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History and narrative of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in the mid-Eighties

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مقدمة

إن هذه الاطروحة هي محاولة تقريرالتاريخ والخطاب السياسي لحزب فلسطيني, وهو الجبهة الشعبية لتحرير فلسطين خلال الفترة ما بين سنة 1982 و 1987. مثلت هذه الفترة من جهة مرحلة صعبة حيث واجهت منظمة التحرير الفلسطينية (م. ت. ف.) هجمات غير مسبقة كانت هدفها التصفية الكاملة للحركة الوطنية الفلسطينية, ومن جهة أخرى عاشت الجبهة الشعبية و اليسار الفلسطيني كله خلال هذه الاعوام انهيار مؤكد.

كانت الجبهة الشعبية الفلسطينية القوة الفلسطينية الثانية وراء حركة فتح التي اسسها ياسر عرفات حتى بروز حركة المقاومة الإسلامية حماس. لذلك تحليل سياساتها هو تأكيد لرؤية بديلة لهذه الفترة الحاسمة. إذ تركز أهم الدراسات عن الحركة الوطنية الفلسطينية على قيادة م.ت.ف فهو كثير الاهتمام بنقل التركيز على الفصائل الأخرى، بما فيها الجبهة الشعبية، من أجل الحصول على صورة اشمل. بالاضافة ان هدف هذه العملية هو تحديد تصرف حزب معين للمعارضة الفلسطينية في إطار مؤسساته الوطنية وجهوده للاحتفاظ بنفوذه السياسي.

إن تقييم مواقف الجبهة الشعبية في الثمانينات مهم جداً لكي نفهم ماهو درجة المسؤولية لسياسات الحزب و لفهم اجراءاته في صنع القرارات في التهميش الذي شاهده لاحقاً. في الواقع، برزت في الثمانينات بعض العوامل الدولية والاقليمية التي كانت خطيرة ومضرة لليسار الفلسطيني: لعب كل من النهج العدواني الجديد للولايات المنحدة في سياساتها ضد الاتحاد السوفياتي في منطقة الشرق الاوسط تحت ادارة ريغان وغياب موسكو من سيناريو المشرق العربي حتى بداية رئاسة غورباتشوف دوراً اساسياً في تحديد مصير المنظمات الماركسية اللينينية.

اليوم يدخل النقاش حول القضية الفلسطينية والحلول الممكنة في مأزق "حل الدولتين" الذي ظهر من اتفاقات اسلو.في نفس الوقت مشاريع التسوية البديلة تعتبرها مجموعة صغيرة من الخبراء والمتخصصين فقط. اذا ننظر إلى فكرة الحل و مشروع الدولة الفلسطينية الوحيدة لدى الجبهة الشعبية نستطيع ان نفهم بشكل اوضح التطورات التي أدت إلى المأزق الراهن. ليس هناك اقناع إن كانت سياسات و انهاج التصدي للجبهة ومواقفها المتغيرة فيما يتعلق بمشاريع السلام صحيحة و صائبة ام لا، ولكن هذه المواقف كانت جزءاً من نطاق اكبر يقوم بإغناء النقاش وتنوعه. في المأزق الحالي إن اعادة الاعتبار في هذه المواضيع التي كانت مركزية هي عملية ضرورية جداً. أخيراً و ليس أخراً قد تكون هذه الاطروحة محاولة لتصحيح نقص الابحاث في مجال الحركات اليسارية في فلسطين وفي العالم العربي بشكل عام، وفي نفس الوقت هي جهد لتوازن التحليلات المستقطبة للسياسة الفلسطينية والعربية، الماضية والحاضرة ، حيث القوات الاسلامية المعارضة للقوات الليبيرالية من دون الاخذ بعين الاعتبار التجارب السياسية الاخرى .

اما فيما يتعلق بتحليل ورواية الأحداث ارتكزت على منشورات الجبهة الشعبية و بشكل خاص مجلتها الرسمية عنوانها "الهدف". تم دراسة أغلبية اعداد الهدف على طول الفترة المعنية لأن هذا المنهج له ميزات كثيرة: اولاً هو يقدرنا ان نرصد ونفسر الخطاب السياسي الذي تمسك به الحزب والتغيرات التي قام به حسب الاحداث الابرز والتحولات الاقليمية. بالاضافة إلى ان، هذا المنهج مفيد للاشارة إلى تطور النقاش حول "الدولة الفلسطينية" وإلى المواضيع التي استخدمتها الجبهة من اجل تأييد مواقفها. فبالتالي من الممكن أيضاً التشديد على التناقضات التي برزت خلال تلك السنوات و اعتبارها في الاطار الاوسع لتوطرات السياسة الاقليمية. علاوة على ذلك، نشرت المجلة العديد من الوثائق الرسمية للجبهة الشعبية بما فيها بيانات المكتب السياسي و بيانات مشتركة مع الفصائل الاخرى والخطابات لمسؤوليين الجبهة التي فسرت الخط الرسمي. نشرت الهدف أيضاً كل المقابلات التي اجراها كوادر للحزب مع الصحافة العربية والدولية. تعطينا هذه المقابلات امكانية تحديد كيف تغير خطاب الحزب حسب الجمهور الذي توجه إليه. كانت المقابلات مساعدة لفهم ما كانت القضايا الرئيسية التي اهتم بها الحزب سنة بعد سنة واذا حاولت قيادة الجبهة تغطية مواقفها المشبوهة المتناقضة مع الخط الرسمي. لم تكن منشورات الهدف هي نوع المصادر الاولية الوحيدة التي تم استغلالها لهذا البحث. لقد نشرت دائرة الاعلام للجبهة الشعبية كتابات عديدة التي فسرت النظرية الرسمية للحزب حول القضايا الاساسية باللغة العربية والانجليزية. منشورات دائرة الاعلام تزود المباديء الرئيسية والفهم لدى الجبهة لقضايا مركزية مثل الكفاح المسلح والاستراتيجية العسكرية و موقف الحزب الاصولي حول إقامة دولة عربية على اراضي فلسطين التاريخية. بجانب ذلك، تم دراسة النصوص الكاملة للتقارير السياسية الصادرة عن المؤتمرات الوطنية للجبهة الشعبية من اجل التتبع الدقيق لمسار الخط السياسي. كان وضع الخطاب السياسي للحزب في إطار مؤسسات م.ت.ف. هدف رئيسي للاطروحة لذلك تم فحص مقررات المجلس الوطني الفلسطيني(م.و.ف.). من خلال الدراسة المقارنة للتفسير الذي اعطته الجبهة لدورات المجلس مع رؤية الفصائل الاخرى، خاصة فتح والجبهة الديمقراطية، نستطيع ان نحدد مدى تمسك الحزب بمقررات م.و.ف. وأيضاً كيف رد على المواقف المختلفة. وكذلك، المقارنة بين مطالبات الجبهة قبل انعقاد كل دورة جديدة للمجلس والمقررات النهائية معبرة عن قدرة الحزب على التأثير على السياسة الفلسطينية وعن دور الضغوط الخارجية في تشكيل المطالبات. نصوص مقررات م.و.ف. متوفرة بالاتترنيت وبنسخ مطبوعة بالعربي والانجليزي. في هذا الصدد كانت المصادر الرئيسية هي المواقع الالكترونية للمركز الفلسطيني للتوثيق والمعلومات و للمجلس الوطني الفلسطيني. الترجمات بالانجليزي متوفرة على مجلة الدراسات الفلسطينية التي تنشر ايضأ العديد من الوثائق الصادرة عن الدول العربية او بمناسبة احداث بارزة مثل قمم الجامعة العربية. بقدر ما كانت هذه الوثائق مهمة بشأن البحث تمت

دراستها كما كان الحال فيما يتعلق خطط السلام العربية مثل خطة فاس او الخطاب الذي القاه الملك الاردني حسين حيث اعلن اسقاط اتفاقات عمان مع قيادة م.ت.ف.

أخيراً،كانت الاعمال المتخصصة عن منظمة التحرير والسياسات الامريكية والسوفيتية تجاه الشرق الاوسط والصراع العربي الاسرائيلي والحرب الاهلية في لبنان والسياسات الخارجية للدول العربية المتورط بشكل مباشر في القضية الفلسطينية مرجعاً رئيسياً لهذه الاطروحة.

جدير بالذكر من اهم المراجع: رشيد الخالدي فيما يتعلق بالسياسة الفلسطينية ومواقف الولايات المتحدة تجاه منطقة المشرق منذ الحرب العالمية الثانية وايلينا كوبان ويزيد صايغ عن التاريخ السياسي والعسكري لـ م.ت. ف. وغاليا غولان عن السياسات السوفياتية و اسعد ابو خليل و جميل هلال و طارق اسماعيل بصدد حركة القوميين العرب واليسار الفلسطيني والجبهة الشعبية. اخيراً جورج كورم وجامز غيلفين هما مراجعان دقيقان فما يتعاق بالاطار التاريخي العام.

تتكون الاطروحة من ثلاثة ابواب والخاتمة. الباب الاول بعنوان "الجبهة الشعبية عشية الاجتياح الاسرائيلي للبنان" وهو مقدمة لتاريخ الاعوام التي سبقت تأسيس الحزب ونشاطاته خلال السنوات الخمسة عشر الاولى في حياته. بعد ذلك، يعالج الباب اساس النظرية التي حددت الاستراتيجية العسكرية والسياسية كما يتناول التصورات الاولى التي أيدتها الجبهة بشأن "الدولة الفلسطينية" باطار النقاش العام الداخلي للحركة الوطنية الفلسطينية. وضح الباب الاول ايضاً وضع الحزب قبل عدوان اسرائيل على لبنان سنة 1982 لتشريح استعداد الجبهة للمواجهة الوشيكة مع الجيش الاسرائيلي. يغطي الجزءان الاخيران للباب العلاقات التي اقامها الحزب مع المنظمات والدول العربية ومع الحلفاء الدوليين الاهم.

يركز الباب الثاني بعنوان " عقب الاجتياح الاسرائيلي" على فهم و تقييم الجبهة للحصار الذي عاشته في بيروت م.ت.ف. في صيف عام 1982 واستغرق ثلاثة اشهر وعلى تقدير الحزب لاخطائه سواء قبل وخلال "حرب لبنان" ورأيه عن خروج الفدائيين من بيروت كذلك. تم علاج لوضع الجبهة الشعبية في السيناريو الجديد في اطار التعاون الكبير مع سوريا والعلاقات مع الاتحاد السوفيتي ايضاً. ينتهي الباب بتحليل النماذج السياسية الجديدة التي تتبعها الجبهة خلال هذه المرحلة وبالتحديد محاولات اقامة ائتلافات مع الاحزاب اليسارية والوطنية الاخرة المعارضة لقيادة منظمة التحرير. في نهاية المطاف لدينا، الباب الثالث والاخير عنوانه "الجبهة الشعبية والانقسام داخل م.ت.ف.". يتناول هذا الباب السياسة الفلسطينية الداخلية والانشقاق غير المسبق الذي واجه منظمة التحرير بعد سنة 1983. الموضوع الاول لهذا الباب هو النقاش الذي قاد الفصائل الفلسطينية إلى الدعوة إلى انعقاد الدورة السابعة عشر للمجلس الوطني الفلسطيني وهي دورة تثبيت الانقسام داخل الحركة الوطنية ومقاطعة مؤسسات م.ت.ف. من قبل الجبهة الشعبية لفترة اكثر من ثلاثة اعوام. بعد ذلك التركيز على جهود الحزب لكي يعارض مبادرة عرفات للتعاون مع الاردن ومشاركة الجبهة الشعبية في تشكيل جبهة الانقاذ الوطني الفلسطيني. موضوع

اخر للباب هو انفجار الاشتباكات المسلحة في مخيمات بيروت عام 1985 بين المسلحين الفلسطينيين و لواءات الحركة الشيعية "أمل" التي اثرت كثيراً في اوليات وسياسات الجبهة الشعبية. الجزء الاخير يتناول نهاية التعاون بين م.ت.ف. و الاردن و مصالحة الحركة الوطنية الفلسطينية. هذا الجزء يغطي الفترة الاولى لانفجار للانتفاضة الاولى في شهر كانون الاول/ديسامبر 1987.

تركز الخاتمة من جانبها على النقاط والمفاهيم المركزية التي برزت من تحقيم العمل. احدى هذه النقاط هي قدرة الجبهة الشعبية لتكييف موقفها حسب حاجات الحالات المختلفة. ظهرت هذه السمة الخاصة بشكل قوي خلال الثمانينات بمناسابات عديدة. على سبيل المثال، تغيرت الجبهة رؤيتها للتسوية النهائية للقضية الفلسطينية عدة المرات خلال هذه الاعوام واحياناً كانت المواقف المتتالية متناقضة بشكل واضح مع المواقف السابقة. لذلك كان دور الدعاية الاعلامية مهم جداً في تبرير التغيرات السياسية. في هذا الصدد كانت مجلة الهدف الالة المركزية لانتشار الخط "الصحيح" بين اعضاء الحزب. كررت المجلة الافكار الرئيسية اكثر من مرة واحدة داخل نفس العدد. اضافة إلى ذلك، بررت الجبهة موقفه بفضل مفهوم تصوره ماو تسي دونغ وهو مفهوم التناقضات الاولية والثانوية: مثلاً، كانت العلاقات مع سوريا في حالة تناقض اولي قبل حرب لبنان و خروج م.ت.ف. من بيروت بسبب تدخل الجيش السوري عام 1976 للجيش السوري في الحرب الاهلية المضر للمصالح الفلسطينية. ولكن هذا التناقص صار ثانوية لما نقلت الجبهة الشعبية مكاتبها الى دمشق واصبح التعاون مع الرئيس حافظ الاسد ضرورية بعد عام 1982. استفاد الحزب من استخدام هذه النظرية السياسية في آفاق التوترات للمنطقة.

نقطة ثانية تركزت عليها الاطروحة هي حالة الانقسام، واحياناً الاقتتال، التي عاشتها الحركة الوطنية خلال الثمانينات. رغم من بروز لاختلافات بين فصائل اليسار من جهة وفتح من جهة اخرى في نهاية الستينات، لم تكن هذه الاختلافات خطيرة الا بعد عام 1983. الا ان عرفات استغل هذا الموضوع لكي يكتسب هيمنة اقوى على منظمة التحرير وفقا لسياسة سمتها الجبهة بانفرادية. كانت المشكلة الاكبر للجبهة في تحديها ضد استراتيجية رئيس اللجنة التنفيذية هي عدم القدرة على قيام ببديل مصدقي لسياسة عرفات. في الواقع، كان الاستياء تجاهه منتشر ايضاً بين العديد من المستقلين وحتى بين بعض الكوادر الفتحاويين. مع ذلك، فشلت الجبهة في جذبهم وما زالت أغلبية م.ت.ف. تدعم قيادة عرفات. كان تفوق حركة فتح على الاحزاب الفلسطينة الاخرى متأسس على شبكة العلاقات الدولية التي بنتها منذ انطلاق الثورة الفلسطينية عام 1964. إن نقص الدعم الدولي الواسع للجبهة الشعبية هو عنصر رئيسي في تهميشها في فترة الازمة لـ م.ت.ف. كانت استراتيجية فصيل جورج حبش خلال العقود السابقة السبب الذي أدى إلى ابعاد الحلفاء الاهم لكل حركة التحرر الوطني، الاتحاد السوفيتي والصين بالتحديد.على سبيل المثال عارضت موسكو اختطاف الطائرات والتعاون مع المنظمات الارهابية مثل الجيش الاحمر

الياباني واعتبرت الاتحاد السوفيتي هذا السلوك للجبهة الشعبية مغامر ومعاد لمصالح فلسطين. لذلك ، فضل السوفيتيين الارتباط مع فتح التي صارت شريكهم الفلسطيني الاول. كان وضع العلاقات الاقليمية والدولية للجبهة وهيناً جداً في نصف الثمانينات. من جهة، كان العراق وهو حليف تاريخي للحزب في مأزق حربه مع ايران ومن جهة اخرى ما كان الهدف الحقيقي للنظام السوري دعم المعارضة الفلسطينية ولكن السيطرة عليها وقمع استقلال منظمة التحرير بشكل عام. في نهاية المطاف، عانت الجبهة الشعبية من هذه الحالة التي لعبت دوراً كبيراً في تضعيفها.

جانب بارز أخر تشدد عليه الخاتمة هو موقف الجبهة تجاه الاراضي الفلسطينية المحتلة و سكانها. بعد نهاية تجربة م.ت.ف. في لبنان زادت اهمية الاراضي المحتلة سياسياً واستراتيجياً لأنها صارت النقطة المركزية لكل مشروع تسوية سواء عربي أو أمريكي وإضافة إلى ذلك سرعت اسرائيل حملتها الاستيطانية في الضفة الغربية وقطاع غزة. لهذا السبب عززت بعض الفصائل الفلسطينية ومنها الجبهة الشعبية وجودها في الوطن المحتل. مثلاً تم اقامة علاقات اضيق مع النقابات والاتحادات العمالية كما تم تحسين وتوسيع الخدمات الاجتماعية التي زودتها الاحزاب الاكبر إلى مخيمات اللاجئين في الداخل. بصدد الجبهة ارتفعت درجة العناية مجلة الهدف، بقضايا الاراضي المحتلة ايضاً وتعددت المقالات والتحليلات التي تعالج المواضيع الاهم المتعلقة بها. بجانب ذلك، مثل التقارب من الجماهير الفلسطينية كقاعدة للتأييد الشعبي للجبهة والتي نجت سياسياً حتى حيث استطاعت الحفاظ على دورها الاجتماعي. مثال لذلك هو تجربة الانتفاضة الاولى حيث فقدت الفصائل بدون تمثيل قوي في الاراضي المحتلة كل اهمية سياسية. على العكس، ما زالت الجبهة الشعبية تحافظ على حصة من نفوذها خلال الانتفاضة لانها كان لها تمثيل مهم ومنتشر ولذلك دخلت في القيادة المتحدة للانتفاضة مع فتح والجبهة الديمقراطية والحزب الشيوعي. ولكن اضاعت الجبهة الشعبية دورها الاجتماعي لدى الجماهير الفلسطينية في السنوات اللاحقة وهذا كان سبباً رئيسياً لانهيارها النهائي. خلال التسعينات انسحبت الجبهة الشعبية من تزويد المساعدات المختلفة إلى سكان الضفة والقطاع كما لم تجدد باي شكل من الاشكال مبادرتها السياسية خاصة في المقارنة مع حركة حماس التي برزت كالمعارض الاول لسلطة عرفات. أسست حماس دعمها الشعبي بفضل شبكة خدماتها الاجتماعية بينما ضعف اليسار الفلسطيني في هذا المجال. بالاضافة، ترك العديد من اعضاء الجبهة والاحزاب اليسارية الاخرى فصائلهم الاصلية و فضلوا التوظيف في المنظمات غيرالحكومية بسبب عدم نشاط احزابهم السابقة. وجاء هروب التأييد الشعبي مع أزمة اليسار العالمية: تضمن سقوط الاتحاد السوفياتي نهاية الثقة في النموذج الاشتراكي وساهم إلى أزمة في القومية العربية. في المنطقة، وقفت الانظمة "الوطنية" وبشكل خاص سوريا دعمها الى الحركات اليسارية في إطارعمليتها اعادة تنظيم تحالفاتها الاقليمية. بدأت سوريا تشكيل محور جديد معاد لاسرائيل والولايات المتحدة مع ايران وبعض القوات الاسلامية في كل من لبنان وفلسطين. لم تعد الجبهة الشعبية الوسيلة

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السورية الرئيسية لتدخل في الصراع مع اسرائيل وساهم ذلك كثيراً في انهيارها. بالنهاية، نقطة حاسمة اخرى هي اعتماد الجبهة الشعبية على "كريزما" الامين العام والمؤسس جورج حبش وعدم قدرتها على اكتساب الاستقلال منه. قد ضعف حكم "الحكيم" للحزب بسبب مشاكل صحته المرتبطة بالدماغ وقاد ذلك إلى بروز التوترات الاولى في اجراء صنع القرارات. كان تعنت الجبهة تجاه العدو و"المعتدلين" العرب والفلسطينيين ركن التأييد الشعبي للحزب. لذلك أدت التغيرات والتناقضات في الخط السياسي خلال الثمانينات إلى نتائج مضرة. حاول حبش ان يقدم استقالته عدة مرات خلال التسعينات ولكن منعوا منها قادة الجبهة خوفاً من التداعيات السلبية على الفصيل كله. استطاع حبش الانسحاب من منصبه سنة 2000 فقط ولكن لم تكن الجبهة قادرة على استبداله حقاً. من جهة لم يكونوا الامناء الاحقين (ابو علي مصطفى واحمد سعدات) قابلين للمقارنة مع حبش فيما يتعلق كفاءتهم الزعامة ومن جهة اخرى تحملت قيادة الجبهة الشعبية بعد عام 2000 القمع العنيف من قبل كل من اسرائيل و السلطة الوطنية الفلسطينية. قُتل ابو علي مصطفى عام 2001 خلال غارة جوية اسرائيلية بينما أُعتقل سعدات مرات عديدة وحتى اليوم هو اسير في سجون اسرائيل. اصابت هذه الهجمات القيادة الضعيفة للجبهة وسرعت اختفائه من السيناريو السياسي الفلسطيني.

أخيراً، قد يكون هذا البحث اساساً للمزيد من الدراسات. في الحقيقة، هناك العديد من الجوانب ومن خطوط البحث التي تستحق تحليل عميق كما تحتاج ايضاً إلى انواع مختلفة من مصادر أولية. على سبيل المثال من الممكن كتابة تقرير مفصل عن علاقات الجبهة الشعبية مع المنظمات اليسارية الاخرى، فلسطينية وعربية، عبر مقابلات مع كوادر حزبيين، خاصة اذا لم يعودوا اعضاء لفصائلهم السابقة. إضافة إلى ذلك، تقرير حول المصادر المالية والصعوبات الاقتصادية للجبهة خلال الثمانينات والتسعينات قد يكون متمتع للتعميق خاصة في الفترة ما بعد انهيار الاتحاد السوفياتي واتفاقات اوسلو حيث اصبحت السلطة الوطنية الفلسطينية تتفوق م.ت.ف. وتعتمد على تمويل الاتحاد الاروبي و الولايات المتحدة. اي مواصلة لهذه الاطروحة قد تتناول فترة اطول من الزمن وتشمل تحليل سلوك الجبهة على طول كل الانتفاضة الاولى وموقفه امام توقيع اتفاقات السلام مع اسرائيل عام 1993 وحتى انتفاضة الاقصى التي اختلفت بشكل كبير عن الانتفاضة الجماهيرية السابقة . في الختام ، من الضروري تغطية الاعوام التي تبعت استقالة المؤسس والامين العام جورج حبش وكذلك ايضاً دراسة العناصر الرئيسية الأخرى التي أثرت و ساهمت في انهيار الجبهة الشعبية لتحرير فلسطين.

Introduction

This work is meant as a tentative to report the history and narrative of a Palestinian party, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) between 1982 and 1987. This period represented on the one hand a phase in which the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) had to face unprecedented attacks aiming at its elimination and, on the other hand during these years the PFLP and the whole Palestinian left experienced a definitive decline. As the PFLP occupied always the second position for importance within the PLO behind Arafat's party Fatah, until the rise of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), the analysis of its policy is seen as the statement of an alternative vision of this critical period. Since the most important works on the Palestinian national movement focus on the leadership of the PLO and deal with PFLP's policies as collaterally, it is actually worthwhile to shift the focus on secondary actors in order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the Palestinian national movement. Furthermore, this dissertation tries to reverse the standard approach that characterizes several works on this subject: actually the focus is not on the umbrella organization that gathered the principal Palestinian parties but is on one single faction. The goal is to define how a minority actor behaved in a broader context, interacted with Palestinian national institutions and worked to retain its political weight.

In addition the assessment of PFLP's stand throughout such a key period is useful to understand to which extent its decision-making process and its policies were responsible for the marginalization of the following years. Actually, during the Eighties some global and regional factors revealed harmful, and maybe fatal, for the Palestinian left: the combination between the new US aggressive stand in its cold war policy and the substantial absence of the Soviet Union from the Middle East until Gorbachev's takeover played a major role in shaping the destiny of Arab organizations that espoused a Marxist-Leninist approach.

Currently, the debate over alternative solutions to the one defined by the Oslo peace process reached a deadlock. For this reason, a survey on the idea of solution and the project for a unique Palestinian state that the Popular Front advocated, can allow us to better understand the evolution that resulted in the current impasse. PFLP's resistance-policy paradigms and its shifting stands vis-à-vis peace proposals and foreign plans of settlement are not seen as the correct ones. Rather its positions are considered a part of a broad range of approaches that enriched and diversified the debate: retracing the "last days" of this once central question and resuming the discussion is highly needed.

Last but not least, a work focused on PFLP's history can be a tentative of filling the current lack of specific research about leftist movement in Palestine in particular and in the Arab world in general. At the same time, it is an effort to balance the analyses on Palestinian and Arab politics, that today tend to give a polarized image where Islamist forces are opposed to liberal, moderate and pro western parties, this current narrative extended to the past too.

The analysis and the narrative of the events is mainly based on PFLP's publications and in particular on an accurate survey on its official mouthpiece, the weekly *Al Hadaf* (The Goal). A wide range of Al Hadaf issues over the considered period has been studied as this approach offered several advantages. First of all, it allows to observe and eventually illustrate the political discourse espoused by the party and the shifts it underwent according to regional changes and major events. In addition, this approach revealed fundamental to show the evolution of the debate over the Palestinian state and how the Party used to argue its positions. Consequently, it was also possible to underline the inconsistencies that emerged over the whole period and to put them in the context of the broader developments of regional politics. Moreover this weekly journal published a large part of PFLP's official documents such as Political Bureau's statements, joint statements with other organizations or other state officials and speeches which were also usually coupled with the detailed illustration that the official line gave to these documents. Furthermore, Al Hadaf reported all the interviews that high Party cadres gave to the Arab and international press. These interviews offer the possibility of identifying how the Popular Front adopted different approaches according to the public it addressed. The articles published in each issue also allow to understand which were the most important questions that concerned the party year by year as well as whether its leadership cover or neglected those positions which were in contradiction with the official line. Al Hadaf publications are not the only kind of primary sources exploited for this work. PFLP's Information Department used to publish booklets that outlined the official doctrine of the Party concerning fundamental and constitutive issues, both in Arabic and English. The publications of the Information Department provide with PFLP's theoretical principles and understanding of key issues such as armed struggle and military strategy or Party's first stand on the creation of the future Arab state over historic Palestine. Besides that also the full text of Political Reports issued from PFLP's national conferences has been studied so to exactly and regularly trace the course of the political line.

In order to set the Popular Front's narrative in the framework of PLO institutions, resolutions from the Palestine National Council (PNC) have been closely examined. The compared study of PFLP's interpretation of the final resolutions of each PNC's round with those given by other factions, above all Fatah and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), enable us to define to which extent the Party showed adherence to them as well as how it responded to different understandings. In addition, the comparison between PFLP's claims before every new PNC's round and what actually the Council further decreed, is telling about Party's capability to influence the Palestinian political arena in a given moment as well as to which extent, its stands and demands were dictated by external pressures. The texts of PNC resolutions are available both online and printed and both in Arabic or in the English translation: at this regard the main sources were the web-site of the Palestine Center for Documentation and Information, PFLP's official site as well as that of the Palestinian National Council. Translations in English instead are provided by the Journal of Palestine Studies. When needed, this latter source provide a wide range of documents issued by Arab states and in occasion of relevant event such as Arab League summits.

As far as these documents revealed important for the research they have been taken into account and this was the case with Arab peace plans such as the Fez Plan or the speech delivered by King Hussein of Jordan when he decided to breakdown his coordination with the PLO leadership for instance.

Finally, specific literature about the PLO, US and Soviet policies towards the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Lebanese civil war and the foreign policies of Arab states directly concerned by the Palestinian question was also used as main reference for this dissertation. Particularly important are the works by: Rashid Khalidi for both Palestinian politics and US attitude towards the region since World War II; Helena Cobban and Yezid Sayegh for political and military history of the PLO; Galia Golan for what concerns USSR policies; As'ad AbuKahlil, Jamil Hilal and Tareq Y. Ismael about the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN), the Palestinian left and the PFLP. As general references for Near and Middle Eastern history Georges Corm and James Gelvin were taken into high consideration.

The dissertation consists of three chapters followed by the conclusion, which highlights the main points touched in the work. The first chapter (The PFLP on the eve of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon) presents first of all an introduction to the history of the years that preceded the creation of the Popular Front and its first 15 years of activities from 1967 to 1982. Afterwards, the chapter treats the fundamental theoretical bases that defined PFLP's military and political strategy, touching the first hypothesis advocated by the organization on the issue of the creation of a Palestinian state, in the framework of the overall debate within the Palestinian national movement. Then, Party's stands and situations before the 1982 Israel's invasion of Lebanon are addressed in order to explain how the PFLP prepared to the imminent confrontation with the Israeli army. The two final parts of this chapter cover the relations that the Popular Front established with Arab states and organizations as well as with the most important international actors and allies. The second chapter (The aftermath of the Israeli invasion) focuses on how the party interpreted and assessed the three months long besiege the PLO underwent in Beirut during summer 1982, how the PFLP dealt with the assessment of its own mistakes before and during the "Lebanon war" and how it saw the evacuation of Palestinian fighters from Beirut. Next to that, also the collocation of the Party in the new scenario is addressed, taking into account the closer coordination with Syria and the relations with the Soviet Union. The chapter ends with an analysis of the new political paradigms, that the PFLP followed during this phase, namely the attempt to establish coalitions with other leftist and nationalist Palestinian parties in opposition to the PLO leadership. Finally, the third and last chapter (The Popular Front and the split in the PLO) mainly deals with Palestinian internal politics and the unprecedented split that divided the PLO after 1983. It first, treats the process and the debate that led to the convening of the 17th PNC which sealed the division inside the national movement and PFLP's boycott of the principal PLO institutions for more than three years. After that, the focus is on how the Party tried to counter Arafat's initiative for a closer coordination with Jordan, namely its participation to the Palestine National Salvation Front (PNSF). A part of the chapter, also touches the clashes that erupted in

Beirut Palestinian camps in 1985, between Palestinian fighters the troops of the Shiite movement Amal, which heavily affected PFLP's priorities and policies. The last part of this chapter, deals with the end of PLO-Jordan coordination, the reconciliation of the PLO which ensued and finally cover the disruption and the first months of the first Intifada in since December 1987.

To conclude, this work is to be considered as the base for further studies. Actually, there are still several aspects and lines of research that deserve an in-depth analysis as well as need different kind of primary sources. A more detailed account of relations between the PFLP and other leftist organizations, both Palestinian and Arabs, would be tremendously enriched by interviews to former Party cadres, in particular those who are no longer members of their former faction. Also a report over PFLP's sources of financing and the economic hardness that the Party experienced during the Eighties and the Nineties would be an interesting subject of study, especially for the period that followed the downfall of the Soviet Union and the Oslo agreements when the Palestinian National Authority overshadowed the PLO and the newly established Palestinian entity became entirely dependent from EU and US donations. In addition prospective continuation of this work could cover a longer period of time, analyzing PFLP's conduct over the whole duration of the first Intifada and vis-à-vis the signing of the peace process agreement with Israel in 1993 up to the Al-Aqsa Intifada which differed highly from the first mass uprising in the occupied Palestine. Finally, in order to reach a good level of completeness, it would be essential to give account of the years that followed the resignations of the founder and Secretary-General George Habash, and how this and other major factors affected and contributed to the decline of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

1.The PFLP on the eve of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982)

1.1 Military and Political strategy

A short introduction to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

Before founding the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in 1967, George Habash had already been engaged in different, and for certain aspects inconsistent, political experiences during his stay in Beirut as a medicine student at the American University. His political path starts in 1949 with the formation of *Kata'ib al- Fida' al-'Arabi,* a small faction, characterized by far right stands, a manifest anti-Semitism and a strict military structure; the party strategy, which included attacks on a synagogue in Damascus and on a Jewish school in Beirut, didn't gain much consensus to the movement, forcing its members to find a new approach to gather the Arab youth, shocked by 1948 Nakba.

After the failing tentative to merge with Aflaq's Ba'ath party, the Movement of Arab Nationalist (MAN) was established in order to meet a broader popularity within Arab masses and George Habash soon distinguished himself as a prominent and charismatic party leader. This Movement too, began with a nationalistic and pan-Arab ideology, still right-wing and organized in a quite autocratic structure, but in its early years, it managed to attract a number of Arab intellectuals such as Muhsin Ibrahim or Nayef Hawatme. During the Sixties a shift towards Marxism, occurred within the movement thanks especially, to Ibrahim's role and his two-fold view of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a nationalist and class one. Different currents borne within the MAN, a rightist and nationalist one led by Habash and, a leftist, pro-nasserist one led by Ibrahim just to cite the most important among them[1]. The internal divisions caused a decline that concluded in the end of the movement with the 1967 defeat and the rise of Fatah, who embodied the new course of the Palestinian struggle: the *Fida'yin* and armed struggle era was beginning and the MAN had no choice but to enjoy the competition with Fatah, accepting the new paradigm. The ideal of popular liberation war was reaching its climax all over the Third World, the experiences of Cuba, Algeria and Vietnam were nourishing the myth of guerilla warfare which quickly became the source of legitimacy of every Palestinian faction. As has been pointed out many times the importance of armed struggle was reflected in the composition of the Palestine National Council, where even the smallest armed faction such as PFLP-GC or As-Sa'iqa had a strong representation despite their dimensions.[2]

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[1] *Cfr.* Yezid Sayegh, *Reconstructing the Paradox: The Arab Nationalist Movement, Armed Struggle and Palestine, 1951-1966,* Middle East Journal, Vol. 45 No. 4, (Autumn 1991).
As'ad AbuKhalil, *George Habash and the Movement of Arab Nationalists: Neither Unity Nor Liberation,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 28 No. 4 (Summer 1999)
B. Al Kubeissi, *Storia del Movimento dei Nazionalisti Arabi,* Jaca Book, 1977
[2] Rashid Hamid, *What is the PLO?* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 4 No. 4, (Summer 1975)
James Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War,* Cambridge University Press, 2005

These premises show the gradual change that resulted in the creation of the PFLP and his adoption of Marxist-Leninist doctrine in order to differentiate itself, firstly, from Fatah, and to launch a revolutionary claim around which, Palestinian masses would have been able to gather. Shortly after its creation, the PFLP suffered several split mainly caused by personal rivalries between party high cadres and Habash's leadership, that led to the creation of other Marxist formations such as Hawatme's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Ahmad Jibril's Popular Front-General Command.[3]

While Fatah sought to meet the broadest consensus, gathering its militants around general nationalistic calls for the liberation of Palestine, Palestinian left, and of course PFLP too, had a purely Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the Arab-Israeli conflict according to which it was impossible to reach any of the national goals without relying on a strategy based on the role of masses: the well-off bourgeoisie was innately unable to lead such a struggle, for it is impossible for that class to renounce to its privileges in order to submit to the priorities of revolution. On the contrary only popular masses can be the engine and sustain the revolutionary process against the Israeli and the Arab reactionary enemy, therefore the mobilization of Arab masses is the core of their strategy, a mobilization that must not resort to emotional and propaganda calls but that must be based on scientific premises:

> What is required now is the mobilization of the masses trough revolutionary political consciousness and the organization of their vanguard in the party. (…) The main key to the mobilization of wide sections of the masses, so as to deal violently with their national and class enemy, is by pointing out the relationship between the problems of their daily life and the political struggle which aims at liberation and the establishment of a democratic power working for the interest of the classes of revolution[4].

The PFLP distances itself from Fatah also by its view of a threefold enemy and its panarabist understanding of the conflict: the Palestinian revolution had to face three enemies at the same time that act with a common goal, namely, American imperialism, Israel and its Zionist colonial project which represents the USA *longa manus* in the region and the Arab reactionary regimes such as Jordan, the Gulf monarchies or post Camp David Egypt. The revolution cannot be achieved and liberation cannot be accomplished before a change of power in these countries occurs, before creating an "Arab Hanoi" in Palestine neighboring countries; this interpretation of the conflict has been summarized by the famous Habash's motto "the path to Jerusalem passes for Amman".

Such perspective of the Palestinian question shows the extent of discordance between PFLP's theories and Fatah ideological base which founded its success among the masses on the consideration that only the Palestinian people was responsible for its liberation and that the solution to their question couldn't come from other Arab states : "All we demand you (Arab

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[3] Tareq Ismail, *The Arab Left,* Syracuse University Press, 1976
[4] *The political report of the third national congress of the P.F.L.P. Task of the new stage*, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-Foreign Committee, 1973, pp. 59-60

regimes) is surrounding Palestine, forming a security belt and then watching the battle between us and Zionists"[5]. These divergent views will characterize the choices of the two Parties throughout the turmoil of the conflict and their stands towards the main Arab actors involved in the confrontation with Israel, especially in the case of Syria and Jordan.[6]

The clashes between the Jordanian army and the Palestinian resistance that became famous as the "Black September" in 1970 led to the expulsion of Palestinian armed factions from Jordan and to the choice of Lebanon by the PLO as the new center for their military activities and institutions building, especially by virtue of Cairo agreements signed in 1969 between the PLO and the Lebanese State which legalized Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon. For Popular Front's political bureau another stage in their struggle for self determination and revolution began, a stage where some priorities and threats were made evident by the last Jordanian events. In this new phase the main danger that left-wing faction had to face, was the acceptance of any peace settlement of the Palestinian question. Until the September defeat the right-winged elements of the Palestinian field were forced to align themselves with the more radical instances inside the National Movement, but the negative result of the confrontation with the Hashemite regime revealed their "retreatist" nature and their will to realize a peaceful solution. The main precondition to such an agreement was the liquidation of the armed resistance followed by a settlement unable to respond to Palestinian national demands; the disproportion of forces was too big to assure a balanced appeasement. This fundamental evaluation, led to the main conclusion that in order to reject the reactionary-imperialist plot, the resort to a scientifically organized revolutionary violence was needed, beside other "prescriptions" that are clearly explained in the political report of the Third National Congress held in Lebanon in March 1972:

> "The practice of violence should aim at the creation of conditions that facilitate the
> process of building the (revolutionary) party and the patriotic front, and mobilization of
> the masses, on the other, must always remain clear in our minds"[7].

For the Popular Front, the failure in confronting the Jordanian monarchy was mainly caused by the inability of the right-wing leadership of the National Movement to build a unified, revolutionary body, capable of rejecting the reactionary attack: the time came for the left to take the head of the national front. Until then the balance of power was favorable to nationalist forces firstly because of the support they received from Arab regimes, but also because of the fragmentation of the leftist parties; new conditions imposed a turnover in the leadership of the National Front, an ideological, political and organizational practice that only a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary party could put in place. But Marxists theories, that define the role of the revolutionary party, present some inconsistencies when related to the situation of the Palestinian National Movement and that

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[5] Alain Gresh, *OLP Histoire et Stratégies; vers l'état palestinien,* SPAG-PAPYRUS, 1983, p.44
[6] Helga Baumgarten, *The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism*, Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 34 No. 4 (Summer 2005)
[7] *Ibid, note 4 p.62*

inevitably are reflected in a certain ambiguity in PFLP's idea of a new National Front: on one hand, the party accused the "nationalist-bourgeois" of being linked to reactionary regimes, but on the other it sees the PLO as a national platform to wage the fight against Israel and functional to the building of the revolutionary party; in fact the PLO "prevents the isolation of the party from the masses, which could results in its inability to play its historical role in the stage of national democratic revolution"[8]. Likewise it is not clearly stated whom the PFLP meant to charge when speaking of the responsibilities of nationalist factions within the Palestinian arena while in the same time, affirming the necessity of maintaining the unity of the National Front and that right-wing forces "still have a role to play".

Finally it is interesting to note the idea that the Front has, of its role and participation within the PLO and its Executive Committee: seeing the PLO as an instrument that "provides a strictly delimited possibility for the struggle towards a partial and gradual evolution", the party considered itself as the representative of the "correct political line" and its stances in front of the other factions, would diffuse among the masses that correct political line. At the same time the PFLP declared its intentions of working outside the PLO in order to unify leftists faction, since the bases for such a consensus had to be sought among masses, and its goal of overthrowing "the hesitant and deviating elements which played a part in the retreat of the resistance"[9]. However, during the Seventies, the PLO will experience a shift that will distance the organization, from PFLP idea of a new National Front, and in the middle of the Lebanese turmoil, Arafat appeared more trustful of a diplomatic strategy based on compromise in which the armed struggle had always a more rhetorical role.[10]

During the first years of the Seventies the Palestinian presence in Lebanon was characterized by what Georges Corm calls "Black September complex". In other words, the Palestinian leadership was convinced that a final, decisive confrontation with those forces that wanted the liquidation of the armed resistance would take place in Lebanon sooner or later, certainty strengthened by the perception of Lebanon as their last stronghold. The PFLP and the other radical factions felt particularly threatened as Maronite milieus showed a growing hostility towards Palestinian leftists groups that they considered the "bad and subversive" side of the resistance. At this regard, the spectacular operations that the Popular Front and other Marxist factions carried on all over the world, in collaboration with some European and Japanese terroristic leftists organization, nourished the fear of Lebanese and Arab ruling bourgeoisie and contributed to the formation of more intolerant stands to their presence in Lebanon, like the one embodied by the Phalanges party. The tension was also exacerbated by the Israeli army, that did not find any obstacle in the Lebanese institutions or in the Lebanese army to its air raids that hit Palestinian

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[8] *Ibid,p.54*
[9] Ibid,p.57
[10] *Cfr.* Yezid Sayegh; *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993;* Oxford University Press-Institute for Palestine Studies; 1997.
Muhammad Y. Muslih; *Moderate and Rejectionists within the Palestine Liberation Organization;* Middle East Journal, Vol. 30 No. 2 (Summer 1972)

camps and positions as well as some Lebanese "targets", causing the death of thousands of civilians and contributing to the increasing rage of some sectors of the Lebanese society against the Palestinian resistance.[11]

The situation finally collapsed the 13 of April, 1975, when the Phalanges party prepared an ambush to a bus carrying some Palestinian fighters, members of the Arab Liberation Front, one of the factions of the radical galaxy: it was the beginning of the Lebanese civil war, that in its first phase, between 1975 and 1982, was more characterized by political divisions, between "progressive forces" and "fascist factions" than by sectarianism in which Israeli intervention plaid a major role. [12]

Before the Invasion

At the beginning of year 1982, the Palestine Liberation Organization and within it, the PFLP reached the highest point in terms of development of its civil, institutional and military infrastructures in southern Lebanon.[13] The ongoing Lebanese civil war and the double front that Palestinian forces had to deal with – the internal arena and the Israeli threat - pushed the military apparatus to some sensible improvements: since the disruption of clashes in Lebanon the PLO decided to acquire heavier armaments that, though quite obsolete in some cases, were sensibly effective against internal Lebanese enemies. Of course this was not true when facing the Israeli army. As underlined by Yezid Sayegh, this double confrontation drove Palestinian forces to develop a "strong functional dualism[14]" that entailed two different, and in some cases contradictory, efforts in order to train their fighters according to their deployment on the Lebanese battlefields and the enemy they had to face. The PFLP seemed to be aware of this situation and since the first months of 1982, it joined the debate on how to prepare to a possible, wide-range Israeli invasion of Lebanon insisting on not abandoning the guerrilla strategy, while exploiting at its best the new heavy weaponries: a complete shift to a traditional warfare strategy would be not only a tactical mistake but also a betrayal of the nature of Palestinian armed struggle that must follow the rules of every Marxist armed liberation movement; guerrilla must still be the bedrock of Palestinian confrontation with Israeli military superiority and in such a framework, regular armaments like tanks or antiaircraft weapons must be used to protect and ensure Palestinian-controlled position while serving as a base for the growth of operations behind the enemy lines, in the occupied territories. According to this interpretation of the war of liberation,

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[11] Rosita Di Pieri, *Il Libano Contemporaneo. Storia, Politica, Società,* Carocci Quality Paperbacks, 2009

[12] Georges Corm, *Le Liban Contemporain. Histoire et société*, La Découverte Paris, 2012

[13] Cheryl A. Rubenberg, *The Civilian Infrastructure of the Palestine Liberation Organization: An analysis of the PLO in Lebanon until June 1982,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 12 No. 3 (Spring 1983)

[14] Yezid Sayigh, *Palestinian Military Performance in the 1982 War,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol.12 No.4 (Summer, 1983)

the Popular Front stressed the importance of escalating military operations against the enemy since an improvement of military performance would serve both political and war goals.

The debate over an impending Israeli aggression was complicated by the debate over respecting the ceasefire signed in July 1981 with Israel after the so called "July war" and its interpretation: the Popular Front considered the ceasefire effective just for the Lebanese front, therefore it judged fully legitimate to continue every kind of operation on any attainable front, inside Palestine as well as abroad. In the Party's views military activity wasn't just a matter of responding to Israeli strikes or of inflicting huge losses, it was once again related to the nature of the Palestinian resistance; in fact operations against the enemy represented the justification of Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon and a strong stance against quietist approaches that were spreading in the Arabs countries with the support of the "reactionary front".

In this regard, it is important to note how this particular stage of the Lebanese crisis was just another episode of the inter Arab confrontation about any possible solution to the conflict with Israel: the Popular Front, aligning itself with the position of the Steadfastness and Confrontation Front, wanted to halt the spread of the Camp David strategy into the Palestinian arena; the goal was stopping the defeatist approach at every level, and strengthening the rejectionist front against any opening to the dialogue with Israel that would require an official recognition of the Jewish state. These fears of the Popular Front were not unfounded: in February 1982 the mayor of Bethlehem Elias Freij issued a provocative statement to Israelis *Haaretz* and T*he Jerusalem Post* where he called the PLO to a "mutual, reciprocal, and simultaneous recognition'[15]' with Israel. Shortly after, he received the approval of Rashad Shawa, the well-known mayor of Gaza, who added that the PLO "represented just a part of the Palestinian people"[16] calling into question one of the historical gains of the Palestine Liberation Organization: the recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.[17] The PLO unanimously responded with its reject of these declarations and the PFLP denounced them in an official communicate issued on January 1982, as violation of the Palestinian National Chart. Such a kind of stands by Palestinian politicians were even more dangerous if considered in the light of Begin's cabinet strategy to create an alternative authority to the PLO in the West Bank: between 1979 and 1981 Israel established several "Village Leagues" in Hebron, Ramallah and Bethlehem, everyone headed by Israeli collaborators that received financial and political backing by occupation authorities. In addition the Front's concern at this regard was fostered by a significant consensus that the new proposal for a comprehensive settlement of the conflict, issued by Saudi crown prince Fahd in 1981[18], was gaining also in the Palestinian arena.

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[15] Trudy Rubin, *West Bank Palestinian calls for PLO peace with Israel,* The Christian Science Monitor, February 23, 1982
[16] *Al Hadaf,* no.572, 1/30/1982
[17] Issa Al-Shuhaibi, *The Development of Palestinian Entity Consciousness,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Part I Vol. 9 No. 1 (Autumn 1979), Part II Vol. 9 No. 2 (Winter 1980), Part III Vol. No. 3 (Spring 1980).
[18] Adeed Dawisha, *Saudi Arabia and the Arab Israeli Conflict*: *The Ups and Downs of Pragmatic Moderation*, International Journal, Vol. 38 No. 4 The Middle East After Lebanon (Autumn 1983)

The Party was observing a dangerous shift of what it defined the "defeatist line" favorable to a dialogue and implicitly to a formal recognition of Israel, from the Arab stage to the Palestinian one. If the "moderates" considered the dialogue as a step toward liberation, the Party's stand was clear: the Fahd's plan and any positive consideration of a dialogue with the Zionist entity was another attempt to implement the American-Israeli "conspiracy" of a peace plan to the Lebanese and Palestinian questions, the second stage of what began with the signature of Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel, translated to the core of the conflict. As a pan-Arab movement, the PFLP has also always been contrary to any solution that entailed a bipartisan dialogue between one of the sides involved in the conflict and Israel, avoiding in this way, a comprehensive negotiation in which, every country participated together with a common strategy; for these reasons the Fahd plan was to be considered as imbued of the "Camp David spirit" the first presenting such features[19].

Beyond the concern expressed by PFLP's high cadres about the "contamination" of the National Movement by "defeatist" approaches, the split in the PLO was a matter of fact and to the luck of the most inflexible factions, the PLO chairman Yasser Arafat, who probably participated to the drafting of Fahd proposal, was quite isolated in his effort to gain the approval for a solution based on Saudi prince's plan.

Taking into account this new division in the Palestinian field, the political and the military strategy, in the Popular Front, play a complementary role on the eve of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The call for an escalation of resistance operations was not only the expression of a renewed attachment to the armed struggle as source of legitimacy but also a political choice that aimed at countering Arafat's efforts to obtain diplomatically new gains for the PLO, trough a rapprochement with the Jordanian regime and the adoption of the Fahd plan as an official PLO initiative: the raising level of violence and the increasing number of military actions, per se viewed as a success, would give reliability to PFLP claims and reject the spread of the quietist and pro dialogue line.

In the meanwhile the disruption of a popular uprising in the occupied territories against Israeli projects of establishing a Palestinian civilian government and against the Village Leagues, seemed to confirm PFLP thesis, attesting the popular refusal of dialogue and collaboration with Israel and the recognition of the PLO and people's trust in armed resistance. Such a context encouraged the Popular Front to propose the arming of the masses involved in the uprising exploded in the West Bank in the first month of 1982, against a Palestinian administrative self government: striking on every front seemed to be the rallying cry of the Party, also according to its speculation about continual Israeli breaks of the ceasefire.[20]

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[19] *At-Taqrīr as-siyāsī aṣ-ṣādir 'an dawra al-laǧna al-markaziyya al-'ama li-l-ǧabha aš-ša'abiyya li-taḥrir filasṭīn/The Political Report of the central committee of the PFLP* in *Al-Hadaf*, No. 576, 02/27/ 1982.
[20] *Al-Hadaf,* No. 576, 02/27/1982
Al-Hadaf. No. 580 03/27/1982
Al- Hadaf, No. 581 04/03/1982
Al-Hadaf, No. 589 05/29/1982

Once again the national movement split up because of different interpretations of the ceasefire: the core of the debate was whether the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon should consider the Israeli raids against its positions, occurred during the first half of 1982 as a simple break or as a fall of the ceasefire signed the previous summer. Again the Front seemed not to have any doubt: Israel decided the fall of the ceasefire and the new raids were a test in order to probe Palestinian fighting capabilities, before launching a wide range invasion of Lebanon in order to liquidate PLO armed presence in that country. Furthermore such a campaign had, among its main goals, the one of hitting the morale of the Palestinian masses located in Lebanon in order to weaken their effectiveness against the incoming invasion.[21]

This internal debate to the Palestinian arena, just before the beginning of operation "Peace in Galilee" in June 1982, shows the level of awareness that the Palestinian leadership had toward the next direct confrontation with the Israeli enemy; this is also confirmed by PFLP acknowledgment of some serious weaknesses that the resistance was experiencing from the military point of view, like, for instance, the lack of coordination between Palestinian armed factions with the consequent isolation of each battalion. In fact, when the invasion finally took off, they acted independently, without being able to effectively stand in order to slow the invasion.

Beside these problems, Front's military analysis was also concerned by some battlefield obstacles that jeopardized the success of its actions beyond Lebanese-Israeli borders: first of all the presence of multinational forces in southern Lebanon. The party strongly expressed its opposition to the possibility, proposed by the Lebanese government, of an increase of the number of UN Emergency forces and at this regard, Abu Ahmad Fu'ad, PFLP's military responsible declared in an interview to *Al-Hadaf* magazine:

> We see no advantages for the Palestinian revolution in an increase of multinational emergency forces for three main reasons: first they represent a security barrier favorable the Zionist enemy; secondly they're actually not only deployed on the truce line between Palestine and Lebanon, but also in other areas such as Suwar or Nabatieh which should not be allowed and finally often they didn't take a concrete position against Haddad's or Zionist forces that consequently committed several massacre against our masses in the South[22].

Next to the refusal of the Multinational Security Forces we observe a strong refusal of any possible deployment of the Lebanese army in South Lebanon:

> As it is well known, until now approximately a thousand soldiers responding to
> Sa'ad Haddad's orders are still in southern region, everyone coming from the

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[21] *Al Hadaf,* No. 575, 2/20/1982
[22] *Ibid.*

> Lebanese Army. For this reason we cannot trust in that army and we don't believe
> it will take a positive stand toward the Palestinian revolution.[23]

Obviously Palestinian concern about the role of the Lebanese Army wasn't the only one with regards to the internal threats. The PLO as a whole, was sure that the Israeli Army was coordinating its maneuvers with the Phalanges Party in order to close the Palestinian resistance in an "accordion" attack. Indeed, Ariel Sharon, Israel's defense minister at that time, met Bashir Jemayel, the Phalanges leader and then elected Lebanese president, on an Israeli war ship docked at Jounieh port, confirming the rumors, about the Israeli-Phalanges plan to liquidate the PLO. Arafat for first, considered this plan fully plausible.[24]

The Sixth of June, 1982, the invasion finally started and despite the wide-range debate that took place during the months preceding Israeli military operations, Palestinian military performance was disappointing showing many discrepancies at various level regarding tactics, deployment and units training[25]. Palestinian forces in the south, deployed in rural areas, were unable to form a serious obstacle to Israeli armored units and lost cohesion and any possibility of effectiveness very quickly: communications and roads were easily cut also because PLO units were insufficient to cover all possible Israeli invasion line. Even if some successful operation had been carried on by scattered group against small Israeli units, a huge part of Palestinian fighters withdrew towards Beirut. Another feature of Palestinian military experience in Lebanon that Yezid Sayegh exposed in his article we cited above, is the beginning of "regularization" process without having the concrete means to achieve it: during the Seventies the type of training that military cadres received was more suitable for a regular army than for little armed formations that would have been more effective if employed as elite units which obviously required, a totally different kind of training.[26] Tshal reached Beirut in nine days and began a terrible siege of the town forcing the civilian population to endure the awful sufferings that contemporary historiography has extensively treated: in such conditions, entrenched in a urban context, Palestinian forces managed to organize a more effective resistance were their "regularized" troops acted skillfully.

The PLO withdrawal from Lebanon started in September 1982 in a victory climate that contrasted with the destruction that the country underwent during the operation "Peace in Galilee": somebody looked at the Lebanon War as "Israel's Vietnam"[27] that exposed its brutality to the world. The PLO moved to Tunisia, while PFLP decided to transfer its political offices to Syria, in Damascus: Arafat, far away from Palestine definitely decided to shift to the diplomatic strategy

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Al-Hadaf* No. 574 02/13/1982
Arafat on the Lebanese War, Journal Of Palestine Studies, Vol. 12 No. 4 (Summer 1983)
Cfr. Richard A. Gabriel, *Operation Peace for Galilee: The Israel-PLO war in Lebanon,* New York: Hill and Wang, 1984
Yezid Sayegh, *Israel's Military Performance in Lebanon, June 1982,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 13 No. 1 (Autumn 1983)

[25] *Ibid.* Note. 14

[26] *Ibid.* Note 14

[27] Kirsten E. Schultze, *Israeli Crisis Decision-Making in the Lebanon War: Group Madness or Individual Ambition?*, Israel Studies, Vol. 3 No. 2, (Fall 1998)

that after the rapprochement with Jordan also entailed new relations with Egypt. The radical front couldn't accept such a change and continued its call for the importance of armed confrontation with the enemy: the process of marginalization of leftists forces was entering in its more acute stage and the choice of Syria as new headquarter is very meaningful of that declining path that characterized Palestinian left in the next decade.[28]

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[28] George Habash, Interview, *The Future of the Palestinian National Movement,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 14 No. 4 (Summer 1985)

1.2 The debate over Palestine: democratic state, revolution and revolutionary process

One of the most important feature that characterized the Palestinian political arena, since its appearance as a defined identity within the Arab context, was its debate over the main issues concerning the different resistance factions. This democratic aspect was mainly due to a fragmented political scenario where each faction enjoyed an important autonomy and in some cases the support of some Arab countries that gave a political weight also to the smallest formations. Such a fragmented reality entailed the pursuit of unity and consensus within Palestinian institutions, and in particular within the Palestine National Council, the higher political organ of the PLO, in order to attract the largest Arab support, and to reply with a united front to the threats impending on the Palestinian front. However during the period that lasted from the real emergence of an independent PLO after 1967 defeat to the expulsion of the Palestinian resistance from Lebanon in 1982, just one, fundamental principle was accepted by every factions: the armed struggle is the only mean by which the Zionist enemy could be confronted and any peace settlement rejected; every other issue like the "Jewish Problem", the "democratic state" or the liberation strategy would generate an intense debate, wreaking important split within the Palestinian Movement.

In this context the PFLP distinguished itself on the base of two main feature: as the successor of the Movement of Arab Nationalists, pan-Arabism was still strong in its political analyses and its Marxist-Leninist approach pretended to have a scientific understanding of Middle Eastern reality and of liberation strategy. Even before the foundation of the Popular Front and the shift to Marxism, differences between MAN leadership, in particular Habash, and Fatah started at an organizational level: in fact during its first decade, Fatah introduced some new elements on the Palestinian and Arab political arena, like for instance its inclusive character, the seek for the largest possible consensus and general nationalistic claims which clashed with the strong MAN-PFLP's theoretical and doctrinal structure. While Arafat's movement since its birth, addressed its call to every sector of the Palestinian society, the Popular Front was strictly attached to a class view by which it was able to individuate the reason of Arab setbacks:

> "The 1948 defeat came at the hands of religious feudal Palestinian leaders such as Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the bourgeoisie, such as the Independence Party and the Defense Party, etc., and the Arab feudal regime exemplified in the Arab kings and presidents. This defeat gave direct evidence of the dialectic connection between the actual state existing in Palestine, the Arab world and the international setup. The disaster of Palestine and the creation of the "state of Israel" is the result of the Palestine Arab dialectic." [29]

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[29] Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Arab Left, Appendix D:* The Political Report of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Syracuse University Press, 1976

Such an analysis was a consequence of the fatal defeat to which Nasserism was subjected in 1967. In fact before the June war an heated debate took place inside the MAN on a possible merger with Nasserism. The left-wing of the movement led by Mohsen Ibrahim was in favor of this union while Habash and its right-wing entourage was very skeptical towards Nasser's intentions. But what is worth mentioning here, is that this interpretation of Arab nationalism wasn't a class one and even leftists inside the movement didn't see bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie's participation in the liberations movement as an obstacle: on the contrary, they supported a view where the whole society had a role to play in the struggle for liberation.

Afterwards, the 1967 war marked the military crush of Arab armies and above all the end of the golden era of Arab nationalism: Nasser and Nasserism, totally lost their credibility in the eyes of Arab masses and politicians.[30] In the light of this events, the adoption of Marxism-Leninism by MAN's splinters, can be seen on the one hand, as the result of the influence of leftist intellectuals inside the movement, and on the other, as a response to an ideological tradition considered responsible for the defeat. What seem to confirm such a thesis is that the PFLP, though deprived of its internal leftist opposition after Hawatmeh's and Jibril's defections, undertook a sharp political relocation towards Marxism: despite his previous right-wing stands, Habash believed that the new Party needed a radical background in order to survive and eventually arise in the new political scenario. But now the whole group of heirs of Arab Nationalists agreed on the firm belief that bourgeois nationalism demonstrated unable to lead the revolution and condemned the Arab countries to humiliation:

> "The petit bourgeois class occupies the leading role in the Palestinian and Arab liberation movements and this class has led the entire range of the class, political, economic and military changes within the ideological, class and political structure of the petit bourgeoisie. In June 1967, this program was the one which was defeated. The economy that was set up by the petit bourgeoisie could not resist the Zionist-imperialist attack because it was a consumer economy based on light industrialization and agrarian reforms".[31]

Criticism to Nasser's economic program appears quite clear in this excerpt where it is highlighted how both progressive and reactionary regimes failed to establish a revolutionary economic system, capable to counter the aggression of a technologically and educationally superior state: the link with capitalist economy must be cut, a revolutionary economic program must be launched, where heavy industrialization is at the core of the strategy and popular classes lead the revolutionary process. In fact only popular classes can guide this effort, for bourgeois and owners' class will never renounce to their material privileges. The PFLP is inspired by the Vietnamese and

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[30]*Cfr.* James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History,* Oxford University Press, 2011
Georges Corm, *Le Proche-Orient éclaté 1956-2010,* Editions Gallimards, Paris 2010
Massimo Campanini, *Storia del Medio Oriente 1798-2005,* Il Mulino, 2006
[31] *Ibid. p.10*

Cuban experience where, in its view, a popular economy was the backing for a guerrilla warfare, the only strategy that will enable the Palestinian resistance to counterbalance Israeli military strength. Traditional warfare starts to be seen as a bourgeois one, while a scientific approach immediately shows that in order to weaken the enemy and "keep the spark of revolution burning"[32] within Arab masses guerilla tactic is needed: the ordinary military approach led the Arab countries to two terrible defeats, that provoked two wages of Palestinian refugees whose moral has been severely hit; this situation had to be overturned and a popular armed struggle was the key of the new course as demonstrated by the battle of Karameh, during which a popular battalion inflicted huge losses to the Israeli army, succeeding in what Arab regular armies failed in more than twenty years.

The PFLP specifies that mobilization of Palestinian masses is the key for the victory of revolution, the masses have to be consciously involved in the military effort, led by the vanguard of the revolutionary party, because only with the exploitation of their numerical potential, the resistance can face Israeli economic and military superiority. But the question was how to mobilize the masses. First of all the Popular Front rejects any mobilization based on emotional and patriotic claims which do not focus on the scientific reality of their situation: accordingly generic propaganda doesn't allow to build a revolutionary struggle; masses have to be organized on the base of trade unions and other kinds of collective organizations, such as the Union of Palestinian Journalists and Writers for instance. The vanguard, will provide them with the most important principles that will engine a responsible mobilization:

> "The main key to the mobilization of wide sections of the masses so as to deal violently with their national and class enemy, is by pointing out the relationship between the problem of their daily life, and the political struggle which aims at liberation and the establishment of a democratic power working for the interest of the classes of revolution"[33]

Afterwards, the concept of revolutionary violence is to be put in strict relation with the task of mobilizing masses. Once again it is possible to observe how the practice of armed struggle, especially after the war in Jordan, acquires a political meaning that goes far beyond the military one: the training of masses to guerrilla warfare is the only way to ensure a growing mobilization, to prevent Israeli efforts to control political life and organizations in the occupied territories as well as to reject reactionary interference in the diasporas. PFLP's attachment to this concept will become stronger during the Seventies when the idea of a Palestinian statehood in the West Bank and in Gaza starts to gain consensus and Israeli attempts to create a Palestinian civilian

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[32] *Military Strategy of the PFLP,* PFLP Information Department, 1970, p.51
[33] *Ibid*. Note 1 p. 62

administration will become more dangerous since they will be part of an official strategy, unlike similar earlier efforts in the first years following the occupation.[34]

All factions, within the Palestinian national movement, agree on the role of guerrilla war, but differences have to be found in theoretical premises. In a book issued by PFLP Information Department we can read the following consideration:

> "If we do not want our revolution to be simply a spontaneous outburst without a range
> of vision, and if we want to be prepared for a revolutionary war of long duration which is
> based on psychological warfare, then the guerrilla must embrace a theory".[35]

Fatah believed on the theory of Palestinian nationalism and stressed the role of Palestinian masses who didn't need the Arab regimes to fight for them: the popular armed resistance had to be just a Palestinian one and the refusal of any direct Arab intervention was clearly stated[36]. Far away from this view, PFLP was convinced that nationalism had to be rejected and that a brand new Panarbism had to be created on the bases of Marxist-Leninist theories and popular class solidarity. Marxism-Leninism was at the same time the tool that enabled the masses to carry on the revolution as well as the goal in itself because the new society would be founded on the bases of the theory which put popular classes on the top of its social organization, directing the revolution until to the elimination of class differences, that is communism.

Starting from this point of view, the PFLP understood the conflict through class struggle criteria: every actor involved, according to its nature, played its class role, notwithstanding "blood bonds" or nationalist ideal, but rather following its own interests, as demonstrated by the history of the conflict, at least since 1948.

Between 1967 and 1971 Jordanian events, a certain political confusion predominated in the Palestinian field in regards of several issues - some of which will be analyzed later – and Fatah's newly acquired leadership inside PLO wasn't stable as it will be in the further decade: during that phase the PFLP will multiply its claims for a change in Palestinian national front's leadership, presenting the building of a revolutionary party as the key of the liberation path. What is not fully understandable is if Arafat's chairmanship, acquired in 1969, is to be considered as a part of the bourgeois establishment that led the national movement to the defeat. In fact even after the black September, the political report of party's third national congress affirms that:

> "Because of its middle class nature and in the absence of a scientific understanding of
> the battle it is engaged in, the leadership of the resistance was unable to understand
> this reality (Jordanian regime will to liquidate Palestinian resistance) and the direction of
> its movements. Thus its own policies led to its defeat."[37]

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[34] *Ibid.* Note 5 and 17
[35] *Ibid.* Note 32
[36] *Ibid.* Note 6
[37] *Ibid.* Note 1

However that may be, the PFLP and DFLP decided to openly challenge PLO leadership in September 1970 in what could be considered both as a tentative to seize power inside the national movement and to topple King Hussein's regime[38]: as has been made clear by PFLP's narrative, the series of planes hijacking, attacks and hotels sequestrations in Jordan operated by the party, was meant to put an end to a situation of "dual power[39]" where a revolutionary resistance movement couldn't coexist with a reactionary regime whose complicity with imperialism and Zionism had been fully proved. Fatah evidently didn't share such a view and always tried to mediate between the most radical wing of the PLO and Jordan but, unfortunately for Arafat's party, leftists formations and the government substantially agreed on the concept of dual power and when the regime decided to respond to Palestinian commando's provocations, besieging the camps and exterminating Palestinian military forces, PLO's chairman couldn't but to declare his support for the fedayins. The PFLP dragged the whole resistance in this conflict in order to put into practice its purpose of creating an "Arab Hanoi"[40], giving birth, trough armed struggle, to a revolutionary power in Jordan but its tragic miscalculations led to the decimation of Palestinian military potential and the loss of the most important field of action against Israel; as a consequence, the weight of leftist formations inside the PLO was sensibly reduced.

The PFLP doesn't seem to have learnt the lessons and no considerable shift are to be remarked in the "post September" stage strategy. The rightist leadership continues to be held responsible for its shortsightedness and its lack of a scientific interpretation of the conflict with Jordan which made it unable to understand the dual power situation; thereafter, also the leftist front is blamed, because of its divisions and its incapability to form a unified force able to prepare the resistance to the showdown with the Hashemite regime.[41]

However, the real heart of the debate inside the Palestinian national movement is represented by the discussion about the features of the political entity that will be established in the liberated Palestine, after the defeat of Zionism.

Since the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948 and at least, until the 1967 war, the belief that the liberation of Palestine would have occurred through an Arab intervention, was paralleled by the belief that the political future of Palestine wouldn't have been detached from the one of the surrounding Arab countries, a certainty that was shared by both "liberal" and "progressives" regimes. This idea was also the dominant one among Palestinian formations and political personalities: the Fifties, and to a less extent the Sixties, were the golden age of Arab Nationalism during which the idea of the creation of a Palestinian independent state, on the territories defined by British mandatory authorities, was considered to be near to imperialist plans for Near East, since it would have been seen as an obstacle to Arab unity. This aspect is underlined by the

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[38] Olivier Carré, *Septembre Noir : Refus Arabe de la Résistance Palestinienne,* Bruxelles, Ed. Complexe, 1980
 Abbas Kelidar, *The Palestine Guerrilla Movement,* The World Today, Vol. No. 10 (October 1973)
[39] *Ibid.* Note 37
[40] *Ibid.* Note 32
[41] *Ibid.* Note 4

creation of the PLO by the Arab league in 1964 and the election of a weak personality such as Ahmad Shuqeiry to its chairmanship. In fact, until the election of Yasser Arafat, the PLO will be fully controlled by the Arab countries and also several components of the PNC weren't Palestinian at all; this situation is reflected in the first National Charter issued in 1964 during the first Palestine National Congress, where it is stated that the "PLO do not exercises any sovereignty on the West Bank of the Kingdom of Jordan, nor on the Gaza Strip"[42].

Obviously the MAN, as a pan-Arab organization, implanted with different branches all over the Arab world, regardless of its different currents, didn't see any solution for the Palestine question but inside a comprehensive settlement, involving the whole Arab homeland an charged any solution outside this paradigm as linked to colonial interest and as "regionalist". In the early Fifties its leaders do not even speak of Palestine or Palestinians as for them, just a unified Arab people exists, beyond Western fabricated boundaries.[43]

The first actor capable of breaking the chorus of Arab nationalism is Fatah who, conforming to its "palestinianism", will introduce for the first time the concept of "democratic state" as future political structure of a liberated Palestine, catching the spirit of the post '67 era and the decline of pan-Arabism in 1969 a statement issued by the Central Committee of Fatah launches this new idea:

> "The Palestine national liberation movement Fatah declares solemnly that the final goal
> of its struggle is the restoration of the independent and democratic Palestinian State,
> whose citizens, whatever their confession may be, will benefit of equal rights".[44]

The concept of democratic state, as shown by the reference to confession in the statement above, is deeply tied with the question of Palestinian and Arab attitude towards the Jewish settlers and its formulation entails a gap with the previous period, during which Jews and Zionists are put on the same level, giving to Israel a pretext that is still extensively exploited today: Fatah's goal is the destruction of Israel inasmuch as it is a Zionist and racist state which denies Palestinians' right to live in their homeland but the movement doesn't want to erase the Jewish presence in Palestine, Jews will have the chance to live in a democratic and multi-ethnic Palestinian State, beside Muslims and Christians. Despite its former stands, the PFLP agree on this view of the Jewish presence, but as usual, this is the only one it shares with Fatah.

In order to proceed with due order, is important to explain PFLP's position, since the beginning of this debate in the late Sixties: as defined by its second congress held in 1969 the PFLP, concerning the Jews, aims at liberating Jewish masses from the state of exploitation they are living in Israel, since their interest, is at odds with the Zionist project. In fact, the latter, being an

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[42] palestine.assafir.com *Filasṭīn Al-'adad 19:al-mīṯāq al-qawmī al-filasṭīnī/Palestine, no. 19:The Palestinian National Charter.*

[43] *Cfr.* Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: the Construction of Modern National Consciusness,* Columbia University Press, 1997
Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine,* 1992
James Gelvin, *The Israeli-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War,* Cambridge University Press, 2007

[44] *Ibid.* Note 2

imperialist outpost in the region, whose goal is a continued pillage of local resources, it is deeply linked to international capitalism and so, in contradiction with working masses interests, despite the fact that they are Jews. The PFLP defines Jewish masses as "misled" because Israel is trying to mobilize them to a "life-or-death" struggle, representing the Palestinian resistance as an anti-Semite movement; such a contradiction will be further unveiled by the continual of the armed struggle which will clarify the real identity of the Palestinian national movement.

A first point of discord, between Fatah and leftist organizations, in particular the Front, is the geographical definition of the future Palestinian state: Arafat's movement is devoted to the liberation of the only soil of Palestine, within the borders emerged after World War I and the end of the Ottoman empire, a position that further distinguishes Fatah from other Palestinian factions and that is still a minority one at the beginning of the seventies. On the other hand the PFLP refuses to give a precise definition of the liberated Arab country which will be an integral part of a supranational, socialist Arab homeland. The point of depart of PFLP's argumentation is that what is going on, since the establishment of a Zionist state, is an aggression to the whole region and even if the Palestinian people is the one who suffered the most and therefore it constitutes the vanguard of the liberation movement, all adjoining countries are damaged by Israel, but above all, since Zionism is basically a colonial movement, economically built on capitalism:

> "The liberation of Palestine is linked with the liberation of the masses of, at least, the Arab countries adjoining Palestine from the burdens of their present conditions, of the reactionary regimes, of the economic and social relations which are based on exploitation, of the repressive forces and of the factors of backwardness and disunity."[45]

It is impossible to speculate about the boundaries of the future state at this stage, since the struggle has yet to mobilize the greatest part of Arab masses in the pattern of a popular struggle.
But a major subject of discussion during this phase, is the definition of "democratic" and the understanding of a "democratic solution". Starting from the latter point, the concept of democratic solution could refer to three different aspects of the conflict: a democratic solution to the Israeli question, to the Palestinian question or to the Jewish question. The Popular Front rejects the idea that the conflict with the Israeli entity could end trough a democratic solution, as the birth of Israel is the result of a colonial aggression that finds its roots in the contradiction between "European Jewish bourgeoisie and European bourgeoisie"; a progressive party cannot but fight an entity whose basis are to be found in the "bourgeois and capitalist conceptions of European Jewry" that has been prevented to "integrate by the European bourgeoisie"[46]: in other words it's impossible to speak of a democratic solution of capitalism or colonialism, but, as has been highlighted previously, the PFLP supports a democratic solutions of the Jewish question, for the party aims at liberating Jews too. Finally, speaking of a democratic solutions of the Palestinian

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[45] *Palestine, Towards a Democratic Solution.* PFLP Information Department, 1970 p. 24
[46] *Ibid.* p.17

question, allows us to explain PFLP's view of democracy: democracy is not an absolute value upon which lies a unanimous consensus, instead each class, has its own conception of democracy, "what is democratic for a liberal has always been some form of political domination over proletarian classes" and the PFLP clearly fights for the establishment of a popular democracy in the Near East in which Arab masses will be free of the existent paradigms of exploitation. In order to do so, the struggle cannot be restricted to the Palestinian arena, nor find its foundations in a "chauvinist" solution that would entail the creation of a bi-national state, detached from the rest of the Arab homeland, where the premises for the continuation of the current exploitation of Arab masses would subsist. The final interpretation of the concept of "democratic state" can be summarized by a statement made by Habash during an interview with the Lebanese news paper "Al-Ahrar":

> "The PFLP views that the genuine content of the concept of a 'democratic Palestinian state' and its practical interpretation lie in presenting a democratic solution to the Jewish question in Palestine, in a way that all Jewish citizens would and should equally and indiscriminately the right of citizenship within a liberated Palestine, organically united with the Arab homeland and nation."[47]

The Jordanian events will seriously affect the debate and the PFLP, but to some extent almost every faction in the PLO, finds itself stuck in a contradictory position towards Palestinian masses and some independent political personality. The violent clashes that took place between 1970 and 1971 have shown that a return to a Jordanian sovereignty over the West Bank is not feasible nor desirable at all, but in order not to renounce to the unity of the East and the West bank of the river Jordan, the PFLP seems unable to formulate a concrete alternative, while rejecting the idea of a mini-state in the West Bank and Gaza and also the project of establishing a state within the mandatory borders. In such a context the idea of the creation of a Palestinian state, starts to raise interest and this is proved by the emergence of the first projects such as the one proposed by the journalist Muhammad Abu Shalbaya[48], especially if the PLO is unable to take a clear stand, exposing itself to a certain ambiguity in front of renewed Jordanian claims of sovereignty over Palestine.

The phase that is opening after the Jordan war, and that will last until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, is characterized by the strong necessity for the Palestinian resistance to ensure its survival and by the new real priority for the PLO to protect the revolution. In addition, the new possibilities for the creation of the debated Palestinian state, will pressure different regional and international actors to the formulation of plans for a peaceful settlement of the conflict, especially after 1973 October war[49]: all these elements determine a defensive stance in PFLP's political line

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[47] *Ibid. p. 35*
[48] *Ibid.* Note 14
[49]*Cfr. Ibid.* Note 5
Georges Corm, *Le Proche-Orient éclaté: 1956-2010,* Gallimard, Paris, 2011

as other Palestinian parties become more comfortable with the idea of the establishment of a Palestinian State on any part of liberated Palestine; the secretary general of the DFLP Nayef Hawatmeh outlines, since the end 1973, his party's position, which is very close to Fatah's: he clearly affirms the necessity of creating a national power on any fraction of land, liberated trough the force of arms, negotiations or the implementation of any plans conceived by the countries involved in the conflict, without recognizing Israel. The creation of such a national power is a fundamental step in the liberation of the whole historical Palestine and in the achievement of the final goal, the edification of a democratic state.[50]

In this new climate, also the US administration makes an historical change in its consideration of the Palestinian question that is the prelude to its efforts to impose a settlement with Israel. Such a shift is also highlighted in the political report of the third PFLP's national congress where is reported 1972 Nixon's declaration in which he admits that "stability in the Middle East could not be achieved without providing a solution to the problem of the Palestinian people: not as a refugee problem, but as a people searching for a homeland"[51]. The whole PLO and especially the PFLP will remain suspicious of any US initiative, that first of all, will be considered a conspiracy conceived with Israel: the refuse of any conference aiming at a political solution of the Palestinian question is clearly stated in the resolution adopted by the 12th PNC in which the organization affirms its refusal to the participation to the Geneva conference, to UN resolutions 242 and 338 and to any recognition of Israel. The result of this Council reveals that the hard line within the PLO imposed its view on the moderate one, but this resolution didn't express a real consensus among the different factions and the situation will blow in an important split within the national movement in the aftermath of this PNC turn[52]. If on one hand the PFLP interpreted the resolution as an absolute refusal of any negotiation with the enemy, Fatah and other factions, such as the DFLP, didn't and for this reason, Arafat will take part to several diplomatic initiatives and in 1974 he participates to the UN General Assembly where he obtains the recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination, to independence and national sovereignty.[53]

Arafat goes to Moscow, the chances for a political settlement increase and the PFLP reaffirms its adherence to the refusal of any solution that is not based on armed struggle: the Rejectionist Front is formed, inside the PLO, by the PFLP together with some small factions as PFLP-GC, Sa'iqa and the Arab Liberation Front. Although the PFLP still remains the second most

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William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967,* Brookings Institution Press and the University of California Press, 2005
[50] *What Palestinian State' An Interview with Nayef Hawatmeh,* MERIP Reports, No. 24, January 1974
Eric Rouleau, *The Palestinian Resistance at a Crossroads,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 3 No. 2 (Winter 1974)
[51] *Ibid.* Note 4 p. 43
Cfr. Nixon's Strategy for the Middle East, MERIP Reports, No. 13 (Nov., 1972)
Malcolm H. Kerr, *Nixon's Second Term: Policy Prospects in the Middle East,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 2 No. 3 (Spring 1973)
[52] *Ibid.* Note 5, 28 and 10
[53] *Ibid.* Note 30
For UN resolutions see: *http://www.un.org/documents/resga.htm*

important force inside the PLO, its attempt to constitute an opposition front will remain marginal and the party, once more, reveals a lack in its capacity to represent an alternative[54]. The PFLP deploys an ideological attachment to the principle that founded the Palestinian resistance, while the new course of Arafat's strategy is bringing the PLO to international recognition. After the participation to the UN General Assembly the leader of the National Movement multiplies its international travels and reaches the Soviet Union again, while showing its will to participate to the Geneva conference with the support of an absolute majority inside the PLO. In the meanwhile the municipal elections, held in the occupied territories in 1976, register a great popular participation, the 80% of electoral turnout, consecrating the PLO as the definitive and sole representative of the Palestinian people. The refusal and the boycott adopted by the PFLP to all these initiative will further accelerate PFLP marginalization, demonstrated also by the refusal to leave the PLO.

The turning point that will certify PLO final acceptance of the creation of a Palestinian State as a strategic target is 1977 13th PNC, whose final resolution declares the organization's *"exclusive right"*[55] to participate as representative of the Palestinian people to any conference that will treat the Palestinian question. The PFLP continues to reject this acceptance but its attacks at this regard, are sensibly reduced until, some months later, party's political bureau will conforms itself to majority Palestinian factions.[56]

Around the end of the decade the PLO has obtained a total international recognition and its infrastructure in Lebanon demonstrated its capabilities to build a statehood, but unfortunately for the national movement, these prominent achievements will be seriously weakened by some external factors: the Camp David accords and the Egyptian abandonment of the Palestinian question first, and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon within the ongoing civil war, will controvert the success of the resistance and erase its military weight. In such a new scenario its curious to notice how the PFLP will strongly support the establishment of a democratic state, after opposing it for more than a decade, in order to counter Fatah's and international attempts to create the mini-state on the occupied territories and recognizing Israel.

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[54] *Ibid.* Note 5
[55] 13th PNC session resolutions: *http://www.malaf.info/?page=ShowDetails&Id=65&table=pa_documents&CatId=63*
[56] *Ibid.* Note 5

1.3 The PFLP and the Arab-Palestinian context

As has been pointed out previously, the weight of personal rivalries, played a not negligible role in defining Palestinian political parties' stands towards each other; this is particularly true for the leftist block, as it is, for instance, the main cause that provoked Hawatmeh's split from the PFLP. In a review of a book by Muhammad Jamal Barut on the Movement of Arab Nationalists, As'ad Abu Khalil has no hesitations in affirming that Hawatmeh was, substantially, envious of Habash's popularity and couldn't accept that a leader, which he considered less smart, enjoyed such an appeal among Palestinian masses[57]. DFLP's defection is mainly a split operated by the Palestinian first Marxist core inside the MAN, against the rightist leadership, but apart from political positioning, is to be considered as a challenge to Habash's leadership with the purpose of establishing an independent group, even if with the same, fundamental doctrine background. If not so, how to consider Hawatmeh's search for Fatah's help, in 1969, when he decided to break away from the PFLP? In addition, it is important to note at this regard, that Habash always used an autocratic system to manage its party and his far-right past has always had a prominent influence, in the organizational structure of its leadership. This governance style, in addition to the cult for the personality of *Al Hakim*, resulted in a decision-making process in which the final pronouncement of the leader determined the party line, imposing itself over the conflicting trends Iand not giving enough space for a real debate. In such a context the concept of democratic centralism was exploited in order to justify this authoritarian decision-making process. This feature is observable in most of the Palestinian parties, and certainly for the leftists and it contributed in fostering competition between different forces, shaping those patterns of fragmentation that characterized the leftist block throughout all its history.[58]

An even harder competition is the one that defined the relations between PFLP and Fatah. In Jamil Hilal's book *"The Palestinian Left: Where to?"*[59] a former leader of the Palestine Communist Party made the following comment about the PFLP stand towards Fatah : *"The Popular Front adopted a policy of differentiation that was substantially based on the principle that where Arafat stood, the party stood on the opposite side"*[60]. Actually, this has been true since the creation of the PFLP and, to a certain extent, it had always to run after Arafat's political dynamism, often being forced to react to his considerable shifts. The PFLP was born as an offshoot of the MAN, therefore the new party was imbued of a tradition deeply tied to a season already concluded in 1967; the cadres of Palestinian leftist forces, at least PFLP's and DFLP's, developed their political consciousness in a milieu where the struggle for the liberation of Palestine was just one point of the political agenda of Arab nationalism and of which the ideological understanding was much

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[57] As'ad AbuKhalil, *George Habash and the Movement of Arab Nationalist: Neither Unitiy nor Liberation,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 28 No. 4, (Summer 1999)

[58] As'ad AbuKhalil, *Internal Contraddictions in the PFLP: Decision Making and Policy Orientation,* Middle East Journal, Vol. 41 No. 3 (Summer 1987).

[59] Jamil Hilal, *al Yasār al filasṭīnī: 'ilā 'aynā? / The Palestinian Left: Where to?,* Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2009

[60] *Ibid.*

more important than the strategic one. This aspect was also emphasized by the fact that several MAN leaders were not Palestinian at all (Hawatmeh was a Jordanian, while Mohsen Ibrahim a Lebanese, for instance) or they were sons of Palestinian families, born and raised in others Arab countries; all these factors, in addition to a lack of cohesiveness, if compared to Fatah's politburo, determined PFLP's delay in catching the spirit of post June war era, while Fatah, since its creation has always been more attached to Palestinian nationalism than to the ideal of Arab unity, putting the liberation of the occupied lands on the top of its agenda and demonstrating its readiness to take up the challenge of the new course[61]: Fatah is the organization that emerged as the first Palestinian force, thanks to a conception of the conflict that managed to mobilize Palestinian masses at an extent never experienced before, the PFLP reacted to this situation and succeeded to ensure to the party a strong consensus among the masses, however, it accumulated a delay that it will never be able to recover. As noticed previously in the first phase of Fatah leadership in the PLO, this newly acquired prominent position, was not completely stable, therefore the PFLP will try to topple Arafat, persuaded that the "bourgeois" guidance failed in leading the national movement: the only real attempt to conquer PLO chairmanship was the one that ended in September-July war in Jordan in 1970, that definitely sealed Arafat's leading position; from then on, the PFLP had to defend itself as second force, in front of DFLP's will to substitute it.

Another feature that shaped PFLP stands inside the national movement and that brought the great part of the consensus it enjoyed among the masses, is its coherence and attachment to the same national goals, that changed very little throughout more than two decades, and this thanks mainly to Habash's charisma: its authority succeeded in imposing a political line that always demanded the total liberation of Palestine, the intimate link between the Palestinian and Arab liberation movements and the refusal of any peaceful solution which contributed to representation of PFLP as the intransigent force, inside the PLO, adding this aspect to its Marxist-Leninist identity. Only after 1982, also because of a stroke that hit George Habash, with a consequent limitation of his physical and intellectual skills and the emergence of a new leadership inside the party, the PFLP started to change stand towards some of the historical issues, accepting for example the call for the establishment of a democratic state on the soil of mandatory Palestine, as a main strategic goal after having rejected it since its first formulation by Fatah.

Outside Palestine, the PFLP maintained relations that changed considerably during the decades, according to the major events that shaped the geopolitical balance in the region. In Lebanon the party maintained its relations first of all with those movement born after the dissolution of MAN in 1967, such as the Communist Action Organization in Lebanon, founded in 1970 and led by Mohsen Ibrahim, of which we observed the role in MAN Marxist shift. In general the whole Lebanese left, was very sympathetic with the Palestinian resistance and until the crossroads of 1982 the progressive character that was embodied by the PLO prevailed on national and sectarian sentiments towards the Palestinian armed presence in the country. The PLO as a

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[61] *Ibid.* Note 5, 10, 43, 57

whole, was seen as a crucial ally in the confrontation against Lebanese rightist forces, openly colluded with Israel who was favorable to the establishment of a sectarian Christian power in Lebanon. The relations between Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese National Movement, the coalition of progressive Lebanese parties, lasted officially until the end of the war in 1990, but after 1982, and especially after the half of the Eighties, it lost any concrete operational meaning; the decline of this collaboration was determined by both internal and external actors: every Palestinian faction especially Fatah, PFLP and DFLP to a less extent, behaved in a total disrespectful way regarding any Lebanese sensibility towards sovereignty on their lands; Palestinian militias erected checkpoints and in some case were responsible of looting at the expense of the Lebanese civilian population: such episodes were successfully exploited by PLO adversaries in their propaganda against Palestinian presence. [62]

The Israeli intervention will mark also a change in the bases of the conflict, which will be much more sectarian-oriented than before: an historical Palestinian ally, such as Walid Jumblatt, will take part to a bloody confrontation with Phalanges party that will lead to the transfer of the Christian residents of the Shouf region; this new climate, which Israel strongly fostered[63] didn't play in the advantage of the Palestinian implantation in Lebanon.

During a first phase of the alliance, Lebanese leftist forces, and above all Kamal Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist party, found in the Palestinian armed presence a strong backing in their attempt to establish a new kind of power: in the Seventies the PLO was still bearer of a radical, anti-imperialist discourse, to which the narrative of parties like the PFLP contributed greatly and that represented a favorable background for the formulation of an antagonist alternative to the traditional Maronite-Sunni establishment. In the first part of the seventies, Palestinian Marxist parties, were advantaged in achieving a remarkable consensus among certain sectors of the Lebanese society: their political doctrine along which opposition to sectarianism and their theoretical and material support for underprivileged classes appealed on one hand the consensus of liberal Christian bourgeoisie and on the other popularity among a part of Shiite masses, and namely some sort of political affinity with Imam al-Sadr's Movement of the Deprived[64]. The gradual radicalization of Lebanese political climate was aggravated by continual Israeli raids against Palestinian camps which if on one hand fostered rightists hatred for Palestinian armed presence, on the other, consolidated the PLO-LNM alliance, on the threat of Israeli expansionist intentions towards southern Lebanon. During the first period of the civil war the "progressive front" felt himself able to topple Maronite authorities but the Jumblatt-led LNM went too far in escalating the conflict and Syria couldn't accept that: Jumblatt paid this gamble with his life while

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[62] *Ibid.* Note 12

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] A movement created in 1974 on the initiative of the Shiite Imam Musa al-Sadr that further was absorbed by the Shiite Lebanese party *Amal.*
On the subject see: Leonardo Capezzone, Marco Salati, *L'islam Sciita. Storia di una minoranza,* Roma, Edizioni Lavoro 2006.

the PLO faced for the first time a Syrian strategy whose only goal was impeding to any Lebanese actor to impose itself on the others.[65]

In order to describe PFLP's stands in front of Syria, it might be useful to quote a statement related to the Front's relation with Arab petit-bourgeois regimes, that was first issued in 1969, but then recalled in the third Congress Political Report:

> "Given that these regimes are, one the one hand, anti-imperialist and are against Israel, and do, on the other hand, put forward compromising and non-radical programs in their confrontation with the enemy; the relationship with these regimes must be at the same time one of alliance and of conflict."[66]

The reasons of this ambiguity have to be sought in the complexity of Syrian intervention in the Arab-Israeli conflict and in inter-Palestinian relations: first of all, Syria had a direct representation in Palestine National Council and PLO Executive Committee, thanks to the financing and control of Sa'iqa faction, a small armed group whose political weight was totally disproportionate to its real dimensions[67]. Syria exploited this group several time in order to halt any Palestinian initiative in contradiction with its interests and, since the very beginning of the Lebanese civil war, resorted to both its proxies and to its own national army, to prevent PLO-LNM to conquer a predominant position: Tell ez-Za'tar, or the later "War of the Camps" are some examples of Sa'iqa, Amal and Syrian army intervention to the detriment of Palestinian goals[68]. At the Arab and international level, if after the October war Syria showed interested for a political settlement with Israel, since the beginning of bilateral negotiations between Egypt and Israel, the regime decided to pass on rejectionist positions for it considered unacceptable a separate agreement which didn't include the Syrian front and the occupied territories.[69]

These developments definitely pushed the Soviet Union to see Syria as its favorite partner in the area and to back its view of solution to the conflict in order to counter Camp David initiative and contain the US newly acquired advantage in the region: after Jordanian military liquidation of the Palestinian resistance, Sadat's firm will to find a peace settlement with Israel and Arafat's most evident intention to implement a diplomatic strategy, the PFLP couldn't afford to completely cut the relationships with Asad's Syria. The PFLP was stuck in an embarrassing position: on the one hand it had to face Syrian ambiguous policy in the civil war and on the other declare its support for Syria's rejection of any settlement based on Camp David blueprint. Furthermore, the PFLP started

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[65] *Ibid.* Note 12

[66] *Ibid.* Note 4 p. 70

[67] This Palestinian armed group was created by the Syrian Ba'ath Party in 1967 and responds to Damascus directives *Cfr.* Anders Strindberg, *The Damascus-Based Alliance of Palestinian Forces: A Primer,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Spring, 2000)

[68] *Ibid.* Notes 11 and 12

[69] *Cfr.* Alasdair Drysdale; Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process,* New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1991

to move some of its offices to Damascus at the end of the seventies, and it will finally be established there after 1982, having to deal directly, with Baathist control of its activity.

In shifting our focus on PFLP's view of Egypt is worthwhile to put in evidence Habash's consideration of the experience of this country and the total reversal of his opinion over the years. During the years of MAN, as we mentioned many times, Habash remained always very skeptical towards Nasser's regime, while the whole movement, during the experience of the United Arab Republic, decided to merge with Nasserism: he was afraid that Nasser wanted to transform the Movement of Arab Nationalist in an intelligence tool, incorporating it in the bureaucratic structure of the UAR: as events demonstrated, he was right. In 1965-1966 the clashes between the MAN and UAR governmental apparatus led to the final rupture between Nasserism and the MAN putting definitely the latter, on the way of its adoption of Marxism: even one of the strongest supporter of the union with Nasserism like Mohsen Ibrahim, further acknowledged that the merger was a mistake because Nasser thought that socialism could be realized trough *"peaceful means"* without the adoption of the theory of class struggle, by repeating the Egyptian model: in 1967 Nasserism failed and Arab Nationalism, as was conceived until then, was dead[70]. After the June defeat and the Marxist transformation, the PFLP adopted, even towards Egypt, the double stand we outlined in the case of Syria, while Sadat's succession to Nasser was about to subvert the balances in the region. Sadat had the intention to bring the country in the American sphere of influence, since his arrival to the power and the October war was the event that paved the way for a political settlement with Israel[71]: in PFLP's view, Egypt became the most dangerous enemy in the region, for it set a precedent that was now applicable to every country in the region. In fact the decision to isolate Egypt by the Arab league, was not due to Sadat's betrayal of the Palestinian question, but because he decided to make such a step, separately, while many regimes involved in the conflict were ready for a comprehensive peace agreement with Israel.[72]

With a peaceful settlement made possible and PLO leadership always more favorable for a diplomatic strategy, the PFLP saw the ghost of the abandon of armed struggle materializing at the horizon. From now on, the party systematically rejects any initiative that it sees as a continuation of the Camp David strategy, since such peaceful approach would destroy the basis of party's understanding of the conflict: namely, according to them the use of revolutionary violence in order to establish a socialist regime in all of Palestine and the surrounding Arab states. After Camp David, the "Black September complex" and the fear for a liquidation of Palestinian resistance became more concrete and this pushed the Popular Front to reaffirm the necessity of armed struggle and popular mobilizations against the "conspiracies" that were "spreading" all over the region after 1979 peace agreements[73]. Adopting its rejectionist stand in front of the Egyptian model, the PFLP showed the real political function of the armed struggle: providing that armed

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[70] *Ibid.* Note 3

[71] Moshe Shemesh, *The Origins of Sadat's Strategic Volte-face: (Marking 30 Years since Sadat's Historic Visit toIsrael, November 1977),* Israel Studies, Vol. 13 No. 2 (Summer 2008)

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[73] *Al Hadaf,* No. 574, 02/13/1982; No. 576 02/27/1982; 581 04/02/2982

struggle as a way of defeating the enemy had not concrete chances to be implemented, such concept remained not only as a source of legitimization, but also it represented the only alternative to the Camp David approach. The Party seemed unable to formulate an alternative way of resistance, nor a credible alternative political strategy and in such a context it found in the attachment to the traditional philosophy of Palestinian resistance, the only way of retaining a sensible consensus among Palestinian masses. Camp David and the idea of a political solution became PFLP's obsession that not even the first intifada, the unprecedented popular uprising that the party always dreamed of, will be able to defeat. In such a context the reminiscence of Nasser's era, acquires a new meaning for the party and especially for its secretary general who now sees in nasserism one of the greatest supporter of the right interpretation of the Palestinian question; as Abu Khalil underlined many times, despite his past opinion about Nasser, during his last years Habash couldn't "mention his name, without breaking down"[74].

The Popular Front, despite a decrease of its military units after black September, managed to organize the opposition inside the PLO, also thanks to some, few, but strong backing in the Arab world and abroad, as for instance the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). PDRY was the only Arab country adopting Marxist-Leninist doctrine as official theory and one-party political system, therefore a "natural" ally for the PFLP. The Front had a strong representation in Aden and the party has always indicated South Yemen as one of the most valuable revolutionary experiences in the region and the world: Habash and other important PFLP's cadres often travelled to PDRY to attend official celebrations that official party media, followed constantly. The opinion of the Socialist Yemeni Party leaders had particular significance and an important space on PFLP press, which often proposed the analyses of Yemenis comrades on the pages of *Al Hadaf*: Yemen was a front line revolutionary country, surrounded by reactionary regimes, therefore it acquired a symbolic value for a party that was looking for concrete, existent alternatives, to capitulationist solutions.[75]

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[74] *Ibid.* Note 54
[75] *Al Hadaf,* No. 582 04/10/1982

1.4 The PFLP and world actors

Beside the conception of a three-fold enemy, the PFLP outlined a three-fold view of its range of action. While Fatah's "palestinianism" entailed the theoretical non-intervention in any other country's affair, the PFLP considered itself as part of the internationalist struggle of national liberation movements, therefore it advocated its full legitimacy to operate on three levels of action: national, Arab and international. Action on these three different levels served at the same time the goal of linking the Palestinian question to decolonization struggles all over the world, to bring international community's attention to their national cause and especially to build a strong consensus among Palestinian masses in the occupied territories, in Israel as well as in the refugee camps in neighboring countries. This would demonstrate the "global" potential of party's armed struggle. Actually, if we observe the period during which the PFLP carried on several international operations, late sixties early seventies, we can say that it represented the zenith of party's military effectiveness and in particular, the zenith of a base consensus that enabled the Front to challenge Fatah's leadership in the new PLO, a situation that will not occur again.

As we remarked previously, a key factor that allowed the PFLP to maintain a certain influence and a core of strong supporters throughout more than three decades, was its distinctiveness, due to the firm, rejectionist and radical approach it maintained almost unchanged, at least until Habash's resignations: during the first period, just after the foundation, this peculiar political stand, was paralleled also by an original military strategy that, relying on spectacular international operations, granted to the PFLP an augmented weight inside the Palestine Liberation Organization. The kind of actions that earned a worldwide reputation to the party is by far, the airplane hijackings that started in 1968 and that marked the beginning of military operations against Israeli targets, outside Palestine, by Palestinian armed factions. The impressive seizure of Israeli and western aircrafts and the blows-up that used to follow the passengers' evacuation, on the one hand resulted to be very useful on the internal arena, giving an outstanding, operational legitimacy to PFLP's revolutionary calls, while on the other hand, revealed a certain shortsightedness: beyond the mere internal success, these actions, provided useful pretexts to the Israeli propaganda apparatus that ably exploited them.

However, in order to implement its international military strategy, but also in the attempt to realize the strategic goal of building a worldwide, anti-imperialist front, the PFLP developed important relations with foreign, far-left, terroristic group such as Italian Brigate Rosse, German Rote Armee Fraktion and in particular the Japanese Red Army (JRA), which eventually gave birth to a Lebanese fraction of the organizations, thanks to support and training received in Popular Front controlled refugee camps in Lebanon[76]. The PFLP and the JRA coordinated several actions and hijackings and probably the Japanese organization carried on some operations for the PFLP as has been claimed for the "Lod Massacre" when JRA members killed 26 people during a shooting at the

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[76] Patricia G. Steinhoff, *Hijackers, Bombers, and Bank Robbers: Managerial Style in the Japanese Red Army*, The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Nov., 1989)

Israeli Lod airport. The escalation in aircraft hijacking, and particularly the "Dawson's Field hijackings" is considered one of the reasons for the Jordanian attack of Palestinian armed factions implantations on its soil: in turn this led to a sensible weakening of PFLP military capacities and the gradual abandonment of these actions and links with terrorist groups by the Popular Front contacts, shifting its interest to state or party actors worldwide.

The PFLP was first of all, interested in developing connections with the two main socialist powers: USSR and China were an essential ideological reference and the most likely to supply the party with the armament it needed. Actually, China had a little presence in Palestinian factions' political discourse and in their official press organs. However, its involvement in Palestinian affairs, it's bigger than what is generally estimated[77]. The problem for state actors, willing to support the Palestinian revolution relied in dealing with a high fragmented political reality. On the other side a declaration released by George Habash in 1970, clearly affirmed PFLP vision of the People's Republic of China:

> "Our best friend is China. China wants Israel erased from the map because as long as Israel exists, there will remain an aggressive imperialist outpost on Arab soil."[78]

At the same time, the party found in Maoist theories on armed struggle, a very solid justification to its military action. In addition, China always appeared more comfortable than the USSR in supplying Palestinian armed factions, both with verbal and military support. In doing so China tried to favor the unity of different factions and the formation of a united front trough the means of her military support.[79]

China continued for a long time, to distribute light armaments to every Palestinian factions never asking for political engagements in return, as instead USSR used to: its main goal, was to create a base of influence in the region, by demonstrating the viability of her revolutionary model. Despite China could rely on two Marxist-Leninist organizations inside the PLO and in particular on the PFLP, it never showed any preference toward this party and instead chose Fatah as her main contact among the Palestinians. This stand was fundamentally determined by two factors: the first phase of huge Chinese support to the Palestinian revolution, coincided with PFLP large use of terroristic operations which finally resulted in the alienation of China's backing, since the latter, never considered these attacks as revolutionary. Without any doubt, these attacks were counterproductive for PFLP's popularity and for its international image, both in western and socialist countries: the first consequence of this strategy was to present Fatah as a moderate interlocutor for the West, and as a pragmatic force, with a true military, revolutionary strategy, closer to Chinese understanding of armed struggle. As a consequence, since Chinese objective was to build a bridgehead for their influence, they found in Fatah a more reliable partner and in

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[77] Lilian Craig Harris, *China's Relations with the PLO,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 7 No. 1 (Autumn 1977)
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] *Ibid.*

particular they estimated that only Arafat was able to unify under his authority the national movement. Sino-Palestinian relations fluctuated throughout the years and they recorded a cooling after Black September events: after having openly supported Palestinian commandos in their confrontation against the Jordanian monarchy, the Chinese were disappointed for Palestinian military performance and the contacts between the two side experienced a reformulation. These years represented the highest moment of success for the PLO and of Arafat's leadership, marked by the 1974 recognition of the PLO as representative of the Palestinian people by Arab states and by UN membership as observer. On the contrary, the PFLP lived a harder period and observed its radical stands find little support. Of course these international developments strengthened Fatah's reputation in China instead that of the PFLP. With the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil war and the increased need of the PLO for weapons, China did not increase her amount of armaments supplies and remained distant from any involvement in the conflict. China still wasn't able to formulate a precise policy for the Middle East and lacking of a real opinion of what was happening in Lebanon, she avoided to espouse Palestinian thesis on the conflict.[80]

Chinese policies relating to the Palestinian question were heavily conditioned by USSR-China competition and it is also possible to explain Chinese bigger aid to the Palestinian, by their will to discredit the Soviet Union in order to highlight the inconsistencies of her Middle East policy: the USSR beside maintaining her support of liberation movement worldwide, preferred to give assistance to Syria or Egypt than to the Palestinian resistance.

Despite China behaved in a similar way, Soviet preference for state actors in the Middle East, is to be considered as a matter of fact and Soviet late recognition of the PLO as well as the iron-strong alliance that characterized Soviet-Syrian relations clearly reflects which kind of involvement the USSR had in the region.[81] In such a context, however, the PFLP openly considered the Soviet Union and socialist countries as the most important axes of its foreign policy, a position that has been stressed many times, during and after every turmoil that shacked the region and therefore Soviet involvement in the Middle East. In 1972, the PFLP expressed in its political report the:

> "belief in the necessity and in the inevitability of the unity of the socialist camp and of
> the establishment of relationship with the socialist countries by realistic commitments
> to this belief".[82]

For the PFLP, the Soviet Union, represented first of all, a concrete justification of its ideological claims, the evidence that the model of liberation and society-building it supported was fully feasible. At the same time, claiming its belonging to the socialist block, the party wanted, once

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[80] *Ibid.*

[81] *Cfr.* Galia Golan, *The Soviet Union and the PLO since the War in Lebanon,* Middle East Journal, Vol. 40 No. 2 (Spring 1986),
Galia Golan, *Yom Kippur and after: The Soviet Union and the Middle East Crisis,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

[82] *Ibid*. Note 4 p. 79

again, to display itself as the leftist wing of the national movement and therefore, as the best candidate to intercept Soviet assistance.[83]

But beside official stands or the recognition of the USSR as the most influent country in the Palestinian arena, the reality was quite different and the points of divergence between the Popular Front and the Soviet Union were numerous and serious. Once again, despite its Marxist doctrine, the PFLP wasn't seen by the major socialist power as a reliable ally, which considered Fatah far more capable of leading the National Movement and therefore receive its support[84]. The USSR viewed the party as Chinese-inspired revolutionary movement, representative of radical positions that had no real hope to be put in practice, as for instance, the creation of a united socialist entity in the whole of Arab east. Similarly the Soviet Union never showed an open support for armed struggle as China did, preferring instead, a negotiated solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict, comprehensive of all the parts, involved in the conflict, with the goal of gaining the status of first referee in Middle Eastern questions. In addition, unlike China, the USSR feared a war escalation in the region, that could lead to a direct military confrontation with the US: one more reason to reject excessive radical position: here lies one of the biggest ideological differences between a revolutionary liberation movement, like the Popular Front and USSR superpower interest and views. The PFLP had a more "guevarist" understanding of the confrontation with Israel and strongly believed in the necessity of escalating the conflict. One of the party's long term goals, was that of creating the condition for a regional war, in which progressive forces would have formed a united front against Israel: this distance of views, led the Soviet Union to the condemnation of terroristic attacks and hijackings operated by PFLP commandos, which were described as "adventurist" and liquidated as Maoist negative interpretation of the national struggle. Indeed China, at that time, didn't openly criticized PFLP operations, though we know that she didn't appreciate them neither.

These, are some of the reasons that explains USSR's choice of the PLO moderate leadership as main partner. The Soviet Union though reluctant, was obliged to increment its support to the PLO, above all, because of its competition with the US. In fact, Americans never hesitated in siding with Israel in order to gain hegemony in the Region. Fatah was by far a more appropriate ally for the Soviet Union than the so-called PLO rejectionist front, since they agreed in some of the fundamental issues of the conflict: for instance, the USSR manifested its approval for the creation of a Palestinian State in 1974, an idea that Habash's party continuously stigmatized as an "imperialist liquidatory" plan, and later backed Palestinian participation to the Geneva conference. Furthermore we can say that the central issue that divided Soviet understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict from the one of the whole Palestinian national movement, in particular its most radical representative, was USSR's consideration that the two main side of the conflict were Israel

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[83] *Resolutions adopted by the fourth congress of the PFLP held at the end of April 1981* in *Documents and source material: Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 10 No. 4 (Summer 1981)
[84] *Ibid.* Note 82

and the Arab countries surrounding her and that the Palestinian liberation movement wasn't at all the central Arab actor in the confrontation with Israel.

Another element that shaped Palestinian-Soviet relation is USSR's great attachment to its Syrian ally. This relation was strengthened after Camp David accords and Egyptian transition towards the American sphere of influence also because, with the ongoing Lebanese civil war, Syrian and Soviets interest seemed converge always the more to the detriment of Palestinian armed factions: the Syrians feared the disruption of another war with Israel after 1973 October war, while the Soviets were extremely afraid that the situation would have entailed a US intervention and the deflagration of a major conflict. These concerns pushed the Soviet Union to contribute actively to the consecration of the feature, typical of the Lebanese conflict, that Georges Corm defined as "a sum-zero game" in which no one of the parts enmeshed in the war could never prevail.[85]

In this scenario if Arafat tried to ensure his project of a political solution, based on the accordance to the PLO of a "state-like" status, looking for American recognition. The PFLP could not but oppose these moves by reaffirming its traditional stands and proposing again the unity of the socialist front and its reliance on the USSR in order to close the ranks of its followers among Palestinian masses. The PFLP paid hard its inability to present itself as a strong movement, attracting the support of a major socialist power: it faced the consequences of the adoption of an ideology unable to spread among the Palestinians, which even the USSR and China didn't consider likely. Last but not least, the party paid the mistake of its commitment, during the period of 1967-1971, to an operational strategy that alienated a great part of its potential backers and contributed to discredit it compared to Fatah.

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[85] *Ibid.* Note 12.

2 The aftermath of the Israeli invasion

2.1 PFLP's interpretation of the Lebanese war

Less than a year after the eviction of the Palestinian resistance from Beirut, the Central Committee of the PFLP held a general assembly focused on the Lebanese war and its aftermath: the goal was to analyze the events of the three-months long confrontation with the Israeli army and to define the political line for the new stage.

In its report on the expectations on the Israeli invasion, the central committee acknowledged fist of all, the serious miscalculations made on the extent of the incoming Israeli military operation. Despite information leaks on a possible invasion were frequent, the Party never expected that the Israeli army had decided to push its forces until Beirut in order to siege the city. On the contrary the Front admitted that according to its evaluations the invasion couldn't pass beyond the region of Zahrani, an evaluation that made the consensus not only at a "Palestinian-Lebanese" level, but also on the regional and international ones.[1] At this regard, two main factors were at the base of this miscalculation according to the PFLP: first, the Palestinian resistance as well as the Lebanese National Movement overestimated their military capabilities while at the same time, they didn't realize to which extent, Israeli forces were committed to the destruction of PLO military potential. This led the Palestinian leadership to hesitate in recognizing the deficiencies of its troops in terms of military training on the one hand and in waging a long-term war against the enemy on the other. Secondly, the PLO leadership was unable to understand the "new orientations of the American policy, under the Reagan administration"[2] and its consequences on the Arab level. In fact, since its arrival to power, president Reagan expressed its determination to acquire a military superiority in respect to the Soviet Union and a part of its strategy concerned the attack on national liberation movements in order to weaken Soviet influence.[3] The Palestinian resistance failed to put the Israeli aggression on Lebanon in that context and to understand that Israel was the executor of this new US strategy in the region, beside the "Arab reaction". The main reason that produced the incautious underestimation of Israeli intents is to be explained with the concept of "Black September Complex"[4]: the interpretation of the turmoil that the Palestinian resistance lived in Lebanon, especially after the

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[1] *At-taqrīr as-siyāsī aṣ-ṣādir 'an al-laǧna al-markaziyya fī dawratihā ar-raābi'a ḥawla ḥarb Lubnān/The political report issued by the fourth general assembly of PFLP's Central Committee on the war of Lebanon,* PFLP Information Department, Damascus, 1983.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Cfr.* Federico Romero, *Storia della Guerra Fredda,* Torino, Einaudi, 2009

Douglas Little, *American Orientalism. The United States and the Middle East since 1945,* Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2008

Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis.The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East.* Boston, Beacon Press, 2009

Sheila Ryan, *Israel's invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis*, Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 11 No. 4 (Autumn 1982)

[4] Georges Corm, *Le Proche-Orient éclaté: 1956-2010,* Paris, Gallimard, 2010.

beginning of the civil war, is heavily conditioned by the defeat that the Jordanian army inflicted to the Palestinians in 1970. Since its implantation in Lebanon the PLO expected that, sooner or later, the Lebanese government would have launched an attack with the goal of eliminating Palestinian armed presence. In 1982 the PFLP thought that the showdown was near and it was right but as it further acknowledged it didn't understand who would have accomplished it:

> "(The Popular Front) improperly estimated that the Lebanese reactionary army, would have been the main instrument of the attack against the Palestinian revolution in order to liquidate it, supported in this, by Lebanese isolationist forces"[5]

The Party, as well as the whole PLO and the LNM, was persuaded that Israel was not disposed to pay a high price in terms of human losses in order to destroy PLO facilities in Beirut trough a long penetration in Lebanese territory. As a consequence PLO-LNM forces did not prepare adequately to face the invasion while on the contrary, Israel took all the time it needed to plan the military operation aimed at fulfilling its political goals, namely the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon, the withdraw of Syrian forces and the signing of a peace treaty with a Phalanges-led government.[6]

Beyond the military cooperation between the PLO and their Lebanese allies, the Popular Front recognized to LNM forces also the credit of being able to retain Lebanese consensus in favor of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon, especially among Muslims masses: actually, the war exacerbated the intolerance toward Palestinian armed factions also among Lebanese leftists and members of parties that had always been PLO's closest supporter in Lebanon. In such a situation the "old Islamic symbols" tried to exploit the war and the hardness endured by the civilian population in order to regain the consensus they lost until then. LNM supported the PLO as well in the final negotiation that put an end to Beirut siege, influencing Lebanese Muslim opinion and balancing hostile factions. The game of balances is a main feature that characterized policy-making in Lebanon during and after the war: the Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) alliance with the PLO, for instance is to be seen in the light of this game. Many Lebanese actors couldn't afford to alienate PLO consensus because of the impending threat of a Maronite hegemony on Lebanon. For these reasons despite the bulky PLO presence and a Lebanese public who considered it as a sort of outsider actor, Palestinian factions remained on Lebanese soil throughout the war and after an important partner that none of Lebanese parties could totally neglect.[7]

On the military level the PFLP criticized in its report, the lack of coordination between the different "progressive" factions, the presence of several military commands and their inability to fully exploit their heavy armaments against the enemy: the Party believed that Palestinian armed forces were not ready to transform into a regular army and that they should continue with their

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[5] *Ibid.* Note 1

[6] *Cfr.* Yezid Sayegh, *Israel's Military Performance in Lebanon, June 1982,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 13 No. 1 (Autumn 1983)

Rosita Di Pieri, *Il Libano Contemporaneo: Storia, Politica Società,* Roma, Carocci, 2009

[7] *Cfr.* Rashid I. Khalidi, *Lebanon in the Context of Regional Politics: Palestinian and Syrian involvement in the Lebanese Crisis,* Third World Quaterly, Vol. 7 No. 3 (July 1985).

guerrilla strategy, also while facing a direct Israeli invasion. What was needed was a "secret fedayin war" able to extend both the duration and the range of the war, possibly involving new allied actors: the resistance was not ready to confront with an Israeli military plan that didn't envisage the consolidation of the newly occupied territories, but that aimed at a fast advance in order to encircle Beirut.[8] Again the Party showed its attachment to its traditional understanding of armed struggle and advocated that the continuation of the war along three months was a success of "people's war" strategy: while the Begin administration and high Israeli officers planned a 72 hours-long operation, Palestinian commandos managed to postpone Israel's fulfillment of its goals thanks to their guerilla strategy. Furthermore, the Political Report explain also how the Syrian forces committed a mistake by interpreting the confrontation with Israel in a "classical" way instead of following a guerrilla strategy, the same error committed by the great part of the Palestinian leadership, according to their views. In the light of this analysis the first and most important lesson is:

> "The necessity of the victory against the Zionist enemy through a long-term battle launched by Arab masses trained and armed with political consciousness and gun, able to stand and fight in front of the enemy notwithstanding sacrifices, hardnesses and difficulties"[9]

In the Party's view the resistance, while prolonging the duration of the war, let some "inconsistencies" arise inside Israel both at government level and civil society levels: the war provoked an unprecedented wave of opposition, as for instance the demonstrations organized by the "Peace Now" movement or the petition signed by several Israeli officers who demanded to stop all military operations in Lebanon.[10] According to Party's evaluations the emergence of such opposition was "proportional" to the duration of the conflict, a matter of fact that underlined once more the importance of carrying on a long-term confrontation with Israel. Despite Israel's mistakes and setbacks during the operation "Peace for Galilee" are only in part related to a Palestinian active role[11], the attention that the Party paid for Israel's internal political developments is noteworthy.

PFLP's analysis focused on three different levels that revealed the emergence of these inconsistencies and their connection with the armed resistance. The first one is the popular level: the 1982 invasion was Israel's first military operation that didn't receive an unanimous support from its citizens. As we have just remembered, several demonstrations were organized and people's participation to them was related both to human losses that the army underwent during the campaign as well as to the tragic events that characterized the war, one above all, Sabra and

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[8] *Ibid.* Note 1

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] Zachary Lockman, *The Israel Opposition,* MERIP Reports, No. 108/109 in *The Lebanon War,* (September-October 1982)

[11] *Cfr.* Kirsten E. Schultze, *Israeli Crisis Decision-Making in the Lebanon War: Group Madness or Individual Ambition?,* Israel Studies, Vol. 3 No. 2 (Fall 1998)

Shatila massacre. The second level is the economic one: the invasion exacerbated the economic crisis that Israel was living at that time, negatively influencing the popular perception of the war. Beside the human price, Israeli citizens were forced to pay for the rise of inflation, fiscal pressure and prices.[12] The third and most dangerous level of inconsistency was the military one: the most important institution in Israel lived some breaks for the first time and experienced defections among simple soldiers and some officers as well as demands for resignation and judgment of the Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. Actually, the disastrous plan that Sharon implemented in Lebanon led Israel into a hard imbroglio: the majority of Israel's goals weren't reached, Begin's resigned a year after the invasion, Sharon resulted "indirectly responsible" for the massacre committed by Phalangists in Sabra and Shatila camps and Israel occupied south Lebanon until for almost twenty years.[13]

Afterwards, the Political Report expresses PFLP's appreciation for the role played by "democratic and progressive forces" inside Israel and especially that of the Rakah-Israeli Communist Party (ICP). Alongside other movements and parties Rakah denounced in several ways and places the aggression and the crimes committed by Israeli armed forces in Lebanon, including through parliamentary interrogations at the Knesset. But what distinguished Rakah's role is the background of its opposition to operation "Peace for Galilee": it is not just engendered by the losses the Israeli army underwent in Lebanon but it is related to a refuse of the "expansionist, racist and fascist nature of Zionism". This ideological feature separated the ICP from other leftist experiences inside the "Zionist entity" and shed a brand new light on PFLP's consideration of Israeli political parties:

> "The lesson that we have to learn here is that the organizations opposed to Zionism and
> to the Zionist entity must receive total support from the Palestinian Revolution. The
> position in respect to these organizations is one of political alliance that represents the
> translation of the slogan of a Popular Democratic Palestinian State"[14]

What is important to underline here is the shift in PFLP's idea of the future Palestinian state: while before the 1982 war the Front refused the project of a secular democratic state in Palestine opposing to it a pan-Arab socialist confederation, the developments of the Arab-Israeli conflict forced the Party to change its mind about the debate. Such a shift is to be considered as a first compromise that PFLP's radical views accepted also paralleled by the acceptance by mainstream PLO leadership of the project of a "mini-state" in the occupied territories.[15] In addition, although

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[12] *Cfr.* Shlomo Frenkel and Yehuda Lukacs, *Israel's Economic Crisis,* MERIP Reports, No. 136/137 (Oct.- Dec., 1985)
Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler, *The Global Political Economy of Israel,* London, Pluto Press, 2002
[13] James Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War,* Cambridge University Press, 2005
 Final Report of the Israeli Commission of Inquiry into the Events at the Refugee Camps in Beirut, Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 12 No. 3 (Spring 1983)
[14] *Ibid.* Note 1
[15] *Cfr.* Alain Gresh, *OLP: Histoire et stratégies, vers l'état palestinien,* Paris, SPAG-PAPYRUS, 1983

Rakah was mainly representative of Palestinian citizens of Israel[16], the opening to an official Israeli political party is an unprecedented step made by the Popular Front that followed after more than eight years the statements of dialogue released by Democratic Front's Nayef Hawatmeh in 1974.[17]

In its survey on the Lebanese war the Popular Front reserved a significant attention to the perception of the war, both inside Israel as well as at a world stage: the fierce resistance that PLO-LNM joint forces opposed against the enemy revealed to the world the real nature of Zionism and its "expansionistic tendencies". Consequently the opinion of the international community became more conscious about the question of Palestine and it was ready to show its support for it and for Palestinians' struggle. Actually, Israel's invasion represented a turning point at this regard: for instance, reactions in European countries to the invasion showed an unprecedented shift in their criticism toward Israel. The mainstream press harshly condemned the sufferings that the Israeli aggression inflicted to Palestinian and Lebanese civilians while European governments also mobilized to demand the stop of military operation and the end of Israeli occupation in Lebanon: as also PFLP report remembered, France presented a joint draft resolution at the UN with Egypt in order to put end to the war and also countries like Netherland and West-Germany, Israel's closest allies in Europe, expressed their criticism toward Begin's cabinet. These "new" perception of the Arab-Israeli conflict in Europe was mitigated by US attachment to its support of Israel and probably some European government didn't want to exacerbate their tensions with the Reagan administration due to economic issues.[18] But some analysts on the contrary, estimated that the 1982 invasion did not received the due disdain: when talking of Middle East, Western public opinion appears used to its violent turmoil, the "banalization" of Middle-Easterner justify the different measure used to read conflicts in that region.[19]

On the regional level the PFLP is critical both of the conservative and the progressive camp. But before formulating its analysis on their respective role, the Political Report outlined how the relations between Arab regimes were living their worst moment. Before the invasion Arab states were stuck in a serious impasse due to their inability to find a political solution to the Lebanese conflict and beside that, those regimes interested in normalizing their relations with Israel, were dealing with the impossibility to impose the Camp David blueprint in Lebanon and Jordan. But after the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel another event changed the balance between the "National regimes" and the "Arab Reaction" for the benefit of the latter: the Iraqi attack on post-revolutionary Iran resulted in the exit of Iraq from the nationalist camp. According to the PFLP this

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[16] For a background on the Communist parties and movements in Palestine-Israel see: Musa Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist*
Party: Arab and Jew in the Struggle for Internationalism 1919-1948, Haymarket Books, 2010
Ran Greenstein, *A Palestinian Revolutionary: Jabra Nicola and the Radical Left,* Jerusalem Quaterly, 46 Summer 2011
Nadim Rouhana, *The Political Transformation of the Palestinians in Israel: From Acquiescence to Challenge,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 18 No. 3 (Spring 1989)
[17] *Hawatmeh on an Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 3 No. 4 (Summer 1974)
[18] Pamela Ann Smith, *The European Reaction to Israel's Invasion,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 11/12, Vol. 11 No. 4 - Vol. 12 No. 1, Special Issue: The War in Lebanon (Summer - Autumn, 1982)
[19] *Ibid.* Note 4

new regional situation created suitable conditions for the Israeli invasion, which was further exploited by reactionary regime in order to impose their concept of settlement. The regimes of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Morocco tried to use the Israeli invasion in order to reconstruct their relations with Egypt under the slogan of "the unity in the confrontation of the Zionist threat". But the real goals of these moves, namely a political settlement through the liquidation of the resistance, were quickly unveiled on the one hand by the immobilism of conservative countries during every Arab initiative aimed at stopping Israel's aggression and their collusion with Lebanese actors who were hostile to the Palestinian revolution: as an evidence of this collusion the PFLP stressed on the convocation of Bashir Gemayel, leader of the Phalanges Party at a conference held in Taif despite he was not holding any official position. The role played by the "Arab Reaction" during the 1982 war also highlighted some harmful positions inside the Palestinian national movement: those factions that believed in reactionary regimes and their American supporter as a reliable partner to reach a solution saw their certainties falling as the war showed the collusion of these actors with Israel.[20]

Shifting its attention on the role of the Steadfastness and Confrontation Front[21] in supporting the progressive forces in Lebanon, PFLP's analysis remained very critic. Actually, the events of the war registered an almost complete absence of any active role played by the countries forming the front and pushed the PFLP questioning the real meaning of its existence. Furthermore, this inaction was exploited as a pretext by those regimes that were doubtful of the principles that constituted the front as well as supplied the Palestinian right with the arguments they needed to put all Arab regimes on the same level, reactionaries and nationalists. The only exception was represented by Syria, indeed the only member of the front involved in the Lebanese conflict. However as has been pointed out previously, the Popular Front addressed some critics to Syrian military strategy during the invasion: for the PFLP, Syria lost the chance of extending the confrontation against Israel to a regional scale pressuring other nationalist regimes to join the battle. In fact Syria assumed a "defensive stance" that didn't allowed its forces to escalate the conflict and open a new front of the battle forcing reluctant regimes to concretely participate to the war on its side. This scenario was the one envisaged by the PFLP since its adoption of people's war strategy: the disruption a regional-scale war with a final showdown between Arab countries and Israel.[22] This interpretation of the Syrian role reveals PFLP's misunderstanding of Syria's intentions during the invasion: what the party defined as a "defensive stance" was in fact a clear will not to enter in an open confrontation against Israel[23], a position supported also by Syria's most important supporter, the USSR afraid of being dragged into a direct conflict with the US.[24]

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[20] *Ibid.* Note 1

[21] *Statement of the Tripoli Summit Conference issued in Tripoli, December 5, 1977,* in *Documents and Source Material: Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 7 No. 3 (Spring 1978).

[22] *Military Strategy of the PFLP,* PFLP Information Department, Beirut, 1970.

[23] *Ibid.* Note 6

[24] Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria. Revolution From Above,* London and New York, Routledge, 2001

Galia Gola, *The Soviet Union and the PLO since the War in Lebanon,* Middle East Journal, Vol. 40 No. 2 (Spring 1986).

PFLP's assessment of Soviet role during the war is positive and the party seemed unable to formulate any critic towards them. The Popular Front stressed on its appreciation for the political and diplomatic activities that the USSR carried on in order to support the "triangle of the steadfastness", in particular its support and proposition of those resolutions aiming at stopping the Israeli military operation and at the withdraw of its armed forces. The Soviet Union went even further by proposing economic sanctions against Israel that inevitably encountered American veto. Concerning Soviet material help, the PFLP on one hand stated how this support enabled the resistance to be more effective against the enemy while on the other pointed out that it never expected a direct Soviet intervention in the conflict. In doing so the PFLP utilized the same traditional argument used by the USSR to justify its ambiguity and reluctance in supporting the PLO:

> "We didn't expect a Soviet ground intervention in order to save the Palestinian revolution and the Lebanese National Movement.(…) We also knew that the power and extent of its support is proportional to the arrangement that the Arab background prepares for it"[25]

In other words, the Soviet Union maintained throughout the invasion that its inaction was first of all due to the lack of an Arab common initiative, of Arab unity in backing the PLO. The USSR couldn't intervene since Arab countries demonstrated unable to formulate any common strategy, to organize a summit on the crisis or to use the weapon of oil against Israel's Western backers.[26] For the PFLP as well the limited Soviet action was rather a signal of Arab failure in forming a base capable of receiving and coordinating USSR help to the Palestinian revolution.

In reality the Soviets were hiding themselves behind this argument because their priority was protecting Syria from an Israeli blow and avoiding an escalation with the Jewish state and its American patron. As a consequence, the PLO was expendable in order to ensure such priorities.[27] Despite this situation, the PFLP openly claimed the protection of Soviet image and role in the region as one of its deserts during the war: the Party wanted to counter the "campaign of discredit" that some Arab and Palestinian actors started against the USSR because of its ineffective and ambiguous support for Palestinian factions. The fact that the PFLP decided to express this consideration suggest that the Israeli invasion represented an incubation period for those divisions that disrupted after PLO evacuation from Beirut, especially regarding PLO foreign attitudes. In particular it accelerated Arafat's orientation toward western-backed Arab states such as Egypt and Jordan: this rapprochement obviously was not acceptable for the PFLP and consequently it was

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[25] *Ibid.* Note 1
[26] Karen Dawisha, *The USSR in the Middle East: Superpower in Eclipse?*, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 61 No. 2 (Winter 1982)
[27] *Ibid.*

worried of showing its attachment to "steadfastness countries" in line with Soviet policy for the Middle East.[28]

The war in Lebanon represented a major failure for Israel, which managed to reach just one of its goals: the end of the PLO as a military threat to its security. The PLO had also to face several threats to its political status of sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in post-invasion period but Arafat's strategy allowed the conservation of such status. Indeed, this strategy represented a point of disruption between rejectionists and moderates and coincided with the fastest phase of PFLP process of marginalization.

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[28] Robert O. Freedman, *Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East,* Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science, Vol. 36 No. 4 Soviet Foreign Politcy, 1987.

2.2 The Party in the new scenario

After their evacuation from Lebanon, the commands of the different Palestinian armed factions were scattered across several Arab countries: PLO offices moved to Tunis but the PFLP decided to transfer its headquarters to Syria willing to keep the organization close to the "battlefield". Despite the serious tensions that characterized PFLP-Syria relations and Syria's ambiguous involvement in the Lebanese civil War, the Popular Front was almost forced to chose Damascus as its new base. Unlike Fatah, the PFLP maintained stable relations, though sometimes turbulent, with just few Arab countries. Furthermore, after 1980 the Party cut almost all its relations with Iraq consequently to the rapprochement with Syria and Iraq's attack on Iran which the Popular Front strongly condemned.[29] In the wake of the Lebanese war, the PFLP still had its strongholds in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and in Damascus suburbs. In addition the new situation emerged in the region seemed to make Syrian and PFLP's interests closer

As also PFLP's analyses outlined, the aftermath of the war represented an outstanding opportunity for those actors interested in a comprehensive political solution of the conflict to implement their project of settlement of the Palestinian and Lebanese questions. Actually, if on one hand the Israeli invasion of Lebanon had among its declared goals the imposition of a peace treaty between Israel and Maronite-run Lebanon, on the other, the hard setbacks underwent by the PLO and the Reagan Peace Plan issued in September 1982[30], provided the suitable conditions for a new Jordanian initiative: King Hussein aimed first at normalizing its relations with Israel as well and unexpectedly had the chance to regain the status of representative of the Palestinian people in the international arena, especially thanks to American project for the region. In fact, US president Ronald Reagan issued a declaration after PLO forces completely evacuated from Beirut in which he outlined is path to a stable peace in the Middle East: Arab countries had to recognize Israel's existence as a matter of fact and during negotiations King Hussein of Jordan would took charge the representation of the Palestinian people since the Reagan administration didn't envisage of the possibility of establishing an independent Palestinian state, though only in the occupied territories.[31] Almost simultaneously, the Fahd plan which Arab states rejected in 1981 was finally accepted during a summit organized in Fez: the plan backed the project of creating a mini-state in the West Bank and Gaza after a transitional period under PLO administration, which

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[29] As'ad AbuKhalil, *Internal Contradiction in the PFLP: Decision Making and Policy Orientation,* Middle East Journal, Vol. 41 No. 3 (Sumer 1987)

[30] In September 1982 US President Ronald Reagan announced his proposal for a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. What came to be known as the "Reagan Plan" called for Palestinian and Arab recognition of Israel and for direct talks between Israel, Jordan and Palestinian for the recovery of 1967 Palestinian Occupied Territories. These talks had to be carried on in the framework of UN resolution 242 and the model of Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel.

[31] *Cfr.*Spiegel, Steven, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1985

Rashid Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit .How the US has Undermined Peace in the Middle East,* Boston, Beacon Press, 2013

Naseer H. Aruri and Fouad M. Moughrabi, *The Reagan Middle East Initiative,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 12 No. 2 (Winter 1983)

was held as the sole representative of the Palestinians.[32] In just three months Middle Eastern political scenario was completely subverted and the PLO was risking to lose all the gains it obtained during the previous decade. In such a context, the situation for the "rejectionists" inside the Palestinian National movement was even more challenging: Fatah's PLO leadership intended to rebuild its relations with Egypt and Jordan and this was an important signal about whom they considered as the main international power able to engineer a solution for the conflict, namely the US. The events occurred in Lebanon during the war and its attachment to the alliance with Syria made Arafat totally lose any confidence in concrete USSR support to the PLO: Arafat was definitely driven to find more reliable partners in Mubarak's Egypt or the Jordanian kingdom.

The PFLP was aware of the dangers emerged in the region after the war and as a consequence it consecrated full attention also to those efforts made by American diplomacy to impose their depiction and narrative of the conflict suitable to the kind of the settlement they conceived. Consequently the Popular Front restated in its fourth Political Report its conception of the conflict: contrary to the image that the US tried to diffuse the Arab-Israeli conflict did not become a mere diplomatic or political one after the invasion of Lebanon. In Party's view the conflict was still a confrontation between colonizing forces and a national liberation movement and it was not possible to reduce it to a "dispute of rights and laws".[33] This declaration intended also to clarify a PFLP's position of a complete hostility towards those Palestinian personalities that praised US initiative and looked with interest to a renewed collaboration with the Hashemite Kingdom.

In addition the Party realized that though the Israeli invasion was meant to impose a peace treaty to Lebanon, the "conspiracy" didn't exclude Jordan from the political reorganization of the Near East. For these reasons, PFLP's narrative in this period focused on the denunciation of "deviationist" elements inside the Palestine Liberation Organization who were pressuring the national movement in order to distance it from its historical goal or, in other words, from the position assumed during the two last session of the PNC. In order to legitimate its claims, the Popular Front emphasized its attachment to PNC resolutions and to the Palestine National Charter: "deviation" from the boycott of Camp David Egypt, the new Arafat-Hussein dialogue as well as the acceptance of the Fahd plan were all examples of betrayal of the traditional PLO political line which less than a year earlier was impossible to question[34].

However, during the meetings between different Palestinian leaders in preparation of the next session of the PNC, the PFLP didn't avoid to behave ambiguously as well, assuming in the space of a month several inconsistence positions. From the 4th to the 6th of December Habash, Arafat and Hawatmeh met in Aden and signed a statement aiming at the creation of common basis in order to coordinate PFLP, DFLP and Fatah efforts in the post-Lebanon stage: PLO's members had to preserve the "oneness" of the battle in order to attain the three main goals of the resistance, namely the right of return for Palestinian refugees, the right to self-determination and

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[32] *Ibid.* Note 15
[33] *Ibid.* Note 1
[34] *Ibid.*

the establishment of an independent state, significantly no definition of that future state is formulated in the final declaration. Afterward the document issued from the summit seemed to state a clear will by the PFLP to find a rapprochement with Fatah, also on those critical points that further created deep division in the national movement: first of all, all faction agree on rejecting "any formula or bloc outside the PLO" in accordance with what stated about the oneness of the battle. Secondly, although the document refused to delegate to Jordan the Palestinian representation as well as clearly stated the separation in two independent states, it did not reject the idea of confederal relation between the two countries. Finally, defining the stand toward Egypt, the Aden agreement declared that "the siege on the Egyptian regime must not be lifted except in proportion to its distance from Camp David" opening therefore to the possibility of adopting a position that went beyond the full isolation of Egypt. On a other hand Fatah too seemed to make some concessions to its leftist opposition when agreeing to improve relations with Syria and Libya and to coordinate "with the Soviet Union within the Arab peace plan to expand recognition of the PLO by Western Europe", a formal commitment that Arafat did not intend to fully respect.[35]

A month later, another summit was organized in Tripoli (Libya) under the patronage of the Libyan Jamahiriya, but the participants as well as the content of their discussion and the final approved document were completely different. From 10th to 16th of January 1983 the PFLP and the DFLP met in the Libyan capital with the most radical Palestinian resistance groups like the PFLP-GC, Sa'iqa and the Popular Struggle Front: the first aspect to be remarked here is PFLP's participation to a meeting with the most hard-line factions after having launched signals of rapprochement toward Fatah only a month earlier. The final document is a statement of rejection of any political solution and of any chance of recognizing the Zionist entity. There was no space left for any diplomatic initiative of any kind, nor for the evolution of the traditional position toward Egypt: the document was characterized by a strong revolutionary vocabulary that called for "fida'i action" as the sole mean to reach liberation. Moreover the Tripoli statement affirmed the intention of rebuilding the Steadfastness and Confrontation Front by safeguarding Palestinian-Syrian relations and improving connections with Libya: the priority was the formation of a unified front able to oppose imperialist conspiracy under the forms of the Reagan plan, the Fes summit and the Lebanese-Israeli negotiations. If the Aden meeting could be interpreted as a rapprochement with the PLO leadership the one held in Tripoli alluded to the formation of a radical core inside the national movement committed to a strategy that contradicted the one Arafat was trying to implement.[36]

With these premises the 16th session of the Palestine National Council opened its works in February 1983 in Algiers: this round was the last one which forced the deputies, especially Arafat,

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[35] *Text of Agreement Reached by Palestinian Resistance Groups Meeting in Aden, December 4-6, 1982*, in *Documents and Source Material: Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 12 No. 3 (Spring 1983).

[36] *Bayān ṭarāblus/ Tripoli Statement* in *Al Hadaf,* No. 657, 01/23/1983

to seek a consensus among all the factions and the last one to which all parties took part. As a consequence of this consensus-policy the 16th PNC didn't issued any real new political line nor strategy when compared to the two previous session[37]: it reaffirmed some of the traditional stands such as the importance of armed struggle and of national unity, the uniqueness of the PLO as representative of the Palestinians, supplying the PFLP with a certain official justification, on the other the final text didn't clearly rejected the Fahd plan nor totally excluded a form of coordination with Jordan:

> "The PNC considers the resolutions issued from the Fez summit as the minimum political effort by Arab countries that needs to be integrated with the military action in order to shift the balance of forces in favor of Palestinian and Arab struggle and rights.(…)
> The PNC sees the establishment of future relations with Jordan as based on a confederation of two independent state".[38]

These general formulations didn't define any clear position expressing the divisions existing in the PLO at that time and the necessity of avoiding precise statements: PFLP's attachment to PNC resolutions was the consequence of its interpretation of them, a critical feature of the Palestinian scattered political arena.

During this phase splits within the national movement became more evident: the lines of friction that characterized the PLO since 1969, namely the division between the Fatah component and the leftist one were exacerbated by the historical crisis that the every faction was facing. Arafat's party, thanks to the supremacy acquired inside the PLO and to its wide international network of support and relations had the means to react to the setback the PLO underwent in 1982. Also the PFLP and the DFLP managed to retain a certain political weight inside the national movement thanks to their few but strong connections within the Arab world and the socialist countries as well as thanks to their presence inside the occupied territories. However, as the PFLP was strong especially in Lebanon, hence it had much more difficulties to overcome the evacuation from Beirut: it was the beginning of a serious process of marginalization of PLO leftist opposition which corresponded to Arafat's growing decisional power.[39]

The depth of the fractures within the national movement manifested itself during the rebellion that Arafat had to face inside his party: while Fatah rebels led by Abu Musa and armed by the Syrian regime[40] were besieging the fighters loyal to PLO chairman, the PFLP didn't overtly supported the armed uprising but approved some of the reasons of the rebellion. This position is also to be considered as a main manifestation of the change of dominant faction inside the

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[37] Patrick Seale, *PLO Strategies: Algiers and After,* The World Today, Vol. 39 No. 4 (Apr. 1983)

[38] *Ad-dawra as-sādisa 'ašara, al-ğazā'ir 02/14-22/1983/The sixteenth session, Algers, http://www.malaf.info/?page=ShowDetails&Id=68&table=pa_documents&CatId=63*

[39] Yezid Sayegh, *Struggle Within, Struggle Without: the Transformation of PLO Politics since 1982,* International Affairs, Vol. 65 No. 2 (Spring 1989)

[40] *Cfr.* Muhamad Shuqeir, *The Fateh Split,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 13 No. 1 (Autumn 1983)
Eric Rouleau, *The Mutiny Against Arafat,* MERIP Reports, No 119, *The PLO Splits* (Nov. Dec. 1983)

Popular Front. Actually the party had always been organized in different leading groups that were the main cause of the defections that shaped Party's first years of life: since 1978, but especially after 1982 the faction led by Deputy Secretary-General Abu Ali Mustafa was prevailing on the former dominant group whose most important representatives, Habash apart, were Bassam Abu Sharif chief editor of "Al Hadaf" and Abu Mahir Al Yamani, PFLP's member of PLO Executive Committee. The first group was close to Syria in its foreign policy orientation and at the same time it held a more intransigent position toward Arafat policy: this group pressured Habash who eventually aligned the Front on a more sympathetic position toward the reasons of Fatah's rebel despite he was more favorable to an appeasement of the relations with PLO chairman. The Secretary-General probably feared a defection by Abu Ali Mustafa's group: actually his attitude toward internal currents was heavily conditioned by Hawatmeh's and Jibril's painful breaks. Such fear has also been indicated as the reason of his reluctance to approve Fatah rebellion against Arafat.[41]

Fluctuations in PFLP's policy emerged also as unprecedented shifts took place toward some fundamental issues while the Party tried to maintain its traditional approach of revolutionary party vis-à-vis the "moderates" inside the PLO. For instance Popular Front's commitment to armed struggle remained unvaried and, despite the serious reduction of PFLP's means, the role of military action was still central: Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon was the symbol of the Palestinian revolution and it assured to PLO a worldwide attention. In addition, given the dangerous projects that regional and international powers were preparing, the practice of armed struggle against Israel from neighboring countries, was intended as a support for the masses inside the occupied territories who were resisting the "liquidatory" policies through strikes and civil disobedience. But on the other hand, the threats of a hostile political settlement of the conflict entailed a historic change in PFLP's conception of the future Palestinian state. After having called for the establishment of a "democratic socialist Pan-Arab" state on the whole Near Eastern area since the day of its foundation, the "new phase" imposed the adoption of a different "tactical" position which was expressed in the following top priorities:

> "The work in order to develop and strengthen national Palestinian unity based on the attachment to Palestinian national struggle goals of this phase and represented by the right to self-determination, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, the uniqueness of the PLO as representative of the Palestinian people and the defense of the gains that our revolution realized throughout past years."[42]

Once considered as a regionalist solution, the idea of an independent state on the soil of mandatory Palestine was now a necessary slogan in order to counter the new "defeatist" tendencies both inside and outside the Palestinian arena. The whole national movement, as we

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[41] *Ibid.* Note 29
[42] *Ibid.* Note 1

have seen, was shifting toward less radical positions, led by Arafat's renewed diplomatic activity and his increasing power within a weakened PLO.[43]

The PFLP was able to justify such an outstanding change in its foreign policy thanks to its interpretation of "tactical" and "strategic" objectives: while the long-term strategic goal remained the realization of a socialist state through the defeat of Zionism and Arab reaction, the one of establishing an independent state on Palestine was described as a necessary step imposed by the new regional situation.[44] In addition this tactical position would be effective against Jordanian attempts to "steal" the representation of Palestinians: the Party intended to formulate an alternative to the idea of a confederation-state able of counterbalancing internal Palestinian trends favorable to this solution as well as to show Jordanian real aims in its new dialogue with PLO leadership. Moreover, the PFLP, when dealing with the struggle of Palestinian masses in Jordan, stopped calling for the toppling of the regime by military means and stressed the necessity of engaging the Palestinian population in political, informational and organizational activities as well as on their right to use Jordanian territory as a base for their resistance against the enemy. In the formulation of these "slogans" the PFLP appeared conscious of its downsized possibilities:

> "We have no illusion that the Jordanian regime is going to voluntarily accept these compromises. We raise these slogans in order to incite our masses aiming on one hand at the expansion of national effectiveness and at unveiling Jordan's pretentions while, on the other, we aim at reducing Jordanian benefits from its relation with PLO leadership".[45]

The circumstances emerged from the war in Lebanon also entailed a qualitative shift in PFLP's evaluation of the role of the Palestinian occupied territories: the loss of the bulk of its military capabilities, of the freedom of action it enjoined in Beirut and the menaces impending on the political and administrative future of the occupied territories drove the Popular Front to focus further on the resistance inside the West Bank and Gaza. Although Israel's projects to establish the Village League or any form of Palestinian self-administration were rejected by popular uprisings in occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Party considered as fundamental the development of a "unified instrument" which would be able at countering the hostile conjuncture. This instrument was the Palestine National Front, an institution that gathered local committees in the occupied territories and was responsible for the organization of the resistance against the Israeli occupier.[46] The new attacks carried on by the Reagan administration, Jordan and the Arab regimes had to be fought reinforcing those institutions that declared their allegiance to the PLO, as for instance those municipalities that played a key role in boycotting Palestinian collaborationists who were involved in the creation of the Village League. The PFLP clearly stated the intention of working to develop a

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[43] *Ibid.* Note 4
[44] *Cfr. Ibid.* Note 35
[45] *Ibid.* Note 1
[46] Abdul Aziz Hajj Ahmad, *Interview with the Palestine National Front,* MERIP Reports, No 50 (Aug. 1976)

resistance network in the territories and to increase the level of its relations with leftist organizations. The choice of focusing its efforts on the occupied homeland proved successful: actually, the early Eighties marked the raise in relevance of the territories for every Palestinian factions. Therefore those parties who had any significant implantation inside Palestine were increasingly marginalized and lost political weight inside the national movement. Fatah could count on an unchallengeable supremacy in the territories, but the PFLP and the DFLP maintained an appreciable base as well that enabled them to prevent, or at least to delay, the complete exclusion from the Palestinian political scenario.[47] These political investments paid their interests notably during the first Intifada when the PFLP obtained a significant representation in the Cnified Command beside Fatah, the Communist Party and the DFLP[48].

The whole debate on a possible settlement of the conflict and of the Palestinian question and the strong endorsement they received by moderates paralleled by equally strong condemnations by rejectionist, totally lost its preeminence in a time lapse: the Reagan plan didn't lead to any concrete change and was quickly abandoned. First of all the same Reagan administration was preoccupied with the situation in Lebanon and the Lebanese-Israeli negotiation. Secondly the Likud government in Israel rejected the American plan since it was not able to relinquish its control of the West Bank and Gaza, which according to them would represent a dangerous shift from the Camp David pattern[49]. In the same way, the Arab plan adopted at the second Fez summit had not any significant following: the Arab regimes, as also the PFLP recognized in its 1983 Political Report, were experiencing a serious impasse during which they proved unable to define any initiative vis-à-vis the ongoing Lebanese civil conflict and the Iraq-Iran war.[50] Concerning the Palestinian resistance, the first post-Lebanon period was characterized on the one hand by a certain hesitation of the different factions to identify a new path while on the other they saw the deepening of an unprecedented split. Divisions crystallized in PFLP and DFLP boycott of the 17th PNC and in their effort to build a viable alternative to Arafat's policy.

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[47] *Ibid.* Note 35

[48] Helena Cobban, *The PLO and the Intifada,* Middle East Journal, Vol. 44 No. 2 (Spring 1990)

[49] Naseer H. Aruri and Fouad M. Moughrabi, *The Reagan Middle East Initiative,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 12 No. 2 (Winter 1982) and *Op. Cit.* Note 4

[50] *Ibid.* Notes 1 and 4

2.3 Moving to Syria and looking at Moscow

Both the choices made by PLO leadership to establish a new base in Tunis and by the PFLP to settle in Damascus were signs of a serious weakening that led every faction inside the Palestinian national movement to accept some unprecedented compromises. Yasser Arafat decided to bet on his diplomatic strategy and he needed as much independence as possible for his initiative in order to open a new course in PLO's relations with Egypt and Jordan: the price to pay was an exile-like base in Tunis and the risk of major splits inside the Liberation Organization.[51] On the other hand the PFLP couldn't afford to completely deny its two-decades long radical stand and in the current situation, and Syria was the only state in the Arab east adopting a "steadfastness" position toward the conflict. The PFLP knew that it was losing much of its independence and freedom of action while moving to Damascus but its adherence to its radical strategy didn't leave much room for other possibilities. In other words, the PFLP was unable to compete within the framework of the "Jordanian option" that prevailed in post-Lebanon period in the ranks of the PLO: this definition has been used to define PLO leadership decision to shift its attention and presence toward the Occupied territories and Jordan and toward a political strategy, abandoning the military approach that dominated the previous decade.[52] As we outlined previously, despite the Popular Front had some significant implantations in the occupied territories, the bulk of its mass support was still in the Beirut refugee camps and in Syrian controlled Lebanese area as well as in the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus.

Every Arab state that directly dealt with Palestine armed presence never had the intention to allow to the PLO a full autonomy of action and Syria was no exception. President Hafiz al-Asad in particular was highly averse to Arafat freedom of action at least since the disruption of the Lebanese civil war[53]; after Egypt historic "betrayal" Syria's main goal in its regional policy was the creation of a bloc formed with Lebanon and the PLO in order to break its isolation and reach a hegemonic position.[54] As PLO chairman seemed always more committed to the Jordan option, Syria tried to influence Palestinian policies in the new stage through PLO opposition groups based in Damascus, notably the PFLP: in this phase the Popular Front couldn't but accept that its goals coincided with Syrian ones.

In the first aftermath of Israel's invasion PFLP and Syria objectives became actually closer mainly due to their opposition to American efforts to implement a political settlement between Lebanon and Israel, which was comprehensive also of the withdrawal of "all foreigners forces": an equation that put on the same level Israeli, Syrian and Palestinian armed presence on the Lebanese territory. The signature of the Lebanese-Israeli agreement of the 17th May 1983 definitely seemed to put the Palestinians and Syria in the same camp and the PFLP grasped the

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[51] Emile F. Sahliyeh, *The PLO after the Lebanon War,* Westview Press, 1986
[52] Rashid Khalidi, *The Palestinian Dilemma: PLO Policy after Lebanon,* Journal Of Palestine Studies, Vol. 15 No. 1 (Autumn 1985)
[53] Eric Rouleau, *The Syrian Connection,* Journal Of Palestine Studies, Vol. 12 No. 4 (Summer 1983)
[54] *Ibid.* Note 4

occasion to call for the development of a common strategy with Syria and the Lebanese National Movement: the PFLP alongside Syria refused the linkage of Israeli and Syrian forces withdrawal and asked a unilateral Israeli withdrawal instead. Moreover, the Party thought that an increased level of military coordination with Syria was also needed because it was not possible to exclude another Israeli blow in order to liquidate the last obstacles to the normalization of its relations with Lebanon. At this regard the PFLP estimated that Israel could resort to confessional divisions in order to deliver the final attack to Syria and the Palestinian revolution, therefore the alliance with the biggest "nationalist" force operating in Lebanon, appeared as the best way to prepare for defense.[55]

However the 1976 Syrian intervention against the PLO was not that far and the PFLP had to make an important effort of pragmatism to justify such an alliance. But the Party could count the lessons of the most important Marxist forces worldwide: for example, in this case, Maoist doctrine on primary and secondary inconsistencies allowed the PFLP to be flexible in its foreign policy and to adapt to a continuously changing situation of conflict.[56] After 1982 the PFLP couldn't afford adopting a conflictual stand with Syria, therefore contradictions with the Syrian regime, although always on the ground, automatically became less important and justified the pursuit of a greater entente with Assad. In addition this rapprochement with Syria was not just dictated by a post-war urgent necessity: it was the result of internal pressure by the pro-Syrian group led by Abu Ali Mustafa. After the stroke that hit Habash in 1979, his leadership started to lose weight in the decision making process while Mustafa's group raised in importance. [57]

Since the PFLP found almost all of its mass-based support from Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the weight of their opinion in Party's policies was preponderant if compared to that of Palestinians exiled in other Arab country or living in the occupied territories: for these reasons the perception they had of Syria's role in Lebanon received more attention by PFLP leadership. Syria's image among both Lebanese and Palestinians positively changed after the Israeli invasion. Before the Israel's military operation Syria was much more perceived as simply another actor who wanted to impose its interests and hoped to benefit from the conflict. Although one cannot speak of a full support to the Syrian regime, the direct confrontation with the Zionist enemy mitigated the negative image that was attached to Syria intervention in Lebanon since 1976: the Syrian forces were an Arab army that was now directly opposed to the major enemy. This shift in people's perception of Syria revealed useful for the PFLP in presenting the coordination with Syria as a natural development of the ongoing war, not only against Israel's proxies but also directly against Zionist forces.[58]

Furthermore, despite the hard setback that Syria underwent during its short military confrontation with Israel in 1982 and its consequent withdrawal from the Chouf and south

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[55] *Ibid.* Note 1

[56] *Cfr.* Stuart Schram, *The Thought of Mao Tse-Tung,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989

[57] *Cfr. Ibid.* Note 29

[58] Rashid Khalidi, *Lebanon in the Context of Regional Politics: Palestinian and Syrian Involvement in the Lebanese Crisis,* Third World Quarterly, Vol. 7 No. 3 (July 1985)

Lebanon, the Syrian Army still owned a remarkable military potential as the Soviet Union didn't hesitate to replenish its depleted arsenals.[59] As a consequence, although Syria could not compete with Israel's military supremacy, it could easily impose an overwhelming balance of power to the different militias in the Lebanese occupied territories. Syria involvement in Lebanon was characterized by the use of force against armed factions in situation of overwhelming favorable balance[60], the Palestinians knew it and the PFLP, also in the light of Tripoli events, had no intention to defy Syria's strategy.

Further divisions inside the PLO were fostered by the debate over the role of the Soviet Union in the Arab-Israeli conflict and more precisely over the importance of PLO alliance with USSR in the wake of Israel's invasion and reoccupation of Lebanon. The PFLP was concerned by a decrease of Soviet prestige within the Palestinian political arena: while none of the fedayin organizations overtly raised doubts on the alliance with the Soviet Union, some independent members of the council, as for example Shafik al-Hout, highlighted Soviet ambiguous support for the PLO and its low consideration of the alliance with the Palestine National Movement.[61] Therefore the PFLP, beside the DFLP and PFLP-GC, committed itself to the defense of USSR role in the region. Actually, at this regard during its PNC speech, Habash referred to the Soviet Union to declare that

> "All the questions about what the USSR did during the siege aimed at dividing the Palestinian revolution from their natural allies. I invites this council to declare our clear distinction between our imperialist, Zionist and reactionary enemies and our friends from the socialist countries and the world national liberation movement"[62]

The Party feared that these "negative tendencies" could gain popularity inside the PLO and firmly denounced those declarations that affirmed that "the key of the conflict was in American hands". These positions were strengthening the "imperialist plans" of settlement by trying to marginalize the importance of the major world actor engaged in the opposition to US expansion.[63] At the end of the PNC, the PLO stated once more the strategic role played by the Soviet Union in supporting liberation movements worldwide and formally reaffirmed USSR influence on the Palestinian arena: this is to be considered a concession to the leftist opposition made by a PLO leadership which always more disenchanted toward Soviet role.[64]

After the signing of the Camp David accords, the USSR decided to improve its relations with the PLO in order to counterbalance the loss of Egypt and its transition toward the Western camp. This moment coincided also with an improvement of Soviet Union's relations with the PFLP. Once

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[59] Galia Golan, *Soviet Policies in The Middle East: from World War II to Gorbachev,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990

[60] *Ibid.* Note 56

[61] Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Flexible Militancy: A Report on the Sixteenth Session of the Palestine National Council, Algiers, February 14-22, 1983,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 12 No. 4 (Summer 1983)

[62] *Al Hadaf* No. 661 02/21/1983

[63] *Ibid.* Note 1

[64] *Ibid.* Note 37 and 59

very critical toward USSR's stands about some central questions of the conflict, the Popular front started to reduce its critics and showed a greater alignment with Soviet views of Middle Eastern politics[65]: for instance during the 16th session of the PNC, the PFLP pressured for the rejection of the Reagan and Fahd peace plans while did not oppose the acceptance of the Brezhnev proposal of settlement. Actually, the latter was far from the Reagan plan as it recognized PLO's role of unique representative, but did not differ sensibly from the plan issued by the Saudi crown prince which was immediately labeled by the Party as "reactionary and liquidatory". In other words the PFLP did not blackmailed PLO leadership on the issue of the acceptance of any political solution of the conflict, de facto eliminating the main reason of discord with the Soviet Union.[66]

Although the rapprochement was a sensible one, there were still several points of distance between Soviet projects for the Middle East and PFLP's understanding of the new phase. Nevertheless the Party avoided to stress or mention these discrepancies both in its press organs and in its political statements. In fact if the Popular Front was aligned on Syrian positions in rejecting any Arafat's contact with Egypt or Jordan, the Soviet Union was not a-priori opposed to some sort of Arafat-Hussein coordination or to the establishment of good relations between Mubarak and PLO chairman. Actually the USSR didn't want to be completely excluded from possible peace negotiations and therefore was interested in presenting itself as a fundamental actor, even in the eyes of those countries that were moved closer to the Americans. Concerning the plan for a political settlements of the conflict, the only point of full agreement between the Soviets and Habash's party was the firm rejection of the Reagan plan: the USSR was playing a hard game of balances between its two most important allies, namely Syria and the PLO, and between the different components of the Palestine national movement.[67]

The Soviet Union always showed its preference in supporting established governments rather than liberation movements, therefore despite the existing inconsistencies with Syria, it decided to enhance its relation with the Assad regime and to increase its presence in the country since early 1983. Nevertheless, Soviets did not envisage neither a Syrian-controlled PLO and consequently decided to improve the relations with Arafat as well in order to balance Syria's rejectionist stand. In addition, the Soviets did not appreciate that PLO leadership did not totally close the door to the American administration. In such a context, the USSR was trying to maintain good relations with every possible actors in order not to preclude any possibility of action: this policy-pattern led the Soviet Union to give more importance and support to the rejectionist opposition inside the PLO, stressing on PFLP or DFLP position, rather than on that of Fatah, over the Reagan plan.[68]

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[65] Galia Golan, *The Soviet Union and the Israeli Action in Lebanon,* International Affairs, Vol. 59 No. 1 (Winter 1982, 1983)

[66]*The Brezhnev Peace Plan, 15 September, 1982* in Yehuda Lucaks, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. A Documentary Record 1967-1992,* Cambridge, The University of Cambridge Press, 1992
*Cfr.*Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire. The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev,* Chapel Hill, North Carolina University Press, 2007 and *Op Cit.* Notes 15 and 37
Silvio Pons, *La Rivoluzione Globale. Storia del Comunismo Internazionale 1917-1991,* Torino, Einaudi, 2012
[67]*Cfr. Ibid.* Note 28
[68] *Ibid.* Note 24

Unfortunately for the USSR this policy did not succeed in balancing support to its different allies and resulted in eventually fostering PLO internal split and hostility between the Palestinians and Syria: the civil war erupted in Tripoli among Arafat loyalists and Syria-backed rebels represented the failure of this policy and became the worst scenario the Soviet Union could face.

Given this fragile game of balances, the PFLP committed, before and after Algiers PNC, to a propaganda effort to present the viability of the alliance with Syria and the fundamental necessity to rely on the USSR and rejecting any American involvement. The analyses published in PFLP's Al Hadaf focused on the continued role of opposition that Syria played during and after the war toward Israel's aggressions and US attempt to impose their settlement. The stress was always on the positive stand that Syria was adopting at the Arab level as well as on the pressure that the Syrian regime was exercising on those regimes favorable to negotiations within the American pattern: Syria declared that it would attend upcoming Arab summits only to discuss the results reached until then, excluding any debate on possible alignment of Arab positions with the Reagan plan. Furthermore, the Assad regime was continually urging Jordan not to join American settlement negotiation. PFLP's account centered on the guarantee represented by Syrian armed presence in Lebanon: a precious guarantee of protection for PLO 's interests. Before the Tripoli crisis, the PFLP also used to remark that Syrian-Palestinian relations were experiencing a "real operation of correction" since until then they were not "established on the right bases"[69]

In its description of the important factors impeding the implementation of American conspiracies, the PFLP distinguished between direct factors and "helping" factors: while Syrian position was listed among the firsts, Soviet stand was considered part of the second group, in line with Soviet narrative over its intervention in Middle Eastern affairs, especially during the Israeli invasion.[70] In Popular Front's views, progressive forces upgraded their relation with the Soviet Union because the "strategic alliance" between them had to reach the level of the "strategic collaboration" existing between the US and Israel. Moreover, Soviet increasing supplies of armaments to Syrian forces represented an important factors of deterrence toward an always impending new Israeli military operation, preserving the Syrian controlled area in Lebanon.[71]

In this moment of shifting alliances, the Popular Front was trying to restitute a homogenous image of the "Steadfastness Front", focusing on the element of accordance between its regional and international patrons. In Party's narrative the Israeli invasion showed once more American unreliability which entailed the unfeasibility of diplomatic strategy. The clear step to take was full adherence to armed struggle, which in the new phase could only be carried through a greater reliance on the Syrian ally and its Soviet backer.[72] The inconsistencies between the renewed stress on the importance of armed struggle and the new posture toward Soviet peace proposal is to be explained mainly with two factors: on one hand the PFLP needed to respect the principle of

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[69] *Al Hadaf,* No. 669 04/18/1983
[70] See *supra* paragraph "PFLP's interpretation of the Lebanese war"
[71] *Ibid.* Note 67
[72] *Ibid.* Note 24

consensus within the PNC as well as to pander the Soviets. On the other, the Popular Front was fully involved in the Lebanese arena in a struggle for survival, therefore the rhetoric of armed resistance still played a major role in Party's narrative. However, as we will see, PFLP's attachment to Syria's goal only provoked further marginalization, reinforcing Arafat's leadership and its strategy inside the PLO, nor protected the Party from Syria's divide-et-impera strategy in Lebanon.

2.4 The PFLP and "coalition politics"

The 16th session of the PNC followed the traditional pattern of consensus politics but it was the last time that this principle was put into practice.[73] In fact, the post war period was marked on one hand by Arafat's increasing autonomy in decision making and on the other by the spreading pattern of coalition politics to which opposition parties inside the Palestinian arena started to resort more frequently: from this moment the different factions that disagreed with Arafat's line tried to coordinate their policies in order to acquire a greater weight within the PLO and counterbalance Fatah's increasing power. That being so, coalition politics can be interpreted as a clear sign of the weakening that leftist opposition was experiencing in that period.[74] On the eve of the opening of the PNC the PFLP stressed continuously on the importance of "building front-like internal relations between Palestinian factions, far from any form of monopoly, individualism and authoritarianism"[75] complaining also about the lack of attention reserved to the issue of national unity until then. Therefore, the strong attachment that PNC resolution expressed toward the unity of the PLO was considered as a result reached thanks to Party's efforts: PFLP's propaganda focused on "the spirit of national unity" that characterized the National Council, welcoming PLO adherence to the rejection of American peace plans. However, as we have seen, PNC formulation of the tasks for the new stage left space for free interpretations and contacts between Arafat and Hussein continued undisturbed. The whole opposition inside the PLO knew that the chairman was determined in pursuing his diplomatic strategy, therefore PFLP and DFLP started to hold joint meetings since the firsts months after the PNC in order to organize a prompt reaction to any possible "deviation" from what they considered as PNC political line. In April 1983, a statement issued by one of these meetings clearly declared their priorities and concerns toward Palestinian politics by affirming that *"the two Fronts will firmly stand against any retreat from Palestine National Council Resolutions"*[76].

The PFLP and the DFLP also used to be concerned by the pressure to which the PLO leadership was subjected especially from Jordan and saw the increasing coordination between them as a useful tool to stop any attack aimed at substituting the PLO in its representative role. A great danger was embodied by "bureaucratic groups" and their "bourgeois aspirations" inside the national movement who were preaching the "American solutions" for the conflict. At this regard the two organizations started to call for sensible change in PLO main institutions :

> "The prompt application of democratic reform within the framework of the PLO organs
> and institutions requires enforcing the democratic forces among the Palestinian
> revolution's forces. (…)This reform should be implemented within the framework of

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[73] *Ibid.* Note 15
[74] *Ibid.* Note 38
[75] *Al Hadaf,* No. 657, 01/24/1983
[76] *Al Hadaf,* No. 670, 04/25/1983

national unity and with adherence to the principle of internal democratic dialogue that will enhance the role of the Palestinian national revolution and its national decisions."[77]

Attachment to Palestinian national program and the urgency of wide-range democratic reforms inside the PLO were the two main slogans waged by the two fronts, especially when the first clashes between Fatah loyalists and rebels started to occur in the Bekaa valley, in Lebanon, in June 1983.

The developments that the Lebanese and the Palestinian arenas lived since the second half of 1983, namely growing tensions inside Fatah and between PLO leadership and Syria as well as the clashes in Lebanese Al-Jabal area between the National Forces and Phalanges-Lebanese army joint forces, pressured the two factions toward a greater coordination, in order to retain their political weight. As a results, at the end of June the PFLP and the DFLP announced the formation of a "political and military Joint Command" that would have been "responsible for the political affairs and moves of the two Fronts and for their armed forces, within the framework of strengthening the relations between them and unifying their ranks"[78]. The official statement as well as analyses by PFLP's cadres clearly defined the would-be scope of this step: the Joint Command was not to be considered as a simple "axis", rather it represented the move toward a concrete unification founded on "an objective basis". Moreover, the PFLP and the DFLP intended to make more efforts to unify also their social institution and trade unions. In such a critical moment, the two Fronts' aim was bolstering PLO institutions and role as well as to contribute to "the success of the decision of the Palestine National Council, including the decision to establish a unified Palestinian national army".[79]

But as PFLP press testified, this step received also some critics from those who saw an attempt by the two factions to benefit from the serious break that Fatah was experiencing. At this regard, the PFLP replied not only that such move aimed at building a strong bases for the unity of leftist forces, but that it was also a necessary decision in order to save the PLO from the current impasse and to protect it from a further fragmentation, an event that would only serve those forces aiming at its liquidation.[80]

As Fatah internal crisis continued, the Joint Command decided to issue a "program for unity and democratic reform" of the PLO on October the first 1983: this proposal intended to represent a base for the salvation of PLO as well as to open a comprehensive dialogue on the major changes

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[77] *PFLP-DFLP Joint Communique on the Developments on Palestinian and Arab Levels, Damascus, 6th June 1983,* in *Documents and Source Materials: Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 13 No. 1 (Autumn 1983)

[78] *PFLP-DFLP Joint Statement on the Formation of a Joint Political and Military Command, Damascus, June 26, 1983,* in *Documents and Source Materials: Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 13 No. 1 (Autumn 1983)

[79] *Ibid.*

[80] *Al Hadaf,* No. 680 07/04/1983

to be implemented in the Liberation Organization.[81] First of all, the program defined three main dangers impending on the PLO namely, political liquidation, threats of divisions that became more likely since PLO evacuation from Beirut and the eventual emergence of Fatah internal clashes and finally the risk of "restriction" of the PLO through the imposition of an Arab tutelage on it. These external factors apart, the document focused on PLO internal problems with regards to foreign policy and organizational aspects. Since the beginning of the post-Beirut phase, the PLO was not able to express clear positions towards the main issues that concerned the organization, despite those stands were fully defined by PNC resolution: this situation was a consequence of the "preponderance of tactics on strategy" which led to the implementation of "shortsighted maneuvers" that did not follow the scope of long term interests. To be clearer, the program affirmed that this shortsightedness emerged in several PLO improper behaviors: first, the Palestine Liberation Organization disregarded its anti-imperialist nature and consequently seemed to forget the "strategic truth" of the impossibility of coexistence between the Palestinian and Arab peoples and Zionism. The Joint Command referred to the dialogue that chairman Arafat wanted to open with those regional and international parts that called the PLO to recognize Israel. More precisely the document condemned PLO leadership tendency to put all the Arab regimes on the same level which allowed dialogue also with "reactionary regimes": but the PLO forgot that it was part of the Arab liberation movement and therefore, contacts and collaboration was possible only with nationalist regimes, namely countries members of the Steadfastness and Confrontation Front and Syria in particular. Turning the attention on organizational aspects, the Joint Command highlighted the growing "despotism and individualism" in the decision-making process inside the PLO. Without directly mentioning Yasser Arafat, the document denounced the "individualistic tendency" that exacerbated during the last year in every context which was paralleled by a "category-based control" inside PLO organs. All this was to the detriment of PLO institutions and the practice of collective command that characterized the PLO for the previous two decades and fostered the emergence of a "bureaucratic class" inside PLO institutions accompanied by corruption and cronyism.[82] By pointing out these problems the PFLP and the DFLP were recognizing the arguments that Abu Musa, the Fatah-Uprising's leader, put forward in order to justify its rebellion against Arafat autocratic behavior.[83] The whole national movement was aware of the lack of democracy inside the PLO at that moment, but the Joint Command decided not to attack Arafat nor to ask for his removal until, his departure from Tripoli and the unprecedented meeting with Hosni Mubarak in Egypt.

The solution to these problems was the implementation of democracy at every level of the organization: the concept of "collective leadership" had to be implemented again in every decisional organs and the control of "deviation" was to be enforced. Furthermore the program of

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[81] *Barnāmağ al-waḥda wa al-iṣlāḥ ad-dimuqrāṭī fī munaẓẓama at-taḥrīr al-filasṭīniyya/ Program of unity and democratic reform in the Palestine Liberation Organization* in *Al Hadaf,* No. 665 10/24/1983

[82] Cfr. *Arafat and the Journey of the Palestinian Revolution: An Interview with Shafiq Al-Hout,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 39 No. 1 (Autumn 2009) and *Op. Cit.* Note 38

[83] MERIP Reports, *The PLO split,* No. 119 (Nov. - Dec., 1983)

reforms envisaged a stricter control over the effectiveness of the "highest councils in the PLO" and the concession of a real autonomy to PLO unions and other civil institutions: this entailed the enhancement of Occupied Territories institutions in which every faction had to be represented according to its electoral weight. Concerning economic and military aspects, unification was the keyword for the correction of PLO path: a unified Palestinian army had to be created as well as all PLO finances had to be managed in the cadre of the Palestinian National Fund, which was considered as the only institution that could equally distribute resources among the different factions without much corruption or cronyism.

All these organizational reforms had to be paralleled by PLO alignment with the Arab Liberation Movement and by putting an end to every "ambiguous" contacts with "defeatist" leaders which were threatening the implementation of PNC resolution and were a main cause of Fatah split.

Throughout the entire siege of Arafat's loyalist forces in Tripoli, the PFLP alongside other leftists factions, continued merely to call for the unity of the movement and for dialogue and cohesion with the Syrian regime as well as to offer its good services as mediator. However the break between Arafat and Syria was too deep and the Joint Command was unable to play any active role, further demonstrating the correspondence of coalition politics and political weakening: this tragic episode of PLO history was demonstrating Syria's will to cancel the Palestinian national movement as an independent actor in the Arab-Israeli conflict and put it under its tutelage, disavowing Joint Command intention to depict it as a fundamental ally.[84] On the other hand, Arafat was not to give up the path he started after PLO eviction from Beirut and demonstrated it by visiting Cairo during his evacuation from Tripoli.

In fact, the conflict with Syria and the blow he underwent in Tripoli drove PLO chairman to an astonishing visit to Egypt with whom no contacts were held since "Sadat's betrayal": once again Arafat reaffirmed his will to continue the dialogue with the "moderate camp" and reject any collaboration with the "radicals". In front of Arafat's step the rest of the Palestinian movement, included a sensible part of Fatah, expressed deep outrage. For the PFLP and the Joint Command, previously loyal to Arafat leadership, his resignations became now an "urgent national mission"[85]. The decision of accomplishing this trip, represented the most serious evidence that Arafat was determined in continuing his "individualistic" governance of the PLO. Therefore George Habash, called every PLO organs to move to reestablish democracy inside the national movement. The PFLP carried on an attack merely to the person of the chairman, stating continuously its will to act in respect of PLO rules and PNC resolutions. Similarly, Party's cadres précised that they were not leading an attack to Fatah but they only wanted every deviation to be removed: "the PLO was stronger than Yasser Arafat".[86]

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[84] *Cfr.* Eric Rouleau, *The Future of the PLO,* International Affairs, Vol. 62 No. 1 (Fall 1983)
[85] *Al Hadaf,* No. 704 12/26/1983
[86] *Ibid.*

Also after Arafat's trip to Egypt, the pattern of coalition politics emerged as a top priority for the PFLP: the call for the unity of the left and for its takeover in the PLO became a mantra repeated at every official occasion. The 25th of December 1983, the Joint Command issued a proclaim together with the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP) and the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) in which these factions invoked the formation of the "largest Palestinian national front in order to end any form of conflict and partisan rivalry".[87]

This "Front" had to be convened in the framework of the Central Council of the PLO and at this regard the statement called Fatah Central Committee to further condemn the Arafat's visit in Cairo and to facilitate the organization of the Council: once this convened, all the parts refusing the "defeatist line" would implement the procedures to destitute Arafat. In addition the proclaim demanded Palestinian masses and institutions in the occupied territories to hold a "national conference like the one held Jerusalem in 1978 to condemn and fight Sadat's conspiracy". In sum, the four parties called for Arafat's total isolation both in the Palestinian as well as in the regional arena: the PLO leftist opposition needed the unification of Palestinian ranks to ouster the man that alone was imposing his strategy to the Palestinian National movement.

In the attempt to close the ranks of the left, the PFLP also tried to emphasize the divisions inside Fatah in the hope that this would relinquish Arafat's path choosing the "steadfastness" approach and the alliance with Syria: official statements and declarations by members of Fatah Revolutionary Council or by Fatah foreign office were published in which high-rank cadres rejected Arafat's action and affirmed that the chairman planned the trip by his own and thus lost his legitimacy inside the movement.[88]

However these efforts were not successful: at the end of March 1984 the Joint Command the PCP and the PLF, under the patronage of Democratic Yemen, issued another statement that replicated the same call to all "nationalist personalities and forces" for the establishment of a collective leadership.[89] No progresses were registered, on the contrary, the hopes that Fatah members reactions to Arafat's visit would subvert the leadership inside the PLO, were sensibly smashed after few months. Actually a Fatah "political document" issued in March, provoked PFLP's critics which considered it a serious regression from the previous Fatah statements since it defined Arafat's moves only as a "organizational violation". This document, that intended to build the base for a dialogue with the Joint Command, didn't overtly condemn the visit nor took any clear position toward Arafat's contacts with Egypt and Jordan: in PFLP's views Arafat's policies represented the main reason of PLO split and without a firm denunciation, no dialogue was possible. For the PFLP, Fatah leadership was trying to force a split in the Liberation Organization,

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[87] *Al Hadaf,* No. 705 01/02/1984

[88] *Al Hadaf.* No. 706 01/16/1984

[89] *Statement Issued by the Joint Command of the Democratic and Popular Fronts, the Palestine Liberation Front and the Palestine Communist Party, Calling for a Collective Leadership. Aden, PDRY, March 27 1984, in, Documents and Source Materials,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 13. No. 4 (Summer 1984)

pressuring opposite factions to leave the national movement in order to impose its "new defeatist line" to other minor factions.[90]

The first half of 1984 quickly deleted any chance to form an alternative front inside the PLO. Arafat proved able to impose its self-made policies to the movement and resist the mutiny that Syria engineered against him. PFLP's efforts were now focused on forming a progressive front capable of countering PLO alignment with the "Amman-Cairo axis", though without leaving the PLO. However old inter-left policy patterns and the new external pressure played a major role in shaping the PFLP conduct. As a consequence, during the period that preceded the 17th PNC called by Arafat in Amman, the Party did not manage to adopt a clear political line since it dealt with inconsistent factors and pressures that heavily influenced its policy-making.

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[90] *Al Hadaf,* No. 717 04/02/1984

3 The Popular Front and the split in the PLO

3.1 Towards the 17th Palestine National Council

The "Aden Statement" entailed no particular progress in the dialogue between PLO leadership and leftist opposition. However, the PFLP took this meeting in high consideration because it represented an important step in the formation of a united leftist front, the first condition to meet in order to "correct" PLO political course after Arafat's visit to Egypt. The "Democratic Alliance" was set up, the Joint Command established common "points of views" with the Palestine Communist Party and the Palestine Liberation Front: in George Habash's words the development and unity of the "democratic and revolutionary current" was the "security valve for the treatment of the PLO crisis".[1] Actually, since the beginning of the year, the whole Palestinian national movement was mainly focused on internal politics and on the preparation of the 17th session of the Palestine National Council. The PFLP and other opposition factions were aware of the importance of the next PNC, the one who would seal the imposition or the rejection of the diplomatic strategy which the chairman tried to impose as the official political line. In this framework the Democratic Alliance was a tactical tool, and therefore a short-term entente, in order to safeguard the revolution from Arafat's activism, with a view to the establishment of a larger national front: "this front is open to everybody without exception. To every parts who is ready to fight the deviationist approach and defeatism in the Palestinian arena".[2]

In this new phase, PLO opposition was on a total defensive stance and its political activity is limited to the reaction to the activities of the leadership: on one hand Arafat and his supporters were interested in holding the next PNC as quick as possible, on the other, the Democratic Alliance was seeking to gain time in order to reach some guarantees on the content and the focus of the discussions, before convening the council. For instance, the Joint Command conditioned its participation to the PNC to preliminary meetings that would define the "right political line with no space for interpretations"[3], as on the contrary was the case for the 16th PNC. Furthermore Abu Ali Mustafa explained in a public intervention at the end of April, that the council could not be convened without the "comprehensive political and organizational agreement" of every PLO faction. Such a consensus was the only condition capable to preserve the integrity of the PLO and prevent the split to which the leadership was leading the national movement.[4] This demand also revealed PFLP's attachment to the traditional PLO consensus-policy as a mean to stop or at least to reduce the weight of Arafat's initiatives on the Palestinian arena: a further signal of the defensive attitude adopted by the Democratic Alliance. In addition, PFLP's secretary general explained that in order to "defend the legality" of the PLO, the Party was ready to resort to the boycott of the Executive Committee. If Fatah Central Committee had continued to back "the

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[1] *Al Hadaf,* No. 718 04/09/1984
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Al Hadaf,* No. 721 04/30/1984

deviationist line" the Democratic Alliance would prevent "Arafat to speak for the PLO" by refraining its delegates to take part to Executive Committee activities: deprived of six member the committee would be unable to represent the Palestinian people. Therefore, though Arafat owned a sharp majority, the leftist opposition had the means to preserve right course of the national movement.[5]

Despite the unprecedented split that the national movement was facing during this phase, usual preliminary talks between the Democratic Alliance and Fatah started in Aden and Algiers, the two countries that along with Syria were committed to a strong diplomatic backing of PLO opposition: Arafat's trip to Egypt represented a brand new factor in internal Palestinian politics but the pattern of action that was prevailing at the open of preparatory activities was still the one that featured previous PNC sessions.[6]

The first round of talks between delegations of Fatah and the Democratic Alliance took place in Algiers from the 19th to the 23rd of April 1984. During the five days long discussion, leftists forces submitted to Fatah central committee the Aden statement, presenting it as the base for starting a dialogue, as PFLP's deputy secretary-general later explained: "we will give the chance during the meetings we decided to convene, to expose every point of view about PLO crisis but we will keep attached to the basic issues outlined by the Aden statement".[7] Actually, the two conflicting parts didn't reach an agreement on sensible matters to be discussed at the PNC and limited themselves to the rhetorical reaffirmation of traditional PLO slogans. However, both Fatah and the Democratic Alliance showed their interest in pursuing a real dialogue and in safeguarding PLO institution and role. Fatah accepted the condition to convene the PNC only after the achievement of a comprehensive consensus on political and organizational issues as demanded by the opposition, therefore, the delegation of the Democratic Alliance agreed on the continuation of the dialogue with PLO leadership[8]: "The meeting of Algiers was without doubt a first step that represented a practical translation of the initiative issued from the Aden talks by the Democratic Alliance."[9]

If on one hand Fatah seemed to make some concessions attesting a certain disposition to the dialogue, on the other Arafat continued with his policy, which combined a wide media campaign: on the eve of the second round of talks, the PFLP returned to harshly attack PLO chairman, calling for his "downfall", while at the same time continued to hope in the dialogue opened at the end of April. Actually, the PLO leader released some interviews to Western and Arab media in which he advocated the readmission of Egypt within the Arab community, through the "Palestinian gate" or urged the holding of the PNC since its delay "only served American interests". Furthermore, he personally opposed the participation of rebel faction to the next PNC for "those people were

[5] *Ibid.* Note 1

[6] *Cfr* . Alain Gresh, *OLP: Histoire et stratégies, vers l'état palestinien,* Paris, SPAG-PAPYRUS, 1983

[7] *Ibid.* Note 4

[8] *Balāġ ṣaḥafī ʿan ʾiğtimāʿāt al-ğazāʾir bayn at-taḥaluf ad-dimuqrāṭī wa wafd al-laǧna al-markaziyya li-ḥaraka fatḥ/Press Statement on Algiers meeting between the Democratic Alliance and the delegation of Fatah Central Committee* in *Al Hadaf,* No. 521 04/30/1984

[9] *Ibid.* Note 4

merely jackals and there was no space for them on the Palestinian scene"[10] as well as carried on his contacts with Jordan backing the idea of an international peace conference under the patronage of the United Nations.

For the PFLP these declarations were a clear evidence that Arafat intended to pursue his deviationist line and his goal was the failure of the negotiations started in Algiers and the PLO alignment with "Camp David supporters": Arafat's ouster became a daily slogan for the leftist opposition because was clearly ignoring the first entente reached in Algiers and disregarded previous PNC resolutions. In this phase, despite the clear inconsistencies, the Democratic Alliance continued to attack Arafat violently but still left a open door to Fatah Central Committee as if a real detachment of the latter from its leader's policies was really possible:

> "If any progress will be realized during the second round, Arafat will find himself in a serious impasse because if he will disregard these results he will have to face Fatah Central Committee. Isolated, he will have on his sides only his most loyal followers. But if Algiers talks will fail, as Arafat wishes, he will impose an even greater authority on the Central Committee"[11]

The delegations from Fatah and the Democratic Alliance resumed their negotiations the second week of May but the meeting did not produced any sensible results. At the end of works only a short statement was issued and the two parts only agreed on making a final attempt in the last meeting scheduled in Aden. According to the report made by the PFLP, the Fatah delegation accepted to find a consensus on organizational and political issues before the PNC but only if the opposition was ready to overcome the debate over Arafat's trip to Cairo and over possible measures to be taken against him. The Democratic Alliance was not disposed to accept "God's forgiveness on what is passed" policy as demanded by Fatah Central Committee, therefore the possibility of concrete results was postponed to the last round of talks, to be held in Aden. As the PFLP outlined, opposition rejection for Fatah conditions was not just related to Arafat visit to Egypt: Arafat's political activism have always been characterized by some individualism in decision-making and his meeting with Mubarak was not the first nor the last example of his "deviationist attitude". For these reasons, neglecting to judge his unprecedented step would not save the PLO from further deviations and violations of PNC resolutions.[12]

As Democratic Alliance forces criticized rightist PLO leadership, similarly the most radical factions (PFLP-GC, Fatah-Intifada, as-Sa'iqa and the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front), united in the National Alliance, were critics of the PFLP, the DFLP and PCP and of the dialogue they started with Fatah. They accused the PFLP in particular, because it didn't stand effectively and concretely

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[10] *Cfr.* Yasser Arafat, Simon Malley, *Yasser Arafat Interviewed,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 14 No. 1 (Autumn 1984)
Al Hadaf, No. 722 05/14/1984
[11] *Al Hadaf,* No. 723 05/21/1984
[12] *Al Hadaf,* No. 274 05/28/1984

with Fatah-Intifada during the uprising and did not joined them against Arafat. Afterwards, the National Alliance accused the Democratic forces for having withdrawn from some positions expressed in the Aden statement in order to open a dialogue with Fatah, and finally it labeled the project of building a "large national front" too much confused to be effective. This project was the core of Democratic Alliance initiative and obviously the PFLP rejected these critics. According to the PFLP's the changes recorded in its positions were limited to "tactical" issues, not on strategic ones, as for instance the dialogue with those exponents of the Palestinian bourgeoisie that disagreed with Arafat deviations, fundamental to build a national and united front. In addition, the Democratic Alliance viewed this verbal confrontation with Fatah as part of their struggle to rectify the path of the national movement: a total uprising as advocated by the National Alliance was a dangerous and vane project that could not but result in a deeper split inside the PLO, while the main interest was the safeguard of PLO institutions.[13] Stuck in this impasse, the leftist opposition was forced to be the mediator between Syrian proxies of the National Alliance and the "moderates" of Fatah in order to avoid a total fragmentation of the only existing Palestinian political platform.[14]

Finally, the parts convened in Aden for the last round of talks from the 22nd to the 27th of June 1984, herein the Democratic Alliance and Fatah delegation, at the presence of the Algerian National Liberation Front and of the Socialist Yemeni Party, reached the agreement they sought for more than two months, as demanded by leftist forces the final text concerned both the political and the organizational aspects. With regard to Arafat's visit to Egypt the text defined it as a "circumvention of the resolution of the Palestine National Council" as well as affirmed that the PLO was not "bound by any of its political consequence or commitment". The Democratic Alliance had at least reached a formal condemnation of Arafat's step, however it was forced to cede on the issue of Arafat's judgment: after having demanded the immediate "downfall" of PLO chairperson, the leftist forces agreed on a formula that passed the judgment to the "framework of the PLO's legitimate institutions" accepting to postpone the showdown with their powerful adversary.[15]

However, the PFLP and other democratic forces could consider these accords an overall success since it recognized most of their demands in various fields. Concerning regional politics, the Aden agreement clearly stated the opposition to any delegation of representation to Jordan and condemned Hussein's attempts to undermine the PLO as sole representative. The agreement also confirmed that relations with Egypt should be based on PLO attachment to Baghdad summit and PNC resolutions: every contact had to be stopped until the Egyptian regime would not accept to "relinquish" Camp David policies. Moreover, the document demanded the establishment of positive relations with Syria on "nationalist and pan-Arab basis". In doing so, the PLO would

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[13] *Al Hadaf,* No. 725 06/04/1984

[14] Naseer Aruri, *The PLO and the Jordan Option,* Third World Quarterly, Vol. 7 No. 4 (October 1985)

[15] *Aden-Algiers Agreement Between Fateh Central Committee and the Palestinian Democratic Alliance, Aden, June 27, 1984,* in *Documents and Source Material,* Journal Of Palestine Studies, Vol. 14 No. 1 (Autumn 1984)
Muḥaḍḍir liqā' 'aden/Report of the Aden Meeting, in *Al Hadaf,* No. 730 07/17/1984

enhance its coordination with both Syrian and the Lebanese National Forces in its confrontation of Israel's occupation of Lebanon.[16]

But the most important section of the agreement was the one related to the organizational aspects: actually, the document expressed a concrete commitment to the development of an effective collective leadership and asked the creation of organs of control, as demanded by the Joint Command since the issue of its "program of reforms". First of all, the Palestine Communist Party was admitted to the National Council, strengthening the leftist front. Afterwards the two parts agreed on empowering the Central Council more control tasks, especially over the Executive Committee: the Council could now "call the Executive Committee to account of its implementation of the decisions of the National Council" as well as set the creation by the Council of "permanent, effective committees composed by all member of the National Council". Regarding the Executive Committee the accords envisaged the implementation of different steps in order to control its activities in a clear attempt to limit Arafat's individualism in decision-making[17]: the Executive Committee had to regulate its works with internal rules which would had been part of "basic regulations". In addition a secretariat general and special committees had to be set up in order to respectively take charge of political, financial and military issue "between the two meetings of the Executive Committee" and to monitor and supervise "political affairs" in the occupied territories. Finally, every member of the PNC should benefit of representation inside the Committee.[18] The goal was to modify PLO's institutional pattern to impede Arafat's complete takeover on the Organization.

Once the agreement was signed, the PFLP intended to integrate the national dialogue including the National Alliance which remained out of the negotiations as well as the representatives of Palestinian social and trade unions and independent personalities, especially from the occupied territories. But if the latter parts were satisfied of the agreement reached in Aden, National Alliance's forces rejected this result and accused the Democratic Alliance for the definitive abandonment of Aden's statement purposes, choosing to pass over Arafat's resignation and disregarding the commitment to the implementation of collective leadership inside the Executive Committee: the National Alliance considered the reforms envisaged by Aden-Algiers accords as demagogic for they were set in the framework of PLO's organs which were still under the full control of Arafat.[19]

In addition to these critics, the Democratic Alliance had to defend the achievements of Aden-Algiers process also from Arafat's adherence to his political course: just after few days from the signing of the agreements, Arafat issued a declaration from Amman in which he restated his will to

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[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.* Note 14

[18] *Ibid.* Note 15

[19] *Policy Statement by the Palestinian National Alliance on the Aden Agreement between the Fateh Central Committee and the Palestinian Democratic Alliance, Damascus, July 9, 1984,* in in *Documents and Source Material,* Journal Of Palestine Studies, Vol. 14 No. 1 (Autumn 1984)

visit Egypt again. Such declaration was a challenge to all the principles that the Democratic Alliance had just seen recognized by Fatah Central Committee and consequently strongly condemned this renewed violation of the national legitimacy. In PFLP's view, Arafat backed by other right-wing personalities, was attempting to substitute the national legitimacy and consensus with an Arab one capable of "liberating it from Aden restrictions".[20] It is interesting to remark at this regard, that the inversion of role and positions between the Popular Front and Fatah continued: the PFLP in this phase advocated the preeminence of Palestinian legitimacy vis-à-vis the new "pan-Arabist" Hussein-Arafat-Mubarak axis while throughout its history the party was committed to its pan-Arabism and the preeminence of this level of nationalism on regionalist approaches.

If on one hand the PFLP and PLO left factions considered the path outlined by the Aden-Algiers agreements as the only way to "restore the unity of the national movement", on the other the PLO was de facto divided in three groups, each one advocating a different and conflicting strategy to correct the course of the Palestinian revolution. The Democratic Alliance was stuck between the brand new approach emerged with Arafat's activism, who was trying to bypass the internal opposition through a broader entente with Jordan and Egypt, and a radical small opposition committed to full rebellion and totally in the hands of Syria. Furthermore some contrasts started to appear also inside the Democratic Alliance: divergences emerged especially about the position to adopt vis-à-vis Arafat, after the signing of the agreements. The PFLP labeled reports of divisions with the DFLP as "rumors" but actually was not allowed to issue a reminder to Fatah Central Committee on measures to be taken against Arafat in behalf of the Democratic Alliance. The Democratic and the Popular Fronts didn't share exactly the same view on the matter and though this is a small event, it showed the "tactical" nature of the alliance between forces that at given moment had also opposed opinions on important issues.[21]

At the end of summer 1984 the impasse inside the PLO reached its climax, the "comprehensive national dialogue" that the agreements were supposed to start was paralyzed: every faction was contributing to this paralysis and despite the PFLP and the Democratic Alliance continued to claim their adherence to the accords vis-à-vis Arafat's violation and Fatah Central Committee inability to refrain its chairman, they started to demand the deferment of the 17th session of the PNC, although in Aden they agreed on convening it in mid September. First, the PFLP argued that both holding a PNC with the exclusion of National Alliance forces, as demanded by Fatah and abandoning the legitimacy of PLO praxis in order to revolt against the leadership and topple Arafat as the National Alliance was asking, would have consecrated the final fragmentation and the end of the PLO as an effective actor in the region. Afterwards, the review of the relations with Syria became a top priority: for the PFLP's 1985 could have been a "hot year" in which

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[20] *Al Hadaf,* No. 733 08/06/1984
[21] *Al Hadaf,* No. 740 10/1/1984
Muḏkira al-ǧabha aš-šaʿbiya ʿilā al-laǧna al-markaziyya li-ḥaraka fatḥ/ Reminder from the PFLP to Fatah Central Committee, in *Al-Hadaf* No. 738 09/18/1984

another military confrontation with Israel in Lebanon was likely to occur; in addition the dangerous phase demanded to put apart any different and unify around major issues, namely the opposition to the international defeatist plan. Convening the PNC before reaching a solution concerning relations with Syria would worsen the current crisis.[22]

This last PFLP's position, is mainly a consequence of Syria's and to a less extent of Algeria's pressure on the whole Democratic Alliance. In fact, analyzing PFLP's stands during the debate that preceded the PNC, the first element to be remarked is the continued recall to the safeguard of PLO unity. For these reasons a clear inconsistence emerged between the claim of the Democratic Alliance to include the National Alliance in the dialogue, while the latter was first of all committed to Arafat's deposition and to the creation of an alternative Palestinian platform. The Popular Front too accused several times the National Alliance of "revolutionary adventurism" and of "behaviors that fostered divisions".[23] Moreover, Algeria as well contributed to the impasse since it conditioned its disposition to host the PNC to the achievement of a full national consensus. But Syria's Assad influenced directly or indirectly the whole opposition in the PLO and was determined to obtain Arafat's downfall while the chairman was more and more engaged in his diplomatic strategy with Jordan and Egypt and had no intention to deal with Syria's projects and its Palestinian proxies: such context determined PLO's most serious imbroglio and was about to definitely break the national movement jeopardizing its chances of survival.[24]

In October PLO crisis was exacerbating, the two main factions continued to accuse each other respectively of paralyzing the national movement and of violating Aden-Algiers agreements. Yet at the end of September, the restoration of Jordanian-Egyptian relations deepened the split between Fatah and the democratic forces as Fatah high-cadres welcomed the step made by King Hussein while for the Palestinian left it represented another proof of Jordan's commitment to defeatist plans.[25]

At the beginning of November the split was made official: the Fatah Central Committee decided to convene the 17th session of the Palestine National Council out of the framework of Aden-Algiers agreements for the 22nd of the same month, and moreover it decided to hold it in Amman, for the first time since 1970 Black September. By convening the PNC Arafat sanctioned PLO new course: the one where the principle of majority prevailed on the principle of consensus in the decision-making progress. He exploited the "paralysis" provoked by the insistence of the Democratic Alliance to make his line pass through legitimate PLO institution.[26]

PFLP's Political Bureau held an emergency meeting shortly after the official call of the PNC and issued an independent statement. The Popular Front bitterly condemned this "individualist" step

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[22] *Al Hadaf.* No. 739 09/24/1984

[23] *Ibid.*

[24]Rashid Khalidi, *The Palestinian Dilemma: PLO Policy after Lebanon,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 15 No. 1 (Autumn 1985) *Op. cit.* Note 14

[25] *Al Hadaf,* No. 741 10/08/1984

[26] *Cfr.* Yezid Sayegh, *Struggle Within, Struggle Without: The transformation of PLO Politics since 1982,* International Affairs, Vol. 65 No. 2 (Spring 1989)
Op. Cit. Note 14

which was about to realize the worst threat to PLO's survival: Arafat was officially sanctioning the split in the national movement in a moment when "imperialist efforts" were "focused on the crystallization of a reactionary axes" and needed the "Palestinian coverage" to succeed. Ironically, Fatah made its step while a delegation of the Democratic Alliance was heading to Tunis in order to hold further talks meant to overcome the crisis. The party finally declared its dissociation and rejection vis-à-vis this decision as well as called all parties and personalities opposed to the deviationist line and its "destructive consequences" to concretely start a comprehensive dialogue and to make all possible efforts to prevent the PNC to take place.[27]

However, PFLP's efforts to thwart the holding of the PNC were vain, and Fatah managed to convene the council though a considerable part of the PLO decided to boycott the session. All the factions of the Democratic Alliance did not take part to the PNC but the leftist coalition seemed to be about to finish, especially the experience of the Joint Command with the DFLP. Actually in the communiqué that the Popular Front issued in order to express its position with regards to the PNC, it also could not but state its regrets for the "freezing" of the Joint Command decided unilaterally by the DFLP in November 1984. This latter formation accused the PFLP of being responsible for the failure of the talks with Fatah since it didn't accept to hold the Executive Committee meetings in Algiers. The Popular Front rejected every accusation, labeling DFLP's decision as a "gift to the defeatist rightist current" and replied that the only cause for the failure of Aden-Algiers agreement was Fatah's determination to shortcut it and its attachment to the Amman-Cairo axis.[28]

The moment was an overall critical one: Arafat succeeded in imposing his line to the PLO, a line that for the PFLP represented the liquidation of the Palestinian cause. Furthermore as Fatah decided to go for the showdown, leftist opposition failed in stopping it and shortly after fragmented quickly. At the end of 1984 the PFLP was facing its worst moment of isolation in the Palestinian arena.

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[27] *Al Hadaf,* No. 747 11/19/1984
[28] *Al Hadaf,* No. 748 11/26/1984

3.2 The Amman agreement and the Palestine National Salvation Front

The PNC session held in Amman did not imply outstanding political changes but represented an overall success for Yasser Arafat and his authority on the PLO. In fact, having reached the quorum without the presence of the leftist opposition, the Assembly confirmed him in his position "by acclamation" and showed support for Arafat's efforts to reengage in relations with Egypt: on one hand the PNC condemned any "tentative of sabotage aiming at splitting the PLO" with reference to Fatah's armed rebels while on the other expressed the will of having Egypt back in the Arab fold. Moreover this PNC session sealed the PLO adoption of the "Jordan Option" since it affirmed the importance of developing joint efforts in order to recover the occupied lands as well as the importance of Jordan's role in the path towards the fulfillment of Palestinian rights. In addition, the PNC decided "to study" Hussein proposal calling for an international conference on the Israeli-Arab conflict with a Palestinian-Jordanian joint participation. Finally, Arafat's image and authority were strongly bolstered by Jordan State television that broadcasted the PNC session at work allowing Palestinian population in the Occupied Territories to see their representatives engaged in the council. This gave to the PLO leadership a great reliability in Palestinians' eyes which was completely in detriment of PFLP and other opponents' interests who worked throughout 1984 to attack Arafat and to make his "deviationist" line fall.[29]

This phase in PFLP's course inside the Palestinian national movement can be considered as a landmark of its marginalization: the reaffirmation of Arafat's leadership in a PNC unilaterally convened by PLO rightist current meant that the opponent minority could not rely anymore on the policy of consensus inside the Palestinian institutions, one of the fundamental principle of the PLO until then. In a framework where the majority expressed by the PNC had to prevail on minority claims of realizing a national consensus, Fatah obtained an overwhelming advantage thanks to its broad mass support and the ostensible backing of the Cairo-Amman axis.[30]

Since the opening of PNC works in Amman the Popular Front considered the council illegitimate not only because it was consequence of a break of Aden-Algiers agreements but also because the whole opposition boycotted it. The Party still relied on consensus policy and from this point of view a PNC that did not reflect a national unanimity was not valid. In a political statement issued after the conclusion of the council the PFLP rejected "all the political and organizational consequence resulted from the illegitimate Amman council since it represented a step back from the path towards unification". Afterwards the statement invoked the organization of another PNC on the base of the Aden-Algiers agreements and the resolution of the 16th PNC to restore PLO unity and correct its relation with Syria.[31] Such a call paralleled some claims expressed by the

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[29]*17th PNC Session Resolution,* http://www.malaf.info/?page=show_details&Id=69&CatId=63&table=pa_documents
Hanna Siniora, *PNC: Report on the 17th Session of the PNC in Amman,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 14 No. 3 (Spring 1985)
Op. Cit. Note 14 and 24
[30] *Ibid.* Note 24
[31] *Al Hadaf,* No. 750 12/10/1984

Syrian government even before the convening of the PNC in Amman, in which Syrian authorities asked the Democratic and National Alliances to hold a National Council without Fatah's participation but that the PFLP did not follow until then in order to respect its claim of attachment to PLO unity and its legal frameworks.[32]

In front of Arafat's successful initiative the PFLP could only repeat the claims that characterized his policy for the whole 1984 and his alignment with Syria resulted in the incapacity of countering PLO mainstream and creating an alternative block for, as we have already outlined, relations with the DFLP were not passing through a positive phase.

During the first two months of 1985 the PFLP focused its efforts in the settlement of the differences inside the Democratic Alliance concerning the proper approach to be adopted in order to counter PLO leadership initiative. As the Party highlighted a number of times the only source of disagreement among "nationalist" forces were the "method to face the deviationist current": actually the party disagreed both with those who backed the idea of building an alternative Palestinian organization and did not seek at all any dialogue with Fatah and those opposition forces and personalities who thought that the resolutions of the 17th PNC needed just to be emended.[33] Actually the PFLP at the same time denounced the dangerous choices made by PLO decision makers and rejected their accusation of exit from the national framework but also envisaged a dialogue with Fatah central committee members who were closer to its position.[34]

However while leftist forces found unity only in the condemnation of Arafat's policy, the latter pursued successfully his dialogue with King Hussein and finally reached an accord with him, the so called "Amman Agreement signed the 11th of February 1985". The agreement was a "bid for joint action" and represented an overall acceptance of the proposals made by Jordan's king during his opening speech at the PNC. In its brief text, the agreement asked for Israeli total withdrawal from the occupied territories and stated that the Palestinians would "exercise their inalienable right of self-determination" "within the context of the formation of the proposed confederated Arab State of Jordan and Palestine". Moreover the accord affirmed adherence to UN resolution on refugee question and called for an "International Conference" under the patronage of the five permanent members of the Security Council and with the participation of all the parties involved in the conflict. The PLO, still defined as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, would participate in a joint delegation with Jordan: however the agreement put Jordan and the PLO de facto on the same level as far as the legitimacy of representation was concerned.[35]

As was the case after every new "spectacular" Arafat's steps PFLP Political Bureau held an assembly to condemn the accord. The Popular Front considered the Hussein-Arafat entente an unprecedented violation of the Palestinian National Charter since it implicitly accepted UN resolution 242, and the principle of "land for peace" which was entailed, as the base for

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[32] *Cfr.* Emile F. Sahliye, *The PLO After the Lebanon War,* Westview Press, Boulder Colorado, 1986

[33] *Al Hadaf,* No. 755 01/28/1955, No. 756 02/04/1985

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Text of Jordanian-Palestinian Accord Released February 23, 1985, Amman,* in *Document and Source Material,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 14 No. 3 (Spring 1985)

negotiation with Israel. The Party argued that the most dangerous consequences of the approval of this resolution was the transformation of the Palestinian cause in a "conflict on borders" and therefore its acceptance meant the abandonment of national historic goals, the loss of the legitimacy to represent Palestinian masses as well as the official adherence of the PLO leadership to American reactionary settlement of the conflict. Furthermore this accord represented a more serious danger for the Palestinian question for it came after the reelection of Ronald Reagan as US president which implied a revival of its 1982 plan to solve the conflict: in PFLP's view the Amman accord formalized PLO reliance on American project to liquidate the national cause. This firm belief was strengthened by the several meetings that President Regan held with the exponents of the "Arab reaction" just after the signing of the accord. In fact Reagan met both King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and this latter in particular officially praised the Jordanian-Palestinian agreement and added that "no nation" was "more qualified than America to support the Palestinian people's right to self determination.[36] In addition Yasser Arafat continued to sponsor the accord in Europe too, through several trips, gaining the support of many European capitals. Another aspect of the accord that the PFLP saw as a big threat to Palestinian and its own interests was the tacit renouncement of armed struggle against Israel and the total reliance on diplomatic initiative as the sole mean to achieve a solution to the conflict. Beyond the fact that this renouncement was a violation of the resolutions of the 16th and 17th PNC, which reaffirmed PLO adherence to the military fight, the PFLP was more afraid of its political consequences. In fact this step was appreciated not only by the US and Europe but also by other actors, namely the Soviet Union which has always been in favor of a political settlement of the Palestinian question: this international appreciation would have enhanced PLO leadership image worldwide and isolated PFLP's hard-line stands. Finally, the PFLP relied much more than Fatah on the symbolic importance of armed struggle to legitimize its policies vis-à-vis Palestinian masses.[37]

In front of this threat and given all the results that the national movement reached in his long resistance struggle the establishment of a "broad nationalist front" was a top priority and the PFLP urged all nationalist forces and Fatah's cadres who disagreed with Arafat to join the front as well as "publicly and concretely" state their position on PLO leadership deviation: the front was the only mean to make the defeatist approach fall and safeguard the gains of the Palestinian revolution.[38] As George Habash explained in the press conference that followed the Political Bureau assembly, the PFLP was persuaded that in front of the official alignment with the American solution, nationalists forces, namely political parties and trade unions, would have put their differences apart and merge together in order to form a national front: actually he was calling for a definitive coordination between the Democratic and the National Alliance after months of controversies between the two coalitions.[39] However that was not the case for PLO opposition

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[36] *Statement by Egyptian President Muhammad Husni Mubarak on His Visit to Washington, Washington D.C., 12 March 1985* in *Document and Source Material,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 14 No. 4 (Summer 1985)

[37] On the political role of armed struggle see *Supra* Chapter 1.

[38] *Al Hadaf,* No. 758 02/18/1985, No. 759 02/25/1985

[39] *Ibid.*

factions because actually the main obstacle to the establishment of such a front was DFLP's refusal. This believed that such e formation would foster PLO polarization process that began with the Fatah mutiny as well as it did not considered it a viable mean capable of gaining any political legitimacy.[40]

A month after the announcement of the Arafat-Hussein agreement and despite the hesitation which characterized the reaction of the opposition, the creation of the Palestine National Salvation Front (PNSF) was proclaimed: essentially the PNSF saw the participation of the PFLP and of National Alliance's forces namely, Fatah-Uprising, PFLP-GC, Sa'iqa Forces, the Palestinian Liberation Front, the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front as well as some PNC and Executive Committee member and other nationalist personalities close to rejectionists' positions.[41] Predictably the DFLP did not join the Front for the reasons we have just outlined, therefore, the birth of the PNSF meant PFLP's exit from the Democratic Alliance: the Popular Front decided to align itself with radical and Syrian-backed factions and at the same time to put an end to the tentative of establishing a leftist platform with the Communists and the Democratic Front. Arguably such step fostered critics to the PNSF notably by the rightist current which started to depict the Salvation Front as a mere Syrian tool and PFLP's participation to it as result of Damascus pressures.[42]

The political program of the PNSF had two main goals: it was launched in order to realize the downfall of the Amman accord and to restore the nationalist course of the PLO. To fulfill these tasks the forces adhering to the front called for the toppling of PLO deviationist leadership and the end of its abuses. While claiming so, the PNSF replied to the critics of being an illegitimate "alternative to the PLO" stating in the first article of its program its adherence to the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" and its commitment to "the National Charter and the resolutions of the PNC issued from its legitimate sessions which protect the nationalist line and its achievements". Afterwards, the PNSF intended to promote the armed struggle inside the "occupied homeland" and the surrounding countries, but special stress was posed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip because the Salvation Front also intended to stop defeatist forces there, through the revival of the Palestine National Front as a coordinative mean for resistance activities. With regards to foreign policy, obviously the PNSF sought the recovery of Palestinian relations with Syria and a reinforcement of "joint work" with Lebanese Democratic National Front and Amal movement aiming at the liberation of southern Lebanon. The deepening of ties of the "triangle of resistance" was a key factor in order to counter politically Jordanian initiative and impede "secret contacts with Camp David regime", two explicitly stated goals of the Salvation Front. In Habash's view, the PNSF represented also an opportunity for Arab regimes and

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[40]*Ibid.* Note 40
[41] *Announcement by the Palestine National Salvation Front of its Political Program, Damascus, 25 March 1985,* in *Documents and Source Materials,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 14 No. 4 (Summer 1985)
[42] *Ibid.* Note 39

the Arab national liberation movement as a whole, to show the right support for the Palestinian cause by siding with this "new qualitative start" of the Palestinian revolution.[43]

Concerning the organizational structure of the Front the most important article is the first, where it is defined that the PNSF is a "temporary framework that works in order to bring back the PLO to its nationalist line opposed to imperialism, Zionism and reactionary projects and make defeatist deviationist approaches fall". This is another point that PNSF's members tried to emphasize in order to deny what they called a "propaganda and information campaign" waged by the Palestinian right to discredit their efforts. The PNSF was "open to everybody who agree with its program" and relations between the faction were founded on the base of a "democratic front" where each decision had to receive the unanimous consensus of all the members, in opposition to the new "majority policy" introduced in the PLO at the 17th PNC.[44]

The PFLP tried also to bolster PNSF reliability stressing on the results that the coordination with Lebanese national forces and Syria allowed to reach against both Phalanges forces and the Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon. The fall of 17th May Israeli-Lebanese agreements and the withdrawal of Multi-National Forces and Israel's army from "most Lebanese territories" were praised and highlighted in order to foster a certain disappointment that Arafat's strategy was provoking inside the Palestinian arena: Arafat was accused of "running Palestinian affairs from airplanes" while flying among different Arab capitals to gain support from regional actors, on the other hand the "triangle of resistance" had been able to inflict serious setback to the enemy and to drive back Phalanges militias to their "isolationist ghetto".[45]

Another critical point that the PNSF had to face was the geographical distribution of its factions since the only Party with a solid implantation in the occupied territories was the PFLP, all the others were mainly located in Syria and to a lesser extent in Lebanon. As the importance of the West Bank and Gaza emerged in Palestinian parties' agenda and Israel's colonization of Palestinian lands increased dangerously, the set up of a specific strategy for the occupied homeland became a top priority, therefore PNSF's limited presence in the territories could reveal harmful for Front's credibility. At this regard the PFLP used to remind, beside the central position of the occupied territories in its agenda, that the diasporas could not be neglected neither and argued that it was impossible to legitimize Palestinian movements on the basis of their implantation. In the words of Taysir Quba, deputy head of the PFLP Political Relations Department it was "very difficult to say who is who" and that every party could be criticized on this issue, given Fatah reliance on its headquarters in the Gulf and in the Arab Maghreb as well as Communist Party absence from the whole Palestinian diasporas.[46] On the other hand, the continued Israeli seizure of Palestinian

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[43] *Al Hadaf,*No. 764 04/1/1985

[44] *'I'lān al-barnāmağ as-siyāsī wa al mabād'i at-tanẓimiyya al-'asāsiyya li-ğabha al-'inqāḏ al-waṭanī al-filasṭīnī/Announcement of the Political Programm and Foundative Organizational Principles of the Palestine National Salvation Front* in *Al Hadaf,* No. 764 04/1/1985

[45] George Habash, *George Habash: The Future of the Palestinian National Movement,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 14 No. 4 (Summer 1985) and *Op. Cit. 39*

[46] Mark Garfield, Jamil Hillal and Taysir Quba, *Palestinians in Damascus: The Democratic Front and the PFLP,* MERIP Reports, No. 134, Asad's Syria (Jul. - Aug., 1985)

territories, shown its clear will of creating "facts on the ground" in order to take bigger and bigger advantages in view of possible negotiations. Consequently, according to Popular Front's interpretation, Arafat's goal of coordinating PLO diplomatic efforts with Jordan was not only vain, but also very dangerous because it allowed Israel to increase the imbalance of power with the national movement. As the PLO was politically paralyzed by the split, the PFLP advocated once more that the escalation of armed struggle in the occupied territories was the only mean to counter the colonization wave and to make life "exceedingly difficult for the Israelis and more costly than comfortable for their colonialist enterprises".[47]

Despite its priorities related to internal Palestinian politics, one of PNSF's greatest concerns in the first half of 1985 was the Lebanese situation. As we have outlined Multi-National Forces withdrew from Lebanon in 1984 and they were followed by an Israeli redeployment on a reduced portion of the Lebanese territory. If on one hand this withdrawals were considered as a success for the "national forces" they also implied important shifts in the overall balances of power among all the militias involved in the Lebanese conflict. Actually in this phase Palestinian factions managed to reconstitute some of their military potential and these developments started to raise worries also among pro-Syrian factions formally allied with the Palestinians. Tensions between Palestinian parties and Amal and between this latter formation and Jumblatt's forces were reaching a critical point.[48] At this regard the PFLP denounced some "trends inside the Lebanese national rank" hostiles towards the Palestinians that were responsible for some harassments and provocation in the nearby of Palestinian camps such as unjustified arrests of Palestinians or the establishment of checkpoints at the entrance of the camps. In this context the PNSF, as it was more present in Lebanon rather than PLO leadership, behaved as the representative of the Palestinian people and tried to find an accord with the Lebanese National Front and the Amal movement, on Palestinian armed presence. The Salvation Front denounced those moves aimed at creating a Palestinian-Lebanese conflict exploiting sectarian divisions and asked to the whole Lebanese national movement to find an entente on the grounds of the joint struggle against the common enemy. For this purpose in the first half of May 1985, a PNSF delegation headed to Beirut in order to renegotiate Palestinian armed presence and reorganize the relations with Lebanese national factions on a more "clear, durable and firm base" capable of assuring Palestinian right to "bear arms".[49]

Unfortunately PNSF's delegation had no chances to fulfill its mission with success as in the meanwhile the situation exacerbated dangerously leading to a direct armed confrontation. The PFLP, after having shaped in particular its internal policy in alignment with Syrian interests, underwent a blow launched by Amal, until then considered one of the "Lebanese nationalist forces" therefore an ally, and eventually by the other Syrian-backed Palestinian factions, with Assad's consensus and military supplies. It was the beginning of the so called "war of the camps"

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[47] *Ibid.* Note 44
[48] *Cfr.* Georges Corm, *Le Proche-Orient Eclaté 1956-2010*, Gallimard, Paris 2010
[49] *Al Hadaf,* No. 769 05/13/1985

that lasted for more than two years and whose consequences reflected not only on the balances of the Lebanese conflict but also inside the Palestinian arena.

3.3 The disruption of the war of the camps

The 20th of May 1985 the attention of Palestinian factions is suddenly focused on the new tragic developments registered in the Lebanese scenario: the Shiite Amal movement along with the Sixth and the Eighth brigades of the Lebanese Army carried on a brutal attack to Beirut Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra, Shatila and Burj al-Barajneh where an important part of remaining Palestinian fighters was sheltered and where the great part of Beirut Palestinian civilian population lived. The armed clashes quickly transformed in a real siege of the camps that recalled to Palestinians' leaders and population the 1976 battle of Tall az-Za'atar: once again a Lebanese militia covered and this time directly armed by Syria[50] was waging an attack aimed at the definitive elimination of Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon.[51] The Popular Front was particularly concerned by the disruption of the war of the camps since Beirut camps were among its most important implantations in Lebanon and in the whole region as well. The PFLP immediately rejected the official version given by Amal to explain its attack and goals: the Shiite movement declared that it aimed at striking "Arafat's gang" and his deviationist line. The Party replied that while Amal was "waging battle against deviationism", indeed it was besieging in Beirut camps those forces committed to the salvation of the Palestinian revolution from the "liquidation". Therefore the PFLP evocated once again the "conspiracy" whose goal was the liquidation of Palestinian armed presence from Lebanon in order to detach the Lebanese and Palestinian questions and impose the Camp David blueprint to the country: Amal was charged of executing the third part of a plan started in 1976 by Phalanges forces, pursued during 1982 with Israel's invasion and that reached its third stage with the war of the camps. As Amal explicitly declared its intention of separating the Lebanese question from the Palestinian one in order to reach a settlement such stand fully demonstrated, for the PFLP Amal's commitment to the sectarian rearrangement of the Lebanese territory: by eliminating Palestinian armed presence the movement wanted to impose its sectarian order on west Beirut and south Lebanon alongside the north eastern Phalanges's "isolationist ghetto". The Lebanese authorities endorsed this plan as demonstrated by the participation of two brigades of the Lebanese army to the assault. This move was in line with the strategies that Israel always adopted in Lebanon. To show Amal closeness to Israeli interests, the PFLP also evocated an agreement reached between the Shiite movement and Israel thanks to French mediation. [52] For the PFLP Palestinian the "armed revolution" was the main element that gave to the Lebanese conflict a "nationalist dimension" and therefore a major obstacle to the "reproduction of sadatism" in the Lebanese arena. Consequently, Amal's tentative to liquidate it had to be put in the framework of regional efforts by "defeatist" forces to revive

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[50] As'ad AbuKhalil, *Syria and the Shiites: Al-Assad's Policy in Lebanon,* Third World Quarterly, Vol. 12 No. 2 (April 1990)

[51] *Palestine Chronology, March-May 1985,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 14 No. 4 (Summer 1985)

[52] *Al Hadaf,* No. 772 06/03/1985

Camp David approach on every front of the Arab-Israeli conflict, namely Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine.[53]

As clashes in the camps erupted, the whole PNSF was aligned with PFLP's position and firmly denounced the "lies on Arafat's gang and his approach" used by Amal to cover the liquidation of Palestinian forces. However every faction in the PNSF were in an embarrassing position since Syria was backing Amal materially but also in terms of political coverage.[54] For this reason the Salvation Front decided to stress on the alleged Israeli support and Amal's coordination with Lebanese authorities as they always used the formula "those who support them" while speaking about the hostile conspiracy. Furthermore, during the first weeks of armed confrontation the PFLP presented an interpretation of Amal's aggression in which Syria was seen as a target of the blow, on the same level of the Lebanese National Movement. In PFLP's view, Amal sought to impose its supremacy to southern Lebanon and west Beirut and intended to became the Muslim representative of a new alliance with the Lebanese Forces, replacing the Sunni elements in a government axis with Christian factions. Such a shift in Lebanon power balance was also envisaged by the US and Israel according to the PFLP because they believed that the Shiite Amal could better serve their interests rather than the more diversified Sunni fold. In addition the Amal takeover would entail the weakening of Lebanese progressive forces, namely Jumblatt's party and lessen Syrian influence on the government.[55] This narrative according to which Amal's aggression was harmful for Syria was used even when Syrian support to the Shiite movement became evident. The PFLP criticized Assad's choices but, at the same time, it could not totally alienate Assad's government.[56]

Concerning Israel's offstage role in this new crisis, the PFLP also thought that the war of the camps was a direct consequence of Israeli withdrawal. An unsigned Al Hadaf article, affirmed that as Israeli forces retreated they found in Amal a militia capable of assuring them a "security zone" in proximity of the northern border. Actually, on one hand Israel's leadership was interested to a certain extent in setting up good relations with Amal, especially on "security matters"[57]; on the other it should be remarked that Palestinian forces were able to rearm themselves also thanks to Israel's and Christian militias' inaction towards the flow of men and weapons in direction of Palestinian camps.[58]

A first ceasefire was unilaterally announced by Amal's secretary general Nabih Berri the 31st of May when the 6th Brigade took control of Sabra Camp. Despite the PNSF accepted it clashes continued and still no medical assistance was allowed to enter Palestinian camps.[59] As the war protracted the PFLP was unable to neglect or deny Syria's "green light" to Amal aggression and

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[53] *Al Hadaf,* No. 773 06/10/1985
[54] *Cfr. Ibid.* Note 46.
[55] *Ibid.* Note 52
[56] *Cfr. Ibid.* Note 46
[57] *Coexistence with the Shiites,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 15 No. 1 (Autumn 1985)
[58] *Ibid.* Note 48
[59] *Ibid.* Note 51

relations between them deteriorated. However, this crisis did not lead to a total estrangement from Assad's regime and to a consequent rapprochement with PLO mainstream, at least on the early stage. As Georges Habash declared in an interview with Radio Monte Carlo, the PFLP "remained keen to treat what is happening now so that it will not affect our relations of alliance with Syria" and added that his Party could not "became closer to the defeatist approach that was behind all the problems the Palestinian revolution lived". Furthermore PFLP's secretary general affirmed that if Amal was accomplishing the "military slaughter" of the Palestinian revolution, Arafat already "politically slaughtered" the Palestinian national movement.[60] Afterwards, a statement issued by PFLP's Politburo at the mid of June even affirmed that the Arab reaction moved successfully thanks to the crisis within the "Arab national rank" and sided with those who called for the detachment of the Lebanese question from the overall "Arab-Zionist" conflict.[61] But in another interview given to the BBC, and reported by PFLP's official weekly, Habash précised his view about Syria's involvement in the crisis: Syria was seeking a settlement for the "Lebanese affair" and both Phalanges' party and Amal's would accept a Syrian-sponsored settlement following the neutralization of Palestinian military presence. For this reason Assad was likely to let Amal attack Palestinian bases in the refugee camps. What is interesting to remark here, is that this view of Syria's intentions in Lebanon is quite close to the understanding of Israel's role that the Popular Front expressed in the first days of fighting.[62]

Actually bitter disappointment towards Syria's policy emerged only in PFLP's separate statements and communiqués while in PNSF's numerous interventions the stress is much more on Amal connection to Israeli interests than to that of Syria. For instance in a PNSF's reminder to the "national liberation movement" and to the socialist countries, the Salvation Front group asked international solidarity for the achievement of a stable ceasefire and the implementation of a four-parties dialogue concerning Palestinian forces, Lebanese National Democratic Front, Amal and Syria. Concerns were expressed much more about the exacerbation of tensions between the Palestinians and Syria and speculations about alleged Syria's hegemony tactics in Lebanon were avoided.[63]

Despite the PFLP claimed that the war of the camps did not harm Palestinian factions' relations with Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), during the first days of the aggression against Beirut camps the latter assumed a low-profile position and preferred neutrality to a direct involvement in the crisis. In fact, the Druze leader too was interested in a settlement of the Lebanese situation and in the participation of a government of national unity once the Maronite hegemony project failed the past year: the "Syrian option" was seen by most of Lebanese parties as the only viable one and the Muslim-Druze front was disposed to "sacrifice" their former

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[60] *Ḥabaš fī muqābala maʻa ʻiḏaʻa monte carlo/ Habash in an interview with Radio Monte Carlo* in *Al Hadaf,* No. 773 06/10/1985

[61] *Bayān ṣadir ʻan al-maktab as-siyāsi li-l-ğabha aš-šaʻbiyya li-taḥrīr filasṭīn/ Statement issued from PFLP's Political Bureau,* in *Al Hadaf* No. 774 06/18/1985

[62] *Ibid.* Note 53

[63] *Muḏakkara ğabha al-ʻinqāḏ/Reminder of the Salvation Front,* in *Al Hadaf,* No. 773 06/10/1985

Palestinian ally in order to reach an arrangement. The PFLP used to affirm that its Lebanese allies supported them through diplomatic means and with the contribution of "unknown soldiers" that sided with its ranks during the clashes.[64] However, the PSP avoided to complete align with Amal in order not to alienate a still potential partner in a conflict where alliances used to shift suddenly.[65] Moreover, the effective resistance that Palestinian fighters opposed to Amal's assault highlighted the inability of the Shiite movement to "secure" its would-be controlled area and prolonged the clashes for a far longer period that what Nabih Berri's faction, as well as Syria and the PSP, expected. This lead to rising tensions between Jumblatt and Amal and as a consequence the PSP let Palestinian fighters shell Amal's forces in order to allow some military and medical supplies reach the besieged camps.[66]

As Amal proved unable to crash the Palestinian resistance, it turned the armed confrontation into a war of attrition adopting, an ambiguous stand vis-à-vis all the attempts made by several mediator to reach an agreement for a ceasefire: while a tentative made by the Lebanese Democratic National Front to find an entente faced another failure, the PFLP labeled Amal and Lebanese armed forces' strategy as a "gradual erosion" of the besieged camps.[67] However after a month of bloodshed, especially among the Palestinian civilian population, Syria's "pacification strategy" was risking the failure also because clashes between Druze and Shiite militias where spreading in West Beirut. Therefore, the Assad government decided to intervene and prompt a ceasefire agreement which was signed by all parties involved in Damascus, on the 17th of June 1985. The PFLP and the whole PNSF were satisfied as the articles of the accords sealed to a certain extent the success of the resistance. Beside the lift of the siege to Beirut camps the Palestinians, and in particular the PNSF factions, apparently won some political and military benefits. First of all Palestinian fighters were allowed to carry light weapons for self-defense while heavy armaments were conditioned to the general abandonment of this kind of weapons by all the Lebanese factions. De facto this condition ensured future use of these arms by every militia as no party was disposed to surrender them. In addition, Lebanese army's brigades involved in the conflict should withdraw and "fulfill the tasks they were supposed to before the disruption of the clashes" while the security of the camps passed under the responsibility of the Lebanese gendarmerie, a weak security organ which granted wide Palestinian rule over camps. Furthermore, Syria, the Amal movement and the Lebanese National Democratic Front recognized the PNSF as the only Palestinian political leadership in Lebanon, until it would restore the "national course" of the PLO.[68] Such a recognition came despite also DFLP and Fatah combatants resisted to the siege of the camp alongside PNSF fighters. Probably this formulation was prompted by the Syrian government which was trying since the battle of Tripoli in 1983 to delegitimize Fatah and PLO

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[64] *Ibid.* Note 46

[65] *Cfr.* Rashid I. Khalidi, *Lebanon in the Context of Regional Politics: Palestinian and Syrian Involvement in the Lebanese Crisis,* Third World Quarterly, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Jul., 1985)

[66] Joe Stork, *The War of the Camps, the War of Hostages,* MERIP Reports, No. 133 (June 1985)

[67] *Al Hadaf* No. 774 06/18/1985

[68] Text of the "Damascus Agreement" in *Al Hadaf,* No. 775 07/01/1985

mainstream as representative of the Palestinian people. The PFLP welcomed this article of the agreement since it formally recognize its role in rehabilitating the PLO anti-imperialist course but disappointment was expressed also by the Democratic Front which did not adhere to the PNSF. As DFLP's spokesperson Jamil Hilal declared in the wake of the signing of the ceasefire: "the agreement was made with the PNSF, one Palestinian party as opposed to the Palestinians as a whole". Actually the DFLP feared that this contradiction could be exploited as a justification for breaking the ceasefire and that previous agreements signed by the PLO could be considered annulled.[69] At this regard, the PFLP probably was aware of possible misinterpretation of the accord and wanted to clarify that the Damascus agreement did not represent an alternative to the 1969 Cairo agreement between the PLO and Lebanese authorities which legalized Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon. In fact, the PFLP advocated that the accord signed under Syrian tutelage concerned just the PNSF and not the whole PLO and did not see the participation of the Lebanese government. Presumably, the Popular Front intended to reply with this argument to those, as the DFLP, who were highly critical of the accord formulation.[70]

Although the ceasefire represented a relief for the inhabitants of the camps, it did not assured a durable situation in this part of Beirut. Actually Nabih Berri did not renounced to gain full control of the south and was determined to resort to every means: kidnappings included as many radical groups were doing at that time.[71] Moreover, Syria did nothing to deescalate the conflicts and instead actively contributed to fuel it by bolstering Amal's arsenal with several tanks.[72]

The ostensible end of the war of the camps allowed the PFLP to turn back its attention to internal Palestinian problems as Arafat's path toward the implementation of the so-called "Jordan option" registered some "qualitative progresses". Actually, at the mid of July the American administration received a list of names of Palestinian personalities likely to take to the joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation entrusted to hold talks with Washington. This step represented for the PFLP another batch of "free concessions" made by the "deviationist leadership" to the US which still refused to recognize the representative status of the PLO. An evidence of this was embodied by the names of possible participants to the delegation: these were people traditionally close to the Jordanian regime who previously criticized and tried to lessen PLO's role of representative of the Palestinian people such as Farij or al-Shuwa. The talks with Washington were a preemptive step to direct Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian negotiations. In such a context, another danger was represented by the initiative of Arab reactionary regimes that were working behind door to convene an Arab summit and endorse the negotiation process. At this regard, Jordan intended to propose an emendation of the Charter of the Arab League in order to allow resolutions to be approved by majority and not by consensus, in a move that paralleled Arafat

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[69] *Ibid.* Note 46
[70] *Al Hadaf,* No. 775 07/01/1985
[71] *Ibid.* Note 66
[72] *Ibid.* Note 48

shift to majority policy inside the PLO. In light of these developments PFLP's priority was to "call up" all "nationalist forces and regimes" in order to counter the "Arabization of Camp David".[73]

The Arab summit was scheduled for the 7th of August in Casablanca and before the opening of its works the PNSF decided to send a remainder to "Arab kings and presidents" to express its factions' concern over the consequence of such meeting. For the Salvation Front this "emergency summit", as it was labeled by the countries that convened, was a mere execution of a Reagan's recommendation that he expressed to a delegation of the Arab League in October 1982: in this occasion he asked for a strong Arab mandate to King Hussein to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians with Israel as this was "in PLO's interests as well". In this framework the summit came as the next step of a process started after the war in Lebanon that never benefitted of Palestinian national legitimacy and was transforming the "international Palestinian question" into a Jordan's domestic affair. Concluding the remainder, PNSF's leadership affirmed that it would "hold all the supporters and participants of the summit, responsible for its dangerous consequences", since the Palestinian question was "the central question of the Arab community and nobody had the right to dissipate it."[74] Finally the summit took place to examine several issues among which that of Jordan-PLO joint initiative. However, it did not see the participation of seven Arab countries and those who participated sent second-level delegates so that the meeting did not assumed the appropriate dimension to give a full credible endorsement to Arafat-Hussein entente. The PFLP defined the meeting as a "partial summit paving the way to the complete one".[75] Actually the final communiqué issued from the summit affirmed its support for a peace conference in the framework of UN resolutions concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict but did not overtly endorsed the Amman agreements. Nevertheless, the PFLP believed that the summit implicitly accepted the agreements but avoided to do it formally since "somebody among America's Arabs" didn't want to enter in a direct confrontation with Syria. Habash further pointed out that if the US considered the resolutions of the summit as sufficient concession, then negotiations would start.[76]

Fortunately for the PFLP, the US seemed to be not completely satisfied with the PLO-Jordanian initiative as the American envoy Richard Murphy concluded his tour in the Middle East without achieving concrete results. No green lights were given to the dialogue with the Palestinian-Jordanian delegation aimed at paving the way to direct talks with Israel.[77]

However the situation for the Party was not improving either, because the implementation of the Damascus agreement languished after three month from its signing and Amal continued to violate it: it kept Palestinian prisoners in its jails and attacked Palestinian camps, always in coordination with the Lebanese army. The second war of the camps erupted in September 1985. According to what the PFLP reported, Amal evocated again the will to oust Arafat's loyalist

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[73] *Al Hadaf,* No. 778 07/22/1985
[74] *Qiyāda ğabha al-'inqāḏ tuwağğih muḏakkara li-l-mulūk wa ar-ru'ūsā' al-'arab/PNSF's Leadership Addresses a Remainder to Arab Kings and Presidents,* in *Al Hadaf,* No. 780 08/05/1085
[75] *Al Hadaf,* No. 781 08/12/1985
[76] *Al Hadaf,* No. 782 08/19/1985
[77] *Ibid.*

presence from Lebanon, as they represented a threat to the Syrian-backed process of stabilization in Lebanon. Amal's leader Berri even stated, according to the Popular Front, that Palestinian blood was the price for the downfall of the Amman Hussein-Arafat agreement. The Party responded to this claims that the military liquidation of Beirut Palestinian camps, could only benefit the "defeatist current" inside the PLO as they were already leaned toward a negotiated solution under American tutelage. In such a framework, the elimination of the "Palestinian rifle" in Lebanon entailed the elimination of an obstacle to the implementation of the solution envisaged by PLO chairmen. Furthermore, the Popular Front added that despite every Palestinian factions was represented in Beirut camps, they all espoused PNSF's approach. As a consequence Amal's second aggression directly harmed Palestinian nationalist front inside the PLO. In its analysis of the second round of clashes with the Shiite movement, the PFLP emphasized the fact that, as it was the case during the first round, they came together with new attempts to settle the conflict between the Lebanese militias. The project to divide the "confessional cake" among Lebanese main factions was paralleled by the intention to liquidate the Palestinian armed presence, a disturbing factor for those who founded their power on sectarian basis.[78] Actually, after the failure of the American-brokered agreement between Lebanon and Israel to which Syria extensively contributed, the Assad government wanted to catch the chance and impose a solution in Lebanon under its tutelage[79]. Since September 1985 contacts between Amal, the PSP and the Lebanese Forces were held by means of Syrian mediation and eventually resulted in the signing of a tripartite agreement in Damascus in October. Nevertheless, also this tentative of settlement was doomed to fail because a great part of the Christian rank was opposed to the agreements and rejected it by armed force.[80] In the light of these developments, the PFLP correctly argued that the new wave of attacks against Palestinian implantation was related to Amal's intention of securing its dominance on its part of Lebanese territory. However, it still avoided to denounce Syria's responsibilities and the involvement of one of its former closest ally as the PSP in Amal's renewed aggression.

The inability of foreign powers to engineer a suitable settlement of the Lebanese civil war assured the protraction of violence for the entire decade, and the war of the camps continued as an attrition war for the following two years.

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[78] *Al Hadaf,* No. 785 09/16/1985
[79]*Cfr.* Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria. Revolution From Above,* London and New York, Routledge, 2001
[80] Farid El Khazen, *Ending Conflict in Wartime Lebanon: Reform Sovereignty and Power, 1976-1988,* Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 40 No. 1 (January 2004)

3.4 The PFLP and the fall of the Amman accords

Starting from September 1985, the PLO-Jordanian coordination was facing a hard impasse as. Basically, the dialogue with the US administration, which was supposed to anticipate direct negotiation with Israel, was not progressing because of Arafat's hesitation in accepting new American conditions, namely the full acceptance of UN resolutions 242 and 338. On the one hand King Hussein pressured Arafat, on behalf of the Americans, to make PLO chairman accept US conditions, on the other the Palestinian leader was not keen on making further concessions. Several were the reasons advanced to explain this hesitation: the increasing US-Israeli military coordination, Israeli "iron fist" policy in the occupied territories, Syrian pressures, the fear of throwing away the "last card" in the hands of the PLO, in particular the official recognition of Israel, the terrorist attack carried on by some minor Palestinian group in the international arena and the following Israeli retaliation were some of the factors that seemed to provoke the crisis with Jordan.[81]

Obviously the PFLP looked at this developments with great interest as it saw the possibility to achieve its main goal on the Palestinian arena and to restore a minimum of influence inside the PLO. The Party defined the state of impasse as a "favorable occasion for nationalist forces" and urged all forces committed to the fall of Hussein-Arafat accords to take advantage of this situation, exploiting the protests in response to the occupation in the West Bank and Gaza and the obstacle to the progress of the "defeatist dynamics" represented by "American intransigence". While Arafat was seeking to bolster the Jordan option looking for Egypt's support, the PFLP intended to make the necessary efforts to hold a "Palestinian Popular Conference" with the participation of all the representatives of Palestinian institutions and parties in order to reestablish the nationalist character of the PLO.[82]

The events that involved the region helped the Popular Front in its narrative: the first of October Israel's air forces bombed the PLO headquarters in Tunis killing 63 people in response to an attack to Israeli civilians in Cyprus claimed by a small Palestinian factions. Afterwards, US air forces hijacked the Egyptian plane that was carrying the Palestinian hijackers of the Italian ship *Achille Lauro* and some PLO representatives. PFLP's stand in front of this events, was stated by the secretary general in an interview with a North Yemenite newspaper: for Habash the raid was carried on in coordination with the US and therefore it was a clear message to Arafat. The PLO had to recognize UN resolution 242 and 338 before starting any negotiations otherwise it would be compelled by the use of military force.[83] After the attack Jordan and Egypt tried to deescalate the confrontation calling to avoid any retaliatory blow capable of "threatening peace". For the PFLP the situation was clear and Arafat was heading toward a cul-de-sac: even if the attack

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[81] *Cfr.* Mark A. Bruzonsky *The Second Defeat of Palestine*, Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Spring, 1986) *Op. Cit.* Note 24, 26, 45.
[82] *Al Hadaf,* No. 786 09/23/1985
[83] *Al Hadaf,* No. 792 11/04/1985

demonstrated that Israel was likely to negotiate only after a complete surrender to its conditions, the PLO chairperson went too far in its "deviationist" strategy and could not relinquish the path he went through since the evacuation from Beirut in 1982.[84] As an evidence, the PFLP highlighted the declaration made by Arafat in Cairo the 7th of November 1985. The statement was issued after the terrorist operations by Palestinians commandos that hit also Western objectives. What became known as the "Cairo declaration" aimed at reaffirming PLO's abandonment of armed operations outside Palestine and its "condemnation of all acts of terrorism".[85] For the PFLP this declaration was a:

> "new qualitative step in the framework a continued policy of concession vis-à-vis the American-Zionist enemy and reflected the extent of the willingness to comply with Washington and Tel Aviv conditions about the abandonment of armed struggle."[86]

Arafat's efforts to carry on his diplomatic initiative despite the difficulties where paralleled by PFLP's attempt to gain momentum. The Party highlighted the shared vision of the leftist opposition highlighting two political statement issued respectively by the PNSF and by the DFLP together with the Communist Party. These two statements did not really add much to the traditional stand adopted by PLO opposition toward mainstream policies: the stress given to them by the Popular Front was an attempt to revive the idea of a comprehensive opposition front as until then the PFLP managed to implement only partially[87].

In January 1986, the PLO leadership, tried to pave the way to Palestinian reconciliation. The PLO Central Council reunited in Baghdad alongside another Executive Committee meeting without the participation of the four opposition members. However, the Central Council called the formation of a committee in order to resume internal Palestinian negotiation. This call found a concrete reply, since a group of "Palestinian nationalist personalities" met in Amman the 12th and the 13th of January and decided to form the "National Palestinian Unity Committee". This Committee gave itself the mission to "evaluate the path of the revolution since its start", "discuss the organizational and constitutional principles for the restoration of PLO unity" and find an agreement on the composition of the next PNC. The PFLP was skeptical about this initiative though its upholders affirmed their adherence to the National Charter and to the role of armed struggle. Despite efforts aiming at the reunification of the Palestinian arena were appreciable, these new attempts still did not headed to the core of the crisis. First of all, the Central Council that called for the establishment of the Unity Committee still stated its support for the Amman agreement, afterwards, the Unity Committee neither took concretely distances from PLO "deviationist line". In the PFLP the intransigent line was prevailing: only the abrogation of all the steps that gave birth

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[84] *Ibid.*

[85] *Cairo Declaration on the PLO and Terrorism as read by PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat, Cairo, 7 November 1985* in *Documents and Source Material,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 15 No. 2 (Winter 1986)

[86] *Al Hadaf,* No. 795 11/25/1985

[87] *Ibid.*

and exacerbated the split in the PLO could represent a proper base for the restoration or the unity of the organization. The call of the Central Council was a deception since they issued it while "preparing for the acceptance of UN resolutions". Therefore, any genuine initiative could not neglect "to besiege the deviationist approach and to abrogate the Amman agreement and all its consequences". The PFLP while opening to the initiative of the Unity Committee called it to align with the struggle of the Palestinian nationalists against the "deviation".[88]

Meanwhile, the PLO leadership was about to experience an hard setback as the Joint-Palestinian initiative stalled in an impasse: after two weeks of negotiations, King Hussein did not manage to pressure Arafat to accept UN resolution 242 and 338, the preliminary condition imposed by the United States for starting talks with the PLO-Jordan delegation. As a results, King Hussein made the following announce on the 19th of February in conclusion to a long speech he delivered about the Middle East peace process:

> "Brothers and sisters, after two long attempts, I and the government of the Hashemite
> Kingdom of Jordan hereby announce that we are unable to continue to coordinate
> politically with the PLO leadership until such time as their word becomes their bond,
> characterized by commitment, credibility, and constancy"[89]

It was the end of the 11 February 1985 Hussein-Arafat agreements, a year after they were signed. Jordan's monarch held the PLO responsible for this critical situation: according to Hussein's speech, Arafat retreated at the last moment from what he agreed on, namely the recognition of UN resolutions on Palestine. The PLO leadership was astonished by the King's moves and replied the 7th of March with a statement by the Executive Committee: the PLO, from its part, held the USA as the first responsible for the impasse since the American administration did not intend to recognize to the PLO the right to participate to the talks as legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and, by doing so, to deny the right of the Palestinians to self-determination. Furthermore the statement expressed PLO's "regret" toward the King's speech which blamed only the PLO and did not address any critics to US ambiguous stand.[90]

For the PFLP, Hussein's breakdown of joint action with the PLO was a half victory: actually the Amman agreements were finally abrogated but not due to Palestinian initiative and therefore this shift did not marked the abandonment by the PLO leadership of its commitment to American plans of settlement. In PFLP's view Hussein decided to put an end to his political coordination with Arafat in order to "keep the reins of the initiative from a more powerful position", depicting

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[88] *Al Hadaf,* No. 800 01/13/1986
Palestine Chronology 16 November 1985-15 February 1986 in Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Spring, 1986)
[89] *King's Hussein Address on Middle East Peace, Amman, 19 February 1986,* in *Documents and Source Material,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 15 No. 4 (Summer 1986)
[90]*PLO Executive Committee Statement, Tunis, 7 March 1986*, in *Documents and Source Material,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 15 No. 4 (Summer 1986)
The Breakdown of Palestinian-Jordanian Coordination, interview to Salah Khalaf, Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 15 No. 4 (Summer 1986)

himself as a credible partner who made any possible effort to allow negotiations go further. Moreover such stop did not represent the end of Jordanian aspirations on the West Banks. The King in fact, invested political and economical resources during the last years to gain a certain consensus in Palestinian lands. For the PFLP, the King's speech represented a "step of escalation" in the attack that aimed at the "cancellation of the PLO and of the Palestinian cause" by depicting the organization as an unreliable party for negotiations. The new phase that opened after the Hussein's break was still full of dangers as Jordan's goal, in line with Peres' proposal for negotiations, was to build a new front in the occupied territories, alternative to the PLO.[91]

In this context, the PFLP kept its attention on the goal it pursued since the signing of the Amman agreement, namely the establishment of a large front capable of countering the monopoly of Fatah inside the Palestinian arena. Even in front of the fall of PLO-Jordan entente, the Party based its policies on coalition patterns that substantially asked for the restoration of the principle of consensus, as it was before 1982: the "Popular Conference" had to see the participation of all Palestinian representative institutions in what resembled to an alternative PNC, convened by those who did not consider Arafat and his fellows the "common denominator" capable of unifying the PLO. However the opposition was still divided along those lines that produced the failure of previous attempt and again the PFLP had to play the mediator between the National Alliance constituency and more moderate "nationalists". The former saw the Popular Conference as an expansion of the PNSF and intended to establish a new organization representative of all the Palestinians. In addition it excluded the dialogue with Fatah and with the members of its Central Committee as they were totally looked down upon. On the other hand, the moderates within the opposition did not see the "nationalists alignment" as a final goal, but as a "card to pressure Fatah" and did not exclude a priori the dialogue with PLO leadership. Given the last developments of regional politics they were also disposed to discuss about the Amman agreement since the priority was the reunification of forces. The Popular Front claimed to have a third approach, supposedly the one that gained the "largest consensus among Palestinian masses" and the more viable one. The Party affirmed that as none of the opposition forces was able to attract the majority of the Palestinian masses, the different factions had to focus on the common ground, namely the removal of the rightist leadership committed to American solutions, even if differences of view and the principle of consensus was almost sacred. The political base for the Popular Front was launched by Habash in a speech he delivered during the celebration for the Day of the Palestinian martyr, the 7th of March: first, the abrogation of 11 February agreements was the fundamental condition for "opening the gates in front of the way toward unity"; secondly, a critical review of the path of the revolution in order to survey and judge the experiences of the PLO. Finally, the consolidation of the nationalist political program according to the resolutions of the legitimate rounds of the PNC, "the program of the right of return, of self-determination and of

[91] *Al Hadaf,* No. 806 02/24/1986

Yehuda Lucaks, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. A Documentary Record 1967-1992,* Cambridge, The University of Cambridge Press, 1992

the independent state". Foreign powers aligned on nationalist position, both regional and international, were favorable to the Conference, according to the Party and the several meetings between opposition's faction went on the right way:[92] PFLP's optimism was probably fostered by the return of the Soviet Union as an actor in Palestinian and Arab politics[93]. Actually, the breakdown of Jordanian-Palestinian coordination was considered by many observers, more or less critical of American policies, as a dangerous setback also for US administration: after the latest developments, the PLO could undergo a shift toward a more radical stand with a consequent rapprochement with the USSR. This, was due to American intransigence and lack of foresight according to some, or to PLO's stubbornness for some others.[94]

However, efforts aiming at Palestinian reconciliation continued without sensible results. The aforementioned National Unity Committee shifted toward a closer stand to the PFLP and affirmed that many member of Fatah were disposed to support the reconciliation. Nevertheless, the PFLP could not fully trust these "positive attitudes". In fact at the same time, Arafat was still attached to his relation with Egypt as he continued to reach Cairo to hold further talks with president Mubarak: this was a sign of PLO chairman's will to continue his alliance with the "Camp David regime" and a major obstacle to the restoration of Palestinian unity. Meanwhile, Algeria made and eventually postponed a call to host a meeting of Palestinian factions that had injected further optimism in the Popular Front. In June 1986, several month after Hussein's speech, the PLO did not find a way out of its crisis yet and the PFLP did not show any sign of shift from its rejectionist position.[95]

The Palestinian opposition was weakened also by the ongoing political dispute between the PFLP and the DFLP that occasionally exacerbated since the end of the Joint Command in 1984. In the mid of 1986 the dispute continued as the two parties accused each other for their inconsistent declarations concerning the dialogue for reconciliation. The Democratic Front was favorable to immediately start talks with Fatah in order to reach an agreement and restore the unity of the PLO. In a political report issued in April, it accused the PFLP of maintaining a "hesitant, petit-bourgeois and selfish position" as it did not agree on opening the dialogue at the current conditions. The Popular Front replied with a long article on *Al Hadaf* showing to which extent DFLP's political discourse was affected by inconsistence since 1984. The central point was that while some DFLP's high cadres affirmed that the Amman agreements took the PLO out of its "nationalist line" and that their abrogation was a fundamental condition to start negotiating with Fatah Central Committee, others were disposed to renounce to such conditions. Beyond its contents, disputes such these showed the inability of leftist parties to find the "common denominator" that the Palestinian national movement needed and that all factions opposed to

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[92] *Al Hadaf,* No. 813 03/14/1986
[93] *Cfr.* Galia Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East: From World War II to Gorbachev,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990
[94] Robert G. Neumann and Ghassan Bishara, *Robert G. Neumann: A Failure to Negotiate*, Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Spring 1986) and *Op. Cit.* Note 80
[95] *Al Hadaf,* No. 819 06/02/1986

Arafat repeated like a mantra since the Fatah rebellion. The Democratic and Popular Fronts as well as Syrian-controlled National Alliance maintained that Arafat lost all its capability of representing the aspiration of the Palestinian people. However, at the same time, those factions did not manage to come out from the "individualistic and narrow views" which provoked the fragmentation of the opposition and that every one of them denounced as petit-bourgeois.[96]

The fragmentation of the whole Palestinian movement continued while Jordan's activity was feverish in what the PFLP considered an unprecedented "plot" to eliminate PLO's political weight coordinated with Israel and the US administration. For the Popular Front the situation couldn't be clearer in light of new Hussein's steps: after he dropped his relations with Fatah, the Jordanian monarch decided to improve his ties with Israel and increased Jordan's collaboration with it over the administration of the West Bank. Moreover, he announced the launch of a five-year development program for these territories and coordinated with Israel in appointing some mayors of important West Bank cities, such as Nablus and Ramallah. For the PFLP, the Jordanian policy was meant to create a political base, loyal to his authority in order to disavow PLO diplomatic weight. The US and Israel that were adamant in their refusal to negotiate with the Liberation Organization couldn't but be favorable to Hussein's initiative and supported his efforts.[97] Furthermore, in July the King showed the extent of his attack against Arafat as he ordered to shut down all Fatah's offices in Amman and expelled several high-rank Fatah's officials. In this framework, the PFLP was astonished by Arafat's inaction and strongly denounced his "continued procrastination" in opening the dialogue with Palestinian nationalist factions and in definitely detaching the PLO from the Amman agreement. In PFLP's view this attitude was even more counterproductive as Palestinian reconciliation found important international support, notably in Algeria and the Soviet Union. But Fatah did not seem willing to abandon the American option and according to the PFLP, Arafat was delaying the convenience of Fatah Central Committee, supposed to dictate the political of the movement, since he did not intend to actively reject Jordan's policies.[98]

But at the regional level things seemed to go even worse. The King of Morocco Hassan II invited Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to visit the country in July: it was the first time that an Arab chief of state issued such invitation to an Israeli leader and a step that strongly echoed Sadat's policy. The PFLP consequently issued a political report in which it expressed all its concern and indignation for this decision. For the Party, it was another concrete evidence that the second stage of Camp David was on its way of implementation. The real danger was not the establishment of good relations between Morocco and Israel but rather that the Moroccan king intended to

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[96] *Al Hadaf,* No. 820 06/09/1986
[97] Kevin Kelly, *Jordan's Plan for the West Bank,* MERIP Middle East Report, No. 144 (Jan-Feb. 1987)
Cfr. Miriam Joyce, *Anglo-American Support for Jordan: The Career of King Hussein,* New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008
Nigel Ashton, *King Hussein of Jordan. A Political Life,* Yale, Yale University Press, 2008
[98] *Al Hadaf,* No 824 07/14/1986; No. 825 07/21/1986

become the mediator in the core operation of "Camp David two", namely negotiations between Jordan and Israel leading to a final settlement in detriment of the PLO.[99]

Throughout the rest of 1986, the Palestinian political arena did not experience substantial shift despite contacts among every faction continued to find a common political base to hope for a reconciliatory PNC. The DFLP and the Communist Party started to dialogue with Fatah Central Committee while the Popular Front was not ready yet to join the talks. In fact, the PFLP continued to denounce "Fatah's double stand" about some fundamental issue to which reunification was conditioned: for instance, PLO's acceptance of UN resolution 242. On the one hand Fatah Central Committee declared its rejection of the resolution while on the other, Arafat publicly affirmed that he was disposed to accept it, as a base to resume his dialogue and coordination with Jordan and Egypt.[100]

In January 1987 the PLO leadership and its opposition were still deeply divided over the most sensible issues. The Popular Front continued to criticize Fatah, notably Arafat's individualistic leadership, as he was still trying to exploit the Egyptian mediation to travel again trough the path toward the American solution and the reestablishment of his relations with Jordan.[101] Meanwhile, the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was undergoing a growing pressure by Israeli occupation forces who increasingly resorted to various "extrajudicial administrative measures against Palestinians" such as administrative detention, restriction orders and deportation in the framework of the "Iron Fist" policy launched by Israeli Defense Minister Rabin in 1985.[102]

On the other hand, Palestinians in Lebanon were still facing the aggression of the Amal movement against their camps as no ceasefire seemed to find serious implementation and the Damascus agreement was de facto fallen apart. In 1987 this confrontation exacerbated and involved also some parts of southern Lebanon: the war of the camps became a "generalized war" which broadened also to Druze militias and inflicted to the population of the areas affected by the conflict unprecedented sufferings. Such chaotic situation led the Syrian army to enter west-Beirut in March to end the uncontrolled armed clashes to which its government contributed predominantly.[103]

The end of the third bloodiest part of the war of the camps allowed the PFLP, and the whole national movement, to turn its attention to the internal Palestinian problems. Frequent contacts were held between the DFLP and Fatah in Prague and rumors about an imminent PNC started to surface on local media. However, the PFLP was firm in its intention of not starting a comprehensive dialogue with Fatah, as long as Arafat's movement did not accept to formally abrogate the Amman agreement. Arafat's stubbornness, according to the PFLP, was even more

[99] *Al Hadaf,* No. 826 07/28/1986
[100] *Al Hadaf,* No. 832 09/10/1986, No. 836 10/13/1986, No. 845 12/22/1986
[101] *Al Hadaf, No. 848 01/12/1987*
[102] Penny Johnson, *The Routine of Repression,* MERIP Middle East Report, No. 105 (Jan.-Feb. 1988)
[103] Georges Corm, *Le Proche-Orient Eclaté. 1956-2010,* Paris, Gallimard, 2010
  - *Le Liban Contemporain. Histoire et Société.* Paris, La Découverte, 2012

difficult to understand, as King Hussein was deeply involved in his talks with Israel and notably with Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. Actually, Hussein and Peres met secretly in London the 11th of April and reached an accord on the organization of an international conference under US patronage. The PFLP affirmed that while these developments represented an increasing threat upon the PLO since no project of conference contemplated PLO participation, Arafat hesitated in rejecting the Amman agreements.[104] However, the Israeli-Jordanian accord had no concrete following as it was subjected to Israel's cabinet approval in which the Likud opposed the document of the accord submitted by FM Peres.[105]

The dismissal of Jordanian-Israeli talks on the international conference as well as the end of the Amman agreement policy by King Hussein represented a setback for US action in the region. On the contrary they set the suitable conditions for a renewed Soviet initiative in the Middle East under Gorbachev's new political course. Gorbachev aimed at reviving Soviet diplomatic role in the whole area after a long period in which the United States acquired a predominant weight while the Soviets had no significant influence on key issues as for instance, the organization of an international peace conference. USSR's efforts to improve its relations with Egypt, Jordan and even Israel should be observed through this pattern and also its policy toward the PLO was no exception.[106] Therefore, Soviet mediation between PLO leadership and the rejectionist opposition revealed fundamental before, but especially during the 18th PNC, to permit the reunification of the Palestinian National Movement. The PFLP's did not lack to stress on the importance of Soviet activity to bolster the reconciliation of the PLO, as well as Algerian and Libyan contribution to the end of Palestinian fragmentation.

Concerning inter-Palestinian negotiations, a great number of contacts and meetings were held in different Arab cities, from Tripoli (Libya) and Algiers to Tunis and Tripoli (Lebanon). Relations between the leftist opposition and Fatah sensibly improved as the PFLP stopped to use the traditional definitions of "defeatist" and "deviationist" to label the main Palestinian party.[107] However, the problem of the abrogation of the Amman agreement was still on the table as Fatah hesitated on the issue. For Arafat, the main problem on the relinquishment of the American backed option, was the consequent deterioration of his relation with Mubarak's Egypt. Allegedly, Egypt pressured Arafat since it feared a PLO alignment on more radical stands about Palestinian-Egyptian relations, following the reconciliation with anti-Camp David factions.[108] With regards to relations with Egypt the PFLP, on the eve of the final agreement that prompted the convening of

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[104] *Al Hadaf,* No. 853 02/23/1987

[105] *Cfr.* Eyal Ehrlich, *The Great International Conference Campaign,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 17 No. 1 (Autumn 1987)
Mutayyam Al O'ran, *Jordanian-Israeli Relations. The Peacebuilding Experience,* London, Routledge 2009

[106] *Cfr.* Galia Golan, *Gorbachev's Middle East Strategy,* Foreign Affairs, Vol. 66 No. 1 (Fall 1987)

[107] *Al Hadaf,* No. 856 03/16/1987

[108] *Cfr. The Eighteenth PNC: An Analysis,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 16 No. 4 (Summer 1987)

the "unification PNC", stated that the cut of all relations with the "Camp David regime" was a preliminary base to launch the National Council.[109]

Nevertheless, the two months long contacts between Fatah and "moderates" within the opposition resulted in an important political document, further known as the Tunis document. The most important faction which signed the document were Fatah, the DFLP and the Communist Party and represented a breakthrough toward the PNC as it called the convening of the Council for the 20th of April preceded by a "Comprehensive National Dialogue" scheduled for the 10th of April, both to be held in Algiers. Finally, the document entailed the abrogation of the 11th February Amman agreements on which the accord was reached during the talks held in Prague. In addition, it was stated that the PLO did not accept any "form of tutelage" on it and rejected all "separate solutions" to the Arab-Israeli conflict, such as the Reagan plan, "autonomy and functional partition" namely Jordanian-Israeli coordination in the administration of the occupied territories as well as the UN resolution 242. The document also opened to the total inclusion of the PCP in all Palestinian institutions.[110]

The Tunis document converged to a large extent with the document signed few days later by some radical formations such as Abu Nidal's Fatah-Revolutionary Council and the PFLP-GC, but also by the DFLP and the PFLP. The document paralleled the one signed in Tunis, notably on the call for the abrogation of the Amman agreement as well as concerning the issue of the international conference. If on one hand the parties gathered in Tunis considered the Arab peace plan issued during the Fez summit an "obligatory framework", the Tripoli document supported the organization of an international conference where the PLO would enjoy full and equal representation vis-à-vis others delegations and which should be based on 29 July 1984 Soviet peace proposal. Indeed this Soviet plan was very similar to the Brezhnev plan and even opened to the possibility of a confederation between Palestinian and Jordanians.[111] In sum, the two documents were very close relating to the project of settlement.

With regards to the organizational reform, the Tripoli document asked to broaden the National Council and connected institutions, to every Palestinian faction, namely Fatah-RC, Fatah-Uprising and the Communist Party. Concerning the organization of the work of the executive branches of the PLO, it echoed the Aden-Algiers agreements and demanded the implementation of the consensus principle to the decision-making process as well as asked to charge the Central Council to control the activity of the Executive Committee and possibly to "freeze" the membership of up to one third of the members.[112]

The only point of disagreement was a matter of timing, notably the schedule for the national dialogue and for the PNC. The PFLP pretended a formal rejection of the Amman agreement before

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[109] *Al Hadaf,* 857 03/23/1987

[110] *The Tunis Document, Tunis, Tunisia, 16 March 1987,* in *Documents and Source Material,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 16 No. 4 (Summer 1987)

[111] Larry C. Napper, *The Arab Autumn of 1984: A Case Study of Soviet Middle East Diplomacy,* Middle East Journal, Vol. 39 No. 4 (Autumn 1985)

[112] *Al Hadaf,* No. 858 03/30/1987

the beginning of the PNC and feared that such a short space would lead to a discussion over the abrogation during the works of the National Council. The Party was afraid of Fatah's ambiguous stand because if on one hand the Tunis document was a positive answer to opposition's traditional demands, Arafat's movement failed to define its position and continued until the very last moment to keep in contact with Mubarak.[113]

Nevertheless, the comprehensive dialogue started and a day before the beginning of the 18th PNC, the Executive Committee finally announced its cancellation of the Amman agreements with a short statement in which was pointed out that the agreement became an obstacle to the development of Arab bases of action and for the development of "brotherly relations" between Palestinian and Jordan. The causes of this failure were the differences of interpretation over some parts of the text of the agreements and the US pressure that brought Jordan to end its coordination with the PLO.[114] After more than a year of harsh opposition, the PFLP saw one its main goals realized and welcomed the results as it marked the "half-way toward the council". The pressure had to be held now on Fatah in order to push the movement to take the proper position about its relations with Egypt.[115] Actually, after the cancellation of the Amman agreement, PLO leadership's break with Mubarak was not a foregone conclusion since for its part, Egypt continued to pressure Arafat, even after the PNC opened its works.

The 25th of April 1987, after four years of split the PNC ended its 18th session restoring Palestinian unity. The resolutions reflected the political documents previously signed in Tripoli and Tunis: the Communist Party gained representation in all PLO institutions and the council reached the consensus over the project of an international conference. The PLO stated its support for a conference "within the framework of the United Nations" and with the participation of all UN Security Council permanent members alongside all the countries involved in the conflict and the PLO. The matter of relations with Egypt was the most critical point that was treated at the PNC. As a draft resolution over Egypt was presented to the council, Mubarak threatened Arafat, affirming that the text had a "strong language" toward Egypt which would lead to "complete estrangement in the relations between Egypt and the PLO".[116] After a long private meeting, Arafat, Hawatmeh and Habash found a solution and allowed the PNC to conclude positively and to reelect unanimously Arafat as PLO chairman: the Executive Committee was entrusted "with the task of defining Egyptian-Palestinian relations in accordance with successive PNC resolutions, especially those of the sixteenth session".[117] As a consequence, in the following days Mubarak ordered to close PLO's offices in Cairo as a sign of protest: Egypt criticized the reference to the 16th PNC in

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[114] *Cancellation of the Amman Agreement, Algiers, 19 April 1987*, in *Documents and Source Material,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 16 No. 4 (Summer 1987)
[115] *Al Hadaf,* No. 861 04/20/1987
[116] *The Eighteenth PNC: An Analysis,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 16 No. 4 (Summer 1987)
[117] *Resolutions of the Political Committee of the Eighteenth Session of the PNC, Algiers, 26 April 1987*, in *Documents and Source Material,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 16 No. 4 (Summer 1987)

which was stated that relations with Egypt were related to an abandonment by the latter of Camp David treaty.[118]

The PFLP was fully satisfied as it saw its positions and demands acknowledged by the resolutions of the "unification PNC". The PLO was now back to its "natural" "nationalist and progressive line" and the "doors of reactionary countries were closed". All the condition were met to focus on the reconstruction of PLO-Syrian relations and to resume the coordination between the countries of the "Steadfastness and Confrontation Front" since all nationalist regimes could count on a united PLO.[119] Moreover as the American solutions seemed to be dismissed, the Popular Front, as well as a large part of the national movement, positively looked at the return of the Soviet Union on the Middle Eastern scenario and hoped it could open new horizons for the settlement of the situation, namely it hoped in USSR's contribution to counterbalance American-Israeli advantage.[120] Everything was set to start a new period of national struggle and all the proper conditions were now on the ground. The PFLP and the USSR hoped that Arafat really became less committed to American diplomacy and shift to a political path closer to their views for the region.[121]

However the disruption of the first Intifada, subverted the conditions of the conflict and heavily contributed to the definition of the new political framework of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Beyond the "start date" of the Intifada, which is usually considered the 6th of December 1986[122], the population of the occupied territories was carrying on demonstration for several months when the famous bus accident occurred in Gaza. The difference after this event was, as Helena Cobban clearly outlined, that the Intifada "within weeks of its original eruption it became institutionalized as an organized, near-unanimous challenge to Israel's presence in the territories" and that this institutionalization allowed the uprising to escalate without breaks for at least two years.[123]

For the PLO, the overall uprising of the West Bank and Gaza represented a major crossroad comparable to the 1982 evacuation from Lebanon in terms of political consequences: after the eruption of the Intifada those factions that had no base and popular support in Palestinian lands were definitely emarginated within the national movement. This development reduced also the capacity of Arab states, above all Syria, to defy the PLO and try to impose their control on it.[124] The PFLP, alongside with Fatah, the DFLP and the Communist Party, managed to play a role in the uprising thanks to its entrenchment in the occupied territories that started to develop in the late Seventies. Members of the PFLP were in the Trade Unions and the Party, like the others, set up various kind of relief and welfare organizations to sustain the people during the struggle. Thanks

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[118] *Ibid.* Note 116

[119] *Al Hadaf,* No. 863 05/04/1987

[120] *Cfr.* Yury Polsky, *Arab views of Soviet Policy in the Era of Glasnost, 1985-1991,* Middle East Journal, Vol. 56 No. 4 (Autumn 2002)

[121] *Ibid.* Note 106

[122] James Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007

[123] Helena Cobban, *The PLO and the Intifada,* Middle East Journal, Vol. 44 No. 2 (Spring 1990)

[124] *Ibid.*

to this policies, the Popular Front found an equal representation vis-à-vis the other factions in the PLO's Unified National Command of the Uprising (UNCU), which became the official leadership of the uprising. The organ of leadership of the Unified Command was composed by four representatives, one for each organization, namely Fatah, PFLP, DFLP and PCP. All other PLO's factions, represented in the PNC were de facto excluded.

Therefore the Popular Front was ready to respond adequately to the popular uprising. The Party shifted its attention to the occupied territories highlighting single operations as well as stressing on the new political slogans that was coming out from the Intifada. *Al Hadaf* started to underline the importance of "escalating civil disobedience" and to report the development of new forms of struggle which witnessed of the "deep resources of the Palestinian people". The Party was also sensible on the matter of PLO's leading role in the Intifada: the PFLP denounced all the claims coming from "suspected sources" about a "reduced role" of the PLO in the organizations of the protests. Those claims also affirmed that the uprising had a major "spontaneous nature" and that PLO's role was limited by the important contribution that Islamist organizations were giving to the uprising. For the PFLP, UNCU's statements and slogans testified its allegiance to the Liberation Organization. If on one hand during the first weeks of the Intifada the spontaneous aspect of the protests prevailed, on the other its continuation let the "institutionalized" aspect emerge: although the popular initiative was not to be underestimated, PLO's infrastructures and networks constituted the fundamental background to the Intifada.[125]

Concerning the organizational aspect of the uprising, it is interesting to remark PFLP's attitude toward the main tool that allowed UNCU's instructions and orders to easily reach the population: the leaflets, diffused also via radio. These "calls" of the Unified Command imposed as the most important way to manage the Intifada since its second issue in January 1988. However, it acquired its definitive outlook starting from its sixth issue, when allegiance to the PLO opened the text.[126] As the PFLP wanted to affirm PLO's authority on the uprising it started to regularly publish the leaflets with the issue of call number seven on *Al Hadaf* 's pages in order to contribute to the organizational efforts.[127]

The situation that the PLO lived before and after the beginning of the Intifada looked similar to the period that preceded the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon: before the invasion the PLO was engaged in the safeguard of its civilian institutions and its military presence in Lebanon, in 1986 and also in 1987, the Liberation Organization spent the greatest part of its efforts in order to survive politically to Jordan's renewed aspiration on the West Bank and Israel's "iron fist". At the end of 1987, as in 1982, this unforeseen event shocked regional politics and imposed a brand new political scenario. Consequently the PLO had to formulate a new strategy and a new political discourse first in the attempt of benefitting from the uprising and then trying to respond to the new regional balance.

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[125] *Al Hadaf,* No. 897 01/24/1988
[126] *Ibid.* Note 123
[127] *Al Hadaf,* No. 900 02/21/1988

Conclusion

Throughout its history the PFLP always tried to retain a distinctive character vis-à-vis other factions and in particular the Democratic Front. Since the earlier period, when the Party adopted a Maoist profile up to its alignment with anti-Arafat factions in the wake of 1983 Fatah in-clashes, the Popular Front bet on the approach perceived as the most radical. Allegedly, the influence of the different Arab patrons contributed to PFLP's strategy and political collocation. Iraq first and afterwards Syria had an outstanding weight in Party's definition of its foreign and internal policies. The latter succeeded to a larger extent to limit PFLP's independence and in some cases drove the Party to adopt given stands inconsistent with its own goals: despite the PFLP's correctly understood Arafat's policy-pattern after 1983 aiming at acquiring a more independent authority within the PLO, the choice of causing the impasse of the Aden-Algiers agreements and the boycott of scheduled rounds of talks mainly served Syria's goal to limit and possibly crack down Arafat's power and to control the PLO. On the other hand, this position largely contributed to the deepening of PLO's split and finally revealed harmful for PFLP's declared goal of forming a stronger leftist block first and a "united nationalist front". Beside these factors, internal ones also contributed to this "pursuit of distinctiveness". Habash's rivalries and competitions with other Palestinian leaders, above all Arafat and Hawatmeh could be considered as major elements that shaped PFLP's Palestinian policy. Although the PFLP and the DFLP made several attempts to coordinate their actions, especially after 1982 they never really succeeded in forming an effective joint command: defining the impact of Habash-Hawatmeh rivalry on the failed efforts of coordination between the two major Palestinian leftist parties would be an interesting starting point for an in-depth analysis of principal decision-making factors of the PFLP. A similar approach could be useful to analyze PFLP-Fatah relations as well. Since the launch of these two organizations the PFLP found itself always behind Fatah's initiative. Fatah was the first armed Palestinian faction to appear and to which the whole national movement adapted: in a sense, the establishment of the PFLP was MAN's answer to Fatah's "palestinianism"[1]. Without evaluating his results, it could be said that Arafat distinguished himself for his outstanding political dynamism which imposed to the entire PLO the new courses of his policies, both when chairman's power was still limited by other factions as well as when it started to completely prevail since 1984.

PFLP's ruling class was persuaded that their party was provided with a better theoretical background and that it had a deeper global vision of long-term strategy, therefore they felt uncomfortable vis-à-vis Fatah's primacy. Such a factor drove the PFLP to try to defy Fatah's primate since 1970. The competition with Fatah was another element that led the Party to align its position with Syria after 1983. If on the one hand, the PLO has been labeled an "organization of re-

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[1] See chapter one.

action"[2] due to its passive stand towards external pressures, on the other it could be said that the PFLP in several cases has shaped its policies as a reaction to Fatah's.

An example of PFLP's necessity to reformulate its positions in order to respond to regional changes and Fatah's initiative is the development of its narrative over the idea of a Palestinian state and its stand on the different projects of settlement that followed one another since late Seventies. When the Party had still the real military and political capacity to challenge Fatah's supremacy in the PLO, it was genuinely committed to the creation of a socialist state all over the Arab Levant. The rejection of every "partial solution", such as the Fatah's call for the establishment of a democratic state on historic Palestine stemmed from this pan-Arab view. This slogan continued to be waged also after the expulsion from Jordan despite it represented then only a rallying cry: after "Black September" PFLP's military potential was seriously compromised and the loss of its Jordanian bases definitely eliminated every possibility to topple the Jordanian regime through armed struggle. The Popular Front continued to declare its commitment to the idea of a pan-Arab state, however, this stand was mainly adopted to counter Fatah's increasing interest for a negotiated settlement and Arafat's path towards the so called "two-state solution". The first major shift in PFLP's stand occurred after 1982 as the evacuation from Beirut put an end to Palestinian capability to confront Israel militarily. The once "regionalist" call for a democratic state became a "nationalist" slogan when Arafat's diplomatic strategy headed towards the alignment with Arab plans of settlement. During the period between 1983 and 1986 PLO's factions experienced unprecedented shifts in their foreign policy. When the PLO leadership made its final choice for the "Jordan option" and boosted Palestinian relations with Cairo and Amman, the PFLP started to increasingly stress on the traditional demands of Palestinian nationalism: namely the right of return, self-determination and the establishment of an independent state. In 1985 the Popular Front was stuck between Arafat's reliance on a regional legitimacy stemmed from the Amman agreements strategy and Syria's ambiguity which sacrificed its Palestinian allies for its project of hegemony over Lebanon. For these reasons the Party decided to rely on a pure Palestinian nationalist narrative to counter Arafat's "deviation" and to consolidate the support of Palestinian population in Lebanon during the bloody war of the camps. PFLP's narrative appeared subverted if compared with the one it adopted since the late Sixties and throughout the Seventies: in its attempt to discredit the strategy of the PLO leadership, the PFLP stressed on what could be defined as its "Palestinian sources of legitimacy" namely adherence to the Palestinian Nation Charter, to the consensus principle within PLO institutions and PLO traditional anti-imperialist line. At the same time it attacked Arafat because he was seeking to base his legitimacy no longer on the Palestinian national consensus, which he lost after the convening of the 17th round of the PNC in Amman in November 1984, but on the regional and international endorsement of its diplomatic strategy. This overview on PFLP's political line shows the capacity of the Party to shift and adapt according to external changing conditions, both at Palestinian and Arab level. In less than a decade

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[2] Alain Gresh, *OLP. Histoire et Stratégies. Vers l'Etat Palestinien,* Paris, Spag-Papyrus, 1983

the Popular Front adopted some positions that may appear inconsistent but that probably were fundamental as the party wanted to still occupy a radical nationalist position within the PLO.

This dissertation extensively focused on the internal PLO split, which arose as the main problem for the national movement in the middle of the decade, though it dated back from the takeover of the PLO by armed organizations. However, the deep split represented for PLO chairman Arafat the chance to increase his authoritarian governance of the Palestinian national movement that reached its climax after the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The main problem for the PFLP in its challenge to Arafat's rise was the inability to build a viable and reliable alternative to his project in order to gather around the disapproval for his policies. Actually, even if discontent towards Arafat touched also a significant part of Fatah's cadres as well as many independents, the PFLP failed to attract them and ultimately they preferred not to distrust Arafat as head of the whole national movement. But Fatah's superiority demonstrated to be built on the international support and credibility, which is what the PFLP actually lacked most. After Beirut, to a certain extent Arafat managed to counterbalance the loss of such an important military and civilian base with his diplomatic ties emerging as the only reliable figure within the Palestinian arena. Fatah leadership was encouraged in pursuing its strategy by several states, among which Egypt was emerging as the main US partner for the region. On the contrary, as Iraq was sinking in its war with Iran, "progressive" organizations as the PFLP could only address to Syria, which was more likely to use them rather than support those parties. In general the Popular Front paid in the mid-Eighties the price for not having developed a large and strong network of support as actually Fatah did. In fact, the PFLP during its earlier stage, alienated the key partners for national liberation movements worldwide, namely the USSR and China. Although thanks to its spectacular international operations, the PFLP benefitted of the reputation of a true revolutionary party, its policy perceived as "adventurist" pushed the Soviet Union to establish deeper contacts with Fatah. This element demonstrated fundamental once the PLO lost Lebanon and the PFLP did not find the adequate support to build its alternative to Fatah. Furthermore, the retreat and the inaction that characterized the USSR vis-à-vis the United Stated in the Middle East after 1982, made "moderate" and pro-Western leaders definitively look far more credible than "radicals" and leftists.

The lapse of time that this work covered was also characterized by a fluctuations and reversal in Middle Eastern politics. An interesting point that emerged from the study of PFLP's policies in the mid-Eighties is the way the Party exploited its ideological substratum to adapt to regional politics shifting paradigms: during the years the PFLP lost much of its revolutionary and Maoist features typical of its earlier period, however, it continued to rely on some teachings of global Marxism throughout its history. We outlined how the Party used the Maoist theory of primary and secondary contradictions to justify a closer coordination with Syria and how apparently inconsistent choices were labeled as "tactical" for the current phase in order to pursue the general strategy. This theoretical instrument was used in other cases too. For instance, the participation to the PNSF was seen by many PFLP's critics as a dangerous step, undermining PLO's historical

legitimacy. The Party argued instead, that it was a "tactical move" necessary to pave the way to the "correction" of PLO's line, which became the strategic goal. This step was probably dictated by the need to counter Arafat on the one hand and to align with Syria's goal on the other, though that entailed building an alliance with those forces overtly committed to the establishment of an "alternative PLO". Also the weekly Al Hadaf was used following a typical Marxist-Leninist pattern. The official mouthpiece was extensively exploited to diffuse Party's political line in a given moment: in every new issue the current position was outlined since the very first pages, in *Mawqifunā/Our Position* column. Then, the official line and stand were repeated several times in the same issue within articles of analysis or interviews to prominent political men and Party's apparatchiks. The continued repetition of the political line in official media was a typical tool used by Marxist-Leninist parties to ensure the diffusion of the "correct interpretation" and to consolidate the support of its militants. Such a task appears even more important for the Popular Front as it was an organization that had to quickly adapt to Middle Eastern turmoil and deal with threats to its existence from very diversified actors. For example, when the Party was involved in the war of the camps against the Amal movement, analysis of the events issued on Al Hadaf regularly focused on Amal's will to liquidate Palestinian armed presence in order to create the conditions for a "confessional settlement" of the Lebanese question. Such a narrative, which is actually correct, however, was repeated throughout more than three years while little attention was paid to the real responsible of Amal aggression to Palestinian camps, namely Syria. The PFLP could not overtly counter Syria's policy therefore, though critics to Assad were published, the bulk of the attention was on "Amal's liquidatory plot".

Although the Party saw its independence diminished during the 1982-1987 period and as a consequence it was forced to take some counterproductive steps, the Popular Front made several efforts to resist to its weakening process and to an increasingly hostile environment. For instance, when the occupied territories started to attract much attention from all the actors involved in the conflict, the PFLP understood that investing in the development of a well-established popular base was a key policy to retain a significant role within the national movement. Therefore it started to develop better contacts with several civil society organizations and worked to its own social networks on the territory, all this disposing of far lesser funding than Fatah. As a consequence the West Bank and Gaza Strip started to find also growing space in Al Hadaf articles and analysis. In doing so the PFLP was also driven by one of its most important principle that characterized the Party, since its foundation: the constant contact with "Palestinian masses". As far as the Popular Front succeeded in providing to the Palestinian population, especially in Lebanon and Palestine different kinds of assistance, ranging from political support to social aid, it ensured a bulk of consensus that granted political survival. These factors demonstrated vital during the first Intifada in which the PFLP could have been completely marginalized as the Lebanese arena was no more central to the PLO and Syria was unable to play any substantial role. Furthermore, the decline that all Palestinian leftists organizations faced during the Nineties up to nowadays, had among its numerous reasons the retreat of these factions from the social and popular fields. Non-

Governmental Organizations started to be the principal source of welfare in the Occupied Territories and at the same time, many leftist militants left their parties to work with these NGOs. Former leftist cadres saw no more reasons to work in the framework of those parties that had no concrete political agendas and were no more committed to the relief of people's difficulties. This was a major blow to which also the PFLP did not resist as it saw many of its members flowing towards NGOs.[3] Furthermore, the NGOs drain was also paralleled by the "attack" that political Islam led to leftist parties on the welfare and social grounds. Actually, the rise of Hamas during the first Intifada and its successive affirmation as first competitor of Fatah's supremacy, is largely built on a mass consensus, gathered through extensive social activism. In an interview held in November 2008, Hamas representative for Lebanon, Osama Hamdan tellingly affirmed the following about the creation of the Islamic Resistance Movement: "Others movements were backed by single countries: Fatah, for instance, received support from Egypt. The answer was: we must build our support on people. And we really knew our people".[4] The sum of this two phenomena is a major cause of PFLP's final marginalization within the Palestinian political scenario, that proves the importance of popular-rooted policies for this organization.

In any case, it is questionable whether the Popular Front actually had any possibility to counter the rise of Islamism on the one hand and avoid a final marginalization on the other. Beyond possible mistakes on policies and strategies, the Palestinian and Arab left had to face regional hostile trends that were simply too big: throughout the Eighties, and in particular in the second half of the decade, Islamist movements affirmed themselves as a concrete alternative to a failed Arab nationalism. In addition, these movements, following their different ideologies and beliefs could always count on powerful regional backers which leftist parties totally lacked. For instance Hamas, not only could rely on an important ally such as Iran but also enjoyed support from Syria, which started to develop deeper ties with Islamist movements both in Lebanon and Palestine in the framework of a new axis opposed to the US and Israel. As a consequence, leftist organizations were left apart as they became too weak.[5] Beside this, the renewed Soviet initiative on the Arab-Israeli conflict scenario did not to last significantly as the country eventually experienced the unprecedented crisis that led to its downfall. Since the US emerged as the only superpower acting in the Near East and the PLO entered the Oslo peace process, the PFLP and other leftist factions where stuck between Arafat's state-building project and the rise of Hamas which embodied the only real challenge to Fatah's hegemony. Consequently, the PFLP fluctuated between dialogue with the Palestinian National Authority and alignment with Hamas' positions.[6]

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[3] *Cfr.* Jamil Hilal, *al-yasār al-filasṭīnī. 'ilā 'ayna?/ The Palestinian Left. Where to?, Ramallah, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation 2009*

[4] Paola Caridi, *Hamas. Che Cos'è e Cosa Vuole il Movimento Radicale Palestinese,* Milano, Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 2009

[5] *Cfr.* Abbas William Samii, *A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands: Assessing the Hizbullah-Iran-Syria Relationship,* Middle East Journal, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Winter, 2008)
Khaled Hroub, *Hamas. Political Thoughts and Practice,* Washington, Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000

[6] Anders Strindberg, *The Damascus-Based Alliance of Palestinian Forces: A Primer,* Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Spring, 2000) and *Op. Cit.* Note 3

Another critical point that in more recent years contributed to the decline of the PFLP was its dependence on the charisma of its founder and secretary-general George Habash. The Eighties were a decade marked by the weakening of Habash's capabilities to guide the organization, mostly due to his physical problem. Habash's authoritarian rule of the Party was justified by the popularity that the Popular Front retained in its first fifteen years of activity: the PFLP was perceived as an hard-line faction, not likely to make concessions neither to the enemy nor to Arab powers, consequently this fame gave to the Party a great political endowment among "Palestinian masses". At this regard it has been argued that if the Party remained firm in its positions, the first significant shifts appeared after 1980, the year of Habash's stroke which marked the beginning of the rise of a new dominant group inside the Popular Front. "Al Hakim" was no more able to impose his line to the rest of PFLP's leadership and inconsistencies and disagreements acquired a heavier weight.[7] As his health problems became more serious, Georges Habash tried to retreat several times but he was allowed to do it only in 2000. Once the father of the movement was out of the Palestinian political arena, the PFLP was further weakened by Israeli successful attempts to rule out the heads of the movements. Only a year after he was nominated secretary-general, Abu Ali Mustafa was killed by a rocket that an Israeli helicopter launched against his office in Ramallah. His successor, Ahmad Sa'adat was arrested several times, both by Israeli occupation forces and by the Palestinian National Authority and his today detained in an Israeli prison. These attacks hit seriously the already weak leadership of the Party accelerating its disappearance from the Palestinian scenario.

Today, while in countries like Tunisia and Egypt, leftist movement survived decades of repression and managed to play a significant role in the 2011 popular uprisings, reorganizing a leftist front within the Palestinian political scenario appear much more difficult. The signing of the Oslo agreements, exactly twenty years ago, quickly led the Palestinian question to a serious impasse. If on the one hand it has been fully proven that the framework established by the peace process fostered Israeli control and the expansion of colonial settlement in the territories occupied after 1967 as well as accelerated the deterioration of the Palestinian economy[8], on the other it seems that Israel, the PNA and the international community cannot accept an alternative to this framework which would be labeled as an exit from the peace process. This pretext has been deeply exploited by both Israel and the PNA to restrain any attempt to denounce Oslo and revive the national movement. Assuming that the Palestinian left should be at the forefront of a movement that would challenge the current impasse, it is doubtful that it would have the political and economical means to endure the reaction of the status-quo based Palestinian and Israeli institutions.

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[7] As'ad AbuKhalil, *Internal Contradictions in the PFLP: Decision Making and Policy Orientation* Middle East Journal, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Summer, 1987)
[8] *Cfr.* Sara Roy, *Failing Peace. Gaza and the Palestinian-Israli Conflict,* London, Pluto Press, 2007
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