



Dimensions for Strategic Studies

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The DCSS was founded in the United Kingdom on January 2020 ,1, and is headquartered in London.

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Preamble

The Palestinian situation, with all its political components, is moving towards more partisan and popular conflicts, and from time to time new entities appear that reject what was created by partisan disagreements. These entities; however, did not come from outside the conflict environment, but emerged from the womb of division, if it is not a major cause of its creation!

Mistaken is anyone who believes that the Palestinian division is a case of Fatahi-Hamsawi bipartisanism. This is a general picture that reflects only the external crusts of the Palestinian scene. If we look a little more closely at the Palestinian situation, we will discover dozens of partisan, societal and geographical divisions and differences that stand in contrast to any attempts at national unity.

The great majority of the Palestinian people did not recognize the slogan of the Liberation Organization as the sole representative of the people, except through the media, and the statements of the Palestinian leaders in all their political colors. The institutions of the organization, which are invoked in times of need by virtue of the control of the ruling Fatah movement, are living the state of confrontation without being present on the ground!

At the same time, the opposition factions do not find any glimmer of hope for rapprochement or agreement on a unified political program that would take them out of the political wandering state; because they have become addicted to division, even popular forces from them cannot appear in the scene far from the factional arrangements.

In light of this, the paper discusses the evolution of the conflict between the Liberation Organization and the factional and community components of the Palestinian people, according to the developments that impose themselves on the Palestinian scene.



First:

Background of the factional and popular conflict with the Liberation Organization

On this point, the paper discusses two important issues. The first is about the reasons that push the Palestinian factions and forces towards opposition to the Liberation Organization, and the attempt to establish political entities that compete with it or replace it. The second explains the reasons that prevent these forces from joining the Liberation Organization.

Since the early hours of the birth of the Palestine Liberation Organization on 2 June 1964, its differences with the Palestinian factions have emerged, as the representatives of the factions had a negative attitude towards the results of the national conference that determined the organization's vision of the conflict and its political position, and considered it supernatural that does not reflect the Palestinian public, especially since the head of the liberation organization, Ahmed Shuqairi, was under Arab pressure.

If the Egypt of Nasser had played the primary role in the formation of the Liberation Organization, both Syria and Saudi Arabia had objected to its establishment. This prompted the regime of President Gamal Abdel Nasser to seek Arab recognition of the legitimacy of the organization, which was achieved during the second Arab summit held in Alexandria on 10 September 1964.

At that time, the Palestinian factions considered what happened to be a marginalization of their role, or an export of the Liberation Organization as a representative of the Palestinian people at their expense, which prompted the military wing of Fatah to carry out its first military operations against the Israeli occupation in January 1965⁽¹⁾

With the defeat of Arab armies in the 1967 war, and the fall of all Palestinian lands and some Arab lands under Israeli occupation, the Liberation Organization lost its Arab incubator, and it was no longer able to play its political role in front of the factions in the Palestinian arena, and many other factions formed at that historic moment, and this is what prompted its president, Ahmed Shuqairi, to resign, and then turn the rudder of the organization to the Palestinian factions, most notably the Fatah movement.

This important shift in the history of the PLO was not limited to replacing Shaqiri with Yasser Arafat; because the nationalist ideas that characterized its charter during the Shuqairi era became Palestinian nationalist ideas. However, the differences in the nationalist liberation organization founded by Shuqairi remained and took on other dimensions after Fatah took control of it after the end of the Shuqairi era.

(1) Maher Sharif, PLO – The resurgence of the Palestinian national movement, The Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestinian Question: 2u.pw/4Zpx8



1- Reasons for disagreement between the Liberation Organization and Palestinian factions

It is possible to talk about a number of reasons that explain the differences that emerged early between the Liberation Organization and the Palestinian factions in their various political colors.

A- The absence of «legitimacy of national representation»

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was not the first political entity to represent the Palestinian people. It replaced the Higher Arab Authority for Palestine, formed in 1946 under the chairmanship of Hajj Amin Al-Husseini, by a decision of the League of Arab States. That commission had a head office in Cairo and many branch offices in several Arab countries, as well as an office at the United Nations.

More importantly, the broad regional and international out reach of the commission was also paralleled by a wide spread inside the Palestinian territory; because it was recognized by all Palestinian parties and factions as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, in contrast to the state of domestic vulnerability that faced the Palestine Liberation Organization in its infancy⁽²⁾.

This was demonstrated by the Palestinian factions and unions that opposed the establishment of the Liberation Organization from its earliest beginnings, as they tried to bloc into rejection entities calling for free Palestinian elections away from the Organization. This was stated in a joint communique in 1964 by the Arab Nationalist Movement, the Palestine Liberation Front, the Palestine Students Union and the Palestinian Arab Youth in Lebanon⁽³⁾.

For its part, Fatah worked on forming pressure fronts on Shuqairi because of his methods of managing the Liberation organization. Perhaps its formation of a Palestinian organizational bloc from outside the Liberation Organization, and work to address many Arab regimes, was one of the reasons that led Shuqairi to resign, especially since the results of the 1967 war isolated the Liberation Organization from its regional incubator.

In this context, the Popular Front supported a factional initiative that called for the isolation of Shuqairi, and described the organization and its entity as an empty structure dominated by individual dictatorship and disregard for the masses and political charlatanism⁽⁴⁾.

(2) "Supreme Arab Authority for Palestine", Palestinian Encyclopedia: shorturl.at/KOSTZ

(3) Helena Cobain, *The Organization under the Microscope*, Translation of Solomon Farzley, Highlight Publications, London, 1984, p. 60

(4) *Palestinian Arab Documents*, Foundation for Palestinian Studies, vol III, 1967, p. 1018.



The crisis of democratic legitimacy has stuck with the PLO throughout its history. Despite the fact that many factions joined the Organization, a dispute over legitimacy persisted between the Popular Front and Fatah, the largest faction within the organization. Therefore, the Popular Front did not participate in the work of the first conference of the Palestinian resistance movement called for by the Fatah movement in Cairo in 1968, under the pretext of unequal representation of factions or in the representation of the real weights of the factions within the Liberation Organization, especially since the Popular Front was leading the resistance guerrilla action against the occupation during that period. This placed the internal mechanism of the Liberation Organization before a rejectionist led by the Popular Front because of the quasi-absolute control of Fatah⁽⁵⁾.

In other words, if Fatah's objection to the presence of Shuqairi at the head of the pre-1967- liberation Organization, because of his individual domination of the Organization and its decisions, Fatah has entered into similar disagreements with the Popular Front and other leftist factions for the same reason.

The problem of the hegemony of one faction over the decision of the Liberation Organization continued during the 1970s, which called for the formation of what was known as the "Palestinian Rejection Front", which included both the "Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine", the " Popular Front" - the General Command, the "Palestinian Popular Struggle Front", and the "Arab Liberation Front". These factions formed their membership and announced the formation of a parallel entity headed by Commander Ahmed Al-Yamani (Abu Maher).

This entity, led by the Yemeni, was relatively successful after obtaining regional support, especially from Iraq and Libya, but it did not last long because of the regional upheavals resulting from the Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel in 1979, and the subsequent regional rapprochement between many Arab countries, and the departure of the Liberation Organization from Lebanon, which constituted a regional pressure on the rejection front and pushed it to dissolve itself in 1982⁽⁶⁾.

The problem of legitimacy experienced by the PLO was not limited to the conflict between Fatah and the other factions, because there were conflicts within the Fatah movement that surfaced during the 1980s, perhaps the most prominent of which were the differences that emerged at the time with the rebellion of Abu Al-Zaeem (Atallah Muhammad Atallah) in 1986.

(5) Ghazi Khorshid, *Directory of Palestinian Resistance Movements*, Palestine Liberation Organization, Research Centre, 1971, p. 112.

(6) Alyan Alyan, " The Palestine Liberation Organization from the entity of liberation to the strategy of settlement and recognition of Israel (1989-1964)", Amman: Dar now, 2021, p. 238.



Abu Al-Zaeem is considered one of the leaders of the Liberation Army of the Liberation Organization in the Kingdom of Jordan. The insurgency came in the context of the correctionist movement, especially as the organization at that time lacked a strong presence within Palestinian communities due to the crisis of legitimacy, renewed internal differences, as well as its political positions on the conflict with the Israeli occupation and its regional relations⁽⁷⁾.

In the second half of the 1980s, factional controversy within the Liberation Organization focused on the political agenda of the organization, at the expense of the problematic issue of factional representation and democratic legitimacy. The postponement of the dispute over the reform of the councils of the Liberation Organization and the renewal of its democratic legitimacy may be due to the outbreak of the first Palestinian intifada in 1987 and the subsequent Madrid conferences, leading to the Oslo Agreement in 1993.

The Oslo Accord weakened the political components of all the Palestinian people and transformed the Liberation Organization into a sort of Palestinian Authority subdivision that would be called upon when necessary. Therefore, the factions have repeatedly tried to reform the organization's councils, and they reached an appropriate formula for reforming their programs, structures and councils in Cairo in 2005⁽⁸⁾. This was followed by a series of factional gatherings, most notably the meeting of the Secretary-Generals of the Palestinian factions in Beirut in 2020 and the understandings of Algeria reached in October 2022⁽⁹⁾.

There is no doubt that the failure to apply these understandings is due to reasons related to factional representation, the fear of Fatah and many small parties from entering new Palestinian factions such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, as well as the wide gap in political positions between Fatah and many other factions, especially the resistance factions.

(7) Mamdouh Noufal, *The Story of the War on the Camps in Lebanon*, a national of the Palestinian Foundation for the Study of Democracy, 2006, p. 331

(8) Asaad Abdel Rahman, *Palestine Liberation Organization and the Legitimacy of National Representation*, The Palestinian Studies Foundation, 4. <https://2u.pw/qSNV2>.

(9) Alaa AlCurrency and Mohammed Ghazi Hamad, *Fact Sheet: Outcomes of the Meeting of the Secretaries-General of the Palestinian Factions*, Palestinian Center for Policy Research and Strategic Studies (Masarat), 2020/11: <https://2u.pw/YnYRO>



B- Controversy over the political agenda

Resistant military action is the most prominent element that would confer real national legitimacy on any Palestinian institution or entity. This was clearly demonstrated by the Higher Arab Authority for Palestine in 1946.

From its earliest days, the Authority formed military groups with the assistance of a number of Arab States and began to carry out its military exercises, which earned it much internal Palestinian popular support⁽¹⁰⁾.

This is in contrast to the circumstances faced by the PLO. The early stages of the emergence of the Organization witnessed the occurrence of what is known as the Palestinian setback in 1967, when all the Palestinian territories were under Israeli occupation, which made them subject to criticism by the Palestinian factions, in other words, the Palestinian factions at that time accepted no position from the Liberation Organization except to adopt a program of resistance against the Israeli occupation. For this reason, Fatah linked its accession to the Liberation Organization in 1967 to the condition that it adopt the armed revolution as its political slogan, which Fatah affirmed when it amended the Charter of the Liberation Organization in 1968, emphasizing the revolutionary approach⁽¹¹⁾.

Simultaneously with Fatah's rejection of the political position of the Liberation Organization, the factions of the left where the hardest in their objection; as the Popular Front and other left factions considered the position of the Organization to be far from the Palestinian people and their resistance that emerged clearly in the Palestinian territories after the defeat of 1967.

Meanwhile, little has changed in the Liberation Organization's position towards the Israeli occupation soon after Fatah took control of its political decision, which necessitated the formation of a Palestinian national rejectionist front, objecting to peaceful solutions, under the leadership of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in 1974. The formation of that front was in response to what was then known as the "Ten-Point Program" adopted by the Liberation Organization, which provided legitimate cover for the occupation's presence in the Palestinian territories⁽¹²⁾.

(10) Burhan Dajani, *The Palestinian Question Yearbook*, The Palestinian Studies Foundation, 1969.

(11) Ibrahim Abrasch, *The National Dimension of the Palestinian Question: Palestine between Arab Nationalism and Palestinian Nationalism*, Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1987, p. 216.

(12) PLO Interim Political Program Document, scheduled by the Palestinian National Council at its twelfth session, Cairo, 1974: <https://2u.pw/w5qyg>



In the same context, the Salvation Front was established in the Syrian capital Damascus in 1985, in response to the return of the Liberation Organization's relations with the Arab parties that had signed the Camp David agreement with Israel.

The organization was accused of submissiveness. The Popular Front accused the PLO of deviating from the Palestinian decision and called for a rectification process, which was met with positive interaction by the Organization's leadership at the time; because the Popular Front had a strong influence within the organization.

The PFDJ objected to the positions of all factions of the organization except Fatah; which forced it to negotiate with the Popular Front in Tunisia, Moscow and Prague, respectively, in 1986⁽¹³⁾.

Despite the pressure of the Popular Front, Fatah succeeded in circumventing it by gathering factions opposed to the Organization's political program, and the five-year agreement was signed in Algiers in 1987 without the participation of the Front. It was only after the Tunis agreement of 1991 and the dissolution of the Salvation Front that factional consensus was restored within the Liberation Organization.

C- The emergence of the Palestinian rejectionist forces

In reaction to the Oslo track, the PFLP-GC headquarters in Damascus witnessed a meeting of 10 factions under the title of the Coalition of Palestinian Resistance Forces. Those factions are the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front -General Command, the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front, the Thunderbolt "Saiqa" Organization, the Palestinian Communist Revolutionary Party, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Fatah Intifada, and the Palestinian Liberation Front-Abu Nidal.

The state of the ideological diversity of the factions between the left and the national and Islamic factions is noticeable. However, the influence of these factions on the political track of the Liberation Organization has not reached the required level, which prompted many of them to gradually exit the bloc and move towards resistance, which returned to the Palestinian arena after the failure of the peace agreements and the start of the second Palestinian intifada in 2000. The departure of Hamas from Syria in 2011 limited this alliance between the Popular Front-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada, and the role of the alliance became limited to issuing statements on various Palestinian occasions⁽¹⁴⁾.

The Palestinian factions did not stop opposing that political path of the Liberation Organization, many of them refused to continue negotiations with Israel, and Gaza became, after the Palestinian division in 2007,

(13) Maher Sharif, *The Search for an Entity: A Study in Palestinian Political Thought*, Center for Social Research and Studies in the Arab World, 1995, p. 352.

(14) Wael Al-Mabhouh, *Opposition to the Political Thought of the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas 2006-1994 - Analytical Study*, Zaytouna Center for Studies, Beirut, 2012, p. 79.



an important incitement against the positions of the Liberation Organization, which engaged in the peace process and abandoned its historical role to that nascent entity, the Palestinian Authority.

Within this framework, Hamas attempted to form an opposition Palestinian bloc in partnership with the forces of the left, which rejects the political behavior of the Liberation Organization, and offers many initiatives and solutions to reform it, not to overthrow it.

The first such attempt was in 2010, when the factional meeting focused on calling on the Palestinian Authority to withdraw from the Oslo Agreement.

However, that attempt did not achieve its objectives; it came after the division and as a reaction to the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip in 2009⁽¹⁵⁾.

2) Reasons that obstructed the joining of new factions to the Liberation Organization

Four main reasons that have prevented new Palestinian factions from joining the Liberation organization can be mentioned: The first is a political one related to the wide gap between the positions of the resistance factions regarding the relationship with Israel and the Fatah movement, which dominates the decisions of the organization, while the second is related to the relations of the Liberation Organization with the international community, as there are many international forces that classify the Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements as terrorist groups⁽¹⁶⁾.

The third reason concerns interests as the organization's factions fear the joining of new factions such as Hamas, which is very popular inside the Palestinian territories, which gives it the ability to compete with Fatah. The small factions are also afraid of the Hamas presence, which will threaten the privileges of the factions within the organization, especially since these small factions are similar to the "salon elites" that do not have any support in the Palestinian street, and some of them have been known just through the appearance of their historical leaders in the media⁽¹⁷⁾.

That is why the repeated attack on Hamas by the Executive Committee member of the Liberation Organization and the Secretary-General of the Popular Struggle Front, Ahmad Majdalani, is always explained in that context. The vast majority of the Palestinian people are unaware of any members or leaders representing this faction, and everyone knows Majdalani only.

(15) Opposition Fronts v. Past-Present Liberation Organization, Palestinian Dialogue Group, 2022, <https://2u.pw/aj9S3>

(16) "Approved in 2018 and not implemented. The Palestinian Central Council suspends recognition of Israel and security coordination », Al-Jazeera Net, 2022/02/09: <https://2u.pw/2VVjW>.

(17) Bilal Al-Shuwaiki, "Hamas and Jihad Joining the Liberation Organization, Is It Possible, and How?", Network, 2022/09/13: <https://2u.pw/OzUCY>.



Mutasim Hamadah, a member of the FDLR political bureau, prefers that his party remain within FLN for fear of incurring losses related to the privileges obtained, believing that Fatah hegemony and exclusivity over FLN is no more dangerous than joining any entity led by the very popular Hamas⁽¹⁸⁾.

The fourth and most important reason is that the reform of the Liberation Organization has become one of the most important issues of the Palestinian division, as all reconciliation dialogues have included this, but Fatah faces these pressures through putting the Oslo Accords, and many resolutions of international legitimacy, as obstacles before Hamas or any other Palestinian factions to join.

Perhaps the important contradiction in the insistence of Fatah and some small factions in the Liberation Organization on Hamas recognition of the Oslo Accords and the ensuing resolutions of international legitimacy, as a condition for its joining the organization, lies in the fact that some factions that are members of this Organization do not recognize the political agreements that they signed with Israel, but Fatah considers this recognition a condition for Hamas's joining!

In a related context, the Charter of the Liberation Organization does not oblige the factions of the Organization to sign or agree to political agreements, because the Organization consists of bodies that include many councils, departments, federations, factions, etc⁽¹⁹⁾.

That is why, when Hamas won the 2006 Legislative Council elections, it had 76 members in the National Assembly, which represents the largest and most important institution of the Liberation Organization. The Legislative Council⁽²⁰⁾, which is established by the Palestinian Authority, is itself subordinate to the National Assembly. According to the Law of the Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, members of the Legislative Council are members of the National Council. However, conditions of Palestinian division and subsequent developments over more than a decade and a half have prevented new factional members from joining the Liberation organization.

It should be noted that 14 factions participated in the meetings of Palestinian factions, which culminated in the Algiers Declaration of 13 October 2022, while other small factions were ignored or excluded. That number is considered to be greater than the 10 factions of the Liberation Organization, although the membership of the Popular Front has been frozen due to disagreements with Fatah⁽²¹⁾.

(18) Special interview with the leader of the Democratic Front, Mu'tasim Hamada, 2022/01.

(19) PLO documents, PLO website: www.plo.ps.

(20) BPalestinian Official: Reducing the Members of the National Council to 350, Anatolia Agency, 2022/01/18: <https://2u.pw/oOfVU>

(21) Hani Al-Masri, The withdrawal of the Popular Front from the "executive" does not solve the problem, Palestinian Center for Policy Research and Strategic Studies "Masarat", April 2010. <https://2u.pw/6z0hD>



Second: Attempts to create an alternative or competing entity for the Liberation Organization

In practice, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is no longer the influential political entity or the one that makes the Palestinian decision. On 8 February 2022, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman Mahmoud Abbas of the PLO amended the Basic Law and promulgated a law to make the PLO, its institutions and departments part of the State of Palestine, which many considered to be a serious violation of the political and legal standing of the PLO, as it is the internationally recognized Palestinian institution, and the Palestinian Authority and all Palestinian political institutions are subordinate to it, not vice versa⁽²²⁾.

That decision was met by an angry Palestinian reaction, which prompted Abbas to retreat, but the historical moment accompanying this decision would reveal the reasons for the Palestinian President to take such a step.

On 11 February 2022, a few days after that amendment decision, there was a meeting for the Central Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which is an intermediary institution between the PLO Executive Committee and the National Council, and serves as the PLO Parliament and the Palestinian people in general.

The meeting resulted in many decisions and arrangements; and it was called by the media the Fatah quotas for the post-Abbas phase. Rouhi Fattouh was elected President of the National Council to serve as interim President of the Palestinian Authority in the absence of Abbas, and Hussein Sheikh was elected a member of the Executive Committee of the Liberation Organization to be a strong candidate for Abbas' succession, in addition to several similar decisions regarding the installation of a number of conquering personalities for important vacant seats⁽²³⁾.

There is no doubt that these arrangements represent an unprecedented violation of the Basic Law and the regulations of the Liberation Organization as well as the will of its councils and members from different factions and institutions.

(22) What does it mean to turn President Abbas into a constituency of the State of Palestine? Palestinian Press Agency – Safa, 2022. <https://2u.pw/NpbYP>

(23) Naela Khalil, Meeting of the Palestinian Central Council. Post-Abbas Quota Arrangement”, Al-'Arabi al-Jadid, 2022/02/11: <https://2u.pw/2y472><https://2u.pw/oOfVU>



This explains the issuance of these legal amendments by the President of the Palestinian Authority and then retreating from them after the sessions of the Central Council, which arranged the status of the Organization according to the narrow vision of the Authority and the Fatah leadership.

Meanwhile, the opposition factions moved forward and issued a joint statement on 10 February 2022 (Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Islamic Jihad), in response to the meeting of the Central Council of the Liberation Organization. The statement called for the formation of a transitional national council with the aim of eliminating the exclusivity of Fatah and its general movement, led by Abbas, with the Palestinian decision.

Abbas's actions at the level of the Liberation Organization were preceded by other actions at the level of Palestinian reconciliation. The decision to cancel the legislative and executive elections preceded the actions related to the Organization for a few months.

In this context, it is possible to talk about three Palestinian blocs that recently appeared in the Palestinian scene, and the Fatah leadership and the Liberation Organization now consider them a competitor or alternative political entities to the Organization.

1) Palestinian People's Congress Abroad

The Palestinian People's Congress abroad is one of the important Palestinian entities that emerged recently, representing half of the Palestinian people outside Palestinian territory, and away from the internal Palestinian landscape. This explains the People's Congress's reliance on Palestinian personalities and elites abroad, with limited factional support limited to some factions opposed to the Liberation Organization, such as Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

At its first meeting in Istanbul on 25 February 2017, the Popular Conference of Overseas Palestinians was not presented as an alternative, and it does not present itself as a rival or opponent to the liberation Organization, but rather seeks to benefit from Palestinian cadres abroad.

Therefore, the factional contacts with the conference were personal and without any announced arrangements, and the majority of the factions opposed to the Oslo Accord and anti-Abbas attended the first and second conferences in February 2022⁽²⁵⁾.

(24) Mohammed Majed, "Palestinian factions call for the formation of a 'new National Transitional Council'", Anatolia Agency, 2022/02/10. <https://2u.pw/PiD6k>

(25) «Palestinians abroad' hold their second conference 25 February next», Palestinian Return Center, 2:2021/12/20u.pw/aJpTG



However, the weakness of the political dimension in the activities of the Palestinian People's Congress abroad, the focus on utilizing Palestinian power and expertise, and enhancing the effectiveness of Palestinian communities abroad through coordination with various Palestinian institutions reduces the importance of the criticisms made by the Liberation Organization, especially since the absence of the latter at the foreign level was a motive and motivator for the birth of the People's Congress⁽²⁶⁾.

Perhaps what distinguishes the Popular Conference of the Palestinians abroad is that it is transient to the Palestinian factions, and this is an important shift in the history of Palestinian political work, because the factions have traditionally been at the forefront of Palestinian political work. Perhaps the shift here is that the Palestinian elites and personalities have become present, or have the ability to influence Palestinian political action, especially since the idea of the Popular Conference of Palestinians abroad is not just an idea in passing, but rather a cumulative and sophisticated work in external arenas that embrace Palestinian communities.

2) Palestinian National Front

On the basis of the joint tripartite statement of Hamas, the Popular Front and the Islamic Jihad, on 10 February 2022, arrangements began between those three factions, in an attempt to establish a political entity that would reflect as much of the Palestinian people as possible, one that adopts a political agenda that rejects any agreements with Israel, and calls for an end to the division in Palestinian society, through the reform of the PLO institutions and the restoration of the democratic track that was interrupted with Abbas's cancellation of the May 2021 elections.

Based on that tripartite vision of the three leaderships of the three factions and their initial consensus on the idea of the new political body under the name of the Palestinian National Front, the contact was made. The decisive and important moment came in the meetings of Beirut on 24 June 2022, which brought together the aforementioned parties in addition to the Popular Front-General Command, where both Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine presented comprehensive perceptions about the new front, but the final version was not reached, and that political body was not announced.

(26) "Establishment of the Popular Conference of Palestinians Abroad", Popular Conference of Palestinians Abroad, 2022/09/03: <https://2u.pw/fr1Aw>



Perhaps what postponed the announcement of the Palestinian National Front was that Hamas wanted it to be an inclusive Palestinian framework for all Palestinian factions and national forces, including institutions such as the Popular Conference of Palestinians Abroad and Palestinian institutions, in addition to independent members at the internal and external levels. This structure is very similar to that of the PLO, and this was agreed upon before going to Beirut. The PFDJ paper, however, came up with a different proposal that confined the new front to the issue of resistance only; which made it depart from the political vision presented by Hamas⁽²⁷⁾.

Although PFDJ is the Palestinian faction most opposed to the Liberation Organization, what it presented in Beirut has been interpreted as a draw back that does not reflect its stated position. However, in general, the four factions did not adopt any position rejecting the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), nor did they put forward an alternative entity, as stated in the statements of Hamas political office member Khalil Al-Hayya on 28 July 2022, where he explained that the PLO is the Palestinian inclusive house, demanding that it be reformulated according to a national program representing Palestinians at home and abroad⁽²⁸⁾.

Hamas' stated position is not different from that of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) vis-à-vis the PLO, as the latter's leadership expressed on 21 June, a few days before the Beirut meetings, its dis-allowance of an alternative entity to the PFLP and demanded that it be reformed and that it return to the democratic track to end the division⁽²⁹⁾.

However, in general, attempts to form a "Palestinian National Front" can be understood within the framework of the factional pressure on Fatah to push it to retreat from the Liberation Organization self-centeredness, return to the path of reconciliation, or an attempt to form an alternative or competing political entity for the Organization, even if the factions did not declare this explicitly, knowing that these attempts are continuous and would not stop at the Beirut meetings.

(27) Possibility of Forming a Palestinian National Front, Palestinian Dialogue Group: <https://2u.pw/zP4rk>

Possibility of Forming a Palestinian National Front, Palestinian Dialogue Group: <https://2u.pw/zP4rk>

(28) Yousef Abu Watfa, «Khalil Al-Hayya: "Hamas" does not discuss the formation of a national body outside the Liberation Organization,» Al-'Arabi al-Jadid, 2022/07/28: <https://2u.pw/48ahC>

(29) "Popular Front: There is no alternative to the Liberation Organization and we will not allow the creation of any alternatives", Dunia al-Watan, 2022/06/21: <https://2u.pw/7qcel>



3) Palestinian People's Congress – 14 million

In an unprecedented move, human rights institutions, journalists, and many independent figures succeeded in forming a new Palestinian political body that rejects the sole control of the institutions of the Liberation Organization and calls for the achievement of Palestinian national unity.

The Palestinian People's Congress - 14 million was not welcomed or actively participated in by Palestinian factions. Although it organized 16 simultaneous sessions in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Palestinian interior and various areas of the Palestinian diaspora, factional participation was weak. In all likelihood, the factions would not have had to comment on the convening of this conference or adopt a political position towards it during its first session on 5 November 2022, had the Palestinian Authority not reacted violently and in a repressive way towards those meeting in Ramallah.

The National Council of the Liberation Organization had condemned the emergence of such entities, considering them a step towards strengthening and entrenching the Palestinian divide, and not in the national interest, national consensus and unified confrontation with the Israeli plan.

Various Palestinian factions were keen to condemn the violent behavior of the Palestinian Authority bodies towards the meeting in Ramallah. At the same time they did not take a position of rejection or support for this nascent political body.

According to factional figures and insiders; however, the organizers of the first meeting of this conference are non-partisan figures, and most of them belong to human rights unions such as Salah Abdel-Atti, Omar Assaf, Rashid Shaheen, Imad Barghouti, and others close to the a Fatah leader Muhammad Dahlan. This explains the factions' lack of attention; especially since those in charge of the conference did not coordinate with Palestinian factions or institutions such as the Popular Conference of Palestinians abroad.

Added to this is the attendance of the Islamic Jihad (Tarek Ezzedine in Ramallah and Khader Habib in Gaza), which has led some to point to the presence of an undeclared Iranian support. Overall, however, the 1,000 attendees confirmed that they were on their way to elect 81 members as the new Palestinian National Council⁽³⁰⁾.

(30) 'The Palestinian People's Congress 14 Million' affirms the importance of electing a new National Council', Al-' Arabi al-Jadid, 2 :2022/11/5u.pw/cNNT3

Third : The reaction of the Liberation Organization and the Fatah movement

The Fatah movement, which controls the Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, uses different methods to counter any factional or popular attempts to form any entity that may constitute a pressure or threat to the Organization. These methods range from following the political method in the relationship with the factions, employing political conditions, and the relationship with the region, to the use of security tools, which will be explained in the following points:

1) Employment of the political and legal status of the Liberation Organization

When following the political discourse of all Palestinian factions, especially those in the ranks of the opposition, it is noted that there is a consensus that the Liberation Organization is the only official representative, and that all the issues aimed at forming other entities start from rejecting the current political situation, and provide proposals or solutions to reform the institutions of the organization, and achieve Palestinian reconciliation. The rhetoric of the opposition factions is also anxious to dispel any accusations in this regard.

Despite the state of weakness and flaccidity that the Liberation Organization appears to be in, this does not detract from its importance for the region. The Arab regimes had contributed effectively to its emergence in the mid1960-s, and thus will not easily allow any Palestinian party to change that reality, especially since the recognition of Israel by the Organization through participation in the Madrid Conference, and the signing of the Oslo Accords were not isolated from the Arab regimes, which played a major role in pushing the leadership of the Organization in this direction⁽³¹⁾.

So, as a rapprochement began to loom between Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (the joint resistance chamber and union and university electoral alliances), the region moved to prevent any factional alliance outside the framework of the liberation Organization.

(31) Asaad Abdel Rahman, "The Palestine Liberation Organization and the Legitimacy of National Representation," The Palestinian Studies Foundation, 2 :2014/11/21u.pw/JLMmLr



In this context, informed sources pointed out that the essence of the meeting that brought together the leadership of the Popular Front with the Egyptian Intelligence in Cairo on 21 September 2021 focused on the Egyptian side's rejection of any Palestinian factional alliance outside the Liberation Organization, which was confirmed by several Palestinian sources after the failure of the Beirut meetings on 24 June 2022 that aimed at forming a Palestinian national front⁽³²⁾.

Therefore, the opposition factions' eagerness to deny the accusations leveled at them by the leadership of the Liberation Organization about their efforts to form an alternative entity to the organization is directed not only at the Palestinian interior, but also at the region that hampers the emergence of any new Palestinian political entity.

2) Exploitation of regional relations

One of the main obstacles that faced the organizers was to persuade the host country to hold the PCC meeting abroad. The attempts to convince the Lebanese government to host the first appearance of the Palestinian People's Congress abroad in 2017 did not succeed. Holding the conference in Turkey was the alternative option.

Although the Turkish government agreed to hold the sessions to announce the emergence of the People's Congress, the holding of the second version of the conference in 2022 was close to failure. According to sources close to the People's Congress, the Turkish government was refusing to host the events of the conference at the request of the Palestinian Authority; especially since Ankara had begun to make some adjustments to its foreign policy towards the Middle East; and this transpired in the announcement of full normalization with Israel.

In this context, Ankara's hosting of the leadership of the Palestinian Authority came after Turkey restored a full diplomatic exchange with Israel. Here, Turkey wanted to minimize the negative repercussions of normalization on the Palestinian issue, while at the same time wishing to be at the same distance from Palestinian factions⁽³³⁾.

For its part, the leadership of the Palestinian Authority is taking advantage of the development of its relations with Turkey to prevent any factional or popular movement. According to sources close to the People's Congress, Hamas had played an important role in persuading Turkey to host the Congress.

(32) "Details of the PFDJ Delegation Meeting with the Head of Egyptian Intelligence in Cairo", Palestine Now, 2:2021/09/23u.pw/wsJYwl

(33) After restoring relations with Israel. Turkey greets Abbas with hospitality and rejects any change in the status of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa", Al-Jazeera Net, 2:2022/08/24u.pw/7kmCq7



3) Use of the national reconciliation dossier

The Fatah movement is aware that the primary goal of the pressure being exerted against its exclusive control over the Palestinian political decision is participation and reforming the institutions of the Liberation Organization.

Moreover, all the spectra of the Palestinian people, including different factions and community elites, are keen on reaching a Palestinian reconciliation. That is why Palestinian political elites always use the term 'managing the Palestinian divide'.

The use of that term is tantamount to accusing both sides of division of holding them responsible for the status quo. The faction leadership, and in particular the Hamas leadership, does not miss any invitation from any party under the title of national reconciliation, with the aim of achieving a political goal of the movement based on openness to the region, while at the same time it does not want to give any party the chance of accusing it with disrupting Palestinian reconciliation.

It is therefore noteworthy that during the years 2021 and 2022, several factional tours and understandings took place between Fatah and Hamas, in Turkey, and then various factional meetings in Cairo, leading up to the Algiers Declaration adopted by the Arab Summit on 2 November 2022. Such encounters, in these close times, may block any rapprochement or alliances between Palestinian factions outside the framework of the Liberation Organization. Such a policy is often pursued by Fatah in the face of factional pressures⁽³⁴⁾.

This was openly exploited by the leadership of the National Council of the Liberation Organization when it accused the Palestinian People's Congress of 14 million Palestinians of being a break with Palestinian reconciliation and the Algiers Declaration.

4) Penetrating the ranks of the opposition

The leadership of the Palestinian Authority was keen to congratulate and communicate directly with the Deputy Secretary-General of the Popular Front, Jamil Muzher, after the Front held its eighth conference in June 2022. Although Muzher went to Lebanon to put the final touches on the Palestinian National Front, disagreement with Hamas; however, prevented this from happening. However, the few months following the failure of the Lebanon agreement revealed significant shifts at the level of the Palestinian opposition factions.

(34) Osama Abu Arshid, "Why Don't We Promise 'Palestinian Reconciliation' in Algeria?", Al- 'Arabi al-Jadid, 2022:2/10/14u.pw/hVMmGs



Perhaps the most important indicators that illustrate this is the lack of effective participation of the faction leaders in the last meeting that resulted in the Algiers Declaration. Palestinian factions, with the exception of Fatah and Hamas, are usually keen on such meetings, but the picture coming from Algeria at the time showed that there is a great interest on the part of Hamas, through the participation of its political office head, Ismail Haniyeh in the meetings, unlike other factions, including the Popular Front, which was represented by a less than a deputy secretary-general.

This suggests a shift in the position of the Popular Front, or a convergence with Fatah, was evident on 27 October 2022, with a joint statement by Fatah, the Popular Front, the Democratic Front and Islamic Jihad, entitled United National Command in the Jenin Governorate in the northern West Bank. The statement indicated several steps to be followed at the grassroots level during the escalation in the governorates of Nablus and Jenin.

It is noted that the statement brought Fatah together with the Popular Front and Islamic Jihad, and excluded Hamas from the resistance scene in the West Bank, an important step by Fatah at the expense of opposition factions to disperse their positions.

In this context, the representative of Fatah Azzam al-Ahmad played an important role during his visit to Beirut in conjunction with the meetings of the factions in June 2022, where he met with Talal Naji, Secretary-General of the Popular Front- General Command, one of the factions that was consulting at the time on the Palestinian National Front. Fatah has pre-empted these steps by granting the left factions six of the 15 seats, which is the total number of seats on the Executive Committee of the Liberation Organization, a step that can be explained in the context of Fatah's attempts to thwart any steps or attempts by the factions against the Liberation Organization.

5) Applying security pressure

The sessions of the Palestinian People's Congress - 14 million on 5 November 2022 were prevented by the Palestinian Authority's security services. Although official authorization was obtained by the independent conference organizers from the Ramallah municipality, the meetings were not held, nor were the press conferences already planned.



At the same time, the coordinator of the conference in Ramallah, Omar Assaf, was arrested by the security services; the latter did not heed popular, factional, human rights and journalistic criticism, and stormed the press conference scheduled for the following day to announce the 81 members elected as representatives of the Popular Congress⁽³⁵⁾.

The Palestinian Authority's security conduct is supported by the condemnations and accusations of members of the National Council of the Liberation Organization, who consider such actions to be a promotion of division and circumvention of the legitimacy of an organization, which is considered the sole representative of the Palestinian people. Such a position is customary for the leadership of the Authority and the Liberation Organization to counter any factional or societal attempts⁽³⁶⁾.

(35) Abdel Hamid Siyam, "Palestinian Security Services Arrest Omar Assaf, Coordinator of the People's Congress Hours Before It Launches," Al-Quds Al-Arabi, 2 :2022/11/5u.pw/ITlcHB

(36) "The National Council condemns the call of the Palestinian People's Congress to hold meetings at home and abroad", News source, 2 :2022/11/5u.pw/RulaY7

Fourth : Hypothetical Scenarios

Based on all the above data, the next phase can be visualized through the following scenarios:

1) Birth of a Palestinian political entity as a rival or substitute for the Liberation Organization

This scenario assumes the success of those factional and popular endeavors opposed to the Palestine Liberation Organization, in agreeing on a work program for a Palestinian political institution that adopts a national project that reflects the vast majority of the Palestinian people at home and abroad, provided that this project has the ability to attract as many factions, unions, federations and other Palestinian political and social components as possible.

A. Conditions for the realization of this scenario

- Participation of as many influential Palestinian factions as possible, such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front and other factions, and civil society forces at home and abroad.
- The political agenda should not be limited to the vision or ideology of the Palestinian resistance factions, or the resistance against the occupation should not be the main heading, to give Palestinian gatherings in various areas the opportunity to enter within this broad entity that expresses them.
- This entity needs a suitable internal Palestinian environment, which is willing, and has an acceptance to interact with such national entities as it expresses.
- It also requires regional Arab support, or at least acceptance by the Arab and regional States that are most able to influence the Palestinian cause, and not to disrupt those endeavors.

B. Probability of the Scenario

Based on the available data, the relative weight of this scenario is very weak for several reasons:

- Despite the fact that the factions (Hamas, the Popular Front and the General Command; in addition to the Islamic Jihad) agreement in principle to form a Palestinian national front, they did not take any step in this direction after the failure of the Beirut meetings on 24 June 2022; and each of the parties holds the other responsible for the failure.
- Palestinian historical experience says that any movements or activities of this kind cannot go beyond factionalism, because all historical attempts were factional. It is; however, clear that the Palestinian divide is not only between Fatah and Hamas, but also between opposition factions.
- It is clear that the internal Palestinian environment is not ready to interact with such entities. The Palestinian People's Congress did not receive factional or popular support. Had it not been for the forceful intervention of the organs of the Palestinian Authority, the activity would have passed without any media repercussions. All the condemnations of the factions were directed at the behavior of the security services, and the importance of this political and national action was ignored by all.
- The region is not ready to embrace or support new or alternative political entities to the Liberation Organization, because the latter is part of the region and is the only internationally recognized political entity; and this is what all Palestinian factions understand and focus on in their political discourse, especially since the agendas of the factions and their external relations play an influential role in their decisions.
- The opposition of the Liberation Organization is not a permanent phenomenon in the Palestinian political environment, but rather a temporary reaction that will soon end if some opposition factions succeed in achieving partisan interests.

2) Opposition forces uptake scenario by the PLO

This scenario assumes the success of the Algiers Declaration of 2 November 2022 in applying what was agreed upon regarding Palestinian reconciliation, as the first steps are supposed to start with the formation of a Palestinian government within a year, and then return to the implementation of the democratic path to all Palestinian political institutions, including the institutions of the Liberation Organization.

This would bring several Palestinian factions under the umbrella of the Liberation Organization, as it is supposedly the representative of all the Palestinian people.

A. Conditions for the realization of this scenario

- This scenario requires regional pressure and an international resolution that goes beyond the capacities of the Palestinian parties. The adoption by the Arab Summit in Algiers of the reconciliation dossier is a historic precedent, which gave those familiar with the Palestinian issue some hope of achieving something internally.
- Reforming the institutions of the Liberation Organization by restoring its political legitimacy is an important factor, if not the main factor, in ending the division. Achieving this would put an end to the factional differences of the Liberation Organization; the latter would be within the framework of that Organization.
- Regional pressure and the international decision do not include agreeing to achieve a formal or temporary Palestinian unity; it rather requires international positions that are more open to Palestinian components, especially since many Palestinian factions are included on the lists of US terrorism, which is an international position related to the "Palestinian-Israeli" conflict.

B. Probability of the Scenario

The relative weight of this scenario is the weakest ever, for the following reasons:

- The entry of opposition factions into the Liberation Organization is beyond the capabilities of the Palestinian leadership and requires intellectual and ideological change at the level of the Organization, as well as at the level of the opposition factions. This is because the differences are not formal or are merely a presence and political weight within the organization, but there is a wide gap between the parties in terms of the relationship with Israel and the future of the Palestinian national project.
- Numerous regional and international parties linked the abdication of Palestinian resistance forces from their political programs as a condition for reconciliation, and entered as a partner in the Liberation Organization, serving the narrow agenda of Fatah and the small factions in the Organization. The Liberation Organization's justification for its sole control is justified by the regional and international pressures facing the organization, and this meaning is always present in the speeches of Abbas, which express his adherence to international legitimacy, and his demand of the factions to work accordingly for achieving national reconciliation.



3) Scenario of failure of Palestinian factions and elites to form a political entity

This scenario assumes the failure of all factional and popular endeavors to form an alternative or parallel entity to the PLO, especially since all previous attempts temporarily succeeded, because of regional and internal conditions; while the current political situation does not avail that. The success of these entities has not even evolved to the level of an inclusive Palestinian entity, as attempts have been limited to some left-wing factions, but they have not received significant Palestinian and regional interaction with them, nor have they significantly affected the presence of the Liberation Organization regionally and internally.

A. Conditions for the realization of this scenario

This scenario reflects the current Palestinian reality. According to the available data mentioned in the text, changing the current situation in the relationship between the Liberation Organization and the Palestinian factions is not considered an issue for reflection even at the level of the various Palestinian elites. Change requires radical transformations that run counter to the interests of the parties in control of the Palestinian political decision, and of regional and international parties, and that are beyond the capacity of other Palestinian components seeking change.

B. Probability of the Scenario

Fatah seeks to prolong this scenario through the following steps:

- The procedures and arrangements of the Fatah movement at the level of the councils of the Liberation Organization as a proactive step after the Abbas era, which will prolong the conflict between the opposition factions and the Liberation Organization, and maintain the continuity of the current situation.

The Fatah movement and the Palestinian Authority are confronting any attempts to change by all possible means. They consider any change in the current situation as an end to the current trend that controls the Fatah movement and the Palestinian Authority.

- Attempts by opposition factions and popular elites remain limited and unable to organize themselves, as each party is linked to different internal and regional interests.

Conclusion

The demands for the reform of the Liberation Organization, and the attempts to modify its political path, or the emergence of competing or alternative entities, remain valid and renewable in various aspects according to many variables, most notably the internal Palestinian division and the development of the Palestinian relationship with the Israeli occupation.

Despite the continued factional and popular rejection of the behavior of the Liberation Organization, the level of influence is declining, or the Palestinian factional and popular elites are currently unable to pressure the Organization to respond to those legitimate demands. The reason lies in the fact that the historic rejection that began with the emergence of the Liberation Organization benefited from the state of regional division, the exit of the opposition and the factional rejection from within the body of the Organization; because the Palestinian left, who stood in the opposition, was working from within that Organization, contrary to this stage. PFLP membership in the PLO is frozen, and the Islamic Movement factions (Hamas and Islamic Jihad) are not members in it. Attempts by popular forces that follow the institutions of civil society and political figures operate outside the Liberation Organization; and this weakens their ability to influence.



In addition, the geography from which the institutions of the Liberation Organization are moving, especially after they have moved from Tunisia to work from within the territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority and its security services, has given it an additional advantage that has reduced the influence of the region and the influence of factional and popular groups.

Therefore, it can be said that the situation of confrontation between the Liberation Organization and the Palestinian opposition forces will remain in the short and medium term under the third scenario, i.e. «continuation of the status quo».



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