Guerrillas for Palestine

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Introduction

Since the October War, the world at large has shown a growing awareness of the complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict and of the urgent need to restore peace to the Middle East after more than twenty-five years of antagonism and confrontation. Right at the heart of this conflict lies what has become known as the Palestine question. Now that a serious attempt is at last being made to bring about a solution to the conflict, it has become more abundantly clear than ever that any just and lasting peace must guarantee the rights and the future of the Palestinian people.

'The Palestine question' has of course been with us in one guise or another since World War One. It began to take on its present form as soon as the first refugees fled from the Jewish take-over of Palestine and the creation of the Jewish state of Israel. But a proper public recognition — however limited — of the human misery this exodus has involved is much more recent, and has had to wait on the emergence of the resistance movement in the wake of the 1967 war. It is no exaggeration to say that the identity of the Palestinian people has only been reasserted with the rise of the Palestinian guerrilla.

*Guerrillas for Palestine* is an examination of the commando phenomenon, and, more broadly, of the resistance movement as a whole. This book begins with a general account of the commandos' emergence as a force in the Middle East conflict, and moves to a description of the many groups, their various approaches to the problem and their relations with Arab and foreign states. The political apparatus of the resistance is treated in a separate section. The final section of the book gives profiles of the major personalities in the resistance movement.

*Guerrillas for Palestine* is based largely on contacts and interviews with the leaders and the theoreticians of the commando organizations, conducted by the Palestinian affairs specialists on the research staff of *An-Nahar Arab Report*.
1. The Rise of the Commandos

The emergence of the Palestinian resistance movement as a political force after 1967 was an event of revolutionary importance to the Arab world. Very rapidly the resistance was able to develop a standard of leadership, of organization and of mass popular support that marked it off from earlier efforts under the British mandate in Palestine, and indeed from most other political movements in the Arab world. It also acquired a military capability against Israel which, however modest, was still felt to be politically intolerable by the Israelis. Even more significantly to the Arab world, the resistance from the beginning posed a challenge to the traditional methods of confrontation with Israel followed by the Arab regimes involved in the conflict, thereby bringing into question their very authority and precipitating the grievous setbacks suffered by the movement at the hands of its supposed allies in 1970 and 1971.

Opposition between the Arab regimes and the resistance movement was inherent in the circumstances accompanying the movement’s birth. There existed in the Palestinian community after the creation of Israel conditions more favourable to revolution than ever before in the Arab world. The Palestinians, their traditional society disrupted and their deprivation self-evident, were more susceptible to mobilization in a revolutionary cause than either their forbears under the mandate or their contemporaries elsewhere in the Arab Middle East. The extraordinarily high degree of education among the exiled community itself inspired a growing awareness of the injustice suffered, while the 1967 defeat convinced many Palestinians that the traditional leadership was bankrupt and a new departure should be made.

The behaviour of Israel was another powerful factor in the emergence of the resistance movement. Since 1948, Israel constituted a perpetual trauma in Arab politics, but after 1967 the occupation of significant portions of Egypt, Syria and
Jordan locked the neighbouring states irrevocably into the conflict with Israel. Henceforth there could be no question of relegating the Palestine question to second place in the concerns of the Arab world. The increased significance of Israel — and thus the Palestine problem — in the decision-making of Egypt, Jordan and Syria was inevitably reflected in a new political activism among the Palestinians themselves.

The growth of the Palestinian resistance movement marked the first attempt to find a new means of affirming Palestinian identity since the failure of the insurrection of the 1930s and the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948-9. Palestinian Arab politics under the early mandate had been dominated by loose alliances of religious, landed and commercial notables with little appreciation of modern political forces of organization. Under the pressure of continuous Jewish immigration, a more elaborate political structure began to appear in response to the sophisticated organization of the new adversaries. Political parties, like the Istiqlal and several regional, middle-class organizations, emerged as tentative expressions of nationalism, while families long influential in political affairs (such as the Husseinis and the Nashashibis) began to adopt more formal political structures. The Husseinis sponsored the Arab Palestine Party (Al Hizb al Arabi al Filastini) and the Nashashibis the National Defence Party (Al Hizb al Difa’ al Watani).

But behind the cosmetics of Western-style politics, the Palestinian leadership retained its traditional bases of support. Hajj Amin al Husseini, the Grand Mufti, exploited the influence of the Supreme Muslim Council to dominate the national movement and the smaller bourgeois parties and groups. And it was Hajj Amin and his Arab Palestine Party who dominated the Arab Higher Committee, a coalition of six parties that tried to co-ordinate the unsuccessful rebellion of 1936-9. The new Palestinian organizations, either individually or as part of the Higher Committee, lacked a well-developed elite at an intermediate level that would permit them to mobilize popular support — although the small size of the country and the extensive connections of the leading families meant that they could lay claim to popular representation of
sorts. Nevertheless, the penetration of the community at large that they were able to achieve was necessarily limited and they remained essentially feudal in their organization.

The 1936-9 rebellion itself owed relatively little to the traditional political structures. Although undoubtedly widespread, involving thousands of fatalities and tying down a large British occupation force, it was basically a spontaneous and uncoordinated peasant uprising. Indeed, the leading notables were against the insurrection at first. Hajj Amin was approached by one Izzedin al Qassem who requested appointment as a roving 'preacher' to prepare the way for the revolution. Qassem was rebuffed on the grounds that the Palestinians should be working for a political solution to their problem, but he went ahead undaunted and organized secret cells among the poorer workers and peasantry. On 14 November 1935 he fought his first battle against the British forces in the Jenin area, and was killed.

The rebellion he instigated, however, dragged on for more than three years, and although it was unable to achieve any of its major objectives, the mere fact that it took place outside the traditional family leadership in Palestine undoubtedly posed a major challenge to the feudal and bourgeois concept of Palestinian nationalism.

The chief weakness of the 1936-9 rebellion was the total absence of any unified and politically aware authority capable of giving direction to the insurrection. The traditional leadership was unable to fulfil this role in any proper sense, partly because many of its members were in exile, and partly because many others correctly perceived the threat the popular rebellion constituted to their position, with the result that they co-operated with the British. Even within the leadership, there was constant personal bickering between various personal interests among the feudal and bourgeois groups, who showed little hesitation in attacking the rebellion both by condemning it to the people and conducting negotiations with the mandatory authorities. The combatants themselves were ill-equipped against the occupying forces, and there was a minimum of co-operation between the various fronts. Gradually, the rebellion became weaker, and by the outbreak of
World War Two it had expired altogether.

The 1936-9 revolt demonstrated both the incapacity of the established nationalist movement to secure Palestinian Arab political rights (confirmed all the more strongly by the 1948-9 war) and severely undermined the Palestinians' ability to face the challenge of the creation of the Israeli state. Politically active Palestinians considered that the Arab governments were mainly responsible for the 1948-9 defeat: with the expiry of the mandate on 15 May 1949, the Arab states had taken on responsibility for the fight against Israel and had signal failed to make any impression. The exodus to Jordan, Syria and Lebanon effectively destroyed the traditional nationalist organization, such as it was, and until 1952 resurgent nationalist activity was paralysed by both the shock of defeat and expulsion and by the expectation of a United Nations settlement. In 1949 the UN had invited the refugees to return to Palestine, but the Israelis effectively opposed the move on the grounds that it would imperil the principle of a Jewish majority state.

The destruction of the traditional Palestinian social organization and the resulting political vacuum among the refugees, together with the resentment at the inefficiency and incapacity of the established Arab states, channelled Palestinian political energies into pan-Arab parties such as the Ba'ath and the Arab Nationalist Movement. With their stress on the unity of the Arab masses, such groups appealed to the widespread Palestinian conviction that the road to confrontation with Israel and the liberation of Palestine lay in a strong and unified Arab nation superseding the states that had emerged from the colonial era.

Until the Suez War of 1956, there was still no embryo of a national Palestinian organization. But the occupation of the Gaza Strip (the only part of Palestine that had not been formally annexed by Israel or Jordan) prompted the first nucleus of the future Fateh organization. Formed from students and politically conscious elements from a variety of social backgrounds who had come to the conclusion that the Palestinian people had no choice but to take their cause into their own hands, the movement made slow initial progress. It
identified itself with the tide of Nasserism, enthused with slogans of Arab unity and pan-Arab strength.

The theme of one Arab world was never so insistently promoted as in the decade before the 1967 war. Nor, ironically, has the bitter rivalry between Arab states ever been more acute. If the ideal of Arab unity struck a deep emotional chord among the population as a whole and provided the impetus for (and confused rivalry between) Ba’athists, Nasserites and Arab nationalists, the Palestinian national question and the continued existence of Israel made it possible for many an Arab government to redirect popular aspirations toward external objectives and an external enemy.

An initiative from new Palestinian nationalists was no more welcome to the established regimes than it had been to the established Palestinian leadership in the 1930s. Fateh leaders were accused by some Arab states of being agents of CENTO. The strict secrecy with which the various resistance movements surrounded themselves up to 1967 was not due so much to the Israelis as to the attitude of Arab regimes which subjected Palestinian militants to house arrest, prison and worse. Fateh still remembers that its first partisan casualty occurred at the hands of a Jordanian soldier in 1965.

The beginning of the 1960s witnessed two events that had a profound effect on Palestinian political thinking. In September 1961 Syria ruptured the union with Egypt in the United Arab Republic that had been the hallmark of Nasserite pan-Arabism. The demonstrable frailty of pan-Arab unity on a practical political level convinced those Palestinian activists who had seen the path to liberation along Nasserite lines (of an Arab nation in arms against Israel) that they could not wait until the rest of the Arab world pulled itself together. Now they began to think of liberation through independent Palestinian action and an independent Palestinian entity. As a result, more than 30 Palestinian organizations sprang up (most of which had only a small membership). And while this proliferation of organizations was ample evidence of the new trend in Palestinian thinking and a renewed enthusiasm to work seriously and independently for the liberation of the homeland,
it also reflected the lack of a strong and effective direction.

The second event to have a major effect on the course of the Palestinian revival was the eventual triumph of the Algerian revolution in 1962. This example of a successful popular war of liberation could only give more weight to the concept of independent Palestinian activity. The Algerians had been able to recruit material and moral support from various Arab regimes, and through armed struggle, attain their independence. The impact on many young Palestinian militants was understandably considerable.

Practically, the effect in Fateh was to shift the emphasis on to the formation of a military organization. Just as the years 1958 and 1961 had been spent in setting up the nucleus of a political structure, so from 1962 onwards the movement concentrated its efforts on the building of an effective military formation. The nucleus of Fateh gave rise to the nucleus of Al Assifa (The Tempest). But what above all decided Fateh to go over to the course of military action in preference to the path of political persuasion was the realization in the early 1960s that the movement was simply unable to bring sufficient political weight to bear that would affect the unfolding of developments in the Middle East.

The formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization by the Arab regimes was itself the result of growing unrest among Palestinian militants at the inaction of the established governments. Disillusionment with their reliance on ‘progressive’ Arab regimes for the fulfilment of their national ambitions had prompted the refugees to start organizing themselves politically and militarily. And now it was with some anxiety that the Arab governments faced the possibility of a gradual loss of control over the Palestinian movement, hitherto part and parcel of the ‘pan-Arab’ dream. The ineffectiveness of the regimes contrasted with the promise offered by the new organizations of concrete and violent measures against the Israelis, regardless of what the Arab governments might think about such action or do about the inevitable retaliatory blow from Israel.

The first summit of Arab kings and presidents took place in
Cairo in January 1964. The conference gave formal recognition to the Palestinian ‘entity’, though it soon became obvious that the heads of state were more interested in keeping a tight rein on Palestinian activities than in promoting an effective Palestinian resistance. Fateh had already succeeded in creating a political organization with a nucleus of Palestinian intelligentsia and a broad base of popular support in the refugee camps. It was ready to initiate its first commando raids against Israeli installations and begin activities on its own, independent of the aegis of the Arab states. But the Arab states thought differently.

The first Palestinian congress in Jerusalem drew up a National Charter and called for the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization, which was duly set up at the second Arab summit in Alexandria the following September. Created with the Arab League’s stamp of approval and to be financed by Arab states, the PLO was supposed to rally mass Palestinian support (as it initially did), hopefully isolating Fateh and other organizations in the process, and making them appear superfluous to an officially recognized entity backed by the Palestinian people. The PLO moreover would have behind it the prestigious blessing of President Nasser.

For a time, the strategy was successful. Fateh’s growing influence was temporarily checked and the Palestinian movement’s dependence on the Arab regimes was perpetuated. But the formation of the PLO did not free the Arab governments of their Palestine problems, chiefly because the organization, if it was to have any success, had to bend to some of the radical pressures exerted upon it by the Palestinian masses it was supposed to be representing.

The overwhelming defeat of the 1967 war took the Arab regimes totally by surprise. As for the Palestinians, it proved once and for all that dependence on Arab governments and armies for the liberation of Palestine would lead nowhere, and that the concept of Arab unity under prevailing conditions was a dangerous illusion if perceived as a means to the recovery of Palestine. The Arab masses were isolated and unable to play any proper role in the battle, being left behind to watch the defeat of their armies and the occupation of their territories.
The idea of a 'popular war' has frequently been raised in the Arab world, but the stark truth is that most Arab regimes are as frightened of their own people in arms as they are of the Israelis.

So the Palestinians finally took it upon themselves to act, to continue the war against the enemy and rally the Arab people to their side without regard for the politicking and diplomacy of the regimes. After the 1967 war, the PLO leadership was largely discredited, but the apparatus continued to function and provide a useful umbrella for the resistance movement as a whole.

By 1970, Fateh had emerged as the richest, most successful and structurally the most sophisticated of the guerrilla movements. Gradually, it extended its control to the Palestine National Assembly and the PLO Executive Committee, while in Jordan it succeeded in creating a virtual state within a state, complete with an army, hospitals, social security and tax collectors. But Fateh was never able to exercise complete hegemony over the commando movements that had grown up after 1967 from earlier Palestinian organizations. To complicate matters, various Arab regimes took a hand in creating their own Palestinian commando organizations. Syria sponsored Sa'eqa and Iraq produced the Arab Liberation Front. Even Jordan sought — admittedly without much success — to develop its own guerrilla groups as a counterweight to the independent organizations operating on its territory.

The most important alternatives to Fateh, however, were the Palestinian groups of Marxist-Leninist orientation. Though numerically and financially weaker than Fateh, they enjoyed an influence disproportionate to their size because of the widespread appeal of their radical ideology. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP) placed heavy stress on political indoctrination, setting an example which was increasingly emulated by Fateh, and put the Palestine problem firmly in the context of Western imperialism.

A significant step in integrating the activity of the various groups was taken early in 1969 when Fateh won control of the
PLO apparatus. A step towards rationalizing guerrilla action was also taken with the formation of the Palestine Armed Struggle Command in Amman. The PASC, too, was dominated by Fateh, and included all the major groups with the exception of the PFLP, which refused to join for fear that the largely non-Marxist leadership of Fateh would jeopardize the cause.

A year later, in February 1970, after another abortive attempt by the Jordanian government to restrict guerrilla activity, a new umbrella organization was announced. This was the Unified Command for the Palestinian Resistance Movement, and for the first time included the PFLP.

But although halting progress was being made towards integrating the resistance movement and co-ordinating the guerrilla groups, persistent and increasing tension between the Palestinians and the governments of Lebanon and Jordan (not to mention Israel) demanded much faster and closer co-ordination. In June 1970, a new executive co-ordinating body appeared — the Central Committee of the PLO — embodying the Executive Committee and additional representatives from all the commando groups. But if the newly flexible structure helped the guerrillas to hold their own in Jordan as long as they did during the army onslaught of September 1970, it was clearly unable to provide adequate coherence to prevent the inexorable (and almost fatal) erosion of the resistance’s capacities that followed. While a greater measure of co-ordination had been achieved than existed previously, and a stop was put to the proliferation of peripheral groups, the movement’s leadership had been quite unable to agree on a common policy towards the Arab states. Fateh and the ‘moderates’ attempted to work with regimes like Saudi Arabia and Jordan, while the radical groups would have nothing to do with such ‘reactionaries’.

After 1967, the Palestine resistance movement had taken on the form of a nationalist uprising and not a social revolution. The dominant theme was always the recovery of the land and the re-establishment there of a distinctively Palestinian community. But into this overwhelming preoccupation with nationalist ends, the radical organizations sought to inject an ideology that might transcend local, parochial or liberal-
bourgeois nationalism. The radicals looked back to the failures of past Palestinian nationalist movements and saw the necessity of introducing ‘modernity’ and ‘democratic socialism’. Modernity meant a rational and programmatic strategy of liberation. Democratic socialism implied the redistribution of power, wealth and opportunity for the disadvantaged classes, be they Arab or Jewish. The rhetoric, the values and the strategic doctrine of the Third World left became increasingly evident in the resistance movement, not only in the PFLP and the PDFLP, but also in Fateh itself and among younger Palestinian intellectuals generally.

The core of Palestinian resistance ideology was the return of all Palestinian Arabs outside Palestine to live in a secular, democratic state of Palestine with all of the present inhabitants, irrespective of their religion or their cultural background, provided that these people consented to live peaceably in the new state. The resistance movement used this formula to gain wide support among Palestinian and other Arab communities. It was simple, and yet ambiguous enough to attract diverse and conflicting elements. As interpreted by the leadership of the PLO and Fateh, it differed little from the traditional, liberal-bourgeois Palestinian and Arab nationalist appeals of the mandate period. But to others, and notably the PDFLP, it symbolized a radical, populist ideological perspective whose most salient attributes were secularism, participation and social justice in the context of a revolution of national liberation. Secularism implied a political society freed from the influence of traditional religious authorities, Moslem as well as Christian — a non-sectarian rather than a multi-sectarian community. Throughout the 1960s, younger Arab intellectuals, and not just Palestinians, were increasingly attracted to the future depicted by the radical resistance organizations.

Thus, in terms of the substantive ideology, there was by and large agreement in the resistance movement about the ultimate goal of the revolution: a secular, democratic Palestine. But there was considerable conflict when it came to interpreting how the new society was to be governed and where its resources were to be allocated. The radical Marxists of the PFLP and the
PDFLP constantly challenged the comparatively liberal and pragmatic orientation of the PLO and the Fateh leadership.

But whatever divisions existed within the movement during the period between the 1967 and 1973 wars, the Palestinian resistance found unity in the adoption of violence as its chief strategic tool. The pragmatic Fateh leaders were just as willing as the radicals in the two Popular Fronts to accept the Maoist dictum that ‘power grows out of the barrel of a gun’, and showed themselves in the military field, at least, to be as ‘radical’ as the PFLP and the PDFLP. The concept of a people’s liberation war, formerly only marginal in Eastern Arab political thinking, became the essential element in a guerrilla programme. The ultimate success of the Algerian War and the disastrous performance of the conventional military in 1967 pointed the way to this new development. Mao, Giap and Guevara were read avidly even by those with little sympathy for their political outlook. Fateh exemplified the application of radical social and military analysis to ends that were not altogether politically radical in themselves. Meanwhile, Palestinian radicals found Frantz Fanon’s analysis of the psychologically liberating effects of violence very relevant to their situation, and the guerrillas applied Fanon’s insights to their training.

The radical groups on the other hand were deeply concerned that greater emphasis be placed on indoctrination and political activism as elements in their own right. Systematic political education had ultimately to be carried out among the Palestinians, the rest of the Arabs and even the Jews if the goal of a non-sectarian, democratic state as conceived by the PFLP and the PDFLP was to be achieved. Politicization was a central element in radical thinking, the essential prerequisite if a new Palestinian mentality was to overcome the embedded feelings of self-pity and despair and open the way to common participation in the struggle for liberation.

If the Palestinian guerrillas generally presented to the world outside the Middle East conflict an undifferentiated similarity, the divisions between the main trends were both deep and fraught with significance for the future. The ‘ideological revolution’ met with considerable opposition within the
mainstream of the movement. The deepest divisions arose between the radicals and the moderates on the question of who the real enemy was. The PFLP and the PFLP tended to see Western imperialism generally rather than Zionism specifically as the obstacle to be confronted in the promotion of a socialist revolution in Palestine. For the PLO apparatus and the Fateh leadership, however, violence ought to be directed specifically against the immediate enemy — the Zionist institutions — even if this meant entering into potentially compromising alliances with non-radical and even reactionary elements in the Arab world for support. Within the Palestinian movement as a whole, there was a greater proportion of younger intellectuals and activities who supported the first position, while the older generation predominantly favoured the moderate approach. Years of unrewarded political struggle in exile, unwillingness to accept the newer Third World theories of imperialism and traditional aversion to Marxism all tended to dispose the majority of the older generation to a diplomatic solution and compromise where these offered themselves, even though they might fall short of the stated goals. During the 1960s and early 1970s the argument remained largely academic, but in the aftermath of the October 1973 war it was to become suddenly and dramatically relevant.

In September 1970 the Jordanian Army launched a massive counter-attack against the growing power of the Palestinian resistance movement in the country. In the following months, the commando leadership found itself obliged to accede to royalist demands for the dismantling of commando and militia organizations in the cities. By the spring of 1971, the commandos were effectively limited to their last strongholds in the Jerash and Ajloun areas of north Jordan. The thoroughness with which the Jordanian Army proceeded to eliminate them in July 1971 caught the Palestinian leadership off balance and removed the guerrillas as an effective force in Jordan for the immediate future. By the end of 1971 the resistance was dead in Jordan and in a critical condition in the rest of the Middle East. It was faced with the need for an urgent reassessment of its position in the Arab world and the discovery of an alternative to the strategy it had followed since the October War.
One of the fundamental problems was the movement's inability to develop a sufficient degree of rational executive authority to confront its many formidable adversaries. At a lower level the same disorganization proved equally crippling. None of the resistance groups imposed enough discipline and responsibility among the rank-and-file commandos and militia and supporters. Such a short period elapsed between the initial honeymoon with the regimes and the increasing hostility towards the resistance's tactics and strategy, that the movement's leadership was never able to give sufficient attention to internal and structural questions. Indeed, before the September 1970 catastrophe, the guerrillas had made a point of co-operating with King Hussein instead of joining hands with his opponents, and many non-Palestinian Arabs who might otherwise have been actively favourable to the resistance were alienated by the tacit (and fruitless) alliance with King Hussein.

Fateh's strategy of co-operation with the Arab regimes was effective at first since it bought time for the movement to establish itself. That it succeeded for as long as it did can be partly explained by the need for Israel's neighbours to cultivate a morale-boosting distraction for their disillusioned citizens. But as the United States' peace initiative launched in the summer of 1970 gained momentum, these regimes saw a new way out of the impasse of the post-1967 era. The Palestinians suddenly became not an asset in gaining popular support for the Arab governments, but instead a liability on the road to a negotiated peace. Two decades of bitter experience should have taught the Palestinians that state interests take precedence over Arab national interests in the Arab world, yet they still appear to have been totally unprepared for the upheaval of autumn 1970.

Moreover, there was a distinct gap between the leaders' understanding of the situation and their ability to act. The guerrilla and PLO leadership in general, while largely repudiating the traditional Palestinian leaders, had been unable to commit itself to a total and coherent radical strategy, nor had it severed the ties binding it to regimes which could tolerate it only as a weak and non-radical movement, useful primarily
for propaganda purposes. If the mainstream leadership in this period showed a typical human weakness, it was not a conscious betrayal of ideals but rather a willingness to be co-opted into the company of the politically influential. The temptations of power and prestige dimmed perception of the dangers entailed.

The Jordan defeat subjected the resistance movement to divergent pressures. From outside the movement there was pressure for ‘domestication’; from within the movement there was pressure for greater ‘radicalization’. Arab governments were implicitly in agreement that the resistance movement should be effectively subservient to state military and political planning and control. While Jordan’s Arab neighbours publicly protested at the severity of Hussein’s suppression of the guerrillas, each had in its own way seriously limited the freedom of action of the resistance. One effect of the Jordan defeat was to require the guerrilla leadership to accede to more constraints imposed by the Arab states than it may have considered desirable, given the imperative of strengthening its legitimacy through armed struggle.

But there were many influential Palestinians who drew an entirely contrary lesson from the experience of 1970-71. They perceived the paramount necessity of going underground and waging a campaign of terror, assassination and sabotage against Israel, Jordan and American interests in the area. Those who argued in favour of this strategy point out that: (1) The resistance must go underground to preserve its independence from Arab governments, including the ‘progressive’ regimes; (2) other approaches, such as the creation of a Palestinian entity on the West Bank, would ultimately require acceptance of an unsatisfactory diplomatic settlement that would forever silence the Palestinian claim to independence and sovereignty in all or even part of Palestine; and (3) Jordan in the short run and Israel in the long run were vulnerable to internal disruption through terror and violence, while neither were vulnerable to conventional force because of their outside protectors; the great powers would respect nothing but violence.

The 1973 war has served to exacerbate the divisions in the
Palestinian resistance. The cohesion never existed in the movement to enable it to choose decisively whether to adopt a strategy in alliance with the established powers of the Arab world or else to rely entirely on its own resources (and thus go underground, given the hostility such a position would provoke). In the post-1973 era this debate has become all the more immediately significant. The polarization has crystallized with the emergence of two identifiable and opposing factions within the PLO. The official stance of the movement is prepared to negotiate a settlement which approves the establishment of a Palestinian authority on liberated territory of Palestine (such as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) as a step towards the goal of a secular democratic republic throughout the whole region. This position is advocated chiefly by Fateh and supported by Sa‘eqa, the PFLP and independent representatives from the West Bank. But the more radical elements have organized themselves into a hard-line ‘rejection front’ comprising the PFLP, the Arab Liberation Front, and smaller groups like the PFLP-General Command and the Popular Struggle Front. The ‘rejection front’ opposes what it sees as the ‘deviationist’ and ‘capitulationist’ trend in the PLO, and advocates a continuation of the struggle to liberate the whole of occupied Palestine through armed struggle. In this they are supported by some renegade Fateh elements in Baghdad, and — at a discreet distance — by some Arab regimes, including Iraq and Libya.
2. The Commando Organizations

FATEH
It was on the night of 31 December 1964 that Fateh, the Palestine Liberation Movement (Harakat al Tahrir al Filastini, from the initial letters of which in reverse order the name Fateh is derived) commenced its military operations. A group of men belonging to Al Assifa, Fateh's military wing, struck inside Israel, and the operation was announced by a military communiqué issued on 1 January 1965:

Depending on God, believing in the right of our people to struggle to regain their usurped homeland, believing in the duty of Jihad (Holy War), believing in the revolutionary Arab from the Atlantic ocean to the Gulf, and believing in the support of the world's free and honest men, units of our strike forces moved on the night of Friday 31 December 1964 to carry out all their assigned operations inside the occupied land, then returned safely to base. We warn the enemy against taking measures against Arab civilians, wherever they may be, because our forces will reply to their attacks with similar attacks and will consider such actions as war crimes. We also warn all countries against interfering on the side of the enemy in any way, because our forces will riposte by clearing the way to the destruction of the interests of these states, wherever they are. Long live the unity of our people and their struggle to regain their dignity and homeland! Signed: the General Command of Assifa Forces.

Interest in the new group grew rapidly, especially with Israel's quick response. On 14 January 1965 an Israeli military spokesman announced that a group of Arab infiltrators had been intercepted while on a mission for a clandestine terrorist organization to sabotage Israeli hydraulic installations. The target was presumably part of the works in the Israeli project
to divert the waters of the Jordan valley which was causing great controversy. The diversion project was one of Assifa’s declared targets.

Israeli papers picked up the military statement. *Maariv* said that the new organization was called ‘The Command of Palestinian Crescent Forces.’ Five days later Premier Levi Eshkol cited guerrilla activity in a speech in Tiberias warning the Israelis to stay prepared and alert. A week later the seriousness with which the situation was taken gained new confirmation with Eshkol’s speech to former Haganah men announcing that they might be called back to duty to protect Israel from saboteurs.

Fateh operations continued, and on 1 March 1965, Eshkol, who was Defence Minister as well as Prime Minister, warned ‘Arab countries in general and Jordan in particular’ that his government would hold them responsible for the activity of the commandos. At the same time Israel filed a complaint with the UN Security Council. Fateh had finally arrived.

The origins of the movement are hard to trace in detail, and the organization itself has cast little light on its origins. The creation of Fateh certainly goes back to 1959 when groups of young Palestinians (some of whom had taken part in commando operations in Gaza in 1956) joined together to organize propaganda and political activity, though not under the explicit name of Fateh. They published a periodical called *Our Palestine* to express their ideology and political views on Palestine.

These may be summed up as follows:

1) The only manner in which Palestine could be regained was through military violence and ‘the true meeting between the Palestinian forces on the battle front.’

2) The battle would shape the destiny of the Palestinians, and hence it was imperative that old and stale ideologies and principles be dropped to polarize all the Palestinian forces. In other words, the Palestinians had no time to embark on a fruitless dialogue over the shape of the country after liberation.

3) The Arab governments had given regional interests priority over confrontation with the enemy. All that would be asked of the Arab regimes therefore was that they protect their
own borders and permit and support Palestinian operations inside the occupied territories.

(4) The slogan 'The Liberation of Palestine is the Road to Unity' must replace the slogan 'Unity is the Road to the Liberation of Palestine.'

The enunciation of these principles put Fateh in a camp by itself. Other Palestinian commando organizations in existence then were all linked in one way or another with the progressive Arab states, such as Egypt, Syria or Iraq. These groups still embraced the pan-Arab orthodoxy which considered the unity of the progressive Arab regimes a precondition for the liberation of Palestine. All agreed that the leadership of the Palestinian liberation movement, such as it was, should comply with general Arab strategy, such as that was.

Fateh took the opposing view. It saw Arab strategy as a fraudulent disguise for the interests of the established regimes, and consequently refused to be linked to any one government which would inevitably come to dominate the activities of the group. Fateh also rejected the socialist principles so popular in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the prestige of Nasser and the Ba'ath.

Paradoxically, this rejection of socialism brought Fateh support from conservative regimes who had previously been wary of Palestinian activities. At a Press conference in March 1973, Fateh's representative in Saudi Arabia (Abu Hisham) declared:

We will not be revealing a secret when we declare that Saudi Arabia has been in the vanguard of the supporters of the Palestinian revolution since its inception on 1 January 1965 to help us in liberating all the occupied territories and free the Holy Places. A meeting that took place then between King Feisal and members of the movement drew up the kingdom's inalienable policy towards us.

Certainly, during Fateh's early days in the public eye, there were consistent rumours that it belonged to the anti-Nasserite camp. The Arab World was split between the 'progressives' and the 'conservatives', with King Feisal trying to counter Nasser's
evangelist socialism through the creation of an Islamic League. Fateh perceived that becoming involved in the internecine quarrels of the regimes would serve little purpose, but nevertheless it found itself under fire from the progressives.

The Arab regimes were as quick as Israel to respond to Fateh’s commencement of military action. Soon after Eshkol’s declaration that the Arab states would be held responsible for commando activity, the Unified Arab Command ordered the arrest of Fateh members in March 1965. Arab information media launched into a campaign against the movement, accusing it of operating as a CENTO agent to provide Israel with a pretext to attack the Arab states. Fateh members were branded as Moslem Brothers, and dozens were rounded up in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. Yasser Arafat, the movement’s leader, spent 51 days in Mazza prison in Damascus, and others who were detained suffered torture. There were reports that some Fateh members died under arrest, and in Lebanon it was claimed that Jalal Kaoush was liquidated by army intelligence, although an official report said he died of natural causes.

Fateh’s rebirth came with the 1967 defeat. The movement’s insistence on a long-term people’s war gained new significance, and Fateh was determined to seize the opportunity. A congress of the movement was held in the outskirts of an Arab capital (as yet unidentified) to discuss the course of action. Two factions emerged, one voting for immediate resumption of the fighting against the enemy, the other warning that this could give the Israelis an excuse to indulge in a massacre of Palestinians.

In the event the advocates of the continued struggle prevailed, and the conferees set out to implement the programme. Yasser Arafat, Abu Sabri (who died later in Damascus) and Mazen Abu Ghazaleh returned to the occupied territories and began to organize cells. The date for the resumption of fighting was set as 29 August 1967, and over the succeeding months Fateh launched a series of operations across the cease-fire lines in Jordan and Syria. The level of activity can be judged from the figures of Israeli casualties given by Defence Minister Moshe Dayan before the Knesset on 25 January 1968. Since the June War, he said, 21 Israeli soldiers had been killed and 76 injured as a result of commando activity.
On 28 February 1968 he further reported that there had been 128 sabotage incidents in Israel in the same period.

But the real political and military coming of age occurred at the battle of Karameh on 21 March 1968. Suddenly, the resistance movement emerged from the shadows as the only force in the Arab world still engaged in fighting the Israelis and refusing to accept the defeat of 1967. The battle itself took place across the Jordan river in Jordanian territory and arose from Fateh’s anxiety to demonstrate that the Palestinian resistance did more than merely strike and run away. A large Israeli punitive task force supported by helicopter-borne paratroops found itself locked in battle with commando forces and later units of the Jordanian Army, and after a day-long struggle it was forced to withdraw with heavy losses across the Jordan. Resistance losses included 91 Fateh killed, and 33 from the Popular Liberation Army. In one day Karameh changed the overwhelmingly defeatist atmosphere in the Arab world after the 1967 rout and effectively secured for the resistance movement a home base in Jordan.

At the same time guerrilla skirmishes were beginning from Lebanon. Fateh began to set up rearward bases in the south of the country for operations against Israel, but the Lebanese authorities were apprehensive of the outcome of guerrilla activity across their southern border. In November 1968 Lebanese forces surrounded the commando bases in the south. Tension between the resistance forces and the government persisted, with serious clashes developing in April and October 1969. The dispute was eventually settled with the signature of the Cairo agreement, which recognized the presence of commando bases in the south and the independent status of the commando movement. Thus the resistance won itself for the time being two major bases in Lebanon and Jordan.

On the political front, Fateh was gaining control of the PLO and Arafat was elected chairman. The movement was establishing itself as the most significant of the resistance organizations, and international recognition came with Arafat’s visits to the Soviet Union, China and North Vietnam early in 1970.

But the conflict of interests between the Palestinian
resistance and the Arab regimes could not be long repressed. By the beginning of 1970 there were almost daily clashes between guerrillas or resistance militia and the Jordanian Army. However, there is no doubt that even if a confrontation with the Hashemites was ultimately inevitable, it was resistance miscalculations that brought about the tragic events of 1970 and the thorough elimination of the movement in Jordan in 1971. For one thing, Fateh along with the other organizations believed that the military balance in Jordan was in the resistance’s favour. Encouraged by a mistaken impression of its strength, Fateh deviated from its earlier principle of not interfering in the affairs of the host regime. The resistance thought that its penetration among the Palestinians in the ranks of the Jordanian Army, and the presence of Iraqi troops in Jordan (as part of the eastern front against Israel) would restrain King Hussein from taking action against the Palestinians. Moreover, Nasser was deeply engaged in attritional warfare with Israel across the Suez Canal. Fateh felt that the Jordanians could hardly strike at the resistance in such circumstances.

In the event, all its estimates proved wrong. When fighting began in earnest in September 1970 the Iraqis stood aside, the king made certain to employ only loyalist regiments against the Palestinians and the resistance found itself outgunned. Most important of all, the resistance was caught fatally unawares by Nasser’s unexpected acceptance of a cease-fire along the Suez Canal early in August. Overnight the political situation changed and Hussein struck before the Palestinians had time to draw up a new strategy.

After the September 1970 fighting, Fateh and the Jordanian government came to a new agreement. The resistance had been badly shaken by the experience and several elements inside Fateh started to review the situation in the light of events. The resistance militia had fought surprisingly well against the Jordanians, and there was a move to preserve militia unity that emanated from Fateh. But the independent guerrilla organizations were reluctant to give up their respective militia units, and after the final military defeat of the resistance in the Jerash and Ajloun battles during July 1971 a new agreement
with the Jordanian regime culminated in the appropriation of all the militia's weaponry.

Between the September fighting and the elimination (for all practical purposes) of the resistance presence in Jordan in July 1971, Fateh was subject to major internal dissension. The elimination of Jordan as a guerrilla base sparked off bitter recriminations and the first congress after the defeat saw a serious clash between two wings of the movement. One group called for a radical change of methods, a return to secrecy and an emphasis on military activity. The opposition warned against submitting to a political miscalculation and taking a drastic course of action that was unwarranted by the significance of what had happened in Jordan.

The congress was unable to settle the dispute which persisted for a long time, and the conflict was complicated by the further problem of whether or not to attend a peace conference with Jordan. The hard-liners were in a majority, but nevertheless a Fateh representative of the most moderate wing of the movement, Khaled Hassan, was sent to Jeddah for negotiations with the Jordanians. As it happened, the Jeddah negotiations proved abortive.

But the repercussions of the Jordanian tragedy did not cease to affect Fateh. In June 1972 a violent dispute erupted between Fateh's Central Committee and the organization's Lebanon command, led by one of the stiffest opponents of peace talks with Jordan. It took an outbreak of fighting at Tall al Zaatar camp in Beirut and the transference of the command's chief to Damascus before the dispute was settled. Bloody clashes again erupted between rival Fateh factions when Abu Yusuf Kayed, a leading military official of Fateh, mutinied against supporters of the central command.

The result of the internal strife was the emergence of left-wing groups within Fateh who managed for a time to isolate the rightists, represented chiefly by Khaled Hassan. The right called for closer ties with Arab regimes (particularly conservative states) to avert a repetition of the Jordan events, and blamed the fighting in Amman on left-wing commando groups whose slogans and provocations had impelled the Jordanian government to take action. They also claimed that
Fateh’s links with leftist commando groups had alienated Fateh’s support in the Arab world. The Khaled Hassan group demanded that Fateh should work anew to unite all the resistance organizations under it supervision.

The left has been represented in Fateh chiefly by Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad) who considers that any attack on a commando group is an attack on the resistance movement as a whole. Fateh’s left believes that the Jordanian regime provoked the leftist organizations to act in order to strike at Fateh. They insist that the resistance movement is an integral part of the Arab liberation movement, which in turn is part of the international liberation movement as a whole. In their eyes, Fateh should strengthen its ties with other commando groups and leftist organizations in the socialist block and throughout the world.

The left dominates Fateh today. Since 1971 relations between Fateh and the socialist countries have developed fast. Yasser Arafat visited Moscow in July 1972, only one day before President Sadat announced the expulsion of the Soviet military technicians from Cairo. Since then the Soviets have shown themselves increasingly sympathetic towards the Palestinian cause and more willing to differentiate between what the Arab regimes want of Israel and what the Palestinians claim. The phrase ‘the legitimate rights of the Palestinians’ has taken the place of the ‘Palestinian refugees’ in Soviet pronouncements. Meanwhile, the Soviets have extended more and more economic and political assistance to the Palestinian resistance, supplying better equipment and giving more guerrillas military training in the Soviet Union. The PLO has also been recognized by the Soviet Union as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in accordance with the resolutions of the Rabat summit in October 1974. Preparations for the opening of a PLO representative office in Moscow have been made, but to date no such office has been established.

PLO offices have been opened elsewhere in the socialist and non-aligned world. Peking has long had a PLO office, and East Germany was the first to open one in Eastern Europe. Soviet support meanwhile has led to the recognition of the PLO by all the world’s Communist parties.

Fateh for its part has tried to build a national front of
commando groups not allied to Arab regimes. There have been attempts at *rapprochement* with the PFLP and the PDFLP, notably more successful in the case of the latter. At the request of the Soviets, the number of Fateh operations in Israel decreased in view of international reaction, though Fateh has felt compelled since the October War to mount operations in order to avoid being outflanked by radicals and ‘rejectionists’. Co-operation between Fateh and the Soviet Union reached a peak with the intervention of Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny with King Hussein to stop the execution of Abu Daoud, a Fateh commando leader arrested in Jordan in February 1973 on his way to carry out a special operation in the occupied territories.

Closer ties with the Soviet Union have enabled Fateh to develop closer relations with other international left-wing organizations. Co-operation has also been initiated with Arab Communist parties, despite a difference in strategy, and the Communist parties voluntarily dissolved their own commando group, Al Ansar (The Partisans), and integrated its members in Fateh. An Arab Front Participating in the Palestine Revolution has been formed, grouping representatives of all the revolutionary organizations of the Arab world, and leading to co-operation between Fateh and other Arab organizations that have previously had little contact, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman. Fateh has also established relations with leftist groups in Turkey, Iran and Eritrea, and has trained large numbers of their men. Many Iranian and Turkish commandos have since been arrested and admitted to links with Fateh. Others have carried out operations in concert with Fateh, such as the assassination of the Israeli consul in Ankara.

However, the October War has brought about fresh divisions within Fateh. Opposition to Fateh (and PLO) policy with regard to a settlement has prompted hard-liners within Fateh to identify with the ‘rejection front’. The former Fateh representative in Baghdad, Sabri al Banna (Abu Nidal) has had his membership of Fateh suspended, and a Fateh military tribunal condemned him to death *in absentia* in October 1974. Abu Nidal, who heads what is known as the Political Committee of the Palestine Revolution, based in Baghdad, stated in an
interview with a Beirut weekly, Al Diyar, in January 1975 that his group was composed of dissident Fateh members and representatives of the ‘rejection front’, and that it had links throughout the Arab world that enabled it to take initiatives in the name of the PLO. He accused Arafat of arrogating power to himself exclusively and warned of the possibility of a civil war within the resistance.

Abu Nidal has been associated with Ahmad Abdul Ghafour (Abu Mahmoud), a Fateh dissident who was shot in Beirut in September 1974, after having been sentenced by a Fateh court. Abu Mahmoud was widely believed to have had close connections with Libya and to have headed a somewhat shadowy organization known as the Arab Nationalist Youth for the Liberation of Palestine. The group carried out a number of spectacular operations, such as the attack on Rome’s Fiumicino airport in which 30 people, including several Mooroccan government officials, died. In July 1974 Abu Mahmoud issued a statement in which he condemned the leadership of Fateh for betraying the revolution and neutralizing Al Assifa forces, and he called for the convening of a Fateh congress to correct such deviationist tendencies.

Before his death, Abu Mahmoud was known to have travelled to Iraq and met Abu Nidal. Iraq has stubbornly protected Abu Nidal from the wrath of Fateh. The government in Baghdad has consistently refused to hand over Abu Nidal or even to cease regarding him as the official PLO representative in Iraq. The tension between the PLO and Iraq culminated in an acrimonious attack on the regime which implicated Vice-President Saddam Hussein in the December 1974 hijack of British VC-10 at Dubai by a group calling itself the Squad of the Martyr Abdul Ghaffour. It was claimed that under interrogation the hijackers named Abu Nidal as mastermind in the plan, but this was subsequently denied.

THE POPULAR FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE

The Popular Front for the Liberation was born on 11 December 1967 as the result of the merger between three formerly independent groups. Two of these — the Heroes of the Return Organization and the National Front for the Liberation of
Palestine (Young Men of Revenge) — were affiliated to the Arab Nationalism Movement, whose most prominent member, Dr George Habash, emerged as the PFLP's effective leader. The third participant was the Palestine Liberation Front, which included a number of smaller groups all named after Palestinians who had fought up to 1948 — the group of the Martyr Abdul Latif Shrour, the group of the Martyr Izzedin Qassem and the group of the Martyr Abdul Qader Hussein.

According to the PFLP's first political statement, the merger of these three organizations was intended to achieve 'unity of all those forces which realize that the nature and dimensions of the battles and the forces opposed to it make it imperative to rally the revolutionary ranks of our people and all their efforts for their long and bitter struggle against their enemy.' The statement made an open call 'to all Palestinian forces and groups to join together in nationalist revolutionary work to attain firm national unity among all the elements of the Palestinian armed struggle.'

The PFLP laid down six principles on which its beliefs and actions would be based. Paraphrased, these read as follows:

1. The only language that the enemy will understand is revolutionary violence.
2. Fighting against the enemy in all lands occupied by its troops is the strategy of operations imposed on us by history, until we reach the stage where we can open a wide front against the enemy and transform the land of Palestine into an inferno which will consume the invaders.
3. Armed resistance must not be limited simply to the fighters. Every Palestinian at every level has a role to play in resisting the enemy. Nor can any dealings with the enemy be contemplated: the entirety of its economic, civilian and political organization must be boycotted.
4. Armed resistance is the only effective method available to the masses in their challenge to Zionism.
5. The material resources of the resistance movement lie with the masses, and the mobilization of their capacity can only be achieved through a popular revolutionary organization.
(6) The struggle of the Palestinian masses in the occupied territories is an effective contribution to the Arab revolution against world imperialism and its lackeys. This demands an organic link between the struggle of our Palestinian people and the struggle of the Arab people facing the same overall danger and the same overall enemy. Armed Palestinian action will serve as a touchstone throughout the Arab world of those who are for the Palestinian revolution and those who are against it.

The PFLP issued its first military communiqué on 17 December 1967, concerning an operation near Al Zarra'a settlement. Two days later it took up its first political stand supporting a PLO Executive Committee memorandum demanding the dismissal of Ahmad Shukairi as PLO chief.

The creation of the PFLP must be seen in the context of a fundamental change in the structure and thinking of the Arab Nationalist Movement. During an ANM conference in 1966, two major decisions were reached which were to have a profound effect on the Palestinian revolution. First, the conference decided to hive off the Palestinian elements in the ANM as a special group to be known as the Palestine Region. This group was led by George Habash, the ANM’s founder, and included Ahmad Yamani (Abu Maher), Abdul Karim Hamad (Abu Adnan) and Wadih Haddad. The conference approved in principle the concept of armed struggle against Israel, but put back the date for the launching of the struggle ‘in order to train, prepare and contact the interior.’ The new organization rapidly won support among the Palestinians, and when operations against Israel began after the 1967 war, the PFLP gave the greatest trouble, since it was already firmly established inside the occupied territories.

The 1966 ANM conference also officially adopted ‘scientific socialism’ as the movement’s guideline to action, largely at the insistence of younger elements in the leadership. While the creation of a special Palestinian section of the ANM heralded the emergence of the PFLP, the adoption of a socialist ideological trend foreshadowed the radical leftist colouring that the PFLP was later to take. Some cadres under Nayef
Hawatmeh had earlier embraced Marxism, and at the PFLP's congress in August 1968 the leftists won the day over their opponents when their radical programme was adopted. Two ex-members of the Palestine Liberation Front, Ahmad Jibril and Ahmad Zaarour, had been resolutely hostile to the direction the young PFLP was taking, and promptly split with the Front to form their own organizations — the PFLP-General Command and the Palestine Arab Organization respectively. The new groups remained splinter movements, however, and Habash considered they were proof of the failure of foreign elements to create small organizations to operate in rivalry with the ANM.

But a few months later a much more serious division in the PFLP's ranks occurred with the breakaway of Nayef Hawatmeh on 21 February 1969 to form the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Hawatmeh wanted to see a much more rigorously Marxist approach by the resistance and had come to regard the PFLP as compromised by its petit bourgeois origins in the ANM of the 1950s. The PFLP tried to physically liquidate the dissenters, but Fateh intervened to restrain them. Thereupon, Habash himself swung leftwards and officially adopted Marxism-Leninism to confront the new split, using his personal prestige with old comrades in the movement to force through adoption of the new direction.

Although Marxist indoctrination began quickly, it remained a basic question whether the PFLP was no more than an outgrowth of the ANM taking on Marxist attitudes, or a truly Marxist-Leninist organization. The PFLP gave its own answer by describing itself as a petit bourgeois group that was working towards 'transformation' to Marxism-Leninism. This transformation process was used as an argument to condemn the PDFLP, since it was possible for the movement to change from within, then Hawatmeh's disruptive breakaway became meaningless.

The question was to rise again after experience of the September 1970 massacre in Jordan. Another crisis within PFLP ranks erupted, this time between the leadership of Habash, Yamani, Haddad and Ghassan Kanafani, and a new leftist group under Abu Shihab. Habash tried hard to contain the rift, but refused to consider Abu Shihab's insistence that the entire old guard leadership should be dismissed to clear the
road for real change, and appoint younger leftist cadres to the finance, supply, information and foreign operations commands of the Front. Habash defended his comrades as ‘the struggling trend’ and dropped the leftists instead. Abu Shihab then formed a new splinter group in March 1972 which took the name of the Popular Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Palestine. In the event, the new movement found the going hard and after numerous difficulties dissolved itself in 1974. Many of its members joined Ahmad Jibril’s PFLP-GC, while others returned to the PFLP fold with a letter recanting the reasons for their original defection.

The dissensions within the PFLP reflect its attitude towards the other Palestinian resistance movements, and Fateh in particular. The PFLP regards Fateh as a collection of Palestinian bourgeois and Moslem Brothers identified with the reactionary Arab regimes. It considers itself in its capacity as the true manifestation of the Palestinian left wing to be more representative of the interests of the Palestinians, and its internal disagreements arise basically out of a constant attempt to define the alternative path to Fateh.

The PFLP and Fateh have clashed repeatedly in heated argument before and after the Jordan fighting. The dispute between the two came to a head in November 1971 over the allocation of responsibility for the expulsion of the commandos from Jordan. Kamal Adwan, a member of Fateh’s Central Committee in charge of information, held a Press conference in Beirut where he accused the PFLP of acting as an agent of the Jordanian regime, which on several occasions when the commandos were still in Jordan had prevented Fateh from settling accounts with the PFLP. Adwan also criticized the PFLP for providing the Jordanians with all the necessary pretexts for the liquidation of the commando movement in the country. The PFLP replied by rejecting — in whole or in part — all Adwan’s statements, and condemned the Press conference as an attempt to promote Fateh’s battle with the PFLP over its ideology and win sympathy for itself among the Palestinian people.

Relations between the two movements have continued to be marked by severe strain, despite periodic moves towards
reconciliation. In 1973 there was even some talk of a merger when in April Yamani told the Front’s magazine *Al Hadaf* that the task confronting the PFLP and Fateh was the creation of a broadly based popular front. He revealed that the two organizations had already agreed on the need for such a front to escalate the fighting with the enemy and that co-operation would be based on the programme of the Palestine National Assembly session of January 1973. Military operations in the occupied territories, and especially in the Gaza Strip, were co-ordinated, and when Syria and Jordan showed signs of *rapprochement* (with Sa’eqa adopting a hostile line toward Fateh), the two sides moved even closer together.

But the October War put an end to such schemes. Fateh became the prime mover of a moderate attitude that would enhance the PLO’s international political standing, holding out the promise of an eventual Palestinian authority in those areas of the occupied territories evacuated by Israel. The PFLP, on the other hand, moved in precisely the opposite direction in spearheading the rejection front that opposed all negotiations with Israel and any compromise which fell short of the resistance movement’s ultimate goals.

The PFLP’s refusal to compromise and its hostility to the PLO’s ten-point programme adopted at the Palestine National Assembly in Cairo in June 1974 (which generally reflected Fateh’s thinking) led to its suspension from membership in the PLO Executive Committee in September 1974. Previously the Front had threatened to leave the organization altogether if the PLO ever decided to attend the Geneva conference. Since then it has denounced the resolutions of the Arab summit held in Rabat in October 1974, and the following month was reported to be holding its own conference to map out a new strategy for the rejectionists.

Militarily, the PFLP has achieved fame for its special ‘foreign operations’ involving parties not directly concerned in the Middle East conflict and reactionary regimes. The ‘foreign operations’ was initiated with the hijacking of an El Al airliner to Algeria in July 1968. Israel released 16 Palestinian prisoners in return for the aircraft and its passengers. But the Front’s most famous operation was the hijacking of four international
airliners in September 1970 on the eve of the fighting with the Jordanian Army. An American Boeing 747 was blown up and the other three planes with their 500 crew and passengers were taken to ‘Revolution Airport’ near Zarqa.

The PFLP justifies such operations by pointing out that the Palestinian cause lacked the elements for a people’s war along the lines of Algeria and Vietnam and needed recourse to other more spectacular methods to publicize itself and inflict damage on its enemies. A guerrilla war in Palestine could only be limited in nature. By making the whole world the resistance’s theatre of operations, the Front wanted (in its own words) ‘to force international opinion to realize that there is such a thing as a Palestine cause and that there is an uprooted people fighting on other people’s lands because it has been denied its own land.’ The Front argued that foreign operations served to keep the problem alive in a way that no limited guerrilla operations in the occupied territories could do.

And sometimes foreign operations have functioned in exactly this way. The shootings at Lydda Airport in which Japanese Red Army commandos took part reverberated throughout the world, and there was a general outcry for a solution to the Palestine problem. But other operations have caused just as much harm to the cause. The September 1970 hijackings above all gave King Hussein the pretext he needed to launch his army at the commandos in Jordan while securing at least international acquiescence for his action because of the alarm felt at attacks on civil aviation targets.

Even within the PFLP foreign operations have found opposition. Some groups follow the Soviet line, believing that these examples of ‘revolutionary violence’ contradict the principle of popular participation in the fighting. And despite their generally favourable attitude to the Front, the socialist bloc countries have frowned upon the PFLP’s military methods. During his visit to China in 1970 Habash was told that Peking supported the Palestine revolution but was opposed to the foreign operations because they were not in the nature of a people’s war. Habash heard the same view during trips to North Korea and the Soviet Union, where Soviet leaders told him that the foreign operations were making it
difficult for Moscow to defend the justice of the Palestine cause.

Relations between the PFLP and the Soviet Union have cooled noticeably anyway since Moscow's espousal of the PLO policy calling for independent participation at the Geneva conference. Habash for his part has attacked the Soviets for backing solutions which in his view can only lead to the liquidation of the Palestinian movement, and for their promotion of a peaceful settlement which would ultimately (as Habash sees it) sanction the existence of Zionist Israel. The Soviets have replied through their Press, condemning Habash for effectively serving the cause of the Arabs' enemies. Habash says that the dialogue with the socialist countries is going on, but there is no indication of any settlement of the differences between the two parties.

The publicity that the Palestinians have attained and the hostility provoked by the foreign operations among potential friends and within the movement prompted the PFLP to announce an end to such activities. Nevertheless, the Front was reported to have been behind two major hijackings in 1973, of a Lufthansa plane at Aden where a five million dollar ransom was extracted, and of a Japan Air Lines Boeing flown to Dubai. The same year the PFLP became involved in an attack on an oil refinery in Singapore which later led to the occupation of the Japanese Embassy in Kuwait to secure the freedom of the Singapore commandos (two Palestinians and two Japanese Red Army commandos).

Perhaps of greater long-term significance has been the PFLP's steady organization of underground cells in the occupied territories, particularly in Gaza where it has been active ever since 1967. The last Front leader to be killed there by the Israelis was the so-called 'Guevara Gaza' who died in the spring of 1973. Closer operational co-ordination with Fateh was instituted soon after.

PFLP relations with other Arab countries have been none too smooth either. Early in 1968 Habash was arrested by the Syrians for his activities there, and relations with the Syrian authorities deteriorated when PFLP men sprang Habash from prison. Better relations have been maintained with South Yemen after the NFL take-over (the shelling of the tanker Coral
Sea on its way to Eilat was directed not only against Israel, but also against Saudi Arabia whose relations with South Yemen have never been better than cool). The Front’s relations with Libya have also been through rough patches, which at one point culminated in a complete rupture after Colonel Kaddafi announced his intention of fighting Marxist tendencies in the resistance movement. But of late the Front and Libya have grown closer as Kaddafi fully approves of the PFLP’s rejectionist stance. By a similar token, relations with Iraq have been generally good, and Habash has visited both Tripoli and Baghdad on a number of occasions.

THE POPULAR DEMOCRATIC FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE

Mention has been made of the PFLP congress held in August 1968 which adopted a left-wing programme and led to the first split in the Front. At the time of the Congress, George Habash was still in jail in Syria, but he was known to oppose the leftist trend, and his opinions were defended by Wadih Haddad and Hamad Farhan. The left was represented chiefly by Nayef Hawatmeh, Abdul Karim Hamad (Abu Adnan) and Qais Samarrai (Abu Leila). Their programme, which the congress approved, was specifically designed to transform the PFLP into a popular progressive movement — ‘there is no ideological, political or historical justification for the existence of a petit bourgeois group within the resistance movement.’ The main features of the programme stressed:

(1) Complete alignment with the ideology of the working class.
(2) Formulation of internal (among members) and external (among the masses) relations within the framework of central ideological and political democracy. In other words, the masses were to be consulted on all issues, while the minority reserved the right to declare its views openly.
(3) Moving political and military operations to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and cutting down dependence on the Jordan Valley, which should only serve as a supply route.
(4) Struggle to create a broad national front including all the political and social forces opposed to imperialism, Zionism and reaction under the command of the progressive fighting units.

(5) Putting the battle with Israel in its proper context of a struggle both with the Zionist state and those who are behind it.

Organizationally, the congress agreed to purge the ranks of the PFLP of all reactionary and disruptive elements and to suppress independent power centres and private domains of influence. The congress then elected a new Executive Committee which was dominated by the left who took ten seats to the right's five.

However, the rightists rejected the structural changes in the resolutions, although they approved the ideological and political platform. According to Nayef Hawatmeh, the right-wingers physically forced the leftists to relinquish their representation in the new leadership which re-emerged as overwhelmingly right-wing, with only one leftist on the Executive Committee. The dispute between the two sides continued for a long time, however, and several leftists were arrested. At one point Fateh even had to intervene to prevent an attempt to liquidate the left.

Ultimately the result was a secession of the leading leftists. The Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine came into being after 'the progressive revolutionary wing in the Popular Front had realized that it could not coexist with the right wing of the Arab Nationalist Movement which is leading the right wing of the Front; and after the leftists had suggested to the right-wingers the holding of a congress at which firm guarantees would be made for the minority to abide by the will of the majority; and after consulting with all the Palestinian factions joined in the Popular Front.' The secession drew support from branches on both the East and the West Banks, and by all the Front's branches in Iraq, Syria and Kuwait and about half the Lebanese branch, as well as student groups in Europe and America. The PFLP was thus enabled to
establish its own identity and to persuade other commando groups to give their recognition.

The new organization was thus from the beginning notably leftist in orientation. It argued that the progressive regimes had failed to achieve their own national and social goals, and as a result could be put in the same boat as the reactionary regimes and fought equally strongly. The initial targets of the Front thus included Iraq, Egypt and Algeria along with the conservative states. The PDFLP established close ties with organizations working to topple existing regimes, including a faction of the Iraqi Communist Party which was then on the threshold of armed resistance in Iraq. Links were also made with revolutionary movements in the Gulf area and Oman, and with the Lebanese Socialist Organization (the Lebanese branch of the ANM which had adopted Marxism).

It was the PDFLP’s argument that the liberation of Palestine by the resistance could never be achieved until all the Arab regimes had joined the battle against Israel and imperialism. Arab countries with reactionary regimes were incapable of participating in this confrontation, and therefore the prelude to the liberation of Palestine was a general Arab revolution. And since the Arab revolution would ultimately be part of the world-wide revolution, the PDFLP was soon making contact with international revolutionary movements such as the Trotskyists (although these never led to anything much and were allowed to lapse).

While the resistance was still in Jordan, the PDFLP adopted an approach that raised such questions as the social conditions of workers and led to fomenting strikes and demonstrations. This was the best method, the PDFLP argued, to create an effective link between the Jordanian and Palestinian peoples.

During the summer of 1970 before the climactic clash with the Jordanian Army, the PDFLP played a waiting game vis-à-vis the regime. But once the fighting between commandos and the army became more frequent and intense, the Front raised the slogan ‘All Authority to the Resistance’ only a few weeks before the battles of September. The PDFLP called desperately for the formation of a broad front of
all the commando organizations, but it went unheeded. The PDFLP also stressed that 'the victory of the Palestine liberation movement over the Zionist enemy depends on victory over imperialism in the Arab region. Hence the struggle against the national enemy is linked to the struggle against imperialism and reactionary circles that co-operate with it. Thus the future of the Palestine revolution is linked to the future of the Arab revolution against imperialism and to change the balance of power in the region.'

The PDFLP refused to distinguish between the armed resistance and the political and organizational education of the Palestinian masses since it believed that historical experience showed no revolutionary movement would be able to exist with a revolutionary doctrine. It was also notable for electing its leadership by vote and its refusal to pay its commandos salaries like other commando groups.

As a first step, the PDFLP decided to create a Marxist-Leninist party to be the mouthpiece of the working masses. But the September 1970 fighting in Jordan forced the organization to reconsider many of its original objectives. Just before the outbreak of the fighting on 22 August 1970 it held a congress which demanded an end to the duality of authority in Jordan by giving full power to the commandos. Then the PDFLP became involved in a number of clashes with the Jordanian Army in the hope of bringing Fateh into the conflict, and in the belief that the combined force of the commando movement would emerge victorious from any showdown with the Amman authorities.

When Egypt accepted the Rogers plan for steps towards a peace settlement that autumn, the PDFLP staged major demonstrations that played a considerable role in further widening the already serious cleavage between the Egyptian government and the resistance movement. After the September 1970 defeat, the PDFLP blamed the Arab right, claiming that the resistance had paid the price for rightist domination of the majority of Fateh commands. The Jordanian regime had been chosen by the Arab governments to eliminate the Palestinian
resistance movement before settling differences with Israel. Moreover, Fateh had failed to grasp that the reactionary Jordanian government was in no position to conduct any sort of struggle with Israel or the imperialist powers.

Until the end of 1971 the PDFLP’s chief message to the resistance was the fatal penetration of right-wing tendencies which it perceived to be fundamentally at the root of all the movement’s troubles. But from 1972 onwards it became increasingly concerned with the errors that it had committed itself in the light of experience as a leftist group. The Front changed its attitude towards the Syrian and Iraqi governments, and began to seriously propose the unity of the commando movement. Playing a leading role in the attempt to end the fragmentation of the resistance, it gradually found itself growing closer to Fateh. The PDFLP now argues that resistance unity is a practical answer to King Hussein’s plan for a United Arab Kingdom. It is not enough to say ‘No’ to such reactionary schemes: an alternative must be proposed.

Since the October War, the PDFLP has openly aligned itself with Fateh within the PLO. It has shown itself to be a staunch supporter of the Palestine National Assembly’s June 1974 resolution, which favours the establishment of a national authority in whatever parts of Palestine are liberated from Israeli occupation. But the Front continues to assert that political and military action are complementary, and has not stopped carrying out military operations inside Israel.

Despite opposition within the resistance, the PDFLP has gone on pushing the need for work towards the reunification of the two banks of the Jordan on a nationalist and democratic basis. The argument has won adherents since the October War. The Front has also changed its attitude towards the Soviet and Arab Communist parties. Originally it accused both the Soviets and the local Communists of failing to understand the real problem of Arab nationalism; it consequently advocated the creation of a new and sounder Communist movement to replace the existing revisionists. But since the fighting in Jordan, the Soviet Union has come to be seen as a badly needed ally. Since the liquidation of the Sudanese Communist Party by President Numeiri in July 1971 (which caused a considerable shock
among progressive movements in the Arab world), relations with the Lebanese Communist Party have improved markedly, and as a result there has been some material assistance from the Soviet Union. In October 1974 Nayef Hawatmeh led a PDLFP delegation to Moscow, the first time that the organization had been invited in its own right instead of acting as part of a PLO delegation. At the same time relations with China have been maintained. A large delegation visited Peking in July 1973 under Tayssir Khaled, a member of the political bureau, and then in November 1974 Hawatmeh led another delegation to China.

THE POPULAR FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE — GENERAL COMMAND

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command is led by Ahmad Jibril, a Palestinian officer who left the Syrian Army with a number of compatriots soon after the Syrian-Egyptian union in 1958. The following year he created a small commando group which he called the Palestine Liberation Front with the aim of initiating guerrilla war against Israel.

Information about Jibril's activities in the Syrian Army and during the early days of his own organization is scanty. But it is believed that he supervised a few operations against Israel while still a Syrian officer (he was a captain when he left the army). The Palestine Liberation Front was made up of young Palestinians, some of them ex-Syrian Army conscripts, and although he conducted some operations in Upper Galilee, most of the group's work was in the nature of scouting out information for future use.

When Fateh began military operations in Israel at the beginning of 1965 there was some short-lived co-operation with the Palestine Liberation Front. But in October 1967, Jibril's group joined in the formation of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The merger lasted only a year, and in October 1968 the Jibril faction broke away to form the PFLP-General Command.

Jibril's withdrawal was prompted chiefly by his insistence that commando activity was the prime task of the resistance and too much time was being wasted with futile political
discussion. The leftist stance adopted by the PFLP at Nayef Hawatmeh’s instigation during the Front’s August 1968 congress convinced Jibril he would be better off acting on his own — the choice of the epithet General Command emphasizes the military priorities of the PELP-GC and reflects the former position of Jibril in the united PFLP as a military leader.

Since 1968 Jibril has worked alone. He has refused to join in any moves to unite with other groups, and it was not until 1974 that the PFLP-GC was represented in the PLO. Until then the group declined to be bound by the decisions of the Executive Committee, and in 1972 insisted on carrying on operations across the south Lebanese border in violation of PLO policy. The PFLP-GC also rejected all the decisions of the Palestine National Assembly regarding national unity and refused to merge any of its military, information and political activities with other organizations.

The General Command is particularly critical of commando groups affiliated to Arab regimes. ‘The resistance movement’, its leaders complain, ‘has become a testing ground for the various Arab states.’ However, in 1973 the General Command did break its traditional stand with a suggestion that Sa’eqa, the Popular Revolutionary Front and the PFLP-GC might draw up a common programme to merge the three groups. It is not unlikely that some pressure may have been exerted on the General Command since it has received financial and military aid from both Syria and Libya (Colonel Kaddafi admitted in a newspaper interview that he was helping the General Command), so it is not quite as independent from the regimes as it claims and wishes to be.

In a recent appearance on French television, Jibril outlined the General Command’s current thinking on the Middle East conflict. He reaffirmed his group’s total opposition to a peaceful settlement and declared his intention of organizing increasingly spectacular suicide operations to disrupt any attempt to reach a political settlement. He aims to create a situation whereby Israel would be forced to conduct reprisal raids which would, he hopes, drive moderate Palestinians to rally to the rejection front. He also added in the interview that the PFLP-GC would prefer to see a Palestinian state of only 180 square miles from
which to carry on the armed struggle against Israel to one ten times the size with enforced frontiers.

In 1974 the General Command joined the PLO for the first time, and in June Talal Naji (Abu Jihad Talal) was elected to the organization’s Executive Committee at the National Assembly meeting in Cairo. Although the group supports the rejection front led by the PFLP, it has not so far followed the latter organization’s example in suspending its members of the Executive Committee. Talal Naji, meanwhile, was a member of the PLO delegation that accompanied Yasser Arafat to Moscow in November 1974.

The General Command is estimated to include about 300 to 400 fighters stationed in Lebanon and Syria. All their bases are mobile so they cannot be easily tracked down. The General Command’s presence in Lebanon has been marked by several incidents with the Lebanese authorities.

SA’EQA

Sa’eqa is the military wing of the Vanguards of the Popular War of Liberation Organization. This group was established before the 1967 war from Palestinian cadres of the Ba’ath Party in Syria and claimed a limited number of adherents who took part in the Golan fighting during the war. The ninth congress of the Ba’ath Party held in September 1967 regarded the creation of the Vanguards as a practical crystallization of the Party’s strategy as adopted at the congress. The aim of the new organization was to enlighten masses, organize and mobilize them in preparation for the ‘destiny-shaping battle’.

In May 1968 the Palestinian Ba’ath organizations in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Jordanian East Bank, Syria and Kuwait held what was described as a Palestinian Preparatory congress, from which the United Palestinian Organization of the Ba’ath Party emerged. This organization became the practical backbone of the Vanguards group.

The Vanguards and Sa’eqa share, not surprisingly, the same principles on Palestine as the Ba’ath Party. They hold the view that:

(1) The Palestinian revolution is an integral part of the Arab revolution.
(2) The destiny of Palestine has been and will be decided historically by conditions in the surrounding countries.

(3) The failure of the Palestinian-Jordanian bourgeoisie to adopt a nationalist attitude has made it a direct ally of the forces of colonialism and imperialism, and hence of the Zionist movement.

(4) The nature and depth of the battle will create the revolutionary conditions for the birth of an Arab liberation movement that will cover the whole Arab region through a popular liberation war which will herald the birth of the new Arab and the liberated Arab socialist society.

(5) All 'capitulationist' and 'liquidation' settlements of the Palestine problem must be firmly condemned and repudiated since they all call for the acceptance and recognition of a Zionist entity in Palestine.

The creation of Sa’eqa fulfilled several requirements of the Syrian Ba’ath Party. The Damascus regime needed an active commando group which could counter criticism stemming from the performance of the Syrian Army in the 1967 war. The new group could also neutralize the popular disenchantment which was reflected in student and labour agitation in Egypt throughout 1968, as well as enable the Party’s leadership to provide a new and radical stimulus for younger militants in the country. The Party had taken on the garb of scientific socialism in 1966, which had brought about major theoretical and practical political changes. This in turn demanded that every means of mobilizing the Party’s cadres be exploited, and an active and hard-line approach to the Palestine problem provided one opportunity.

Sa’eqa launched its first military operations against Israel from stationary bases in Jordan. From the beginning it presented itself as an alternative to Fateh, and has never quite given up its aspirations to make the running in the resistance movement. At first, Sa’eqa considered itself to be on the left of Fateh, an organization it saw as right-wing in its connections with reactionary Arab regimes. Sa’eqa faithfully reflected official Ba’ath thinking, and indeed from 1968 it was attached
directly to the Party after being linked with the army (whose Palestinian officers had earlier been transferred to Sa’eqa). Once Sa’eqa came under the civilian party, it began to play an increasingly important role in Syrian political life. Party organizations and affiliated mass groups, particularly student organizations, were asked to join the training courses of Sa’eqa to counterbalance the influence of the army.

In its attempts to resist Fateh’s growing control of the PLO, Sa’eqa enlisted the support of two small commando groups — the Palestine Popular Liberation Front and the Galilee Organization — and then proceeded to form an alliance of those opposed to Fateh. Considerable support was derived from the officers and men of the Palestine Liberation Army, the bulk of whose forces were based in Syria, and PLA pressure was exerted on Fateh.

Sa’eqa also gained wide popularity among non-Ba’athist Palestinians by launching a large number of operations against Israel. In this it managed to score points against the Iraqi Ba’ath-backed Arab Liberation Front which mounted only a few operations and failed to win mass support.

By early 1969 relations between the resistance and the Jordanian government were beginning to deteriorate in an alarming manner, and Sa’eqa was convinced that a showdown was imminent. The organization began to work for the overthrow of the regime in Amman and the then leader of Sa’eqa, Dahi Jumai’ani, made contacts with Jordanian Army officers. How far Sa’eqa got in its attempts to topple King Hussein is unclear, but after the September fighting Yasser Arafat referred to an offer by a commando organization ‘working for an Arab regime’ to undertake a coup against the king. He said the organization had told him that the armoured forces guarding the radio station at Amman might be ready to back the plot, but pointed to subsequent developments as proving the naivety of trying to stage a coup at that stage in Jordan.

Sa’eqa also played a leading role in the friction between the Lebanese authorities and the resistance. Clashes between Palestinian commandos and the Lebanese Army had taken place on a number of occasions in the south, and Sa’eqa found
itself in a privileged position. It could rely on strong Party allegiance in south Lebanon where the commandos had been grouping to launch attacks on Israel since 1967. It also benefited from the support of Syria in disputes with the Lebanese government. Since Lebanon's main income comes from its transit trade with the rest of the Arab world and its only Arab frontier is with Syria, the Damascus regime could bring pressure to bear on Lebanon by closing the borders every time the commandos and the Lebanese Army clashed.

Sa'eqa's role became clear in the crisis of October 1969. Sa'eqa commandos occupied several Lebanese police posts near the border and Damascus sent PLA units to support the commandos in their skirmishes with the army. Syria's support for Sa'eqa was also a main factor in concluding the Cairo agreement that year which allowed the commandos to operate officially from south Lebanon.

During the September 1970 fighting in Jordan, the civilian wing of the Ba'ath Party in Syria put considerable pressure on the army to intervene. There was a bitter dispute between the civilians led by Salah Jedid and the military headed by Hafez Assad. Jedid managed to despatch armoured forces, but Assad, who was air force commander, refused to provide air support and the tanks were eventually withdrawn. Assad argued that any Syrian interference would lead to US and Soviet involvement, and pointed to the movement of American and Israeli forces to back Jordan. Assad's failure to support the Syrian Army intervention widened the split inside the Ba'ath Party, and materially helped to bring forward his take-over of the country in November 1970.

During the bloodless coup, Assad surrounded Sa'eqa's bases in Syria and after his assumption of power he eliminated pro-Jedid elements from the organization as a whole. His attempt to enforce the changes through a congress of the Palestinian branch of the Ba'ath Party did not produce the required result, however, and the authorities were constrained to arrest several Sa'eqa leaders in June 1971 and install a former teacher in Qatar, Zuhair Mohsen, as Secretary-General.

The upheaval seriously weakened Sa'eqa. Its standing in Lebanon was affected, and there were questions about its
intention to carry on the fight against Syria. At a Press conference in June held in Beirut, Mohsen revealed that at least three Sa’eqa leaders had been imprisoned by the Damascus regime and that major differences existed between the organization and the government. Mohsen also added that arms sent by Algeria to Fateh had been seized by the authorities.

Relations between Sa’eqa and the new Ba’ath leadership remained strained for a long time. Army Chief of Staff Mustafa Tlas was sent to Jordan in July 1971 to negotiate with the Jordanians during the final round of fighting between King Hussein and the commandos in the Jerash-Ajloun area. Syria also pressured Mohsen into going to Jeddah for talks with the Jordanian government but although he accompanied Fateh’s Khaled Hassan, nothing came from the meeting.

Sa’eqa’s main problem is that it lacks the popularity of Fateh among the Palestinian masses and Fateh’s influence with the other commando organizations. An attempt to promote a merger with the Popular Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the PFLP-GC was abortive. On the other hand Fateh cannot afford to ignore Sa’eqa because of the latter’s connections with the Syrian regime, and the importance to Fateh of its bases and training camps in Syria.

Sa’eqa is now regarded as a supporter of PLO policy and is grouped with Fateh in opposition to the rejection front. After the June 1974 Palestine National Assembly, Zuhair Mohsen, who is a member of the PLO’s Executive Committee, was appointed to head the organization’s military bureau, and was part of the PLO delegations that visited Moscow in July and November 1974.

THE ABAB LIBERATION FRONT

Established in April 1969 from cadres of the pro-Iraqi Arab Ba’ath Party, the Arab Liberation Front is Iraq’s reply to Sa’eqa, the rival Syrian Ba’ath Party’s commando group. The ALF was welcomed as the first serious attempt to ‘Arabize’ the Palestine cause. As its name implies, the organization sees itself as stressing the Arab rather than just the Palestinian nature of the liberation war.
The ALF’s first political statement outlined the reasons for the establishment of yet another commando organization:

The two years that have elapsed since the defeat have underlined the need of the commando movement for a new leap forward to continue the glorious march begun by the heroes of this nation who chose the path of armed struggle. The resistance movement must now be strengthened to face the danger of isolation that threatens the Arab revolution in Palestine. Such danger is especially striking in the attempt to restrict the revolution to its regional (Palestinian) limits and to sever the artery that connects it to the mainspring of energy and power of the Arab masses. This conspiracy hopes that the day will come when the revolution in Palestine can be cut to pieces.

The Ba’ath Party in the Arab world is divided into regional commands attached to each Arab country, and a national pan-Arab command. The ALF felt, as is evident from its statement, that too much stress was placed on the regional Palestinian nature of the struggle with Israel to the detriment of the Arab nature of the cause. Iraqi Ba’athists would rather give the general Arab cause precedence over regional problems.

The ALF’s statement also called for a popular war of liberation deploying the numerical superiority of the Arab people against the technological superiority of the Israelis. ‘The purpose of this liberation war is to enlist all the Arab people, freely and willingly, in the battle, side by side with the Arab armies. . .’

A clear distinction is thus drawn between the ALF (and to a certain extent Sa’eqa) and the other resistance organizations. Orthodox resistance thinking does not hold the view that Arab participation in the struggle will come about through existing regimes and considers the mobilization of the Palestinian people to be a pre-condition for the participation of other Arab peoples. The majority of commando movements see Arab participation under present circumstances as an attempt to bring the movement under the tutelage of the regimes and the subjugation of a future Palestine to their interests. The ALF,
for its part, has since its inception been unique in drawing the majority of its members from other Arab countries — particularly Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan, and only a minority from the Palestinians (which explains its relatively weak position in the refugee camps).

The ALF has also faced a major difficulty in the constant rivalry between the Syrian and Iraqi Ba'ath parties. In July 1969, the Syrian authorities arrested 300 ALF men and later expelled them to Jordan. The incident was not an isolated one, and ALF weapons have been frequently confiscated and their carriers placed in detention. Each time, the PLO has been obliged to intervene to secure the release of the ALF operatives.

Up until the September 1970 fighting the ALF was helped in Jordan by the presence there of 12,000 Iraqi regular army troops as part of the unified eastern front against Israel. But the failure of these troops to give the resistance any assistance during the fighting weakened the ALF which lost many of its members. The front was hardly helped either by the attitude of Dr. Munif Razzaz, one of its most prominent leaders, who subsequently agreed to bury the hatchet with King Hussein.

After the elimination of the resistance in Jordan the ALF was forced to fall back on Syria as its chief base, an unfortunate and short-lived arrangement which terminated when the Syrian government closed down its base as part of the internecine struggle with the Iraqi Ba'ath. The two blows to the ALF left it prostrate, and it was not until 1972 when the Iraqi government began to concern itself more actively with Palestinian affairs that the ALF began to recover.

A significant fillip was given to the organization by the major role it played in the Beirut conference that led to the setting up of the Arab Front Participating in the Palestine Revolution in October 1972. Since then the ALF has managed to exert more influence than its small size would indicate. Iraq's firm support of the Palestinians during the fighting between the commandos and the Lebanese government in May 1973 further raised the ALF in Palestinian esteem. But the fortunes of the organization still remain directly linked to politics of the Ba'ath leadership in Baghdad. Ba'athist power struggles can hurt the ALF, as was demonstrated by the fall of one of its chief

Today the ALF counts some 400 to 500 fighters, mostly based in south Lebanon. The bases follow the directions of the pro-Iraqi Ba’ath Party in Lebanon, although the guerrillas themselves maintain an independent military leadership. But since the October War the standing of the ALF has again been weakened by the hard-line policy adopted by the Iraqi Ba’athists. The ALF has aligned itself with the rejection front, and the rift with the PLO has been made greater by Baghdad’s protection of the renegade Fateh leader Abu Nidal.

Nor has the Front covered itself with much military distinction, confining its attacks to raids across the border while opposing foreign operations. It has failed to establish a presence in the occupied territories. All in all, the ALF functions strictly according to the interest that the Iraqi Ba’ath Party is showing at any given time in the Palestine problem.

BLACK SEPTEMBER

The Black September organization, an offshoot of Fateh, was the resistance’s most violent response to the events in Jordan of 1970-71. The Cairo and Amman agreements which put a temporary stop to the fighting that year left the commandos with several positions outside the Jordanian capital, and the resistance largely regarded the agreements as a truce to save lives before the struggle against the Jordanian regime was resumed. But King Hussein had different ideas which he began to implement after Nasser’s sudden death. His strategy was to isolate the commandos in the Jerash-Ajloun area before eliminating them altogether, and by July 1971 a series of battles between the resistance and the army had succeeded in totally destroying the commando presence in Jordan.

Those who got away were deeply embittered by the Jordan tragedy. How and why the movement had been trapped in such a situation became the subject of prolonged and acrimonious debate in the camps in Syria and Lebanon. Some leaders suggested a return to clandestine work such as Fateh had undertaken in its early days. Others objected that this would lose the resistance the political gains it had secured through its contacts with the Arab masses and would transform the
resistance into a guerrilla group pure and simple. Its chances of political survival under such circumstances were not rated very highly.

In this feverish atmosphere Fateh held a general congress in Damascus in August and September of 1971. Two distinct groups emerged, composed of extremists drawn largely from the younger commandos who had escaped the Jerash-Ajloun rout, and 'moderates and practicalists'. The extremists insisted that the organization should give up the policy of coexistence with the Arab regimes it had pursued since 1965. In the end an open crisis was avoided with a compromise from older Fateh members that seemed to satisfy the demands of both groups and allow Fateh to continue its unified existence.

Then, shortly after the congress, Black September — named after the 1970 fighting in Jordan — made its first appearance. Men claiming to belong to the previously unknown organization assassinated Jordanian Prime Minister Wasfi Tal in Cairo on 28 November 1971.

Immediately the question was asked: What was the relationship between Fateh and Black September? Fateh officially denied any connection with the new group and still insists that all the operations have been planned and executed without its knowledge. In a letter to the London Times in September 1972, the PLO representative in London, Said Hammami, denied that Black September was a member of the PLO or affiliated to any of the commando organizations belonging to the PLO. Nor was it represented in the Palestine National Assembly. Matters were hardly cleared up by a statement from another Fateh leader, Khaled Hassan, who announced at the same time that Black September 'will strike again somewhere'. He denied that the group had any connection with the PLO, but said that the PLO had 'asked world public opinion to discuss the reasons why Black September should be necessary'.

What Fateh does admit is that most of Black September's members are ex-Fateh men. Several Fateh leaders meanwhile have come out in opposition to the violence of the Septembrists, particularly when this has not been directed against Israel. But in general Fateh points to the circumstances in which Black
September was born and the psychology of its members to justify their actions.

The official line is probably not too far from the truth. It is, for instance, highly unlikely that any group with close links to Fateh would have been allowed to stage the attack on the Saudi Embassy in Khartoum in 1973 that resulted in the death of three diplomats. Fateh leaders at the time took great pains to dissociate their organization from the Black September operation.

Nevertheless, there have been persistent reports of a link between certain Fateh leaders and Black September. The name of Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad) has often been mentioned in connection with the Septembrists. And Abu Daoud, a Fateh official arrested in Jordan in February 1973, accused some Fateh leaders of planning the Septembrists’ operations.

Black September has been responsible for a great many spectacular strikes. On 15 December 1971 its men shot and slightly wounded Zeid Rifa‘i, the Jordanian Ambassador in London (and later Jordanian Prime Minister). The following day a letter bomb was delivered to a member of the Jordanian mission in Geneva, wounding four people. On 6 February 1972, Septembrists blew up a gas plant in Ravenstein, Holland, owned by a company that was supposed to have close connections with Israel. The same day five Jordanians were killed in Bruehl near Cologne, accused of spying on Palestinian workers in West Germany for the Jordanian authorities.

On 22 February Black September blew up oil tanks in Hamburg and soon afterwards an oil pipeline in Trieste, probably with the help of local operatives.

Then on 8 May Black September organized a much more difficult operation that consisted of hijacking a Sabena airliner and forcing it to land at Lydda airport, where the guerrillas demanded that the Israeli authorities release 100 commandos, threatening to blow up the plane with its passengers if their demands were not met. But the guerrillas were tricked by Israeli troops dressed as International Red Cross men, and the operation ended in the death of two of the commandos and the arrest of two others. The operation generated considerable controversy throughout the world, with Israel and the Red
Cross engaged in a bitter exchange of letters over the method used to flush out the guerrillas.

The second Lydda operation took place in 30 May in which Japanese commandos opened fire in the hall of the airport, killing 26 persons and wounding about 80 others. The second was considered to be partly a response to the failure of the first.

Black September launched its most spectacular operation on 5 September 1972 at the Olympic Games in Munich. Eleven Israeli athletes were seized by September guerrillas, and an ambush by West German police ended in the death of all of them, plus five commandos and a German policeman. Three other commandos were arrested but later released when a Lufthansa airliner was hijacked on a flight from Beirut to Frankfurt on October 29. World reaction to the Munich operation was extremely hostile, but Black September was undeterred and followed up with a letter bomb to the Israeli Embassy in London on 19 September, which resulted in the death of the agricultural attaché. Other letter bombs were also sent to Israeli embassies around the world and even to Israel itself.

On 28 December 1972 Black September commandos seized the Israeli Embassy in Bangkok, taking six hostages. But the operation, unusually, ended peacefully, with the commandos releasing their hostages and leaving for Cairo after the personal intervention of Prince Sihanouk and the Egyptian Ambassador. Then a month later, on 26 January 1973, an Israeli intelligence official named Baruch was killed in a Madrid street.

On 15 February the Jordanian authorities arrested a group of commandos led by Mohammad Daoud Odeh (Abu Daoud), a member of Fateh’s Revolutionary Council. The group had apparently entered Jordan secretly to kidnap members of the Jordanian Cabinet in an effort to prove the continuing activity of Fateh in that country. The failure of the operation was a heavy blow to Fateh’s prestige. But on 1 March another group of commandos occupied the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Khartoum and seized six diplomats — two Americans, a Belgian, two Saudis and a Jordanian. They demanded the release of Abu Daoud and his men, but after abortive talks the American and Belgian diplomats were executed and the
commandos gave themselves up to the Sudanese authorities.

The operation was greeted with great indignation in the United States, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. Relations between Fateh and the Saudis were very strained for a while, despite the personal efforts of Yasser Arafat. Jordan seized the opportunity to confirm the death sentence on Abu Daoud and his men, although foreign intervention obtained its commutation and the captured commandos were eventually released in a general amnesty that summer.

Black September’s next operation was in Cyprus on 12 March where an Israeli businessman working for Israeli intelligence there was killed. Less than a month later, on 9 April, commandos unsuccessfully tried to occupy the Israeli Embassy in Nicosia.

The May 1973 fighting between the Palestinians and the Lebanese Army brought a temporary halt to commando activity. The only operation of any importance was the assassination of an Israeli assistant military attaché in Washington on 30 June. On 5 September, a group of Black September commandos occupied the Saudi Embassy in Paris, took several hostages, and commandeered an aircraft to Kuwait where the Saudi hostages were released. The commandos were supposed to stand trial, but were released during the October War to join fighting units on the front.

Black September operations represented a new tactic in planning and execution, as well as providing an additional focus for the Palestine problem. Black September managed to maintain complete secrecy and so far all reports of its structure and methods seen to have fallen wide of the mark. There appear to be no leader or leaders, no officers to speak of, and certainly no paperwork. It may be that Black September existed formally only for the duration of each operation, whereupon its members went back to their regular commando work and the organization melted away until the next operation. At all events, it is now assumed that Black September has been officially frozen, a decision taken after the Khartoum operation which was the last one actually to bear the organization’s name.

What Black September’s violent activities accomplished was to expose the counter-violence of the Israelis. The Zionist state
emerged as a terror organization in its own right with raids on Palestinian refugee camps and a policy of repression of Palestinians inside Israel and the occupied territories. The world had largely affected to forget the terrorist origins of Israel, but by forcing it to resort once more to terror as a weapon against the Palestinians, Black September showed up the state terrorism of Israel in a clear light.

Thus Israeli agents have been responsible for the assassination in a car explosion of the PFLP’s principal spokesman, Ghassan Kanafani. His successor, Bassam Abu Sharif, was later wounded in a letter bomb explosion. Another letter bomb injured Dr Anis Sayegh, head of the PLO Research Center in Beirut. Israeli agents also killed Wael Zuaiter, a Fateh official in Italy, Mahmoud Hamshari, the PLO representative in Paris, Bassil Qubaisi, a PFLP leader in Paris. Israeli counter-violence culminated in the murder of three Palestinian leaders in Beirut by an assassination squad on the night of 10 April 1973. These were Abu Yusuf (Mohammad Yusuf Najjar) and Kamal Adwan, both Fateh leaders, and Kamal Nasser, the PLO’s official spokesman. Israel’s least successful operation of this nature was to use fighter aircraft to force a Lebanese airliner to land in Israel in the belief that George Habash was aboard. He wasn’t...
3. The Political Apparatus

THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION

Due to the nature of its formation, the Palestine Liberation Organization's fortunes have fluctuated at the whim of the Arab governments. The PLO was created by decree at the 1964 Cairo summit of Arab heads of state, one of the noisiest demonstrations of official Arab solidarity. Established with the approval of Arab governments, it was dependent on them for financial and political support. But it did not turn out to be a totally helpless creature.

When the PLO was set up in 1964, the ostensible reason given for its creation, as is so often the case, did not reflect the real impetus behind the decision of the Arab heads of state. The official explanation was that the dispersed Palestinian people needed an organization capable of representing their national interests and effectively continuing the struggle for the liberation of their homeland. Certainly this was — and still is — the fundamental raison d'être of the PLO, but there were other and weightier concerns in the minds of the Arab leaders responsible for the organization's establishment.

The palpable unrest of the Palestinians in the early 1960s caused growing alarm among the Arab leaderships. Disillusionment with the so-called progressive Arab regimes who had been expected to take the lead in fulfilling the national ambitions of the Palestinians led the refugees to begin organizing themselves politically and militarily. Nervously, the regimes looked forward to the day when new militant groups like Fateh would take the initiative into their own hands and cause difficulties for the established governments. Already small Palestinian organizations were promising to take concrete and violent measures against the Israelis, regardless of what Arab governments thought or did about the retaliation the Israelis were bound to inflict.

By the time the Cairo summit met in 1964, Fateh was becoming a well-known force which had succeeded in creating a
political organization with a nucleus of the Palestinian intelligentsia and a broad base of support in the refugee camps. Fateh was ready to begin operations against Israeli installations. The Arab governments were certainly not willing to accept such independent activity from the Palestinians.

The PLO thus came into existence as an attempt to contain the Palestinians through an official body of the Arab League. In this it was successful for a while, attracting considerable support and partially blocking the way to Fateh's development. The Palestinians' dependence on the regimes was perpetuated for a time and the growing nationalism of the camps held in check.

But the PLO's position was by its very nature ambiguous. On the one hand it was supposed to function as a damper on the more militant aspirations of the refugees, while on the other hand it was forced to make concessions towards the nationalists if it was to retain its influence. Thus in 1966 the PLO came into open conflict with Jordan in an effort to satisfy radical pressures among the Palestinians — which was the very kind of situation it had been designed to avoid.

Nor was the Arab regimes' choice of a leader for the Palestinian cause an entirely felicitous one. The Arab League Council meeting in September 1963 had reviewed the question of granting the Palestinians an organization of their own and appointed the notorious Ahmad Shukairi as the representative of the Palestinians at the Arab League. He was instructed to hold talks with Palestinian leaders to discuss the formation of a new general government of Palestine, and was to tour the Arab capitals to elicit the kind of help the Arab governments would extend to facilitate such an enterprise.

Shukairi had previously been Saudi Arabia's representative at the United Nations but had resigned when he felt unable to defend the Saudi point of view against Egypt over the Yemen War. This occurred in the summer of 1963, and as a prominent Palestinian he seemed to the Egyptians to be the ideal choice to head the new Palestinian organization. And as the PLO's leader, Shukairi made sure during his tenure of office that popular Palestinian sentiment was never expressed more strongly than the collective Arab leadership would desire.
The appointment of Shukairi to head the Palestinian initiative was also one factor in selling the PLO scheme to Jordan. King Hussein acquiesced to the plan largely because he believed that the new organization would remain something of a paper tiger and pose no threat to his hold over the large majority of the Palestinian refugees who lived in his kingdom. Furthermore, Nasser had already assured him in advance about precisely who was to lead the PLO, and Hussein saw no objection to the noisy but scarcely radical Shukairi.

As a result of Shukairi's tour of the Arab world, preparatory committees were formed wherever there were substantial communities. Their task was to nominate delegates to the first Palestinian congress meeting due to be convened in Jerusalem in May 1964. In the course of his consultations with governments and Palestinian leaders, Shukairi also discussed the draft of the Palestine National Charter and the constitution of the PLO. These two documents, as they were finally authorized, outlined the basic principles of the PLO and specified the goals for which it was supposedly working.

After it was formally constituted by the Cairo summit and its charter and constitution adopted by the Jerusalem congress, the PLO quickly spawned its own organizational agencies. The Palestine National Assembly continued to meet at regular intervals, endorsing whatever the chairman of the Executive Committee — Ahmad Shukairi — proposed. The membership underwent changes in number and personalities, but the National Assembly's overall character has not radically changed to this date. This is largely because the Assembly is appointed, although the National Charter specifies that it should be elected by the Palestinian people. Such elections have never been found practicable, partly because many of the countries in which exiled Palestinians reside do not have such elections themselves and could find them embarrassing, and partly because it would be naïve to suspect that such elections could be held without governmental interference. Real power in the PLO resides with the Executive Committee, led by its chairman.

Shukairi's image was tarnished by his bloodthirsty demagoguery which brought him world-wide attention during
the 1967 war and made him look ridiculous afterwards. The regimes came swiftly to the conclusion that he was more of a liability than an asset, and after some struggle, the Executive Committee, backed by PLA officers and the commando organizations, forced his resignation in December 1967. Now retired from public life, Shukairi devotes his time to justifying his record in voluminous memoirs. He was succeeded as acting chairman by a leftist Palestinian lawyer, Yahya Hammouda, who retained the position until the commandos took over the PLO apparatus.

The existing bureaucratic structure was supplemented in 1973 by a Central Council between the National Assembly and the Executive Committee. The council holds routine meetings once every three months. It comprises members of the Executive committee, the chairman of the National Assembly, the commander of the PLA, representatives of commando organizations not members of the Executive Committee, and some independents. It acts in place of the National Assembly when the body is not convened.

The Palestine Liberation Army has been one of the most delicate issues between the PLO and the Arab governments. Even within the PLO it has caused disputes. Giving the Palestinians their own autonomous regular fighting force was considered by many regimes to be a risky undertaking. King Hussein eventually yielded to the idea of the PLO but would not tolerate the presence of any sort of officially constituted Palestinian armed force on the East Bank or the West Bank. Lebanon as well has consented to the presence of the PLO in the country, but only as a political formation with neither national nor military responsibilities.

In the end the PLA was set up in Syria, Iraq and the Gaza Strip (under Egyptian administration until 1967, but never formally annexed). In Syria the PLA contingent was known as the Hattin forces, in Iraq as the Qaddissiah forces and in Gaza as the Ain Jalut forces. It is currently estimated to be about 6,000 strong with the largest detachment stationed in Syria.

The PLA was always supposed to be under the indirect supervision of the Arab governments through the PLO, but in fact its total dependence on the states for armament, training,
financial support and even qualified officers has naturally meant that the PLA units have become no more than Palestinian contingents in the Syrian, Egyptian, and Iraqi armies. Control by the PLO has been nominal, and the host governments have gone to the trouble of ensuring that the upper echelons of the PLA command have been staffed with officers whose loyalty is chiefly directed to the state in question rather than to the PLO.

The growth in influence of the commando organizations after the 1967 war and the tarnishing of the PLO apparatus’ image prompted the PLA to try and make up lost ground with the formation of its own guerrilla organization, known as the Popular Liberation Forces. Formed in February 1968, the PLF never gained the impetus of Fateh, nor the flair of the PFLP. It failed to capture the imagination of the Palestinian masses and never played more than a secondary role. The best estimates of its maximum strength put the figure at about 2,000.

On the planning and information side, the PLO has given birth to a number of institutions. The PLO Research Center and Information Service was founded in Beirut in February 1965 under the direction of a well-known Palestinian writer and speaker, Dr. Faye’z Sayegh. The present director of the Center is his brother Dr. Anis Sayegh. In addition to publishing information and documentation pertinent to Palestinian problems, the Center built up a sizeable library of material from many sources on the issue. In 1969 a planning centre was also set up in Beirut under the direction of a third brother, Dr. Yusuf Sayegh, an economics professor at the American University of Beirut. A radio service was also organized and began broadcasting from Cairo in March 1965 for three hours every evening as the Voice of Palestine. By the end of the year broadcasting time had been increased to six hours a day. Other PLO radio stations have been established in Dera’a (Syria) and Iraq. The information media of all the commando groups and the PLO were eventually unified under a Central Information Council which operates the Palestine News Agency, Wafa, and publishes a weekly magazine, Filastin al Thawra.

As soon as any of the various organizations operating under the PLO’s auspices began to show effective independence,
friction inevitably arose with the host governments. Not surprisingly, the most violent disputes occurred with the Jordanian government. For all that the PLO was supposed to be a damper on militant Palestinian aspirations, it naturally wished to extend its influence over as many Palestinians as possible — and the largest concentration of refugees lived in Jordan. The conflict between the PLO and Jordan was inevitable and the 1970-71 fighting was only the climax of a rivalry that stemmed from the inherent challenge posed by the PLO to the jealously guarded supremacy of King Hussein over his Palestinian subjects.

Before open conflict erupted in June 1966, attempts were made in Cairo to effect a working relationship. Hussein and Shukairi met at the Arab League headquarters to work out some kind of compromise. There were a host of issues to be settled stemming from PLO demands: the introduction of compulsory military service in Jordan (which the king agreed to study); the recruitment of PLA units on Jordanian territory (which the king submitted to the Unified Arab Command for study); the establishment of Palestinian summer youth camps for military training (to which the king agreed, provided they were run by Jordanian officers); the arming of front-line villages and the reinforcement of Jordanian units on the Israeli border; the opening of PLO offices throughout the kingdom; permission for one hour a day of broadcasting over Jordanian radio; freedom of movement for the PLO to hold mass meetings, popular assemblies and rallies; and granting the PLO the right to collect taxes from the Palestinians.

The full implementation of these demands would certainly have impaired the king’s sovereignty in his own state. There is no question that he signed the document presented to him as a purely tactical move, particularly as he publicly abrogated it in June 1966. The conflict with the PLO was thus brought out into the open: the king denounced the organization, rejected all its demands, broke off all relations with it, closed its offices and arrested several leading Palestinians.

The dispute between Jordan and the PLO went on right up to the 1967 war. It was only when King Hussein suddenly dashed off to Cairo on the eve of the outbreak of war and signed a
defence pact with Nasser that he and Shukairi were reconciled through Nasser's mediation. Shukairi then accompanied Hussein back to Amman.

But last-minute reconciliations counted for little in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat. The PLO played little part in the war, although PLA forces in Gaza Strip were reported by the Israelis to have fought with unusual determination (their remnants later constituted the core of resistance activity in the Gaza Strip). The rout of the conventional forces of the Arab states widened the rift with the PLO, which since it had taken such a peripheral role in the fighting and the events leading up to it (despite Shukairi's noisy performance) refused to consider itself subdued. At the Khartoum summit conference in August 1967 the PLO criticized the Arab regimes for what it saw as a readiness to seek accommodation with Israel in return for the newly occupied territories. Shukairi submitted a heavily critical memorandum and promptly withdrew. He asserted the right of the Palestinians to continue their struggle for the liberation of Palestine, took the regimes to task for the failure to rupture relations with all Israel's Western allies, and decried the half-hearted application of the oil weapon and the refusal to use already extensive currency deposits in the West to pressure Israel's supporters.

The adoption by the United Nations of Security Council resolution 242 on 22 November 1967 was the occasion for another bitter attack by Shukairi. The resolution was eagerly welcomed by a number of Arab states as a basis for a peaceful solution of the Middle East crisis. Shukairi denounced it as null and void regarding the Palestinians and their desire to liberate their homeland, since it made no reference to their national rights at all and merely referred to them as refugees.

Shukairi's fall in December 1967 was the beginning of the process by which the commando organizations, led by Fateh, gradually took control of the PLO: Fateh had long kept its distance from the PLO apparatus, although it was represented in the National Assembly. During 1968 however it managed to obtain a reconstitution of the National Assembly where it emerged as the dominant force, and at the fourth assembly in February 1969 Yasser Arafat was elected chairman of the Executive Council.
Henceforth, the PLO became practically identified with Fateh. This in itself, although it gave the organization a new lease of life, did not solve the matter of the unification of the various commando organizations within the PLO — a problem that is unresolved to this day. And it only exacerbated relations with the PLA which resented the growing power of the guerrillas. Every National Assembly since 1969 has made efforts to integrate the PLO more effectively, but each effort has failed over the contradiction between the desire for a strong centralized power and the diversity of opinion within the resistance movement.

However, despite all its drawbacks, the PLO remains the essential focus of Palestinian activity. It is the only recognized and legitimized organization that can speak for the Palestinians collectively, and is the only roof under which all the manifold organizations, groups and interests in the resistance movement can meet. If a political solution to the Middle East crisis is ever to become feasible, the PLO will be the only organization that has the ability to fight for the rights of the Palestinians.

Its central role in the Middle East conflict is at last beginning to be recognized, and consequently its influence and prestige are increasing. The Rabat summit of Arab states in October 1974 finally recognized it as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, a decision in which even the Jordanians were brought to concur. The socialist bloc, including the Soviet Union, has also recognized the PLO, as well as a large number of states around the world. But the organization's greatest triumph came with the invitation to Yasser Arafat to address the United Nations General Assembly in November 1974, the first representative of a political entity that had not achieved statehood to do so. Subsequently, the United Nations voted to grant observer status to the PLO and recognized the right of the Palestinians to return to their homeland and exercise their national rights.

THE PALESTINE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Ten sessions of the Palestine National Assembly have been held since its first meeting in May-June 1964. The following section deals with each assembly in turn, outlining its decisions and the circumstances in which it met.
First Session: (Jerusalem, 28 May—2 June 1964) The founding assembly of the Palestinian people was held in the aftermath of the Cairo Arab summit which had formally created the PLO. It was attended by 422 representatives drawn from Palestinian communities around the Arab world and chiefly made up of elected public officials, middle-class professionals and businessmen. The largest geographical representation came from the two banks of the Jordan, followed by the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria, Kuwait and Algeria.

The opening speech was made by King Hussein, followed by the Secretary-General of the Arab League and the new PLO Chairman, Ahmad Shukairi. In his address, Shukairi notably attempted to allay the Jordanian monarch’s fears by making it clear that the PLO did not contemplate separating the West Bank from the kingdom of Jordan, but was only interested in 'liberating' that part of Palestine under Zionist control.

The results of the founding assembly were:

— The unanimous election of Ahmad Shukairi as Chairman of the Assembly, and his appointment of a 15-man Executive Committee which he was empowered to select and convene.

— The establishment of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in the Arab world and internationally.

— The appeal of all professional Palestinians to form their own unions which would be affiliated to the various Arab professional unions.

— The immediate opening of military training camps for all Palestinians and provision for the enrolment of substantial numbers of young Palestinians in Arab military academies as the best substitute for compulsory military service.

— The formation of regular Palestinian military units, as well as irregular paramilitary forces, and their provision with weapons and equipment.

— The adoption of the articles of the National Charter and the PLO Constitution.

— Arrangements for financial support.

The National Charter consisted of 29 articles which affirmed the basis of Palestinian nationhood. Palestine is the homeland of the Palestinian Arab people; the Balfour Declaration of 1917
and the UN Partition Plan of 1947 are rejected; and the Palestinian people are determined to continue their struggle against Israel until they have secured the right to return to their homeland. The charter also specifically recognized the Arab status quo (much to the satisfaction of the Arab states) by stating that the PLO did not exercise any sovereignty over the West Bank, the Gaza Strip or the small slice of Palestine then held by Syria and known as the Himma area. Nor would the PLO interfere in the internal affairs of the established governments. Needless to say, these assurances were self-contradictory if the PLO wished to pursue any meaningful existence, and they soon proved quite illusory.

The first Assembly also established the Palestine National Fund to finance the PLO. The source of revenue was to be an annual subscription paid by every Palestinian over 18 years of age, in addition to loans and grants offered by the Arab governments and other friendly countries. Arab states were to deduct between three and fifteen per cent from the salaries and wages of gainfully employed Palestinians for the benefit of the fund. Furthermore, the Arab states pledged to make regular and fixed contributions to the PLO and its armed forces.

Second Session: (Cairo, 31 May—4 June 1965) The representation of the second session was the same as the first, and the main task on its agenda was to define the ways and means of organizing the Palestinian people. It was decided that the best method would be to gather all the Palestinian groups and factions in one organization, to uphold specific objectives and operate according to a defined set of regulations and laws. The move reflected the general feeling among most Palestinians at the time that the chief priority was to attain national unity.

Third Session: (Gaza, 20—24 May 1966) Once again the general atmosphere of the Assembly was support for the concept of Palestinian national unity. The PLO framework was conceived of as the natural and logical place for the gathering of all Palestinian groups and the focus of their capabilities. It was felt that inter-Palestinian disputes could be usefully set aside and a common programme for Palestinian action agreed upon. But
the abstention of the commando organizations was evidence even then that Palestinian unity was an objective not so easily achieved.

Fourth Session: (Cairo, 10—17 July 1968) The fourth session of the National Assembly marked a turning point in the evolution of the PLO. Defeat in 1967 galvanized the Assembly into action and the meeting witnessed some of the noisiest debating at any Palestinian gathering. But most significantly, the Assembly was dominated by the commando groups. Limited now to 100 members, the Assembly was composed of 38 representatives of Fateh, Sa’eqa and smaller groups, 10 PFLP representatives, 20 PLA members, three delegates from trade union organizations and 29 independent members of the PLO. The legislative and executive branches of the PLO were separated, the autocratic role of the Executive Chairman was reduced, and provision was made for the election of the committee which in turn would elect the Chairman (although for the time being the existing committee was confirmed in office). The dismissal of Shukairi, which had taken place the previous December, was confirmed, and Yahya Hammouda took his place. The PLO Planning Center was established, the Assembly demanded freedom of movement for Palestinians in the countries bordering Israel, and rejected Resolution 242.

Fifth Session: (Cairo, 2—4 February 1969) The fifth session confirmed the commandos’ take-over of the PLO with the election of Yasser Arafat as Chairman of a new Executive Committee. Fateh was the largest group in the 105-member Assembly with 33 seats, with 12 each for the PFLP, Sa’eqa and the Executive Committee, five for the PLA, three for union representatives and 28 independents. But the tension between the organizations was dramatically demonstrated by the PFLP’s and the PLA’s boycott of the Assembly. On the other hand the creation of the Palestine Armed Struggle Command was a definite move towards unifying the resistance’s military capability.

Sixth Session: (Cairo, 7—9 September, 1969) The major
controversy at the sixth session centred on membership of the Assembly, which was increased to 112. Almost all the commando groups got themselves seats in the Assembly, but the Executive Committee was asked to continue their dialogue with the PFLP and try to convince it to end its boycott of PLO activity. The session also rejected all 'capitulationist' solutions that it saw being promoted by some Arab regimes, and once again demanded freedom of movement for Palestinians in commando actions. But once again it was stressed that the PLO had no intention of interfering in the internal affairs of the Arab states.

Seventh Session: (Cairo, 30 May—4 June 1970) The Assembly met against the background of growing friction in Jordan, the commandos' only real base of operations against Israel. The major innovation of the Assembly was the formation of a Central Committee to deal with the worsening situation in Jordan. Its specific task was to take the urgent decisions confronting the resistance movement, and try to arrange a more profound unity among the commando organizations. The Central Committee was placed above the Executive Committee temporarily, and was composed of the Executive Committee, the Chairman of the National Assembly, a leading delegate from each of the commando organizations (who did not have to be a member of the National Assembly), three members of the Assembly chosen by the Executive Committee, and the commander of the PLA. The Committee was headed by the Chairman of the Executive Committee.

The seventh council also decided to have the Executive Committee form a unified military command for the Palestine revolution, with a military council comprising the leaderships of the various commando groups and a general staff to be attached to the military council. All active military groups were supposed to be attached to this command.

Immediately after the seventh session, trouble broke out in Jordan and the resistance accused King Hussein of trying to smash the movement. The General Committee called upon the National Assembly to hold an extraordinary session in Amman to take the appropriate action to protect the commandos from
liquidation. On 27 August 1970 the Assembly met in Amman and reaffirmed the Palestinians’ opposition to resolution 242 and to all ‘capitulationist’ settlements, stressed the unity of the Palestinian-Jordanian arena and declared the right of the Assembly to represent all Palestinians ‘who refuse to surrender’.

Eighth Session: (Cairo, 28 February—6 March 1971) The eighth session was called upon to deal with the disastrous situation in Jordan. It was preceded by a meeting of the Central Committee which assessed the new political situation that had intervened since the extension of the Suez Canal ceasefire, the resumption of the Jarring mediation mission, and the steady deterioration of the resistance in Jordan. But the overriding concern of the Central Committee meeting was the failure of the resistance movement to achieve an adequate degree of unity to deal with the threat it was facing in Jordan. From this meeting of the Central Committee (and an earlier session which had assembled in Amman in December 1970) two competing positions emerged. One called for organizational unification in the political, military, financial and information leaderships as a step towards retrenchment and consolidation of the battered resistance movement. The other was more aggressive, however, and demanded that the lessons of the Jordan débâcle be learned and acted upon immediately. This meant uniting with the Jordanian national movement on a formula that would provide for liberation of the West Bank, the establishment of democracy on the East Bank and co-ordinated opposition to the Hashemite regime.

The Central Committee was unable to agree on a strategy, however, and the whole question was referred unresolved to the National Assembly. The same difference of opinion split the Assembly. Some members thought it more important for the movement to confine itself to consideration of the political situation.

The other major question before the Assembly was the past and present policy of the resistance movement in the face of the Jordanian crisis. The Secretary of the Central Committee, Ibrahim Bakr, delivered a report to the Assembly which came under violent criticism from the commando organizations. He
wanted to confine the assessment of the situation in Jordan to the tactics of the movement rather than getting involved in criticism of the Jordanian regime, which he thought was well enough known anyway. The weakness of the movement was to be found in the divisions between the commando groups, which had resulted in a very ill-defined reaction to Arab approval of the Rogers Plan and had given King Hussein an excellent opportunity to strike at the movement. The adoption of slogans such as ‘All Power to the Resistance’ and sabotage activities (notably the hijacking and blowing up of airliners by the PFLP) had provided further opportunities for the Jordanian regime. Meanwhile, ‘disciplinary’ actions like arrest of Jordanian soldiers had created an unnecessary atmosphere of enmity between the commandos and the Jordanian Army.

The PFLP, the PDFLP and Sa‘eqa felt themselves directly attacked by these criticisms. They saw the analysis of the Central Committee as effectively absolving the Jordanian regime of responsibility for the fighting and placing the blame for the bloodbath wholly in the hands of the resistance. It was essential, they claimed, to discuss the Jordanian role in the affair (rather than ignore it, as the Secretary-General of the Central Committee seemed to want to do) if any conclusions were to be drawn on which future action could realistically be based. As for the disunity of the commando organizations, this was not a matter of wilful infighting, but the result of the lack of any unified political vision in the Palestinian resistance movement. The Palestinian masses in Jordan had been thoroughly confused by the contradictory policies of the resistance, which had been fighting one day and coexisting the next, with the result that there was no basis for mobilizing the people behind a definite strategy in the confrontation. As for the criticism that there had been no unified resistance response to the Rogers Plan, the critics replied that their forthright rejection of the scheme was in line with the PLO Charter and the successive decisions of the National Assembly. If there had been an error, then it was the hesitation in deciding what action to take against the Jordanian regime after the Rogers Plan. Furthermore, describing the resistance as divided between ‘moderates’ and ‘extremists’ was invidious since the slogan ‘All
Power to the Resistance' was consonant with the slogan 'National Authority' to which Fateh had subscribed and which had been approved by the Central Committee.

The upshot of the dispute was a fairly anodyne draft plan for national unity drawn up by Yasser Arafat which, after a few amendments, was adopted by the National Assembly. Arafat managed to push the plan through since it was couched in such general terms and dealt only with points already contained in the National Charter. Nevertheless, three issues were postponed for consideration until the next National Assembly: the matter of an immediate military merger; the composition of the Central Committee; and the election of a political bureau.

Finally, the eighth session of the National Assembly was notable for the attendance of Fayek Warrad, the leader of the Ansar group, and the inclusion of Israeli Arabs in the assembly’s membership. Warrad was only accepted as a private representative because of his affiliation with the Arab Communist parties’ commando group, but even so his presence aroused opposition because of his group’s acceptance of resolution 242 and refusal to announce its adherence to the PLO. Of greater long-term significance was the attendance of three prominent Palestinians from Israel — Habib Qahwaji, Mahmoud Darwizh and Sabri Jirys — who for the first time represented those under occupation since 1948.

Ninth Session: (Cairo, 7—13 July 1971) The ninth session was held in strained and tense circumstances on the eve of the Jordanian Army’s final assault on the remaining resistance strongholds at Jerash and Ajloun. Notably, it was the first assembly at which all the commando organizations were represented, the PFLP having 12 seats. (Previously the PFLP had sent only one token observer representative, and only attended in full strength when it felt that its minimum action programme had a chance of being adopted.) The Palestinian unions also saw their representation increased to 25, reflecting their increasingly effective role in bringing the Palestinian
people together at a grass roots level.

Some moves towards commando unification also accompanied the assembly. One small group — Issam Sartawi's Action Organization for the Liberation of Palestine — merged with Fateh, and the military wing of Ahmad Zaarour's Arab Palestine Organization integrated its military wing with Fateh's al Assifa (although the increased strength to Fateh was minimal since both had been badly mauled by the PFLP after their support of the Suez cease-fire arrangement). There was in fact a general feeling that co-operation was vital with the imminence of the final Jordanian death blow, although in practical terms little could be done.

Fateh made two suggestions at the Assembly. It posed the alternative of forming an Executive Committee from organizations with politically close ideas, with other organizations playing the role of a constructive opposition; or else including all the organizations in the Executive Committee on condition that they adhered to the decisions of the Assembly and the Committee. Fateh also insisted that all decisions taken by the assembly on subjects under discussion should 'promote the Palestinian character' of the matters in hand: in other words, the resistance could and should defend itself, while there was no point in working to topple the Jordanian regime which could be left to the Jordanian nationalists.

But the PFLP called equally vehemently for a commitment to overthrow the Hashemite regime in Jordan through armed violence, and, as a first step towards this objective, the formation of a joint Palestinian-Jordanian front to face the government in Amman. The PFLP also led the movement advocating the abrogation of the Cairo and Amman agreements.

The PDFLP meanwhile offered its own programme. It proposed as a major objective the creation of national democratic rule to accomplish the protection of the resistance, its freedom of action, the creation of a war economy and the rejection of a defeatist peace. The Front urged the Assembly to declare its responsibility for the protection of the national rights of Palestinians in Jordan and its determination to resist the return of the West Bank 'to the authority of the lackey
regime and its repressive regionalism’, working instead towards a liberation of both banks of the Jordan under a united authority as a base for the struggle against Israel. On the other hand, the PDFLP supported the Cairo agreement and the Amman protocol on the grounds that they asserted the ‘right of the Palestinian people in decisions on the future of Jordan, and that the Palestine revolution is the sole representative of the people of Palestine.’

The Ansar leader, Fayek Warrad, led a fourth tendency at the Assembly. He urged the delegates to accept the UN resolutions on Palestine and to extend their support to progressive Arab regimes in their policy towards the Palestine cause, so that the Palestinians would not seem to be in conflict with other Arabs. He also suggested a ‘quiet’ policy towards Jordan.

Essentially, the four streams of thought at the Assembly boiled down to an argument about the situation of the resistance movement in Jordan and the attitude the movement should adopt towards the regime in Amman. The assembly elected five committees to draw up recommendations on the affairs of the occupied territories. national unity, military affairs, financial matters and political and information questions. In the event, the Assembly only discussed the recommendations of the first two of these committees. The occupied territories commission advocated the mobilization of support for the resistance among the population of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which the Assembly unanimously backed. But it was unable to accept the recommendations of the national unity committee which were felt to fall short of the political and organizational steps approved by the eighth Assembly. Instead the question of national unity was simply shifted over to the Executive Committee, as were the resolutions of the other committees. The whole Assembly was wound up as the last round of fighting erupted in Jordan. A new Executive Committee (unburdened by the Central Committee which was disbanded) was elected to face the threatening situation.

Tenth Session: (Cairo, 6—10 April 1972) Three weeks before
the tenth session opened in Cairo, King Hussein announced his proposal for a United Arab Kingdom comprising both the East and West Banks of the Jordan under a federal monarchical authority. The Assembly meeting initially took the form of a gathering of some 500 Palestinians and representatives of revolutionary and progressive movements in the Arab world, held to oppose the so-called Hussein plan. At this popular conference a long series of resolutions were adopted which amounted to a merging of the Palestinian and Jordanian revolutions, and within this framework an integration of the activities of the commando organizations. The strategy the conference envisaged was one of a long-term popular war of liberation. The Palestinian and Jordanian revolutionaries would join forces to liberate Palestine and overturn the Hashemite monarchy. The dual struggle meanwhile would be linked to the Arab struggle as a whole through the formation of a front of all progressive and national forces opposed to Zionism and imperialism, which was itself supposed to co-operate with foreign organizations also occupied in the war against imperialism.

On the question of national unity, the conference suggested the formation of a single front of commando bodies to oversee the revolution, the unification of armed forces, information media, and foreign relations agencies, the creation of a committee to study the affairs of the occupied territories and Jordan and draw up a formula for unification, and an assurance of internal organizational and ideological independence for all commando groups. Finally, the conference urged the Arab League to expel Jordan from membership and sever all financial assistance to the regime in Amman.

The National Assembly proper sat only for one day at the end of the popular conference. It approved all the recommendations of the conference and agreed to expand its own membership. A 22-man committee was to be formed to study the subject of national unity. Meanwhile, work on the unification of international media and the collection of funds started immediately after the assembly dissolved, while an Arab Front Participating in the Palestine Revolution was formed in November 1972 to effect the link between the resistance and
Arab progressive forces.

Eleventh Session: (Cairo, 5—12 January 1973) The membership of the Assembly was further expanded to 180 delegates, including Fuad Nassar, the Secretary-General of the Jordanian Communist Party. Much of the debate at the Assembly centred around relations between the PLA and Fateh. The committee on national unity created at the tenth session charged the PLA with indiscipline, while a PLA pamphlet calling for the merging of the commandos in the PLA (with the army as a regular force, its subordinate Popular Liberation Forces grouping the guerrillas and the Popular Resistance Forces as a militia) was taken as evidence of political interference. The PLA was also apparently guilty of making statements in Jordan that contradicted official PLO policy.

The dispute threatened to explode, but Arafat’s intervention and explanations by the PLA smoothed matters over. Arafat justified the presence of PLA units in Jordan and certain technicalities concerning the PLA which had ruffled other Fateh members, while the PLA commander, Brigadier Musbah Budeiri, explained the activities of his command. He declared that the PLA was ready to discuss and settle all disciplinary infractions, that the statements attributed to the PLA in Jordan were untrue, that the PLA pamphlet was merely a private venture which the Assembly was free to accept or reject as it chose and that all PLA relations with other Arab countries were governed by agreements concluded by the PLO.

There was also evidence of a split in the Executive Committee when Khaled Hassan rose to call the Assembly to take into consideration the atmosphere of détente in international relations. Arafat replied indirectly by stressing that the PLO would continue to resist all imperialist attempts to obtain its liquidation. Although Arafat denied that there were any differences in the PLO Executive Committee, it is noteworthy that Khaled Hassan was not re-elected.

Twelfth Session: (Cairo, 1—7 June 1974) The twelfth session adopted a 10-point programme that had been drawn up by a meeting of Palestinian leaders in Beirut the previous month.
The programme reaffirmed the PLO’s rejection of resolution 242, the determination of the organization to liberate Palestine by any available method (the foremost being armed struggle), and the objective of establishing a democratic regime in Jordan. But most important of all the programme envisaged the establishment of a national Palestinian authority on any area of the occupied territories that might be liberated from Israeli control as a step toward the total liberation of all Palestine. Any move which entailed peace or recognition of Israel was, however, ruled out.

Although the PFLP adopted the resolution, it is reported to have since admitted that this was an error which constituted a violation of its principles as the leading member of the rejection front. At the time the PFLP hailed the programme as a refusal to contemplate a ‘capitulationist’ settlement. The Front is still a member of the National Assembly, nonetheless, although it has withdrawn its representative (Ahmad Yamani) from the Executive Committee.

The Cairo session elected a new Executive Committee of 14 members, of which the majority were Fateh or pro-Fateh. The PFLP-GC was represented for the first time, along with four prominent West Bank personalities.
4. The Commandos and the Arab States

JORDAN

It is a moot point whether there was ever any chance that the resistance and the Jordanian regime could have avoided a confrontation. Their aims are so mutually antagonistic and their involvement in one another's affairs so inextricable that conflict was inevitable. It can only be said that neither side made much of an attempt at any time to defuse an obviously dangerous situation.

King Hussein made his position perfectly clear soon after Fateh had recommenced its operations against Israel. He roundly condemned commando action in September 1967 as activity that could only assist the enemy, and announced that it was his duty to resist the commandos with all his power. The PLO's insistence on privileges that posed a serious challenge to Hussein's sovereignty has already been noted. But if the delicacy of the situation convinced Fateh to tread warily, the political convictions of the PFLP and PDFLP brooked no dealings with the Hashemite regime whose reactionary nature they saw as an obstacle planted directly across the path of Arab and Palestinian liberation.

As far as Hussein was concerned, however, all commandos were alike. Since Fateh shared with the radical groups a vision of the East Bank of the Jordan as a guerrilla base against Israel, Hussein saw no more point in talking to Arafat than to Habash or Hawatmeh. They all planned in effect to challenge his authority in his own land, and to subject Jordan to the wrath of Israeli retaliation. Furthermore, their claim to sole representation of the Palestinians directly contradicted the Hashemite claim to represent all Palestinians living on the East and West Banks, and since these were the largest concentrations of Palestinians outside Israel the question was naturally a fundamental one.

Hussein began harrassing and arresting commandos even in 1967. The two sides had effectively chosen to fight out their
differences, and the inevitable outcome was a series of major armed confrontations in November 1968, February, June and September 1970 until the final denouement in the spring of 1971.

The civil war of September 1970 was precipitated by the growing boldness of the radical Palestinian commando organizations in their challenge to King Hussein’s authority (animated as observed earlier by a false impression of the resistance’s strength and the king’s weakness) and increasing impatience within the Jordanian regime at the deteriorating situation throughout the country. The first explosion of the September fighting came after the PFLP’s hijacking operation at Dawson’s Field. The commandos were quite unprepared for a major clash, as the rapid elimination of their presence in southern Jordan during the first fortnight of September demonstrated.

The formation of a military Cabinet on 16 September was the cue for general fighting. The unprecedented seriousness of the situation immediately prompted several Arab leaders (notably Sudan President Numeiri) to intervene in an effort at mediation. A cease-fire was eventually arranged, and on 27 September the first of a long series of abortive attempts at reconciliation between the regime and the resistance was hammered out in Cairo between Hussein and Arafat under Nasser’s auspices. The Cairo agreement provided for the establishment of a follow-up Committee under Tunisia’s Bahi Ladgham to supervise the implementation of the accord. A multinational military mission was organized to supervise the cease-fire, and the whole agreement was ratified by a further protocol signed in Amman on 13 October.

Two things emerged clearly from the September fighting. First, the resistance had suffered gravely at the hands of the Jordanian Army, whose supposed pro-Palestinian disaffection was found to be imaginary (at least as far as the troops who participated in the fighting were concerned). Second, the Arab regimes made little concrete attempt to forestall the destruction of the resistance apart from verbal hysteria. Syria alone intervened, and only then by an invasion of armoured vehicles disguised as PLA units so as not to implicate the regime, an
operation that had more to do with Ba'ath Party power struggles than the resistance. The Iraqi Army contingent in Jordan stayed completely quiet, and for all that Nasser spent his last days badgering Hussein into a cease-fire he was as patently worried about preserving the unity of the Arab regimes as he was of preserving the resistance. In fact, all that the resistance could be said to have salvaged out of the mess was a far more favourable cease-fire settlement than their military situation warranted, and their escape from an even worse defeat at the hands of the Jordanian Army due to the imprecations of the massed Arab heads of state. That was as far as the regimes' contribution to the resistance effort went.

Hussein moved over to a more subtle tactic. Taking advantage of the disarray of the resistance, he quietly began mopping up their weaker points to the degree that he could impose new terms in January 1971. These stipulated the virtual disbandment of the resistance militia (as opposed to the hard-core commandos) by impounding their weapons in arsenals (which admittedly remained under nominal supervision). Since the militia constituted the major portion of resistance manpower, the Palestinians emerged even weaker than before.

By early 1971, the resistance was effectively limited to the north-west of Jordan. The major towns of Jerash and Zarqa had been re-occupied by the army in December, and Irbid fell in March. In April the last resistance presence in the capital was evacuated, and the commandos were literally holed up in the hilly forests around Jerash and Ajloun. The final coup de grâce was administered without much dissembling. Concentrated air and land strikes on the resistance strongholds in July ended in 1,300 commandos killed, wounded and captured. In less than nine months the resistance had been forcibly ousted from Jordan.

The whole operation from the Cairo agreement was carried out under the eyes of the Ladgham mission, which found itself completely helpless, unable to do more than send back increasingly condemnatory reports of Jordanian actions. The regime did everything to obstruct the mission's task, and by late April its president had resigned and the Egyptians had
withdrawn their military representative in a mute and useless gesture of protest.

In fact it soon became abundantly clear that the Ladgham mission was in reality acting as a cover for Arab inaction. Any violation of the Cairo agreement was supposed to initiate collective Arab action. Apart from high-sounding speeches, no action was ever taken by any regime despite the overwhelming evidence of what was going on. The significance of the Jordan shock to the guerrillas was that it spelt out more clearly than ever before the paramount concern of the Arab governments for a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict if one could be found, and the resistance’s virtual isolation in its opposition to this solution. At the same time, the resistance found itself more helpless than it had imagined without the backing of the regimes. The result was the long debate in the aftermath of the Jordan débâcle on the correct attitude to take towards the regimes.

The aftermath of the Jordanian civil war was an attempt to regularize the new situation in a way which might restore the unity of the states confronting Israel. For this it was essential that King Hussein, for all the rancour he had evoked, should be brought back into the fold — and for that it was equally essential that some agreement be patched up with the resistance. Egypt and Saudi Arabia took up the task.

It was an impossible enterprise and unsurprisingly ended in futility. Sadat and King Feisal tried to work out an arrangement whereby commandos would be readmitted into Jordan solely to operate against Israel, presumably under strict Jordanian supervision. The resistance was deeply divided over whether to even talk about such a suggestion, although a delegation led by Khaled Hassan and Zuhair Mohsen did eventually turn up in Jeddah for two abortive conferences with the Jordanians in September and November. Hussein sensed his domestic victory had been bought at the price of isolation from the Arab world and attended the Jeddah conference to reconstruct his bridges.

It is unlikely that the resistance movement as a whole would have accepted any agreement achieved in Jeddah so soon after the bitterness of the Jordanian defeat. Nor did Hussein intend
to give away any of the fruits of victory if he could make the first steps back to reintegration in the Arab community. As it turned out the whole project collapsed over the question of the representation of the Palestinian people and the extent to which the putative commando presence in Jordan would be able to operate as it chose. The negotiation deadline in Jeddah ended on 26 November. If there was any prospect of an agreement still remaining, Black September finally quashed it with the assassination of the Jordanian premier, Wasfi Tal, in Cairo on 28 November.

King Hussein’s next move to secure his position vis-à-vis the Palestinians took place in March 1972 when he announced his plan for a United Arab Kingdom embracing the East and West Banks of the Jordan. As envisaged by his proposal, Amman would be the regional capital of the East Bank and the whole confederacy, while the West Bank would have autonomy including ‘all other parts of liberated Palestine willing to join’ (implying the Gaza Strip), with Jerusalem as the capital.

Implicitly, the Hussein plan denied the right of the Palestinians to be represented by anybody but the Hashemites. The ninth Palestine National Assembly took up a strong stand against the scheme at its Cairo session in April, while Hussein told a conference of some two hundred Jordanian and Palestinian notables on 10 May that he was going ahead with the plan and a committee had been formed to examine the possibility of the return of those who had fled the country in 1970-71, including army deserters and those sentenced in absentia. Fateh merely responded by commenting: ‘This royal amnesty is laughable and an insult to people’s intelligence.’

Any link between the Amman government and the resistance was not totally ruptured. Sabotage and assassination attacks against Jordanian officials (including, unsuccessfull, the army commander) continued in Jordan, and the PFLP Lydda operation was condemned by King Hussein as ‘a crime conceived by a sick mind’. The Mayor of Gaza in the occupied territories narrowly escaped death in September 1972 after announcing in Amman that he found the Hussein plan acceptable and would hold a Gaza plebiscite in the event of a peaceful settlement determining the Strip’s future in Israel or
Jordan. Guerrilla propaganda was directed against the army where it was hoped dissident elements might overthrow the king.

Mediation efforts between the king and the resistance continued under Saudi-Jordanian auspices. A Kuwait paper reported a Saudi-Jordanian plan for the return of the commandos and the reactivation of the Eastern front, and it was reported that Arafat had arrived in Tunis in August to meet the Saudi Interior Minister and President Bourguiba. Sa’eqa, the PFLP, the PDLFP and the ALF promptly denounced any contacts designed to reconcile the resistance with Jordan, stating that they were a disciplinary violation without collective commando consent, although the PLO spokesman later denied that any such statement had been made. PDLFP leader Hawatmeh attacked the right wing of Fateh for engaging in mediation efforts, and Arafat had to come out with a statement denying all reports of such contacts, though admitting that Egypt and Syria had been approached by Hussein for just such a reconciliation.

By November a state of more or less open war existed between Jordan and the resistance. An assistant to the military attaché at the Jordanian Embassy in Beirut was arrested in possession of explosives, and it transpired that he had been ordered to place them at the Fateh information office in Beirut as well as arrange for the assassination of two resistance leaders. Rumours of a conspiracy in the Jordanian Army to overthrow Hussein surfaced in November after a director of the Bank of Jordan and a former Jordanian Minister, Said Dajani, had made contacts with ‘certain Arab quarters’ in connection with a plot to establish a government of national unity in Jordan. Mass arrests followed in Jordan. King Hussein admitted the coup attempt later that month, confirming the involvement of the 40th Armoured Brigade under Colonel Hindawi, and implicating Abu Iyad of Fateh and the Libyans.

But the course of events was running against the resistance. First, a meeting of the Arab Defence Council in January 1973 found most of the delegates in favour of improving relations with Jordan, apparently in anticipation of an American peace effort on the occasion of King Hussein’s forthcoming visit to
Washington. The Palestinian delegation described this as the 'sacrifice of the resistance for the sake of the Jordanian regime', to which Amman replied by withdrawing its offer of readiness to reactivate the Eastern front, with commando participation.

Second, a commando unit of 17 men was arrested in Jordan in February charged with planning to blow up government buildings in Amman. Jordan television relayed an interview with the unit's leader, Abu Daoud, who admitted to plotting an occupation of the Jordanian Cabinet building and kidnapping Ministers, according to plans drawn up by Abu Iyad in Baghdad. Fateh denied that it had been Abu Daoud on the television at all, but he reappeared again during his trial to urge the resistance to conduct its operations in the occupied territories, and blame it for the September 1970 fighting. When he was condemned to death, there were pleas for clemency from King Feisal, Presidents Sadat, Assad and Bourguiba, the Ruler of Kuwait, and the Kremlin. Although the sentences on the commandos were commuted and the prisoners eventually released, the incident only heightened the war between the resistance and the government.

In May 1973 Hussein was still talking in the same terms as September 1967. A circular addressed to the armed and security forces read: 'Regarding the so-called Palestinian resistance, our attitude is clear... Our wounds are not yet healed and will not be forgotten; they were sustained by our nation at the hands of that corrupted resistance. ... Our attitude is to wish good luck to those who want it. As far as we are concerned, it has no chance of appearing in our land with its suspect leadership.'

The October War has made its mark on Jordanian-Palestinian relations. The Algiers summit in November 1973 recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, although the Jordanians abstained. It was becoming obvious that the deadlocked situation could only be resolved if the rights of the Palestinians were taken into account. The PLO would have to become an essential part of the peace-making process, and the PLO has been encouraged to adopt the plan for the establishment of a national authority on the West Bank in the event of its being liberated from Israel. Jordan has stood notably against the scheme, and the regimes once again have
felt that it was hardly worth alienating Jordan if it was the only partner with which Israel would be prepared to negotiate the future of the West Bank.

Hussein has continued to insist on his right to negotiate the return of the West Bank, the determination of its future by a free plebiscite and his representation of the Palestinians living on both the East and West Banks. In its anxiety to promote a rapprochement, Egypt made the mistake of agreeing to the last of these points at a meeting between Sadat and Hussein in July 1974, but subsequently backtracked from the outraged reaction at a tripartite conference with Syria and the PLO in September.

Verbally at least, King Hussein finally conceded at the Rabat summit in October 1974, where he joined the other Arab heads of state in adopting a five-point resolution which affirmed the right of the Palestinians to repatriation and the establishment of a national authority in liberated Palestinian territory under the leadership of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Jordan, along with Syria, Egypt and the PLO was invited to draw up a formula for the implementation of the policy.

But at a quadripartite summit in Cairo the following January attended by all four, it was evident that little real progress had been made. The Jordanians contented themselves with the fact that the meeting had been held at all and that mutual recriminations would henceforth be dropped. And there are plenty of commandos whose opposition to the Hashemite regime remains steadfast. Abu Iyad, who was involved in an assassination attempt against the king at the Rabat summit, has subsequently reiterated his commitment to do away with Hussein on two occasions. And the commando left still cherishes the hope of establishing a national democratic regime in Amman.

EGYPT

Egyptian involvement with the commando movement effectively dates back to a meeting between two Fateh leaders, Abu Iyad and Abu Lutf, with Egyptian officials on 1 August 1967. Foreign Minister Mahmoud Riad was informed of the principles of the movement and extended his ‘good wishes’. The
two Palestinians met Mohammad Hassanein Heykal, the influential editor of *Al Ahram*, and were introduced to President Nasser. The Egyptian leader expressed his wish to see firm relations established with Fateh and offered large-scale aid in arms, training and supplies. Nasser proposed that liaison be assured through the head of military intelligence, Major-General Sadeq, and Heykal.

Relations between Egypt and the commandos were fairly unruffled until Nasser’s surprise acceptance of the Rogers Plan in the autumn of 1970 and the cease-fire along the Suez Canal that put an end to the war of attrition. In Amman the PFLP and PDFLP instigated anti-Egyptian demonstrations, while Nasser felt impelled to assure Fateh representatives in Cairo that he thought there was one chance in a thousand that the plan would succeed. However, King Hussein’s onslaught against the commandos in Jordan brought about a rapid reconciliation between the Egyptians and the resistance organizations.

In fact, the whole course of Egyptian-Palestinian relations has been marked by sudden about-faces on the part of one side or the other. The post-Jordan amity was soon dispelled when *Ah Ahram* came out with a report in January 1971 that surprisingly claimed resistance unanimity (including the PFLP) in favour of a political solution to the Middle East crisis. The report announced that the organizations had withdrawn their objection to the Rogers Plan and quoted Arafat as saying, ‘Cairo’s firm attitude as regards implementation of Security Council resolution 242 has proved the steadfastness of its nationalist line.’ Habash was also supposed to have said that ‘We are now more convinced of the necessity to differentiate between continued commando action and Cairo’s support for the UN resolution,’ implying that the two were no longer held to be in conflict.

Fateh, the PFLP and the PDFLP all immediately came out with denials of the *Al Ahram* report. But significantly a similar declaration by the PLO Central Committee in Amman was phrased quite differently. An official spokesman announced that the resistance did not oppose any attempt by the regimes to liberate their land under Israeli occupation, ‘provided this
does not in any way affect the rights of the Palestinian people or their revolution’. Conspicuous by its absence was any reference to the previous rejection by the resistance of resolution 242.

Nevertheless, Cairo’s apparent attempt to stampede the resistance into a conciliatory approach upset relations between the two sides until fighting broke out again in Jordan. Each successive instance of Jordanian pressure on the resistance forced the Egyptians to forget their own differences with the commandos in their attempts to find a solution to the Jordanian-Palestinian confrontation. But like President Nasser before him, Sadat found all his efforts were to no avail.

Egypt’s failure to stop the débâcle in Jordan naturally had repercussions at home. Pro-Palestinian feeling in Egypt was crystallized by the assassination of Jordanian Premier Wasfi Tal in Cairo in November 1971. Egyptian students began to form committees whose primary aim was to secure the release of the four Black September guerrillas who had killed Tal. In several rallies the students gleefully repeated passages from a speech that Nasser had delivered in May 1967 describing Tal as a spy for the British and the Americans: ‘I will not deal in any way with these spies, for this is a battle of destiny in which spies have no part.’

These student committees formed the nucleus of the campus riots of January 1972. Initially formed to support the Palestinian cause, they became swept up in the general wave of protest against Sadat’s regime. The government accused the resistance of being behind the disturbances and proceeded to arrest a number of Palestinian students. And in reaction to what is called ‘Palestinian provocation’ the Egyptian leadership began to encourage Ahmad Shukairi, the former PLO chairman, to re-enter the political fray. Shukairi never got very far in his effort to resurrect his political career, but at Egyptian instigation he met several Palestinian notables and issued a call for the ‘rectification’ of the resistance within the framework of the PLO. The incident is more interesting for the light it throws on Egypt’s attitude towards the resistance than for any significance in Ahmad Shukairi’s half-hearted comeback.
Again, when Palestinian students demonstrated against King Hussein’s plan for a federation between the East and West Banks under his leadership in March 1972, they were repulsed from the Jordanian Embassy by Egyptian security forces, thereby bringing right out into the open the confrontation between the student body and the government. A strong note of protest was delivered to the authorities by the students.

Sadat managed to calm the internal situation and restore better relations with the commandos by his severance of diplomatic relations with Jordan in protest against the Hussein United Arab Kingdom plan and his presence at the tenth session of the Palestine National Assembly in Cairo in April 1972. The Hussein plan was condemned by the Egyptian President as an attempt to ‘devalue’ the Palestinian cause and as an ‘unacceptable deviation from the Arab line’. Relations were further improved when Cairo radio described the Lydda kamikaze raid by the PFLP as a success for the Palestinian liberation movement in winning international support and associated itself with the world revolution. Premier Aziz Sidiki himself commented that the Lydda operation had succeeded in exposing Israel’s vulnerability. (Even so, a strong American condemnation of such ‘irresponsible’ statements resulted in an official description of the Lydda killings as ‘senseless’.)

The susceptibility of Egyptian-Palestinian relations to ulterior events and developments was again demonstrated by the Palestinians’ suspicion of Sadat’s expulsion of the Soviet military advisers from Egypt in July 1972. The resistance saw this as preparation for Cairo’s acceptance of a US settlement in the Middle East. Indeed, Arafat had begun talks in Moscow with Soviet leaders only one day before Sadat’s move.

Nevertheless, the resistance has never been hasty in entering into disputes with the Egyptians. When Sadat took the occasion of his speech on the second anniversary of the death of President Nasser to propose the formation of a Palestinian government-in-exile (which Egypt would be willing to recognize), the PLO Executive Committee waited some days before issuing an extraordinarily conciliatory reply. Its opposition to the scheme was well known, but when it made its
response it was couched in careful wording that went no further than saying that the Committee had decided to ‘strengthen the Palestinian structure represented by the PLO’.

At the same time, an official Palestinian delegation arrived in Cairo for talks with the Secretary-General of the Arab Socialist Union, Sayyed Mare’i, and President Sadat. A communiqué issued after the meeting said that the President had placed special emphasis on the right of the Palestinian people as represented by the PLO to decide their own future. He had already clarified matters by admitting that the suggestion for the formation of a government-in-exile had been made without prior consultation with the Palestinians; thus the whole issue — which might have blown up to a crisis of major proportions — was successfully defused by moderation on both sides.

Egypt’s cautious willingness to keep its line open to the resistance was well demonstrated by the participation of an official delegation — composed of literary and intellectual figures of little political weight — in the Arab People’s Congress in Support of the Palestinian Revolution, held in Beirut in November 1972. But the frail basis on which relations between Egypt and the resistance are based was equally forcibly demonstrated by the tension that resulted from attempts to make up matters with Jordan during the Arab Defence Council meeting in Cairo in January 1973 just prior to King Hussein’s visit to Washington. Resistance suspicions were not allayed when it was revealed that contacts between Jordan and Egypt had been going on secretly for some time.

Tension was exacerbated by the Khartoum operation mounted by Black September, and relations had obviously reached a low ebb when the Egyptian Government conspicuously failed to condemn Lebanon for its confrontation with the commandos in May 1973. And when Foreign Minister Zayyat brought out a plan for the creation of a Palestinian state, resistance suspicions were even more seriously aroused. What could such an entity be apart from an Egyptian manoeuvre to create a Palestinian authority to negotiate with Israel?

If Sadat did alert the Palestinian leadership to the imminence of the 1973 war a few days before the outbreak of fighting, and subsequently insisted on the presence of Arafat at the signature
of the January 1974 disengagement agreement with Israel, conflict was renewed during 1974 over the question of reconciliation with Jordan, and the representation of the Palestinian people. The PLO took violent exception to the wording of a communiqué issued after the visit of King Hussein to Cairo in July which stated that ‘the two sides declared the PLO was the legitimate representative of the Palestinians except those living in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.’ The PLO immediately issued its own reply which declared that the communiqué undermined the national rights of the Palestinians and contradicted the official Arab view of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. At the Algiers summit held after the October War a resolution asserting the PLO’s role in its representation of the Palestinians had been adopted, and the commando leadership saw in the communiqué a clear violation of an earlier Egyptian undertaking.

But the Egyptians managed to ride out the storm of Palestinian criticism. At a tripartite conference with the PLO and Syria in September 1974, a joint statement affirmed that the two regimes would continue ‘to give support to the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. . .' In November, Egypt, along with the other members of the Arab League, confirmed this recognition at the Rabat summit.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Egyptian policy towards the PLO remains essentially the same as always. While supporting the PLO and the resistance as the de facto representative of the Palestinians, the Egyptians will continue to work for some kind of modus vivendi between the resistance and the Hashemites. And inside the PLO, Egyptian support will always be forthcoming for the moderate elements.

IRAQ

Iraq’s relations with the resistance have been dictated by the ruling Ba’ath Party’s assessment of its support in Iraq and its conviction that a political settlement with Israel would constitute a signal defeat for the Palestinian cause. When the present Ba’athist regime came to power in 1968, it found itself isolated from the rest of the Arab world and handicapped by
an insecure power base at home. The regime was in open conflict with the Kurds, and the two factions of the Iraqi Communist Party were distinctly unfriendly (the Central Committee faction attacked the Ba'athists as a Fascist government, while the General Command faction went into open and armed revolt). In such circumstances, the Ba'athists were naturally suspicious of the resistance as another potential source of opposition, and despite the governing Revolutionary Command Council's verbal support for the Palestinian cause, relations with the resistance were very uneasy.

Today, and for different reasons, matters have not greatly improved. If the regime finds itself on firmer ground domestically, it has taken great exception to the moderation shown by the PLO in its acceptance of the principle of a West Bank Palestinian state. It is no coincidence that Baghdad has become the spiritual home of the rejection front.

Iraq's suspicions of the intentions of Syria and Egypt have on occasions extended to the resistance's dealings with these countries. Thus it was in an atmosphere of less than complete trust that the secretariat of the recently constituted Revolutionary Command Council sent a note in April 1969 to the resistance outlining the latter's present and future status in the country. Particular exception was taken to the failure of the various resistance organizations to co-ordinate their activities with the Iraqi-backed Arab Liberation Front. In several instances, it was pointed out, Palestinian organizations had operated without informing the Directorate of Military Intelligence. The grievances of the Iraqi government were fairly broad. They included resistance festivals, demonstrations, fund-raising campaigns, interference in student affairs, participation in the formation of political parties and opening offices for commando groups. There were also charges of attacks on Iraqi citizens, and the appearance of guerrillas dressed in military apparel in public was said to have enabled rebel Kurds and Communists to pass themselves off as commandos.

For the future, various conditions were put on continued commando activity in Iraq. A resistance representative would have to remain in constant touch with the government, training
camps would be removed from the towns to an area near the Jordanian border, and a ban was placed on the wearing of battle dress in public, contacts with Iraqi political parties and commando fund-raising. To cap it all, the legitimacy of the resistance presence in Iraq was implicitly rejected by stressing that the commandos belonged more properly ‘in the battlefield against the Israeli enemy’ — that is, in Jordan.

The strain in Iraqi-Palestinian relations indicated by the RCC note was no momentary aberration. During 1970 matters became steadily worse, exacerbated especially by the failure of the Iraqi units stationed in Jordan to intervene during King Hussein’s onslaught against the commandos there in September 1970. In obvious contrast, the Syrian regime (or part of it) intervened directly in the fighting.

By the spring of 1971 the Iraqi authorities were refusing to pay the salaries of the PLA Qaddissiah Brigade stationed in Iraq and attached to the Iraqi Army. In June the RCC sent a second note to the resistance imposing further restrictions on its activities. The authorities were henceforth to be notified of the names of all Iraqi citizens applying for membership in commando groups, of all important directives issued to commando units (in advance) and of all resistance publications released in Iraq.

If this was the low point in relations between the resistance and the authorities, a certain lessening of tension began to be detectable with the easing of the international political situation. The defeat of the dissident Communists, the formation of a common front with the Central Committee faction of the Iraqi Party and an agreement with the Kurds went a long way to restoring the government’s confidence in its own standing, and thus in its dealings with the resistance. Meanwhile, the assumption of power in Syria by Hafez Assad (who had opposed Syria’s intervention in the Jordan fighting) and President Sadat’s initiatives in search of a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict aroused the nationalist ire of the Iraqi leadership who came to see the resistance as a potential ally instead of a force for internal subversion.

The Ba’ath regime now began to reorient its Arab policy. First of all, it called a conference of Arab forces in support of
the commandos. This was then backed by several domestic measures ameliorating the situation of the Palestinian community and resistance. Under a resolution passed by the RCC, Iraqi citizens employed in public and private institutions were allowed to join the resistance without losing their rights and salaries as employees. Palestinians were henceforth to be given equal treatment in matters of employment, and Palestinian students would enjoy the same scholarship privileges as their Iraqi counterparts. Early in 1972 a fund was established by the RCC to aid families of commandos killed in action, and it was announced that Iraqi passports would be issued to Palestinians on demand.

For its part the resistance took Iraq’s bold nationalization of the Iraq Petroleum Company in 1972 as testimony of the regime’s militancy, thus helping to remove some of the stain of Iraq’s neutrality during the Jordan fighting. And during the summer preparations for the pan-Arab conference in support of the resistance proceeded rapidly. Indeed, when the conference was finally held in Beirut in November, the Iraqi delegation was so large that the Syrians withdrew, claiming that the whole performance had turned into a show of support for the Iraqi Ba’ath Party. Nevertheless, the session went ahead and formed a general secretariat under the direction of the Lebanese socialist leader, Kamal Jumblatt.

The Iraqi-sponsored conference marked an important turning point in the regime’s relations with the resistance. Several meetings between commando leaders and Iraqi officials took place, culminating in talks with Yasser Arafat and Nayef Hawatmeh. As a result of this new-found friendship, Iraq promised to increase its financial aid to the resistance, to help bring the resistance closer to the Soviet Union and open Iraqi airports to resistance arms shipments from abroad (the Syrians had earlier seized large quantities of arms sent to the resistance by certain socialist bloc countries). Furthermore, all restrictions on resistance activity in Iraq were lifted, including the prohibition of contacts with Iraqi political parties.

The resistance meanwhile agreed to the formation of a ‘political committee’ which would co-ordinate the activity of all the resistance groups in Iraq and facilitate dealings with the
government. The organizations to be included in this committee were Fateh, the PFLP, the PFLP-GC, the PDPFLP and the Arab Liberation Front. The resistance also lent its help in resolving Iraq’s border dispute with Kuwait, and in training Iranian rebels (some of whom were subsequently executed in Tehran) to overthrow the Shah, one of Iraq’s bitterest enemies at the time.

Joint action was agreed upon in the urgent task of forming an Eastern front against Israel. This was planned to include Iraq, Syria and the commandos (the Jordanians being regarded as irredeemable), while the resistance would make every effort to overcome the rivalry between the two ruling Ba’ath parties in Damascus and Baghdad. It is not improbable that the removal of King Hussein through joint action of the three parties was also envisaged.

The crisis between the Lebanese authorities and the resistance in May 1973 demonstrated just how far relations between the commandos and Iraq had improved. In an attempt to put an end to the fighting in Lebanon, Abdul Khaleq Sammarrai, a prominent RCC member who had earlier been instrumental in resolving differences with the resistance in Iraq, was despatched to Beirut. Sammarrai proceeded to give the commandos Iraq’s full backing and authorized them to take measures that would be guaranteed by Iraq. It is significant that when renewed clashes broke out, the Iraqi envoy to Beirut was sent off to Damascus to co-ordinate policy with Syria. The resistance also received 100,000 dinars from Iraq as compensation for Palestinian property destroyed during the fighting.

Such Iraqi-resistance friendliness ran into trouble after the October War. Hitherto, the resistance had found in Iraq an ally untainted with suspected sympathies for a political settlement with Israel. But the outcome of the war and the tentative negotiations between Egypt and Syria and the Israelis, albeit at a distance, caused grave divisions within the resistance movement. While the majority of the PLO, led by Fateh, was willing to keep an option open that would result in the establishment of a West Bank/Gaza Strip state, hard-liners rejected an implicit lessening of the resistance’s goals.

Iraq promptly sided with the rejection front, led by the PFLP
and the PFLP-GC. Relations with the resistance, as represented by the official PLO, began to deteriorate rapidly. Fateh’s official representative in Baghdad, Abu Nidal, took a stand alongside the rejection front, which earned him Fateh’s dismissal and even a death sentence in absentia. The Iraqi authorities made matters worse by refusing to hand him over to Fateh or even to accept a replacement.

At the end of 1974 the PLO publicly accused Iraq of complicity in the hijacking of a British Airways airliner in Dubai. An official Palestinian radio statement in Algiers absolved the PLO of all responsibility for the affair which was placed firmly on the shoulders of ‘agents and traitorous individuals... who were encouraged by the agent government of Iraq.’ The PLO was especially incensed at the timing of the incident, which came hard on the heels of the organization’s successes at the UN and seemed deliberately designed to harm the PLO’s standing in the international arena.

Although this particular dispute seems to have faded from prominence, it is ample testimony to the estrangement between Iraq and the PLO. Whether the Iraqis were implicated in the hijacking or not is less important than the fact that the PLO saw fit to accuse them of complicity. There seems little doubt that relations with Iraq will continue to worsen until the PLO itself makes some concrete moves to resolve its own internal schisms. Until the rejection front is reabsorbed into the organization, Iraq will continue to hold aloof from the moderates in the resistance.

LEBANON

The story of the resistance in Lebanon has been a series of confrontations with the government that have uniformly failed to solve the underlying problems aroused by resistance presence in the country. In the early days after the June 1967 war, two factors were chiefly responsible for tension between the commandos and the government. First, the social and economic status of the refugees was bound to cause friction, but this was made all the worse by the complications of Lebanon’s own multiconfessional social organization. Second, relations between Fateh and the authorities were strained at a very early
date by the death in ambiguous circumstances of a Fateh commando arrested before the June War.

But the real problems began to surface when the resistance grew in Jordan and attempted to expand operations into South Lebanon. By 1968, Lebanese Army patrols in the south were engaging Palestinian commandos in small skirmishes as the guerrillas tried to launch operations against Israel across the border. Israel lost no time in carrying out retaliatory raids, including strikes against villages in the south, which culminated in the dramatic attack on Beirut Airport on 28 December 1968 during which 12 Lebanese civil airliners were destroyed on the tarmac.

Not surprisingly, the human and material damage brought down on Lebanon by Palestinian guerrilla raids caused considerable dissenion in the country. Students in support of the guerrillas clashed with the private militia of the right-wing Christian Phalange Party, and a subsequent demonstration in Tripoli led to the death of two participants.

The following year events took a further turn for the worse as the commandos tried to establish themselves along the borders with Israel. As several bloody clashes occurred between guerrillas and the army, Lebanese left-wing sympathizers called for demonstrations to condemn the military authorities in March. In April marches were held in Beirut, Sidon, Bar Elias and the Beka’a, and scores of demonstrators were killed when they ran into security forces. On the same day as the marches, Premier Rashid Karami submitted his resignation and the country was plunged into its longest ever governmental crisis, lasting seven months.

But fighting between the commandos and the army continued. In a clash with the PFLP two soldiers were killed, and on 7 May President Nasser’s envoy, Hassan Sabry Kholi, arrived to mediate. Yasser Arafat even met President Charles Helou, but the efforts to mediate were a failure and the President went on to issue a momentous rejection of the status quo created by the commandos in Lebanon. Karami, who was still acting as caretaker premier, replied by opposing the President’s declaration in favour of the principle of collaboration between resistance and the authorities.
The crisis was further complicated by continued Israeli attacks on Lebanese border villages, and late in August the most serious fighting to date broke out between the army and the inhabitants of Nahr al Bared refugee camp outside Tripoli. On 6 September 1969 the Palestine National Assembly announced its refusal to accept withdrawal from Lebanon, and even King Hussein fruitlessly offered his services to mediate.

On 25 October the commandos clashed with the Lebanese Army in the village of Aitaroun, while during demonstrations in Tripoli 15 people were killed and a local leftist leader (Farouk Mohaddem) occupied the old castle with his supporters. The situation was by now becoming so serious that the President announced his acceptance of Egyptian mediation, and the army commander (General Emile Boustani) travelled to Cairo on 27 September. Meanwhile the fighting continued.

Later the same month Yasser Arafat also arrived in Cairo and a cease-fire was arranged. On 3 November both sides initialed a document that became known as the Cairo Agreement. This recognized the Palestinians’ right to work, reside and circulate in Lebanon. It agreed upon the formation of Palestinian committees to look after the interests of the refugees in the camps in co-operation with the local authorities and within the framework of Lebanese sovereignty. Permission was also formally granted to Palestinians resident in Lebanon to participate in the Palestinian revolution through armed struggle, once again within the framework of Lebanese sovereignty and security.

Commando action against Israel was also officially permitted with a long list of provisions. Points of passage and observation in the border area were to be specified, and a road to the border Arqoub region secured. The Palestine Armed Struggle Command assumed the task of controlling the actions of all member resistance organizations and ensuring that they did not interfere in Lebanese affairs. Liaison was to be established between the PASC and the army, while the resistance and the authorities would desist from public attacks on one another. A census of armed struggle elements would be held, and representatives of the PASC would be delegated to the army general staff. Concentration points in the border area would be
selected, with entry, exit and movement closely regulated. The army meanwhile would assist in medical, evacuation and supply work and would release detainees and weapons seized. The resistance accepted the continued exercise by the Lebanese civil and military authorities of their full responsibilities throughout the national territory.

The signing of the agreement paved the way for the formation of a new government with the leftist leader Kamal Jumblatt taking the vital Interior Ministry and responsibility for relations with the commandos. Jumblatt's presence in the Cabinet was reassuring to the resistance, but he maintained a judicious balance in his dealings with the commandos. In the wake of further Israeli raids Jumblatt asked the resistance to suspend operations against Israel in return for complete jurisdiction in the camps. Although clashes with the army recurred however, Jumblatt took a firm line with the commandos and when a prominent Sa'eqa leader was killed in a skirmish in a southern village, Jumblatt threatened to resign if the instigators were not detained.

Fighting with the Phalange also blew up again when right-wing militia members were understood to have ambushed commandos on the main road to Damascus, killing 20 of them. Fighting immediately erupted in the capital and was again only ended with outside intervention (this time by the Libyan Foreign Minister). Nor were matters any quieter on the borders. Palestinian guerrilla operations and Israeli retaliation raids succeeded one another, culminating with a mass Israeli strike deploying 2,000 troops and 200 tanks which resulted in six Lebanese soldiers and 30 commandos losing their lives. The commandos struck back by destroying an Israeli bus, and the Israelis retaliated again with a raid that killed 15 Lebanese civilians. Border villagers hurried to the safety of the towns away from the zone of fighting.

The change in regime with the election of Suleiman Franjieh as president at first boded well for Lebanese-Palestinian relations. Government officials most likely to provoke trouble with the resistance were removed from office, while the resistance reduced the number of its offices in Beirut and unified fund-raising activities. Throughout the latter part of
1970 and most of 1971, commando energies were chiefly focused on Jordan, and the period passed relatively quietly in Lebanon. But commando operations against Israel picked up on the southern border, and Israel resumed retaliatory raids in January 1972. The Israelis warned that unless the Lebanese authorities took action then Israel would be forced to extend a permanent occupation to south Lebanon, and Premier Saeb Salam appealed to Arafat to curtail operations from the south. Meanwhile, President Franjieh turned to other Arab governments in face of the Israeli threat to Lebanon's territorial integrity.

Then in February events were brought to a head by a large-scale Israeli incursion into the Arqoub region of the south where the commandos were allowed bases under the Cairo Agreement. After four days of occupation the Israelis pulled back, but the Lebanese Army moved in behind the retiring enemy columns, meeting no resistance from the commandos, and have stayed there ever since. Since then commando presence in the border area has been severely reduced and operations across the border have to all intents and purposes ceased.

This has done little to ease Lebanese-Palestinian relations since the Israelis have seized upon attacks on Israeli property and personnel at home and abroad to retaliate against south Lebanon, depicted as the headquarters and training ground of the resistance. The Lydda operation by the Japanese Red Army for the PFLP in May 1972 resulted in Israeli threats of massive retaliation, despite the fact that the PFLP stressed that the planning for the operation had taken place outside Lebanon. (The Israelis claimed that the captured commandos had told a different story which revealed that they had been trained outside Beirut, and once again called on Lebanon to end the commando presence.)

President Franjieh took immediate action. PFLP information activity was banned, and a guerrilla unit travelling to the south in June was stopped by an army road block. The commandos also responded with a government request to evacuate southern border villages to forestall Israeli retaliation, and most of the resistance forces came to be concentrated on the Syrian border.
Nevertheless, the Israelis accused the resistance of firing bazooka shells on a busload of tourists in the Golan Heights from Lebanese territory and launched a particularly fierce raid that ended with 14 Lebanese civilians dead, 4 soldiers and at least 30 commandos. It is interesting that the village that bore the brunt of the attack had earlier observed a three-day strike in protest at the commando presence there and had called for the abrogation of the Cairo Agreement. But if the Israelis intended to put further pressure on the local population to make trouble for the resistance, they were largely thwarted here as elsewhere by the willingness of the resistance to co-operate with the inhabitants and make as many concessions to them as possible.

The government's dilemma was becoming increasingly critical. Casualties from Israeli retaliatory raids were increasing and Israel was threatening ever more drastic action. President Franjieh instructed Premier Salam to reach agreement with the resistance for the cessation of raids against Israel from Lebanese territory, which was successfully accomplished along with a promise that a substantial proportion of commando forces in the border region be withdrawn. For some two months no serious action was recorded against Israel, either from the border or elsewhere in the world.

The situation was once again overturned by the Munich Olympics operation which produced the expected Israeli counter-attack on 16 September. Heavily resisted by both the Lebanese Army and the commandos fighting side by side, the Israelis occupied the south with severe casualties to both their opponents. A state of emergency was declared and the army delivered an ultimatum to the commandos to evacuate the region totally. Although the radical groups objected, they were overruled by moderate resistance opinion in the interests of preserving amicable relations with the authorities. Indeed, by this time there was considerable tension between the resistance and the government, although on the surface everything appeared to be cordial and restrained.

Lebanese immunity from Israeli raids seemed henceforth assured. Calm persisted into 1973, and it was the Israelis themselves who took a hand in reactivating the conflict between the Palestinians and the Lebanese. In February 1973
 Israeli troops landed by sea near Tripoli and attacked two refugee camps. There were complaints that the army had refused to help the Palestinians, which were countered by claims that such intervention would have only been risky to the commandos themselves, and in any case it had been declined. The situation worsened when an Israeli commando team penetrated Beirut on the night of 10 April and killed three prominent resistance leaders. Defensive action by the Lebanese Army and security forces to this invasion of the capital was almost non-existent, giving rise to charges of an army conspiracy to liquidate the resistance. The premier, Saeb Salam, resigned in protest at the army’s refusal to intervene, conscious of the apprehensions of his Moslem supporters. The army weakly countered that by the time assistance had been requested, the raiders had fled.

By now the radicals in the resistance were becoming restive. A few days later the oil storage tanks at Zahrani were blown up (although the resistance disclaimed responsibility), and at the end of the month two members of the PDLFLP were arrested at Beirut Airport in possession of explosives and guns. Two days later a bomb was discovered at the airport after a tip-off by a caller who demanded the release of the men.

The atmosphere was now fraught with danger. Four commandos were detained outside the American Embassy in possession of explosives, and on 1 May two soldiers were kidnapped by commandos against the release of the arrested Palestinians. At last on 2 May fighting broke out, and within 24 hours 14 soldiers and 22 commandos had been killed, and 92 commandos wounded. President Frangieh belligerently warned that ‘no Lebanese will accept an occupation army in Lebanon.’

Although a brief cease-fire was reached on 4 May when reports of a PLA brigade entering Lebanon from Syria reached Beirut, fighting continued for another week and it was not until 18 May that an accord was reached. Its provisions were kept secret (although it was known that the agreement ‘guaranteed Lebanon’s sovereignty and the security of the Palestinian revolution’).

Serious tension between the resistance and the government unsurprisingly persisted. A hostile Syrian regime closed the
borders for some time afterwards, the premier resigned after only a month in office, and the reverberations of the most violent open confrontation between the two sides continued to echo until the outbreak of the October War.

Since then the situation can hardly be said to have fundamentally improved. Despite several spectacular raids against Israeli villages near the Lebanese border and fierce Israeli strikes against Lebanese villages and Palestinian camps, villagers and refugees in the south have not been provoked to confrontation. In December 1974, the PLO offices in Beirut were even assaulted by rockets mounted on cars.

In 1975, the danger of another confrontation between the Lebanese authorities and the resistance has grown worse with the outbreak of fighting between Phalange and the resistance. In April the right-wing Christian Phalange ambushed and massacred a busload of Palestinians, thereby starting the first of four rounds of internal civil strife (by September 1975). The later confrontations expanded to include other Lebanese elements on both the right and the left, and the resistance stayed as far apart as possible from what had become an essentially internal Lebanese affair. Inevitably and inextricably, the Palestinian presence in Lebanon has become bound up with the Lebanese struggle between Christian and Moslem, right and left, and privileged and underprivileged.

LIBYA

Libyan involvement with the Palestinian resistance dates back no further than the coup d'état that brought Colonel Kaddafi to power in September 1969. The royalist regime had certainly given permission to the commando organizations to raise funds in the country, but was equally careful to see that any political activity by the resistance or any of the several thousand Palestinians living in the country was nipped in the bud. The militant Arabism of Kaddafi has pursued a very different policy.

The level of Libya's involvement in the Palestine cause before the 1969 coup can be judged by the comment of the Prime Minister to a Fateh official he met in Tripoli in 1968. 'The Libyan people are naïve,' he is reported to have commented.
‘They believe what you say and do. Therefore, I am going to permit the fund-raising, but I repeat, I have no faith in your struggle.’

Colonel Kaddafi, on the other hand, was much more eager to seize the opportunities of a ‘progressive’ reputation offered by collaboration with the resistance. Before the coup the PFLP had been represented in the country on an informal basis, largely as a repository for members of the banned Arab Nationalist Movement, while Fateh had established its presence through clandestine contacts with the Palestinian community. Under Kaddafi, however, financial aid to Jordan (as agreed upon at the Khartoum summit in 1967) was suspended when King Hussein launched his assault on the resistance in September 1970. The young Libyan leader joined Nasser and Sudanese President Jaafar Numeiri in attempts to resolve the Jordan crisis, and similarly held talks with President Helou of Lebanon about the commando-government confrontation there.

Nevertheless, Kaddafi’s reverence for the long-standing progressive leaders of the Arab world was such that he immediately followed suit in Libya when Nasser closed down the Palestinian radio in Cairo for criticisms of his acceptance of the Rogers peace plan.

Kaddafi was however the first Arab leader to call for a summit conference to resolve the conflict between the Jordanians and the resistance in the Jerash and Ajloun areas in July 1971, but when the meeting was held at the end of the month he roundly expressed the hope that King Hussein would be killed ‘by the bullets of free Jordanian officers’.

At the same time as its verbal attacks on the Hashemites, the new Libyan regime began to give military and financial aid to the resistance and undertook fund-raising operations of its own (the greater part of a fund for liberation movements around the world went to the Palestinians). Huge quantities of small arms are reported to have found their way to the commandos from the Libyans. It was particularly surprising that Libya became the commandos’ major centre for foreign operations. A Jordanian airliner, for example, was hijacked and diverted to Benghazi in September 1971 without any measures being taken
against the guerrillas.

Libyan solidarity with the Palestinian cause reached quite unprecedented lengths when the Libyan representative to the Arab Defence Council meeting in Cairo in November 1971 refused to sign a telegram of condolence sent to King Hussein on the occasion of Jordanian Premier Wasfi Tal’s assassination by Black September commandos. Colonel Kaddafi followed this up by strongly criticizing the United Arab Kingdom project of King Hussein and refusing to receive a Jordanian delegation sent around the Arab capitals to explain the scheme.

Nor was the outspoken Kaddafi’s criticism limited to Jordan. In April 1972 he announced that the guerrillas’ effectiveness was being destroyed by restrictions imposed on their activities in Syria and Egypt. A call was put out for Libyan volunteers to join the resistance in accordance with Kaddafi’s pan-Arab concept of the Palestine struggle. About 600 recruits were sent to Fateh in Syria and Lebanon during the early summer of 1972, and a considerable number were killed subsequently during border raids of Israeli retaliatory attacks.

Nevertheless, Kaddafi’s relations with the resistance were not entirely unblemished. His militant Islamic thinking abhorred ‘communist’ and ‘atheist’ influences among the commandos and the PFLP and the PDFLP came in for particularly bitter attack. On the other hand, Kaddafi did manage to retain cordial relations with Fateh and the PFLP-GC, despite an increasing sensitivity to the growing leftward trend in the resistance. After Arafat visited Moscow in July 1972, Kaddafi complained that commando leaders were ‘fighting for the sake of ideologies and not in order to liberate their land’. Kaddafi could scarcely disguise his contempt when the resistance collectively agreed to freeze operations from south Lebanon under the pressure of mounting Israeli retaliatory raids on Lebanese citizens, and he openly encouraged the PFLP-GC to reject the agreement with the Lebanese government.

Noisy Libyan commentaries on the activities of the resistance were beginning to annoy commando leaders, while the commandos were conforming less and less to Kaddafi’s vision of a resistance movement. On 1 January 1973 it was
announced that Libyan volunteers fighting for the resistance would be withdrawn since in Kaddafi’s words the resistance ‘did not wish to continue’ its struggle against Israel. When a Libyan airliner was shot down after straying over Israeli-occupied Sinai in February recruits were again invited to join up, but the assassination raid by Israeli commandos in Beirut that resulted in the death of three Palestinian leaders in April elicited the comment from Kaddafi that the resistance was now ‘dead’.

Commando chiefs were by now very tired of Kaddafi’s hectoring and, leaping to the defence of the movement, Abu Iyad challenged Libya to show its true revolutionary spots by nationalizing all American oil interests on its territory and striking a direct blow against Israel. ‘The yardstick is no longer beautiful words and money donated to a charity. It is a decisive stand against the interests of the United States in the area,’ Abu Iyad said, in an all-but-direct reference to Kaddafi.

The widening breach between the commandos and the Libyan regime was demonstrated even more forcibly when Kaddafi at first pointedly refused to make clear his support for the Palestinians during the fighting between the resistance and the Lebanese Army in May 1973. Even when Kaddafi invited Arafat and Abu Iyad to Tripoli for discussions on the resumption of Libyan aid, the two leaders declined to make the journey on the grounds that current events in Lebanon were too pressing.

So in Libya training bases were closed down and the authorities began a large-scale campaign of arrests among Palestinians and Libyan sympathizers of the PFLP, whose organ Al Hadaf charged that houses had been unlawfully broken into by the police while Palestinians were beaten, arrested and tortured.

There were reports at the time that the harrassment — which coincided with Kaddafi’s ‘cultural revolution’ — would be broadened to take in the entire resistance and that all suspects would be deported. Some Palestinian sources reported meanwhile that the Libyan government had expelled at least 100 Libyan students in the space of a few weeks and that newly formed ‘people’s committees’ had forced the dismissal of
a number of senior Palestinian employees in the oil industry. One instance of the lengths to which the authorities were prepared to go was the successful pressure put on the Palestinian senior translator at the American Embassy to leave his job.

Officially, all that was revealed was a request 'to leave' the country issued to a certain number of Palestinians and other Arabs as a result of their 'communist and revolutionary inclinations'. But a spokesman for the PLO in Libya said that exit permits had been refused for about 5,000 Palestinian teachers who wished to spend their summer vacations abroad.

After the October War, Libya joined the rejection front to denounce the 'defeatism' of President Sadat. Ironically, although this only exacerbated Libyan-PLO relations, it brought the PFLP back into Colonel Kaddafi's good books. An official PFLP delegation visited Tripoli and Libyan information media began a campaign on behalf of the rejectionist front. Nevertheless, when Kaddafi made one of his perennial decisions to reconcile with Sadat, the virulent pro-rejectionist propaganda was very much toned down.

But Libya, true to its militant principles (although there are those who see more words than action in Libyan policy), still remains a home for the rejection front. It is also supposed to have been closely associated with Black September, and there are rumours to the effect that Colonel Kaddafi was the only leader in the Arab world to know of the Munich Olympic operation in advance. Libya certainly remains a haven for the commandos associated with the operation, and the group that hijacked a Yugoslav airliner to free the captured Olympic guerrillas chose Benghazi as their destination with no objections from the Libyan government.

Indeed, according to some reports, Libya was also directly implicated in the Black September kidnappings in Khartoum in March 1973. The Sudanese loudly denounced the Libyan regime, and there never was any denial from Tripoli. Like Iraq, Libya has also been a protector for dissident Fateh elements. A number of international guerrilla operations organized outside the main commando groups can be traced back to Libya, although it is interesting that in the case of the attack on
Rome’s Flumicino airport, the operational organizer (Ahmad Ghafoor, known as Abu Mahmoud) was told he would no longer be welcome after the incident.

SYRIA
The classic dilemma of the Arab regimes in dealing with the resistance is nowhere better illustrated than Syria. Verbally among the most outspoken supporters of the Palestine cause, the Syrians have felt constrained to keep a firm grip on the commandos at home. This ambiguity created something of a storm during negotiations between the Lebanese Army and the commandos in 1973 after the fighting between the two in May. A Beirut newspaper published the text of what it claimed was a memorandum sent by Syrian Defence Minister Hafez Assad (who had become President by the time of its publication) to the commando leadership in May 1969 which outlined rules and restrictions governing guerrilla activity on Syrian territory.

The accuracy of the published memorandum may be in doubt as to detail, but it certainly reflects the approach of the Syrian regime to commandos in the country. Four groups only were allowed to function officially — Fateh, the Syrian Ba’ath-sponsored Sa’eqa, the PFLP and the PLO’s regular military wing, the Palestine Liberation Army. All were required to maintain a representative at the defence ministry to co-ordinate activities with the national defence authorities, and no commandos were permitted to enter the occupied territories from Syria without the ministry’s written approval. While in Syria, the guerrillas were prohibited from carrying arms when moving through the country or wearing uniforms except when carrying out official instructions from the intelligence department. Similarly, there were restrictions on the location of training camps and shooting ranges, the use of special identity papers, detention or questioning of suspects, unauthorized statements and marches or ceremonies.

A whole section of Syrian intelligence — called Branch 235 — was supposed to be devoted to resistance affairs and act as liaison with the authorities. This section had to be supplied with all the necessary information about the resistance, and its officials were allowed to visit commando offices and camps ‘to
acquaint themselves with any problems that might be facing the resistance and to solve issues related to commando action.' Certain restrictions were also placed on Syrians wishing to join the resistance, which was obliged to notify the authorities of any applications from non-Palestinian Arabs.

In Beirut, the resistance was naturally not eager to have a major ally portrayed in such a compromising light. Sa'eqa chief Zuhair Mohsen described the memorandum on its publication as no more than a set of suggestions put forward by certain army quarters at the time, and declared that Assad had himself overruled them. Mohsen even went on to say that the resistance was subject to no restrictions at all in Syria.

Other commando sources stated more cautiously that Syria had never imposed continuous written limitations on commando activity, and that the relationship with the authorities was not governed on a legal basis as in Lebanon.

Nevertheless, whatever the truth of the memorandum incident, there is no doubt at all that by 1971 (when Hafez Assad was firmly ensconced in power) the Syrians were becoming nervous about commando activity. The resistance defeat in July 1971 by the Jordanian Army found Syria playing host to a large number of angry and embittered commandos. Discussions were going on constantly to try and effect a Jordanian-Palestinian reconciliation under Egyptian and Saudi auspices. The Syrians suddenly introduced restrictive measures, presumably in order to encourage the resistance to come to terms with the Hashemite regime.

The measures followed the familiar pattern: intensified control of guerrilla movement in border areas; obligatory display of identity cards and military orders by commandos entering the country; advance notice, details and the names of participants of operations against Israel; the right of the army to cordon off refugee camps in the event of a threat to national security; and strict control over resistance publications.

As it happened, attempts to bring the commandos and King Hussein together were abortive, and after the failure of the Jeddah conference the restrictions were lifted, but resistance activity was only tolerated when it served national interests. Thus, while operations were tolerated and even encouraged
when the Syrians wanted to put pressure on Israel, restrictions were in effect reimposed whenever Israeli retaliation became too severe. The general pattern appears to be that close restrictions exist on commando activity, but they are only applied when and where they are felt necessary by the authorities. At present it would seem that their application is on a limited and specific scale.

It would, however, be wrong to give the impression that the resistance is seriously hampered today in Syria. All the major commando organizations (with the exception of the PFLP and the Iraqi-backed Arab Liberation Front) have opened offices in Damascus, and two of these — the PDFLP and PFLP-GC, — were not included in the 1969 memorandum. There are those who also draw conclusions of a favourable nature from the fact that the Fateh office is only a stone’s throw from the Damascus sector command of the Syrian Army.

On the other hand there is no denying that despite every effort of the PLO to exert its authority, the Syrian Army retains total control over the PLA brigade stationed in Syria. Strict supervision is also exercised over the Yarmouk Brigade, a Fateh regular army group composed of defectors from the Jordanian Army which formed after the September 1970 fighting (its 5,000 men deploy armoured vehicles, artillery and other heavy weapons). Moreover, the Syrians are known to have intervened in arms shipments destined for the resistance from Arab and foreign states. On one occasion several consignments (included armoured vehicles) were prevented from reaching Fateh.

Early in 1973 fierce fighting developed on the Golan Heights between the Israelis and the Syrians. A Syrian note was delivered to the resistance demanding the observation of a number of new conditions. All commando bases were to be withdrawn 15 kilometres from the cease-fire line, commandos were to leave all border villages and there was to be no political agitation by commandos among the inhabitants of such villages. Further, the resistance was to stand off at least five kilometres from Syrian Army positions and prior notification of operations against Israel was demanded.

But Syrian support was invaluable in the resistance con-
frontation with the Lebanese Army in 1973, and it was through Syrian mediation that an agreement was reached, to promulgate a first cease-fire. When this broke down, the Syrians even permitted the Yarmouk Brigade and PLA units to cross the Lebanese border. Even after the fighting, the frontier remained closed for three months until August to the considerable detriment of Lebanese transit trade.

Close co-operation between the resistance and the leftist parties constituting the ruling Syrian National Front (dominated by the Ba'ath Party) is seen as a strong political safeguard for the Palestinian presence in Syria. Further encouragement is derived from the favourable treatment given to Palestinians by the civil authorities. Palestinians are not required to obtain residence or work permits, and in other respects are accorded equal rights with native Syrians. The camps are not subject to special legal regulations or a separate administration. Although there are UNRWA* schools, Palestinians may also send their children to Syrian schools. They are even allowed to exercise a degree of political activity.

If a tentative conclusion can be reached regarding the situation of the resistance in Syria, it is that Syrian concessions like those mentioned above have managed to avert the kind of serious confrontation which has characterized Lebanon and Jordan, the other areas of high Palestinian concentration. This is all the more significant given the large number of Palestinian commandos and regular army units in Syria, amounting to some 20,000 men. And while the government has kept a firm rein on the PLA and the Yarmouk Brigade, the commandos for their part have steered well clear of the internal political involvement that precipitated their downfall in Jordan.

At the same time, Syria’s policy towards the resistance, like every other Arab regime’s, is subject to the flux of events in the Arab world. When Egypt and Syria restored diplomatic relations with Jordan in 1973 as part of an effort to bring the Hashemit regime back into the mainstream of Arab politics, the the Palestinian radio station at Dera’a was summarily closed

*United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.
down and its director arrested. Then with the October War, Syria found it more suitable to recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people (thereby undermining King Hussein’s claims), and since then has given strong support to the overall policy of the PLO.

THE ARABIAN GULF

If Palestinian relations with the ‘progressive’ regimes of Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Libya have been fraught with contradictions and complications, their relations with the unashamedly ‘reactionary’ regimes of the Arabian peninsula have often been even more ambiguous. Saudi Arabia, as the most powerful Gulf state, is a revealing instance.

Initially, Saudi Arabia was very hospitably disposed towards Fateh. The emergence of a militant Palestinian group with a number of leaders vehemently opposed to Nasserism was too attractive to pass by. Throughout the 1960s Saudi Arabia found itself on extremely bad terms with the Arab progressives, and Fateh — with its contingent of Moslem Brothers looking very attractive to Saudi Arabia’s Islamic activism — gave it the opportunity to demonstrate both its own independence from the ‘progressives’ and its effective hostility to Israel.

When King Feisal met the first official Fateh envoy (Abu Iyad) in 1968, he took the occasion to stress his support for the liberation of Palestine, as well as launching into an attack on Marxism and Arab leftism. The king willingly granted permission for contributions to be sought in Saudi Arabia for the ‘fighters and their families’.

The emergence of avowedly radical movements such as the PFLP only heightened Saudi Arabia’s support for Fateh. Urging Fateh to engage in direct confrontation with other resistance movements, Saudi Arabia restricted its recognition and financial aid to Fateh alone.

The special relationship with Fateh entered into Saudi efforts to mediate between the resistance and Jordan. Amman was pressed to co-operate only with Fateh, while they were looked on to control the other groups and impose ‘national unity’, if necessary by force. After the final bout of Jordanian-resistance fighting in July 1971, Saudi Arabia helped
to organize the ill-fated Jeddah conference. But its plans to get Fateh alone permission to remain in Jordan were unsuccessful, and all the organizations were expelled.

Since then Saudi relations with Fateh have visibly deteriorated. King Feisal obviously set greater store by King Hussein than the Palestinian liberation movement when the choice had to be made, especially as Fateh took on an increasingly leftist tinge of its own and improved its own relations with more radical commando groups. When Kuwait and Libya suspended the contributions promised to Jordan at the 1967 Khartoum conference in protest against Hussein's treatment of the resistance, Saudi Arabia significantly failed to follow suit.

Although there was no overt hint of Fateh's estrangement from the Saudi regime, the gulf separating Riyadh from the resistance was amply demonstrated by the fact that Saudi Arabia was represented at the Beirut pan-Arab conference in support of the Palestinian revolution in November 1972 by delegates from leftist organizations dedicated to the overthrow of the monarchy. Not long afterwards Khaled Hassan, the Fateh leader closest to Saudi Arabia, was dismissed from his responsibilities in the movement.

Relations with the resistance reached their lowest ebb when Black September stormed the Saudi Embassy in Khartoum and held the Ambassador and several diplomatic guests hostage in May 1973. The irate Saudi government threatened to expel all the Palestinians in the kingdom if the ambassador was harmed. Fateh was unwilling to provoke an open rift with Saudi Arabia, and the group's representative in Saudi Arabia, Abu Hisham, came forward to give an unexpected news conference praising King Feisal's attitude. Denouncing attempts to sow discord between the resistance and Saudi Arabia, and recalling Saudi Arabia's early support of the resistance, Abu Hisham spoke of the regime's deep concern for the Palestinian revolution which had prohibited it from co-operating with 'any Palestinian organization other than Fateh so as to preserve the unity of the revolution'.

Naturally enough, the other resistance organizations immediately denounced Fateh. The PFLP let loose a bitter attack, and PDFLP leaders demanded Abu Hisham be put on
trial. Saudi Arabia was offended when the Fateh second-in-command, Abu Iyad, paid a visit to South Yemen soon after (the two countries were in virtual open conflict) and declared the support of the resistance for the ‘struggle of the South Yemeni people for liberation from imperialism’.

By the time the Lebanese Army was fighting the commandos in May 1973, King Feisal’s antipathy towards the resistance had reached the stage where he sent a message approving President Franjih’s measures against the commandos, blaming the conflict on ‘radical leftist organizations’. The PFLP and the PDFLP at once took up the challenge by accusing Saudi Arabia of inciting Lebanon to liquidate the commandos.

Later that year, however, Arafat visited Saudi Arabia and managed to paper over the differences. The Saudis even agreed to resume financial aid to the PLO. And after his triumphant appearance before the UN General Assembly in 1974, Arafat again paid a visit to Saudi Arabia. ‘I found His Majesty offering affection, understanding and readiness to face the approach of the next vital phase,’ Arafat told a Press conference. Abu Hisham repeated his familiarly strain with reference to Arafat’s appreciation of Saudi Arabia’s leading role in the contribution towards victory in Palestine.

But, when the Algiers Arab summit met after the October War in November 1973, Saudi Arabia made a determined effort to forestall consideration of the PLO’s ‘sole’ representation of the Palestinian people. Indeed, when Saudi Arabia eventually withdrew its opposition, it was the first time that it had formally recognized the organization.

Since the October War Saudi support for the resistance has become more marked as the kingdom’s involvement with the Arab-Israeli struggle intensified with the adoption of the oil weapon in 1973-74. Saudi Arabia’s greater commitment can be gauged from an interview given in November 1974 to a Lebanese weekly by the Minister of the Interior (and current Crown Prince) Fahd bin Abdul Aziz. He declared that the Palestine question was ‘the very quintessence’ of the Middle East conflict, and that it would ‘continue to be the fulcrum of Saudi Arabia’s diplomacy, the target of its efforts and its primary and greatest preoccupation until Arab rights are restored.’
KUWAIT AND THE GULF STATES
Kuwait’s relations with the resistance are dictated by a completely different set of circumstances. Kuwait has always tried to play the part of the neutral state accommodating Arab and international viewpoints and reconciling the differences between the Arab regimes. It also plays host to a large Palestinian community which exerts a leading influence in the political, economic and social life of the country. This community has produced many Fateh leaders (Khaled Hassan continues to draw a salary from the Kuwait government) and has retained good terms with the resistance, particularly in its financial support.

The Kuwaiti government withdrew its financial contributions to Jordan after the Palestinians had been expelled from the country, and actively tried to mediate between the rivals. In December 1970 the Prime Minister pledged Kuwait’s support for the Palestinian revolution and promised to oppose any solution to the Middle East crisis unacceptable to the Palestinian people. And during the May 1973 fighting between the resistance and the Lebanese Army, the Kuwait Foreign Minister came to Beirut and was successful in arranging a meeting between the President and the commando leaders.

The resistance has also been careful to cultivate the friendship of Kuwait, despite its status as a conservative regime. In other instances, radical resistance movements have proved far more critical of what they see as ‘reactionary’ regimes, but the relative freedom of action allowed Palestinian political activity in Kuwait (as distinct from the complete ban imposed in Saudi Arabia) and the country’s role as a source of funds have helped to mollify leftist militancy. Yasser Arafat even took part in a bid to settle Kuwait’s long-standing border dispute with Iraq in 1973, and was instrumental in bringing about the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwaiti territory.

But like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait objected at first to the legitimization of the PLO’s claim to be the sole representative of the Palestinians. And also like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait has had to put up commando operations aimed at least partially against itself. In this case, the PFLP occupied the Japanese Embassy in Kuwait to secure the release of hijackers taken in a Singapore
incident. The resistance was prudent enough to issue an official disclaimer and condemn the operation.

Indeed, for all its friendliness towards the resistance, neither Kuwait nor the inherently conservative Palestinian community there have shown much sympathy for the Palestinian left. It was no surprise that the dissident Fateh commando, Ahmad Ghafoor, failed to establish himself in Kuwait after leaving Libya.

The other Gulf states have played only a marginal role in resistance affairs. There is a large Palestinian community in the United Arab Emirates which has been active in fund-raising for the commandos. UAE relations with the resistance have been trouble-free and the Council of Ministers approved the imposition of a 'liberation tax' on all citizens of Palestinian origin in May 1973.

By contrast, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman are on bad terms with the resistance. Significantly enough, an invitation to the Beirut conference in support of the Palestine revolution in November 1972 was sent to leftist opposition quarters in Bahrain rather than official circles. As for Oman, the resistance has little love for a regime conducting a war against the guerrillas of the Dhofar province in the west of the country. The PFLP and the PDFLP have both notably announced their support for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman, Fateh has undertaken extensive propaganda activity on its behalf, and the PFLO was invited to the November 1972 Beirut conference.

Conversely, relations with the only 'progressive' Gulf state are very friendly. South Yemen's ruling National Liberation Front is the offspring of the Arab Nationalist Movement, also the parent of the PFLP and the PDFLP. There was no official sanction against a PFLP military operation in the Red Sea from South Yemen and an attack on a Lufthansa airliner which was hijacked to Aden in February 1972 resulting in a 5 million dollar ransom. And although South Yemen issued a denial, there were rumours that a PFLP base was maintained on an island at the mouth of the Red Sea.

Aden gives political support to the resistance in general and refuses to indulge in mediation between the commandos and Arab regimes because of its solidarity with the former. When
the South Yemen premier visited Beirut in May 1973, he made a point of meeting resistance leaders only.

THE MAGHREB

The three Western Arab states have varied experiences of the resistance. Morocco enjoys peculiarly bad relations, Algeria has been generally favourable, while Tunisia has pursued a course of its own which has not always been very welcome to the resistance.

Morocco is one of the conservative regimes in which the resistance sees little that is commendable. King Hassan has made the obligatory pro-Palestinian statements, but he is generally regarded as a pawn of ‘imperialism’, and the assassination of the left-wing leader Mehdi Ben Barka served only to reinforce this judgement.

The Moroccan opposition has worsened matters with reports of official collaboration with Israel. There have been stories of a special trade relationship and co-operation between the two countries’ intelligence services. What is certainly true is that King Hassan was the first Arab leader to publicly meet a semi-official spokesman for Israel when he had talks with Nahum Goldmann, the President of the World Jewish Congress in April 1970.

Again, the test of the regime’s unpopularity with the resistance was the invitation of opposition leaders to the Beirut conference in support of the Palestinian revolution in November 1972. Opposition groups have maintained close contact with the resistance, and co-operated both in Morocco and Europe.

The identification has prompted King Hassan to take action on several occasions. One Moroccan participant at the Beirut conference, Oman Ben Jelloun, narrowly escaped an attempt on his life, and many arrests were made among Fateh supporters. It was partly to distract attention from such activities that a Moroccan contingent was despatched to Syria in 1973 amid great publicity. It later took part in the fighting on the Golan Heights.

Fateh has tried to stay as neutral as possible with regard to Morocco, at least on the official level. Other groups have been less circumspect. The PFLP and the PDFLP have long been
bitterly critical, although Sa‘eqa felt impelled to cool its attacks when the Moroccans arrived on the Golan Heights. The present state of relations is perhaps best exemplified by the choice of the Moroccan capital, Rabat, as the site of an assassination attempt (probably the work of Black September) on the life of King Hussein during the Arab summit there in February 1974.

Algeria, with its impeccable guerrilla credentials, was one of the first states to support Fateh before the 1967 war, and its official position on the Palestine cause is identical with that of the commandos. It has always rejected resolution 242 and urged — on the basis of its own experience — a people’s war against Israel.

Fateh made its first contacts with Algeria as far back as 1964 when its representatives met President Ahmad Ben Bella. The Algerian allowed Fateh to establish a training camp and a secret office in the country. Indeed, Algeria is frequently taken as the best example of a successful popular revolution for the Palestinians. Fateh has declared that the Algerian experience is closer to the Palestinians than Vietnam, and it resembles the Algerian National Liberation Front in its stress on the commando organization as the only viable framework for the confrontation with Israel and Zionism.

PFLP and PDFLP relations with Algeria have been more variable, largely because of their conviction that President Bounedienne has yielded important political and economic concessions to neo-imperialism. When Foreign Minister Abdul Aziz Bouteflika publicly advocated direct talks between Israel and the resistance in July 1973, provided the former announced its intention to ‘liquidate imperialism’, the response from the radical commandos was predictably frosty. But the resistance has never sought to cut itself off from Algeria, and both sides have usually tried to settle their differences amicably, and in private.

In the Palestinians’ dealings with the Arab world Algeria has consistently displayed its pro-resistance sympathies. It argued for decisive action when King Hussein attacked the commandos in 1970, and was the first Arab state to break off diplomatic relations in protest. Unlike the Libyans, no Algerian leader has ever indulged in an attack on the resistance, and Algeria has
habitually used its good offices in disputes between commandos and the regimes (notably during the fighting in Lebanon in 1973 and the occasion when Syria seized Fateh weapons in 1971).

Algeria has even taken the initiative in seeking ways to make its support for the resistance more effective. A delegation representing the defence ministry and the NLF arrived in Beirut in October 1972 for discussions with the resistance on political and military matters. After meeting Arafat, Hawatmeh and Mohsen, the Algerians were reported by resistance sources to have suggested severance of all communications with the Jordanian regime, persuading other regimes of the inimical nature of the Jordanian government in the struggle for liberation, promoting the PLO's claim to sole representation of the Palestinians, giving material support to the revolution and rejecting all peaceful solutions. The next month at the Beirut Congress of the Arab Front Participating in the Palestinian Revolution, Algeria and Iraq offered to shoulder jointly all the expenses.

There have, of course, been instances when relations between Algeria and the resistance have gone through a somewhat less than harmonious phase. Fateh has had its differences with the regime, and even recruited the support of Algerian opposition groups in Europe among the considerable émigré Algerian population. One dramatic instance was Fateh's co-operation with a prominent opponent of Boumediene, Mohammad Boudia, who became a Fateh member and was assassinated by Israeli agents in June 1973.

But the championing of the PLO's claim to be the sole representative of the Palestinians at the Algiers summit in 1973 and the Rabat summit in 1974 has amply compensated for peripheral friction. Boumediene has also been active in trying to reconcile the post-October War differences within the resistance, and even went some way towards persuading Habash to accept the Palestine state project in a personal meeting in Algiers in February 1974.

Fateh has never received any military or economic aid, or even permission for political activity from Tunisia. When President Habib Bourguiba toured the Middle East in 1964 and
suggested the then unthinkable idea of negotiating with Israel, he permanently blotted his copybook as far as the resistance was concerned. The appointment of a former Tunisian premier as mediator in the conflict with Jordan in September 1970 did something towards rebuilding the resistance's image of the Tunisian regime, and Arafat visited Tunis during the Arab-wide tour in January 1971 while seeking support for the commandos. He was diplomatically appreciative of Tunisian mediation efforts, and when Radio Tunis announced that ‘national duty dictates that we surmount every obstacle standing in the way of the Palestinian resistance’, it was obvious that relations had much improved.

Foreign Minister Masmoudi supported the Palestinian cause with no reservations on a visit to Paris in September 1972, and urged the European states to assume their responsibilities. He refused to condemn terrorism, and said that the solution to the problem lay only in including the Palestinians in all stages of the settlement.

As relations with Fateh improved, Tunisia began to present the resistance with proposals for a peaceful settlement, all of which were thrown out of court by the PFLP, which saw in them nothing more than an attempt to divide the resistance movement and isolate the radicals. Nevertheless, it is worth remarking that the ruling Destour Party was the only ‘conservative’ party to be invited to the 1972 Beirut congress.

And a decade after annoying the Arab nationalists with his plan for a negotiated settlement based on a partitioned Palestine, Bourguiba managed to thoroughly alienate King Hussein by putting forward a new Palestine state plan in 1973. This one, apparently formulated with Kaddafi and Sadat, and with a promise from Fateh not to take open opposition, posited a Palestinian state on the East and West banks replacing the 'fake' Jordanian state. The Palestinians could hardly accept such an idea, but it did have the merit of provoking King Hussein to break off diplomatic relations with Tunisia.
5. The Commandos, China and the USSR

CHINA

The first encounter between the Chinese and the resistance took place in 1964 when Yasser Arafat and Abu Jihad of Fateh secretly visited Peking to outline the programme of their organization to Chinese leaders. The response was said to have been ‘encouraging’, though it was not until the resistance began to emerge as a distinctive force in the Middle East after the 1967 war that substantial Chinese military aid was accorded to Fateh, along with training of guerrillas on Chinese territory. In 1970, a delegation led by Arafat made the first public and official trip to Peking since the commando take-over of the PLO, and in September of that year the Chinese offered to replace equipment lost during the Jordan confrontation.

China has a special place in the Palestinian view of the non-Arab world as being the first Communist state to affirm the rights of the ‘Palestinian people’ rather than the Palestinian refugees. China never took any part in the formation of Israel, and accepted the PLO as the ‘legal Palestinian representative’ at a time when the Soviet Union (which played an active role in the establishment of Israel) was still ignoring Israel.

As early as 1965, Ahmad Shukairi visited Peking, and a joint statement was issued saying that ‘China has supported and continues to support the Palestinian people, without reservation, in their demand for the repatriation and the restoration of all their rights in Palestine.’ But until the 1970 fighting in Jordan, all China’s support went exclusively to Fateh, and no other Palestinian commando group was recognized by Peking. When the PFLP requested assistance in 1969, it was even rejected on the grounds of being Trotskyist.

But from late 1970 onwards China took an increasing part in the training of PFLP cadres. It obviously considered the PFLP a safer bet than the PFLP, whose summer 1970 hijackings were condemned by the People’s Daily as ‘precipitate acts’ which ‘conflict with the liberation war’. 
Ideologically, China considers the Palestine resistance as part of the world-wide body of liberation movements. The commandos in the Middle East are seen as an important regional force free from Soviet or American dominance in an arena where the dispute has become one essentially between two imperialist powers. But Chinese aid to the resistance has ebbed since the Cultural Revolution and the entry of China into the United Nations. It has also conspicuously failed to play a major part in the UN debates on Palestinian rights.

This may be partially a response to the Soviet Union’s greater sympathy for the commando organizations. Nevertheless, commando leaders are anxious to keep on good terms with both major Communist powers, not only to avoid being embroiled in the socialist bloc’s own internal disputes, but because for all the material help extended by Moscow, the Chinese line is undoubtedly the more sympathetic.

Throughout 1974, Chinese interest in the Palestinians was still evident. A number of delegations were hosted in Peking, representing the PLO, Fateh, the PFLP and PDFLP. Hani Hassan led a PLO trip which stayed in China for over a fortnight in September 1974. Palestinian sources have meanwhile been at pains to emphasize that the movement enjoys the ‘full support’ of China, while the People’s Daily saw fit to run an article on the occasion of Arafat’s appearance before the UN entitled ‘National Rights of the Palestinian People Must be Fully Restored.’

THE SOVIET UNION

Soviet acceptance of the Palestinian cause has been slow and gradual. The first official meeting between the two sides did not take place until Arafat accompanied Nasser on a visit to Moscow in July 1968, and it was not until a year later that a Soviet-backed body (the International Conference of Communist and Workers’ Parties) brought itself to acknowledge the ‘legitimate rights’ of the Palestinians.

But such recognition as was extended by the Soviet Union remained purely verbal for a considerable time. In 1969 the Soviet Ambassador in Cairo bluntly turned down a Fateh request for military aid. Moscow and the Eastern Europeans
were disturbed by what they saw as the ‘adventurous’ trend of the resistance, and preferred instead to give priority to the ‘progressive’ Arab regimes. Moscow was also suspicious of Fateh’s flirtation with Peking, and of the early contacts by both the PFLP and the PDLFP with the European Trotskyists. By the same token, Arab Communist parties also steered well clear of the resistance movement, holding its goal of total liberation to be unrealistic and its exclusive concentration on armed struggle to be impractical.

However, after Arafat made a further visit to Moscow in 1970, relations with the Soviet bloc began to improve. The commandos had at least proved their stamina, and the victory of the Jordanians in 1970 and 1971 was enough of a shock to the Soviet Union to prompt an offer of aid. But the real breakthrough came with the death of Nasser and the demise of Nasserism in Egypt, followed by the liquidation of the Sudanese Communist Party. Arafat found himself on the receiving end of increasing military and political assistance, particularly after a third visit to Moscow in October 1971. The Soviet Union simultaneously started contacts with other commando groups, foremost being the PFLP and the PDLFP. The former’s leader, George Habash, visited Moscow for the first time in June 1972.

As the Soviets gradually became more amenable, the resistance too altered its attitude. Moscow was no longer attacked for its position vis-à-vis Israel or its acceptance of resolution 242. When Arafat made yet another trip to the Soviet Union in July 1972, relations between the resistance and Moscow appear to have achieved an unprecedented cordiality. Arafat was received by a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and while he was in the Soviet capital Sadat announced the expulsion of the Soviet technical advisers from Egypt — which served to further strengthen the sense of shared interests between the two parties.

Arafat returned to the Middle East to defend publicly the Soviet Union against its critics in a speech at Alexandria the same month. From this time too dates the beginning of closer co-operation between the resistance and the Arab Communist
parties.

The Munich Olympics operation later in the year revived Soviet criticism of the kind of resistance activity which it declared was harmful to the Palestinian cause. The Soviet position has always been that terrorism conflicts with the principle of popular mobilization and constitutes 'an expression of anarchistic and adventurist trends'. But the clear lack of direct involvement of most of the major groups in this kind of operation meant that it could hardly stand in the way of improving resistance-Communist relations. An indication of how much better these had become can be seen in the major participation of Arab Communists in the Beirut congress in support of the Palestinians in November 1972. This was, in fact, the first official instance of Arab Communist-resistance collaboration.

When Fateh's right wing fell from grace at the Palestine National Assembly in November 1972, and the PFLP and PFLP made approaches towards mutual reconciliation under Fateh's pressure (and at Soviet instigation), it was clear that the Moscow alliance had come to stay. Moscow also increased its influence inside the PFLP, which began to drop its foreign operations and suspend its criticism of Arab Communists. In return the PFLP got substantial military aid. And in March 1973 when King Hussein had the captured Fateh leader Abu Daoud condemned to death, it was, of all people, Soviet President Podgorny who asked that his life be spared.

The Soviets also played an important role in the fighting in Lebanon between the resistance and the army in May 1973. Soviet Ambassador Azimov gave resistance leaders his country's assurance that their liquidation would not be tolerated. It is interesting to note that according to Azimov, Nasser had promised the Soviets the same thing in 1970 as regards the Palestinians in Jordan, and as a result of that unhappy experience Moscow had decided to establish direct contacts with the resistance rather than depend on any Arab state as an intermediary.

Then when Secretary Brezhnev travelled to Washington the Soviet side insisted on the inclusion of a reference to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people in the final summit
communiqué. Palestinians claim that the nascent Soviet-American détente was almost wrecked as a result. Whether that is the case or not, it was certainly the first time that the United States had ever signed a document containing such a reference.

Communist Party leaders meeting in the Crimea issued a communiqué explicitly recognizing Palestinian rights, and Yasser Arafat was invited to East Berlin — and allowed to open a PLO office there in a gesture of implicit official recognition.

Another important turning point came with the publication of conspicuously warm appreciation of the resistance by a conference of the Lebanese, Jordanian, Syrian, Iraqi, Sudanese and Algerian Communist parties in September 1973. It praised the organizations’ striving towards unity, their condemnation of ‘adventurist’ acts and ‘isolationist’ methods, and their ability to ‘distinguish between their enemies and their allies’ in spite of Arab and foreign pressure.

The seriousness with which the Soviet Union was coming to take the resistance was displayed by a note delivered by the Soviet Ambassador in Beirut to Arafat, Hawatmeh and Habash directly after the October War. The note affirmed that the Soviet Union considered the resistance to be the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and the PLO to be their sole spokesman. Since a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict now seemed at last to be possible, the Soviet Union would expend every effort to ensure an Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied territories and the securing of the national rights of the Palestinians. The note observed that while all this had been discussed with US Secretary of State Kissinger, the United States, Israel and Jordan were all opposed to Palestinian representation at the Geneva peace conference. Therefore, the Soviet Union asked to be informed of the precise attitude and opinions of the resistance movement so as to be able to take the appropriate action. If the resistance wanted, the Soviet Union would exert itself to secure Palestinian representation at the Geneva conference.

The resistance has since kept in close touch with the Soviet Union as the American step-by-step peace policy unfolds in the region. Arafat was in Moscow in November 1973, with representatives of the PFLP, PDFLP, Sa’eqa and the ALF.
When tension has arisen with the Soviet Union, it seems to have had its roots in the Palestinian side. Thus, on the occasion of Arafat’s trip to Moscow in the summer of 1974 (for the first time as an official guest of the country rather than a guest of the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Committee), the PLO was not accompanied by representatives of the rejection front. Agreeing to permit the opening of a PLO office in Moscow, the Soviet Union firmly reiterated its belief for the need of an independent Palestinian presence at the Geneva conference. It was precisely because of this approach that PFLP leaders refused to attend the Moscow visit and instead attacked the Soviet Union for its support of a peaceful settlement. This was too much for the Soviets who roundly accused Ḥabash of serving the cause of the Arabs’ enemies, since which time relations between Moscow and the PFLP have been effectively frozen.

So far the projected PLO office in Moscow has failed to materialize, despite a further PLO visit after Arafat’s UN speech. But this latest visit was significant for the representativeness of the delegation, and the inclusion of a leading member of the PFLP-GC, who, as members of the rejection front, would seem to have been unlikely visitors to Moscow. It is a comment on how resistance-Soviet relations have developed over the past few years that a representative of a group opposed to Moscow’s current Middle East policy could not only journey to the Soviet Union, but announce afterwards that ‘we have found more than any other time further attention, more clarity and more understanding in our dealings with Moscow.’
YASSER ARAFAT (FATEH)

Considering his prominent position, relatively little is known about Yasser Arafat. His appearance in the political arena is cloaked in mystery, and even after his assumption of the chairmanship of the PLO Executive Committee information about his background has remained scarce. A Moslem who abstains from smoking and drinking, Arafat is unmarried and apparently totally dedicated to the cause of Palestine and little else: ‘Palestine is my wife,’ he is reported as saying. His character is supposed to be quiet and self-effacing.

Born in Jerusalem in 1929 — one of ten children by two wives — Arafat took part with his fathers and his brothers in fighting Jewish terror organizations in Palestine before the 1948 war. At 17 he became the personal secretary of Abdul Qader Husseini, one of the Palestinian commanders and heroes of the 1947-9 war. After the war he moved to Gaza where the tragedy of the refugees made a lasting impact on him. From Gaza he travelled to Cairo, where he became an engineering student and underwent military training.

In 1952 he was elected President of the Palestinian Students’ Union in Egypt, a post he retained until 1957. His term of office is best remembered for efforts to establish links between Palestinian students throughout the world. During the Suez campaign he took an active part in the fighting alongside the Egyptians, specializing in explosive sabotage.

In 1957 he graduated and left to work in Kuwait. His stay there was a major turning point in his development as a Palestinian leader as he soon came into contact with a rich and influential Palestinian community which found time to indulge in political activity. His earliest efforts to build Fateh may be traced back to 1961, but they remained very limited in nature until 1963 when the organizational framework of the commando group began to take shape.

According to available information, Arafat left Kuwait in
1964, and with other Palestinian militants is believed to have visited Ahmad Ben Bella and Houari Boumedienne in Algeria. The Algerians, it seems, introduced him to Syrian contacts.

In 1965, Fateh issued its first military communiqué, and from this date the movement’s real history begins. Arafat himself spent 51 days in Syria’s Messe prison at this time — which may help to explain the secretiveness of his habits ever since. Fateh’s relations with Arab states were not helped by its attitude towards the officially constituted PLO.

After the 1967 war, Arafat prepared what he termed the ‘second launching’ of Fateh. He entered the occupied territories and established secret cells for his organization. At the time he was unknown to the Arab world, or indeed, to everyone except a handful of intimates. It was the Israelis who succeeded in putting his name in the headlines. He was dubbed one of the ten most wanted commandos, according to international news agencies. From foreign sources the Arabs and the Palestinians gradually became aware of the existence of the man who was soon to head the resistance. Considering the ubiquitous nature of Israeli intelligence in the occupied territories and certainly its knowledge of him, his ability to slip in and out of the West Bank unnoticed was quite an achievement. Meanwhile, his growing prominence in the resistance was consecrated by Fateh’s victory at Karameh over an Israeli task force in March 1968.

In February 1969 Yasser Arafat took the forefront of the stage with his election to the chairmanship of the Executive Committee of the PLO. Nasser himself encouraged Arafat to take over the PLO and transform it into a mother organization for all the commando groups. Now, as chairman of the PLO, Arafat became the acknowledged leader of the Palestinian people. He negotiated with Arab heads of state, led delegations to friendly countries and attended summit conferences.

As a political leader, Arafat has displayed considerable flexibility and a capacity to understand and absorb changes in the world. Although Fateh is based ultimately on a rightist nationalist ideology, Arafat has shown himself fully capable of dealing with Nasserites and Ba’athists without allowing himself to become identified too closely with any single group.
At the same time he has accepted the emergence of left-wing currents among the Palestinians, arguing that the political contradictions within the resistance movement reflected by competing groups and ideologies is in fact a sign of healthy debate and that the divisions are of only secondary importance. All Palestinian factions, Arafat claims, are agreed on the basic principle of the struggle to liberate the homeland. The identity of the new regime will only be (and can only be) defined after liberation. Before then, all such talk is premature and will lead to a fragmentation of the movement's energies.

In keeping with his role as a mediating influence in the resistance movement, Arafat has repeatedly intervened to save the mother organization and many of the constituent groups from self-destructive rivalries and dissension. He has worked tirelessly to persuade the various commando groups to accept the PLO as the framework for the whole resistance movement, and at the same time has tried to put an end to overt rivalry and disputes between commando groups for fear they might endanger the PLO. He has personally intervened to settle inter-commando arguments, helping to bring an end to the bloody conflict between the PFLP and Hawatmeh's new breakaway PDFLP. Similarly, he prevented the PFLP from massacring supporters of another offshoot, the PRFLP. (It is ironic that early in its career Fateh tried to eliminate the smaller resistance organizations but was opposed by the PFLP, which obviously saw its turn coming next. However, there is no evidence that Arafat was linked to this attempt, and he has always been noted for his opposition to violence in handling other groups.)

The same flexibility has marked Arafat's relations with the Arab regimes. It is to his credit that he has managed to maintain friendly relations with such disparate friends as Libya, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and South Yemen. Not only has he successfully walked the tightrope of inter-Arab relations, but on occasions has intervened to mediate in their disputes (such as the perennial Iraqi-Kuwaiti confrontation over borders). Even the embarrassing splinter group operations against the Saudi Embassies in Khartoum and Paris failed to jeopardize Arafat's relations with Riyadh. Naturally, there are those who
are suspicious of Arafat’s ability to be all things to all regimes and argue that his hold on the leadership derives simply from the fact that the resistance could never agree on a replacement. Which, may, of course, be just another way of saying that in present circumstances Arafat is the best man for the job.

Even more remarkable is Arafat’s successful wooing of both the Soviets and the Chinese. He has firmly held aloof from involvement in disputes within the socialist bloc, and constantly argued that the only criterion for a friend or foe is his attitude towards the Palestinian cause. In implicit recognition of his leadership of the Palestinian revolution, the Soviet Union deals directly with Yasser Arafat.

Arafat combines undoubted personal courage with the utmost prudence in regard to his personal security. Apart from his work inside the occupied territories, he personally conducted the battle at Karameh and was in Amman throughout the fighting between the commandos and the Jordanian Army in September 1970. Yet he takes every precaution to keep his movements and whereabouts secret. He almost never sleeps at the same time two days in a row and often changes plans at the last minute. It is common practice for him to announce one destination and then turn up somewhere entirely different.

Prudence has paid off. Arafat has been the object of several attempts on his life, including one organized by Jordanians and Iraqis in Israeli pay in July 1970, and another while inspecting advance commando bases along the Syrian-Israeli cease-fire lines in October 1971.

ABU IYAD (FATEH)

Abu Iyad (Salah Khalaf) was born in Jaffa in 1933, and moved to Gaza in 1948 at the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war. He went to secondary school in Cairo, where he came to know Arafat. When Arafat was elected Secretary-General of the Palestinian Students Association, Abu Iyad was one of his most active supporters, and the two have enjoyed a lasting relationship ever since.

Arafat and Khalaf began to toy with the idea of creating an organization which would maintain a Palestinian identity and
combine the elements in the Arab regimes which sought the downfall of the Zionist state. They were encouraged by the popular urge to fight for the homeland which they sensed, and the total ineffectiveness of the Government of All Palestinians, then the only organization representing the Palestinians.

The 1956 war hastened their project. Abu Iyad went to Kuwait to search out finance for the scheme, and was soon joined by many Palestinians who were later to become prominent in the movement, such as Arafat, Abu Jihad and Abu Lutf. Until 1967, Abu Iyad taught Arabic in a secondary school in Kuwait, but on the outbreak of the June War travelled immediately to Damascus.

Thenceforth, Abu Iyad took control of Fateh’s relations with the Arab regimes and in this capacity he and Abu Lutf met Nasser in Cairo in September 1967. The meeting ended with Nasser’s recognition of Fateh and his promise to provide all possible assistance to the movement. Abu Iyad also obtained financial assistance from President Abdul Rahman Aref of Iraq, and in 1968 met King Feisal and the Prime Minister of Libya. In 1969 he was one of the first Palestinian leaders to be received by Colonel Kaddafi after the September coup.

At a Press conference in Beirut in October 1968, Abu Iyad was the first to formulate the concept of the secular, democratic Palestinian state as the final goal of the Palestinian revolution. The concept was reiterated in a Fateh communiqué published the following January.

Abu Iyad soon established himself as a prominent figure in Fateh’s left wing, and his influence grew at the expense of the more traditional members of the organization. Thus Abu Iyad won a certain degree of privileged access to Palestinian leftists, Arab revolutionary movements and progressive regimes (particularly Egypt). In August 1970 he was a member of a Palestinian delegation which went to Cairo to meet Nasser after the acceptance of the Rogers Plan which Fateh had bitterly denounced.

Then, during the opening rounds of the September fighting in Amman, Abu Iyad was arrested by the Jordanian authorities. Nasser’s good relations prompted him to send the War Minister, General Mohammad Ahmad Sadeq, to secure Abu
Iyad’s release, and the two returned to Cairo. Abu Iyad also tried to prevent any fresh fighting between Palestinians and Jordanians after the Cairo and Amman agreements, sensing that the balance of forces was heavily tipped against the Palestinians. But after the defeat at Jerash and Ajloun, he finally gave up on the moderating tactics of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and resisted all further attempts to bring about a political reconciliation with the Jordanian regime. As one of King Hussein’s bitterest opponents, it is not surprising that the Jordanian government should have named him as the man behind the killing of Premier Wasfi Tal in Cairo in November 1971. Indeed, Israel went so far as to call him the creator of Black September. It is more likely that Abu Iyad was the instigator of a plot to kill King Hussein on the eve of the Rabat summit in October 1974. When the conspiracy was uncovered by the Moroccan government, Abu Iyad disappeared for a while. He finally resurfaced to announce that the attempt would be repeated.

FAROUK QADDOUMI (FATEH)

Better known as Abu Lutf, Farouk Qaddoumi was born in Jaffa and educated in Palestine. As a young man he went to Cairo where he met Yasser Arafat and Abu Iyad and travelled with them in the Gulf in their attempts to raise money for the establishment of Fateh.

Until 1967, when he was superseded by Abu Iyad, Qaddoumi handled Fateh’s relations with the Arab states (and Egypt and Iraq in particular). He was arrested along with Abu Iyad by the Jordanians in September 1970, and freed at the same time on Nasser’s intervention.

Abu Lutf is currently a member of the PLO Executive Committee and director of the political department charged with the PLO’s foreign relations. In this capacity he has made frequent tours abroad and set up PLO offices in Asia and Africa. In January 1975, he represented the PLO at the quadripartite meeting in Cairo with Egypt, Syria and Jordan.

GEORGE HABASH (PFLP)

Born in Lydda in 1926 to a Greek Orthodox family, George
Habash left Palestine during the 1948 war with a large group of fellow-countrymen as a medical assistant. Ever since the idea of armed violence has dominated his thinking. He looked for revenge against the British and the Arab rulers who had led the nation to defeat. Initially, Habash believed that a bullet in the head of this or that leader would spark off a popular war in the Arab countries to end the era of defeat and backwardness. As a result he was uninterested in most of the existing political movements in the Arab world; he deemed them toothless because they did not believe fervently enough in the principle of armed violence. His appreciation was reserved for movements like ‘Young Egypt’ which formed the Kata’ib al Fida’ who plotted to kidnap the Iraqi premier, Nuri Said, King Abdullah of Jordan, Jordanian Army commander Glubb Pasha and Syrian strong man Adib Shishakly. The group did indeed manage to kill a leading British agent in Beirut and threw explosives at the British Club.

But Habash soon matured from this rather pointless violence and discovered that there was a need for a clandestine political movement that would ‘enlighten the masses and organize them prior to moving on to the stage of armed violence’. He split company with the Kata’ib al Fida’ and formed his own group.

As a medical student in Beirut in the early 1950s, Habash was both at the top of his class and a popular figure. He led a group called Al Urwa al Wuthqa (Close Bond) which comprised progressive students in rebellion against the Arab impasse that had led to the Palestine defeat. From this society, Habash was able in due course to establish a nucleus of a new secret organization which first took the name Young Arab Men. It published a journal called Revenge which rapidly achieved popularity in the refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Soon Habash, Wadih Haddah, Ahmad Yamani, Abdul Karim Hamad and others later to be prominent in the PFLP became familiar figures in the camps.

In 1955 Habash presided over the first congress of the Young Arab Men organization with the aim of transforming it into a political party. His comrades approved his plans, and asked him to move from Lebanon to Syria and Jordan to establish new branches for what was renamed the Arab Nationalist
Movement. Habash moved off to Jordan where his father lived, and began to publish a weekly called *al Ra‘i*. The paper so infuriated Glubb Pasha that he had it closed, and Habash was forced to retreat to Damascus to resume publication.

The ANM believed that the way to the liberation of Palestine lay through Arab unity, but the defeat of 1967 forced Habash and his associates to return to more specific Palestinian concerns — hence the formation of the PFLP. Habash has led the Popular Front ever since its establishment, despite the successive splits which have left a deeper mark on the movement than similar experiences have on others.

Habash himself lives in strict secrecy and his movements are known to only a few. Most other resistance leaders can be pinned down between Beirut, Damascus or Cairo, but Habash is much more elusive. His secrecy has become even more obsessive since his colleague Wadih Haddad was the target of an Israeli assassination attempt. Indeed, in the summer of 1973, the Israelis forced a Lebanese airliner to land at Lydda in the (mistaken) belief that Habash was aboard. As is often the case with resistance leaders, he had seen fit to change his travel plans at the last moment. The PFLP also claims that the Jordanian regime is anxious to see him liquidated, and that money was offered to anyone giving information as to his whereabouts in Jordan. According to the PFLP, several attempts have been made on his life by Jordanian intelligence services since his departure from Jordan.

Since the 1973 war, Habash has remained steadfast in his opposition to any form of peaceful settlement and the Popular Front constitutes the backbone of the rejection front. However, Habash himself suffers from poor health, and a heart attack in 1972 forced him to go to the Soviet Union for treatment. In the same year the assassination by Israel of his close companion Ghassan Kanafani shook him particularly badly.

WADIH HADDAD (PFLP)

Born in Safad, Wadih Haddad comes from a well-to-do Greek Orthodox community. He began his political activities while studying medicine at the American University of Beirut alongside George Habash. There he met other future PFLP
leaders, including Ahmad Yamani, and Abdul Karim Hamad. He participated in the publishing of their magazine *Revenge* and was very active in the camps. Habash and Haddad opened dispensaries in the camps and took care of political propaganda activities, while Yamani and Hamad devoted themselves to the military side of the cause (which led to their being arrested on more than one occasion by the Lebanese authorities).

Haddad was a founder member of the Arab Nationalist Movement, though he participated little in the ideological debates and stood on the sidelines during the dispute that split the movement in the early 1960s. The ANM’s decision to create a Palestinian division resulted in the immersion of Habash, Haddad, Yamani and Hamad in Palestinian affairs from 1966. With the emergence of the PFLP, Haddad devoted his energies to the special operations activities of the Front. He was notably responsible for the very first aircraft hijacking that took an El Al airliner to Algiers.

It was Haddad too who organized the springing of Habash from jail in Damascus in 1968 by disguising PFLP commandos as Syrian soldiers and spiriting Habash across the border to Lebanon. In February 1969 Haddad stuck by Habash in the conflict with Nayef Hawatmeh, who was hostile to the special operations of Haddad and the insufficiently revolutionary leadership of Habash. Haddad however continued his hijacking to the point where the Israelis tried to mount an assassination attempt on him in the middle of Beirut in 1969. This, the first specific attempt on the life of a resistance leader by the Israelis, apparently resulted in the disfigurement of his son when rockets were fired from an apartment across the street, although Haddad himself escaped unharmed.

Since then, Haddad has led a life of complete secrecy. He prepared the hijackings that preceded the civil war in Jordan in 1970 and is still reportedly behind the PFLP’s latest operations. But he is also under attack from the left wing of the movement for his ‘terroristic vision’ of the struggle against Israel. For instance, when the PFLP seceded in 1972, they specifically drew attention to the damage done to the Front by the hijacking operations carried out by Haddad.

Although Haddad’s movements and whereabouts are
shrouded in secrecy, it is generally believed that he spends much of his time in Baghdad.

NAYEF HAWATMEH (PDLP)

Nayef Hawatmeh was born in Salt on the East Bank of the Jordan in 1935. His family is of Christian Bedouin extraction. He studied in Jordan and at the Arab University in Beirut where he joined the ANM and played an active role in events in Jordan in 1957, for which he was sentenced to death.

Hawatmeh took refuge in Baghdad where he supervised the 'Iraq region' of the ANM. He was arrested in 1959 after the attempted coup of Colonel Shawwaf in Mosul and was not arrested until 1963 when the Ba'ath Party toppled the Qassem regime. After that Hawatmeh led the fight in the ANM to make it adopt more left-wing policies; it was at this point that his troubles with George Habash began. He co-operated with Mohsen Ibrahim and Mohammad Kishly in promoting more radical views, and the three brought out Al Hurriya (Liberty), a magazine in Beirut used as a forum for Hawatmeh's ideas. His efforts were eventually crowned with success at the 1966 ANM conference which adopted 'scientific socialism' as the platform of the movement.

Hawatmeh was one of the first Arab Marxist ideologists to speak out against petit bourgeois political thinking, the Nasserite experience and Arab socialism. The 1967 war convinced many of the ANM cadres of the correctness of Hawatmeh's analysis, which led to the breaking of the bond between the ANM and the Nasserites.

Hawatmeh later went to Aden where the National Liberation Front had taken power. There he assisted in drawing up a radical government programme, parts of which were included in his book The Crisis of the South Yemen Revolution. The NLF congress in April 1968 adopted the programme, but with the assistance of the army the right wing of the Front succeeded in ousting the radicals and Hawatmeh returned to Beirut. (The Aden leftists have since returned to power and relations between South Yemen and the PDLP have been close and friendly.)

From Beirut Hawatmeh went to Jordan and worked within
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the PFLP until the split which gave birth to the PDFLP. He was still in Jordan during 1970 events with Arafat, and for some time it was thought that he had been killed or seriously wounded. These rumours proved unfounded, but it is certain that the PDFLP itself took a heavy beating. Since then Hawatmeh’s movement has become closer to Fateh. Like Arafat, Hawatmeh believed in the concept of a Palestinian state established on the liberated portion of the occupied territories, though such a move should remain complementary to armed activity. Thus the PDFLP continues to mount operations inside Israel, for example the Maalot and Beit Shean incidents in 1974.

Hawatmeh himself surprised many observers by according an interview to the Israeli paper Yediot Aharanot in March 1974. The PDFLP is in fact the only Palestinian organization to have made contact with anti-Zionist Marxist Israelis. Hawatmeh accompanied Arafat on his recent visit to the Soviet Union, and in November 1974 led a PDFLP delegation to Moscow — the first time the organization had been invited in its own right — which led to speculation that Moscow may be coming to favour the PDFLP over Habash’s PFLP. Certainly, the aims of the PDFLP would appear to be much closer to Soviet ideological thinking than Fateh, which Moscow regards as a fundamentally bourgeois organization.

AHMAD JIBRIL (PFLP-GC)

Ahmad Jibril was born in Ramleh in 1935. He fled to Syria in 1948 with his family and joined the Syrian Army. But the late 1950s he had become a captain in the engineering corps, but some time before 1960 he left the army, possibly because of his opposition to the UAR. By the mid-1960s he was leading a fedayeen group from Syria known as the Palestinian Liberation Front.

The PLF was a non-ideological group that initially co-operated with Fateh, but after the 1967 war Jibril took it into the PFLP until he withdrew in late 1968 in disgust at the ideological bickering of the movement. The new PFLP-General Command remained a small group but won a high reputation for dedication and efficiency. In 1970 the group joined the
Unified Command, and by virtue of this Jibril had a seat on the PLO Central Committee of 1970-71. The PFLP-GC did not formally join the PLO until 1974, however.

Along with Habash, Jibril is one of the leading exponents of the ‘rejection front’, and has explained his group’s suicide attack on Qiryat Shimona in terms of his hope to prevent a peaceful settlement. Jibril is however a fundamentally non-political leader who has attempted to steer clear of Palestinian political infighting. His reputation rests on his skill as a soldier and a technician. Jibril is married to the daughter of a former Syrian Minister and lives largely in Damascus.

ZUHAIR MOHSEN

Zuhair Mohsen was born in Tulkarm on the West Bank in 1936. His involvement in politics began early and he joined the Ba’ath Party at the age of seventeen. Later he worked as a teacher in Jordan, but was arrested in 1957 for subversive activities and lost his job as a result.

Seeking employment in Qatar, Mohsen was deported after only one year as a result of political activism. He stayed in Kuwait until 1967, when he left for Damascus and helped form Sa’eqa. After General Hafez Assad took power, Mohsen rose to a leading position in the Syrian-sponsored commando group.

In June 1971 Mohsen took over the leadership of Sa’eqa, putting an end to internal disputes between pro- and anti-Assad groups. At the same time Mohsen made his way on to the PLO Executive Committee where he took charge of military affairs. He has also been Vice-President of the Palestine National Assembly since 1968.

With Fateh’s Khaled Hassan, Mohsen travelled to Jeddah for talks with King Hussein in the summer of 1971. The failure of the negotiations led Mohsen to take up a particularly uncompromising stand toward the Jordanian regime. On the eve of the October War, however, the Sa’eqa leader began to show some interest in a rapprochement with Jordan. Conflicting with the Fateh viewpoint, Sa’eqa was backed by the PFLP-GC and the PRFLP, but Jordan’s failure to contribute substantially to the fighting with Israel forced Mohsen to change his viewpoint once again.
Since the war, Mohsen has by and large reflected the views of the Damascus regime concerning the possibilities of a settlement. Sa‘eqa has also aligned itself with the moderates in the PLO. In an interview with the London *Financial Times*, Mohsen affirmed that Israel's return to the borders recognized by the UN in 1947 and the re-establishment of the state of Palestine were necessary preconditions for a new relationship leading to a lasting peace. Only under such circumstances, Mohsen said, would the Palestinians agree to end the state of war. However, even the establishment of a new state should not blind the resistance to its ultimate goal of complete liberation, according to Mohsen.

Zuhair Mohsen is unmarried and lives mainly in Damascus. His family are still residents of Tulkarm where his father is the *mukhtar*, and has reportedly been made to suffer the consequences of his son's fame.
Glossary

ALF: Arab Liberation Front (Iraqi-backed)
ANM: Arab Nationalist Movement
CENTO: Central Treaty Organisation
Fateh: Palestine Liberation Movement
PASC: Palestine Armed Struggle Command
PDFLP: Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP-GC: Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine — General Command
PLA: Palestine Liberation Army (regular military wing of the PLO)
PLF: Palestine Liberation Front
PLF: Popular Liberation Forces (guerrilla wing of the PLO)
PLO: Palestine Liberation Organization
PRFLP: Popular Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Palestine
RCC: Revolutionary Command Council (government of Iraq)
Sa’eqa: military wing of Vanguards of the Popular War of Liberation Organization (Syrian-backed)
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