

Emerging Trends in Palestine Strategic Political Thinking and Practice

Dr. Ziad Abu-Amr

PASSIA

**Palestinian Academic Society for the Study
of International Affairs - Jerusalem**



Emerging Trends in Palestine Strategic Political Thinking and Practice

Dr. Ziad Abu-Amr



PASSIA

**Palestinian Academic Society for the Study
of International Affairs - Jerusalem**

PASSIA, the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, is an Arab, non-profit Palestinian institution, with a financially and legally independent status. It is not affiliated with any government, political party or organisation. PASSIA seeks to present the Question of Palestine in its national, Arab and international contexts through academic research, dialogue and publication. PASSIA endeavors that research undertaken under its auspices be specialised, scientific and objective and that its symposia and workshops, whether international or intra-Palestinian, be open, self-critical and conducted in a spirit of harmony and co-operation.

This paper represents the free expression of its author and does not necessarily represent the judgement or opinions of PASSIA. Dr. Ziad Abu-Amr is a lecturer at the cultural studies department at Bir Zeit University. He presented this paper as part of PASSIA research studies programme of 1992. PASSIA encourages the publication of various research studies on the Question of Palestine which reflects the plurality of perspectives and methodology within the context of academic freedom.

Copyright © PASSIA
First Edition - December 1992
Second Edition - December 1996

PASSIA Publication
Tel: (02)6264426 Fax: (02)6282819
P.O.Box 19545 - East Jerusalem

INTRODUCTION:

The emergence of new trends in Palestinian strategic political thinking and practice, or the evolution of existing ones, does not necessarily mean the total decline or disappearance of existing trends. A state of interaction or conflict between the old and new sets of trends may arise, resulting in coexistence, equilibrium, or the predominance of the new trends over the old ones, or vice versa.

This study focuses primarily on the Palestinian situation inside the Occupied Territories. The Palestinian "exterior" is discussed only when it becomes necessary to shed light on the issues discussed in the "interior".

Since the theme of this study is emerging trends (i.e., trends that are in the process of formation, the conclusions of the study will remain tentative. Further investigation and Verification may be warranted. And because the proposed trends are still emerging, it is difficult at this point, to define their permanent features, depth or prospects. Furthermore, and for this same specific reason, emerging trends may be reversible, or at least influenced by objective developments or intervening events, especially in light of such changing and volatile conditions of the Palestinian society in the Occupied Territories.

The emerging trends are not totally conclusive. In other words, certain developments within a given emerging trends may give a counter indication to the general direction of the trend. But what is significant in this case is the general tendency, and not piecemeal counter evidence.

The term "strategic" is used in this study to denote the new trends or transformations which are characterized by comprehensiveness, depth, serious impact, and relative continuity.

Finally, some of the tentative conclusions included in this study may be unsoothing to some Palestinian circles. Nevertheless,

these trends reflect an existing reality and conditions which have resulted from local, regional, and international developments that have not been favorable to the Palestinian cause, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, or the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories and in the diaspora. It is natural, therefore, that these negative developments would not be a source of optimism for the Palestinians. Of these developments are the following:

- 1) The collapse of a bipolar world order, and the emergence in its place of a unipolar world order dominated by the United States. This change in the world order caused a clear disequilibrium in local, regional, and international balances of power. These changes have weakened the Arabs in general, and the Palestinians in particular, and have strengthened their adversaries, especially Israel.
- 2) The Gulf war and its extremely negative outcomes and consequences on the Palestinian people. This war resulted in political isolation and economic hardship, as well as a moral setback for the Palestinian people and their leadership who were penalized for their sympathetic attitude towards Iraq.
- 3) The decline of the Intifada as a popular uprising. After five years of bitter struggle against the Israeli occupation and tremendous sacrifices by the Palestinian population in the Occupied Territories, Palestinian material and human resources could not maintain the initial tempo of the intifada. Other intervening developments such as the harsh Israeli measures on the one hand, and internal Palestinian problems on the other, reduced the prospects of the intifada as a means to national liberation from the Israeli occupation.
- 4) The hard conditions for Palestinian participation in the Madrid Peace Conference and the subsequent Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. These conditions have disregarded the nationalist agenda which was thus far considered a frame of reference for the Palestinian people. Most important of these hard conditions was the exclusion of PLO from direct participation

in the conference and the negotiations.

As a result of all of these negative developments, especially the Gulf war and the Palestinian participation in the peace process which has not been based on national consensus, a state of national malaise has emerged among the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories.

NEW TRENDS:

A number of emerging trends in Palestinian political thinking and practice can be identified:

- 1) Evolution from ideological purity or revolutionary idealism to political realism or pragmatism.
- 2) Changing methods and forms of Palestinian national struggle.
- 3) The emergence of the Islamic factor and the change in the balance of political forces in the Occupied Territories.
- 4) A decline in the status and image of the Palestine Liberation Organization, its leadership, and its constituent factions.
- 5) The empowerment of the Palestinian "interior" versus the Palestinian "exterior".
- 6) The rehabilitation of the Jordanian role by the Palestinians.
- 7) The decline of the processes of social change in the Palestinian society.

FIRST: EVOLUTION FROM IDEOLOGICAL PURITY OR REVOLUTIONARY IDEALISM TO POLITICAL REALISM AND IDEALISM.

Palestinian political thinking has never been rigid or dogmatic. Despite the heavy ideological and rhetorical doses it contained, this thinking has always been flexible and elastic. Changing ideological positions were usually masked and introduced as political tactics or interim solutions (versus the less comprising strategic solutions).

Aspects of this kind of ideological flexibility can be traced back to the early beginnings of the Palestinian nationalist movement. For example, one early publication of the Fatah movement referred, in the late 1950's, to the necessity of establishing a Palestinian entity in those territories which remained under Arab control after the loss of Palestine and the establishment of Israel¹. The territories referred to in this context were the West Bank, which was then under Jordanian control, and the Gaza Strip which was administered by Egypt.

But the real and clear evolution in Palestinian ideological and political thinking towards pragmatism occurred in 1973/74 when the Palestinian national movement, led by the Palestine Liberation Organization, adopted the new concept of "national authority". This concept meant that the movement was prepared to establish a Palestinian national authority on any Palestinian territory that would be freed from Israeli occupation. The concept of the "national authority" later evolved into the concept of the "Palestinian state". Both concepts came to replace previous concepts such as the "liberation of the total area of Palestine" and the "democratic secular state" in Palestine. The adoption of the "Palestinian state" was more than an implicit evolution in Palestinian ideological and political thinking, and it was a recognition of some kind of the existence of another state in Palestine, i.e., Israel.

The main catalyst for declaring and adopting the new concept of the "national authority" was the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and its outcomes. This war did not only reveal the limitations of the Arab military option, but also revealed the limitations of Palestinian armed struggle, at least in the way it was exercised, as the principle means to the liberation of Palestine.

As this was demonstrated, the most Egypt and Syria, the two major Arab military powers neighboring Israel, could achieve during this war, after a surprise attack against Israel, was a very modest gain illustrated in "breaking the barrier of fear" from Israel. But on the other hand, this war resulted in the occupation of more Arab lands by Israel, in addition to the areas that were occupied in the 1967 war.

What was of more significance, in as far as the outcome of this war was concerned, was the fact that it opened the door for serious thinking about diplomatic and political solutions for the Arab-Israeli conflict. This change of attitude was embodied in the convening of the Geneva Peace Conference in 1973, and later on in the Disengagement Agreements between Israel and Egypt in 1974, and Israel and Syria in 1974/75. But the new tendency had culminated in the Camp David Accords of 1979 which resulted in the signing of a bilateral peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. As a result of signing this treaty, Egypt was no longer included in Arab or Palestinian military calculations vis-a-vis Israel. The exclusion of Egypt from the equation reinforced the evolution of Palestinian thinking towards pragmatism.

A few other developments had also pushed in the direction of pragmatism. Most important of these developments was the expulsion of the PLO from Beirut in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The loss of Beirut had deprived the Palestinian national movement from its most important external arena. As it became clear later, this loss had weakened the PLO and made the attainment of its declared national objectives less feasible. And as a result of that, the PLO had become more prepared to consider ideas, positions, and plans the organization would not entertain in the past. Just to mention one example, the PLO rejected the resolution of the Fez Arab Summit Conference in Morocco in 1981 before the invasion of Lebanon because of the implicit call in these resolutions to recognize Israel. But in the second Fez Arab Summit in 1982, and after the expulsion of the PLO from Beirut, the Palestinian leadership accepted the same resolutions.

On the other hand, the loss of Beirut marked a change in Palestinian strategy where in the Occupied Territories have become the main arena for the Palestinian national struggle. And since Israel, as an occupying power, was there in these Territories, the Palestinians of the "interior", as well as those who live in the "exterior" could not ignore this reality which has had a sobering effect on Palestinian ideological and political thinking. Against this background, and in light of retreatations revolutionary articulations and

positions which began to stumble in subsequent years, new ideas and positions, which reflected a larger measure of political pragmatism, began to emerge, be come common, and gain popularity.

For example, the idea of establishing a Palestinian state (in the West Bank and Gaza), that would live in peace, side by side, with Israel, began to be entertained and promoted inside the Occupied Territories and in the diaspora. Inside the West Bank and Gaza, pragmatic thinking reached new heights in the arguments advanced by in essence Dr. Sari Nuseibeh, a leading public figure, a daring articulator and practitioner, and a trend-setter. Dr. Nuseibeh called, in essence, for a binational state in which the Palestinians and the Israelis would live in full equality².

In the Palestinian "exterior", pragmatic thinking manifested itself in the clearest way in the Jordanian-Palestinian Accord of 1985. This accord called for the establishment of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation, whereby the Palestinians could exercise their right to self-determination within the framework of the confederation. Because of its clear departure from national objectives described as the "bottom line consensus" among the various PLO factions, the signing of the accord created sharp polarization within the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

During the last five years, Palestinian pragmatic thinking has taken a sharp turn. During the period, the PLO has among other things unilaterally recognized the existence of Israel, accepted the UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and renounced terrorism. This shift towards political pragmatism came as a result of a number of events, developments and pressure which are still acting on the Palestinians. These include:

(1) The collapse of the former Soviet Union and the socialist camp. Due to this collapse, the Palestinians lost a strategic ally. The former socialist bloc, led by the Soviet Union, provided the Palestinians, for more than two decades, with all forms of political, diplomatic, ideological, moral, logistical and material support. The outcome of the collapse for the Palestinians was not restricted to the

loss of an ally, but further to the emergence of new states or political regimes that have become either friends or allies of Israel, in the meantime, and as a result of this collapse, the United States of America, Israel's strategic ally, has become, at least for the time being, the only superpower in the world.

Faced with their inability to confront a new world order led by their traditional adversaries (the US on the international level, and Israel on the regional level), the Palestinians found themselves isolated and without cover. The new situation caught the Palestinians unprepared, and a process of national debate ensued. One trend in the Palestinian national movement believed and argued that there were some gaps within "America's new world order" that can be manipulated in order to buy time and find alternatives in order to minimize the damage sustained by the Palestinians as a result of the collapse of the old world order.

On the other hand, another trend believed and argued that there was no way to challenge the "inevitable American hegemony", and that the Palestinians should find themselves a place in the new order with a bottom line objective of self-preservation. The advocates of this second line of thought, who are also the influential segment in the Palestinian leadership, had to alter previous political positions in order to secure an acceptable place for the Palestinians in the "new world order".

(2) The intifada: The popular uprising of 1987 is considered one of the most important developments that has had a great impact on the various aspects of the Palestinian question and Palestinian society at large. The intifada has caused, in the way it developed, an evolution in Palestinian political consciousness.

It is obvious that the intifada has revealed the tremendous hidden potentials and capabilities of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories. But it has also revealed the limitations of Palestinian capability and power vis-a-vis Israel. As a result of that, it may have dawned on the Palestinians that they cannot alone force Israel to yield to what they consider as their legitimate national

objectives. All through the intifada, and at its highest point, Israel did not change its previous which are based on the denial of Palestinian national rights as they are defined by the Palestinians.

There were, of course, those Palestinians who believed that it was possible to escalate the intifada in different ways and consequently extract major concessions from Israel. But as it became clear later, this kind of approach did not materialize. Furthermore, it is unlikely that Israel would yield these rights now after the intifada has subsided as an encompassing popular movement. The Palestinians for their part have lost hope in the potential of mobilizing the "Arab depth" to ensure a qualitative escalation of the intifada and to take it beyond its Palestinian pavements. All of these considerations have reinforced the tendency towards political pragmatism. Part of the Palestinian political elite in the Occupied Territories promoted this tendency and described it as a sign of Palestinian political maturity.

Palestinian "pragmatists" in the West Bank and Gaza engaged in a process of the promotion of new political stands. They tried to legitimize their endeavors by a variety of means including the collective signing of appeals by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. These appeals called on the PLO leadership to adopt more realistic stands. Newspaper articles in local and foreign press were published advocating the same attitude. For example, prior to the convening of the 19th session of the Palestinian National Council (PNC), a number of public figures from the Occupied Territories, especially Jerusalem, pressured and urged the PLO to undertake new steps that emanated from a realistic reading of the situation in the Occupied Territories³.

When the PLO leadership actually adopted decisions in this PNC session recognizing Israel, accepting UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and renouncing terrorism, the pragmatic thinking in the Occupied Territories had prevailed over the uncompromising ideologues and nationalists, since the formers' views were translated into actual and binding PLO political resolutions. The prevailing pragmatists described the differentiation between them and their

opponents as one between those who still live in the past and those who possess wisdom and a vision of the future.

(3) The Gulf War: As a result of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent war in the Gulf, Iraq's military capabilities were destroyed and its economic and political power extremely weakened. The Palestinians in Kuwait and other Gulf states lost an advantageous status. The Gulf war and its outcome resulted in a number of extremely negative consequences for the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories and the diaspora. Of these consequences are the following:

- a) The departure of most Palestinian residents in Kuwait from that country and the loss of sources of their livelihood, and the transformation of thousands of them into refugees. This sudden change in circumstances has impacted the social and economic conditions in the Occupied Territories. Prior to the Gulf war, the Palestinians in these territories received remittances from relatives in Kuwait and other Gulf states. These remittances amounted to tens of millions of dollars annually. Moreover, some Palestinian institutions in the West Bank and Gaza received direct donations from these countries.
- b) The loss of Kuwait and other Gulf states as important sources for financial and political support for the Palestinian Liberation Organization: Financial payments to the PLO by Kuwait and other Gulf states decided upon by Arab Summits, were interrupted. Donations in the form of deductions collected on behalf of the PLO from Palestinian working in these countries were also interrupted. Resulting cuts in PLO funds created a sense of uncertainty and anxiety within the PLO which bears great financial responsibilities towards the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories and in the diaspora, especially in Lebanon. By losing the Gulf states, the Palestinians have also lost important arenas for Palestinian nationalist and organizational mobilization and activities.
- c) The moral psychological setback afflicting the Palestinians as

a result of Iraq's defeat. Although it was not very clear how Iraq's various capabilities prior to the Gulf war would translate into immediate, direct and practical assets to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, the defeat of Iraq had caused a widespread moral and psychological setback among the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza. Perhaps it was the collapse of hopes and expectations vested on Iraq as a strategic Arab power that caused a state of severe frustration and demoralization among the Palestinians.

- d) The state of Arab and international siege to which the PLO was subjected as a punishment for its sympathetic, and sometimes supportive attitude towards Iraq. This state of siege created a sense of fear and isolation among the PLO leadership. The PLO was very keen to break this siege. But it soon became clear that the PLO leadership, as well as the Palestinian people, had to pay a costly price for a partial relaxation of this siege. This was made amply clear in the very harsh and unjust conditions the PLO had to accept as a prerequisite for Palestinian participation in the Madrid Peace Conference in October 1991, and in the subsequent Arab-Israeli negotiations in Washington.

For all of the above-mentioned reasons, political pragmatism was no longer a matter of choice for the Palestinians, but perhaps a matter of necessity, as was indicated by several influential quarters in the Palestinian leadership, political factions, and the population at large.

(4) The imperatives of Palestinian participation in the peace process: Palestinian participation in the peace process, which emanated from a position of objective weakness (regardless of the justice of the cause, the cleverness of the Palestinian negotiations, and the tremendous efforts exerted by them) was necessarily bound to lead to political pragmatism and a recognition of the dictates of the balance of power, despite expected Palestinian resistance to such dictates.

Non-Palestinian parties (Arab and foreign), on their part, have urged Palestinian decision-makers, negotiators, and the Palestinians in general to be realistic, flexible, and pragmatic, and to recognize the changing circumstances which are not in favor of the Palestinians. In certain cases the Palestinians were subjected to more than rational persuasion or gentle pressure. In fact, they were threatened privately and publicly that they would be left out if they remained intransigent and did not accept the terms of participation which were primarily set by their adversaries, Israel and the United States. Calls on the Palestinians to demonstrate political pragmatism were not, however, restricted to Arab and foreign parties. Rather, this issue became part of inter-Palestinian national debate. Supporters of pragmatism argued that, under the circumstances, pragmatism provide the best possible means to achieve Palestinian national objectives, or at least, part of them.

The shift towards pragmatism reflected itself in both Palestinian political thinking and practice. As indicated earlier, the Palestinians have unilaterally recognized Israel, and have been negotiating with it in a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. After such significant developments, it was only natural that the Palestinians alter some of their old national practices. For example, in 1991, and for the first time in several years, the Palestinians did not strike in protest of the annual anniversary of the Partition of Palestine. In 1992, they did not strike in the annual anniversaries of the establishment of Israel in May 15, 1948 or the June 5, 1967 war.

The shift from ideological purity or revolutionary idealism to political realism or pragmatism resulted in what could be described as "national schizophrenia". This kind of schizophrenia had taken place before in the Palestinian arena in the aftermath of adopting the concept of the "national authority" in 1973/74, and later on the concept of the "Palestinian state" instead of the "total liberation of Palestine" and the establishment in it of a democratic secular state". It took the various Palestinian factions several years in order to be reconciled and reunite once again on one political-national program. The pillars of this program were self-determination for the Palestinian people, their right to establish an independent state of

their own, and their right to return to their homeland.

Currently, there is a similar state of "national schizophrenia" in the Palestinian arena. The Palestinians do not seem to have satisfactory answers to a number of critical questions they pose to themselves. But the search is still continuing, and so is the schizophrenia. Some of the questions that are being individually and collectively asked are the following:

- * Can the Palestinians live in peace with Israel which deprived them of their homeland in 1948, and continues to occupy what was left of it?
- * Is Israel genuinely interested in a just and peaceful settlement with the Palestinians?
- * Is Palestinian participation in the current peace process and Arab-Israeli negotiations in the interest of the Palestinians or against their interests?
- * Does the interim self-rule bring the Palestinians closer to the achievement of their fixed national objectives, or does it endanger these objectives?
- * Who are the friends of the Palestinians and who are their enemies?
- * Is the United States of America, the patron of the peace process, a neutral party? And should it be trusted by the Palestinians?

Such questions and the lack of conclusive answers underlie the state of national schizophrenia, malaise, and confusion spread among the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories.

Regarding the negotiations with Israel, there are those Palestinians who support participation in these negotiations, and there are those who oppose it. There is also a widespread national debate

about the utility of continued Palestinian participation in these negotiations. Supporters of continued participation argue that the Palestinians should not withdraw from the negotiations because there may be an actual opportunity to reach an agreement with the Israelis that would pave the way for an acceptable final settlement to the conflict. Furthermore, these supporters argue that Palestinian withdrawal would cast a negative image for the Palestinians, as far as the public opinion is concerned, something the Palestinians can definitely do without. The supporters agree that the initial terms of Palestinian participation were not fair because the overall local, regional and international circumstances have not been in their favor. But the supporters also hope that the peace process may evolve in a way where this injustice is removed.

They are two trends of opponents to the Palestinian participation in the negotiations. The first does not oppose the process of negotiations in principle, but objects to the terms of reference. The other trend opposes negotiations with Israel as a matter of principle, because of doctrinal as well as strategic considerations.

The symptoms of national schizophrenia among the Palestinian are evident in both political thinking and conduct. This schizophrenia is manifest in the divergent and uncoordinated program of the intifada, which calls for, on the one hand, continued struggle to achieve "freedom and independence" and on the one hand the program of the negotiations which revolves around an interim Palestinian self-rule, and later on negotiations on the final status of the Occupied Territories that do not ultimately guarantee "freedom and independence". In the very recent past, the acceptance of autonomy (self-rule) was considered a form of national treason⁴. Today it has become a national demand. Hence the confusion and schizophrenia.

Despite their participation in the negotiations, a sense of anxiety, fear and uncertainty haunts the supporters. These supporters know that there is a great deal of risk involved in what they do. If they don't secure the rights of their people, they may be subject to

the course of history, and will also be held accountable before the people on whose behalf they negotiated.

The opponents, on the other hand, have no ready made alternative options to present to the people. And while they advocate the continuation of struggle, they, deep in their hearts, and despite their opposition, wish that a miracle would take place in these negotiations, and an honorable solution that meets the basic national rights of the Palestinians would be found. Like the supporters, they too realize that the Palestinian people are desperately eager to rid themselves of the Israeli occupation.

Schizophrenia in terms of political practice or conduct is manifest in the fact that some Palestinians are conducting peaceful negotiations, while others are still fighting and dying, without any coordination or division of labor between the two sides. There are also those Palestinian youth who are wanted to the Israeli authorities and who live as fugitives, while there are those who live in peace and security in their homes. This schizophrenia may be the reason which pushed scores of the wanted activists to surrender themselves to the Israeli authorities.

National schizophrenia is manifest in other spheres. Today the Palestinians cannot agree among themselves on "who are their enemies, and who are their friends". In the recent past, the Palestinians talked about a "tripartite enemy", Israel, the U.S., and reactionary Arab governments. At a later stage, the terms "reactionary" was dropped from the list. Today, by contrast, some Palestinians talk, without any embarrassment about coexistence with Israel and establishing cooperative relations with it. Some of them even talk about the possibility of establishing a Palestinian-Israeli confederation once peace is achieved.

The U.S. on the other hand is no longer viewed by mainstream political trends as an enemy, but rather as an honest broker, despite its continued support for Israel, and its commitment to Israel's qualitative military edge against the Arab countries combined. The Palestinian acceptance of the U.S. letter of

assurances and the letter of invitation to the Madrid Peace Conference, and the terms of reference included in these two documents, is an indication of Palestinian acceptance of the U.S. as a neutral party, an honest broker, and no longer as an enemy. This attitude in itself is a significant manifestation of Palestinian evolution from ideological purity to political pragmatism.

Furthermore, occasional Palestinian pronouncements in the Occupied Territories and elsewhere, indicate Palestinian satisfaction towards the American attitude, "the U.S. commitment to achieve a settlement to the conflict", "the American understanding of the Palestinian position", and the "positive gradual evolution in the American position". In this context, reference could be made to what some members of the Palestinian delegation to the negotiations had related to the PLO of an evolving American position in favor of the Palestinians. Faisal al-Husseini, the head of the Palestinian supervisory committee to the delegation, declared on more than one occasion that the Palestinians have succeeded in drawing a wedge between the United States and Israel.

On the other hand, Mahmud Abbas, a PLO Executive Committee member, and a member of the Fatah Central Committee stated: "We believe that the American Administration works seriously [for a settlement], and we support it until the very end, especially after it had begun to understand the details of the Palestinian question which it did not know in the recent past"⁵. Mr. Abbas is the PLO official who is closely involved in supervising Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, and the peace process as a whole.

The Palestinian impression of a changing American position in favor of the Arabs and the Palestinians is reinforced by pro-Israel American media as well as Israeli media, which argue in protest that such change is actually taking place⁶. The objective conditions which forced the Palestinians to deal with the American position and American terms have been obvious from the very beginning. But it may be premature to jump to the conclusion that the U.S. has been an honest broker between the Palestinians and the Israelis. American pro-Israel biases are intrinsic in the U.S. approach to the conflict as

a whole, in its point of departure, and the American proposed solutions to the conflict which do not observe international standards of justice.

Palestinian acceptance of the argument of U.S. neutrality regarding the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations could entail serious risks for the Palestinians. The U.S., which objectively dominates the United Nations, could orchestrate the issuance of new UN resolutions that enjoy international legitimacy, but that do not meet legitimate Palestinian rights. It would then be difficult for the Palestinians to accuse the U.S. of partiality after they, themselves, had praised American neutrality.

SECOND: EVOLUTION FROM VIOLENT TO NON-VIOLENT FORMS OF NATIONAL STRUGGLE

The evolution from ideological purity and revolutionary idealism to political realism and pragmatism was necessarily bound to cause a change in the forms and styles of Palestinian national struggle and political practice. Some aspects of this change are the following:

1. Evolution from violent resistance (armed struggle) to non-violent resistance. This evolution was an outcome of the failure of armed struggle as the principal means to the liberation of Palestine. A discussion of the objective and subjective factors leading to the decline of the Palestinian armed struggle experience falls outside the scope of this study. Despite the scornful way by which the PLO factions viewed calls for applying non-violent means or resistance, these factions have in effect, and from the very start, engaged in several forms of non-violent resistance such as commercial strikes, hunger strikes, sit-ins, and demonstrations.

But evolution from violent resistance to non-violent resistance took a radical shift with the eruption of the Intifada in December 1987. From the very beginning, this Intifada was characterized as a

popular uprising that would not rely on violent means. Of course, there were those Palestinian opinions which wanted to back the Intifada with armed actions. But armed acts of resistance in the Occupied Territories have remained during the years of the Intifada rather limited and modest if compared to the various forms of non-violent resistance.

However, when the popular nature of the Intifada retreated, a violent dimension of it began to emerge. This was illustrated in stabbing and the use of fire-bombs. Firearms were also occasionally and sporadically used. But the last two years of the Intifada witnessed a marked rise in the use of firearms. This rise can be attributed to at least 4 factors:

- a) The decline of popular participation in the Intifada created a need to maintain a certain level of antagonism or conflict as a sign of Palestinian rejection to the Israeli occupation.
- b) The extremely harsh measures Israel applied in its attempts to suppress the Intifada created anger and frustration among the population, and a sense that only violence can counter these violent Israeli measures, since Israel is dealing with the Intifada in the same way it deals with violent and armed actions.
- c) Score of Palestinian young activists have become wanted to the Israeli authorities. These individuals have become almost totally alienated and feel that they are condemned anyway. The circumstances under which they live are also radicalizing. These are the kind of individuals who belong to armed groups such as al-Fahd al-Aswad, al-Naser al-Ahmar (PFLP), and Ezz Eddin al-Qassam (Hamass).
- d) The fact that the peace process has gone so far nowhere created a sense of disillusionment among many Palestinians. Opposing Palestinian factions to the current negotiations with Israel, especially the Islamic groups, resort to the use of firearms against the Israeli occupation as a means of

protesting these negotiations and perhaps of sabotaging them.

2. Ascendance of political, organizational, and popular action, and institutional building. There is no doubt that the resort to these forms of national activities, as well as to national institution building, was directly or indirectly related to failure or decline of armed resistance.

Political, organizational, and popular action, and national institution building were almost totally non-existent in the late 1960s and early 1970s when armed struggle was at its height. The resort to political action and national institution building provided a legitimate cover to abandon an option (armed resistance) whose successful exercise has become extremely difficult and costly.

With the decline of armed resistance, the Palestinians have also resorted to social work and organization as illustrated in the formation of trade union, professional associations, welfare societies, and student unions, or in the expansion of such existing frameworks. Today there exist across the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza scores, if not hundreds, of all sorts of national institutions and professional associations.

The Israeli authorities have been less objectionable to the shift from armed resistance to political work and social organization. Political and social activities are considered less dangerous than armed acts, and are easier to monitor if compared to the usually covert armed resistance. Israel is also interested in learning about the political and social trends emerging in the Palestinian society in the Occupied Territories. Close observation of Palestinian political, social and economic institutions, as well as trade unions and professional associations serve this Israeli purpose. Israel is usually relatively tolerant towards political and social work, but less so towards organizational or armed action.

3. Increased tendency towards open political activity. This tendency was initially linked to the retreat in military and organizational activities which required a large measure of secrecy.

By contrast, political and popular action and national institution building require, and lead to, visibility, openness, and free movement. Exaggerated open political activity prior to the Intifada enabled the Israeli authorities, after the eruption of the Intifada, to arrest scores of leading activists and cadre's of the various political factions in the Occupied Territories.

The eruption of the Intifada and subsequent developments reinforced the tendency towards open political practice. This tendency reached its climax in the formation of the "Political Committee" which work openly and with the knowledge of the Israeli authorities. The declared purpose of forming these Political Committees is the promotion of peace between Israel and the Palestinians. But the formation of these committees could also be motivated by a struggle for political influence and leadership.

Nevertheless, the formation of the committees has special significance in the evolution of Palestinian political practice. Regardless of the motives, these committees and their style of work reflect a new tendency to abandon forms of covert struggle which remained in practice for many years, and also reflect the belief that the old forms of covert struggle are no longer suitable or useful. In this sense these committees can be viewed as a mechanism for political struggle leading to the required political settlement with Israel. But the formation of the committees may also be part of a certain strategic approach for political engineering and construction, both during the phase of an interim political settlement and afterwards.

THIRD: THE EMERGENCE OF THE ISLAMIC FACTOR AND THE CHANGE IN THE POLITICAL BALANCE OF POWER IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Evolution from ideological purity and revolutionary idealism to political realism and pragmatism in Palestinian thinking resulted in an ideological or doctrinal vacuum. For maintaining all kinds of

balances and general equilibrium in the Palestinian society, it was essential to fill in this vacuum with an idealistic or revolutionary ideological or doctrine. In the Occupied Territories, there was no ready-made alternative other than Islam.

On the other hand, the change in forms and styles of national struggle, helped offset the old political balance of power. While the PLO factions, which derived their initial legitimacy from the exercise of armed resistance, began to turn away from violent tactics, the emerging Islamic groups have embraced these same tactics, which proved to be an important source for popular support. The Islamists, in particular, were good at manipulating armed action, describing it as an exercise of jihad. By exercising jihad, the Palestinian Islamists transformed Islam into a liberation theology.

But other developments and intervening factors have also contributed to offsetting the balance of political forces in the Occupied Territories. Most important of these developments is the Intifada which marked, for the first time, a full engagement by the Islamic mainstream Muslim Brotherhood Society in the Intifada against the Israeli occupation.

Previous failures and retreats of the PLO and its constituent factions, and the stumbling of the nationalist program as a whole, have all contributed to the declining influence of the nationalist forces vis-a-vis the Palestinian Islamists. Almost every failure of the nationalists translated by default into a gain for the Islamists, represented in the Muslim Brothers (later the Islamic Resistance Movement-Hamas) and the Islamic Jihad Movement.

But the Palestinian Islamists were for at least a decade, prior to the Intifada, building for themselves religious, social and political infrastructure which enabled them to gain and accumulative influence. When the Intifada erupted, the Palestinian Islamists enjoyed a significant quantitative presence in several areas in the Occupied Territories. Their power base relied on an extensive network of social services which helped them expand their power base⁷.

The presence of the Palestinian Islamists in Palestinian University campuses in the Occupied Territories was also considerable. Islamic student blocs comprised the second largest blocs after those blocks supporting the Fatah movement. In the Islamic University in Gaza, the student supporters of the Islamic movement exceeded in number the supporters of Fatah.

The Intifada was, however, a turning point and an indicator for the transformation of the quantitative Islamic presence into a qualitative factor. The Intifada marked the actual rise in Islamic political activism, not only against the Israeli occupation, but also vis-a-vis the PLO nationalist factions.

Questions are frequently asked inside and outside the Occupied Territories about the actual weight of the Islamic trend (especially Hamas) in contrast to the weight of the PLO, in terms of influence and size of the following. A conclusive answer to these questions is almost impossible without conducting free and democratic elections for the mass of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza. Such elections provide perhaps the only criteria to accurately assess the balance of forces between Palestinian nationalists and Palestinian Islamists.

Until these elections are conducted, only tentative assumptions and conclusions can be made about the strength of Hamas vis-a-vis the PLO. The prevailing assumptions indicate that the PLO still enjoys the upper hand over Hamas. These assumptions are based on the sectoral elections which are conducted in Palestinian institutions, trade unions, professional associations, student unions, and chambers of commerce in the West Bank and Gaza. These sectoral elections demonstrate that the Islamists usually enjoy 40 to 45 percent of the popular vote. In some of these elections, they even get a higher percentage.

It is important in this context to distinguish between the number of votes each trend wins, and the electoral system applied in any given institution. Forty five percent of the votes may not necessarily translate into an equal percentage of seats in an elected

council. For example, the islamists won 45 percent of the votes in the elections of Nablus chamber of commerce in 1992, but that translated only to 3 out of 21 seats in the council. In these sectoral elections, the Islamists own more votes than any given PLO faction, except perhaps for the Fatah movement. In certain elections, the Islamists won over Fatah itself, or even all the PLO factions combined. The elections of the chamber of commerce in the city of Ramallah in the West Bank in 1992 is a case in point. But there are of course a large number of national institutions, professional associations, chambers of commerce, and student councils which are dominated by the PLO, and these institutions exceed in number the institutions controlled by Palestinian Islamists.

In a recent (November 1992) student council elections at Birzeit University, PLO supporters won 66 percent of the votes, while the Islamists won 33 percent. The large difference in votes is attributed to heavy Christian presence in the student body which is estimated at about 25 percent. But this presence at Birzeit University is not paralleled in other institutions in the Occupied Territories, except perhaps in the Bethlehem University. If that 25 percent is deducted, then the 40 to 45 percent estimate of Islamic strength still applies.

Taking the limitations of sectoral elections into account, free democratic elections in the Occupied Territories may produce unexpected surprises. Perhaps it is worth drawing some parallels between the Palestinian case, and the cases of both Jordan and Algeria. Contrary to all expectations, the Jordanian Islamists scored an impressive victory in the 1990 elections, winning 32 out of 80 seats in parliament, becoming as such the largest political bloc in the country. But the Jordanian Islamists worked for decades almost unchallenged in a context of noticeable absence or weakness of other political forces. The situation in the Occupied Territories is different since the PLO has been enjoying for more than two decades an active presence, legitimate representation of the Palestinian people, and an extensive network of infrastructure. By contrast, the Palestinian Islamists are considered in this regard the new comers.

But the Algerian case is more unsoothing for the PLO. The PLO is compared to the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) which had enjoyed the legitimacy of the achieving national independence, and ruled the country for about 3 decades. Yet none of these assets helped the Front in the 1991 legislative elections when it lost badly to the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) which won about 82 percent of the popular vote. Worth remembering that, unlike the FLN, the PLO has not yet achieved national independence.

The Palestinian Islamists enjoy a great deal of political and moral presence among the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories. Hamas, and even the smaller in size Islamic Jihad Movement, could call on the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza to observe a comprehensive strike and get a positive response. It is doubtful that any PLO faction, except perhaps for Fatah, could do the same and find a similar response.

Islamic influence and the change in the balance of power between the Islamists and the nationalists are also evident in the changing nationalist discourse. Mindful of rising Islamic influence, the nationalists have resorted to the frequent use of Islamic references. The leaflets of the Intifada which are issued by the Unified National Leadership as well as other nationalists statements contain Karami verses and other religious indications. In the last elections of the Chamber of Commerce in Nablus, the PLO nationalists ran under the name of "the Muslim Nationalist Trend"⁸.

The new strategic variable in the balance of political forces in the Occupied Territories has been the emergence of a political force, the Islamic factor, with an ideology and a political program that are diametrically opposed to the ideology and political program embraced by the national trend, led by the PLO. Currently, the Islamic trend enjoys influence and support in several areas in the Occupied Territories, especially in the Gaza Strip, that could match the influence and support enjoyed by the PLO and its nationalist factions. The Palestinian arena has never witnessed such ideological and political duality and serious rivalry between the Islamic and secular trends, perhaps since 1948.

Of the permanent ramifications of this strategic change is the fact that rivalry and the struggle for power between the two trends are not likely to cease if the Israeli occupation is removed, or after a peaceful solution to the Palestinian problem is achieved. This may be the case because the struggle between the two trends has become to revolve around defining the identity of the Palestinian society, its direction, and leadership. The occasional clashes that take place between Hamas and Fatah in Gaza and other parts of the Occupied Territories should be seen in this context.

The rivalry and struggle between the Palestinian Islamic and nationalist trends are also consistent with similar developments that are taking place in several countries in the region. The Islamic forces and influence in countries such as Jordan, Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, and Egypt are on the rise, while the influence of nationalist, Pan-Arab, secular, and leftist forces are on the decline.

The future relationship between the secular and the Islamic trends will be greatly influenced by the quality of performance of each trend, as well as by current and future developments in the Occupied Territories and the region as a whole. Added to that is the Israeli attitude towards each trend. For example, the Israeli deportation of more than 400 leaders and activists of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad is bound to weaken the Islamic trend vis-a-vis the PLO. It cannot be ascertained at this point in time whether the Palestinian Islamists will, in the future, gain supremacy over the PLO nationalist. But even if this supremacy was realized, the Islamic trend is bound to face the same tremendous challenges the PLO has been facing. It is not also certain whether the Palestinian Islamists would be more successful than the PLO in achieving their declared objectives, whether strategic (establishing an Islamic state in the whole of Palestine) or short term (ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza).

To use the words of one prominent Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leader, a successful confrontation with Israel would require the full mobilization of the Islamic nation⁹. It is not likely that the Palestinian Islamists would be able to undertake such

mobilization, or to drag Islamic forces in the region in an actual confrontation with Israel. The most the Islamic movement can expect is unlimited moral, material and logistical support.

FOURTH: DECLINE OF STATURE AND IMAGE OF THE PLO AND ITS FACTIONS

There is a widespread belief in the Occupied Territories that the stature of the PLO and its constituent factions has been undermined. There are sufficient indicators to substantiate this belief. The PLO decline is attributed to a number of factors, some of which are also symptoms of the decline. Most important of these factors are the following:

- a) The stumbling of the nationalist program embraced by the PLO and its factions. Despite the fact that the PLO has been responsible for the crystallization of the Palestinian national identity, and has defined and articulated the fixed national objectives of the Palestinian people, the PLO has not so far succeeded, in spite of its continued leadership of Palestinian struggle, in realizing the goals it had defined for itself and the Palestinian people. Added to this failure, the retreat of national struggle, and the nationalist program itself.

The PLO nationalist program was initially predicated on the total liberation of Palestine and the establishment of a democratic secular state in it. This program was later reduced to a Palestinian state only on a part of Palestine. Today, the PLO accepts a solution to the Palestinian problem that would initially start with a period of 5 years of interim self-rule in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) and Gaza. It is hoped that this arrangement will later lead to a state in these two areas that would be part of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation. But even the realization of this modest goal does not seem at this point a forgone conclusion.

On another vain, the unjust terms for Palestinian participation in the Madrid Peace Conference and the negotiations with Israel created skepticism among significant parts of the Palestinian people about the political wisdom of the PLO leadership and the soundness of its decisions.

- b) The inability of the PLO and its factions to live up to the challenges of the Intifada, and to develop it towards the realization of the agreed upon national objectives (self-determination, statehood, and right of return). While the PLO may have laid some foundation for the eruption of the Intifada, the PLO leadership had no direct role in its eruption. Prior to the Intifada, the PLO suffered from weakness, and after its eruption PLO support for it has not reached the required level. However, this characterization does not mean that the PLO did not try to provide full backing, but it seems that the Intifada required varied and extensive means of support that exceeded what the PLO could muster.

In the final analysis the PLO could not satisfactorily address the problems of the masses in the Occupied Territories. And in certain ways, the PLO has been responsible, at least partially, for the decline of the Intifada as a popular movement. The PLO and its factions could not fill the emerging authority vacuum that resulted from the Intifada against the Israeli authority, and could not maintain adequate social order, and provided a sufficient sense of security among the population of the Occupied Territories. The inability of the PLO leadership to meet the needs of the Intifada and its masses led to a greater degree of self-reliance of the Palestinian "interior" on itself. This inability was linked in the minds of many to what is frequently circulated about decadence and financial and administrative corruption in the PLO institution, and bad conduct of some of its leaders outside and inside the Occupied Territories.

- c) The Gulf war and its negative consequences. One consequence of the Gulf crisis had been the deterioration of

the PLO's political and financial assets. The PLO financial support to the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories, as well as to those of the diaspora, has been undermined. Furthermore, the PLO has been preoccupied with the political and financial siege imposed on it by Arab and foreign countries alike, because of its position on the Gulf crisis, and with the attempts to contain the consequences of this siege and to break away from it. This preoccupation caused a decline in PLO efforts to follow up developments in the Occupied Territories and to help solve the existing or emerging problems of the Palestinians in these territories.

- d) The rise of the Islamic factor. The rise of Islamic influence in the West Bank and Gaza is an objective indicator for a decline in the popularity of the PLO and its constituent factions in the Occupied Territories (This point has been discussed in some detail in a previous part of this study). The new important variable in this context is the emergence of another party, next to the PLO, as a frame of reference for an important segment of the Palestinian people. This new frame of reference is accorded loyalty and legitimacy by its supporters. During the last five years of the Intifada, the Palestinian Islamists have asserted their nationalist credentials and have accumulated a tradition of resistance on which they can draw for many years to come.

Furthermore, the Palestinian people as a whole tend now to compare the PLO and the emerging Islamic power in terms of ideological, doctrinal, political or national stands, as well as in terms of general conduct. The Islamic trend has benefitted from being in the position of the opposition vis-a-vis the "incumbent" PLO. In such a position, this trend is relieved from taking responsibility for any failures of the "incumbent". It can only cultivate gains, whether by default or as a result of active involvement.

- e) Lack of national consensus and national unity among the PLO factions. The absence of national consensus and unity is most

evident in the current split in attitude towards the peace process and the issue of Palestinian participation in the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. There is also a clear decline in the area of joint national action. What is happening, for example, to the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising, and which PLO factions are still participating in it? It seems that this leadership does not longer exist in the way it started, since some factions are not currently participating in it, and are openly calling for a new leadership body to take its place¹⁰.

On another level, what has happened to those national accords which used to regular the relationships among the PLO factions within the framework of the PLO, and hold them accountable to national consensus? It appears that the PLO factions are no longer capable of forging such committing national accords. Instead, search for some national consensus has been reduced to devising "mithaq sharaf" (a pact of honor) which the various Palestinian forces should respect. But even this pact has not materialized since the different Palestinian factions could not agree on it.

Palestinian national politics has also witnessed a change in the pattern of alliances inside and outside the Occupied Territories, at least tactically. Some major PLO factions such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), led by George Habash, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), led by Nayif Hawatmeh, have, in several occasions established alliances with the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) against other PLO factions such as the Fatah movement and the Palestinian Peoples Party (the former Palestine Communist Party)¹¹.

- f) Regress in democratic relations and conduct among Palestinian factions, and in the decision-making process, and the absence of processes of re-assessment and self-criticism. Regress in democratic conduct became especially evident, and was reinforced, after the Palestinian decision to participate in

the Madrid Peace Conference and the peace negotiations with Israel. Political tolerance has retreated and in several occasions difference in view was expressed through violent means, especially between Fatah and Hamas.

On the other hand, in real democratic conduct, decision-makers usually tend to take the views of their opponents into account. This kind of practice helps mitigate internal disaccord and make the opposition an integral part of the decision-making process on the national level. In the Palestinian case, there is currently an opposition to the peace process and the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. This opposition is different in nature and comes from different sources.

There is the opposition of some PLO factions, such as the PFLP and DFLP, which support in principle a negotiated settlement to the conflict with Israel, but object to the conditions of Palestinian participation in the current negotiations, and to the terms of reference of these negotiations. There is also the principled and doctrinal opposition of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad to these negotiations. Other opposition circles exist even within the participating factions in the negotiations, among Palestinian independents, and among several other PLO factions outside the Occupied Territories.

Nevertheless, all of these forms of opposition have not changed the position of the Palestinian leadership participating in the negotiations, and have not affected its commitment to the terms of reference or the terms of Palestinian participation in the negotiations. On another level, the PLO and its factions have not been engaged in any public process of national reassessments or self-criticisms. Failure to undertake this exercise has subjected these factions to popular criticism.

- g) Predominance of PLO factional interest over national interest. There is a widespread impression among the Palestinians of

the Occupied Territories that the various PLO factions are more preoccupied with factional interest and rivalry than their pre-occupation with the imperatives of national struggle against the Israeli occupation. This kind of impression is substantiated by public and private criticism and resentment. Criticism of factionalism has also found its way to public platforms and local media.

About this phenomenon of factionalism for example, Dr. Haidar Abdul-Shafi, head of Palestinian delegation to the negotiations with Israel, states: "We need to take a truthful stand, staying away from deviousness and hypocrisy. The national movement, with its various factions, has been preoccupied with factional friction that has taken it away from undertaking its responsibilities in coping with the Intifada, solving the problems of the citizens, and standing firmly against all violations of the principles of justice, solidarity and compassion".

- h) The crises and splits within the various factions of the PLO. Crises with the PLO factions are common place. But what is novel in this regard is when these crises become deep and complicated, and in certain cases lead to internal fragmentation or even splits. Reasons for such crises, fragmentation or splits lie in sharp differences within each faction over one political issue or another, or in personal differences or rivalry.

In 1991, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestinian was split into two groups, one led by Nayif hawatmeh, and the other by his deputy, Yasser Abd Rabbo. The split within the DFLP found its way to the Occupied Territories, where a similar polarization in the Front and its following has emerged. The Hawatmeh group accuses Abd Rabbo of surpassing the Front's political program by closely associating with the policies of PLO chairman Yasser Arafat.

On the other hand, the Palestine Communist Party had, after the collapse of Communism in the former Soviet Union, changed its name into the Palestine People's Party, and had also abandoned its Marxist-Lenin ideology. The party still has a structure and a following, but it does not have an ideology. It is not certain for how long can this party preserve itself without reorganization, and without devising a new ideology and political program for itself.

As for Fatah, the internal organization of this movement has been considerably weakened after the assassination of a number of its founding leaders, especially Khalil al-Wazir (Abu-Jihad), and Salah Khalaf (Abu-Iyad). The absence of al-Wazir in particular created a leadership vacuum within the movement, at least in these spheres in which he was involved. Al-Wazir closely supervised the Intifada, and ensured all forms of support to it. He was also in charge of the Fatah organizational structure, as well as armed activities in the Occupied Territories. Al-Wazir oversaw the process of national institution building in these territories.

In addition to the loss of historic leaders, and perhaps because of this loss, rivalry among completing trends within the Fatah movement has intensified. But PLO chairman Arafat, who is also the leader of Fatah, has so far succeeded in regulating this rivalry and in keeping the movement intact.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine is not problem free. The PFLP, which is considered the second largest faction within the PLO after Fatah, is going through an intense internal debate about a number of issues, most important of which is the attitude towards the current Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. While the PFLP officially opposes the terms of Palestinian participation in the negotiations, a trend within the Front is less adamant about this participation. But the personality of Dr. George habash, the founder and leader of the Front, is playing a balancing role. He, like Arafat in Fatah, is keeping the PFLP together.

The PFLP is also suffering from relative weakness due to successive strikes by the Israeli authorities against the Front.

- i) Differentiation within the PLO. This differentiation is taking place in attitudes and opinions at a variety of levels: within the PLO factions inside and outside the Occupied Territories, between the Palestinian "exterior" and the Palestinian "interior", and between leadership and following. Within each PLO faction, there is, for example, difference in opinion over a number of basic issues. This difference also exists among the factions themselves, and among them and their respective extensions inside and outside the Occupied Territories. Differences revolve around a number of important issues such as the peace process the Intifada, its future, and other forms of national struggle, the relationship between the "interior" and the "exterior" interfactional relations, Palestinian leadership institution and the process of decision-making, process of democratic reforms, reassessment and self-criticism, among other issues.

There is also a breakdown in the chain of national authority and within each faction. In certain cases, leaders of the "interior" would ignore wishes or instructions of leaders of the "exterior". Today, for instance, it is not known to what extent striking groups such as Al-Fahd Al-Aswad (Black Leopard) of the Fatah movement, Al-Nisr Al-'Ahmar (Red Eagle) of the PFLP, and Ezz-Eddin Al-Qassam of Hamas, would abide by instructions of the factions to which they belong. Certain acts undertaken by these groups would support the assumption that these groups do, in some cases at least, act on their own.

- j) Increased criticism of the PLO and its factions. The conduct of the PLO and its factions has been subject to varying degrees of criticism even by PLO followers and supporters, as well as the Palestinian public in general. Criticism of the PLO, at least among certain Palestinian circles, is not novel. But what is novel, since the eruption of the Intifada, is the

scope and magnitude of this criticism, and the-ever-increasing critical circles within the Palestinian community in the Occupied Territories.

The leadership of the PLO is frequently a subject for criticism. PLO factions criticize each other, and they are usually criticized by the public. The nationalist trend as a whole is also criticized by the Islamists for the former's shortcomings and its failure to embrace the Islamic option. Criticism takes place privately and publicly. It has even found its way to the local press which is subsidized by the PLO itself:

A general theme of criticism is the PLO's failure to solve the Palestinian national problem, and the participation of some of its constituent factions in the negotiations with Israel under unfair conditions to the Palestinians. On a different level, the PLO is also criticised for failure to solve the immediate pressing problems facing the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. These problems include daily life problems such as insufficient financial support for those who are badly in need of it.

The PLO is also criticised for the factional nature of its conduct and the tendency of its constituent factions to promote their narrow interests. The PLO and its factions are held responsible for the retreat of the Intifada and for some of the negative manifestation that have become associated with it such as the violent rivalry and clashed among the nationalists and the Islamists, as well as the killing of Palestinians who are accused of collaborating with Israel. About the killing of collaborators in particular, Dr. Haidar Abd-al-Shafi, says: "What creates anxiety among the masses is the continuation of the assassinations, and the lack of clarity in justifying them. It is probable that these killings may be driven by personal motives, and are part of settling certain accounts"¹².

For all of these criticisms, and a host of others, the PLO has lost part of its "mystique" or sanctity in the Occupied Territories. The change in PLO stature in the minds of the Palestinians is reflected in the kind of criticism levelled at the PLO and its factions. One local pro-PLO publication accuses the organization and its institutions of inefficiency and pre-occupation with itself, so much to the negligence of the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories and their needs. This publication calls on the PLO and its factions in both the "interior" and the "exterior" to reassess and review their conduct: "There is a need for internal reassessment in each faction -- There is a need for reassessment within the PLO as a political entity -- The Palestinian arena in the interior is in bad need for reassessment. There are deficiencies in certain institutions -- There are crises in others -- There are defeats in certain areas -- There are many resentful and complaining voices"¹³.

Another local PLO publication turned its synical criticism towards PLO leaders: "Whether you like it or not, the same heads and leaders will remain. And you will remain the burning fuel lighting the dark way for these same heads and leaders because you are a refugee and you live in a refugee camp"¹⁴.

One additional significant example of criticism is a statement that was published by the local press. This statement was signed by a number of national institutions and figures in the Hebron area. The statement complained about the "marginalization of the political role of Hebron and the neglect of its financial needs". The statement further warned that this marginalization is not acceptable¹⁵. The significance of this statement lies in the fact that it was not issued by any specific political faction or orientation, but from a whole region, Hebron, with all the political trends in it.

Finally, and after this long list of reasons and manifestations of decline in the stature of the PLO and its consistent factions and despite arguments that the PLO has come to full circle, and that its demise has become inevitable, the organization and its factions still possess a variety of potentials, capabilities and means to revitalize and reassert themselves. But in order to be able to do that, the PLO factions have to overcome their differences and tackle all the factors and problems contributing to the decline of their stature and image. Radical steps, and systematic effort have to be undertaken in this regard. The PLO and its factions may have to undergo some structural and other forms of change or adaptation in order to ensure effective survival. The question that remains to be answered is whether the PLO, its factions, and its leadership are capable of undertaking such systematic effort, and radical steps.

FIFTH: EMPOWERMENT FOR THE PALESTINIAN "INTERIOR" VERSUS THE PALESTINIAN "EXTERIOR"

A number of factors and developments have altered the old relationship between the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and their leadership in the diaspora. The new relationship is characterized by a greater and more significant role, and a general empowerment of the Palestinian "interior" vis-a-vis the "exterior". Some of the factors and developments that have contributed to this change in relationship are the following:

1. The PLO loss of Beirut, in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, as the primary base for the Organization. This loss forced the Palestinian leadership to focus on the Occupied Territories as a substitute major arena, since the PLO had no other alternative base in those Arab countries surrounding Israel.

Furthermore, when the prospects for armed struggle that was waged against Israel from neighbouring Arab countries have become extremely limited and difficult to undertake, the PLO and its factions

turned their attention to the building of national institutions, organizational structures, professional organizations, trade union and the like. Contrary to armed resistance which basically relied on the work of small and secretive cells or groups, the construction of national institutions and other mass organizations had led to the mobilization of large segments of the Palestinian population in the Occupied Territories. This mobilization had generated a new political awareness among the Palestinians of the "interior" of their place and significance on the map of national struggle. In the previous years, the role of the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories was viewed as secondary to the role of the Palestinian armed resistance movement, which was primarily an exile movement, and to the role of the PLO in the political, diplomatic, and propaganda spheres.

2. The eruption of the Intifada. The Intifada of December 1987 is considered a turning point in the relationship in the evolving relationship between the Palestinian "interior" and the Palestinian "exterior", since it has reversed the existing relationship prior to its eruption. After the Intifada, the Palestinian "exterior" has become, to a large extent, dependent on the Palestinian "interior". During the initial phase of the Intifada, the "interior" has undertaken the actual leadership and struggle against the Israeli Occupation, while the role of the "exterior" was restricted to providing moral, political and financial support.

As the Intifada progressed, the "exterior" began to have an input in its leadership. In the process, some attempts were made by the "exterior" to back the Intifada by military acts across the borders. At a later stage of the Intifada, the pre-Intifada dependence of the "interior" on the "exterior", and the post Intifada dependence of the "exterior" on the "interior" was transformed into a partnership. Each side possessed its particular sources of strength, and both derived strength from this partnership. Currently, while the "exterior" seems to be holding the reins, the "interior" has developed some intrinsic sources of power which will be difficult to take away.

3. The imperatives of Palestinian participation in the peace process. The terms of Palestinian participation in the Madrid Peace

Conference of October 1991, and the subsequent Arab-Israel negotiations in Washington, stipulated the restriction of Palestinian representation to delegates from the West Bank and Gaza, and the exclusion of the PLO and the Palestinian diaspora¹⁶. Such terms of participation brought the role of the Palestinian "interior" to the fore, and reinforced the role and significance of local leaders and public personalities.

While these leaders and personalities initially and primarily derived their legitimacy from the PLO, they derived additional legitimacy by virtue of "access and function". In terms of access, the leaders and personalities of the "interior" have direct access to the two most important parties involved in the process (Israel and the U.S.) to which the PLO has no direct or official access. As for function, the leaders and personalities of the "interior" are the party who is sitting around the table, negotiating formally on behalf of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and tacitly on behalf of the PLO and the entire Palestinian people. This kind of access and function has made the leaders and personalities of the "interior" more aware of their significance.

And as is the case in similar contexts, and regardless of the degree of nationalist commitment, competition for influence, authority and leadership is in the nature of things. The case of the Palestinian "interior" and "exterior" is no exception. In fact, the nature of the proposed political settlement, especially in the proposed phase of interim self-rule, nourishes or reinforces the explicit or dormant leadership ambitions among some leaders and public personalities of the Occupied Territories.

It is worth-mentioning here that, according to the terms of reference, if and once a self-rule authority is established, it will be comprised of Palestinians from the "interior". An influential local publication, forecasts in this regard, not only the composition of leadership during the interim period, but also the leadership of a future state:

Most likely, the leadership in the state will be an extension of the one [that] existed in the transition period. It is most likely to be formed from politicians and technocrats, with a minimum role for those with any military backgrounds. At a lower level of leadership, it is predicted that family and regional factors might push traditional people to hold office . . . the Intifada leadership will provide the state institutions with leaders who will compete with the leaders from outside the O/T [Occupied Territories]. Their claim for legitimacy will be backed by their Intifada records and the contributions they made to the success of the peace process.¹⁷

4. The role of the "interior" as a legitimizing factor for the "exterior". Because of the evolution of the Occupied Territories into the main arena for Palestinian national struggle, and because of the increasing importance of these territories and their population in the eyes of all the parties involved or interested in the Palestinian issue, the Palestinian leadership in the "exterior" began to lean heavily on local leaders and personalities to cast legitimacy on political positions and decision the PLO leadership undertakes. In several occasion, the PLO leadership in exile invited some of the local leaders or personalities to address PLO decision-making institution and circles in Tunis or elsewhere in order to make a case for the utility of certain attitudes or views usually embraced by PLO leaders.

After the exposure of local leaders and personalities to the PLO leadership, especially after the eruption of the Intifada and the Palestinian participation in the peace process, the local leaders and personalities have become aware of the limitations of PLO leaders, and also aware of their distinct skills, capabilities and ability to perform vis-a-vis some PLO leaders who had been in the past engulfed in an aura of national grandeur and mystic. The Intifada and the terms of Palestinian participation in the peace process, have demystified the PLO leadership. Of course this change in stature of the PLO leadership should be seen in the broader context of the local, regional and international developments and the new dynamics these developments have created.

SIXTH: THE REHABILITATION OF THE JORDANIAN ROLE BY THE PALESTINIANS

Since the Palestinians have come to the conclusion that a Palestinian-Jordanian partnership, or some form of relationship, is a pre-requisite for an acceptable political settlement to the parties directly or indirectly involved in the conflict (Israel and the U.S. respectively), and since, it seems that, they have reconciled themselves to this reality, it has become natural, and even necessarily, that the Palestinians not only rehabilitate themselves for accepting a Jordanian role, but also help rehabilitate the Jordanian role itself in an agreeable way to the Palestinian people. Of the manifestations of this dual process of rehabilitation are the following:

1. A general rapprochement between the PLO and Jordan. This rapprochement began with the improvement of relations between the PLO and the Jordanian regime and in particular between Chairman Arafat and King Hussein. It has also been manifested in the continuing coordination between the Palestinian leadership and the Jordanian government. This coordination culminated in the Palestinian decision to participate in the negotiations with Israel in a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.
2. A change in attitude by PLO factions towards the regime of King Hussein. All PLO factions, including the PFLP and DFLP, which were hostile to the regime of King Hussein now support the idea of a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation. They also support PLO coordination with the Jordanian government. Given other scenarios in Jordan, it seems that the PLO factions have come to a realization that the regime of King Hussein may be the best regime to work with. Most PLO leaders visit Jordan regularly and hold meetings with the King or with members of his government. Some of these leaders are now residing permanently or semi-permanently in Jordan.
3. Re-emergence of pro-Jordanian elements and personalities. It was natural that the PLO search for close coordination and confederation with Jordan would lead to a revival of pro-Jordanian

influence in the Occupied Territories. Pro-Jordanian figures and interest groups would feel less embarrassed to identify more publicly with Jordan which pro-Jordanian stands come in the form of strong advocacy for an intimate Palestinian-Jordanian cooperation. In several occasions, pro-Jordanian types addressed King Hussein as the King of the "Two Banks" of River Jordan, the reference being to the West Bank and Jordan.

On another plain, the deteriorating conditions in the Occupied Territories and the tremendous hardships resulting from the Intifada and harsh Israeli measures, as well as the absence of real prospects for a meaningful political settlement, have all invoked nostalgia among some Palestinians of the West Bank about the period of Jordanian rule prior to 1967. These deteriorating conditions made the Palestinians more prepared to review their previous negative attitude towards establishing some relationship with Jordan. King Hussein's decision of legal disengagement from the West Bank in July 1988 opened the door, from a Palestinian point of view, for a new future relationship with Jordan.

4. There are other manifestations of the rehabilitated Jordanian-Palestinian relationship. Palestinian local press publish messages of congratulations to King Hussein in certain occasions or anniversaries. Those messages appear in the form of paid advertisement and are sponsored by local figures, individuals, or institutions. In the aftermath of a surgical operation the King had undergone in October 1992, scores of these messages appeared in the local press in the Occupied Territories.

Future, few delegations from the West Bank and Gaza, as well as from the Palestinian Arabs of Israel, visited Jordan to congratulate the King for his recovery. On the other hand, King Hussein's invitation to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, to receive treatment in Jordan after Arafat's plane accident, as well as the official reception extended by the King to Arafat as head of state in October 1992, were all signs of improved relations between Jordan and the PLO.

SEVENTH: REGRESS OF THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Of the emerging trends in the Palestinian society in the Occupied Territories is a noticeable regress in the process of social change. This process was positively influenced and enhanced at one point by the early experience of armed and national resistance, and by the political and organizational role of the PLO factions in mobilizing the Palestinian population. The imperatives and requirements of the national struggle in the late 1960's and early 1970's had crystallized a certain social awareness in the minds of the people as a side effect of their crystallizing national awareness.

At a later stage, the process of national institution and infrastructure building which started in the mid-1970's had also reinforced the process of social change. But from a sociological point of view, the popular Intifada has been a catalyst for social change. In its early stage, it marked a culmination of the interaction between national struggle and some process that are associated with social change. This was manifested in the involvement of the various social segments of the population, in varying degrees, in one form or another of the activities of the Intifada.

But the process of social change in the Palestinian society in the Occupied Territories has not been linear. Because of the volatile circumstances of occupation and resistance, this process suffered from disruption, discontinuity, impediment and regress. Furthermore, this process had no agenda of its own, and was never guided by a well-perceived or even planned strategy, neither was it part of a broad process of social engineering. Social change in the Occupied Territories was a function of the side effects of national struggle and other societal dynamics.

Therefore, the faltering of armed resistance, the decline of national struggle and mobilization, and the retreat of the popular nature of the Intifada have caused a parallel retreat in the process of social change. This retreat has been evident in the continuing and strong existence of traditional and patriarchal relations as illustrated

in tribal, clannish, and familial loyalties and practices. Such loyalties and practices have also imposed themselves, in varying degrees, on the structures and internal relations within the PLO factions themselves.

The current relative rise in vertical relations as opposed to horizontal relations comes in a context of national authority vacuum resulting from a decline in Israeli authority even the Palestinian society in the aftermath of the Intifada, the inability of the PLO and its factions to effectively fill in this vacuum, at least in terms of regulating societal relations. In the absence of other authority structures, the population in many parts of the West Bank and Gaza relied heavily on the role of traditional notables and the heads of tribes and clans to mediate, arbitrate, and resolve local conflicts, and solve all kinds of problems.

The role of the PLO factions in this field has been limited. These factions failed to establish for themselves sufficient "revolutionary authority" to draw upon as a source of popular credibility and legitimacy. Furthermore, these factions have been consumed in pursuing factional interest. But perhaps more importantly persistent harsh Israeli measures against these factions did not enable them to develop appropriate and effective mechanisms to reach out to the masses and to solve their daily problems. By contrast, the Islamic trend, relying on its religious legitimacy, managed to play a more effective role, in solving different types of societal problems. In this sense the Islamic trend has, in a way consolidated its conservative influence among the population.

On a different level, the role of Palestinian women in the process of social change has also remained marginal. The nationalist, political, and factional nature of women's activities has prevailed over all other functions and activities Palestinian women could undertake to enhance the process of social change. Existing women structures and organizations have perhaps deliberately avoided involvement in areas of social struggle. Voices calling for women's emancipation, and granting them a larger measure of equality with men remained isolated.

Finally, the composition of the Palestinian delegation to the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations may reflect some sort of regress in the process of social change, and the resilience of traditional relations in the Palestinian society. The widespread belief among the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories is that some of the members of the delegation were selected ascriptively for regional, familial, factional, and loyalty considerations, and not necessarily for their political or negotiations skills and capabilities.

CONCLUSION

The emerging strategic political trends in Palestinian political thinking and practice discussed in this study are the outcome of a combination of changing objective conditions as well as subjective decisions and choices. Intervening local, regional and international events and dynamics are also responsible for the emergence of these trends.

But it is the belief of this author that these emerging trends, or at least some of them, can, and may be undermined, altered, and even reversed. Many of the important variables accounting for their emergence are still at play and these trends are still evolving. The outcome of the current peace process will play a defining role in determining the nature and direction of future developments, not only in the Palestinian society, but perhaps in the Middle East region as a whole. Both the PLO and Israel can play an important role in influencing the emerging political trends in the Occupied Territories. But the Palestinian society in these territories has acquired intrinsic potential and dynamics of its own. It provides the context in which all trends emerge.

ENDNOTES

1 Issa al-Shu'aibi, al-Kiyaniyya al-Filastiniyya: al-Wa'i al-Dhaki wal-Tatawwur al-Mu'assasati, 1947-1977, [The Palestinian Entity: self-consciousness and Institutional Development, 1947-1977] (Beirut: The Research Center, The Palestine Liberation Organization, 1979). p. 54.

2 Sari Nuseibeh, "The Continuation of the Status Quo", Al-Fajr, August 9, 1987, pp. 5, 6.

3 _____, "The Options Facing the 19th PNC: A Critical Appraisal", Middle East International, October 7, 1988, pp. 15-17.

4 Of the sharp manifestations of this schizophrenia is a graffiti which said: "autonomy is a national demand", with another graffiti next to it stating: "armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine". Worth mentioning is that both graffiti lines were signed by the Fatah movement.

5 Al-Ouds, May 20, 1992.

6 Shumuel Katz, "An Admirable Ally of the Arabs" The Jerusalem Post, May 15, 1992, p. 6A.

7 Ziad Abu-Amr, Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya fi al-Daffa al-Gharbiyya wa Oita' Ghazza: Jama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin wa Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami [The Islamic Movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: The Muslim Brotherhood Society and the Islamic Jihad Movement] (Acre: Dar al-Aswar, 1989), p. 32.

8 Al-Ouds, May 18, 1992.

9 See the leaflet issued in the Occupied Territories by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in June 4, 1992.

10 In the Occupied Territories, several leaflets were issued jointly by Hamas, the PFLP, the DFLP, and the Islamic Jihad condemning, for example, the Palestinian participation in the negotiations with Israel, championed by the Fatah movement. Several leaflets are issued by these factions outside the Occupied Territories. See for example, the leaflet which was issued in Damascus in September 17, 1992 and signed by 10 factions, including the 4 mentioned above, in protest against Palestinian participation in the Peace negotiations in Washington. This same leaflet was also circulated inside the Occupied Territories.

11 Dr. Haidar Abd-al-Shafi, "Is it the Shortcomings of the Intifada or the Crisis of the National Movement". Al-Ouds, May 29, 1992.

12 Al-Ouds, May 29, 1992.

13 "He who has an EAR should Listen", Al-Bayadir al-Siyasi, No. 488, March 21, 1992.

14 Basim 'Ed, "Notes to Whom it May Concern: From the Occupied Territories to the Palestine Central Council ... Do You Hear us !!!", Al-Fajr, May 10, 1992.

- 15 A statement issued by National Institutions and Figures in Hebron, Al-Quds, September 26, 1992.
- 16 Palestinians from East Jerusalem were also excluded from participation in the negotiating delegation. While excluded from bilateral Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, Palestinians from the diaspora were later allowed to participate in the multi-lateral negotiations. Israel stipulated that these diaspora representatives should not be members of the PLO or the Palestine National Council (PNC).
- 17 Salamah Abdullah, "Who will be the Leaders of Tomorrow's Palestine?", Al-Nashra Al-Istratijiyya, The Jerusalem Center for Strategic Studies (Maqdes), No. 3, September 1992, p. 8.

