

Introduction

Palestine has enjoyed geographic, religious and political centrality in the Middle East and has since the beginning of the last century been vulnerable to the plans and ambitions of foreign powers. The resulting conflicts have led to the dispersal and prolonged suffering of the Palestinian people, and during the past eight decades in particular the Palestinian people have fought continuously to defend their internationally recognized rights to freedom and independence.

The ambitions and policies of the various external powers involved over the years have had an undeniable impact on inter-Arab relations, and on the international relations of Arab states. They have also had a direct effect on shaping the history of Palestine and the evolution of its future. Despite this external pressure, the Palestinians have succeeded in defending and maintaining their Arab identity and political presence by organizing socio-economic institutions and a political infrastructure which have allowed them to challenge the power of the various conquerors in the ongoing national struggle. Having legitimate representation forced other parties to recognize and engage with them despite attempts to deny them their rights to self-determination and national independence.

This volume is one of a series that organizes key political documents covering the time from the pre-Ottoman period to 2007. This volume includes the text or excerpts of over 160 documents, covering Jordanian/Egyptian Rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (1948-1967); June War of 1967; and the period up to the Geneva Conference of 1973. This introductory chapter outlines the history of this period to provide a framework to guide the reader to the historical context of the papers.

Jordanian/Egyptian Rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

The Arabs in the area administered by the British under the Mandate comprised about two-thirds of the population, which rejected the Partition Resolution (Resolution 181) of the United Nations. The Jewish Agency accepted the Resolution as a first step towards the formation of a Jewish state and on 14 May 1948 formed a provisional government and proclaimed the State of Israel.

The Arab Higher Committee called on Arab states to save Palestine and the subsequent war led to the Palestinian *Nakba*. Jewish forces took much of the intended Arab Palestinian State, while Jordan took control of the West Bank and Egypt gained control of the Gaza Strip. The Palestinians found themselves divided: an Arab minority within the Israeli State; citizens of Jordan on the West Bank; residents of Gaza under Egyptian administration; and stateless refugees in the neighboring Arab countries. On 1st October of that year the Higher Arab Committee declared Palestine to be independent and established an All-Palestine Government in Gaza.

The serious refugee problem caused by the *Nakba* led the United Nations to form the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees in the Near East. Temporary camps were set up for the refugees, and their right to return to their homes or receive compensation was included in UN Resolution 194.

The Arab-Israeli War of 1948 ended in various truces signed in the early 1950s. In the following years the Palestine Question was primarily addressed as a refugee problem; how-

ever, it impacted surrounding countries in the form of coups d'état in Syria, assassinations (Lebanon's Prime Minister and King Abdullah in Jordan); and the Egyptian Revolution under Jamal Abdul Nasser in 1952. The Zionist leaders portrayed the events of 1948 as their inheritance of the Mandate from the British. As for the Palestinians, the aftermath of the War was simply the *Nakba* – the Catastrophe.

In the late 1950s-early 1960s the British, US, Australia, and Canada, along with UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld tried to solve the Palestine problem, but the Suez War of 1956 escalated tensions and called a halt to any progress. A study by the US State Department in 1962 led to the revival of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) and the reaffirmation of the necessity to enforce Resolution 194.

In 1964 Arab states formed the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to establish a central representative for the Palestinian people; Ahmad Shuqeri was the first chairman.

The June War of 1967 and Israeli Occupation of the Rest of Palestine

The Arab-Israeli conflict entered a new chapter with the 1967 war, which led to the two major Palestinian communities of Gaza and the West Bank, including Jerusalem, coming under one system of military rule. This marked the beginning of the Palestinization of the conflict in terms of resistance, political initiatives and subsequent challenges.

The UN condemned the Israeli occupation and called for Israel to refrain from an occupation, citing international law as the basis for this call. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 242 calling for Israel to withdraw its army from the occupied territories. Also in 1967 Arab leaders called for Israeli withdrawal, and refused the possibility of recognizing Israel.

In 1968 the armed resistance met Israeli army forces at the Battle of Karameh and the PLO amended its constitution to continue armed struggle against Israel. In 1969 Yasser Arafat was elected chairman and began to change it into a wider umbrella organization open to all Palestinian factions.

Throughout the 1970s there were a series of attempts by intermediaries to find political solutions for the conflict. The first was a plan by King Hussein of Jordan for a unified Arab kingdom that included Jordan and the West Bank; a proposal from the EU following the 1973 War as proposed at the Geneva Middle East Peace of December that year.

A Final Note

Although we have endeavored to make this publication as reader/user friendly as possible, one should be aware that there is some inconsistency in terms of the spelling of non-English words - names and places (such as Haram Ash-Sharif or *Intifada*) – since we adhered, wherever possible, to the original version rather than apply our usual spelling rules. It is for the same reason that the volumes contain a number of minor typographical errors such as the omission of apostrophes, inconsistent capitalization, and spelling mistakes found in the originals.

Footnotes included in the volumes - excluding those marked “the ed.” - are mostly those that appeared in the original texts though the readership note that the numbering will not necessarily be accordance with the original version.

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi
Chairman of PASSIA