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**THE 18TH PALESTINIAN NATIONAL CONFERENCE:
A VICTORY WHICH SPELLS DEFEAT**

Hillel Frisch

Arabs in Judea, Samaria and Gaza followed reports of events at the 18th Palestinian National Conference (PNC) with increasing despondency. Gloom descended when President Mubarak ordered the Egyptian officials attending the conference to leave. It increased upon the announcement of the long-debated resolutions, which significantly were downplayed by the nationalist press in the territories and published only on back pages because of their poor reception. It reached a peak with the announcement of the closure of all Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) institutions in Egypt.

The Egyptian move was the heaviest blow. It had been a central tenet of Palestinian strategy to maintain good relations with at least one of the three front-line confrontation states – Egypt, Syria or Jordan. For the first time in the history of the Palestinian movement, the PLO has become persona non grata in all three states. Jordanian-PLO coordination came to an abrupt end in February 1986; the Syrian government, which expelled Yassir Arafat in 1983, continues to support anti-Arafat factions and the Shi'ite Amal in Lebanon against the PLO mainstream (fighting between Amal and Fatah was renewed in

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Sidon a day after the PNC meeting ended); and now Egypt has closed its doors to the PLO.

Arafat's gross political misjudgment can be seen from reading an editorial in the Jerusalem Arab daily, *Al-Fajr*. In an attempt to restore unity to the Palestinian movement and to induce the leftist factions, especially George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, to attend the PNC meeting, the PLO mainstream agreed to a resolution insisting on Egypt's disavowal of the Camp David accords. Arafat, who had initiated the rapprochement with Egypt after the expulsion of Palestinian forces from Tripoli in 1983, thought that he could appease Egypt by arguing that a united PLO which included the leftist factions could better facilitate the normalization of relations between Egypt and other Arab states which had been ruptured in the wake of the Camp David agreements. In fact, however, Egypt hardly needs the good offices of the PLO to improve its standing in the Arab world. The worsening situation in Iraq will probably prove sufficient to induce the Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, to resume normal diplomatic relations with Egypt, as Jordan has already done. In any event, economic relations between Egypt and these states are excellent.

Palestinians in the territories were also distressed at the internal changes wrought by the inclusion of the leftist factions once again into the PLO fold. One problem involves the democratization of the Palestinian movement. Most Palestinians would like to see decisions made by majority vote and not by the traditional *ijma'* (consensus) in which small factions, by employing their veto power, impose their will on the majority. An additional problem involves concern over the ability of the PLO to deal with the political task at hand. Most Palestinians would like to see a politically-oriented PLO, rather than an umbrella organization of terrorist factions, in order to ensure some hope for a political resolution to the Palestinian situation. The 18th PNC has now burdened the Palestinian movement with these two problems for the sake of unity with factions which can claim the support of only a fraction of the Palestinian public, even among the elites.

Worse still were the feelings of shame at seeing Fatah give in to three essentially Marxist

factions, including the Palestinian Communist Party which for the first time was accorded membership in the PNC and the PLO executive committee. Palestinian society is by and large religious and in recent years has witnessed a strong fundamentalist resurgence. The PLO mainstream in the territories has long since come to terms with this phenomenon. The nationalist press no longer displays lightly clad women, a feature common ten years ago, and refrains from advertising alcoholic beverages. The local Shabiba movement (the political wing of Fatah in the territories) begins most of its public announcements with traditional Muslim religious phrases and urges its members to respect the fast of Ramadan. Shabiba has also fostered its own Muslim nationalist organizations to combat inroads made by local fundamentalists. While most religious Palestinians might tolerate the existence of Communists among them, they would not accept having terms dictated by them. The fact that two of the most prominent leftists, Habash and Hawatmeh, are Christians only adds to the dismay of Muslim Palestinians who comprise over 90 percent of the Palestinian population. In addition, Palestinian society is fiercely entrepreneurial, in stark contrast to the ideology espoused by the Marxist factions.

Years ago, local nationalist activists would have justified the resolutions of the PNC by pointing to gains resulting from improved relations with the Soviet Union. Today, however, they recall Russian inaction when Syria massacred Palestinians at Tel-Za'atar in Lebanon in 1976, when Israel invaded Lebanon, or when the Syrians supported Amal in the recent fighting around the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Even if the Russians are resolved to help the Palestinians, it is realized that they have little influence over Israel to make concessions.

Yehuda Litani, writing in the *Jerusalem Post*, claims that the recent PNC was another brilliant Arafat maneuver. Not only is this analysis questionable, it is immaterial. After 23 years of PLO maneuvers, the Palestinians would like to see some concrete moves toward a political settlement. The results of the 18th Palestinian National Conference were a step in the wrong direction.

A WEARY ONLOOKER: TURKEY AND THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

Since its beginning, the Iran-Iraq war has been analyzed for its impact on such issues as the security of the Gulf states, the continuation of oil supplies to the West, the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the Arab world, the role of Iranian revolutionaries in Lebanon, and the effects of the war on Israel's security. Yet as the tide turns increasingly in favor of Iran, one often-overlooked regional power may play an increasingly prominent role in the area's balance of forces. That power is Turkey, the most populous, powerful and modern Muslim state in the Middle East.

The republic of Turkey is a natural enemy of the Iranian revolution. The historical enmity between the Ottoman and Persian empires is no less bitter than that of the Arab and Iranian dynasties. Like the Iraqi elite, most of Turkey's population is Sunni Muslim, opposed to the Iranian Shi'ites.

Religious differences have exacerbated relations in the past. While Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's secularism is one of the excuses employed by the Iranians for continuing the war against Iraq, Iraqi secularism pales in comparison to that of the Turks. Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish republic, enshrined secularism as one of the basic tenets of his revolution. He did so after abolishing the caliphate, purging the Turkish language of its sacred Arab script, and banning state support for Muslim religious institutions. No other Muslim regime, including Marxist South Yemen, has dared to go so far. While there has been a substantial retreat from Ataturk's extremism and Islam is respectfully tolerated in today's Turkey, the regime remains far more secular in character than any other Muslim state.

Until now, Turkey has been a weary onlooker, maintaining strict neutrality between Iran and Iraq. However, unrest among Turkey's Kurdish minority, as well as a recent surge of Islamic fundamentalism within Turkey, have increased tensions between Turkey and Iran. Many Turks accuse Iran of exacerbating minority tensions and promoting ideological and religious subversion.

Turkey's Kurdish problem has been a major issue on that country's internal agenda since

before the inception of the republic. Many of Turkey's ten million strong Kurdish minority see themselves as part of a Kurdish nation which spans parts of Iraq, Iran, Syria and the Soviet Union and numbers some fifteen million people altogether. It was only in 1931 that the Kurds were effectively pacified on the Turkish side of the border.

The Kurdish problem reemerged prominently in 1983 when Turkey launched a deep raid into Iraq, with that government's consent, against the Iranian-backed Kurdish Democratic Party. The Kurdish movement outside of Turkey, which over the past 50 years has been employed as the pawn of various states, has been increasingly mobilized by Iran against Iraq. Since 1984, a Communist Turkish group called the Apoists has taken the lead in a renewed Kurdish struggle against Turkey. The group was founded by the leftist terrorist Abdullah Occalan, who went underground in Istanbul in 1979, only to resurface in southeastern Anatolia. This group has been responsible for an increasing number of terrorist activities which have claimed over 200 lives in the past three years.

In the first week of March 1987, Turkish forces once again crossed the Iraqi border with the Turkish air force conducting massive bombing raids against Kurdish terrorist bases in Iraqi territory. The Turks also delivered a sharply worded protest to Syria, Iran's ally, where Occalan and his headquarters are presumably located. Iran, meanwhile, vigorously protested the bombings of the Kurds whom it regards as its allies in the war against Iraq.

The rising tension between Turkey and Iran over the Kurds came soon after broader religious tensions surfaced between the two states during a mid-January visit to Iran by Nuzheit Kandemir, director-general of the Turkish Foreign Ministry. Kandemir was told by Iranian Prime Minister Hussin Muravi that "the respect of Islamic values and beliefs in Turkey could play a key role in the development of relations between the two countries," a statement obviously referring to the current campaign against Islamic dress in Turkish universities. Leading Turkish newspapers were sharply critical of this apparent interference in

Turkey's internal affairs. Yet despite the serious differences between the two countries, the Turkish government has so far gone out of its way to defuse tensions.

Turkey would much prefer to continue its strong economic ties with Iran, its second biggest trading partner and chief supplier of oil, yet also to continue its positive relationships with Iraq. It seeks no conflict with the Khomeini regime and has no wish to be dragged into the turbulent politics of the Middle East.

Turkey regards itself as a Western state. Its industrial sector compares favorably with the

states of southern Europe, its exports compete successfully in European markets, and its workforce is 30 percent female (compared to 10-12 percent for Middle Eastern states such as Egypt and Syria). All of these achievements have enabled its government to request membership in the European Common Market. It is also a long-standing member of NATO. Turkey therefore chooses a policy of forbearance towards Iran, despite the fact that it clearly has the military capability to contain Iran's unwanted revolution, if necessary.

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A NOTE ON EGYPTIAN ORGANIZATIONS *

Samuel Z. Klausner

Western-style universities in Egypt date from the founding of the Egyptian (now Cairo) University in 1908 and the American University in Cairo in 1921, followed by Alexandria in 1942, Assiut in 1949, and Ain Shams in 1950. By 1952, some 35,000 students were enrolled in these universities. Students and faculty were drawn from the upper 3 to 5 percent of the population - the business and governing elite. The elite families had coopted the universities in support of their dynastic social leadership.

The revolutionary government sought to extend higher education to other regions and other populations. This expansion was, in part, a response to the politicization of the peasantry and the economy's need for workers and professionals. Laws were passed in 1954, 1956, and 1958, delineating new organizational structures; the tables of organization were backed by allocations for building programs. The provincial universities expanded in the 1960s with the establishment of the universities of Al-Mansoura, Port Said, Minya, and Ismailia, among others.

By 1980-81, Cairo was trying to teach 96,109, Ain Shams 92,110, and Alexandria 88,519

students. Al-Mansoura, a provincial university, taught about 4,900 students in 1972-73, but 29,000 by 1976 and 37,234 in 1980-81. The eightfold growth in students in a decade was not accompanied by equivalent faculty growth. The faculty-student ratio in Cairo had reached 200 to 1 by 1958, by which time meaningful teaching was already out of the question.

How was the demand for faculty met? Egypt could hardly produce Ph.D.'s to staff the new classrooms. Other Arabic-speaking universities, such as those in Libya, Algeria, and the wealthier Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the Gulf States attracted both younger Egyptian scholars and some of the senior professors. Few teachers were imported from the West. (Foreign institutions such as the American University of Cairo, were an exception.) Ph.D.'s working in other sectors of the society, such as government, were drawn to the academy. A professor could become peripatetic, spending two days a week at Al-Mansoura, another day at Port Said, and two in Zagazig. Two and a half to three government salaries could be earned. The professor's family in Cairo could enjoy him on Friday. Lectures for

Government workers, or at some local branches of Al-Azhar, the principal theological institution, provided attractive additional income. Under these circumstances, who has time for professional literature, research, writing, supervision of students, or even class preparation?

Western society is existentialist. Egypt is essentialist. Whatever the philosophers say about the validity of these positions, societies choose one or the other in constructing their ways of life. Americans begin by interacting around common interests. If the activity is meaningful, a more stable relationship may evolve. Egyptians initially seek to establish a relationship, affirm belongingness, and demonstrate loyalty. Cooperative activities become possible only in the comfort of an established relationship.

Religious belongingness is the ground of all belongingness. The Nasser Egyptianization program encouraged emigration of Jews and non-Coptic Christians. The policy focused on the passport as a symbol. The national state seemed to be tightening the association between citizenship and various economic and residence rights.

A high official under Nasser (we will call him Dr. Anwar) lamented the loss of the cultured Egyptian Jews. Though Jews had been in Egypt continuously since Pharaonic times, they had chosen to leave, mostly for Israel and, in Anwar's opinion, after great persuasion by Israeli agents. He had good reason to lament. Jewish emigres from Arabic states, Iraq and Egypt in particular, became a mainstay of Israeli military manpower. Popular resentment against Jews followed Israeli participation in the Suez attack of 1956 and what the Israelis call the Six-Day War of 1967. Several hundred Jewish men were detained by the Government. An espionage trial of young Egyptian Jewish recruits to Israeli intelligence received wide publicity. I asked Anwar, with some naivete, how he would feel were the Egyptian Jews in Israel to regret their move and seek to return. Anwar became deadly serious, almost shocked at the suggestion. With finality in his voice, he said that they had chosen the enemy. Loyalty and trust are the litmus test.

I jumped into a shared taxi in Cairo to find myself seated beside a young attorney. Identifying me as American, he spoke of Islam and Christianity. I told him I was Jewish, and he

turned to Isaac and his brother Ishmael, to the common covenant which we shared. Time and again, my Jewish identification would open a conversation about Judaism - not Jewish ethnicity, not Zionism, not Jewish nationalism, but Judaic faith.

The Egypt-Israel conflict is discussed at the diplomatic and governmental level in national political terms. Diplomats are trained in these concepts. At root, the confrontation is between Judaism and Islam. Israel, a Jewish state, holds political hegemony over a Moslem minority. Always a difficult notion, it is particularly so near the Hejaz, the Islamic heartland. The Temple Mount and Dome of the Rock, holy to both faiths, constitute a volatile issue.

One does not talk much today of *dhimmi*, the practice that both protects Jews and Christians in a Moslem society and requires that they pay certain tribute. The Moslem has traditionally tolerated Jews and Christians as a political minority. The "people of the book" may occupy high positions within an Islamic society, top policymaking excepted. Policy must be informed by the *shari'ah* (Islamic law). Boutros Ghali, a Copt, is the perennial Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (essentially a deputy foreign minister), but never Foreign Minister. Recently, a Coptic leader responded to the Nasser-Sadat position on Islam as the national faith by complaining that his people were again *dhimmi*.

During my stay in Egypt, much was said about how progress toward a rapprochement with Israel had been stymied by the Lebanese invasion. Withdrawal from Lebanon was a condition, an official, Government-espoused condition, for renewed progress. I do not doubt the political significance of this issue. Yet, if my grasp of the Egyptian view is correct, the removal of that obstacle will very likely be followed by another obstacle, perhaps the Temple Mount or the issue of Taba, the disputed Sinai tourist site. The Egyptians are pleased by the absence of war. But little short of conversion of the Israelis to Islam would be needed for full cooperation.

The strengthening of middle-range organizations, whether academic, political, or industrial, would require that they assume some degree of independent authority. This is not a simple matter in a centralized system weighed