

How the PLO Was Legitimized

Jeane J. Kirkpatrick

SOME leaders win power through inheritance, some through elections, some through civil war or coup d'état. Yasir Arafat and the PLO are trying something different. They are attempting to come to power through international diplomacy—reinforced by murder. And they have nearly succeeded. Arafat himself believes that they are in “the last fifteen minutes” of a long struggle.

“The dawn approaches. Victory is at hand,” he told the special session of the United Nations General Assembly that was convened in Geneva last December for the sole purpose of hearing the PLO leader state the PLO case.

Arafat exulted on that occasion. And why not? One hundred fifty-four members of the UN had voted for this special session. Now his appearance was being treated as the diplomatic event of the year. The UN Secretary General, some twenty foreign ministers, and more than two hundred ambassadors were present. An extended and enthusiastic standing ovation was further evidence of international approval.

Three days later the U.S. and Israel cast the sole votes against the resolutions that “acknowledged” the PLO’s proclamation of a sovereign Palestinian state, authorized a commemorative postage stamp, and “affirmed” that Israel should “withdraw from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the other occupied Arab territories” (emphasis added), and dismantle all Israeli settlements there.

The declaration of a Palestinian state, its recognition by more than ninety governments, and the U.S. decision to enter into a “dialogue” with the PLO marked a new stage in what has traditionally been called the Arab-Israeli conflict. No wonder Arafat thinks that the final phase of the “phased struggle” has now begun. Is he right?

How could he be? The PLO has no territory, no army, no independent resources. It is a gov-

ernment in search of a country. Yet watching Arafat and his representatives travel from capital to capital in quest of recognition and support, seeing friendly powers like the Soviet Union upgrade the status of the PLO mission from interest section to “embassy,” witnessing the effort of this fictive country to win “membership” in UN agencies, one becomes ever more aware that the central tactic of the PLO is and has been to use the arenas and instrumentalities of diplomacy—especially multilateral diplomacy—and public relations to achieve legitimacy, and then to use legitimacy to win territory. The notion that might can make right is common enough in our cynical times. That a presumption of right could be the basis for creating might is a less familiar idea.

Traumatized by spectacular instances of violence, and by conventional conceptions of war, Americans—and a good many Israelis—have misconstrued the nature of PLO tactics. Both Americans and Israelis have been slow to understand that terrorist attacks are self-consciously political acts, and that the *intifada* is less an armed uprising than a political melodrama staged daily for credulous Western viewing audiences whose sympathies are quicker than their comprehension.

Of the *intifada* Arafat has observed: “Israel’s state terrorism and its crises are being witnessed daily in every home in the world.” Therefore this carefully orchestrated “spontaneous” uprising cannot be permitted to end. It is a major instrument for keeping the conflict high on the international agenda, for blackening Israel’s reputation, and for brutalizing the image of its army. The youthful martyrs of the West Bank seem to prove the PLO’s point: that the Palestinians are David and Israel is a heartless Goliath.

Worse yet, “The Israelis are the genocidal Nazis imposing a holocaust on us,” PLO partisans have insisted, seeking to appropriate Jewish vocabulary, to invalidate the Jewish experience, to deprive Jews of their history, simultaneously claiming and obliterating the reality of the crematoria out of whose ashes the state of Israel was founded. Arafat himself pushes the analogy between Israelis and Nazis. He told the French weekly *L’Express* this past April: “We are a people who resist occupation exactly as the French in the times of Nazism. That which you did, we are also doing.”

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II

THE struggle between Arabs and Israelis is a conflict about who should have the right to live and work and organize a government and constitute a state in the territories that are now called Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza. The fact that United Nations Resolution 181 of 1947 partitioned the land included in the old Palestine Mandate into one Jewish and one Arab state barely affected the dispute. All Arab leaders rejected the partition as unjust and also declined to accept the verdict of three wars (1948, 1967, and 1973) concerning whose claim to the land should be honored.

There is disagreement among Arab governments about who has rightful sovereignty over this area, but all agree that it is not Israel. Arab states have aggressively pushed their case. They have fought costly wars and made it necessary for Israel to maintain large, powerful, expensive military forces to defend itself against them. But when Israel's military victories made the price of large wars too high, the struggle was moved to the UN, an arena whose chief activity is not conflict resolution (as is generally believed) but what has been correctly termed "collective legitimization" and "collective delegitimization."

Because Americans in and out of government normally pay scant attention to semantic battles in the UN, it was hardly noticed that the PLO was incrementally winning international support in a sustained campaign against the state of Israel, and in favor of its own claims. Arafat mentioned this error in his speech to the special session in Geneva:

Fourteen years ago, when you told us in the General Assembly hall: "Yes, to Palestine, and the people of Palestine, yes to the Palestine Liberation Organization, yes to the inalienable national rights of the people of Palestine," a few imagined that your resolutions would carry no weight. . . .

He himself always knew better, Arafat assured the Assembly. He and his colleagues (with a little help and instruction from the Soviets) had never underestimated the importance of the international body. They understood early that as war is politics by other means, so diplomacy may be war by other means. They recognized the UN as a political opportunity and knew how to grasp it. They devised tactics for practicing the distinctive brand of bloc politics that passes for diplomacy in multilateral organizations, and they worked relentlessly in the UN committees, commissions, and agencies to deprive the state of Israel of legitimacy and to legitimize their own struggle and claim to power.

The PLO also understood the propaganda value of the violent deed. Hijacking planes; murdering a Jordanian prime minister, Israeli athletes, and countless Israeli and other civilians; killing

would-be Palestinian rivals and Arab critics—all this captured worldwide attention and made the PLO's reputation as a terrorist organization. That reputation is today in doubt, not because the PLO has denounced terrorism but because, with patient work and diplomatic skill, the PLO and its allies have nearly persuaded the world to adopt a new definition of terrorism, one which retroactively legitimizes the PLO's aggressive violence and delegitimizes Israel's efforts at self-defense.

"The worldwide embrace of our just cause," Arafat told the General Assembly last December, "demonstrates clearly that the world has unequivocally identified the predator and the prey, the aggressor and the victim, the struggler for freedom and peace, and the terrorist."

The issue, Arafat knows, is not whether the PLO has used violence against unarmed civilians. It is not over whether the PLO *will* use violence again. The issue is whether that violence was and is justified.

THE basis of Arafat's assertion that the PLO has the right to use force rests on a long string of resolutions and redefinitions of the General Assembly stretching back to 1960. From these regulations have come new names for old acts—names as arbitrary as those conferred by Alice's mad queen, as dangerous as the bombs and bullets they seek to justify. Together they comprise the ideology which Arafat cites today to justify violence against Israel and to deny Israel the right to self-defense.

It is an ideology that integrates the Arab nationalist struggle against Israel with the struggle against "colonialism," "imperialism," and "racism," and in this fashion extends and exacerbates the conflict by involving countries in it that are remote from the Middle East. Anti-colonialism is meaningful to virtually all former colonies, which are thereby invited to identify the PLO's claims with their own fights for independence. The struggle against "imperialism" pits "progressive" forces against any country perceived by Marxists or quasi-Marxists as an obstacle to the "socialist camp." The struggle against racism asks the world's colored peoples—most of whose countries see themselves as part of the Third World—to join a coalition for one more battle against white exploiters.

The association of each with the others reinforces the whole. Moreover, each of these ideological terms is anchored in an organized group in multilateral arenas. Arab nationalism is embodied in the Arab countries and in the Islamic Conference. The "anti-colonialism" struggle is carried by the Nonaligned Movement (NAM). Anti-imperialism is pushed by the Soviet bloc and the "progressive" camp. Racism is a major concern of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

These overlapping blocs are the action units of multilateral organizations and multilateral diplomacy. Inside the UN, blocs function like political

parties—they mobilize and “structure” issues and votes. They eliminate the need for individual governments to make their own decisions on issues. Together the blocs arrayed against “colonialism,” “imperialism,” and “racism” constitute the famous “automatic majority” of the United Nations. They reward loyalty and encourage cohesion. They can offer members protection from negative actions aimed at them. They can also deliver a majority against some targeted country or cause—such as Israel.

Support for Palestinian nationalism and the PLO by the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc has long been crucial to the campaign against Israel. The Soviets have developed and sponsored much of the doctrine and many of the key resolutions that have effectively transformed the UN Charter from a document designed to eliminate violence from world affairs to one that licenses revolutionary violence, and that have also associated Israeli democracy in particular with reaction and racism.

Nikita Khrushchev was the first ruler of the Soviet Union after Lenin to see the opportunities available to the Soviet Union in the struggle against “colonialism.” In 1960 Khrushchev proposed a resolution to the UN General Assembly denouncing “colonialism in all its aspects” which was adopted as the “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries.” “All peoples have the right to self-determination,” it proclaimed. And although Yasir Arafat, invoking this right, cited Woodrow Wilson in Geneva last December, it was clear from 1960 on that “self-determination” as defined and endorsed by Khrushchev, the General Assembly, and (later) the PLO was not at all the same as the *democratic* “self-determination” advocated by Wilson and affirmed by the UN Charter. Marxist-style self-determination, in contrast to the Wilsonian model, does not require popular participation. It means replacing a “colonialist” or “imperialist” government with a “progressive” regime allied to the USSR. It refers not to how government is organized, but to who governs.

The next major step in the development of the ideology of national-liberation movements also came from the Soviet Union. But this time it came from outside the United Nations, in a major speech in which Khrushchev clearly associated “self-determination” with “national-liberation movements” and endowed any movement which led a “war of national liberation” with a special historical role. Basing himself on Stalin’s classification of legitimate and illegitimate wars, Khrushchev declared that an “imperialist” power fighting against a Third World country was engaged in an unjust “local war” which violated the UN Charter’s prohibition on the use of force; but wars of national liberation and popular uprisings against “colonialism” and “imperialism” were, Khrushchev argued, “good force,” a fulfillment of the UN Charter, not a violation of it.

NOT long after Khrushchev articulated these distinctions, the United Nations General Assembly formally adopted them. Where the Charter permitted force by member states only to defend themselves against attack, GA Resolution 2708 XX (1970) created a new category of “legitimate” force which could be used *against* member states. This new right was confirmed in subsequent resolutions approving the struggle of “liberation” groups against “colonialism” by “all necessary means at their disposal.”

Step by step the new doctrine was codified in the General Assembly. In 1970, with U.S. and Western support, the General Assembly adopted the “Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Nations” which further expanded the rights of “peoples” and restricted those of states by providing, *inter alia*, that “all peoples have the right freely to determine without external influences their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development, and every state has the duty to respect this right in accordance with the provisions of the Charter.”

Moreover: “Every state has the duty to refrain from any forcible action which deprives people . . . of their right to self-determination and freedom and independence. *In their actions against resistance to such forcible action in pursuit of the exercise of self-determination, such peoples are entitled to seek and receive support*, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter” (emphasis added).

With this declaration, the General Assembly, more clearly and unambiguously than ever, took the position not only that “peoples” had rights superior to those of member states, but that states resisting the rights of “peoples” could themselves become a “threat to peace.” The General Assembly thus subordinated the principle of the “sovereign inviolability” of states to the struggle of “peoples” against “colonialism” and put important new restrictions on the right of states to self-defense.

The U.S. and the other Western nations joined in these resolutions without much thought, dismissing them as without significance outside the halls of the United Nations. This fundamentally frivolous attitude ignored the cumulative impact of such resolutions in focusing attention, in expressing what is widely considered to be “world opinion,” and, finally, in having an impact on international law. As Michael Reisman has observed in the *Yale Journal of International Law*:

In a relatively short period of time, majority votes of comprehensive conferences such as the General Assembly were deemed to be, if not international law, at least strong evidence of international law. By 1975, the International Court of Justice, which had become increasingly oriented toward the General Assembly, also adopted this position.

And why not? The judges of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) are elected by the General Assembly in a manner that represents the political configuration of that body. New rights and duties seep like ground water from the General Assembly to the ICJ because the latter is a creation of the former.

It should, therefore, have been no surprise when, three years later, a General Assembly resolution drew the logical inference of the emergent doctrine of national liberation and declared that henceforth not only would "peoples" struggling against "imperialism" and "colonialism" be permitted to violate sovereignty and territorial integrity, but that resisting them would be considered "a criminal act."

These new "rights" and "duties" have served as the framework for the legitimization of the PLO's attacks on Israel, and the condemnation of Israel's resistance. They are the intellectual foundation of the more and more widely accepted redefinition of terrorism and of the current confusion about what is terrorism and what is self-defense, what is aggression and who is an aggressor.

Thus, when the 1972 massacre of Israeli athletes at Munich, the slaughter at Lod Airport, and numerous attacks on planes and diplomats stimulated urgent demands for UN action, the then-Secretary General, Kurt Waldheim, under heavy pressure from Western delegates to act and from Arab delegates not to act, finally asked the Legal Committee of the General Assembly to investigate and report on "measures to prevent international terrorism . . . and the study of the underlying causes of those forms of terrorism and acts of violence which lie in misery, frustration, grievance, and despair and which cause some people to sacrifice human lives, including their own, in an attempt to effect radical change." Yet some countries opposed even that equivocal formulation. The Soviet Union charged that the Waldheim proposal "could be used by neocolonialists to suppress the liberation movements." Others explicitly approved of and supported violence by "oppressed nations and peoples" and called on the UN to do likewise.

III

THOUGH founded in 1964, the PLO was not really mobilized until after the Six-Day War of 1967. Henceforth Arabs displaced by partition, war, and alienation—who had until then been referred to in all official documents as "Arab refugees" and treated as a refugee problem—would define themselves as the "Palestinian people" and would identify their situation with that of other victimized peoples.

Four additional defining factors were present virtually from the beginning. First, the PLO's principal component groups already had strong ties to Marxism-Leninism and the Soviet Union

and presented their purposes in the context of the global struggle against "imperialism." Second, the PLO utilized violence in the fashion recommended by Georges Sorel and Frantz Fanon as "propaganda of the deed"—that is, as a means of attracting attention, raising consciousness, recruiting militants, and dramatizing the Palestinian struggle. Third, the PLO immediately focused on Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza as its national constituency and on the United Nations as its natural arena, understanding the utility of the UN and the associated web of Third World organizations and the guarantees of the UN Charter as redefined. Finally, the goal of the PLO from its founding was the destruction of Israel and its replacement with a Palestinian state, as stated clearly in the Palestinian National Covenant adopted in July 1968.

The PLO Covenant remains an extremely important document because many of its key propositions have been incorporated in resolutions of the UN General Assembly, and because it has never been formally renounced (though Arafat recently suggested that it has been "superseded").

As the Declaration of Independence states the American claim to legitimacy, the PLO Covenant states the Palestinian case. The Palestinians are, it asserts, an authentic "people" who, having been deprived of their homeland, demand their right to self-determination and sovereignty. The Covenant declares that the struggle to "regain" the Palestinian homeland is a national-liberation struggle against the "forces of Zionism and imperialism." It further declares that "armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine." Armed struggle is described as "the overall strategy," not merely a tactical phase. The Covenant flatly rejects all forms of compromise or peaceful settlement or coexistence such as that proposed in Resolution 242 of the UN Security Council. The Palestinian people, "expressing themselves by the armed Palestinian revolution, reject all solutions which are substitutes for the total liberation of Palestine and reject all proposals aiming at the liquidation of the Palestinian problem. . . ." The Covenant proclaims that "the liberation of Palestine from an Arab viewpoint is the national duty." Arab destiny requires repelling the "Zionist and imperialist aggression against the Arab homeland and aims at the elimination of Zionism in Palestine."

In keeping with the double-talk of the international revolution, the Covenant defines armed struggle as self-defense ("The liberation of Palestine from an international point of view is a defensive action necessitated by the demands of self-defense") and the state of Israel as an illegal act of aggression ("The partition of Palestine in 1947 and the establishment of the state of Israel are entirely illegal, regardless of the passage of time"). The Balfour Declaration, the Mandate for Palestine, and "everything that has been based on them, are deemed null and void."

In the eyes of the Covenant, Jews have no

historical ties to Palestine, are not a people, do not constitute a "single nation" with an identity of its own. Jews are merely citizens of the various states in which they live. They therefore have none of the rights of a people, and all national movements which act in their name are illegitimate and should be outlawed. This applies specifically to Zionism, "a political movement organically related to world imperialism and hostile to all movements of liberation and progress in the world, . . . a racist and fanatical movement in its formation, aggressive, expansionist, and colonialist in its aim, and fascist and Nazi in its means. Israel is the tool of the Zionist movement and a human and geographical base for world imperialism." All states should therefore "outlaw" its existence and "ban its operation, in order that friendly relations among people may be preserved."

WITH its Covenant, the PLO thus claimed all the rights of a people under the redefined UN Charter and denied the state of Israel any rights whatsoever. That claim became more serious as the UN General Assembly began to adopt the PLO Covenant as its own, importing its key elements into resolutions and citations of resolutions. A first step was the explicit recognition of Palestinians as a people.

Until the adoption by the General Assembly of Resolution 2535 B XXIV in 1969, there had never been any mention of "Palestinians" in UN resolutions; they were, as already noted, "Arab refugees." But that landmark resolution spoke of the "inalienable rights of the Palestinian people," including the "right" of "self-determination." Indeed, Palestinians were now usually described not only as "a people" but as "a colonial people" whose struggle was identical with that of other colonial peoples. As the self-designated representative of this newly identified people, the PLO was ripe for designation as a national-liberation movement and its struggle as a war of national liberation.

But if the Palestinians were victims of colonialism, Israel must be a colonial power. Manifestly, Israel did not possess colonies. How then could it be a colonial power? By virtue of the fact that "colonialism" had already been redefined so that it was no longer a historical condition, but a political designation deriving from the relation of movements and countries to Marxist goals.

In any case, the argument was heard more and more frequently that Israel was not a "normal" nation of any kind. It was located in the Middle East but it was not an Arab nation, neither did it seem to be an Asian nation. It had been excluded from the first gathering of the Afro-Asian countries at Bandung. Its democratic system and its participation with France and Britain in the Suez War against Nasser, a founding member of the Nonaligned Movement, seemed to prove that it did not belong to the Third World but was rather a

"tool of Western imperialism," or as was often said in UN corridors, "a Crusader remnant," which would be expelled as all earlier Crusaders had been.

The rise of the PLO's status and the undermining of Israel's inside the General Assembly were reinforced by a similar process within a number of institutions of the Third World—the Organization of African Unity, the Islamic Conference, the Nonaligned Movement. Thus Israel was not a member of the NAM but the PLO was invited to attend its summit meeting in 1969 as a guest. In 1973 at Algiers the PLO was granted "observer status," and in 1974 in Havana the NAM expressed full support for the Palestinian cause.

The PLO's pathway to international influence was also pushed by the Arab bloc, which itself was centrally placed in the network of overlapping Third World organizations. Most Arab states were members not only of the Arab bloc but also of the NAM and the Islamic Conference, and several were members of the OAU as well.

Two of the latter, Algeria and Egypt, worked inside the OAU to identify Israel explicitly with South Africa and to link the Palestinian problem with that of South African blacks. This campaign bore fruit when the 1973 OAU summit expressed support for Palestinian rights. A little later in the same year, on the motion of the OAU, the Algiers summit of the NAM adopted the "Declaration on the Struggle for National Liberation," affirming (1) Palestine as a case of colonial domination and exploitation completely identical with the situation in South Africa; (2) the legitimacy of the struggle of the Palestinian people against colonialism, Zionism, and racism; and (3) the PLO as "the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and their legitimate struggle."

As if to underscore the point, the NAM summit also called on all nations to end diplomatic, economic, military, and cultural relations with Portugal, Rhodesia, South Africa, and Israel, and asked members to work for invoking sanctions against all these "colonial" powers. This action assigned Israel not only to the category of "colonial" states but to that of a "pariah" state, an abomination to be isolated by the "community" of "peace-loving" nations.

BY 1974, the stage was set in the UN itself to follow up on these developments. "In many respects," writes Chaim Herzog, who was then serving as Israel's ambassador to the UN, "the 1974 session of the General Assembly was the reverse of the historical 1947 session" (establishing Israel). In 1974, Yasi Arafat addressed the General Assembly. Had the General Assembly had the power, it would surely have replaced Israel with a PLO state then and there. Lacking the power, it instead adopted Resolution 3236, which specified that the rights of the Palestinian people included national independence and sovereignty, the right to use all means to

obtain these goals, and the right to support from other states. Moreover, all states were called on to aid the Palestinian struggle. During the same session the PLO was granted status as a "permanent observer," a status which gave it access to the arenas and resources of the United Nations.

Finally, on November 10, 1975, on the 37th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, the General Assembly declared Zionism to be "a form of racism and of racial discrimination." Israel's designation as a "racist" state was tantamount to formal designation as a target. From the perspective of UN ideology, *Israel had no rights*. The General Assembly had branded Israel's very existence as an act of aggression against the Palestinian people and thus too as *a crime against international law*. From this perspective, any attack against Israel was justified and any effort by Israel to defend itself was illegal aggression.

More was yet to come. In 1979, the International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages exempted from the prohibition against hostage-taking any such act "committed in the cause of armed conflict . . . in which people are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist regimes in the exercise of their right of self-determination. . . ." Later in the same year the Ad Hoc Committee on Terrorism issued a report condemning "the continuation of repressive and terrorist acts committed by colonial, racist, and alien regimes which denied peoples their legitimate right to self-determination and independence."

In these ways the General Assembly explicitly affirmed that the permission which had been granted national-liberation movements to use "all necessary means" included terrorism and hostage-taking. And in case anyone doubted that the permission was serious, the support offered to Abu Z. Ein in 1982 showed vividly that the General Assembly majority meant precisely what it implied: throwing grenades into a crowded Israeli supermarket—killing and maiming shoppers—was an act of "political dissent" and "self-defense" and was *not* punishable by law. For when, after two-and-a-half years of legal battles, the U.S. courts finally agreed to honor Israel's request for extradition of Abu Ein (who had been represented by a former U.S. Attorney General, Ramsey Clark), the General Assembly condemned the United States and Israel. Abu Ein, it said, was a "freedom fighter" and Israel had no right to put him on trial.

Thanks in large part to this relentless campaign, much of the world is now confused about who is the aggressor and who is the victim, who is the terrorist and who is the victim of terrorism. Such confusion is manifest in the response to the various "concessions" of Yasir Arafat, which are themselves the most recent move in his ongoing effort to legitimize the PLO. The U.S. response in particular is evidence of a growing willingness to give Arafat the benefit of the doubt.

IV

RONALD REAGAN and his Secretary of State, George Shultz, surprised the world twice in their final weeks in office: first when they denied Arafat's request for a visa to speak at the United Nations General Assembly, and again on December 15, 1988, when they broke a long U.S. boycott and announced that the U.S. ambassador to Tunisia would enter a "dialogue" with PLO representatives there.

Both decisions were explained by reference to Arafat's words. Arafat had been denied the visa, it was said, because the PLO had not met the three conditions set in 1974 by the then-Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger: renunciation of terrorism, acceptance of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and recognition of Israel's right to exist in peace and security. But then, according to Shultz, "I didn't change my mind, they changed theirs." In fact, however, a leap of faith was required to believe that U.S. requirements were satisfied by the statements concerning PLO intentions toward Israel that Arafat made in Stockholm on December 14.

For years officials of the United States government and other interested Americans had been led to expect that Arafat was about to declare peace in his long struggle against the state of Israel, was about to accept Israel's right to exist within secure borders, was willing to settle differences within the framework of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and would renounce terrorism.

From 1982 forward, Egyptians, French, British, and Jordanians had predicted that a new, more moderate Arafat would soon offer the desired assurances. "Arafat is a very moderate person, . . . you will see," President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt assured George Shultz repeatedly. These predictions focused in turn on the PLO "unity" conference of April 1987 at which all PLO factions were present; on the meeting of the Palestine National Council (PNC) in November 1988; and on Arafat's speech to the special session of the General Assembly in December. Yet each occasion came and went and the participants and the communiqués belied the optimistic expectations.

The 1987 "unity" conference was especially disappointing. The conference expressed its attitude toward terrorism in deeds rather than words. Abu Abbas, wanted for the hijacking of the *Achille Lauro* and the murder of Leon Klinghoffer, was made a member of the PLO executive committee, and two of the most extreme factions—George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Nayif Hawatmeh's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)—were welcomed back into the PLO fold. Instead of the clear assurances hoped for, there was clear rejection of Resolution 242, the Camp David accords, and the Reagan Plan. There was condemnation of Egypt for having made peace, a pledge

by Arafat himself “to continue the war against Israel until victory,” and a reaffirmation of the “Zionism-is-racism” resolution.

Movement of a sort did take place between that 1987 meeting and the conference of the PNC in November 1988 at which the PNC unilaterally declared a Palestinian state. The declaration was accompanied by language that both did and did not accept the UN Resolution (181) which had partitioned Palestine into one Jewish and one Arab state. The PNC did not so much renounce terrorism as confirm its redefinition, and the affirmation of Resolutions 242 and 338 was accompanied by an affirmation of other resolutions of the General Assembly which made opposite commitments, especially all those dealing with Palestinian self-determination. Arafat was even less ambiguous in an interview with *Time* magazine in which he said flatly, “We are opposed to a Zionist state. Zionism is a racist movement according to a UN resolution. . . . We don’t want a racist state in this area.”

Arafat’s speech before the General Assembly in Geneva also wrapped acceptances in rejections, “renunciations” in justifications, and in the end had nothing constructive to say to anyone who had hoped that he was ready to offer peace with security for Israel.

STILL, those convinced that the PLO was the road to Arab-Israeli peace refused to take no for an answer. A private group of American Jews traveled to Stockholm with a “declaration” which—it was reported—had been drafted by officials of the U.S. Department of State to meet our minimum conditions for “dialogue.” Arafat signed the document. And George Shultz, who only two weeks before had refused to issue a visa to Arafat to address the General Assembly in New York, decided that the PLO leader had, at long last, met the American preconditions for a dialogue.

Though studded with ambiguities, the Stockholm declaration “accepted” Israel as a state in the region, “renounced terrorism in all its forms,” and proposed an international peace conference on the basis of Resolutions 242 and 338 and other UN resolutions. No one associated with either the Stockholm conversations or the U.S. decision to “recognize” the PLO inquired closely about what Arafat’s “agreements” meant or implied, or about the degree to which they were binding on the various groups belonging to the PLO. Arafat’s American interlocutors could not, however, prevent him from distancing himself from the document he had just signed. Though he found the statement “a good reading of the PNC resolution,” he himself, he said, had not drafted the document, nor participated in its drafting. “I must assert I want to remove any misunderstanding after I have seen that certain papers attributed [the document] to me.”

Moreover, “With all the respect that I had for the U.S. delegation,” Arafat said, “I want to make it clear that I sign documents with officials and members of governments.” Thus the “non-paper” drafted by the Department of State, and delivered by an unofficial delegation, had produced a “non-agreement” whose terms would, in any case, become subject to the endless reinterpretations and qualifications that always characterize dealings with the PLO.

According to Arafat, the Stockholm declaration restated his understanding of PNC decisions of the previous month. Both “accepted” the “two-state solution”—one Jewish and one Palestinian state—on the basis of UN Resolution 181. Yet not only did the November 1988 meeting of the PNC describe Resolution 181 as a “historic injustice inflicted upon the Palestinian people, resulting in their dispersion and depriving them of their right to self-determination,” but Arafat himself denounced the “historic wrong that was done to our people” by the partition of Palestine in his speech to the General Assembly.

In short, the Stockholm declaration offered no clear-cut acceptance of a Jewish state. Instead it offered contradictions, evasions, circumlocutions. As there was no clarity about “accepting” a Jewish state, neither was there clarity about what its borders should be nor about what should be the borders of the new “Palestinian state.” The declaration was utterly ambiguous. So have been later “clarifications.” Is Israel to exist within its pre-1967 borders? Is the PLO asking for the 1947 borders specified in Resolution 181? Or what?

On the one hand, Bassam Abu Sharif, an Arafat deputy who speaks to the West, said in an interview, “We accept the principle of UN Resolution 181 rather than its specifics. The borders we want are those of 1967. That much should be clear seeing that we accept UN Resolutions 242 and 338 which talk about withdrawal to 1967 borders. . . .”

On the other hand, Arafat himself has addressed the same issues with less clarity: “The recognition of the state of Israel by me is based on UN Resolution 181, the division plan of 1947. Considered from a historical point of view, this resolution did an injustice to us. But I accept it. A Jewish and Palestinian state are to be established in Palestinian territory.”

“What will be the borders of the Palestinian state?” an interviewer asked. Arafat replied: “We expect a peace conference to strictly implement all UN resolutions. *In them you find everything regarding the borders of our state*” (emphasis added).

Interviewer: “Would you expect Israel to have to cede not only occupied territory but also major parts of the country it has possessed for 40 years?”

Arafat: “We can negotiate on this at the peace conference. However, in any event we will demand the establishment of a corridor between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. And our demand for Arab Jerusalem is non-negotiable.”

The same ominous ambiguity about borders is found in the UN resolution the General Assembly adopted at the special session in Geneva which (to cite it once again) calls for the withdrawal of Israel from "the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the other occupied Arab territories" (emphasis added).

The most recent and perhaps most definitive PLO statement on borders is carried in the logo of the stationery of "The State of Palestine." There is a silhouette. "Palestine" includes not only the West Bank and Gaza but the entire state of Israel.

Arafat has further declared that Jewish settlers and settlements are to be removed from the West Bank, but Palestinians everywhere will have the "right to return" to any place they formerly lived inside the present borders of Israel.

CONCERNING Resolutions 242 and 338 Arafat again made concessions and then denied them within the week. Sometimes Arafat said he had offered nothing new, having "accepted" 242 five times earlier. At other times (as in Abu Dhabi in late December) he said that the PLO's acceptance of Resolutions 242 and 338 was *conditional* on a Palestinian state, self-determination, and the right of return for all Palestinians. But since these "conditions" are not part of 242 and 338, such a statement is tantamount to not accepting the resolutions at all.

There is less ambiguity about the meaning of Arafat's "renunciation" of terrorism. Following the Stockholm meeting, U.S. publications rushed to the conclusion that Arafat had renounced the use of force and violence and would henceforth rely instead on negotiations. "It is better to talk than to shoot," observed *Time* magazine in welcoming Arafat's decision to rely on a "political" rather than a "military" solution.

But *Time* had evidently not listened to Arafat's Geneva speech. In it he made crystal clear his strong support for continuation of the *intifada* and provided an example of what he meant by terrorism when he paid tribute to a PLO official who had been killed, presumably by Israeli agents: "I offer a reverent salute to martyrs who have fallen at the hands of terrorism and terrorists, foremost among whom is my lifetime companion and deputy, the martyr-symbol Khalil-al Wazir."

The late Khalil-al Wazir, better known as Abu Jihad, was commander of the military branch of Fatah, which specializes in attacks on civilians. Israeli officials believe Abu Jihad masterminded the 1972 Munich attack that left eleven Israeli Olympic athletes dead; the attack on the Savoy Hotel in Tel Aviv on March 5, 1975, which left eight civilians (as well as three Israeli soldiers) dead and a score wounded; the coastal-road massacre of March 11, 1978 in which 33 civilians were

killed and 82 wounded; and the Hebron attack on Jewish worshippers in May 1980 in which six civilians were killed and 16 injured. They also credit Abu Jihad with numerous attacks on Arabs critical of the PLO, including the murder of cartoonist Naji-el-Ali in London on July 22, 1987.

In choosing Abu Jihad as his example of a martyr to terrorism, Arafat exposed his semantic cynicism. Terrorism is not premeditated violence against Israeli civilians. Terrorism is an attack on an official of the PLO who leads terrorist actions against civilians.

Obviously, then, when Arafat "renounced" terrorism he did not define it as the U.S. State Department defines it: "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine state agents, normally intended to influence an audience." Obviously, if violence against unarmed and unprotected civilians is not to be called terrorism, if specialists in that kind of violence like Abu Jihad are not to be called terrorists but victims of terrorism, then we are in the world of doublethink and doublespeak, where words are emptied of their normal meanings and turned into their opposites. We are in a world where language depends on politics and on majorities of the General Assembly.

Arafat introduced still a new layer of ambiguity when, after being received in May by President François Mitterrand of France, he announced that the PLO Covenant had been superseded by subsequent PNC decisions. It was then, he said, "null and void," "*caduc*." This apparent "concession," which made headlines internationally, was partially retrieved when Arafat indicated that he was not prepared to call a meeting of the PNC to secure formal action on the Covenant. But without such action, Arafat's statement is only a personal opinion. The Covenant itself provides that it can be amended only by a two-thirds vote in a meeting called expressly for the purpose of considering amendments.

One step forward. Two steps back.

THE long march through the UN has produced many benefits for the PLO. It has created a people where there was none; an issue where there was none; a claim where there was none. Now the PLO is seeking to create a state where there already is one. That will take more than resolutions and more than an "international peace conference." But having succeeded so well over the years in its campaign to legitimize itself and to delegitimize Israel, the PLO might yet also succeed in bringing that campaign to a triumphant conclusion, with consequences for the Jewish state that would be nothing short of catastrophic.