

WEEKEND BOX.

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I imagine that there will be a report from Lord Carrington on his return.

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14 October 1980

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

The Rt Hon Lord Carrington KCMG MC
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth
Affairs
Downing Street
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Ivan Peter.

When I spoke to you about the PLO I explained that I was concerned for British interests. It seemed to me that by encouraging PLO representativeness we encourage, a) the emergence of a Soviet client state, which must be b) irredentist and threatening to Saudi Arabia and to Jordan and c) we intensify Palestinian aspirations (see similar view expressed by Linowitz reported in recent telegram) and Israeli insecurity - both incandescent factors.

You replied that Jordan and Saudi Arabia support the PLO; and that (c) is a risk, but that you always stress the need for the PLO to accept Israel as a condition for representativeness. Ian, to whom I spoke when we flew back together from Paris, adds that the PLO are not a Russian client, and are indeed financed in part by Saudi Arabia.

I would now like to return to the fray!

- 1) The PLO do seem to be very close to Russia - see attached Shapiro article in SURVEY. There seems to be no change in the situation which he describes.
- 2) Saudi Arabia may provide money - as an insurance premium. They are not adventurous, and seek to be left alone. But they are afraid of the PLO; witness their care not to allow PLO activity in their own country. It is even said that during the Lebanese civil war of 1975-76 they helped financially the Maronites who were fighting the PLO.
- 3) Whatever the exact truth of the matter, it cannot be gainsaid that the PLO are clients of the Soviet Union - while at the same time receiving help from the Saudis. Is it safe to disregard the Soviet connection, and assume that the Saudis will be able

/to ...



to control a PLO state in Palestine?

Of course it is a British and a Western interest to see an end to the Israeli/Arab quarrel. But a settlement cannot be the outcome of Israel/PLO negotiations. If Israel had bargained as effectively with Syria and Jordan as with Egypt, the PLO would cease to count.

Jordan saw the PLO off in 1970. Syria may use the PLO outside her own borders, but has never given them freedom to act in Syria. When, in 1975-6 the PLO tried to take over the Lebanon, Syria moved in with Maronite agreement and clobbered them.

I have no knowledge of Israel's attitude but I surmise that if it weren't for the danger that the PLO might become officially recognised and might even acquire territorial rights the PLO would not be more than a nuisance.

Any attempt to increase UK arms trade with Saudi Arabia by doing what we think will please and supporting the PLO would be short-sighted if we want peace in the area.

The PLO now has a large following in the Arab areas. But this is largely because it is thought to be winning, to be recognised and supported by the Arab States, by the Soviet Union, by West European powers and even on occasion by some US officials. If this should change, the PLO would soon lose popularity. Who now remembers the Egyptian Wafd which were once thought to have the overwhelming support of the Egyptian people?

It is not the PLO, I suggest, that can liquidate the Arab/Israeli quarrel, but Egypt, Syria and Jordan.

Progress towards peace between Israel and Egypt has made much headway. Of course, Egypt will try to obtain as much as practicable from Israel in order to justify its claim to Arab leadership. But Egypt is unlikely to rejoin the anti-Israel coalition. Egypt's pitch has to some extent been queered by European wooing of the PLO. Should not Europe have said to Egypt, "Marvellous - go on!", and encouraged Jordan to do the same?

Of course, the people in Gaza and on the West Bank have to be provided for; but the settlement, if it is to endure, has to be such as not to constitute a threat either to Israel or to Jordan or to give scope to Soviet interference. Only such a settlement can give real security to Saudi Arabia, and we should try to persuade them of this.

On these counts I still maintain that EEC and our policy towards



the PLO and our failure to encourage Egypt are likely to reduce rather than increase the stability of the area and are not likely to serve British interests.

I am copying this to the Prime Minister.

If you want to argue with me about
industry I shall make myself as instantly available
as possible!

Yours,

Hein

The Soviet Union and the PLO

Leonard Schapiro

SOVIET policy towards the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has travelled a long way since 1967 and early 1968 when it was attacked in such strong terms as "hysterical" and the like.¹ Interest in the PLO did not develop until after the Six-Day War: its operators now became "partisans." Yassir Arafat visited Moscow with Nasser in July 1968, and again alone in February 1970, but it was only after the expulsion of the Soviet advisers from Egypt in 1972 that Arafat on a further visit was given direct Soviet arms supplies: this was part of the Soviet effort to forge a progressive front of Syria, Iraq and the Palestinians.

Soviet official advocacy of a Palestinian state did not occur until the autumn of 1974. In general, the Soviet Union has since then repeatedly made it clear that what it has in mind is an independent state alongside Israel formed on the territories which were occupied by Israel in 1967: the Soviet Union has never openly supported the PLO policy of a "democratic" Arab-Jewish state (i.e. in effect the destruction of Israel), which has remained virtually unchanged over the years (in spite of occasional apparent wavering on the part of the PLO's main component Fatah)—presumably because of fear that this might involve confrontation with the United States. But it has tended to slur over this important divergence from PLO policy: thus, for example, a statement at the close of Arafat's visit to Moscow in November 1975 referred to a proposed Palestinian state "on Palestinian territory," and did not use the usual PLO formula "in the areas to be liberated" or in "all of Palestine." From the Soviet point of view support of the PLO (as will be argued below) is mainly an aspect of its overall long-term aim to polarize the Middle East into a national revolutionary "left" and a conservative pro-American "right." Equally important to the Soviet Union's short-term aims is the reconvening of the Geneva Conference, since this would give it some foothold in Middle East politics which it has been progressively losing since 1972. In view of widespread opposition to PLO participation in such a conference, and uncertainty about the US position on the question, the Soviet Union, up to the end of 1976 at all events (and, in effect, since then as well) has in its official utterances been careful to leave open options which would enable Geneva to re-open without the PLO—while in its propaganda vociferously (at all events since 1975) voicing the demand that the PLO must participate in any conference, usually using words like "participation by the Arab people of Palestine on an equal footing as represented by the PLO"—though occasionally, especially in broadcasts in Arabic, the PLO was described as "the sole"

¹ E.g. *Pravda*, 29 July 1968.

representative. (It should be borne in mind that since there is no definite article in Russian, the frequent English translation "the representative" may sound stronger than intended by the Russian original). Side by side with the Soviet demand for participation of the PLO in the Geneva Conference has gone a determined attempt to establish it as an internationally recognized body—a PLO office was opened in the GDR in 1973 and in Moscow in 1974, and the Soviet Union successfully supported PLO efforts to be heard at and virtually recognized by the United Nations.

One of the perennial problems of the Soviet Union in dealing with the PLO has been the constant tendency within that body to fission between its main element Fatah and the many other components. (Indeed, at the time of writing, virtually open warfare has broken out between the various elements of the PLO and between the PLO and Iraqi-supported terrorists). From the outset the Soviet Union concentrated its efforts on the non-Marxist Fatah, probably regarding it as the best candidate for helping to secure, by its fashionable nationalist claims and its occasional suggestions of moderation, international recognition. But, since 1973 at least, it has also extended its support to the Marxist People's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP) led by Hawatmeh and, for a time at any rate, to the Palestine National Front, a Soviet-sponsored Marxist organization created by the Jordanian Communist party. Dr Golan lists the use of terror as one of the factors which have made Soviet relations with the PLO less than smooth over the years.² But in view of the terrorist activities of the PDFLP as well as of the evidence which is accumulating of Soviet involvement in Arab terrorism this judgment seems somewhat over-simplified. It is probably true to say that Soviet policy is, in general, more sympathetic to terroristic acts which can be identified as part of a liberation struggle—for example action within Arab territories now in Israeli occupation—(as distinct from hijacking an aircraft or the murder of athletes in Munich) hence this is consistent with the general Soviet policy of insisting on exempting acts committed in the course of a "War of Liberation" from international definitions of "terrorism." But, as will be seen below, there are exceptions even to this distinction of principle in Soviet practice.

The year 1977 brought the Soviet Union both a major success in its Middle Eastern policy, and a major setback: the success was the joint US-Soviet declaration of 1 October in which the United States (in line with the well-known Brookings Report on the Middle East Conflict) agreed with the Soviet proposal that the Geneva Conference should be reconvened, and that the "legitimate interest" of the Palestinian Arabs

² Galia Golan, "The Soviet Union and the PLO," *Adelphi Papers*, No. 131, published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1977, pp. 3, 19-22. This paper provides a detailed and excellent study of Soviet-PLO relations up to the end of 1976, to which I am much indebted.

should be safeguarded³—but said nothing about the participation of the PLO. This agreement with the USA signified a departure by the Soviet Union from its usual insistence, in the course of 1977, that the PLO must participate on equal terms in the Geneva Conference when it was reconvened. The agreement was followed by much diplomatic activity on all sides in preparation for the Conference. But the whole policy suffered a dramatic setback. This was the peace initiative and the Jerusalem visit by President Sadat very shortly afterwards in November. Sadat's motives for his action were immediately interpreted by the Soviet Union as dominated by his desire to counter any move which would enable the Soviet Union to regain influence over any settlement which might result in the Middle East.

Whatever misgivings the PLO may have had about Soviet intentions at Geneva, it was evidently persuaded to accept the agreement of 1 October with good grace, no doubt in the hope that it might prove to be the thin end of the wedge. Arafat at the time described it as "a genuine effort" in the right direction, while urging recognition of the PLO. Some time later he said in an interview that "in our opinion the well-known Soviet-American statement on the Middle East of October 1977 can serve as a firm foundation for a settlement."⁴ But throughout 1977 and 1978 Soviet policy towards the PLO continued to show variations in the degree of enthusiasm with which it was offered support. The highlight of Soviet support for the PLO came on 7 April 1977 when Arafat on his 10th visit to Moscow since the opening of a PLO office there, was for the first time received by Brezhnev. According to a Tass statement on the meeting, Brezhnev "reaffirmed" Soviet policy that assurance of the national rights of the Arabs of Palestine was an "inseparable element" of a Middle Eastern settlement, including their right to self-determination "up to" the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Brezhnev also said that the Soviet Union is "invariably" in favour of the participation of the PLO in the Geneva Conference.⁵ Arab sources apparently went further in reporting the meeting by adding that Brezhnev had said that the Soviet Union refuses to attend any conference in the Middle East if the PLO does not attend it on equal terms with all parties; and had promised to step up military aid.⁶ Arafat, in turn, was lyrical in praise of the Soviet Union's support for the cause of the Palestinian Arabs and for its "economic military and other aid and support."⁷ The pattern of Soviet propaganda treatment of relations with the PLO was to remain fairly constant, at any rate until the spring of 1978, when the Soviet Union (as will be seen) became increasingly concerned at the disunity of the PLO and the conflicts within it. There is constant emphasis,

³ Text in *The New York Times*, 2 Oct. 1977.

⁴ *The New York Times*, 3 Oct. 1977; *Summary of World Broadcasts*, Part I (S.W.B.), 4 May 1978. Cf. Interview in *The Guardian*, 3 Jan. 1978.

⁵ *Le Monde*, 9 Apr. 1977.

⁶ *The Times*, 9 Apr. 1977; *Le Monde*, 14 Apr. 1977.

⁷ *Soviet News*, 19 Apr. 1977.

especially but not exclusively, in broadcasts in Arabic on the PLO; usually described as the "sole" legitimate representative of the Palestinian Arabs—a phrase which is, so far as is known, never used in official Soviet statements. On the PLO side, there are repeated, fulsome references to the value and importance of Soviet aid to the Palestinian Arab cause. The United States, Israel and, of course, Egypt are repeatedly assailed for their refusal to recognise the PLO's right to represent the Palestinian Arabs. Propaganda apart, Soviet support for the PLO was reiterated on at least two important occasions. One was in reply by Brezhnev to questions put to him by a *Pravda* correspondent at the end of December 1977; but, more significantly, perhaps, since this was intended as a directive to communists and pro-communists all over the world, was a long article on the legal standing of the PLO in *New Times*, by Igor Blishchenko, who is Secretary of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, an important communist front organization. His case in support of the PLO as "the legitimate representative of the Arab people of Palestine" rests on six propositions:

- (a) The PLO is officially recognized by many socialist and Asian countries, and *de facto* recognized by the Western countries which have allowed it to open information centres.
- (b) The PLO is signatory to the 1949 Geneva Convention for the Protection of Victims of War and to a number of other international documents.
- (c) The decision of the Rabat Conference in 1974, and the admission of the PLO to the Arab League in Cairo in 1976 as a member of equal rights.
- (d) The grant of observer status by the 29th Assembly of the United Nations, and the resolution of the Assembly recognizing the Palestinian people as one of the principal parties to a just and lasting peace "in practical terms" makes PLO participation in peace negotiations "obligatory."
- (e) There is no duty on the part of the PLO to recognize Israel, since Israel has not recognized the PLO.
- (f) The argument that the PLO should abandon its claim of a democratic state of Arabs and Jews is invalid in view of the Zionist claims and in view of those programmes of ruling Israeli parties which "proclaim as their aim the establishment of a greater Israel extending from the Nile to the Euphrates thus threatening the existence of Arab states."*

And on 9 March 1978, on one of his frequent visits to Moscow, Arafat was again received by Brezhnev and assured of the Soviet Union's continued support for the PLO. Brezhnev was showered with much fulsome praise for the Soviet Union in return.

Soviet relations with the hard-line Arab states (Algeria, Libya, Syria,

* *New Times*, No. 4, 1978, pp. 20-21.

the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and Iraq) on the issue of the PLO are too complicated to be examined here. In the course of 1977 the Soviet Union was successful in securing Syrian assent to the proposal that the Geneva Conference should be reconvened, with the participation of the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian Arabs, but was unsuccessful in the case of Iraq (whose relations with the PLO were rapidly deteriorating) and of Libya. (Later in the year, however, President Assad told *The New York Times* that the Arab League could faithfully represent the Palestinian issue at a Geneva Conference).

On the other hand, consistently with its policy of keeping options open, the Soviet Union at the same time as endeavouring to assure the PLO of its unwavering support, was pursuing other possible options. Only a fortnight before Arafat's arrival in Moscow on 4 April 1977, Brezhnev had outlined, in a speech to the Soviet Trades Unions Congress, a plan for a Middle Eastern settlement in which the PLO did not figure at all. This comprised: withdrawal by Israel from all territories occupied by her; demilitarized zones policed by UN teams "possibly" including Soviet, US, British and French contingents; mutual obligations to respect each other's sovereignty, and self-determination for the Palestinian Arabs on the basis of their own state.⁹ These proposals, in effect, above all including the guarantee of borders by a United Nations force, in which the Soviet Union was "willing" to participate, formed the basis of the US-Soviet statement of 1 October 1977. (In a broadcast report of this speech in Arabic, Brezhnev was nevertheless reported to have referred to the PLO as "the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian Arabs."¹⁰) No doubt the press rumours (presumably ultimately KGB inspired) suggesting that the Soviet Union was prepared to be flexible on the issue of PLO participation and Soviet broadcast denials that the USSR was abandoning the PLO in the course of 1977 are to be explained as part of the ambivalent policy of pursuing alternatives. Looked at from the Soviet point of view, a PLO dominated Arab state on the borders of Israel and Jordan would offer the best of prospects for the expansion of Soviet influence in the Middle East, which is, beyond doubt, the overriding Soviet objective. Even the inevitable conflicts between the discordant elements inside the PLO might, in Soviet thinking, become less acute if they could all turn their attention to the aim of conquering Israel. Moreover, the Soviet Union might well hope that if the Soviet presence in the PLO state were sufficiently massive, as it presumably would be, the USA might be deterred from intervening to save Israel. However, since the prospect of a PLO state in the face of US, Egyptian and Jordanian (to name only some), to say nothing of Israeli, opposition, may at present seem rather remote, a Soviet military presence in the Middle East in the guise of a UN contingent might offer

⁹ *Keesing's Contemporary Archive*, 1977, 28383-28385.

¹⁰ *S.W.B.*, 25 Mar. 1977.

considerable attractions. For one thing, it would provide the KGB with a secure base for subversive operations and could enhance Soviet influence over Middle Eastern positions in other ways as well.

IT is in the general context of the ultimate Soviet aim of expanding to the maximum its influence in the Middle East that recent Soviet policy towards Marxist and left-wing elements within and outside the PLO become of particular interest. With this in mind it is useful to examine an important Soviet analytical article which appeared in October 1977 in the official *Soviet State & Law*. The author is deputy head of the Near Eastern Countries Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The main burden of this article is that the Palestine resistance movement, in the person of its true representatives, as distinct from the "prattlers and the open or camouflaged advocates for yesterday's colonizers," has become a part of the general anti-imperialist movement. The 13th session of the Palestine National Council in Cairo in March 1977 rightly laid down the aim of the Palestine movement as the setting up of "an independent national state on its own territory" and the entitlement of the PLO to take part on a basis of equality in all international discussions of the Middle East. (What the author did not point out, however, is that this resolution was repudiated by the leader of the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Habash, the following day.) But the essentially nationalist movement of the Palestinian Arabs is acquiring, largely from the example of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, an increasingly anti-imperialist and revolutionary character—in other words (and here he quotes with approval a theoretical work of great significance by K. N. Brutents, who is one of B. N. Ponomarev's deputies in the International Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU). This kind of nationalist movement reaches socialism "not by class-conscious rejection of capitalism, but through anti-imperialist nationalism." (In plain English: nationalist movements, with proper direction, can be harnessed to the cause of world socialism). On the other hand the radicalization of the ranks of the Palestine Resistance movement leads sometimes to the kind of left extremism that Lenin characterized as the "infantile disease of leftism." The national-democratic nature of the Palestinian movement is the decisive factor in its drawing close to the world revolutionary movement, though it is premature as yet to talk of final victory of the national democratic element in the Palestinian movement.

The core of the problem, according to this author, is the refusal of Israel to take part in a Geneva Conference if the PLO should be present there; on the other hand the Palestinian Arabs are daily growing to realize more and more that the natural allies of their movement are the Soviet Union and the other socialist states. The ultimate outcome of the Palestinian struggle will depend on the result of the struggle going on in the Middle East between the progressive and the imperialist forces, and the extent to which the openly and covertly pro-Western

reforms in the Arab world can succeed in retarding revolutionary democracy. But it will also depend on what happens inside the Palestinian movement itself: it will depend on whether the progressive elements in the movement get the upper hand, or whether those elements will prevail which are ready to sacrifice the principle of the Palestinian cause for some private advantages of their own or in order to strengthen their own positions. (This sounds like a clear hint at some trends inside Fatah.) Meanwhile, the communist parties in the Arab world are careful not to act prematurely in their relations with the national movements, remembering the words of Lenin to the effect that no social revolution is conceivable without nationalist revolts and without revolutionary explosions "among part of the petty bourgeoisie . . . and without the movement of unconscious proletarians and semi-proletarians masses" against the oppression of the landlords, the Church, etc.

The article then proceeds to grade the Arab states, in favourite Soviet manner, in degree of their utility for the socialist cause. Egypt and Jordan are prepared to make a deal with Israel in order to recover the territories captured from them, as are also Tunisia and Morocco, who recognised the 1947 plan for the partition of Palestine. This is, incidentally, one of the few Soviet statements which appears to accept the Palestinian aim of the destruction of Israel: the position of Tunisia and Morocco is characterized as a compromise with the reactionaries since "it presupposes the recognition by the Arab countries of the fact of Israel's existence, as well as the necessity of concluding a durable peace treaty with Israel." The oil-producing countries, headed by Saudi Arabia, are primarily interested in oil profits and this necessarily makes them politically orientated towards the United States. They support the Palestine resistance movement financially in order to counter their radical critics, but are terrified of any further radicalization of the Palestine movement. The most "sincere" attitude to the Palestinian movement is that of Algeria, Iraq, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen and Libya. The position of Syria and Lebanon is complicated by the invasion of the latter by the former. The article ends by squarely adopting Brezhnev's speech to the Trade Union Congress in March 1977—in other words with a much less than full endorsement of any exclusive rights of the PLO.¹¹

The significance of this article is that it shows in a way that, so far as I know, has not been done before or since, the importance which the Soviet Union attaches in its Middle Eastern policy to traditional left-wing revolutionary elements, and above all to the ultimate polarization of the whole area into an increasingly radical, anti-imperialist movement opposed to the traditional conservative Arab states as much as to Israel. The ultimate aim is seen to be a series of uprisings, supported by the Soviet Union, which would end in the defeat of the pro-United States countries before the rising tide of revolution. These

¹¹ E. D. Pyrlin, "Palestinskoe natsional'no—osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie i blizhnévostochnoe uregulirovanie," in *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo*, No. 10, Oct. 1977.

would now include Egypt: since the November 1977 peace initiative Egypt has been repeatedly branded by the Soviet Union as in league with the United States. Whether this Soviet policy is realistic is another question—though it is the case that the Soviet Union has done quite well up to date against the West in its policy of supporting left-wing “national liberation” movements. But it is in the light of this overall policy that Soviet moves in the Middle Eastern arena should be seen. In particular, so far as the PLO is concerned, its largest component Fatah, is non-Marxist, and this may well, in spite of all the propaganda showered in its support (which is, of course, rewarded by PLO propaganda on the virtues of the Soviet Union as the Arab’s best friend) affect Soviet policy towards it.

The Sadat initiative in November 1977 took both the Soviet Union and the PLO by surprise. The Soviet reaction to it was predictable—it was a capitulation to American imperialism, it was a plot concerted between Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia (supposed disagreements between Sadat and Begin were a put-up show). It was primarily designed to prevent the Geneva Conference from meeting and in particular to frustrate the legitimate rights of the PLO, and so forth. These charges were broadcast in Arabic from Moscow and repeated or improved on by the PLO, and the whole operation from the Soviet point of view, no doubt was, *inter alia*, intended to serve the aim of polarizing the Middle East into left and right, and cementing the unity of the left. According to Communist reports (*Morning Star* of 3 December 1977) the immediate effect was to cause disunity among the “rejectionists” in conference in Tripoli: Syria, Algeria, South Yemen, Iraq, Libya and the PLO disagreed on the issue of an eventual negotiated peace in the Middle East—a course urged by Arafat.

IN this context, it is worth glancing at Soviet relations with some of the Marxist components of the PLO and with other left-wing organizations in the Arab world. Of the three main Marxist organizations within the PLO, the Soviet attitude to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) whose leader is Habash, has never been cordial, since Habash’s open criticism of Soviet peace-making on the basis of the Geneva Conference led to what was in effect a Soviet break with the PFLP in the political sphere,¹² though it is probable that clandestine links have continued in the sphere of terrorist activity. (In September 1974 the PFLP withdrew from the PLO Executive Committee, but remained in the Palestine National Council, which acts as a kind of parliament for Palestinian resistance). The Palestine National Front (PNF), created by the Jordanian Communist Party, was for some years publicized and supported by the Soviet Union. Up to 1976, at any rate, Soviet intentions seem to have been to groom the PNF, in coordination with the Moscow-orientated new Communist Party of

¹² Golan, *op. cit.* p. 18.

Israel (RAKAH) as a guerrilla resistance movement which would try to take over the West Bank. However, before long the Soviet Union seemed to revert to its policy of supporting the PLO on the grounds that it enjoyed the support of West Bank Arabs.¹³ It may be of significance that in August 1977 the PNF was praised in a Soviet broadcast for its effort to secure recognition of the PLO as "sole legitimate representatives" of Palestinian Arabs.¹⁴ The most cordial Soviet relations seem to have been with the People's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP) whose leader Hawatmeh, was cultivated by Moscow independently of Arafat.¹⁵ He has paid virtually annual visits to Moscow since 1974, and is apparently used by Moscow as someone whom it looks on as capable of restoring unity in the much-riven PLO, however improbable and unrealistic such a Soviet hope may seem. His most recent visit at the head of a delegation in May and June 1978, when he was received by Ponomarev, was stated in an Arabic broadcast from Moscow to be "to investigate ways to strengthen relations between the Soviet Union and the PLO," and the need for unity was strongly emphasized in the Tass statement on the visit.¹⁶ The visit did indeed come in the aftermath of one of the periodic revolts against Arafat in May 1978 in which the Soviet Union apparently intervened (this is discussed below).

There have also been numerous Soviet contacts with left-wing organizations outside the PLO, especially in 1978. This increased activity has presumably been due to two causes: the Sadat initiative, which made the reconvening of a Geneva Conference unlikely and therefore caused the Soviet Union to look increasingly to the other alternatives, the stepping up of revolutionary activity in the Middle East; and secondly, the increasing disunity in the PLO which made it even less attractive than hitherto as the sole hope for Soviet ambitions. Of course, in some cases these visits may well have been connected with Soviet policies relating to the particular country involved. Thus, in March 1978 a delegation of the Lebanese Communist Party was in Moscow, and in the following month Vilner of the Israeli CP (RAKAH) was received by Suslov, and in June delegates of the "Lebanese Patriotic Forces" on a visit to Moscow stressed their "fraternal unity" with the Palestine resistance movement. Around the same time support was given to the Iraqi Communist Party (21 of whose leaders had been executed by the Iraqi Baath regime in May) by reprinting long extracts from an article in the Communist Party organ. Similarly in May 1978 a Radio Forum on Palestine in Arabic included, apart from Soviet pundits like the Secretary of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, Blishchenko and the KGB-controlled Jewish pseudo-General Dragunsky, the Secretaries of pro-communist youth organizations of Lebanon,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *S.W.B.*, 20 Aug. 1977.

¹⁵ Golan, *op. cit.* pp. 16-17.

¹⁶ *Pravda*, 8 June 1978; *S.W.B.*, 3 June 1978.

Morocco and Israel. Such evidence, which could be multiplied, lends credence to the reports of Israeli observers who toured the area of the Lebanon occupied by the Israelis that "communist influence among the terrorists appears to be much stronger than their support for the Palestinian cause."¹⁷

The endemic disunity within the PLO has been a matter of constant concern to the Soviet Union. It has been occasionally mentioned in speeches and articles on the Soviet side, and at times admitted by Arafat who has, however, always minimized its importance. Indeed in an interview in March 1978 he stressed that unity had been established in the ranks of the Palestinians,¹⁸ which if true, was at best very temporary. One might suppose that, in an endeavour to make the PLO more acceptable to the international community, and the USA, the Soviet Union would try to persuade it at any rate to show moderation particularly on the question of UN Security Council Resolution 242 of 22 November 1967 (which recognizes *inter alia* the right of Israel to live in peace within "secure and recognized boundaries," and restricts the Arab claim to "achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem"). There have indeed been frequent press rumours, for example, that the Soviet Union was trying to break the deadlock by introducing an amended version of Resolution 242, which would recognize the rights of the Palestinians to a state, or that the PLO would accept Resolution 242 if Israel recognized the right of the Palestinians to a national homeland. These rumours can be assumed to have emanated from the Soviet Union.¹⁹ Arafat has blown hot and cold on the issue: at one time denying outright rumours that the PLO was ready to recognize Israel,²⁰ at others leading the Secretary General of the United Nations to believe that it was prepared to recognize Israel.

But, whatever ploys in the diplomatic game the Soviet Union may engage in, it seems to be the case that Soviet pressure on the PLO, and particularly on its leader Arafat, is always in the direction of greater toughness and intransigence, and not in the direction of compromise. This is, indeed, logical policy from the Soviet point of view. Firstly, because if unity is to be preserved within the Palestine resistance movement this can only be achieved by a tough policy on the part of the PLO since this is the only policy which has any hope of uniting the discordant elements within the movement; and secondly, if it is right that the Soviet Union is interested in Arab nationalism only as an aspect of furthering world socialism in the Middle East (as Pyrlin suggests) it is plain that an intransigent policy has much more chance, is indeed the only way, of achieving the kind of polarization in the area that is likely to be beneficial for the advance of communism. Negative support for the view that the Soviet Union may have doubts about placing too

¹⁷ *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 Mar. 1978.

¹⁸ *New Times*, No. 12, 1978, pp. 8-9.

¹⁹ *The Financial Times*, 10 May 1977; *The Guardian*, 6 Sept. 1977.

²⁰ e.g. *Le Monde*, 12 May 1977.

much of its political hopes on the PLO, as distinct from a wider revolutionary and socialist movement, is provided by the fact that the Soviet Union has made no move to encourage the PLO to set up a Palestinian government in exile—a move which the PLO obviously could not take without Soviet support and approval.

Early in April 1978, according to numerous detailed and circumstantial reports, Arafat struck at the unruly elements within his movement who were demanding more violent action and who in particular opposed Arafat's support for the observance of the cease-fire in Lebanon. About a hundred arrests were reported to have been made.²¹ The matter did not end there. In the course of April, Arafat was engaging in the kind of diplomatic ambiguity which characterized him by giving press conferences which suggested (and were so interpreted) that the PLO was prepared to recognize Israel. He also said the same thing privately to senior US, British and UN officials. This provoked violent reaction from the more extremist elements in the PLO, and, reportedly, led to Soviet intervention. At all events, Arafat hastened to correct the impression that he was ready for compromise. In a speech on 27 April and in a television interview in Moscow on 29 April he now proclaimed more clearly the more familiar warlike intention to wage war to the end against the Zionist occupation of Palestine. Agreement with the PLO rebels seemed to have been reached when the Central Committee of Fatah published on 3 May a long communiqué, said to have been approved in advance by the Soviet Union, which followed the line of the extremists to the full, stressed the unity within the PLO, and called for escalation of "the military struggle inside our occupied territories, using the necessary means of struggle against the Zionist occupation." The communiqué did not restrict the intended action to the territories occupied by Israel in 1967: it rejected "the substituted homeland" (meaning clearly a state on the West Bank) and demanded repatriation and establishment of an independent state "on their national soil"—which in Arab terminology means the whole of the territory of what has become known since the British Mandate as "Palestine." Around the same time Arafat gave his usual kind of ambiguously worded interview in Beirut, which could be (and was) interpreted as a sign of willingness to recognize Israel's continued existence. Evidently he was hoping both to conciliate his extremist opponents, and to convey the impression of moderation outside the Middle East, for fear of being excluded from peace negotiations. The suggestion that the PLO might be prepared to recognize Israel, said to emanate from the PLO observer at the United Nations, was, however, denied officially.²²

There followed feverish activity in Moscow aimed at cementing the newly-proclaimed, and presumably fragile, unity within the PLO. The

²¹ E.g. *Le Monde*, 27 Apr. 1978; *The Guardian*, 24 Apr. 1978; *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 Apr. 1978.

²² See e.g. *S.W.B.*, 4 May 1978; Israel Information Service, based on Arabic sources; *The New York Times*, 2 May 1978; *Le Monde*, 10 May 1978.

mission of Hawatmeh of the PDFLP has already been referred to, with its explicit aim, stated in the Tass report, of recognizing the "urgent necessity of consolidation and unity of action of all branches of the Palestine resistance movement within the framework of the PLO."²³ But Hawatmeh went very much further than merely acting as mediator to restore PLO unity: he, in effect, called for a much wider movement than the PLO represented, distinctly socialist in character, and since the speech was made at a meeting by the Soviet Committee for Solidarity with Afro-Asian Countries, it is obvious that the appeal was made in concert with the Soviet Union: "We call on the PLO . . . to take a series of initiatives to mobilize all the popular masses behind the plan of action opposed to . . . Zionist imperialism, Arab reactionaries and defeatists." He also demanded a "national popular democratic front" of all the "national democratic, revolutionary democratic and Communist parties" in the Middle East in a united front against "Imperialism, Zionism and right-wing Arab reaction. Further evidence that this move may represent the beginning of a shift in Soviet Middle-Eastern policy from over reliance on the PLO towards an all-out revolutionary policy, is provided by a broadcast commentary in Arabic by the most authoritative Soviet spokesman on the Middle East, Kudryavtsev. This commentary scarcely referred to the PLO, and stressed Soviet support for the national aspirations of the Palestinian Arabs. It was dated 4 May 1978—which was around the time when disunity in the PLO had reached its highest peak.²⁴ The PDFLP delegation was followed in July by a delegation of Fatah. An Arabic News Agency dispatch, somewhat mysteriously denied that Fatah would raise "specific Palestinian demands," but stressed that the "Palestinian cause is facing a real crisis." It was also stated that the delegation would stay 10 days, which in fact it did.²⁵ These events seem very emphatically to confirm the report that the Soviet Union was intervening in PLO policy, as one would expect. They suggest two inferences. First, that the Soviet Union will not tolerate conciliatory diplomatic ploys by Fatah in general and by Arafat in particular. And secondly, that Soviet support of the Palestine resistance movement extends far beyond the interests of that movement as such, which is seen by the Soviet Union merely as a part of a much wider Middle Eastern revolutionary process.

IT remains to consider briefly Soviet policy towards terrorism by the PLO. There is no possible doubt that the Soviet Union has for some time past been supplying the PLO with arms, economic aid and training in guerrilla warfare, a fact which is not denied either by the PLO or by the USSR. On the occasion when he met Brezhnev for the first time, Arafat praised Soviet "economic, military and other aid," and a

²³ *Pravda*, 8 June 1978.

²⁴ *S.W.B.*, 11 May 1978; 6 June 1978.

²⁵ *Pravda*, 5 Aug. 1978.

Moscow broadcast listed aid given by the Soviet Union as including military aid and the training of cadres in the USSR.²⁶ These statements apart there is ample and repeated evidence of the quantity of Soviet weapons shipped to the PLO, some of it direct, some of it via Libya, Iraq, North Korea and Eastern Europe, especially Eastern Germany. The shipments are escorted by Soviet naval vessels. Israeli sources have repeatedly confirmed that the military equipment is of great variety and highly sophisticated. There is also ample evidence of the training of guerrillas, in East Germany and elsewhere.

Quite apart from the supply of weapons, the evidence which has been accumulating in the past year or so of Soviet direct and indirect involvement in acts of terrorism makes it very difficult to sustain the view that one of the issues dividing the Soviet Union and the PLO is Soviet disapproval of acts of indiscriminate terrorism against civilians. There has, it is true, been occasional Soviet condemnation of acts of terrorism committed by various groups within the PLO in the past, but not so much in recent years. Even in the past, condemnation was selective—not extending, for example, except tentatively, to condemnation of the PLO in 1974 for its attack on an Israeli school, because at the time the Soviet Union was anxious to promote and support its leader Hawatmeh.²⁷ More recent evidence suggests that the Soviet Union, while not wishing to be openly associated with acts which shock much of world public opinion, nevertheless recognizes the value of such acts both for their part in helping to polarize the Middle East and in promoting unity within the PLO which cannot be achieved by any show of moderation. It is also fully consistent with the characteristic Soviet policy towards the PLO, in the same interest of polarization, of encouraging it in the direction of extremism rather than of diplomacy and conciliation. There are also occasions when an act of terrorism may even be encouraged by the Soviet Union as something which could assist its overall policy. This seems to have been the case of the Tel Aviv attack on 11 March 1978. This action perpetrated by Fatah's terrorist arm, "Black September," only a few days after a visit by Arafat to Moscow, must have been made known by him to the Soviet authorities in advance, if not actually coordinated with them. The attack (which was on a bus carrying civilians, including many children) was immediately, on 12 March 1978, described by Tass as an "armed clash between a detachment of Palestinian guerrillas and Israeli army units" near Tel Aviv, in which "over 30 soldiers were killed."²⁸ The aim of this jointly planned operation—if such it was—could have been to goad the Israelis into acts of retaliation and thus help to sabotage the Sadat peace initiative. Subsequent terrorist acts like the murder in London of the representative of the PLO or the murder in Cyprus of an Egyptian editor, were variously described by Moscow as acts of the

²⁶ *Soviet News*, 19 Apr. 1977 and *S.W.B.*, 30 Dec. 1977.

²⁷ See Golan, *op. cit.* pp. 20–22.

²⁸ *S.W.B.*, 14 Mar. 1977.

Zionists or the British—in line with PLO propaganda designed to conceal the extent of dissension within the PLO.

The evidence of Soviet involvement in the training and arming of terrorists (especially Arab terrorists) is at best circumstantial, and based almost entirely on evidence which has been leaked to press correspondents by various intelligence services. According to Western intelligence leaks, for example the leader of "Black September," Abu Jihad, has spent a great deal of time in Moscow, East Berlin, Aden and Tripoli and has recently been helping to organize training facilities and the flow of Soviet arms to Palestinian bases in Cyprus and Lebanon. According to information leaked by the French Security Service (DST) Henri Curiel, one of the founders of the Egyptian Communist Party, recently murdered in Paris, was a KGB agent employed by them to penetrate terrorist organizations, and to assist in escapes and contacts, as well as to provide the Soviet Union with information on their activities. There are many more such stories: they cannot be confirmed, but to dismiss them as imagination would be to fly in the face of what we know for a fact about much of Soviet policy. The evidence does not suggest that the Soviet Union controls or inspires the entire Arab terrorist movement: but it confirms the suspicion that it maintains, whenever possible, contacts with it, is aware of most or much of what is going on, at times encourages specific actions and, in general, does not discourage terrorism. Indeed if the argument advanced above is correct—that Arab nationalism is of subsidiary importance to the Soviet Union as compared with the spread of revolution in the Middle East—a Soviet preference for violence over diplomatic initiative, so far as the PLO is concerned, would be completely logical.

TO sum up, in the course of 1977, at any rate up to the Sadat initiative of November, the Soviet Union stepped up its support of the PLO as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian Arabs at the Geneva Conference, which the Soviet Union was most anxious should be reconvened. At the same time, the Soviet Union was careful not to commit itself finally to support for the PLO and was prepared tentatively to explore courses which could provide it with alternatives to a PLO Palestinian state as a foothold in the Middle East—for example participation in a UN Military guarantee force. In the course of 1978 the Soviet Union, which regards support of Arab nationalism as subordinate to its ultimate aim of the expansion of revolution in the Middle East, stepped up its support of Marxist revolutionary elements both within and outside the PLO. This policy may have been influenced by the growing disunity within the PLO. But support of revolutionary organizations, and of some of their terroristic activities, offers other advantages to the Soviet Union in helping to polarize the Middle East into reactionary and revolutionary "camps," in the traditional form pursued by communist tacticians. However there are two factors which are likely to make continuing and increasing support of the PLO the pivot

Soviet policy. One is the failure of the Soviet Union to acquire a reliable client state in the Arab world. The second is the realization that in an area where the conditions for the development and progress of Soviet-type socialism are unfavourable, the national appeal of the PLO as well as its dependence on the Soviet Union for international support, offer the best chance for the extension of Soviet influence in the Middle East. After Camp David Yassir Arafat made another visit to Moscow and had talks with Gromyko and Kosygin. It was his third official trip this year (he might have been there more often unofficially). The official communiqué published in *Pravda* referred (for the first time) to the PLO as "the sole legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people. The Iraqi-Syrian-PLO rapprochement and the Baghdad meeting of the Arab states against the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty have been warmly endorsed by the Soviet Union. In this perspective the role of the PLO is even more enhanced as an element of the general Soviet strategy of "destabilizing" the Middle East. Recent events in Iran have also underlined the dangers of Soviet expansion southwards.

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