

Algiers in 1987. PLO officials were quick to attribute the document to the personal initiative of Bassam Abu Sharif, leaving an air of unclarity around the PLO's position in international circles, and disturbing Palestinian national unity.

The PLO Central Council, meeting in Baghdad from July 31st to August 3rd, alleviated this situation by adopting a resolution against any statements that do not reflect the official PLO position.

DISTORTING REALITY

Aside from compromising basic Palestinian principles and the unity among the organizations in the PLO, this document distorted the facts before international public opinion which it purported to address. The most basic distortion was equating 'Israel' with the Palestinians, thus blurring the distinction between the oppressors and the oppressed. If Palestinian and Israeli interests in peace are equivalent, why then has 'Israel' initiated four major wars in addition to innumerable bombing raids and mini-invasions, while the Palestinian liberation movement's employment of violence has been aimed at addressing the wrongs inflicted by Israeli aggression and expansion in these wars? These are not just realities of the past. Rather, the ever augmented militarization of the Israeli economy makes aggression a structural imperative of the state, as are arms sales to reactionary forces around the globe, participation in the US's Star Wars program, etc.

If the document attempts to make a separation between the average Israeli and the government, it still misses the mark. Opinion polls over the years and today show a rather solid public consensus for the state's aggressive acts. The first notable exception occurred during the war in Lebanon; it occurred because of unprecedented Israeli losses in the face of the resistance of the Palestinian and Lebanese masses and fighting forces. Today, the majority of Israelis concur with the army's heavy-handed tactics for beating down the popular uprising in the occupied territories, despite the broad international outcry against the army's policy of shooting to kill, breaking bones and

tear-gassing to death. Some cracks in the consensus have occurred. Most significant is the conclusion that the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is counterproductive, reached by over 250 reserve officers grouped in the Council for Peace and Security, led by General Aharon Yariv, former head of military intelligence. This group reached this conclusion after half a year of uninterrupted Palestinian uprising. Clearly, experience shows that cracks in the Israeli consensus are made by struggle, not by offering unwarranted concessions, based on illusory premises.

The document toys with reality on two other basic points. The first of these is the distinction between Judaism and Jews on the one hand, and Zionism and 'Israel' on the other. (In fact, only 20% of Jews in the world live in 'Israel'.) Making this distinction has always been crucial for creating broader understanding of the nature of the Middle East conflict and the Palestinian cause. The PLO has, for its part, defined itself as a national movement, i.e., it represents the Palestinians regardless of their faith. In the early seventies, the PLO launched the concept of a democratic, secular state in Palestine, devoid of discrimination on religious or racial grounds. Yet with its ramblings about «the Jewish people», this document returns the discourse to the Middle Ages, before the separation of religion and statehood, which is now standard in democratic societies all over the world. This is a major concession to Zionism which has worked to equate Judaism with nationality, in the interests of its colonial project.

The other crucial truth toyed with by the document is the oneness of the Palestinian people and their cause. By failing to mention the Palestinians' right to repatriation, the document ignores those Palestinians who have been forced into exile by the repeated waves of Zionist aggression, beginning in 1948. A concurrent fault of the document is that the referendum it proposes would be conducted only among Palestinians present in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, again shunting aside over half the Palestinian people. This is in addition to the fact that such a referendum is at

best superfluous, since the PLO is recognized as the Palestinian people's sole legitimate representative; even among forces antagonistic to our cause, this is widely acknowledged, if only off the record.

The Palestinian liberation movement - and democratic Israelis - would be better served by a realistic assessment of what must be done to bring peace to the Middle East. In fact, the PLO is in possession of a realistic peace proposal as was clearly specified in the resolutions of the 18th PNC, held in Algeria, in April 1987:

«8. To support the convening of an international conference with full authority under the auspices of the UN and on the basis of its resolutions related to the Palestinian cause. This conference is to be held in order to deal with the Arab-Zionist conflict and its core, the Palestinian cause. The conference shall be attended by the five permanent members of the Security Council. The PLO shall participate as a full, independent party, on an equal footing with the other parties, because the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, as stated in the Arab summits' resolutions. To uphold this form of international conference.»

OLD—NEW TACTIC

Bassam Abu Sharif and whoever else may have formulated this document are well-aware of these issues. Careful reading reveals that the document in reality addresses neither international public opinion nor the Israeli citizenry, but rather the US administration. Why else does it take pains to concur with the US view of an international conference as an umbrella for direct talks between 'Israel' and the Palestinians? Again, the document veils actual Israeli policy in illusions, saying that the Palestinians agree that no outside party should impose a settlement. Do the authors of the document really not know that the reason the Israeli leaders object to a fully empowered international conference is that they don't want to be confronted with the PLO and the legitimacy of Palestinian national rights which are recognized by the majority of countries in the world, as evidenced at the UN.