

and village councils in the West Bank ushered the testing ground for the new strategy. The resulting overwhelming victory for pro-PLO forces, and the defeat of the scheme for "administrative self-rule" -- with minor exceptions -- was a vindication for those elements in the PLO who had called for a reorientation of strategy (Lesch, 1980:71-76). The formation of the National Guidance Committee in 1978 as a tight coalition of all pro-PLO forces in the West Bank marked the consolidation of the "internal" base of those elements in the Palestinian leadership who were promoting a territorial settlement with the state of Israel. Simultaneously, the Committee represented an attempt to prevent any vacillating pro-Jordanian or implicitly pro-Israeli forces (such as the Village League) from making political deals with Israel within the framework of the Camp David Agreement.

But political developments within Israel itself were simultaneously moving away from any territorial accommodation. By 1979 the Likud government was already calling for the establishment of Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza (Nazzari, 1980:123). The Allon Plan, the Labour Party formulation for a territorial deal with Jordan was annulled, and the Sharon Plan, based on Jewish colonial settlements in the territories, became official policy (Benvenisti, 1981:12). The National Guidance Committee was declared illegal, its members were either arrested, confined to their towns of residence, or (in the case of two mayors) deported from the country. Assassination attempts at the three most radical mayors (of Nablus, Ramallah and al-Bireh) by extremist Jewish nationalists were virtually uninvestigated by the security forces. The culmination of this policy was the abandonment of the earlier attempts to establish a modus vivendi with local nationalist forces, who were previously seen as "moderate" by the Israeli government, and correspondingly the settlers' associations