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Dolna 17, Warsaw,
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+48 226 0 227 03
editorial_office@rsglobal.pl

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INTELLECTUAL, POLITICAL, AND ORGANIZATIONAL DISAGREEMENTS INSIDE THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT “FATAH” AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES ON THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION, 1965–1986

Saadia Guenfoud

Dr., University of Mohamed Khider – Biskra. Laboratory of Social Change and Public Relations

Djamel Benkhaled

Dr., University of Mohamed Boudiaf – M’sila. Laboratory of Sociology of Public Service Quality

ABSTRACT

This study is discussing the phenomenon of intellectual, political and organizational disputes that have been accompanying the journey of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement “Fatah,” considering it the most important Palestinian fedayeen organization in terms of armament, organization and numbers. It addressed the internal conditions of the movement and revealed its most significant internal crises. The study concluded that the Palestinian National Liberation Movement “Fatah” carried, since its establishment in the early 1960s, the seeds of disagreement and schism that would grow and bloom at every turning point and impasse the movement—and the Palestine Liberation Organization at large—faced. This affected the absence of a shared vision among its cadres and armed forces, and was responsible for the armed clashes that occurred among its branches spread across the Arab arena. It led to the body of the movement splitting and the birth of new organizations, which increased the number of fedayeen factions on the Palestinian and Arab political and military stage. Ultimately, these disputes widened the circle of Palestinian–Palestinian conflict in all its forms, harming the Palestinian struggle and allowing regional and international actors to meddle in Palestinian internal affairs and exploit them to serve their regional and global policies and agendas.

KEYWORDS

Palestinian National Liberation Movement “Fatah”, Intellectual Disputes, Political Disputes, Organizational Disputes, Internal Conflicts, Palestinian Cause

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Introduction

The “Fatah” movement gathered within its goals and methods of work many contradictions, and it contained at the same time elements of strength and elements of weakness; as it combined between democracy and despotism, partnership and individuality, progress and backwardness, and between alignment with the popular masses and the care for the capital. (Abdel Hamid, 2011, p. 36) Therefore, it was inevitable that with all these contradictions it would witness many internal disagreements and crises—intellectual, political, organizational, and military—some of which reached the level of armed clashes between its frameworks and its armed forces in the branches spread over the Arab scene before and after the 1967 war. Some others reached the level of the movement’s body splitting and the birth of new organizations, which increased the number of the fedayeen factions on the Palestinian and Arab political and military scene, and led to the widening of the Palestinian–Palestinian disagreement circle in all its forms that harmed the Palestinian struggle.

So, to what extent did the internal conditions of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement "Fatah" affect the lack of agreement on a shared vision among its frameworks and armed forces?

And to answer this question, we divided the study into three requirements:

The first requirement: The internal conditions of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement "Fatah".

The second requirement: The internal crises of the National Liberation Movement "Fatah" (1965–1986).

The third requirement: The splits within the Palestinian National Liberation Movement "Fatah" and their consequences (1965–1986).

The First Requirement: The Internal Conditions of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement "Fatah"

First Branch: The Absence of Intellectual Identity and the Ideological Multiplicity inside the Movement

The "Fatah" movement did not adopt a specific ideology and did not outline a comprehensive and defined party system like other movements or parties spread across the Palestinian or Arab scene, since from its beginning it was a front-like framework that included various intellectual backgrounds—Islamic, nationalist, Marxist, and liberal—that gathered around the goal of national liberation. (Ghazi, 1971, p. 39)

In the first period of its establishment, among its different members there prevailed a positive intellectual criticism, which enriched its intellectual experience, especially after the creation of the "Research Center," the magazine *Palestinian Affairs*, the magazine *Revolution of Palestine*, the magazine *Economic Samid*, the publications of the "Planning Center," and the large collection of books and research that discussed the Palestinian thought and strategy, particularly from the leftist trend members in the Fatah movement; among them were Munir Shafiq, Naji Alloush, Majed Abu Sharar, and Mahjoub Omar.

With time, the positive intellectual criticism declined in favor of political plurality and political opposition, after its members became distinguished ideologically and politically from each other and were divided into two main groups: the first group included the founding elements with Islamic reference, among them Khalil Al-Wazir, Yasser Arafat, and Salah Khalaf (...), and they would later be symbolized as the bourgeois right or the democratic right; while the second group included members from outside the Islamic current, such as "Farouk Al-Qaddoumi" and "Khaled Al-Yashruti" from the Baath Party (the Baathist nationalist left). To these two were added during the movement's third conference in September 1971 in Damascus the two leftists "Majed Abu Sharar" and "Qadri Abu Kuweik," to form together within the movement's central committee what was later known as "the democratic line" or "the democratic left." (Al-Qaliqali, 2020)

The two groups became clearly distinguished after the policy of moderation in dealing with the Palestinian cause appeared in 1971, as the group of the democratic left appeared alongside the group of the democratic right. The group of the democratic left itself became divided into three lines (branches): the Soviet line, the Maoist line, and the Vietnamese line, which were collectively called since 1983 the democratic line within the Fatah movement. (Al-Qaliqali, 2020)

1 – The Vietnamese Left:

This trend appeared during the presence of the Palestinian revolution in Jordan, by the martyr "Abu Ali Iyad," who adopted the approach of the Vietnamese leader "Ho Chi Minh" (holding to peaceful coexistence, politics springs from the mouth of the gun, and the golden mean between them). He called the leaderships of the movement to settle in the mountains and live with little supplies, and he worked to impose this approach inside it, but he faced opposition from the right-wing group who preferred stability inside the cities and capitals where they were present. (Al-Sabah, 2023)

This trend opposed the process of settlement with the Zionist entity, and called for the necessity of applying democracy in the internal relations of the Fatah movement. In its organizational form, it was close to the party formula, and among its most prominent leaders besides Abu Ali Iyad were Omar Hanna Mikhael, Abdel Rahman Mar'i, and Sameeh Abu Kuweik, but it adopted the political program of the Palestine Liberation Organization in general. (Al-Kayali, 2012, p. 47)

2 – The Maoist Line:

Or the Maoist left, it is attributed to the Chinese leftist leader "Mao Tse-Tung." It was led by "Munir Shafiq" (one of the frameworks of the Jordanian Communist Party), and this trend included a large number of militants in its ranks unlike the other leftist trends. This trend opposed the political line of the Palestine Liberation Organization, especially the transitional program of 1974, despite that it maintained good working relations with the leaders of the Fatah movement, particularly "Khalil Al-Wazir." (Al-Qaliqali, 2020)

3 – The Soviet Line:

Or the Soviet Left, also known as the Traditional Left Trend, represented the pragmatic direction of the democratic left in the Fatah movement. It was more of a political-propaganda trend than an objective one (focusing on spreading information to influence the recipient). It was led by "Nimr Saleh," "Majed Abu Sharar," and "Saeed Maragha." This trend supported the idea of settlement with the Zionist entity and called for a strategic alliance with the Soviet Union. During its struggle journey, it was unable to establish organizational frameworks that represent it or express its ideas. (Sayigh, n.d., p. 506) It split in 1983 from the mother Fatah movement under the name *Fatah-The Uprising*, supported by Libya, Syria, and the Palestinian leftist organizations, and entered into armed clashes with it on Lebanese territories.

In addition to the previous leftist trends, a *Nationalist Left Trend* appeared inside the Fatah movement. It included radical leftists with Marxist-Leninist tendencies influenced by popular Arab nationalism and by the Chinese experience. At its head were "Naji Alloush" and "Mohammed Odeh," in addition to the "Jordan Affairs Committee," a group of independent leftist figures, and several independent organizations, among them "The Student Battalion" and "The Palestinian Women's Organization." (Sayigh, n.d., pp. 506–508)

In conclusion, we can say that the intellectual multiplicity in the Fatah movement reflected negatively on the process of integration and coexistence among its members, who were connected by superficial and utilitarian relations in most cases (Al-Kayali, 2012, pp. 45, 47). Intellectual, political, and organizational conflicts appeared among them, which led to the growth of power centers and favoritism, the absence of democracy, and the spread of financial and administrative corruption. As a result, the movement became characterized by *populism* (—) the word derived from "people" from *Mawdoo3* site (2023) and *randomness* (—) the word derived from "random" from *Mawdoo3* site (2023), after it had been revolutionary in its nature, seeking to achieve a comprehensive national liberation project.

Second Branch: The Absence of a Clear Strategy

The Fatah movement did not adopt a clear political and military strategy; that is, it did not formulate an integrated and balanced intellectual program related to the political and social rights of the Palestinians and to the nature of the political and economic system of the desired Palestinian state. It also did not adopt a clear struggle strategy in defending the cause and people of Palestine, which made it enter into side military confrontations with Arab regimes and organizations in both Jordan and Lebanon, and with Syria during the Lebanese war. These confrontations exhausted the Palestinians' forces and made the Palestinian resistance lose its base positions on the confrontation lines with the Israeli enemy. (Al-Kayali, 2012, pp. 45, 47)

Instead of focusing on the revolution against the Israeli enemy, the leaders of the Fatah movement, along with other Palestinian organizations within the Palestine Liberation Organization, went toward attempting to establish a Palestinian state within the Jordanian state, then *the Fakhani Republic* (named after the Fakhani district in Beirut where the PLO headquarters were located) on Lebanese soil. (Al-Sabah, 2023)

The movement relied on military power to impose balances and settle internal disputes, and it worked to impose a kind of sacredness on the armed resistance after it made it above the level of criticism. (Al-Kayali, 2012, pp. 45, 47) Fatah also neglected the cultural and intellectual side of the revolution just as it neglected the political and military strategy. The Research Center of the PLO—which was founded at the beginning of the organization's creation and was supported by its president "Ahmad Al-Shuqeiri"—faced difficulty in accepting the intellectual and cultural performance of the new leadership of the organization led by Fatah, which in turn was displeased with the Center's approach that did not match nor promote its own. This led most Palestinian intellectuals to leave Lebanon during the period between 1971–1982, and those who remained turned into performing the role of justification for the leadership. (Al-Yasin, 1995, p. 19)

The movement also rejected the method of planning to draw or foresee a clear and correct policy, through its refusal of the proposal to establish the *Palestinian Planning Center* which was suggested during the fourth session of the Palestinian National Council in the summer of 1968 in Cairo, under the pretext that the revolutionary situation experienced by the Palestinian people does not need planning. Although the center

was later established and chaired by Dr. Yusuf Sayigh, "all its studies and reports that foresaw the Israeli and Arab policies were neglected despite their importance, especially those that conflicted with the policy of the movement's leadership. (Al-Yasin, 1995, p. 19)

Third Branch: Centralization and Individualism of Leadership

The organizational bodies that the Fatah movement established, despite their hierarchical structure—represented in the Central Committee, the Revolutionary Council, the Higher Movement Committee, and the Regional Committees—could not participate in decision-making (Awad & Mukhaylif, 2021), because most of the decision-making power was concentrated in the hands of the general leader of the movement, who also controlled the military and financial centers after merging them. This situation led to the appearance of centralization and individualism in management, along with the rise of the paternalistic management pattern that characterized the movement throughout its path, as the leadership did not allow the existence of any partner or competing centers within the movement. For that purpose, it established parallel bodies to the organizational ones (Abdel Hamid, 2011, p. 45), such as the security institutions whose formation processes were not clear or transparent for the majority of the movement's members, and which worked on suppressing the opponents of the dominant approach, weakening them and undermining their positions. (Al-Sabah, 2023)

"Khaled Al-Hassan" (one of the movement's leaders) described the internal organizational situation of the "Fatah" movement as "the genius of failure," which refuses collective work and seeks to exclude any party that rejects and challenges the paternal (leadership) decision. (Abdel Hamid, 2011, p. 45)

Since its establishment, the movement also adopted a policy of distancing the supportive masses from its different organizational bodies. It did not allow the participation of labor unions, professional syndicates, and various popular federations in the process of decision-making through practicing supervision and voting, as it assigned the employees in the administrative, financial, and military apparatuses inside the movement to handle these matters. This caused these federations to fall behind in performing their role in organizing and mobilizing the Palestinians inside the occupied Palestinian territories and in the diaspora. (Abdel Hamid, 2011, p. 45)

Fourth Branch: Neglect of Social Mobilization and Following a Rentier Policy

Social Mobilization is the process that includes directing individuals and groups toward a specific political direction and engaging them in the life of society widely and positively, by changing their behaviors and lifestyle in various fields of life, so that their mentalities change and they become capable of taking positions and imposing a new political reality. (Kayali et al., n.d., p. 212)

The fact is that the "Fatah" movement, being the largest Palestinian organization demographically and financially and the one controlling the Palestine Liberation Organization, neglected social mobilization and did not give attention to education and to the intellectual and revolutionary reconstruction. It also did not adopt a social transformative project inside the Palestinian interior that would employ the individuals of society, benefit from their energies, and provide for their basic needs (Abdel Hamid, 2016). Moreover, it did not depend on the people in the "People's War," which was the slogan it raised at its establishment, while the Palestinian fedayeen action was in need of a base of support, an internal leadership, and a united national front. Instead, it turned to follow the policy of guerrilla warfare, the monopoly of arms, and the infiltration policy from outside to inside, instead of stability and organizing resistance inside the occupied territories. (Al-Yasin, 1995, p. 17)

Alongside that, it followed a policy of *Statism* (—) philosophically and morally from *Al-Maany* electronic dictionary (n.d.), which turned the relationship between it and the various social groups into a utilitarian one based on rent (the unproductive economy). Its administrative apparatuses became channels for pumping the huge funds obtained from abroad into the Palestinian interior and outside it, distributing them to all individuals without exception in the form of direct aids and grants. Thus, the funds supporting the Palestinian cause became the strong link between the Palestinian people and the Fatah movement / the Palestine Liberation Organization. (Abdel Hamid, 2011, p. 41)

This policy, on the internal level, led to the spread of benefit networks specialized in establishing influence and control. The phenomenon of loyalty to the funder (the leadership) appeared among the different social groups, and a wide, uncoordinated network of beneficiaries emerged whose goals and means differed. As for abroad, the support funds were used in creating the military, administrative, and media apparatuses, which led to inflated salary lists and the weakening of the volunteering spirit among the resistance ranks. (Abdel Hamid, 2011, p. 41)

To continue applying this policy, the movement went on strengthening its relations with the Arab Gulf countries—the biggest financial supporter of the movement—and opened up to the socialist bloc, to the

communist parties and liberation movements in the world, and extended bridges of relations with the Western European countries. Even more, it contacted the Israeli Communist Party and Jewish–Israeli peace groups, which made it in continuous interaction with the regional and international events. This interaction, sometimes positive and sometimes negative, caused most of its internal and external crises. (Abdel Hamid, 2016)

The previously mentioned elements—

- Neglect of social mobilization,
- Not depending on the energies of society and the people within a social liberation project,
- Dependence on the external financial and political support—
- led to:
- The weakening of the movement and the dominance of the personal tendency and the national strategy with a class social content inside it.
- The marginalization of the social foundations necessary for rebuilding the Palestinian society.
- The emergence of political, organizational, and strategic disagreements and crises inside the movement. (Abdel Hamid, 2011, pp. 39–40)

Requirement Two: The Internal Crises of the National Liberation Movement”Fatah”

The first of its disagreements appeared to the public in the year 1965, when the branch of the movement in Kuwait — the main financier of the Damascus branch with the necessary funds for the commando operations — accused its leadership in Damascus of squandering money, of individualism in decision-making, and of presenting incorrect and exaggerated reports about its militant activities. This situation pushed the Central Committee of the movement to issue a decision, on 29/04/1966, which stated the withdrawal of confidence from its leader”Yasser Arafat” and to submit him for investigation. Later, in its statement issued on 02/05/1966, it clarified the real reasons behind this decision, which, according to what came in the statement, were as follows:

The head of the movement presented untrue reports about the activities of the movement, especially the military ones.

Rebellion against the collective decisions issued by the leadership of the movement.

Squandering the funds of the movement in an irresponsible and unstudied way. Following the policy of favoritism by trying to buy the consciences of the fighters.

Disclosing the secrets of the movement. The leader of the movement”Yasser Arafat” made secret trips to Cyprus, Beirut, and Saudi Arabia without permission and without presenting reports about the reasons and results of the travel.

Individual behaviors in the military field.

His refusal to appear before the investigation committee. (Ghazi, 1993, p. 85–86)

The head of the movement continued practicing his duties in his position and enjoyed all his authorities, and the calls for reform against corruption and against individualism by peace and by violence continued inside the movement (Kilani, 2016), which allowed the disagreement to continue inside it. During the year 1966, a person called”Abu Obeida” from the group of the Kuwait branch announced the rebellion, accusing its leadership of individualism in taking decisions and criticizing all its working methods. As a reaction to that, its head ended the duties of the rebellion leader and the duties of the members of the Fatah office in Kuwait. (Kilani, 2016)

On 8/5/1966, Captain”Yousef Arabi” and his assistant”Mohammad Hashmeh” managed to take control of the headquarters of Al-Asifa Forces in Damascus (Kilani, 2016), and the first took command of Al-Asifa Forces and gained a high position among its soldiers, which made him a strong competitor to Yasser Arafat in leading the Fatah Movement. This led to tension in the relationship between the two, to the extent that each of them used to put his hand on his gun in every meeting that gathered them together.

In order to get rid of him (Youssef Arabi), he was accused of trying to impose the domination of the Syrian Baath Party over the Fatah Movement. Then, a decision was issued against him to remove him from his position, and finally, he was assassinated in a mysterious incident on the Syrian lands, after which some responsible authorities in the movement declared that the incident happened because of an armed clash between”Youssef Arabi” and one of the leadership members, after he refused the order to hand over the fighting groups he was supervising in compliance with the decision of his dismissal. (Ghazi, 1993, p. 92)

The conflict between the two branches of the movement in Damascus and Kuwait renewed after the Arab defeat in the 1967 war, when its Central Committee in Damascus approved in 1968 a gradual approach that included the agreement to establish a Palestinian entity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip without referring

to its branch in Kuwait, which condemned that and demanded again to remove the leader of the movement from his position. (Hourani, 1980, p. 101)

But soon the disagreement ended after Yasser Arafat moved to Kuwait, where he dissolved the branch leadership and appointed a new leadership loyal to him, and thus he kept his position and continued to perform his full duties on all Palestinian, Arab, and international levels. (Ghazi, 1993, p. 92)

During the June 1967 war, the "Palestine Liberation Working Committee" appeared in the form of a popular body among the Palestinian people residing in Iraq, and with the rise of the Palestinian revolutionary action, it took the name "Working Committee for Supporting the Palestinian Revolution", where it joined the medical services unit of the Fatah Movement (Kayyali et al., n.d., p. 111) in order to support the Palestinian resistance. It quickly turned into a fedayeen organization known as "The Palestine Liberation Working Committee" led by Dr. "Issam Sartawi". (Kayyali et al., n.d., pp. 111–112)

This organization officially appeared after the Arab defeat in the June 1967 war and decided to adopt the strategy of armed struggle as the only means to liberate the Palestinian and Arab lands and end the Israeli presence. It called upon all Palestinian fedayeen organizations to unite their ranks, and also called upon the Arab regimes to support these organizations financially and humanly in order to develop the armed struggle and escalate it into a comprehensive liberation war; because the situation did not require a large number of fedayeen organizations but rather required their organizational and strategic unity. (The Brochure of the Palestine Liberation Working Committee, 1968, p. 3)

The Palestine Liberation Working Committee believed, within its ideological foundations, in the connection between the battle of liberating Palestine and the Arab unity socialist revolution, and focused in its announced goals in its first statement on trying to develop the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization and to find a unity formula between the various fedayeen organizations. (The Brochure of the Palestine Liberation Working Committee, 1968, p. 4)

It joined the "Fatah" movement in 1968, but political and organizational conflicts occurred between its leader "Issam Sartawi" and the leadership of the movement, which turned into armed clashes, leading to Issam Sartawi's declaration of his split from it on May 23, 1969. (Ghazi, 1993, p. 95)

After that, he refused to join the "Palestinian Armed Struggle Command" that was established in mid-1969, demanding that all Palestinian institutions and resources be placed under the control of a new front that would replace the Palestine Liberation Organization. (Sayigh, n.d., p. 357)

But in the ninth session of the Palestinian National Council held from June 7–13, 1971 in Cairo, he announced the dissolution of his splinter organization and his rejoining of the "Fatah" movement, to become a member of its Revolutionary Council and an advisor for foreign affairs of the Palestine Liberation Organization. (Ghazi, 1993, p. 95)

During the third conference of the movement, which was held after the departure from Jordan in September 1971, sharp discussions took place inside the movement about the reasons for the events of Jordan, in which its members exchanged accusations of negligence, carelessness, and misjudgment of the situation. Most of the blame was directed to the Revolutionary Surveillance Apparatus (a military-security unit), which was accused of failure, and the relationship between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Fatah Movement was described as bureaucratic. The conference, in its closing session, called for the consolidation of the principle of collective leadership and for adopting the method of democracy as a working tool inside it. (Palestinian News Agency – WAFA, 2024)

In the year 1971, the leadership of the movement made a decision to transform the "Al-Asifa Forces" into semi-regular units, and this decision faced wide rejection from its cadres and some members of the Palestine Liberation Army (Ishtayeh, 2011, p. 99). Captain "Salah Awad Abu Zard" (a battalion commander in the Palestine Liberation Army) accused its leadership of individualism in decision-making and of wasting money, declaring his rebellion against its leaders. He was punished by cutting the financial funding of his battalion, which increased the intensity of the rebellion; he arrested the financial officer of the movement and seized 18, 000 Syrian pounds from the treasury of the movement, which he used to cover his battalion's expenses. After these events, a statement was issued signed in the name of the Al-Asifa Forces condemning favoritism and the privileges enjoyed by some of the leaders in the movement. (Ghazi, 1993, p. 95)

At the end of May 1972, and always on Syrian soil, the commander of the Palestinian Fedayeen base in the Golan, "Hussein Al-Haibi," rebelled against the leadership of the movement, as a reaction to the supply cut operations that were repeatedly carried out against this base. This rebellion aimed to end the life of Yasser Arafat through an ambush that was set for him, but he survived it, while one of his companions was killed.

The leadership of the movement accused the Syrian intelligence of being involved in this rebellion because of its relationship with its leader. (Kilani, 2016)

At the end of 1972, after the transfer of the Fatah leadership and its settlement in Lebanon, a crisis of competition occurred between its members who came from Jordan and those already present on the Lebanese scene, where a military rebellion was led by the military officer in charge of the Fatah forces in the Beqaa Valley in eastern Lebanon, "Officer Abu Youssef Al-Kaid, " who justified it by his dissatisfaction with the performance of the Fatah Movement. The rebellion ended a week after its appearance without causing a split within it, and Abu Youssef Al-Kaid was dismissed from his position, as the movement considered it merely a disagreement between military officials. (Kilani, 2016)

In 1977, the officer "Mohammad Daoud Odeh, " briefly described by Al-Jazeera (2020) and known as "Abu Daoud, " led a rebellion inside the movement following the visit of Egyptian President "Anwar Al-Sadat" to Jerusalem on 19/11/1977, which caused disagreements among the leaders of the organization about how to deal with Egypt after this visit. Reports mention that the rebellion of "Abu Daoud" and his group was in order to strengthen the left-wing inside the "Fatah Movement" so that it could face the right-wing within it. (Al-Abbasi, 1991, pp. 152–154)

In 1986, while the Palestinian leadership was in Tunisia, a sharp disagreement occurred within the Central Committee of the movement after most of its members voted on a decision to hold one of its cadres accountable after he attempted to assassinate the Israeli Prime Minister "Shimon Peres" in Morocco. But when it became clear that "Salah Khalaf" was behind this attempt, "Yasser Arafat" opposed the decision of the majority, and the crisis occurred, but it was ended in order to preserve the unity of the movement. (Ishtayeh, 2011, p. 99)

Practically, the aforementioned crises did not lead to a split of the Fatah Movement, but it is certain that they led to tension in the relations between its members and caused confusion in the course of work inside it, and to the distraction and diversion of its leaders' attention from the main goal for which it was founded.

Requirement Three: The Splits within the Palestinian National Liberation Movement "Fatah" (1967–1987) and Their Consequences

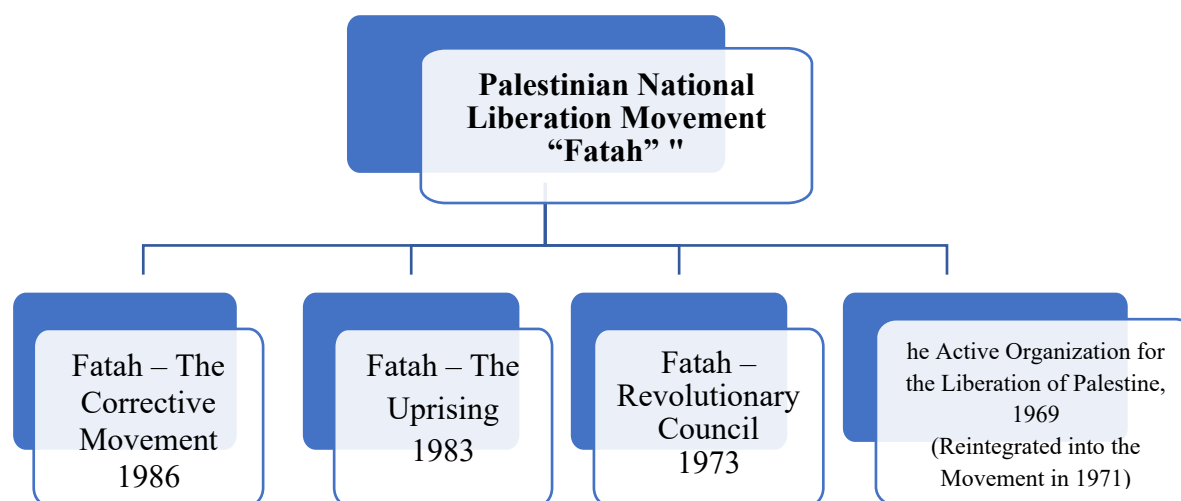


Fig. 1. An illustrative diagram showing the main organizations that split from the "Fatah" Movement (1967–1987)

Source: Prepared by the researcher according to the available information.

Alongside the mutiny crises that ended without causing a split within the structure of the Fatah Movement, and alongside the union–separation (split) crises it experienced with some other Palestinian guerrilla organizations — such as the Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Nationalist), the Liberation Front of Palestine in 1966, the Popular Struggle Front in 1968, and the Active Organization for the Liberation of Palestine in 1968 — the Movement also experienced internal splits that led to the creation of new organizations. These increased the number of factions on the Palestinian and Arab political and military scene, widening the scope of the Palestinian–Palestinian division in all its forms, which negatively affected the Palestinian struggle.

Branch One: The Split of Lieutenant Colonel Abu Nafed Farouk (1969)

The split of the commander of the Palestinian armed forces belonging to the Palestine Liberation Army in the Citadel of Tripoli, Lebanon, Lieutenant Colonel *Abu Nafed Farouk*, on 24/11/1969, is considered the first split in the history of the Fatah Movement's struggle. It occurred immediately after the signing of the Cairo Agreement on 03/11/1969 — the Lebanese–Palestinian Reconciliation Agreement of 1969 (Ben Bteit & Al-Taher, 2021) — between the Lebanese government and the Palestine Liberation Organization. He refused to implement some provisions of the agreement that stipulated the closure of the Palestinian military base in the Citadel of Tripoli and the withdrawal of Palestinian forces from it. Despite the withdrawal orders issued to him by the High Command of the Palestine Liberation Army, he insisted on disobedience, declared rebellion, and announced the establishment of the "24 October (November) Movement" in Tripoli, Lebanon, which remained active throughout the Lebanese civil war independently of the mother Fatah Movement. (Kilani, 2016)

Branch Two: The Split of Captain Mahmoud Al-Sahla (7/3/1972)

During the process of reorganizing the Palestinian resistance on Lebanese territory following its withdrawal from Jordan, a separatist movement emerged within Fatah called the *Command of Special Units*, led by Captain *Mahmoud Al-Sahla*, who accused its leadership of abandoning the path of armed resistance and leaning toward compromise and surrender in resolving the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. On this date, he issued a statement announcing his split from the mother Fatah Movement and his joining of the *Palestinian National Liberation Front* (Kilani, 2016), which had been founded as a guerrilla organization in the early 1960s by *Abu Hilmi Al-Sabarini**.

Branch Three: The Split of the Arab National Youth Organization for the Liberation of Palestine

At the beginning of March 1974, the officer *Ahmad Abdel-Ghafour*, known as *Abu Mahmoud*, who was the financial officer of the Fatah Movement in Lebanon, together with a group of political and military cadres of the movement, announced his split from the mother organization and the establishment of a new organization representing the "struggling and fighting Fatah" (Kilani, 2016), under the name *The Arab National Youth Organization*. This group established an armed wing for the organization, which carried the name *The Seventh Suicide Brigade*, after it received financial and logistical support from Libya. *Abu Mahmoud* was known for his direct relations with the Libyan leadership, as well as for his harsh and extreme positions and his high spirit of criticism toward everyone. Among his activities were military operations carried out abroad, which embarrassed the Palestinian leadership and harmed the reputation of the Palestinian revolution.

At the end of 1974, *Abu Mahmoud* was subjected to an unknown assassination in Lebanese territory, which led to the disappearance of his organization and the joining of its members to *Sabri Al-Banna's Movement (Fatah – Revolutionary Council)*, which had split from the Fatah Movement in the same year. (Badwan, 2019)

Branch Four: The Split of Fatah – The Revolutionary Council

In 1974, a movement split from *Fatah* known as *Fatah – The Revolutionary Council*, led by *Sabri Khalil Al-Banna (Abu Nidal)** (Ashtiyeh, 2011, pp. 99–100). He began his political and military opposition activity

* A pioneer of the Palestinian armed national struggle, he was born in Haifa in 1917. He participated in the Al-Qassam revolt of 1935–1936 and moved to Syria during the first Arab-Israeli war. In the early 1960s, he founded the Palestinian National Liberation Front, establishing a military base in the eastern area of the Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria to train his organization's members. He merged with the Fatah movement after the second launch of the armed struggle in March 1968. He participated in the Battle of Karamah on March 21, 1968, was a member of the Palestinian National Council, and was among the leadership of the western sector in the occupied Palestinian territories. He worked under the leadership of Khalil Al-Wazir and Kamal Adwan.

(See: Ali Badwan, (Abu Hilmi) Hasan Ali Abdullah Al-Sabbareeni, publication date: 15/09/2020, retrieval date: 28/09/2024, Dunia Al-Watan, link: <https://pulpit.alwatanvoice.com>).

Ghazi Kilani, previous reference.

Ali Badwan, Ahmed Abdelghafour (Abu Mahmoud), 12/10/2019, Dunia Al-Rai – Dunia Al-Watan, retrieval date: 01/07/2024, link: <https://pulpit.alwatanvoice.com>

* Nicknamed "Abu Nidal," he was born in 1937 in Palestine. He studied at the Faculty of Engineering at Cairo University but did not complete his university education. In the early stages of his political life, he was among the activists of the Palestinian branch of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. From 1968, he joined the ranks of the Fatah movement within its security apparatus. He was appointed as a representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Sudan and later moved to Baghdad, where he was recruited by the Iraqi regime and used as a tool in the conflict between Iraq and Fatah on one side, and the Ba'ath Party branches in Iraq and Syria on the other. Several sources described him as a creation and agent of the Iraqi regime. He disappeared with his followers from the Palestinian and Iraqi political scene on the eve of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991. He died in Baghdad in 2002 under mysterious circumstances, after being accused of conspiring against the Iraqi regime in favor of Kuwait.

(See: Muhammad Ashtiyeh, previous reference, pp. 99–100).

by criticizing the policy of Fatah, which, in his view, was responsible for the events of Jordan (*Black September 1970*), and by calling for the execution of military operations against Arab and foreign targets as revenge for what had happened to the Palestinians in Jordan (Al-Abbasi, 1991, pp. 149–150). He continued his opposition to the policy of the Movement and behind it the Palestine Liberation Organization, as he opposed in 1974 the decision of the Palestinian National Council that included the establishment of a Palestinian state on any liberated part of Palestine, considering this decision as a concession and a betrayal of the principles of struggle (BBC, 2023).

As a reflection of this stance, he officially announced his split and founded his organization *Fatah – The Revolutionary Council*, to which *The Al-Qadisiyyah Forces* in Baghdad, belonging to the Palestine Liberation Army, joined. He also declared his non-recognition of the Fatah Movement because it had not held elections for its Central Committee since 1971, and therefore he considered the Palestine Liberation Organization illegitimate, since Fatah leaders were part of it. He demanded the execution of *Yasser Arafat* because, according to him, Arafat had adopted the approach of compromise with the Israeli enemy state and neglected armed struggle (Al-Abbasi, 1991, pp. 149–150).

This organization was born in Baghdad, and throughout its presence in Iraq, the Iraqi regime was able to contain it and use it to confront the policies of the Fatah Movement (Ashtiyeh, 2011, p. 100) and its opponents on the Arab scene, especially Syria, to the extent that during a certain stage of its activity, it was described as *the Iraqi stick*.

After the improvement of Iraq's relationship with the *Fatah* Movement in 1977, following the visit of the Egyptian president *Anwar al-Sadat* to Israel, the Iraqi government froze the activities of *Abu Nidal's Organization* (Al-Abbasi, 1991, pp. 150–151), which made him search for another Arab supporter to host him outside Iraq, so he turned toward Syria, and through it, he entered Lebanon.

During his stay in Iraq, *Sabri Al-Banna* used the financial support he received from Libya and Syria to absorb some of the political and military cadres of the *Fatah Movement* who were rejecting the path of compromise adopted by its leadership. He adopted violence as a means of struggle, carrying out many assassination operations against Israeli and Arab figures, as well as several representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization abroad — such as the assassination of *Ezzedine Al-Qalq* in Paris in 1978, and *Saeed Hammami* in London in 1978 (Ashtiyeh, 2011, p. 100) — because they had made contacts since 1972 with the Israeli left supporting peace, and for making several statements proposing coexistence with Israel on the land of Palestine (Sayigh, [n.d.], p. 604).

He was also accused of being behind the assassination of the representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization, *Naim Khader* in Brussels in 1981 and *Issam Sartawi* in Portugal in 1983. In 1982, he carried out a mass assassination operation targeting members of *Fatah* within his new organization, along with some of his closest aides (Ashtiyeh, 2011, p. 100). His military activities also targeted some Arab and foreign embassies across world capitals. In 1974, he hijacked a British Airways plane that was on a flight between Dubai and Tunisia, and this activity was described by various Arab and international entities as *international terrorism*.

The *Abu Nidal Movement* (*Sabri Al-Banna*) possessed enormous financial and military capabilities, but it did not use them to strike the interests of the Israeli enemy (Al-Abbasi, 1991, pp. 150–151), nor for the benefit of the Palestinian resistance, which led some sides to affirm that he had been recruited by Israeli intelligence. The British writer and journalist *Patrick Seale*, who specialized in Middle Eastern affairs, mentioned that his gun was directed at everyone except Israel, describing him as *a hired gun*, since all his operations served Israeli goals (Seale, n.d., p. 17).

Apparently, the policy of *Fatah / the Palestine Liberation Organization*, by abandoning armed struggle, was the direct reason for *Abu Nidal's* split, and the main cause behind the path his organization took. However, most analyses concerning his activities confirm that his defection was driven by revenge, after being expelled from *Fatah* in the early 1970s, and not due to ideological or strategic disagreement with its leadership. They also affirmed that the motive of profit and gain through extortion or hired operations was among the causes of the split as well. The proof is that most of his operations targeted Arab and international governments and figures on behalf of other governments and figures, after his claim of dominating Palestinian organizations and their intertwined files of personal and intelligence nature (—) *The Story of Abu Nidal* (2005).

The *Abu Nidal Organization* carried out numerous military operations at the Arab and international levels that, in one way or another, harmed the Palestinian cause. Among these were the *Nicosia bombings* in Cyprus on May 11, 1988, and the *massive bombings in Sudan* on May 15, 1988, which led to the withdrawal of global popular support for the Palestinian *Intifada* and created tensions between the Sudanese authorities and the Palestinian fighters who had moved to Sudan after their departure from Beirut in 1982 (Seale, n.d., p. 359).

As a result, *Salah Khalaf* (Head of the Intelligence Service of the *Palestine Liberation Organization*) exerted great efforts to track and confront these operations in order to thwart them, succeeding in foiling about 120 out of 200 operations carried out by *Sabri Al-Banna*, particularly in Europe.

In addition to the conflict within the *Fatah* Movement, a personal conflict also took place between *Sabri Al-Banna* and *Salah Khalaf*, during which each of them attempted to assassinate the other dozens of times (Seale, n.d., p. 411).

During the Eighteenth Session of the Palestinian National Council (The Reconciliation Session), held in *Algeria* from April 20–26, 1987, under the slogan “*Session of Unity*”, mediators, led by *Algeria* and *Libya*, worked to restore relations among the various Palestinian organizations and to end the historical division within the *Fatah* Movement that began in 1974 with *Sabri Al-Banna*’s movement.

However, the lack of trust between *Salah Khalaf* and *Sabri Al-Banna* thwarted all reconciliation efforts, as the latter feared that his organization would collapse at the hands of *Salah Khalaf* after reconciliation, while the former was convinced that *Sabri Al-Banna* sought to infiltrate and destroy the *Palestine Liberation Organization* with encouragement and support from *Israel* (Seale, n.d., p. 412).

The *Palestine Liberation Organization* regarded *Sabri Al-Banna*’s organization as a terrorist and collaborative one, operating for regional and international intelligence services (Nofal, 2006, p. 77).

During the *Second Gulf War*, after *Iraq*’s invasion of *Kuwait* on August 2, 1990, *Salah Khalaf* was assassinated in *Tunisia* along with *Hael Abdul Hamid (Abu Al-Hol)* and *Abu Muhammad Al-Omari*, all of whom were senior cadres in the *Fatah* Movement.

Most sources indicate that *Sabri Al-Banna*’s organization was involved in the assassination (Ashtiyeh, 2011, p. 100), while some others pointed fingers at *Israeli intelligence*, since *Salah Khalaf* and his companions had opposed the strategy of *Fatah* and the *Palestine Liberation Organization* in supporting and backing the *Iraqi President Saddam Hussein* during his invasion of *Kuwait*.

Branch Five: The Split of the “Arab Popular Socialist Movement”

The *Fatah* Movement also faced a split in 1977, led by *Naji Aloush*, a member of its *Revolutionary Council* and the *Secretary-General of the Union of Palestinian Writers and Journalists*, who had a *Baathist nationalist orientation* opposing that of the leadership.

He founded the *Arab Popular Socialist Movement*, which joined *Sabri Al-Banna*’s group (*Fatah – Revolutionary Council*), but soon separated from it, operating independently and on a limited scale (— *Zawaya Foundation*, 2021).

Branch Six: The Split of the “Fatah – Path of Correction” Movement

In 1980, *Abdel Karim Hamdi*, known as “*Abu Saed*,” one of the security elements in the *Palestinian Intelligence Service*, defected, and his organization took the name “*Fatah – Path of Correction Movement*.” However, it disappeared shortly after its emergence (— *Zawaya Foundation*, 2021).

But there is not enough information available regarding the causes and motives behind this split.

Branch Seven: The Split of the “Fatah – Intifada” Movement

On May 13, 1983, a serious military split occurred within the ranks of the *Fatah Movement*, following the withdrawal of most forces of the *Palestine Liberation Organization* from *Lebanon* (Abu Gharbiya, 2004, p. 495).

It was led by commanders of *Al-Asifa Forces* (the armed wing of the *Fatah Movement*) and members of its *Central Committee* from the leftist group, headed by *Colonel Saeed Maragha (Abu Mousa)*, *Nimer Abu Saleh*, *Sameeh Abu Kweik (Qadri)*, and *Lieutenant Colonel Khaled Al-Omleh*.

The splinter movement appeared under the name “*Fatah – Intifada*” or what was then known as “*Abu Mousa’s Movement*” (Nasser, 2014, pp. 79–80), after issuing, in *January 1983*, a statement in the name of the *General Command of Al-Asifa Forces*, clarifying the reasons for its split and its goals.

These goals were represented in opposing the decisions of the *Central Committee of Fatah*, which, according to them, tended toward a political settlement with the *Zionist enemy state* by accepting the Arab and Western settlement projects proposed for solving the *Palestinian–Israeli conflict*.

The statement also called for restoring consideration to the *Central Committee* after its failure to perform its duties, and for correcting the path of the *Fatah Movement* through the implementation of the principles of *democratic centralism* and *collective leadership*, and by restoring the standing of the military cadres, while

committing to the resolutions of the *General Conference* of the movement and holding firmly to its foundational objectives (Fatah Intifada, 1983).

At the session held by the *Fatah Revolutionary Council in Aden* on January 27, 1983, those (the defectors) expressed their rejection of the policy and approach of the *Fatah Movement*, confirming the goals and demands included in the aforementioned statement, and declaring their refusal to attach *Al-Asifa Forces* to the *Palestinian Liberation Army* (Al-Natour, 2014, pp. 78–79).

As a reaction from the parent *Fatah Movement*, its *Central Committee* decided, in its meeting held in *Kuwait* in the same month of 1983, to dismiss *Nimer Abu Saleh* and *Sameeh Abu Kweik (Qadri)* from their positions as members of the *Central Committee* and from the command of *Al-Asifa Forces* (Sayigh, [n.d.], p. 787).

The membership of *Abu Saleh* in the *Fatah delegation* to the *Palestinian National Council session* scheduled to be held in *Algeria* on February 21, 1983, was also frozen (Al-Natour, 2014, p. 79).

During the *Algeria session*, the defectors tried to give their new organization a structural, political, military, and financial character.

They worked to spread a strong atmosphere of opposition to the decisions of the leadership of the *Fatah Movement/Organization*, considering these decisions as steps toward recognizing the *UN Resolution No. 242* and toward recognizing *Israel* (Al-Natour, 2014, pp. 79–80).

Abu Mousa accused *Yasser Arafat* of seeking to end the revolution, saying:

“Yasser Arafat wants to get out of the circle of conflict and to end the revolution. We are for the continuation of the revolution. When Yasser Arafat compromises the cause, then there is no reason for the revolution, and Yasser Arafat has compromised the cause; therefore, he does not want a revolution.”

(Nasser, 2014, pp. 79–80)

The two Palestinian parties entered into armed confrontations that lasted for seven months in the city of Tripoli and in the refugee camps in Lebanon, leaving more than 450 killed and 2000 wounded. (Abu Ghribya, 2004, p. 495) During this period, the “Fatah–Intifada” movement received wide support from some Arab regimes and leftist Palestinian organizations, as it found political and military support especially from Syria, (Sayigh, [n.d.], p. 787) which was seeking to distance the Fatah movement and its leadership, so that other Palestinian factions loyal to it could control the Palestinian decision and the Palestine Liberation Organization. (Al-Natour, 2014, p. 80)

At the end of July 1983, the Military Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization was convened in Tunisia at the invitation of Yasser Arafat, who mistakenly hoped to find support against the dissidents. He faced severe criticism because of his orientation toward settlement and his deviation from the articles of the Palestinian National Charter. The council concluded, after its long sessions on 3/8/1983, with a decision to stop the fighting and to form a reconciliation committee charged with implementing this and restoring unity to the Fatah movement. (Abu Ghribya, 2004, p. 495) This committee, in its statement issued on August 21, 1983, presented the solutions it had reached to overcome the internal crisis; they were the necessity to cease fire, to form a temporary transitional committee from the members of the movement entrusted with specific tasks, and to strengthen cooperation with the Lebanese Salvation Front to face the dangers that threatened the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon. (Fatah Intifada, 1983)

On 12/10/1983, a field military committee was established that supervised the implementation of the ceasefire, but it failed to achieve that and the forces of the mother Fatah movement were forced to withdraw outside the city of Tripoli with the assistance of Egypt and France. (Abu Ghribya, 2004, p. 495)

The “Fatah–Intifada” group was struck by winds of political and organizational disputes among its leading members, centered mainly around assuming leadership positions, around whether Palestinian forces should stay in Lebanon or leave it, and around managing the organization’s financial resources. These disputes led “Abu Khalid Al-Amleh” and “Abu Musa” to dismiss “Nimer Abu Saleh” and “Qadri,” and led to the intervention of Syrian intelligence, which managed to take control of the situation, as “Abu Saleh” was placed under house arrest in his home in Damascus after he failed to escape despite seeking the leadership of the Fatah movement to help him in that, and the elements loyal to him in Lebanon were contained by the mother Fatah movement. (Noufal, 2006, p. 49)

The “Abu Musa” movement continued to exist on the Palestinian political scene through its participation in the Camps War on the Lebanese scene (1985–1988), and through its clear and frank positions regarding all Palestinian political and military issues. It opposed the declaration of the State of Palestine by the Palestine Liberation Organization in Algeria on 15/11/1988, and also opposed the recognition by the Palestine Liberation Organization of the two UN resolutions No. “242” and No. “338” (Al-Abbasi, 1991, p. 169), which led to the signing of the Oslo Agreements on 13/09/1993.

Shafiq Al-Hout says that the "Fatah–Intifada" movement appeared in the beginning to fight financial corruption inside the Fatah movement and the organization, but it turned into a new organization that increased the burden of the Palestinian revolution and the Palestinian people, (Al-Jazeera, 2003) after it entered into a bloody conflict with the Fatah movement at the end of 1983, which ended with the withdrawal of what remained of the Fatah forces from Lebanon

Branch Eight: The Split of Fatah – The Corrective Movement

In April 1986, and in the aftermath of the cancellation of the Palestinian-Jordanian Agreement (the Amman Agreement), a new dissident movement emerged within Fatah in Jordan, taking the name "**Fatah – The Corrective Movement.**" It was led by the officer '**Attallah'Attallah**, known as "**Abu Al-Za'im**," who had served as Director of Military Intelligence, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Palestinian Revolution Forces, and a member of the Revolutionary Council of Fatah. Upon his separation, he declared that his movement was not a split or a coup, nor was it connected to any external party,

but rather a corrective movement aiming to restore Fatah and the Organization to their proper revolutionary path. (Al-'Abbasi, 1991, pp. 172–173)

The reasons for the split had been accumulating within this group due to the political and military events witnessed by the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon—especially the transformations in the strategy of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the early 1980s and the beginning of the organization's/Fatah's leadership's orientation toward a peaceful solution to the Palestinian issue."Abu Al-Za'im" also disagreed with Fatah's leadership over political positions and internal organizational procedures, such as authoritarianism, individuality in decision-making, and the arbitrary spending and accumulation of funds in personal accounts. (Al-'Abbasi, 1991, pp. 172–173)

"Abu Al-Za'im" described the internal situation of **Fatah** by saying:

"Fatah had become a collection of mini-states within one state: the state of Salah Abu Khalaf, the state of the Unified Security, the state of Abu Jihad, the state of the leftist group led by Abu Saleh and Abu Musa—which was connected to both Libya and Syria—the group of Yasser Arafat, and the group of Khaled Al-Hassan, which tried to establish an independent state but failed to do so." (Al-'Abbasi, 1991, pp. 168–169)

"Abu Al-Za'im" continued his act of rebellion/split despite being dismissed from all his official duties. He exploited the closure of Fatah offices in Amman by the Jordanian government after the cancellation of the Amman Agreement, appointing their former staff members to the offices he opened for his new movement. He also granted promotions to a large number of officers in the Palestine Liberation Army—especially those who attended the meeting he held in Amman—(Al-Tali'a Newspaper, 1982), which led to an increase in the number of officers and politicians in the new movement.

The movement of 'Abu Al-Za'im, "**Fatah – The Corrective Movement**," received financial and political support from several official Arab parties, including the Sultanate of Oman, Egypt, and Jordan. Sultan **Qaboos** provided financial assistance to the movement, although he had never before allowed the PLO to open offices on Omani territory. Egyptian President **Hosni Mubarak** expressed his admiration for the ideas and goals of 'Abu Al-Za'im," allowing him to publish a special bulletin for his organization in Cairo. The Jordanian government also did not delay in offering support to this organization, which sought to divide the ranks of **Fatah**. (Al-Tali'a Newspaper, 1982)

Despite the crises and internal splits that Fatah experienced during the period from **1965 to 1986**, its leadership did not undertake a process of self-review to address points of weakness and dysfunction, which led to the continuation of the situation as it was for many more years in the life of the Palestinian cause and struggle.

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