} is part forms not a cultural lens that may aid in our understanding of a particular social phenomenon—such as, for instance, ‘Alawi or Tikriti political hegemony in Syria and Iraq respectively—but a determinate model for how domestic politics and state building works in the Arab and Islamic world, from Morocco to Tajikistan.\textsuperscript{118} This amounts to what Rapport and Overing have referred to as the “politics of exotica,” the use of cultural concepts for the purpose of “distancing ourselves—politically, epistemologically, morally, technologically, mentally—in time and space from all other peoples of the world.”\textsuperscript{119} Gellner made this exoticism explicit by remarking that “we may as well admit that [patronage] appeals to our

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\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 272; the quote is taken from M. Seurat, \textit{L’État de barbarie} (Paris: 1989), p. 131.
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\textsuperscript{118} Roy takes his case studies form Morocco and Tajikistan “at both extremes” of the Arab-Islamic cultural sphere, and implies that whatever occurs in between will conform to the same pattern; p. 272.
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\textsuperscript{119} Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, \textit{Social and Cultural Anthropology}, p. 100.
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political voyeurism. We like to observe a political relationship which we suspect of being illicit.\footnote{Ernest Gellner. ‘Patrons and Clients,’ in Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury (eds.) Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies (London: Duckworth and the Centre for Mediterranean Studies of the American Universities Field Staff. 1977), p. 1.} According one’s research subjects all the dignity of a political peepshow, there is no underlying recognition of human commonality but a mere dissection of the ‘cultural other’—as usual conceived of as merely an object of inquiry.

These approaches reflect a lack of critical thought about social change, its catalysts, implications and effects. While the concept of asabiyya may aid us in understanding instances of patronage and clientilism, their various and specific appearances in the world of human interaction are not only socioculturally but also historically contingent, and, ultimately, in a state of constant evolution. To paraphrase Heraclitus of Ephesus—we step, yet do not step into the same cultural rivers twice.

**Patron-Client Dynamics: The Centrality of Reciprocity**

For a more nuanced and realistic understanding of patron-client dynamics, this thesis turns yet again to contemporary anthropology. Here, patronage and clientilism tend to be approached with neither the formalizing and abstract tendencies of international relations, nor references to generalized explanatory models of ‘the Arab mind.’ Utilitarian functionalism based on rational choice is acknowledged as central to the patron-client relationship, but so is sociocultural contingency. Anthropology’s focus is the ‘cognitive glue’ that holds these relations together; this ‘glue’ is what, for our purposes, is most interesting.

Accepting that there is a measure of instrumental, goal-oriented choice involved in patron-client relationships, as well as a measure of cultural contingency, the next question to ask is, ‘what holds the parties together?’ At the heart of the bond between patrons and clients in the eastern Mediterranean, argues Malina, lies *reciprocity,*

a sort of implicit, nonlegal contractual obligation, unenforceable by any authority apart from one’s sense of honor and shame. By means of this principle of reciprocity, the honorable person selects (or is
selected by another for a series of ongoing, unspecified acts of mutual support.121

Returning to the honour concept is not a means of establishing a tidy analytical framework to serve the present thesis, but a reflection of the fact that eastern Mediterranean patron-client relations are utterly unenforceable—and would be practically impossible—without a range of social norms and codes related to honour and shame. These “dyadic contracts”122 are initiated by means of a positive challenge (see fig. 2.1 above), which signals the start of an ongoing reciprocal relationship. A gesture, petition or gift may set the patron-client process off. When a helping hand is extended, Malina points out, it is important to remember that “in reality there are no free gifts, just gifts which mark the initiation or continuance of an ongoing reciprocal relationship.”123 If the two parties have the same social status one can talk about a “colleague contract.” A patron-client contract, however, is distinct because the “relationship is asymmetrical since the partners are not social equals and make no pretense to equality.”124

“What patrons offer is ‘favors.’ A favor refers to some object, good, or action that is either unavailable at all or unavailable at a given time.”125 Patronage and clientilism in the eastern Mediterranean are intimately connected with the idea of the limited good, the perception (emanating from peasant society) that all social, economic and natural resources exist only in limited, finite quantity and are always in short supply. This perception arose out of the fact that individuals’ existences were limited by the resources of their village or immediate area, which were also very much the limit of the world as verified by their experience. Describing clients’ search for social security in historical eastern Mediterranean peasant society, Malina explains:

Their approach was pragmatic and eclectic, based on trial and error, and in a spirit of ‘nothing ventured, nothing gained,’ so typical of

123 Ibid.
125 Ibid., p. 102.
traditional peasant society. Thus honorable persons looked for ways to interest and obligate potential partners whom they felt could help them, and in so doing committed themselves to carry out the terms of the contract with those who, in effect, accepted their offer. [Thus they] maximized their interests and security posture in the uncertain world in which they lived.126

As eastern Mediterranean societies have 'moved on' in terms of societal structures, modes of production and so forth, goods that were once limited and finite are no longer so. Even today, however, certain goods only exist in finite quantities and are subject to intense competition; in such situations, traditional patron-client processes are eminently appropriate to address the problem. As regards Palestine specifically, physical space—that is, land—and honour have intermingled so as to become inseparable, and both of these are limited goods.127 Within the Palestinian national movement, the ability and power to affect the trajectory of the collective political effort—issuing in social status—has always been limited and subject to fierce competition. Land, honour and political power have thus been at the heart of Palestinian factional politics and the source of the search for patrons.

**Patron-Client Dynamics as 'Proximity of Discourse'**

If reciprocity enforceable by honour lies at the heart of patron-client dynamics, which are set in motion by a positive challenge—what determines the choice of whom to challenge? As regards the Palestinian national movement specifically, its various factions have entered into such relations with a host of states, including Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Iran. Within the rejectionist current, smaller factions such as the PRCP and PPSF have found important patrons in more prominent factions such as PFLP, PFLP-GC and Fateh-Intifada. In the case of state patronages, these have often been mutually exclusive due to interstate rivalries and conflict, and the patron-client relations may have served to deprive another state of clout, or to deploy the Palestinian factions to strike against Arab foes. This thesis does not seek to obfuscate the fact that for much of the 1970s and 80s, several of the factions within the Palestinian national movement served as

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126 Ibid., pp. 102-3.
proxy combatants for their various Arab patrons. The question at hand is ‘why?’ Should their clientilism be understood as simply being ‘guns for hire,’ or have there been other significant dynamics at play?

Robert Paine has defined a patron as someone whose power lies in having his own values affirmed by others, who come to identify themselves as clients.\textsuperscript{128} It is patron-client relations in this sense, as converging discourse rather than as pure rational choice, that can shed light on its prevalence in the eastern Mediterranean and, more specifically, as regards the historical and current bonds between regional state actors and factions within the Palestinian national movement. At its broadest, discourse can be understood to mean ways of speaking that are commonly practiced and specifically situated in a social environment, “speech in habitual situations of social exchange.”\textsuperscript{129} Within these situations there are relations of social power and dominance, which condition not only agents’ speech, but also their behaviour, objectives and allegiances. Dell Hymes has stressed the regularity of ways of speaking practiced by human beings in particular times and places, and the close ties between modes of speaking, behaving and interacting. Within what Hymes terms the “speech-community,” there are shared rules concerning the conduct and interpretation of speech.\textsuperscript{130} The ability to set these rules marks out a patron. A brief overview of some insights from discourse analysis can illuminate how this is so.\textsuperscript{131}

Discourse finds a useful conceptual parallel in Wittgenstein’s notion of the “language-game,” a mode of speech-making in which people habitually engage, accompanied by particular habitual actions.\textsuperscript{132} Language-game is an attempt to convey the embeddedness of speech-making in routine social relationships and behaviours, the “formulaic way in which speech accompanies everyday social interaction and amounts to a whole form of

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  \item \textsuperscript{127} Honour as limited good has been a subject of close anthropological scrutiny for the past several decades. For some of the more significant works in the field, see note 97 (infra).
  \item \textsuperscript{128} Robert Paine, ‘A Theory of Patronage and Brokerage,’ in Robert Paine (ed.), Patrons and Brokers in the East Arctic (St John’s, Canada: ISER Press, 1971).
  \item \textsuperscript{129} Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, Social and Cultural Anthropology, p. 117.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Dell Hymes, ‘Models of Interaction of Language and Social Life,’ in J. Gumperz and D. Hymes (eds.) Directions in Sociolinguistics (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972).
  \item \textsuperscript{131} For an insightful and cutting critique of the elevation of discourse to form the parameters of social scientific inquiry, see Brian Palmer, Descent Into Discourse (Temple University Press, 1990); cf. G. Brown and G. Yule Discourse Analysis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
\end{itemize}
life."\(^{133}\) "What the concepts of discourse and language-game share is their insistence on intrinsic ties between speech and behaviour, between the linguistic and the socio-cultural, and between individual speakers and social conventions."\(^{134}\) Garfinkel has emphasized the ways in which everyday conversation is mediated by a set of common background expectancies shared by the speakers; an engagement in habitual discourse maintains and reinforces a common world-view and a common set of social structures in whose terms speakers lived.\(^{135}\)

An important insight for our purposes has been offered by Paine, who distinguishes rhetoric as a particular kind of discourse, arguing that while most speech-acts concern "speech about something" the kernel of rhetoric is that "saying is doing."\(^{136}\) Hence, rhetoric as an activity most closely resembles music or drama, where act and effect are indissoluble. The effect which rhetoric most often intends is persuasion, most obviously, perhaps, in the realm of politics.\(^{137}\) While the persuasion of an audience by a speaker is the most apparent rhetorical 'direction,' a speaker may also be persuaded by his or her own words. Rhetoric may thus serve to persuade both the transmitting and receiving party.\(^{138}\) In either case,

Rhetoric can be seen as an instrument by which a speaker gains or increases control over a political environment. And once this control becomes routinized, institutionalized, then control over language, over the right to speak, may be defined as an essential base of power and authority.\(^{139}\)


\(^{134}\) Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, Social and Cultural Anthropology, p. 118.


\(^{137}\) An important critique of this view of rhetoric can be found in the work of Lisa Wedeen, who argues, in the case of Syrian official rhetoric, that is serves to generate public dissimulation rather than persuasion.


\(^{139}\) Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, Social and Cultural Anthropology, p. 119.
Austin has characterized speech as having meaning, force and effect.\textsuperscript{140} In particular, an important range of speech-acts—`preformative utterances'—does not merely describe the social world, but give it form and content too. This is speech with the `illocutionary force' to create social happenings, “speech as an instrument of social action with significant social consequences.”\textsuperscript{141} Lastly, Burke has observed that symbolically mediated and interactionally coordinated forms of behaviour—such as speech, gestures and ways of dressing—could be studied for the ways they are used artfully so as to influence other beliefs and attitudes.\textsuperscript{142} The effects of the successful use of rhetoric may be to cause an audience to achieve a state of identification with a speaker, “whereby aspects of the social identity or being of the people involved in the rhetorical encounter come more closely to approximate one another.”\textsuperscript{143}

At this point we can return to Paine’s suggestion that a patron is someone whose power is to have values of his own express choosing affirmed by others. This, then, is not true only for a patron of the arts, but also for a political patron; according to Burke there may be no significant difference between the two.\textsuperscript{144}

**Discursive Patronage and the Palestinian National Movement**

Following Paine and Burke, we may view patronage and clientilism as based on rational choice, enforced by honour and sustained by the discursive proximity of the two parties. This, then, can offer significant insights into previously unacknowledged dynamics within the Palestinian factions’ relations with the region’s state actors.

\textsuperscript{141} Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, Social and Cultural Anthropology, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{143} Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{144} At this point some mention need be made of the conspicuous absence of references to the work of Michel Foucault, from which virtually any discussions of discourse set forth in the past couple of decades are considered inextricable. While those sympathetic to the Foucauldian method and modes of thought would invariably disagree, Foucault’s relevance to the present thesis is minimal. His disregard for human agency and cogency, and for the culturally and individually specific, together with a deterministic view of social affairs (signified by his replacement of individual mentalities with collective “governmentalities”) places his work far beyond the pale of the theoretically useful for a project such as the present.
Kazziha tells us that “the relationship between the Arab regimes and the Palestine question has, since the First World War, been a continuous theme in Arab politics.”145 Prior to the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Palestinian Arabs’ failed attempts to retain their land and limit Zionist settlements elicited strong sympathy and solidarity throughout the Arab world. The nakbah consolidated the emergent pan-Arab currents outside Palestine, and presented the Arabs with a tangible example of the transgressions of Zionism and Western imperialism. As noted above, the Zionist endeavour amounted to an encroachment on Arab physical space. Importantly, it was in the struggle for Palestine that the generation of Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi military officers that were to subsequently shape Arab politics gained their first substantive taste of ‘Arab brotherhood.’146 It also gave them a common rallying point, and the failures of the Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi monarcho-monarchies to successfully aid the Palestinians in 1948 were major catalysts for the subsequent nationalist revolutions in those countries, which in turn ensured that the liberation of Palestine became a focal point of regional politics and synonymous with the restoration of Arab honour.147

The ability to have decisive influence on the struggle against Zionism and thereby be seen to lead the effort to restore national Arab honour became an important motor for Arab regional politics and relations in the decade following the nakbah. Accordingly, each state sought to manipulate the collective, interstate discourse, to excel in embodying pan-Arab ideals, and in championing the cause of Palestine.148 As the fasa’il emerged and grew stronger, developing into independent political entities with their own agendas and objectives, discursive hegemony within the Arab state system came to necessitate patronage of factions within the Palestinian movement. Prospective clients were approached by the various states—issued with a “positive challenge” consisting of weapons, training facilities, funding, and so

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146 For Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser’s own account of serving as an officer for Palestine, see his Toute la Vérité sur la Guerre de Palestine (Cairo: Direction des Relations Publiques des Forces Armées, 1955).

147 See Walid Kazziha, Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World: Habash and his Comrades from Nationalism to Marxism (London and Tonbridge: Charles Knight, 1975), ch. 1.
forth—insofar as they were considered attuned to the patron’s cognitive approach to dealing with the Palestinian problem and fitted within its discursive parameters. The intended client would respond to the approach according to its perception of the tactical utility of the alignment, on the one hand, and the appeal of the potential patron’s official discourse, on the other.

Chapters four and five deal with the various specific relations between patronage and discourse throughout the history of the rejectionist trend. It suffices for the moment to note that durable patron-client relationships have required discursive compatibility, which is not to be equated with political sameness. Within the parameters of a given discourse there is scope for diverging views and ideas. The proximity lies in the rhetorical devices—the communicative symbols, the ways in which those symbols are deployed and the contexts within which they are meant to be interpreted by audiences. For example, it is widely accepted that the PFLP-GC is one of Syria’s most entrenched clients, yet their ideological, tactical and strategic visions have at times been widely divergent (as will be seen in later chapters). Nonetheless, the rhetorical devices by which they have sought to justify their positions, the ‘objective political backdrop’ against which they have presented their activities to their audiences, and the means and methods they have considered legitimate or required in their political struggle have been virtually identical. Syria and the PFLP-GC have been a patron-client ‘success story,’ not because they have pursued the same political end, but because they have co-existed within the same discursive universe.

At this juncture it seems warranted to point out that the wish to control the Palestinian arena and compete in the regional balance of power game should not be equated with mere cynical manipulation of the Palestinian factions, as power political ambition in no way precludes the existence of idealistic ambitions or ideological aspirations. Moreover, for states, the principal importance of acquiring clients has not been to attain proxy combatants but to have their discourse validated. Such validation has boosted their status within the Arab states system by enabling them to influence the direction of the Palestinian national movement. For the individual factions, similarly, a patron has never been merely a supplier of

148 See Michael N. Barnett, Dialogues in Arab Politics, pp. 87-98
arms and funding, but a state within whose discursive universe they could feel politically comforted and comfortable. This power relation has not been as asymmetrical as is often assumed, however. While the patron sets forth its official discourse and ‘offers’ it to a prospective client, the client has the freedom of choice to respond to such overtures in a number of ways. Furthermore, should a discursive dissonance develop within a patron-client relation, the client can at any time terminate the ongoing reciprocity (preferably in accordance with the norms of the challenge-response game), and seek out another, more suitable patron.\footnote{Cf. Sorokin’s remark, note 133 (infra).} If all goes well, however, patron and client both reaffirm and validate each other’s claim to honour and social status—within their respective sociopolitical spheres—and reinforce the soundness of each other’s discourse. What may begin as a marriage of convenience may lead to a durable working relationship, sustained by commonality of discourse and enforced by the parties’ sense of honour and obligation. Moreover, as rhetorical discourse within the patron-client relation becomes routinized and institutionalized, it may be internalized by both parties to the extent that they come to identify with each other. Convinced by the force of their own rhetoric, so to speak, the parties develop loyalties towards one another, which may be difficult and even disagreeable for either to extricate itself from. In this way, rational choice, discourse and honour may converge to form durable patron-client relations.

A MACRO-FRAMEWORK OF ARAB STATE POLITICS
The three significant levels of intergroup dynamics—between factions within the rejectionist assemblies, between the rejectionist assemblies and the PLO/PA leadership, and between the rejectionist assemblies and the refugee communities—take place within a wider framework provided by the ‘objective constraints’ of the regional and international balance of power. Michael Barnett has offered a constructivist model for understanding the processes of Arab politics that is of great relevance to the present thesis.\footnote{Michael N. Barnett, Dialogues in Arab Politics.} He views Arab politics as “a series of dialogues between Arab states regarding the desired regional order,” an ongoing debate about the norms of
Arab politics and the relationships of those norms to their Arab identities.\textsuperscript{151} Practical politics in the Arab state system, he argues, has thus been an expression of the parties’ positions on the preferred political order. Providing an important macro-parallel to our present study, Barnett argues persuasively that “Arab states competed through symbolic means to control the foreign policies of their rivals and determine the norms of Arabism... their weapons of influence and control have derived from the symbols of Arabism.”\textsuperscript{152} What Barnett aptly terms “presentational politics” is, in fact, key to understanding the rejectionist project.\textsuperscript{153} “The tools of [inter-Arab] conflict did not come from a military arsenal. They came from a cultural storehouse.”\textsuperscript{154}

A cautionary \textit{caveat} must be inserted at this point. While the structures and processes of the regional and international systems may be constructed through the interaction of powerful actors, less powerful ones stand in a different relationship to these structures. For actors such as the various rejectionist assemblies, and for the Palestinian national movement as a whole, the international and regional environment has presented—to all intents and purposes—a number of ‘objective realities.’ The ability of these overpowering contexts to affect the movement has not been dependent on the movement itself; the APF, for instance, has never been engaged in constructing the regional balance of power but constantly been made subject to it. Thus, while the structures and processes of the international and regional systems may well be contingent constructs, whether or not they function as such to any given actor is subject to that actor’s own power capabilities.

As we examine the history of the rejectionist movement, there are three areas of ‘objective reality’ that emerge as particularly significant through their continuing impact on the Palestinian national movement. \textit{The changing international and regional balance of power} has affected issues such as the level of Soviet support and US attitudes towards the PLO as a negotiating partner. \textit{Fluctuations in Israel’s domestic balance of power} have

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{151} Ibid., preface.
  \item \textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{153} Ibid., p. 2 (n. 5).
  \item \textsuperscript{154} Ibid., p. 11.
\end{itemize}
affected Israeli principles of interaction with the Palestinian national movement, ranging from warfare to negotiations. *Relations between the Arab states* have impacted on the crucial matters of state patronage, operational abilities and levels of political independence. These are all areas in which the Palestinian groups have been the subjects of constraints and opportunities, not partners in creating them.

Even so, Barnett's approach integrates systemic structures with sociocultural processes and notions of power political instrumentalism. "The challenge," he suggests, "is to acknowledge this social character [of Arab politics] without forgetting that actors are frequently strategic and manipulative. Indeed, they could not be strategic and manipulative if there were no social foundations or normative expectations to exploit and use for ulterior purposes." Barnett provides a model for understanding the processes through which important regional actors have integrated genuine political idealism with cynical power politics, producing seemingly erratic political behaviour that is difficult to comprehend through the application of traditional models of international relations. When contextualized within socially and culturally meaningful frameworks, however, they emerge lucidly.

Barnett clearly shows that projecting unfavourable reflections on a rival in order to manipulate his behaviour is a well-entrenched tactic in Arab politics. He also points to the symbolic and essentially negotiated significance of 'objective' political processes and constraints, an insight that affects the present study of rejectionist efforts. As events and developments beyond the control of the Palestinian national movement occur, these are likely to gain both 'objective' and 'subjective' significances. The movement's encounters with the world around it are incorporated into the national mythology and lore, and acquire deep symbolic and normative values. Thus, they become matters of interpretation and not infrequently establish themselves as pivotal to intergroup competition. The 'Black September' calamity, for instance, had a direct impact on the Palestinian national movement as its fighters were expelled from Jordan, depriving them of their most advantageous base of operations. The event was quickly incorporated
into the national lore and a process of interpretation ensued, which has contributed to shaping intergroup conflict within the Palestinian movement ever since; the normative dimensions and implications of Black September reverberated long after the movement had recovered from the loss of its bases in the Jordan Valley. The 1967 defeat, the Battle of Karameh\textsuperscript{156}, Syrian intervention against the Palestinians during the Lebanese civil war, Israel's invasions of Lebanon, the 1983 split within Fateh, the siege of Tal al-Za'tar—all these have been significant events both in terms of practical impact and symbolic reverberation.

**SUMMATION**

This chapter has outlined why and how the significant other towards whom rejectionist efforts are directed is the PLO/PA leadership, not Israel. To be sure, rejectionist rhetoric and symbolism have always highlighted irreconcilability towards, and confrontation with 'the Zionist enemy,' and done so in a highly demonstrative manner. The reasons for such behaviour—and why this demonstrative rhetoric cannot be taken at face value—have been described in this chapter. Rejectionism is not a term describing virulent anti-Israeli fanaticism but a primarily inter-Arab or inter-Palestinian political category. Every Palestinian rejectionist assembly has coalesced in reaction to perceived deviance and lack of 'steadfastness' (\textit{sumud}) on the part of the Palestinian leadership. In this context it is instructive to note that the lexicographical meaning of the word \textit{sumud}, derived from the root \textit{samada}, is "to raise one's head proudly."\textsuperscript{157} It is a term that has become saturated with political connotations, equating resistance with the preservation of honour.

'Rejectionist ideology' has not been Marxism-Leninism, socialist nationalism, Islamism, or any other faction-specific interpretation of the national heritage, but a \textit{generalizable nationalism} based on honour and resistance, thus accessible to all Palestinians regardless of factional

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., preface.
\textsuperscript{156} Karameh's use for the construction of myth within the Palestinian national movement is lucidly discussed in W. Andrew Terrill, 'The Political Mythology of the Battle of Karameh', \textit{Middle East Journal}, vol. 55, no. 1 (Winter 2001), pp. 91-111.
preference. As a political concept, rejectionism stands apart from traditional political opposition by virtue of its general withdrawal and isolation from what it considers the offending parts of the movement. Thus, while rejectionism shares with opposition “the unusual characteristic of being defined partly by what it opposes,” it seeks to not “[develop] within and in opposition to an ideological and institutional framework....”\textsuperscript{158} Instead, its institutional frameworks have grown out of the ideologies it encompasses and the patron-client relations that sustain it, and they have been erected in contradistinction to the frameworks of the PLO/PA leadership that it rejects. Engagement, it is thought in rejectionist circles, cannot be constructive but necessarily validates the interlocutor’s errant ideas.\textsuperscript{159} This is a divisive tendency, and some factions, notably the PFLP and DFLP, have consistently been torn between the principles of opposition—which place value on national unity under the PLO umbrella—and rejection—which implies factional severance from that unity, for the sake of ‘a higher purpose.’

This thesis suggests that we should understand rejectionism as, essentially, a structurally subordinate ‘counterculture’ within the Palestinian national movement, which seeks to demarcate the difference between its oppositional nationalism and the PLO/PA’s official nationalism by reference to an outside ‘other,’ Israel. It is only in relation to the ‘other’ that identifying the ‘self’ becomes meaningful\textsuperscript{160} and the content of the ‘self’ is in part determined by its relationship to the ‘other.’ By demonstratively and ceaselessly contrasting the national leadership’s positions \textit{vis-à-vis} Israel with its own adherence to the culturally resonant ideals of armed struggle, total liberation, and comprehensive right to return, the objective of rejectionism has been to assert social status, offset the leadership’s ‘defeatism’ and restore factional and national honour.


\textsuperscript{159} It is possible to argue, although beside the point for the purposes of the present thesis, that this attitude stems from another set of culturally embedded norms identified as salient in the eastern Mediterranean—purity codes and practices. For foundational literature, see Mary Douglas, \textit{Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo} (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966); Jerome H. Neyrey, ‘Unclean, Common, Polluted and Taboo,’ \textit{Forum}, vol. 4, no. 4 (1988), pp. 72-8.
Thus, rejectionist politics has not been about violence and destruction, but, rather, about competing with the PLO/PA leadership in constructing collective norms and guidelines, forging the national identity. Wedeen has pointed out that successful use of rhetoric and symbols can produce, among other things, legitimacy and the ability of “political leaders to win support for themselves and their policies by fostering collective ethnic, national, or class identifications.”\textsuperscript{161} The notion that nationalism creates the nation rather than \textit{vice versa} would reinforce the \textit{prima facie} viability of the rejectionist project.\textsuperscript{162}

Rejectionism’s ‘essence’ lies in its behaviour rather than its agenda; it reacts to perceived transgressions against social norms, in accordance with patterns of behaviour described above as attending the challenge and response game. Cutting ties with the PLO leadership, adopting demonstrative positions that are the antithesis of those of Arafat and proclaiming the inadmissibility of Israel’s existence are all part and parcel of this behavioural pattern. Far from being ‘kindergarten politics,’ this behaviour is rooted in the socioculturally entrenched honour-shame dialectic; the preservation of honour and enhancement of social status should be seen, not contrary to rationality but as a socioculturally contingent instance of rational agency. Because of the rejectionists’ and the PLO/PA leadership’s divergent perceptions of what is required for the restoration of honour, this dialectic has accompanied their dealings since prior to the guerrillas’ take-over of the PLO.

The rejectionist trend sees itself as the guardian of the national movement’s intellectual heritage, and the PLO/PA leadership sees itself as the \textit{de facto} motor of the movement; as the following chapters will demonstrate, both views have considerable justification. Viewing rejectionism as a dynamic force whose behaviour is conditioned by a mixture of rational choices, cultural cues and intergroup dynamics—rather than a

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{161} Lisa Wedeen, \textit{Ambiguities of Domination}, pp. 5-6.
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static rejection of peace and diplomacy—allows us to make sense of its otherwise perplexing features. In this context it is important to recall that restoration of honour does not require one to be successful in one’s response, simply to not let the challenge pass without confrontation. Talal Naji, deputy secretary general of the PFLP-GC, has hinted at the ongoing dynamic:

Realistically, nobody can ignore the fait accompli situation... There is a victim and an oppressor—we are the victim. Always you [Europeans] used to ask us ‘what is your opinion about the oppressor? Do you recognize your oppressor?’ I am the victim and the oppressor is still [triumphant]. Let the oppressor first recognize me, give me mercy, allow me to live, to survive. When I get those things... this question could be asked. When you find my neck under the guillotine and ask me ‘what is your opinion about the executioner?’ I would tell you ‘I would like his head to be in the guillotine, not mine’... I don’t deny or ignore the possibility of coexistence but I don’t agree to [be forced into it] while I am still a refugee, outside and with no rights. If I am not to survive, I would not accept their survival; if my children would be refugees without peace and with miserable lives, I would not agree for their children to have peace and good lives... This is the main question: If the Israelis would accept to live in peace... I want to call to implement the resolutions of the United Nations—partition of Palestine and right of return of the refugees. And this, as I said, would not represent all ambitions but it is the minimum that would be acceptable by the majority of the Palestinian people.163

163 Talal Naji, 28 May 2000.
CHAPTER III
SETTING THE STAGE: A PRE-1973 HISTORY OF THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

As a historian, I infer the existence of a still aimless movement that could be called the 'pre-current'—a spiritual disquiet that spreads out before tangible things appear. Parties have not yet formed, but are adumbrated. Something is going to happen. Even nuclear fission was preceded by whispers.

Ernst Jünger

SUMMARY INTRODUCTION

The interfactional divide among the fasa'il in the form of the rejectionist-mainstream divide is deeply rooted in the earlier history of the Palestinian movement, an overview of which is necessary in order to grasp its depth and pervasiveness.

Rejectionism is rooted at the heart of the Palestinian national movement. Due to the manner in which the various guerrilla groups emerged, their diverging ideological agendas, different state patronages, different trade-offs between ideal goals and practical objectives, conflicting characters and clashing personalities, a 'rejectionist-mainstream' dichotomy was virtually guaranteed from the movement's earliest days. The rejectionist trend has always been a structurally and politically subordinate minority within the movement, and almost always unable to control PLO decision making. The organization's key positions, the majority of PNC delegates and the bulk of Palestinian military capabilities have always been in the hands of Fateh. Even so, the rejectionists have been fully aware of the popular resonance of their maximalist principles and the emotional and political pre-eminence of their calls for 'liberation from the river to the sea' over calls for 'a Palestinian entity.' Moreover, while Fateh is rightly credited as being the progenitor of the use of armed struggle for identity formation, the rejectionists would later—when Fateh and its allies were readying themselves

for negotiations—appropriate the armed struggle ethos and place themselves as its true guardians; “armed struggle provided the ‘currency’ in which political competition among the Palestinians was conducted.” The ability to resonate among, and reflect the human aspirations of a dispossessed people, have not only given the rejectionist current political weight unwarranted by its small size, but moreover the self-esteem and vigour to press on against seemingly insuperable political obstacles.

1948-1968: FORMATIVE DISILLUSIONMENT

The mass-expulsion and flight of Palestinian Arabs from Palestine in connection with the creation of the Israeli state in 1948 was a monumental event and a watershed in Palestinian history. Between April and October 1948 between 700,000 and 800,000 Palestinian Arabs were forced into exile, adding to the circa 40,000 that had fled a few years earlier as a result of British counterinsurgency measures after the ‘Great Revolt’ of 1936-9. This “collective trauma of immense and devastating proportions,” as one scholar referred to it, defined subsequent Palestinian politics: “The salvation of the Jews had come at the expense of another people, and in that tragic encounter were laid the seeds for another 45 years of bitter and unremitting conflict.”

The first fifteen years following al-nakbah was a period of disillusionment for those that had hoped neighbouring Arab states would take charge—or even decisively assist—in wresting Palestine from Zionist control. The absence of a credible Palestinian institutional actor, such as an exile government, meant that the states under whose jurisdictions the refugees found themselves were free to appropriate the Palestinian issue for their own political needs and schemes. This they did; the Palestinian problem quickly became entangled in the political agendas of the ‘confrontation states’ in particular, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq.

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2 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 196
3 See ibid., pp. 2-5.
Lebanon had received between 100,000 to 130,000 refugees by 1949, Syria between 85,000 and 100,000, Jordan 360,000 to 500,000 (in the East and West Banks), while Egypt received some 7,000. The relatively smooth social and economic assimilation of the politically conscious, Palestinian modern middle class meant that they lacked any real socio-economic incentive to engage in nationalist politics.\(^5\)

The political trends that attracted followers among the Palestinian refugees in this period were primarily those that built on concepts of pan-Arab unity. In this the Palestinians succumbed to the general mood prevailing in the region at the time; they lived, after all, among their fellow Arabs and were exposed to the same sociopolitical currents. The main available ideological trends in the first half of the 1950s were Islamism, Ba'thism, communism, and Arab nationalism, none of which espoused a specifically Palestinian agenda. Islamism was primarily represented by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and, from 1952, by Shaykh Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani's Islamic Liberation Party. Ba'thism—Syrian-sponsored pan-Arab socialism—was also able to draw a following among the refugees, but remained a relatively marginal political force until the late 1960s. Communism, in the form of the West Bank Organization of the Jordanian Communist Party and the Palestinian Communist Party in Gaza, proliferated inside Palestine but was unable to attract any significant following among the refugees. It is estimated that between 1949 and 1967 the West Bank communists could count some 2,300 active supporters compared to, for instance, the MB's following of between 700 and 1,000 individuals.\(^6\)

**The Emergence of the ANM—Fateh Rivalry**

The most influential political movement to emerge in the early 1950s was the Arab Nationalists Movement (ANM). The ANM took shape in 1951 around George Habash, a Palestinian medical student at the American University of Beirut (AUB), and a number of his student colleagues—Hani al-Hindi, Wadi' Haddad, Ahmad al-Khatib and Muhsin Ibrahim. Habash and Hindi had since 1949 been active in the literary nationalist student society The Firmest

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Bond (al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa), which had provided them with a cover under which to recruit students for the ANM. Together with Haddad, Habash had also been a central figure in The Battalions of Arab Sacrifice (al-Kata'ib al-Fida' al-'Arabi), a nationalist underground group set up in 1949 as an anti-Zionist and anti-colonialist strike force. The Kata'ib proved unable to "respond to the zeal of young Arab students at the American University of Beirut" and was dissolved in 1950, giving way to the ANM. Organizationally, the ANM developed a strict hierarchical structure—"the classic pyramid of communist parties"—and set up offices around the Arab world. Its guiding ethos was one of discipline, secrecy, and obedience; ideologically, the organization has been described as a "fascistic organization with vague ideas of Arab unity."

The ANM's initial ideological inclinations are of utmost importance for the present thesis, as they laid the foundation for the development of its subsequent position and relations within the wider national movement. Heavily influenced by the political thought of Constantine Zurayk and 'Ali Nasir al-Din, revenge (tha'r) aimed at restoring Arab national honour was a central theme. Following Zurayk, the ANM believed that the Zionist movement and the Israeli state aimed at extending its hegemony beyond the borders of Palestine in order to dominate the entire Arab Middle East region. The ANM thus posited the destruction of Israel as a primary goal, along with the struggle against imperialism and the prevention of further Arab fragmentation. The liberation of Palestine was a central objective, but

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9 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, pp. 73.
10 As'ad AbuKhalil, 'George Habash and the Movement of Arab Nationalists,' p. 94.
11 For a succinct expose of the thought of Zurayk, see Al-'Uruba al-Filastin: Hawar Shamal ma' Qustantin Zurayk (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1997).
12 Walid Kazziha, Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World, p. 3.
13 Ibid., p. 11.
thought to be contingent upon the defeat of imperialism and the achievement of Arab unity.

The ideological centrality of Palestine set the ANM apart from other political currents at the time and facilitated the achievement of a relatively wide support base among Palestinian refugees. Soon, however, the ANM became ever more closely identified with Nasser and the Egyptian regime, and at the same time drifted further away from focus on the liberation of Palestine. Initially suspicious of the Free Officers coup in Egypt in July 1952, the ANM was soon won over by Nasser's anti-Western stance. His opposition to the Baghdad Treaty in 195514 and his nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 propelled the ANM into full official identification with 'Nasserism,' although some of the movement's leaders, notably Habash, represented a 'rightist' pro-Iraqi trend within the movement, and were wary of Nasser's virtues and abilities. Accordingly, and in keeping with the function of political patron-client relationships, the ANM offered its military and political capabilities to Egypt for use in confronting pro-Western and anti-Nasser governments, not Israel.15

By the late 1950s, the National Movement for the Liberation of Palestine, Fateh, had emerged as a serious political alternative to the increasingly Cairo-focused ANM, not only challenging but also, in fact, eclipsing the ANM's dominant position in Palestinian politics. Its ideological position was fresh and, at the time, unique. Fateh was founded on principles of Palestinian parochial nationalism (wataniyya), in direct contradistinction to the prevalent tendency towards pan-Arab nationalism (gawmiyya).16 The organization coalesced around a group of Palestinian students at Cairo University 1956, among them Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad).

[W]hen the [US-UK-Israeli] tripartite invasion took place and the [Zionist] enemy occupied the Gaza Strip, the foremost question in our minds was how to involve a large number of Palestinians in the Strip

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14 The Baghdad Pact sought to institute a US-aligned alliance of Arab states to contain the regional influence of the USSR.
15 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 75.
in our armed activity? And how to form a focus of support for the popular resistance groups in Gaza?\textsuperscript{17}

Soon it became apparent to the future founders of Fateh that the main problem was not how to elicit support for armed activity but, rather, how to respond to the absence of autonomous Palestinian organizations.\textsuperscript{18} The MB, to which the founders of Fateh had close ties, had been shattered in 1948, as had the credibility of Palestine’s political parties. Significantly, the ANM—notwithstanding its commitment to Palestine—had by 1956 turned into an all too pliant Egyptian instrument, and its commitment to qawmiyya rendered it ineffectual in the eyes of the Fateh leaders.

“The experience of al-nakbah made for a distinct Palestinianness, but not necessarily for Palestinianism.”\textsuperscript{19} The pent-up Palestinian particularism that existed among increasing segments of both the diaspora and the residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip had no appropriate channels and remained substantially unattended and untapped. Properly Palestinian politics, it appeared, was in a state of suspended animation. Thus, in mid-1957, a group of six individuals—including Yasser Arafat, Khalil al-Wazir and Salah Khalaf—met in Kuwait to form a clandestine organization, Fateh. The first cell was likely formed sometime in the following year.\textsuperscript{20} Organizationally, the movement consisted of “loosely interconnected underground cells” for the first several years,\textsuperscript{21} which hampered its ability to tap into the ferment of Palestinian politics.

Even so, Fateh was insightful and boldly innovative. The movement’s leaders realized that a cohesive group action requires a group to think of itself as a group; that its members recognize the group as a source of a shared positive identity rather than merely observe it as a matter of ‘objective’ fact. Subjective group status, and therefore the possibility of group action, was absent among the Palestinians until the late 1950s. “Refugees,” Sayigh points out,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Quoted in Yezid Sayigh, \textit{Armed Struggle and the Search for State}, p. 83.
\item Ibid., p. 83.
\item Ibid., p. 666.
\item Some sources suggest that the formal establishment of Fateh took place at a later time, 1959, 1960, or even 1963. See Hanna Batatu, \textit{Syria’s Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 287 and 386 (notes 2, 3, and 4).
\item Ibid., p. 287.
\end{enumerate}
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generally do not form a social force so much as a disparate group, and are consequently less able to turn themselves into an organized political force... [P]olitical organizations formed by refugees tended to simple nationalism with little or no ideological depth; Fateh and the Palestinian Liberation Front were foremost examples... 22

This is surely true, but Fateh’s innovative skill lay not in the introduction or adoption of some exciting new ideology, but in explicitly feeding on the refugees’ wretchedness to produce the movement’s raison d’etre. Indeed, Sayigh has also conceded that

The driving force in the philosophy and ideological outlook of Fateh, to the extent that they existed, was profoundly existential. It derived overwhelmingly from the physical circumstances and deep alienation of the majority of uprooted and exiled refugees rather than the minority of Palestinians who still resided in their homes after the end of the 1948 war. The same existential drive imbued Fateh’s notion of ‘revolution’. ‘With revolution we announce our will [hence existence], and with revolution we put an end to this bitter surrender, this terrifying reality that the children of the Catastrophe [of 1948] experience everywhere... With revolution we will restore our people’s self-confidence and capabilities, and restore the world’s confidence in us and respect for us.’ 23

In terms of applied philosophy, these sentiments are easily recognizable as pure existentialism, developed into a cohesive model for anti-colonial struggle by Franz Fanon some ten years later 24; it was, in fact, quite an appropriate mobilizing ethos for the Palestinian situation. It brought with it the need, however, for sharp differentiation between ingroups and outgroups, between Palestinians and non-Palestinians, including other Arabs. As Hani al-Hassan put it, “Fateh refused the confiscation of the Palestinian Self and its melting in the wider circle of Arab nationalism.” 25

The elevation and consecration of wataniyya over and above qawmiyya served that very purpose.

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22 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 56.
23 Ibid., p. 88. The document quoted within the quote is Fateh, Revolutionary Lessons and Experiences (n.p., n.d.) pp. 100-103.
24 See Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1965). Sayigh discusses the existentialist foundation of Fateh but does not acknowledge it as an innovation or achievement. See Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, pp. 88-92.
There was no immediate ‘rediscovery’ of Palestinian identity associated with the launch of Fateh’s political program, but it did begin the process of narrowing the focus of Palestinian politics. Fateh articulated positive social and political identities for what had become merely a scattered group of Palestinian Arabs. In delineating a group with a recent, tangible, and meaningful shared past experience it drew from this a shared political goal. It appealed to this group through the rhetoric of revolution and armed struggle, offering the remedy to the collective affliction of ‘the generation of the revolution’ (al-jil al-thawra), those Palestinians born after the loss of Palestine. Lindholm-Schulz tells us that “Palestinian identity was reinvented from an exile experience.” This reinvention sought to endow this generation with a positive social identity by turning humiliating weakness into assertiveness, action and strength. This accords with the pattern of social creativity within the social identity theory model.

A basic dichotomy of ‘struggle/resistance’ and ‘suffering/sacrifice’ gradually came to embody a Palestinian narrative of selfhood and history. Palestinian identity was formed out of the trauma of loss as well as the active creation of al-Fateh. Struggle now became a fundamental core ingredient of Palestinian national identity.  

This, then, contributed to the ANM’s gradual political reorientation. In order to safeguard its sociopolitical status, its ability to provide members and constituents with a meaningful social identity, and its ability to reflect Palestinian political aspirations, the ANM was forced into competition with Fateh. Reconciling its ever-increasing emphasis on Arab unity while still paying special attention to the liberation of Palestine had become a growing problem. Nasser’s admission in May 1959 that he had “no plan for the liberation of Palestine” coincided with the growth of Fateh, in response to which a shell-shocked ANM set up a ‘Palestine Committee’ and began to discuss military options for the liberation of Palestine. Still at the end of the 1950s, however, the ANM refrained from drawing real distinctions between Palestinians and other Arabs; not even its Palestine Committee differentiated

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between Palestinian and other members until 1963, when it set up the Palestinian Action Command (PAC). This entrenched wataniyya now hampered the ANM’s ability to compete with Fateh.

The confrontation states, in whose affairs the Palestinian issue had become intimately embroiled, discouraged political expressions that were beyond their grasp, including Palestinian particularism. It was in this environment that Fateh now addressed the consciousness of the suffering Palestinian refugee, going against the general political mood as well as the tactical and strategic preferences of the confrontation states. Fateh furthermore had the political nerve to argue that the Arab governments had a duty to assist in the destruction of Israel, while at the same time insisting on its absolute organizational independence. From the beginning of their interface, the ANM and Fateh were thus set on a course of intergroup competition and conflict.

Fighting the Battles of Others

Throughout the 1950s, all actual attempts at liberating Palestine by the force of arms had been hampered by the agendas of the confrontation states, and their control of all Palestinian armed units. Egypt controlled the fida’iyyun (men of sacrifice’), originally a Palestinian reconnaissance unit employed by Egyptian military intelligence for scout missions into Israel. The Palestine Border Police, redesignated the 11th Battalion Palestine Border Guards in 1954, was employed to protect Egypt’s borders against unauthorized Palestinian infiltration. Similarly, Syrian military intelligence operated the 68th Reconnaissance Battalion, deployed against Arab enemies but under strict orders to avoid combat against Israel. 

Iraq for its part set up the Palestine Liberation Regiment (PLR) in November 1960, an attempt by General ‘Abd al-Karim al-Qassam to up the stakes in his contest with Nasser over regional leadership. After Qassam’s overthrow in February 1963, the PLR was disbanded and some of its Palestinian officers were incorporated

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28 For instance, the 68th was used to assassinate Ghassan Jadid, the man who shot ‘Adnan al-Malki in April 1955, and were dispatched on sabotage operations in Jordan after the fall of al-Nabulsi’s government in 1957. After the 1963 coup in Syria, the 68th was used primarily for surveillance of Palestinian refugees in Syria, as the new government was weary of pro-Nasser sympathies among them. The 68th saw very little action in Israel, but virtually none after 1963.
into the regular Iraqi army, deployed primarily in Kurdistan; none of them saw action against Israel.

It was clear to those concerned with the liberation of Palestine—including the Fateh leadership and the ANM’s Palestine Committee—that the confrontation states’ use of Palestinian fighters was not conducive to the liberation of Palestine, nor was it designed to be. Increasing disenchantment with ideologies that did not adequately address the Palestinian issue caused a proliferation of small and short-lived ‘liberation groups’ in the early 1960s, as well as an increase in popular support for the ANM and Fateh.

One notable exception to the transient nature of the liberation groups was the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), set up in 1959 by a Palestinian former captain in the Syrian Arab Army’s Corps of Engineers, Ahmad Jibril. The PLF recognized the divisive and essentially sedative effect of ideological discussions, and considered them counterproductive to actual practical steps towards liberating the homeland. Based on an initially rather crude fusion of nationalist socialism and Palestinian particularism, the PLF argued that properly addressing the Palestinian problem meant transcending (or ignoring) ideological divides and simply getting on with armed struggle. Not unlike Fateh, the PLF believed that the practical concerns of armed struggle should be impaired by a minimum of ideological discussion. The PLF’s action-oriented Palestinianism was rooted in a view—common particularly among refugees hailing from northern Palestine (as did Jibril)—that Palestine was historically part of Greater Syria. The PLF leadership’s close personal ties with the Syrian authorities and the pro-Syrian content of their Palestinian particularism allowed them to forge close ties with the regime in Damascus, but limited their appeal among wider segments of the Palestinian people. Notwithstanding its daring-do attitude to politics, the PLF grappled with great organizational difficulties for the first several years, and did not initiate armed struggle until 1965. This delay was partly due to pressures from Syria, on whose territory most of the organization’s infrastructure was based.29

The activities of Fateh, the emergence of the PLF and Nasser’s ‘defeatism’ catapulted the ANM into the complexity of interfactional politics
that has since characterized the Palestinian national movement. In late 1963 the ANM leadership approved the formation of the Palestinian Action Command (PAC) with authority, albeit nominal, over Palestinians in the movement’s various branches. The decision was primarily Haddad’s (Habash was still in hiding in Syria following an abortive pro-Nasser coup earlier that year) and represented the wishes of the Nasserite trend. Despite protests from a growing leftist segment within the movement, the leadership moved decisively; after Habash’s escape from Lebanon in early 1964 the PAC became a fully autonomous branch.\(^3\)

The division between a leftist ‘pan-Arab Marxist’ trend, represented primarily by younger non-Palestinian cadres such as the Lebanese Muhsin Ibrahim and Jordanian Naif Hawatmeh, and a relatively rightist, more Palestinian-focused trend within the ANM widened during the movement’s 1963 conference. Muhsin Ibrahim, the ANM’s ideologue, presented a report to the conference in which class conflict was given primacy. There was to be no distinction, argued Ibrahim, between national struggle and class struggle.\(^3\) The old guard reacted strongly against the plans of the left. Haddad suggested to Habash that he should bomb the offices of al-Hurriyya, the ANM’s mouthpiece over which the leftists had established firm control. This never came to pass, but the report was suppressed and debate on the issue of ideological orientation was suspended.\(^3\) The establishment of the PAC, to the distress of the leftists, was the rightist’s own attempt at giving the ANM a distinct profile in an increasingly competitive Palestinian political environment. Until 1969, there was to be competition between not only the ANM and Fateh, but also between the left and the right within the ANM.

In late 1963 or early 1964, Haddad oversaw the establishment of the Struggle Apparatus (al-Jihaz al-Nidali), a paramilitary intelligence-gathering unit operating under a central military committee headed by Haddad himself. It reported to the ANM leadership but was kept strictly secret from the regional commands. As PAC convened its first conference in

\(^2\) Fadl Shunru, November 9, 2000.
\(^3\) Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 108.
\(^3\) As’ad AbuKhalil, ‘George Habash and the Movement of Arab Nationalists,’ pp. 96-97.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 97.
Beirut in September 1964 a central question was whether the committee should cede the initiative to the newly formed Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) or to promote its own political and, ultimately, military agenda. Still true to Nasser, the leadership under Habash urged caution, while delegates from the West Bank and Gaza called for urgent action. The decision was taken to strike a balance: To conduct reconnaissance missions, recruit Palestinian citizens in Israel, and develop the Struggle Apparatus while refraining from initiating combat, waiting to see what the PLO would do. The slogan to express this balancing act, coined by Ghassan Kanafani, was ‘above zero and below entanglement’ (fawq al-sifr wa taht al-tawrit).

The Creation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization

Introducing another contender in Palestinian politics, a Palestinian assembly in Jerusalem decreed the establishment of the PLO in May 1964. Convened by the Palestinian representative to the Arab League (AL), Ahmad al-Shuqayri—who was selected as the organization’s chairman—the assembly reconstituted itself as the Palestinian National Council (PNC). “The statist ambition of the PLO founders was unmistakable, as was their conception of a distinct Palestinian variety of the broader Arab national identity.” The PLO’s conception of Palestinian national traits was more conventional than those formulated by Fateh; they built on ideas of social and cultural rootedness rather than shared existential angst. It was a socially conservative organization, which clearly favoured and supported the traditional social and political elite of the pre-1948 era.

From its conception, the PLO was inextricably tied to state interests. Although the rhetoric of Shuqayri would sometimes give the appearance of an independent Palestinian forum, the PLO was hamstrung by Egyptian and Jordanian agendas. This subservience caused the ANM, Fateh and the liberation groups to raise objections against the new body, arguing that it would be unable to wage war on Israel. Here, the intellectual and ideological turmoil within the ANM was painfully obvious: Until the ANM established the Palestine Committee and the PAC, it had opposed any moves to

33 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 110.
34 Ibid., p. 98.
"Palestinize" anti-Zionist politics, partly on grounds of Arab unity, partly because of its worry that a Palestinian 'entity' would allow the confrontation states to abdicate responsibility for the Palestinian struggle. Now, as the ANM itself had Palestinized its organization it came to see the PLO as a political rival and social competitor, fearing that its increasing social status within the Arab and Palestinian arenas might detract from its own standing. Nasser's support for the PLO chairman could not win the ANM over but, rather, worried the ANM leadership, as the closeness to Egypt had previously been the ANM's political privilege and asset. Thus, in order to issue a counterchallenge, the ANM promptly declared that the PLO "has no relation to the Palestinian masses and [lacks] the foundation of a military organization." The ANM's initial caution turned into total rejection for fear of diminished social and political status, a behavioural pattern that would later be repeated by the various rejectionist assemblies.

To the much more radical and revolutionary Fateh, the PLO had even less appeal. The upper class backgrounds of the PLO leadership, their ties to Egypt, and a strong clash of personalities between Wazir and Shuqayri boded ill for PLO-Fateh relations. Even so, Fateh's official attitude towards the PLO was more accommodating than that of the ANM. The reason was that Fateh had itself argued for the creation of a Palestinian political and military entity since 1959. Fateh rejected Shuqayri's suggestions of a merger, primarily because it still entertained plans to convene a national conference of its own, turning Fateh into the Palestinian national entity and taking command of the armed conflict with Israel. Fateh was aware that "the PLO enjoyed Arab legitimacy, and this was important." Fateh planned to take control of the PLO and its institutions or else establish an alternative front by setting up parallel unions, associations, and mass organizations. If this was done in alliance with other liberation groups, Fateh believed that such an Arab alliance would be in a position to issue demands for assistance to the Arab governments.

36 Al-Hurriyya, 15/6/1964; as quoted in ibid., p. 100.
37 Ibid.
When the Arab League (AL) recognized the PLO and its military wing the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) in 1964, the appeal of the PLA to Palestinian youth posed a threat to Fateh’s own viability. As a consequence it decided to steal PLA thunder by launching the armed struggle itself. Aligned with Syria—where suspicions that the PLO was an Egyptian tool abounded—Fateh began to discuss concrete military options. The leadership was divided, falling into ‘the rational wing’ (al-‘aqlaniyyun) led by ‘Abd al-Karim, urging caution, and the ‘madmen’ (al-majanin) led by Arafat and Wazir, urging immediate action.40 Kuwaiti and Algerian sponsors threatened to withhold funding until they saw some military action, and the Syrians - Fateh’s principal state ally at the time - wanted to see Nasser, Shuqayri, and the PLA embarrassed. After failed initial attempts, New Year’s Day 1965 saw the first official armed attack against Israel, carried out by Fateh in the name of the General Command of al-’Asifa Forces.

A team of infiltrators from the ANM’s Struggle Apparatus had, in fact, been intercepted by Jordanian patrol as early as November 2, 1964 and lost one of its members, Khalid ‘Aysha al-Haj. Although Haj could be said to be the armed struggle’s first martyr, the ANM did not publicize its operations at the time. In any case, Fateh’s ‘launching’ of the armed struggle and the military activities of the ANM stole the political and military momentum from the PLO, which in turn was jolted into action. The PLO appointed a military committee to head up the PLA and stepped up the process of establishing and consolidating the PLA structure, as well as recruiting.

There were now three principal competitors in the Palestinian arena: The ANM, Fateh, and the PLO. As each vied for public and state support and legitimization they came to compete among themselves as well as within themselves. Seeking to enhance its own standing and status relative to the others, each group resorted to social creativity—redefining and altering the premises of intergroup comparison—and competition—improving social status vis-à-vis the dominant group on existing premises—which lead to a proliferation of revolutionary, militant factions within a few years.

40 Ibid., p. 106.
Fateh 1965-7

The competition between the ANM and Fateh, and their vying over hegemony in the Palestinian arena was also expressed through, and entrenched by their conflicting military doctrines. Fateh’s military doctrine rested on the concept of ‘consecutive detonation’ (al-taffir al-mutasalsil), aimed at setting off an Arab political chain reaction. It hoped to be able to provoke the Israelis into counterattacking with sufficient force to ignite the fury and solidarity of the wider Arab masses. This, in turn, was expected to force the Arab governments to support the Palestinian cause. If they did not they would go against their own people and risk revolutions. Influenced by the Cuban foco concept, a revolutionary nucleus would practice political propaganda through military action. The educative, not tactical aspect was paramount; “Effectiveness was not a priority.”

In May 1966 the Syrians arrested Arafat and a number of other Fateh leaders after an internal gun-battle in Damascus. Defence Minister Hafez al-Asad took charge of the prisoners and sent them offers of cooperation. Eventually an agreement was reached regulating the presence and activity of Fateh in Syria, and Arafat began a close working relationship with Syrian military intelligence. On the recommendations of the Ba’th Party’s 9th congress in September 1966 ‘Adnan Abu Ahmad led a handful of disaffected followers out of Fateh to form the Organization of the Pioneers of the Popular War of Liberation—al-Sa’iqa (‘The Thunderbolt’). The new organization was virtually stillborn but even so an expression of the interests of Asad’s enemies within the party, who were guarding against his moves. Hafez al-Asad had already identified Fateh as contrary, not complementary, to his view of Syria’s and the Ba’th Party’s interests; there was nothing but temporary convenience to their relations. Asad also began evidencing an

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41 Ibid., p. 120.
43 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 120.
44 Ibid., p. 128; Yezid Sayigh, oral communication.
extraordinary personal animus towards Arafat that has never been adequately explained.\textsuperscript{45} It has been suggested, however that

[Hafez al-]Asad was very much a ‘straight arrow.’ As such, he always needed to know whom he could trust and whom he could not. Arafat, on the other hand, has always been a fixer, a man that gets out of binds and agreements with great ease and without qualms. Asad simply could not stand this type of personality, especially as [in Arafat’s case] it concerned the Palestine question, which was... too important to him.\textsuperscript{46}

Even so, in the period leading up to the 1967 June War, Asad encouraged Fateh to resume activities in order to offset Salah Jadid’s formation of Sa’iqa. Syrian support for Fateh enabled the organization to grow within its borders and ranks swelled in both the cities and the camps. In Jordan and Lebanon, however, the situation was relatively unfavourable. A series of government crackdowns and arrests of virtually any and all politically active groups in Jordan shattered much of the Fateh infrastructure and increased its dependence on Syria. Syria, meanwhile used its influence over Fateh to encourage it to carry out operations across the Jordanian border, thus destabilizing the kingdom. In the period between January and June 1967 Fateh carried out a further 37 raids across Jordanian and Lebanese borders. The extent of its relationship with Syria is illustrated by the fact that Fateh operations increased fourfold in March and April, coinciding with intensification in Syrian-Israeli border skirmishes. Cognizant that Syria and Fateh were ultimately incompatible, Fateh was forced to approach Egypt for support in order to avoid becoming a Syrian satellite.

ANM 1965-7

The ANM did not possess a military doctrine properly so called, but was forced to develop one in the context of competition with Fateh, as well as in the context of severe internal ideological strife. Immediately preceding the 1967 June War, the internal debate about ideological orientation intensified, as did preparations for military action. The movement’s leadership had

\textsuperscript{45} Hanna Batatu, Syria’s Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics, p. 281.

\textsuperscript{46} Syrian academic, interview with author, Damascus, July 2001.
proposed to Nasser that he take charge of a “wider revolutionary socialist coalition” within which the ANM would merge. Nasser declined, prompting the ANM to finally start its own preparations for sustained and sustainable armed struggle. With a newfound focus on Palestinian rather than Arab liberation, and renaming the PAC the Revolutionary Youth Organization (RYO) the ANM began recruiting and training guerrillas. Two PAC members were seconded to the editorial board of al-Hurriyya to balance against the leftist inclinations of editor Ibrahim. This had little effect on al-Hurriyya’s ideological orientation, however, which was increasingly turning into a hotbed of leftist dissent, more specifically of a Maoist bent. As a consequence, the ANM leadership established Filastin, a weekly supplement of Lebanese pro-Nasser daily al-Muharrir, using it to counter Fateh calls for immediate and autonomous armed action, as well as checking the leftist agenda of al-Hurriyya. The ANM leadership would not give up its faith in the eventual intervention of Nasser.

Within the ANM there was now a three-way political balance comprising the ‘old guard,’ the leftists, and the rightists. The right, which had its centre of gravity in the Jordanian regional command, demanded immediate military action against Israel. The left, meanwhile, urged caution and argued that because the Palestinian struggle was part of a much greater Arab workers’ and peasants’ struggle against imperialist oppression, there needed to be more training and preparation. In between the two opposing views were the ANM’s core leadership, known as the Centre, comprising primarily Habash, Hindi and Haddad, whose task it had become to arbitrate and reconcile the opposing factions.

An ideological reorientation did take place at this time, driving the ANM to the left but also towards further Palestinian particularism. A statement issued in March 1965 read “our struggle for Palestine is at the very heart of our struggle for the realization of the [Arab nation’s] objectives: unity, liberation, socialism, and the redemption of Palestine.” Partly derived from its competition with Fateh, partly because of a crisis in the relationship with Egypt, the ANM had come to believe that liberation of Palestine was the means to Arab liberation, rather than vice versa. The internal ideological debate intensified, and the movement’s general conference in 1966
“condemned ‘bourgeois bureaucracy’, implicitly that of Egypt, and moved decisively towards a brand of socialism more radical than that of Egypt.”47 The ANM branches in Syria and Iraq were at the same time instructed to withdraw from the pro-Nasser Arab Socialist Union (ASU).

The leftist surge was accommodated by the old guard, which “found it expedient to give way to the left on these issues, in order to concentrate on the conflict with Israel.”48 The ANM leadership had come to believe that Israel stood to gain from the passage of time due to its atomic weapons program, and that time was running out for the Arabs. ANM and PLO began military cooperation in setting up a guerrilla group officially under the command of the PLA, *Abtal al-'Awda* ('the Heroes of Return'). The new group was based on the ANM's Struggle Apparatus “and had no independent existence, although it performed new functions...”49 Firmly under ANM control, *Abtal al-'Awda* was used to forge ties with Syria where the ANM was still banned, and on October 19, 1966 the group carried out its first attack. Until June 1967 the group, in effect an armed extension of the ANM, carried out a further seven attacks on Israel from the West Bank. The ANM still argued that “controlled escalation” rather than “deliberate entanglement” (Fateh's concept) was the better way to proceed, and despite the rift with Nasser carefully cited his support for the guerrillas as a basis for their own position. Nasser's increasing praise for the guerrillas emboldened (or prompted) the ANM leadership to take a more militant stance, and the organization soon came to follow Fateh thinking and assessments.50

Writing in *al-Hurriyya* in February 1967, As’ad ‘Abd al-Rahman gave expression to a view of armed struggle that Sayigh suggests is representative of the leadership at the time and, in any case, became the kernel of military thinking for several years to come.51 ‘Abd al-Rahman viewed guerrilla action as a means of asserting the Palestinian cause in the international arena, causing an outburst of Arab potential and revitalizing the Palestinians while weakening and striking fear into Israel. Although guerrilla action was

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., p. 140.
51 Ibid., pp. 140–41.
insufficient to achieve liberation it could be used to overturn reactionary Arab governments and promote Arab unity in order to provide the power necessary to attain the ultimate objective—liberation. This was not a very different conception of the purpose of struggle from that of Fateh’s ‘consecutive detonation,’ although the latter did not directly prescribe or require the fall of ‘reactionary’ Arab governments. In addition, ANM thinking still lacked Fateh’s deeply rooted existentialist perspective.

Since January 1965 the various guerrilla groups had carried out 113 attacks on Israel (according to the Israeli count), killing eleven and wounding 62. While the guerrillas in no way posed a direct threat to Israel they did serve to heighten Israeli threat perceptions. In June 1967, the RYO was authorized to commence raids against Israel in its own name; on June 5 it issued a statement announcing its first two attacks.

THE POST-WAR PROLIFERATION OF THE FASA’IL

After the June War, both Nasser and King Hussein reached the conclusion that “Israel was here to stay.” The war furthermore shattered the Palestinians’ faith in ‘progressive nationalist’ Arab governments and prompted a sharp and decisive turn towards parochial Palestinian nationalism. Palestinians felt that they had suffered the loss that was the Arab armies’ military defeat. The guerrillas gained widespread popular support in the West Bank and managed to carve out sanctuaries in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan due to weakened government control in the wake of the war. The war furthermore contributed to the discredit of PLO chairman Shuqayri, who was forced to resign in December 1967. From March 1968 there were intense confrontations between the guerrillas and the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), which by February 1969 had generated enough support for them to have the Palestinian National Congress elect Yasser Arafat chairman of the PLO.

With the 1967 defeat, the Arab states’ repressive abilities were reduced. This gave the guerrillas the opportunity to build on Chinese, Cuban and Vietnamese experience, creating a revolutionary entity with a defined territorial base. The newly occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip offered such a
base. Fateh transferred its leadership cadres to the West Bank in June and July 1967. Arafat was chosen as field commander and, after consultation with other guerrilla groups they set September 1 as the date on which to initiate combat operations.

Attacks on Israel intensified and throughout 1969 there were several hundred operations per month. Syria and Egypt provided vital military and logistic assistance in order to divert Israeli attention from their own military reconstruction. Crucially, both helped in securing a sanctuary for the guerrillas in Lebanon. Fateh, which immediately came to dominate the PLO, received support from both ‘progressive’ and ‘reactionary’ Arab states, as well as from China, North Vietnam, North Korea and, later, the Soviet Union and Cuba. There was an inherent and pressing paradox involved in state support for the guerrillas, however, as

[i]ts slogans of ‘people’s war’ and ‘total liberation of Palestinian soil’ could only be attained through the total involvement of the Arab confrontation states and beyond, yet these aims sat ill with host governments and moreover clashed with the pragmatic requirements of securing wider recognition of the PLO as a statist actor with international character. That serious changes in Arab state power, and even sweeping social revolution, were required in order to remove the obstacles to full involvement only intensified this tension. The result was a contest between the guerrilla groups—carried out at every level of politics, ideology, and organization [ ]—based on the false premiss that these were all real options among which they could make free choices (in the historical sense).53

Ideological developments and organizational politics before 1967 laid the foundation for the proliferation of Palestinian political-military organizations in the immediate aftermath of the June War. The appeal of revolution and armed struggle—“not only political strategies but... crucial identifying principles of nationhood and [its] main discursive strategies”54—led to the establishment of a host of liberation groups, representing a range of ideological inclinations and espousing a multitude of tactical preferences.

Ideological developments and organizational politics prior to 1967 also cemented a basic division between these groups on the issue of armed

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52 Ibid., p. 143.
53 Ibid., pp. 147-8.
struggle. Fateh’s conception of armed struggle had initially hinged on the existentialist notion that it served to foment Palestinian group and national cohesion, aiming to construct a strong enough group identification to keep the scattered communities unified until a solution, possibly diplomatic, could be found. As we will see below, when Fateh managed to achieve a dominant position within the PLO—and believed itself to be in a position to pursue that diplomatic solution—its radicalism gave way to statism, seeking to preserve, rather than upset, the regional status quo. ‘Consecutive detonation’ was thus a highly contingent concept. This transformation was an obvious way to enhance ingroup social status within the national movement, with most of Fateh’s main rivals espousing revolutionary ideologies that led them to seek the subversion of Arab governments and pursue class struggle. In addition, the majority of Fateh’s rivals saw armed struggle in a different light. They probably agreed that armed struggle was necessary to foment group cohesion, but saw it as serving more straightforward military-strategic purposes. Some of them wanted to militarily exhaust Israel, while other strove to confront ‘reactionary’ Arab states, bringing about revolutionary change in the Arab arena that could then be channelled against the Israeli enemy. An important belief, which has defined the radical segment of the national movement to this day, has been that armed struggle is not contingent, that it could not be replaced by other forms of struggle, merely augmented and enhanced by them. Given the agonistic ambient culture and the intensity and significance of their political competition, the factions’ differing conceptions of politics and armed struggle gradually became badges of honour, each of them contending that their particular path to liberation was ideologically and tactically superior to others.

**GENESIS OF THE FACTIONS**

The origins and emergence of each faction, and their early relations with other groups within the national movement had significant impact on their subsequent ideological and tactical stances. While it is commonly assumed that splits and rivalries occurred due to ideological commitments, also the

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reverse was true: Interfactional rivalries fundamentally conditioned the ideological and tactical positions of the groups' in their quest to enhance their positions within the movement. An overview of the emergence of each of the movement's significant groups provides an insight into how the foundation for a specific pattern of intergroup alignment was laid.

From ANM to PFLP

The leftist-rightist rift within the ANM became acute after the June War. The movement was losing recruits and support due to its sluggishness in responding to the reality of Arab defeat, which prompted the Centre, the PAC and the Palestine Military Action Committee (PMAC) to—yet again—agree on the need for autonomous military action. The ANM's Executive Committee met in late July 1967, but rather than signalling an eagerness for combat, the meeting revealed the influence of the left-wing. Arab defeat was blamed on bourgeois fear of the masses and subsequent failure to mobilize them, whereas Israel's supremacy was identified as an outcome of its place within the world capitalist and imperialist scheme. Under the outwardly unison barrage of left-wing clichés, there was still heated internal ideological debate. The left urged caution and continued preparation to mobilize a united Arab front. The right feared that passivity would play into Israeli hands, giving the enemy the opportunity to create new political and practical obstacles. The Centre took a middle position once again, and argued that although military action is urgent, the objective conditions for achieving popular mobilization were not yet present.

Still in keeping with Egyptian policy, the ANM opted for further preparation and caution. The Executive Committee meeting made Habash responsible for organization, while Haddad and Hindi began military preparations, setting up a new Special Apparatus that a year later was to carry out a series of aircraft hijackings in accordance with the July-meeting's resolution to “strike at the enemy everywhere.” The Centre also went on to create a Jordanian support command to facilitate mobilization, within which

56 *Arab Nationalist Movement, After the Colonialist Zionist Aggression* (Political report by the National Committee of the ANM, July 1967).
the predominance of traditionalists and rightists was resented by the leftists and caused further friction.

The ANM meanwhile was losing ground to Fateh as well as to Jibril’s PLF, and began to rebuild its West Bank branch in late July; the ANM field command had barely been formed when Fateh announced what it referred to as its “second launch” on August 28. On a fundamental level, the ANM still did not believe that the Palestinians could liberate Palestine without Arab assistance “but accepted that that they should conduct selective guerrilla action and disrupt the occupation until Nasir could bring Arab power to bear.”

Fateh’s launch of military operations in August was followed by PLF’s on October 13 and the ANM began to feel the financial cost of inaction as donors withheld funds until the ANM showed some militant initiative. As a means of boosting public morale and achieving “comprehensive armed resistance” the ANM Centre responded by calling for guerrilla unity. It set up bases in the Jordan Valley and in October gained access to the PLF training camp in Syria. At the same time the ANM, the PLF, Abtal al-‘Awda, and a group of pro-Nasser Jordanian exiles agreed to form a united front. Characteristic of ANM pandering to Nasser, his urging the movement to guerrilla action tipped the scales and an eager ANM Centre communicated to the more cautious field command that “the battle might start without us... Fateh and Jibril will be the only ones to reap the credit... and that will finish us.” The new united front launched a series of raids into Israel, beginning with an attack on Ben Gurion Airport on 11 December. A statement released in Beirut the same day announced the new grouping as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

The PFLP as originally composed was troubled and short-lived. On the basis of tactical and ideological differences, Jibril lead his PLF cadres out of cooperation with the ANM in April 1968. In February 1969, after a year that saw left-wing dissension grow into an outright rebellion within the ANM, leftist cadres headed by Naif Hawatmeh announced the formation of the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP).

57 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 165.
58 Ibid., p. 166.
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command

The PLF cadres had entered into cooperation with the ANM with serious doubts as to the enterprise's feasibility. The PLF had carefully kept its members, cadres and fighters separated from those of the other groups in the coalition, and retained training camps for its own exclusive use. The PLF contingent's eventual exodus was connected to two primary factors: The Battle of Karameh, and the rise of the left within the ANM.

On March 19, 1968, Habash and a number of other PFLP members were arrested by Syrian military police, a measure taken to forestall their plotting of a coup d'etat, together with Syrian dissidents. The arrests took place two days before the Israeli attack on Karameh, an event that has since become one of the key points in Palestinian political mythology. Some three hundred Palestinian fighters joined with Jordanian infantry in repelling the assault of a numerically superior Israeli force. The contribution of the Palestinians was, in tactical terms, minor but in subsequently constructed national lore, the spectacular victory of Karameh (meaning 'dignity' in Arabic) belonged to the fida'iyyun. The only fida'i forces to participate at Karameh, however, belonged to Fateh and a smaller group known as the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF, returned to below); the PFLP never participated. In Habash's absence, PFLP military commander Jibril took the decision—apparently believing PFLP forces to be inadequately prepared—to withdraw from the theatre of conflict the day before the battle. Fierce recriminations ensued, particularly accusations from an increasingly vocal left-wing against Jibril for incompetence and ideological unsoundness.

Accusations of incompetence sorely offended Jibril's deeply ingrained sense of personal pride, and incensed other PLF leaders and cadres that felt implicated by attacks against their leaders. Accusations of being ideologically unsound were of a different order; they did not so much offend as exasperate the PLF contingent. The PLF had never been given to ideological debate and the rise of the left within the ANM now forced them to cohabitate with a set of individuals for whom ideological discussion was an integral part of any and all endeavours. The PLF people were witnessing the ideological debate

59 Fadl Shururu, November 9, 2000.
60 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 227.
getting entirely riotous within the ANM as military matters were turning into ideological issues when the left-wingers brought the writings of Mao, Che Guevara, and Frantz Fanon to bear on tactics and strategy. The ANM itself was crumbling as its Jordanian and Lebanese branches were incrementally but decisively taken over by the leftists and turned against the comparatively ‘rightist’ Palestinian branch. The fact that the appropriateness of PLF’s role in the PFLP was part of the dispute between the ANM’s left and right made matters all the more poignant for Jibril and his comrades.

In August 1969 the Palestinian branch of the ANM held its national conference in which the leftists won massive majorities in the leadership elections. The left also secured the approval of its Basic Political Report, which lambasted Egypt’s role in the 1967 war and Arab acceptance of UNSCR 242. More importantly, the report indicated a preparedness to intervene in the sociopolitical affairs of Arab countries, accusing the PFLP leadership of having hankered after Fateh’s policy of non-interference. The left moreover believed that the Special Apparatus’ first hijacking operation, which took place on 23 July, was timed to impact on the conference by enhancing the stature of the old guard.

Jibril and the PLF had had enough. The recriminations after Karameh, the subjection of PFLP military tactics to ideological talking shops, and the implementation of external operations for ‘internal effect’ were “unbearable.” Having disclaimed ties with the ANM already in April, October 1968 saw Jibril leading the PLF contingent out of the PFLP (possibly encouraged by Syrian intelligence), assuming the name PFLP-GC. While the exodus of political cadres from the PFLP conglomerate was relatively minor, the PFLP-GC attracted some 200 guerrillas, one quarter of the PFLP’s total combat strength of circa 800 fighters.

**Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine**

As Jibril left, tensions within the ANM continued to mount. Habash was sprung from prison in November, but was unable to placate the left.

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63 Fadl Shururu, November 9, 2000.
Following probes from the leftist leadership, Syrian Ba'th Party Chairman Salah Jadid ordered Sa'iqa to provide the ANM left with military support, while Fateh pledged financial and other material assistance. The war of words turned violent as the rightists realized that the leftists were about to break away; in mid-February 1969, rightists attacked leftist offices in Jordan, killing at least one of their cadres.

It is in this context that we should understand the spate of external operations conducted by Haddad's Special Apparatus in this period. Its attack on an El Al aircraft at Athens airport on December 26, and a further attack on an El Al plane in Zurich on February 18, 1969, were both intended to demonstrate rightist strength and tenacity in its internal rivalry with the leftists. Fateh came to the leftists' aid, and stepped in with supplies, arms and funds. This generosity was in part based on a wish to both embarrass and divide the PFLP en bloc, the latter being Fateh's most serious political rival. Emboldened by this support, the leftists under the leadership of the Jordanian Naif Hawatmeh announced the formation of the PDFLP on 22 February 1969.

Hawatmeh's group was initially relatively small, mustering some 150 civilian members and likely less than fifty fighters. It was, however, a youthful organization; the leftist cadres that rebelled against the ANM leadership had been a younger generation, most of them born in the 1940s or early 1950s. Similarly, its popular appeal lay with a young constituency, particularly among refugees in Syria and Lebanon, and in the West Bank. Its small size and lack of political and military clout indubitably affected its members' feelings of self-worth, as the organization's status within the movement was marginal. In order to overcome this impediment, the PDFLP came to portray itself as the movement's revolutionary vanguard, the spearhead of genuine Marxism-Leninism in the Palestinian arena. Through al-Hurriyya, over which the PDFLP retained control, it began to propagate elements of both Trotskyism and Maoism. Going in the absolute opposite direction of the PFLP-GC, the PDFLP sought (but failed) to democratize its military apparatus, introducing the concepts of elected officers and the abolition of the military rank system. Its absorption of the small but radical
Maoist group, the Popular Organization for the Liberation of Palestine (POLP) more than doubled the PDFLP's membership and reinforced its radical tendencies.

The organization quickly took to proselytizing its principles within the national movement, as well as outside. Needing to demonstrate its ability to stand on its own two feet, the PDFLP turned on Fateh as well as the PFLP for 'collaborating with reactionary regimes.' Needing to consolidate its position within the movement—carve out a niche—the PDFLP's revolutionary enthusiasm soon offended or unsettled virtually every Arab government. As for the PDFLP's attitude to Jordanian politics and the Hashemite monarchy, its slogan “no authority over the authority of the resistance” would subsequently prove particularly portentous.

**Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine**

With the PFLP-GC and PDFLP gone, the PFLP was substantially weakened. The two splits had cost the organization in terms of membership and fighters, and its political prestige was seriously damaged. In addition, the shame of not having fought at Karamah was an ignominy that continued to be associated with the PFLP, rather than with the disaffiliated Jibril. Accordingly, the PFLP had difficulties in recruiting, was getting increasingly strapped for funds, thus running the risk of military-political marginalization. It opted for a boycott of the PLO as a sign of its displeasure with what it saw as the other factions'—particularly Sa'iqa and Fateh's—with conspiracies against it.

The PFLP found the solution to its dilemma in a combination of social creativity and competition. Creativity, by a temporary stress on external operations whereby it carved out a distinct profile for itself; competition, by turning to the left in order to gain access to the PDFLP's small but steadily growing constituency. The feud with the leftists within the ANM had already

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65 During a visit to Moscow in the early 1970s, Hawatmeh offended his Soviet hosts by seeking to explain to them why they should rehabilitate Trotsky. "I told him: 'What do you think you are doing? It is not your place to teach socialism to the Soviet Union!' Hawatmeh always thought he could work political miracles. He always had great faith not only in his revolutionary principles, but also in his own abilities." ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Nu’aimi, interview with author, May 2000 (Al-Nu’aimi visited
prompted the PFLP to adopt a “scientific revolutionary” model of ideology along quasi-Maoist lines. The PDFLP’s turn to the left, as well as its stress on Palestinian territorialism prompted the PFLP to follow suit in order to not be outdone. “The split [with the PDFLP] was an incentive towards Marxism” At its second general conference in February 1969, the PFLP resolved to transform itself into a “proletarian party” onto which it grafted a communist-style politburo and central committee. Habash was elected secretary general, and the old guard leadership of the erstwhile ANM all took up positions in the politburo. Thus, a radical ideological reorientation was embarked upon with no changes whatever in the leadership, making it obvious that the change was purely tactical. In fact, those who had most fiercely opposed the leftism of Hawatmeh and his comrades—including Haddad and al-Hindi—were now busy vying with the PDFLP over which organization was the superior adherent to Marxism-Leninism; the PDFLP cadres were denounced not merely as traitors, but as bourgeois splitters and enemies of the revolution. The PFLP’s new organ (set up after the leftists retained al-Hurriyya), al-Hadaf (“The Target”) proclaimed support for Mao and the Chinese model of Marxism-Leninism. More importantly, the PFLP’s initially mild criticism of the Hashemite monarchy hardened into aggressive hostility after the split with the PDFLP, and soon the organization advocated uprising in Jordan in order to establish an ‘Arab Hanoi’ in ‘Amman. The early relationship between the PFLP and the PDFLP thus provides a textbook example of social competition in accordance with the social identity model, in which ideology not only led to interfactional conflict, but was seriously affected and altered by that conflict.

Haddad’s Special Apparatus intensified its external operations—armed attacks against ‘Zionist and imperialist’ interests outside the region—in this period. On July 17, 1969, two London department stores were

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Moscow together with Hawatmeh as a delegate of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arab Gulf (PFLOAG).

67 Ibid.
69 Ibid., p. 232.
bombed, followed by the August 25 attack on the London offices of an Israeli shipping company, and the August 29 hijacking of a TWA aircraft en route to Tel Aviv. September 8 saw simultaneous grenade attacks on buildings owned by Israel in Bonn, The Hague and Brussels, and in October the PFLP attempted to blow up a US pipeline carrying Saudi oil across the Golan Heights. Often seen as contrary to the PFLP’s ideological transformation, it seems that these external operations were in fact attempts to creating a distinct profile and appeal for the PFLP, parallel to engaging in ideological competition with the PDFLP. To be sure, the audacity of these external operations attracted recruits as well as attention to the Palestinian cause. In terms of the social identity theory model, it is interesting to note that these actions produced outcomes in both the PFLP-GC and the PDFLP. Both denounced the activities of the Special Apparatus as deeply flawed, the former basing its stance on military tactics and the latter on ideological grounds, yet, soon thereafter, the PFLP-GC began ‘external operations’ of its own.

Palestinian Popular Struggle Front

Announcing its existence on July 15, a month after the end of the June War, the Palestinian Popular Struggle Organization (later renamed the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front) undertook its first military strike on November 25, against an Israeli radio station in the Bethlehem area. It set up its limited military and political infrastructures in Jordan’s East Bank, from whence it infiltrated across the border with ill-equipped militants drawn primarily from the West Bank. The efficacy of its strikes was marginal, yet the group saw itself as serving an example of militant, rather than military, aptitude to the other organizations. Its activities attracted a small stream of members, among whom was Bahjat Abu Gharbiyya—a member of the PLO’s executive and military committees—whose membership in turn boosted the status and appeal of the nascent grouping. Mostly, its early leadership was composed of former or current members of the ANM, including its first secretary general, Subhi Ghosheh.

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71 See Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 234.
72 Khalid ‘Abd al-Mejid, October 18, 1999.
Ghosheh was disturbed by the ideological chaos within the ANM, and took the opportunity provided by the ANM’s period of post-war shell shock to leave the movement and set up the PPSF.\textsuperscript{73} This was little more than an annoyance to the ANM leadership; the PPSF’s lack of a distinct group profile and its poor military capacity rendered it harmless. Also, the PPSF’s ideological orientation was Arab nationalist, in effect reinforcing the ANM’s own position, which prompted the ANM to initially cooperate with the PPSF. So too did Fateh, which supported the new group with arms, funds and intelligence support. The underlying reason was the same as provided the \textit{rationale} for Fateh’s support of the PDFLP, that is, the wish to challenge and embarrass the PFLP.

PPSF’s participation together with Fateh at Karameh boosted its status, and the organization spent most of 1968 forming its institutions and bureaucracy, which were \textit{ad hoc} and rudimentary in its first year.\textsuperscript{74} Bahjat Abu Gharbiyya took over at the helm, and led the PPSF until his resignation in 1972, when the secretary generalship was assumed by Samir Ghosheh, Subhi’s brother. The group’s lack of a distinct profile was problematic, however, and, unable to supply its members with a meaningful social identity, the PPSF had difficulties in keeping its membership up. It thus decided to latch on to the external operations escapades of the PFLP’s Special Apparatus, bombing an El Al office in Athens on November 29, 1969, and hijacking an Olympic Airways flight on 22 July 1970 (to secure the release of its two operatives responsible for the November bomb).\textsuperscript{75} This apparently did impact positively on the faction’s ability to recruit.\textsuperscript{76}

\textbf{Organization of the Pioneers of the Popular War of Liberation—\textit{al-Sa’iqa}}

As mentioned previously, the Syrian Ba’th Party established \textit{Sa’iqa} in September 1967. The organization remained inactive until early 1968, however, when it was reactivated as an element in the power struggle between the party chairman Salah Jadid and Defence Minister Hafez al-
Asad. Jadid saw the creation of a militia within the party as a counterweight to Asad’s ever-firmer control of the Syrian Arab Army. Thus, the organization was set up within the Ba’th Party itself, and soon became its Palestinian section; the head of Sa’iqa, initially Dafi Jumay’ani, was a member of the party’s national command. All Palestinian members of the party automatically became members of Sa’iqa and were required to undergo military training. Through ample financial and intelligence support from the party, and through cooperation with the PLA, Sa’iqa was able to accumulate some 400 guerrillas by October 1968, growing further to some 1,000 by late 1969, by which time its firepower was on par with that of Fateh.77

Ideologically, Sa’iqa followed the development of Jadid as he ventured ever further to the left during his intensifying struggle with Asad. In its first year of activity it had enjoyed generally good relations with Fateh, due to Fateh’s and Syria’s shared interests, particularly vis-à-vis the ANM and Egypt. It propounded a Ba’thism that was rather orthodox, that is, adhering to the principles of Michel Aflaq.78 The internal situation in Syria prompted it leftwards, however, and by early 1970 it had come to view itself as a Marxist-Leninist organization. Accordingly, it abandoned its political and military alliance with Fateh and realigned itself with the Palestinian left—the PFLP and PDFLP—and supported the emergence of the Jordanian Communist Party’s guerrilla force Quwwat al-Ansar (‘The Partisan Forces’).

During the Correctionist Movement of November 1970—Hafez al-Asad’s ousting of Jadid and suppression of the Marxist-Leninist trend within the party—Sa’iqa was brought firmly into line with Asad’s worldview. During the final and hopelessly asymmetrical showdown between Jadid and Asad, Sa’iqa provided the only armed units to rally behind Jadid. After extensive purges in its top echelons, Asad handed Sa’iqa’s leadership to Zuhayr Muhsin.

After Asad had brought the objectives of the Syrian armed forces and those of the party apparatus into relative congruence—unifying Syrian policy towards Palestine—Damascus has deployed Sa’iqa to do its bidding within the PLO. Hence, the difference between Sa’iqa’s relationship with Syria and

77 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 185.
those of other factions merely aligned with Syria has always been vast: "Sa'iqa is the spearhead of Ba'th party policy in the Palestinian arena."}

**Arab Liberation Front**

After its 1968 coup, the new Ba'th Party regime in Baghdad sought to enhance its regional status by establishing its own faction, the Arab Liberation Front (ALF), under the leadership of 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Kayali. Its existence was announced on April 11, 1969. Like Syria's establishment of Sa'iqa, Iraq set up the ALF as the Palestinian section of its Ba'th Party. Unlike the Syrian situation, however, ALF was set up primarily because Iraq wanted to benefit from the popularity and enthusiasm engendered by the emergence of Palestinian factions, rather than for reasons of domestic power politics.

Also unlike Sa'iqa, ALF's appeal has remained relatively minor throughout its existence. Although there was a sizeable Palestinian community in Iraq, there were no refugee camps. Hence, the Iraq-dwelling Palestinians' "generally higher level of skill afforded them a broader range of professional opportunities than that open to many of their compatriots in Syria." With no significant unskilled and politically desperate refugee pool, the majority of ALF's personnel came to be drawn from non-Palestinian Arabs. The Iraqi army began training courses for tentative ALF recruits in November 1968, and by its formation the following April, its combat strength was a sizeable 300 guerrillas.

The new Iraqi regime gradually came to distrust Fateh's close ties to Egypt and Syria, and its activities in Iraq were thus restricted. When Syria retaliated by placing heavy restrictions on ALF activities in Syria in July 1969, ALF and Fateh underwent a limited rapprochement. Iraqi-Fateh relations soured decisively in September 1969, however, after Fateh had secured an amendment to the PLO charter (originally proposed by the PDFLP), calling for the establishment of a "secular, democratic Palestinian state," in which Muslims, Christians and Jews were to enjoy equal rights. The

80 Helena Cobban, The Palestine Liberation Organization, p. 163.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.; Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 236.
Iraqi Ba’th—and thus ALF—as well as the PFLP and the PPSF saw this as a potential danger. The PFLP promptly became the recipient of ample Iraqi aid as a result, and the ALF refused to join the PLO.

The ALF’s ideological orientation, quite naturally, has always been that of the Iraqi Ba’th Party. Unlike Sa’iqa, the ALF’s relationship to the Palestinian national movement has tended to be rather distant. Largely because of its demographic makeup, and (again) the policy orientation of the Iraqi Ba’th, ALF has tended to eschew Palestinian particularism. This—unlike Sa’iqa—has precluded it from contending for a position of significant influence within the national movement. The ALF holds that “the Palestinian question always has been and always will be a primarily Arab question.” While Sa’iqa, by virtue of its mass following among Palestinian Ba’thists in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan was able to quickly establish itself as a central player within the national movement, ALF was not. It is possible to suggest, as members of other factions have, that “while Sa’iqa was a Syrian extension with its foundation in Palestinian aspirations, ALF was an Iraqi extension with its foundation chiefly in Baghdad’s objectives.” Because of this, those Palestinians with affinities towards ALF’s pan-Arab socialism and secularism tended to affiliate themselves with the PFLP, which, at any rate enjoyed Iraqi support.

Fateh—The Sorcerer’s Apprentice

Having encouraged splits and divisions within other factions in order to enhance its own social status, the political arena soon became uncomfortable for Fateh. While it should be noted that the proliferation of the fasa’il never actually threatened Fateh’s organizational and political hegemony, the multitude of contenders—and their state patrons—came to restrict Fateh’s ability to manoeuvre.

The ability to manoeuvre was important to Fateh because—as noted above—its rationale for armed struggle was different than that of most of its rivals. With the exception of the diplomatically inclined PFLP, all of the

83 Helena Cobban, The Palestinian Liberation Organisation, pp. 163.
84 Mahmoud Abu al-‘Abbas, Rashidiyeh, November 5, 2000.
85 PFLP-GC Central Committee member, interview with author, Damascus, May 2000.
emerging factions viewed armed struggle as an inherent and essential part of
the national struggle, while Fateh had come to view armed struggle as a card
in a larger diplomatic game. Nasser brought Arafat to Moscow in July 1968,
introducing him to, among others, Foreign Minister Kosygin, Chairman
Brezhnev, President Podgornoy and Central Committee member Kyril
Mazurov, whose responsibility it was to liase with national liberation
movements. Arafat was thus being introduced into non-Arab diplomatic
circles in a way that the other factions were not, notwithstanding PFLP and
PDFLP visits to both Peking and Moscow. This laid the foundation for
Fateh’s realization that the instruments and forums of international
diplomacy might offer a means of recovering Palestine. In this context, Fateh
was willing to replace armed struggle with negotiations, while the other
groups—in part due to their lack of diplomatic channels—were not prepared
to make such a concession. Thus, while the proliferation of the fasa’îl was
facilitated by Fateh’s divide and rule policy within the national movement, its
‘rule’ was becoming increasingly contested. Following the status boost it
received after the Battle of Karameh, Fateh had decided to renew its contacts
with Arab governments, most notably Egypt and Saudi Arabia; the former
for arms, training and diplomatic support, the latter for finances.

In the immediate aftermath of the June War, most Arab governments
appreciated the appeal of the fasa’îl, and viewed alignment with them—
although often at arms length—as a cost effective way to shore up their
damaged political prestige. In Jordan and Lebanon, however, the
governments were alarmed by the growing power of the fasa’îl. In both
countries there were large Palestinian communities. The growth, success and
prestige of the fasa’îl were part and parcel of the increase in the refugees’
feelings of self-worth, issuing in a surge in Palestinian nationalist fervour
“which threatened to set the delicate power balance in each of these pro-
Western countries swinging wildly.” Because of the extent of their shared
borders with Israel, both countries were attractive bases from which the
fasa’îl could strike at Israel. This meant that these countries, in turn, could
expect to be held accountable for fasa’îl activity. For instance, after the

\[\text{\footnotesize 87 Ibid., p. 46.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 88 Ibid.}\]
above-mentioned PFLP attack on Athens airport in December 1968, Israel retaliated by sending commando units to blow up thirteen Arab-owned airliners at Beirut airport.

The late 1960’s saw an increase in confrontations between the various groups and the government troops in both Lebanon and Jordan. In Jordan, however, the situation spiralled out of control, particularly as the leftist factions had joined political forces with Jordanian nationalists, calling for the overthrow of the monarchy. In early September of 1970, the PFLP mounted a multiple hijacking operation. Although significant sections of the operation failed, by September 12 the PFLP had managed to bring three hijacked airliners—one American, one Swiss and one British—to a secure airfield—"Revolution Airstrip"—in the Jordanian desert near Zarqa. The planes were blown up in an effort to "embarrass the Jordanian monarch acutely, both in the eyes of his own people as well as of his Western friends."89 King Hussein responded by forming a military cabinet on September 16, and by dawn the following day, the Arab Legion began encircling and attacking guerrilla positions in and around Amman, “fully prepared and possibly encouraged, if not pressed, by the Nixon administration, which tended to see Russians behind every sand dune in the Middle East...”90 The PFLP was reinstated in the PLO, and its central committee called for a general strike in order to force the resignation of the military government. This proved too little, too late. Civil war broke out, and by September 26, between three and four thousand Palestinians were killed, some 10,000 were wounded, and around 50,000 displaced.91 Palestinian military losses have been estimated at between 910 and 960 dead, of whom over 400 belonged to Fateh, some 200 to the PLA, 80-90 to Sa'iqa, 70-80 to the PFLP and 30-45 to PDFLP.92

89 Ibid., p. 147.
90 Hanna Batatu, Syria’s Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics, p. 290.
91 Ibid., p. 290.
92 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 267.
Bitter recriminations followed between the fasa‘il over responsibility for Black September, with the left accepting the thesis that they had been overly arrogant toward the Jordanian authorities, yet blaming ultimate defeat on opportunists and defeatists in PLO ranks. Regardless of internal wrangling, the early 1970s brought a sharp turn in the fortunes of the fasa‘il. A crucial development was Asad’s assumption of power in Syria, which heralded the primacy of raison d’etat in Syrian policy towards the Palestinians. Jadid—on ideological grounds—had been extremely enthusiastic about the fasa‘il in the aftermath of the June War; Syrian official rhetoric had been replete with belligerent far-leftist remarks catering to the fasa‘il, such as the famous statement on Damascus Radio that “Arab Damascus is no less heroic than Hanoi.” Conversely, Asad—on political-strategic grounds—was very cautious and considered Jadid’s policy both unsavourily leftist as well as reckless. After 1970 the Syrian position became more guarded and in March 1972 Asad stated his willingness to accept UNSCR 242, signalling Syria’s final acceptance of Israel’s existence.

Also Egyptian authorities imposed severe restrictions on the guerrillas, and the situation in Lebanon was also getting ever more difficult. In the same period, the US-Israeli ‘special relationship’ developed into a strategic alliance, hardening attitudes towards the guerrillas in the international arena. Intense Israeli counterinsurgency campaigns as well as Israeli and Jordanian attempts to create their own leadership structures in the occupied territories coupled with Lebanese insistence on suppression of guerrilla activity were the catalysing factors for Fateh’s own incursions into ‘external operations’ between 1971 and 1973. At the same time these were also the factors that convinced the PLO leadership that the time was right for a peace conference.

93 In conversations with the author, leading DFLP and PFLP officials, including Hawatmeh, continue to claim that ultimate responsibility lay with the Fateh dominated PLO leadership, as well as Iraq for failing to come to the Palestinians’ rescue. For official DFLP historiography concerning the event, see ‘Imad ‘Abd al-Latif Nidaf (ed.) Naiif Hawatmeh itataddath (Damascus, Dar al-Katib, 1996), pp. 91-107.
A little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical.  

Thomas Jefferson

SUMMARY INTRODUCTION

Having set the scene for the coexistence and rivalry of the fasa'il, we can now go on to examine the emergence and rationale of the sequence of rejectionist assemblies, beginning with the 1974 Front for Rejection of Capitulationist Settlements, known as the Rejection Front (RF). Through the various factional positions as they emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a political and tactical dichotomy placed itself at the heart of the Palestinian national movement. From 1973 onwards, it has formed a dialectic mechanism without which the movement likely would not have survived or, at any rate, remained a viable political force. While Fateh created and sustained the concept of armed struggle as the 'cognitive glue' of Palestinianness and thus as the foundation of Palestinianism, it eventually came to replace its slogan “revolution until victory” with an attitude of ‘revolution until negotiation’.

The RF and subsequent rejectionist assemblies have all been ascribed the inability to compromise and a hatred for negotiated settlement as their fundamental rationale. This image, which already prima facie is overly simplistic, does not square with the political statements and actions of the groups in question. The major rejectionist factions have never eschewed negotiation with the enemy as a possible solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but have insisted that diplomatic instruments could never replace military struggle, but could envisage situations where armed struggle would
be used to augment and enhance diplomatic instruments. Exacerbating the political divisions emanating from this different view on diplomacy, the factions that have tended to coalesce in rejectionist assemblies have also set themselves different standards from those of Fateh as to when and how diplomatic instruments are admissible. Rejectionism has functioned, as mentioned earlier, as a ‘correctionist movement’ in that it has sought to prevent the movement’s leadership from veering away from its original—and collectively agreed upon—commitments. It has sought to hold the leadership to the Palestinian National Covenant, as well as to its word to them as fellow strugglers.

For reasons derived from ideology, patron-client relations and group dynamics, what has distinguished the rejectionists from the mainstream have been a qualitatively different set of preconditions for, and objectives of diplomatic negotiations. To the main rejectionist factions—in particular the PFLP and the PFLP-GC—the goal of liberating Palestine has always been inextricably intertwined with the goal of restoring national honour; one without the other has been impossible and to claim otherwise would mean a depletion of factional and personal honour. To the rejectionists, there has never been any question of deviating from the fundamental goals—national recognition, repatriation, self-determination and independent statehood, not even for tactical reasons. This ‘higher standard,’ as hypothesized earlier, likely derives from their structurally and politically subordinate position within the national movement, and the need to creatively enhance their own social status and appeal. If these fundamental goals were taken seriously and accommodated by the enemy camp, the rejectionists too could sit down and parley. Otherwise, they would “continue fighting for dozens of years, whatever is involved.”

These standards, which have been based on ideological, tactical and personal perspectives different from those of the PLO leadership, have caused the rejectionists to view Fateh’s statist pragmatism as ‘liquidationism,’ ‘deviationism’ and a sign of ‘bourgeois predispositions.’ In

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1 Letter to James Madison, January 30, 1787.
addition, as indicated by Talal Naji’s statement that concluded chapter two, the Israelis have been expected to take the first step by virtue of being the original transgressor. Likewise, Muhammad Muslih noted in 1975, that

From the standpoint of the PLO, the injured party cannot be expected to grant recognition to its victimizer. Thus the Palestinians seem to believe that the onus of recognition falls on Israel.³

Given the ambient cultural framework, it is thus perfectly natural that the onus of both recognition and initiative should fall on the original transgressor, that is, Israel. As a consequence, Arafat’s pragmatism and willingness to initiate diplomacy—based on Fateh’s particular patronages, constituencies and views of armed struggle—have therefore been seen by the rejectionists as a violation of socially and culturally acceptable norms and codes, according to which, in the eastern Mediterranean, the injured party brings nothing but further shame upon himself by approaching the transgressor for reconciliation. To add injury to insult—quite literally—Arafat’s diplomatic overtures vis-à-vis Israel as head of the PLO have been seen as bringing shame not only to himself, but upon the PLO as a whole, as well as upon the Palestinian people. In addition, but perhaps co-incidentally, the political games that have preceded the establishment of every rejectionist assembly have involved manoeuvres on the part of Arafat perceived by the other fasa’il as direct challenges to their honour and social status. Without seeing the difference between rejectionists and mainstream behaviour in this context, there is little hope of making sense of the chronologies of events preceding and following the establishment of rejectionist assemblies. This, presumably, is why they are usually not properly accounted for and explained.

THE 1974 REJECTION FRONT: MOBILIZING AGAINST GENEVA

Scholars routinely claim that the RF was set up in order to oppose “any participation in a peace process”⁴ or due to a total refusal to accept the PLO’s

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⁴ Ibid., p. 7
transitional program. These claims disregard the fact that three of the four RF members—the PFLP, the PFLP-GC and PPSF—actually signed the so-called ten-point agreement, returned to in detail below. What followed was not a change of heart on behalf of the rejectionists, but, rather, their realization that they had been tricked into conceding to a dishonourable political trajectory. For the sake of national and factional integrity, and in order to safeguard their vision of national objectives, they broke off to form the new Front.

**Political and Tactical Anxieties**

After the October War, all factions grappled intellectually with the problems presented by a forthcoming peace conference. The war had, ostensibly, achieved some measure of strategic parity between Israel and the Arabs, and a peace conference might be a venue at which at least some Palestinian land could be regained. The horns of the dilemma were these: If the PLO were to sit down at the negotiation table, it would thereby recognize Israel as an interlocutor and, thereby, as a *de jure* entity. If it did not sit down to negotiate, the PLO would invariably miss any opportunity to regain occupied land through diplomacy. What was worse, however, rejection of diplomatic instruments would afford Jordan’s King Hussein the opportunity to go ahead with his plans for a United Arab Kingdom, in which the West Bank would be merged with Jordan. The Geneva conference, proposed by the US and USSR in the immediate aftermath of the October War, was the tangible expression of this opportunity. It was fraught with problems for the *fasa'il*, however. Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, who announced the conference plans, claimed that the Palestinians would be represented, but failed to specify by whom. Furthermore, the conference was based on UNSCR 242, consistently rejected by the PLO because of its reduction of the Palestinian people from nationhood to refugee status.

At the same time, and as the regional arena was getting more difficult—due to Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon all seeking to restrict the

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activities of the *fasa'īl*—the international arena was showing signs of improvement. Fateh and PDFLP were cognizant of a change in the international balance of forces, and Fateh's diplomatic connections made it acutely aware of the significance of such a change. These two pragmatist factions were particularly heartened by a joint US-USSR statement that referred to "the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people." So too was Sa'iqa, which, in harmony with Syrian policy more generally wanted to make the most of the new global situation. As these three factions saw it, then, the October War had reduced the necessity for armed struggle. The October War had eliminated the feeling of powerlessness that had once necessitated armed struggle as an instrument of identity formation, and it had brought about a climate favourable to the launch of diplomatic initiatives; it was time to get on with the diplomatic programme and formulate realistic aims and objectives. The primary problem the pragmatic troika faced was that it could find no way of reconciling attendance at a peace conference with the aims and objectives of the Palestinian National Covenant.

The rejectionist factions were no less aware of the potential of the sea change in international politics, and they too grappled with the problems presented by the peace conference concept. By the time of the 12th PNC in Cairo, held in June and July 1974, the rejectionists had decided to accept political struggle as a supplement to armed struggle, a decision that prompted them to sign the ten-point agreement. They were adamant, however, that the current situation did not allow for the fruitful launch of a diplomatic initiative, and that the Geneva conference format was absolutely unacceptable, both on grounds of UNSCR 242 and the issue of representation. Furthermore, and more importantly, the rejectionist factions believed that the national authority concept propagated by Fateh and the PDFLP—the establishment of a Palestinian entity on all territory gradually retrieved from occupation—evidenced destructive short-sightedness on behalf of the pragmatists. The PFLP-GC believed that a national authority in the West Bank and Gaza would have no military value whatsoever, that it

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simply could not be used as a forward base.\textsuperscript{10} The PFLP emphasized that a mini-state in the West Bank and Gaza would be a means of pre-empting, rather than launching, a liberation war. The PFLP also believed that if the PLO gave up armed struggle—incrementally or abruptly, stealthily or overtly—it would forfeit its status as the Palestinians' legitimate representative.\textsuperscript{11}

\section*{Introducing the Diplomatic Option}

The PDFLP had come to pioneer the notion of participation in a peace process by introducing the idea of a two-state solution. While its language was guarded and it approached the idea in terms of "liberation in stages," it nonetheless paved the way for diplomacy and negotiation. "In August 1973, two months before the war, we became the first Palestinian organization to call for the first peace program," Hawatmeh later recalled. "It was... a realistic policy to solve the Palestinian issue, the Israeli issue and issues related to Palestinian-Israeli relations."\textsuperscript{12} Because of its distinct revolutionary ideological profile, the PDFLP came under a barrage of criticism from the PFLP and PFLP-GC, who asserted that 'mini-statehood' would cancel out the revolution because a Palestinian entity currently has no future. It was these 'opportunistic' rejections that Hawatmeh addressed when he declared that

\begin{quote}
We are fighting to end occupation and to stand effectively against imperialist solutions. We are fighting for our people's right to establish their national authority on their own land after the occupation has been ended... These opportunistic forces do not have a leg to stand on. At times they claim that a national authority would not have the means necessary for economic subsistence and would not be able to survive on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. To these opportunists we answer that we are not at the stage of searching for a homeland. Over there is our homeland...\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{10} Fadl Shururu, November 9, 2000.
\textsuperscript{11} Al-Hadaf, November 10, December 8, 1973.
\textsuperscript{12} Naif Hawatmeh, June 16, 1999.
\textsuperscript{13} Statement by General Secretary of the PDFLP Naif Hawatmeh Defending the Establishment of a Palestinian National Authority in Territories Liberated from Israeli Occupation, 24 February, 1974; quoted in Yehuda Lukacs (ed.), The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, pp. 307-8.
\end{footnotes}
As each camp was condemning the other in terms of opportunism, defeatism and lack of tactical understanding, perceptions of the function of armed struggle emerged, yet again, as the central fault line. To the pragmatists, the October War had produced international and regional conditions favourable for diplomatic advances. For those that came to take a rejectionist position, armed struggle no matter how inadequate the resources was part of a national effort to evict the occupier and restore national honour. It could not be superseded, merely strengthened, by diplomacy, and then only under the right conditions. The October War success suggested to the PFLP, PFLP-GC and, not least, the Karameh veteran PPSF that military victory was possible. The confidence and self-esteem among Arab nationalists generated by the war was seen as an indicator that further military victories might well lie ahead. Thus, while the October War impacted heavily on the utility of armed struggle as the pragmatists saw it, it had a very different impact on the rejectionists' distinct perception.

Negotiations ensued within the PLO in order to hammer out a viable compromise formula that would satisfy all parties' political and military minimum requirements. On June 8, the 12th PNC unanimously adopted the so-called ten-point agreement, clause two of which read:

The PLO will struggle by all possible means and foremost by means of armed struggle for the liberation of Palestinian lands and the setting up of a patriotic, independent, fighting peoples regime in every part of the Palestinian territory to be liberated. It affirms that this will only be accomplished through major changes in the balance of forces to the advantage of our people and their struggle.¹⁴

This acceptance of a prospective diplomatic solution was signed by all rejectionist factions apart from the PPSF, which nevertheless gave its verbal endorsement through Samir Ghosheh. It affirmed the PLO's willingness to participate in a peace conference, but only if it was recognized as the sole legitimate representative. This was a claim to being the head of the Palestinian people, the symbolic significance of which was already discussed in chapter two. Without such recognition of status and honour, the PLO would not initiate negotiation. Recognition as head of the Palestinians, then,
was the positive challenge required for the PLO to respond. Having made
that demand, again within the challenge-response game, there was no way of
backing out without shaming oneself. Also within the framework of the
challenge-response game, a peace conference would be an opportunity to
break the deadlock and gauge the willingness of the enemy to counter-
challenge the Palestinians’ positive challenge. The rejectionist factions thus
agreed to this use of diplomacy, presumably seeing it as an optimal balance
between political pragmatism and the satisfaction of factional and national
honour. In an attempt to compromise neither ideological imperatives nor
factional integrity, the ten-point programme could not be seen to make any
concessions to Israel. Its language was thus guarded and militant, and its
scope was necessarily limited.

Problems loomed large, however. It was well known to all parties at
the time—and the formulation of the last sentence of the clause makes it
plain at any rate—that the PLO’s leadership intended to use this agreement
to insert itself into diplomatic negotiations. By their approval of the
agreement, the rejectionists in fact endorsed these intentions, but made clear
that the specific formula provided by the Geneva conference—at which
Arafat was known to have set his sight—was deemed humiliating, shameful
and entirely unacceptable. The PLO would not go to Geneva—this was the
understanding that allowed the PNC to adopt the ten-point agreement nem
con.

The Compromise Falls Apart
The ten-point compromise was short-lived. On September 26, Habash
announced the PFLP’s resignation from the PLO Executive Committee, and
within three weeks, the PFLP-GC, PPSF and ALF followed. Due to the need
to decisively and clearly disassociate themselves from the PLO leadership,
the rejectionists’ official rhetoric claimed that their defection resulted from
the repugnance of the transitional program, lambasting the notion as a
deviation from the true path of the revolution. This was politically astute
since it resonated with large segments of the Palestinian diaspora, especially
those refugees hailing from within Israel’s 1948 borders, who felt that the

14 Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin (eds.), *The Israel-Arab Reader*, p. 162.
transition program placed the realization of their rights in a state of suspended animation.\textsuperscript{15} The RF's wholesale condemnation of both the transitional program and any and all peace initiatives were also social counterchallenges to the PLO leadership, intended to detract from the legitimacy of its enterprise.

What so offended the rejectionists was their well-founded suspicion that Arafat was not only interested in inserting the PLO into diplomatic negotiations, but to do so specifically within the Geneva conference format, thus violating the explicit understanding between the rejectionists and the mainstream that had made possible the unanimous adoption of the agreement. Announcing its decision to leave the PLO Executive Committee, the PFLP made clear that it gave its approval to the ten points, although in fact they were a compromise and a threadbare formula for national unity, after having placed on the record in the minutes of the session our understanding of them to the effect that they involved rejection of the Geneva conference and set the Liberation Organization outside the framework of the liquidationist settlement. At the end of the twelfth session of the Palestine National Council it was clear what the surrenderist leaderships intended by their acceptance of the ten-point programme. They regarded it as legalizing their pursuit of the course of deviation and surrender.\textsuperscript{16}

The rudiments of the RF thus took shape immediately after the closing of the PNC, and suspicions of Arafat's motives and potential political trajectories grew ever stronger. Until the break on September 26, the rejection front was envisaged as a corrective counterbalance existing within the PLO. This was made clear by Habash in an interview on in early August, in which he yet again made clear that the object of rejection was not negotiations \textit{per se}, but the present format for negotiations:

\begin{quote}
In fact, what is called the rejection forces is nothing but an expression of Palestinian and Arab forces that emerged from an analysis, summarized as follows: the Palestinian revolution is strained and ends when it becomes a part of the political settlement presently
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} Helena Cobban, \textit{The Palestinian Liberation Organisation}, p. 62.

\textsuperscript{16} 'Statement by the PFLP Announcing its Withdrawal from the Executive Committee of the PLO. Beirut, 26 September, 1974'; quoted in Yehuda Lukacs (ed.), \textit{The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict}, p. 314.
proposed, and the continuity of the revolution is only ensured by resisting and fighting the proposed political settlement plans. These forces now work as though they are one front. But such a front did not arise until now. It is the duty of these forces to organize one front that has its own political programme, a list of specified organizational interrelationships and consolidated struggle programmes. Presently it is the duty of this front to work within the framework of the Liberation Organization to prevent its complete deviation, so that the Liberation Organization does not become part of the settlement. But in the event that the PLO goes to Geneva, the rejection front becomes the sole representative of the continuity of the revolution.  

Thus, the RF did not centre on rejection of peace, but of what was perceived as the PLO leadership's intolerable acceptance of an inadequate and ignominious peace deal. The RF's members failed, moreover, to see how the Geneva conference could be considered compatible with the political program of June 8, 1974 which stated, *inter alia*, that

> our Palestinian people [is]... determined to continue the struggle, to escalate the armed struggle and to strongly resist the Zionist occupation, the Jordanian reactionary monarchical regime's plots represented by the united Arab kingdom plan, and the imperialist schemes parallel to it.  

> "What was Geneva if not an imperialist scheme?" one PFLP-GC cadre later asked. "It went completely against the [ten-point] agreement." Similarly, in its detailed official statement announcing the PFLP's withdrawal from the PLO Executive Committee, it was asserted that

> The Front has made every effort to ensure that this period should provide an opportunity to strengthen the revolution and consolidate its national unity on the basis of the unambiguous and definitive rejection of the Geneva conference and the liquidationist conspiracy, and of continuing the line of revolution. But the leadership of the Organization has persistently evaded defining any attitude...

On the eve of the twelfth session of the Palestine National Council which was held in Cairo last June, the leadership of the Liberation Organization started talking about national unity and its importance at this stage. It showed that it was prepared to move from an attitude...

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which was no attitude to an attitude of (temporary) refusal to attend the Geneva conference...

At the end of the twelfth session of the Palestine National Council it was clear what the surrenderist leaderships intended by their acceptance of the ten points programme. They regarded it as legalizing their pursuit of the course of deviation and surrender. They started to interpret it as they wished, later making statements as they wished, in a manner incompatible with the Organization's charter and with the resolutions adopted at the sessions of its National Council, including those adopted at the eleventh and twelfth sessions...

The leadership of the Liberation Organization started to represent the possibility of its attending the Geneva conference—‘the conspiracy’—as a great victory won by it over Jordanian reaction and Israel. They also started to talk of the possibility of coordination with the reactionary subservient regime in Jordan if certain conditions were met, thereby coming into conflict with the resolutions of previous sessions of the National Council which insisted that the regime should be overthrown...

Nor is this all. The leadership of the Liberation Organization has denied that any secret contacts have been made with America, the enemy of peoples. But we have established that such secret contacts have been made, without the knowledge of the masses... In the light of the above, how can we continue to bear any responsibility within the framework of the Executive Committee? 20

A New Perception of Armed Struggle

In the aftermath of the Cairo PNC, the rejectionist fasa'il had intensified their guerrilla attacks from southern Lebanon for the purpose of demonstrating resolve. Through armed struggle they sought to “challenge the PLO leadership politically and demonstrate opposition to the peace process.” 21 The primary arena in which armed struggle was intended to have an impact was the political, and spectacular attacks such as the PFLP-GC’s taking of several dozen hostages in Kiryat Shmona on April 11, 1974, sought to demonstrate the rejectionists’ ability to nip any ‘deviationist’ peace talks in the bud. 22

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20 ‘Statement by the PFLP Announcing its Withdrawal from the Executive Committee of the PLO. Beirut, 26 September, 1974’; quoted in Yehuda Lukacs (ed.), The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, pp. 313-7.
22 Ilal-Amara, March 5, 1976.
It was in this period that the rejectionist trend began viewing armed struggle from an existential perspective previously associated almost solely with Fateh. Armed struggle became a “defining and indispensable” feature of what it meant to struggle for the homeland, and struggling for the homeland, in turn, was a defining feature of what it meant to be Palestinian.\textsuperscript{23} Without armed struggle, no \textit{fasa‘il}; without the \textit{fasa‘il}, both Palestinian identity and the Palestinian dream were in peril. This position was similar to that espoused by Fateh since the early 1960 but had now abandoned, and was clearly developed (or adopted) for reasons of social competition with the PLO leadership. By defining as an indispensable element of Palestinianness, something that the leadership was now seen to renege on, the rejectionists posed a formidable social challenge. Cobban has noted that the rejectionist effort had significant popular appeal, suggesting that opposition to the ‘national authority’ scheme voiced by the Rejection Front represented a widespread grass-roots phenomenon, especially in the refugee camps of the Palestinian diaspora which were Fateh’s traditional political base.\textsuperscript{24}

Thus, through social competition based on the efficacy and therefore honourability of the proposed peace conference, the rejectionists came to redefine their own stance on armed struggle. This rejectionist position—while espoused by various factions over time—has remained intact and become the way in which to politically challenge the PLO (and more recently PA) leadership.

**Syrian Support for the PLO**

At the end of October 1974, Arafat led a large PLO delegation to the Arab Summit in Rabat and secured, on the basis of the ten-point program, Arab endorsement of PLO’s claim to being the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.”\textsuperscript{25} On November 13, thanks to Arab intercession, Arafat addressed the UN General Assembly. Aware of the rejectionist agenda’s ability to resonate with the Palestinian people, and of the

\textsuperscript{23} Talal Naji, May 28, 2000.
\textsuperscript{24} Helena Cobban, \textit{The Palestinian Liberation Organisation}, p. 62
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 62.
uncertainties involved in the diplomatic effort, Arafat never mentioned the national authority scheme in his UN address, talking instead in vague and general terms of a future Palestinian return to the homeland. At that session, the PLO was accorded observer status at the UN, a major political victory and giant leap forward on the path to diplomatic negotiations.

Despite Syria’s wariness of Fateh and Asad’s dislike and distrust for Arafat, and despite its abhorrence at the extreme left positions of the PFLP, Syria was a major supporter of the PLO leadership against the charges of the rejectionists. It wanted the PLO to attend the post-October War peace conference, and had together with Egypt fought for Arab League recognition of the PLO’s status as the Palestinians’ sole legitimate representative. Syrian attitudes to the Palestine conflict were clearly reflected in the policy of Sa‘iqa. In this period, Sa‘iqa Secretary General Zuhayr Muhsin repeatedly and lucidly articulated the PLO leadership’s statist ambitions, arguing that the establishment of power structures in liberated areas were a fundamental prerequisite for the continued success of the Palestinian revolution. Syria’s support for this position—apart from Muhsin’s apparently significant policy input into PLO policy—was primarily predicated on its rivalry with Jordan, and it was loath to see King Hussein regain control over the West Bank. Pushing the PLO towards participation in a peace conference would ensure that that would not happen.

Iraqi Support for the RF

Within two weeks of leaving the Executive Committee, Habash had travelled to Baghdad together with Jibril, PPSF’s Ghosheh and ALF’s ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Kayyali, plus a delegation of senior cadres. In a joint communiqué, the four groups and the National Command of the Iraqi Ba‘th Party stated that they

condemned the deviationist trends in the Palestinian arena aimed at enticing the Palestinians to participate in the liquidationist settlements. They agreed that these proposals must be opposed and

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26 For the full text of the speech, see Yehuda Lukacs (ed.), The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, pp. 317-33.
27 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 334.
combated and not be allowed to be pushed through. They also agreed that this requires the establishment, on a firm scientific basis, of a unified front comprising the sections of the resistance, all mass bodies and organizations and patriotic persons that reject surrenderist solutions.29

This was the formal birth of the RF, on 10 October, 1974, the purpose of which was “to undermine the evolving policy of the PLO.”30 The four factions in the RF found succour in Iraq’s confrontational and aggressive discourse, but just as the Syria-PLO alliance, this one too was a temporary expedient rather than a developing bond. Aside from the ALF’s organic linkage to Iraq, the RF’s relationship with Baghdad was rocky because it was utterly transparent to the factions that Iraq’s primary reason for backing the RF was to challenge Syria and Egypt, both of whom backed the PLO leadership. For the PFLP, ever entangled in political analyses of the present phase, objective political conditions and so forth, this presented an intellectual problem: Iraq was handing out funds and arms to the cause, but was essentially as bourgeois and non-progressive as Syria and Egypt. “We operated at that time on the principle that beggars can not be choosers,” one PFLP member later remarked.31

The relationship with Iraq was particularly troublesome for the PFLP-GC, however. The organization’s leadership harboured substantial loyalties towards Syria; Jibril had served in the Syrian army, it had received financial and material support from Damascus since inception and Asad personally had been supportive of the PFLP-GC’s non-ideological approach to combating Zionism. The PFLP-GC and Syria tended to function well together, even though their strategic visions for Palestine were far from compatible. These factors combined to make alignment with the Iraqi Ba’th unpleasant for Jibril and the PFLP-GC leadership.

As far as the model of patron-client relations outlined in chapter two goes—which argues that such relationships are ideally able to establish a common discursive universe—the Syria-PLO and Iraq-RF patron-client relationships were in some sense mismatches; alliances dictated solely by the

power political necessities of the present rather than long-term discursive and political compatibilities. This is clearly reflected in the PFLP-GC behaviour during the Lebanese civil war. The PFLP-GC leadership wanted to escape from the Iraqi orbit, and to realign itself with its erstwhile Syrian patron. Given prevalent sociocultural frames of reference, this required a positive challenge from Jibril, a political offering that would clearly demonstrate the PFLP-GC's continued bond to Syria. From the beginning of the war, in April 1975, the RF sided with the leftist Lebanese National Movement (LNM). Syria saw the radical stance of the LNM as threatening Lebanese stability, thereby jeopardizing what was a cornerstone of the Syrian national security doctrine. Ostensibly neutral, and initially deploying Sa'iqa as a peacekeeping force, Syria nevertheless sided with the Maronite forces against the LNM. While this further entrenched Syria's position as an enemy of the RF, the PFLP-GC openly supported the Syrian position, and even launched into several skirmishes and battles on the Syrian side, against its supposed LNM allies. The PFLP-GC had 'made good' and, politically speaking, had returned home.

**The Palestine Liberation Front**

One of Jibril's longstanding aids and one of the organization's more prominent military commanders, Muhammad Zaydan Abu Al-Abbas, was by the mid 1970s getting increasingly disturbed by what he saw as the PFLP-GC's continuing failure to formulate a solid ideological vision. The above-mentioned PFLP-GC attack on Kiryat Shmona in April 1974 had gained the organization prominence, and attracted scores of new recruits. This allowed the organization's leadership, which had remained in place with very few changes since 1959, to stave off and suppress burgeoning leftist within its ranks, a process that had begun already in the late 1960s. In September 1970 Jibril unilaterally dissolved the central committee, which preserved the structures of the organization but fuelled further leftist discontent. As in the ANM, leftist dissent came primarily from younger members who had joined the civilan organization after 1967, and from the well-educated cadres that

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31 PFLP-GC Central Committee member, interview with author, Damascus, June 2000.
manned the information bureau in Damascus.\textsuperscript{32} The arrival of 'Abd al-Fattah Ghanim and Tal'at Ya'qub in 1970, who had been inducted into the PFLP-GC central committee on their militant credentials, had strengthened the leftist trend. Jibril, with his primary support base in the might of the anti-leftist guerrilla cadres, suppressed the trend but was unable to root it out.

The PFLP-GC's official endorsement of Syrian support for the Maronites led Abu al-Abbas, Ghanim and Ya'qub to break off in May 1977, forming the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF). They brought with them roughly a quarter of the PFLP-GC's members and cadres, substantially weakening the mother organization. Jibril's prioritizing a militarily alignment with Syria, over and against the ideologically grounded interests of the LNM, was a decisive catalyst.\textsuperscript{33} Assuming the PFLP-GC's pre-1967 name, the breakaway faction wanted to show that they were guarding the original ethos of the organization.\textsuperscript{34} It was thus a highly militant group, but also one that placed an emphasis on formulation of, and adherence to, coherent left-wing ideology.

It was hypothesized at the time that Iraq had encouraged Abu al-Abbas to break away in order to punish Jibril for his pro-Syrian stance; it was also thought that Fateh, with which Abu al-Abbas had enjoyed good relations, was yet again trying to assert its hegemony by dividing its opponents.\textsuperscript{35} At any rate, the PLF immediately joined the PLO and also came to replace the PFLP-GC within the RF framework. The outraged PFLP-GC leadership, whose political clout and social status was thus weakened, immediately launched into a vicious feud with the PLF, with internecine violence soon becoming the order of the day. In August 1978, an entire eight-story apartment building in Beirut, which housed the PLF headquarters, was levelled in a massive bomb attack, killing just under 200 individuals. With that, even the warring factions themselves realized that things had gotten out of hand, and it was resolved by all factions that internal Palestinian quarrels should not be settled by force of arms.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{32} Yezid Sayigh, \textit{Armed Struggle and the Search for State}, p. 339.
\textsuperscript{33} Abu Nidal al-Ashgar, October 28, 1999.
\textsuperscript{34} Abu Nidal al-Ashqar, October 28, 1999.
\textsuperscript{36} Helena Cobban, \textit{The Palestinian Liberation Organisation}, p. 162.
The End of the Rejection Front: Saved by the Bell

The announcement of the Camp David accord in September 1978 is said to have sounded the death-knell for the RF\(^{37}\), but its final phase had begun a little less than a year previously. In November 1977, Sadat had travelled to Jerusalem in his efforts to make peace with Israel and regain occupied Egyptian land; in so doing he managed to completely reshuffle the political deck of the Middle East and, \textit{inter alia}, render the RF redundant.

On several levels, things were going badly for the RF. Iraq was resolving its differences with the 'reactionary' Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates, which threatened to deprive the RF of much needed state support. At the 13\textsuperscript{th} PNC, convened in Cairo in March 1977, the PLO leadership had been able to resolve the ten-point-program debate in its favour. The RF, severely weakened by the war in Lebanon, and by the fact that that war had made a Palestinian entity an attractive prospect—managed to collect only thirteen votes against the 194 that voted in favour of Fateh's formula. The RF delegates themselves boycotted the meeting and, thus, could not vote against.\(^{38}\) On March 16, US President Carter issued a call for an inclusive Geneva conference, and for a short period the PLO's participation appeared a foregone conclusion.

Syria, Algeria, South Yemen, Libya and the PLO came together in the Steadfastness Front, initiated in early December 1977 in Tripoli as a response to Sadat's visit to Jerusalem. Apart from the closing statement that, among other things, denounced Sadat as a traitor, there was also a "Unity Statement," signed by both the PLO and the various individual factions.\(^{39}\) This statement contained a blanket rejection of UNSCR 242 and 338 and the Geneva conference, and reiterated that there could be no peace, no recognition and no negotiation with the Zionist enemy. It was a major setback to the PLO leadership's pursuit of the Geneva conference formula. Both Fateh and the PLO were compelled to sign the document, although Arafat delegated the odious task to Khalaf (for Fateh) and Hamid Abu Sitta (for PLO), thus not associating himself personally with its contents. The RF factions now claimed to have been vindicated. The document, and the fact

\(^{37}\) See, for instance, ibid., p. 151.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., p. 150.
that it was signed by the PLO as well as its main state patrons, Syria and Libya, was such good news that the PFLP announced that it would be ending its three-year boycott of the PLO Executive Committee and Central Council. The RF anti-Geneva effort had, if not met with success, at least not been defeated.

The DFLP (the PDFLP had dropped the word ‘Popular’ from its name in 1975) was also becoming openly critical of what it saw as the Fateh dominated PLO leadership’s pandering to US wishes, and sided openly with the rejectionists in May 1978. On May 24, the DFLP and the RF factions signed a joint memorandum roundly condemning the PLO leadership on a number of issues, including its lack of resoluteness vis-à-vis US machinations and failure to take the Steadfastness Front and the Unity Statement seriously.40 The latter point was also steering the PLO leadership towards confrontation with Syria. While Sadat’s visit was considered a political disaster, it strengthened the RF’s position and afforded it the opportunity to move closer to Syria and Libya, thus offsetting the imminent loss of Iraqi support.

After Sadat’s advance towards Israel, the RF accused PLO leadership of trying to use the Egypt-Israel rapprochement for its own diplomatic gains, but it soon became evident that Sadat had no intention of including the Palestinians at all. Thus, the threat of a peace conference à la Geneva, based on UNSCR 242, was averted and with it the rationale for the RF. Immediately following news of Camp David, the PLO executive Committee convened to consider the PLO’s response to these developments. For the first time since 1974, the PFLP attended. In October, the rejectionist members of the PLO Central Council—who had never formally resigned yet not attended for four years—participated in that body’s meeting in Damascus to endorse a proposal to amend the 13th PNC’s program. These amendments made the call for a Palestinian state unconditional, that is, not tied to any other political or tactical considerations. The rejectionists approved this prescription.

40 Ibid., p. 433.
Conclusion: Focused Rejection and Self-Esteem

Generally seen as an ignominious step down, the dissolution of the RF and the factions' re-entry into the PLO mainstream was in fact a success. As this thesis has argued, the RF was set up specifically to respond to the PLO leadership's deceit in using the ten-point program to insert the organization into the Geneva format against its explicit promises. Thus challenged, the rejectionist factions set up their alliance in order to thwart that particular transgression. The fact that they had signed the ten-point program in itself serves as evidence that they did not oppose diplomatic instruments as such, only those instruments that they perceived would defeat the point of the national liberation effort. In the heat of the challenge-response game, and through the dynamics of intergroup alignment and radical state sponsorship, the rejectionists' rhetorical devices came to incorporate wholesale condemnation of any and all negotiations with the enemy, although this was not the actual standpoint on which the RF was predicated. These were nevertheless rhetorical devices deemed necessary in order to isolate the 'righteous remnant' from the policies of the 'capitulationist transgressor,' comprehensively challenging the PLO leadership's diplomatic aspirations. Once Camp David superseded the Geneva formula, the rejectionists returned to the PLO fold and approved a range of diplomatic efforts, including the unconditional demand for a Palestinian state. "The national cause suffered from [Camp David, but] we... had accomplished our main task and could fully join the [institutions of] the PLO again."41

THE INTIFADA WITHIN FATEH AND THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL SALVATION FRONT: STEADFASTNESS, HONOUR AND SYRIAN PATRONAGE

By early 1981, the Palestinian national movement found itself in a complex situation of contrasting strengths and weaknesses. While the Camp David accords had been a harsh diplomatic setback for the PLO leadership, the total factional unanimity in rejecting it had consolidated the structures of the organization. It had also gained it renewed support inside the occupied territories.42 The PLO had also gained some strength vis-à-vis a chronically

41 PFLP-GC Central Committee member, interview with author, Damascus, November 2000.
divided and fragile-looking Arab League (AL), whose pitiful state meant that the Arabs were unlikely to be able to negotiate a deal with Israel that would satisfy Palestinian demands. This also gave the PLO room for inter-Arab manoeuvring.

By the time of the emergence of the next rejectionist coalition in 1985, the Palestinian arena had evolved considerably, as had the regional political environment. Camp David had stirred everything up and the region's power relationships and alignments were very different from 1978. In the early 1980s, three interconnected, major political-strategic developments contributed to changing the trajectory of Palestinian politics: Israel's invasion of Lebanon, the Reagan Plan and the split within Fateh. Each of these pushed the various components of the PLO further apart on the political and strategic level, eventually issuing in the rejectionist Palestinian National Salvation Front (PNSF). The argument presented here, however, is that the most significant rejectionist effort of the period was the 1983 split within Fateh. At its core to this day, Fateh-Intifada—the group that emerged as a result of the uprising within Fateh—is institutionalized rejectionism; its genesis was a model of social identity concerns at work.

Originally, the rebellion was a sign of internal dissent as Fateh's military cadres were concerned that their social status was being adversely affected by Arafat's diplomatic manoeuvres; manoeuvres that the Fateh officers at any rate thought contrary to the goals of the movement. The split was encouraged by other factions that shared the rebels' concerns. They, in turn, were encouraged by the rebellion to violently confront what they saw as Arafat's renewed liquidationism. Because the Fateh dissidents' maintenance of a distinct group identity required them to adopt positions in contradistinction to those of Arafat, and because Arafat was firmly set on the path of diplomacy from the early 1980's onwards, their emphasis on armed struggle ossified, turned into a constant from which they could not extricate themselves even if they wanted to. The Intifada within Fateh had serious political repercussions within the whole of the Palestinian arena, one of which was to give rejectionism a lasting 'discursive home' in Syria, where it has remained to this day.
Operation ‘Peace for Galilee’

The subterfuge that the Israeli government had used to justify its invasion was retaliation for the assassination attempt on its ambassador in London, on June 3, 1982. The attack was carried out by Abu Nidal’s FRC, which was not PLO affiliated, but on June 4 Israeli bombers attacked refugee camps and other targets in Beirut, as well as Palestinian and Lebanese targets in the south. Palestinian artillery responded by shelling targets inside Israel for the first time following a ten-month cease-fire. Two days later the full force of the IDF was brought to bear in Lebanon.

When the Israeli army launched its massive invasion of Lebanon on June 6, the general battle plan had apparently been ready for over a year. Deploying in total 75,000 to 78,000 troops, the Israeli tactics hinged on a sophisticated coordination of air, naval and ground forces. Progressively seizing strategic points northwards towards Beirut, the Israelis were able to link up with the Phalangist-dominated Christian militias within the Lebanese Forces (LF) that had been their local allies since 1976, on June 14. The Palestinians, who fought alongside the Lebanese resistance within the framework of the so-called Joint Forces (JF), were now trapped inside West Beirut. On a strategic level, the Palestinian response was by and large unsuited for the Israeli tactics. The guerrillas were unable to engage in guerrilla warfare, and found themselves defending a static frontline around the perimeter of Beirut.

The IDF found Beirut a tough nut to crack, and it was clear to the Israeli leadership that the city would not be taken without heavy Israeli losses. Given the balance of forces, the guerrillas did not do badly in the task that had been thrust upon them. Importantly, however, there were fierce recriminations about the performance of two of the key commanders in the south—al-Hajj Isma’il and Abu Hajim, who had abandoned their command posts as the Israelis advanced. Many within the PLO, in particular some of their fellow Fateh officers and the PFLP-GC, believed that this had contributed to the speed with which Israel was able to advance toward Beirut; this was to become a catalytic issue in the split that was to break up Fateh.
On June 8, US veteran mediator Philip Habib returned to the region to try to ameliorate the situation. Suspicious of the US-Israeli relationship, the Palestinians refused to deal with him directly. Instead, they relayed messages to him via Lebanese Premier Shafiq al-Wazzan, who took the message to President Sarkis, who in turn informed Habib, who then relayed the Palestinian position to Israel. 44

Israeli Defence Minister Ariel Sharon proceeded to demand the PLO's unconditional and unarmed evacuation, which was rejected by the Palestinians, who saw this as amounting to unconditional surrender. Being, in every political and military sense of the word, the underdog, the PLO leaders managed to get only their absolute minimum demand satisfied. Yet, they tried to save Palestinian gains and face by an exhibition of audacious and dogged negotiations. Their first demand was to evacuate the city only if there was a disengagement of forces through a balanced troop withdrawal by both sides, When Israel refused, they demanded to be allowed transfer to another part of Lebanon. This was also refused. The PLO then tried to get recognition of the Palestinians' right to self-determination through the UN, as that would be considered "an appropriate political gain from the Battle of Beirut, worth our leaving Beirut for." 45 The US vetoed the proposal. The Israelis also refused a subsequent demand for an overland evacuation of PLO forces to Syria. The PLO then offered to leave Lebanon, but only if it would be allowed to retain there its political offices and a symbolic brigade of the PLA. That too was refused. Arafat's final demand—not subject for negotiation—was that the Palestinian forces would leave without any conditions, provided that an "American-international guarantee for the security of the civilians in Beirut" was issued. 46 This guarantee was issued in a document, subsequently published by the US State Department, which set the parameters for the evacuation and the deployment of the multi-national force under whose auspices the evacuation would take place. The document stated:

43 For details of the invasion, see Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, pp. 522-37.
44 Helena Cobban, The Palestinian Liberation Organisation, p. 122
45 Anonymous Palestinian source, quoted in ibid., p. 123.
46 Ibid.
Law-abiding Palestinian noncombatants left behind in Beirut, including the families of those who have departed, will be subject to Lebanese laws and regulations. The Government of Lebanon and the United States will provide appropriate guarantees of safety in the following ways.

The Lebanese Government will provide its guarantees on the basis of having secured assurances from armed groups with which it has been in touch.

The United States will provide its guarantees on the basis of assurances received from the Government of Israel and from the leadership of certain Lebanese groups with which it has been in touch.\textsuperscript{47}

The decision to finally evacuate was confirmed by Arafat on August 15, after a decision taken by the ‘unified leadership,’ that is, the PLO Executive Committee plus all fasa'îl general secretaries that had remained in Beirut (which was all of them, apart from ALF and Sa'iqa, although the latter was represented by a second-level cadre).\textsuperscript{48} The first contingent of PLO fighters set sail for Cyprus on August 21, 1982, each fighter still carrying his personal arms as a sign that the evacuation was not equal to surrender. On August 30, the PLO chairman himself left and ‘the Beirut era’ had come to an end.

The worst was yet to come, however. A little more than two weeks later, on September 15, Israeli tanks surrounded Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. The following day, the LF entered the camps with Israeli logistic and intelligence support. Ostensibly to root out terrorists, the LF went on to kill some 3,000 civilians in the next 42 hours while the Israeli troops, whose commanders were fully aware of what was going on inside, were under strict orders not to intervene. Israel’s Defence Minister Ariel Sharon was subsequently found to bear “personal responsibility” for the massacre by an independent Israeli fact finding commission, as was Chief of Staff Lt. General Rafael Eitan.\textsuperscript{49} The effect of the massacres on the evacuated PLO fighters and leaders was traumatic. They had expected violence and vengeance from the


Israelis and their allies upon their entering Beirut\textsuperscript{50}, for which reason they had demanded that guarantees be given to prevent this. The US, however, had withdrawn its peacekeeping contingent on September 10, satisfied that the evacuation was successfully completed, which prompted the Italian, British and French contingent to withdraw shortly thereafter, on September 14.\textsuperscript{51} This left the remaining Palestinian civilians at the mercy of their enemies. Throughout the ranks of the PLO, the atrocities bred further despair, as well as entrenched pre-existing hatred for Israel and utter distrust for the US.

**The Reagan Plan**

While the PLO leadership was still at sea, on September 1, US President Reagan unveiled a comprehensive peace plan for the Middle East. This was the first overall Middle East peace proposal that the US had backed since Camp David. The Reagan Plan did not call for a complete Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967, although it urged further substantial withdrawals. It ruled out the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, but called for the establishment of a Palestinian entity in some form of confederation with Jordan. As a sign of good faith, Reagan appealed to the Israeli government to halt the establishment of further settlements in the occupied territories.\textsuperscript{52}

Although it offered nothing to the Palestinians, Farouq Qaddoumi remarked on September 2 that the Reagan plan contained “positive elements” and, the following day, Arafat stated that “We do not reject Reagan’s proposals, nor do we criticize them; but we are studying them.”\textsuperscript{53} Not only did this response reflect the PLO’s greatly reduced bargaining power, but also, apparently, its intention to secure Arab support for a counter proposal. A PLO Executive Committee meeting, held immediately upon arrival in Tunis, gave Arafat what one participant has described as a “carte blanche” on policy formulation.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} Former PFLP-GC field officer, interview with author, Beirut, October 2000
\textsuperscript{51} Ye'zid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 538.
\textsuperscript{52} For the full text of the plan, see ‘U.S. President Ronald Reagan: The Reagan Plan, September 1, 1982.’ in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin (eds.), The Israel-Arab Reader, pp. 257-63.
\textsuperscript{53} Quoted in Helena Cobban, The Palestinian Liberation Organisation, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
hammered out at the imminent Arab summit in Fez, due to open on September 7.

The Fez summit was convened to debate a modified version of the so-called Fahd plan. On August 7, 1981, Saudi Crown Prince Fahd had announced a peace plan to be sponsored by the Kingdom. The original plan contained eight points, which included a call for Israeli withdrawal from all Arab lands occupied in 1967; the dismantling of post-1967 settlements in occupied territories; an affirmation of the Palestinians’ right to return or compensation; the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza; and—controversially—“that all states in the region should be able to live in peace,” a thinly veiled recognition of Israel.

The proposal caused a stir and the original summit, held in Fez on November 25, had been adjourned and was now being reconvened. This time Fahd’s plan had been amended to contain specific reference to “the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to exercise their firm and inalienable national rights, under the leadership of the PLO, its sole legitimate representative...” In a reshuffling of the controversial clause seven, it now read “The drawing up by the Security Council of guarantees for peace for all the states of the region including the independent Palestinian state.” Arafat argued that this formulation made peace in the region contingent upon the establishment of a Palestinian state; its obvious corollary was that the PLO was willing to recognize Israel and negotiate on the basis on UNSCR 242.

Originally rejected by both the PLO and Syria, the Fahd plan—which from then on became known as the Fez plan—was this time adopted by a consensus of all those attending the meeting, which included every Arab state except Libya. Hafez al-Asad, however, approved the statement with considerable reluctance. While Syria had in effect recognized Israel already in 1967, its worry was now that the Arabs were giving away an important bargaining lever ahead of negotiations. Also, Asad’s longstanding distrust for Arafat, and sound political instinct, set off alarm bells when it emerged that

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55 For the full text of the original proposal, see Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin (eds.), The Israel-Arab Reader, pp. 234-5.

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the latter was extremely eager to keep channels of dialogue open with the US.57 This troubled Damascus, which began to emphasize that it dealt with the PLO as a political entity, not with its chairman.58

The PLO leadership’s eagerness to accommodate the US and recognize Israel without a prior sign of good intent from either also aroused worries within the ranks of the PLO. Parallels between the emerging situation and the events surrounding the leadership’s willingness to attend the Geneva conference were already being discussed in opposition circles.59 It was clear that they saw the leadership’s position as a possible indicator of a dangerous sell-out ahead.

There was also deep-rooted hostility among the various factions towards the Reagan administration. Ronald Reagan—before and since taking office—had repeatedly described the PLO as simply a terrorist organization, often referring to its supposed role within a Soviet-sponsored international terrorist network.60 Once president, he had added further preconditions for the opening of a US-PLO dialogue to the single condition of President Carter, that the PLO recognize of UNSCR 242. Reagan demanded that the PLO also renounce ‘terrorism’ and that it explicitly recognize Israel’s right to exist. The White House was subsequently forced to moderate its position after complaints from moderate Arab governments, and he effectively retreated to Carter’s position. Even so, in Reagan’s announcement of his plan for the region in September 1982 he made his base line abundantly clear: “I have personally followed and supported Israel’s heroic struggle for survival ever since the founding of the State of Israel 34 years ago... America’s commitment to the security of Israel is ironclad. And, I might add, so is mine.”61

Syria and a growing number of PLO opposition figures were thus developing similar concerns, albeit for different reasons. On Asad’s

58 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 552
60 This belief found intellectual support in the work of academic Claire Sterling, The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981). While the books conspiratorial view of essentially all ‘terrorism’ as instigated or sponsored by the USSR has been thoroughly discredited by more recent historical research, it served as a foundation for the Reagan administration’s approach to a number of national liberation movements, including the PLO.
61 Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin (eds.), The Israel-Arab Reader, pp. 660, 662
invitation, several opposition leaders attending the Fez conference accompanied him to Damascus, where the PFLP and PFLP-GC delegates, Ahmad al-Yamani and Talal Naji, signed a joint statement with the dissident Fateh central committee member Nimr Saleh, condemning article seven of the Fez statement.

The Dialogue with Jordan

A further concern for both the Syrians and the PLO opposition was Arafat’s revival of dialogue with Jordan. The Reagan plan caused these concerns to gain some level of acuteness. Immediately upon Arafat’s arrival in Athens, after being evacuated from Beirut, King Hussein sent envoys to offer renewed diplomatic coordination between the PLO and Jordan. On September 14, the king officially offered support for the Reagan plan and within the next few days stated that the dialogue with the PLO would resume “with the aim of formulating a confederal union between the Palestinian and Jordanian entities.”62 Arafat and King Hussein discussed these proposals in ‘Amman in early October, and agreed to form a joint committee to prepare a diplomatic strategy. During these talks, Arafat presented a peace plan that suggested negotiations for a Jordanian-Palestinian union, without making the venture conditional upon prior Palestinian independence.63 Fateh’s Revolutionary Council approved the principle of confederation with Jordan in Tunis on November 9.64 In order to facilitate its diplomatic initiative, the PLO leadership needed the good offices of Egypt, and renewed talks with the Egyptian government in early November. On November 21, a PLO delegation visited Cairo openly for the first time in five years.

Arafat was given ample warning by the PLO opposition that he was pursuing a dangerous political line. The PFLP argued that the proposal for a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation was intended to “eliminate the PLO and the Palestine cause... and to destroy national unity within the PLO and create tension between it and Syria.”65 The DFLP lambasted the proposal as a

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62 Al-Safir, September 26, 1982; as quoted in Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 552.
63 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 553.
64 Ibid.
65 Al-Thawra Mustamirra, October 16, 1982; quoted in ibid., p. 553.
revival, in a new guise, of the 1972 United Arab Kingdom proposal, while the PFLP-GC warned that giving Jordan a mandate to speak on the PLO’s behalf would be a “brazen concession of legitimacy.” Arafat’s dialogue with Egypt, which clung to its separate peace with Israel, further polarized positions and hardened attitudes.

Throughout all of this, Syria was waging an ever-less discreet battle against the PLO leadership. It argued that the Jordanian-Palestinian confederation concept violated the 1974 Arab recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Syrian media launched a sustained attack against the concept, and stepped up contact with the PLO opposition. Asad was seen repeatedly on Syrian television together with Nimr Saleh, whose increasingly vitriolic attacks on Arafat from his Damascus base were soon being issued in unison with the PLO opposition factions. In addition, Syria invited the FRC to set up an office in Damascus, in a clear demonstration of contempt for the PLO leadership. This move troubled the PLO opposition, however, which strongly disapproved of Abu Nidal and his group; throughout the three years that the FRC was represented in Damascus, the other factions refused to undertake joint operations with it. The rationale for inviting the FRC was, apparently, Syrian knowledge that while it could coordinate political and military positions with those PLO factions close to it, it would not be able to use any of them as ‘guns for hire.’ For such tasks, which were to include the assassination of ‘Issam al-Sartawi in April 1984, Syria needed the FRC.

The PLO leadership finally published its four-point agreement with Jordan on December 26, essentially based on the final statement of the Fez summit. It revealed that the PLO had opted for “integral coordination” with Jordan, going so far as to form a single delegation to any prospective peace process. The meaning of this was lost neither on Syria, nor on the PLO opposition: Arafat had secretly joined the peace process under US auspices, once again working by deception to circumvent a lack of consensus.

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66 Al-Safer, October 17, 1982; quoted in ibid., p. 553.
67 Muhammad ‘Issa Abu Khalil, Damascus, July 28, 2001. It should be noted, however, during the armed confrontations surrounding the 1983 split within Fateh, the FRC, PFLP-GC, PPSF and Sa’iqa coordinated field activities in support of Abu Musa.
Arafat was now drawing fire from the PLO opposition, Nimr Saleh's circle of Fateh dissidents, Syria and Libya. Colonel Qadhafi invited the general secretaries of all the major opposition factions to Tripoli in mid-January 1983, where a senior Libyan official suggested that they set up an alternative PLO, funded and supported by Tripoli. None of the factions were interested in the deal, wishing instead to offset Arafat's manoeuvres from within the PLO. Similar to the view that preceded the establishment of the RF in 1973, the PFLP in particular was keen to remain as a positive force inside the PLO, for as long as this was conscionable. As one opposition cadre would later remark: "The best way to stand up for the dignity of [Palestinian] politics was to dislodge defeatism [from the PLO], not ourselves." Even so, the Tripoli meeting issued a declaration, on January 17, that rejected the Reagan plan, the Fez declaration, joint diplomacy with Jordan and relations with Egypt. "The signatories concluded with the 'three noes' pronounced by the Arab summit conference of August 1967: no peace, no recognition, and no negotiation with Israel." Rejectionism as a collective political strategy was back in the national movement.

The Rebellion Begins

On January 21, 1983 Syria repealed its approval of the Fez declaration, and proceeded to step up contacts with the Palestinian opposition, especially the dissidents within Fateh. Nimr Saleh was still the most prominent of these, but Sa'id Maragha Abu Musa and Abu Khalid al-'Amleh, two senior military cadres stationed in the Biq'a' Valley, were quickly rising to prominence. During meetings in Damascus between Fateh dissidents and other factions, Sa'iqa, PFLP-GC and PPSF helped draft a memorandum that Abu Musa would present at a meeting of Fateh's Revolutionary Council in Aden, January 25 to 27. Wanting to encourage the militant trend within Fateh represented by Nimr Saleh, the opposition also wanted to make sure that their views were compatible. Abu Musa's eventual list of accusations against the Fateh central committee was extensive indeed. It had, he said, neglected the common soldiery since the evacuation from Beirut; failed to return forces

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69 Retired Fateh-Intifada officer. interview with author, Beirut, October 2000
70 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 556.
to positions in the Biq’a Valley, which could have been facilitated by Syria; disregarded requirements to meet regularly and take decisions by collective agreement; spread lies about how the PLO had fought alone in Beirut, intended to encourage defeatist attitudes among the masses in order to pave way for an end to armed struggle; and accepted the Fez declaration, which threatened to end the state of war with Israel and thus destroy the PLO’s raison d’être.71

This last remark was of key importance as it sought to emphasise the notion of Fateh and the PLO as the guardians of Palestine’s future through armed struggle; after years of using armed struggle primarily for combat purposes, Abu Musa now reminded the Fateh Revolutionary Council—in coordination with the opposition factions—that armed struggle was more than just military schemes, it was the very foundation of the PLO. Any recognition of, or dialogue with Israel was therefore unacceptable, as was empowering Jordan to negotiate on the Palestinians’ behalf, and renewing relations with Egypt. Abu Musa urged Fateh to regenerate its old alliance with Syria and the USSR.

As the sixteenth PNC met in mid-February 1983, delegates’ views as to the PLO’s military and political options were wildly divergent and the atmosphere was antagonistic.72 Arafat managed to get the council’s support for the Fez declaration, but it ultimately refused to approve the Reagan plan.73 Arafat felt emboldened enough to call for direct dialogue with the US in early March. In direct violation of the decisions of the sixteenth PNC, Fateh’s Executive Committee released a working document, suggesting that a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation be set up containing no official PLO members, negotiating on the basis of the Fez declaration, UNSCR 242 and “the principles of the Reagan initiative.”74 The Fateh central committee rejected this proposal. The Jordanian government, feeling snubbed, declared that its dialogue with the PLO had come to an end. The Fateh dissidents

71 Ibid., p. 556.
73 For the full text of the final statement, see Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin (eds.), The Israel-Arab Reader, pp. 277-80.
74 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, pp. 557-8.
considered this a vindication of their position, and the PLO opposition was relieved.

The Fateh dissidents had already, quietly, commenced their rebellion and the failure of the leadership's dialogue with Jordan reinforced their sense of mission, rather than placating them. After its failure to influence the sixteenth PNC, the dissident trend had decided that a more radical approach was needed. The hard core of the rebels were the military men, Abu Musa, Abu Khalid and their circle of officers, many formerly of the Jordanian army. These men were able to feel neither respect nor trust for the Fateh leadership, especially after the reinstatement and promotion of al-Hajj Isma'il and Abu Hajim, whose flight from the southern frontline during Israel's invasion the previous year was thought to have facilitated the Israeli advance on Beirut.

Although engineered by senior and middle-ranking officers, the Fateh rebellion was based on widespread frustration and bitterness among the rank-and-file soldiery, particularly those in eastern Lebanon and Syria. Not only were they under heavy restrictions and confined to quarters by the authorities, but they were also feeling neglected by the exiled leadership. The atrocities in Sabra and Shatila fuelled, among other things, resentment of the US whose guarantees had proved worthless; when Arafat revived the Fez declaration and showed interest in the Reagan plan, this added insult to injury. Other groups within Fateh besides the military men rumbled. The heads of Fateh's Gaza and Nablus committees joined in issuing a memorandum, criticizing the leadership for its disregard for the Arab dimension and lack of focus on national unity. They also criticized the leadership's autocratic domination of decision making in political, military and financial affairs.75 Senior leftist cadres complained that the leadership had precipitated ethical, moral and military decline within its armed forces by replacing the evacuated guerrillas with mercenaries, mainly Bangladeshis.76 The transfer of specialized personnel to camps in other Arab states weakened the few effective armed units in Lebanon that were still

75 Ibid., p. 559.
76 Ibid.
operational. This was seen as a deliberate attempt to weaken the military organizations. One senior Fateh dissident later maintained:

The leadership at the time...planned to remove all the fighters and strugglers from the Lebanese arena in order to more easily be able to abandon its stated aims, including armed struggle. [The transfers were] part of the leadership's reconciliation of differences with the Zionist enemy.77

Fateh-The Uprising

In March 1983, Abu Musa set up headquarters at Hammara in the Biq'a Valley, from which he coordinated contacts with sympathetic officers in various units, as well as continued his lobbying of the rank-and-file. The Syrian army facilitated his activities by allowing the free movement of personnel carrying passes signed by him. The Syrians' political and logistic support, in their own subsequent estimation, was a crucial catalyst for the rebellion.78 Libya also contributed, pledging $5 million in monthly assistance to the dissidents after having been introduced to them by Jibril.79 Meanwhile, cadres Nimr Saleh and Hashim 'Ali Muhsin provided the intellectual and ideological content of the rebellion, later joined by Elyas Shufani.

In early May, Abu Musa, Abu Khalid, Abu Saleh and Abu Kwayk reached an agreement with the political and military leaderships of the PFLP-GC, PPSF and Sa'îqa to "correct the path of the revolution."80 In order to do this they set up a joint military command and three military sectors in Lebanon, each led by a dissident Fateh officer and representatives of the other factions.81 Arafat got wind of the plans and flew to Damascus in order to convene the military council and stave off the rebellion. He assigned al-Hajj Isma'il and Ghazi 'Atallah as PLO force commanders in northern Lebanon and the Biq'a Valley, and ordered the transfer of a total of forty dissident officers, including Abu Musa and Abu Khalid, to Tunis and military camps in other Arab countries. The following day Syrian military intelligence

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77 Muhammad 'Adili al-Khatib Abu Fakhr, October 30, 1999.
79 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 561.
80 Mahmud Hamdan: as quoted in ibid., p. 561.
81 Ibid., p. 561.
delivered sixty tons of confiscated PLO arms to the rebels at the Masna' border crossing, and on May 9, Abu Musa seized the command posts of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Yarmuk Forces, declaring the start of a “corrective movement in Fateh.”

To connect the epithet ‘intifada’ to the name of the movement is a kind of differentiation between two sets of opinions within the Palestinian arena... The revolutionary movement within Fateh came about in May 1983. The leadership abandoned its aims and has also abandoned altogether the role of armed struggle, and went onto the path of reconciliation of differences with the enemy. We believe that the aim of this was to liquidate the Palestinian cause and to simply recognize the existence of the Zionist entity on Palestinian land... The motive behind the intifada of the year 1983 was to protect the Palestinian revolution, the continuation of armed struggle [in order to] confront the Zionist enemy that overtook Lebanon; the reorganization and reshaping of the Palestinian Liberation Organization; and the continuation of struggle and conflict with the enemy until we achieve the objectives of our people as far as issues of liberation and return to our home are concerned.

As the Fateh dissidents were forced to formulate coherent political and military positions, it became clear that the primary catalyst for the rebellion was their fear that the military forces were being ignored and abandoned in order to facilitate the leadership’s diplomatic manoeuvres. At the time, not even Abu Musa was entirely opposed to the use of diplomatic instruments to regain occupied land, but refused to accept the notion that diplomacy could be successful without the backing of force. As one dissident veteran would later remark: “The negotiations after [the Battle of] Beirut lacked military [backing, and] got us nothing. Was it not the immediate lesson, that without armed struggle we cannot even negotiate?” Abu Musa and his comrades also abhorred the denigration of the military as a means of levelling the road towards diplomacy. Accommodation with the enemy was taking place at the cost of the military, which had always been “the national movement’s most indispensable part, its core.” In fact, a profound sense of deprivation of social status had catalysed the rebellion. Routed by the Israelis and suffering

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82 Ibid., p. 562.
84 Retired Fateh-Intifada officer, interview with author, Beirut, October 2000.
intense post-war fragmentation and self-doubt, the military leadership in Lebanon now saw their traditional prominence within the organization threatened. Their political legitimacy had been based on their military might, which was now being undermined. In order to shore up their own social status and the positive social identity of their men, the military forces needed to be restored to organizational prominence.

In a statement on May 13, 1983 the dissidents made clear that they believed that it was they themselves that were fending off a hostile onslaught. Arafat’s recent transfer order for forty officers and several units from Lebanon, in conjunction with senior commissions being given to officers that were “deviationist, defeated and wanted for trial” constituted a “military and organizational coup in Fateh.” The purpose of this coup was to facilitate “the US settlement.” Later it was pointed out that “our principal enemy is the US, our immediate enemy is Israel, and our immediate foe is Arafat.” The dissidents demanded that the transfer order be rescinded and that ‘Atallah and al-Hajj Isma’il be dismissed and court-martialed.

In an interview on May 26, Abu Musa again made clear that his was not opposition to diplomacy per se, but to diplomacy without military force to back it up. Speaking about the rebellions’ rationale, he said

Fateh’s leadership knows that the Palestinian cause is not an issue of an officer or a group of officers, or an issue of a military group of elements in the arena of conflict in al-Biq’a’ rebelling against military orders. Ours is a cry for correcting a mistaken political action that had begun to develop and emerge more clearly following our departure form Beirut. Frankly, there is a political conflict within Fateh that has been going on for years...

Following the battle of Beirut, we should have... submitted a struggle plan that commits the Palestinian revolution to confront the U.S. plan on Lebanon’s territory by virtue of the fact of the existing occupation and as a field of struggle through alliance with the nationalist movement... However, the leadership went to Fez, and we consider that the Fez plan is actually Fahd’s plan which stems from Camp David and from UN Resolution 242, despite the inclusion of certain

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88 Dissident cadre quoted in Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 566.
points which at first glance appear positive... But we wonder who is capable of translating [into reality] this program or that plan. Are Arab summits capable of doing such a thing?

And I answer: No, because from our experience in Lebanon no one moved to provide Beirut's children with a single drink of water. We realize that the establishment of the Palestinian state and the return of the refugees is an issue that requires several wars. When the United States and Israel feel that their interests in the region are threatened, it is only at that moment that our voice as a Palestinian revolution will be heard. Then the Arab countries can impose their plans...

We are an indivisible part of Fateh. We are the conscience of Fateh who have raised their voice and thought aloud, and express the broad faithful base... Therefore it is necessary to stop and examine what we have achieved. What has this revolution achieved? ... What should I say to my father who fought in 1936 before the occupation of Palestine and the establishment of the Israeli state? What should I say to those who fought during these years in order to prevent the establishment of such a state? Are we fighting in order to recognize Israel? This is not reasonable...

Responding to attempts at mediation by other officers within Fateh, the rebels demanded the return of all PLO forces to Lebanon and the establishment of a supervisory committee to monitor and regulate Fateh's finances; the latter demand was issued partly in order to halt the carcinogenic corruption within the organization, partly to stop Arafat from using funds for his own neo-patrimonial purposes. They also demanded that a general conference be convened to resolve the present impasse. Fateh's central committee responded positively to these demands, although they refused to agree to the monitoring of finances. Taken aback by having most of their demands met, the rebels surmized that the central committee had rallied decisively around Arafat and that their response was a ploy. Libya and Syria encouraged Abu Musa to take a confrontational line vis-à-vis the Fateh leadership, while the latter continued to assert its impartiality. The rebels then demanded that an emergency leadership be set up within Fateh, dividing the revolutionary council between the two conflicting sides and

restructuring the central committee, until such a time that a general conference could be convened. Arafat’s counteroffer fell short of satisfying these demands.

In early June a handful of Fateh officers joined the rebel camp, but the rebellion was not gaining any particular momentum. The effort being a primarily military effort, civilian support for the dissidents was low. Publicly supported by PFLP-GC, PPSF, Sa’iqa and FRC, the PFLP and DFLP were more cautious.91 The PFLP was siding, in principle, with Abu Musa and held Arafat responsible for the troubles, while the DFLP was secretly but actively supporting Arafat’s forces.92 The PFLP was also keen that the national movement should forge closer links with Syria, for “both tactical and strategic reasons,” having identified Syria as the only Arab state capable of assisting the Palestinian endeavour.93 Yet both the DFLP and PFLP insisted that the dispute within Fateh be settled peacefully and without causing a rupture, and on June 26, they established a “Unified Command” in order to safeguard their neutrality vis-à-vis the rebellion and autonomous decision-making process vis-à-vis Syria.

Rejection Becomes Armed Struggle

On June 18 and 19, 1983 dissident forces attacked loyalist units near Ta’nayel and Ta’lbaya, backed by PFLP-GC armour. The following day, Syrian troops seized a Fateh training camp close to Damascus and shelled loyalist positions in the Biq’ā Valley. On June 22, Syrian armour forced loyalists to evacuate their positions at Majdal ‘Anjar. After an attempt on Arafat’s life on June 23, the Fateh leader, who was still in Damascus, accused Syria of having orchestrated the Fateh rebellion in order to bring the PLO to heel; Syria responded by expelling Arafat and declaring Khalil al-Wazir persona non grata.94 On June 27 and 28, the PFLP-GC, PPSF and Sa’iqa threw their military weight behind the rebellion, engaging loyalist units at Rawda and

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91 "Abu Nidal’s support was valuable, but caused plenty of resentment among all those who knew his reputation." Retired Fateh-Intifada officer, interview with author, Beirut, October 2000.
94 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 565.
Kfar Zabah, leaving some 50 casualties.\textsuperscript{95} Syrian commando units joined the effort to push the loyalists out of the Biq'a Valley. In spite of several goodwill gestures, which one Fateh dissident later referred to as “intended to lull the revolution into [contentment] with partial achievements,” the rebels renewed fighting on June 23, after a three-week truce.\textsuperscript{96} Although pressured by Arab states and the USSR to disengage, Syria made clear to a PLO Executive Committee delegation in early July that a Syrian resumption of dialogue with Fateh required the latter to accept the dissidents’ demands. In late July, Syria intervened militarily again, pushing the loyalist units out of Kfar Zabad and Jdita.

Israel’s announcement that it planned to withdraw its forces from the Shouf Mountains triggered fierce sectarian clashes between the various Lebanese actors for control of the soon to be evacuated area. All parties to the rapidly escalating Palestinian conflict saw political and military opportunities. The Fateh dissidents and the PLO opposition were openly satisfied with Syria’s position of strength, bordering on hegemony, in Lebanon. Syria’s position was facilitated by USSR support, prompting Abu Musa to remark that “the Soviets are here too, and it seems that many things have changed since last autumn. We are witnessing new realities. We can see now that the US role has become much less effective.”\textsuperscript{97} As Syria moved in to quell the unrest in Lebanon, the Fateh dissidents, PFLP-GC, Sa’îqa and the PPSF fielded forces in support of Syria, and Abu Saleh talked of a new “Soviet-Syrian-Palestinian alliance.”\textsuperscript{98}

The PLO leadership, meanwhile, perceived an opportunity to return to Lebanon and Beirut, and ordered its forces into battle. In mid-September Arafat surfaced in Tripoli to tour the refugee camps and drum up support for his leadership. His presence challenged Syrian plans for, and involvement in Palestinian affairs, the Syrian high command proceeded to order all loyalist forces down from the Matn Mountains on September 20; on September 23 it

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., p. 565.
\textsuperscript{96} Muhammad `Adili al-Khatib Abu Fakhr, October 30, 1999.
\textsuperscript{97} Interview with Abu Musa, published in al-Kifah al-'Arabi, May 30, 1983; as quoted in Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 567.
\textsuperscript{98} Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 568.
forced the last remaining loyalists to leave the Biq'a Valley. The retreating convoy reached Tripoli on September 28.

Meanwhile, the PLF had split again, this time into three factions. One faction, under Abu al-'Abbas, remained loyal to the PLO leadership; a second ultra-leftist faction under 'Abd al-Fattah Ghanim supported the Fateh dissidents; and a third faction under Tal'at Ya'qub aligned itself with the PFLP and DFLP, seeking to remain neutral. According to the official account of the PLF's present secretary general, who at the time belonged to Ya'qub's faction,

When the battles began in north Lebanon and Biq'a, we refused to participate and said we must have discussions to stop the war between Fateh and the other organizations. We resolved not to [side] with any participant in the Palestinian war. Abu Al-'Abbas chose to be with Arafat; he then left the Front... At the same time, 'Abd al-Fattah Ghanim chose to be with Fateh Abu Musa; then he also left our Front. Our Front continued its [refusal] to participate in a Palestinian war. We were under the leadership of Tal’at Ya’qub.99

Arafat's forces strengthened their positions in and around Tripoli, and the dissidents responded by seizing Fateh's facilities in Syria. They were helped by the Syrian government's decision, on October 5, to confiscate all Fateh property in the country. The rebels also seized several PLO offices, including the WAFA news agency office in central Damascus, which to this day serves as Fateh-Intifada's central information office. By October 11, the dissidents had taken control of every Fateh office in the country and set about to push the loyalists out of Lebanon also. As Arafat was strengthening positions inside the perimeters of Tripoli, Syrian armour was in close proximity to the city. By late October Tripoli's defenders, some 4,000 strong, were faced with nine PLA battalions numbering 4,000 men, some 500 Fateh dissidents, 400 PFLP-GC and Libyan troops and contingents from Sa'îqa and PPSF numbering some 100-200 men each.100 The ensuing battle along the front line, which spanned a semicircle from Nahr al-Barid refugee camp in the north, southwards to just the Baddawi refugee camps, was fierce and largely static. A ceasefire, the conditions of which were negotiated by Saudi Arabia,

was called on November 24. The terms of the agreement included evacuation of all Palestinian forces from Lebanon and initiation of dialogue between the guerrilla groups. Arafat accepted the terms immediately, but Jibril demanded that Arafat should be charged with deviation and tried by a revolutionary tribunal. After further negotiations, the first loyalists were evacuated from Tripoli on December 17; the UN Security Council had approved—anon December 3—a proposal to allow five ships provided by Saudi Arabia to transport the evacuees under the UN flag.\textsuperscript{101} In all, some 5,000 individuals shipped out in the following days, prisoners were exchanged with the Syrians and Fateh handed out the contents of its remaining arms caches to various sympathetic Lebanese forces, including Amal and Hizb'Allah. The Palestinian civil war precipitated by the rebellion in Fateh had cost 438 lives and 2,100 wounded.\textsuperscript{102}

**Arafat Strikes Back: The `Amman PNC**

On his way from Tripoli, Arafat stopped in Egypt for a meeting with President Husni Mubarak. Arafat suggested that the “imperatives of protocol” had dictated the meeting.\textsuperscript{103} Its actual purpose was long a subject of debate, not unnaturally affected by fierce partisanship. Those who condemned the meeting, including the PLO opposition and even sections of the Fateh central committee, saw it as a further step to replacing, rather than augmenting armed struggle with diplomatic approaches. Those who took a positive or neutral stance to the meeting argued, conversely, that it was intended to encourage Mubarak to abrogate Camp David and return to the Arab fold.\textsuperscript{104} The PFLP, DFLP and the ostensibly ‘independent’ Palestinian Communist Party (PCP) representatives in the PLO Executive Committee failed to persuade the committee to condemn the visit. Arafat continued full steam ahead to insert the PLO into a peace process. On April 24, 1984 Arafat reaffirmed the PLO’s willingness to negotiate directly with Israel, soon after

\textsuperscript{100} Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, p. 570.
\textsuperscript{101} Saad El-Shazly, *The Arab Military Option*, p. 165.
\textsuperscript{102} Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, p. 573.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p. 574.
\textsuperscript{104} Saad El-Shazly, *The Arab Military Option*, p. 165.
which he suggested that the PLO and Israel should recognize each other and hold peace talks under UN supervision.

While the Israeli government persistently rejected Arafat’s overtures, they thoroughly alarmed the PLO opposition. The course Arafat was chartering for the PLO was seen as “political suicide.” As Abu Musa pointed out, in the above quoted interview, it would require massive amounts of military force in order to get a favourable negotiating position, and the thoroughly ideologically minded Shamir government appeared even less amenable to dialogue than that of Begin. Having been evicted from Lebanon, his troops virtually ‘quarantined’ in camps throughout the Arab world, Arafat had no military option and no territorial base from which to construct one. Indeed, “his forces steadily dwindled, until he could not have exercised the military option even had he wished.” This fait accompli, the opposition had argued all along, had been Arafat’s master plan, who, indeed, seems to have believed that “the loss of the territorial base in Lebanon had freed the mainstream leadership to undertake controversial steps…”

Even so, in need of legitimizing his manoeuvres, Arafat decided to convene a PNC session. Fearing a raucous session, and concerned that not enough delegates would attend to make the session quorate, Arafat made reconciliatory moves to the opposition. He managed to strike a compromise deal with the PFLP, DFLP, PLF and PCP; these four had joined together in the so-called Democratic Alliance (DA) on March 27, 1984 intended to serve as a “front for militancy, [yet willing to engage in] dialogue.” While the DA refused to legitimize the PLO leadership’s unilateral political manoeuvres, and continued to reject contact with Egypt, the Reagan plan and the formation of a joint negotiation team with Jordan, it nevertheless believed that inter factional dialogue was still possible and that the upcoming PNC would be a suitable venue. Fateh, in return, recognized the PCP as a formal member of the PNC and approved PLO Executive Committee seats to the PPSF, PLF and PCP. The PPSF joined with the PFLP-GC, Sa’ïqa and the Fateh dissidents, however, refusing dialogue and criticizing the DA sharply

for approving the convening of the PNC before the PLO leadership had rehabilitated itself politically and organizationally. These four groups formed the National Alliance (NA) on July 9, to “coordinate moves against deviation.” The NA considered the upcoming PNC as an attempt to split the PLO, alternatively to “eradicate the opposition.” Accordingly, PNC speaker Khalid al-Fahum, who resided in Damascus and maintained close ties to both the opposition and the Syrian government, believed that the PNC should not convene until a format for solving outstanding differences had been determined. He thus refused to convene the council. The PFLP then responded favourably to lobbying by the NA factions, primarily the PFLP-GC and PPSF, and made its attendance at the PNC conditional upon “completing the national dialogue.”

Arafat overrode Fahum and convened the council in his capacity of Chairman. As the PNC opened in the Jordanian capital on November 22, it was attended by 257 accredited delegates, out of a total of 374, in spite of the fact that only three factions sent delegates: Fateh, Abu al-'Abbas' PLF faction—and ALF. The other five refused to attend, which meant that 168 delegates would be absent, 42 delegate short of achieving quorum. Prior to the meeting, however, Arafat had arranged to have 47 of the absent delegates formally expelled, which would enable the leadership to replace them with delegates loyal to the leadership. The opposition complained that Arafat's ploy was illegal, but being absent they could not press their case.

With a guaranteed majority for the leadership’s positions, the council proceeded to take momentous political and organizational decisions. Politically, the PNC called for “dialogue and coordination” with Jordan, and renewed its support for an eventual confederation between an independent Palestinian state and the kingdom. It praised Egyptian support for the PLO leadership during 1983 rebellion, and authorized renewal of bilateral relations between the PLO and Cairo. Moreover, the PNC endorsed a

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111 Ibid., Cf. Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 575.
113 Saad El-Shazly, The Arab Military Option, p. 168.
114 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 577.
diplomatic strategy based on “all UN resolutions relating to the Palestine question,” although it refrained from mentioning UNSCR 242 specifically.\textsuperscript{115} This was a major political victory for Arafat; he had pushed the PLO to the position he wanted it.

Organizationally, Arafat was also able to score a major victory by having the council elect him chairman directly for the first time.\textsuperscript{116} Previously, the practice had been for the council to elect the executive committee, which then went on to select one of its number as Chairman. “That system...ensured that the leader was only the first among equals. Under the new system, by contrast, Arafat could claim a mandate to override the committee.”\textsuperscript{117} This new arrangement, then, was not only significant because it began the process of formalizing and institutionalizing Arafat’s autocracy within the organization. More importantly at the time, it was a clear signal to the oppositional leaders—who all regarded themselves as Arafat’s peers—that, for all intents and purposes, they had been made redundant. “The new procedures were humiliating to [the opposition] leaders, because he cut them out just like that.”\textsuperscript{118}

On February 11, 1985, Arafat made use of his newly formalized powers, announcing a draft statement on principles for achieving peace with Israel, together with King Hussein. The ‘Amman Accord called for total withdrawal of Israeli troops from territories occupied in 1967, in return for a “comprehensive peace as established in UN and Security Council resolutions,” which would include “all parties to the conflict.”\textsuperscript{119} In addition, the accord also specified that the

Palestinians will exercise their inalienable right of self-determination when Jordanians and Palestinians are able to do so within the context of the formation of the proposed confederated Arab states of Jordan and Palestine.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Saad El-Shazly, The Arab Military Option, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Tahsin al-Halabi, October 26, 1999.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
Thus tying Palestinian statehood to a confederation with Jordan and, in another clause, committing itself to a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to attend the negotiations, Arafat brought down a barrage of condemnation upon himself. Attempts at justifying his actions by publishing a watered down and linguistically ambiguous version of the accord came to naught after King Hussein published the original text, and insisted that the reference to UN resolutions did, fact, imply UNSCR 242.

In the Palestinian arena, the move antagonized every single faction. Even the DFLP and PCP, both of which had hoped for reconciliation and dialogue with the leadership rejected the accord harshly. In the regional arena, both Syria and Libya denounced Arafat’s move as treasonous, as did Algeria and South Yemen. In late February, Syria took the lead in calling for the establishment of a Palestinian front that would confront Arafat’s liquidationist schemes.121 The parallels with the 1974 RF were apparent to those involved. “It was like [a flashback]: We are here again. This is once more the same confrontation [of deviationism].”122 After negotiations between themselves about the new body’s internal structures, the opposition announced the creation of the Palestinian National Salvation Front (PNSF) on March 25, 1985; the new assembly was intended to confront Arafat’s procedural modifications within the PLO leadership, as well as the political ‘deviation’ that was likely to follow.

The turnout for this new creation was, in terms of factions, massive. The PFLP, PFLP-GC, Sa’iqa, PPSF, Fateh-Intifada and PLF joined (Tal’at Ya’qub and ‘Abd al-Fattah Ghanim merged their competing PLF factions at this point). While operating on the primus inter pares principle, the political lead was taken by the PFLP and PFLP-GC, the former having decided to leave the DA. The PNSF was essentially a self-appointed steering committee for the PLO, the stated central aim of which was to protect national unity under the leadership of the PLO. This, then, was thought to require the overthrow of Arafat. Because it was seen as a safeguard for the PLO, rather than a replacement, the FRC was forced to stay outside the new structure,

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121 Al-Ba’th, February 27, 1985.
122 Muhammad ‘Issa Abu Khalil, October 2000.
although Fateh-Intifada was apparently keen to include them. The PNSF’s secretary general was Khalid al-Fahum, regarded in rejectionist circles as the legitimate speaker of the PNC despite the fact that he had been replaced at the meeting in ‘Amman. “Everyone felt cheated by Arafat,” one oppositionist later remarked.”

In the event, Arafat suffered a severe diplomatic setback on his Jordanian track when the loyalist Abu al-‘Abbas Faction of the PLF hijacked the Achille Lauro cruise ship in early October 1985. The suspension of Abu al-‘Abbas’ membership of the PLO Executive Committee did not ameliorate international disapprobation; neither did the PLO’s Cairo Declaration of November 7 in the same year, in which it strongly condemned all forms of terrorism and vowed disciplinary measures against all PLO members found to engage in such activities. These developments did, however, prompt an increasingly uncomfortable Jordan to distance itself from the PLO, instead seeking rapprochement with Syria. The two countries issued a joint statement on November 13, in which they stated their opposition to the conduct of separate peace talks with Israel, and on February 19, 1986, King Hussein announced the suspension of its diplomatic and political coordination with the PLO.

Conclusion: The Twin Results of the PNSF

The PNSF failed to take any major policy initiatives and did not regenerate the spirit of militancy within the mainstream PLO. It also failed to topple Arafat, presumably related to the evident half-heartedness of the effort. In fact, despite having identified the need to rid the PLO of Arafat and his allies, the PNSF factions had been cooperating with Fateh in its incremental, clandestine build-up of forces in Lebanon, and their subsequent deployment against the Israeli occupation in the south. “After all, struggle [against Israel] was our main objective.” Just as the RF before it, the PNSF was intended to offset the leadership’s deviationism and to demonstratively reject the ‘arrogance’ with which it treated the opposition, thereby reasserting the

125 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 587.
member factions’ social and political status within the movement. Thus, in the confrontation between the pro-Syrian Shi’a Amal militia and Fateh, following the latter’s military build-up, all Palestinian factions except Sa’iqa rallied to support Fateh, even Fateh-Intifada and the FRC\textsuperscript{127}; this conflict came to be known as the Camps War. The PNSF and DFLP artillery signalled this unified position by shelling Amal positions on May 22, 1985, infuriating Syria, which viewed this intra-PLO rapprochement as a way for Arafat to reassert his position without having to make the necessary policy modifications.\textsuperscript{128} Syria thus ordered its clients to cease fire and proceeded to seal their offices, restrict the general secretaries’ ability to travel, confiscate their assets, block their supply lines and suspend the publication of the PFLP, PFLP-GC and DFLP weekly magazines.\textsuperscript{129} It also confronted demonstrations by Palestinian refugees in Damascus’ Yarmuk and al-Thawra refugee camps, reportedly detaining as many as 2,300 demonstrators.\textsuperscript{130}

Syria’s measures against its clients were temporary, and good relations were soon restored on the basis of “converging [readings] of the political situation,” but only after the factions had contributed to the defeat of the Amal militia.\textsuperscript{131} In fact, it was a resumption of shelling of Amal positions by PNSF factions in mid-June that forced the former to finally accept a cease-fire agreement on June 17. Syria was not pleased, but on June 25, Syria and the PNSF issued a statement of joint political intent. In late July, the PNSF joined Amal and the Popular Nasserite Organization (PNO) in a joint security committee intended to track down “agents of Israel and members of the capitulationist Arafatist line,”\textsuperscript{132} which was followed over the next few weeks by the assassination of several leading Fateh military and political cadres by Fateh-Intifada and FRC operatives.

\textsuperscript{127} Hanna Batatu, \textit{Syria’s Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics}, p. 311.
\textsuperscript{128} Tahsin al-Halabi, October 26, 1999.
\textsuperscript{129} Yezid Sayigh, \textit{Armed Struggle and the Search for State}, p. 583; Hanna Batatu, \textit{Syria’s Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics}, p. 311.
\textsuperscript{130} Hanna Batatu, \textit{Syria’s Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics}, p. 311
\textsuperscript{131} Talal Naji, November 3, 2000. This opinion was corroborated from the Syrian side by Sa’iqa’s Farhan Abu al-Hajja, November 10, 2000.
\textsuperscript{132} Al-Nahar, July 25, 1985; as quoted in Yezid Sayigh, \textit{Armed Struggle and the Search for State}, p. 585.
The PNSF persisted in contravening its official line whenever it perceived the PLO leadership to be unduly besieged by non-Palestinian parties, however, reflecting its member factions continued perception of the PLO as its first priority. For instance, the PNSF’s Amal associates assaulted Shatila in late March 1986, blaming its attacks on provocations by PLO forces and claiming that Arafat was seeking “to create disturbances in the camps... in order to embarrass Syria.”\textsuperscript{133} Despite the imperatives of its Syrian patronage, the PNSF supported the position of the PLO against Amal and Damascus, arguing that Amal was the \textit{provocateur} and the PLO the victim of aggression.

At the time it was set up, the PNSF filled two primary functions. One was to demonstrate to Arafat that while he may have thought that his procedural modifications at the ‘Amman PNC were expeditious, he could not simply treat his fellows within the national movement just any way he wanted. In a period of intense political conflict, Arafat had unilaterally formalized his position as the head of the Executive Committee, discarding the longstanding \textit{primus inter pares} principle. As we saw in chapter two, being head of an organization implies a special position of honour. Simply assuming that position, within a cultural framework where honour is considered a limited resource, necessarily means detracting from the honour and social status of those who become subordinate. In concert with Syria, the Executive Committee’s new subordinates responded to this outrage by setting up an alternative structure, challenging Arafat’s control and the representative status of his PLO leadership. On the level of PLO politics, as described above, the PNSF might have been a political dud, but it was an important event on the sociocultural level, asserting the PLO opposition’s honour and social status.

On a political level, the PNSF tied Palestinian rejectionism to Syrian positions, a discursive home that it has kept to this day. While the post-RF rapprochement between Syria and the rejectionist trend may have started out as sheer power politics, it soon took on a deeper significance. In the early 1980s, Syrian and rejectionist politics converged on enough points for them

\textsuperscript{133} Amal deputy leader ‘Akif Haydar, in \textit{al-Safir}, April 9, 1986; as quoted in Yezid Sayigh. \textit{Armed Struggle and the Search for State}, p. 590.
to achieve discursive harmony; previously, compatibility between the two had been sporadic and laboured. Syria’s rejection of Camp David and subsequently of relations with Egypt; of the Reagan Plan; the Fez declaration; separate Jordanian-Palestinian negotiations with Israel; and the ‘Amman Declaration demonstrated to the rejectionists that “this [was] a state that functioned as a bastion against Zionism and defeatism.”

More importantly, Syria’s support for the dissidents within Fateh was a practical demonstration that Syria more than any other state would be an indispensable territorial and political bedrock for future confrontations with Israel, political or military. Syria’s support for Abu Musa—whose uprising would have almost certainly come to naught without it—afforded Damascus a firmer toehold in Palestinian politics than ever before. Fateh-Intifada not only retained all Fateh offices and assets in Syria and northern Lebanon, but was also honour bound to be supportive of Syria and its positions, a circumstance reflected in the group’s alternating between supporting PLO against outsiders such as Amal, but assaulting it at the behest of Syria. This new lever was crucial to Syrian policy making, because

In Asad’s scheme of things, the Palestine problem was too important to be left to the Palestinians. It was much bigger than a disputed land or the fate of a few hundred thousand refugees. It was the rightful concern of all Arabs, and the way it was settled would determine under whose order the Arabs would live and what meaning was to be given to their independence.

As the confrontation between Amal and the PLO demonstrated, Syria and its clients did not always see eye to eye on matters of tactics or strategy, or even on all issues pertaining to eventual solutions to the Palestinians’ predicament. During the Camps War, “the alliance [between Syria and the Palestinian opposition] was sorely tested,” but it did endure. The extent of the PNSF’s political marginality, but arguably also its importance as a device for cementing social relations between its constituent parties, is demonstrated by the fact that it has never been disbanded. It exists still

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135 Ibid.
136 Patrick Seale, Asad of Syria, p. 348.
137 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 584.
today as a formal structure, although now with only two members, the PFLP-GC and Sa’iqa. Its main function is to organize social functions and performs social services to Palestinians in Syria, such as endorsing visa and passport applications. “We meet, we perform some [social] services to the Palestinians in Syria and other places, but we do not have any political activity now. You can say it is nearly dissolved, nearly.”138 It nevertheless continues and remains under the symbolic leadership of the deposed PNC speaker Fahum, a faint symbol of Syria’s claim on Palestinian politics.

THE ALLIANCE OF PALESTINIAN FORCES: MEETING THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE

By the time of the signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP), the Oslo accord, on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993, several regional and international developments beyond the national movement’s control had impacted on its trajectory. The fall of the USSR was perhaps the most momentous, depriving as it did the leftist factions of not only a patron but also a source of intellectual credibility. Importantly, it also deprived Syria of its primary international ally and supplier of arms, puncturing Damascus’ ability to maintain a credible military deterrent vis-à-vis Israel. Among other things, this prompted Syria to participate in the US-led war against Iraq, in return for greater freedom of action in dealing with the increasingly troublesome anti-Syrian stance of the Maronite forces in Lebanon. The fall of the USSR adversely affected the political status of Syria and the social status of the Palestinian leftists, the latter finding it difficult to provide a credible intellectual framework for their political positions. It was the straw that broke the camel’s back as far as the PPSF, PLF and PRCP were concerned. Theirs were an already waning political existence, made much more difficult by the collapse of the primary sponsor of international socialism’s. Also the DFLP, PFLP and PFLP-GC were hit hard, all three having ascribed to the view that, as expressed by the PFLP-GC, “[t]he Socialist system, led by the Soviet Union, represents the main ally of the national liberation movement in the world.”139

On the Palestinian arena, the intifada that erupted in 1987 had transferred the centre of activist gravity to the inside. The occupied territories had replaced southern Lebanon as the struggle’s main battleground, and thereby dented the political and social status of the exile based *fasa’il*. It had also, importantly, transferred the struggle from the shoulders of guerrillas to the shoulders of ordinary civilians. While the factions were unanimous in their support for the uprising, it troubled some of them that the traditional role of the military was thus supplanted.

**The Emergence of the Islamist Trend**

With the intifada, Islamism had also come to the fore; Hamas and MIJ constituted a further challenge to the *fasa’il*, all of which now needed to contend with the Islamists for popular support. The Islamists thrived in the occupied territories and in the revitalized political environment of the intifada, and were attracting scores of supporters and members.

Founded in Egypt in late 1979 by Palestinian students Fathi Shiqaqi, ‘Abd Al-‘Aziz Al-‘Awdah, and Bashir Musa, the MIJ is a derivative of Muslim Brotherhood thought, heavily influenced by the Islamic revolution in Iran and the writings and actions of Egyptian radicals. Due to close relations with those individuals responsible for the assassination of President Sadat, the leadership of the nascent MIJ was expelled from Egypt. The faction formally announced itself as the Movement of Islamic Jihad in Palestine, in the Gaza strip in 1981, under Shiqaqi’s leadership. The MIJ’s ideological position was based on the assumption that the liberation of Palestine is a precondition for the unity of the Islamic world. This liberation must be accomplished or, at least, initiated by an Islamic vanguard, envisaged as weakening Israel through attacks against which it cannot defend itself. The MIJ aims at establishing an Islamic state in all of Palestine, which would be loosely modelled on the Islamic Republic of Iran; the faction has always been attracted by Imam Khomeini’s position on Islamic unity, and endorses the
concept of the *velayat-e faqih*, the ‘guardianship of the jurisprudent.’ The faction has also been a recipient of Iranian funding since 1981.

Active inside the occupied territories—primarily in the Gaza Strip—until the Intifada in 1987, the MIJ was thought to have numbered between 200 and 300 activists. In August 1988, the group’s leadership was expelled to Lebanon, curtailing the faction’s ability to operate inside Palestine. While in Lebanon, however, the faction’s leaders worked ardently on establishing good relations with the Hizb’Allah, as well as with Iran through Revolutionary Guards units stationed in the Biqa’ valley. It also came into close contact with Fateh-Intifada and PFLP-GC, and established a political rapport with these two factions. In 1993, MIJ formally set up its headquarters in Damascus.

Official Hamas historiography claims that the movement was established on December 8, 1987, coinciding with the eruption of the Intifada. Hamas’ emergence was certainly catalysed by the Intifada, although it first announced itself in February 1988. It claimed to be the military wing of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Palestine; Shaykh Ahmad Yassin, the movement’s spiritual leader, was a long-standing leading figure within the MB in Palestine. Until the Intifada, the MB had concentrated on matters cultural and spiritual, eschewing violence and political activism. With the Intifada, however, the MB was faced with a choice: “forgo its de facto accommodation with the occupation or lose the Palestinian street, where legitimacy was born less of piety than national resistance.” Hamas chose resistance and did so with considerable success; in June 1989 the Israeli Defence Forces outlawed the movement. Although it pledged unity with the forces and aims of the PLO, Hamas operated independently throughout the Intifada and managed to build a relatively wide support base, establishing itself as a significant force in Palestinian politics. A series of political events, including the Madrid negotiations, pushed the movement from its initial

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The signing of the DOP was perhaps the most dramatic watershed in the Palestinian national movement’s post-1967 history. Formally launching the ‘Oslo peace process’ in which the State of Israel and the PLO were committed to peaceably negotiated solutions to their differences, the DOP constituted a fundamental change of the struggle’s parameters and objectives. It also imposed specific timeframes on these new parameters and objectives, increasing the sense of urgency among those who opposed it. In fact, even those movements, factions, and individuals vehemently rejecting the DOP would find that it defined Palestinian political reality from that point onwards. “Oslo was the achievement that Arafat had aimed for during all these years,” remarked a senior Hamas cadre. “A fait accompli against which resistance would be powerless.”\footnote{‘Irrad al-`Alami, June 7, 1999.} To its supporters the accord was a historic step towards reconciliation and peace between two peoples that had seen too much suffering and enmity. To its critics it was a shrewd neocolonialist manoeuvre whereby Israel made the PLO leadership its subservient enforcer in the occupied territories. To the Palestinian opposition, it constituted the greatest political sell-out of all times—a betrayal of the Palestinian people and a formidable threat against their own political survival.

**Imposing Israeli Objectives**

The negotiations leading up to the DOP consisted of a series of thirteen secret meetings in the vicinity of the Norwegian capital. These commenced in December 1992 and were conducted in parallel with the open Israeli-Palestinian dialogue in Washington.\footnote{For first hand accounts of the secret process, see Mahmoud ‘Abbas (Abu Mazen), Through Secret Channels (Garnett, 1995); Shimon Peres, Battling for Peace (Orion, 1995). For an account of the parallel Washington negotiations and an ‘insider criticism’ of Oslo, see Hanan Ashrawi, This Side of Peace (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).} The two channels were not linked, however, and unbeknown to the Washington negotiators Haidar ‘Abd al-
Shafi, Hanan Ashrawi, and Faysal al-Husseini, their activities were largely diversionary from early 1993 onwards. Only Arafat, Mahmoud ‘Abbas, Yasser ‘Abd Rabbu, Bashir al-Barghuti and “a handful of their closest colleagues” were fully appraised of the secret dialogue, which on the Palestinian side was conducted by Ahmad Qray‘ Abu ‘Ala and Hassan ‘Asfur.

Because the Israeli government disapproved of direct contacts with the PLO, it initially dispatched two academics, Yair Hirschfeld and Ron Pundik, to serve as the Palestinians’ interlocutors. By mid-May 1993, Yitzhak Rabin was satisfied that the PLO was serious about the Oslo negotiations and authorized the inclusion of government representatives in the Oslo delegation. Shimon Peres proposed Israeli withdrawal from ‘Gaza first’ in early June, which was well received by the Palestinians. This proposal came against a background of increasing violence in the occupied territories, particularly in Gaza. Graham Usher observes that

By April 1993, the occupied territories were hovering on the brink of anti-colonial war, with military forms of resistance replacing the uprising’s earlier modes of mass protest and civil disobedience. Nor did it escape Israel’s notice that the armed struggle was being led not by the PLO but by Hamas...  

Israel was as eager to get rid of the burden of administrating Gaza, as Arafat was to assume it. Arafat saw the offer as a useful opening but needed more, however, than just the Gaza Strip. On 11 June, Arafat answered Peres through an interview published in the Israeli daily Ha’aretz:

Give me the Gaza Strip. I can restore order there as I did in Lebanon where the situation was far more complicated. The situation is simpler in Gaza and will improve because we will receive financial aid. This would be a good start for the whole peace process...I also need somewhere in the occupied West Bank. It could be Jericho or elsewhere. I cannot let it be said that I sold out the West Bank for Gaza. Obviously a corridor would have to be set up between the two areas under international control.

145 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 653.
146 Graham Usher, Dispatches from Palestine, p. 9.
147 Quoted in Harold Cubert, The PFLP’s Changing Role in the Middle East, p. 84.
The ‘Gaza-Jericho first’ formula was thus formulated to the mutual satisfaction of Israel and the PLO leader. “From this point onwards,” Sayigh tells us, “the PLO chairman obstructed the official talks in Washington with even greater insistence, to the dismay of ‘Abbas and other colleagues who preferred to progress on both tracks...”148

The two delegations hammered out the minutiae of a basic agreement on which they hoped to be able to base a subsequent overt and comprehensive dialogue. This agreement provided, first of all, for the establishment of a self-governing authority in Gaza and Jericho, controlled by the PLO. In a second phase, Palestinian authority would be extended to remaining Palestinian population centres on the West Bank. This second phase was set to coincide with general elections for a governing council, the nature and powers of which would be subject to further negotiations. These interim agreements were to last for five years, but further “permanent status negotiations” would start after the first two years of autonomy. These negotiations were to decide those issues that were too complex to be settled promptly—the fate of Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem and the future of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, borders, and security arrangements. Once agreement had been reached on these thorny final issues there would be a permanent peace settlement in Palestine.

The existence and substance of this secret dialogue leaked to the media in late August. Journalists—not Arafat—inform the humiliated Palestinian negotiating team in Washington about the substance of the Oslo dialogue on August 27.149 The existence and substance of the Oslo channel precipitated immediate hostility from within the PLO. Independent executive committee member Mahmoud Darwish resigned and Shafiq al-Hut—widely regarded as the ‘voice’ of Palestinians resident in Lebanon—suspended his participation in protest. Faysal al-Husseini, one of the negotiators in the Washington talks, called for the establishment of a “Palestinian government of national salvation that would arrest the all-out collapse of the Palestinian institutional network.”150 Farouk Qaddoumi,

director of the PLO's Foreign Relations Department, voiced angry criticism against Arafat and his circle for having kept him in the dark about the substance of the dialogue.

Arafat submitted the accord to the Fateh central committee during a session on September 3 to 5, and then to the PLO Executive Committee, which debated the proposition for two days, September 8 to 9. The proposal faced "spirited resistance at [the] Fateh central committee meeting," but eventually won "grudging ratification." Arafat was eventually able to secure nine votes in favour of the accords, exactly half of the total number of committee members. This was far from a resounding approval but all that was needed to press ahead.

Within hours after the adjournment of the executive committee meeting, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin exchanged letters of recognition. In his letter, as explained in chapter one above, Yasser Arafat conceded to "the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security." More far-reaching, he renounced "the use of terrorism and other acts of violence," and assumed "responsibility over all PLO elements and personnel in order to assure their compliance, prevent violations and discipline violators." Furthermore, Arafat stated that "the PLO undertakes to submit to the Palestinian National Council for formal approval the necessary changes in regard to the Palestinian Covenant." Prime Minister Rabin responded that "in light of the PLO commitments included in your letter, the Government of Israel has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and commence negotiations with the PLO within the Middle East peace process." Four days later the two leaders met in Washington for the ceremonial signing of the DOP. After a further seven months of negotiations, Arafat and Rabin met in Cairo on May 4, 1994 to sign the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and Jericho Area, also known as the Cairo accord. The first PLO military personnel entered Gaza on May 10 and

151 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 658.
152 Letter from Yasser Arafat to Prime Minister Rabin, dated 9 September 1993.
153 Letter from Yasser Arafat to Prime Minister Rabin, dated 9 September 1993.
154 Letter from Prime Minister Rabin to Yasser Arafat, dated 9 September 1993.
Jericho on May 13; Arafat arrived triumphantly in Gaza on July 12 “to lead the nascent Palestinian Authority in person and start an entirely new phase in the Palestinian striving for statehood.”

Opening Pandora’s Box

“Yasir Arafat’s reception at the White House,” commented one observer, “has signalled both his acceptance into ‘the new world order’ and also his formal departure from Palestinian national consensus.” Arafat had barely managed to push the Oslo concept through the Fateh central committee and had not the opposition succumbed to its counterproductive practice of boycotting ‘offensive’ committee meetings, the PLO executive committee would, in fact, have been equally split between those in favour and those against. As the accord was signed, the pro-Oslo camp was far from representative of a Palestinian political mainstream: There were angry demonstrations in virtually every Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan (by those whom the accord consigned to indeterminate dispossession), in the West Bank and Gaza (again, primarily by the refugees), and all Palestinian factions except Fateh, the PPP, FIDA, PPSF-Ghosheh, and ALF opposed the agreement. Oslo carried the day due to Arafat’s skills at manipulating his custom-made system of political patronage and it was clear from the beginning that in order to fulfil his duties as stated in the accord he would have to steamroll his opponents, and wrest authority from the emerging independent political trends in the occupied territories. “As he inched towards signing the second Cairo Agreement, the one which gave Oslo the worst possible interpretation, he was already isolated from mainstream Palestinian thinking.”

While the international political response to the Oslo accord was overwhelmingly favourable—measured in, for instance, the flood of financial aid to the fledgling PA and official invitations to Arafat from capitals around

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155 Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, p. 659.
157 For an early survey on refugee attitudes in Lebanon, see Hussein Sha’ban, ‘What do the Palestinians in Lebanon Want?’ in Journal of Palestine Studies (Arabic), no. 19 (Fall 1993), pp.176-87.
the world—a host of critical voices were immediately raised against it. These voices were not confined to the rejectionist PLO factions and Hamas, but came most forcefully from Palestinian, Israeli, and Western intellectuals and academics. Much has been produced by way of commentary on the Oslo accord and process; it is instructive to look at some of the main criticisms from outside the Palestinian national movement, as well as the logistics of Arafat entering Gaza, before examining the opposition’s response.

**Criticisms of the DOP**

There were strong resemblances between the DOP and previous proposals for Palestinian autonomy. The crucial differences lay in the official role of the PLO, its responsibility for internal security, and the economic arrangements through which the PLO leadership could now assume control of the territories’ financial affairs. That is to say, the DOP ensured continued political survival for the PLO as an organization and for Arafat as its leader. The absence of funding from the Gulf States and the international pariah status that resulted from PLO support for Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait meant that the alternative to reaching an agreement via Oslo and taking an active part in peace negotiations was the collapse of the PLO. “Arafat had committed himself to reaching agreement in Oslo at any price,” commented Said Aburish. “[T]he PLO’s financial problems were affecting his bureaucracy in Tunis and resulting in complaints, defections, paralysis and disintegration.”

“I could see in 1991,” Edward Said was later to remark,

> not only that the gains of the intifada were about to be squandered but that Arafat and a few of his closest advisors had already decided on their own to accept anything that the United States and Israel might throw their way, just in order to survive as part of the ‘peace process.’”

It was not the objective of survival *per se* that seemed to disturb observers and commentators, but the way in which that survival had been safeguarded. Many saw the secrecy that had been necessary to ensure the success of the

159 Ibid., p. 253.
Oslo dialogue as conspiratorial backhandedness designed to make this Arafat’s victory not only against occupation but also against his opponents within the Palestinian arena. Edward Said, again, noted that in setting the PLO up for this “Palestinian Versailles,” 161

the Palestinian side had no legal consultants to help it conclude a binding international agreement, that its tiny handful of secret negotiators were untrained, poorly educated, and unmandated ‘guerrilla’ leaders who ignored Palestine National Council resolutions as they set about dismantling the whole structure of Palestinian resistance... I am aware of no more than a handful of people including Arafat who, with scant legal background or experience of ordinary civilian life, holed up in Tunis, hatched these decisions affecting almost 6 million people. 162

The reliance on inexperienced negotiators was the price that the PLO team had to pay for secrecy and, thus, success, albeit Pyrrhic. Their poor calibre relative to the Israeli negotiators eventually got them a deal so far from the objectives of the National Covenant that the Israeli writer and commentator Amos Oz referred to it as “the second biggest victory in the history of Zionism” 163, while Ilan Pappe called it “a wholly Israeli formula. There is nothing Palestinian in it.” 164

A direct consequence of the asymmetrical relationship between the parties during the dialogue in Norway was the asymmetry of the resultant documents—the letters of recognition and the DOP itself. The mutual recognition contained in the exchange of letters made PLO-Israeli dialogue possible and the two parties “humanized” their opponent. 165 Arafat’s letter contained much more than recognition and humanization of Israel, however: It made the PLO accountable to Israel on specific issues of policy, tactical means, and strategic objectives. Arafat guaranteed Israel’s security in the occupied territories, promising to prevent and punish those who did not toe the Oslo line. In his letter, Rabin committed only to recognition of the PLO

161 Ibid., p. 7.
162 Ibid., p. 5.
163 BBC interview, 14 September 1993.
164 Ilan Pappe quoted in Graham Usher, Dispatches from Palestine, p. 35.
165 Ilan Pappe, quoted in Graham Usher, Dispatches from Palestine, p. 34.
as representative of the Palestinians and an interlocutor in forthcoming negotiations.

Arafat also pledged that the provisions of the National Covenant that were inconsistent with the commitments of his letter of recognition were no longer valid. Not even the reluctant approval of the PLO executive committee could have authorized Arafat to make this unilateral commitment, as it would require a PNC session to amend the National Covenant. The view that Arafat was simply steamrolling his opponents by forcing the PLO into a situation from which it could not turn back was not uncommon among observers. "The contents of the letters of recognition were irreversible," and the process was destined from that point onwards to be asymmetrical, stacked against the PLO. "He was determined that this time we would not have any say [whatever] in his affairs," a rejectionist leader later commented.

The structure of the negotiation process was also found offensive, in particular the relegation of virtually every issue of importance to the Palestinians to eventual permanent status negotiations. While this procedure was ostensibly supposed to aid dialogue, its indeterminate character impacted heavily on the essence of the issues. Three areas were particularly affected by their postponement—borders, settlements, and refugees.

By making borders—which entails issues of land rights and sovereignty—a matter for later discussion, the Palestinians in effect surrendered their internationally acknowledged legitimate claims to the West Bank and Gaza. "[T]hese have now at most become disputed territories," wrote Edward Said. "Thus with Palestinian assistance Israel has been awarded at least an equal claim to them." This innocuous procedural detail effectively removed the concept of 'occupation' from the political equation, thus depriving the Palestinians of the legitimacy of struggling—by any and all means—to repel an occupation force. It also rendered UN Security Council Resolution 242, calling for Israeli withdrawal from lands occupied in 1967, inapplicable to the West Bank and Gaza. As of September

166 Said Aburish, Arafat, p. 259.
167 Talal Naji, November 7, 2000.
168 Edward Said, Peace and its Discontents, p. 11.
13, 1993 Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip became an 'Israeli-Palestinian land dispute.'

The deferment of borders was connected to the issue of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, also designated a permanent status issue. The settlements were launched shortly after the 1967 war as a means of expropriating Arab land, earmarking it for Jewish use, thus making sure it would never be anything but 'Israeli soil.' Far from being pioneer homesteaders breaking virgin ground, as their euphemistic appellation might imply, 'the settlers' have always been politically motivated, government funded paramilitary outposts designed to expand the territorial claims of the Israeli state, most commonly through confiscation of Arab property. Because the DOP deferred the fate of the settlements, the Israeli government was under no obligation to halt the construction of new settlements, or curtail the expansion of existing ones. By creating and expanding settlements, Israel would be in a better position to claim more land come the final round of negotiations. From a Palestinian standpoint, this state of affairs was simply preposterous—but Arafat nevertheless signed.

Even though it lies at the heart of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the issue of refugees was also postponed to the last round of negotiations. At the time of the DOP a majority of the Palestinian people were in the diaspora, of whom most were refugees. For decades the Palestinian struggle had pursued two primary objectives: the retrieval of occupied lands and the refugees' right to return. Not only did the DOP relegate the refugee issue to permanent status negotiations, thereby opening the refugees' right of return in accordance with UN resolution 194 up for discussion—those 800,000 individuals displaced in 1948 (and their descendants) were not even going to be discussed. The Israelis persisted in the official fallacy that the original 1948 displacement of some three quarters of the Palestinian people was no fault of Israel's, and consequently saw no reason to allow for their return.\footnote{A brief elucidation of the official Israeli view on the right of return is given in an article by Judith Lapidoth, 'Do Palestinian Refugees Have a Right to Return to Israel?', posted on the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0j8r0. For the first (and to date most lucid) 'new historian' refutation of this view, see Benny Morris. The Birth of the Palestine Refugee Problem, 1947-49 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987).} Israel's only commitment vis-à-vis the refugees was to consider "the
modalities of admission of persons displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, together with necessary measures to prevent disruption and disorder." 170 This, in effect, amounted to no commitment at all. "The Israelis refused any reference to Palestinian national rights," Abu Mazen, the architect of the Oslo dialogue, was later to complain. 171

Arafat had committed to the PLO to recognition of, and peaceful coexistence with Israel, as well as agreed to enforce Israeli security requirements in Gaza and Jericho. Israel, in turn, had committed itself to none of the core demands of the Palestinian national movement. "It’s clear," commented Hanan Ashrawi, "that the ones who initialled this agreement have not lived under occupation." 172

**Entering the Occupied Territories**

The Oslo process was a renewed lease on political life for Arafat and his PLO hierarchy, a *tour de force* of Arafat the Survivor, and the people of the occupied territories greeted the return of Arafat and other leading PLO cadres with massive demonstrations of support. The transferral of PLO institutions from Tunis to the occupied territories meant, however, that the rudiments of popular democracy that had emerged during the intifada, and which constituted power structures distinct from those of the PLO, were crushed under foot. It also meant that it became necessary for Arafat to extinguish the intifada itself, partly to enforce his own order, partly to fulfil the terms of the Oslo agreement. 173 The international approbation that followed in the wake of the Oslo accord confirmed the primacy of the PLO over independent formations, and within the PLO it confirmed the primacy of Arafat’s statist power elite over the revolutionary *fasa’il*. By late summer 1994, Arafat was in full personal control of political and financial affairs in the Gaza strip and Jericho area. This in turn meant that he controlled the rudiments of the new, territorially based Palestinian political system.

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170 *Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements* (Israel Information Service, 1993), article XII.
Arafat speedily transplanted what has been referred to as his “three sources of power” into the occupied territories: the 7,000 men from the PLA who were to form a Palestinian police force, the loyal Tunis bureaucracy, and the financiers and notables “who owed their loyalty to the chief and not to the Palestinian cause.” Among these ‘money men,’ incidentally, were Abu Mazen and Abu ‘Ala, the architect and the coordinator of the Oslo negotiations, respectively.

Upon arrival in Gaza, Arafat assumed the role of president of the council of the PA. Because elections for the council were not due until the end of the initial two-year period, Arafat’s presidency entailed absolute power pending elections. The three areas of greatest concern to Arafat were to form a PA executive, to establish the security apparatus, and to assume control of all aspects of propaganda. Having created an executive made up primarily of Tunis officials, he purged the city councils by replacing their elected or independent leaderships with loyalists, thus forestalling independent power bases. Trade unions and professional associations were purged of leaders that had opposed the Oslo accord.

The 7,000 PLA soldiers that began to arrive in Gaza on May 10 were to form the nucleus of the Palestinian Security Service (PSS). Arafat appointed al-Hajj Isma’il to command the first contingent to enter Jericho, the man who had abandoned his field command during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and whose 1983 reinstatement and promotion served as one of the catalysts for Abu Musa’s rebellion. The PSS was “empowered to arrest or imprison people because they belonged to particular political groups, opposed PNA policies or spoke against the terms of the Oslo and Cairo agreements.” It became Arafat’s first anti-dissident strike force, although several more were to follow.

As a sign of things to come, Colonel Jibril Rajoub, in charge of PSS in the Jericho area, and Colonel Muhammad Dahlan, his counterpart in the Gaza strip, promptly held a series of meetings with Yacov Perry, head of Israel’s internal security service, Shin Bet, and General Amnon Shahak, Israel’s deputy chief of staff and chief negotiator vis-à-vis the Palestinians.

175 Ibid.

As a result of these meetings the Israelis allowed Rajoub's companies to operate throughout the West Bank in pursuit of suspects and oppositional elements, even though this ran counter to the terms of the Cairo accord. These operations were undertaken with considerable brutality and "a short time later the first reports of Palestinians dying under torture began surfacing."177 Ironically, the PLA had thus become a tool of Israeli national security.

Such abuses notwithstanding, the international media support for Arafat and the Oslo process was massive. "Within a matter of days," Edward Said commented in October 1993,

the 'independent media' had totally rehabilitated Arafat. He was now an accepted, even lovable roly-poly figure whose courage and realism had bestowed upon Israel its rightful due. Anyone who opposed, or criticized what he had done was either a fundamentalist like the Likud settlers, or a terrorist like Hamas.178

Also, the PA promptly went to work on the propaganda and information aspect of proto-statehood. PA radio, known as Radio al-Quds, was launched on July 12 1994, the day that Arafat arrived in Gaza. As television was added to its activities six months later, PA media services adopted the formal name of the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC). Radio al-Quds used the same long-wave frequency as the PFLP-GC's al-Quds Palestinian Arab Radio, as "Arafat was determined to deny his people the benefit of the opinion of others."179 PBC conducted a massive propaganda barrage against all Palestinian opponents of the DOP, denouncing them as "enemies of peace" and "terrorists."

Understanding the Opposition's Reaction

The DOP and the commencement of the Oslo process were monumental, fearsome and drastic developments as far as the Palestinian opposition was concerned. They were seen as shameful compromises on Palestinian rights and honour, and Arafat's hard-line attitude towards the opposition made it
clear that they were given a choice of total acquiescence or total ostracization. Riled and frightened, the opposition chose total rejection, and refused to have any dealings with the DOP’s political and institutional derivatives; even so, the Oslo process would set the framework for their activities after 1993. While their vociferous refusal to acquiesce dented the authority with which Arafat could proclaim his manoeuvres to express the will of the PLO and the Palestinian people, they could not stop the process. “The Oslo agreement marked a new stage in our struggle,” PFLP cadre Leila Khaled later remarked. “It is a difficult time because the whole issue of our aim has been diverted in a different direction.”

Total rejection notwithstanding, three of the major secular opposition parties—PFLP, PFLP-GC, and DFLP—had already voiced clear unilateral support for a peace settlement, based on relevant UN resolutions and the primacy of the PLO as the Palestinians’ representative. The PNSF—representing the PFLP-GC, Fateh-Intifada, PRCP, and DFLP—had also indicated in 1991 that they would support peace negotiations in which the PLO was accorded a well-defined representative status. However, they demanded that any peace with Israel recognized and righted the wrongs that had been perpetrated against the Palestinians as a people, restoring their collective honour. The recognition of the PLO as head of the Palestinian people was also crucial. While they participated in and sustained the intifada inside the occupied territories, and carried on the guerrilla war against Israel from their bases in southern Lebanon, they were not inherent enemies of peace; rather, they were enemies of a dishonourable peace. Given the primacy of honour as a pivotal social value in the ambient Eastern Mediterranean culture, it was only natural that the opposition should yet again have taken this stance. Their reaction to Oslo thus included wholesale and uncompromising embrace of armed struggle, refusal to deal with the PLO/PA leadership, and total dismissal of Israel’s right to exist.

‘Peace with honour’ had been a longstanding theme with the opposition. ‘Abd al-Hadi Nashash, spokesman for Fateh-Intifada, stated in

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179 Said Aburish, Arafat, p. 282
180 Leila Khaled, 23 October 1999.
April 1991 that it is necessary for Palestinians to work in order to “preserve the unity of the PLO as a sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people,” and continued:

There are Arab lands occupied by Israel and there are resolutions demanding Israeli withdrawal from these territories. All we want is implementation of UN resolutions. We wish this could be done through peaceful means.182

This statement constituted part of a PNSF initiative to unify the PLO, and was significant in that it was not accompanied by previous demands that Arafat be removed and armed struggle against Israel intensified. “The peace that we understand is our return to the Palestinian homeland—to Haifa, Jaffa, Jerusalem—not to the land that was occupied in 1967,” stated Ahmad Jibril some months later, as preparations were being made for a comprehensive intra-factional dialogue in Sana’, based on the PNSF’s call. Jibril continued:

We told [the PLO leadership] very frankly, ‘If you are speaking about a peace conference, then peace is our right to return to Palestine, the right to self-determination, the right to establish a Palestinian state. Without this, there will be no peace in the region.’

... This leadership has over the past few years offered concessions that the enemy never dreamed of. These misled people in the PLO leadership thought that if they offered such concessions, such as recognizing the Zionist entity on the land of Palestine, they would have a seat at the peace conference. They offered them all these concessions. Finally they asked this leadership to do one final thing; namely, give itself the coup de grace. They asked it to give itself up as a concession, to cancel itself, to cancel the PLO.

Therefore, we say if the PLO leadership remains on this course, it will end up conceding the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Who concedes the land will concede his symbolic name. This is our understanding of these issues... We believe that the Palestinian leadership should be firmer and more adhering to Palestine and Jerusalem than all Arabs, all Muslims and all those rulers. Regrettably, we see that those leaders are making more concessions than all parties.

... We say in advance [of the Sana’ conference]: ‘No concessions on Palestine.’ And the minimum level that we might accept as a PLO program is the right to repatriation, the right to self-determination and the right to establish an independent Palestinian state. We cannot accept anything but this. And this also means that we have made many phased concessions in this regard...\textsuperscript{183}

This clear indication of willingness to negotiate was not a one-off statement by an unpredictable and erratic revolutionary; as this chapter has repeatedly indicated, the rejectionist current within the Palestinian national movement has shown far greater constancy and predictability in its political position and behavioural patterns than the PLO leadership. Jibril’s speech was a signal among many that the opposition was prepared to negotiate but not to humiliate itself. In early October 1992, Jibril restated the same position, in the context of rejection of the Madrid formula:

Brothers: Some people ask ‘Since things are in this state of chaos, and we know that they are in a bad state, what is the alternative? What is the alternative for our people and our nation?’ First of all, we have to agree that what is presented to us is surrender, not a just or honourable peace, as some claim, and that the United States wants to bring us to our knees and raise the Israeli flag over all Arab and Islamic capitals. First of all, we have to agree on the amount of damage we will sustain if we travel to Washington to conclude a dirty deal.

As for the alternative, I tell you from this forum—and I am being honest with you—we do not have a magic alternative. We say, however, that the will of nations can work miracles...\textsuperscript{184}

Not only did this statement indicate the perception of a dishonourable settlement as unacceptable, but also that armed struggle was not “a magic alternative” that could solve all political problems. George Habash elaborated on the alternative:

If the [Madrid] negotiations fail, the slogan or political position that we as Palestinians and Arabs must adopt is this: ‘Resorting to

\textsuperscript{183} Speech by Ahmad Jibril at a graduation ceremony for youth and vanguard classes’ as broadcast by Al-Quds Palestinian Arab Radio, August 13, 1991 (italics added).

\textsuperscript{184} Speech by Ahmad Jibril in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners held in Zionist jails, in the Yarmuk camp, as broadcast by Al-Quds Palestinian Arab Radio, October 9, 1992; BBC SWB, 12 October 1992.
international legitimacy.' If the negotiations fail, we cannot now say that we want to liberate Palestine from the river to the sea. The international situation, the official Arab situation, and perhaps the situation of the Arab masses at this stage do not enable us to raise such a strategic slogan. However, it must remain our true, long-term and strategic slogan with regard to the conflict between us and Zionist invasion and domination. The slogan we can raise, and which I believe will be acceptable to the international community and to Arab officialdom, is this: 'Resorting to international legitimacy.' We want a solution of our issue via international legitimacy, its resolutions and institutions. We do not want our issue to be settled by a U.S. solution, because the United States is Israel's strategic ally. All experiences have shown that the United States cannot be a neutral mediator in this conflict..."185

The increase in militancy, exaltation of armed struggle, and implicit threats against Oslo and its supporters were responses to what the opposition saw as Arafat's breach of the honour code, his underhanded methods, which had slighted the opposition and exacerbated the gravity of the Palestinians' political quandary. "Walk out, walk out, walk out of the quagmire of treason," Jibril had exhorted the PLO leadership, "because the Palestinian land is not for sale!"186

Responding to the Challenge
The opposition shared the wider criticisms of Oslo—the clandestine and bungled negotiations, the asymmetrical commitments in the letters of recognition, the lack of reference to Palestinian rights in the DOP, and the incremental process that left the most important issues for last. Arafat's interview in Ha'aretz had appeared to the opposition as a plea to be made an Israeli enforcer against fellow Palestinians.187 They were also resentful about the fact that Arafat had negotiated in Oslo as the Israelis launched 'Operation Accountability,' a massive bombardment of PFLP-GC, Hizb'Allah, and civilian targets in Lebanon during the summer of 1993. The most crucial issue for the opposition, though, was Arafat's unilateral cancellation of parts of the National Covenant. Not only did this 'divert the struggle' in a way they

185 'Interview with Dr. George Habash' as broadcast by Voice of the Mountain (Lebanon), October 7, 1992 (italics added).
186 'Speech by Ahmad Jibril in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners held in Zionist jails, in the Yarmuk camp.'
felt to be entirely unacceptable, but it was simply not Arafat's personal prerogative to do so. This usurpation of rights was a blatant challenge to the structurally and power politically subordinate opposition factions. Moreover, it demonstrated to them that Arafat was interested in the PLO only in so far as it could be used to legitimate the policies formulated by him and his circle. They were not surprised, however.

We have known Abu ‘Ammar for many decades. We knew that when he would be in a situation of power he would make sure that we could not affect him... he would humiliate us as members of the PLO if it would be good for his political goals.188"

Khalid al-Fahum further emphasized how the disgrace of Arafat cancelled out his legitimacy as head of the PLO:

The recognition is a shameful move. This is the least that can be said about it. He recognized the Zionist entity, which occupies all of Palestine, part of Syria and part of Lebanon. What has the Zionist entity offered in return? It offered nothing but recognition of an organization as the representative of the Palestinian people. In other words, the Zionist entity did not talk about an independent state, the right to self-determination and a sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Israel offered nothing. Arafat offered everything... The charter is within the jurisdiction of the Palestine National Council. The charter was not prepared offhand; it is the product of in-depth studies and lengthy debates. It is the product of hard work. Therefore, the pledge to change the charter is illegitimate. By his action, Arafat is not considered a legitimate leader of the Palestinian people...189

Since even the oppositional factions not affiliated to the PLO shared a significant measure of loyalty to the organization’s function as the Palestinian people’s legitimate representative—including, as of the early 1990s, Hamas—Arafat’s behaviour offended the whole opposition across the board. Their continued commitment to the representational primacy of the PLO thus came to imply the duty to struggle against the organization’s own leadership.

188 Talal Naji, November 7, 2000.
Although the Oslo negotiations were a closely guarded secret until their public disclosure on 20 August 1993, a steady stream of news reports throughout the summer had suggested that significant Israeli-Palestinian transactions were going on outside the open channels.\textsuperscript{190} Arafat’s dispatch of a Palestinian delegation to the Madrid conference, after the tumultuous PNC session in Tunis in September 1991, had been branded by the PFLP-GC as “another thoughtless step, which will have great negative results,” giving “an open endorsement to the elimination of Palestinian rights.”\textsuperscript{191} Khalid al-Fahum had commented that “this is not a delegation for negotiations [but] a delegation invited to accept capitulation.”\textsuperscript{192}

The opposition remained committed to armed struggle from bases in Lebanon, and to the intifada in the occupied territories; some had sought to orchestrate the militarization of the intifada, moving gradually towards guerrilla and eventually conventional warfare.\textsuperscript{193} These activities—apart from their direct function in combating the enemy—were intended to communicate three distinct messages to three distinct audiences: To the PLO leadership, that the opposition could wreck any peace deal that was not ‘just and comprehensive’; to Israel, that while it may have found a pliant partner in Arafat he did not call all the shots; and to their Palestinian constituents, that the opposition would continue to constitute a bastion of steadfastness and resistance. In this context, they were understandably anxious about the media’s suggestions of a ‘secret deal.’ Due to their continued commitment to the armed struggle and the intifada, the opposition factions’ intellectual and discursive context remained an essentially military-strategic one and the trickle of news about secret Israel-PLO channels did nothing but promote further militancy.

The PFLP-GC in particular intensified the armed struggle in early 1993. On 18 December 1992 the Israelis had deported 413 Palestinian

\textsuperscript{190} See, for instance, ‘Peres Said to Hold Secret Peace Talks with a PLO Leader,’ Agence France Presse, July 16, 1993; ‘Israel Studying PLO Idea on Peace Talks-Peres,’ Reuters, July 29, 1993; Jericho, Gaza Strip could be Pilot Projects for Autonomy-Peres,’ Agence France Presse, August 16, 1993;


Islamists to Lebanon, most of them members of Hamas, in reaction to the capture and execution of an Israeli border guard by Hamas. Lebanon refused to receive them, and they ended up in the Marj al-Zuhour camp inside the southern Lebanon security zone. On 7 March 1993 the PFLP-GC captured and executed another Israeli soldier in “retaliation for the daily crimes committed against our defenceless Palestinian people and in response to the Zionist enemy’s procrastination in returning the mujahidin deportees to their homes.” Against this background, border skirmishes continued throughout the spring, and eventually, on July 8 to 9, joint PFLP-GC and Hizb‘Allah operations resulted in the deaths of five Israeli soldiers inside the southern Lebanese ‘security zone.’ Israel retaliated, on July 25, with a seven day bombardment of civilian targets throughout the ‘security zone’ and in southern Biq’a, naval shelling of an area north of Tripoli, and air raids against Syrian positions in Lebanon. ‘Operation Accountability,’ resulted in some 130 deaths, 450 injuries, and in excess of 300,000 internal refugees. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was quoted as saying that “Israel would make south Lebanon uninhabitable” if attacks by Hizb‘Allah and its allies did not stop, and that he would “flood Beirut with refugees.”

Against the backdrop provided by these attacks, the Oslo negotiations went on regardless; their public disclosure came less than a three weeks after the last Israeli air force sorties into Lebanon. Faced with the news, the opposition was thrown into a state of shock and disarray as the apparent deadlock in the Washington negotiations had encouraged the opposition to relax its attitude. It took until 31 August for a formal statement to emerge, in which the PNSF commented:

News agencies and media organizations have disseminated reports on feverish political moves and activities concerning measures to implement autonomy on the Palestinian track, called the Jericho-Gaza First option. These moves, which seek to liquidate the

196 Lebanon: Refugees Flee from Israeli Barrage’ in Middle East Economic Digest (6 August 1993).
197 Khaled Hroub, Hamas, p. 120
Palestinian cause and harm the Palestinian people’s rights, are a humiliating overt conspiracy against all the objectives, martyrs, and struggle of the Palestinian people, and against their dignity and future. At the same time, these moves are a retraction and a relinquishment of the unity of the Palestinian people and land, the Palestinian people’s right to repatriation and to national independence, and an abandonment of holy Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine, with all the emblems of dignity and steadfastness that it represents for our people and nation... This conspiratorial agreement is being concluded on the basis that Zionist security stipulates the liquidation of the intifada... While we warn against this destructive scheme and this conspiracy, which greatly harms Palestine and its people and the militant relationship that binds the Palestinian people to their nation, we appeal to all the nationalist factions, figures, forces, and the honest and militant Palestinian masses to responsibly and courageously oppose this defeatist scheme.

In light of the seriousness and gravity of the requirements of the current stage, our people no longer accept compromising stands by this or that party, not to mention the state of continued indifference, impotence, and silence. These stands—no matter how they are justified—are a cover for the conspiracy and the results that are taking place... These agreements and appellations, which take place in the name of the PLO whose leadership has become a tool in the hands of U.S. and Zionist policy, do not represent our people, express their will, bind them, or detract from their determination to pursue the struggle to attain their national rights, primarily their right to return to their homeland. Our people are more determined than ever to pursue the liberation of their land and regain their rights in spite of all the conspiracies. Our people will remain the people of heroism and bountiful offering, and the militant vanguard of the Arab and Islamic nation. It is not fair that the militant Palestinian people are taken to account for the humiliating behaviour of this leadership and these collapsing and defeatist figureheads.198

At the World Conference in Support of the Islamic Revolution in Palestine, convened in Tehran October 22-24, 1991, ten Palestinian military-political organizations had announced the formation of the Ten Forces Resistance Organization (TFRO).199 The formation had been intended to coordinate opposition against the Madrid conference, which was convened earlier that month. However, the TFRO remained a chimera because the groups failed to

199 Its membership was the same groups that later formed in the APF, with the exception that instead of the PLF, the TFRO was joined by the FRC. One rejectionist cadre explained the inclusion of the FRC by saying: “Everyone who was against the Madrid conference was invited to sign the statement.
erect any form of organization structure. On receiving news of Oslo, the rejectionist leaders wasted no time in convening meetings between the factions belonging to the TFRO, scrambling to ascertain the politically possible. They also set about investigating the positions of Syria, Libya, and Iran in order to ascertain what moves would receive their endorsement and support. On September 2, Jibril, Fahum, and Abu Musa met separately with the Iranian chargé d'affaires in Damascus. Regional support was seen as crucial because, as Khalid al-Fahum observed,

This draft plan also creates a new axis, that is, a Palestinian-Israeli axis antagonistic to the Arab world and Muslims. This is because the two parties will make agreements on water, water desalination, environment, the economy and everything. Since Israel is the stronger party, it will be the dominating party. This draft agreement strikes deep at our relations with Arab and Islamic countries, which do not expect the Palestinians to be the first party to embark upon a liquidation and capitulation process... This agreement also isolates the other Arab countries, makes things more difficult for them, and places new obstacles before them should they opt for a certain solution.

There was also the pressing practicality of every major rejectionist faction apart from Hamas being based outside Palestine. No one among them harboured any illusions about Arafat allowing political pluralism inside the occupied territories, nor could they now afford to be seen as subjecting themselves to his authority. Syria in particular was seen as a crucial ally due to the large amount of Palestinians living under its authority, in Syria proper as well as in Lebanon. While they were loath to accept any division of the Palestinian people, they recognized at this early stage that the diaspora was likely to become their primary constituency.

The three potential state sponsors were well disposed towards a renewed rejectionist project, although each took a very different view of its own prospective involvement. Iran, for its part, seized the moment to rush to the defence of the Islamic shrines, largely to improve its image as an Islamic

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rather than a Shi'a state. Ayatollah Khamenei called for Muslims to mobilize against the Oslo deal. "The enemies of Islam think they have taken a step forward, but the Islamic world should launch a counter-attack and push them back." Khamenei denounced Arafat as a "disgraced individual," and within days Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Hussein Sheikholeslam met with, among others, representatives of the PFLP-GC, DFLP, and Hamas in Damascus. Although he assured them of Iran's continued support for the intifada, no funds were pledged. The opposition had to take heart in the fact that the Islamic Republic offered its moral and political support.

Syria was appreciative of Tehran's sympathetic position; while Damascus was furious by the Oslo deal, it remained committed to the wider peace process in accordance with the Madrid formula. Through its bilateral nature, Oslo had reduced the Syrian demand for a comprehensive peace to a chimera and thereby struck a heavy blow against its negotiating position. According to Zuheir Jannan, the spokesman for Syria's Madrid delegation,

"Oslo [was] a bomb that undermined the whole peace process, or—at least—the first step towards undermining it... All Arab delegations were saying that they didn't want just to regain their [own] occupied territories but that they also wanted a just solution to the Palestinian issue... When Arafat accepted Oslo he undermined the positions of all the other Arab states... The attitudes of Arafat and his group have weakened the Arab stance vis-à-vis Israel. It was the starting point that weakened the whole Arab position."

Seeing itself as the guardian of 'the Arab position,' Syria was nonetheless forced to realize that the impending establishment of a Palestinian Authority would render its forays into internal Palestinian politics impossible. The larger context of this realization was the thawing of Syria's relations with the West in general, and the U.S. in particular. "Damascus would not want to be seen as actively sponsoring the 'no' camp," one Western diplomat remarked at the time. "It wants to keep its lines open to Washington in the hope of regaining its occupied lands." Especially, if its role in the war against Iraq was to be translated into political capital, Syria could not afford to squander

it on getting involved in a new phase of Palestinian rejectionism. Yet Syria’s ties with the rejectionist trend had long since developed into much more than mere tactical convenience. Syria therefore viewed increased Iranian patronage of the opposition as an opportunity for itself to adopt a stance of ‘benevolent non-interference’ towards the opposition, allowing them to maintain offices and camps in areas under its control, conduct its political and military activities (the latter subject to national security considerations), but supplying them with neither arms or funds. This remains the Syrian policy to this day.206

Libya, on the other hand, was unenthusiastic about getting involved in the rejectionist project. It had sharply reduced its interest in Palestinian politics in 1987, following the US bombardment of Tripoli. It was now under intense international pressure to hand over two of its intelligence agents accused of the Lockerbie bombing, for which the PFLP-GC had also stood—briefly and spuriously—accused. While it still expressed rhetorical sympathy for the Palestinian oppositional position, it was not willing to get involved, thereby running the risk of strengthening its circumstantial ties to the PFLP-GC. Thus, Libyan support for the new rejectionist effort was not forthcoming.

By the time Arafat had gotten around to seeking endorsement for the DOP from Fateh’s central committee, Ahmad Jibril announced that an oppositional riposte was imminent:

The active Palestinian, national and Islamic forces are holding successive meetings. In a few hours, an important statement will be issued by those factions calling for the establishment of a national, democratic and Islamic front to assume the responsibility of confrontation in the coming stage. This front will call for regional conferences in every country, to be followed by a general conference attended by those forces together with sincere and patriotic figures, to take up the responsibility of continuing the struggle against the Zionist entity. This is our program for the near future.207

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205 Youssef Azmeh, ‘Iran’s opposition to peace deal raises fears of violence.’
207 ‘Interview with Ahmad Jibril’ broadcast on Radio of Islam-Voice of the Oppressed (Lebanon), September 4, 1993
By the time that the DOP had become a reality, a statement was issued to the
effect that the ten factions within the TFRO would upgrade themselves into a
new front intended specifically to struggle against the DOP. Negotiations
between the factions turned out to be difficult. The main difficulty hinged on
the incompatibility of secular and Islamist visions for the new grouping. The
new alliance was intended to extend beyond the secular leftist nationalism of
the *fasa'il* that had been involved in previous rejectionist efforts, by
developing the secularist-Islamist *modus vivendi* of the TFRO. The
secularists wanted to take advantage of the Islamists' growing importance
and support inside the occupied territories, their aggressive stance on, and
reputation for, armed struggle and their powerful and wealthy patrons in the
Gulf States and Iran. The Islamists in turn were aware that their popular
mandate in Palestine was based more on their ability and willingness to
engage in armed struggle than on their Islamic principles, and felt a need to
partake in what they hoped to be a functional *national* alliance.\(^{208}\) Hamas’
strict Islamic social agenda was in fact becoming increasingly unpopular in
the occupied territories, which added urgency to a partial reinvention.
Alignment with the *fasa'il* was thought to be a remedy as Hamas felt it could
drop some of the more unpopular elements of its social doctrine in the name
of 'national unity.'\(^{209}\)

No sooner had negotiations about the new alliance begun than
divisions over the internal balance of power ensued. Hamas proposed
"rebuilding the institutions of the Palestinian people, first and foremost the
PLO, on a fair and democratic basis."\(^{210}\) The secular factions were naturally
receptive to this proposal, but Hamas went on to demand forty percent of the
delegates to the proposed central committee, with the other factions
collectively making up another forty percent and the remaining twenty
percent being made up of independents. The other factions opposed setting
up a quota system, just as they had long opposed quotas within the PLO.
Eventually, by December a formula was agreed upon whereby each faction
regardless of actual size would have two delegates in the alliance’s central
committee.

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\(^{208}\) Talal Naji, May 30, 1999

\(^{209}\) Graham Usher, *Dispatches from Palestine*, p. 25.
The alliance was a product of the primacy of ‘national interest’ over ideology. Even so, “the backgrounds of this combination of forces”, the PIJ’s secretary general Ramadan Shallah was later to comment, “ideologically, politically, practically... inside and outside Palestine... there is a great difference. There is a lack of trust between the parties that form the alliance.” The dispute over the internal balance of power was compounded by the continuing intense distrust between the secularists and Islamists, in spite of two years coexistence within the TFRO. It took almost two months of intensive negotiations just to settle on a name for the new grouping, the bone of contention being whether to include the epithet ‘democratic’ or ‘Islamic’, or neither. Eventually they settled on using neither, adopting the politically neutral name under which they held their founding session on January 5, 1994, the Alliance of Palestinian Forces. While their leaders were negotiating the APF framework in Damascus, Hamas and PFLP members clashed in the streets in the West Bank and Gaza, causing frequent injuries and occasional deaths. “We tried to find a common ground but failed”, a senior PFLP cadre later remarked. “Hamas was shouting slogans like “The people of the book [i.e. the Jews] are closer to us than the reds!” They also killed our cadres.”

“The longer the delay in announcing their plans,” commented Gerald Butt at the time, “the harder it is likely to be for Arafat’s opponents to stop the momentum of the Israel-PLO dialogue.” The intra-factional wrangling meant that no constructive oppositional alternative to Oslo had emerged by the time the PLO Central Council met to ratify the Oslo deal on October 10, 1993. The unified leadership of the PFLP and DFLP decided to boycott the session, claiming that it was “illegitimate because the party calling for it has lost its legitimacy.” A spokesman for the unified leadership said that “this meeting had been called to secure a facade of legitimacy for the Gaza-Jericho agreement after the agreement had failed to obtain a majority of votes in the PLO executive committee.” This was patently untrue since the executive

210 Khaled Hroub, Hamas, p. 121.
211 Ramadan Shallah, June 10, 1999.
215 Ibid.
committee did in fact vote in favour of it, but the two fronts simply wished to have nothing to do with the PLO leadership; their opposition had come to necessitate total rejection. A statement issued by the PFLP-GC at the conclusion of its central committee meeting in late September pledged to do “all in its power to abort this agreement” and “rally every resource towards that end.” It stressed the importance of rallying the broadest spectrum of the Palestinian ranks and of creating an Arab-Islamic front in order to mobilize the masses to topple the agreement, and escalate the intifada and “all forms of struggle” until liberation.

The PLO opposition’s lack of constructive counter proposals, together with the fact that it was now closely associated with Hamas and the MIJ (at this stage more a matter of public perception rather than actuality) turned out to have profound effects when the Palestinian National Council was convened to ratify or reject the Oslo deal. It endorsed the Oslo accord by 63 votes to 8; 11 delegates abstained and a further 25 had boycotted the meeting. The majority of those voting in favour were “swayed by the opposition’s failure to provide a viable alternative or even an opposition platform, as well as fear of Hamas, an argument used by Arafat’s aides to carry the opinion of independent members.” Oslo had become a political reality, due at least in part to the opposition’s failure to constructively confront it. The Central Council session, commented one observer at the time,

marks the most serious split in the [PLO’s] history and means that the Palestinian institutions have lost their role in the decision-making process. In addition to the fact that the various strands of opposition have formed a ‘new rejectionist front’ with the Islamists, the Central Council meeting indicated that the PLO has been transformed from a popular national liberation movement into a struggling regime, even before the establishment of a state.

The long consultations that preceded the negotiations, including the PCC meetings, have revealed disintegrating institutions and a de facto acceptance that Israel dictates the rules of the game. Moreover the leadership used all methods to extract the ‘ratification’, including implicit warnings that opponents, especially Fateh members, could

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216 Ibid.
lose their posts and institutions their funding, which threatens the lavish lifestyles that some have grown accustomed to.218

Not one Fateh delegate had voted against the proposal, and anti-Oslo ‘hawks’ such as ‘Abbas Zaki and Sakhr Habash instead chose to abstain. In fact, some representatives of political committees affiliated with the opposition parties endorsed the deal, apparently due to disillusionment with the opposition’s prospects.219

The PFLP, DFLP, and PFLP-GC, to underscore their refusal to acquiesce, intensified their guerrilla raids from southern Lebanon in the week leading up to, and coinciding with the PNC sessions in Tunis. “Arafat would be weakened when attacks continue as it would be made clear that he does not control the ground... Any Israeli reprisals would reflect that Israel is not committed to real and just peace.”220 They also struck against military and settler targets in the West Bank, and the PFLP-GC orchestrated a wave of arsons in northern Galilee. “These attacks are only the start,” said one senior Palestinian dissident in Damascus. “All factions have agreed to escalate the armed struggle, our alternative to the peace process, against Israel where ever possible, namely from Lebanon and inside [the occupied territories].”221

This defiant posturing did not help their political cause, however. Fateh Central Committee member ‘Abbas Zaki, a moderate critic of the DOP, was dispatched by Arafat to Damascus for talks with the opposition leaders in December. He met with Habash, Hawatmeh, and al-Fahum, and made contact with lower level officials from the other factions. Zaki failed in his mission to convince the opposition of the virtues of moderate condemnation of the agreement. According to the oppositionists, however, Zaki conveyed “a picture of the confused state of affairs the PLO leadership” derived from the difficulties inherent in the agreement with Israel, in conjunction with the development of considerable opposition within the Fateh movement in the occupied territories.222 If anything, the Damascus factions took heart from Zaki’s visit.

218 Ibid.
219 ‘PFLP-GC members reportedly support accord with Israel at Central Council meeting’, broadcast on Radio Monte Carlo, October 12, 1993; BBC SWB, October 14, 1993.
220 Nadim Ladki, ‘Radical Arabs step up guerrilla war against Israel’; Reuters, October 10, 1993.
221 Ibid.
CHAPTER V
RHETORIC, SYMBOLISM AND POLITICAL PRACTICE IN THE
ALLIANCE OF PALESTINIAN FORCES

...a mistake only becomes an error when one cannot extricate oneself from it. There are periods of
decline when the purpose assigned to us by life becomes indistinct. Then, we stumble like beings
with a bad sense of balance. We are hurled from bleary joy into bleary pain; the constant awareness
of something lost makes the future and the past more appealing. We live in times gone by and in
distant utopia, while the moment passes us by. 

Ernst Jünger

THE ILLUSION OF MILITARY MIGHT

As the previous chapter demonstrated, the Palestinian opposition, when
confronted with the reality of Oslo, responded with belligerent rhetoric and
symbolically charged violence. Ahmad Jibril, when asked about the
forthcoming anti-Oslo alliance’s stance on violence declared:

We do not call it violence. We call it legitimate struggle and jihad. As a
front, we will not abandon the armed struggle programme, and we are
still in a state of war with the Zionist existence on the land of
Palestine. This struggle and fighting will continue until we return to
our homeland from which we were expelled 44 years ago... I am not
exaggerating by saying that we have thousands, and even tens of
thousands, of youths who are enthusiastic about fighting with us in
this phase. These youths are not just Palestinians, but also Arabs and
Muslims. They are extremely enthusiastic about fighting, and they
were not influenced by the agreement signed in Washington. On the
contrary, this agreement has increased their insistence on fighting
and martyrdom.

Jibril was, in fact, exaggerating. Yet, in order to distance themselves from,
and defy Arafat, the opposition factions issued statement after statement
claiming variously that a popular war of liberation, jihad, or intifada—
directed by the opposition or erupting spontaneously—was imminent. These
statements included claims to having received petitions to assassinate Arafat,
such as Jibril’s assertion that

1 Auf den Marmorklippen (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1960)
Thousands of martyrs' sons, wives and families were at the top of the list of those wishing to do so before we did the same. We are not in a forward position for this mission... It is a public trend and no one can stop it... We don't know when they will hunt down Arafat.3

This statement, incidentally, became commonly misinterpreted as a death threat. Jibril also told al-Wasat that it was only a matter of time before Arafat was assassinated for signing the deal with Israel, by any one of "hundreds of Arab men and women" that had written to him.4 The repeated references to Arafat's imminent assassination by ordinary Palestinians served to underscore the DOP's lack of popular support. References to organized military activity were intended to underline the steadfastness of the opposition, its refusal to acquiesce in the denigrating sell-out that they perceived the DOP to be, and to contrast Arafat's position to their own. These were a far cry from Jibril, Habash and Fahum's previous talk of seeking to achieve a minimum of their demands through international diplomacy.

From the outset, however, these claims to engage in or plan armed struggle proved problematic. "We never had a military option after Oslo. It was a myth and everyone [in the opposition] was aware of that," Fahum was later to recall. "Some factions and individuals persist in this myth, and they do so for many different reasons."5 Two of the factions, the PLF and PRCP, had no armed capabilities whatever by 1993. "Our last armed attack was in 1991," PLF's Abu Nidal al-Ashqar later explained. "Since 1993... we have no armed units... all our fighters, officers and military command are still with us [but] they have [to prioritize] their own circumstances and have to work to earn a living."6 The PRCP has had no military capabilities in the post-Oslo period. Refusing to acknowledge this embarrassment, 'Arabi 'Awwad claims that the organization's military wing is "not disbanded, but due to difficulties we could not participate in [armed struggle] since Oslo."7 These difficulties have included a lack of arms and the non-existence of training camps.8 Until

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3 Ibid.
4 'Jibril says hundreds of Arabs want to kill Arafat,' Reuters, October 19, 1993.
7 'Arabi 'Awwad, October 27, 1999.
the present, the PPSF has maintained a small military hierarchy parallel to its political leadership, but it has no practical use or value and is "ineffective as an instrument" of struggle. The military shortcomings of these three factions stem primarily from their financial situations.

PFLP and DFLP maintained military infrastructures in Lebanon until 1996—nominally under the direction of their Unified Command—at which point Syria ordered an end to Palestinian operations against Israeli forces in the southern Lebanese 'security zone'. Until then, both factions had participated in operations together with the Hizb'Allah in that area. "After that, the Syrians wanted that only the Lebanese should attack [in the security zone]." Today, we have nothing outside," explained Abu Khalil. "All our armed struggle capabilities are now inside." Sa'iqa, Fateh-Intifada and PFLP-GC's military infrastructures in exile are intact to this day; Sa'iqa has consistently operated around a half-dozen military training camps in Syria, while the PFLP-GC and Fateh-Intifada runs a similar number of camps divided between Syria and Lebanon, primarily in the Biq'a Valley. These units were indeed viable fighting forces at the time of the DOP, as evidenced by fasa'il activities during Israel's 'Operation Accountability.' Enforced idleness, however, caused these forces' stagnation over time, even though both Fateh-Intifada and the PFLP-GC have maintained a "strategic partnership" with the Hizb'Allah since 1993. Both have intermittently joined the Lebanese resistance in cross-border raids. The PFLP-GC has, importantly, also supplied the Lebanese resistance with arms and ammunition, most notably its Katyusha 107-millimeter artillery rockets.

Hamas and MIJ have never possessed significant military capabilities in exile, although both have had strategic partnerships with the Hizb'Allah similar to those of the PFLP-GC and Fateh-Intifada. Both have lost fighters in joint operations with the Lebanese resistance, and their limited military infrastructure in exile has been based in Lebanon, centring on access to PFLP-GC and Hizb'Allah training grounds. The Syrian government,

9 PPSF cadre, interview with author, Damascus, October 2000.
12 Tahsin al-Halabi, November 2, 2000; Talal Naji, November 7, 2000.
13 'Imad al-'Alami, June 7, 1999.
cognizant of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) roots of both groups, refused from the beginning of the APF to allow either Islamist group to build up military strength or to stockpile significant amounts of arms inside Syrian borders. The fear of its potential uses for domestic MB activism overrides solidarity with the Palestinian cause, and there have been no training of Hamas or MIJ operatives taking place in Syria. Both groups' military infrastructures are based inside Palestine, although training, as mentioned above, has taken place in Lebanon.

THE ROLE OF SYRIAN PATRONAGE

The alliance's rapport with Syria has fuelled imaginations and generated conspiracy theories. To be sure, Syria's political support has been crucial to the APF effort, enabling the organizations to work among their refugee constituents. In return, the organizations have displayed their gratitude and respect toward Syria through their rhetoric and symbolism—partly because public displays of regime adulation are part of the Syrian political order within which they function, partly because they are genuinely appreciative and bound by honour to confirm the status of their patron. Because of this close relationship—about the nature of which both Palestinians and Syrians are generally taciturn—elements within Western scholarship have continued to recycle outdated analyses of pre-Oslo patron-client relations, erroneously ascribing the rejectionists a role as 'Syrian proxy terrorists'.

In fact, Oslo had a profound impact on Syria's role as patron of the Palestinian opposition. Having been involved in patron-client relations for over a decade, Syria and the opposition factions were brought closer still by shared outrage over Oslo. The accords devastated the Syrian position in the Madrid negotiations, which had proceeded in parallel with the covert Oslo negotiations. Oslo severed the Palestinian track from that of Syria and the

14 For an analysis of the Asad cult, see Lisa Wedeen Ambiguities of Domination.
other Arab states. It reduced the theme of ‘Arab unity’ to a chimera, rendering obsolete Syrian demands for a comprehensive and just peace, and thus weakened Syria’s negotiating position. Hafez al-Asad’s longstanding animus towards Arafat and the PLO leadership was further reinforced, and the APF—whose complaints against the DOP were similar to those of Syria—received Damascus’ endorsement as the true representatives of the Palestinian struggle.

On the other hand, the creation of the PA forced Syria to recognize that its traditionally intrusive policies towards the Palestinian national movement could not continue. For several years, Syria had been the only Arab state to which the Palestinian issue had remained militarily, politically and discursively central, which is why it attracted large parts of the PLO opposition. The advent of the PA meant that political reality had moved on, however, and that the traditional relationship between Syria and the rejectionists was no longer viable. Because of the dishonour Hafez al-Asad would bring on himself and his country if he simply disavowed them, he was in no position to terminate the modus vivendi with the rejectionists, particularly as the post-Oslo phase of Palestinian politics meant they needed Syria more than ever. Furthermore, the patron and its clients had grown politically close over the years and very real political loyalties had developed on both sides. Damascus’ solution was to leave the factions entirely to their own political devices after Oslo, but continue to offer political support within its discursive universe.

Wishing to move closer to the West in the wake of the Cold War—and not wanting to prejudice its own, separate peace negotiations with Israel—Syria adopted a stance of “benevolent noninterference” towards the APF.16 It allowed the alliance to organize itself politically in Syria and Lebanon, but ceased all active support and sponsorship of individual groups and, after 1996, effectively proscribed the last of the armed activities of the factions closest to it. “Not one Kalashnikov nor one single dollar ever passed to us from Syria [after Oslo],” remarked PFLP-GC central committee member

16 Anders Strindberg, ‘Realism and Restraint among the Palestinian Rejectionists,’ p. 23.
Tahsin al-Halabi. “They don’t expect anything from us and we don’t expect anything from them... They keep us here to observe us... and to protect us.”

If revolutionary and subversive militancy was really the APF’s intended response to Oslo, alignment with Syria showed uncharacteristically poor judgment. The received view, based (yet again) on perceived Cold War realities, maintains that Syria is a notorious, if increasingly weakened, sponsor of international terrorism and that the APF factions are notorious international terrorists—hence, the two parties are perfectly matched. While this has been an expedient and politically valuable image in the black and white world of agenda driven threat assessments, the ‘patronage as proximity of discourse’ model suggests a subtler, more credible rationale for Syrian-APF rapport. Syria has never intended for the APF or its constituent members to act as its proxy combatants, as suggested by the fact that Damascus has supplied them with neither funds nor arms since the early 1990s. Syria had affirmed to Israel’s right to exist for fully thirty years and participated in the Madrid negotiations based on the ‘land for peace’ formula contained in UNSCR 242. It countenances no armed activity in its neighbourhood that it cannot fully control, and aligning with Syria was thus a virtual guarantee that there would be no APF instigated armed struggle, and certainly no revolution. Furthermore, the rejectionist factions themselves were neither willing to, nor interested in waging war against Israel, an issue returned to in the following section. As we saw in the previous chapter, several rejectionist leaders had made cautious yet repeated public remarks in the two years preceding the DOP to the effect that they were willing to sit down to negotiate an honourable peace with Israel. Syria and the rejectionists were thus working within the same discursive and strategic parameters.

Added to this, Syria saw that the alliance’s potential political appeal among the refugees could be of regional political significance. The presence and politically free reins of the APF among the refugees in Syria and Lebanon highlighted the PA’s vulnerability and demonstrated the fragility inherent in PA-Israeli negotiations. It was an ever-present warning to Arafat

not to concede too much, not to cave in further to Zionist demands and not
to continue to compromise Arab honour. Arafat had chosen to defy and
humiliate Syria on the issue of a unified Arab negotiating position in 1993;
Syria’s refusal to discontinue its patronage of the rejectionist current was, in
a sense, payback. If the APF could successfully stand up to Arafat and
humble him on account of the Oslo process, this could only validate Syria’s
argument that separate Arab tracks are doomed to failure. If the APF did not
succeed, the failure would not be Syria’s.

Syria and the rejectionists, according to a senior Syrian civil servant,
exercise “coordination and consultation on many issues, including political
issues.”

Even so, both parties have considered the matter of Palestinian
military mobilization and deployment—in Syrian service or otherwise—a
“non-issue.” Astutely manipulating the excessively apprehensive threat
assessments of terrorism scholars and policy analysts, Syria created a
strategically beneficial myth in the knowledge that the optimal use of the
‘Palestinian card’ is its implication. By patronizing the factions and then
merely hinting at its abstention from deploying them, Syria has been able to
show good will at no effort. This gambit has, however, reinforced perceptions
in the West of the rejectionists’ being a ‘terrorist card’ up Syria’s sleeve.

Since Oslo, Syria has been aware that its ability to influence
Palestinian politics is sharply reduced, on pain of international
disapprobation, and in 1996, Syria and the Lebanese government apparently
agreed that the only party allowed to undertake cross-border operations into
Israel should be the Hizb’Allah. Knowing full well that isolated Palestinian
incursions into Israel would be militarily useless, have no nominal
internationally based legitimacy—as opposed to Hizb’Allah’s struggle to
implement UNSCR 425—and bring down the full wrath of the IDF upon
Syrian and refugee targets, Syria seems to have never considered allowing
the Palestinians military latitude. Alignment with Syria in 1993 was a virtual
guarantee that there would be no military struggle, let alone revolution.
There is also the issue of despondency. “Why should the Palestinians in

\[18\] For a critical overview of Syrian foreign policy objectives, see Henry Siegman, ‘Being Hafiz al-
Lebanon struggle militarily when those inside only negotiate?” remarked DFLP’s Suheil al-Natur. “They have the hardest lives anyway, why make it worse by encouraging Israel to bomb us?”

THE POLITICAL FUNCTION OF MILITARY SYMBOLISM

Given the pitiful state of military preparedness and capability from its exile positions, and Syria’s restraining role, it is not feasible to argue that the APF was intended as a forum for armed struggle. On the issue of ‘terrorism,’ it should be noted that the alliance never established a bureau or even a working group for the implementation or coordination of military operations. Instead, “every organization works alone on military matters. There [has been] no cooperation until now on military matters, but of course there is cooperation politically.” These facts corroborate the hypothesis that militaristic hyperbole has filled a primarily symbolic political function. Indeed, asked directly whether the founding rationale of the APF was to coordinate political or military struggle, Khalid al-Fahum later stated that it was political. How can we know this? Because it never carried out any joint military operations, ever… [Its aim was] political activities… opposition, you know. To criticize, not to accept the policy of Yasir Arafat and his colleagues, to preserve the [Palestinian National] Charter, to make the whole world see that Yasir Arafat doesn’t represent all the Palestinians. He represents some, but not all the Palestinians. This is essentially political activity within the PLO, all of them are with the PLO.

The APF’s militarily charged defiance of the PLO/PA leadership, which it was unable to sustain in practice, was gradually filled with constructive substance. “We saw that the alliance [was] important because it [gave] the Palestinian people the hope that their cause will not perish.” The APF framework thus evolved into a forum for discursive competition with the PLO/PA leadership, the rejectionists’ collective bid to impact on Palestinian national identity. Seeking to tap into—in a generative sense—Palestinian

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national consciousness, the APF factions slowly set about trying to manipulate the refugee communities’ public discourse and manage its meanings and perceptions, thereby strengthening the militancy that had become entrenched in Palestinian identity over the preceding decades.

Rather than a military base, then, Syria has functioned as “a base among our people” and a “media base” for the purpose of “public relations.” The political liberties afforded the factions by Syria far exceed those on offer in neighbouring Arab countries. The consistent official Syrian line since Oslo has been to view the rejectionist factions as “political groups who have the right to express their own views on their own fate and future, no more than so.” That the official Syrian attitude is earnest has repeatedly been corroborated by the Palestinians themselves, as is the rejectionists’ awareness that their ability to connect with the refugees depends on Syria. For instance:

Here we have freedom of assembly, of press, and of speech. Syria offers sympathetic political support only... most importantly, access to the communities of refugees. They don’t intervene in our activities among the Palestinian refugee communities whether in Lebanon or Syria... This has been [Syria’s] absolutely crucial role.

The primary purpose of the APF was always propaganda as it sought to propagate the necessity of armed struggle in an attempt to yet again extract militant Palestinianism out of already militant Palestinianness. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, a number of authors have pointed to armed struggle as a foundational element in modern Palestinian national identity. Specifically, prior to 1973, armed struggle confirmed Palestinian national identity and reasserted the existence of an autonomous national will, even though the military capabilities of the fasa’il compared to their Israeli enemy were negligible. It has been noted that in its early days,

24 `Arabi `Awwad, October 27, 1999.
26 Ramadan Shallah, June 10, 1999.
The PLO, unable to resolve the inside-outside dichotomy, experienced a constant tension between its two wings reflected in the contrasting forms of struggle adopted by each. The military action used by the outside was an essential means to assert a distinct Palestinian identity within the wider Arab identity and to carve out and define the Palestinian entity amidst the Arab state system. Armed struggle was also the most effective means of mobilizing the scattered diaspora... the Palestinian leadership based its legitimacy on its role in the armed struggle against Israel...

Thus, it seemed not only reasonable but imperative to the APF factions that armed struggle should continue to be the rallying point against Arafat and the peace process, as it had been during the time of the RF, the creation of Fateh-Intifada and the establishment of the PNSF. Their Damascene media base would be used to not let the Palestinian public lose sight of the nation’s honourable past and the ignominious present imposed upon it by the leadership. This effort, then, crystallized into the alliance’s collective bid to impact on Palestinian national identity in competition with the PLO/PA leadership; seeking to manipulate public discourse and manage its meanings and perceptions, thus strengthening the spirit of steadfastness.

Opting for this tactic built on failure to anticipate the full effect on Palestinian politics of the PLO/PA leadership’s successful shift of the political centre to the inside. It also involved a miscalculation of the international reaction, as the factions had hoped to harness the international support for the Palestinian cause generated by the Intifada. Instead, in terms of international politics, the APF’s rhetoric and activity came to contrast sharply against that of Arafat, thereby legitimizing his reform project further; no international or regional support to make the APF “a serious Arab or Islamic alternative to stand fast against Arafat and his project” was ever forthcoming.

As a political alliance whose focus has not been on military issues, it mattered little, then, that the alliance’s members have never been able to agree on the efficacy of various tactics of armed struggle. Limited attempts were made in throughout 1994 by PFLP-GC, Hamas, MIJ and Fateh-Intifada to coordinate military efforts; these were bilateral efforts, however, and not

\[29\] Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, pp. 22-23.
\[30\] Ramadan Shallah, June 10, 1999.
part of the APF framework. While they cemented the strategic partnership with the Hizb‘Allah, they failed to produce a joint military programme among themselves. Furthermore, the Islamists’ dispatch of suicide bombers against civilian targets inside Israel has generally met with revulsion in leftist ranks, particularly within the PFLP and DFLP, who have tended to view such attacks as morally reprehensible and politically counterproductive, and have even, in off-the-record discussions, condemned them in very strong language.

All APF factions have vociferously proclaimed their aim to be the deliverance of all of Palestine from Zionist control, that armed struggle is a fundamental element of that enterprise, and that a negotiated settlement with the enemy is unequivocally unacceptable. The APF’s determined persistence in the patently impracticable rhetoric of armed struggle has not been due to inflexibility or irrationality. Rather, it has been a primary feature in the alliance’s attempts at manipulating the refugees’ public discourse. Thus, the alliance has hoped to thus provide guidelines for politically acceptable behaviour, speech, and thought. Within these guidelines, each organization has been free to formulate policy in pursuit of its own distinct strategy.

Thus, there have been significant differences between the various organizations as to how they have viewed the discursive struggle with the PLO/PA leadership—and how they are prepared to talk about it to researchers. The APF’s collective discursive parameters in fact encompass a multiplicity of discourses, each of which is in part determined by inter- and intra-group relationships—with fellow oppositionists, with constituencies and with external actors. This claim is nothing more than a reiteration of the fact that discourse is conditioned by the social and political contexts in which it arises. The upshot of this is, however, that while some organizations are quite frank in discussing armed struggle as a discursive device, others insist that commitment to armed struggle means just that—end of story. The hypothesis that the post-Oslo rejectionist struggle has centred on the use of rhetoric for discourse manipulation should not give us reason to doubt the sincerity of some rejectionist factions’ continued calls for the “complete

31 Ibid.
destruction of the racist, colonial Zionist project, and the total liberation of our homeland, from the river to the sea." As stated earlier, some factions are clearly sincere in their rhetoric and fully committed to Israel's destruction through the force and arms; there is no contradiction between being engaged in a 'rhetorical struggle,' on the one hand, and being sincere about what one utters and does, on the other. Some factions, however, have come to acknowledge Israel as a fait accompli beyond the reach of their military capability. None are prepared, however, to ascribe to Israel's legitimacy and de jure recognition. Very different from the APF's unified façade of 1993, the factions' increasingly divergent attitudes to armed struggle and other instruments of national struggle have developed as a result of their different ideologies, abilities, social status and interaction with constituents. The APF has never been a monolith and understanding the situation and agenda of each factional part is crucial in understanding the development of the collective whole. Some have worked extensively within the fields of media and propaganda while others have planned and conducted acts of violence against Israeli targets. Some have done nothing more than issue pamphlets or newsletters, not coincidentally those whose position on armed struggle is most intransigent. In so far as these activities have served the purpose of the rejectionist agenda, they have met with collective approval.

INSTRUMENTS OF DISCOURSE MANIPULATION

Being primarily intended to coordinate activities within general parameters provided by rejectionist principles, the alliance's members have generally attempted to control refugee discourse unilaterally. Each has emphasized different aspects of the political whole, ostensibly complementing each other. However, the emphasis on different messages and on different modes of communication has led, in the long run, to political incompatibility, likened by one rejectionist cadre as "an unhappy family, getting on each others' nerves." The primary instruments of discourse manipulation have been

print, broadcast and electronic media; social, cultural and educational organizations and the conduct of political rallies.

**Print, Broadcast and Electronic Media**

With the exception of the PLF and PPSF, all member factions have been engaged in information and propaganda dissemination through the printed media. In addition, the PFLP-GC has been responsible for operating *al-Quds Palestinian Arab Radio*. While the various magazines and newsletters have primarily sought to supply the factions’ own members with a source of political analysis and information, *al-Quds Radio*, by contrast, has sought to bring the rejectionist viewpoint to a wider audience. Importantly, *al-Quds Radio* is received in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where it is a popular channel of discontent and apparently has a large audience.\(^{34}\)

Six of the leftist-nationalist factions have published magazines principally available to a diaspora audience, while the two Islamist factions’ regular publications are printed and distributed primarily in Palestine. Hamas’ organ *al-Watan* (‘The Homeland’) seems to have a negligible circulation in the Syrian and Lebanese refugee camps, its main market being the ‘inside’.\(^{35}\) Its editorial board, headed by ‘Imad Faluji, is located in Gaza City where it also finds most of its readership. Similarly, MIJ’s periodical publications are scarce outside Palestine. As the present thesis’ main focus is ‘outside politics,’ it will not deal with the Islamist media.

The DFLP’s *Al-Hurriyya* (‘The Freedom’), PFLP’s *Al-Hadaf* (‘The Target’), PFLP-GC’s *Ila al-Amam* (‘Forwards’)\(^{36}\) and Fateh-Intifada’s *Fateh* (‘Conquest’) have in some aspects been very similar publications. They all serve primarily to highlight and analyse current events, promulgate official doctrine and print statements and communiqués by the organizations’ military and political wings. They all include coverage of cultural affairs and

\(^{34}\) This was suggested to the author during a telephone conversation with a UNDP official stationed in Ramallah.

\(^{35}\) ‘Imad al-‘Alami. October 27, 1999. It is important to note that the following is not an attempt at formal content analysis, only a generalized description of the various media’s editorial content and how they relate to the factions’ social and political position.

\(^{36}\) *Ila al-Amam* was discontinued in 1999 for lack of funding. In the ten years prior to being closed down, its circulation had diminished drastically. Libya had cut off financial support in 1987. As a direct result, the magazine went from an estimated 15,000 weekly copies in the mid-1980s, to a mere 5,000 monthly copies by 1999. Tahsin al-Halabi, September 23, 2001.
events among the refugee communities in Lebanon and Syria, as well as inside Palestine.

All four magazines have filled internal functions by informing members of current events and seeking to reinforce their commitment to the struggle. They have also filled external functions in two main ways: By indicating policy and announcing political or military initiatives, and by seeking to signify to the Palestinian communities the implications of Palestinian identity. The latter has been attempted either through discussions of the dynamics of armed struggle or of the various imposed aspects of Palestinian life, such as suffering and sacrifice. Poetry and other art that stresses return, suffering, sacrifice and armed struggle are also recurrent in all three magazines.

Beyond these basic similarities, however, the magazines have closely reflected not only the political lines but also the social situations of their respective factions. The absence in al-Hurriyya and al-Hadaf, relative to Fateh, of armed struggle hyperbole reflects not only the more moderate political line that they take, but also the higher social status and political significance of these factions. With political networks around the globe, and with significant support both inside and outside Palestine (while Fateh-Intifada’s main support bases are among refugees in Syria and northern Lebanon), neither the DFLP nor the PFLP have been in urgent need to use their organs to reinforce the positive connotations of ingroup identity through emphasizing armed struggle—especially since this would only damage their international standing.

Al-Hurriyya has been published by the DFLP since the PFLP leftists held on to that organization’s editorial offices in Beirut during the 1969 split. Since Oslo, discussions of international law, the relevance of UN resolutions to the fulfilment of Palestinian objectives and the need for Palestinian national unity have been prominent recurrent features. Al-Hurriyya’s pages, virtually free from the persistent armed struggle rhetoric that has characterized most other rejectionist publications, is part of the DFLP’s distinct profile since inception, combining ideological radicalism with

political pragmatism. In fact, it appears that a strong focus on the specific issue and mechanisms of the right of return has offered an alternative—and possibly more effective way—to grab the refugee communities’ attention and imagination. A significant section of *al-Hurriyya’s* pages are also devoted to cultural affairs, particularly to events organized by the many DFLP-affiliated NGOs.

*Al-Hadaf* is very similar to *al-Hurriyya* in terms of balance of content and ‘general tenor,’ but the PFLP’s greater suspicion of international law and UN resolutions is evinced by a greater emphasis on Palestinian and Arab self-reliance and a greater readiness to call for armed struggle.38 In addition to *al-Hadaf*, which is published in Damascus and inside Palestine, the PFLP also puts out an English language newsletter, *Democratic Palestine*, which aims to inform foreign audiences of policy initiatives.

Fateh-Intifada’s *Fateh* is edited and printed in Damascus, at the PLO news agency offices seized by Abu Musa in 1983.39 The editorial content of *Fateh* naturally reflects the faction’s more militant orientation, as well as its continuing firm foundation within the Syrian political orbit. Its main recurrent themes since Oslo have been the necessity for a renewed popular struggle in the West Bank and Gaza, the need for armed resistance from Lebanon and recent and historical services rendered the Palestinian cause by Syria. Still living relatively well off sound investments, Fateh-Intifada has been able to put considerable more money into its magazine than any of the other factions. As a result, the magazine is of excellent editorial and graphic quality, yet its circulation is only in the region of 3,000 copies per issue. With virtually no circulation in Palestine, *Fateh’s* primary target is its own membership and the various exile communities. Fateh-Intifada’s claim to represent the real Fateh has little credibility beyond its own membership, however, and even among the exile communities, the magazine is sent to sympathizers and members rather than ‘Palestinians at large.’

Sa’iqa’s biweekly *Al-Tala’i‘* (“The Pioneers”) stands out among the rejectionist publications not only for its lack of graphic and editorial quality,

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39 Statements about *Fateh’s* contents are based on readings of ten consecutive volumes, spanning issues no. 219 (September 15, 1990) through 447 (October 2, 1999).
but also for its political contortionism.\textsuperscript{40} Of all the factions within the rejectionist camp, Sa‘iqa’s political position has arguably been the most complicated since Oslo, which is reflected in its tangled and perceptibly uncomfortable discourse. As has been demonstrated above, Syria finally gave up any and all claims to jurisdiction within internal Palestinian politics in 1993. This left Sa‘iqa in a very difficult position: As a well-funded and historically important part of the Palestinian national movement, Sa‘iqa has been compelled to be seen to contribute to Palestinian politics by engaging in constructive activities for the furtherance of the national movement’s objectives. However, as an integral part of the Syrian political establishment, Sa‘iqa is neither disposed, nor authorized to actually impact on the Palestinian political environment. Syria’s outrage over Oslo made Sa‘iqa an obvious APF candidate, but since it signed the APF’s founding statement, the faction has been immobilized by its Syrian connection, causing failure to conduct activity both in the diaspora as well as inside Palestine. The horns of Sa‘iqa’s dilemma are its organic linkages to both Palestinian and Syrian politics, which it has been unable to reconcile.

It is interesting in this context to note that al-Tala‘i‘ is replete with searingly maximalist rhetoric that fundamentally opposes the legitimacy of the PLO/PA leadership, calls for the complete dismantling of Israel and occasionally lapses into anti-Semite derision of Jews and Judaism. Just as its inactivity does not square with its APF partnership and commitment to the PLO, the editorial content of al-Tala‘i‘ does not square with its commitments to Syrian policy. Although diluted with adulation of Hafez al-Asad and analyses of Israeli politics, PLO-Israeli agreements, Zionism and so forth that carefully duplicate Damascus’ polices, the incongruence is evident. It seems that while the other rejectionists engage in the discourse of armed struggle in part for reasons of social creativity, it is possible to infer that Sa‘iqa’s discourse is simply frozen in a pre-Oslo time warp for lack of the ability and opportunity to construct an alternative. This is also suggested by the fact that in interviews, Sa‘iqa cadres have consistently circumvented any and all questions concerning contemporary and practical issues by launching

\textsuperscript{40} Statements about \textit{al-Tala‘i‘}'s contents are based on readings of issues 1224 (September 2, 1998) through 1276 (November 2, 1999), and various issues from 1994, 1995, 2000 and 2001.
into theoretical abstraction, historical analysis and total rejection of “that entity, which they nowadays call ‘Israel.’” Hamstrung by its dual commitments, Sa‘iqa’s intense post-Oslo political crisis is reflected in the pages of al-Tala‘i’.

The PRCP’s al-Muqawama al-Sha‘biyya (‘The Popular Resistance’) is a brief newsletter of, on average, less than ten black-and-white pages. While no number is available for how many copies are printed, it is very small as its main readership is internal. “No one ever reads that thing,” commented a cadre from a fellow rejectionist faction. “It is only read by the party’s own, and there are less than thirty of them.” The newsletter is also dispatched to the offices of sympathetic communist organizations in other Arab countries. Apart from commentary and analyses of current events in Palestine and the fortunes of world communism, the newsletter’s editorial board spends considerable effort hammering home the notion that communism did not cease being a viable political force at the end of the Cold War. Never aligned with the USSR, the PRCP has consistently refused to acknowledge the fall of the USSR as anything more than an inconvenience.

The sole purpose of the newsletter, then, is to enhance the collective identity that comes with PRCP membership, the positive connotations of which were seriously dented by a number of events throughout the 1990s. The fall of the USSR—regardless of PRCP official aloofness—was a serious intellectual problem. As the PRCP split from the PCP in 1982, the latter became Soviet clients while the former remained independent. The PRCP thus never received funding from Moscow, but—problematically—neither did it receive funding from any other communist state. Consequently, the faction ran out of funds when its membership drastically receded, towards the mid-1990s. After briefly being funded by the PFLP until 1997, Fateh-Intifada has since then footed the PRCP’s bills and put its leadership on the payroll in order to maintain the appearance of a broad factional front against Arafat. In addition, as mentioned above, the faction lacks an armed wing within a political environment that places a premium on armed struggle. Together

43 PFLP-GC cadre, interview with author, Damascus, October 2000.
these three factors have seriously affected the self-esteem attached to PRCP membership. *Al-Muqawama al-Sha'biyya* appears to primarily be an instrument to compensate for these shortcomings by insistence on continued ideological superiority, as well as unflinching commitment to armed struggle.

In this context, FRC's newsletter *Filastin al-Thawra* ('Palestine The Revolution') deserves to be mentioned, even though the faction is not a regular part of the rejectionist spectrum.\(^{44}\) Due to its mercenary nature, the FRC is easily the most detested of Palestinian factions—among the refugee communities in general as well as among other factions—and entirely obsolete in terms of impact on practical Palestinian politics. The FRC has thus been faced not only by the structural problems imposed by Oslo on the opposition as a whole, but also by the practical and emotional problems of isolation within the Palestinian opposition. While it signed the TFRO's founding statement in October 1991, the FRC has not been in political communion with any other faction since it was forced to leave Damascus in 1987.\(^{45}\)

As with the PRCP's newsletter, *Filastin al-Thawra* closely reflects factional lack of positive social status within the national movement and attempts to shore up a punctured social identity. Throughout the mid to late-1990s, the main themes of its editorials were the necessity for national unity and the need for armed struggle against not only Israel but also the PLO/PA leadership. The blame for deficiency in both these areas was then routinely put on other rejectionist factions, particularly the DFLP and PFLP. This cerebral contrivance has allowed the FRC to claim that while it is both ready


\(^{45}\) When mentioning my forthcoming interviews with FRC personnel in Lebanon to a PFLP-GC cadre in Damascus, I was told "stay away from them, they are nothing but homicidal maniacs." Another senior PFLP cadre told me "Personally, I hate Abu Nidal al-Banna and his scum more than anyone else." I was repeatedly told, by a number of rejectionists in Syria, about "the hideous crimes" of the FRC. They also reiterated the theory that Abu Nidal is an employee of the Mossad, because "no other Palestinian has done so much damage to our cause. He has killed many more Palestinians than Israelis." Fatah-Intifada cadres, while negatively disposed to the FRC, have generally employed far fewer invectives and been able to discuss the FRC as a *bona fide* faction within the national movement.
and able to build national unity and engage in armed struggle against the "twin-enemy", its supposed partners are lax and decrepit.46

The PFLP, DFLP and Fateh-Intifada also maintain a presence on the World Wide Web, publishing online versions of their magazines.47 The reason for bringing the magazines online is to be able to better reach the diaspora communities, and also to establish a 'positive presence' on the web. “Do a search on PFLP,” noted one of the PFLP’s information officers, “and nine out of ten hits refer to terrorism. This is not good at all.”48 In addition, both PFLP and a group affiliated to Fateh-Intifada operate mailing lists through which they supply subscribers with political analyses and news updates via e-mail.49

Al-Quds Palestinian Arab Radio is of a different order than the factions’ printed media, and has consistently served as the opposition’s only collective mouthpiece. Established in 1987 by the PFLP-GC, which still operates and funds it, it broadcasts over five different frequencies, each of which has its own transmitter. With a network of correspondents throughout the West Bank and Gaza, as well as in the refugee camps in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, al-Quds Radio has developed a proficiency in broadcasting news speedily.

From its establishment in 1987, the station has sought to propagate a "national line", rather than a narrowly focused PFLP-GC position; while by no means a secret, the PFLP-GC has chosen to never explicitly state its ownership of al-Quds Radio on air, seeking to use it as a rallying point also for those who might be adverse to the PFLP-GC, yet supportive of oppositional and militant activity. This attitude became an important base for the APF at its foundation in 1993, when al-Quds Radio became the ‘voice of the opposition,’ having previously styled itself the ‘voice of the intifada.’ According to Fadl Shururu, al-Quds Radio’s senior editor,

46 Particularly instructive are Al-Thawra al-Sha'biyya Al-Filastiniyya, vol I-III (Beirut: Filastin al-Tahwra, 1990, 1991, 1992). These special compilations are designed to demonstrate the FRC’s continued relevance to Palestinian politics by implying that it, more than any other individual faction and the intifada leadership, organized the events of the 1987-1993 intifada.
47 For al-Hurriyya, see http://www.alhourriah.org/; for Democratic Palestine, see http://revolt.st/dp/; for Fateh, see http://www.yafa-news.com/.
49 Fateh-Intifada’s virtual mouthpiece is the Free Arab Voice (http://www.fav.net/), while al-Hadaf operates its own mailing list from the PFLP’s Damascus offices.
the message of this radio is national, Palestinian national and, of course, the message of the Alliance of Palestinian Forces... Maybe one day you [might] think the radio belongs to Hamas, another day to Jihad al-Islami. Everybody who makes a movement, we speak about them and for them. But always in a position of opposition to the [Palestinian] Authority and Abu 'Ammar.50

The main purpose of the radio station has been to maintain a cognitive unity between inside and outside communities, seeking to “maintain and foster a unity of struggle in all our people.”51 One way to achieve this has been interfactional broadcasts, recurrently airing all the various factions’ political and military statements, interviews with the rejectionist general secretaries and sympathetic coverage of any and all armed activity against Israel. Another attempt to achieve this unity has been made by using the al-Quds Radio news network to create the illusion of oppositional omnipresence:

We apply some measure of division (infisam) in our broadcasts. When we write the news, or stories, or reports, we write it as if we were inside... So, in Damascus, when we want to say what Teshreen or al-Thawra writes, we say 'our editors from Damascus sent to us so and so.'... So we have a division of location (infisam fi al-makaan), two places. The actual location of the editors who write everything is in Damascus, but inside ourselves we live in Palestine. Just when you arrived here, I was writing some news from Bait Sakhum in the name of 'our editor in Beit Sakhum'. This way everybody hears that we are there, with them.52

Apart from news coverage and political analysis, al-Quds Radio also broadcasts general encouragement to struggle as well as practical suggestions for how to take direct action such as acts of sabotage, and also advice on which roads are least dangerous or congested for travel. As for militant propaganda, the core rationale of the station is apparently that people must be encouraged to think in new ways, provided with new information, and that this in itself will enable maintenance of a Palestinian consciousness of struggle. “It is very difficult to explain what you want in brief broadcasts,” explains Shururu, “to make the listener believe in what you

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
are saying. So, we have a way to make him think, then to believe. To take [our information] and then be free to begin to think, or not. In this way, we can keep the struggle going."\textsuperscript{53}

The refugee communities and the residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip are given widely different advice on how to struggle, reflecting an awareness of the lack of militant capability on the 'outside.' While the latter has received practical advice for action since 1987, the message for the refugee communities is one centred on intellectual and emotional perseverence and sacrifice with a long-term objective of not "surrender[ing] the people's historical rights."\textsuperscript{54} Broadcasts have discouraged the refugee communities from armed activity. More significantly, since around 1990, \textit{al-Quds Radio} has encouraged younger refugees, particularly those resident in Lebanon, not to reject the offers of work permits, education and health benefits extended to them by a number of Western states, particularly Australia and Canada. This was a dramatic reversal of the PFLP-GC's previous policy, which viewed such disintegration of the refugee communities as a political offence because it weakened the Palestinian refugee communities and potentially complicated the right of return. "We learn our lessons... We saw that this will be good for the future, to learn technology, to let the children and the families receive good health care, education, information... But they will remain Palestinians inside [their hearts]."\textsuperscript{55} With the majority of the other APF factions opposed to this 'dilution' of the Palestinian refugee communities, this has been \textit{al-Quds Radio}'s most severe editorial bone of contention.

This discouragement of armed struggle and encouragement of moves to other countries seems to further bolster the hypothesis that armed struggle has been a rhetorical device, not an actual intention. Likening the Palestinian struggle to "relay running, where you take the stick and run, and later you give the stick to another," Shururu suggested that

The Palestinian revolution continues like this. In every situation, in every stage and wherever there are Palestinians there is some kind of

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
struggle. The overarching important aim of the opposition is to continue the struggle—by stone, by word or by fire, but always to continue the struggle. And we, in *al-Quds Radio*, our [intended] contribution is to prolong that struggle.

Thus, while the printed media have sought to either promulgate formal statements and communiqués, or to shore up ingroup cohesion by enhancing the positive connotations of belonging to those groups, *al-Quds Radio* has sought to broadcast an interfactional message of resistance and struggle to the Palestinian communities in and around Palestine. Senior cadres of Hamas, MIJ, PFLP-GC, Fateh-Intifada, and PPSF have all emphasized the value of *al-Quds Radio* as not only a launch pad for the opposition’s ideals, but as an instrument of interfactional cohesion and solidarity. “*Al-Quds [Radio]* has allowed us to come together and speak as one,” remarked Khalid ‘Abd al-Mejid, “which has been important for the Palestinian people and for us ourselves.”

**Social, Cultural and Educational Activities**

Each rejectionist faction has engaged in social and educational activities in Syria and Lebanon. Each faction—with the exception of PLF, PPSF and PRCP—operate women’s and youth organizations and cultural sections, which organize a wide range of events. Cinema evenings, art exhibitions, poetry recitals and traditional craft fairs are some elements of these organizations’ programmes, intended to provide meaningful leisure time and political education simultaneously. Thus, for instance, when the DFLP’s youth organization screened the film version of Ghassan Kanafani’s *al-Mutabaqqi* (‘Those Staying Behind’) in November 2000, it was both preceded and followed by lectures on what the film taught about Zionism, Judaism, 1948 and the right of return.

Rather than mixing politics and pleasure, the poetry and prose recitals recurrently organized by Fateh-Intifada in association with various Palestinian cultural clubs in Syria—often attended and addressed by Abu Khalid al-‘Amleh—are attempts to appropriate expressions of Palestinian

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culture and infuse them with a militant content. In this context it is interesting to note that the magazine *Fateh* as well as its affiliated website the Free Arab Voice both emphasize poetry and art as mode of expressing Palestinian aspirations: *Fateh* regularly contains three to four pages of poetry and other artistic efforts, and the Free Arab Voice contains an extensive selection of nationalist poetry, which tend to emphasize traditional Palestinian 'virtues' such as suffering, sacrifice and unfulfilled dreams, as well as armed struggle and revenge.58 While not expressed thus by the rejectionists themselves, the apparent centrality of poetry to expressions of rejectionist resistance echoes the notion of Nietzsche and Heidegger that a people's soul can be found in, and accessed through its poetry.59

An indispensable element of the rejectionist effort to manipulate the refugee's political conscience and discourse has hinged on their links with a host of faction-affiliated NGO's, the daily activities of which bring them into contact with the populace to an extent that is beyond the capability of the factions themselves. These NGOs' activities include the management of orphanages, kindergartens, healthcare centres and cultural clubs, areas where children and youths receive formative impressions of the world around them. The various factions have been able to use their NGO linkages—which often amount to direct control—to bring these formative impressions into line with their ethos of struggle, sacrifice and return.

Two points of clarification need to be made at this juncture: First, the PLO and its various factions have operated and supported a range of NGOs within these and other areas for several decades. Indeed, prior to the PLO leadership's expulsion from Lebanon in 1983, such NGOs were part of the backbone of the Palestinian social infrastructure. Thus, it must not be inferred from their use by the rejectionist factions that their existence is somehow an organizational innovation for the purpose of discursive resistance. Second, these organizations generally do conduct valuable social work among the communities in which they exist, and this has remained their primary task and function. They must thus not be thought of as political groups masquerading as, or concealed within NGOs; rather, they are *bona*

58 See http://www.fav.net/RhythmsOfTheStorm.htm
fide social and educational organizations that also perform political functions. Each NGO’s factional affiliation appears to produce identifiably different ‘discursive effects.’

Each rejectionist faction—with the exception of the PRCP, PLF and PPSF—have either operated social and educational NGOs directly, or closely coordinated their political agendas with independent NGOs in the post-Oslo period. As with most other endeavours undertaken by the APF factions, each has promoted its own line within the general parameters of an anti-Oslo and anti-PLO/PA leadership agenda. Hence, the political substance of the various NGOs’ activities has differed greatly. These organizations include the DFLP affiliated al-Najdeh Association, which organizes a range of social, educational and cultural activities; the PFLP-operated Ghassan Kanafani Association, which organizes cultural events for children and adults; the PFLP-GC affiliated al-Khalsa Association, which organizes cultural and social events primarily for children and youths; the Hamas and MIJ affiliated Al-Aqsa and Al-Shaheed Associations, both of which provides medical and financial services in the refugee camps; and the Sa’iqa affiliated Palestine Association, operating kindergartens and pre-schools, primarily in Syria. Fateh-Intifada is particularly energetic in this sphere of activity. After the expulsion of the Fateh/PLO leadership from Lebanon in 1983, Fateh-Intifada seized Fateh’s and PLO’s assets and infrastructures in Syria and Lebanon, which included financial and political ties to a number of NGOs. These included the Palestine Martyrs Works Society (Samed); the National Foundation for Health, Social & Educational Services; the Handicapped Social Association; and—until early 1998—the National Institution of Social Care and Vocational Training-Beit Atfal al-Sumud.

Several of these organizations operate on a non-discriminatory basis, but many of them refuse to, for instance, admit orphans whose parents were not members of the faction to which the NGO is affiliated. This has been the case with, for instance, with al-Khalsa and Palestine Associations. Each of these organizations instils a “different sense of being Palestinian,” and inculcates a distinct brand of Palestinianism into the children and youths.

with whom they work. An interesting case in point is the contrast in political conscience developed by the children processed by Beit Atfal al-Sumud and those processed by al-Najdeh.

**Beit Atfal al-Sumud** was established in August 1976 at the initiative of the Secretariat of the General Union Of Palestinian Women with the objective of providing substitute homes to the children who were orphaned by the Tal al-Za‘tar massacres. It is presently the largest Palestinian NGO in Lebanon in terms of resources and geographical areas of operation, with activities in ten of Lebanon’s twelve officially recognized refugee camps and sponsors from a range of charitable organizations around the world. Its initial Fateh and PLO affiliations were taken over by Fateh-Intifada in 1983, and the two remained affiliated until early 1998. A split—apparently precipitated by financial differences—caused the Beit Atfal al-Sumud’s disaffiliation from Fateh-Intifada, but the two organizations have nonetheless continued their political communication and coordination. According to UNRWA staff and other aid workers who have had first hand experience of the kindergarten and literacy programmes of **Beit Atfal al-Sumud**, its curricula “seem devised to propagate a very narrow and particular view of their social and political situation” that “match closely Abu Musa’s positions... they are indoctrinated, learning to hate Arafat. It is very political and very sad.” First hand contact with children that have passed through the organization’s “Family Happiness Project”—a programme that seeks to offer homes and human contact to orphans regardless of their parents’ factional affiliation—evidences not only the children’s absorption of highly militant rhetoric, but also their ascription of a register of horrific qualities to the PLO/PA leadership and to Arafat personally. “This is part of what **Beit Atfal al-Sumud** teach[es] them... they say to the children ‘you

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60 Olfat Mahmoud, October 25, 2000.  
61 Annika Hampson, UNRWA field worker, Beirut, June 2000.  
62 For background, see Yezid Sayigh, Armed Struggle and Search for State, pp. 400-1.  
63 For the organization’s own list of sponsors, see http://www.socialcare.org/cts  
65 UNRWA field worker, whose duties included contact with Beit Atfal al-Sumud during 1999: interview, Beirut, October 1999.
must curse Arafat, you must curse the [Palestinian] Authority. This is connected directly with their political basis... [which is] Abu Musa's."66

By contrast, the DFLP affiliated al-Najdeh Association—set up in 1978 as a Lebanese social organization and working in areas similar to those of Beit Atfal al-Sumud—devises curricula that are less militant and less aggressively anti-PA. Al-Najdeh's central cognitive themes instead appear to be the right of return, principles of legality and struggle through suffering, themes that accord with the exact issues emphasized by the DFLP. These topics would be difficult to ignore, but when taught about Palestinian history and politics, and in particular about current affairs, the children processed by al-Najdeh are, in the judgment of one UNRWA worker, "given a more balanced and less aggressive view of the world... It is clear that [al-Najdeh and Beit Atfal al-Sumud] have different political lines. It is clear, above in the children's different awareness of politics and the world around them."67

This is not to suggest that these NGOs' activities have yet had, or will have discernible or demonstrable socio-political repercussions, although work in the field of sociology of education would suggest this to be the probable case.68 The long-term effects of such different socialization experiences are not at all clear and lie beyond the scope of the present thesis. What is interesting for our present purposes, however, is the way in which the APF factions have sought to use the NGOs in the camps to perform the same educational and socializing functions on their behalf, as the PA approved school system in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has done on behalf of the PLO/PA. As one NGO organizer put it:

Without the NGOs, they [the rejectionist factions] couldn't do anything. They don't have that kind of membership or party structures... We [the NGO's] can benefit from the margin of freedom that exists in this country [Lebanon].69

The APF factions' use of NGOs in their political struggle against the PLO/PA leadership has aimed at maintaining a militant ethos as an integral

component and pivot of Palestinian political consciousness. As each faction has promoted its own variety of Palestinian nationalism through its affiliated NGOs, the intended collective effort has been to articulate the nature of Palestinian identity and prescribe its implications, to define the limits of the socially and politically acceptable. This effort, aimed at extracting a viable and active Palestinianism out of a unified heritage of Palestinianness based on struggle and sacrifice, has been of a long-term nature.

**Political Rallies**

A more short-term instrument for impacting on the political consciousness of the refugee communities has been the conduct of political rallies and mass meetings. Organized by every faction—with varying degrees of professionalism and attendance rates—these events have taken place regularly in all camps in Syria and Lebanon. As each faction has its own anniversaries and notable dates in addition to the various national holidays—such as, for instance, Land Day—political rallies are frequent and it is hoped that, sustained over time, rallies may impact on the attendees’ conceptions of their community and their role within that community.70

Among the APF factions, major factional anniversaries and holidays have tended to be occasions for shows of political unity and strength, generally attended by senior members of all factions. In addition, external dignitaries such as PLO cofounder Bahyat Abu Gharbiyya or Hizb’Allah’s Secretary General Shaykh Hassan Nasrallah are recurrently invited to attend and speak, thus enhancing the importance of the meetings and of the organizing and participating factions.71

Political rallies are political propaganda spectacles, allowing elites to communicate directly with a potentially mobilizable populace, disseminating their conceptions of political realities, obstacles, and challenges. The problem is that unless one is already predisposed to the message that is preached, one is unlikely to attend. However, as social identity theory suggests, social movements often need to ‘preach to the converted’ in order

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69 Qassem ‘Aina, October 26, 2000.
70 This was suggested by ‘Munir’, one of the main organizers of MIJ’s rallies in Damascus.
71 The author has attended four major rallies in Damascus during the course of this research, two of which were organized by MIJ, two by Fateh-Intifada.
to enhance morale and the positively charged self-esteem that goes with ingroup membership. Thus, political rallies are essentially introvert occasions.

The present discourse of rejectionism builds directly upon the collective, national Palestinian discourse of the pre-Oslo period. If only by dint of repetition, the various Palestinian refugee communities have thus become fluent in the language of rejectionism. Thus, what is said at political rallies—as well as what is printed in the rejectionist media, broadcast by al-Quds Radio and taught by NGOs—could be said to be the discursive ‘default setting’ of Palestinian refugee communities in Syria and Lebanon, which have been excluded by the PLO/PA leadership’s state building efforts. At rallies, the various secretary generals attend and deliver speeches with the aim of producing political legitimacy, not primarily for themselves as individuals or their factions—although given the pride and honour attached to the national project, this is clearly a part if it—but for ‘traditional’ Palestinian politics and its ethos: A PLO-centric political system encompassing the Palestinian people rather than the Palestinian territories, the pivot of which is all forms of struggle including armed struggle. This sort of project accords with Seymour Martin Lipset’s understanding of legitimacy as “the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society.”

**THE BEGINNING OF THE END**

While the APF factions seem to have intended to produce meanings and manage discourse without engaging in dialogue with their constituencies, their position in the midst of refugee communities made such a ‘clinical’ approach impossible. Thus, the APF engaged in a dynamic process of interaction with the refugee communities. Through the factions’ media activities, social and cultural work, educational organizations, political rallies and so forth, they were in fact affected themselves. By late 1996, after almost three years in the same essentially passive and defensive track, the various factions had begun to seriously assess and question the repercussions of

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their relations with, and performance among their people. This in turn prompted each faction to incrementally reevaluate and redefine its identity and role-conception within the APF collective. Each faction’s distinct combination of political and armed struggle abilities, ideology, social status and mode of relations with the refugee constituents, combined to affect its political trajectory. Thus, the alliance did not change as a whole, but, instead, its parts began to diverge.

It was in this atmosphere of collective and factional self-doubt that the DFLP announced an end to its opposition to the peace process and the PLO/PA leadership in February 1997. The faction had never been comfortable under the APF umbrella, having joined solely out of opposition to the DOP, with very little affinity for its APF partners. Over time, the DFLP’s activities among the refugee communities and inside Palestine suggested to it “total rejection of everything leads nowhere.”73 In a joint statement with Farouk Qadoumi, head of the PLO’s political department, Hawatmeh suspended the DFLP’s membership of the alliance and urged all factions to join in a comprehensive national dialogue with the PLO/PA leadership. Seeing its collective existence threatened, the alliance’s reaction was immediate and sharp:

The readiness of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which responded to Arafat’s call [to promote the Oslo and Hebron accords] to relinquish armed struggle and to participate in the so-called final status negotiations, clearly exposes and makes us recall the role it played at past stages as an advance reconnaissance platoon for the opportunistic and defeatist current in the Palestinian arena.74

The rejectionists were correct in that the immediate catalyst for the DFLP’s defection was indeed the Hebron accords of January 15. These accords specified a range of new PA responsibilities vis-à-vis Israel, including completion of the process of revising the national charter, strengthening of security cooperation, and a range of anti and counter-terrorism measures directed against the opposition, including the prevention of “hostile propaganda.” It also specified the terms and schedules for hand-over of land

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73 Naif Hawatmeh, June 16, 1999.
The Hebron accords as seen from the APF vantage point—especially its specifications for security cooperation—constituted a direct assault by the PLO/PA leadership on the Palestinian opposition and people, carried out in concert with the 'primary enemy.' It was a very real threat, however. Deeply concerned about their collective political future, the APF construed the DFLP's call for unity and national dialogue as brazen support for the Hebron accords. This was far from a correct reading of the DFLP's actions, however, which deplored the accords, but saw them as a lamentable result of Palestinian weakness vis-à-vis Israel. The DFLP had come to believe that the only remedy for that weakness was national unity, not continued rejection and division. If the other factions did not come together to bolster the PLO/PA negotiating position, so DFLP reasoning went, Palestinian land and rights would surely be squandered. More could be achieved by rallying behind Arafat than by simply rejecting his authority and legitimacy. Consequently, the DFLP's third General National Congress in January 1998 approved a complete review of the Oslo agreements; its fourth General National Congress in April and May 1998 presented and approved a political report entitled 'Spreading the sovereignty of the Palestinian State over all of the Palestinian territory occupied in the aggression of 1967,' which called for greater unity on both popular and factional levels.

The PFLP also suspended its APF membership in February 1997, but for very different reasons; the PFLP shared the other factions' outrage over DFLP moves to support the PLO/PA leadership. Since June 1996, however, the PFLP had boycotted APF meetings after being subjected to a barrage of criticism from its alliance partners—primarily Fateh-Intifada, Sa'iqa, PRCP, PLF and PPSF—for having attended the 1996 Gaza PNC, a meeting that ratified changes to the National Charter despite strenuous PFLP objections. The subsequent boycott and suspension of APF membership was symbolic politics, however, as the PFLP circumvented both through bilateral relations.

75 For the full text of Dennis Ross' 'Note for the Record' appended to the Hebron Protocol, see Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin (eds.), The Israel-Arab Reader, pp. 522-3.
76 Naif Hawatmeh, June 16, 1999.
77 See Qays 'Abd al-Karim et al., Khams Sanawat 'ala Itifag Oslo (Beirut: Dar al-Taqadam al-'Arabi li-l-Sihafa, 1999)
with the other factions. Its status as a leading rejectionist faction thus remained intact.

Importantly, its formal withdrawal from the alliance together with that of the DFLP reinforced the other APF factions' existential angst. Revising their post-Oslo activities and agendas, the APF factions were faced with the painful realization that their potential long-term impact on Palestinian political consciousness was not a pro-active enough approach. The Hebron accords underscored the fact that Israel and the PLO/PA leadership were drastically changing facts on the ground, and that the latter was now committed to actually engaging them in political and possibly violent combat. “Our thinking about tactics was necessarily shaped by the changing circumstances,” one rejectionist cadre later recalled. “The question was how to continue resistance in a constructive way. There is only one law of struggle, and that is resistance... [but] we must be a positive force.”

Neither prepared for, nor able to wage armed struggle, the APF and its agenda existed as if in a political vacuum. The alliance had no possibilities to respond effectively to the political developments inside Palestine, as a collective. The APF’s crisis of self-confidence became further aggravated when the PA and Israel signed the Wye River memorandum on October 23, 1998. The memorandum provided, among other things, a far-reaching blueprint for tripartite security cooperation between the United States, Israel and the Palestinian Authority. In the event, the Wye River memorandum precipitated substantial crackdowns on mostly Hamas and MIJ infrastructures inside the West Bank and Gaza, and to a lesser extent it also affected the PFLP’s ability to operate.

Characterizing the Wye River memorandum as a “disgrace [to] the Palestinian people’s honour and dignity,” it is interesting to note that in calling for action to oppose it, the PFLP-GC, for one, did not call for armed struggle. *Al-Quds Radio* noted that

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command has said the Wye River Agreement ‘dealt a treacherous blow’ to the

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Palestinian struggle. It said the agreement gave the United States Central Intelligence Agency and Israeli Mossad ‘the right to hound’ Palestinians and would ‘serve the strategic interests of the Zionist enemy.’ It called on Palestinians ‘to close ranks, escalate popular resistance in Palestine, activate the opposition, mobilize the public’ and ‘embark on a political and media campaign of incitement to expose and foil this agreement.’

As the APF’s key player after the DFLP and PFLP had suspended their memberships, the PFLP-GC’s tenor was significant, as well as an indicator of further changes ahead. All factions shared grave concerns about the situation. When PNC Chairman Salim al-Za’nun issued a call for a meeting of the Palestinian Central Council to be held in Gaza on December 10, 1998, set to discuss the final repeal of several articles of the national charter, the APF factions saw an opportunity for collective and decisive action.

Seeking yet again to demonstratively challenge the status and legitimacy of the PLO/PA leadership, the APF called for a National Palestinian Conference to be held in Damascus the day after the scheduled Central Council session in Gaza. On November 8, the APF’s general secretaries held an initial preparatory meeting, followed on November 19 by a second meeting attended by a number of independent Palestinian personalities. In a press statement prior to the closed-door proceedings, Khalid al-Fahum—the convener—explained:

... The most recent of these setbacks was the Wye Plantation accord, which dealt a fatal blow to our Palestinian people in several respects, particularly regarding their land. Arafat’s leadership has relinquished as much as 82 per cent of the West Bank land and 35 per cent of the Gaza Strip land to the enemy... The second tragedy is the security issue. The US and Israeli insistence on the issue of security was highly noted by all of us in the Alliance of Palestinian Forces. This means combating the legitimate struggle of all the opposing factions. They even went a step further when they began to combat media, press, cultural and speech instigation... The third tragedy is the [Palestinian] Charter. The charter is of paramount importance. It constitutes the backbone of the PLO...
As the proceedings were concluded, al-Fahum emerged to issue another statement containing the rejectionists' renewed counterchallenge to the PLO/PA leadership's hegemony:

... it was agreed to set up a preparatory committee representing our people inside and outside as a prelude to hold an expanded national conference. In this conference, national decisions can be taken to confront the current stage and the challenges of the future... It was also agreed to set up an emergency committee in all Palestinian camps and communities to mobilize the masses and rally the efforts to prevent the Palestinian [National] Authority from holding any meeting for the PNC, or from infringing upon the PLO charter...83

Activity preceding the conference was hectic, particularly as it related to attempts to draw up a working document. “At this stage our differences were evident,” one senior cadre would recall.84 As mentioned above, each faction’s tactical objectives and preferred instruments had begun to take its own route, and the factions’ attitudes were becoming difficult to harmonize. The Palestinian Central Council convened in Gaza on December 10, 1998, and voted by 81 to 7 to reaffirm changes to the national charter removing references to Israel’s right to exist.85 At the insistence of the Israeli government—who sought water tight assurances that the Palestinians would not at some later point deny the validity of the decision—the Palestine National Council was set to convene the following week to ratify the decision with a formal vote.86 That PNC session, scheduled for December 16, was to be attended by President Clinton; an enormous PR victory for Arafat, it was an equally massive blow to the APF’s self-esteem.

In what possibly amounted to the greatest show of rejectionist might ever mustered, the Palestinian National Conference—held in Damascus December 12-13—was attended by 382 delegates, which included all Palestinian rejectionist factions, representatives of the various refugee communities, independents and intellectuals, Arab statesmen and

83 Ibid.
sympathetic political movements from throughout the Arab world. During the two days of the conference, fifty-five speeches were delivered and thirty-six letters and twenty telegrams were read out. Rather than producing a fresh action plan or innovate the instruments of rejection, which were the conference’s ostensible objectives, the meeting turned into a show of support for the Palestinian cause and its ‘true representatives,’ the rejectionist factions of the APF. The alliance’s leaders sought to present this event to their members and to the refugee communities as a victory for their cause, a positive development in which representatives from all over the Arab world had affirmed the righteousness of rejecting the PLO/PA path. Much was made of the attendance of the former Algerian President Ahmad Ben Bella, whose attendance was some measure of comfort in the face of President Clinton’s address to the PNC in Gaza, scheduled for the following week.

What the factions wanted and needed, however, was innovation, and the only tangible political instrument to emerge from the conference was a follow-up committee mandated to investigate the most efficacious ways in which to recapture the structures of the PLO. “The Palestinian people strongly oppose the cancellation of the Palestinian National Charter,” said the closing statement, and “those who cancelled the charter... have lost their national and legal legitimacy.” Even that follow-up committee was stillborn, however, as its members were divided on the issue of just what their mandate implied. Was a parallel, or anti-PLO to be set up? Should the existing PLO be brought around to the APF standpoint, and if so, how? The disparity between those who believed that the existing PLO was sacrosanct—even though corrupted and twisted by Arafat—and those who believed that a new structure erected on the basis of the APF would be preferable, was simply too great. In the former camp were the PFLP, DFLP, PFLP-GC and Sa‘iqqa, as well as Hamas and MIJ; the remainder took the latter view.

87 A complete attendance list can be found in the conference proceedings, Filastin min al-Nahr ila al-Bahr: al-Mu’tamar al-Watani al-Filastini (Beirut: Dar al-Kanun al-Adabiyya, 1999), pp. 9-15.
88 Filastin min al-Nahr ila al-Bahr, p. 325
89 Tahsin al-Halabi, November 2, 2000.
MAKING AN EXAMPLE OF THE DFLP

Despite the best efforts of the 1998 conference in Damascus, the APF structure was now set to cave in on itself due to its increasingly evident internal differences over how to deal with the PLO/PA in the long term. The divide between those who had decided to practice limited cooperation with Fateh and those that could not bring themselves to do so was becoming ever more paralysing. In early 1999, however, none of the factions would openly admit to this deterioration. In order to demonstrate continued unity and resolve, the factions seized the opportunity, in March 1999, to make themselves look ‘more steadfast’ by making an example of the DFLP’s increasingly ‘liquidationist’ policies. Although it had left the APF already in 1997, the DFLP’s continued presence in Damascus and attendance at the 1998 conference made it de facto a continuing part of the rejectionist block. It also remained within the Unified Command that it had set up together with the PFLP in 1984, which structurally, if not politically, tied it to the alliance bilaterally. In fact, the DFLP found itself in a political limbo, caught between the APF—with which it no longer wished to be associated—and the PLO/PA leadership, which did not seem to want to be associated with the DFLP. When Hawatmeh attended the funeral of King Hussein in March 1999, he met with Ezer Weizman.

I was in my rooms after the funeral when Weizman entered. We shook hands and exchanged assurances that we both wished for peace and historic reconciliation between our two peoples. [Yitzhak] Mordechai, [Shimon] Peres and Lea Rabin also came into the room and I shook Peres’ hand too. I told [Peres] that he was wrong to refuse me entry to Palestine for the elections in 1996. Then they left... that was it.90

The symbolic handshake with Weizman caused an immediate and massive uproar in Damascus. The day after the funeral, the PFLP dissolved the Unified Command. “We consider it a fatal mistake by Comrade Hawatmeh, and it is clear to us that the Democratic Front is on its way to join the Arafat camp, probably within the next few months.”91 The PFLP-GC, Fateh-Intifada

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90 Naif Hawatmeh, June 16, 1999.
91 Muhammad 'Issa Abu Khalil, telephone interview, March 1999. It was claimed that a further reason for the PFLP’s harsh reaction was a claim by DFLP cadres that George Habash’s wife, Hilda...
and Sa'iqa, meanwhile, resorted to arms, attacking DFLP offices in the refugee camps adjacent to Damascus, Hama and Dera', injuring one DFLP member. As the clashes in Syria petered out after two days, they intensified in the camps of northern Lebanon. The three assailant organizations set upon the DFLP-operated Palestinian Cultural Centre in Nahr al-Barid, killing one DFLP cadre and injuring two of its members.

That Sa'iqa participated in these attacks was as a signal of Syrian displeasure with Hawatmeh's increasingly unilateral manoeuvres. At any rate, the clashes could not have occurred had not Syrian military intelligence, which is responsible for security and order in the camps, turned a blind eye. “No one can do anything [in Syria and northern Lebanon] without the mukhbarat's acceptance... These groups particularly can do nothing without encouragement and support from some of the Syrian authorities,” remarked Hawatmeh. 92 In the aftermath of the clashes, Syrian authorities apparently caused “administrative, political and practical problems” for Hawatmeh “personally, and for the organization.” 93

The clashes caused an outrage among refugees, in Lebanon in particular, less out of sympathy for Hawatmeh’s manoeuvres than from memories of the Camps War. 94 At the time, Hawatmeh was convinced that the attacks were due to the rejectionists’ failure to supply their organizations with a positive collective identity based on actual political achievements “The rejectionists are in fact reactionary; they look to the [past] and not to the present and future. They want things to be the way they once were, which is not possible.... They are punishing the Democratic Front [on the outside] because they are powerless in Palestine, while we are making constant progress.” 95 Violation of physical space was, indeed, a way of shaming the DFLP, whose apparently increasing importance detracted from the others social status.

While Hawatmeh seems to have been correct in his analysis of the immediate reasons for the attack, describing the DFLP’s political path as one

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(Umm Maysa), received funds from Egypt on one of her visits there. The source of this information was a central committee member of the PFLP-GC, corroborated by a senior PFLP cadre.

95 Naif Hawatmeh, June 16, 1999.
of 'constant progress' proved overly optimistic. Driven by Hawatmeh's firm belief that peace between Syria and Israel was imminent—his estimation was "within two years"—and that the then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak looked favourably on the DFLP's promotion of Palestinian national unity as a necessary prerequisite for lasting peace also with the Palestinians, the attacks did nothing but entrench the DFLP's sense of being right. Events in Syria and Lebanon made dialogue with Arafat and the PNA easier by removing the last structural and political restraints from its APF partnership, as well as adding a sense of urgency. The DFLP-Fateh dialogue, carried out by second tier officials from both parties, had in fact been going on since 1997. Undeterred by events in Syria and Lebanon, Hawatmeh met with Arafat during the first weekend of August 1999. Regardless of the political fruitlessness of the actual proceedings, the summit encouraged the US State Department to remove the DFLP from its list of terrorist organizations in September. This, in turn, prompted Israeli authorities to communicate to the PA, in mid-October, that Hawatmeh would be permitted to return to Palestine. Anxious to not be seen to surrender or defer to Israel, Hawatmeh gave a series of interviews in which he stressed the legitimacy of armed struggle as long as the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza continued. His remarks caused uproar in Israel—where the memory of the DFLP's botched Ma'lot operation in 1974 is still fresh—96—and two weeks after the Israelis had decided to allow Hawatmeh back, Ehud Barak personally intervened to revoke his visa. Structurally and politically, the DFLP was to remain in this halfway position, wedged between the opposition and the PLO/PA leadership until the outbreak of the intifada.

THE PFLP CHANGES COURSE
Meanwhile, in Damascus, relations between the PFLP and the other factions were also getting tenser. On the last weekend in July—one week before Hawatmeh met Arafat in Cairo—PFLP Deputy Secretary General Abu Ali Mustafa Zibri had also met the PLO chairman in Cairo. George Habash had

96 In 1974, in the Israeli town of Ma'lot, a DFLP unit seized a school building and took some 30 students hostage. In the ensuing gun battle with Israeli security forces, twenty-two of the students were killed. There are several Israeli NGO's that work to continuously keep this event in the public eye.
made his attendance of the meeting conditional on the reinsertion into the PLO charter of the clause demanding the destruction of Israel. This, of course, made a meeting impossible, but Habash was concerned that acceptance of Arafat’s invitation might be perceived as a quasi-endorsement of his authority, and an endorsement of the Gaza Conference the previous December.97 Abu ‘Ali Mustafa, conversely, distanced himself somewhat from Habash’s rhetoric, and while denying that the PFLP was joining forces with Fateh in the PNA he welcomed moves towards “improved relations” with Fateh, and called for greater national unity, indicating a preference for dialogue between rejectionists and the PLO/PA leadership. Leila Khaled later explained:

Five years have passed [since the DOP] and a new question has emerged—‘How are we going to deal with the Palestinian Authority?’...There has been a big discussion within the PFLP about this issue, but that does not mean we are divided. If we [enter into] dialogue with the Palestinian Authority this doesn’t mean we agree with them. It simply means that reality necessitates dialogue... The dialogue is not going to go smoothly because we are opposed to many of the points that the Palestinian Authority works for.98

The other Damascus-based groups were angered and worried by Abu Ali Mustafa’s performance, however, and proceeded to demonstratively ignore the PFLP. After the popular rumblings following the attack on the DFLP, they could not afford another PR setback. Besides, all APF factions have far greater esteem for the PFLP and its leadership than they have for the DFLP and Hawatmeh, primarily because of the PFLP’s unimpeachable history of rejectionism and Habash’s personal stature. Even so, on the issue of PFLP, Fateh-Intifada’s Abu Fakhr remarked:

They left us. Where are they now? They have gone to Arafat’s camp... all the participants [at the 1998 Damascus conference] agreed that Arafat will not represent our people after the Gaza conference. The Popular Front did not honour this agreement. In such a situation, what is there to negotiate with the Popular Front about? They have gone to Arafat, let him speak to them...99

98 Leila Khaled, October 23, 1999
As with the DFLP, the deterioration in relations with the other APF factions facilitated policy shifts that were already in the PFLP pipeline. Habash had decided earlier that year to resign at the upcoming 6th National Congress, and Abu ‘Ali Mustafa—Habash’s deputy since the Front’s foundation—was set to succeed him. In fact, Habash resignation was brought on by not only increasingly poor health, but by awareness that he may no longer have been the best man to head the organization. In September, he formally announced his intention to resign. Refusing to compromise his personal convictions, Habash preferred to hand over the leadership, which earned him great respect in the middle and lower tiers of other Damascus-based factions.

This is how it should be done, I am telling you! He knows that he has done all he could do for our struggle and that he must not be a political burden... I wish these other people—Jibril, Abu Musa and the others—would do the same, let a new generation take over. But they believe they are secretary general[s] for life.100

This sort of reception likely compounded the perception among the remaining APF factions that the PFLP’s internal political developments were a profound threat to themselves. At any rate, the PFLP’s Political Department had seen the necessity to launch into a process of self-criticism, which would be one of the main tasks of the upcoming congress. As Habash put it:

We have to consider our struggle now after fifty years. We have not been victorious, not yet. Our main task that we have to face today is to explain why we failed. Our cause is very just, our masses are enthusiastic to struggle but until now we have not succeeded. We have to ask ourselves 'why?'101

When the Diaspora round of the Congress102, which was postponed several times, eventually convened in late April 2000, Habash not only tendered his resignation but moreover used his speech to criticize sharply both the activity of the PFLP and himself. Habash argued that the defeat of the Arab

100 Central committee member of the PFLP-GC, interview with author, Damascus, June 1999.
Nationalist effort had not been inevitable, and that "objective factors," while significant, were not decisive. Rather, he argued that the primary factors leading the revolution to defeat was the "absence of rationality and objectivity" in the slogans raised by the movement. Habash's speech contained searing criticism of the PFLP's post-Oslo activities, which implied criticism of the APF project to use "slogans" as symbols, rather than practical guides to action. The speech also emphasized the positive connotations of the PFLP's social and political identity through its achievement in the face of adversity, its ideological traditions, ethics and history. The speech is worth reiterating in some detail, and it is worthy of note that the last remark in the quoted passage rests on the assumption that honour and righteousness is vindicated not by a successful counterchallenge, but by the mere existence of a counterchallenge, as suggested by the challenge-response game.

A basic question that beats upon the wall of our reality, that comes from our past to reach our present and travel into our future is: Why have we been defeated—as a Front, as a liberation movement, as Arab states, and as the Arab Nation as a whole? In spite of all the sacrifices, pain, and suffering?

And although this is an important question, for it means a readiness to look critically, to review ourselves, and re-read our history; that only takes us half of the way. Preparing to respond to the question is what will pave the rest of the way...

[On the subject of women,] how can we attain real progress and approach the attainment of our national goals while we enslave and ignore half the energies of our people? ... The youth constitute another field where our program, institutions, and practice are to be tested. Will we be able to meet the needs of this vital group, do you imagine?

Let us now look at our situation in the Front. Let us try to assess the proportion of our members who are young and the extent that they are reflected in the leading bodies. What do we see? Comrades, both men and women, do not ever allow the party to grow old, for that really means death and the end...

Now, as I come to the end of my speech, I would like to remember martyrs of the Front, the martyrs of Palestine and of the Arab Nation. I remember Wadi' Haddad, Ghassan Kanafani, The Guevara of Gaza, Shadia Abu Ghazzala, and Abu Jihad Khalil al-Wazir. I remember

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102 There were three separate proceedings—for Diaspora, West Bank and Gaza Strip residents—with the two latter convening in May 2000.
103 Al-Safir, Beirut, April 28, 2000.
each of the martyrs, one by one, and without exception; those martyrs to whom we are indebted, for whom we must continue the struggle, holding fast to the dream and hope, and protecting the rights of the people for whom they shed their blood. Their children and their families have a right to be honoured and cared for.

I know well what material [the Front's] members are made of, the value and the depth of its traditions, and the ethics and values that the Front has planted all these years. I have faith that you will not squander these national treasures, for the generation of the future that will carry the banner and continue the march forward will be able to attain its goals....

One last word I say to you is that I know well that the goals for which I worked and struggled have not been attained. And I cannot say how or when they will be attained. But on the other hand I know in light of my scientific study of the march of history in general, and Arab and Palestinian history in particular, that they will be attained. In spite of this bitter truth I leave my task as General Secretary of the Front with a contented mind and conscience. My conscience is content because I did my duty and worked with the greatest possible effort and with complete and deep sincerity...

And my aim, again and again, is to emphasise the need for you to persist in the struggle in the service of our masses, for the good of our Palestinian and Arab masses. The good of the masses that lies in the just and legitimate cause, as it does in the realization of the good of all those who are oppressed and wronged. You must always be of calm mind, and be of contented conscience, with a strong resolve, and a steel will for you have been and are still in the camp of justice and progress, the camp whose just goals will be attained and which will inevitably attain its legitimate rights. For these are the lessons of history and reality, and no right is lost so long as there is someone fighting for it.104

DISSOLUTION AND ATTEMPTED RESTORATION

The DFLP's political limbo act and the PFLP's process of self-criticism deprived the APF of its two largest and most respected members; with the exception of Hamas, these were the only factions with a significant following inside Palestine, as well as considerable diaspora support. In the words of one rejectionist cadre,

104 Excerpts from the speech, as published in al-Safir, May 4, 2000.
We went from being the [Alliance of Palestinian Forces] to being ‘the Palestinian opposition without Habash and Hawatmeh.’ This was so bad for us... as a front against [Arafat].

At some point during November 1999, the remaining eight APF factions decided to dissolve the alliance and regroup themselves. This coincided not only with the departure of the DFLP and PFLP, but also with the commencement of the final status negotiations between Israel and the PA, as well as with the renewal of Syrian-Israeli peace talks. On July 20, 1999, Syria’s then Vice President ‘Abd al-Halim Khaddam summoned Abu Musa, Ahmad Jibril and Sa’iqa’s general secretary ‘Issam al-Qadi to “suggest” that “armed struggle was no longer a viable option” and that “the emphasis should be placed on political work.” The meeting, commonly interpreted in Western media at the time as Syria instructing the Palestinians that “it is time to end the armed struggle” was Damascus’ way of signalling good will to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak in order to get the Syrian-Israeli peace talks under way. The following day, eight of the APF factions issued a joint statement vowing to continue the armed struggle regardless, the PFLP and DFLP withholding their signatures. With that, the episode was over; Syria had shown good will and the factions went on with their work as usual; there were no active arms to lay down. While their ability to carry on political work in some form was never in doubt, the episode nevertheless unsettled the factions because it indicated a potential reorientation in Syrian objectives. Followed, as the episode was, by the PFLP and DFLP’s meetings with Arafat, the need to formulate a strategy that could somehow constructively challenge the peace process, as well as maintain a level of militancy high enough to place it in contradistinction to the reconciliatory attitudes of the PFLP and DFLP, became acute yet again.

The smaller factions—PRCP, PLF and PPSF—took a hyper-militant line By this time, these three were using the alliance essentially as a life

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105 Former Fateh-Intifada officer, interview with author, Beirut, October 2000.
106 This rendition of the conversation, which is Talal Naji’s, has been cross-corroborated by several individuals close to the participants, including Abu Khalid al-’Amleh, Farhan Abu al-Haija and Tahsin al-Halabi.
107 See, for instance, ‘Middle East new drive for united Palestinian Front,’ BBC Online, August 23, 1999.
support machine: All of them had ‘moderate mirror groups’ inside Palestine—the PPP, PLF-Abu al-‘Abbas and PPSF-Samir Ghosheh, respectively—and were well aware that they would not survive as factions without the conflict with the PLO/PA leadership. Also, they were aware that as parts of a collective their existence was magnified, with constant speaking engagements, interviews on al-Quds Radio, and so forth. Fateh-Intifada also took a radical position, not because its existence was threatened by the absence of a collective, but because at the heart of its raison d’être, as we saw previously, lies the necessity to encourage and maintain resistance against the Fateh leadership. While the other rejectionist factions could not accept dialogue with Arafat as head of the PA, Fateh-Intifada, by contrast, was compelled to oppose dialogue with Arafat as leader of Fateh. In this context it is worth reiterating that the hyper-militant factions, with the exception of Fateh-Intifada, were also those that were least suited to urge armed struggle, given their lack of armed capabilities. Yet, in order to make up for this deficiency, their principled position on armed struggle was all the more categorical. The PFLP-GC, Hamas, MIJ and Sa’iqa, were those least interested in being seen to intend confronting Arafat head-on, each for its own reason (returned to below).

Although all eight factions joined in the motions, the four radical factions were mainly responsible for the development of a provisional ‘compound strategy’ for the new grouping, the working name of which was the Palestinian Coalition (Tahaluf al-Filastini)\textsuperscript{109} “They are preparing a new aspect of struggle”, claimed Imad Al-Alami, Hamas’ representative in Syria, in reference to the radical secularists. “There is a project under study within the alliance to oppose what is developing on the political side [inside Palestine] ...We, all the factions, are awaiting that new proposal.”\textsuperscript{110}

The draft proposal was three-pronged, but so routine and uninnovative that it was politically dead on arrival: Resurrection of the Intifada, renewal of cross-border military operations, and rebuilding the institutions of the PLO on the basis of the APF. For each of these proposals, its proponents failed to answer the question ‘how?’ Instead, they resorted to

\textsuperscript{110} Imad al-‘Alami, October 27, 1999.
hollow rhetoric. Rather than the generalized and abstract defence of the principles of armed struggle that had been the hallmark of the APF, militant rhetoric was now used to urge specific courses of action. Within the model of social identity theory, the proposals and their justifications were clear attempts at social creativity in the face of a challenge to social status, yet they seemed—politically speaking—merely desperate, strained and ill defined.

Resurrecting the Intifada

The action plan's main elements were apparently a compromise, each reflecting the preferences of various groups within the alliance. Actively resurrecting the intifada found its strongest advocates in the PPSF and the PRCP. With no mobilized or mobilizable cross-border guerrilla capacities, these two argued that "We need to practice all possible pressures on the plan of Oslo in order to prevent the signing of the final status agreements. Therefore we will work in order to revive the intifada, militant upheaval inside West Bank and Gaza, to resist all forms of occupation." The proposal was also supported by Fateh-Intifada. "We believe in all means of struggle", explained Fateh-Intifada's Abu Fakhr, "If the situation is right... if the road has been paved for the Intifada, then it will happen." It was clear that Fateh-Intifada was interested in paving that road, hoping to make use of those sympathizers it apparently has within Arafat's Fateh organization.

While fanning flames of discontent inside Palestine need not have been a complicated matter, the proposal was nevertheless extraordinarily confused. The intifada was variously supposed to thwart a final status agreement; variously it was thought that the final status agreement would be the intifada's catalyst. Also, several factions were categorically opposed to the idea, most notable the PFLP-GC, Hamas and the MIJ. They feared that in a new intifada, popular pressure would be brought to bear not only on the Israeli authorities, but also, and more directly, on the PLO/PA. This was

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111 Khalid ‘Abd al-Mejid, October 18, 1999.
112 There are allegedly several 'closet' Abu Musa supporters within Arafat's ex-PLA PSS hierarchy, unwilling to confess their allegiance out of salary considerations. This is a claim that cadres from several organizations, both sympathetic and averse to Fateh-Intifada, have made.
something that all the larger groups wanted to avoid. MIJ’s Ramadan Shallah had expressed it thus:

We keep a low profile, we don't feel we are in a hurry because eventually our existence will bring us into conflict with the authorities themselves. But we don't want a new Algeria. We don't want someone with an interpretation of the sharia' saying, 'they co-operate with the Israelis, we must fight them in the same way.' This would be of benefit to no one but the Israelis. 114

Renewal of Cross-Border Raids

In the light of regional and international developments, this proposal seemed simply surreal. With whatever guerrilla capabilities they possessed being confined to barracks by the Syrians—and following as it did on the meeting between Khaddam and the three principal rejectionist leaders—the factions knew that they would have no opportunity to attack Israel from either Syria or Lebanon; any other base was equally unfeasible. "[Despite restrictions] we still train our militants", said Abu Fakhr, "it is very important for us to continue the struggle." "[A]rmed struggle has not fallen from our minds", agreed Abu Nidal Al-Ashqar. "When we can, we will do it again."

What seemed- mere posturing in order not to lose face had a more significant dimension, resting on a long-term analysis of regional politics that all eight factions seem to have agreed upon. "They are waiting for an Arab revival in neighbouring countries", explained Tahsin Halabi. "But there are no forces there to accomplish such a change. It is not on the agenda. They must understand—finita la musica!" 115 Halabi’s suggestion was borne out time and again by articles in Fateh-Intifada’s magazine, and by statements on the PFLP-GC’s al-Quds Palestinian Arab Radio. "It is a fact that the Palestinian people and organizations cannot by their own means and forces achieve their goal of liberating their homeland and returning home", argued ‘Arabi ‘Awwad. “This goal demands the potentialities of the Arab countries, especially those neighbouring Israel—Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq.” 116 “The struggle with the Zionists is a struggle of the whole Arab nation against Israel,” Khalid ‘Abd al-Mejid agreed. “Based on that belief the

114 Ramadan Shallah, June 10, 1999.
Struggle Front maintains good relations with other Arab and Palestinian progressive and national forces... We don’t feel that we are unrealistic.”

While it was pure fiction to claim that the Damascus-based PPSF (as opposed to Samir Ghosheh’s Ramallah-based PPSF) pursued regional networking, it is worth noting that this entrenched pan-Arabism, shared by all secular rejectionist factions, came to the fore in their political work after the outbreak of the intifada. At the time, however, the smaller factions hypothesized that pivotal changes among the region’s heads of state—not a grand systemic overhaul—might afford them the opportunity to rearm and revive the guerrilla struggle. The relatively fluid succession mechanisms of most Arab regimes procedures mean that there is no way of predicting who will succeed any given present head of state, nor if that person would stay on the path of ‘normalization’. The issue of a successor to President Assad was a particularly crucial issue as the personal world-view and power-base of a new Syrian leader would redefine their license and ability to operate from Syria and Lebanon. “Asad is old, what is there to say that the next president will control these groups in the same way?”

It was further hypothesized that a moderate leader with a weak power base—a description thought at the time to potentially fit Bashar Al-Asad—could also be advantageous to a guerrilla revival as issues of ‘solidarity with Palestine’ and ‘confrontation with Zionism’ are among the habitual rhetorical devices of Syrian politics.

Capturing the institutions of the PLO

The inventors of the proposal for rejectionist ‘renewal’ had intended the new organizational structure to contain representatives of Palestinians living in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza in addition to the diaspora, and that not only the factions but also independent unions and professional associations should be invited to join. This inclusion of ‘independents’ was a sign that the Palestinian Alliance was intended as a means of capturing or replacing the PLO. The APF, like the RF and PNSF before it, had aimed at correcting the positions of the PLO leadership by exerting political pressure. Apparently

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believing that they were failing to impact significantly on the PLO/PA policies—and seeing their long-term discourse manipulation being thwarted by the shifting policies of the PFLP and DFLP, the rejectionists now considered the back-up option of creating parallel PLO institutions. It is clear that the reconstructed PLO was envisaged to function as, among other things, a support network for the regenerated armed struggle, both the intifada and cross-border operations. Asked to elaborate on the plans, however, the lack of concrete ideas was painfully evident:

We consider PLO under Arafat to be nothing... the PLO must be rebuilt to once again represent all Palestinians wherever they are. When we rebuild the PLO we will take the program they cancelled. Then we will call representatives from all the places where Palestinians exist... we will reconstitute the Palestinian National Council, which will re-elect a leadership that accepts the [National Charter]. When we have this [chain of] command... we will be able to say that we are the official representative of the Palestinian people. After that, we will be able to put the Arab nation and the whole world in front of their responsibilities [vis-à-vis] the Palestinian cause.120

All eight remaining factions publicly agreed to this project, and went to great pains in pointing out the primacy of this goal.121 Indeed, at their December 1998 Damascus conference, the factions vowed to restore the PLO.122 Yet, the PFLP-GC, Sa'iqa and the two Islamist factions were not, in fact, seriously interested. By the early months of 2000, the Syrians were seeking some sort of long-term rapprochement with the PLO/PA, and the PFLP-GC and Sa'iqa both considered the institutions of the original PLO sacrosanct. The Islamists, whose infrastructures in the West Bank and Gaza were already badly damaged by the joint anti-terrorist campaigns by the PA, CIA and Mossad that followed on the Wye River agreement did not want to give Arafat further reason to clamp down on them; they had for several years stuck to the position that they were not challenging the PLO, and were not about to change it. In addition, due to their relatively larger followings, they were forced into a greater awareness of the structural and political realities that would impede the effort. The four radical factions' inability to

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121 See, for instance, Fateh, no. 430 (December 26, 1998), pp. 10-3
122 Filastin min al-Nahr ila al-Bahr, pp. 326
operationalize their ideas, partly due to the obstruction of their four more moderate partners, kept the rejectionist current in a limbo until the breakout of the intifada in September 2000.

**THE DEATH OF HAFEZ AL-ASAD**

The second half of 2000 was a period of momentous events and significant change for the rejectionist organizations. On June 10 Hafez al-Asad died, temporarily plunging the Damascus-based factions into political and organizational uncertainty. While the factions had received no active support from Syria since Oslo, the value and importance of the political succour and comfort provided them by Syria’s policy of benevolent non-interference could not be overestimated. Syria was the rejectionists’ political lifeline, enabling them to exist among their people in the camps, and affording them the opportunity to print their propaganda and broadcast their agendas. Moreover, over the almost two decades since Syrian and rejectionist objectives had begun to converge—a process that began in the wake of Camp David—the two had come to coexist within the same discursive universe, each reinforcing the ethical righteousness and political correctness of the other. The Palestinian cause and its symbols had been adopted by official Syrian rhetoric—evident for instance in the emblem of the Ba’th Party, which carries a Palestinian, not a Syrian flag—just as Syrian official discourse had been adopted and internalized by the Palestinian organizations; even Hamas and the MIJ had come to join in this process, referring to Asad as al-akh al-\textit{kabir} (‘the great brother’) and al-ra’\textit{is} al-munadil (‘the president struggler’), stock phrases in the Syrian political dictionary.\textsuperscript{123} The Islamists had realized the value of Syria when, in late 1999, the Jordanian government cracked down on Hamas activity, expelling its leaders and dismantling its infrastructure. Syria took Musa Abu Marzouk, head of Hamas politburo, and a number of other senior Hamas functionaries under its wing, making Damascus the new hub of Hamas exile leadership. To the entire rejectionist current, then, Syria continued to be a “bastion of the liberation struggle”\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{123} Speeches by Musa Abu Marzouk, head of Hamas politburo, and MIJ’s secretary general Ramadan Shallah, respectively, on the fourth anniversary of the death of MIJ founder Fathi al-Shiqaki, Yarmuk camp, Damascus. October 23, 2000.
\textsuperscript{124} Talal Naji. May 28, 2000.
and the “last citadel to stand firm against Zionism.”\textsuperscript{125} Reciprocally, to Syria the rejectionists continued to be part of a “mutual alliance among national liberation movements in their struggle with imperialism, Zionism and racism...”\textsuperscript{126}

Even so, since the rejectionists’ meeting with Khaddam described above—in which it was suggested to them that they should lay down arms and concentrate on political work—there had been some question marks as to what their future in Syria might hold. The rejectionists’ confidence in continued Syrian support for their political efforts was nonetheless borne out by developments in the Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations. Most importantly, Syria’s refusal to expel, or even take steps to limit the activity of the Damascus-based factions was apparently a central bone of contention that contributed to the breakdown of the Syria’s negotiations with Israel in Shepherdstown, in January 2000.\textsuperscript{127} “We know this and we are of course very grateful for this position,” remarked Talal Naji at the time.\textsuperscript{128}

After the death of Hafez al-Asad, however, all bets seemed to be off. As his oldest surviving son, Bashar, assumed the presidency there was widespread speculation among Western commentators that the new president’s more ‘Westernized’ and ostensibly liberal worldview would cause him to seek rapprochement with the West at the expense of traditional Syrian friends and interests, among others the Palestinian rejectionists.\textsuperscript{129} Such suggestions hinged on the hypothesis that Bashar al-Asad harboured fundamentally different views of Syria’s national interest and mission than his father, and were contradicted by a number of factors, to begin with the agenda specified by the new president himself.\textsuperscript{130} In his inaugural speech to the National Assembly, Bashar al-Asad stated

\begin{quote}
The political strategy which [Hafez al-Asad] laid down and supervised in both its implementation and development proved a great success
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{125} `Arabi `Awwad, May 10, 2000.
\textsuperscript{126} `Adel Reda, Al-Tarikh la taharrakahu al-sudafah (Cairo: Akhbar al-Yom Press, n.d.), p. 431
\textsuperscript{127} Interview with a senior Ba’th Party official, Damascus, May 14, 2000.
\textsuperscript{128} Talal Naji, May 28, 2000.
\end{footnotes}
until this very day... today we need economic, social and scientific strategies that may serve both development and steadfastness...

[The Israelis] have betted on many things... The only betting that may succeed is to bet on the will of the people to return to their rights through the return of their complete territories to the line of June 4, 1967. Only then can we proceed towards a just and comprehensive peace. We call upon the United States to play its full role as an honest broker and a co-sponsor of the peace process. Pressure has to be exerted in order to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy with all the legitimate rights they dictate for the Lebanese, the Syrian and Palestinian people.131

Following Bashar’s accession there were repeated signals from the US that cutting ties with the Palestinian rejectionists would go some way towards facilitating a Syrian-US rapprochement and contribute to an eventual reopening of the Syrian-Israeli peace track. Also, Washington made clear that Syria’s need to procure and improve finances, technology, and industry—essential to the new administration’s domestic reform program—could be thus facilitated. However, it was relations with the US that came to turn sour, while relations with the rejectionists remained on a steady course.

In March 2000, Hafiz al-Asad had met with US President Clinton in Geneva to explore avenues of reopening the Syrian-Israeli negotiations. Asad had refused to compromise on Syria’s territorial demands and the summit was an abject failure. Washington proceeded to openly side with Israel, squarely blaming Syria for the summit’s failure. On the subject of the rejectionist factions, the US was relentless. “We know they only get safe haven here, but that’s still unacceptable,” remarked a US diplomat in Damascus in March 2000. “If the Syrians want to show good will they need to kick those people out.”132 Shortly after assuming the presidency, Syria recalled its ambassador to the US, Ghassan al-Mu’allem; one of Syria’s top diplomats, al-Mu’allem was replaced by a lower level apparatchik whose “primary function seems to have been to make US-Syrian relations more difficult.”133 This move was in part a result of the new president’s need to not be perceived as ‘selling out to Zionism,’ which could threaten his domestic

power base and hurl Syria into political instability. There was also the issue of ideological principles and integrity. The shared Syrian-rejectionist discourse appeared to have solidified to the extent that safeguarding the integrity of the patron-client relationship had become an integral part of the Syrian national interest. As noted in chapter two above, patron-client relationships are only enforceable through a shared sense of obligation based on honour; arguably this has never been more palpable than in Bashar al-Assad’s refusal to act against the Palestinian rejectionists despite numerous incentives and pressures in favour of such a move. In fact, socioculturally contingent honour and integrity on the ideological level appear to have become integral elements of the Syrian raison d’État.¹³⁴ This, then, gave the rejectionists reason to rejoice, as they came to understand that the new Syrian administration was unwilling, “for reasons of political steadfastness and for reasons of national honour,” to alter its position vis-à-vis the Palestinians.¹³⁵ “Bashar is a man of political principles,” remarked Talal Naji. “We have nothing to fear from him because he believes in our cause, just as his father did.”¹³⁶

RETURN TO THE TERRITORIES—BUT ONLY FOR SOME

On September 28, 2000, the then Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon visited al-Haram al-Sharif, the Temple Mount compound, by special permission of the Israeli government and with a massive military and police escort. To Palestinians, Sharon’s name is indelibly connected to the 1982 atrocities in Sabra and Shatila, and his visit sparked an outbreak of violent demonstrations. It soon became obvious that the unrest was not transient; the new intifada grew in strength and intensity by the day, and soon the collective despondency of the people of the West Bank and Gaza was transformed into popular struggle. Confrontations between Israeli security forces and Palestinians escalated, as did the body count.

The rejectionists were caught as unawares as the PLO/PA leadership by the outbreak of the intifada, although they were quick to deploy their media—most importantly al-Quds Palestinian Arab Radio—in its support.

¹³⁴ Anders Strindberg, ‘Growth with Strength,’ p. 33.
Like Arafat, the rejectionists resolved to attempt to harness this outpouring of popular anger and, also like Arafat, they knew that a considerable part of the people’s discontent was this time directed against the PA. This, the rejectionists quickly concluded, was an indictment against the Oslo process and the utility and legality of the PA.

Arafat now needed to bolster his position after coming under increasing pressure from the US and Israel after the breakdown of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. In July 2000, having made very slow progress ahead of the September deadline for final status negotiations, Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Barak had enlisted the support of the US in an attempt to move matters forward. Both Israel and Arafat refused to give up claims to sovereignty over Jerusalem, however, and the summit came to naught. In its aftermath, the US joined with the Israelis in laying the blame on Arafat’s intransigence, notwithstanding President Clinton’s remark that “I was not condemning Arafat, I was praising Barak.” The deadlock caused unease and frustration in Palestine, and an increasing disillusionment with the PLO/PA leadership. Sharon’s excursion was the spark that set off the fire.

Within the first two weeks of the outbreak of the intifada, a shell-shocked Arafat invited the PFLP, DFLP, the PFLP-GC, Hamas and MIJ—who thus far had shunned any association with the PA leadership—to join with him in directing and controlling the intifada; within another week Sa’ïqa was also invited. The factions persistent refusal to have anything to do with the PA—“now exposed as a sham and an illusion”—prompted the establishment of the interfactional National and Islamic Forces (NIF), within the framework of which they came to cooperate with Fateh. As a gesture of goodwill, the PA released Hamas, MIJ and PFLP-GC activists from its prisons.

Arafat’s invitation was exactly what the fragmented and increasingly dysfunctional rejectionist camp needed. On a political level, they realized that this was an opportunity to reinsert themselves into the political mainstream and thus have the opportunity to exert greater and direct

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137 ‘U.S. President Bill Clinton: Statement after the Camp David Peace Talks (July 25, 2000),’ in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin (eds.), The Israel-Arab Reader, p. 553.
influence on Palestinian affairs. On the less obvious level of sociocultural
dynamics, Arafat’s invitation was a significant gesture on behalf of the party
that had challenged their honour and threatened their integrity by signing
the DOP. Oslo, they had argued all along, had been a dead end leading
neither to a lasting and equitable peace settlement, nor to the recovery of
Palestinian rights; Israeli intransigence on the issue of Jerusalem was simply
a case in point. As far as they were concerned, ‘Arafat the transgressor’ now
conceded defeat and humbled himself by reaching out to them. “Abu
‘Ammar’s request is important,” remarked Talal Naji at the time, “because it
shows that he understands the real implications of what is happening on the
ground.”139

The rejectionists lobbied hard to enlist Syrian support for the intifada.
The Arab Extraordinary Summit convened in Cairo in late October to
address the escalating violence inside Palestine was Bashar al-Asad’s first
significant international engagement as president. The summit was an
opportunity to demonstrate that Syrian foreign policy remained intact, the
shift in leadership notwithstanding. “This blood has not been shed so that we
may come and stop it being shed,” he told the other delegates, “but to make
Israel pay the price.”140 Syria’s stance was predictably among the more
uncompromising of those gathered in Cairo, and President Asad called for
the severance of all Arab ties with Israel. More importantly, at the
Conference of Islamic Heads of State in Doha in November 2000, the Syrian
president reportedly suggested in private meetings with other delegates that
the financial donations they had pledged in support of the intifada should
benefit also the Palestinian rejectionists.141 For the first time in many years,
then, Syria may have actively solicited finances for the Palestinian
rejectionist organizations.

In return the Syrians had also exerted pressure on the rejectionists to
take the opportunity afforded them by Arafat’s gesture. With a new
administration in Damascus that was attempting to mend fences with a
number of neighbouring leaders, among them Arafat, Syria was keen to

139 Talal Naji, November 7, 2000.
140 President Bashar al-Asad’s Speech at the Arab Extraordinary Summit, Cairo, October 21-22, 2000
141 This was alleged to the author by several Western diplomats in Damascus in November 2000.
promote Palestinian unity as this would not only enhance the rejectionists' position but also facilitate Syria's own overtures. Syria's Minister of Information remarked at the time that

We hope to see all the groups united in one. We have done everything possible in the past, to bring them together... because unity is strength for all. But unfortunately unity is sometimes not easy [to achieve]. Although [I must stress] that this is an internal matter for the Palestinians.142

The six invited factions let go of their rejectionist foothold and joined forces with Arafat for the first time since the early 1980s. This did not mean a change in tenor, however. "Oslo is now dead," remarked Talal Naji, "and it is imperative that we cooperate within a joint national leadership to confront Israeli aggression."143 On January 6, after repeated US requests that the PA leadership quell the intifada and return to the negotiating table, the NIF issued its first statement—entitled 'The Call for Adhering to the Constants and Rejecting the US Proposals'—which read in part:

Our great masses, at the time when the criminal Zionist attacks and aggressions executed by the Zionist occupation army and the settlers' gangs escalate against our masses, the US-Israeli conspiracy heightens! This conspiracy that aims to drag us into the trap of accepting the US proposals, which are nothing but a blatant expression of the Zionist scheme that aims to impose surrender on our people and aims to force the PLO to extinguish the torch of the great Intifada of al-Aqsa, Jerusalem, Independence and Return. The National and Islamic Forces affirm on their constant position that rejects the conspiracy and aggression; the forces stress on the following:

Firm rejection and condemnation of the US Proposals and condemnation of any party that tries to exert pressure on the PLO to accept the proposals and affirmation of the position of the Executive Committee, which rejected these proposals in principle; affirmation of the clinging to the national constants that constitute the basis of our rights, firstly the right of return of the Palestinian refugees to their homes and properties; affirmation of the Arab and Islamic nature of Jerusalem and rejection of the fragmentation of this sovereignty over this city, which is the eternal capital of the Palestinian state; rejection of any concessions on the borders and rejection of any exchange of

143 Talal Naji, November 7, 2000.
lands; stress on the withdrawal of the occupation army and settlers’ gangs from all occupied territories, and the establishment of the independent Palestinian state with al-Quds as its capital; rejection of a return to negotiations in the light of the oppressive Zionist aggression, and rejection of any security coordination with the murderers who aim to strike the Intifada and eliminate the cause of our struggling people; affirmation of the continuation of the intifada as a struggle option that develops and escalates through progress in its various activities.

[...] Victory to the Intifada and Defeat to the Conspiracy!
Glory and Eternity to our Martyrs!
Recovery to the heroic wounded and Freedom to the Courageous Prisoners!
It is an Intifada till Victory!
The National and Islamic Forces
The State of Palestine, January 6, 2001

This statement was historic, and very different from anything that the six rejectionist factions had previously put their names to. It indicated their adaptation to, and acceptance of prevailing political circumstances in Palestine. Behind the fierce and irreconcilable rhetoric there were subtle signs of actual political intent. Most importantly, the NIF statement clearly implied the signatories’ acceptance of 1967 borders. Rejection of negotiation with Israel was only conditional, hinging on the “oppressive Zionist aggression” that accompanied the intifada. Signed in the “State of Palestine,” the statement also signalled commitment to Palestinian statehood in the West Bank and Gaza.

It should be noted, however, that the statement was also very different from anything that Fateh had signed in several years. Its political tone and was unmistakably rejectionist, suggesting that Fateh had gone quite some way in order to placate the rejectionists. Be that as it may, the rejectionists had found an opportunity to reinsert themselves into the mainstream without losing face and without having to alter their rhetoric. In this context it should be recalled that as early as 1991, both Jibril and Habash had made explicit statements in which they accepted partition of Palestine as well as negotiation and coexistence with Israel.

144 Statement by the National and Islamic Forces, January 6, 2001; per facsimile from PFLP-GC, Ramallah.
Wanting to demonstrate its adherence to legitimate forms of struggle, the PFLP-GC initially opposed the use of firearms in the intifada. Talal Naji especially voiced strong concern and unease about the political and PR repercussions of the armed operations carried out by Fateh’s Tanzim militia.145 As violence escalated, however, the PFLP-GC leadership decided to change approach and at some point between February and April 2001, the faction began efforts to transfer its military infrastructure from Lebanon to Palestine.146 The first step was transfer of small arms.

It was apparently the PFLP-GC’s decision to actively collaborate with Arafat that prompted a similar decision by the MIJ and by Hamas’ external leadership in Damascus. The latter was also induced to soften its traditionally militant position, having long been of a considerably more militant hue than the Hamas leadership in Gaza. ‘Imad al-‘Alami, head of Hamas’ Damascus delegation, stated in November 2000 that the organization has come to “accept the existence of Israel within the borders of 1967, even if it is with a heavy heart.”147 Some measure of policy coordination between the PFLP-GC, Hamas and MIJ had come to be natural, as the three factions had grown close over the years, although through its mutual alignments with the Hizb‘Allah rather than within the APF framework. Moreover, the PFLP-GC receives its entire social affairs budget—pensions, allowances for martyrs’ families, etc.—from private donors in Iran, a connection with runs through the good offices of the MIJ and, to a lesser extent, Hamas. The PFLP-GC thus needs the Islamists for continued solvency. The Islamists, for their part, have come to depend on access to PFLP-GC military camps in Lebanon to train their activists in guerrilla warfare.148

Fateh-Intifada, backed by the PPSF, PLF and PRCP promptly suspended cooperation with the six Damascus-based factions that had signed the NIF statement. These four were unable to participate in the general factional rapprochement that followed in the wake of the intifada. The

145 Talal Naji, November 7, 2000.  
146 According to a senior UN officer serving in Syria, Damascus, July 2001.  
148 Hamas’ and MIJ’s interest in guerrilla warfare, it has been suggested by one Hamas functionary, “may be a result of the Lebanese resistance’s victory over the Zionists.” It is thus a relatively recent development.
reason was highly existential. In addition to the six rejectionist factions, the NIF statement had also been signed by, among others, the Palestinian People's Party (PPP), the PPSF-branch headed by Samir Ghosheh, the PLF-branch headed by Abu al-‘Abbas and Arafat's own Fateh.\textsuperscript{149} The participation of these four effectively precluded involvement by ‘Arabi ‘Awwad's PRCP, Khalid ‘Abd al-Mejid's PPSF, Abu Nidal Ashqar's PLF and Fateh-Intifada. These four former and the four latter were competing claimants to the same organizational heritage. The PRCP had broken off from the PCP in 1982 on the issue of armed struggle (the latter changing its name in 1991 to the Palestinian People's Party, PPP), the PPSF had split in two in 1991 over the issue of Madrid, the PLF had split in three in 1984 due to diverging opinions on the split in Fateh, which took place in 1983. Cooperation within the NIF would require recognition by each of these factions of their rivals.

Several further issues prevented the Damascus-based factions from taking such a step. First, the PRCP, PPSF and PLF remain seriously committed to the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea—if only in an increasingly misguided effort to enhance their members sense of self-worth and social identity—and see no reason to compromise this position in return for a place among the mainstream factions. In addition, the PRCP, PPSF and PLF are tiny organizations of which the former two have virtually no financial resources (the PPSF is still able to live off sound financial investment plans made in the late 1980s); they depend for their subsistence on Fateh-Intifada. Were they to ‘join the mainstream' they would be unable to compete with their well funded and relatively better organized rivals, and thus seriously puncture their own social status. “They would rather risk going under here in exile,” remarked a senior rejectionist cadre, “than face certain destruction inside Palestine.”\textsuperscript{150} These three factions simply could not compete with their rivals in a way that would allow them to maintain a positive social identity. In Damascus, they have concluded, they are at least without competition.

A similar dynamic applies to Fateh-Intifada, although it remains financially solvent and well organized. Fateh-Intifada sees itself as the

\textsuperscript{149} Also participating in the NIF were the Palestinian Democratic Union (FIDA), the Arab Liberation front (ALF), the Palestinian Arab Front (PAF) and the Islamic National Salvation Party (INSP).
original Fateh. “The executive leadership inside the movement,” remarked Abu Fakhr, “defected from the principles that had already been agreed upon and cancelled the national program that had already been established... We do see ourselves as the Fateh movement because we believe in its principles and its aims and objectives...”\(^{151}\) Since cooperation with ‘Fateh-Arafat’ would imply recognition of his authority as a leader of Fateh, Fateh-Intifada is inherently unable to take such a step. While other factions have refused to cooperate with Arafat in his capacity as head of the PA, Fateh-Intifada cannot even afford to acknowledge him as head of Fateh, lest they deprive themselves of their raison d’être. In addition, there is the issue of personal and factional pride:

> These are fiercely proud men... Abu Musa and Abu Khalid. They are military men. They have dedicated their entire lives to this path of struggle and they cannot now turn around and simply change [path]. Impossible, how could they? They could not do that and still keep their honour and pride.\(^{152}\)

In late October 2000, Fateh-Intifada announced its deployment of the ‘Umar al-Mukhtar Forces, its military wing, which soon began claiming responsibility for a number of car bombs inside Israel. Fateh-Intifada’s military camps in Lebanon underwent “reorganization” between October and December, likely to facilitate the increasing activities of its military wing.\(^{153}\) Similar to the PFLP-GC, Fateh-Intifada has attempted, since early spring 2001, to shift the balance of its military capabilities from its outmoded reliance on infantry and armour—which continue to predominate their training camps—to underground strike forces, and to transfer these capabilities from Lebanon to the West Bank.

\(^{150}\) Tahsin al-Halabi, November 8, 2000.
\(^{151}\) Abu Fakhr, October 30, 1999.
At the time of writing, this is where matters stand for the rejectionist current. A possible bellwether for the four remaining rejectionist factions was provided by recent developments within the PPSF. As part of a PLO delegation, Samir Ghosheh visited Damascus in July 2001, and took the opportunity to meet with the cadres belonging to Khalid ‘Abd al-Mejid’s faction. The latter remonstrated vehemently, but to no avail. At the meeting, which was facilitated by members of other factions, Ghosheh reportedly stated: “Oslo is now history, there is no longer anything to separate us politically. Come with me to Palestine and let us work together again, in the West Bank. There you have a chance to make a difference.”154 Thus, Samir Ghosheh was able to split Khalid ‘Abd al-Mejid’s faction, bringing with him roughly half of its cadres who no longer saw any sense in separation. Those who stayed loyal to Khalid Abd al-Mejid did so primarily for personal and financial, rather than political reasons. Able to supply his followers with no political purpose—which is crucial to the positive social identity of a political organization—all but a handful left Damascus. “‘Arabi ‘Awwad and Abu Nidal [Ashqar] are very worried now, just as much as Khalid ‘Abd al-Mejid is upset. None of them can give their members anything to do. They have no identity as groups. Without a strong identity—finita la musica!”155

154 Samir Ghosheh, July 2001, as quoted by a non-PPSF participant in the meeting.
CHAPTER VI
SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT AND REJECTIONISM: SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND REMARKS

Conflict does not split, much less destroy unity. It constitutes unity, it is a binding-together, logos. Polemos and logos are the same.

Martin Heidegger

"Political scientists," according to Lisa Wedeen, "have generated neither precise concepts nor an adequate methodology for understanding the role of rhetoric and symbols in producing political power." As the analytical narrative of this thesis has demonstrated, rhetorical speech and symbolic action have lain at the heart of rejectionism, and on a more profound and active level within its post-Oslo framework than at earlier stages. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that scholars and analysts have so profoundly missed the point of rejectionist efforts.

On a deeply rooted cognitive level, the post-modern ethos that permeates contemporary Western scholarship is inherently hostile to belief in absolutes, such as adherence to 'narrow' nationalism or religion. Groups and individuals' espousal of concepts such as the social value of honour and integrity are seen as being primitive or pre-modern. When, in addition, they engage in violence or the rhetoric of violence to further their objectives, they become stereotyped as threats to modernity and civilization. Western political science has found it difficult to approach such social phenomena without superimposing ethnocentric judgment or unsuitable analytical frameworks; it then becomes an exercise in threat assessment rather than balanced scientific inquiry. 'Terrorism studies' is an instance of this. Scholars

4 See Kevin Avruch, *Culture and Conflict Resolution*, pp. 53-72.
within that field have sought to understand what ‘terrorism’ is—whom it attracts, why it occurs, and what causes it to thrive or decline. They have sought to extrapolate the essence of ‘terrorism’ from a whole range of socioculturally specific instances and—with very few exceptions—have rejected the explanatory capacity of the Emic. Often in obvious pursuit of political agendas, those groups who come in for scrutiny by terrorism scholars are prejudged as irrational and threatening, and the profound lack of primary research that characterizes the field serves to perpetuate these images. Schmid and Jongman have pointed out that

... if it is assumed that nonviolent behavior in society is normal, those who engage in violence, criminal or other, are necessarily ‘abnormal’ deviating from the rules of society. An outflow of this assumption are the many theories which regard the terrorist as a peculiar personality with clear identifiable character traits.  

As was made clear in chapter two, this thesis rejects the assumptions and methods of terrorism studies. Even so, mention must be made of them because they have come to form the basis for current academic orthodoxy on the subject of rejectionism, if only by default. In describing rejectionism as being simply “of little practical significance” while their progenitors are “[e]vil itself... [b]rooding in their own, self-imposed darkness,” stereotypes are imposed, which are then further entrenched by a well-nigh complete lack of field research on the subject. Scholarly assumptions about how politics ought to work according to formal models often obscures understanding of how it actually works on the ground; looking for a ‘terrorist threat’ and patterns of ‘military strategic thought’ will likely suggests to the researcher that the rejectionists are terrorist threats with an inability for military strategic thinking. Ilana Kass and Bard O’Neill inadvertently summed this malpractice up when they used their observation that “a student of strategy

7 Avraham Sela (ed.), Political Encyclopedia of the Middle East, p. 637.
9 From their annotations and source index, Kass and O’Neill, for instance, appear to not have actually spoken with, or interviewed a single rejectionist leader, cadre or activist for their research, relying instead heavily on Israeli and Arab press reports.
who looks for a substantive elaboration of such statements [in a speech by George Habash]... will do so in vain" to conclude that there was no processes of strategic thought within the PFLP, only “generalities and slogans.”10

In attempting to remedy these shortcomings, the present thesis has applied a socioculturally sensitive framework that emphasises the explanatory capacity of Emic perspectives and beliefs; this has evinced the depth of misrepresentation pertaining to the rejectionist current within the Palestinian national movement. Situating it within a political context that is internal to the Palestinian national movement, and within a sociocultural framework that draws on the salient features of the ambient eastern Mediterranean culture, previously unexplained incongruence between rhetoric and action—and between rhetoric over time—falls into place. In the early 1970s, consenting to a phased solution and the use of diplomatic instruments to achieve Palestinian objectives by signing the ten-point agreement, the PFLP, PFLP-GC, PPSF and ALF then went on to vehemently reject that agreement as well as negotiations and diplomacy in any and all forms. In the early 1990s, having made cautious but repeated remarks about accepting that a “minimum” of Palestinian demands be met through principles and mechanisms of “international legitimacy”, the PFLP, PFLP-GC and Fateh-Intifada greeted Oslo with total rejection of peace negotiations and co-existence with Israel. In both instances, the rejectionists were brought back to the ‘mainstream’ only after the diplomatic processes collapsed.

Social identity theory, anchored within a sociocultural framework that is meaningful to the Emic and comprehensible to the Etic through anthropological research and primary understanding, gives us the tools to understand this seemingly erratic behaviour. The theory suggests that groups need to supply their members with a positively connoted group identity in order to continue to exist. If a group cannot make its members see its value—and internalize that value to the point where it becomes a part of the individual’s own identity and self-worth—that group will perish. Arafat’s behaviour in each of these instances has been perceived as affronts to

10 Ilana Kass and Bard O’Neill, The Deadly Embrace, p. 244 (n. 34).
national and factional honour; this can not pass without response lest group identity and cohesion suffer. Herein lies the importance of culture.

Any group’s attempt to supply members and constituencies with a positive social identity must take into account ambient ‘background expectancies,’ the collective cognitive mechanisms through which individuals typify their experiences and comprehend the world. Alfred Schuetz proposed that group membership may be understood in terms of a collective sharing a set of common background expectancies by which the world was to be properly typified and understood. Such a group, then, could be anything from a political faction to a nation. Background expectancies are “intersubjective norms which are shared by members of a socio-cultural milieu; not only socially derived, they are also socially approved, controlled, maintained and institutionalised.” Perhaps foremost among social pivots in the agonistic cultures of the eastern Mediterranean is honour, and, as was noted in chapter two, a number of significant social norms and cues revolve around this concept. With specific reference to the Palestinian context, notions such as steadfastness, sacrifice and suffering have constituted other elements of collective background expectancies. As this thesis has demonstrated, the award, withdrawal, control, maintenance and institutionalization of honour, and the practice, preservation and institutionalization of steadfastness, sacrifice and suffering, have been the pivots of rejectionism.

Resistance against Israeli occupation has been part of the agenda of every fasa’il by virtue of its being a part of the Palestinian national movement; on this level of analysis, Israel has undeniably been the continuous ‘significant other’ against which Palestinian political and military efforts have been exerted. On this level—whether they accept Israel’s existence or not—their positions have been divergent, ambiguous and fluid. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the fact that the rejectionists have been engaged in a rhetorical battle is not an indicator of their underlying and concrete political objectives. As Lisa Wedeen has pointed out with reference to the ‘Asad cult’:

Sometimes the rhetoric is patently absurd; sometimes it blends consensual understanding with obviously false statements, appropriating meanings... And sometimes, too, the official discourse represents widely shared convictions about political life, albeit in stark Manichean terms that simplify the range of complex differentiated visions expressed... in private.  

For the rejectionists qua rejectionists, however, the significant other has always been the PLO/PA leadership and Israel has not been a focus, but a cognitive backdrop. Their political efforts have been part of their ongoing struggle to compete with the national leadership for social status, to determine and maintain a correct course within the Palestinian national movement and to provide a distinct input into the process of filling *Palestinianness* with content capable of turning it into *Palestinianism*.

The aim of this thesis has not been to essentialize Palestinian or eastern Mediterranean cultures, nor to suggest that rejectionism is somehow ‘Palestinianness in fine focus.’ Moreover, it has not sought to suggest that the rejectionist current is somehow comprised of individuals that are ‘better Palestinians’ or more ‘culturally aware’ than the PLO/PA leadership with which they have been locked in competition. Rather, it has sought to demonstrate that in order to resonate, rejectionism—like any other social or political phenomenon—must operate with reference to the immediate sociocultural *milieu* within which it exists; this applies also to the PLO/PA leadership. But if the two camps exist within the same cultural context, how can context explain their differences? The answer is that it does not, it merely explains the manifestation of their differences, allowing outsiders to give sense to otherwise perplexing speech and behaviour. The Fateh-dominated PLO/PA leadership and the rejectionists have had conflicting opinions on, and perceptions of the purpose of armed struggle; the correct ideological approach to resolving the national predicament; the circumstances under which diplomacy is an appropriate instrument; and the efficacy of alignment with certain external actors (e.g. Syria, Egypt, Jordan, the United States). Sharing a cultural framework obviously does not preclude individuals or groups from having conflicting opinions. The practical

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consequences of such conflicts, however, are played out within a behavioural and cognitive framework that derives from the ambient culture and its background expectancies. To be sure, rational actors by definition take rational steps, but—as Clifford Geertz has argued on the related subject of common sense—the immediate socio-cultural milieu limits and defines what an actor finds reasonable and rational to do and say. It defines the parameters of speech and behaviour.

Given the pivotal position of honour within the cultural milieu of the fasā'īl, then, it has only been natural that the very public and politically significant conflicts of opinion between the PLO/PA leadership and the rejectionists would become matters of honour. It was also natural that those factions that were to form the core of the various rejectionist assemblies—primarily PFLP and PFLP-GC—would come to attach greater importance than Fateh to the defence of factional honour because of their pre-existing social status deficit. They have found themselves in a position of structural disadvantage relative to Fateh ever since the fasā'īl took over the institutions of the PLO, yet had sizeable memberships and constituents to provide for and organize. In order to remain viable social movements, they thus needed to continuously and actively compete with Fateh for social status. Consistently being the dominant faction within the national movement, Fateh never needed to worry too much about its ability to provide members and constituents with a positive social identity. Fateh was the principal actor and it was up to others to challenge its position. Since the opposition was unable to alter structural relations within the PLO, they needed to ascertain other connotations that would resonate positively within the ambient sociocultural framework; their response was a socially creative emphasis on honour and integrity, intended to balance out Fateh's political dominance.

Arafat has consistently sought to impose his and Fateh's preferred courses of action on the national movement as a whole. Repeatedly, however, this has been done in ways that the rejectionists have perceived to be dishonest and dishonourable, challenging their social status and threatening their honourability. The establishment of the three rejectionist assemblies examined in chapter five's analytical narrative, as well as Abu Musa’s

rebellion within Fateh itself, should be understood in this context, as culturally embedded responses to Arafat's challenges to these groups' honour and social status.

With regard to the break-up of the APF in early 2001, social identity theory is yet again able to provide significant insights. The groups that saw a way of enhancing their own and their members' sense of self-worth by returning to the 'mainstream' accepted Arafat's invitation; their honour had been satisfied. Those smaller groups, however, that would face certain destruction within the 'mainstream' due to inability to compete for status with their larger, better entrenched rival factions, chose to stay behind. They knew that their appeal would be limited and that they would risk losing the last of their members within the PA-centric political system. Their distinct group identities would consequently dissolve and they—'Arabi 'Awwad, Khalid 'Abd al-Mejid and Abu Nidal al-Ashqar, would be consigned to history. Within the framework of culturally embedded social identity theory, they thus made a rational choice to stay behind and take their chances. Some scholars have made distinctions between rejectionists and pragmatists, and “the politics of resistance” has been separated from “the politics of realism.” This thesis, in contrast, submits that rejectionist resistance against ‘deviationism’ and ‘liquidationism’ has been decidedly pragmatic as well as anchored in awareness of social and political realities.

16 Helena Lindholm-Schulz, Ambiguities of Domination, p. 163.
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