

# The Demise of the PLO: Neither Diaspora nor Statehood

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As Fatah and Hamas continuously fail to come to an agreement over the issues between them, it is quite clear that the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which is responsible for catapulting the Palestinian issue into international prominence, has ceased to exist. Not only does it not maintain an Internet site, its popular body, the Palestinian National Council (PNC), which is meant to convene every two years, has not met officially since 1996, and since 1991, according to Hamas and other Palestinian factions opposed to Muhammad Abbas, its titular head. There is a need to understand the implications of the demise of the PLO, an institution that once loomed large in Middle Eastern and world politics.

The following article will try to demonstrate that the political death of the PLO reflects the withering of the Palestinian political diaspora. However, unlike its Zionist forebear and state antagonist, it only achieved the first of three necessary steps, the transfer of the locus of power from the diaspora to the territory being contested. The other two steps, statehood and the building of a state, which could effectively mobilize its diaspora, seem highly unlikely to be achieved in the near future. Instead, as Palestinians ponder their stateless condition, there is a perpetual state of near or actual civil war between the nationalist and Islamist camps in the territory being contested by Israel and the Palestinians, and the destruction of the Palestinian community in Lebanon, which more than any other serves as the symbol of uprooted Palestinian life, continues unabated. These four themes, the imperative to territorialize politically, the failure of the Palestinians to create a state, the demise of the PLO, and the withering of the Palestinian diaspora, due also to political economic factors, form the core of the following analysis.

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## THE IMPERATIVE TO TERRITORIALIZE

Diasporas have often spawned territorial nationalism long before it took hold in the territory defined as the future homeland. Thus, Turkic-speaking intellectuals espoused pan-Turkish nationalism in Russia long before there were Turkish nationalists in the Anatolian peninsula itself,<sup>1</sup> intellectuals in Pinsk and Minsk articulated Zionism long before it was espoused in Jerusalem itself (in fact many of the Jews in Jerusalem opposed Zionism), Algerian and African nationalists appeared in Paris before they espoused nationalism in Algeria and the African homelands,<sup>2</sup> and Arabic-speaking intellectuals comprised 12 out of the 23 delegates of the first Syrian–Arab Congress held in Paris in 1913, one of the founding moments of pan-Arabism.<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, political independence, the fundamental goal of nationalist movements, can only be achieved in a homeland. According to the principles of the international system, which is based on territorially sovereign states, most political solutions in international affairs are territorial.<sup>4</sup> In a world divided into sovereign nation states embedded in a system of coordinate territorial states, whose territorial jurisdictions exhaust the inhabitable surface of the earth, the only nationalist political claims that are taken into account are those emanating from the contested territory itself. This means that in those few disputed territories where no past claim to sovereignty has been conclusively accepted by the international community, as in the Palestinian case, the right to independence must ultimately be advanced by the indigenous population, not by its representatives in the diaspora.

Diaspora movements must then territorialize either directly through the transfer of leadership and resources from “outside” to “inside,” or indirectly, by mobilizing the indigenous population to press a claim for independence on behalf of the national movement. A voice that remains only in the diaspora, such as that of the Armenians who claim parts of present-day Turkey, is a voice in the wilderness.

This was the challenge faced by the PLO as an institution that emerged in the diaspora. The PLO itself was the handmaiden of the Arab states. On

<sup>1</sup> Hillel Frisch, “Nationalism in the Middle East” in Alexander Motyl, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Nationalism* (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2001), 489.

<sup>2</sup> Michael C. Lambert, “From Citizenship to Négritude, ‘Making a Difference’ in Elite Ideologies of Colonized Francophone in West Africa,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35 (April 1993): 239–262, at 247–251; Charles-Rober Ageron, *Modern Algeria: A History from 1830 to the Present* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1993), 93–94.

<sup>3</sup> Eliezer Tauber, *The Emergence of the Arab National Movements* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 185–186.

<sup>4</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 26; James Mayall, *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge Studies in International Relations 10, 1993), 19; Anthony Giddens, *The Nation State and Violence* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987), 172; Peter Sahlin, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California, 1989), 61–63, 78–89.

1 January 1964, Arab presidents and monarchs attending the first Arab summit decided to set up an organization that would mobilize the Palestinians in the conflict with Israel. That decision became a reality six months later with the establishment of the PLO. Palestinians themselves had failed to take the initiative, not so much due to a lack of zeal but rather as a result of the Arab regimes' almost total unwillingness to tolerate any autonomous political initiative—least of all that of the Palestinians. Although Ahmad Shuqairy, the PLO founder and first chairman of its Executive Committee, succeeded in pressuring a reluctant Jordan to allow the inaugural council meeting to take place in East Jerusalem, the former government center of the British mandate and center for Arab Palestinian politics, most of its representatives came from areas outside the boundaries of Mandate Palestine.<sup>5</sup> Even Shuqairy himself had in the past represented both Saudi Arabia and Syria in the United Nations as a professional diplomat.

Autonomous Palestinian institution building was even more clearly rooted in the diaspora. Fatah, the first authentic grassroots Palestinian organization, emerged in Lebanon in 1959. A profile of Fatah's leadership reflects its diaspora political roots. Thus, of the four major figures in Fatah over the subsequent three decades, Yasser Arafat became active in politics solely in the diaspora; Salah Khalaf engaged in Palestinian politics in Cairo in the early 1950s and then only briefly in Gaza before departing for Kuwait in 1960; Faruq al-Qaddumi left Jordan for Saudi Arabia by 1952; and Khalil al-Wazir was politically active in the Gulf as early as 1957, although he may have emigrated there even earlier.<sup>6</sup> Only four (Khalaf, Muhammad Yusuf al-Najjar, Salim Za'nun and Muhammad Abu Mayzar), out of 23 prominent Fatah leaders, were actively engaged in politics in Gaza or the West Bank during the 1950s, none in the name of Palestinian nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

Once Fatah and the other guerrilla factions took over the PLO in 1968, and Fatah established its hegemony over the organization a year later, the composition of the Executive Committee changed radically in favor of those who had made their mark outside the physical boundaries of Mandate Palestine. A comparison between the composition of the Executive Committees of the PLO during the years 1964–67 and during the three years after Arafat became chairman at the sixth PNC meeting in Cairo in January 1969 also clearly reflects the hold of the diaspora-based leadership over the PLO. While seven of the fourteen members of the first Executive Committee lived and were politically

<sup>5</sup> Moshe Shemesh, *The Palestinian Entity 1959–1974: Arab Politics and the PLO* (London: Frank Cass, 1988), 42.

<sup>6</sup> John W. Amos II, *Palestinian Resistance: Organization of a Nationalist Movement* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980), 48–55.

<sup>7</sup> Salah 'Abd al-Jawad Salih, "Dirasa fi Qiyadat Harakat Fatah," *Qadaya* 4 (August 1990): 1–21, at 39–40; Ziad Abu 'Amer, *Usul al-Harakat al-Siyasiya Fi Quta' Ghazza 1948–1967* (Acco: Dar al-Aswar, 1947), 85–97.

active in the West Bank or Gaza,<sup>8</sup> only two members of the PLO's Executive Committee after 1967 (Kamal Nasir, a former Ba`thist, and Hamad Abu Sitta) had played important political roles in organizations or parties active in the West Bank and Gaza before 1967.<sup>9</sup> The actual concentration of power within the organization was overwhelmingly in the hands of the diaspora leadership.

Nonetheless, PLO leader Yasser Arafat had the advantage of hindsight, which the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann and the early Palestinian Arab leader Hajj Amin al-Husayni had lacked. Weizmann's predilection for diaspora diplomacy over territorial institution building facilitated his own replacement by David Ben-Gurion as the leader of the World Zionist Organization (WZO) and later as the founding leader of the fledgling State of Israel. The lesson from Hajj Amin's life story was even more severe. His absence from Palestine at critical moments in the formation of a potential Palestinian state condemned him to an increasingly peripheral political existence.<sup>10</sup> The experiences of both leaders underscore the importance of being physically present in the territory being contested. Arafat attempted to achieve this objective in the fall of 1967 when he adopted a strategy of guerrilla warfare, traversed the Jordan River, and set up base in the West Bank.

However, this model of national liberation did not serve Arafat or Fatah well. They overlooked the power and determination of the nation-state they were up against. It has been estimated that Israeli forces captured 1,000 guerrillas and killed 200 more between the time Arafat moved to the West Bank and his escape to Jordan four months later.<sup>11</sup> The damage inflicted against Israel hardly justified such losses. Artillery duels between the Jordanian army and Israel accounted for the overwhelming number of incidents. In 1968, for example, only 33 of a total of 1,320 recorded military incidents in the West Bank could be linked to internally generated guerrilla activities. The same is true of casualties: guerrillas operating within the West Bank and Gaza killed only six Israeli soldiers in 1968, while 108 died in inter-state border conflagrations on the Jordanian and Suez fronts alone. And while communiqués released by the various PLO factions claimed responsibility for the deaths of 2,618 Israelis in 1968,<sup>12</sup> only 177 Israelis were killed in hostile activities of all types.<sup>13</sup> In any event, Arafat and the PLO factions were forced to flee to Jordan by the winter of 1968 and, following the violence in Jordan in 1970–71, had to move their centers to Beirut.

<sup>8</sup> 'Abd al-Jawad Salih, 21–22; Yehoshofat Harkabi, *Arav ve-Israel* (3–4) (Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 1975), 25, 84, 124, 129, 171.

<sup>9</sup> Salih, 21–22.

<sup>10</sup> Phillip Matar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem—Al-Hajj Amin Husayni and the Palestine National Movement* (New York: Columbia University, 1988), 111.

<sup>11</sup> Ehud Yaari, *Strike Terror: The Story of Fatah* (New York: Sabra, 1970), 150.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Middle East Record-1968* (Jerusalem: Shiloah Institute for Middle Eastern and African Studies and Israeli University Press, 1973), 352.

Loss of any physical contact with the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza should have encouraged Arafat and the PLO to revive attempts to create links with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, especially after the 1976 municipal elections in the West Bank, which catapulted “nationalist” anti-Jordanian and anti-Israeli mayors into power. Two groups of mayors, one from the twin towns of Ramallah and al-Bireh and the other from the smaller towns of Tulkarem and Qalquilya, agreed to establish coordinating committees in a move aimed against the Israeli administration, which was anxious to prevent the creation of broad representative institutional structures in the areas that came under Israeli rule in 1967.<sup>14</sup> At least four towns publicized their desire to encourage the activities of voluntary work committees established by the Jordanian Communist Party under the aegis of the clandestine Palestinian National Front.<sup>15</sup> Finally, three east Jerusalem dailies, two of which were ardently pro-PLO, followed these developments with great enthusiasm.

However, instead of focusing on the territories and pouring resources into cadres eager to fight, students and shopkeepers willing to protest, and an elected local nationalist elite, the PLO responded with its own attempt at state building in war-ravaged, ethnically torn, and politically penetrated Lebanon. For the PLO, the maintenance of functional monopolies was more important than territorialization. Sabri Jiryis, the veteran editor of the prestigious journal *Shu'un Filastiniyya*, condemned the PLO's preoccupation with the diaspora, accusing the factions comprising the PLO of “distancing themselves day by day from the essential problems.”<sup>16</sup> Jamil Hilal, a spokesman in the PLO administration with pronounced leftist leanings, concurred, though he stated things more bluntly. The PLO, as far as he was concerned, attempted to deliberately marginalize the importance of the territories when the diaspora center was so weak.<sup>17</sup> Presumably, the opposite should have been the case, as the time seemed propitious to transfer resources from the PLO to the territories.

Accordingly, funds flowed overwhelmingly to Lebanon. The widening civil war and the disappearance of an effective state left a vacuum in the provision of social services to the Palestinian population that the PLO felt only it could fill.<sup>18</sup> The “alternative state” (*al-watan al-badil*) in Lebanon came to comprise 140 Palestinian Red Crescent Society clinics augmented by 47 more run by

<sup>14</sup> *Al-Fajr*, 17 April and 15 June 1976.

<sup>15</sup> On the cooperation of the Jericho municipality with the Voluntary Women Committees (VWCs), see *Al-Fajr*, 20 June 1976; in Ramallah and Al-Bireh, see *Al-Fajr*, 15 June 1976; on a visit of the Ramallah VWC to Hebron and its meeting with Mayor Fahd Kawasmi, see *Al-Fajr*, 17 June 1976.

<sup>16</sup> Sabri Jiryis, ‘Hawar Min Naw‘ein Ahirin Hawla ‘al-Hawar’ wa ‘al-Wahda al-Wataniyya,’ *Shu'un Filastiniyya* 170–171 (May–June 1987): 18–29, at 24.

<sup>17</sup> Jamil Hilal, “Lahzat Hasima fi-Ta'arih al-Nidal al-Watani al-Filastini,” *Al-Fikr al-Dimuqrati* 4 (Winter 1988): 4–13, at 4–7.

<sup>18</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Under Siege: PLO Decision Making During the 1982 War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 28–36, 136–43.

Samed, the PLO's economic arm, ten hospitals, and a vast bureaucratic network with over 8,000 employees. The PLO para-state presumably enjoyed a budget in the hundreds of millions of dollars (including constituent organizations), three quarters of which went to support the PLO's social and administrative programs. Such a build-up amounted to state building rather than simply the replacement of the Lebanese presence.<sup>19</sup> Five thousand more individuals were directly employed by Samed or by a communications network that included the Voice of Palestine radio station, several newspapers, the Wafa press agency, and a research institute.<sup>20</sup> Creation of the para-state in Lebanon took a military turn with the transformation of guerrilla units into conventional army formations. It is estimated that the PLO spent at least a third of its budget just to support its standing army.<sup>21</sup> The effort to establish a conventional army was another indication that Lebanon was becoming a permanent base of Palestinian nationalism.

A more basic problem for the PLO lay in its failure to grasp the near impossibility of creating a para-state in foreign territory. In Jordan, the organization had been foiled by a sovereign territorial state. In Lebanon, communal counter-mobilization, principally amongst the Shiites, would have compromised PLO efforts even had the Israelis not invaded Lebanon. Prior to 1982 and what was effectively the PLO's military expulsion from Lebanon, communal counter-mobilization by newly politicized communities in Lebanon, primarily among the Shiites, was already constraining Palestinian political action. In short, the PLO leadership, which was forced to depart for distant Tunis, faced a stark choice: to territorialize or to wither in the diaspora.

#### ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC DIMENSIONS TO THE WITHERING OF THE DIASPORA

Engaging in Palestinian politics in Arab host states not only had a pernicious effect on the PLO, it also had a deleterious long-term effect on the Palestinian diaspora as a distinct political community from which the PLO and other diaspora institutions could have drawn political and economic support.

Consider the consequences of the Jordanian civil war in 1970–71 in which the PLO was defeated. Since the 1970–71 disturbances and the ouster of the armed Palestinian factions from Jordan, the Kingdom has been surprisingly successful in containing violent and nonviolent manifestations of Palestinian discontent.<sup>22</sup> Even when Palestinian dissent resurfaced, it did so under the

<sup>19</sup> See Rashid Khalidi, "The Palestinians in Lebanon: Social Repercussions of Israel's Invasion," *Middle East Journal* 38 (Spring 1984): 255–266.

<sup>20</sup> Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinians: The Making of a People* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 223.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Yezid Sayigh, "Jordan in the 1980s: Legitimacy, Entity and Identity" in R. Wilson, ed., *Politics and Economy in Jordan* (London: Routledge, 1991), 167–183.

guise of Islamic fundamentalism, an ideology that essentially negates Palestinian ethnicity and territorial partition.<sup>23</sup> The discontent resurfaced in two forms: first, the success of Muslim fundamentalist candidates in the 1989 elections (the first since 1967), primarily in areas populated by Palestinians, who won approximately 33 of the 80 seats in Parliament; and second, acts of unrest that involved minor protests during the Iraqi invasion in 1990–91 and several relatively negligible attempts at initiating violence against the state.<sup>24</sup> Even during the far bloodier and more-prolonged disturbances in September 2000, which cost thousands of Palestinian lives in the Palestinian Authority (PA) in subsequent years, the reactions of Jordanians of Palestinian origin were relatively low-key. Only one demonstration, which took place in the Baq'a refugee camp, had lethal consequences, which resulted in the death of one Jordanian of Palestinian origin.<sup>25</sup> Considering Jordan's tumultuous past, these proved to be only minor threats to the stability of the state and reflected the fact that Jordanians of Palestinian origin had accepted their status as citizens of Jordan, however uneven and unsatisfactory that status might have been. Thus, according to a Minorities at Risk report in 2006, 4 of 28 ministers in the Jordanian government in 2006, 9 of 55 senators in the upper house of Parliament, and 18 of 110 senators in the lower house were of Palestinian origin, though Palestinians made up the majority of the population. No Palestinians held any of the governorships in Jordan at the time.<sup>26</sup>

The reasons for Palestinian acceptance of their Jordanian identity can be gleaned from results of an important survey conducted by the University of Jordan's Center for Strategic Studies in the winter of 1995. The survey investigated relations between native Jordanians and Palestinians in Jordan and the attitudes of each group toward the state and the peace process.<sup>27</sup> Responding to the question of whether interaction between the two groups has molded them into one people with one identity, 64.9 percent of the Jordanians, 72.3 percent of Palestinians living outside the refugee camps, and 65.9 percent of Palestinian living in the refugee camps felt that there was a considerable degree of integration. By the mid-1990s, and probably long before, the largest non-territorial concentration of Palestinians was no longer focused primarily on their Palestinian identity.

The expulsion of approximately 400,000 Palestinians from Kuwait at the end of the Iraqi occupation in 1991, many of whom found refuge in Jordan, both accelerated the assimilation process in Jordan and proved to be a major

<sup>23</sup> Louis-Jean Duclos, "Les élections législatives en Jordanie," *Maghreb-Machreq* 129 (July–September 1990): 47–76.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence Tal, "Dealing with Radical Islam: The Case of Jordan," *Survival* 37 (Fall 1995): 139–156, at 141–142.

<sup>25</sup> "Jordan," *The Middle East and North Africa-2000* 50: 632–633, at 633.

<sup>26</sup> "Assessment for Palestinians in Jordan," 31 December 2006, accessed at <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=66302>, 9 October 2010.

<sup>27</sup> *Istiila' lil-Ra'i Hawla al-'Alaqa al-Urdunniyya-al-Filastiniyya* (Amman: Markaz al-Dirasat al-Istratijiyya February 1995), Table III.

economic blow to the PLO.<sup>28</sup> The economic situation of tens of thousands of Palestinians from Kuwait deteriorated significantly, and they were absorbed into the Jordanian political environment described above.

Palestinians in Lebanon, though they never faced expulsion, have nevertheless suffered from significant attrition in the past three decades, declining from an estimated 430,000 in the 1970s to 250,000 currently, according to Nadim Shehadi of Chatham House, as a result of civil war, economic discrimination, and the “camp wars” between the Shiite Amal organization and Palestinian factions in the 1980s.<sup>29</sup> Palestinian influence in Lebanon, as well as its ability to bolster the PLO, declined accordingly.

The Palestinian diaspora, especially in the Arab world, continued to wither during the last decade, with the harassment and expulsion of many Palestinians from Iraq. Shiite militias have targeted Palestinians as being both Sunnis and former beneficiaries and supporters of Saddam Hussein’s Baath regime.<sup>30</sup> The number of Palestinians in Iraq has reportedly declined from 34,000 before the war to 10,000 subsequently, with 3,000 now living in camps along the Syrian–Iraqi border and a small number being accepted by Brazil.<sup>31</sup> Thus, not only was the PLO consistently taking blows outside the homeland, but so were Palestinian communities in the (near) diaspora.

### THE WITHERING OF THE DIASPORA: THE HEZBOLLAH AND NAHAR AL-BARED AS METAPHORS

Two conflagrations in Lebanon, which in the past was the center of gravity for the Palestinian trans-state organization, reflected how marginal “outside” Palestinians had become in Palestinian political life by 2010.<sup>32</sup> Recall that

<sup>28</sup> “Angry Welcome for Palestinian in Kuwait,” *BBC News*, 30 May 2001, accessed at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/1361060.stm>, 8 October 2010; Hassan A El-Najjar, *The Gulf War: Overreaction & Excessiveness* (New York: Amazon Press, 2001), chap. 10, accessed at [http://www.gulfwar1991.com/Gulf%20War%20Complete/Chapter%2010,%20Palestinians%20in%20Kuwait,%20Terror%20and%20Ethnic%20Cleansing,%20By%20Hassan%20A%20El-Najjar.htm#\\_edn12](http://www.gulfwar1991.com/Gulf%20War%20Complete/Chapter%2010,%20Palestinians%20in%20Kuwait,%20Terror%20and%20Ethnic%20Cleansing,%20By%20Hassan%20A%20El-Najjar.htm#_edn12), 8 October 2010.

<sup>29</sup> “Talking to Nadim Shehadi: Palestinian Civil Rights in Lebanon,” 30 June 2010, accessed at <http://qifanabki.com/2010/06/30/nadim-shehadi-palestinian-refugee-civil-rights/>, 8 October 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Joshua Partlow, “Palestinians under Pressure to Leave Iraq: Militias and Police Are Targeting Community, Rights Officials Say,” 25 January 2007, accessed at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/24/AR2007012401888.html>, 10 October 2010; Nir Rosen, “The Flight from Iraq,” 13 May 2007, accessed at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CEFDA1E3EF930A25756C0A9619C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=5>, 10 October 2010; “Filastiniyyu al-Brazil al-Musharradin Yutalibun Haniyya bil-Istijaba li-Istighathatihim,” *Akhbar al-Laji’in*, 121, no date, Division of Refugee Affairs ( Hamas Government), accessed at <http://www.snawd.org/Details.aspx?id=2544>, 5 October 2010.

<sup>31</sup> “Iraq Palestinians See Hypocrisy in Maliki Denouncing Gaza Attack,” 15 January, 2009, accessed at <http://www.aliraqi.org/forums/showthread.php?t=91318>, 5 October 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Are Knudsen, “Islamism in the Diaspora: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 18 (June 2005): 216–234, at 217.



Palestinians in Lebanon were at center stage during the first Lebanese–Israeli War in 1982. In contrast, the Palestinians played almost no role in the second Lebanese war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006. Lebanon’s stability, the war, and the subsequent crisis since then had little to do with the Palestinians and still less to do with Palestinians living in the country. The crisis that has consumed Lebanon since the war emanates from the internal struggle between two camps: Hezbollah and Amal and their Christian allies on one side and an alliance between parties identified with the Sunnis, the majority of Christians and (until recently) most Druze on the other. The conflict is fueled by the support each side receives from their respective external supporters: Iran and Syria, which back Hezbollah; and Amal and the United States, France, the moderate Arab states and, indirectly, Israel, which back the Sunnis and the majority of Christians.<sup>33</sup> The Palestinian presence has become a relatively minor issue compared to that of the division of power between the two camps and the cold war waged by proxy between the United States and the Iranian–Syrian axis.

The weakness of the Palestinian diaspora was once again revealed in the spring and summer of 2007, during which the Lebanese army completely destroyed the Nahr al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp in its attempt to uproot the fundamentalist Sunni Fatah al-Islam group that had set up a base there.<sup>34</sup> Abbas’s appointment in May 2006 of Fatah veteran Abbas Zaki as the PLO representative in Lebanon, a position that had been dormant for several years, had little influence in alleviating the lack of political representation among Palestinian refugees, preventing the build-up of a radical Sunni base in the camp, or ultimately preventing the wholesale destruction of housing for over 30,000 refugees. To add insult to injury, Zaki was loath to criticize Lebanese policies or the conduct of the Lebanese army. The crisis also reflected the marked absence of grassroots representation and the inability of trans-state Palestinian groups to mobilize in order to prevent the wholesale destruction of the camp.

### MAKING TERRITORIALIZATION POSSIBLE—THE EMERGENCE OF THE MIDDLE COMMAND

Given the inhospitable environment in the Palestinian diaspora, how was the PLO to stake its claim in the territory being contested without running the risk

<sup>33</sup> “Hizbollah and the Lebanese Crisis,” *Middle East Report* 69, International Crisis Group, 10 October 2007, 21–22, accessed at [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/69\\_hizbollah\\_and\\_the\\_lebanese\\_crisis.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/69_hizbollah_and_the_lebanese_crisis.ashx), 5 October 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Muhammad Ali Khalidi and Diane Riskedahl, “The Road to Nahr al-Barid: Lebanese Political Discourse and Palestinian Civil Rights,” *Middle East Report (MERIP)* 244 (Fall 2007), accessed at [http://www.merip.org/mer/mer244/khalidi\\_riskedahl.html](http://www.merip.org/mer/mer244/khalidi_riskedahl.html), 25 September 2010.

of creating, as the Zionists had, an alternative territorial leadership that would replace it? The creation of a middle command in the 1980s in the West Bank and Gaza provided a partial solution to the dilemma. It consisted of former prisoners of Israel, whose socialization within the Fatah ranks had begun as early as the age of 15 or 16. While in Israeli prisons, they engaged the authorities through a political committee and its spokesman, the “shawish,” and were exposed to mutual and intensive indoctrination. In this environment, they were rapidly transformed into an ideal middle command. These were officers who could lead but, by the same token, were subordinate to those above them in the hierarchy. Their time in prison helps to explain why Fatah waited so long to mobilize despite the weakness of the opposition; not only did it need time to cultivate a generation of students, but even more fundamentally, it suffered from a dearth of men in the West Bank who had grown up in Fatah’s ranks and who could be depended on.

Released prisoners could be relied upon to remain subordinate to the “outside” center and would promote mobilization over institution building. Some of the prominent students who were released prisoners included Shabiba activist Ghassan ‘Ali al- Masri, who was released in 1979, only to be elected to the al-Najah University Student Council a year later;<sup>35</sup> ‘Adnan Damiri and Ahmad al-Diq, later prominent Fatah student activists in Birzeit University near Ramallah; and Ahmad Jabr Sulayman, who was imprisoned several times for terrorist activity as a member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and then became an activist at Bethlehem University.<sup>36</sup> They soon dominated youth fronts such as the first Shabiba Committees in West Bank villages, refugee camps, and urban neighborhoods in 1980–81 and were also prevalent in student wings such as the Youth Student Movement (Harakat al-Shabiba al-Tullabiyya), first established at Birzeit University in 1980 and then expanded to include the other fledgling institutions of higher learning.<sup>37</sup>

The rise of this middle command represented a change in terms of age, modus operandi, and sociological background relative to the mayoral leadership in the National Guidance Committee (NGC), which was created in 1978 in opposition to the peace process that eventually yielded the Egyptian–Israeli peace agreement. The NGC was officially outlawed on 11 March 1982 after a series of dismissals, administrative arrests, and deportations of its members.<sup>38</sup> Eleven of the 12 NGC members that had been placed under administrative arrest resided in urban areas and included three town mayors, two lawyers, a dentist, an engineer, the president of the Jerusalem Federation of Charitable

<sup>35</sup> “Shnei Harugim geOd Yom Damim baShtahim,” *Ma’ariv*, 12 January 1988.

<sup>36</sup> “8 MeHashtahim Gurshu leLevanon,” *Ha’aretz*, 12 April 1988.

<sup>37</sup> *Al-Fajr*, 27 July 1981; *Al-Bayadir al-Siyasi*, 15 November 1982.

<sup>38</sup> Moshe Maoz, *Palestinian Leadership on the West Bank: The Changing Role of the Arab Mayors under Jordan and Israel* (London: Frank Cass, 1984), 199.

Organizations, and three newspaper editors. All of them were high-level professionals who combined political and professional pursuits.<sup>39</sup>

By contrast, the new organizational command originated from more-peripheral areas, principally refugee camps. Half were of lowly rural or refugee camp backgrounds, and they were all nearly 20 years younger than the most-prominent members of the NGC. While the main NGC members were white-collar professionals, the activists, who were students, labor unionists, and teachers, were almost all linked to the popular mobilization from within the organization. Among those placed under area confinement in 1984 (out of the 37 whose occupation is known), 22 were students, five were workers, five were rank-and-file journalists, two were shop owners, and one was a teacher. Only one, who was a lawyer, formally belonged to the white-collar elite.<sup>40</sup> Thus, while the leaders of the NGC represented the professional elite in the major towns, the emergent organizational command was of humbler social origins and had lower-ranked occupations.

Above all, these men accepted hierarchy, organization, and ideology. They knew how to act but not to speak, to be followers but not leaders, and respected the basic ground rules in the relationship between the PLO and the territories. They represented a middle command rather than a leadership, even a local one, as the NGC was often referred to. The mayors, by contrast, headed municipalities that were intimately connected and ultimately dependent on relations with both Jordan and Israel. Bassam al-Shak'a, who became mayor of Nablus in the 1976 municipal elections, became an internationally known and charismatic personality soon after being elected. His charisma contributed to the tensions that prevailed between the PLO and many of the mayors.<sup>41</sup>

The PLO's preference for the development of a professional officer corps that would stick to organizing resistance to the Israeli authorities and refrain from engaging in broader Palestinian politics is best reflected by the "independence document" episode that took place in early August 1988.<sup>42</sup> The Israeli General Security Services (i.e., the Israeli secret service) found a document declaring the independence of the Palestinian state in the offices of Faysal al-Husayni's Arab Studies Society. Husayni was reputedly the head of Fatah operations in the territories (and indeed formally designated as such after the Cairo agreement of 4 May 1993).<sup>43</sup> The document listed 144 members from the territories in the proposed provisional council, with a similar complement

<sup>39</sup> *Amnesty International Report on Restriction Orders in Israel and the Occupied Territories* (London: Amnesty International, October 1982), 51.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Amnon Cohen, "The Changing Patterns of West Bank Politics," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 5 (Fall 1977): 105–113, at 111.

<sup>42</sup> *The Jerusalem Post*, 7 August 1988.

<sup>43</sup> *Ha'aretz*, 26 November 1989.

of diaspora members to be designated by the PLO.<sup>44</sup> However, only 2 of 53 deportees or those designated to be deported—a Birzeit University professor who was a leader of the Palestinian Communist Party and a DFLP labor unionist—appeared on the final PLO list. The deportees, who had organized the intifada, were part of the middle command and, as such, not regarded as prime candidates for political leadership. The diaspora leadership made sure to maintain its hold of the PLO.

### THE PA, THE DEATH OF THE PLO, AND THE WITHERING OF THE DIASPORA

Yet there was no guarantee that the middle command would not aspire to loftier heights, especially since they claimed credit for the success of the first intifada. Even if they did initiate it, they also claimed to have at least been responsible for its management and perpetuation under the PLO banner. Thus, Arafat, by entering a secret peace process culminating in the signing of the Declaration of Principles on the White House lawn on 13 September, in which he agreed to an autonomy he had so vehemently opposed previously and which permitted him to territorialize his rule, had sapped the Palestinian diaspora of its strength. The two leading and most long-standing publications of the PLO, the popular weekly *Filastin al-Thawra* (Revolutionary Palestine) and the intellectual monthly *Shu'un Filastiniyya* (Palestinian Affairs), were the first victims of Arafat's new strategy to weaken diaspora. The latter, after 150 issues in print over the course of over 21 years, was abruptly shut down in December 1992. Its contents did not even hint of the journal's approaching demise. The same was true of *Filastin al-Thawra*, the more popular weekly that ceased publication in January 1994 after almost uninterrupted publication for over 22 years.

A similar fate befell the PLO Research Center (Markaz al-Abhath) established in 1965 in Beirut. The Center published *Shu'un Filastiniyya*, as well as numerous studies of Palestinian life and Israel. In its heyday, the Israeli security establishment attributed so much importance to the Institute, then based in Beirut (and subsequently in Nicosia), that during the 1982 Israeli incursion into Beirut, the Israeli army took the trouble to take it over and haul its archives back to Israel, only return them in their entirety after the war. The PLO closed down the Center for good in 1994.<sup>45</sup>

Even the way in which the PLO leadership tried to shore up support for the emergence of the PA (which formally came into being with the signing of an agreement in Cairo in May 1994) reflected such a strategy. The weakening

<sup>44</sup> *Al-Nahar*, 26 August 1988.

<sup>45</sup> Saleh Qallab, "The Palestinian Research Center," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 14 (Summer 1985): 185–187; Yair Ettinger, "The PLO is His Life's Work," *Ha'aretz*, 17 November 2004.

of the PLO was probably more dramatic and eventful than the deinstitutionalization in the West Bank and Gaza. The PLO rarely followed clearly defined procedures for decision making, and it was hardly likely to alter its course in the face of massive opposition to the Declaration of Principles among the elite, which included former allies of Arafat, such as Faruq Qaddumi, Muhammad Darwish, and Khalid al-Hasan.<sup>46</sup> According to Bayan al-Hut, a noted historian of the Palestinian movement, Article 7 of the 1964 organic law gave the PNC sole authorization to ratify international agreements.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, since the agreement, in her opinion, contradicted the National Covenant, it would be necessary to revise the Covenant as a whole in order to ratify it, a procedure that would require a two-thirds majority of the PNC. Arafat could hardly muster such support. Instead, he decided that the Central Committee, established at the seventh PNC meeting in Cairo (June 1970) as an intermediary body between the 15-man Executive Committee and the 450-member PNC, would be authorized to accept or reject the agreement.<sup>48</sup> Yet even then, the ratification process was clouded in ambiguity. To begin with, none of the sources agreed upon either the number or composition of the committee (one source speaks of 100<sup>49</sup> members, another of 107<sup>50</sup>). Many more attended than voted. Ghassan Khatib, a leading member of the Palestinian People's Party, who supported the agreement, sharply criticized the selection process, claiming that all those chosen to attend belonged to Fatah. He also asserted that the selections were made on the spur of the moment, as were the appointments of committee members in the Taba negotiation process.<sup>51</sup> Hanan 'Ashrawi voiced similar criticism.<sup>52</sup>

While hollowing out PLO institutions abroad, Arafat and his lieutenants territorialized with a vengeance. Unencumbered by the promulgation of a constitution, a bill of rights, the swearing in of a government, or the modalities of elections, autonomy building took a military turn as convoy after convoy of "policemen" (a total of about 1,500 of them), dressed in the military uniform of the Palestine Liberation Army, crossed over bridges linking Jordan with the West Bank and at the Rafiah border crossing that links Gaza to Egypt. By the end of May 1995, the number of diaspora soldiers turned policemen had reached 6,000 and by April 1995, 17,000 more, including local inhabitants, were serving in the police and the various arms of the security network.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *Al-Quds*, 22, 23 August 1993.

<sup>47</sup> Bayan Nuwihad al-Hut, "Wujub Ijra Ta'dilat Jawhariya 'Ala al-Mithaq," *Al-Hayat*, 19 October 1993.

<sup>48</sup> Guy Bechor, *Lexicon Ashaf* (Tel-Aviv: Misrad Habitachon, 1991), 206.

<sup>49</sup> *Al-Quds*, 10 October 1993.

<sup>50</sup> *Al-Nahar*, 12 October 1993.

<sup>51</sup> *Al-Quds*, 10 October 1993.

<sup>52</sup> *Al-Quds*, 17 October 1993.

<sup>53</sup> George T. Abed, Assistant Director of General Finance of the International Monetary Fund, as reported in *Al-Quds*, 31 May 1995.

Even the civilians who arrived from the diaspora did little to disperse the concentration of political–military power that descended on Gaza soon after the Israeli evacuation. Most of those who arrived in May had been hand-picked to hold top positions in the emerging internal security network, which eventually encompassed 12 agencies in an area of control one third the size of Long Island. For Muhammad Dahlan, the Shabiba leader deported from Gaza and a high-ranking Fatah internal security official in Tunis following his deportation, such favoritism would also characterize future nominations within the general security apparatus. When asked in an interview with *Ha'aretz* who would nominate members of the future general security services from among the Fatah hawks, he responded: “Abu ‘Ammar (Yasser Arafat) would place men in positions like these. Who else? Who appoints positions like these in the Third World?” Dahlan at the time was negotiating with Israeli officials in Rome for the cessation of pursuit of Fatah hawks in Gaza.<sup>54</sup> He later became the head of the Preventative Security Service (Jihaz al-Amn al-Wiqa’i) in Gaza.

From that point until the outbreak of hostilities between the PA and the Palestinian factions and Israel in September 2000 was a period of almost feverish state building. Within one year, the PA was a state in all but name. By the summer of 1995, the PA consisted of a cabinet (chaired by President Arafat), the managing director of the Office of the Presidency (Maktabat al-Riyasa), and ministers (wuzara). These ministers, in turn, presided over ministries (wizarat) typical of any state: Finance, Economics, Planning, Information, and Interior. Even without an official foreign ministry (it was instead called the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation), the PA managed to conduct more foreign policy and to be visited by more world leaders and officials than many conventional states. Completing the organizational picture of a state in the making were an impressive array, on paper at least, of functionally specific state authorities, such as the Palestinian Monetary Agency, a bureau of statistics, an environmental control agency, and a civil service commission. Economically, the PA became by far the dominant force in the territories. Thus, by 1995, it had a budget of \$440 million, approximately one third of the gross national product of the area it controlled at the time. Israeli policy also contributed to the PA’s image as a quasi-state by refraining almost completely from exercising the right of hot pursuit into Gaza and Area A, despite considerable pressure from Israeli parties on the right. In short, the PA, in transition, was probably more of a state than many “juridical” states in Africa, which, though internationally recognized and maintained artificially by the international community, often are ineffective domestically.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *Ha'aretz*, 12 January 1994.

<sup>55</sup> Robert H. Jackson and Carl J. Rosberg, “Why African Weak States Persist: The Empirical and Juridical Statehood,” *World Politics* 35 (October 1982): 1–25.

Perhaps the most-salient blow to the PLO was the failure to convene the PNC, one of the major events of the diaspora-based PLO. Formally a biannual meeting attended by 400 or more delegates, mostly from the diaspora, it has been convened only once in the past 19 years, despite the tumultuous changes in Palestinian politics. Ironically, it was Israeli insistence and U.S. pressure to get the PLO to annul its 1968 National Covenant rather than the Palestinian leadership's desire to call a meeting that resulted in the convening of the PNC, or at least some form of it, for the last time in 1996.

The last official PNC meeting was directly linked to the heated election race between incumbent Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Likud leader Binyamin Netanyahu in 1996. According to the September 1995 Oslo II Agreement, the PLO Covenant was to be revised within two months of the inauguration of the Palestinian Legislative Council, which took place in March 1996, as a necessary condition for the beginning of final status talks between Israel and the PA. The latter were to begin no later than 5 May 1996. The Likud pressed for the implementation of the clause, yet criticized then-Prime Minister Peres's willingness to allow PLO officials, including those who were responsible for killing Israelis in the past, the opportunity to return to Gaza to participate in amending the change of at least 8 of the Covenant's 33 clauses.<sup>56</sup>

What transpired at the meeting fell far short of Israeli expectations. The PNC, whose legitimacy was hotly contested by Hamas and the other Tunis-based Palestinian factions, voted 504 to 54 with 14 abstentions and 97 absentees to amend those parts of the Covenant that contradicted the letters exchanged between the PLO and the Israeli government in 1993. Absent was "an unequivocal specific removal of the Covenant's articles which called for Israel's destruction."<sup>57</sup>

PLO foot-dragging over the Covenant and its implications for the peace process were largely responsible for a mass gathering of Palestinian delegates, including 400 of the 750 members of the PNC, in December 1998.<sup>58</sup> Prime Minister Netanyahu was dissatisfied with Arafat's letter to Bill Clinton in January 1998, which annulled 26 of the 33 articles of the PLO Charter, its renewed confirmation by the PLO Executive Committee on the same day the memorandum was ratified, and the vote of the 124-member Central Council (81–7, with 7 abstentions) to approve Arafat's letter, which the PNC ostensibly annulled on 22 April 1996. To end the controversy over the issue, 500 Palestinian delegates gathered on 14 December in Gaza, with President Clinton as the honored guest, and overwhelmingly approved, by a show of hands rather than

<sup>56</sup> Kenneth W. Stein, "The Arab–Israeli Peace Process," *Middle East Contemporary Survey* (Volume XX, 1996): 34–65, at 43.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Stein, "The Arab–Israeli Peace Process," *Middle East Contemporary Survey* (Volume XXII, 1998): 56–89, at 66.

a counting of votes, the nullification of the Covenant. It was the last political act in which the PNC was in any way involved in Palestinian politics.<sup>59</sup>

### WILL A TRANS-STATE ELECTRONIC DIASPORA REPLACE THE PLO?

Palestinian despair in Lebanon and the demise of the PLO are both reflections of the territorialization of the Palestinian problem, a radical change in the balance of power between the “outside” and “inside” and the withering of the Palestinian community outside the West Bank and Gaza, especially in the Arab world. The question remains whether the Palestinians abroad are creating a trans-state community, aided by advances in electronic communications, to forge links and maintain contact between Palestinians abroad and between them and the homeland. Conceivably, trans-state diaspora networks (as opposed to institutions) in an era of globalization could offset the withering of the diaspora PLO and the growing dominance of territorial players.

Despite some evidence that networks like Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights in Canada and the Palestinian Solidarity Committee in the United States might have emerged to fill the PLO’s former role in Canada, the United States, and Europe during the past 10 years, they have yet to compensate for the demise of PLO institutions.<sup>60</sup> Leading scholars of Palestinian communities in the Arab world and beyond marshal considerable evidence that the presumed blessings of globalization in forging such communities are much weaker and more indeterminate than claimed in the comparative literature on globalization.

This is clearly one of most central themes in the writings of Sari Hanafi, who is both a gifted scholar and, in his capacity as director of a diaspora network called Shaml, which was created to promote such institutions and processes, is an advocate of the potential of “trans-stateness” for Palestinians. He has analyzed and documented the chronic weakness of trans-state institutions and processes in the Palestinian diaspora at length. Demonstrating a capacity for self-criticism, he acknowledged this to be the case regarding a project he himself headed called PALESTA, which was designed to promote networking between Palestinian professionals in the diaspora.<sup>61</sup> Significantly, it was financed and coordinated by an arm of the PA. His assessment, published in 2005, proved to be not pessimistic enough from the vantage point of 2009. A search on the Web for the project yielded a site under construction that refused to open. Similarly, the site belonging to the al-Shatat (Diaspora) organization was not in much better shape, with only one page demanding to

<sup>59</sup> Elie Rehkess and Meir Litvak, “The PA,” *Middle East Contemporary Survey* (Volume XXII, 1998): 483–510, at 491.

<sup>60</sup> Laith Marouf, “Palestinian Diaspora: With or Against Collaboration?” 14 September 2007, accessed at <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article8991.shtml>, 12 September 2009.

<sup>61</sup> Sari Hanafi, “Reshaping Geography: Palestinian Community Networks in Europe and the New Media,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31 (May 2005): 581–598, at 591–598.



“Indict Sharon”—three years after he became comatose (ironically indicative of the moribund state of the project as well). Even local non-governmental organization (NGO) officials and their organizations, which are globally linked and which Hanafi calls the “new Palestinian globalized elite,” proved to be politically powerless in the second intifada relative to the first, despite the advances in communication technology.<sup>62</sup> Paradoxically, their power stemmed from their external dependence on foreign NGOs. These organizations, in deference to the professional ethics that presumably imbued their foreign sponsors, felt the need to remain apolitical, and therefore “this ‘globalized’ (as opposed to global) elite became even more marginal than the violent setting within which they operated after 2000.”<sup>63</sup>

Hanafi’s findings are corroborated by anthropologist Julie Peteet, who shows the irrelevance of the presumed “celebratory aspects of diaspora” that “revolve around the creative and hybrid mergings that occur in the interstices of multiple cultural contexts, the relationships to multiple places, and the position of both vis-à-vis identity formation.”<sup>64</sup> Both Hanafi and Peteet reflect a much more widespread skepticism regarding the degree to which transnational immigrant groups whose identity and interactions transcend state boundaries have in fact emerged.<sup>65</sup> Though some Palestinians in exile may cultivate, like others, the politics of return based on common place of origin, identity formation, and expression, most immigrants and, even more so, most refugees, suffer from considerable economic hardship that does not provide the wherewithal to mobilize through the Internet. Frequently, refugees are also subject to state intervention, making effective organization even more difficult. These conditions hardly contribute to the conceptualization of diasporas as sites of simultaneous “hope and new beginnings.”<sup>66</sup> As Peteet observed during extended work in the field, Palestinian refugee camps do not currently constitute an environment for creative new beginnings as they may once have done in the 1950s or during the years 1968–1982, the heyday of the PLO.

Nor are Palestinian institutions linked across national borders. Peteet points out that communities often have little detailed knowledge of one another, let alone sustained and intimate contact to the extent that “those in the West Bank knew of the experiences of Palestinians in Lebanon and vice versa.”<sup>67</sup> The missing component is a well-known Palestinian elite able to mobilize in transnational

<sup>62</sup> Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar, *Donors, International NGOs and Local NGOs: The Emergence of a Palestinian Globalized Elite* (Jerusalem: Institute of Jerusalem Studies, 2005), 13–15.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Julie Peteet, “Problematizing a Palestinian Diaspora,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39 (October 2007): 627–646, at 635.

<sup>65</sup> Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald, “Transnationalism in Question,” *American Journal of Sociology* 109 (March 2004): 1177–1195, at 1181–1182.

<sup>66</sup> Peteet, “Problematizing a Palestinian Diaspora,” 636.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

settings, especially after the passing away of some of the major intellectual figures of Palestinian nationalism in the West, such as Edward Said.

Acknowledging the possibility that media such as cable television, the Internet, al-Jazeera, and the Dubai-based al-Arabiyya may strengthen Palestinian transnational ties between Palestinians living in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia, as well as the West Bank and Gaza, she points out, nevertheless, that Palestinians in the Arab world and abroad, no matter how supportive they may be of collective goals, are hardly the financial or political mainstay in the quest for self-determination. Peteet concludes, in the spirit of this article, that “[I]n the wake of Oslo and the leadership’s return from exile, political decisions now emanate from inside Palestine.”<sup>68</sup>

### THE ABSENCE OF A MOBILIZING TERRITORIAL CENTER

The political decisions emanating from the West Bank and Gaza are hardly those likely to facilitate the creation of a state that is able to mobilize a diaspora as Israel has so effectively done.<sup>69</sup> The Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, divided between two warring factions and two governments—one in the West Bank headed by Abbas and supported by Fatah and one in Gaza led by Hamas—can hardly play that role. They are simply too involved in suppressing each other to devote their efforts on behalf of the diaspora.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in the attempts to resurrect the PLO and the PNC, the subject of numerous negotiations and agreements between Fatah and Hamas. On the contrary, the prospects of ever resurrecting the PLO decreased as competition between the PA and its Fatah militia intensified after 2000. Attempts to resurrect the PLO featured prominently in both the March 2005 Cairo talks between Fatah and Hamas<sup>70</sup> and the Mecca Agreement establishing a unity government in February 2006 that was brokered by the Saudis in Ta’if between PA President Mahmud Abbas, representing the “nationalist” camp, and Isma’il Haniya, who became Prime Minister following Hamas’s victory in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections the previous month.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Jeremy Goldberg, *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 24; Edward Tivnan, *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 23; Mitchell Bard, *The Water’s Edge and Beyond: Defining the Limits to Domestic Influence on United States Middle East Policy* (Edison, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 6; John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007), 188.

<sup>70</sup> “Quarterly Update of Conflict and Diplomacy, 16 February–15 May 2005,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34 (Summer 2005): 142–167, at 154–155.

<sup>71</sup> The third of four points in the Mecca Agreement called “to move ahead in measures to activate and reform the PLO and accelerate the work of the preparatory committee based on the Cairo and Damascus Understandings,” accessed at <http://www.jmcc.org/new/07/feb/meccaagree.htm>, 19 August 2009.

The impact of these accords, particularly the latter, vanished in the face of increasingly lethal conflict in Gaza between the PA's security forces and Fatah on the one hand and Hamas, its 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam militia and the Hamas government's Executive Force (al-Quwwa al-Tanfiziya) on the other. Internecine fighting culminated in a military victory for Hamas, its takeover of Gaza in June 2007, and in the subsequent establishment of a rival government to the Ramallah-based presidency.<sup>72</sup>

Worse still, the internationalization of the rift between them, as well as the highly publicized and intense local efforts by the two sides to suppress their respective opposition, hardly allowed either the Abbas or Hamas governments to focus on diaspora affairs. The PA under Abbas is clearly identified with the moderate Arab Sunni states (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and most of the Gulf states) supported by the United States, while Hamas belongs to an Iranian-led axis (including Syria, Hezbollah, and, less importantly, Qatar).<sup>73</sup> Thus, a prominent Palestinian human rights organization reported in its annual summary that in 2009 it received 393 complaints of unlawful imprisonment in the area controlled by Abbas and in Gaza.<sup>74</sup> In a situation of such intense conflict and rivalry, there is little focus on a withering diaspora. Insofar as the two sides are involved in diaspora affairs, the effects are usually pernicious, such as the killing on 24 March 2009 of a senior PLO official in Lebanon and three others, presumably as a result of the rivalry between Abbas Zaki, the official PLO representative, and Sultan Abu al-'Aynayn, the head of Fatah operations in Lebanon.<sup>75</sup> Another PLO official, along with three aides, was killed a day later, allegedly by Hamas, leading to the breakdown of reconciliation talks in Cairo in March 2009.<sup>76</sup> Both internal Fatah tensions and tensions between Fatah and Hamas in Lebanon are intimately linked to the wider regional tensions between Iran and its local supporters, including Hamas, and the moderate Arab states, with which the Abbas government is allied.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup> For a detailed analysis of these events, see Hillel Frisch, *The Palestinian Military between Militias and Armies* (London: Routledge, 2008), chap. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Jalal Ghazi, "Iran's Support of Hamas Unnerves Egypt," *New America Media* 1 (January 2009), accessed at [http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view\\_article.html?article\\_id=02d5e69137350252edf332252f4f00af](http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=02d5e69137350252edf332252f4f00af), 12 January 2009; Marie Colvin, "Hamas Wages Iran's Proxy War on Israel," *The Sunday Times*, 9 March 2008.

<sup>74</sup> The (Palestinian) Independent Commission of Human Rights, *The Status of Human Rights in Palestine 2009—the Fifteenth Annual Report*, 80–83, accessed at [www.ichr.ps/pdfs/IHRC](http://www.ichr.ps/pdfs/IHRC) Report 15, 12 January 2009.

<sup>75</sup> "Ightiyal Na'ib Mumathil Munazzamat al-Tahrir fi Tafjir Junub Lubnan," *Felesteen*, 24 March 2009; Sari Hanafi and Taylor Long, "Governance, Governmentalities, and the State of Exception in the Palestinian Refugee Camps of Lebanon," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23 (June 2010): 134–159, at 138, 143–144.

<sup>76</sup> "Ightiyal Mas'ul Filastini fi Lubnan Yusalit al-Dha'a 'ala al-Tasadu'at al-Filastiniyya," *Felesteen*, 25 March 2009.

<sup>77</sup> International Crisis Group, "Nurturing Instability: Lebanon's Palestinian Refugee Camps," *Middle East Report* 84, 19 February 2009, 11, especially fn 86, 14, accessed at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5928&l=1>, 14 April 2009.

## CONCLUSION: BETWEEN A STATELESS TERRITORIALITY AND A WITHERING DIASPORA

The marginalization of the territorial Palestinians in the decision-making forums of the PLO contrasts sharply with the situation that prevailed in the Zionist movement, whereby the territorial leadership dominated the WZO and the territorial rank and file were accorded a “double” vote in organizational elections relative to diaspora voters. In the Palestinian case, instead of a diaspora leadership being replaced by a territorial leadership, there had been increasing subordination to the “outside” center. The extent of such subordination proved to be a function of PLO penetration.

By 1976, the mayoral elite, who are allied with the locally centered Palestinian Communist Organization, had effectively lowered their sights by now seeking parity within the PLO, though they might still have harbored aspirations to eventually replace the PLO’s diaspora focus. The PLO, and especially Fatah, responded by creating a middle command and popular organizations that bypassed the urban elite to mobilize the growing student population.

Once the PLO leadership had territorialized in order to emerge as the leader of the PA, the PLO’s effectiveness as an organization quickly deteriorated. Even claims to the mantle of PLO legitimacy by the leaders of the PA became less credible as time wore on. As politics gravitated toward the West Bank and Gaza, the broader political community of Palestinians living beyond the borders of immediate contestation between Israel and the Palestinians withered, and their influence waned. The rise of Hamas, its electoral victory in 2006, and its subsequent takeover of Gaza in 2007 only deepened the process.

Of course, the withering of the trans-state community was always one of the tenets of Zionism. Ironically, the Palestinian experience has so far confirmed its basic analysis in a much more striking manner than the Jewish experience in which the centrality of Jewish state building is challenged by a vibrant diaspora, at least as reflected in the American Jewish community.

Presumably, in an era of globalization, the Palestinians abroad should have been able to weather political territorialization, thanks to the presumed virtues of the Internet and the low cost of travel and communication. So far, the Palestinian trans-state experience suggests that the effects of these technological advances have hardly offset the predominance of territorial forces. The Palestinians thus face a true tragedy. Divided in the contested territory, they are farther than ever from achieving statehood, while in the near abroad and beyond, they are hardly in a position to form a trans-state community.

The withering of the Palestinian diaspora underscores the importance of unifying the Palestinians territorially. Often, the movement of the locus of politics from the diaspora to the contested territory leads to an increased degree of pragmatism, as might be argued in the case of the Zionist movement. Unfortunately, identity politics of a different sort, which pitted Fatah, a more-secular nationalist faction, against the rising Hamas movement, has

given new life to hardline principles such as the right of return and absolute justice and to a growing chasm between two different worldviews. Wider regional conflicts have only served to divide the Palestinians even further. Thus, there is a pressing need for the international community, led by the United States, to constrain the radical players in the region and to promote Palestinian dialogue on the basis of the minimal rules of the game in the international community. The most important of these principles are mutual recognition by all Palestinians of Israel as a Jewish state and by Israel of Palestinian statehood, once the Palestinian political community has demonstrated the ability to achieve a manageable unified stance over the basic contours of Palestinian statehood.