

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 almost 220 documents, covering the period from the beginning of the first *Intifada* 1987 to the first period of the Middle East Peace Negotiations, i.e., the end of 1994. This brief introduction outlines the history of this period to provide a framework to guide the reader to the historical context of the papers.

First Intifada to the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference (1987-1991)

At the beginning of 1987 the occupation had been ongoing for 20 years, the PLO leadership was isolated in Tunis, and weak Arab governments were unable to influence matters. Most countries in the region had internal preoccupations and no actors, regional or external, were able to enforce UN resolutions. On 8th December 1987 an Israeli vehicle crashed into a crowd at a Gaza refugee camp killing four residents. Palestinians were convinced this was a deliberate attack and the ensuing uprising that spread throughout the Palestinian territories became known as the *Intifada*.

The *Intifada* was an attempt to change the occupation from the inside, without relying on ineffective external intermediaries. It produced new leadership for the PLO from within the territories, organized all factions under one umbrella, and politicized the population at all levels. This unification led to the Fourteen Palestinian Points that included elections, a freeze on Israeli settlements, release of political prisoners, and the right to be free of occupation. The US government tried to mediate with the Shultz Initiative in 1988, which called for negotiations based on UN resolutions 242 and 338. This was rejected by the Palestinians and Israel continued its severe military control. In April 1988 Israel assassinated the PLO second-in-command, Khalil Al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), the godfather of the *Intifada* – a move that shook the global Palestinian people and which was condemned by the UN in

Resolution 611. The *Intifada* enjoyed international and regional support and, in recognition of the call for autonomy, King Hussein formally disengaged Jordan from the West Bank. The *Hamas* movement evolved from the *Intifada* and publicized its charter in August 1988.

The PLO shifted also, with a new consensus passed by the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in November 1988 to: accept partition based on UN Resolution 181; to accept the existence of Israel; to renounce terrorism; and to call for a settlement based on UN Resolutions 181 and 242. The PNC issued a declaration of Palestinian Independence on 15 November 1988 which called for a Palestinian state with its capital in Jerusalem.

Palestinian-Israeli contacts were maintained in spite of continued military confrontations, motivating external actors to continue their peace efforts. One major outcome was the Stockholm Document in which leading figures from the Palestinian and the American Jewish communities expressed strong support for Palestinian independence and called for direct dialogue between the US government and the PLO.

On 13 December 1988, PLO Chairman Arafat addressed the UN for the second time. He presented a Palestinian peace initiative which included a call for the convening of an international peace conference based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338; a call for a temporary presence of UN supervision troops in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT); and an assurance of the Palestinian desire for a comprehensive settlement to the conflict. The following day US President Reagan authorized the State Department to enter into dialogue with the PLO.

Israeli PM Rabin responded in April 1989 with a plan for Israel to hold elections in the OPT in order to choose representatives to negotiate with Israel on an interim peace plan. The Palestinians maintained that the PLO was their legitimate representative body and rejected this proposal. From this point until the Gulf Crisis of 1990 various peace initiatives were introduced by Arab, European and US leaders. None of these succeeded but they contributed to the points of view of the parties in the peace talks that followed the Gulf War of 1991.

The First Rounds of Negotiations (1991-1993)

The Madrid Peace Conference of October 1991 represented the beginning of the first series of bilateral talks in the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and the acceptance by all parties of the principle of "land for peace." From Madrid, two tracks of negotiations emerged: bilateral in Washington from 1991 to 1993, and multilateral starting in Moscow in 1992. The bilateral talks came to a halt after 22 months at the tenth round of talks when the Israeli side proposed autonomy while the Palestinian side demanded an interim self-government authority. The multilateral talks moved to various world capitals covering issues of mutual concern, such as arms control, regional economic development, refugees, and water and environment.

The failure of the Washington talks revealed the gap between the two sides and the reluctance of the US administration to exercise any pressure on Israel. Facing such a dead end, several secret channels were opened between the PLO and Israeli Government; one of them led to the Oslo Accords and the Declaration of Principles (DoP), which was signed at the White House on 13 September 1993 and followed by various subsequent agreements.

The significance of this political breakthrough was mutual recognition, putting the two sides at a crossroads. Whether the agenda of what is since considered the “peace process” would lead to a historical reconciliation with a political settlement or only a temporary “truce” with limited progress remained to be seen.

The “test phase” began with 1994, where much attention was focused on the continuing negotiations that took place in Taba and elsewhere, while back home, violence sparked throughout the Palestinian Territories, the culmination of which came on 25 February, when 29 Muslim worshippers at prayer in the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron, were gunned down by Baruch Goldstein, a settler from nearby Kiryat Arba. Revenge attacks were soon carried out in a series of suicide bombings.

Nevertheless, negotiations continued and at the end of April, the Palestinian-Israeli Protocol on Economic Relations was signed in Paris, followed, on 4 May, by the Gaza-Jericho Self-Rule or Cairo Agreement. Soon after, the first Palestinian police forces entered the autonomous areas of Gaza and Jericho and began to set up a national, preventive, public, and presidential security system. On 1 July, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat returned home and swore in the first ministers for the newly established Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

Since the agreed deadline for Palestinian elections passed (13 July), the next major event was the August signing of the Early Empowerment Agreement on the transfer of five civilian authorities (education, health, social affairs, tourism and taxation) from the Israeli administration to the PNA. In September, Jordan surrendered to the PNA the Waqf and religious courts in the West Bank, and the Gulf Cooperation Council ended its economic boycott of Israel, and in October, Arafat, Rabin and Peres were announced the winners of the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize.

Whereas the year had not been to the fullest satisfaction of the Palestinians, there was some progress evident that made them rather optimistic.

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

