

**THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION THROUGH  
THE YEARS OF KISSINGER DIPLOMACY** ✓

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TO MAA, BAA

AND

BADA BHALNA

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## Chapter I

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Palestine, historically the land West of River Jordan, has been in turmoil since time immemorial. It had been a witness to the victory and defeat of many tribes with varied origins. The earliest known people of Palestine were the Canaanites. Then the land was called the land of Canaan, named after Canaan - the son of Ham. Around 20th or 19th century B.C., the Hebrew or Habiru tribesman named Abraham, from Babylonian Chaldaea, moved into this land of Canaan with his family.<sup>1</sup> With this the Jews established their first contact with their "promised land" which was first made to Abraham.<sup>2</sup> At that time Canaan was claimed to be a part of the Egyptian empire and the Egyptian rulers had to fight many battles with various invading tribes like the Hyksos, Hittites etc. Around 1200 B.C. the Egyptians successfully drove back all the invaders from Canaan. It was about this time that the Habiru or Hebrew descendants of Abraham escaped in general confusion and fled to the desert of Sinai. However, the Egyptian rule over Canaan came to an end around 1154 B.C. with the end of the reign of Rameses III.

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- 1 Ilene Beatty, "The Land of Canaan", in Walid Khalidi, ed., From Haven to Conquest (Beirut, 1971), pp.5-6.
  - 2 Mirta Muniz, "Israel : The Promised Land", Tricontinental (Havana, 1983), no.85, p.9.

After that Canaan remained in a state of tug-of-war between two invaders from without, the Philistines and the Israelites,<sup>3</sup> until about 1000 B.C. It was about this time that the Israelite King David defeated the Philistines and conquered Canaan. He also took over Jerusalem from the Jebusites and finally went on to conquer the small neighbouring nations east of Palestine<sup>4</sup> (Edom, Moab, Gilead, etc.) to set up an independent Kingdom. David ruled the Kingdom for thirty-three years and was succeeded by his son Solomon who in turn ruled it for another forty years.<sup>5</sup> This first Kingdom provided the religious and emotional basis for Jewish interest in Palestine and Zionist claims to the area in late nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The point that the Israelites were basically the invaders and not the national inhabitants of Palestine should be noted here. However, after the death of Solomon, the Kingdom was split into the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the kingdom of Judah in the south.

Both Israel and Judah were too weak to stand alone. The Assyrians conquered the whole of Israel in 722 B.C.

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3 The Hebrews had started calling themselves as Israelites.

4 By then, the land of Canaan had come to be known as Palestine, named after the Philistines.

5 Beatty, n.1, pp.7-9.

6 Fred J. Khouri, The Arab-Israeli Dilemma (Syracuse, New York, 1976), p.1.

and Israel became politically extinct (Never again did it appear till 1948 when the modern state of Israel was established). Same was the fate of Judah which was occupied by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

Then, the country was occupied in turn by the Persians (whose king allowed the return of some Jews in 536 B.C.), the Greeks and the Romans. The Jews rebelled against the tyrannical rule of the Roman kings. As a result, Titus destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and Hadrian severely punished the Jews after quelling the last revolt in 132 A.D. The whole Jewish population was expelled from the area. This was the "Jewish Diaspora" and with this the official Jewish connection with Palestine came to an end.<sup>7</sup>

Around A.D. 638, the entire Roman empire of West Asia including Palestine was taken over by the Arab followers of Mohammed. By then, Mohammed's teachings of Islam had united the tribes of the Arabs, who originated in the Arabian peninsula. The Muslim Arabs settled in Palestine in large numbers and converted the indigenous inhabitants to Islam faith, and the language and the customs of the area became Arabic over the years. Thus, during the Muslim rule, an overwhelming majority of Palestine's population became

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7 Beatty, n.1, pp.10-11.



Arabized and embraced Islam. However, a microscopic minority still remained Christian. Palestine remained under Arab muslim rule for a period of four and a half centuries before being taken over by the European crusaders in A.D. 1099. The crusaders were, however, driven out of Palestine in A.D. 1291 for good by the Muslim Mamelukes - who ruled Palestine from Cairo.

Next came the Ottoman branch of the Turks who defeated the Mamelukes of Egypt and took possession not only of Palestine but the whole area along both sides of the Mediterranean. Suleiman the Magnificent took charge in Palestine. The Ottoman Turk regime in Palestine lasted from A.D. 1517 to A.D. 1918 when finally the Allied Forces occupied the country and acquired Palestine and Transjordan as mandates of the League of Nations. However, the Ottoman regime was a continuation of the Muslim rule and it did not in any way alter or affect the basically Arab character of the country. Its inhabitants, language, customs and culture remained Arabic.<sup>8</sup>

From the above historical record one finds that, but for the Christian interregnum of the Crusaders, Palestine, at the time of the Allied occupation, had been under thirteen centuries of Muslim rule - first Arab and then Turk. The

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<sup>8</sup> Beatty, n.1, p.13.

majority of population over this long period had remained Palestinian Arab - both Muslim and Christian. The Jews had no part in the political history of Palestine since their final dispersion in the second century of our era. The Jewish occupation of Palestine in biblical times was merely an episode in the country's long history of wars, invasions and conquests. Notwithstanding this, the modern Zionist Jews, the great majority of whom can hardly claim to be descendants of the ancient Hebrews, seized upon this biblical episode in order to stake a political claim more than nineteen centuries later upon the territory of Palestine. The rise of political Zionism - in the later part of the nineteenth century - and other developments in world politics accelerated the process.

### The Palestine Problem : Genesis and Evolution

The events in Palestine, following the Allied occupation and the subsequent British mandate, were shaped by the interplay of three important forces: Zionist goals, British colonial interests and the Palestinian Arab nationalist aspirations. In most of the cases the interests of the Zionists and the British coincided and this coincidence made them act in close connivance to the detriment of the basic aspirations of the Palestinian Arabs.

The idea of Zionism had existed for centuries as a fact of Jewish and Christian thought. However, as a political

movement, it emerged only in the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Large scale persecution of the Jews in Eastern Europe and the widespread anti-Semitism in Russia gave birth to Jewish nationalistic feelings. As a result, in A.D. 1882 a Russian Jew named Leon Pinsker, first propounded the concept of Jewish nationalism.<sup>10</sup> However, it was Theodor Herzl, a Hungarian Jew and Journalist, who founded an organized political Zionism and gave a concrete shape to the nascent nationalistic feelings of the 'Jewish Diaspora'. In A.D. 1895, he wrote a political document entitled "Der Judenstaat" (The Jewish state), wherein he advocated the establishment of British sponsored Jewish colonization of Argentina or Palestine with a view to the eventual creation of a sovereign Jewish national state.<sup>11</sup> Before his death in A.D. 1904, Herzl had already initiated the efforts to gain the British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. And even after his death, the Zionist interest in England continued and was greatly intensified shortly after the outbreak of the World War I. This continuity was maintained by Chaim Weizmann, a

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9 Cited by Alan R. Taylor, Prelude to Israel : An Analysis of Zionist Diplomacy 1897-1947 (Beirut, 1970), p.1.

10 Khouri, n.6, p.3.

11 Taylor, n.9, p.4.

Jewish Chemist from Russia. Weizmann, because of his decade-long persuasive and persistent diplomatic manoeuvres with the British Government, succeeded in getting British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine in the form of the famous Balfour Declaration. Hard pressed by the war-time needs Britain sought to placate the Zionists so that the fruitful participation of Russia and America in the war could be ensured. Further, some senior British officials were influenced by Zionist arguments that a Jewish Palestine would enhance Britain's strategic and economic interest in West Asia.

Thus, the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917, named after the then British Foreign Secretary - Arthur James Balfour - which stated that, "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" was no sudden decision. It resulted from the coincidence of British and Jews streams of interest centring around Palestine and came as the culmination of various historical forces which had been gathering strength throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

But there was no legal sanction behind this declaration, nor had it been recognized by the international body.

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12 Palestine : A Study of Jewish Arab and British Policies (Published for the Foundation for Palestine, Inc., New Haven, London, 1947), vol.1, p.1.

This had to be done at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. The Zionist delegation exerted all its efforts to include the Balfour Declaration in the peace treaty. It pleaded for a British mandate over Palestine instead of granting independence to it as demanded by the Arab delegation - based on the Wilsonian principle of 'self-determination'. Arab appeals went unheeded, the Zionists succeeded.

The Allied powers went ahead with their own <sup>plans</sup> ~~plans~~. In total disregard to the report of the King-Crane Commission Britain was assigned mandate over Palestine (including Transjordan which was later formed into a separate state of Jordan) on 25 April 1920. The Balfour Declaration was included in the mandate provision as was evident from Article 4 of it which provided for the recognition of a Jewish Agency to cooperate with the mandatory power in creating a Jewish national home. On 22 July, 1922 Britain was confirmed as the mandatory power by the Council of the League of Nations.<sup>13</sup>

The Balfour Declaration was issued without the knowledge and consent of the Arabs. The Arabs took a serious note of this document. It not only contradicted the previous

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13 Taysir N. Nashif, The Palestine Arab and Jewish Political Leadership : A Comparative Study (Bombay, 1979), p.5.

British war-time promises contained in the well-known Hussein-MacMahon agreement,<sup>14</sup> but also reduced the majority Arab population of Palestine to non-existence by merely referring to it as "non-Jewish communities". Further, once the formal promises of the Balfour Declaration were legalised, the Zionists, with the support of the mandatory power, made relentless efforts to increase the number of Jews in Palestine so that the demographic character of the land could be tilted in their favour as early as possible.

For the Arabs, these developments came as a series of heavy blows - each one being more severe than the last - all directed against Palestine Arab national interests. It gave rise to Palestinian nationalism.

After the commencement of the mandate, large-scale Jewish immigration and land acquisition triggered increasingly violent Arab responses as the Arab community became more and more insecure about their future in their own

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14 The agreement, contained in the form of a letter, was between Sharif Hussein of Mecca and Sir Henry MacMahon, the British High Commissioner for Egypt, in which the letter promised to the Sharif that the Arabs would be given independence soon after the war if they fought with the Allied Forces against the Turks. On this basis, the Arabs had revolted against the Turks in 1916 which greatly weakened the Ottoman cause.

land which was being colonized by a foreign community.

Waves of immigration swelled the numbers of Jews in Palestine from 83,794 in 1922 to 1,84,210 in 1932. The resentment and unease experienced by Jews and Arabs led to the serious riots and disturbances of 1920, 1921, 1929, 1933 and almost continuously from 1936-1939.<sup>15</sup>

The rise of Hitler to power in Europe and his widespread anti-Semitism was to have a further disastrous effect on the Palestine situation. Hitler's merciless persecution of Jews on the one hand and the restrictive immigration policies of the Western countries on the other compelled the Nazi victims to seek refuge in Palestine by any means. This situation sent immigration figures soaring - some 60,000 Jews arrived in 1934 alone - and greatly changed the demographic character of Palestine. By 1939 the Jewish community reached 4,50,000 - about thirty percent of the total population.<sup>16</sup>

Of the above-mentioned disturbances, the 1936 general strike was the most important one. By then, the sweeping rise in Jewish immigration severely undermined the socio-economic status of the Palestine Arabs. To ward off these dangers and to press the British authority to change its

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15 Pamela Ferguson, The Palestine Problem (London, 1973), p.43.

16 Khouri, n.G. p.18.

pro-Zionist policy, the Arab Higher Committee (AHC) gave a call for a general strike in April 1936. The AHC demanded an end to Jewish immigration, a ban on land sales from Arabs to Jews and the establishment of a national government leading to an independent Arab Palestine. The Palestinian Arabs were greatly supported by the Arab world but it did not have any result. The strike had to be called off. The Royal Commission, headed by the Earl of Peel investigated the causes and recommended partition of Palestine as the only solution. The Palestine Arabs strongly rejected the idea of partition and further intensified their agitation. Acts of violence and insurgency continued till 1939. To pacify the Arabs, Britain convened a Round Table Conference in London in February, 1939 which also ended in failure. Nevertheless, for the first time the British government recognised the rights of Palestinian Arabs to be consulted to any issue relating to Palestine.

Then came the British White Paper of 1939, which put ceilings on Jewish immigration. This was for the first time that the mandatory power took a decision that went against the Zionist interest. The Jewish objection was obvious. They now mounted military attacks not only on Palestine Arabs but also on the British troops, while simultaneously continuing clandestine immigration. Thus, the Palestinian situation was extremely disturbing at the outbreak of the World War II.



During the war, there was a relative lull in Palestine. However, after the war thousands of survivors of German atrocities flooded into Palestine. The Arabs, though in a bad shape, violently opposed the immigration. And the internal situation in Palestine became anarchic as both sides indulged in insurgent operations. As fighting and terrorism increased, British forces and installations became the targets of both sides.

Unwilling to sustain continued casualties at a time when she was beset with internal political and economic instability because of the war, Britain decided to withdraw from Palestine. And in February 1947 the Palestine issue was thrown into the laps of the newly-created United Nations.

In the succeeding months, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) examined several possible solutions and finally recommended partition of Palestine into a Jewish state, an Arab state and an international area around Jerusalem. The Jews welcomed the idea and the Arabs strongly rejected it. Despite Arab opposition and intense diplomatic bargaining and lobbying at the United Nations, the UNSCOP plan was approved by the required two-thirds vote on 2 November 1947. But soon it became obvious that partition would be accomplished not by any diplomatic means but by armed confrontation between the Jews and the Arabs. And the Jews were well prepared for such an eventuality.

As the date for British withdrawal approached violence and disturbances increased in appalling proportion. On 15 May 1948 the British forces ceremonially withdrew their last detachments, the mandate came to an end, and the Palestine Jewish community declared the establishment of Israel as an independent state. At this critical juncture, the regular Arab armies of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan crossed into Palestine to rescue their Arab brethren who by then were in a precarious condition. The initial localized fighting took a new dimension and erupted into a full-fledged war. This was the first Arab-Israeli war which was destined to shape the course of West Asian history for years to come.

The combined Arab Forces proved little match to the well-trained and efficient Israel army - the Haganah. By early 1949 the Arabs had to accept the armistice agreements which brought the war to an end.

The war ended with far-reaching consequences. The consequences were frustrating for the Arabs and encouraging for the Jews. The war crushed the Palestinian resistance, the Arab armies were defeated, Palestine as an entity disappeared from the world map and the Arab inhabitants of it were thrown out of their ancestral homes. A majority of Palestine Arabs were displaced and condemned to be hapless refugees in the neighbouring Arab countries. A free independent

Arab Palestine, for which the inhabitants had been fighting since the Ottoman days, remained a dream. Neither a full-fledged Arab Palestine as demanded by the Arabs nor even a limited one as envisaged in the U.N. Partition plan, did ever emerge. On the other hand, the unthinkable, at least for the Arabs, happened. An alien community demanding its ascendancy to the area by some vague religious affiliations established a state of its own. The Jews occupied about thirty percent more territory than had been originally assigned to them in the proposed Jewish state. This was sheer usurpation and armed aggrandizement. The success of Israel's strategy confirmed her bias in favour of relying mainly on military options to solve her long-range political problems. This had to have far-reaching consequences on the conduct of West Asian diplomacy.

The war brought an end to one 'Diaspora' but only after giving birth to another, that of the Palestinians. Thus, the 'Palestinian Diaspora' consisting of thousands of Palestinian Arabs emerged. The original number of Palestinians is subject to debate: Arabs claim that about 900,000 left Palestine, the Israelis put it at 500,000, whereas the U.N. sources give a figure of 7,26,000. However, suffice it to say that there was a large-scale exodus of indigenous Palestinians in to the neighbouring countries of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq. Some even fled to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Trucial states. Approximately 1,60,000 -

1,70,000 Arabs remained in Israel and gradually took Israeli citizenship.<sup>17</sup>

Palestine Liberation Organization & Strategic and Political Dimensions

Once the Palestinians left their country, the Palestinian dimension of the conflict receded into the background. The political aspect of the conflict remained obscured and the whole issue was given a humanitarian colour. The problem of the Palestinians became a problem of 'refugees' and all international efforts were streamlined in that direction.

However, the dispersed, displaced and dispossessed Palestinians did not let their national identity and consciousness go down. It continued to be a dominant theme of their everyday life. Finding themselves in an unusual situation wherein they had to fight the grim battle of 'existence', the Palestinians retained their national consciousness and extended it to the emerging younger generation. And this younger generation had to form the nucleus of the Palestinian resistance Movement in the later years. They could never forget their historical ties with the land of Palestine and the idea of 'Return' took deep roots in their minds.

Although, the national consciousness of the Palestinians

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17 John W. Amos II, Palestinian Resistance & Organization of a Nationalist Movement (New York, 1980), pp.7-8.

was genuine, their social structure and political institutions had been shattered. Their old traditional leadership was miserably discredited in the war and ultimately destroyed. This resulted in a political vacuum which the exiled 'refugees' could not fill because of certain organizational difficulties arising from their being dispersed and to their being subject to the laws and regulations of the countries where they had taken shelter. Those Arab countries had obviously no interest in encouraging a separate national political organization, despite their proclaimed devotion to the Palestine cause.<sup>18</sup>

In view of the severe political and legal constraints imposed on the Palestinians by their host Arab countries - with relative exception of Egypt - an independent Palestinian national movement could not be organized.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the politically active Palestinians tried to identify themselves with various pan-Arab movements like Nasserism, the Ba'th and the Arab Nationalist Movement prevailing at that time in the Arab world. Another factor that tempted such a move was the widespread belief that the road to confrontation with Israel and the liberation of Palestine lay in a

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18 Rashid Hamid, "What is the PLO?", Journal of Palestine Studies (Beirut), vol.4, no.4, Summer 1975, p.91.

19 For a brief idea on the various legal and political constraints imposed by the host Arab countries, see Amos II, n.17, p.13.

strong and unified Arab action. Hence, they dedicated themselves to the cause of Arab unity thinking that the pan-Arab parties were seriously committed to the Palestine cause.

However, this attitude - of regarding Arab unity as the prerequisite for the liberation of Palestine - did not last long. And towards the late 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s there occurred a change in the Palestinian thinking.

The Suez war of 1956, made Nasser the hero of the Arab world but it could not restore Palestine to the Palestinians. Two major events in the Arab world in the beginning of 1960s further affected the Palestinian political thinking. In 1961 Syria ruptured the union with Egypt in the United Arab Republic and in the following year came the triumph of the Algerian Revolution. While the former exposed the theoretical rhetoricity of pan-Arab unity when tested on a practical political level, the latter event set an example that a successful war of liberation against foreign domination could be fought independently. Its impact on the young Palestinians was significant. It gave rise to a prolific growth of Palestinian organizations at one time reaching as many as thirty in all.<sup>20</sup>

These changes led to growing unrest among Palestinian militants that in turn compelled the Arab states to

project an independent Palestine entity through the creation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

The First Arab Summit Conference, called by Nasser, met in Cairo in January 1964, to discuss the Jordan River issue. At this conference, the Arab leaders accepted the principle of projection of the "Palestinian entity". Accordingly, a Palestine congress was convened in Jerusalem from 25 May - 2 June 1964 with delegates appointed by Ahmed Shukairy participating. The Congress announced the establishment of a Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). It also adopted the Palestine National Covenant (or Charter) and the PLO Constitution. Further, the Congress adopted various other resolutions aimed at creating an institutional infrastructure for the Palestinian community in various fields like political, administrative, military and finance. Thus, the various institutions like the Palestine National Council (PNC), the Executive Committee, the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), and the Palestine National Fund came into being. Shukairy was elected Chairman of the PLO Executive Committee.<sup>21</sup>

The PLO, created with the political, financial and military support of the Arab League, could hardly operate independently. Its appointments, organization, training and activities were decided by the Arab League, and in fact by

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21 Hamid, n.10, p.96.

Egypt.<sup>22</sup> Shukairy miserably failed to integrate the rising commando organizations with the main PLO leadership and to prepare the Palestinian masses for a war of liberation. He remained quite subservient to the patron Arab states so also the PLO strategy.

But the situation changed greatly after the commando organizations, led by Fatah, took control of the PLO in early 1969. This was because of two major developments: the decisive war of June 1967 and the battle of Kerameh.

The Six-Day war of June 1967 came as a disaster for the Arab states involved in it. (Egypt, Syria, Jordan). It unmasked Shukairy's incompetent leadership in leading the Palestine struggle. He was thoroughly discredited as much as his patron Arab regimes were. Their verbal extremism and militancy was no match to the Israeli military success. For the Palestinians, it proved once and for all that the dependence on Arab regimes and their armies to liberate Palestine would lead nowhere. The commando groups began to call for the creation of Palestinian organization that would be independent of control by Arab states. The fact that the PLO was in need of a revolutionary strategy and policy became very clear. The old slogan that "Arab unity was the road to the liberation of Palestine" was reversed to read that the

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22 Aryeh Y. Kofat and Yuval Armon-Ghanna, PLO: Strategy and Politics (London, 1981), p.22.



liberation of Palestine would be the Path to Arab unity.<sup>23</sup>  
 The commando groups appeal for a revolutionary armed struggle gained mass-support. They too, in turn lost no time in seizing the opportune moment.

The next event that caused a change in the traditional PLO leadership and its priorities was the battle of Karamah fought on 21 March 1968. The Israelis crossed the Jordan river and entered the village of al-Karamah. The 'fedayeen' confronted them directly and inflicted heavy casualties. At a time when the whole Arab world was submerged in the humiliation of 1967 defeat, the resistance movement emerged as the only force still engaged in fighting the Israelis and refusing to accept the defeat of 1967. The battle of Karamah was a great victory for the propagators of armed struggle and tremendously boosted the morale of Palestinians and the Arab masses in general. In one day, it changed the overwhelmingly defeatist atmosphere in the Arab world.<sup>24</sup>

These two developments increased the popularity of the commando groups. Shukairy had to step down. For a brief period the PLO leadership remained with Yahya Hammouda, who tried to integrate the rising revolutionary commando groups

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23 William B. Quandt, Fuad Jabber and Ann Mosely Lesch, The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism (Berkeley, 1973), p.52.

24 Rayyes and Nahas, n.20, p.30.

by bringing about some changes in the functioning and strategy of the PLO. But it was too late and by early 1969 the commando groups took control of the PLO. On 1 February 1969, the Palestine National Council met in Cairo wherein it elected a new Executive Committee and Yasser Arafat (Abou Ammar) the Fatah leader, became the Chairman of the PLO.<sup>25</sup>

Since then the PLO became a loose alliance or a co-ordinating body of several 'fedayeen' organizations (the commando groups are also known as 'fedayeen' groups or 'Resistance' groups).

With the change in leadership, there occurred a change in the basic objective, strategy and tactics of the PLO. To bring about these changes the original Charter of 1964 was suitably revised and several new additions were made in 1969. The revised Charter, as it exists today, greatly differs from the original one. The important changes were brought through Articles 9, 21 and 28. Article 9 clearly stated that, "the armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine, it is therefore a strategy and not a tactic". Article 21, emphasized the "complete liberation Palestine" whereas Article 28 sought to assert the originality and independence of the Palestinian revolution and strongly

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Mehmood Hussain, The PLO : A Study in Ideology, Strategy and Tactics (Delhi, 1975), p. 26.

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"rejects all kinds of interference, tutelage and subservience"<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the objective and strategy of the PLO became very clear. The objective was "total liberation of Palestine" and the strategy to attain that objective was "armed struggle". But as the PLO consists of various commando groups, there are some ideological differences in achieving the objective, as also the tactics to carry out the strategy. Hence the ideological and tactical differences amongst the 'fedayeen' groups within the PLO. A brief reference to the various groups would make this point clear.

The Palestine National Liberation Movement, generally known by its Arabic acronym Fatah, is the oldest, largest and most influential of the contending resistance groups.<sup>27</sup> The origins of the movement are hard to trace in detail. But its creation certainly goes back to 1959.<sup>28</sup> By the beginning of 1965, Al-Assifa (The Tempest), Fatah's military wing launched its major operation against Israel and blew up the main pump in Eitan.<sup>29</sup> However, it was only after the battle of Karamah that Fatah came to limelight.

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26 Arab World Weekly (Beirut), no.23, March 22, 1969, pp.1-iv.

27 The Arabic name is Harakat al-Tahrir al-Filastini.

28 Royyes and Nahas, n.20, p.28.

29 Hussain, n.25, p.20.

Because of its desire to be dynamic and a dislike for ideological sophistication, Fatah has rarely defined its ideology in explicit terms.<sup>30</sup> Although Fatah appears to be conservative in relation to other groups, it is difficult to accuse it of being a fundamentally conservative movement. Of course, it is heavily representative of the Islamic Arab nationalist orientation and Muslim religious motivations - like calling 'Jihad' against the Israeli occupiers, issuing communiques in the name of "Allah, the magnificent, the merciful..." - are clearly apparent in Fatah than in any other group. But it also has a powerful socialist, secularist wing.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, using Muslim slogans may be a tactic to win over the conservative elements of the Arab world. The mere fact that it does not have a Marxist-Leninist line of thinking can hardly make it less progressive and revolutionary. It obviously believes in a Palestinian revolution and rejects the status quo. On the point whether the revolution should be all-Arab, Fatah stresses the Palestinian motivations. It strongly rejects the dependence of the Palestinian revolution on the Arab regimes though it welcomes their cooperation.

On armed struggle it has opted for "small war tactics" as the most rewarding in the struggle against Israel. Fatah's

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30 Ibid., pp.29-30.

31 Amos II, n.17, pp.44-45.

military doctrine to a large extent has been modelled on Chinese and north Vietnamese principles of guerilla warfare; various terms like "people's war", "base area" and "self-reliance" have been frequently found in Fatah propaganda.<sup>32</sup> Further, it has generally argued that political action and armed struggle are inseparable. And that is the reason why it has opted for a cautious armed struggle.<sup>33</sup>

The next important organization in the PLO is the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The PFLP, headed by George Habash, came into being on 7 December 1967, by a merger of three organizations : the Vengeance Youth, the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) and the Heroes of the Return, led by Nayif Hawatmah, Ahmed JabZul and Wajih al-Madani respectively.<sup>34</sup>

The PFLP has adopted a Marxist-Leninist ideology. In addition to "Zionism", it has identified two other enemies to fight: "imperialism" and "Arab reactionaries" (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, etc.). It regards itself a part of "world revolutionary forces" with its allies, the Cubans, the Vietnamese, North Koreans, Chinese, but less so, the Soviets as the Soviets call for a political settlement. The struggle to

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32 Yodfat and Ohanna, n.22, p.24.

33 Quandt and others, n.23, pp.114-15.

34 Ibid., pp.59-60.

liberate Palestine has been considered to be a part of the general world-revolution that will be both political and social. It rejects Fatah's somewhat undefined nationalist approach to the Palestine struggle against Zionism in favour of a class-oriented analysis. Emphasising on secularism it discards the role of religion in Arab society and espouses a theory of revolutionary change in traditional social customs. Further, while Fatah stresses Palestinian interests first and only after it Arabism, the PFLP reverses the priorities, stating the long term aim to be not the establishment of a Palestinian state but the consummation of Arab unity. It does not believe in cooperation with the Arab regimes, though it has retained connections with Iraq and People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY).<sup>35</sup>

On the strategy of armed struggle, the PFLP has opted for a more radical tactic of "international terrorism" or what it calls "foreign operations". This is in sharp contrast to Fatah's cautious armed struggle and small war tactic. Believing in world-revolution it aims at involving the parties not directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict. To become a successful international terrorist group, it has established ties with other terrorist organisations like the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the German Dader-Meinhoff,

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35      Yodfat and Ohanna, n.22, p.25.

the Japanese Red Army and the Italian Red Brigades. The act of international terrorism was initiated with the hijacking of an El Al plane to Algeria in July 1968. The most notorious hijacking took place in September 1970 when four airliners were hijacked one of which was blown up at the Cairo airport. The PFLP has justified such activities by stating that they keep the Palestinian problem alive and make the international community conscious of its existence, while simultaneously inflicting injuries on the enemy.<sup>36</sup>

A severe ideological quarrel between the 'left' and the 'right' plagued the PFLP around August 1968, when George Habbash was in jail. Towards early 1969, Nayif Hawatmah, representing the PFLP-left, broke away from the main group and formed the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP).<sup>37</sup>

The PDFLP has adopted an extreme Marxist-Leninist ideology. It argues that the liberation of Palestine cannot be achieved unless all the Arab regimes joined hands in the battle against Israel and imperialism. Like the PFLP, it claims that the Palestine revolution is a part of the Arab revolution. And since the Arab revolution will be a part of the world-wide revolution, the PDFLP established contacts

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36 Ibid., p.26.

37 Ammos II, n.17, p.79.

with international revolutionary movements like European Trotskyites.<sup>38</sup> In contrast to Fatah's nationalist phase of the revolution, the PDFLP, like the PFLP, puts emphasis on national liberation as well as class struggle and accuses the Fatah having a bourgeois leadership acceptable to the Arab regimes.<sup>39</sup>

On the armed struggle, the PDFLP has generally followed the conservative and confrontation tactic propounded by Fatah. It agrees with the Fatah that guerilla attacks are necessary to force any Israeli concession, but international terrorism is harmful for the long-term political goals of the Resistance Movement.<sup>40</sup>

The next group, which is again an offshoot of the PFLP, is the popular front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command (PFLP-GC). It came into being in October 1968, when Ahmed Jibjil, representing the PFLP-right faction, decided to withdraw from the PFLP to form his own organization. It joined the PLO only in 1974.<sup>41</sup>

As its very name suggests, it is basically a military body and as such has no clear-cut ideology.

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38 Rayyes and Nahas, n.20, p.46.

39 Hussain, n.25, p.35.

40 Amos II, n.17, p.81.

41 Rayyes and Nahas, n.20, p.50.



On the armed struggle, like PFLP, the GC also believes in international terrorism and has gained reputation of being one of the toughest guerilla organizations. Its first action in this regard was to blow up a Swissair Jet en route to Tel-Aviv in February 1970. The most spectacular terrorist act it has performed so far is a suicide raid on Qiryat Shmoneh on 11 April 1974, in which over twenty people including the raiders were killed.<sup>42</sup> It does not believe in any peaceful solution and political issues are considered to be a waste of time.

With the growth of the commando groups the reputation and prestige of the Palestinian movement increased considerably. The Arab states, who were somewhat contemptuous of the militant activities earlier, took interest in having control over it by sponsoring some other groups, loyal to them, within the PLO. Several states including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Iraq tried but only the last two have succeeded in having their own Palestinian organizations; As-Sa'iqe and the Arab Liberation Front (ALF) respectively.

The Syrian-sponsored Sa'iqe claims to be the second biggest group in PLO, after Fatah. It has been fully financed, armed and trained by the Syrian Ba'ath party. Not surprisingly,

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42 Ammos II, n.17, p.90.

therefore, Saiga is one with the Ba'ath party on the Palestinian question. Among other things, it holds the view that Palestinian revolution is an integral part of the pan-Arab revolution and sees no justification for the establishment of a separate Palestinian state. On the contrary, it opt<sup>s</sup> for a union with other Arab countries under Syria's leadership. Hence the missing of the word "Palestine" from the name of the organization. It presented itself as an alternative to Al-Fatah and has been trying to takeover the political and military lead from it ever since its entry in 1968.<sup>43</sup> But it lacks the popularity of Fatah among the masses and influence over the commando groups.

Syrian efforts to gain control and influence over the Palestinian movement triggered similar tendencies on the part of the rival Ba'ath regime which came to power in July 1968 in Iraq. Quarrels with Fatah as well as the desire to contain the Syrian influence led the Iraqis to sponsor their own Palestinian organization, the Arab Liberation Front (ALF) in 1969.<sup>44</sup>

Here also the missing of the word "Palestine" is to be noted. Hence, ALF puts emphasis on Arab rather than the Palestinian character of the movement. Further, like

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43 Yodfat and Ohanna, n.22, p.27.

44 Quandt and others, n.23, p.65.

Saiqa it also does not favour the creation of Palestine as a new and separate state. Instead, it speaks for the liberation of Palestine and its simultaneous merger with the existing Arab territories, in the interest of the Pan-Arab unity, under the leadership of the Iraqi Ba'ath party.<sup>45</sup>

From the above analysis, it is quite clear that with the commandos taking over the PLO, the movement acquired a militant character. All groups, with the possible exception of Fatah, firmly believe in the armed struggle as the only way to liberate Palestine and thereby reject any political solution of the problem. That is the reason why the PLO rejects all possible efforts—like the Resolution 242 and the Rogers plan — aimed at bringing a solution to the problem. Moreover, the amended Charter itself spoke about armed struggle as "the only way" to liberate Palestine (Article 9) leaving out the political option totally. Hence the lack of a political strategy and full reliance on military strategy.

The strategy of armed struggle as "the only way" faced a severe test in the Jordanian civil war of September 1970. In this civil war, the 'fedayeen' groups engaged in an open confrontation with the Jordanian army. The commando groups received a shattering blow but were saved from complete annihilation by the intervention of Arab states.

Their military power was badly smashed and the single-track strategy of armed struggle was found wanting. These developments demanded an urgent re-appraisal and review of the PLO strategy. The situation demanded that some other methods - notably political - would have to exist along with the military one, though it could not replace it altogether. Accordingly, some modifications towards a political process were introduced. The resolutions at the Eighth Palestinian National Congress of March 1971 defined armed struggle as the "principal way" to liberation, which obviously meant that there existed some other ways too.<sup>46</sup> The fact that the military strategy was not enough was to be felt more pronouncedly in the aftermath of the 1973 war.

United States Policy and the  
Palestine Problem Before 1973

American involvement in Palestine dates back to the days of the Balfour Declaration. Since then, the American involvement became more and more and the trend continues even today. The American Palestine policy before 1973 can be divided into three phases: pre-1948 period, from 1948 to to 1967 and, from 1967 till the outbreak of the 1973 war. During all these phases, the American policy has been shaped by two important factors : internal and external. The former

refers mostly to Zionist influence, sometimes even pressure, the latter to the developments in the world in general and in that region in particular. The Jewish factor is a constant one while the external factor is changing from time to time and the U.S. policy-makers formulate their policies accordingly.

Pre-1948 Period: In the pre-1948 period, it was the decisions of the three American Presidents - Wilson, Roosevelt and Truman - that formed the foundations of Americans policy towards Palestine. During this period the Americans had no policy towards the 'Palestinians' as such, all that they had was a policy towards the 'area' and not the native inhabitants who lived in it. In other words, the Palestinians were a 'non-people' or at best the 'non-Jewish population' in the eyes of the policy-makers.<sup>47</sup>

During the months just before the Balfour Declaration was issued, President Woodrow Wilson was under great pressure to join with Britain in enunciating the policy of a Jewish national home in Palestine. Though, Wilson did not officially commit the U.S. to the Balfour Declaration, his tacit approval of it greatly encouraged Balfour to issue the declaration. President Wilson's interest in Zionism was nurtured by the persons who surrounded him, particularly the

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47 Mohammed K. Shadid, The United States and the Palestinians (London, 1981), p.25.

Supreme Court Justice Louise Brandeis, an ardent Zionist. The American Zionists succeeded in securing Wilson's guarded approval of the Balfour Declaration.<sup>48</sup> This marked the beginning of American sympathy for the Zionist cause which became more propounded during the critical period of 1939-48.

Since Wilson, Roosevelt was the first American President who was faced with the dilemma of making hard decisions for the United States towards Palestine. In the meantime two important developments had taken place. First, the British White Paper of 1939 - which put severe restriction on Jewish immigration - marked the first anti-Zionist posture of Britain. Second, the Zionists had shifted their base of political operation from London to Washington. With this the Zionist movement in America grew rapidly and became more united as is evident from the Biltmore Programme of 1942. In Washington, the Zionist politicians tried very hard to obtain a political commitment, from President Roosevelt. But they met with little success. President Roosevelt remained relatively immune to most Zionist pressure. Moreover, because of the overriding concern with the winning of the war, neither the White House nor the State Department could formulate a realistic policy on West Asia. Nevertheless, Roosevelt had taken the most significant decision on

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Michael E. Jansen, The United States and the Palestine People (Beirut, 1970), p.8.

behalf of the Zionists in 1943, when he urged the British government to permit the entry of 1,00,000 Jewish refugees to Palestine. This obviously substantiated the Zionist claim that Palestine must be reserved as the ultimate refuge of the world's Jews.<sup>49</sup>

However, it was Truman, Roosevelt's successor, who had to take the most crucial decision with regard to Palestine. President Truman's basic outlook on the Palestine situation was shaped by his support for the provisions of the Balfour Declaration and his sympathy for the survivors of Hitler's racism. In his memoirs, he himself admitted this fact when he said,

The Balfour Declaration, promising the Jews the opportunity to re-establish a homeland in Palestine, had always seemed to me to go hand in hand with the noble policies of Woodrow Wilson, especially the principle of self-determination. .... This promise should be kept just as all promises made by responsible, civilized governments should be kept.

On the Nazi victims he said,

The plight of the victims who had survived the mad genocide of Hitler's Germany was a challenge to western civilization, and as President, I undertook to do something about it. One of the solutions being proposed was a national Jewish home.(50)

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49 Shadid, n.47, pp.31-32.

50 Harry S. Truman, *H Memoirs : Years of Trial and Hope, 1946-1952* (New York, 1965), vol.2, pp.158-9.

This pro-Zionist leanings of the President, coupled with the heaviest Zionist pressure produced two most rewarding results for the Zionist diplomacy.<sup>51</sup> First was the U.S. support for the U.N. Partition Resolution. The U.S. played a great role in acquiring the required two-thirds support for the partition plan. The second, which was more significant still was the American recognition of the newly-born Zionist state of Israel. On 15 May 1948 - with the termination of the British mandate the Zionists declared the establishment of the state of Israel and within a few hours, the United States granted de facto recognition to the new state. A few days later the Soviet Union also recognized the state of Israel.

Traditionally, the United States has been cautious in recognizing new governments. But this hasty recognition of Israel marked a departure from the established practice and to a great extent showed with what success the Zionists conducted their operations in the United States.<sup>52</sup>

Second Phase Recognition of Israel was not all that Truman did, he further committed the United States to the survival

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51 For more detail on how the Zionist diplomacy succeeded in achieving American support, see Taylor, n.9, Chapter VIII.

52 Ibid., p.106.



and security of that state,<sup>53</sup> with this the American sympathy towards Zionism was converted to American commitment for Israel - the symbol of Zionism. This commitment should be viewed in the context of the changing world situation. After the second World War, Britain ceased to be the mighty world power and U.S. and Soviet Union emerged as the two super powers. The strategic and economic importance of the area in which Israel existed became more important. Hence Israel was not only the success of Zionism but outpost for Western imperial interests. The commitment made by Truman has been reiterated by all succeeding American Presidents.

As stated earlier, the creation of Israel led to the first Arab-Israeli war which made thousands of Palestinians homeless and dispersed. The American policy for the Palestinians emerged which viewed them as mere "refugees". The Palestinian problem was viewed as a part of the world refugee problem and accordingly the American efforts were streamlined to solve this human problem. The political side of the problem - right to self determination and independence - was completely forgotten. Moreover, the American policy makers linked the refugee problem with the general problem of resolving the wider Arab-Israeli dispute. Thus, in the post-1948 period, the U.S. policy on the Palestinian problem

operated essentially on two levels: (1) it continued to support financially to improve the pathetic living conditions of the refugees and (2) it repeatedly attempted to bring about a workable solution to the refugee problem and thereby a resolution of the issues between Israel and the Arab states. This approach was based on the idea that once the refugee problem was solved, other problems would automatically fall into place for a final settlement.<sup>54</sup>

This was sought to be achieved through economic proposals and plans and also by political efforts.

Most of the economic proposals were through the United Nations. The most important of these was the establishment of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for the Palestinian refugees. The UNRWA consisting of U.S., France, Great Britain and Turkey, was established by the U.N. General Assembly in 1949 as per the report, submitted by Gordon Clapp. The U.S., no doubt, paid almost sixty percent of the UNRWA budget but it had no real commitment or power to ensure resettlement in the Arab world. Its priorities were different, the refugees did not seem to be an immediate political problem and the situation continued without any sign of improvement.<sup>55</sup> Then came the Blandford plan which

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54 Ibid., p.43.

55 David P. Forsythe, "The Palestine Question : Dealing with a Long-Term Refugee Situation", The Annals (London), 467, May 1983, p.93.

asked that the General Assembly seek \$ 250 million for a programme of assistance to West Asian governments 'for the relief and reintegration of Palestinian refugees'. This too could not make much progress because of Arab opposition.<sup>56</sup>

The Eisenhower administration marked further efforts and new enthusiasm to solve the refugee problem. During this period, two important proposals were put forward; the Johnston proposal and the Dulles plan.<sup>57</sup> Both the plans merely emphasized resettlement through economic development as the solution of the refugee problem. As usual, these proposals were rejected by the Arab states.

Thus in all these proposals the basic thrust was on an economic approach to solve the refugee problem bypassing any political solution.

After the failure of the economic efforts, the American policy-makers shifted their attention towards

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<sup>56</sup> Shadid, n.47, p.62.

<sup>57</sup> The Johnston proposal aimed at tapping the Jordanian river water for irrigation and electrical power to provide employment for the refugees who would be tempted to resettle. Dulles proposed a comprehensive mediatory effort, in which the U.C. agreed to contribute to an international fund for compensation to the Palestinians, to help in the adjustments of the borders between the Arab states and Israel, and to enter into security treaties with Israel and its neighbours.

political efforts, though they did not abandon the economic attempts altogether. The process started in the beginning of the 1960s with President Kennedy.

The brief period of Kennedy administration raised some hopes in the Arab world for the solution of the Palestinian problem. He tried to improve US relations with the Arab world by exchange of letters with the Arab leaders. He reiterated the American support for all the UN resolutions aimed at solving the problem and tried to use American influence to establish a just and peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute. As a result, the refugee question was given increased attention by the US through the Palestine Conciliation Committee (PCC) of which it was a member. However, the Kennedy administration too failed to do anything concrete.<sup>58</sup>

Then came the Johnson Administration which did not do anything significant prior to the June War of 1967. The June War of 1967 brought a significant change in the dimensions and nature of the Palestine refugee problem. In addition to the more than one million Palestinian

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Bernard Reich, Quest for Peace & United States Israel Relations and the Arab-Israeli Conflict (New Jersey, 1977), pp.39-40.

refugees, hundreds of thousands more were made homeless by the war. This time the refugees were not only the Palestinians but there were about half a million Syrian and Egyptian refugees from the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula respectively. About 2,50,000 Palestinians fled from the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>59</sup>

On 19 June 1967 shortly after the ceasefire, President Johnson came out with his peace proposal containing five-principles. The most important element of his proposal, with regard to the refugees, was the President's call for "justice for the refugees". These principles, to a great extent, were incorporated in the U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 of 22 November 1967 which, among other things, called for a "just settlement of the refugee problem" and a "just and lasting peace in the Middle East". Resolution 242 remained basically vague as it did not define as to what constituted a "just settlement".<sup>60</sup>

For the Americans, the problem of the Palestinians still remained one of resettlement and integration. No

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59 Shadid, n.47, p.73.

60 Reich, n.58, pp.84-85.

doubt the U.S. call for "justice for the refugees" marked a shift but that was conditioned to be solved within the framework of an overall Arab-Israeli settlement.

Third Phase: The aftermath of 1967, as stated earlier, marked the re-emergence of the Palestinian nationalism in a militant form. The PLO leadership passed into the hands of the commando groups who indulged in large-scale international terrorism to reactivate the Palestinian issue. The United States decried those acts in no uncertain terms and branded the Palestinian groups as "terrorist groups". But it did nothing concrete to solve their genuine problems. On the other hand, it shifted its emphasis to reconciliation of Israel and the Arab states.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the U.S. became more and more concerned with the territorial aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict rather than political settlement of the Palestinian problem.

In the meantime the Nixon administration had come whose major initiative came in the form of the Rogers plan. In a public speech on 9 December 1969, Secretary of State William Rogers emphasized four main points: peace, security,

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61 Shadid, n.47, p.82.

withdrawal and territory. On the Palestinian issue Rogers recognized that:

There can be no lasting peace without the just settlement of those Palestinians whom the wars of 1948 and 1967 have made homeless. . . . There is a new consciousness among the young Palestinians who have grown up since 1948 which needs to be channeled away from bitterness and frustration toward hope and justice. (62)

This was the first official American recognition of Palestinian consciousness, but not of their rights. Rogers himself, in another press conference on 23 December 1969, rejected the possibility of dealing directly with any of the Palestinian guerilla groups. He insisted that the concerned parties - meaning Egypt, Jordan and Israel - should settle the refugee problem.<sup>63</sup> However, because of various internal and external opposition the plan failed to make any progress.

Roger's second initiative came at a time when the Palestinian 'fedayeen' was fighting with Israel from the Jordanian front and Egypt was conducting a war of

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62 "A Lasting Peace in the Middle East: An American View", address by Secretary Rogers on 9 December 1969, Department of State Bulletin (Washington, D.C.), vol.62, no.1593, 5 January 1970, pp.9-10.

63 *Ibid.*, vol.62, no.1594, 12 January 1970, p.24.

attrition across the Suez Canal against Israeli forces in Sinai. Through his simple formula of 'stop shooting and start talking' Rogers proposed a ceasefire on 19 June 1970. The precise intention of Rogers was to ensure a commitment from Egypt and Jordan to control the 'fedayeen' activities, who had been opposing any political settlement based on his proposals of Resolution 242. And to a great extent he succeeded when the initiative was accepted not only by Jordan but also by Egypt. This led to the ultimate defeat of the 'fedayeen' in the Jordanian civil war and Palestinian armed resistance to Israeli occupation was considerably weakened. The Palestinian movement suffered immensely, as it lost its operation base in Jordan.

In the 1970-73 period, the Palestinian issue was pushed even further into the background and did not become a focus of American efforts. Paradoxically, during this period statements by officials of the Nixon administration showed increased cognizance of the Palestinians as an entity and a people with 'legitimate interests and aspiration'.<sup>64</sup> This was evident from the statements made by important officials like Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco, State Department Spokesman John King etc. However, their statements were qualified. For instance Mr. King, while



admitting the need for a Palestinian entity and the legitimate interests and aspirations of the Palestinians, made it clear that the U.S. would not directly deal with the Palestinians. He said, it would only deal with the established Arab governments.<sup>65</sup>

Thus before 1973 the U.S. policy towards the Palestine problem shifted from first regarding the Palestinians as the "non-Jewish" "population" of Palestine, then as "refugees" and finally as "terrorists".

Conclusions: As per the historical record, Palestine was under the Muslim Arab rule since A.D. 638 with short exceptions. Notwithstanding the historical truth, the modern Zionist Jews mooted the idea of establishing a sovereign Jewish national state in Palestine towards the end of the nineteenth century. Their claim - based on some vague biblical connection -- received the support and sympathy of the British Government, the then mandatory power. This was vehemently opposed by the native Palestinian Arabs and resulted in a series of confrontations between the Jews and the Palestinian Arabs. Finally, the Zionists succeeded in establishing an independent Jewish state of Israel (1948) in the Arab land of Palestine. With the creation of Israel

emerged the 'Palestinian Problem' Palestine as an entity disappeared from the world map and the native Arab inhabitants of it became homeless refugees in the neighbouring Arab countries and beyond.

Once the indigenous Palestinians left their country, the political dimension of the problem remained obscured and the whole issue was given a humanitarian colour under the broad heading of 'Refugee Problem'. For a period of sixteen years the Palestinians could not organize a national movement -- independent of the host Arab countries -- to regain their occupied homeland from the Zionists despite the presence of genuine nationalistic feelings in them. It was only in 1964 that the Arab states felt compelled to create an independent Palestinian entity in view of the rising militant nationalistic feelings among the younger generation. Thus came the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). But the newly created organization could hardly function independently and remained subservient to the patron Arab states. The PLO leadership failed to chalk out an independent strategy for the struggle. Two major events -- the Six-day war of June 1967 and the battle of Kerameh -- brought about a great change in the PLO leadership, objective and strategy. The commando groups, led by Fatah, took control of the PLO in early 1969. The commandos, despite their ideological and tactical differences firmly believed in the "total liberation

of Palestine" through "armed struggle". The movement acquired a militant character and rejected any peaceful solution of the problem. Exclusive reliance on a single-track strategy of armed struggle proved inadequate in the light of the Jordanian civil war experience. A review of the situation brought a change in the PLO strategy. Armed struggle then came as the "principal way" instead of the "only way" to liberation.

American involvement in Palestine is as old as the Balfour Declaration is. Its Palestine policy before 1973 can be divided into three phases: pre-1948 period, from 1948 to 1967 and from 1967 till the outbreak of the 1973 war. During all these phases the U.S. policy has been shaped by two important factors - the non-changing Jewish factor in American domestic politics and the changing world and regional politics. During the first phase the foundation of American Palestine policy was laid down by the decisions of three American Presidents - Wilson, Roosevelt and Truman. Truman made the most important decision with regard to Palestine. He not only accorded immediate recognition to the Zionist state of Israel but further committed in U.S. to security and survival. This commitment shaped the American policy towards the Palestinian problem in the post-1948 period. During the second phase, the dispersed Palestinians were viewed as mere "refugees" and the Palestinian problem was regarded as a part of the world refugee problem. Various economic and political efforts were taken to solve the problem. But the problem

remained unresolved as all the American efforts aimed at simply touching the humanitarian part - resettlement and integration - of the problem totally ignoring the political dimension of it - the Palestinians' right to self-determination and independence. Even the 1967 war did not cause any major change in the American approach towards the problem. President Johnson's peace proposal in the form of Resolution 242 remained basically vague and inadequate. The third phase was marked by the re-emergence of a militant Palestinian nationalism resulting in wide scale international terrorism. The U.S. decried those acts and branded the Palestinians as "terrorists". No concrete effort was made to fulfil the genuine political demands of the Palestinians. On the contrary the American policymakers put emphasis on the territorial aspect of the overall Arab-Israeli problem. Even Secretary of State Rogers's two initiatives failed to bring any solution. While the first initiative recognised the Palestinian consciousness (but not their rights) the second one aimed more at crippling the 'fedayeen' aspirations than to enhance them.

## Chapter II

### THE KISSINGER DIPLOMACY

#### The 1973 Arab-Israel War

The October war of 1973 was the fourth war between the Arabs and Israel since 1948. The implications and consequences of the war were far-reaching for the Arabs, Israel, the U.S., and certainly for the Palestinians. As for the Soviet Union, it had a very minor role in shaping the events that preceded or followed the war. Before discussing the war and its consequences, it is worth while to look at the compulsions behind it.

Compulsions: The otherwise tension ridden West Asian region remained deceptively calm in the period between September-1970 (Jordanian Crisis) and the October 1973 war. This was the period of American "standstill" or "preventive" diplomacy towards this area. The acceptance of Roger's second initiative brought a ceasefire between Egypt and Israel - which both the parties preferred to continue - and the suppression of the Palestinian guerrillas in Jordan put an end to the 'fedayeen' activities. The area remained relatively tension-free. After making some half-hearted attempts - like the revival of the Jarring mission, the interim Suez agreement, the proximity talks etc. - the Americans preferred a status quo situation in this area. They followed a policy aimed at simply containing the conflict and preventing an all-out war in the West-Asian region

without venturing on any new initiative to bring about a final settlement of the deadlock. The Arab-Israeli issue ceased to be a policy-priority for the American diplomats till October 1973. However, the American diplomatic passivity should be viewed in a much broader perspective of the internal and international circumstances prevailing at that point of time. Internally, the Presidential election year was approaching. At such a time no President would dare take any important decision on the sensitive Arab-Israeli issue keeping in view the importance of American Jewish community in the electoral politics of the country. On the external front the Administration was intensely pre-occupied with other problems of much more significance like the Vietnam war, the Peking-initiative and the Strategic Arms Limitation Talk (SALT) with the Soviet Union. President Nixon and his National Security Adviser Henry A. Kissinger preferred to concentrate more on these problems so that the President would be able to face the American electorate with a bunch of foreign policy achievements. Further, on the Arab-Israeli issue, instead of taking any new initiative Nixon focussed his attention on maintaining the military balance of the region in Israel's favour. That was the reason why there was a significant increase (almost tenfold) in military aid to Israel. After the Jordan crisis, in fiscal years 1971, 1972 and 1973 Israel received military credits of \$ 546

million, \$ 300 million and \$ 307.5 million respectively.<sup>1</sup> This would not only maintain Israel's military superiority over the Arabs but also hail Nixon as the champion of Israel's security concerns. This once again explains to what extent the American West Asian policy could be influenced and shaped by global developments and American domestic politics.

Moreover, the idea of preventive diplomacy was based on the theory of "military superiority". It was believed that a militarily superior Israel would not strike preemptively against the Arab forces. On the same logic, the Arabs dare not attack the far superior Israeli forces and even if they did, Israel would have sufficient power to absorb the shock and regain an upper hand in the battle. Further, it was assumed that, a more secure and strong Israel would not hesitate to take part in peace negotiations and would be willing to make concessions. Similarly, the less-powerful Arab states would avoid the path of confrontation - with a militarily powerful Israel - and concentrate more on negotiations to regain their lost territories.<sup>2</sup>

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1 William E. Quandt, Decade of Decisions: American Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict. (Berkeley, 1977), p.163.

2 Mohammed K. Shadiq, The United States and the Palestinians (London, 1981), p.98.

This status quo oriented diplomacy of the Americans caused a great deal of frustration and disillusionment in the Arab world in general and Egypt in particular. Ever since 1967, the front line Arab states -- more particularly Egypt -- had been toying with the idea of regaining their lost territories. The crucial role played by Egypt in this regard is worth-mentioning.

In October 1970, Anwar El-Sadat succeeded Nasser as the President of Egypt. President Sadat declared that 1971 would be the "year of Decision" when he would decide whether to have a "peaceful solution or go to war."<sup>3</sup> 1971 passed without any decision. Then came the fateful decision of President Sadat to expel the Soviet military experts from Egypt on 16 July 1972. The Americans failed to exploit such a momentous decision. Instead they, along with their Israeli friends, misinterpreted it to mean that Egypt had finally decided not to fight a battle on its own. President Sadat said that this misinterpretation was "an erroneous conclusion" and served his "strategy" well.<sup>4</sup> This might be an exaggerated observation. But the fact remained that it was a lost opportunity on the part of the Americans to prevent a war and move toward a settlement. The United States still continued with its stalled diplomacy.

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3 Anwar El-Sadat, In Search of Identity: An Autobiography (Fontana, 1978), p.271.

4 Ibid., p.276.



President Sadat tolerated this with the hope that after the Presidential elections in November something could be done. President Nixon's re-election to the White House brought no change in the U.S. policy. Sadat took another initiative to induce some change in the American attitude. He sent Hafiz Ismail, his National Security Adviser, to hold talks with Henry Kissinger (Ismail's American counterpart) to Paris in February 1973. The Paris talks too failed to produce any result. Sadat could no more tolerate the American diplomatic inactivity and decided to break the deadlock by going to war. Accordingly, he vigorously tried to prepare for the battle both on the domestic front as well as the Arab front. More than £ E 127 million were spent on the preparation for the war. He also made an extensive tour around the whole Arab world and the African countries to rally their support behind his decisive move. Contacts with the Syrian President Hafez al-Assad were always there.<sup>6</sup> Another important development in the Arab world was the assumption by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia of a more prominent role in Arab affairs and his decision to use 'oil power' for political ends. This greatly boosted the determination of Egypt and Syria that a military gamble was preferable to going on with the intolerable status quo.<sup>6</sup> The situation of 'no war no peace'

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5 Ibid., pp.285-88.

6 Shadid, n.2, p.09.

had to be broken. The whole Arab world was one on this point. Finally, the 'D-Day' was fixed on 6 October - the Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement.

The War At 1400 hours on Saturday 6 October 1973, a determined and well-prepared Egyptian Air Force of 222 supersonic Jets - launched a major offensive across the Suez canal. The air strike was soon followed by the roaring of Egyptian artillery and more than 3000 field guns began to bombard their targets.<sup>7</sup> The Egyptian offensive on the Southern (Suez) front was synchronized by an equally strong Syrian offensive on the Golan Heights, the northern front.

With this the fourth Arab-Israeli war broke out. This war, was also known as the 'Yom Kippur' or the 'Ramadan' war because of the significance of the date and month of fighting.<sup>8</sup>

7 Sadat, n.3, pp.297-8.

8 For the Jews, it was the Day of Atonement and in the Islamic world it was the holy month of Ramadan. In fact, in April 1973 during a top-level secret discussion between the Syrian President Assad and Sadat three sets of days were suggested by General el-Gazasy, Director of Operations of the armed forces. These were: a set of days in May 1973, another in August and September 1973 and the third in October 1973. The last one was selected as the most suitable. They decided that an attack could coincide with the Day of Atonement on 6 October when all public services in Israel would be suspended.

Although Jordan did not open a third front against Israel, its units were sent to the Syrian front, placed under Syrian command and took part in the fighting in that area.

Other Arab states to enter the war with their respective military forces were Iraq, which sent strong armoured air units to the Syrian front; Morocco, which had earlier sent motorized units to Syria; and also Saudi Arabia whose armed forces units were sent to aid the Syrian army.<sup>9</sup> This was certainly the biggest outbreak of confrontation in West Asia since the Six-Day war.<sup>10</sup>

The plan for Operation Badr was excellent and the initial success on both the fronts was spectacular.

Just fifteen minutes after the artillery barrage 6000 Egyptian troops with 1000 rubber boats started crossing the Suez canal, and the first fortress on the Bar-Lev Line was captured by the second Army at 1500 hours exactly. Simultaneously the engineers with their water cannons were breaking down the sand rampart on the eastern bank of the canal and in four and half hours had breached it in eighty places. At 1710 hours the first Officer prisoners were taken by units of the Second Division north of Ismailia.

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9 Keating's Contemporary Archives (Keynsham Bristol) vol.19, November 5-21, 1973, p. 23173 A .

10 Newsweek (New York), 15 October 1973, p.10.

By 1930 hours, the first formations of the two Egyptian armies were established on the east bank of the Suez along a front of 170 K.M. Eighty thousand men in twelve waves had penetrated Sinai in a depth of three to four kilometers and were all dug in inside the Bar-Lev fortified area.<sup>11</sup>

Similar initial successes were achieved on the Syrian front. Following the tactics of complete surprise Syrian ground forces negotiated the Israeli anti-tank ditch and advanced with great speed. Many Israeli strong points fell within the first hours of the battle and the observation post at Jebel el-Sheikh with its complex electronic equipment, was captured intact. The equipments were immediately sent to Damascus for examination and subsequent use. The Israelis quickly counter-attacked with tanks and aircraft, but Syrian anti-tank and anti-aircraft fire overpowered them and took a heavy toll. A diversionary landing by Israeli forces at Latakia, aimed at obliging the Syrians to withdraw troops from the front for protection of vulnerable areas in the rear, was repulsed.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, during the initial hours of the war the Arabs had a stunning success and the Israelis were fighting a

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11 Mohamed Heikal, The Road to Ramadan (London, 1975), p.207.

12 Ibid., p.203.

defensive battle. The tempo continued for almost five days, then came five days of lull, at the end of which the Israelis took the initiative and the final five days of the fifteen-day battle went to the Israelis.<sup>13</sup>

By the time the ceasefire went into effect a very complex and extraordinary military situation had developed. As stated earlier, on the one hand, the Egyptian Army had established itself along much of the east bank of the Suez canal, advanced eastward into the Sinai desert for distances varying from three or four to nine or ten miles in different sectors and reconquered some 400 to 500 square miles of Sinai. On the other hand the Israeli army in a dramatic counter-attack at the peak of the battle, had established a large bridgehead on the West bank of the canal, extended it north and south of the Great Bitter Lake for a distance of some thirty miles, and pushed inland about twenty miles, as a result of which they were in control of some 500 square miles of Egyptian territory at the ceasefire on the east bank. At the southern end of the front, the Egyptian Third Army numbering some 20,000 men was trapped between the main Israeli forces in Sinai and those West of the Suez canal.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Ibid., p.207.

14 Kacsin's Contemporary Archives, vol.19, 5-11, November 1973, p. 25173A.

Similarly on the northern front, the Syrians after recapturing much of the Golan Heights lost in 1967 war were advancing almost to the edge of the plain of Galilee in Israel proper. However, they were checked and finally thrown back by a powerful Israeli counter-offensive, and at the time of the ceasefire on the northern front the Syrians had not only lost all their initial gains but had been driven back well inside Syria proper - the Israeli Army controlling over 300 square miles of Syrian territory at the time of ceasefire and having advanced to within twenty miles of Damascus.<sup>15</sup>

Arab Reactions to the War: The outbreak of the war brought tremendous support and favour for the participating countries - Egypt and Syria - from all over the Arab world. In fact the support had been assured beforehand. This is quite evident from President Sadat's references in his autobiography. He said, "three weeks before the Zero Hour the support of more than a hundred countries (including the African and non-aligned) had been secured. It had taken many months from January to September to prepare the world for the war".<sup>16</sup> And true to their assurances, as stated above, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Jordan all sent their forces right to the battle field, although Jordan refrained from

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15 Ibid. (For a detailed picture of the day-to-day happenings of the war, see Haskal, n.11, Ch.IV).

16 Sadat, n.3, p.288.

opening a third front against Israel. Colonel Kadhafi of Libya no doubt did not agree with the campaign strategy nor with the battle plan drawn up by Egypt and Syria; nevertheless, he pledged full support to the Arab cause in money and oil. On the domestic front, Assad and Sadat had the widest Syrian and Egyptian mass support respectively. President Sadat himself commanded the operation, while the Egyptian parliament, on 15 October passed a series of Jihad (holy war) measures which including, among other things, a wide range of taxes for the national war effort, graduated increase in the general income tax, an increase in petrol price etc.<sup>17</sup>

However, the most important indicator of Arab solidarity, against Israel, during the war was the use of the 'oil weapon' to put pressure on Israel and her Western Patrons, notably the United States.

After the war of June 1967 the oil weapon came increasingly to the fore because to the Arabs this was the only card left to play in the hours of defeat. This materialised during the October war when the Arab countries put an oil embargo on the oil consuming countries of Western Europe, and the United States. Saudi Arabia, being the key country in shaping the Arab oil policy, took the lead. Around August 1973 King Faisal assured President

Sadat to use the oil weapon if needed. Still then, when the war broke out no precise plan had been drawn up for the use of the oil weapon. It was the Marei-Khalil mission which prepared the groundwork for the embargo.<sup>18</sup> Soon after the Marei-Khalil mission finished its work the Arab oil ministers met in Kuwait on 17 October to coordinate oil policy for the war.<sup>19</sup> A plan of cutbacks and boycotts was adopted. The Kuwait conference agreed on a gradual reduction of petrol by five percent per month until Israel was made to withdraw from the occupied areas. Again in the month of November, the Arab petroleum ministers met in Kuwait and decided to raise the effectiveness of the use of oil as a political weapon by reducing the production by as much as twentyfive percent. They also decided to stop supplies to the U.S. and Holland and reduce the export to other countries by five percent. A huge increase in the price of crude oil was also agreed on.<sup>20</sup> These steps caused a great deal of alarm in Japan.

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18 Sayed Marei, Assistant to President Sadat and Mustafa Khalil, a former Deputy Prime Minister for Industry and Mineral Resources, were asked by Sadat to prepare a memorandum on how oil should be used in the war. Accordingly the report was prepared and accepted by Mahmoud Fawzi. After that Marei and Khalil were asked to visit Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries to explain Egypt's attitude to the war and the possible ways of using the oil weapon.

19 Heikal, p.11, pp.267-73.

20 Colonel B.K.Marayan, Lessons and Consequences of the October War (New Delhi, 1977), p.26.



Western Europe and the U.S. public opinion, and went a long way in bringing about a change in the U.S. policy toward the crisis.

Israeli Reactions: As the D-Day was the Jewish Day of Atonement, the Israelis were busy in fasting, offering their prayers in the synagogues. They were told about the Egyptian and Syrian attack by Mrs. Golda Meir, the Israeli Prime Minister, in a nationwide radio and television broadcast. Unlike the six-day war this time the Israelis were caught by complete surprise and for the first few days they steadily stepped up the military pressure while they mobilized their land and air forces. The various reserve units were called for active duty. As stated earlier, in the initial days of the war Israel was fighting a defensive battle. This was quite clear from the war efforts as well as by Mrs. Golda Meir's remarks when she said, "we have no doubt that we shall be victorious ... We (are defending) our very existence."<sup>21</sup> From the sober and non-aggressive statements of the Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan - the architect of Israel's smashing victory over the Arabs in 1967 - it was clearly evident that the Israeli forces were quite in a bad shape in the

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Quoted in Newsweek, 16 October 1973, p.10.

early days of the war.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Golda Meir, in her knesset address of 16 October condemned the Egyptian-Syrian attack as "criminal war".<sup>23</sup> She also criticised the "sinister role" of the Soviet Union which was supplying massive quantities of arms to both the combatant Arab countries and expressed the Israeli people's gratitude to the United States for the military aid.<sup>24</sup>

As the war advanced, the Israelis regained their earlier losses and with fresh air-lifts from America, they launched effective counter-attacks. By the time the cease-fire went into effect, they had an upper hand in the battle field over the Arabs.

Super Powers' Reactions and the Ceasefire: Like the Israelis, the American decision-makers were also caught off balance, when the war broke out. The war news came as a total surprise to the White House. Henry Kissinger, who had succeeded Rogers as the new Secretary of State just a fortnight back, was awakened at his Waldorf-Astoria hotel suite (New York) by an urgent phone call from Assistant Secretary Joseph Sisco. He, in turn, relayed the news to

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22 Ibid.

23 The address came just some hours after President Sadat's address to the Egyptian Parliament.

24 Kissinger's Contemporary Archives, vol.19, 5-11 November 1973, p.26176.

President Nixon who was in Key Biscayne (Florida) worrying about evidence of corruption on the part of Vice President Spiro Agnew.<sup>25</sup> The absence of the President and his Secretary of State from Washington - the decision-making centre - clearly proved to what extent they were aware of the developments in the Arab-Israeli zone. Why this surprise? This was because of:

1. The American misconception of Egyptian and Syrian intentions that led to a misreading of the situation;
2. the serious American intelligence failure; and
3. the high standard of secrecy and deliberate deception maintained by Egypt and Syria.<sup>26</sup>

The Russians were neither surprised nor fully informed on the outbreak of the war. The Soviets knew that something was going to happen but had been kept in dark about the timing or the scale of the coming attack.<sup>27</sup>

Whatever might be their initial reactions, the Super-powers very soon started jointly exploring the ways

25 Newsweek, 15 October 1973, p.10.

26 For more discussion on these reasons see Quandt, D.1, pp.166-9.

27 The Soviet Ambassadors in Cairo and Damascus were given some vague and imprecise hints by Sadat and Assad on October 1 and October 5 respectively. Heikal, D.11, p.343.

and means of arranging a ceasefire. Both sides in the conflict did not want a ceasefire so soon. The Arabs were determined to consolidate their initial gains while the Israelis were equally adamant not to stop fighting until the Arab attackers had been driven out of the Sinai and the Golan Heights. Only the Super Powers, seemed to have a chance of forcing an end to the fighting. But the important obstacle was they were not one on the conditions of withdrawal. The Americans maintained that the combatants should withdraw to their positions before the outbreak of the war. The Soviets did not agree with such a demand in view of the early gains of the Arabs. And moreover, such a demand had not been made of Israel when a cease fire was negotiated in 1967. The U.S. called a meeting of the Security Council which did not produce any result as that was a purely American initiative.<sup>28</sup>

After the failure of Nixon's move at the U.N., the idea of air-lift of arms to the combatants gained momentum. From the very beginning Israel had been making repeated pleas for American arms to encounter the military difficulties on both the fronts. During the early days of the war Israel was receiving arms in modest quantity and indirectly. Once the Soviet air-lift began to the Arab states on 10 October the Americans also stepped up their air-lift to

Israel. And around 13 October Nixon gave instructions that United States military aircraft should fly equipment directly into Israel.

By the middle of the first week Americans had come to know the extent of Arab success and as a conclusive Israeli victory on both the fronts faded, a call was given for a ceasefire in place rather than a ceasefire combined with a withdrawal. Some pressure was put on the Israelis to accept the idea. The British Prime Minister, ~~Mr.~~ Heath was chosen to convey the idea to presidents Assad and Sadat. The Heath initiative achieved nothing concrete. But by then the Soviets were also looking for a ceasefire-in-place. Premier Kosygin made a trip to Cairo to convince President Sadat on this line. After a three day stay Kosygin returned to Moscow on 19 October without making much progress. Some disagreements over the nature of a peace conference - which should follow the ceasefire - emerged between Sadat and Kosygin.<sup>29</sup>

While Kosygin was in Cairo, President Nixon had been in constant touch with Brezhnev and after Kosygin's return to Moscow, hot line contacts multiplied and the pressure for a standstill ceasefire increased. Brezhnev suggested that in view of the grave situation on the battle

front, Kissinger should come to Moscow to work out the basis for a ceasefire. Accordingly Kissinger arrived in Moscow on the evening of 20 October and the talks started immediately.

While the talks were in progress an important message from Cairo reached Brezhnev. The message was from the Soviet Ambassador indicating President Sadat's willingness for a ceasefire. Then the process got speeded up. Immediately Brezhnev and Kissinger agreed to a simple ceasefire-in-place along with a call for the implementation of the Resolution 242. Text of the Resolution to be presented to the Security Council was drafted on 21 October. They also agreed for negotiations between the parties under appropriate auspices; the convening of a peace conference co-chaired by both the Super powers and the immediate exchange of the prisoners (of war) by the parties soon after the ceasefire.

The Security Council met at 10.00 P.M. on 21 October and after two hours and fifty minutes, in the early hours of 22 October, Resolution 338 was adopted. It called for:

1. a ceasefire to become effective in not more than twelve hours, all forces remaining <sup>in</sup> the positions they then occupied;
2. the parties concerned to start immediately after the ceasefire the implementation of Resolution 242 in all its parts; and

3. the start of negotiations—concurrently with the ceasefire — between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in West Asia.<sup>30</sup>

Kissinger returned to Washington on 22 October via Tel Aviv with a feeling that Israel would respect the ceasefire. For the moment the guns fell silent but not for long.

The Israeli army was determined to encircle the 20,000 man Egyptian Third Army. The Super Powers realized that some further action was required and immediately worked for another Resolution. Accordingly Resolution 339 was passed by the Security Council during the afternoon of 23 October calling for the immediate cessation of hostilities. Even this Resolution did not bring the fighting to a close. Then came the Soviet threat to directly intervene to see to it that Israel did not violate the ceasefire. The United States sharply reacted to it and the U.S. military forces all over the world were put on a nuclear alert in the early hours of 25 October.<sup>31</sup> It appeared that both the Super Powers were on a head-on nuclear collision without

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30 Quantt, n.1, pp.192-3.

31 For more detail on the 'Nuclear Alert' see Heikal, n.11, pp.254-5 and Quantt, n.1, pp.194-99.

caring for the spirit of detente. However, during the afternoon the U.N. Security Council again met and passed Resolution 340 calling for an immediate and complete cease-fire; return to the 22 October lines; dispatch of an augmented U.N. observer force; creation of a U.N. Emergency Force; and implementation of Resolution 338. This time the cease-fire did take hold and the fourth Arab-Israeli war came to an end. With this the imminent Super Power confrontation also faded out and a new chapter in the American diplomacy was about to begin, with Henry Kissinger as the main architect. <sup>32</sup>

Consequences: The October war, with its far-reaching implications and consequences, came as a catalyst for all the parties involved in it directly or indirectly.

After a humiliating period of six years, the Arab world could prove its worth both militarily and in the field of diplomacy. In contrast to the war of 1967, this time the Arabs fought heroically and had achieved tremendous initial success. This initial victory challenged the basic American assumption that Arabs were too weak to wage a war against a militarily superior Israel. The military victory was perfectly co-ordinated with the use of oil weapon which provided a new edge to the effectiveness of Arab diplomacy. Undoubtedly, it improved the Arab bargaining position vis-a-vis the U.S.-Israeli alliance.



For the Israelis, the war came not only as a surprise but a shock as well. They had never imagined that the Arab countries could launch an offensive and engage them in a defensive battle. Their basic, rather false, sense of security based on military predominance was seriously challenged. No doubt, they gained an upperhand in the later stage of the battle but their initial panick was quite evident from the frequent "save Israel" calls to Washington. Further, the war made the Israelis realize that a purely military solution of the problem was not possible; there should be diplomatic and political moves as well. While Israel hitherto insisted on a direct negotiation with the parties concerned, now it became amenable not only to a discussion through the third parties but also to an international conference such as the Geneva conference. Israel could remain no more adamant on its earlier stand that the fate of the occupied territories were not negotiable.

For the Palestinians, the most important consequence was recognition of the Palestinian problem by the whole world in general and the United States and Israel in particular. The need for a solution of the problem was felt more than ever before. Throughout the war period, the Arabs had been insisting on the Palestinian cause and their right to be included in any future peace negotiation. This was quite evident from President Sadat's address to

the Egyptian National Assembly on 16 October. Even Hafiz Ismail insisted on this point during his talk with Kissinger on Egyptian conditions for a ceasefire on 10 October 1973.<sup>33</sup> As a result of which in the post-1973 peace negotiations the question of Palestinian participation became the main point of discussion. The Geneva conference was a case in point.

Coming to the Americans, the October War fundamentally affected the American policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. As stated earlier, prior to the war it was widely believed that stability in West Asia could be ensured by Israeli military predominance; the Arab oil could not be effectively used to pressure the west; the Arabs were too weak to fight against Israel etc. These assumptions were severely challenged by the October war. The myth of Israeli invincibility was exposed, peace and security of the area was disturbed, the preventive diplomacy collapsed and the standstill diplomacy came to an end. The deepening energy crisis further aggravated the situation. As a result, a shift in American policy became the top-priority concern for Nixon and Kissinger. By the time the ceasefire had gone into effect, the United States was already busy in preparing for a new diplomatic

effort. As the war came to a close the new strategy had already been decided and Henry Kissinger was ready with his "step-by-step" diplomacy. A vigorous American diplomatic initiative set in.

Motivations and Rationale of  
Kissinger Diplomacy

An active U.S. diplomatic role in the search for an Arab-Israeli settlement was the first and foremost principle of the post-war American policy. This was sought to be done through the Kissingerian "step-by-step" diplomacy. Thus the aftermath of the October war accelerated Kissinger's initiation into the problems of an area which he earlier thought was not really ready for him. Why did he expedite his diplomatic efforts to resolve a problem which was there since long? In other words, what were the factors that motivated Kissinger to launch his "step-by-step" diplomacy?

The basic motivating factor behind Kissinger's diplomacy was to safeguard and advance the U.S. national interests.<sup>34</sup> This should be seen in the global and

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34 Roger Fisher, "Playing the Wrong Game", in Jeffrey Z. Rubin, ed., Dynamics of Third Party Intervention: Kissinger in the Middle East (New York, 1981), p.97.

regional contexts. The October war not only exposed the myth of Israeli invincibility, it not only challenged the basic assumptions of the U.S. policy but it also exposed the United States and its allies to the blackmail of Arab oil politics. As stated earlier the Arab oil states decided to use the oil weapon by putting an embargo on the United States and Netherlands, cutting the production quota and raising the oil prices. These actions shocked the industrialized world and unleashed what became popularly known as the "energy crisis."<sup>35</sup> The imminent energy crisis in turn not only adversely affected the Western economy but also caused a serious decline in U.S. prestige and credibility among its allies. By the fall of 1973 the United States had run into unexpected obstacles in the effort to revitalize its alliances with West Europe. The October war and the oil shortage further aggravated the situation. The United States then entered into a "period of strain" with Europe and with Japan.<sup>36</sup> The oil power then penetrated into the realm of politics. The European allies started giving a re-thinking to their policies toward the Arab-Israeli problem and became genuinely convinced

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35 Wilfred L. Kohl, "The United States, Western Europe and the Energy Problem", Journal of International Affairs (New York), vol.30, no.1, Spring/Summer, 1976, p.81.

36 Henry A. Kissinger, Years of Upheaval (New Delhi, 1981), p.700.

that it was the US failure to press a settlement on Israel that produced the war. The US had in effect put vital European interests at risk for reasons of its domestic politics. The always latent view that the West Asian tensions would disappear only when Israel would return to the 1967 borders was then put forward with increasing explicitness.<sup>37</sup> The affected European countries took their own way and dispatched a series of bilateral missions to the Arab countries with the aim of cultivating relations with them and swapping arms and industrial products for oil. The climax came when the foreign ministers of the European community met in Brussels, on 6 November 1973, to chalk out an independent European policy on the West Asia crisis. A pro-Arab resolution was adopted which called for an immediate Israeli withdrawal to the 22 October line to solidify the ceasefire and to the 1967 borders to achieve peace. This step not only isolated the United States from its NATO allies but also challenged the basic Kissingerian strategy of "step-by-step" process.<sup>38</sup>

Similar was the case with Japan. Japan is the world's second largest consumer of oil, and eightyfive percent of its supply comes from the Gulf. Though, it did not come under the embargo the production-cut and

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37 Ibid., pp.707-8.

38 Ibid., p.718.

price-increase seriously affected the Japanese economy. Japan got panic-stricken and apprehended a recession or even a ruinous depression. It had no other way out but to surrender to the oil-blackmail. As a result, it did not hesitate to break away from Washington's position on West Asian crisis. In a formal statement, the government warned that if Israel did not relinquish the Arab territory that it had captured in the Six-Day war of 1967, Japan "may have to reconsider its policy toward Israel".<sup>39</sup> Japan came out with many proposals indicating its willingness to grant financial credits and technological expertise to the Arabs. Further, it warned Israel that if it did not begin withdrawing from the occupied territories Tokyo might very well go on to break diplomatic relations with Jerusalem.

Thus, in the global context the Arab oil diplomacy greatly succeeded in isolating the United States from its Western industrial allies. The European countries and Japan easily yielded to the oil-blackmail and did not hesitate to differ with America on the West Asia issue. This was no mean loss to the national interests of the United States, in the light of its prestige as a Super Power.

Coming to the regional context, the October war proved for the first time that the Arab countries - both radicals and conservatives alike - could challenge the American policy towards the area. This was evident not only from their military attack on Israel but also from the use of oil weapon. Earlier the Americans had thought that the Arabs would never take such a step. This view was based on the assumption that Saudi Arabia - being the leading oil producing country and a friend of America in that area - would never agree with such a proposal. But, after the war it was Saudi Arabia who led the Arabs in using the oil weapon. King Faisal repeatedly stated that no oil would flow to the US until Jerusalem gave up all the territory it had captured during the 1967 war. Further, Faisal's oil minister, Sheik Ahmed Zaki Yamani warned that in the case the US and its allies tried to take counter-measures against the Arabs, his country was prepared to cut back production even more drastically from twentyfive percent to eighty percent. In the event of a direct military intervention, Yamani warned, "we would blow up the oil fields and then everybody would have to get along without Saudi Arabian oil. The damage would take years to repair."<sup>40</sup> Saudi Arabia was no more prepared to act as a trusted American ally to safeguard its strategic and economic

interests in the area. The October war also brought the two super powers to the brink of a nuclear confrontation. The US nuclear alert not only affected detente but also it seriously questioned the US prestige as a peace-keeper of the world. In other words, the Arab-Israeli zone was no more a stable area - as thought by the Americans - but had become a highly explosive area containing the element of bringing a Super Power confrontation and ultimately disturbing the world peace which the Americans obviously did not want.

On the domestic scene the impact of the October war in the form of the energy crisis was no less disturbing. Towards the last week of November the American citizens were exposed to the inconveniences of the energy squeeze. A pessimistic economic picture apprehending recession, rising unemployment and inflation emerged. And as public concern over the problem intensified President Nixon, after several weeks of indecision, came out with a series of "tough and strong" actions to deal with shortages.<sup>41</sup> The noted American economists gave a call to the US government to resist the oil blackmail. But the options for the Administration were limited. A counter-economic measure in the form of a "food embargo" appeared futile. The possibility of using the military weapon did not arise at all. The only option then left was the diplomatic weapon.



Thus, the fourth Arab-Israeli war and its aftermath posed a series of challenges which - if not faced properly - appeared to threaten the basic national interests of the United States. The differences with its allies had to be patched up, the world economy had to be restored, a resurgence of Soviet influence in the Arab world leading to another Super Power confrontation had to be prevented. In other words, the simple lesson of the crisis was that the status quo in West Asia was volatile, dangerous and could disintegrate with serious consequences for American global and regional interests. Hence, the status quo must be stabilized. A political process must begin that would offer the Arabs an alternative to war, but it must be carried on at a pace that the Israelis could accept.<sup>42</sup> The only answer was Kissinger's "step-by-step" diplomacy.

The second motivating factor, perhaps even more important, was that an opportunity for a successful American initiative existed.<sup>43</sup> When the 1973 Arab-Israeli war came to a halt, the conditions were ripe for the exercise of US influence in ways that had not been possible two or three years before. Both the Arabs and the Israelis then were looking to the United States. The Arabs had finally realized that the key to any peaceful settlement of the problem lay

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42           Quandt, n.l, p.251.

43           Ibid., p.208.

with Washington rather than Moscow. They had come to believe what Kissinger used to say; the Soviets could provide arms to the Arabs, but only the United States could produce Israeli territorial concessions through negotiations.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the war and its aftermath increased Israeli reliance on America. The initial Israeli defeat, though eventually reversed, destroyed the image of Israeli infallibility on the battle-field. This image of Israel's declining military overlordship, coupled with its renewed dependence on American military assistance, economic aid and diplomatic support, both enhanced Israel's willingness to negotiate with somewhat greater flexibility than before and made Tel Aviv even more susceptible to Washington's influence. Even if Kissinger could not "control all the strings", he was in a position to manipulate a substantial number to serve his own ends. By then the interests of the states in the West Asian conflict-especially Egypt, Israel, and Syria - had been realigned so as to provide the basis for at least a partial settlement of the long standing conflict.<sup>45</sup> This was in contrast to the 1969 situation when Rogers

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44 Ibid., p.209.

45 P. Terrence Hopmann and Daniel Druckman, "Henry Kissinger as Strategist and Tactician in the Middle East Negotiations", in Rubin, ed., p.34, p.202.

had taken his initiative. Then Kissinger had noted that "given the influence and intransigence of the Soviets, the militancy of Nasser, and the power of the 'fedayeen' ... the Middle East was not ready for a comprehensive American initiative."<sup>46</sup> It was largely for this reason that Kissinger had considered Rogers initiative as inopportune. The situation changed greatly after the war. Soviet influence was at its lowest ebb, the militancy of Nasser had been replaced by Sadat's readiness to play his American card, the 'fedayeen' strength had been sufficiently reduced and even Assad of Syria indicated his willingness to let Kissinger try his hand, although he was still suspicious of the Americans.<sup>47</sup> This situation not only greatly motivated Kissinger to take a diplomatic initiative but also helped him, during the time of negotiations, to minimize the Soviet role in the settlement process. In fact one of the guiding principles of the Kissinger diplomacy was to isolate the Soviets from the peace process and thereby reduce their influence substantially in the Arab world. The post-war situation made him feel that the area was ready for

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46 Henry A. Kissinger, The White House Years (New Delhi, 1979), p.357.

47 Quandt, n.1, p.211.

him. As he remarked once:

I never treat crises when they are cold, only when they are not. This enables me to weigh the protagonists one against the other, not in terms of ten or two thousand years ago but in terms of what each of them merits at the moment.(48)

Another important motivating factor was Kissinger's own ambition for personal success. Kissinger generally hates failure. It should not be forgotten that Kissinger by then had emerged as the hero of Vietnam accord, the Peking initiative, the detente talk with the Soviets, etc. From these experiences he had gained enough confidence in his negotiating skill. He then wanted to try his skill and calibre as a successful diplomat in this explosive area of the globe. He wanted to prove that he would succeed where others had failed. The whole national and international mass media should be after him hailing him as the man of miracle. And at last he greatly succeeded in establishing the credibility of his diplomatic skill before the world community. This excessive craze for individual success ultimately shaped the mode of his diplomacy. His diplomacy got personalized. From the very beginning he wanted to be in personal charge of the negotiations. Further

he "took care to ensure that he alone was kept informed of all aspects of the conflict and that he alone was in communication with all the parties."<sup>49</sup> He made the best utilization of his staff and made them work hard. By this he "assimilates the best of their ideas for his own purposes, then comes to his decision alone. When the policy succeeds, he receives the acclamation alone."<sup>50</sup> Kissinger did not see the US. player as being the government of the United States, but rather the Secretary of State as an individual human being. He was not a team player.<sup>51</sup>

Coming to the rationale of the underlying principles, it should be noted that the basic framework of the Kissingerian diplomacy was as its very name suggested a "step-by-step" approach. The guiding principles of this "step-by-step" strategy were: (1) to avoid the Palestinian problem and the question of their involvement in the peace negotiation process even though it was crucial to the Arab-Israeli conflict; (2) to avoid the most difficult problems and to deal with each Arab state separately, step-by-step thus avoiding confrontation with a collective Arab

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49 Ibid., p.38.

50 Ibid., p.172

52 Fisher, n.34, p.98.

position; (3) to avoid linking initial diplomatic steps with the nature of a final peace agreement, and (4) to isolate the Soviets from the substance of the negotiations.<sup>52</sup> Another element of Kissinger's diplomacy was to pursue a parallel policy in the Arab world - promotion of American technology - as a means of increasing American influence throughout the Arab world simultaneously with the efforts to diminish the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>53</sup>

The specific methods that Kissinger employed largely determined the structure of the negotiating process. Kissinger regarded negotiation as a "contest of will in which each party tried to induce the other to change its position."<sup>54</sup> Following are the important tactics. First, Kissinger focussed the negotiations on negotiable issues so that results could be produced at the earliest possible date. In other words, he tried to break down the whole set of issues into manageable pieces and avoid seeking agreement on long-term goals. While breaking the issues into manageable pieces he had also to take into account the urgency of the issue. He would request every party to avoid the irreconcilables at the first stage of negotiation.

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52 Shadid, n.2, p.100.

53 Edward R.F. Sheehan, "How Kissinger Did It: Step by Step in the Middle East", Foreign Policy (New York), no.22, spring 1976, p.6.

54 Fisher, n.34, p.99.

For instance, while talking with Sadat Kissinger said "we must put aside irreconcilables for the moment, we must build confidence; conceive a negotiating dynamic. We must set in motion small agreements. We must proceed step-by-step".<sup>55</sup> Further, Kissinger pursued those negotiable issues even in a bilateral rather than multilateral forum. That was the reason why we saw various bilateral agreements between Israel and her Arab neighbours.

Second, Kissinger was greatly effective in influencing the other parties' perceptions of him as a mediator. Despite his international credentials as a negotiator he had to overcome a lot of difficulties concerning his neutrality on the Arab-Israeli issues. It should be borne in mind that Kissinger was representing a state which was committed to the survival and security of Israel. Still embarrassing was the fact that Kissinger was a Jew. How could the Arabs accept such a person as a mediator instantly? However, Kissinger did overcome these doubts by establishing close relationship with each of the principal actors. His close relationship with Sadat was a well-known fact.

Third, Kissinger put much emphasis on maintaining secrecy as a tactic to facilitate the negotiation process.

By maintaining secrecy, he was able to reduce the influence of domestic political forces at undesirable junctures in the process to prevent the intervention of other outside parties and to enable the parties to make concessions without the fear of loss of face or credibility.<sup>56</sup> For instance, Kissinger excluded Fahmy and Garasy from some of his discussions with Sadat in order to build a strong personal relationship with President Sadat and to convince him of his views.<sup>57</sup> Further, by keeping the Soviets out of the Syrian-Israeli disengagement talks, Kissinger was able to resist Soviet insistence on returning to multilateral negotiations in Geneva, which might have weakened the progress made up to that point.<sup>58</sup>

The fourth important tactic followed by Kissinger was what was called "linkage, leverage and pressure".<sup>59</sup> Sometimes Kissinger tried to persuade the parties with reasoned arguments about the objective merits of a problem. While doing that, he not only emphasized "the dire consequences internationally of a failure to reach agreement", but also marshalled "forces that might influence the

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56 Hopmann and Druckman, n.46, p.219.

57 Sheehan, n.48, p.112.

58 Quandt, n.1, pp.236-37.

59 Fisher, n.34, p.101.



parties, such as other Arab countries or the United States Congress.<sup>60</sup> Further, Kissinger's "step-by-step" diplomacy "presupposed a strong and popular president fully prepared to impose his will upon the obstinacy of either party particularly the Israelis".<sup>61</sup> Kissinger did not hesitate to take a number of tough measures against Israel when the latter remained unyielding during the Sinai II disengagement talks.<sup>62</sup> During the period of the United States "reassessment" (of the West Asian policy) in 1976, he suspended negotiations of F-15 fighter planes for Israel; imposed a selective embargo on military equipment for Israel, delayed delivery of some already committed missiles and told Israeli to ranking officials to stop making frequent visits to Washington. In this, he greatly succeeded in making Israel more flexible and forthcoming that finally led to the conclusion of the agreement.

Besides, these main tactics there were so many other methods which were perhaps peculiar to Kissinger and his skill. He would always try to educate each party and then only present the American plan; he would always press

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60 Quantt, n.1, p.260.

61 Sheehan, n.48, p.151.

62 Discussed elsewhere.

for concessions from each party so that he would convey it to the other.<sup>63</sup> The last tactic was evident from his reported statement to Golda Meir, "You are not giving me anything to go to Cairo with. I have nothing to offer them".<sup>64</sup>

### Kissinger and The Arab-Israel Problem

Kissinger's direct involvement in the Arab-Israel problem came only after the October war broke out. Even though, just three days after becoming Secretary of State (i.e. on 25 September) he had met most of the Arab ambassadors to the UN with the aim of establishing his credentials as a credible mediator, joking about his own Jewish background, there was no clear indication of an active American involvement in the problem.<sup>65</sup> It needed the war to accelerate American diplomatic moves. Kissinger did exactly the same. After the war broke out Kissinger stated that the United States had set two main objectives: one, to end the fighting as quickly as possible, and two, to end it "in such a way" that it would "contribute to the maximum extent possible" to bring about a lasting solution

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63 See Fisher, n.34, pp.100-1.

64 Quoted, Ibid., p.101.

65 See Sheehan, n.48, pp.27-28.

of the problem.<sup>66</sup> Kissinger's role in achieving the first objective has already been discussed. Coming to the second objective, interestingly the war ended in exactly the way the United States wanted it to end - in a situation of "no victory, no defeat".<sup>67</sup> Having achieved this, Kissinger, then had to concentrate on finding the ways for a lasting and a peaceful solution of the Arab-Israel problem. This quest for a solution marked his dramatic and exclusive involvement in the West Asian diplomacy over the next two years.

The achievement of the ceasefire set the stage for progress toward a settlement. But the climate for such an effort was negatively affected by the precarious situation on the battle ground. As stated earlier, by the time ceasefire went into effect, the Egyptian Third Army had been badly entrapped on the West bank of the canal. President Sadat sent frequent and urgent appeals to the White House to save the entrapped Third Army. The Israelis on the other hand were determined to pressurize the Arabs as a means of obtaining release of prisoners of

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66 Shadid, n.2, p.99.

67 See Heikal, n.11, p.247.

war and the end of the naval blockade at Bab al-Mandab. This was a stalemate and appeared to destroy the ceasefire and the "no victory no peace" situation.<sup>68</sup> Kissinger then quickly set two urgent goals: first, to stabilize the ceasefire, second, to bring about a separation of military forces. By 27 October, the State Department announced the willingness of the Egyptians and Israelis to work for the implementation of the ceasefire. But their respective positions on the terms of a ceasefire and on a military disengagement differed greatly.<sup>69</sup> And in order to apprise the United States of their different stands both the Egyptian and Israeli leaders flew to Washington without any further delay.

From 29 October onwards Washington became a centre of hectic diplomatic activity with Kissinger shuttling between the new Egyptian foreign minister Ismail Fahmy and the Israeli Prime Minister Gold Meir and trying to convince them to come to an agreeable point.<sup>70</sup>

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- 68 The surrender of Egyptian Third Army would humiliate Sadat and thereby lessen the chances for Egypt's participation in the peace talk.
- 69 See Kissinger, D.36, pp.614-21, also Quandt, D.1, pp.214-5.
- 70 Ismail Fahmy was named foreign minister on 31 October replacing Mohamed el-Zayyat, who was appointed special advisor to Sadat. Fahmy arrived in Washington on 29 October as the acting foreign minister - Kissinger was informed about Fahmy's visit on 28 October. Fahmy met (f/n.cont.....)

With these preliminary talks in Washington Kissinger then decided to start his West Asian and North African tour on 5 November.

Kilometer 101: Kissinger left Washington on Monday, 5 November, bound for Morocco and Tunisia before the crucial opening to Egypt. By his visits to King Hassan and President Habib Bourguiba, Kissinger wanted to enlist their moral support behind his efforts which could be used to influence other Arab countries particularly Syria. This was in conformity with the Kissingerian tactic of leverage. Kissinger reached Cairo - the real goal of his visit - on 7 November for talks with President Sadat. Much to the surprise of Kissinger the talks proved very useful and encouraging. Kissinger could convince President Sadat on the necessity of working out a plan for a substantial disengagement of forces that would bypass the contentious issue of 22 October lines.<sup>71</sup>

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(Previous f/n cont....)

Kissinger on 29 itself and again two days later met with both Kissinger and Nixon. Golda Meir arrived in Washington on 31 October. Kissinger met her on 1st November and on the same afternoon Nixon also met her. Kissinger had also met the Syrian representative to UN, Mohammed Ismail, on 2 November, but there was still no channel for continuing contacts between Washington and Damascus.

<sup>71</sup> See Quandt, n.l, pp.216-17. The other important result of the talks was that in Cairo itself it was announced that Egypt and the United States had agreed to resume full diplomatic relations for the first time since the 1967 war. Herman Eilts was named American Ambassador to Egypt and American -educated Ashraf Ghorbal became his counterpart in Washington.

Immediately Kissinger asked two of his aides, Joseph Sisco and Harold Saunders to go to Tel Aviv to report the Israeli Government on his talks with President Sadat. Sisco and Saunders had been authorized to work out the details of an accord with Golda Meir. After some initial refusal Meir finally agreed and on 9 November, the agreement on a ceasefire plan and the exchange of POWs was announced. Two days later, a six-point agreement, negotiated during Kissinger's talks and accepted by both Egypt and Israel, was signed by Israeli and Egyptian generals at a point along the Cairo to Suez road known as Kilometer 101.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile Kissinger had flown to Amman for talks with King Hussein of Jordan on 8 November, after which he flew to Riyadh for a meeting with King Faisal.<sup>73</sup> Kissinger appealed to King Faisal for support and requested to lift the oil embargo to facilitate rapid diplomatic efforts. The king, in turn, promised to ease out the

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72 The agreement was signed by Major General Abdel Ghanî Gamasy of Egypt and Major-General Ahran Yariy of Israel in the presence of General Sillasmo, the Commander of the UN Emergency Force. The text of the agreement can be found in Kissinger's Contemporary Archives, vol.19, November 19-25, 1973, p.26203.

73 Kissinger's visit to Jordan was nothing more than a courtesy visit because he was concentrating on the Egyptian-Israeli front as the first step of his "step-by-step" process.

embargo once some concrete progress on Israeli withdrawal started. Kissinger also tried to convince the King of his "step-by-step" approach and appealed to Faisal for help in opening channels of communication with Syria.<sup>74</sup>

Overall, Kissinger's first trip to West Asia and North Africa produced good results. After returning to Washington Kissinger started the preparatory work for the Geneva conference.<sup>75</sup>

The Geneva Conference: Following the ceasefire agreement (at Kilometer 101, a further agreement was reached by senior Egyptian and Israeli officers on 14 November to begin exchanging prisoners of war as from 8 A.M. on 15 November, beginning with wounded prisoners.<sup>76</sup> The next day Generals Yariv and Garasy began talks at Kilometer 101 aimed at implementing the six-point agreement particularly the second point regarding, "return to 22 October positions in the framework of agreement on the disengagement and separation of

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74 See Sheehan, n.63, pp.18-22 and Kissinger, n.33, pp.656-66.

75 Before returning to Washington he also visited Tehran, Islamabad, Peking and Tokyo, see Ibid., Chapter XIV, pp.667-99.

76 Kissinger's Contemporary Archives, vol.19, November 19-25, 1973, p. 26203.

forces".<sup>77</sup> But the generals greatly differed in their plans for withdrawal and disengagement.<sup>78</sup> As a result of which after several rounds (around ten) of talks Egypt finally decided to stop the talks in view of Israel's continued elusiveness in the implementation of second point of the 11 November agreement. And the talks broke down.

Kissinger had been charged with aborting the Kilometer 101 talks which was to some extent true. Kissinger never wanted a major breakthrough at Kilometer 101 before Geneva. Because that would create problems for Syria's participation in the Geneva Conference as Assad would certainly insist on such a disengagement agreement before going to Geneva. Moreover Kissinger did not want that the generals should take the credit for the agreements which would indirectly affect the necessity of United States as a mediator.<sup>79</sup>

Kissinger then turned his attention to organize the Geneva Conference. On 6 December, he announced that it

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77 Ibid.

78 See, Quandt, n.1, p.219.

79 For instance Kissinger warned Ambassador Dimitz "Suppose Yariy comes out a great hero on disengagement, what do you discuss on 18 December (at Geneva)". See, Kissinger, n.36, pp.750-2.



was possible to organize a peace conference at Geneva on 18 December. But the big question remained: who would be the participants? Kissinger had listed them as Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Israel (He made no reference to the Palestinians). Excepting Egypt, every party had some conditions to be met before attending the Geneva talk. Kissinger faced the uphill task of acquiring the consent of each party for the peace conference. Thus, came his second trip to West Asia which started on 12 December. Before that, he had talked to the Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan who had come to Washington on 7 December.<sup>80</sup> He tried to overcome the Israeli reluctance to attend the conference.

During his second trip, Kissinger travelled to Cairo, Riyadh, Damascus, Amman, Beirut and finally Tel Aviv. During these days, Kissinger had many obstacles to overcome. The Arab states wished the conference to be held under the aegis of the United Nations, in which they held a considerable majority. They insisted that the PLO should be invited.

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During his stay in Washington, Dayan held talks with Kissinger, the Vice-President Gerald Ford and the Defence Secretary James Schlesinger. The two important items of the Kissinger-Dayan talk were: arms supplies and the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement plan. See, Moshe Dayan, The Story of My Life (London, 1973), pp. 453-7.

And Syria showed no intention of carrying out the Geneva Convention on the treatment of the Israeli prisoners of war. King Hussein of Jordan was threatening to boycott the session in view of the Arab summit decision in Algiers last November. Of all, Israel's terms were the toughest, Israel did not agree to sit with a Syrian colleague in the conference until Syria complied with Israeli demands for a list of POWs and a visit by the Red Cross to them. It also strongly opposed the role of the UN Secretary General and blankly refused to discuss the issue of Palestinian participation at the Conference.<sup>81</sup>

At the end of his visit Kissinger could persuade all the parties except Syria.<sup>82</sup> Assad remained unyielding and the Syrian Government officially announced its decision on 18 December to boycott the conference in view of

circumstances which indicate that there are manoeuvres aimed at serving Israeli interests and diverting the conference to a discussion of secondary matters that would lead to an endless digression far from the basic issues.<sup>(83)</sup>

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81 Abba Eban, An Autobiography (London, 1977), pp. 643-4.

82 In persuading Israel, Kissinger had to take the help of President Nixon who had to put heavy pressure on Golda Meir through messages. Kissinger also used his tactic of "linkage" by stating that Israel's refusal to attend the conference would disturb global stability, international economic order, etc.

83 Kissinger Contemporary Archives, vol. 20, Jan 28 - February 3, 1974, p. 26317 A.

Finally the Geneva conference convened on 21 December, under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, co-sponsored by the US and the Soviet Union. The foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan and Israel attended and a table with Syria's name-plate on it remained unoccupied.<sup>84</sup> The conference was opened by a ten-minute speech, of the UN Secretary General, Henry Kissinger addressed the conference after his Soviet counterpart, Andrei Gromyko.

In his speech he tried to articulate his "step-by-step" strategy, stating that the basic goal of the conference was peace. He also outlined the various ways to achieve that goal by emphasizing the first urgent need to strengthen the ceasefire by a disengagement of forces and implementation of the UN Resolutions 242, 338.<sup>85</sup>

Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement Having successfully convened the Geneva conference, Kissinger could establish a basic framework for peace. That framework was to be used for an essentially bilateral diplomacy. For Kissinger, peace agreements in such a multilateral conference was neither possible nor even desirable. The bilateral disengagement

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84 Egypt was represented by Ismail Fahry. Jordan by her Premier and Foreign Minister, Zaid Rifai and Israel by Abba Eban.

85 For the text of the speeches (of all the participants) see Kissinger's Contemporary Archives, vol. 20, Jan<sup>y</sup> 28 - February 3, 1974, pp. 26317-8.

agreements then could be concluded under his over-all direction and mediation bypassing the Soviet Union and any other party for that matter.

If the successful completion of the Geneva Talks provided an opportunity to Kissinger, it equally posed a challenge to him. He now had to produce early results on the Egyptian-Israeli front. This task assumed added importance in view of the fact that the Syrians again came to a high level of military alert in late December and resumption of fighting seemed quite possible. Further, the oil embargo had not yet been lifted, on the other hand the OPEC had decided to double the oil prices. Kissinger had to disengage the forces on the Egyptian-Israeli front as quickly as possible.

The situation was too complex to be resolved so soon. Even though fresh talks at "Kilometer 3152"<sup>86</sup> had

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This refers to the fresh talks in Geneva. It was referred to as Kilometer 3152 by a Tel Aviv newspaper, based on its calculation of the distance between Switzerland and Israel. The talks were again supervised by General Ennio Sillanvuo, the UNDP commander Israel was represented by Major General Mordechai Gur while Brigadier General Taha El Magdoub represented Egypt. The talk started on 23 December and was adjourned on 9 January 1974 when the matters were referred to their respective governments.

started between the generals of Egypt and Israel as per the agreements reached at Geneva, differences over the disengagement of forces still persisted. The most important differences were: Egypt wanted Israeli forces to withdraw east of the Mitla and Giddi passes Israel refused; Israel wanted only a token Egyptian force on the east bank; Sadat was adamant in maintaining two infantry divisions with 100 tanks each. He could not face the public if he agreed to a substantial force limitation in territory returned to his control. Further Egypt insisted on mutual force reduction.<sup>87</sup> Another obstacle was the forthcoming crucial Knesset election to be held on 31 December. Before that Golda Meir could not take any strong decision.<sup>88</sup>

Once the election was over -- in which Meir's party came to power with a reduced majority -- Moshe Dayan was sent to Washington for talks with Kissinger on 4 and 5 January. Dayan presented his "five-zone" concept for disengagement, in which each party would have two limited-force zones, separated by a UN buffer. He also specified the type of force limitations that Israel could accept.

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87 See Quandt, p.1, pp.224-5.

88 See Time (New York), 14 January 1974, pp.5-6.

Basically, each side's forces should be beyond the artillery range of the other side. Further, a very small number of tanks should be maintained in the limited zones.<sup>89</sup>

The Dayan plan became the conceptual foundation of the disengagement agreement that was soon to follow. Then Kissinger flew again to West Asia on Dayan's request.<sup>90</sup> Kissinger met Sadat in Aswan on 12 January - where Sadat was recovering from bronchitis - and was surprised to find Sadat's impatience to reach an agreement. On Sadat's request Kissinger had to stay in the area till the agreement was concluded. Earlier, Kissinger had planned to mediate the principles and then refer to the Egyptian-Israeli military committee to resolve the technical details at Geneva. "Why Geneva" Sadat asked, "you can do it all here."<sup>91</sup> So he had to now fly between Jerusalem and Cairo embarking on his first exercise of "shuttle diplomacy".

On 13 January the Israelis handed over a map of the proposed disengagement line to Kissinger which he took

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89 See Dayan, n.80, pp.453-4, also Sheehan, n.53, p.32.

90 Before he left, he first contacted Sadat, who urged him to come at once.

91 Sheehan, n.53, p.32.

to Sadat the next day. Sadat readily accepted the Dayan framework of withdrawal, but did not agree on force limitations. At this critical point Kissinger suggested that in view of the disagreement between both parties the United States should propose the limitations on forces and Sadat agreed.

That afternoon, Kissinger proposed to enshrine the disengagement in two documents: (1) a formal agreement to be signed by Israel and Egypt, and (2) a separate letter from the United States to each government stating its understanding of the force limitations. The formal agreement would vaguely mention the force limitations and the American letter would define them (the U.S. proposal defining the limitations of armament on both sides was included in the letters from President Nixon to Golda Meir and Sadat). This was done precisely because it would enable Sadat to claim that Israel had not imposed the limitations on Egypt.<sup>92</sup> By evening, the American team had prepared the two documents. After the Egyptians defined them, Kissinger again flew to Israel.

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<sup>92</sup> There were also a number of pre-idential letters to both sides containing many assurances. See Kissinger, v.36, pp.838-40.

In Israel, Golda Meir was persuaded to drop the demand for an end of belligerency. And she did. Further Kissinger conveyed the Egyptian disagreement over the proposed five-zone concept. The Egyptians wanted only three zones on the map - for Egypt, Israel and the UN force respectively.<sup>93</sup> Dayan unhesitatingly agreed and immediately produced a map before Kissinger with the suggested changes. On 16 January the proposed agreement was ready and Kissinger after getting Meir's signature flew to Aswan for the last round to get the signature of President Sadat. Sadat put his signature without any more word of protest. The agreement was announced by Nixon at the White House on 17 January 1974 and signed by the chiefs of staff of Israel (Lt. General David Elazar) and Egypt (General Abdel Ghani Gamasy) at Kilometer 101 the next day.<sup>94</sup>

President Nixon described the agreement as the most significant step toward a permanent peace in West Asia, congratulated President Sadat and Prime Minister Meir; and said that he was proud of the role that the United States and Kissinger had played in the ceaseless efforts

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93 Sheehan, n.53, p.33.

94 The text can be found in Kissinger's Contemporary Archives, vol.20, 28 Jan. - 3 Feb., 1974, p.26319.



to bring the parties together to achieve "a just and fair settlement" in West Asia.<sup>95</sup> Never before in a quarter-century of bitter Arab-Israeli diplomatic negotiations had a US Secretary of State been so handsomely treated by both sides. "You have made history this week", said a smiling Golda Meir to Henry Kissinger. In Aswan, Kissinger was embraced by President Sadat who called him "Brother" and said warmly. "let us hope that the road we paved is for a lasting peace".<sup>96</sup>

As per the agreement, the Israelis were to withdraw into the Sinai to a line roughly fifteen miles from the Suez canal, protected by a UN buffer, leaving the Egyptians a thin ribbon of territory on the East bank, where reciprocally they would diminish their army from 60,000 to 7,000 men; symmetrically beyond either line, no missiles for thirty kilometers. Sadat did not give any promise of nonbelligerency nor did he get a timetable for further Israeli withdrawals. But he secretly promised the United States to permit nonmilitary Israeli cargoes to transit the canal as soon as it was cleared. Further, Kissinger gave the Israelis a secret "Memorandum of Understanding" in which the US conveyed Egypt's promise

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95        Ibid.

96        Time, 28 January 1974, p.4.

to clear the canal, rebuild its cities, and resume peace-line activities in the region. Furthermore, Egypt and Israel both accepted the American aerial reconnaissance of the disengagement area.<sup>97</sup>

With the signing of the disengagement agreement Nixon and Kissinger had committed the United States to an unprecedented extent. Not only America's stronghold in Egypt grew but also its prestige in the whole Arab world was on the rise. It seemed that all the cards of an Arab-Israeli solution lay with the United States more than ever.<sup>98</sup>

Syrian-Israeli Disengagement: The tremendous success of the Israeli-Egyptian Disengagement confirmed Kissinger's belief that "step-by-step" process was the best - and perhaps the only one - method for containing the Arab-Israeli conflict. Now Kissinger's next task was to maintain the momentum by achieving another disengagement agreement between the Arabs and Israel that would finally lead to a settlement. And the Syrian sector became the top-most priority. Sadat noted that he was "committed for disengagement on the Syrian front" and would try, during his visit to Assad, to get the talks started.<sup>99</sup>

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97 Sheehan, n.63, pp.33-34.

98 Quandt, n.1, p.229.

99 New York Times, 19 January 1974.

Sadat visited Damascus on 19 January. He also visited Saudi Arabia to persuade King Faisal to lift the oil embargo. Kissinger, after meeting with King Hussein in Aqaba, went to Damascus on 20 January and discussed the issues relating to disengagement and the prisoners of war with Assad.<sup>100</sup> Before returning to Washington, he stopped in Israel to brief the Israeli leadership on Syria's position.

Back in Washington, Kissinger tried to end the oil embargo while simultaneously preparing the ground work for a disengagement on the Syrian front. The US efforts began with all seriousness in mid-February. On 17 February Kissinger met with the Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahy and the Saudi Foreign Minister Omar Saqqaf. In their meetings with Kissinger Fahy and Saqqaf presented a four-nation Arab proposal for a Golan Heights disengagement, which resulted from a meeting in Algiers of Assad, Sadat, Faisal and Boumediene.<sup>101</sup> "Do something for Syria", they told Nixon and Kissinger, "and the embargo will stop."<sup>102</sup>

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100 The visit to Jordan was basically a holding action as there was no likelihood of bringing a disengagement on the Jordanian front until some thing was done on the Syrian front.

101 New York Times, 19 February 1974.

102 Sheehan, n.53, p.36.

While their insistence on not lifting the embargo, until some thing was done on the Golan Heights, angered both Nixon and Kissinger, they also provided a hint to Kissinger that Syria was getting slightly flexible on the idea of disengagement. The time was quite favourable for making attempts to secure an agreement. And for the time being Kissinger had dropped the issue of embargo. On 19 February President Nixon announced that he had asked the Secretary of State to make another visit to the area and on 25 February Kissinger left Washington on his fourth West Asian trip.

But the United States was less hopeful about the prospects of success in view of the complex nature of the Israeli-Syrian situation as compared to the Israeli-Egyptian front. And the US officials downgraded the chances for an agreement.<sup>103</sup> Not only the military issue, but also the domestic political issues were involved. The situation was like this: the Israelis were insisting on a POW list before any move, Meir was still not in a position to take a strong decision as she had not been able to form the coalition government till that time, in Syria Assad was not as undisputed as Sadat was, the Iraqis and the Palestinians were putting constant pressures on Syria not

to enter into any sort of accommodation with Israel. Moreover, unlike the Sinai, the Golan Heights was a very small area where the withdrawal and buffer zone plans would not work effectively.

Kissinger arrived in Damascus on 26 February for talks on that date and the next day with President Assad. On 27 February, he arrived in Jerusalem where he presented to Golda Meir a list of Israeli POWs held in Syria, containing sixtyfive names which had been given to him by Assad; he also brought with him from Damascus assurances that International Red Cross would be able to visit the Israeli POWs in Syria.<sup>104</sup> The Red Cross visits began on 1 March.<sup>105</sup> Israel, in turn, agreed to submit its proposals for disengagement to Syria. The significant development at this stage was Syria's willingness to submit the POW list prior to the Israeli withdrawal of forces from the Golan Heights. On 1 March after a visit from Cairo, Kissinger again flew to Damascus. The Israeli plan was basically modelled on the Egyptian-Israeli agreement line containing three zones - one for Syria, one for Israel and one for the UN - all within the territory captured by Israel in October 1973. Not only Quneitra would be under

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104 Ibid., 28 February 1974.

105 New York Times, 2 March 1974.

Israeli control but also Israeli forces would remain well beyond the 6 October lines.<sup>106</sup>

Knowing very well that such a plan was totally unacceptable to Assad and would lead to the breakdown of the talk, Kissinger did not give the details of the plan to Assad during his discussion with him on the evening of 1 March. Syria and Israel both agreed to send their representatives to Washington for further talks. Kissinger then flew back to Washington on 4 March, after visiting Riyadh and Amman. This time Kissinger's "shuttle diplomacy" did not achieve much progress.

Kissinger clearly realized the difficulties in bringing about a Syrian-Israeli disengagement. Israel could be persuaded, he thought, by a combination of pressure and positive inducements (like arms supply), but what about Syria? How could Assad be convinced? What about the Soviets? Could they be used to persuade Assad? Or would Sadat and other Arab leaders be able to play a role? For the coming days Kissinger had to grapple with these various possibilities.

In the meantime, most Arab oil producers announced on 18 March that the oil embargo against the United States

had been lifted. It was also reported that Syria did not give its assent to the decision, nor did Libya.

This came as an encouraging development for Kissinger. The domestic as well as inter-Arab pressure on Syria, could now be reduced.

Kissinger then needed a reasonable Israeli plan to exploit the situation. Keeping this end in view he held talks with the Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban. Both of them discussed the plans as to how to isolate Syria in the Arab world in order to make it more vulnerable for negotiations. Israel should at least pull back to the 6 October lines, if not more and would have to give up Quneitra.<sup>107</sup> Kissinger wanted that Dayan should come with a workable Israeli plan.

On 29 and 30 March Dayan and Kissinger held detail discussions in Washington about the Israeli plan. Dayan insisted that Israeli forces should remain in Quneitra and Kissinger did not agree with it and termed it as inadequate. But Kissinger repeated that Israel should not give up any settlement at that stage.<sup>108</sup>

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107 Quant, n.1, p.236.

108 See Dayan, n.56, p.473.

On 13 April, the Syrian negotiator, Brigadier General Hikmat al-Shihabi arrived in Washington for talks with Kissinger. Shihabi brought with him far reaching concessions for Syria but not far enough for Israel. He had come with a revised map showing a disengagement line running west of Quneitra. It did not tally Dayana's plan but was certainly an improvement over Asad's original position. He accepted the idea of reciprocal force limits on both sides of the dividing line - initially rejected as incompatible with Syrian sovereignty. Two days later, Kissinger passed the Syrian map to the Israeli Ambassador Dinitz.<sup>109</sup>

With these preparatory talks in Washington, Kissinger left Washington on 28 April, to begin the most important and arduous Jerusalem-Damascus shuttle. This time he had to engage himself in an extensive use of his "shuttle diplomacy". Sometimes he had to make three visits between the two capitals - from Israel to Syria and again back to Israel in a single day. This time a successful diplomacy was needed more than ever because of the crumbling domestic support base of President Nixon due to the Watergate Scandal. Kissinger had been fully assured of the Presidential backing to deal with the Israeli intransigence as and when required.



Before visiting the two main capitals Kissinger made visits first to Geneva - for talks with Gromyko, and then to Algeria and Egypt. Boumedienne and Sadat were the key leaders on whose support Kissinger now counted. More so the latter, who almost became Kissinger's adviser on Arab affairs.<sup>110</sup>

Then he arrived in Tel Aviv on 2 May to begin the actual negotiation on the disengagement process. But his talks in Israel did not produce any substantive result. Israel still remained adamant on its position. Moreover the matter became complicated because of the Israeli internal politics - Meir had resigned and was functioning as a care-taker Prime Minister to negotiate the disengagement. On the next day Kissinger met Assad in Damascus and avoided the discussion on the Israeli proposal. Till 16 May Kissinger kept on shuttling between the two capitals without making any substantial progress. Both the sides remained adamant on their own positions: Israel sought to withdraw only to the line held prior to the 1973 war and wanted a substantial UN buffer force; while Syria sought complete Israeli evacuation from the Golan. Assad insisted on all of Quneitra as well as three surrounding hills, which Israel would simply not yield.<sup>111</sup>

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110 See Ibid., pp.1049-51.

111 See Quandt, pp.240-1.

On 16 May, however Kissinger succeeded in inducing the Israelis to pull back to the base of the hills. The next day Nixon was informed that an agreement was nearing. In Damascus on 18 May, Kissinger found Assad still adamant. At this point Kissinger decided to leave for Washington. But at the last moment Assad dropped his insistence on controlling the hills west of Quneitra and appealed Kissinger to keep trying for an agreement. After the line of control problem was over, the problem focussed on the force limitations and the size of the restricted zones. After further rounds of discussion and the elimination of other obstacles, Kissinger was able to fashion the "United States Proposal" for disengagement acceptable to both sides.<sup>112</sup>

On 29 May the announcement was made that Syria and Israel had reached agreement on the disengagement of forces on the Golan Heights. Two days later the disengagement of forces agreement was signed by Syrian and Israeli military representatives in Geneva.<sup>113</sup>

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112 See Kissinger, n.36, pp.1079-82. The proposal contains the plan of controlling Quneitra and the surrounding hills.

113 Major General Herzl Shafiq represented Israel while Lt. General Adnan Wahid Tayara signed for Syria. The agreement was approved on 30 May by the Israeli Knesset and by the Syrian ruling Ba'ath Party. Time, 10 June, 1974, p.6.

The agreement provided for a ceasefire and for an exchange of prisoners.<sup>114</sup> Disengagement was to be completed within twenty days after the military working group had worked out the precise details of the process. Israel was to withdraw from the territory captured during the October war as well as from certain areas captured during the June war including Quneitra. Israel retained its positions on Mount Hermon and on three strategic hills around Quneitra. Following the Israeli withdrawal, a buffer zone would be set up between Israeli and Syrian forces ranging in width from about one-and-a-half to six kilometers. A UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) would be created in this buffer zone to supervise the disengagement and ceasefire. On either side of the buffer zone would be two six-mile wide zones of limited forces and armament. In the one closest to the buffer each side would be permitted 6,000 troops, 75 tanks and 36 artillery pieces. In the second six-mile zone there could be upto 450 tanks and medium range artillery, but no long-range artillery or anti-aircraft missiles. Further the United States would carry out reconnaissance flights as in the Egyptian-Israeli accord. Both sides declared that disengagement was only a step toward a just and durable peace based on UN Resolution 338.<sup>115</sup>

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114 The text can be found in Keesing's Contemporary Archives, vol.20, June 17-23, 1974, pp.26865-6.

115 Newsweek, 10 June 1974, p.33.

Further, through assurance letters, to the Syrians, the US committed itself to work for the full implementation of UN Resolution 338. Israel's right to self-defence in case of Syrian violation was recognized.

With the signing of the Syrian-Israeli disengagement Kissinger could boast of his diplomatic skill. The successful conclusion of the agreement once again demonstrated the effectiveness of Kissinger's unique brand of personal diplomacy. Once again it appeared that the US had become essential to the shaping of a border peace agreement. Kissinger returned to Washington on 30 May to a rousing welcome after a long-stay in West Asia.<sup>116</sup>

Kissinger's dramatic diplomatic success was followed by President Nixon's visit to five West Asian countries (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Israel and Jordan between 12 and 18 June) intended to "consolidate what has been achieved on the road to peace".<sup>117</sup> Before asking the Secretary of State to launch on another West Asian diplomatic mission Nixon had to resign on the Watergate Scandal and was succeeded by his Vice-President Gerald Ford on 9 August 1974. Though, the new President immediately

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116 Time, 10 June 1974, p.6.

117 Kissinger's Contemporary Archives, vol.20, July 1-7, 1974, p.26597-A.

confirmed to keep Kissinger in charge of foreign policy, some time had to pass before another strong American diplomatic initiative in West Asia was resumed. Moreover, Kissinger himself wavered and could not decide what the next step would be. He knew that the new step would have to deal with a much more complex range of political matters than the mere military disengagements. For a moment, Kissinger thought to suspend the American diplomacy but that ran the risk of weakening the moderate Arab coalition that he had been trying to encourage. So again he came back to "step-by-step" diplomacy and Ford did not differ. But where to begin? The answer was the Jordanian-Israeli front. The assumed belief was that it was worth trying to bring Jordan into diplomacy as a way of "undercutting the more radical PLO".<sup>118</sup>

The Jordanian Attempt: In the first half of October 1974 Kissinger started his second round of "step-by-step" diplomacy to bring a settlement on the Israeli-Jordanian sector. As usual his trip was preceded by preparatory talks in Washington with the diplomats from the Arab countries and Israel.<sup>119</sup>

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118      Cuandt, n.i, p.254.

119      The visitors included Izzat Fahmy, King Hussein, the Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam and the new Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Kissinger had to face innumerable problems on the Israeli-Jordanian sector. Since Jordan did not fight the October war from its territory, there was no question of military disengagement here. Instead Kissinger faced the vexed problem of sovereignty and the status of the Palestinians. The Jordanian sector involved the sensitive issue of the West Bank. On the one hand it had been occupied by Israel in 1967, on the other hand the sovereignty over it was claimed by the Palestinians and the Jordanian king as well. Hence it became a triangular problem instead of a bilateral one involving Israel on the one hand and two Arab entities on the other. Israel and Jordan greatly differed on their respective stands over the West Bank negotiation, despite Hussain's moderate attitude towards Israel. Israel remained adamant not to pull back its forces from the West Bank. Hussein refused to accept anything else. It was a typical case of 'yes or no', there was no middle path. At best Israel would agree for an administrative disengagement but Hussein strongly opposed as that would leave the military control of the area with the Israelis.

Further whatever changes that might have taken place in Hussein's tough stand on the West Bank issue, were marred by the ensuing Rabat Summit of the Arab leaders where a decision was to be taken as to who would represent the West Bank - the Palestinians or the Jordanian

King? Kissinger was told that the king had given an undertaking to Egypt, Syria and the PLO to the effect that his government would "defer efforts to obtain disengagement of forces between Jordan and Israel" until the Rabat Summit.<sup>120</sup> So, Kissinger and Hussain had to wait till that time.

The Arab Summit decision at Rabat came as the most disturbing news for Kissinger. He was annoyed and his diplomacy, at this time, had to suffer a severe setback. The Arab leaders unanimously endorsed the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and authorised the PLO to negotiate for any part of liberated Palestine including the West Bank of river Jordan. With this, Hussein had no more right to negotiate on the West Bank issue. Kissinger would not have liked the PLO to be a negotiating partner of a peace process conducted by the United States. The American strategy to remove the PLO from any negotiation by strengthening the Jordanian king failed. And the Americans could no more persuade the Israelis to come to an agreement with Jordan by their characteristic saying "Better Hussein now than Arafat later". Hence the Rabat Summit marked the failure of the Kissingerian

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Kissinger's Contemporary Archives, vol.20,  
November 18-24, 1974, p.26815.

"step-by-step" strategy,<sup>121</sup> And Kissinger had to come back Washington empty-handed.

The Second Egyptian-Israeli Agreement:

After the Jordanian failure, Kissinger turned his attention towards a second step on the Sinai front. But before doing that he visited the area early in November to explore the possibilities of such a step in the light of the Rabat Summit decisions. At the end of his visit he came to realize that despite the adverse effect of the Rabat Summit both Egypt and Israel were prepared to work for a second agreement. He also obtained a fairly good idea of the Egyptian and Israeli objectives which remained far apart. Egypt wanted that this time Israel should withdraw beyond the strategically important Mitla and Giddi passes and relinquish the control over the Abu Hadeis and Ras Sudr oil fields which were providing Israel with about fifty percent of its oil needs. Sadat was determined to make this step also basically a military disengagement one without making any major political commitment. He certainly did not want to withdraw from the conflict with Israel entirely which would severely affect his position in the Arab world.

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121. The Rabat Summit Decision has been discussed in detail in Chapter III.



The Israelis were demanding just the opposite: substantial Egyptian political commitments and concessions like end of Egyptian belligerency, a long-duration agreement and non-withdrawal from the oil fields. Nevertheless a possibility did exist, Kissinger concluded.<sup>122</sup>

Back in Washington, throughout November and December Kissinger tried to persuade each party to relax its conditions. Besides this he had to confront with some other discouraging developments like the Syrian opposition to another step on the Sinai, the Soviet insistence on the reconvening of the Geneva conference instead of the continuation of the "step-by-step" diplomacy, etc. However, Kissinger pressed forward despite these sources of opposition. In the meanwhile the proposed Brezhnev visit to Cairo was cancelled signalling increasing Egyptian reliance on the Americans. After that Sadat publicly endorsed Kissinger's peace efforts.<sup>123</sup> With such a background Kissinger decided to leave for West Asia again on 9 February.

Kissinger's February trip was admittedly "exploratory" in nature; a trip not designed to settle anything

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122 Bernard Reich, Quest for Peace: United States, Israel Relations and the Arab-Israeli Conflict (New Jersey, 1977), pp.305-6.

123 See Ibid., pp.303-5.

or to generate a "shuttle diplomacy". Kissinger wanted to have first-hand talks with all the major participants to see what the real possibilities of a solution might be.<sup>124</sup> But the exploratory mission did not bring any substantial change in the positions of Egypt and Israel. Nevertheless, Kissinger regarded the trip as successful and apparently felt that he had been able to identify nuances of the respective positions that would justify his return to the region in March.

For the next few weeks Kissinger continued to urge both the parties - more so the Israelis - to moderate their stands so that an agreement could be possible.<sup>125</sup>

Then came his March shuttle on the eve of which Kissinger was depicted as "guardedly optimistic" giving the negotiations a fifty-fifty chance of success.<sup>126</sup>

Kissinger's March shuttle began on 8 with his arrival in Aswan. This was the most crucial shuttle of all because of the complications of the respective stands of both Egypt and Israel. Despite the areas of agreement and desires of all concerned to reach an accord the

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124 "Secretary Kissinger's News Conference of January 28". Department of State Bulletin, vol. 72, no. 1860, 17 February 1975, p. 207.

125 See Sheehan, n. 53, p. 49.

126 New York Times, 6 March 1975.

differences remained over the issues of non-belligerency; Israeli withdrawal from the passes and the complicated issue of Israeli early warning installations at Um Hashiva - at the Western end of the Giddi pass, Israeli insistence on Egypt to conclude a separate and full peace agreement, etc.<sup>127</sup>

The Israelis remained more adamant - even after a warning letter from President Ford - than the Egyptians and the negotiations ultimately deadlocked sounding the suspension of the Kissingerian efforts and signalling a "reassessment" of the United States policy towards West Asia. A dejected Kissinger returned to Washington on 24 March after several days of hectic diplomatic persuasion.

The American West Asian policy "reassessment" was carried out against a disquieting international background -- the problem in Indochina, explosive situation in Lebanon, assassination of the Saudi King etc.<sup>128</sup>

Kissinger's call for a reassessment was his revenge on Israeli behaviour and was immediately followed by selective military embargo on Israel and US refusal to sign any new arms deal (with Israel). This period of

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127 See Yitzhak Rabin, The Rabin Memoirs (London, 1979), pp.193-200.

128 See Quandt, n.1, pp.268-9.

reassessment heralded one of the worst periods of American-Israeli relations.<sup>129</sup>

Kissinger summoned Dean Rusk, George Ball, David Rockefeller, Robert McNamara and other dignitaries and all the American ambassadors in the West Asian region to discuss the crucial issue of reassessment.

By the third week of April the reassessment produced three basic options for Ford and Kissinger. They were:

1. The U.S. should announce its conceptions of a final settlement on West Asia, based on the 1967 frontiers of Israel with minor modifications, and containing strong guarantees. Return to Geneva in which the Soviets should be encouraged to cooperate to resolve all outstanding questions (including the status of Jerusalem).

2. Failing the first option, the US should seek a quasi-total settlement, for the near future, with Egypt being the beneficiary. Israel should withdraw from most of the Sinai in return for political nonbelligerency; her final frontiers with Egypt to be determined at a later stage.

3 Failing the first and second the US should resume the "step-by-step" diplomacy where it had left off in March.<sup>130</sup>

For several weeks it appeared that a new American approach was in the offing but after a careful study of the domestic and international situation Ford and Kissinger ultimately opted for the third option. Soon contacts with the leaders of Egypt and Israel were resumed - this time involving President Ford himself as was evident from his meeting with Sadat in Salzburg.<sup>131</sup>

After Prime Minister Vitzhak Rabin's visit to Washington on 11-12 June, Kissinger confined himself to Washington while Israeli and Egyptian positions were refined and transmitted through him to each other. Dinitz and Bilts were helping Kissinger by shuttling between the respective capitals and Washington. As a result before Kissinger left for West Asia again on 20 August the parties had considerably moderated their stands. An agreement was within the reach. Only the exact location of the withdrawal line was to be settled.

This time Kissinger succeeded in his mission and after some lengthy persuasive discussions, the actual line

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130 Sheehan, n.53, pp.64-65.

131 See Quandt, n.1, pp.270-1.

of withdrawal was agreed upon by both Egypt and Israel,<sup>132</sup> On 1 September 1975 both the governments initiated the text of the Sinai II military disengagement agreement. On 4 September, it was formally signed by Geneva by the military and civilian representatives of both the countries,<sup>133</sup>

The Sinai II was modelled in part on the previous disengagement pacts. Israel agreed to withdraw fully from the Giddi to return the oil fields to Egypt. Each side undertook to refrain from the use or threat of force or military blockade, non-military cargoes moving to and from Israel would be allowed to pass through the Suez (Suez had already been opened for traffic in June 1975). The agreement would remain in force until superseded by a new agreement. A detailed provision titled "Limitation of Forces and Armaments" was also attached. Further, the United States undertook to provide up to 200 civilian technicians to man or supervise electronic early-warning stations in the area of the Mitia and Giddi passes.

The United States also signed three secret agreements with Israel and one with Egypt. A sixteen-point US-Israeli memorandum of understanding dealt with military assistance, oil supply, economic aid and a number of other political assurances. In other words the US was to be "fully

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132 See Reich, n.122, pp.321-25.

133 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, vol.21, 10-16, November 1975, p. 27429 A. The signatories were General Taha al-Magdoub and Mr.Osman Gor Egypt, and General Herzl Shafir and Mr.Mordecai Gazit for Israel.

responsive to Israel's defense, economic and energy needs. Under the US-Egyptian memorandum, the United States undertook inter alia to make a serious effort to help bring about further negotiations between Syria and Israel.

Sinai-II brought many reliefs not only to the parties concerned but also the United States. However, it was greeted with mixed reactions unlike the previous disengagement agreements. Thus ended Kissinger's Gramscian West Asian diplomatic mission. Next year, being a presidential election year, no new initiative was expected and the Arabs and Israelis waited with eagerness and apprehensions till the next president occupied the White House.

#### Kissinger and the Palestine Problem

As stated earlier (Chapter 1) soon after the creation of the state of Israel and the subsequent emergence of the Palestine problem, the United States concentrated on solving what it regarded as primarily a refugee problem by various means. By solving the refugee problem, it thought, it could bring about a settlement between Israel and her Arab neighbours. After this approach failed, the United States, in the aftermath of the 1967 war, reversed its strategy. All American efforts focussed on the territorial aspect of the problem that involved Israel on the one hand and the Arab

states on the other. This trend was based on the assumption that once the territorial disputes were settled, the Palestinian problem would work itself out later. Further, the American policy makers assumed that the dispersed Palestinians would have no other alternative but to accept whatever the patron Arab states might work out for them. Hence, the Palestinians were completely left out of the settlement process.

This trend not only continued during the Kissinger period but also reached the culmination. Whereas his predecessor, Rogers was making some passing references to the Palestine problem - like "there can be no lasting peace without the just settlement of those Palestinians..." -- While simultaneously dealing with the territorial aspect, Kissinger, from the beginning till the end of his West Asia diplomacy, simply tried to avoid the Palestine problem. No wonder, the avoidance of the Palestine problem and the PLO participation in any peace process constituted the basic underlying principle of rationale of his "step-by-step" strategy. Kissinger's perceptions of the Palestine problem and the PLO had been shaped much before the beginning of his "step-by-step" diplomacy. This was due to the following two important factors.

The first important factor to shape Kissinger's perception of the Palestine problem and the PLO was his understanding of the American national interest in the light



of the objectives, policies and activities of the PLO. The PLO, Kissinger thought, was "overtly anti-American as well as dedicated to the destruction of two important friends of the United Nations: Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan".<sup>134</sup> That the PLO was avowedly anti-American was quite evident from the terrorist activities of the Palestinians, which started in the early 1970s. In 1970, they hijacked three airplanes to Jordan and took hundreds of passengers hostage, including many Americans, holding them for several weeks. Two years later the Palestinians carried out the most spectacular act of massacring the Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics games. In 1973 the PLO supporters assassinated two American diplomats in Khartoum.

Coming to the American friends - Jordan and Israel - Kissinger took a very serious note of the 'fedayeen' attempt to overthrow King Hussein during the Jordanian war of 1970. This, Kissinger, thought, was going very much against the basic national interest of the United States, because Hussein was a "valued friend of the United States and a principal hope for diplomatic progress in the region".<sup>135</sup> Hence, the aim of the US, he argued, should be to strengthen the king

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134 Kissinger, n.36, p.623.

135 Ibid., p.623.

and the American role in crushing the Palestinian guerrillas was a well known fact. In fact Kissinger was very appreciative of Hussein's capability to crush the Palestinian Resistance Movement.

Further, Kissinger rejected, in no uncertain terms, the PLO policy and objective of liberating Palestine which would obviously mean the dismantling of the state of Israel. How could the United States enter into dialogue with an organization that aimed at eliminating its most important strategic ally in the area Kissinger argued. Moreover, the United States since the days of Truman was committed to the security and survival of the Jewish state of Israel. Another factor of which Kissinger was very critical was the PLO strategy of "armed struggle". These two factors led Kissinger to believe that a future Palestinian state run by the PLO was certain to be "irredentist". Even if it should change its professed aims, it would not remain moderate for a long period because of the many extremist factions within it. Even if Israel relinquished the 1967 occupied territories - which Kissinger himself regarded somewhat impossible - the Palestinians would not be satisfied with that. On the other hand, they would use it as an operation base to fight against Israel for the total liberation of the erstwhile Palestine. For them, a

state on the West Bank could be at best an interim step toward their final aims. Further, its Soviet ties would make it another radical state like Libya or Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDY).<sup>136</sup> This would not only jeopardize the strategic and economic interest of the United States but also increase the Soviet influence in the area.

In mid-1973, Richard Helms, the then U.S. Ambassador in Iran, informed Kissinger that one of his aides had been approached by a close associate of PLO leader Yasser Arafat. Arafat was interested in a dialogue with the US based on two premises: that "Israel is here to stay", and that Jordan should be the home for a Palestinian state. The PLO also sought clarifications on certain questions like: what did the US understand by "Palestinian interests" in the Brezhnev-Nixon communique? How did it intend to pursue them? How committed was the US to the continued existence of the Kingdom of Jordan etc. Kissinger told Helms that the US had "a nothing message" to send back. Kissinger totally avoided the clarifications by making an evasive and generalized sort of remark: that the US goal was the peaceful co-existence among all the states and peoples in the area; that the US would be interested to hear the ideas of the Palestinians on how this objective could be promoted through negotiations. But Kissinger was quite unequivocal

on one point. The overthrow of existing Arab governments was totally unacceptable to the US and it was committed to the survival of the Kingdom of Jordan.<sup>137</sup>

The second important factor that shaped the Kissingerian perception of the PLO was the international standing of the PLO before the October war of 1973. The Arab states by then had not recognised the political and negotiating right of the Palestinians and the UN resolutions - most important being 242 - had regarded them only as "refugees", that accorded no distinctive political role to them. Both the super powers were quite vague and ambiguous in their concern for the Palestinian rights. After the end of Nixon's Moscow summit in 1972, the communique made no reference to the Palestinians, much less to the PLO. The 1973 US-Soviet summit communique no doubt spoke of the "legitimate interests of the Palestinian people" but never defined what constituted the legitimate interest. In a word, the "Palestinian interest" was rarely a topic of international discussion, much less the PLO participation in those meets. On the West Bank issue, it had been assumed that in any future negotiation the Jordanian king and not the PLO would be a negotiating partner of Israel. Hence, before 1973 the PLO, for Kissinger, was an organization of "terrorists" aimed at threatening the basic national interest of the US., having no international standing or sympathy. Dealing with

Such an organization was not a major policy problem for the United States and it did not deserve any role in the future negotiation process. This continued even after the war during his mediation of the Arab-Israeli problem. That was the reason why Kissinger became annoyed with the Rabat Summit decisions and the UN invitation to Yasser Arafat to address the General Assembly.<sup>138</sup>

As early as 10 October - four days into the war - the United States received an unexpected message from Yasser Arafat, the head of the PLO, through Beirut. Arafat's message declared that it was

99 percent sure that the Israelis will rout the Egyptian and Syrian in the next few days. The United States therefore should not intervene or provide any more aid to Israel until after hostilities. The United States should<sup>139</sup> seek a ceasefire soonest without preconditions.

The Arafat message suggested that the Arabs had regained enough credibility to engage themselves in serious negotiations. Arafat further stated that the PLO's willingness to participate in Arab negotiations with Israel as it had to settle the 'score' with Jordan not Israel. In other words the PLO might make peace with Israel but never with Jordan. Arafat also promised no hostile action against American persons or installations - unless America undertook

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138 Discussed in Chapter III.

139 Kissinger, v.36, p.503.

a resupply of arms to Israel during the war. Whatever might be Arafat's conditions or promises, it made no difference for Kissinger and so also for the US diplomacy at that stage. No reply was given to Arafat until the war was over.

But the tense aftermath of the war compelled Kissinger to give a rethinking to the PLO message. And this time Kissinger did take up the offer though with a different intention. The intention was again in pursuance of the US national interest. The move was intended to safeguard the early delicate stage of the new American approach (toward the Arab-Israeli problem) that was soon to follow the ceasefire.<sup>140</sup> On 25 October - the Nuclear Alert Day - Kissinger decided to send a representative to meet with PLO officials in order to enable him to develop the US reaction to Arafat's proposals. It was sought to be done not directly but through Morocco. Accordingly on 3 November the US representative General W.A. Walters - an expert at discreet missions - met the PLO representative in Morocco's capital, Rabat. Walters had been strictly instructed not to make any proposal on the future political role of the Palestinians but to present the U.S. perception of the Palestine problem in very general terms. Walters stated that the U.S. did not regard the Palestine problem as an international concern but an inter-Arab one; that the PLO should come to an understanding with the Jordanian king instead of working for

his overthrow. However, Walters was very blunt in mentioning that the United States would strongly oppose any threat to the survival and security of Israel and any challenge to its legitimacy; that the U.S. Government would strongly react if any more American blood was spilled by the PLO. The PLO representative, on the other hand, described the injustices done to the Palestinians, its strong opposition to the Jordanian kingdom. He remained evasive on the conditions under which the PLO would recognize Israel. The meeting ended without any positive outcome as neither side made any concrete proposal. The basic intention of Kissinger behind this move was to gain some -- what he called -- "manoeuvring room" to prevent the PLO from disrupting the new American diplomatic initiative into the Arab world. However, this was the "only significant communication" with the PLO and the first U.S. - PLO dialogue became also the last during Kissinger's term.<sup>141</sup>

Notwithstanding the PLO initiative Kissinger started his "step-by-step" diplomacy by trying his best to avoid the discussion on the Palestine problem and the PLO participation in his peace process. Involving PLO in his negotiation strategy, at that stage, he thought, was

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<sup>141</sup> Even though there was one more meeting in March 1974, the matter did not proceed beyond the first meet. See, *Ibid.*, p.629.

'Incompatible with the interests" of any of the parties to the West Asian conflict. He regarded the PLO as a "disruptive force" which would bring the collapse of his mission and thereby the American prestige in the whole Arab world. Not only that, any American invitation to the PLO to participate in the process would be regarded as a basic change in U.S. policy by its strategic ally, Israel, which would be the worst thing for the Americans. Further he considered the PLO a "pot of contradictions", its moderates being overpowered by the radicals. Yasser Arafat was like "a cyclist atop a tight rope, yearning perhaps to descend to earth but urged by his disciples to pedal up to heaven - to the unattainable secular Palestine".<sup>142</sup> From Arafat's message, it was evident that if allowed to participate in the negotiations and if persuaded he would accept a mini-Palestine state - consisting of Gaza and West Bank. But until Arafat put his own house in order why should Kissinger do him favours? A mini-state of Palestine would in no way serve the American interest. On the other hand such miniature principalities create unnecessary tensions provoking a dangerous great power confrontation. This was what history had taught him.

Kissinger faced the problem of Palestinian participation almost from the outset of his preparation for the Geneva conference. On his first encounter with Sadat when



the Egyptian President urged a role for the Palestinians, Kissinger replied that he would try to arrange some form of Palestinian participation.<sup>143</sup> On 7 December 1973, at a meeting at the State Department with Moshe Dayan, the Israeli Defence Minister and Simcha Dinitz, the Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., Kissinger was pressured not to include the Palestinians. Dinitz tried to persuade Kissinger on this line by linking the Palestinian participation in Geneva and the imminent Israeli election in December:

Dinitz: I have Golda's instructions to get an understanding between the United States and Israel in Geneva.

Kissinger: I will be in touch with you, especially in the problem of Palestinian participation.

Dinitz: Golda cannot go into the elections if there is any doubt on Palestinians in Geneva. (144)

This was almost an ultimatum to Kissinger and Kissinger yielded. Further on 20 December 1973, one day before the Geneva, Kissinger passed to the Israelis a secret memorandum of understanding promising that no other parties would be invited to future meetings in Geneva 'without the consent of the initial participants.' This essentially gave the Israelis a veto over PLO participation in any future peace conference. On the same day, Golda Meir assured the

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143        Ibid., p.15.

144        Ibid., p.24.

Knesset in the following words:

It is inconceivable that we should agree to take part in a conference to which representatives of the terrorist organizations were invited - not to speak of negotiating with representatives of organizations whose declared aim is the destruction of the state of Israel .... (145)

Jordan also opposed the PLO participation. Israel was adamant and unyielding on this point. About the Arab leaders, Kissinger rightly guessed that though initially they were opposed to the Israeli stand they could be easily persuaded to go along with it. Sadat was no doubt displeased but acquiesced. The Syrian President had nothing to say as Syria itself boycotted the conference. But later on Assad suggested the inclusion of a Palestine delegation within the Syrian delegation if the Geneva conference was to reconvene.

Kissinger's effort to keep the PLO out of the negotiations suffered a shock after the Arab leaders met in February 1974 and agreed upon the need to create a Palestinian state headed by PLO leader Yasser Arafat. Pressures escalated for the formation of a Palestinian government-in-exile. At a meeting with Kissinger, the Jordanian king asked whether the United States would recognize

such a government. Kissinger denied any such intention. Both the leaders agreed that the U.S. and Jordan should work to forestall the creation of a Palestinian government-in-exile.<sup>146</sup> In his first round, Kissinger succeeded in concluding two important disengagement agreements between Israel and the Arab states of Egypt and Syria without even a passing mention to the Palestinian problem and the PLO's political role.

Kissinger's public stand on the issue of Palestinian accommodation in the peace process was often evasive. At a press conference on 6 June 1979, Kissinger was asked: "What is the U.S. position for a role for the Palestinians as a separate delegation in the peace conference?" He answered that "the issue of the Palestinians has not yet come to us. Our present position is that the delegations at the Geneva peace conference were established at the opening session". In a further question as to whether the U.S. would oppose a separate seating for a Palestinian delegation at Geneva, he replied that "the issue has not yet arisen". He further noted that there "has been no contact between this country and the Palestinians".<sup>147</sup> The fact remained that Kissinger was very much confronting the issue and it was very much there on the scene.

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146 Quandt, n.1, p.234.

147 Department of State Bulletin, vol.70, no.1826, 24 June 1974, pp.702-7.

Then came his second round of "step-by-step" diplomacy in which as a first attempt he tried to bring a settlement on the Jordanian sector. This time Kissinger's basic assumptions on the Palestinians and the PLO faced a gruelling test and failed. As stated earlier, the basic motivation behind the Jordanian attempt was to bring about a negotiation between Israel and Jordan on the sensitive West Bank area before the PLO emerged as a legal claimant to the area. Because in that case a West Bank settlement would never be possible as Israel would simply not sit with the PLO as a negotiating partner not to mention offering any concession. Kissinger thought, given the American influence over both Jordan and Israel something could be possible. Kissinger's attempt to avoid the PLO was more evident at this time than ever before. As the challenge became face-to-face, he increased his efforts more vigorously. He pressed for Sadat's support for Hussein as the spokesman for the Palestinians at the forthcoming Arab Summit conference in Rabat in October 1974. But it was of no use. Sadat could not succeed even in bringing out some ambiguous resolution on the matter. The Arab leaders unanimously endorsed the PLO to act as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestine people". It authorized the PLO to negotiate for any part of the liberated Palestine including the West Bank. Kissinger was annoyed and dismayed at the outcome. In light of this resolution Hussein lost the right to negotiate for the West Bank and the PLO's

claim to this responsibility gained Arab recognition. Kissinger could no longer claim that the PLO lacked Arab recognition and so he did not know 'whom to talk'. No more he could become evasive on the issue. Thus, the Arab summit decision not only made a Jordanian settlement impossible but even more important it marked the failure of Kissinger's "step-by-step" strategy. The belief that he could avoid the Palestinian issue by bringing about bilateral agreements between Israel and her Arab neighbours was shattered.

During the Sinai-II negotiations Kissinger's attitude towards the Palestinians and the negotiating process became still more revealing. On the one hand he expressed his anxiety on the growing importance of the Palestinians and on the other he once again yielded, on the PLO issue, to the Israeli pressure. As stated earlier, during his March 1975 visit Kissinger got annoyed with Israeli inflexibility that led to the suspension of his negotiating effort. Then the Israelis were too rigid on their stand on Sinai-II. At that moment Kissinger had remarked to Rabin:

The Arab leaders who banked on the United States will be discredited -- step-by-step has been throttled, first for Jordan, then for Egypt. We're losing control. We'll now see the Arabs working on a United front. There will be more emphasis on the Palestinians, and there will be a linkage between moves in the Sinai and on Golan. The Soviets will step back onto the stage. The United States is losing control. (148)

Due to the Israeli pressure on the PLO issue Kissinger agreed that the United States would neither recognize nor negotiate with the PLO until the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist and accepted U.N. resolutions 242 and 338. The secret American-Israeli Memorandum said:

The United States will continue to adhere to its present policy with respect to the Palestine Liberation Organization, whereby it will not recognize or negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization so long as the Palestine Liberation Organization does not recognize Israel's right to exist and does not accept Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The United States government will consult fully and seek to concert its position and strategy at the Geneva peace conference on this issue with the Government of Israel.(149)

The memorandum meant further U.S. intractability on the PLO and the Palestine issue. However, after less than a month (on 29 September 1976) Kissinger sought to reassure the Arabs when he promised that he would begin to refine his thinking on how the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people could be met. The promise was made during his talk with the Arab representatives at the U.N.<sup>150</sup>

Then came the Saunderson's document. This refers to a prepared policy statement, made by Deputy Assistant

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149 Kissinger's Contemporary Archives, vol.21, 10-16 November, 1976, p. 27432.

150 Quoted in Quandt, n.1, p.276.

Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Harold Saunders, on the Palestinians before a Special House International Relations Subcommittee on 12 November 1976. The document referred to the Palestinian issue as the 'heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict'. For the first time an administrative official termed the Palestinians as "a people" instead of mere "refugees". It further mentioned that the Palestine people desired a voice in determining their political status. The question was of how, not whether, this could be accomplished. The document said:

...The issue is not whether Palestinian interests should be expressed in a final settlement but how. There will be no peace unless an answer is found. We are prepared to consider any reasonable proposal from any quarter and we will expect other parties to the negotiations to be equally broadminded... (151)

This was the first and most important positive statement by the United States on the Palestinian issue during Kissinger's period. It created a lot of confusion then and Kissinger, when asked for clarifications, totally disowned it though it was reported that he had minutely checked the wording of the draft and had even got clearance from President Ford. Once again he became evasive before the public on the Palestinian issue. And to save his

face Kissinger subsequently told Senator Humphrey's Subcommittee on foreign assistance of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 19 November:

This (the Saunderson's document) was a paper delivered by a Deputy Assistant Secretary to a subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee, which was a somewhat academic exercise explaining in a purely theoretical manner several aspects of the Palestinian problem as Mr. Saunderson saw them. I have stated innumerable times our position on the Palestinian question. The United States will not deal with the PLO, will not consider dealing with the PLO until the PLO accepts the existence of the state of Israel and Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. This has been our position, remains our position, and if we were to change the position it would not be announced by a Deputy Assistant Secretary before a Subcommittee of the Congress. It would be announced at the presidential or my level only after fullest consultation with Israel. <sup>152</sup>

Nevertheless, the document marked a significant landmark in terms of the public record in U.S. Palestinian policy. And it underscored the growing awareness of the Palestine issue among the officials.

From this point onwards throughout the remainder of the Ford period, no significant progress towards a peace settlement was achieved. The 1976 presidential election activities and the Lebanese civil war demanded the primary attention of the administration.



Conclusions: The fourth Arab-Israeli war of 1973 came as a catalyst for all the parties involved in it directly or indirectly. After a humiliating period of six years the Arabs could raise their heads with pride by proving their worth both on the battlefield and in the art of diplomacy. The victory on the battle front was perfectly co-ordinated with the use of oil weapon to put pressure on Israel and her Western patrons, mainly the United States. The Arab bargaining position vis-a-vis the U.S. - Israeli alliance considerably improved. The war also resulted in the greater recognition of the Palestinian problem by the whole world in general and the US and Israel in particular. The need for a solution of the problem was felt more than ever before. The Palestinian question became the main point of discussion in all post-1973 international and regional conferences. For the Israelis, the war was both a surprise and a shock. The Arab states challenged their false sense of security based on military predominance. Israel could no longer remain adamant on its earlier stand that the occupied territories were non-negotiable.

As for the Americans, the October war fundamentally affected the US policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. Stability in the region was disturbed. American policy towards the area was challenged by the Arab countries - both

radicals and conservatives alike. The war also brought both the Super powers to the brink of a nuclear confrontation, thereby posing a threat to the world peace. It exposed the US and its industrial allies to the blackmail of Arab oil politics. The deepening energy crisis got further aggravated. The basic national interests of the United States were at stake. In view of these challenges, the search for an Arab-Israeli settlement became the top-most concern of the American policy-makers. The Kissingerian "step-by-step" diplomacy was a result of all these circumstances.

The main motivating factor behind Kissinger's diplomacy was to safeguard and advance the US national interests. Guided by this motivation, he tried to avoid the Palestinian problem and the question of the PLO participation in the peace negotiation process. Kissinger concentrated on the territorial aspects of the Arab-Israeli problem. He proceeded step-by-step and dealt with each Arab state separately in order to avoid confrontation with a collective Arab position. That was the reason for various bilateral agreements involving Israel on the one hand and her Arab neighbours on the other, instead of any multilateral or comprehensive peace agreement. While working for the bilateral agreements Kissinger avoided the most difficult and irreconcilable issues. For a moment he set aside the long-term goals and concentrated on small urgent issues

where agreement was most likely. Another element of Kissinger's diplomacy was to avoid the Soviet Union from the peace process. After the convening of the Geneva Conference, he totally bypassed the Soviet Union. In this way he tried to prove that it was only the US which could mediate between Israel and her Arab neighbours. Thus various bilateral agreements, like the Israeli-Egyptian disengagement agreement, the Israeli-Syrian disengagement agreement and the Sinai-II agreement were concluded under the overall supervision, mediation and auspices of Kissinger. This obviously increased America's prestige and stronghold - which had been challenged by the war - in the whole Arab world in general and Egypt in particular. But Kissinger's "stop-by-step" diplomacy faced a tough challenge during the Jordanian attempt and ultimately failed in view of the Rabat Summit decision.

Throughout the period, Kissinger's diplomacy was marked by one prominent feature i.e. his deliberate and conscious effort to avoid the Palestinian problem and the PLO participation in the peace process. This constituted the basic underlying principle of Kissinger's West Asian diplomacy starting from the Geneva conference till the conclusion of the Sinai-II. Kissinger not only continued but enhanced the age-old American trend of sweeping the most important issue - the Palestinian question - under the

table. The PLO was viewed as an organization of "terrorists" aimed at threatening the basic national interests of the US. Kissinger was very critical of the policies and objectives of the PLO - particularly that of "armed struggle" and the Soviet link. Involving the PLO in his negotiation strategy, Kissinger thought, was incompatible with the interests of any of the parties to the West Asian conflict. The PLO-initiative on the eve of Kissinger's West Asia mission -- showing its desire to take part in the peace process -- was not taken seriously. A dialogue between the US representative General Walters and the PLO representative was unenthusiastic and ambiguous and did not yield anything. The bilateral agreements that Kissinger negotiated did not even refer to the Palestinian problem.

Thus, throughout his term as Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger successfully resisted the pressure by the Arab governments to recognize and deal directly with the PLO, wilfully yielded to the Israeli pressure to the contrary and tactfully evaded the issue in public. His attitude to the Palestinian issue was evasive and deceptive.

## Chapter III

### THE PLO RESPONSE

#### Diplomatic Initiatives : Arab League, the United Nations and the United States

As stated earlier the first important meeting between the PLO representative and the American representative Walters (on 8 November 1973) ended without any positive outcome. The US. emissary had only a "listening brief" without anything concrete to propose. In other words, Kissinger did not take an important PLO initiative seriously on the eve of his diplomatic mission. This increased the PLO's suspicion about Kissinger's intentions. And to a great extent, the PLO's suspicion was right. From the very beginning Kissinger's "step-by-step" diplomacy side-tracked the central issue in the West Asian crisis, concentrated on the periphery and avoided the PLO participation in the negotiation process. This was quite an alarming development for the Palestinians. The PLO leadership responded to these challenges by taking diplomatic initiatives at not only the regional Arab League but also at the United Nations. It also took some diplomatic initiatives in the United States itself, though without much success.

Arab League: The first step in the process came at the Algiers Arab Summit Conference, a short time after the October 1973 war. A three-day summit meeting of Heads of State of Arab countries was held in Algiers from 26-28 November. Fifteen Arab nations took part in the summit.

The prominent figures included Presidents Assad, Sadat, Bourguiba, Boumediene (Chairman) and kings Faisal, Hassan. Also present was M. Yasser Arafat, the PLO Chairman, as an observer.<sup>1</sup> The greater part of the summit meeting was held in closed session. The summit displayed a remarkable sense of Arab unity and was regarded as "the rebirth of a history, the rebirth of a civilization", by King Hassan of Morocco.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the summit (28 November) the Arab states adopted a tough political resolution setting forth their terms for a peace settlement. Stressing that the ceasefire in West Asia did not mean that peace had been concluded, the resolution said that peace, if it was to be achieved, "presupposes a certain number of conditions" of which two were "paramount and unchangeable": (1) the evacuation by Israel of all occupied Arab territories, "and in the first place Jerusalem" (2) the re-establishment of the full national rights of the Palestinian people.<sup>3</sup> Thus, perhaps for the first time the Arab leaders took such a united stand on the Palestinian cause. The decision marked a great victory for the 'fedayeen'. But one missing point

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N.B. The text continues on P.147. Paging has been inadvertently errad.

- 1 President Mokhtar Ould Daddah of Mauritania was another observer.
- 2 Newsweek, 10 December 1973, p.10.
- 3 There were other resolutions also, like on Africa, on Western Europe, on Arab oil policy, etc. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, vol.19, 17-23 December 1973, p. 25245 A.

in this regard was that in the published statements terms such as "Palestinian people" and their "inalienable national rights" were used. The PLO was not mentioned. Nor was there any explanation defining those rights. These things were to be mentioned in the secret resolutions. The Arab states, in their secret resolutions, transferred to the PLO the exclusive right to represent the Palestinian people, gave it the right to interpret the meaning of "national rights" of Palestinians and committed themselves to action to restore those rights.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the recognition of the Palestinian national rights and their fulfilment as a basic condition for peace was a major landmark for the Palestinians in view of the imminent Geneva peace conference and the beginning of Kissinger's "step-by-step" mission.

One Arab leader who persistently refused to accept the Algiers resolutions - whether public or secret - was King Hussein of Jordan. He did not agree to give up his authority/claim over the West Bank in favour of the Palestinians. The King, advised in advance of the preordained summit decision, did not attend the Algiers Summit.<sup>5</sup> But, to the confusion and surprise of all, very soon, President

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<sup>4</sup> Aryeh Y. Yedfat and Yuval Arnon-Ohanna, PLO: A Strategy and Politics (London, 1981), p.40.

<sup>5</sup> Mr. Bahjat Talhouni represented the king.

Sadat joined hands with King Hussein on this point. At their meeting in Alexandria on 16-18 July 1974, the two leaders tried, for the first time, to bypass the Algiers resolutions. The joint statement that was published at the end of their talks said, inter alia:

The two sides declare that the PLO is the legitimate representative of the Palestinians, except for those Palestinians residing in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. (6)

Sadat also endorsed King Hussein's demand for a Jordanian-Israeli troop disengagement without which the monarch said he would not go to Geneva. Further, to give the King time to work out a disengagement, Sadat agreed to his request for a postponement of the Arab Summit from September to October.

The Alexandria communique not only exposed the cracks in inter-Arab unity on the Palestinian issue but also reduced the Palestinian revolution again to a refugee problem. Here also the timing should be noted. Kissinger had just completed his miracle on the Golan Front, Nixon had paid a good will tour to the West Asian region and Israel Jordan and Kissinger were thinking in terms of a settlement on the Jordanian front. If the Alexandria communique were allowed to proceed, Kissinger



would have been the highest gainer as he always wanted that the Jordanian settlement should be between the Jordanian king and the Israelis with the complete exclusion of the PLO.

The Palestinian movement responded to it by intensifying its opposition to the policy declarations issued in Alexandria. The statement was strongly condemned by Al-Fatah, the largest commando group headed by Yasser Arafat, the Syrian-backed As-Saig headed by Zubeir Mohamad as well as other commando factions. In its statement, addressed to the Palestinian and Arab masses, Fatah said the Hasat-Husseini declaration "reflects very seriously on the Palestinian cause and people". Fatah gave the following reasons to justify its condemnation.

The Alexandria declaration: 1. Constituted a backing-down on the resolutions of the Arab Summit conference in Algiers in November which recognised the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people wherever they might be; 2. in calling for a disengagement agreement on the Jordan front, in effect, it called for disengagement of the Palestinians from the Palestinian land and turning that land over to King Hussein in fulfilment of Israeli and American conditions; 3. responded in a surprising way to the Hashemite-Zionist strategy of obliterating the

identity of the Palestinian people; 4. constituted a surrender to the United Kingdom plan (proposed by King Hussein for a federation between the West and East Banks of Jordan) and 5. represented in all meanings and dimensions an attempt to efface the gains of the October war and constituted a blow to inter-Arab solidarity which was demonstrated in the Algiers resolutions.<sup>7</sup>

Farouk Kaddoumi, a Fatah member and head of the PLO's political department, warned that the Alexandria communique could give the governments of Arab states where Palestinians reside, a justification to claim to speak for these Palestinians, and that would ultimately deprive the Palestinians of their identity.<sup>8</sup>

The PLO Chairman, Arafat found himself in a very critical position. Earlier, Arafat had resisted pressure and criticism from the radical elements inside the guerrilla movement in order to cooperate with Egypt and Sadat in their efforts to bring about a settlement of the Jordanian-Palestinian problem. But with Egypt becoming a signatory to such a controversial declaration, the radical groups mounted their criticism on Sadat's policy and Arafat's moderate attitude. To meet these challenges Arafat paid

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7           Quoted, *Ibid.*, p. 1B.

8           *Ibid.*

visits to the Arab capitals. He met King Faisal and also held talks with Assad of Syria. These talks put pressure on Sadat and a few weeks after the Alexandria meet President Sadat reaffirmed the Algiers resolution in joint statements signed with Sheikh Zeid of Abu Dhabi and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia.<sup>9</sup> Again, on 20-21 September 1974, a tripartite conference was held in Cairo of the foreign ministers of Egypt (Ismail Fahmy), Syria (Abd Al-Halim Khaddam) and the Head of the PLO's political Department (Farouk Kaddoumi) to discuss the PLO issue. Under Syrian and PLO pressure a decision was adopted on the Palestinian problem that straightened the line again with the Algiers Summit decisions:

Starting from the resolutions of the sixth Arab Summit at Algiers, the conference agreed on the following ... Persistence in backing the PLO in its capacity as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people....(10)

This formal declaration was ratified at the seventh Arab summit conference convened in Rabat on 26-29 October 1974. The conference was attended by representatives of all twenty member-states of the Arab League and also of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The meeting was dominated by a dispute between Jordan and the PLO as

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9 Times of India (New Delhi), 5 October 1974.

10 Quoted in Yedfat and Ohanna, n.4, p.41.

as to which of them should be the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people of the Israeli-occupied West Bank of the Jordan River in particular at the UN peace conference to be reconvened in Geneva. After a protracted debate both in plenary sessions and in closed door meetings, the conference resulted in a political victory for the PLO whose right was recognised not only to be the "sole and legitimate" representative of the Palestinian people but also to lead the Palestinian people in establishing a "national Palestinian authority" on any part of the liberated Palestine (including the West Bank).<sup>11</sup> The resolution read as follows:

The conference again affirms the right of Palestinian people to return to its homeland and to define its self-determination;

Again affirms the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent national authority under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in all liberated Palestinian territory. The Arab states will support this authority upon its establishment in all respects and degrees;

Supports the Palestine Liberation Organization in carrying out its national and international responsibility within the framework of Arab obligations. (12)

With this, the PLO achieved the greatest political victory which immensely increased its diplomatic leverage.

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11 Keessing's Contemporary Archives, vol.20, 18-24 November 1974, p. 26813 A.

12 Ibid.

The impact of the Rabat Summit decision on Kissinger's diplomacy has been already discussed earlier. Suffice it to say here that it gave a deadly blow to the American-Israeli-Jordanian strategy of avoiding the PLO and ultimately liquidating it so that "there would be no Palestinian to speak for it". The US initiative on an Arab-Israeli settlement was thrown off balance and the Israelis and the Americans were put in a different position to adjust with this new reality.

Yassir Ahded Rabbo, the PLO information officer rejoiced at the Rabat Summit decisions by stating that the Arab Heads of States rejected Kissinger's proposals "leading to bilateral discussions between Israel and each of her Arab adversaries" and had called for a resumption of the Geneva peace talks, with the "PLO representing the Palestinians".<sup>13</sup>

King Hussein announced on 3 November that he had decided that Arafat and the PLO should henceforth have responsibility for the West Bank and that he accepted "out of a spirit of loyalty" the full consequences of the decision taken in Rabat where pressures on Jordan had been "enormous".<sup>14</sup>

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13           Ibid.

14           Ibid., p.26814.

Thus, the long controversy over the West Bank representation issue was settled in favour of the PLO. A brief discussion on the controversy over the West Bank between the PLO and Jordan is well in order here.

The West Bank was the most sensitive point in the Jordanian-Palestinian controversy. It was a part of the mandatory Palestine and was annexed by Jordan in 1950, just after the first Arab-Israeli war, unlike the Gaza strip which was put under Egyptian administration. These two areas were captured by the Israelis in the 1967 war. Since then West Bank was put under the Israeli rule. The conflict over the West Bank rose from the basic contradiction between the Palestinian nationalist movement and the regime of King Hussein. This movement never accepted King Hussein's rule and Palestinian unrest continued throughout the period that the West Bank was under Jordanian sovereignty. In the wake of the 1967 war, the contradiction moved to the East Bank when the commando movement emerged as a second force in Jordan. This state of affairs continued till the army clampdown on the guerrillas in 1970 and again in 1971, when the commandos were completely driven out of Jordan. Since then the PLO has always demanded the return of the guerrillas to Jordan as part of the reconciliation with King Hussein, who has consistently refused to accede. On the settlement issue,

the PLO was demanding that every part of Palestine which Israel might evacuate should be returned to the Palestinians who would set up a "national authority" there. Under no circumstance should any liberated part of the Palestinian soil be given back to Jordan. The PLO repeatedly warned against a disengagement agreement between Jordan and Israel under which the Jordanian administration would be re-established in the areas the Israelis might give up under any agreement. But Jordan insisted on such an agreement. Arafat demanded that Jordan should recognize the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, whereas Hussein said that it would recognize the PLO but would never agree with the view that the PLO represented all the Palestinians.<sup>15</sup>

Coming to the popularity of these two leaders among the West Bank Palestinians, the PLO was not universally accepted by all one million West Bank Palestinians. Some West Bank Arabs had made huge financial gains under the post-1967 set up - thanks to relatively high Israeli wages - and they did not wish to join hands with a militant Arafat. Others, particularly the "notables" or the local leaders of the West Bank are still loyal to Hussein. But thousands of West Bankers have had a deep-seated resentment against Hussein for his brutal suppression

of the 'fedayeen' in 1970 and have always been seeking an opportunity to show their solidarity with the PLO. In the aftermath of the October war, they demanded some action to restore their "full national rights" and Arafat promised them at least action - if not necessarily results. So the credibility of the PLO among the West Bank Palestinians increased after the war. A Palestinian in Nablus - a West Bank town remarked:

they (the PLO and Arafat) are our leaders now. They have the backing of the other Arab states, of the Soviet Union and most importantly of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia who has the oil. With that kind of support, people will listen when they talk.<sup>16</sup>

And the outcome of Rabat Summit clearly justified this statement. The decision marked the greatest ever victory for the 'fedayeen' and forced the world to re-examine a piece of conventional wisdom that emerged following the 1967 war: that while the commandos may have had a following in the squalid refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria, they had no support whatsoever among the Palestinians on the occupied West Bank of Jordan who much preferred the relative prosperity they had been able to achieve under Israeli rule.<sup>17</sup> Thus the long-standing controversy over West Bank representation

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16 Newsweek, 17 December 1973, p.6.

17 Ibid., 10 December 1973, p.10.



was settled and the PLO was given a free hand to decide the future course of action on the West Bank.

At the United Nations: The Rabat Summit was soon followed by another major Palestinian milestone with considerable international impact. On 13 November, the PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat addressed the UN General Assembly with the full honour of a Head of State. For one full week after that the General Assembly virtually became a discussion forum on the Palestinian problem. However, the spectacular event did not come by itself and was preceded by a vigorous diplomatic initiative by the PLO.

In so far as the PLO was interested in increasing its diplomatic leverage, it had always been seeking the UN support, <sup>for</sup> that way it could command more support than it did in the framework of Super. power initiatives where the support it got from the Soviets was cancelled by the support Israel got from the Americans. This necessity was felt still more in the aftermath of the 1973 war as the United States launched a diplomatic effort aimed at sidetracking the Palestinian problem in the peace process. At this critical point, the PLO thought, an international recognition of the PLO and of the importance of the Palestinian problem would act as a pressure mechanism on both the US and Israel to give more attention to the Palestinians in

in their efforts at the West Asian settlement. Moreover, the PLO could be assured of a majority support in the world body from the Afro-Asian and non-aligned countries who have always been sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

Guided by these considerations the PLO decided to take up its case to the UN General Assembly.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly the PLO Executive Committee made a request to the Arab League to take up the matter as the PLO had no locus standi at the UN then. The Arab nations agreed to press for a more ambitious international definition of the "rights" of the Palestinians. To this end they would call on the UN General Assembly to discuss the Palestinian issue independent of the overall West Asian question. The agreement was reached at the Arab League council meeting in Cairo in the first week of September. A unanimous decision to place the Palestine question as an independent item on the agenda of the forthcoming session of the General Assembly was taken.<sup>19</sup> The decision was hailed by the PLO and Abdel Mohsin Abou Haizar, the official spokesman of the PLO, called it the "most important decision by the League in the past quarter of a century".<sup>20</sup> To back up this move

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18 It had also been reported that the PLO decision to take the question to the UN General Assembly was taken during Arafat's discussion in Moscow with Soviet leaders in August 1974. Arab World Weekly, no.308, 7 September 1974, p.5.

19 The Guardian (London) 3 September 1974.

20 Arab World Weekly, no.308, 7 September 1974, p.4.

the PLO then launched a world-wide campaign to win support of other nations. As many as ten PLO delegates were sent to travel abroad to set the international scene for the UN Assembly's debate on Palestine question. Some news agency reports from Cairo quoted sources close to the PLO as saying the organization even wanted to have contacts with US officials on this matter.<sup>21</sup> Further, it was reported that the Palestinians had been discretely made aware of authoritative reports that the US was prepared to vote for the inclusion of the Palestinian question on the agenda of the UN General Assembly.<sup>22</sup> However, as per the request of the Arab League to the Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, the matter was accepted for the General Assembly debate without a formal vote on 21 September despite strong objections from Israel.<sup>23</sup> Again on 14 October 1974, the General Assembly decided to invite the PLO to take part in its debate on the Palestine question. Israel strongly objected to the resolution by stating that it constituted "a violation of the UN Charter", as the PLO represented "nobody but some 10,000 terrorists bent on the destruction of

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21 Arab World Weekly, no.308, 7 September 1974, p.4.

22 International Herald Tribune (Paris), 27 September 1974.

23 Ibid.

Israel".<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding the Israeli objection the UN General Assembly started the discussion on Palestine from 13 to 22 November. In the meantime Yasser Arafat had reached, with his delegation, New York amidst the most comprehensive security precautions ever taken there for a visiting political leader. There were many pro-Israeli demonstrations and threats of assassination by the Jewish Defence League. Yasser Arafat was greeted by the General Assembly like a Head of State. He addressed the General Assembly on the first day and on the next day, the Lebanese President Suleiman Franjich delivered a speech on behalf of the Arab states. Both presented the Palestine case as the crux of the West Asian conflict. Arafat told the General Assembly that the goal of the PLO was to establish a secular, democratic Palestine state. He "dreamt" of "one democratic state where Christian, Jew, and Muslim live in justice, equality and fraternity".<sup>25</sup> The General Assembly's debate ended on 22 November with the adoption of two resolutions. The first one, passed by 89 votes to 8 with 37 abstentions declared "the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they

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24 Keesing's Contemporary Archives, vol.20, 16-22 December, p.26861 A.

25 For text see Arab World Weekly, no.318, 16 November 1974. pp.22-24.

have been displaced and uprooted." It further declared the Palestinians' "right to self-determination without external interference" and to "national independence and sovereignty".<sup>26</sup> The second resolution, adopted by 95 votes to 17, with 19 abstentions granted the PLO a permanent observer status at the General Assembly and at other international conferences sponsored by the UN. The resolutions were strongly criticized by Western representatives, mainly on the ground that they made no reference to the Security Council's resolution 242 which had been regarded as the basis for peace efforts made since then. Israel was particularly distressed since these actions did not mention Israel's right to exist and did not refer back to the partition resolution of 1947 nor to the Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The United States found no signs of moderation in Arafat's speech nor in the position of the PLO towards Israel. On the other hand Arafat's reference to a "secular democratic state" was interpreted by the US as a call for the destruction of Israel as a Jewish state.

A spokesman for the PLO delegation at the UN described the two resolutions a "triumph" for the Palestinian people and the PLO while the Israeli Ambassador, Youss ef

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Keating's Contemporary Archives, vol.20, 16-22 December 1974, p. 26862. The negative votes were cast by the United States, Israel, Norway, etc. The E.E.C. members abstained.

Tekoah, condemned the resolutions and said that this was a "sad day" for the international organization. He declared that Israel would not abide by the resolutions.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, for the first time in many years, the General Assembly debated the Palestine question as an independent issue. So far the discussion on Palestine had been camouflaged under the wider issue of Arab-Israel conflict. The overwhelming General Assembly support for the Palestinians and their cause gave a deadly blow to the Zionist propaganda that the "Palestinians do not exist".

The discussion on Palestine did not remain confined to the General Assembly alone, it also reached the floor of the UN Security Council. In early 1976 (12 January) the Security Council debated the Palestine problem. All the permanent members with the exception of the United States strongly supported the "inalienable national rights" of the Palestinians. The debate further underlined the increasing isolation of both the United States and Israel on the issue of the Palestinians. Both of them stoutly opposed the seating of the PLO in the Security Council.<sup>28</sup> As expected the resolution on Palestine was voted by the

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27 Arab World Weekly, no.319, 23 November 1974,p.1A.

28 Patriot (New Delhi), 17 January 1976.

United States. Hence the PLO could not gain much from the Security Council debate. Nevertheless it went a long way in arousing increasing international concern for the Palestinian cause. Commenting on the Security Council resolution, Yasser Arafat remarked:

We know there is something called veto; we do not expect that the Security Council will take us to Palestine on a magic carpet or liberate our homeland from the Zionist occupation. It is only a step may be it will be a big step or small step - in the struggle. (29)

In the United States, Unlike in the Arab League and at the United Nations, the PLO Diplomatic initiatives in the United States failed to achieve any breakthrough. The initiatives were mostly indirect and piecemeal. Direct contacts between the PLO and the US Administration were prevented either because of the US denial or due to the severe opposition from the radical commando groups, mostly the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In fact the issue of PLO-US contact raised a great deal of controversy in the organization and was partly responsible for its eventual split.<sup>30</sup>

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29 Quoted in International Herald Tribune  
19 January 1976.

30 Discussed elsewhere.

After the unsuccessful dialogue between the PLO representative and the US emissary General Walters in November 1973, there was one more meeting in March 1974. But the second meeting did not advance matters beyond the point of the first one. After that there was no significant direct communication between the US and the PLO. Kissinger himself admitted this.<sup>31</sup>

In the month of September 1974, there were widespread allegations by the PFLP to the effect that it had proof of contacts between the American Government and the Palestinian guerrilla movement. Abu Maher, a PFLP spokesman said at a news conference that there were confirmed instances of attempts by aides to guerrilla leader Arafat to set up secret contacts with American diplomats evidently to arrange meetings between Arafat and the US Secretary of State Kissinger. He substantiated by saying that there was one such attempt in May in Cairo which was soon followed by another attempt in June during President Nixon's West Asia tour. The Palestinians, he further stated, had also sought the help of the American Embassy in Beirut on the possibilities of secret contacts. In each case the attempt had been rebuffed at the embassy level itself, he remarked.<sup>32</sup>

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31 See Henry Kissinger, Years of Upheaval (New Delhi) 1981, p.627.

32 International Herald Tribune 27 September 1974.



During 1975, Yasser Arafat took some diplomatic initiatives, to acquire American recognition of the PLO, not directly but through the Soviets and the Egyptian President Sadat. Thus during a visit to Moscow in May 1975, Arafat was told that the US would recognize the PLO before the resumption of the Geneva Conference. The Soviets told him that their embassy in Washington had made "preliminary contacts with the American leaders to assure the recognition of the PLO".<sup>33</sup>

After that, there was another attempt by President Sadat who, during his visit to Washington after the Sinai-II accord, asked President Ford to open talks with the PLO, and regard it as an equal partner in the Geneva talk. However, the proposal was rebuffed on the next day itself by Robert Anderson, a State Department spokesman. To justify the US stand of not recognizing the PLO, Anderson quoted an earlier statement of Henry Kissinger, "the USA has no decision to make because we cannot encourage a negotiating process between parties one of which wants to destroy the other".<sup>34</sup>

Even then, the PLO did not close the line of communication with Washington. It tried its best to keep

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33 Patriot, 26 April 1975.

34 Quoted in Tribune (Chandigarh) 1 November 1975.

it open, hoping for substantial contacts after the Presidential election. As part of this strategy the PLO helped protect the evacuation of foreign nationals, including the Americans, from Lebanon during June 1976. The PLO officials were heartened by an announcement from Washington conveying the US Government's thanks to the Palestinians for assisting the first evacuation. A state Department spokesman Frederick Z. Brown, further stated that the US officials were dealing directly with the Palestinians in arranging another pullout of US personnel from Lebanon. Such a statement obviously delighted the PLO.<sup>35</sup>

The most important direct move by the PLO to gain a foothold in the American Administrative circle came in the third week of November 1976. It took steps to open an office in Washington to lobby with the officials and members of congress and to disseminate information about the Palestine cause. It would be on the line of the influential Jewish lobby. The office, authorised by Yasser Arafat, was first registered formally with the Justice Department by Sabri Elias Jiryis, a moderate member of the Palestine National Council (PNC), who went to Washington with a Sudanese passport. In his registration with the Justice Department Jiryis stated

that he received \$ 10,000 from the PLO Headquarters in Beirut to organize an "information office in Washington".<sup>36</sup> Jiryis had been designated as the director of that office who would meet with officials of agencies and departments of the Executive Branch of the US government, members and staff of the Legislative Branch, members of the press and public and representatives of foreign governments as part of his mission of "disseminating information concerning the PLO, its policies and objectives."<sup>37</sup>

But the ambitious attempt did not succeed partly because of some technical errors (The would be lobbyist made a misstatement on his visa application) and partly as a result of the state Department's "sound" judgement that the moment was not "propitious".<sup>38</sup> From the very beginning, the State Department was extremely sensitive to the PLO move as such a move would obviously increase the Israeli suspicion that the US was looking for ways to modify its policy of non-recognition of the PLO.<sup>39</sup>

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36 Under the US law there is no prohibition against opening an office of a foreign government or group. All that is necessary for an individual is to register with the Justice Department as a foreign agent and supply detailed information about his source of money and his intentions.

37 International Herald Tribune, 22 November 1976.

38 Washington Post, 28 November 1976.

39 International Herald Tribune, 22 November 1976.

The real intention behind the PLO move was not just to open an office which it could do anywhere, but to make a "political gesture" out of official US acquiescence in the establishment of a PLO office in Washington.<sup>40</sup> It obviously had the ambition of countering the Jewish lobby. After the mission failed the PLO quickly responded by saying that another attempt would be made after Jimmy Carter became the President. This surely underlined the persistent PLO move to gain some diplomatic access in the American capital.

The New Political Programme and  
the Split Within the PLO

The initial PLO response to Kissinger's diplomacy was one of total rejection. It rejected the "step-by-step" approach as being a formula for a step-by-step isolation and eventual liquidation of the PLO. However, gradually it had to moderate its stand. At the twelfth Palestine National Council a clear-cut political strategy was chalked out indicating the PLO's willingness to participate in the peace process and to accept the establishment of "an

independent fighting national authority" as a first step on any territory liberated from the Israeli occupation. Before discussing the political strategy and the various commando groups' stand on it one has to analyse the various factors that led to a shift from a predominantly military strategy to a political one.

First, a humiliating defeat of conventional Arab armies in 1967 and the resultant loss of prestige by Arab military organizations gave credence to the Palestinian guerrillas as the only viable force which could face Israel's military might. The Palestinian guerrillas came to embody the hopes and aspirations of the Arab world, especially after the battle of Karamah. But the October war reversed the trend.<sup>41</sup> The same conventional Arab armies, with sufficient retraining and rearming, proved that they could also fight the hitherto invincible Israel Army. With this, the exclusive reliance on guerrilla warfare began to fade.

Second, as a result of the war, Egypt and Syria managed to replace the image of the 1967 defeat with a new image of pride and self-confidence. Imbued with

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41 Emile A. Nakhleh, "Absolute Security Versus Total Liberation", New Outlook (Tel Aviv), vol.17, no.9 (155), November-December 1974, p.66.

this new confidence, the Arab states showed willingness to discuss peace terms with Israel from a position of strength. The three "nos" (no negotiation, no peace, no recognition) enunciated by Arab leaders in Khartoum following the Six-day war now gave way to a new desire to enter into peaceful relations with Israel.<sup>42</sup> This new trend tantamounted to a tacit recognition of Israel's right to exist as a state - a position which straight-way ran counter to the professed goals of the Palestine revolution.<sup>43</sup> Further, despite their declared support for the Palestinian cause and their repeated emphasis on the PLO participation in the peace process, the two front-line Arab states - Egypt and Syria, not to talk of Jordan - wavered in their determination. Egypt was very well trapped by Kissinger and attended the Geneva Peace conference along with Jordan, despite the fact that Syria boycotted the conference, and the PLO was not invited to it. Then it went ahead in concluding a disengagement agreement with Israel in January 1974. Syria, despite being adamant initially, followed the suit. A tough Assad had to yield before Kissinger's diplomatic skill and concluded an agreement with Israel for the disengagement of forces on the Golan Heights. The only

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42           Ibid., p.67.

43           Newsweek, 10 December 1973, p.10.

assurance he got from Kissinger about the PLO was that the matter would be taken up in a future Geneva talk. This was a very vague promise. These developments indicated that Egypt and Syria could follow an independent course of action reflecting their national interests which would even bypass the interests of the Palestinian national movement. Their desire to discuss peace terms with Israel gave the indication of a shift from militancy to moderation. The PLO realized that it had to bring some changes in its strategy in order to cope with the new reality so that it would not be left alone on the scene.

Third, since its inception in 1964 no greater threat had confronted the PLO than the Geneva peace conference. It was a threat in the sense that the basic framework of the conference was the Security Council Resolution 242 (November 1967) and the other supplementary resolutions 338 and 339 (October 1974). Within the terms of reference suggested by Security Council Resolution 242 Palestinian representation was subsumed under the category of a "just settlement of the refugee problem". It viewed the Palestine question as a humanitarian problem instead of a national one. And the PLO as a political organization representing the needs and aspirations of Palestinian statehood had no right to membership of the Geneva conference. Matters relating to the Palestinians therefore could only

be discussed by the parties (Arab states and Israel) most directly concerned with the "just settlement" of the problem.<sup>44</sup> This was further reinforced by Kissinger who simply refused to talk to the PLO leaders. In order to succeed in his "step-by-step" diplomacy Kissinger side-tracked the Palestine problem and avoided the PLO participation in the negotiating process. He tried to bring about a solution by encouraging bilateral agreements between Israel and the Arab states. This strategy coincided with the Zionist aspirations of containing, undermining and removing the Palestinians from the whole of Palestine. Very soon Jordan joined hands with them. The US-Israeli-Jordanian strategy appeared to severely threaten the Palestinians' interest and the PLO's position in representing them. It aimed at bringing a Jordanian-Israeli agreement on the West Bank. In other words it meant that the Palestinians had nothing to do with the West Bank and the PLO was nobody to be consulted on the issue. This was too alarming a development to be neglected by the PLO. It had to take an immediate clear-cut stand of its own on the West Bank while simultaneously making efforts to get the Arab recognition as the "sole

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44 Ronald R. Macintyre, "The Palestine Liberation Organization: Tactics, Strategies and Options Towards the Geneva Peace Conference", Journal of Palestine Studies, vol.4, no.4, summer 1975, p.65.



and legitimate representative of the Palestinians".  
 Let the West Bank be integrated in the Hashemite Kingdom  
 of Jordan, either by an "administrative disengagement"  
 or by a military one.

The fourth important factor that led to a shift  
 in PLO's policies was its concern with the international  
 opinion. The October war brought the Palestine question  
 to the forefront more than ever before; it underlined  
 one clear fact that the Palestine and the Palestinians  
 remained the central issue in the on-going Arab-Israeli  
 conflict and in any ensuing peace agreement; it obviously  
 increased the international concern for the plight of  
 the Palestinians.<sup>45</sup> But this itself would not bring  
 back the lost territory and solve the problem. Moreover,  
 Kissinger did not seem to have any regard for the realities  
 that emerged out of the October war as far as the  
 Palestinians were concerned. Hence, the PLO, bearing the  
 overall responsibility of the homeless Palestinians, had  
 to enlist regional and international support in its favour  
 to get a better deal out of any possible settlement.

Before the crucial Cairo meet of the Palestine  
 National Council, the PLO had already achieved a big  
 success in the Algiers Summit of Arab leaders. But the

Algiers Summit Resolution was not forthcoming and explicit in recognising the PLO as the "sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinians". In order to gain an explicit and comprehensive resolution on the representation issue, the PLO leadership speeded up its efforts in the Arab world and it succeeded, as was evident from the Rabat Summit Resolution. By then the PLO leaders were also thinking in terms of taking their issue to the United Nations. The major problem was that the battle at the United Nations had to be fought diplomatically and on the political line. No amount of militancy would work there. The PLO's strategy of exclusive armed struggle would never succeed in getting the world support. Towards 1973 the international position of the PLO had been seriously jeopardized by terrorist activities. This became an acute concern in the aftermath of the war and especially when the PLO sought to acquire the UN support. Fatah had always been very sensitive to the adverse consequences of international terrorism. With the prospects, however, bleak, of a negotiated settlement of the Palestine question, the necessity of international support took an added dimension. It could hardly expect to manoeuvre the peace process in its favour, without international support.<sup>46</sup>

The PLO had to change its strategy to indicate some sort of moderation. It was further required to read correctly the movements and tendencies within the international system in such a way as to maximize the Palestinian interests.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the Soviet factor also played a role in shaping the change in PLO's strategy. Despite its overwhelming support for the Palestine cause and the PLO, the Soviet Union was always opposed to the fundamental objective of the Palestine revolution namely the establishment of a democratic, secular state of Palestine leading to the ultimate de-zionization of Israel. While Moscow had moved towards recognition of the PLO it had never wavered on its position since 1967 regarding the diplomatic recognition of Israel. Moscow's insistence had been that Israel should withdraw from all its territories taken in the Six-day war. Implied in this position was the fact that the Palestine question should be settled on the West Bank and Gaza. So the PLO had to take a clear-cut stand on the West Bank and Gaza, because till then it had insisted on the total liberation of Palestine. Whether Arafat actually took it upon himself to move for a change or under pressure from Moscow, or both, was difficult to say. The impression, however, was that Moscow pushed the PLO to adopt

a position in conformity with the other front-line Arab states to facilitate an invitation to the PLO to attend the Geneva conference should differences with Israel and the US be resolved.<sup>48</sup>

Before taking a decision to bring about a shift in their policies and strategy, the Palestinian leaders had to take into account the above mentioned changes in the Arab world and in the international field as a whole. This was quite evident from Arafat's speech to the Palestine National Council in Cairo. He said, "...Arab and international changes should be taken into consideration... So that the decision we take would be based on clear facts and that we would not be left alone standing in the arena".<sup>49</sup> The policy changes came only after what can be called a thorough and difficult process of self-examination within the commando organizations and the umbrella PLO that represents them.

The process of self-examination had started much before the Palestine National Council met in Cairo. This was quite clear from the various statements the main commando organizations were making from time to time to clarify their stands on the two important issues: Geneva

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48 Ibid., pp.83-84.

49 See "Arafat's Speech to the National Council", Arab World Weekly, no.295, 8 June 1974, p.15.

talk and future Palestinian state. A brief reference to their stands may be made here.

Fatah Since Fatah is the most prominent of all organizations in the Palestine resistance movement, its stand on the issues is important. Several meetings and congresses had been held within Fatah before the Cairo meet. In November 1973 Fatah stated, among other things, that it was studying the problems objectively in the light of the then grave situation. The statement called for continuing "contacts and consultations with all members of our people both inside and outside the occupied homeland, with our Arab brother and with our friends throughout the world". Moreover, Fatah recognized the role of the Arab regimes in the war, and stated that "any positive results of this battle must be taken into account". In taking a position on the Geneva talks Fatah would consider the following four factors:

- A. Any such decision shall be taken in the light of the national interests of the Palestinian Arab people with a view to protecting their legitimate historical rights;
- B. Affirmation of the continuing development of the existence of our people at the level of struggle and at the political level;
- C. Protection of the revolutionary gains and the achievements made by our people; and

- D. Concern for the unity of Palestinian ranks, as regards both the resistance and the people, at home and abroad and action to achieve a united Palestinian attitude. (50)

Three general positions emerged within Fatah concerning the Geneva talks:

- A. Refusal to participate in the talks on the grounds that any participation in the talks would be a tacit recognition of Zionist legitimacy in Palestine;
- B. Acceptance to participate in the talks, recognizing that such a participation would be a logical response to the new political realities;
- C. Neither refusal nor acceptance meaning that the Palestine revolution would participate in the talks without any prior commitment to accepting any results, especially in the context of Resolution 242. (51)

On the future state of Palestine on the West Bank and Gaza, Arafat, during his visit to Bahrain in March 1974, indicated the following five possible alternatives:

- A. The West Bank and the Gaza strip would enter into a federal union with Israel;
- B. The evacuated territories would become a part of Hussein's united Arab Kingdom;
- C. The territories should be placed under international supervision;
- D. The territories should be placed under Arab supervision, or
- E. The territories should be placed under a national Palestinian authority. (52)

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50 Quoted in Journal of Palestine Studies, vol. 3, no. 2, Winter 1974, pp. 203-4.

51 Quoted in Nakhlah, n. 41, p. 68.

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Ibid.

In his speech to the Cairo Palestine National Council Arafat rejected the first four alternatives and insisted on choosing the fifth alternative.

PDFLP: Like Fatah, the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP) of Nayef Hawatmeh took a moderate line and decided to accept an invitation to the Geneva conference, under the following four conditions:

- A. The Palestinian people must be represented by resistance leaders and not by King Hussein;
- B. King Hussein's plan to set up a United Arab Kingdom including the West Bank should not be on the conference agenda;
- C. Recognition that the people living along the West Bank and in Gaza have the right to self-determination (they should be allowed to set up a sovereign democratic state);
- D. Finally, Israel should agree to evacuate all territory seized in June 1967.<sup>53</sup>

In other words the PDFLP showed its willingness to accept an interim territorial solution: the establishment of a Palestinian state on a part of Palestine. But it did not give up the ultimate goal of establishing a single democratic state in Palestine.

PFLP: George Habash's Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) maintained the most radical stand in unequivocally rejecting any possibility of participating in the Geneva talks and the acceptance of a mini-Palestine state on the West Bank and Gaza. Habash regarded Kissinger as "enemy no.1" and the "symbol of American imperialism". He stated, "Kissinger wants to bribe the Palestinian revolution. The bribe is the freak Palestinian state in return for containing the revolution and hitting the Palestinian rifles". Hence, he firmly and categorically rejected the Geneva Conference and strongly advocated the full liberation of Palestine. He stated, "It is the duty of the revolution to declare that our goal is the full liberation of Palestine soil, the destruction of the Zionist entity and the setting up of the democratic society on the land of Palestine."<sup>54</sup>

ALP: The Arab Liberation Front (ALF) followed the Iraqi government line which strongly rejected any piecemeal solution. The ALF leader Abdel Wahab El-Kayali strongly rejected any sort of "bargaining with the Zionist enemy". He also rejected the Geneva conference and any negotiation with Israel.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See George Habash's Speech, Arab World Weekly, no.293, 25 May 1974, pp.14-16.

<sup>55</sup> See Kayali's speech, Ibid., p.16.



As-Saiga: The Syria-backed As Saiga followed the line of PFLP and ALP by categorically rejecting the idea of attending peace talks with Israel at any stage. It argued that there should be no compromise on the historical rights of the Palestinian people. As-Saiga feared that the Palestinian struggle would be relaxed if the revolution contended itself with the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>66</sup>

PFLP-GC: Ahmad Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP-GC) which joined the PLO much later generally supported the PFLP point of view.

From the above analysis, it is quite clear that before the Cairo meet there was a clear-cut division among the various commando groups within the PLO. Of all these groups only As-Saiga changed its stand to support Al-Fatah and PDFLP, the rest stuck to their radical stand.

For several days, serious dialogue went on within the Palestinian guerrilla movement on their tactical objectives and the attitudes they should take toward the current efforts aimed at a peaceful settlement of the problem. Towards the second week of March 1974, three major groups - Fatah, Saiga and the PDFLP - prepared a

working paper and submitted it to the PLO for endorsement. The paper was rejected by other groups consisting of the PFLP and the ALF. The PFLP submitted a rival working paper.<sup>57</sup>

Then efforts continued to unify the two papers in order to ensure a united Palestinian stand. After a series of "summit" meetings, held in Beirut in May, the Palestinian guerrilla leaders approved a 10-point political programme for the PLO. The programme was submitted to the meetings of the Palestine National Council in Cairo on 2 June 1974 by Farouk Kaddoumi, Chairman of the PLO's political department.<sup>58</sup>

The twelfth Palestine National Council (PNC), the Palestinian parliament-in-exile, met in Cairo from 1 to 9 June 1974. The 179 - member PNC met to consider three main subjects of urgent importance: 1. the question of participation in the Geneva peace talks; 2. the future of the occupied West Bank, the Gaza Strip and whatever Palestinian territory Israel might be prepared to give up; and 3. the question of a new leadership for the PLO.<sup>59</sup>

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57 See Arab World Weekly, no.283, 16 March 1974, pp.16-19.

58 Ibid., no.295, 8 June 1974, p.14.

On 5 June, the PLO chairman Yasser Arafat spoke for nearly three hours to the PLO Council outlining the various problems that the Palestine Revolution was facing and the possibilities available to overcome them. He announced before the council that he would be prepared to go to Geneva if the Council would authorize him to do so. He praised the 10-point programme, submitted the other day, and called for the setting up of an independent Palestinian "national authority that would serve as a spring board for liberating the other occupied parts of Palestine in order to establish the democratic, secular state on them". He appealed the members to maintain unity and to reach an agreement on the future course of action.<sup>60</sup>

The outcome of the Cairo meet was a great victory for Arafat and the other moderate groups. Despite their severe opposition, the radicals proved to be a minority in the Council when the majority opted to endorse the 10-point political programme submitted by the PLO with Arafat's guidance. On the leadership issue, it was again in favour of Arafat. The Council elected some independents, proposed by Arafat, to the new 14-man Executive Committee. At its first meeting the new EC re-elected Arafat unanimously as Chairman of the PLO and the Commander-in-chief of the Palestine Revolution. Another new development was

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60 See Arafat's speech, Ibid., p.15.

the election of a representative (Talal Najj) of the PFLP-GC to the new Executive Committee.

Thus after a long debate the PLO leadership could come out finally with a united Palestine stand on the crucial issues of Geneva and West Bank and Gaza in the form of the ten-point political programme. The most important points of the new plan were Nos. 1, 2 and 4. The first point strongly rejected the Security Council Resolution 242 of 22 November 1967, which refers to the Palestinians as "refugees" and, therefore, any conference based on that resolution, "including the Geneva conference". This implied that unless the Palestinians were recognized as a people with national rights, the PLO would <sup>not</sup> go to Geneva. By this point the PLO sought the disengagement of Resolution 242. The second point spoke for the establishment of "an independent fighting national authority of the people on any part of Palestine soil that is liberated". However, such a step would be only a transitional one and not final. It would be, as the fourth point stipulated, "a link in the chain" seeking to realize the final goal "which is to establish the Palestinian democratic state" as specified in the past resolutions of the National Council.<sup>61</sup>

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61 See "PLO's Political Programme", Arab World Weekly, no. 296, 8 June 1974, p. 14.

So in the aftermath of the 1973 war and in reaction to the Kissingerian diplomacy, the Palestinians came out with a "political strategy". While the eighth PLO of March 1971 defined armed struggle as the "principal way" to liberation indicating tacitly the existence of some other ways, the twelfth PLO of June 1974 explicitly spoke of a "political strategy", along with the military one. The PLO, the new programme stated, "struggles by all methods, foremost of which is the method of armed struggle" (point 2). The new programme came as a sort of compromise formula to adjust with the new realities. The underlying motive behind this political programme was to maximize the gains for the Palestine Revolution without losing the basic character of it. In other words the PLO adopted what can be called a fight and negotiate strategy. It was very much in keeping with the demands of time.

From the very beginning there was a sharp difference of opinion among the commando groups on the necessity of an interim solution and negotiated settlement with Israel. The Fatah, PDFLP and Sa'ad supported such a move while the other three groups (the PFLP, PFLP-GC and the ALP) strongly opposed such a move on the ground that it would be a deviation from the original

goals of the revolution and secondly any negotiated settlement with Israel would automatically involve "Palestinian recognition of Israel's right to exist".<sup>62</sup> On the eve of the Cairo PEC, it appeared as if the three dissident groups would quit the PLO on the issue of the "independent Palestinian entity". But a fragile unity among the groups within the PLO was maintained and they all agreed on the 10-point political programme. It was not because the dissident groups supported the move, but because as they were in a minority they had to accept it.

Once the PEC was over, differences erupted on the interpretation of the political programme.

For instance, the first point of the programme stated that the PLO would not take part in any international conference, including the Geneva, on the basis of Resolution 242. To Fatah and its followers in the PLO-EC, this meant that if the agenda of the Geneva conference was revised so as to include one item on the Palestine question per se, then the PLO should take part. But to the PFLP and its other militant followers, it meant a total and categorical refusal to take part in the Geneva

conference.<sup>63</sup>

The differences were further aggravated by the Alexandria communique signed between President Sadat and King Hussein in July. It may be recalled here that the communique announced that the PLO represented the Palestinians with the exception of those living in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. This declaration came as a blow to the commando factions under Arafat who had opted for cooperation with Egypt, and played into the hands of the PFLP - led militants who had been opposing the Egyptian policy all along. Very soon the three groups - PFLP, PFLP-GC and the ALP submitted a joint memorandum to the PLO leadership demanding a "switch" in policy, and asking that the PLO should dissociate itself from such "reactionary regimes" as Egypt.<sup>64</sup> Arafat, however, insisted that a break between the PLO and Egypt was unadvisable and the dialogue should continue. After many contacts and Arab mediations Arafat succeeded in reverting the Alexandria communique by a resolution agreed upon in a tripartite

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63 Arab World Weekly, no.311, 28 September 1974, p.2.

64 In fact the three groups wanted that the PLO should follow the Iraqi line which rejected any negotiated settlement. The PFLP and the PFLP-GC were maintaining close contacts with the regime in Baghdad.

meeting between the PLO, Syria and Egypt in Cairo (20-21 September 1974). The outcome was regarded as a victory for the PLO, but it did not satisfy the PFLP and its followers. Then the breaking point came and the PLO ultimately split.

The PFLP decided to withdraw from the Executive Committee of the PLO and from the Central Council - a body which acts as a liaison with the E.C. and acts like a small parliament while the larger PLO is not in session. However, it decided to continue its membership in the National Council and other Palestinian bodies to expose what it called the PLO's "treacherous pro-American designs".<sup>66</sup> The announcement was made at a press conference in Beirut held by Ahmed Al Yamaní also known as Abu Maher on 26 September 1974. In a written statement the PFLP spokesman accused the PLO leadership of continuing on the course of "capitulationist solutions" and being a "tail" to "defeatist" Arab regimes.<sup>66</sup> The PFLP rejected what it called PLO's "deliberate immersion in the American-sponsored political settlement with Israel".<sup>67</sup> The PLO leadership was further accused of being a "satellite" of reactionary

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65 International Herald Tribune, 27 September 1974.

66 Arab World Weekly, no.311, 28 September 1974, p.3.

67 International Herald Tribune, 21 September 1974.



Arab regimes.<sup>68</sup>

A "supplement" to the statement was also distributed. It gave what was described as "accurate information" about alleged contacts between the PLO leadership and the US through a third party.<sup>69</sup> When asked about the possible formation of a Palestinian provisional government, Abu Haber said that such a step would pave the road to Geneva and the PFLP would fight against such a government.<sup>70</sup>

The PFLP was fully supported by the other two militant groups: the PFLP-GC and the ALF. And ultimately the three commando groups formed what was called the 'Rejectionist Front'.<sup>71</sup> With this the long suppressed cracks in commando ranks were exposed. It further marked the beginning of the end of Palestinian unity which have serious implications in future.<sup>72</sup> The 'Front' argued

68 The Times, 27 September 1974.

69 In identifying the third parties the supplement stated that the contacts were first started through a former Libyan Premier Mustafa Ben Halim and were later followed up by Professor Walid Khalidi of the American University of Beirut and head of the Institute for Palestine Studies. The purpose of the alleged contacts was to arrange a meeting between PLO leaders and US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Arab World Weekly, no.331, 28 September 1974, p.3.

70 The Times, 27 September 1974.

71 The Guardian, 27 September 1974.

72 Ibid.

that the shift in the PLO policy was in direct contrast with the decisions of the sixth PNC session of 1969 which had called for the "total liberation of Palestine". Hence, they branded the new policy as a "surrender solution" and a betrayal of the Palestine cause. The 'Front' emphasised a military rather than any diplomatic or political solution. For them, armed struggle was the only method to destroy the Zionist enemy. In other words they believed firmly in a "fight and liberate" strategy.

When asked whether the PFLP-GC and the ALP would also withdraw from the PLO -- DC, Abu Maher said that all the three groups adopted the same "political attitude" and he expected them to withdraw but the timing was left to them.<sup>73</sup>

#### The PLO and the Lebanese Civil War

An incident in early March 1975 in the port of Sidon when some fishermen supported by a leftist Muslim group came into conflict with the town's security forces sparked off the civil war which converted Lebanon into a bloody battlefield.<sup>74</sup> Very soon the localized war took international dimensions dragging foreign forces into

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73 The Times, 27 September 1974.

74 See Rasafin's Contemporary Archives, vol.21, 18-24 August 1975, p.27287 A.

19. By 1976, the PLO, despite its initial unwillingness, got directly involved in the fighting on the side of the left-wing forces and was eventually made the target of a well-planned conspiracy of the right-wing forces and the Syrian army.

#### Background :

The PLO involvement in the Lebanese internal affairs was neither accidental nor an overnight development. Its involvement was as old as the creation of the organization itself. The reasons were three fold. First, after Jordan it was Lebanon which had a significant majority of the Palestinian refugees (some 40,000 during the civil war period), so it was natural that the PLO leadership would concentrate much of its attention on Lebanon. Second, from geographical point of view Lebanon provided the Palestinians with an effective base to launch attacks on their Zionist enemy. The third reason, which was perhaps more important than the other two, was the favourable Lebanese internal situation. The PLO found Beirut even more convenient than Amman as a political centre.

The Lebanese politics suffered from a highly fragmented society. There was a clear-cut cleavage between Christians and Muslims, which had been further complicated by the existence of various sectarian subdivisions. Some seventeen sects were officially recognized and these did not include a number of smaller but still

sizeable minorities like the Kurds.<sup>75</sup> Religion was the most critical factor in Lebanon, which shaped above all others, the political system of the country. The Lebanese political system rested on a fragile balance between Christians and Muslims. It was a system based on confession and designed to cope with one major problem: Christian-Muslim hostility. The balance of power between these two mutually hostile religious groups had been maintained by the provisions of the National Covenant of 1943.<sup>76</sup> The Covenant had fixed the system of representation in every form of administration from the government machinery down to school boards. The fixation was based on the then demographic ratio of six Christians to five Muslims.<sup>77</sup> By tradition, the President has been a Maronite Christian and the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim. Since 1943, the Christians had taken every care to maintain this delicate system of representation that provided them a major share

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75 Michael C. Hudson, "The Lebanese Crisis : The Limits of Consociational Democracy", Journal of Palestine Studies, vol.6, nos.3-4, spring/summer 1976, p.109.

76 The national pact was concluded between Eishara El-Khoury and Riad al-Sulh, the leading Maronite and Sunni politicians respectively of the independence period.

77 Amos II, n.45, p.13.

in the system. They had carefully evaded a fresh national census the first of which was taken in 1932. A fresh national census, the Christian apprehended and rightly so, would reveal a Muslim majority - because of their high birth rate. No wonder, the Muslims had been insisting on such a step.

A constant confrontation between Muslims and Christians had been a marked feature of Lebanese politics since the creation of the modern state. The Muslims remained totally opposed to the position of pre-eminence and the in-built prerogatives assigned to the Christian community, especially the Maronite Christians under French mandatory rule. While the Muslims had sought to change the system in their favour, the Maronites had resisted any alteration to the status quo. While the Maronites saw Lebanon as an integral part of the Western European civilization the Muslims insisted on its Muslim and Arab character. The struggle was not so much for religious supremacy as for distribution of political power. This schism gradually assumed an ideological character and became a Left vs. Right encounter.<sup>78</sup> The Muslims because of their call for changes identified themselves with the radicals or leftists

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Abbas Kelidar and Michael Durrell, "Lebanon: The Collapse of a State", Conflict Studies (London), no.74, August 1976, p.3.

and Christians because of their insistence on the status quo were regarded as conservatives or Rightists.<sup>79</sup>

Under such a situation of delicate power balance, the Palestinians were widely welcomed by and gained sympathy and support of the Muslim factions in the country. More so in the mid-1960s when the Palestinian resistance began to develop. Till 1967 the refugee camps were under the strict control of Deuxieme Bureau (The Lebanese Military Intelligence) and were subject to many repressive measures like frequent curfews, dawn raids etc.<sup>80</sup> During the period immediately following 1967, a number of Palestinian guerrillas

78 Abbas Kelidar and Michael Burrell, "Lebanon: The Collapse of a State", Conflict Studies (London), no.74, August 1978, p.3.

80 This is a very broad generalisation of Christian and Muslim parties in Lebanon during the civil war period. Some of the important Christian parties and factions are - the Kataib Party (also known as Phalangist Party) led by Pierre Gemayel; National Liberal Party led by Camille Shamun; Al Tanzim led by Fuad Shamali; Zgharta Liberation Army led by Tony Franjeh and the Permanent Congress of the Lebanese order of Monks led by Father Sharbil Qassis. Among the Muslim parties are - the Progressive Socialist Party led by Kemal Jumblatt; Independent Nasserites Movement led by Ibrahim Gulailat; Lebanese Communist Party led by N. Qula al-Shamsi; Arab Socialist Baath Party led by Majid al-Ribai; Syrian Social Nationalist Party led by Imam Rad etc.

80 Kamal S. Salibi, Cross Roads to Civil War (New York, 1976), p.26.

groups committed to the liberation of Palestine through "Armed Struggle" emerged. The emergence of the Palestinian guerrillas had to have a serious impact on the Lebanese domestic scene.

The presence of the guerrillas on Lebanese territory was vehemently opposed by the Maronites as a violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity, while the Muslims found in the young militant guerrillas a potent force which could be used as a leverage against the Christians in their power struggle. The Muslims greatly supported the guerrillas in the hope of acquiring greater concessions from the Christians for their own community within the status quo.<sup>81</sup> The guerrillas, on the other hand, found in the Muslims a solid support base which they could easily manipulate in their favour to put pressure on the Lebanese authority to relax the military restrictions on guerrilla trainings and commando operations. Thus, the interests converged and the guerrillas aligned themselves with the left-wing and radical forces.

Towards the end of 1968, the guerrillas gained a free hand to undertake armed attacks against Israel from the Lebanese soil. Some Palestinian organizations such as the Fatah, Seiga and the PFLP entered into the wild,

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81 Kelidar and Burrell, n.78, p.4.

thinly populated region of ravines and caves on the western slopes of Mount Hermon. The area was on the Lebanese side of the converging borders of Israel, Syria and Lebanon. The Arabic name of the area was Arqub but it was generally referred to as the "Fathland" by the mass media.<sup>82</sup> Syrian aid and supplies were given to the organizations, through a path called the "Arafat Path". The Lebanese authorities, especially Prime Minister Abdullah Al-Yafi tried to first to ignore the process.<sup>83</sup>

These developments dragged Lebanon into the thorny Arab-Israeli conflict. So far the Lebanese leaders had managed to excuse their country from anything but passive participation in the Arab-Israeli conflict on the ground that the country was internally too weak and divided to face an external enemy.<sup>84</sup> But once the guerrillas began to undertake armed attacks inside Israel, Lebanon became the object of fierce Israeli attacks. On 28 December 1968, Israeli commandos destroyed thirteen civilian airliners on the ground at Beirut airport. The raid was, as the Israelis put it, in reprisal for a Palestinian guerrilla attack on Israeli airliners at Athens a few days earlier.

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82 Yodfat and Ohana, n.4, p.32.

83 Quoted in Ibid.

84 Hodson, n.75, p.116.



Lebanon was the object of the retaliation because the terrorists had allegedly come from Lebanon and been trained there. The airport attack was the first of many which Lebanon had to suffer because of the Palestinian presence.<sup>85</sup> The major aim of the Israeli attacks was to turn the Lebanese against the Palestinians and destroy their capacity for attacking Israel.<sup>86</sup> But the Israeli strategy failed as there was a strong solidarity between the Palestinian guerrillas and the Left-wing Muslims and other radical groups. In fact, after the Six-day war the Lebanese government, under the pressure from both its own Muslim citizens and other Arab states, had to give the guerrillas a certain degree of freedom in building their organizations within the refugee camps and in mounting operations against Israel across the southern border.<sup>87</sup>

The stronger the Palestinian organizations became in Lebanon, the greater were their demands. They asked to have more and more training centres in their camps, to

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85 Michael C. Hudson, "The Palestinian Factor in the Lebanese Civil War," Middle East Journal (Washington D.C.), vol. 32, Summer 1978, p. 263.

86 Hudson, n. 75, p. 116.

87 Kelidar and Burrell, n. 78, p. 6.

maintain their arms and to act freely against Israel from the Lebanese soil. The Christian groups strongly reacted to these demands. As they showed a marked and public resentment against the increasing guerrilla activities, the Muslims supported the PLO demands and the Arab states exerted pressure on Lebanon to permit PLO strikes against Israel from her territory. The Lebanese government faced a great dilemma and could do nothing except taking refuge in inactivity and indifference.

But a head-on military confrontation between the Lebanese Army and the Palestinian commandos became inevitable once the Lebanese army attempted to contain the guerrillas in 1969. The period between April and October 1969 witnessed a wave of violent clashes between the Lebanese army and the Palestinian militias in various parts of the country, particularly in areas adjacent to Israel and Syria where the Palestinian commando movement had been operating. The fact that the Lebanese state had ceased to exercise its rightful sovereignty over these sensitive strategic areas, due to the Palestinian commandos' presence there, was as intolerable to the Lebanese army as it was to the Christian groups. Further, apart from strengthening Lebanon's sovereignty the army wanted to remove any new pretext for fresh Israeli retaliation against Lebanon.<sup>88</sup>

The first major clash between the guerrillas and the army occurred on 14 April 1969, at Dayr Mimas in southern Lebanon, when the Lebanese army forcibly transferred a guerrilla emplacement to a place farther away from the border. The incident touched off a series of pro-guerrilla riots and demonstrations in Beirut, Sidon, Tyre and Tripoli in which at least twelve people were killed.<sup>89</sup> More and more clashes continued and in October the army took some more stringent measures to contain the growing guerrilla presence and the Palestinians retaliated with attack on Lebanese frontier posts at Masna and in the north. As the clashes became bitter, Muslim political leaders, and especially the Druze chieftain, Kemal Jumblatt, saw the political need to protect "their rears" and began to express support and solidarity with the guerrillas openly.<sup>90</sup> The radical Arab regimes rose to the support of the Palestinian guerrilla cause and openly condemned the Lebanese army for its attempts to liquidate the Palestinian commando movement in Lebanon. Even the conservative Arab regimes, possibly under pressure from the PLO, began to show their support in favour of the continued existence of the commando movement

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89 Hudson, n.85, pp.263-4.

90 Kelidar and Burrell, n.78, p.6.

in Lebanon under the minimum possible controls. They further argued that the Palestinian armed struggle was the natural right of the Palestinians and that it was not necessarily incompatible with the sovereignty of the Arab states which happened to be their hosts.<sup>91</sup>

The crisis was resolved at least temporarily by what came to be known as the Cairo agreement of 1969. President Charles Helou appealed to Nasser for his mediation. The Lebanese chief of staff General Emil Al-Eustani hastened to Cairo and in the negotiations between him, Arafat and the Egyptian foreign minister Mohamand Riyad, an agreement was reached on 3 November 1969. That was the Cairo agreement. The agreement recognized the presence of the commando bases and their right to act from southern Lebanon against Israel. The PLO, on the other hand, recognized Lebanon's sovereignty and the authority of its government. The PLO activities were to be carried out within the framework of the Lebanese sovereignty and security.<sup>92</sup>

The recognition of Palestinian commando bases in Lebanon came close to the victorious battle of Karameh

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91 Salibi, n.80, p.42.

92 Riad El-Rayyes and Dunia Nahas, Guerrillas for Palestine (London, 1976), p.104.

which had enabled the Palestinian Resistance Movement to acquire an operational base in Jordan. Thus, towards the end of 1969, the movement had acquired two bases; in Lebanon and in Jordan. But the Palestinians lost their Jordanian base after the "Black September" of 1970 when the Jordanian army mercilessly suppressed the commandos. Around July 1971, the 'fedayeens' were completely crushed and the territorial base in Jordan was lost. Then all the guerrillas had to return to their second important base in Lebanon and start regrouping among themselves. This intensified the Maronite fears of the Palestinians. The Maronites were strongly opposing the Cairo agreement and determined to annul it. As the Palestinian guerrillas moved into Lebanon after their losing battle with the Jordanian army the Christian Rightist militias began to arm themselves for what they must have seen a possible future confrontation in which they could hardly count on the Lebanese army.<sup>93</sup>

Gradually the situation became explosive and as apprehended by the Christians a violent confrontation took place in May 1973. This time the struggle was between the Lebanese army and the Christian militia on the one side

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<sup>93</sup> During the five years following the 'Black September' the Christians were rapidly arming themselves smuggling M 16 rifles, Czech M 58 rifles and other small arms they could fire, and spending their evenings in arms drill.

and the Palestinian guerrillas and their Syrian supporters on the other. The waves of violence ended with yet another agreement known as the Meikart agreement. The agreement was signed under the direct pressure from Syria and the threat of the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) and the guerrillas of the Syria backed Haiga which had been despatched across the border into Lebanon to protect the guerrillas from the onslaughts of the Lebanese army and the Christian militia.<sup>94</sup>

The Meikart accord reiterated the provisions of the Cairo agreement and the two sides pledged themselves to co-operate more fully in the future.<sup>95</sup> But the pledge for cooperation lasted only for a very short time and new clashes again broke out, this time as a result of disagreement in the interpretation of the agreement. The outbreak of the October war brought an end to the fighting only to be resumed after less than two years and in a more intensified manner with more severe consequences especially for the PLO.

The PLO's role during the above mentioned period was more or less encouraging in the sense that all the

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94 Kalidar and Eurrell, n.78, p.7.

95 See Ibid.

factions within it co-operated and co-ordinated their activities with very little disagreements and dissensions. The PLO was dominated by Al-Fatah in a coalition with the Syrian-backed As-Saiga and the PDFLP. Much pressure was exerted on the Palestinian organizations by Arab states to unite or at least increase cooperation among them. This led to attempts to act together in areas of military, financial and information activities. A certain measure of cooperation in the military field was achieved in Lebanon in which all organizations had an interest to continue to keep their semi-independent status. However, As-Saiga gained some prominence as the centre of activity moved from Jordan to Lebanon. Syria greatly influenced the PLO activities through Saiga. It played a tactical game in first creating tensions between the Palestinians and the Lebanese authorities which resulted in a sharp deterioration of relationship between the two. This ultimately enabled Syria to intervene on behalf of Palestinians and in that way to gain an influence both in Lebanon and among Palestinian organizations.<sup>96</sup>

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### The Civil War

The civil war period can be broadly divided into four phases.

As stated earlier the Sidon incident was the starting point of the civil war. In the Sidon firing, Ma'ruf Sa'd, the Pro-Palestinian Sunni deputy of the town, received serious wounds which ultimately led to his death. This gave rise to intense fighting between Maronite-rightists and Muslim-leftists of the disintegrated Lebanese army. At the beginning of the civil war, Fatah tried to keep itself away from direct involvement, but by April some organizations mainly from the 'Rejectionist Front' had already involved themselves by supporting Muslims and Leftists in their fight against the Christian-right. Thus, on 13 April, when a busload of Palestinians was ambushed by Kata'ib gunmen, killing some twenty-seven Palestinians, a direct fighting took place between the Palestinians and the Kata'ib militias.<sup>97</sup>

The second phase extended from June through December. During this period there was not much of Palestinian

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97 Keating's Contemporary Archives, vol.21, 18-24 August, 1975, p.27287 A.



involvement and the fighting between the Maronite-rightists and the Muslim-leftists took new dimensions. This period was marked by sporadic clashes characterized by many cease-fires aimed at bringing an end to the fighting. While the fighting between the Leftists and Rightists was continuing, Arafat was trying to conclude an agreement with President Franjiyyah and other Lebanese leaders to remove the Palestinians from the conflict. But as the fighting went on the Palestinian rejectionist groups became more and more involved on the side of the Lebanese National Movement with Arafat trying unsuccessfully to mediate.

The third phase began in January 1976. The civil war in Lebanon took a new turn when forces on the Right-wing Falange party and National Liberal Party (NLP) blockaded the Palestinian Tel az-Zaatar and Jisr al-Basha refugee camps in the Dekwaneh district of Deirut. The seige of the camps brought about a major change in the overall Palestinian position. The blockade of the camps was not prompted by any specific development or event and seemed to be a deliberate attempt to drag the PLO into the fighting.<sup>98</sup> This came at a time when the PLO was expected to participate in the Security Council debate.<sup>99</sup> The PLO-Fatah organizations

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98 Arab Report and Record (London), 1-15 January 1976, p.10.

99 See Ibid., pp.25-29.

were finally brought directly into the Lebanese struggle. Arafat declared that the PLO could not stand on the sidelines any longer. Jumblatt, Rashid Karami, Palestinian officials and other Leftist-Muslim leaders met to unify their ranks and oppose strongly what they perceived as a 'Rightist manoeuvre' toward virtual partition of Lebanon. Similar meetings took place among the Rightist leaders. Several leaders like President Franjiyyah, Pierre Jumayyil etc. met in the Presidential palace and declared that the struggle was now between Lebanese Christians and the Palestinian-Muslim coalition.<sup>100</sup>

On 23 January in the midst of some of the most brutal fightings of the war, Abu Iyad, a PLO spokesman declared, "Franjiyyah and the Rightist command are cooperating in a plot to liquidate the Palestine revolution".<sup>101</sup>

By the end of January the increasing assault on the camps, the seizure of the Maslakh and the use of Lebanese air force against Palestinian enclaves had vastly intensified the hostility between Lebanese factions and brought the Palestinians fully into the war.<sup>102</sup>

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100 See Hudson, n.85, p.271.

101 Quoted, Ibid.

102 See Arab Report and Record, 16-31 January 1976, p.43.

In the meantime commandos of the Lebanese army deserted their units to join their respective factions and the military became a party to the conflict instead of an impartial balancer. Lieutenant Ahmed Al-Khatib declared his desertion from the Lebanese army and the establishment of a Lebanese Arab Army which fought on behalf of the Left and the Muslims. Similarly, Christian soldiers also deserted Lebanon's military forces and joined on the side of the Christian militia.<sup>103</sup>

At this point came the Syrian diplomatic and military intervention. Diplomatically, it tried to mediate to bring an end to the fighting. The Syrian mediation proposal of February called for a return to the old Lebanese model with some modifications in favour of the Muslims.<sup>104</sup> The PLO welcomed the mediation in principle but was suspicious of Syrian intentions; the more militant elements of the Muslim-left had rejected the plan as inadequate while the Christian-right parties found it too revolutionary. The Syrian mediation did not succeed. The Syrian mediation was also accompanied by the introduction into Lebanon of the contingents of the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) to fight on the side of the Palestinians.

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103 Ibid., p.45.

104 See Hudson, n.75, pp.118-20.

The most critical phase of the struggle was the last one, marked by the entry of the regular Syrian forces on 1 June. The Syrian direct intervention was perhaps prompted by the rumours that an agreement between the warring Lebanese factions was at hand - one that would severely curtail Syrian influence in Lebanon. This time the Syrians intervened not to fight with the Palestinians and the Muslim-left but against them. The Syrians fell out with their long-standing allies and extended their support to the Maronites, giving the complex struggle a new turn.<sup>105</sup> The Syrian forces issued an ultimatum to the joint Leftist and Palestinian forces to withdraw from their positions. The Palestinian command and the Muslim-left rejected the ultimatum which ultimately led to a series of fighting between the Syrian forces and the Palestinian and Muslim-leftists. Syrian soldiers directly clashed with the Palestinian guerrillas - both from the main body and the rejection group - and drove them back steadily.<sup>106</sup> By September, Syrian troops were pushing the Palestinians and Lebanese Leftists out of their mountain positions and controlling Palestinian guerrillas in southern Lebanon at some distance from the Israeli border.<sup>107</sup>

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105 Joel Carmichael, "The Legacy of Lebanon", Midstream (New York), vol.22, no.8, October 1976, p.3.

106 See Arab Report and Record, 1-15 June 1976, pp.350-2.

107 Hudson, n.<sup>8</sup>5, p.273.

The Arab summit conferences in Riyadh (18 October 1976) and Cairo (26 October 1976) resolved to end the fighting in Lebanon and gave an inter-Arab legitimacy to a permanent Syrian presence in Lebanon under the guise of an Arab League deterrent force (predominantly Syrian). The summits further reaffirmed the 1969 Cairo accord and the right of the Palestinian organizations to have a presence in Lebanon as per the provisions of that agreement.<sup>108</sup>

The discussion on the Lebanese civil war would remain incomplete without an attempt to answer some important questions: Why did Syria, a long-standing and natural ally of the Palestinians and the Leftist forces in Lebanon, intervene in favour of the Right-wing forces? What role did Henry Kissinger play in this game? What were the attitudes of other Arab actors, notably Egypt? And finally what impact did the Lebanese civil war have on the PLO?

From the beginning of the crisis, the Syrian moves were guided basically by her national goals and interests. Syria wanted a Lebanon that was responsive to the leadership in Damascus and not an independent Lebanon whether under the control of the Christians or the Muslim-left and Palestinians. Thus, in the initial stage when it

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<sup>108</sup> See Arab Report and Record, 16-31 October 1976, pp.651-2.

appeared that the Maronite forces would take over Beirut Syria despatched the PLO units and the Saiga organization.<sup>109</sup> But later on, the tide of the battle began to turn to a point where the Left and the Palestinians spoke of an impending military victory over the Right. At this point Syria changed its stand and its regular armed forces intervened to fight on the side of the Right-wing forces. This was because, Assad was perfectly aware that a Leftist or Palestinian-dominated Lebanon would cause him problems. It might invite Israeli attacks, drawing Syria into premature military confrontation with Israel.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, the Israeli Prime Minister Rabin and Foreign Minister Allon had plainly warned that they could not accept a Lebanon controlled by a Leftist-Palestinian coalition because of the grave threat such a Lebanon would pose to northern Israel.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, the Syrians were always concerned about the influence of the 'Rejectionist Front' mostly the PFLP and ALF - not only on the PLO but on the Lebanese politics in general. The support of Iraq and

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109 Stephen Oren, "Anatomy of a Bluff: Syria, the Palestinians, and the U.S.", Contemporary Review (London), vol. 228, no. 1322, March 1976, p. 116.

110 William B. Quandt, Decade of Decisions: American Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict - 1967-1976 (Berkeley, 1977), p. 282.

111 Oren, n. 109, p. 116.

Libya for the 'Rejectionist Front' who were on the forefront from the beginning of the war - was particularly disturbing because of Syria's ideological feud with the fellow Ba'athist Iraq. Damascus could not tolerate the emergence of a radical regime in Lebanon to provide a platform for the dissemination of anti-Syrian propaganda and a co-ordinated "princer-like movement" with Baghdad.<sup>112</sup> Still another factor was Syria's long desire to impose its overlordship on the Palestine organization by bringing its own group - the Saiga into power. Thus a complex of factors led Syria to decide on a simple course of action: curbing the PLO.

The Syrian intention to curb the PLO coincided with the long-standing desires of three other actors: the United States, Israel and the Lebanese Christian-right. Thus, the Syrian action was a concerted and well-planned attack on the PLO, aiming to destroy it.<sup>113</sup>

The Israeli government had a very simple aim: to destroy the PLO, to nip in the bud the attempt to establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza - a "time bomb" for the Israelis - lest Israel would be required to return the territories. The Israeli arms

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112 Kelidar and Furrell, n.78, p.13.

113 Uri Avnery, "Inside the PLO", New Outlook, vol.20, no.7(178), October/November 1977, p.49.

supply to the Rightists by early 1976 which almost coincided with the blockade of the Palestinian refugee camps should be viewed in this context.<sup>114</sup>

The Lebanese Christian-right wanted to maintain the status quo in Lebanon. And for this they found the PLO as an obstructing force. So by destroying the PLO, they hoped to destroy also the Leftist and Muslim forces in the country which were threatening the privileged status of the Christians.

The intention of the US was well known. This brings us to the second question: role of Henry Kissinger. The United States under Kissinger's direction, saw the Lebanese civil war as another opportunity to destroy the organization which interfered with the imposition of "pax Americana in the Middle East".<sup>115</sup>

During his "step-by-step" diplomacy Kissinger only partly succeeded in causing harm to the PLO - as the events at Rabat and the United Nations showed. While the Rabat Summit sabotaged the Kissingerian effort to bring

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114 See Hudson, n.85, pp.268-9.

115 Aynary, n.113, p.49.



an Israeli-Jordanian settlement, the United Nations greatly increased the international standing of the PLO. The Lebanese war was the next opportunity - in fact the last for him - to try to destroy the PLO. Perhaps, it was the next-step in Kissinger's "step-by-step" diplomacy to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict - i.e. elimination of significant Palestinian resistance.

In the initial stage - when Syria was supporting the Palestinians - the US played a tactical role in urging restraint on Syria.<sup>116</sup> Because Kissinger perceived that a Leftist Lebanon might allow Palestinian guerrilla attacks against Israel which could lead to war eventually. Another round of war between Israel and her Arab neighbours would spoil all that Kissinger had achieved by his disengagement diplomacy; it could bring another oil embargo, it might lead to increasing Soviet influence etc.

But at the later stage of the war when Syria intervened in favour of the Right-wing forces, the United States' assessment began to change and Kissinger viewed the Syrian role as somewhat a stabilizing factor. It no more urged restraint on Syrian military action, rather it silently supported the move. In the Syrian move Kissinger found many positive gains for the United States.

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<sup>116</sup> See Quandt, n.110, p.282.

This change in attitude led many to speculate that there existed a well-planned conspiracy between Assad and Kissinger: Syria would crush the PLO and would be rewarded the Golan Heights in turn; Jordan would recover the West Bank; radical forces and Soviet influences would be finished; continued flow of Gulf oil would be ensured and a pax Americana would usher in. The speculation was perhaps right and the fact that Syrian move was but a part of the Washington - made master plan - to destroy the PLO - could not be ruled out.

As far as the other Arab actors were concerned, Libya and Iraq were quite forthcoming in their support for the Palestinians and the Left-wing forces in the war, Egypt had to stay out of the war till the crucial Syrian "switch". After the conclusion of the Sinai II with Israel, Egypt was largely isolated in the Arab world. In return for part of Sinai, Cairo almost pledged to close the military option against Israel. The Syrians received nothing from this arrangement. While the US did commit itself to finding a Syrian-Israeli interim formula, it did so against the backdrop of Israeli announcement that only 'cosmetic' changes were possible on the Golan Heights, Egypt withdrew from the confrontation against Israel and the Syrians were left alone on the war front. These

developments were viewed as betrayal in Damascus.<sup>117</sup> If Syria could get nothing, same was the case with PLO and Jordan. Syria then tried to form an alliance with these two forces to humiliate and isolate Egypt in the Arab world. Syria immediately proposed a unified command with the guerrillas. It reached agreements with Jordan on military, political and economic co-ordination. In practical terms Jordan undertook to seal off its northern border, long considered the weak-flank in Syria's defence against Israel.<sup>118</sup> Egypt was left alone watching the events helplessly. But once the war tide took a different turn with the Syrian military intervention, Egypt lost no time in seizing the opportunity to restore the lost prestige by fully joining the forces of Iraq and Libya to fight on the side of the PLO and the Left-wing forces to thwart the Syrian moves. Egypt vehemently condemned the Syrian ulterior motives. The relationship between Syria and Egypt was strained. So much so that on 5 June, both the countries withdrew their diplomatic representatives from each other's capital.<sup>119</sup> Egypt improved its relationship with the PLO. Strange re-alignment of forces

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117 Oren, n.109, p.114.

118 Kelidar and Burrell, n.78, p.13.

119 See Arab Report and Record, 1-15 June 1976, p.343.

indeed it was. But once the war was over, Syria once again turned toward her former allies and resumed aid to the PLO, the Muslims and the Leftist forces in Lebanon. Assad and Sadat were reconciled. Assad undertook to end Syria's bitter criticism of the Sinai II accord in return for which Sadat agreed not to press for a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. They agreed to resume diplomatic relations. Assad also got reconciled with Arafat whom Damascus had been seeking to remove from his position as PLO Chairman. All this happened because of the Saudi pressure on Syria. Saudi Arabia threatened to break relations and cut off financial aid to Syria if Assad did not settle his differences with Sadat and Arafat.<sup>120</sup>

Coming to the civil war's impact on the PLO, the Lebanese crisis severely undermined the strength of the PLO. It emerged out of the war very much weakened though not destroyed. After the 1974 split, the civil war once again exposed the lack of unity within the PLO. It once again proved that the commandos could not speak with a single voice. From the very beginning of the war, when the official PLO-Fatah leadership consistently sought reconciliation and compromise, the 'Rejectionist Front' consistently resorted to retaliation and armed struggle in conjunction with the Lebanese Leftist forces. From the

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p.640.

bus massacre of April 1975 through the siege of the camps in early January 1976 the PFLP the PFLP-GC and the ALF were always trying to press for a military rather than a diplomatic solution. They severely criticized Arafat for his what they called compromising attitude.<sup>121</sup>

This was not all. The split became further widened with the Syrian regular forces entering into Lebanon. This gave rise to a very unexpected and pathetic situation in which the guerrilla groups fought against each other. Palestinians fought Palestinians. The autonomy of the PLO and Fatah was further reduced. The pro-Syrian Saiga - which was so far with the Arafat block - and the PFLP-GC preferred to fight alongside Syria against their brother guerrillas. Fatah, PFLP, PFLP and the ALF constituted the other group.<sup>122</sup>

Further, the Syrian-Christian alliance with Israeli aid and the US blessing, was determined to conquer the Muslim regions of Lebanon -- the PLO's last territorial base after its expulsion from Jordan in 1971. This was a serious threat. Had it succeeded the PLO would have been left without any autonomous territorial existence on any territory. It would have had no operational base to

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121 Hudson, n.85, p.268.

122 See, Yodfat and Ohanna, n.4, pp.36-37.

fight the Zionist enemy. Its independence would have been broken with its forces scattered throughout the Arab world. Syria would have taken control of the organization turning it to just another wing of the Assad regime. The whole Palestinian movement would have returned to its starting point, all the gains so laboriously achieved since 1964 would have vanished.<sup>123</sup> It was due to the timely mediation of the Arab countries especially Saudi Arabia and their steps to reaffirm the Cairo accord of 1969 that allowed the PLO to have a presence in Lebanon. Another virtual 'Black June' did not occur.

Conclusions: The brief period of Kissinger's diplomacy constituted the most critical phase for the Palestine Liberation Organization. Kissinger's non-serious attitude towards the PLO-initiative and his deliberate effort to deny the PLO a place in the negotiation process reactivated the Palestinians. The PLO leadership rightly responded to the challenges by taking diplomatic initiatives in the Arab League, the United Nations and even in the United States itself. The Arab leaders at the Rabat Summit recognized the PLO as the "sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" and thereby solved the long controversy over the West Bank representation issue

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123 Avnery, n.113, p.60.

in favour of the PLO. This gave a deadly blow to the American-Israeli-Jordanian strategy of avoiding the PLO and ultimately liquidating it. The Rabat Summit was soon followed by yet another spectacular achievement with considerable international impact. On 13 November 1974, the PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat addressed the UN General Assembly with the full honour of a Head of State. The Palestinian question was put on the Assembly Agenda as an independent issue. The world body recognized the "inalienable rights of the Palestinians" and strongly supported their "right to self-determination without external interference". The PLO was granted a permanent observer status at the General Assembly and other international conferences sponsored by the UN. In early 1976 even the Security Council debated the problem. Never before had the PLO gained so much of international support and concern for its cause. These developments not only distressed the United States and Israel but also largely isolated them before the world community. The PLO-initiative in the US failed to achieve any breakthrough. Nevertheless, it underlined the Palestinians' attempt to explore all the possibilities to achieve their goal.

The diplomatic initiative came only after a major shift in the PLO policy and strategy had occurred. The shift was also in response to the policies of Kissinger

and other realities in the Arab world and in the international field as a whole. Initially, the PLO totally rejected Kissinger's "step-by-step" diplomacy on the ground that it was a formula for a step-by-step isolation and the final liquidation of the PLO. But gradually, it had to moderate its stand. The ten-point transitional political programme, adopted at the twelfth  $\emptyset$  PNC, indicated the PLO's desire to accept a political solution. It stated that in case of an Israeli withdrawal from any part of the occupied Palestine, it would accept to establish "an independent fighting national authority", as a first step. It also declared its willingness to attend the Geneva conference if invited. For the first time in many years the PLO came out with a political strategy along with the hitherto exclusive military one. It adopted a fight and negotiate strategy, which was very much in keeping with the demands of the time.

This moderate posture was vehemently opposed by the radical factions - the PFLP, the PFLP-CC and the ALF -- within the PLO. Ultimately a split took place and these groups formed themselves into the 'Rejectionist Front'. The 'Front' branded the new policy as a "surrender solution" and a betrayal to the Palestinian cause. It rejected the interim solution plan and emphasised the



"total liberation of Palestine" which had been the PLO policy since 1969. The radical groups demanded that the PLO strategy should be to fight and liberate. The shift severely undermined the unity and strength of the organization and exposed the cracks within the movement.

The civil war in Lebanon was the next big disaster for the PLO - this time from outside its ranks. Despite its initial unwillingness, the PLO was dragged into the fierce fighting between the Right-wing and Left-wing factions in Lebanon. It fought on the side of the Left-wing forces and was eventually made the target of a well-planned conspiracy of a combined Right-wing forces and the Syrian army. On this occasion Kissinger played a tactical role first in urging restraint on Syria and then silently supporting it after the Syrian shift. At this point the national interests of both Syria and the US converged. Both found it necessary to crush the Palestinian resistance for their own specific reasons. To some extent they succeeded. The civil war severely weakened the PLO, though it could not destroy it altogether. After the 1974 split, the civil war once again exposed the lack of unity within the PLO although the timely intervention of the Arab states prevented it from being totally crippled.

## Chapter IV

### CONCLUSIONS

The coincidence of Zionist aspirations and Britain's strategic and economic interests in West Asia produced the Balfour Declaration. The British-sponsored document supported the Zionist claim in Palestine for the establishment of a national home for the Jews -- despite the fact that Palestine was the native land of Arabs for a greater part of history. Then events in Palestine were shaped by the interplay of three important forces: Zionist goals, British colonial interests and the Palestinian Arab nationalist aspirations. After a series of confrontations, Britain left the area in turmoil, the Zionists succeeded in establishing their own independent state of Israel and the nationalist aspirations of the Arabs remained unfulfilled. What was important was that Israel came into being not by any peaceful means but by forceful occupation and military strength. It was established not along with the erstwhile Palestine but in place of it. Neither a full-fledged Arab Palestine as demanded by the Arabs since the Ottoman days nor even a limited one as envisaged in the U.N. Partition Plan did ever emerge. On the contrary, Palestine as a geographical and political entity disappeared from the world map, the Arab inhabitants of it were thrown out their ancestral homes. Consequently the 'Palestinian problem' emerged which exists even today.

American involvement in the Palestine question dates back to the early part of this century. In the pre-1948 period the American part in the Palestinian-Zionist-British conflict was minimal. But American support and sympathy for the Zionist aspirations was very much there. The Americans had no policy towards the 'Palestinians' as such. Instead, they had a policy towards the 'area' and not the people who lived in it. For them the Palestinians were a 'non-people' or at best the 'non-Jewish population' of Palestine. This was at a time when the Palestinian Arabs constituted the majority (around ninety percent) of the population. Hence from the very beginning the US policy was biased in favour of the Zionists. American policy became pro-Zionist mainly due to the heavy Zionist influence and pressure on the Presidents - mostly Wilson, Roosevelt and Truman. President Truman not only recognised the newly-created state of Israel but also committed the United States to its survival and security. This commitment has been reiterated by all succeeding American Presidents.

The establishment of Israel rendered thousands of indigeneous Palestinians homeless. Once the Palestinians left their country, the political dimension of the problem receded into oblivion. The 'Palestinian issue' became a humanitarian problem under the broad heading

of 'Refugee problem'. To their surprise the Palestinians found themselves under severe political and legal constraints imposed by their host Arab countries despite the latter's proclaimed devotion to the Palestinian cause. No independent Palestinian national movement could be organised even though the national consciousness of the homeless Palestinians was genuine. The politically active Palestinians identified themselves with various pan-Arab movements prevailing at that point of time in the Arab world. Then the belief was that the road to the liberation of Palestine lay in a strong and united Arab action. But the younger generation refused to accept this logic and insisted on an independent Palestinian national struggle in order to regain the occupied land from the Zionist enemy. Two major events in the Arab world - the failure of the United Arab Republic and the Algerian Revolution - in the beginning of the 1960s further reinforced the feelings of the young Palestinians. The Arab states then felt compelled to create an independent Palestinian entity in view of the growing militant nationalistic feelings among the younger generation. Thus, the Palestine Liberation Organization was created (after sixteen years of the 'Palestine disaster') not by any voluntary move by the Arab states but under compulsion. This showed to what extent the Arab states were devoted to the Palestinian

cause on a practical level. The newly created PLO could not become independent in the operational context and remained under the control of the patron Arab States. No independent strategy for the struggle was chalked out. This continued till the fateful war of 1967.

In the post-1948 period, the United States got actively involved in the West Asian region. After it emerged as a super power, the strategic and economic interests of the area in which Israel existed became more important. Israel became an outpost for Western imperial interests. In view of these changes, the U.S. policy became openly pro-Israel after 1948. The problem created by the Britishers was sought to be perpetuated by the Americans for their own imperial gains. Israel was provided with all sorts of help to survive as a state while the displaced Palestinians were treated as mere "refugees". Their problem was regarded as a part of the world refugee problem and was sought to be resolved mainly by economic proposals out of a humanitarian concern. The United States thus faithfully supported the UNRWA financially and developed many detailed economic plans for the resettlement of the refugees. By providing economic assistance to the refugees, the Americans thought, they would solve the refugee problem which in turn would bring a resolution of the dispute between Israel and the Arab states. But all attempts failed as those were -

though technically sound-politically unrealistic (the proposals were never addressed to the Palestinian right to self-determination and independence). President Johnson's call for "justice for the refugees" no doubt marked a shift in the U.S. policy but that was conditioned to be solved within the framework of an overall Arab-Israeli settlement.

The aftermath of the 1967 war saw the re-emergence of the Palestinian nationalism in a militant form. The Fatah - led commando groups took control of the PLO and advocated the strategy of "armed struggle" to liberate the "whole of Palestine". The new leadership totally rejected any peaceful solution to the problem. The rise of commandos into power also resulted in widespread terrorism inside and outside Israel to reactivate the Palestinian issue that had remained eclipsed till then under the wider cover of the Arab-Israel conflict. The United States reacted strongly to the PLO policy of "armed struggle" and international terrorism. It branded the PLO as an organization of "terrorists", but made no concrete effort to solve the Palestinian problem. On the contrary the post-1967 U.S. policy completely neglected the Palestinians. While during the 1948-67 period the Palestinians constituted the central part of the U.S. policy towards West Asia, albeit only as refugees, in the post-1967 period the U.S. policy

concentrated on the territorial aspect of the Arab-Israel problem. It sought to settle the dispute between the combatant countries first and hoped the Palestinian problem would work itself out later. This approach accorded the Palestinians a less central role in U.S. policy, even though the Palestinian problem remained at the heart of the West Asian conflict. Henry Kissinger continued this trend in a more magnified manner in the sense, that he did not refer either to the Palestinian problem or to the Palestinians throughout his West Asian diplomatic mission.

Kissinger's "step-by-step" diplomacy came as a result of the 1973 war. The war not only challenged the basic American and Israeli assumptions (on the stability in West Asia, the Arab military and diplomatic strength, the possible use of oil weapon etc.) but also questioned the role of America as a super power, as an ally of the Western industrial world and Japan and as the guarantor of Israel's security. The basic national interests of the United States were involved. Without these consequences possibly there would have been no Kissinger diplomacy. Americans might have preferred to continue with their "stand still" and "preventive" diplomacy.

The Kissingerian diplomacy was conspicuous by its deliberate effort to bypass the Palestinian issue though it was the crux of the West Asian tangle. Kissinger

sidetracked the main issue and concentrated on the periphery. The most important guiding principle of his "step-by-step" strategy was to avoid any discussion on the Palestinian problem and the PLO participation in the peace process. He regarded the PLO not an organization which represented the interests and aspirations of the dispersed homeless Palestinians but as a group of "terrorists" with an overt anti-American posture. Involving the PLO in the negotiation process, Kissinger thought, was not in the interest of any of the parties to the West Asian conflict. The PLO was regarded as a potentially 'disruptive force', which would bring an end to the Kissingerian mission and thereby the American prestige in the whole Arab world. Hence Kissinger's main focus was on the territorial issues between the Arab states and Israel. On this point, he succeeded except on one instance - the Jordanian sector. He brought about various bilateral agreements like the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement, the Syrian-Israeli disengagement agreement and the Sinai II agreement.

Kissinger not only avoided dealing with the PLO throughout his mission but also succeeded in creating a sharp division within the PLO ranks which in turn sufficiently weakened the organization. The division came when



the PLO, in response to Kissinger's policies, brought about a shift in its policy and strategy by opting for a political strategy alongwith the military one. This came at a time when Kissinger, after concluding the Egyptian-Israeli and Syrian-Israeli disengagement agreements, was attempting to bring an agreement between Jordan and Israel involving the crucial West Bank territory. The PLO was compelled to chalk out, the ten-point transitional political programme indicating its willingness to accept a mini-Palestine state (as a first step). The PLO adopted this programme in order to maximize the gains for the Palestinian Revolution without losing the basic character of it. Had there been no Kissinger diplomacy the necessity for the PLO to bring a change in its policy would not have arisen and the split would not have taken place. The PLO might have continued with its policy of "total liberation" of Palestine through "armed struggle".

But Kissinger failed to prevent the PLO from getting a wider recognition both in the regional and world contexts. The seventh Arab Summit conference recognised the PLO as the "sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinians" (including those in the West Bank). Kissinger tried to prevent a pro-PLO resolution being passed in Rabat through President Sadat and King Hussein. Sadat and

Hussein failed even to bring about an ambiguous resolution that would have helped Kissinger to negotiate an Israeli-Jordanian agreement. After the Rabat Summit, Hussein expressed his inability to negotiate for the West Bank Palestinians and Kissinger refused to bring the PLO to the negotiating table. Ultimately the Jordanian attempt failed. A few days after the Rabat triumph, the PLO won the status of a 'permanent observer' at the U.N. General Assembly. The world body recognised the "inalienable rights" of the Palestinians. It also supported the Palestinians' "right to self-determination without any external interference". The U.N. resolutions to this effect were passed despite the opposition of the U.S. and Israel. Kissinger could no longer claim that the PLO did not have any international standing. Thus, the events in Rabat and at the U.N. showed the limitations beyond which Kissinger could not proceed.

The Kissingerian diplomacy - so much hailed by the Western media - failed to address the fundamental question in the West Asian conflict. Kissinger's sole intention was to safeguard and enhance the national interests of the U.S. The West Asian diplomacy was but a part of, <sup>his</sup> super-power game. He was mainly interested in stabilising the area, containing the Soviet influence and increasing the U.S. influence in West Asia. His approach represented the age-old American trend of sweeping the main issue

under the table and arranging some 'quick fix' agreements. Kissinger was more interested in preventing another war than producing peace. In order to bring peace one has to work for a comprehensive agreement taking into account the interests of all affected parties. The interim bilateral agreements - that Kissinger negotiated - could hardly ensure peace in the trouble-torn West Asian region. The West Asian conflict does not involve only Egypt and Israel, or Syria and Israel or even Jordan and Israel but it involves the Palestinians. Any approach that tries to neglect the Palestinians - or any other party for that matter - may bring temporary cessation of hostilities but not permanent peace. The later events have proved this. Kissinger's credibility and skill as a diplomat and negotiator can not be questioned. His art of establishing personal rapport with the leaders was superb. He knew very well how to persuade the parties -- either by influence or pressure or both - to come to an agreement. But his role as a peacemaker can be disputed. No genuine peacemaker can afford to ignore the fundamental issue of a problem.

However, the whole blame for the neglect of PLO and the Palestinian problem can not be put on Kissinger. The frontline Arab states are to be blamed equally. Despite their proclaimed devotion to the Palestinian

cause, the Arab states quietly acquiesced to the Kissingerian formula of avoiding the PLO. For a moment under the euphoria of initial victory in the war, both Egypt and Syria vociferously demanded that there could be no negotiation unless the PLO was invited and the genuine demands of the Palestinians were taken into consideration. Syria even boycotted the Geneva Conference. But gradually first Egypt and later Syria concluded the disengagement agreements with Israel that did not mention a single word either about the PLO or the Palestinian problem. Syria did not even hesitate to destroy the PLO during the Lebanese civil war. The Syrian move suited the interests of the U.S., Israel and the Right-wing forces in Lebanon. Fortunately for the PLO, the Syrian intentions did not materialize, otherwise the Palestinian Resistance movement would have been totally crushed. Jordan's devotion to the Palestinian cause needs no mention. During the Kissinger era one trend emerged quite clearly: that the frontline Arab states could easily be persuaded to forget the Palestinian cause in any possible agreement if it served their own selfish national interests. This trend has been further proved even after the Kissinger era. The Camp David agreement is a case in point. Under this agreement Egypt totally withdrew from confrontation with Israel even though the agreement

did not address to the Palestinians' inalienable right to self-determination. Given the chance and proper benefits (like the return of Golan Heights) Syria may well follow the suit. The Arab states' recognition of the PLO as the "sole and legitimate representative" was no doubt a major step. But that was more due to the complex inter-Arab politics than any genuine commitment to the Palestinian cause. One should not forget that just a few months before the Rabat Summit, President Sadat had joined hands with King Hussein in declaring that the PLO was the representative of the Palestinians except those in the West Bank. Further, Egypt's support for the PLO during the Lebanese civil war should not be interpreted as a yardstick of Egyptian commitment for the Palestinians. The Egyptian move was guided more by its desire to contain the Syrian influence than to save the PLO. By then Syria was openly denouncing Egypt for the latter's Sinai-II agreement with Israel. Egypt was isolated in the Arab world. By intervening in favour of the PLO, Egypt used the best opportunity to revenge the Syrian criticism of Sinai-II. In a word, the Palestinian problem has become a very useful card which the Arab states play in the inter-Arab power-game to their utmost advantage.

As for the PLO, the Kissinger era constituted the most critical phase for it since its inception. Despite the wider regional and international support for it, the PLO emerged very much weakened and divided by the time Kissinger's diplomacy came to an end. It no doubt showed its maturity as a liberation organization by suitably bringing about a shift in its policy and strategy after a careful reading of the regional and international situation. But that was at the cost of its own unity and strength. The division within the PLO ranks had to have far-reaching future consequences. The immediate impact was felt during the Lebanese civil war where the commandos fought among themselves. This was too serious a development and considerably eroded the strength of the organization. The trend continues even today. It was quite unfortunate that at a time when unity was most needed the PLO got divided and thereby served the interests of its adversaries be it the U.S. or Israel or even Jordan.

During the Kissinger era the PLO received wider regional and international support for its genuine and just demands. But that itself could not have solved the Palestinian problem. The most important thing that emerged out of the Kissinger diplomacy was that the road to peace in West Asia lay through Washington. Neither the U.N. nor

even Moscow can possibly bring a comprehensive and permanent peace there. It is only the United States which can break the Israeli intransigence on the Palestinian issue. So what is needed is the political will on the part of the U.S. to try to bring peace to the area, which must take into account the Palestinians' right to return to their homeland, to determine their destiny and to establish their own independent state. No settlement that ignores these rights can be either morally acceptable or politically realistic. So long as the Palestinians are kept out of it and their just demands are not accepted to, no just and durable peace can be established in West Asia. It will remain a far cry.

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