

Palestine at the UN: The PLO's relations with UNRWA in the 1970s

ABSTRACT:

This article examines the PLO's relationship with the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA) in the 1970s, when the former's prominence in the refugee camps peaked. Based on archival documents from the UN and UNRWA, along with the PLO's communications and publications, it argues that the PLO approached its relationship with UNRWA as part of a broader strategy for gaining international legitimacy at the UN. This resulted in a complex set of tensions over which organisation truly served and represented the Palestinian refugees. It also demonstrated how the 'Question of Palestine' was in many ways an international issue.

*'UNRWA was a crucial hub for the Palestinian refugees.... It became very important for us [in the PLO] to focus on those who constituted its cadres [and] take advantage of the means that UNRWA could offer.'*¹

Shafiq Al Hout, PLO representative at the UN, 1974-91

In November 1979, Yasser Arafat wrote one of his regular letters to Olof Rydbeck, Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In it, Arafat acknowledged the importance of UNRWA's work and thanked Rydbeck for his efforts on behalf of Palestinian refugees. His wording was warm and solicitous, even addressing Rydbeck as his 'dear brother'.² Nothing in the letter suggested anything other than a friendly working relationship. Yet only ten months earlier, Arafat's PLO had openly accused UNRWA of capitulating to 'imperialist and Zionist pressures'.³ Less than two years before that, it had berated the Agency for 'playing with the lives of Palestinians'.⁴

The contrast between these communications cannot be explained by any major changes in the PLO-UNRWA relationship at this time. Rather, the PLO's approach to UNRWA in this period was consistently paradoxical, and at times even contradictory. It variously criticised, praised, exploited and berated the agency – sometimes switching tacks within very short spaces of time. To understand this apparent inconsistency, it is necessary to situate the PLO's stance on UNRWA within its broader internationalist strategy during the heyday of the long 1970s. It is also important to consider UNRWA's

positioning, role and mission – subjects that hold particular weight in the light of UNRWA’s contemporary crisis and struggle for survival.⁵

Recent years have seen increasing historiographical engagement with the PLO’s international diplomacy, spearheaded by Paul Chamberlin and building on Yezid Sayigh’s earlier study.⁶ Influenced by Matthew Connelly’s work on the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN)⁷ – and arguing that the PLO itself was inspired by the FLN’s example – Chamberlin contends that the historiography on the PLO has wrongly subordinated its diplomatic efforts in favour of a preoccupation with its militancy. In fact, global political diplomacy was a core tenet of the PLO’s strategy, as demonstrated through its continual engagement with the UN. The PLO was in many ways an internationalist organisation, both ideologically and strategically. It understood the Question of Palestine as an issue with international causes and significance, and accordingly sought to promote both the cause and itself internationally. As Noura Erakat writes, the PLO was determined that the UN would recognise it as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The 1970s were a critical period here, as widespread decolonization, resulting changes in the UN’s membership and the rise of Third Worldism all provided an opportunity for the PLO to progress in its international standing.⁸ On this basis, this article examines a question that both Chamberlin and Erakat have overlooked: how did UNRWA fit into the PLO’s international strategy?

The question matters because UNRWA’s work encapsulates the UN’s long-term involvement in Palestinian affairs. It was established in 1949 as a central plank of the UN’s institutional system for dealing with the ‘Question of Palestine’. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) issued the agency with a mandate to provide essential relief services to registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza (the ‘five fields’).⁹ Meanwhile, the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) was responsible for finding a durable political solution to the crisis.¹⁰ Within this setup, UNRWA’s role was constructed as apolitical.¹¹ Like UNHCR, and in keeping with post-1945 humanitarian norms, it was bound by the principle that humanitarianism should be neutral and separate from politics – a notion that has itself been contested.¹² To complicate matters further, by the late 1950s UNCCP had become inactive, leaving UNRWA as the only effective body mandated to work with the Palestinian people.¹³

The repercussions of this set-up were highly significant. Fundamentally, it meant that a stateless people came to rely on a UN body for essential services while lacking international political protection. As a result of this deficit, Palestinian refugees continually turned to UNRWA to pursue their political rights, particularly repatriation – but of course, UNRWA’s apolitical mandate did not allow it to take up their demands.¹⁴ Its actions were further constrained by the fact that the majority of its funding came from Western governments, which were politically opposed to the refugees’ return.¹⁵ Thus notwithstanding its ostensibly apolitical stance, UNRWA was always deeply entangled in the politics of humanitarianism.

This took several forms. Most fundamentally, UNRWA itself was the product of political dynamics, having been established and mandated by Western political actors on the basis of political calculations.¹⁶ Moreover, as is common with international humanitarianism, politics was ultimately central to UNRWA’s work. Ilana Feldman and Randa Farah both point out that the agency served as an international witness to the inescapably political issue of Palestinian displacement. Its work in improving the refugees’ socio-economic conditions also inevitably fed into debates about their future, and the possibility of their permanent resettlement in the host states.¹⁷ Finally, UNRWA itself implicitly drew on politics in its use of human rights discourse – which, as Lori Allen contends, is grounded in political structures and paradigms, and as such not truly apolitical.¹⁸ In other words, UNRWA’s relationship to the politics of Palestinian displacement was far more complex than its apolitical claims would suggest.

What did all this mean for the PLO? On the one hand, UNRWA’s limitations reinforced the PLO’s claim to be the sole representative of the Palestinian people, as it could point out that no other actor was fulfilling this role. Yet at the same time, the PLO did not have the resources to replace UNRWA as the refugees’ primary service provider, and it knew that the latter’s dissolution would not be in Palestinian interests. As a result, its relationship with UNRWA was comprised of competitive tension, juxtaposed with cooperation and support.

The relationship was further complicated by the role that UNRWA inadvertently took on in affirming Palestinian refugee identity – another potential threat to the PLO’s claim to be their sole representative. Although UNRWA was established as an apolitical aid agency, in practice it developed a *de facto* quasi-governmental function for the registered refugees.¹⁹ This was

manifested most obviously through its large-scale healthcare and education programmes, which operated on a scale similar to a national government.²⁰ To this day, UNRWA fulfils more of the administrative functions of a state than almost any other humanitarian organisation.²¹ This was hugely significant in a context of statelessness. In particular, UNRWA-issued identity cards became significant as the only ‘official’ proof of identity for many Palestinian refugees, the majority of whom are stateless.²² While UNRWA management insist that the cards hold no significance beyond verifying the holders’ eligibility for services, in practice refugees have also used them as proof of identity when applying for a *laissez-passer* or for permission to work in the host states.²³ In this sense the cards have served as vital documents for a stateless people needing to engage with state bureaucracy. Again, the PLO could not compete with UNRWA here.

There were other reasons too why the PLO never supported UNRWA’s dissolution. Strategically, the PLO understood UNRWA as an important component of its internationalist strategy in the 1970s. The agency comprised a local address for the UN in the region, making it a route by which the PLO could access the organisation’s supranational system. In another sign of the politics of humanitarianism, UNRWA’s work also provided valuable evidence of the refugees’ plight and the problem of Palestinian statelessness,²⁴ which the PLO could use to support not only its defence of refugee rights, but also its demand for recognition as their representative. These dynamics meant that the PLO’s relationship with UNRWA was characterised not only by rivalry, but also by political strategy. In showing how, this article enriches the historiography about the PLO’s place on the world stage. Its assessment of UNRWA’s role augments key existing scholarship by Chamberlin and Erakat, along with Helena Cobban, Kemal Kirisci, Augustus Norton and Michael Greenberg.²⁵ In the process, it deepens historical and political perspectives on both organisations.

The article is organised into two sections. The first looks at the PLO-UNRWA relationship in the sphere of high diplomacy. It assesses UNRWA’s place in the PLO’s international strategy, at a time when the latter was seeking legitimacy and formal recognition at the UN. The second section explores day-to-day interactions between the PLO and UNRWA in the refugee camps across the long 1970s, when the former enjoyed its greatest prominence and power in these spaces. It thus takes this article’s analysis of the PLO’s UN strategy to a more quotidian level, assessing what

difference the formal international recognition of the organisation in 1974 made on the ground.

The politics of high diplomacy: Internationalizing the Palestinian struggle

The PLO's strategy towards UNRWA is best understood in the internationalist context of modern Palestinian history. Palestinian national politics had been entangled with internationalism – meaning international authorities and the notion of globally-fixed standards – ever since the early twentieth century, when the League of Nations had provided a mandate for the British governance of Palestine. International intervention in Palestinian politics continued with the 1947 UN Partition Plan,²⁶ and the numerous UNGA and Security Council (UNSC) resolutions that followed the 1948 establishment of Israel and resulting dispossession of the Palestinian people (known as the *Nakba*, meaning ‘catastrophe’).²⁷ The UN's role in the creation of Israel, which became a Member State in 1949,²⁸ led Golda Meir to later describe the country as ‘the first born of the United Nations’.²⁹

UNRWA's establishment, and the continuation of its work, typified the UN's ongoing presence in Palestinian – as well as regional – affairs.³⁰ After beginning operations in 1950, it quickly became the dominant service provider for Palestinian refugees in the Levant. It was also a major employer, with Palestinians comprising the majority of its staff at lower levels.³¹ Partly as a result, tension quickly arose over ownership of UNRWA, with refugee communities pushing for it to demand and represent their full political rights.³² Many feared that anything less would simply facilitate their protracted exile. Further tensions emerged over the agency's services, which many Palestinians saw as entitlements stemming from their refugee status.³³ Accordingly, they viewed any service cuts as an infringement on their rights, which became an increasingly heated issue after UNRWA introduced new restrictions in the 1960s.³⁴ The refugees' grievances against UNRWA were reinforced by their underlying suspicion of the UN, which they perceived as having abandoned them during the *Nakba*.³⁵

For much of the 1950s and 1960s, it was the refugee camp grass roots who expressed these grievances. Although the PLO was created in 1964, it was constrained in its early years by the Arab League, which had created it as a means to contain Palestinian nationalism. The PLO was thus relatively

toothless until the late 1960s, when Arafat's Fatah party took control of it and removed it from Arab state control. Thereafter, the PLO embraced a more radical agenda, seeking to present itself as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians, seeking self-determination as a party separate from the Arab states.³⁶ In 1969, it gained a major boost to these efforts when the Cairo Agreement granted the PLO *de facto* sovereignty over parts of Lebanon, most notably the South and the refugee camps, along with the right to hold arms in these areas.³⁷ It thus gained formal recognition as a pseudo-state actor, albeit in a regional rather than international context. This served as a basis from which it then sought global recognition. From the late 1960s, the PLO twinned its militant campaigns against Israel with a diplomatic offensive on the world stage, aiming to reach out to potential allies and raise awareness of the Palestinian cause among as many parties as possible.³⁸

In particular, the PLO engaged with the ideas of Third Worldism, an international post-colonial movement that had first emerged in the mid-1950s and gathered pace in subsequent decades as decolonization swept Africa and Asia. The Third Worldist movement sought to challenge the Global North's political and economic hegemony through South-South cooperation and solidarity. Many of its leading figures, most notably Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, also called for post-colonial states to resist dominant power structures by refusing to align themselves with either of the Cold War superpowers (although some Third Worldist governments did end up in alliance with the USA or, more often, the USSR).³⁹ As Steven Salaita writes, the emergence of Third Worldism as a self-consciously internationalist movement served to crystallise the notion of progressive solidarity across the Global South.⁴⁰ These ideas, and the explicit internationalism underpinning them, all chimed ideologically with the PLO.

In particular, Third Worldism was grounded in peoples' experiences of colonialism and their struggles for self-determination. This was a natural ideological fit for the PLO, which cast Israel as the coloniser and the Palestinians as the colonized⁴¹ – a characterisation that gained added weight after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the birth of the illegal settler movement.⁴² By characterising Israel and Zionism as part of the Western imperialist order, the PLO cast itself in the resistance mould of the global anti-colonial movement.⁴³ Like its counterparts across the Global South, it spoke of its struggle in terms of justice and rights; also

like them, it positioned itself as part of a broader international movement.⁴⁴ To underline this, the PLO regularly highlighted its commonalities with other revolutionary movements, printing posters to celebrate the emergence or victories of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Polisario, among others.⁴⁵

The PLO's communications from this period reflect not only its emphasis on international diplomacy, but also its self-conscious positioning within Third Worldism. In 1969, its dominant Fatah party declared the Palestinian struggle 'a model of resistance to neo-imperialist domination', thus asserting both its solidarity and its wider relevance.⁴⁶ This turned out to be prescient; the 'model' of Palestine became central in decolonial circles in subsequent years, helped by the major cultural output that the PLO produced from its base in Lebanon in the 1970s. In particular, the PLO's success in gaining global recognition at the UN in 1974 marked a huge victory for Third Worldism,⁴⁷ coming a decade after 77 Third World countries formed the G77 voting bloc at the UN.⁴⁸ As such, its campaign became a model pursued by others, including the Indigenous rights movement, and African-American political radicals.⁴⁹ When the PLO leadership wrote in 1980 that it was 'part of the world liberation movement and the shared struggle' [*juʕ' min harakat al-tabrir al-'alami fi al-nidal al-mushtariki*], it was describing both a practical and an ideological reality.⁵⁰

Of course, the PLO's engagement with Third Worldism had an instrumental as well as an ideological purpose. Aligning with Third Worldism served to strengthen the PLO's clout on the world stage, by presenting it as part of a global movement and thus increasing the perceived feasibility of its goals.⁵¹ In particular, the FLN, which was prominent in the Third Worldist movement and to which the PLO had close ties, provided a strong example of a nationalist militant movement that had achieved independent statehood.⁵² When the PLO celebrated the Algerian revolution as a fellow popular uprising against a Western-backed imperialist regime, its ideological solidarity also came with practical benefits; the FLN regime went on to share arms and training facilities with the PLO.⁵³

Yet the PLO's international positioning went further than the post-colonial sphere. Like many other non-state actors of the era – and along with numerous Third Worldist leaders (most prominent Nasser)⁵⁴ – it also participated in the global binary of the Cold War. Specifically, its political opposition to the West, particularly the USA, facilitated links to the Soviet bloc,⁵⁵ with Arafat visiting Moscow for talks and continually referring to the

USSR as a friend and ally.⁵⁶ The PLO also forged close alliances with communist regimes in Romania,⁵⁷ China,⁵⁸ Cuba,⁵⁹ Czechoslovakia,⁶⁰ and Yugoslavia. It was Yugoslavian President Tito who first suggested that the PLO go to the UN in the 1970s, ushering in a watershed moment for its international standing.⁶¹

Palestine at the UN

As mentioned above, many Palestinians – including leading PLO officials⁶² – were suspicious of the UN because of its role in partitioning Palestine in 1947, and subsequent failure to recognize their political rights twenty years later in UNSC Resolution 242.⁶³ Yet notwithstanding this hostility, UN-targeted diplomacy became a central plank of the PLO's strategy from the late 1960s. It stated in a 1976 issue of its publication *PLO Information Bulletin* that 'exposing the Zionist-imperialist enemy to world opinion through the UN bodies' was one of the three strands of its struggle, the other two being defending the *fida'iyyin*'s revolution (*thawra*) in Lebanon, and 'resisting the Zionist occupation forces in occupied Palestine'.⁶⁴

Fatah was the driving force behind this UN-focused strategy. It had long been aware of the importance of international diplomacy, having sent its first recorded communication to the UN Secretary-General in June 1965, only a few months after formally launching its armed struggle.⁶⁵ After coming to dominate the PLO, Fatah continued to pursue opportunities at the UN. A 1980 Fatah document for political planning, later seized by Israeli occupying forces in south Lebanon, listed the aim of securing more pro-Palestinian UN resolutions among its objectives.⁶⁶ This approach provoked considerable censure from some of the Palestinian diaspora, particularly in the Arab world, who continued to see the UN as an enemy force. Shafiq Al Hout, who represented the PLO at the UN from 1974-91, recalls in his memoir how some Palestinians demonstrated against its overtures to the UN as a betrayal of their stance against it.⁶⁷

Despite this opposition, the PLO – or at least its dominant Fatah contingent – insisted that winning over the UN was vital to the nationalist movement's success. The rationale was simple; while many in the PLO leadership shared the general Palestinian suspicion towards the UN, they also recognised that it had been crucial to historical Israeli successes and Palestinian defeats. They accordingly concluded that in order to reverse

Palestinian fortunes, they would need to persuade the UN of their case.⁶⁸ Arafat in particular believed that UN recognition would legitimise the PLO's representative status and generate pressure for its inclusion in negotiations.⁶⁹

In the context of the 1970s, the PLO's view on the UN was further influenced by the changes that had occurred in the latter's membership. As several leading Palestinian officials noted, by this time the UN's composition – and particularly that of the UNGA – looked very different from the 1940s. The large-scale decolonization of Africa and Asia had precipitated the entry of dozens of newly-independent states, which were largely sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.⁷⁰ Moreover, as noted above, the PLO had direct ideological and practical ties to many of these post-colonial governments, often made up of former liberation movements with whom it identified.⁷¹ The increasing prominence and power of Third Worldist states at the UN thus reinforced the PLO's commitment to internationalism.

Indeed, the significance of these states' UN membership quickly became evident. From 1969 the UNGA passed a slew of resolutions in the Palestinians' favour, most notably 2535, 2787 and 2955, which collectively upheld the Palestinian right of return and right to self-determination.⁷² Crucially, these resolutions aligned with the PLO in addressing the Palestinian issue as political rather than humanitarian; 2649 drew explicitly on the PLO's declaration of solidarity with the rest of the Global South by comparing their situation to that in southern Africa.⁷³ The PLO also gained a new voice on the world stage in 1970 when its representative participated in a discussion on the 'Question of Palestine', held by the UNGA's Special Political Committee.⁷⁴

This shift towards a pro-Palestinian stance reached its apogee in 1974.⁷⁵ In October, the UNGA voted by 105 to 4 to invite the PLO to participate in its plenary discussions on Palestine.⁷⁶ The following month, it formally invited Arafat to address the Assembly in New York. Israel opposed the move vehemently, but to no avail.⁷⁷ Arafat's speech, which was broadcast around the world amidst simultaneous fanfare and controversy, articulated the PLO's internationalist strategy, calling on UN Member States to implement the Palestinians' national and political rights.⁷⁸ He asserted both the Palestinian right to self-determination and the PLO's right to represent them internationally.⁷⁹ The same month, UNGA Resolution 3237 invited the PLO to participate in UNGA sessions as an observer entity, with

a similar status to the Vatican.⁸⁰ The PLO thus gained its longed-for recognition as the legitimate Palestinian representative on the world stage.

The events of 1974 marked a turning point in the international status of the Palestinian cause.⁸¹ Resolution 3237 gave the PLO a higher level of UN recognition than any other non-state actor at the time, and allowed it to participate in the UNGA's work and sessions. There were limitations; the PLO was not a full UN Member and remained excluded from the more powerful UNSC. Yet even the latter shifted slightly, inviting the PLO representative to address it after the UNGA requested that it establish contacts with the new observer entity.⁸² The PLO was now unmistakably part of the UN, and much harder to ignore.

The PLO was quick to take advantage of its new opportunities, appointing permanent observers to UN Headquarters in both New York and Geneva.⁸³ Its representative had a private meeting with the Secretary-General in 1976, and continued to appeal regularly to the Secretariat and other Member States for support in subsequent years.⁸⁴ In 1978, Arafat wrote to Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, calling for:

[the Palestinian refugees'] right to return to their homes and property in accordance with the rules of international law, the Charter of the United Nations, United Nations resolutions, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁸⁵

Arafat's invocation of the UN Charter and UN Resolutions is highly telling here. By framing his argument in international norms, he implies that is the UN's responsibility to support the Palestinian national cause. The letter is a clear case of the PLO's internationalist strategy in action. The question remains of what this meant for UNRWA, as the UN's local address for Palestinians in the Middle East.

UNRWA and the PLO's international strategy

As mentioned earlier, UNRWA's work manifests the long-running connections between Palestinian refugees and the international order as encapsulated by the UN. Specifically, it exemplifies the involvement of the UNGA, which provides UNRWA's mandate and to which it is answerable.⁸⁶ As such, UNRWA was directly affected by the UNGA's formal recognition

of the PLO in 1974. Commissioner-General John Rennie acknowledged this in his annual report the following year:

the granting to the PLO by the General Assembly of observer status at the UN and the Assembly's request to the Secretary-General to establish contacts with the PLO on all matters relating to the question of Palestine... were of significance to the Agency.⁸⁷

This fleeting reference did not do justice to what this 'significance' would mean in practice.

Officially speaking, 1974 marked the beginning of UNRWA's relationship with the PLO, as relations could only be formally established once the UNGA had recognised the organisation.⁸⁸ Yet in reality, the Agency's interactions with the PLO long predated this. On some level the relationship was organic, as many of the PLO's cadres had studied in UNRWA's schools and were therefore intimately familiar with the Agency from a young age. Some senior Palestinian officials, including Abu Iyad and Ghassan Kanafani, even worked as teachers in UNRWA schools for a time. As Jalal Al Hussein and Randa Farah have both written, this intimately shaped the link between UNRWA and the PLO, with the former having directly informed the life experiences of many of the latter's members.⁸⁹

From UNRWA's operational perspective, the PLO became a significant actor not with UNGA recognition in 1974, but prior to this, when it gained prominence in the refugee camps in the late 1960s. It loomed particularly large in Lebanon, where the aforementioned Cairo Agreement gave it *de facto* sovereignty over the camps. This meant that the Agency had to work with the PLO in order to implement its mandate. Yet it had to proceed with care. The norms of international humanitarianism bound UNRWA to political neutrality – the demands of the refugees notwithstanding – and the refugee camps were designated civilian areas.⁹⁰ The PLO's authority in the latter posed an obvious risk to this status.

There were also practical considerations. UNRWA's dependence on voluntary donations meant that it could not afford to alienate its donors, the largest of which – the US – continued to classify the PLO as a terrorist organisation until 1988.⁹¹ As if to underline the issue, in 1970 the US had attached to its funding of UNRWA the condition of total detachment from the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) and *fidaiyyin* groups.⁹² The Agency

therefore walked a tightrope in its relations with the PLO for five years after the Cairo Agreement. Its task was complicated further by the fact that even outside Lebanon, the PLO was gaining increasing prominence at this time. In 1970, the Arab host governments, on whose support UNRWA also relied, requested that the PLO participate in meetings on the Agency's education programme.⁹³

Resolution 3237 thus made things slightly easier for the Agency, by providing an official framework within which it could conduct communications with the PLO. After the UNGA's formal recognition of the PLO in 1974, the UNRWA-PLO relationship was formalised,⁹⁴ with Rennie calling on Arafat in Beirut 'to inform him more fully of the Agency's financial difficulties and their implications for services to the refugees'.⁹⁵ Thereafter the two organisations held regular official meetings in Lebanon, chaired by Lebanese government representatives, to discuss operational issues regarding the refugees.⁹⁶

At the same time, the PLO increasingly made use of UNRWA to buttress its calls for Palestinian political rights, sometimes quoting its reports in official speeches at the UN and other international arenas.⁹⁷ Whenever possible, the PLO cited statements by UNRWA officials as evidence of the justice of their cause. A 1977 issue of the *PLO information bulletin* proudly proclaimed that the UNRWA Director in Gaza had 'expressed his strong criticism of the Zionist authorities' policies in the Gaza Strip', particularly the forced relocation of refugees.⁹⁸ The PLO was careful to include this in the *PLO information bulletin*, which was printed in European languages and designed to reach a Western audience. Evidently it perceived UNRWA to have sufficient clout and authority on the world stage that its words were worth disseminating to this audience.

Daily politics: The PLO and UNRWA in the refugee camps

While Resolution 3237 was transformative at the high diplomatic level, its impact on the ground was more muted. The PLO had been on UNRWA's radar since its creation ten years earlier, and for much of the 1960s their relationship was ambiguous. Formally, UNRWA prohibited its employees from publicly identifying with the PLO, in view of its neutrality obligations as a UN agency. It accordingly protested the PLO's conscription of its staff from 1965-67. Yet the PLO's role as *de facto* government of many Palestinian

refugee camps in this period – first in Jordan and then in Lebanon – meant that the Agency could not ignore it altogether.⁹⁹

As Al Hussein and Benjamin Schiff have both detailed, the PLO's rising power in the camps in the late 1960s greatly complicated the situation for UNRWA, whose mandate remained the same despite the changes on the ground.¹⁰⁰ It first directly encountered the PLO in Jordan, where the latter became prominent among a large Palestinian population after the 1967 Arab defeat. Its prominent position proved unsustainable, as the PLO contested the Jordanian regime's approach to Israel and ultimately launched a military offensive against it. The ensuing civil war resulting in the PLO's expulsion from Jordan in 1970, in events known as Black September.¹⁰¹ While the PLO's era of dominance in Jordan was short-lived, it precipitated new themes in its relationship with UNRWA that would dominate the subsequent decade.

After Black September, the PLO re-established its headquarters in Beirut. In view of the Cairo Agreement, UNRWA had little choice but to engage with the PLO directly in Lebanon. At the same time, the PLO demanded that the Agency recognize its role by sharing information and consulting with it over changes in service provision. Relations gradually moved from 'uneasy coexistence to active partnership', in the words of Al Hussein.¹⁰² From the Agency's perspective, the impact was mixed. There were some benefits; Schiff and Sayigh both argue that at a time when UNRWA was facing severe financial difficulties, the PLO's provision of additional services in the camps, as well as its creation of job opportunities, helped relieve the level of need among the refugees and thus reduce pressure on the Agency.¹⁰³ Yet as Al Hussein points out, the legitimacy of the Cairo Agreement did not make any difference to the Western donor states' classification of the PLO as a terrorist organisation, and the resulting challenges for UNRWA.¹⁰⁴

The PLO took a similarly multi-faceted approach to UNRWA, reflecting the views held by many refugees about the Agency. Al Hussein argues that from the mid-1970s, the PLO's policy towards the Agency had two main aims: to maintain and increase UNRWA's services; and to ensure that its decisions were consistent with Palestinian political and humanitarian interests.¹⁰⁵ (It is striking how both aims align closely with contemporary Palestinian approaches to UNRWA, particularly following the Trump administration's defunding of the agency in 2018).¹⁰⁶ Yet these aims did not

always result in consistent policy. It is in fact possible to identify three key strands of the PLO's relationship with UNRWA at this time. First, it loudly endorsed the refugees' grievances against the Agency, and was keen to align itself with their criticisms. Secondly, and simultaneously, it recognised that UNRWA's services were vital to the welfare and wellbeing of many refugees, and thus campaigned behind the scenes for its work to continue. Thirdly and most interestingly, the PLO also sought to use UNRWA's camp infrastructure and services for its own political and nationalist purposes, particularly in Lebanon after the Cairo Agreement. Each of these three strands is now examined in turn.

Criticising UNRWA: The PLO as opponent

The PLO's criticisms of UNRWA were largely grounded in the grievances of the camp refugees. By aligning itself with their criticisms, the PLO underlined its claims to represent them. Like them, it always stopped short of calling for UNRWA's abolition or questioning the grounds for its existence. Instead it endorsed the camp refugees' usual grievances: that UNRWA was patronising towards the Palestinians; that it was politically aligned with their enemies, particularly the US and UK; and that it did nothing to put an end to the refugees' plight by working to realize their political rights.¹⁰⁷ It also advocated long-running demands by the refugees for the Agency to improve its health clinics and increase its ration provisions.¹⁰⁸

Many PLO officials were particularly keen to take up the charge that UNRWA was part of a Western-backed plot to permanently resettle the refugees in the Arab host states, and thus undermine their struggle for self-determination. The fact that UNRWA did not participate in Palestinian national politics – a fact attributable to the limitations of its mandate – was taken as evidence of this. As early as 1965, the PLO in Syria had issued a questionnaire for Palestinian UNRWA staff there, seeking information about their personal backgrounds and their potential to contribute to the nationalist movement. The questionnaire also asked recipients to name up to twenty acquaintances who could participate 'in preparing for the battle of liberation'.¹⁰⁹ UNRWA's refusal to distribute the questionnaire, on grounds of its inappropriate political and military content, was cited as evidence that

it was ‘conspiring’ against the refugee cause – a claim made in numerous PLO pamphlets over the years.¹¹⁰

The PLO also cast UNRWA’s service cuts as politically-motivated, seeing them as a precursor to the Agency’s dissolution and the international abandonment of the refugees.¹¹¹ In a 1977 statement, the PLO accused UNRWA and the US of ‘playing with the lives of Palestinians’ by deliberately providing inadequate welfare services.¹¹² Four years later, a PLO official warned the UNRWA Field Director in Damascus that service cuts would not be accepted, hinting that the PLO would organise grievous demonstrations against the Agency if it continued with its planned cutbacks.¹¹³ Such opposition thus became another factor that UNRWA had to consider generally when deciding whether to implement certain cuts.¹¹⁴

Despite this, the PLO’s influence on UNRWA’s work always remained limited. It failed to prevent many of the decisions it opposed, such as the relocation of UNRWA’s headquarters from Beirut to Vienna in 1978; it also failed to bring in many of the changes it demanded, such as the explicit inclusion of protection activities and political negotiations within UNRWA’s mandate. This is a striking contrast with the success of the refugees’ grass roots campaigns. Most notably, in the 1950s refugee communities had successfully lobbied UNRWA to expand its education programme at the expense of its job creation schemes.¹¹⁵ Conversely, the PLO was unsuccessful in engendering any major changes in UNRWA’s operations. Explaining this discrepancy, Al Hussein suggests that the PLO’s leverage with UNRWA was limited by the fact that it could never establish comprehensive alternatives to the Agency’s services. As it could not threaten to replace UNRWA completely, the PLO retained some elements of dependence on its work.¹¹⁶

The time and effort that the PLO expended on criticising UNRWA’s work indicates that it saw the Agency as a significant, if flawed, player. Unlike its political opponents, the PLO never called for UNRWA’s abolition. On the contrary, it aligned itself with the refugees in insisting that UNRWA must continue its work until their plight was resolved. For the PLO, this insistence translated into action, as its criticisms were coupled with behind-the-scenes efforts to ensure that UNRWA’s programmes could continue. This aspect of the PLO’s relationship with the Agency is examined in depth below.

Supporting UNRWA: The PLO as fundraiser

Officially, the PLO shared the Arab states' position that responsibility for funding UNRWA lay with the Western-dominated international community, on the grounds of its political accountability for the refugees' plight.¹¹⁷ However, in private the PLO recognised that UNRWA's work was crucial to the refugees' wellbeing; it was therefore willing to lobby for Arab funding for the Agency in order to prevent the latter from floundering. UNRWA staff themselves stated internally, 'there can be no doubt whatsoever about desire of Arab host governments and PLO that UNRWA should continue provide services to refugees [sic]'.¹¹⁸ In the PLO's case, this was not simply a desire, but a driving force behind active fundraising work for UNRWA.¹¹⁹

In 1974, facing a serious deficit, UNRWA approached the PLO for help in seeking emergency funding from the Gulf states, where the Agency had previously had difficulties even getting appointments to see high officials.¹²⁰ It also considered asking the PLO to approach Cuba and other communist states on its behalf¹²¹ – further evidence of the PLO's success in establishing itself as an influential party in the non-Western world. The Agency's overtures to the PLO on this front provide one example of how their relationship was symbiotic, with each seeking to use the other to its own advantage whenever possible. It is also a clear case of UNGA Resolution 3237 making a difference on the ground; without it, UNRWA would not have been able to turn to the PLO for fundraising assistance.

The PLO leadership was receptive to the Agency's requests. From 1974-75, it helped secure large emergency contributions to UNRWA from various Gulf states. Although these states refused to commit to regular contributions to UNRWA's General Fund, their emergency donations helped keep UNRWA afloat that year.¹²² UNRWA acknowledged the PLO's vital role in raising these funds; in 1975, Commissioner-General Rennie reported to New York that 'reconsideration by Arab Foreign Ministers of increased contributions to UNRWA is result of approach to PLO [sic]'.¹²³ Nor was this a one-off; in 1975, Arafat asked to be kept informed of UNRWA's financial situation.¹²⁴ Indeed, it was Arafat in particular who was responsible for many fundraising efforts on UNRWA's behalf. Over the 1970s he travelled to numerous Arab and Muslim states to appeal for donations, and the PLO made specific efforts to fundraise for the Agency at the 1978 Baghdad Summit.¹²⁵

The records indicate warm and solicitous relations between the PLO and UNRWA leaderships over this issue; the former spoke positively of the Agency's work in support of the refugees, in contrast with its aforementioned claims that UNRWA was aligned with their political enemies. In one letter in 1979, Arafat wrote:

We cannot but express our appreciation for your concern and interest in seeking solutions to the financial crisis faced by UNRWA, in order to muster sufficient support for the maintenance of its activities.... We are in fact exerting efforts through our contacts with the responsible international circles concerned with a view to participating in helping UNRWA financially.¹²⁶

Their fundraising partnership remained active throughout this period. In 1980 and 1981, Commissioner-General Rydbeck met with Arafat repeatedly in Beirut to discuss the UNRWA deficit, and the PLO Chairman promised to again help raise money.¹²⁷ Arafat subsequently approached Saudi Arabia, Iraq and even Japan on the Agency's behalf. Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the PLO's political department, also appealed to France to increase its contribution.¹²⁸ Again, emergency donations helped stave off total disaster for the agency.¹²⁹

Paradoxically, these fundraising efforts occurred at the same time as the PLO was criticising UNRWA for being part of an international plot to liquidate the 'Palestinian problem'.¹³⁰ This apparent inconsistency is a sign of the divisions that existed within the PLO, sometimes to the degree of generating incompatible policy positions. The internal tensions were exacerbated by the fact that, like UNRWA, the PLO had to navigate the pressures of numerous parties. For the PLO, this meant assuring an Arab audience that it was not 'selling out' on the principle of Western responsibility for funding UNRWA. It publicly held fast to the official Arab line; when asked in a 1975 interview, PLO spokesman Abdulmohsen Abu Mayzar denied reports that the organisation had appealed to Saudi Arabia to help fund UNRWA, stating that such funding was an international responsibility.¹³¹ These public denials were necessary for the PLO to maintain its credibility and hold together despite internal conflict.

Politicising UNRWA: The PLO as pseudo-state in Lebanon

The ramifications of the Cairo Agreement meant that the PLO in Lebanon came to present UNRWA with many of the problems it usually faced from the host governments. Questions of access, personnel and the use of facilities all became topics of potential disagreement between UNRWA and the PLO at this time. The huge controversy that surrounded the PLO – not least in the eyes of UNRWA’s major donors – rendered this especially sensitive for the agency.¹³²

To complicate matters further, an increasing competitiveness between the PLO and UNRWA took hold in this period as the former gained power in the camps.¹³³ The PLO’s new authority meant that its patronage became as important and desirable to the refugees as connections with UNRWA, if not more so. This in turn undermined UNRWA’s authority, disrupting its previously exclusive status as the camps’ *de facto* government.

In practical terms, the PLO increasingly came to use the same sites and installations as UNRWA, albeit for different purposes. For example, the PLO’s Higher Political Committee sought the use of UNRWA schools to hold classes for children on the Palestinian struggle.¹³⁴ Farah writes that this was sometimes due to a lack of alternatives,¹³⁵ and it is true that in the case of the schools, there were not many other buildings in the camps of suitable size and design. Yet the reasons were not merely practical. As this article’s opening quotation from Al Hout shows, the PLO was well aware of the strategic potential that the Agency’s work provided. Schiff, Al Hussein and Bocco all note that from the late 1960s, the PLO accordingly sought to use UNRWA’s infrastructure to extend its own authority and legitimacy.¹³⁶

The PLO’s efforts on this front took different forms. Al Hout recalls that it particularly targeted UNRWA employees in its recruitment drives, aiming to take advantage of the Agency’s network as a way of reaching as many Palestinians as possible.¹³⁷ For this reason, the PLO was keen to align itself with UNRWA’s Palestinian staff in their tensions with the agency, as a way of winning their trust and loyalty. Al Hussein argues that it was here where the PLO actually enjoyed its greatest influence over the Agency, albeit informally. By loudly endorsing the demands of organisations like the General Union of Palestinian Teachers (GUPT), it could turn small-scale grievances into national issues, and win itself a place at the negotiating table in the process.¹³⁸ The PLO accordingly endorsed the teachers’ demands for higher salaries, and supported their complaints about the prohibition of political discussion in schools.¹³⁹ The latter issue was of particular interest to

the PLO, as UNRWA's regulations on staff neutrality, and specifically its ban on employees joining the PLO, severely limited its scope for recruitment.¹⁴⁰

The PLO also took up the refugees' desire for a 'Palestinianised' curriculum as a key issue.¹⁴¹ The absence of Palestinian history and geography from teaching in UNRWA schools was a long-running grievance among many refugees, and served to reinforce their suspicions about the agency's political positioning.¹⁴² Like many other Third Worldist groups, the PLO saw the role of education as central to its ideology. In keeping with this, a 1974 issue of the PLO organ *Falastin al-thawra* wrote of the Agency's 'suspicious attempts to keep the people ignorant'.¹⁴³ At the UNESCO General Conference two years later, PLO observer Ibrahim Souss spoke of the need to 're-evaluate' UNRWA's education system, as part of the burgeoning relationship between the two organisations.¹⁴⁴ This is a key example of how, in league with the refugees, the PLO sought to influence the Agency's policies and programmes along its favoured nationalistic lines.¹⁴⁵ Souss' intervention also shows how the UN's formal recognition of the PLO could intersect with the refugees' demands on the ground, in this case by giving them a voice on the world stage and boosting their leverage.

The PLO had some success in its usage of UNRWA's structures in this period, albeit indirectly. When Arafat addressed the UNGA in 1974, for example, the PLO instructed UNRWA staff in Lebanon to suspend work so as to participate in demonstrations of solidarity. UNRWA reported that nearly all field staff left work early in the morning in response.¹⁴⁶ To a lesser degree, the PLO was also able to mobilise refugees in Gaza for the same cause using the UNRWA school network; the Agency reported agitation in Jabalia and Shati camps on the day of Arafat's speech.¹⁴⁷

From UNRWA's perspective, the PLO's encroachment on its facilities and services caused both political and practical problems. Hasna Rida, who worked as a Research Assistant for UNRWA in Lebanon at this time, recalls that the Agency's relationship with the PLO was an anxious one. Agency management were nervous about the PLO's power in the camps, and the accompanying desire of many refugees to be actively involved in the nationalist campaign.¹⁴⁸ The possibility of the camps becoming non-civilian areas was a major concern for the Agency, not only because of its apolitical mandate but also for fear that perceived politicisation would lead its Western donors to withdraw funding.¹⁴⁹ The PLO's use of UNRWA's

installations for its own purposes also caused serious practical problems, as these buildings were increasingly targeted in Israeli air raids.¹⁵⁰

The Agency's inability to prevent the PLO's infringement on its spaces in the 1970s contrasts starkly with its straightforward refusal in 1965 to distribute the PLO's questionnaire in Syria. By the 1970s, the PLO's leverage had greatly increased, and the situation was much more politically difficult for UNRWA, particularly in Lebanon. Its problems worsened as the Lebanese Civil War escalated and UNRWA's field office in Beirut found itself frequently cut off from both headquarters and area offices. As a result, it was increasingly forced to appeal to the PLO on security grounds.¹⁵¹ This development exemplified UNRWA's long-running, complex and contradictory relationship with the PLO in the camps.¹⁵²

Conclusion

Analysis of the PLO-UNRWA relationship is vital for deepening understandings of the PLO's historical strategy for legitimacy and recognition on the world stage. This article has shown how the PLO pursued its goals both at the level of high diplomatic politics, and by way of more everyday administrative politics in the camps. In the process it has provided a deeper perspective on the PLO's objectives and strategy, showing that its version of nationalism was self-consciously global and interconnected to contemporary movements around the world. In these respects, it was aligned with the common characteristics of post-colonial and de-colonial nationalisms in the 1960s and 1970s.

Analysis of the two organisations' historical relationship is no less important for understanding the full complexity of the dynamics surrounding UNRWA's role and work. Such a subject holds particular weight in view of the agency's post-2018 financial crisis and struggle for survival. UNRWA's set-up has long compelled it to operate at the nexus of politics and humanitarianism, nationalism and internationalism. The resulting tensions are critical in explaining its numerous paradoxes, especially at a time when it faces increasingly prolific criticisms.

Ultimately, the PLO's approach to UNRWA reflects how the 'Question of Palestine' was inextricably tied to the international arena, particularly the UN, and how the Palestinian nationalist movement responded to this. The relationship between UNRWA and the PLO served

as a microcosm of how the apparently contrasting notions of nationalism and internationalism were juxtaposed in Palestinian history, at both the institutional and the grass roots level. Palestinian refugee history occurred not only in the regional context of the Levant, but also in the global context of its relevance to the history of the UN, globalism, and post-colonial constructions of nationalism.

¹ Shafiq Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO: The Inside Story of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 44-45.

² Arafat, letter to Rydbeck, November 8, 1979, File OR131 II, Box OR17, UNRWA Headquarters Archive (UHA) Amman.

³ PLO Political Department, cable to UN Secretary-General, June 26, 1978, S-1066-0066-0004, UN Archive (UNA), New York. See also: *PLO information bulletin*, 5:1, January 1979; 4:1, 30 June 1978, Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS), Beirut.

⁴ 'US-UNRWA Plays with the Life of Palestinians', *PLO information bulletin*, 3:17, 30 November 1977, IPS.

⁵ On UNRWA's post-2018 crisis see: Francesca P. Albanese, *UNRWA and Palestine refugee rights: New assaults, new challenges* (Washington, DC: IPS, 2018).

⁶ Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). Paul Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Paul Chamberlin, 'The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation', *Middle Eastern Studies* 47:1 (January 2011): 25-41.

⁷ Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁸ Noura Erakat, *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 98-100, 107-117.

⁹ UNGA Resolution 302(IV), A/RES/302(IV), December 8, 1949, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/AF5F909791DE7FB0852560E500687282>.

¹⁰ UNGA Resolution 194, A/RES/194(III), December 11, 1948, S-0470-0047-0010, UNA.

¹¹ Press Statement by Howard Kennedy, June 15, 1950, FO 1018/73, The National Archive, London (TNA).

¹² On the ideal of neutrality in humanitarian work with refugees, see: Tom Scott-Smith, 'Humanitarian dilemmas in a mobile world', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 35 (2016): 1-21. See also: UNHCR Emergency Handbook, *Humanitarian Principles*, 4th edition, <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/44765/humanitarian-principles>. On the Palestinian case in particular, see: Lori Allen, *The Rise and Fall of Human Rights: Politics and Cynicism in Occupied Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Ilana Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian refugee politics* (Oakland: UC Press, 2019).

¹³ Albanese, *UNRWA and Palestine refugee rights*.

¹⁴ Lance Bartholomeusz, 'The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3 (2010): 452-474.

¹⁵ On UNRWA's funding see: UNRWA Annual reports, starting 1950 <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/udc.htm?OpenForm>. See also: Lex Takkenberg, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees After Sixty Years: Some Reflections', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3 (2010): 253-259. On the significance of donor relations in humanitarianism, see: Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 102-104.

¹⁶ Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, ch. 1. Simon Waldman, 'UNRWA's First Years, 1949-51: The Anatomy of Failed Expectations', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 25:4 (2014): 630-645. On UNRWA's mandate see: Bartholomeusz, 'The Mandate of UNRWA at Sixty'.

¹⁷ Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 61, 102, 112-117. Randa Farah, 'Uneasy but Necessary: The UNRWA-Palestinian relationship', *Al Shabaka*, November 30, 2010, <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/uneasy-necessary-unrwa-palestinian-relationship>.

¹⁸ Allen, *The Rise and Fall of Human Rights*, 2-5, 12-17. Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 136-137.

¹⁹ Riccardo Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees: A History within History', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2-3 (2010): 234.

- ²⁰ 'The Needs of UNRWA in the Fields of Education and Training', February 10, 1968, File RE230 V, Box RE19, UHA. George Dickerson, 'Education for the Palestine Refugees: the UNRWA/UNESCO Programme', *JPS*, 3:3 (Spring 1973): 124.
- ²¹ Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 14, 29.
- ²² The exception is Palestinian refugees in Jordan, many of whom hold citizenship. Rochelle Davis, Grace Benton, Will Todman and Emma Murphy, 'Hosting Guests, Creating Citizens: Models of Refugee Administration in Jordan and Egypt', *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 36:2 (2017): 1-32.
- ²³ Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 41-49.
- ²⁴ Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief*, 114-115.
- ²⁵ Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Kemal Kirisci, *The PLO and World Politics: A study of the mobilization of support for the Palestinian cause* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986). Augustus Norton and Martin Greenberg (ed.s), *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organisation* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989). Erakat, *Justice for Some*.
- ²⁶ UNGA Resolution 181, A/RES/181(II), November 29, 1947, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7F0AF2BD897689B785256C330061D253>.
- ²⁷ See for example: UNSC Resolution 54, S/902, July 15, 1948, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/54\(1948\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/54(1948)); UNGA Resolution 194, A/Res/194(III), December 11, 1948, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A>; UNGA Resolution 212, A/RES/212(III), November 19, 1948; <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/EDC284B4A5508FD7852560E500670213>.
- ²⁸ UNGA Resolution 273, A/RES/273, May 11, 1949, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/044/44/IMG/NR004444.pdf?OpenElement>.
- ²⁹ Golda Meir, *My Life* (London: Futura, 1976), 263.
- ³⁰ Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 10. Keith Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 30. Allen, *The Rise and Fall of Human Rights*, 13.
- ³¹ On proportions of Palestinian UNRWA staff see: *Palestine Refugees Today*, back catalogue, IPS. See also: Nell Gabiam, 'When "Humanitarianism" becomes "Development": The Politics of International Aid in Syria's Palestinian Refugee Camps', *American Anthropologist*, 114:1 (2012): 100.
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- ³⁵ Rashid Khalidi, 'Observations on the right of return', *JPS*, 21:2 (1992): 33.
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- ³⁸ Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 215.
- ³⁹ Bruce Gilley, 'The challenge of the creative Third World', *Third World Quarterly* 36:8 (2015): 1407. Robert Malley, *The Call from Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution, and the Turn to Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 58, 106-107, 158-59. Chamberlin, 'The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere', 27. Mark T. Berger, 'After the Third World: History, destiny and the fate of Third Worldism', *Third World Quarterly* 25:1 (2004): 11-23.
- ⁴⁰ Steven Salaita, *Inter/Nationalism: Decolonizing Native America and Palestine* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), xiv.
- ⁴¹ Laleh Khalili, 'Commemorating Battles and Massacres in the Palestinian Refugee Camps of Lebanon', *American Behavioural Scientist*, 51:11 (2008): 1564.
- ⁴² For broader studies of the Israeli state as a settler colonialist endeavour see: Lorenzo Veracini, 'Israel-Palestine through a Settler-Colonial Studies Lens', *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 21:4 (2019): 568-581; Lana Tatour, 'Citizenship as Domination: Settler colonialism and the making of Palestinian citizenship in Israel', *Arab Studies Journal* 27:2 (2019): 8-39; Nicola Perugini, 'Settler colonial inversions: Israel's "disengagement" and the Gush Katif "Museum of Expulsion" in Jerusalem', *Settler Colonial Studies* 9:1 (2019): 41-58; Rachel Busbridge, 'Israel-Palestine and the Settler Colonial "Turn": From Interpretation to Decolonization', *Theory, Culture and Society* 35:1 (2018): 91-115; Salaita, *Inter/Nationalism*.

- ⁴³ Chamberlin, 'The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere', 27. Erakat, *Justice for Some*, 95-97.
- ⁴⁴ See for example: Article 22, Palestinian National Charter 1969, OP.32072.956.7, Cambridge University Official Publications Archive (CUOPA), UK. See also: Statement by Yasser Arafat, 29th Session UNGA, November 13, 1974, S-0899-0013-03, UNA.
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- ⁴⁶ Meier, 'The Palestinian *Fiday'i* as an Icon of Transnational Struggle', 327.
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- ⁵¹ Daniel Meier, 'The Palestinian *Fiday'i* as an Icon of Transnational Struggle: The Lebanese Experience', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41:3 (2014): 327.
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- ⁵³ Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 2007 edition), 140, 156. Abu Iyad with Eric Rouleau, *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Times Books, 1981), 42. Tony Walker, *Arafat: The Biography* (London: Virgin books, 2003), 172-174. The PLO would later enjoy a similar relationship with the Iranian revolutionary regime, on which see: *PLO information bulletin* 5:2, February 1-15, 1979; 5:3, February 16-28, 1979, IPS; Chris P. Ioannides, 'The PLO and the Islamic Revolution in Iran', in Norton and Greenberg, *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organisation*, 74-108.
- ⁵⁴ On Nasser's relationship with the USSR, see: Hassan Elbahtimy, 'Allies at arm's length: Redefining Egyptian-Soviet relations in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 42:1 (2019): 91-113; Guy Laron, 'Stepping back from the Third World: Soviet policy towards the United Arab Republic, 1965-67', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12:2 (2010): 99-118.
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- ⁵⁷ Chief of UN Political Affairs Division, Memo to Secretary-General, 17 December 1976, S-1066-0098-0005, UNA.
- ⁵⁸ Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 216-221.
- ⁵⁹ Report of PLO representative in Havana, nd, in Israeli, *PLO in Lebanon*, 147-157. See also: Robert Thomas Baratta, 'The PLO in Latin America', in Norton and Greenberg, *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organisation*, 166-195.
- ⁶⁰ *PLO information bulletin* 3:5, 1 April 1977, IPS.
- ⁶¹ Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, 127.
- ⁶² Erakat, *Justice for Some*, 113.
- ⁶³ Khalidi, 'Observations on the right of return', 33. See also: UNSC Resolution 242, S/RES/242, November 22, 1967, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136>.
- ⁶⁴ *PLO Information Bulletin*, 2:10, March 1976, IPS.
- ⁶⁵ Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 34, 216.
- ⁶⁶ *Masbru' al-burnamaj al-siyasi al-sadr 'an al-muwwtamar al-rabi' libaraka, fatah*.
- ⁶⁷ Al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, 127.
- ⁶⁸ This strategy has not disappeared. In 2011, the Palestinian Authority applied to become a full UN Member State. The following year, it gained Non-Member State status. See: UNGA Resolution 67/19, A/RES/67/19, December 4, 2012, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/19862D03C564FA2C85257ACB004EE69B>. In his accompanying address to the UNGA, Mahmoud Abbas explicitly referenced UNGA Resolution 181 and the long history of UN involvement in Palestine. See: Statement by President Abbas, November 29, 2012, <http://palestineun.org/692/#more-692>.
- ⁶⁹ Erakat, *Justice for Some*, 112-113.

- ⁷⁰ Rajeev Patel and Philip McMichael, 'Third Worldism and the Lineages of Global Fascism: The Regrouping of the Global South in the Neoliberal era', *Third World Quarterly* 25:1 (2004): 241.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 95-97.
- ⁷² For example, UNGA Resolution 2535 alerted the UNSC to 'the grave situation resulting from Israeli policies and practices in the occupied territories and Israel's refusal to implement [UN] resolutions'. UNGA Resolution 2787 affirmed 'the inalienable rights of all peoples, and in particular those of Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea (Bissau) and the Palestinian people, to freedom, equality and self-determination, and the legitimacy of their struggles to restore those rights'. UNGA Resolution 2955 'strongly condemn[ed] the expansionist activities of Israel in the Middle East and the continual bombing of Palestinian civilians, which constitute a serious obstacle to the realization of the self-determination and independence of the Palestinian people'. UNGA Resolution 2535, A/RES/2535(XXIV), December 10, 1969, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/41F2C6DCE4DAA765852560DF004E0AC8>; UNGA Resolution 2787, A/RES/2787, December 6, 1971, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/328/03/IMG/NR032803.pdf?OpenElement>; UNGA Resolution 2955 (XXVII), A/RES/2955, December 12, 1972, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/269/85/IMG/NR026985.pdf?OpenElement>.
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- ⁷⁴ Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 229.
- ⁷⁵ Chamberlin, 'The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere', 26-27.
- ⁷⁶ UNGA Resolution 3210, A/RES/3210(XXIX), October 14, 1974, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/3210\(XXIX\)&Lang=E&Area=RESOLUTION](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/3210(XXIX)&Lang=E&Area=RESOLUTION). Israel, the USA, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic voted against the resolution. See also: Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organisation*, 230.
- ⁷⁷ Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN, letter to UNSC President, November 14, 1975, S/11878, S-0359-0002-0002, UNA.
- ⁷⁸ For the recording of Arafat's speech: UN audiovisual library, <http://www.unmultimedia.org/classics/asset/C792/C792a/>. For the transcript: Statement by Yasser Arafat, S-0899-0013-03, UNA.
- ⁷⁹ Erakat, *Justice for Some*, 97-100.
- ⁸⁰ UNGA Resolution 3237, A/RES/3237(XXIX), November 25, 1974, S-0899-0013-03, UNA.
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- ¹²⁵ Bocco, 'UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees', 240. See also: Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, 108-109.
- ¹²⁶ Arafat, letter to Rydbeck, November 8, 1979, File OR131 II, Box OR17, UHA.
- ¹²⁷ UNRWA Commissioner-General, letter to Jordanian Minister of Development & Reconstruction, March 14, 1980, File RE230(J)V, Box RE20, UHA.
- ¹²⁸ Schiff, *Refugees unto the Third Generation*, 128-133.
- ¹²⁹ The seriousness of UNRWA's financial situation in this period can be observed in its annual reports. In 1979, Commissioner-General Rydbeck reported that 'financial crisis' risked UNRWA's 'very existence'; the following year, he spoke of the 'grim prospect' of 'financial collapse'. Olof Rydbeck, Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General, A/34/13, September 13, 1979, paragraphs 33-34, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/E8149C637F38D5398525684200539E62>. Rydbeck, Report of the UNRWA Commissioner-General, A/35/13, September 18, 1980, paragraph 4, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-176552/>.

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- ¹³⁹ 'GUPT: Palestinian Teachers Intensify Social and Political Struggle', *PLO information bulletin* 5:1, January 1979, IPS.
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- ¹⁴⁸ Interview with Hasna Rida, former UNRWA Research Assistant, Beirut, December 7, 2016.
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