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THE PALESTINIANS AND ARAB-ISRAELI DIPLOMACY, 1967–1991

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In examining the origins of the Palestinian national movement and its influence on the broader dynamics of Arab-Israeli diplomacy, a focus on the pursuit of political self-determination sits uneasily alongside a history of prolonged statelessness. One reason for this tension is that as Palestinians successfully organized around a unified political message of independent statehood, the possible space in which their national home could be built was fast disappearing under Israeli sovereignty. The history of the Palestinian demand for collective rights also extends well beyond the wave of mid-century decolonization, a temporal twist of fate that has posed innumerable challenges for the achievement of national aims. By considering the Palestinian role in Arab-Israeli diplomacy from 1967 until the formal onset of the "peace process" in the early 1990s, this chapter highlights the central paradox in a longstanding struggle for recognition. Just as Palestinians were gaining international attention as a political question requiring a diplomatic solution – marked by acceptance of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Europe, the United States, and eventually Israel – on the ground, the possibility of a resolution in territorial terms was narrowing considerably. This left a political movement disconnected from the successful fulfilment of its statist project, a challenge that continues to shape the Palestinian struggle.

During the early years of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Palestinian issue was often elided by interstate and regional rivalries. Israel's creation in 1948, and the simultaneous dispossession of over 700,000 Arab inhabitants of Palestine, known as the *Nakba*, initially cast the Palestinian question in humanitarian terms. Efforts to address the plight of the refugees included the creation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and local struggles to contain border conflicts growing out of Palestinian efforts to return to their homes in the new state of Israel (Morris 1993). This humanitarian prism shifted considerably over subsequent decades, with the emergence of the PLO in 1964 and regional wars in 1967 and 1973 crystallizing the Palestinian dimension of the conflict.

Widespread Israeli and Western hostility to Palestinian self-determination reflected a deep-seated denial of their national political expression that extended back to the early twentieth century. This opposition intensified in response to the armed struggle that put Palestinian political claims on the international map, as well as Cold War considerations that cast the PLO as a Soviet proxy in the Middle East. For Israel, the opposition also emerged from a deeper fear about Palestinian claim-making over 1948, a reminder that the birth of the Israeli state was

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predicated on the dispossession of the local Arab population. The demand for restitution or rights undermined the Zionist narrative of state creation and posed a demographic threat to the Jewish majority of the state. As the PLO shifted tactics towards diplomacy in the aftermath of the 1973 War, Palestinians gained greater recognition but also continued the opprobrium from their harshest critics, Israel and the United States. The deep cultural affinity for Zionism and a budding strategic alliance contributed to a policy of non-engagement, formalized by United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1975.

Shifting sympathies in Europe throughout the late 1970s, coupled with the rise of human-rights discourse in the United States, ultimately drew the Palestinians into the diplomatic arena. It was a fitful journey, however, with public calls by President Jimmy Carter for a Palestinian "homeland" coupled with secret talks to secure PLO acceptance of United Nations resolution 242, and the triumph of the Camp David Accords, which enabled a bilateral Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979 but ensured lasting Palestinian statelessness. The 1980 Venice Declaration by the European Economic Community (EEC) called for an acknowledgement of the right of Palestinian self-government, but the United States resisted formal engagement until President Ronald Reagan's recognition of the PLO in 1988. In the interim, the outbreak of the 1982 Lebanon War recast the Palestinian struggle and drove the PLO into wider exile, as the national movement was revived in the occupied territories themselves. The 1987 outbreak of the first *Intifada* underscored the staying power of the Palestinian cause on a global scale, leading to official recognition and diplomatic engagement. Not all segments of the Palestinian national movement were in agreement, however, as the birth of *Hamas* (the Islamic Resistance Movement) in this period ultimately challenged the diplomatic track of the PLO.

The end of the Cold War and resurgent United States intervention in the Middle East in the early 1990s coincided with this reorientation of the Palestinian struggle, underpinned by the emergence of a "peace process" with the 1991 Madrid Conference and subsequent diplomatic talks in Washington. But even as Palestinian, American, and Israeli diplomats in the United States were negotiating the extent of possible Palestinian self-determination, PLO leaders sought to leverage their return to the Palestinian territories via secret talks in Oslo. The 1993 Oslo Accords and the division of the territories that followed with the creation of a Palestinian Authority (PA) ultimately put an end to the meaningful pursuit of political sovereignty in part of historic Palestine. Protracted efforts that followed revealed the paradox of the Palestinian role in Arab-Israeli diplomacy: the demand for political rights, which had evolved from a maximalist position for reclaiming all of historic Palestine to the endorsement of territorial partition, would continually be called into question. The demand for a separate independent state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as a Palestinian capital has increasingly been seen as a mirage since Oslo; rather, many Palestinians now advocate for equal rights and equal citizenship across all of Israeli-controlled territory, framing their struggle as a fight against structural discrimination and political exclusion by one sovereign power. This signals a return to some of the same impulses that first animated the Palestinian struggle in the aftermath of Israel's creation.

The Quest for Legitimacy

Just over a decade after 1948, a new vanguard of Palestinian activists created *Fatah* in 1959, an acronym for the Palestinian National Liberation Movement. The movement was conceived by diaspora Palestinian professionals in the Gulf States – many of whom had once been students in Cairo and Beirut and hailed from Gaza – formalizing a political party in 1965. Under the influence of leading figures that included Yasser Arafat, Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyyad) and Khalil

al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), *Fatah* challenged Arab governments to put the question of Palestine back on the political map after the Nakba. In an effort to curb the impact of these brash nationalists, Egypt encouraged the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as a vehicle to exercise control over Palestinian national expression. In June 1964, the Arab League Summit in Cairo announced the creation of the PLO with a national charter that declared the

> Palestinian Arab people has the legitimate right to its homeland and is an inseparable part of the Arab Nation. It shares the sufferings and aspirations of the Arab Nation and its struggle for freedom, sovereignty, progress and unity.
>
> *(1964 PLO National Charter)*[1]

This interplay between pan-Arab liberation politics and Palestinian demands would gradually shift towards a national framing. The Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi argues that "the PLO under the leadership of Fateh was broadly seen in terms of a teleology of evolution from a liberation movement to a para-state that would eventually lead the Palestinians to full-fledged statehood and independence" (Khalidi 2006, 150). Initially, the PLO and its constituent factions advocated direct armed struggle against Israel and did not officially endorse the notion of an independent Palestinian state until the mid-1970s. In part, this was due to Jordanian and Egyptian territorial angling in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a dynamic quickly transformed by the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Israel's conquest of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights was a startling development across the Arab world, reorienting regional politics on Palestine. A large wave of newly exiled Palestinian refugees and the onset of Israeli control over those who remained behind in the occupied territories served to strengthen the PLO's nationalist drive (Raz 2012; Khalidi 2017). The growth of illegal Israeli settlements in the wake of the 1967 War, as well as the ideological influence of the *Gush Emunim* movement, directly challenged these national aspirations.

Regionally, the destruction of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser's credibility as a guarantor of Palestinian rights buoyed the rise of the younger Fatah nationalists under Arafat's leadership. Uniting factional organizations under a fully independent PLO, Fatah gained control of the organization's executive bodies, and Arafat was appointed chairman, a role he maintained until his death in 2004. The PLO implemented intensive guerrilla warfare as part of its strategy, bringing Palestinian militants into armed confrontation with Israel during the War of Attrition (1969–1970), and organizing further strikes, hijackings, and armed attacks that garnered international attention and recast the Palestinian struggle in global terms (Sayigh 1997; Chamberlin 2012).

Disagreements soon erupted between Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), founded by the physician George Habash, as well as the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), led by Nayef Hawatmeh. The PFLP and DFLP supported armed confrontation to overthrow Arab regimes unsympathetic to the Palestinian cause, while Fatah remained less enthusiastic. These internal splits shaped the Palestinian national movement throughout its history, as did regional pressures (Sayigh 1997). The advent of "Black September" in Jordan in 1970 and the expulsion of the PLO from its base shifted the locus of power to Damascus and Beirut, where the PLO would remain until it was driven out during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. While Arab League recognition of the PLO "as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" came in 1974, the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 further highlighted how regional tensions continually shaped their struggle.

By the mid-1970s, Palestinians had managed to gain regional and international prominence through a combination of diplomatic overtures and violent acts of militancy on the global stage,

shifting from a strategy of armed struggle to political engagement.[2] Moderate voices within the national movement had also steadily grown more influential, generating measured support for a negotiated settlement with Israel (Baumgarten 2005; Sela 2014). As Mohammad Muslih argues, from 1969–1973 the PLO political platform moved from an exclusively ethnic state towards a secular democratic entity allowing for the presence of Jews and other minorities. This secular democratic platform of the early 1970s endured until the twelfth meeting of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in June 1974, where the PLO made its first steps towards what would be known as a "two-state solution." The PNC approved the Ten Point Program, which included important steps formulated by Fatah leaders calling for the establishment of a national authority over "any piece" of liberated Palestinian land. It was a break with past rejections of the principle of partition, and set the stage for later negotiations with Israel (Muslih 1990).

The crucial development that drove this shift in the PLO's strategy was the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war. In a bid to force a settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat sought to create a "crisis of détente" (Daigle 2012) to break the status quo in the region. A massive American airlift of tanks and aeroplanes reversed Egyptian and Syrian advances and further solidified close US–Israeli relations. With United States president Richard Nixon distracted by the Watergate scandal, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger negotiated the terms of agreement to end the war. They were passed as United Nations Security Council Resolution 338, which called for a "just and durable peace in the Middle East" along the lines of United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 after the 1967 war. It remained unclear, however, to what extent territorial concessions might include the Palestinians.

Kissinger, as Nixon's envoy and later as Secretary of State to President Gerald Ford, pursued a step-by-step approach to achieve a diplomatic solution between Israel and its neighbours. But these attempts at negotiating a comprehensive solution favoured piecemeal stages that separated the Palestinian issue from broader regional concerns. Palestinian national aspirations, which were emerging as a central point of contention between Israel and the Arab states, were ignored by Kissinger's diplomatic initiatives (Yaqub 2008). In contrast, at the Arab League Summit in 1974**,** the PLO was officially recognized as the representative voice of Palestinian concerns in the Arab world. The organization's efforts at a dialogue with the United States was stymied by a 1975 ban on direct talks with the organization put in place by Kissinger (Khalil 2016).

United States officials began to revisit relations with the Palestinians after Jimmy Carter's victory in the 1976 presidential election. A small number of policymakers recognized the necessity of limited Palestinian rights, fuelled by the broader sweep of decolonization in the Global South (Nemchenok 2009; Pressman 2013; Jensehaugen 2014). The PLO's Information Bulletin, *Palestine*, noted the movement's growing international prominence during this period.[3] The organization was making quiet inroads with Western diplomats. British Embassy officials in Europe, the United States and the Middle East had regular "discreet and informal contact with the PLO," including monthly lunches between the Middle East desk officer in London and Said Hammami, the PLO representative in the city.[4] British officials were mindful of Israeli opposition to these contacts but stressed the importance of hearing their ideas. In France and Belgium, the PLO had attained some official recognition, and the organization was gaining ground with the German and Austrian governments as well.

Among European governments, there was a growing consensus to support the organization, increasingly seen as the legitimate vehicle for achieving Palestinian self-determination. This would be formalized with the Venice Declaration of 1980, which stated that

> [a] just solution must finally be found to the Palestinian problem, which is not simply one of refugees. The Palestinian people, which is conscious of existing as such, must

> be placed in a position, by an appropriate process defined within the framework of the comprehensive peace settlement, to exercise fully its right to self-determination. … These principles apply to all the parties concerned, and thus to the Palestinian people, and to the PLO, which will have to be associated with the negotiations.
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> *(Venice Declaration, 1980, in Laqueur and Rubin, 2008, pp 232–233)*

While the process of diplomatic engagement with Palestinians was clear in Europe, the United States took a more uneven approach under Carter, compounded by pressures from domestic supporters of Israel and the new Likud government of Menachem Begin that came to power in 1977 (Anziska 2018).

Camp David and the Triumph of Autonomy

The rise of the right-wing Likud party in Israel followed soon after Jimmy Carter had taken office as the 39th United States president. A former Democratic governor of Georgia, Carter was eager to break with the dominant Cold War approach of his predecessors. In the Middle East, this yielded a regional strategy that was concerned with local dynamics and recognized the necessity of addressing the Palestinian issue in political terms. At a May 1977 town hall meeting in Clinton, Massachusetts, Carter remarked "there has to be a homeland provided for the Palestinian refugees who have suffered for many, many years."[5] The frank language and insistence on accommodating Palestinians fit with Carter's decisive rhetorical embrace of human rights. But it also elicited a great deal of public criticism from Cold War hawks as well as Israeli and American Jewish leaders, all of whom opposed the emergence of a Palestinian state.

As for the PLO leadership in Beirut, they had praise for Carter's new approach, but also scepticism. Palestinians had moved away from using the term "homeland" in favour of the phrase "independent national state," which reflected a grudging willingness to live side by side with Israel (Tanner 1977). The PLO's *Information Bulletin* recalled a history of declarations that had not brought substantive change on the ground, while seeing Carter's statement as a "step forward in U.S. Middle Eastern policy, and an encouragement for the Palestinian people in their resistance to Zionist expansion and settler colonialism."[6] PLO chairman Arafat relayed a message to President Carter "implying the PLO's willingness to live in peace with Israel." His condition was a "U.S. commitment to the establishment of an independent Palestinian "state unit entity."[7] Although the form of such an entity remained a matter of fierce disagreement, the principle of Palestinian diplomatic engagement was clear.

The new Israeli government, however, was firmly opposed to Carter's stance. Menachem Begin was a revisionist Zionist with deep-seated ideological opposition to Palestinian territorial rights. He was also a believer in settlement expansion in the occupied territories, which he pursued with the help of Ariel Sharon, his agriculture minister and later defence minister. Begin arrived in the United States for his first face-to-face meeting with President Carter on 19 July 1977. During their initial discussion in the White House cabinet room, Carter laid out the central principles of his approach to the Middle East conflict, which included a comprehensive peace based on United Nations resolutions 242 and 338, a resolution of territorial boundaries, and the question of the refugees.

The absence of official Palestinian participation in the efforts spearheaded by the Carter Administration was conspicuous. The PLO leadership was hamstrung by the official United States ban on political contact with the organization that Kissinger and the Israelis had agreed upon in 1975. To circumvent this ban, extensive secret United States backchannel conversations were held with leading Palestinians, intended to clarify the organization's possible acceptance

of United Nations Security Council Resolution 242. Palestinian leaders were hesitant to recognize Israel along the lines of the resolution without some indication of substantive promises in return. There was external pressure on the organization as well, with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the Soviet Union pushing the leadership to sign, while the Syrians were strongly advising the PLO against such a move.

In his secret outreach to American diplomats, Yasser Arafat spoke of the PLO's legitimacy and willingness to accept 242 as long as it dealt with the Palestinians "as a people with national rights and aspirations and not as refugees." This insistence on the Palestinians as a nation was fuelled by the PLO's suspicion of American diplomacy and the Israeli position on the PLO. During an intensive effort over the summer of 1977, the PLO Executive Committee decided against acceptance of 242, even as some within the Fatah faction wanted to begin a dialogue with the United States.[8] It was not, however, the end of the matter. Attempts to meet the American requirements continued with further secret talks, and the disagreements reflected a wide range of internal voices within the PLO, who offered divergent strategies for advancing the political aims of the national movement (Anziska 2018, 66–68).

Against the backdrop of American efforts, the Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat looked to solidify his country's alliance with the West. Egypt had been looking to the United States as a patron since the acceptance of the Rogers Plan for Arab-Israeli peace in 1970. But Sadat's growing frustration over the lack of movement towards a comprehensive regional peace precipitated an unprecedented visit to Jerusalem in November of 1977. In a remarkable speech in front of Israel's Knesset, Sadat declared "there can be no peace without the Palestinians" (Lukacs 1991, 143–144). The Egyptian president argued that the establishment of a Palestinian state and an Israeli withdrawal to the Green Line was essential for regional peace. Members of the Carter Administration, watching in utter amazement from the sidelines, largely supported Sadat's decisive move while finally acknowledging that their own comprehensive peace plans would never come to pass. Sadat's speech also increased the internal debate among PLO leaders about the possibility of statehood, with some figures ready to embrace a small Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while others resisted this idea. There was concern that the bilateral focus between Egypt and Israel would not serve Palestinian political interests.

As subsequent negotiations between the United States, Israel, and Egypt faltered, Jimmy Carter invited Sadat and Begin to the presidential retreat in Camp David for 13 days of negotiations. The Camp David Accords were reached on 17 September 1978, and led to a formal Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty signed by Sadat and Begin on 26 March 1979. The Camp David agreement affirmed United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 as the basis for any negotiated settlement and stated that "Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the representatives of the Palestinian people should participate in negotiations on the resolution of the Palestinian problem in all its aspects" (Lukacs 1991, 157). It also outlined mechanisms to include the Palestinians in a political process, calling for some form of self-government and including specific language to "recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their just requirements." But rather than inaugurate diplomacy that may have led to a possible Palestinian state, Menachem Begin unveiled a detailed autonomy plan for what he called the "Arab residents of Judea and Samaria," proffering limited self-rule rather than full political or territorial sovereignty (Anziska 2017).

For Carter, the Camp David summit was a great diplomatic victory, but also an incomplete one. His ambitious aim to tackle Palestinian aspirations and resolve the wider Arab-Israeli conflict had given way to a narrower bilateral agreement. The 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty secured the return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in exchange for recognition, relieving military pressure on Israel's southwest border and bringing the major phase of interstate Arab-Israeli conflict to an end. Begin's price was the retention of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and

East Jerusalem. Roughly five thousand Jewish settlers lived in the occupied territories when Begin entered office, and the number of settlers continued to rise steadily in the wake of the Accords, reaching over eighty thousand by the late 1980s. Additionally, the agreement included more United States military and economic aid to Israel than had been given under any previous administration: $10.2 billion over four years, a little less than half in grants. Egypt and Saudi Arabia also received military aid and security guarantees, highlighting the emerging spectrum of United States allies in the Middle East.

> In the eyes of the PLO leadership, the implications of a separate peace between Egypt and Israel and an emerging autonomy plan in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were distressingly clear. Arafat conveyed his views to the United States government via a secret back channel. The PLO chairman described the Camp David Accords as nothing more than "meaningless negotiations about some permanent colonial status for the Palestinians under Israeli rule." Arafat warned of the massive build-up of U.S. arms to both Israel and Egypt, and preparations of another Arab-Israeli war which Begin is doing everything to provoke through his attacks on South Lebanon. That is not a treaty for peace – it is a treaty for war.[9]

Arafat was equally dismissive of Begin's autonomy plans, which he called "a farce," suggesting instead an alternative path. "If there is a clear platform for serious, comprehensive peace negotiations," the PLO leader remarked to United States officials, "we will of course take part." In Arafat's view, that platform should include three major points:

(1) Human rights for the Palestinians;
(2) The principle of the right of return for the Palestinians;
(3) The right of the Palestinians to have our own state.[10]

In the wider context of an emerging discourse on human rights in the 1970s, the PLO demands echoed similar political struggles across the globe. The diplomatic context in which these demands arrived would change considerably with Carter's defeat and the election of Ronald Reagan to the United States presidency.

The Lessons of Lebanon

During the 1980 United States presidential campaign, former California governor Ronald Reagan was asked whether he thought the PLO was a terrorist organization. He answered affirmatively while also making an important distinction. "I separate the PLO from the Palestinian refugees. None ever elected the PLO."[11] Reagan's victory signalled a return to global Cold War geopolitics, reconstituting the Middle East as a site of contestation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Given this new reality, relations with Israel were granted strategic priority, while the Palestinians were deemed a Soviet proxy. At the same time, there was direct low-level contact between the American government and the PLO, especially in the context of the Lebanese civil war. By the end of Reagan's second term in office, the United States would officially open a dialogue with the organization. In the interim, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon would overturn regional politics and the fate of the Palestinian national movement, while drawing the United States further into the conflict (Anziska 2018).

Ever since their expulsion from Jordan in 1970, the PLO had regrouped in Lebanon, building para-state institutions and putting the Palestinian question back at the centre of

regional politics. The Cairo Accords of 1969, brokered between the Lebanese Army and Yasser Arafat, authorized actions on behalf of the Palestinian Resistance Movement and guaranteed Palestinian civic rights in Lebanon. Paramilitary training and mass mobilization by Palestinians was seen in some quarters as an encroachment upon Lebanese sovereignty. The PLO solidified its hold in the south of the country, venturing outside refugee camps and launching border skirmishes with Israel. Alongside internal rivalries that had contributed to the outbreak of the 1975 Lebanese civil war, Syria was also drawn into the fighting, while Maronite politicians promoted an alliance with Israel in their fight against the PLO and leftist allies.

New evidence suggests a United States green light for Israel's invasion of its northern neighbour, which was initially portrayed as an attempt by Israel to contain Palestinian attacks on its Galilee border towns. The June 1982 incursion quickly escalated into a full-scale effort to remake Lebanon as Israel's Christian ally. Unlike the wars in 1948, 1967, or 1973, Israel was unequivocally engaged in what Prime Minister Begin called a "war of choice." An unprecedented siege and saturation bombing of Beirut unfolded in the summer of 1982, and the war resulted in the deaths of at least 5,000 Lebanese and Palestinian civilians – over 19,000 by Lebanese estimates that counted combatants as well, in addition to over 600 Israeli soldiers (Anziska 2018). This included the notorious massacre of Palestinian civilians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp in south Beirut by Christian Phalange militiamen, supported by the Israeli army along with the unwitting complicity of the American government (Anziska 2012).

With the involvement of United States diplomats, American officials helped facilitate the departure of Yasser Arafat and thousands of PLO fighters from Lebanon to other Arab countries as a means of ending the conflict in August 1982. Reagan soon unveiled his administration's new peace plan in a primetime address on 1 September 1982. Building on Carter's Camp David framework, he acknowledged that implementation of the Camp David Accords had been slow. The central question, he said, was "how to reconcile Israel's legitimate security concerns with the legitimate rights of the Palestinians." The Reagan Plan reflected a return to the notion of comprehensive peace; however, it did not support outright the creation of a Palestinian state, opting instead for Palestinian self-government in association with Jordan. It was also a short-lived initiative, rejected swiftly by the Israeli cabinet and the last serious United States effort to broker a resolution to the conflict in the 1980s (Quandt 2005).

Throughout the 1982 war, Palestinian leaders asserted the PLO's willingness to accept binding United Nations resolutions and the possibility of a negotiated settlement. In the aftermath of the PLO's August evacuation from Beirut, ABC News hosted an episode of "This Week with David Brinkley" on the situation in the Middle East, inviting Bassam Abu Sharif of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) to discuss the political repercussions of the departure. Brinkley asked the Palestinian spokesman whether he would be satisfied with a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, and Abu Sharif remarked that it was "satisfactory" to have a state on "any part of Palestine." In a follow up, he was asked "does that mean that the Palestinians, in your view, the PLO, in your view, can accept the simultaneous existence of Israel as a Jewish state?" Abu Sharif replied, "This is the PLO program. It was very clear … it is to establish a Palestine independent state on any part of Palestine." Brinkley asked if such an outcome were to materialize, "would that be the end of your hostility to Israel?" Abu Sharif replied that "this would be probably a start for simultaneous cooperation between Palestinians and Jews."[12]

Israel's invasion of Lebanon radically altered global perceptions of the Zionist movement and United States actions in the Middle East, as well as the broader context in which Palestinian nationalism was viewed. The Palestinian quest for self-determination was rendered visible once again on a global scale, despite Israeli hopes that it would disappear from view. One unintended

consequence was the strengthening of calls for a national solution to the Palestinian question. A special National Intelligence Estimate prepared by the CIA in the aftermath of the war described this altered climate. "Israel has been surprised to discover that its military victory has not produced the expected political dividends and seems to have strengthened its antagonists' political hand."[13] This analysis cohered with the view of one Israeli Knesset member, who remarked, "In Beirut, we created a Palestinian state."[14] But the PLO itself was now in exile, with Arafat banished to the forlorn Hotel Salwa in Tunis, where he struggled to rebuild national unity. Far away in North Africa, the PLO was further cut off from the West Bank and Gaza, "working clandestinely to build institutional ties to the population" in the occupied territories (Khalidi 2006, 158). While Israel's short-term aim of defeating the PLO in Lebanon was successful, the long-term implications reignited the national movement and drove a shift in the locus of power to the occupied territories.

From *Intifada* to Recognition

Given the pivotal role of Jordan as a gateway back to the West Bank, Palestinians debated the value of reconciling with the Hashemite regime in order to further ties with Palestinians living under occupation. But relations between Jordan's King Hussein and Arafat deteriorated considerably in the mid-1980s, with factional violence within the PLO continuing and Hussein's political vulnerabilities taking an enormous toll on the alliance (Khalidi 2006, 148; 260–265). In a scathing address in February 1986, Hussein announced the end of any joint initiative with the PLO (Laqueur and Rubin 2008, 299–313). He blamed the Palestinian leadership for continued intransigence in not accepting United Nations resolution 242, and his remarks signalled "the end of an era in which Jordan was the leading actor in the search for a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict" (Shlaim 2007, 433).

By December 1987, Israel's twenty-year control over the Palestinian territories was seen as intolerable, and protests erupted in the Gaza Strip after an incident in the Jabalia refugee camp, quickly spreading to the West Bank. Demonstrators unfurled Palestinian flags, burned tires, and threw stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli cars, and the Israeli security forces responded with force. The first Intifada had erupted. This largely non-violent protest, which lasted through the early 1990s, fundamentally altered the landscape of Palestinian politics and the PLO's relations with Israel as well as the United States (Lockman and Beinin 1999). Supporters of Israel, already distressed by the events in Lebanon, were acutely aware of negative perceptions of the state, increasingly seen as a biblical Goliath fighting a lone David. The PLO was taken by surprise with the uprising, watching it unfold from a distance. The Intifada was entirely generated from within the territories, a spontaneous unplanned eruption. Seeing an opportunity to capitalize on popular discontent in order to secure political clout, the PLO began to assert a leadership role.

> The detrimental impact of the occupation, which had largely failed to penetrate the consciousness of most Israelis or their supporters abroad, was now indisputably apparent. As the Israeli journalist Amos Elon wrote, the occupation has held 1.5 million Palestinians as pawns, or bargaining chips, and as a source of cheap menial labor, while denying them the most basic human rights. The pawns have now risen to manifest their frustration, their bitterness and their political will.
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> *(Elon 1988)*

Among the 14 demands outlined by West Bank and Gaza Palestinian leaders in January 1988 was a call to abide by the Fourth Geneva Convention, a demand for the cessation of settlement

activity and land confiscation, and the removal of restrictions on political contacts between inhabitants of the territories and the PLO (Laqueur and Rubin 2008, 319).

Prominent figures within the PLO began to publicly embrace negotiations with Israel, and a decisive move towards a negotiated settlement came in Algeria that fall. At the November 1988 Palestine National Congress in Algiers, Yasser Arafat won a majority of votes for the historic decision to accept relevant United Nations resolutions 242 and 338 (Laqueur and Rubin 2008, 349–353). The leading national poet Mahmoud Darwish was asked to craft a Palestinian Declaration of Independence, and it proclaimed an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel on the basis of United Nations Resolution 181, which had enshrined the idea of partition in 1947. "This was the first official Palestinian recognition of the legitimacy of the existence of a Jewish state," explained a leading historian of Palestinian nationalism, "and the first unequivocal, explicit PLO endorsement of a two-state solution to the conflict" (Khalidi 2006, 194–195). The notion that a state of Palestine could exist side by side with a state of Israel, near heresy in the 1970s, had emerged as the preferred Palestinian position at the close of the 1980s.

> In light of these developments, United States officials slowly entertained an official dialogue with the PLO. At a Geneva press conference in December 1988, Arafat read out a statement highlighting the PLO's approach to diplomacy. "Self-determination means survival for the Palestinians," Arafat explained, "and our survival does not destroy the survival of the Israelis, as their rulers claim." The PLO leader responded directly to critics who continued to marginalize or dismiss the national movement. "The intifada will come to an end only when practical and tangible steps have been taken towards the achievement of our national aims and establishment of our independent Palestinian state." Arafat's insistence on statehood, however, remained a one-sided pledge. Israeli and American officials were opposed to such an outcome, a reminder that the quest for self-determination did not inevitably lead to national sovereignty. In announcing the beginning of an official American dialogue with the PLO, statehood was explicitly not endorsed. "Nothing here may be taken to imply an acceptance or recognition by the United States of an independent Palestinian state," Secretary of State George Shultz declared. The position of the United States is [that] the status of the West Bank and Gaza [strip] cannot be determined by unilateral acts of either side, but only through a process of negotiations. The United States does not recognize the declaration of an independent Palestinian state.
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> *(Rabie 1995, 180–182)*

By the end of 1988, the Palestinians had finally begun to achieve the international diplomatic recognition that had eluded them for so long. The failed attempts to bypass Palestinian nationalists in the late 1970s and 1980s had actually served to legitimate the PLO and force Israel, the United States, and the wider Arab world to reckon with their quest for national self-determination. This recognition was the culmination of years of diplomatic efforts, armed struggle, and backchannel negotiations. That such a development took place in the last months of a Republican administration ideologically opposed to Palestinian nationalism, viewing the PLO as a Soviet proxy, was certainly a surprising turn of events. PLO recognition did not, however, denote the attainment of political sovereignty. The form and content of a possible Palestinian political future remained unclear in the closing months of the 1980s. The newly inaugurated US-PLO dialogue was fitful, and was suspended in June 1990 after an attack by the Palestine Liberation Front, a splinter group backed by Iraq. It was only with the end of the

Cold War and the onset of the Madrid Talks in 1991 that a possible future based on political sovereignty for the Palestinians was more sharply delineated (Anziska 2018, 260–266).

The election of George H. W. Bush precipitated new opportunities and challenges for the Palestinians. During Bush's tenure, and with the help of Secretary of State James Baker, an Israeli-Palestinian "peace process" was situated as a key foreign policy goal for the United States. The context for this re-emergence was largely geopolitical: the end of the Cold War had removed the Soviet threat, and the outbreak of the first Gulf War in 1990 had reshaped United States interests in the Middle East. President Bush and Secretary Baker launched the Madrid Peace Conference in October 1991, the first official face-to-face gathering that included representatives from Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinian Territories. The Palestinians were part of a joint Jordanian delegation coordinating closely with the PLO leadership in Tunis, who were prevented from attending the conference by Israel. President Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev co-chaired direct multilateral negotiations, while the bulk of negotiations happened in Washington between 1991 and 1993. This was the first time the Palestinians were directly negotiating their own political fate, and the discussions reveal the extent to which meaningful political sovereignty in the occupied territories was debated and considered a plausible outcome for the future (Anziska 2018, 267–282).

Unbeknownst to the delegates in Washington, however, the PLO leadership had begun secret talks with Israeli leaders in the Norwegian capitol of Oslo. The resulting Oslo Accords, which were signed on the south lawn of the White House on 13 September 1993, were considered a breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Alongside Israeli recognition of the PLO and Palestinian recognition of Israel, the Accords marked the start of a multi-year peace process between the parties. But the peace process launched by the Oslo Accords was nowhere near as picture perfect as the famous handshake between Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin suggested. At the time, critics warned that the Accords set aside the most contentious issues left unresolved from earlier efforts while enshrining limited autonomy rather than statehood for Palestinians (Rabbani 2012; Said 1993).

In September 1995, Arafat and Rabin signed the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, or Oslo II, establishing the Palestinian Authority (PA) and dividing the West Bank into three separate zones of control. There was enormous scepticism of Arafat's move in the Arab world, where he was seen as selling out meaningful Palestinian sovereignty for the sake of his own return to the West Bank and subsequent appointment as president of the PA. Oslo II granted the PA limited self-government, for an interim period of time, providing the vestiges of statehood without actual content. The process around Oslo lulled its proponents into the false belief that real issues like Jerusalem, refugees' right of return, settlements, and security were being dealt with. In this regard, Oslo serves as a bookend to the Palestinian national struggle, inaugurating a period of stalemate and calling into question the concessions that led the PLO towards diplomacy without an outcome of sovereign statehood.

Conclusion: The Limits of Self-Determination

What then is the legacy of Palestinian engagement with Arab-Israeli diplomacy between the 1967 war and the peace process of the 1990s? Can real lasting political accomplishments be delineated? Scholars of the Palestinian national movement in the post-1948 era have long argued that the PLO's major political achievement was rooted in a restoration of Palestinian identity and the insistence on maintaining a focus on the struggle for self-determination. While a confluence of factors kept the Palestinian cause ingrained in global consciousness in the

aftermath of the Nakba, the PLO was the driving force for advancing the Palestinian national struggle in military, and then diplomatic, terms. Having coordinated years of armed struggle, it worked to create a vehicle for the achievement of national recognition in political terms. By 1988, this took the form of the endorsement of a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as the capital, along the 1967 lines and in accordance with United Nations resolution 242.

While Israel opposed the statist claims of Palestinians, Europe and the United States gradually accepted these terms, and the PLO did manage to establish a legitimate address for diplomatic engagement by the end of the twentieth century. Moreover, the organization parlayed recognition of the Palestinian national movement to Arab states and the international community, through United Nations recognition and bilateral agreements. Mindful of the pitfalls of exile, it worked to return the political centre of the Palestinian struggle back to the Palestinian territories. Yet despite these important accomplishments, the PLO failed in one central political aim: it could never shift from para-statehood to national independence. This crucial failure of the PLO may say more about the limited horizon for a diplomatic resolution that affected the Palestinians more broadly, whether through the formal channels of the national movement or among informal activists and factions across the Palestinian diaspora.

In the struggle for moral recognition, the Palestinians have largely succeeded; but in the struggle for political rights and sovereignty, the outcome remains quite grim. Critics have pointed to the PLO's embrace of the Oslo Accords as a key moment in this diplomatic failure, but as the present chapter has suggested, the difficulties far predate the 1990s. As the Palestinian national movement gradually came to endorse the concept of statehood in part of Palestine, the physical territory had been transformed by Israeli settlements and the erasure of the 1967 boundaries. What remains to be seen is whether an alternative mode of politics, one that moves away from state building and towards the achievement of equal citizenship and belonging inside Israel and the occupied territories, can open a new space for a just resolution of the Palestinian question.

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Notes

1 Reproduced in the Primary Resources in International Affairs, ETH Zurich, www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125413/2123_Palestinian_National_Charter.pdf.

2 On the revolutionary movement itself, see the extensive resources compiled in *The Palestinian Revolution* website: http://learnpalestine.politics.ox.ac.uk/.

3 "Twelve Years … Palestine Lives," Editorial, *Palestine: PLO Information Bulletin*, 3.1 (January 1977): 4–5. All copies of *Palestine* were accessed in the library of the Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, Lebanon [hereafter IPS].

4 "Contacts with the PLO," Confidential Memo, Roger Tomkys, 14 January 1977, "Status of the PLO in the UK," FCO 93/1134, United Kingdom National Archives, Kew, London.
5 Carter made this comment at a press conference in Clinton, Massachusetts, on 12 May 1977. For the full text see www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7495.
6 "The Palestinian Homeland," *Palestine*, 3 (May 1977), IPS.
7 See Memorandum from Brzezinski to Carter, undated, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977–1980* [hereafter FRUS], Vol. 8, Arab-Israeli Dispute, January 1977–August 1978. Ed. Adam M. Howard. Washington, DC: US GPO, 2013, Doc 51.
8 "CIA Intelligence Information Cable," 20 August 1977, FRUS, Doc 97.
9 "Summary of two evenings of talk with Yasir Arafat – July 24, 25, 1979," undated report, NSA Brzezinski Material, Box 49, File 6, Palestine Liberation Organization 5/79-10/80, Jimmy Carter Library [hereafter JCL].
10 See "Summary of two evenings of talk," NSA Brzezinski Material, Box 49, File 6, JCL.
11 "*Msibat Itonaim-Reagan*" [Reagan's Press Conference], 6 November 1980, MFA-8652/3, Israel State Archives.
12 "Full Text: Middle East," This Week with David Brinkley, 29 August 1982, 11:30AM, CIA Records Search Tool [CREST], (CIA-RDP88-01070R000100330006-3), National Archives and Records Administration.
13 Special National Security Intelligence Estimate, "PLO: Impact of the Lebanese Incursion," 8 November 1982. CREST (CIA-RDP85T00176R001100290014-5).
14 This was Shevach Weiss; see transcript of Knesset meeting, 22 September 1982, Abraham D. Sofaer Collection, Box 8, Hoover Institution Archives.

Questions for Discussion

(1) When did the Palestinian demand for self-determination first get a global hearing in the post-1948 era?
(2) What role did the United States play in Arab-Israeli diplomacy during the Cold War?
(3) Examine the origins of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Why was it founded and how did it shape the Palestinian national struggle?
(4) Discuss the role of Arab states in addressing Palestinian political demands since 1967.
(5) To what extent did diplomatic initiatives between 1967–1991 limit Palestinian sovereignty?

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