Reprinted from AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIST, Vol. 38, No. 2, February 1983
Printed in U. S. A.

Conversations With Arafat

A Social-Psychological Assessment of the Prospects for Israeli–Palestinian Peace

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ABSTRACT: Genuine peace between Israelis and Palestinians requires mutual acknowledgment of each people's right to political expression of its national identity within the land they both claim. Negotiations must focus, therefore, on developing a formula for sharing the land. Furthermore, since most Palestinians perceive the PLO as their legitimate representative, only it—or some agency directly deriving legitimacy from it—has the capacity to negotiate an agreement that will elicit widespread acceptance and commitment among Palestinians. In light of these two assumptions, the PLO leadership's potential readiness for peace becomes critical to the success of negotiations. This article argues that the PLO under Arafat's leadership has signaled such readiness, and it discusses political and psychological reasons for the continuing ambiguity and inconsistency of these signals. Analysis of Arafat's cognitive style and image of the enemy, as revealed in two lengthy conversations with the author, reinforces the hypothesis that he has the capacity and will to negotiate an agreement with Israel, based on mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence, if offered necessary incentives and reassurances. The article discusses methodological questions raised by the analysis and concludes with recommendations for testing the hypothesis derived from the analysis through the policy process.

For a number of years, I have been actively engaged in efforts to facilitate communication between Israelis and Palestinians and to help create the conditions for direct Israeli–Palestinian negotiations (cf. Kelman, 1978, 1982). The work is part of an action research program that utilizes social-psychological concepts and skills in the analysis and resolution of international conflicts. A key feature of the work is the problem-solving workshop in conflict resolution, a third-party approach in which representatives of conflicting parties interact directly in the presence and under the guidance of a group of social scientists (cf. Burton, 1969, 1979; Kelman, 1972, 1979; Kelman & Cohen, 1976, 1979). My colleagues and I have organized such workshops with Israelis and Palestinians at different levels of political involvement. Our first workshop, which had a primarily educational objective, was conducted in 1971 (Cohen, Kelman, Miller, & Smith, 1977); the most recent workshop in this genre took place in April/May of 1982.

In connection with this action research effort, I met with Yasser Arafat, chair of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), on two occasions. The first meeting took place in January 1980 and the second in December 1981. A third meeting, scheduled for the second week of June 1982, was precluded by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon on June 6.

My meetings with Arafat were not interviews, but conversations: I did not come prepared with a list of questions designed to elicit and probe Arafat's precise positions on various issues, nor did I take notes in the course of our discussions. Rather, on both occasions, we engaged in an open, unstructured exchange of ideas for two hours or so. Arafat dominated the conversation, but I contributed my share—particularly in analyzing the range of political thinking within Israel and in exploring the possible openings (on both sides) for communication and negotiation. At each of our meetings only one other person was present—a senior aide who helped to translate a word or phrase now and then and occasionally contributed to the discussion.

I did not come away from these meetings with any startling new revelations or definitive formulations of official policy. What I gained was a concrete sense of Arafat's way of thinking, or cognitive style. I was most impressed with his nondogmatic approach to problems—his ability to differentiate, his openness to alternative views, the flexibility of his thinking—which I saw as the psychological manifestations of his political pragmatism.

These first-hand impressions of the thinking at the top—taken together with what I know about the structure of the PLO, the internal divisions and political diversity within the Palestinian movement, the prevalent views across the various Palestinian com-

munities, and the evolving positions of the Palestinian National Council over recent years—have given me a context for understanding the persistent, yet confusing and ambiguous, signals from the PLO of their readiness for a political settlement on the basis of a two-state solution. I am now prepared to state the hypothesis that Arafat has the capacity and the will to come to an agreement with Israel, calling for mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence, if he is offered the necessary incentives and reassurances. I do not propose that this conclusion be accepted as a proven fact, but I do believe that it is a hypothesis well worth putting to the empirical test.

Although my discussions with Arafat were not secret or off-the-record, I had not intended to publish reports on them, since they were informal conversations held in the spirit of mutual exploration. What I learned from these discussions, however, has become highly relevant to the current debate about the best approach to solving the Palestinian problem, particularly in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The events in Lebanon have brought about a new fluidity in the role and influence of the PLO and in the direction it will take. At the same time, with the evolution of a new, more emphatic American policy on the Palestinian issue, the question of who can best represent the Palestinian people in the effort to achieve a negotiated settlement of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict takes on central significance. Under these circumstances, I concluded that my impressions of the thinking of the top PLO leadership in recent years and of its potential for making peace with Israel ought to be injected into the debate.

For my fellow psychologists, I hope that my discussion will provide a partial illustration of how a social-psychological orientation might contribute to policy analysis and development in international relations. I will not elaborate here on the nature of our interventions and the theory of practice that underlies them. It should become evident, however, how certain social-psychological ideas might enrich the analysis and, in turn, be enriched by it. Such ideas concern the interaction dynamics in intergroup conflict, nationalism and national identity, legitimacy and loyalty, the nature of attitudes and their relationship to action, and the processes of image formation and causal attribution.

This article will attempt to demonstrate why the PLO leadership's potential readiness to make peace with Israel is of critical importance to the success of any coming Israeli–Palestinian negotiations. First, I shall address the question of *what* needs to be negotiated between Israel and the Palestinians. I shall argue that the negotiations must search for a formula whereby the two peoples can share historic Palestine (i.e., the land west of the Jordan River), on the assumption that there can be no genuine Israeli–Palestinian peace without an acknowledgment of the right of each people to give political expression to its national identity within that land. Second, I shall turn to the question of *who* needs to be negotiating. Here I shall propose that the PLO has become the symbol and embodiment of Palestinian nationhood, with a monopoly on legitimacy in Palestinian eyes. Therefore, much as one may disapprove of its ideology or tactics, only the PLO—or some agency that directly derives legitimacy from it—has the capacity to negotiate a peace agreement with Israel that will gain the acceptance and commitment of the majority of Palestinians. Third, I shall argue that the PLO under Arafat's leadership has signaled its readiness to make peace with Israel, although the evidence—for reasons understandable on political and psychological grounds—remains ambiguous and inconsistent. Fourth—using my personal observations of Arafat's cognitive style and his image of the enemy as the basis for my inferences—I shall try to show that his readiness to make peace is probably genuine and merits a serious test. Finally, I shall suggest how the central hypothesis derived from my analysis can be put to the test through the policy process.

What Needs To Be Negotiated

Negotiations toward resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict must take it as a given that the Palestinians—like the Israelis—are a nation that expresses itself through a national movement with its own dynamic and its own political and social institutions. Debates about whether Palestinians are a nation or are entitled to be a nation are as futile as the parallel debates about the status of Jews. A group becomes a nation when its members perceive themselves as such and are prepared to define their identities, to pursue their interests, and to make personal sacrifices in keeping with that perception. The Palestinians have amply demonstrated the depth and authenticity of the perception of their own nationhood. Their national movement has evolved out of

This article was presented as a Distinguished Contributions to Psychology in the Public Interest Award address at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., August 1982. It is an expanded version of an article, "Talk With Arafat," that appeared in *Foreign Policy*. Reprinted with permission from *Foreign Policy* no. 49 (Winter 1982–83). Copyright 1982 by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The author's work on the Arab–Israeli conflict is partly supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation to the Harvard Center for International Affairs. I am grateful both to the Foundation and to the Center for making this work possible.

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the kinds of historical circumstances that characteristically give rise to a sense of national consciousness. These historical circumstances have also set the parameters of Palestinian nationalism: The Palestinians' intense desire to achieve political independence and national sovereignty can be traced to their dual experience of statelessness and occupation. Their emphasis on a distinct Palestinian identity differentiated from the larger Arab identity grows out of the history of their treatment in the Arab world—the latest chapter of which was written during the recent Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Their insistence on national rights within historic Palestine stems from their profound sense of injustice at having been displaced from that land and their powerful need for some concrete acknowledgment of that injustice.

Perhaps the core element of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been the mutual denial of the other's national identity (Kelman, 1978). On the Israeli side, the leaders of the Labor Party have moved toward an explicit acknowledgment of Palestinian nationhood. Shimon Peres, for example, in responding to Sadat's speech to the Knesset on November 20, 1977, said: "We are aware of the existence of the Palestinian identity. Every people has the right to decide its own identity and this does not depend on the authorization of another nation." Yet even the Labor Party has failed to accept Palestinian nationalism on its own terms by continuing to rule out Palestinian self-determination and to insist that Palestinian identity must find its expression within a Jordanian context. This failure to confront the reality of Palestinian nationalism has paved the way for the more extreme policies of the present government, which are aimed at systematic denial and suppression of Palestinian nationalism. The Lebanon operation, with its objective of eliminating the PLO as a political as well as military force, was part of a larger strategy based on the assumption that destruction of the PLO would enable Begin and Sharon to find (or create) a Palestinian leadership on the West Bank and Gaza prepared to cooperate with their incorporation of these territories into Israel and with their version of autonomy. This strategy is designed to transform the Palestinians into an ethnic Arab minority within Israel, with a limited administrative and cultural autonomy in lieu of the right to vote in Israeli parliamentary elections. Palestinians would have a choice between accepting this arrangement or leaving the country. In Sharon's more ambitious vision, which includes the forced establishment of a Palestinian state in Jordan, Palestinian nationalism would be transformed into an "East Palestinian" nationalism; diaspora Palestinians and residents of the West Bank and Gaza who are not content with the autonomy arrangements would thus be given a homeland and an outlet for their nationalist sentiments outside of Palestine itself. Either version of the strategy negates core elements of Palestinian national identity and attempts to force that identity into a shape more convenient to Begin's and Sharon's purposes.

The Begin–Sharon strategy is designed to achieve nothing less than the ultimate defeat of the Palestinians—and hence of the Arabs—in the decades-old Arab–Israeli conflict. In view of the relative military capacities of the two sides as revealed by the recent war in Lebanon, it is not entirely out of the question that Israel may succeed—in the short or even the medium run—in imposing such a defeat on the Palestinians and the Arab states. Nor is it inevitable that Palestinian nationalism will survive and reassert itself; there are historical instances of nations that have in fact been transformed into ethnic minorities with virtually no prospect of national independence (although, unlike the Palestinians, they have generally operated in environments unfavorable to their cause). Still, it is not likely that

The PLO is the only representative agency that speaks for Palestinians as a people

Begin and Sharon will find it easy to play out their scenario. The Palestinians have shown no inclination to accept the roles assigned to them. In its response to the Lebanese invasion, the PLO has demonstrated its resilience and its ability to wrest political victories from military defeat. The West Bank–Gaza population has unmistakably rejected the Village Leagues—the only alternative "leadership" to the PLO that the Israeli administration has been able to come up with—and there is no indication so far that any credible West Bank–Gaza leaders would join the autonomy talks without PLO approval. Furthermore, despite their ambivalent and ineffectual response to the Israeli operation in Lebanon, it is unlikely that the Arab states, the United States, and the international community would acquiesce to the total defeat of the Palestinians. Nor can the Israeli government count any longer on the full support of its own population, particularly as it becomes clearer that—with or without the PLO—the population in the territories will not passively accept perpetual Israeli rule.

Whatever degree of success Begin and Sharon may have in imposing their solution on the West Bank and Gaza, a plan that is widely perceived as total defeat and subjugation of the Palestinians can-

not serve as a basis for negotiations conducive to stable peace in the region and to eventual reconciliation between Israel and its neighbors. If an outcome to this historic struggle is to be achieved in which neither party feels totally defeated, it will be necessary to find a formula whereby the two peoples—as peoples—can share the land they both claim. Whatever formula is negotiated, therefore, must ensure that the Palestinian people has a part in the ownership of the land and an opportunity to give political expression to its national identity within it (Kelman, 1982). Negotiations must start from that assumption. What needs to be negotiated is *how* the land can best be shared so as to satisfy the basic concerns and aspirations of both parties—particularly their quest for justice, security, and national identity—within the context of current geopolitical, military, diplomatic, and economic realities.

To satisfy both parties under present historical circumstances, the negotiated formula for sharing the land will have to be based on mutual recognition of the other's right to national self-determination—a right that has already been conceded to the Palestinians as well as to Israel by a strong international consensus. If anything, the recent events in Lebanon may have moved many Americans and Israelis closer to the international consensus in favor of Palestinian self-determination, by bringing home to them the implications of an Israeli policy that rejects the concept of Palestinian nationhood. In theory, there are a variety of ways in which the Palestinians might exercise their right to self-determination, including the establishment, by mutual consent, of a confederation, federation, or other kind of union with either Jordan or Israel. In practice, the preferred choice of the Palestinians is an independent West Bank–Gaza state alongside of Israel, although at some stage they might well seek to confederate or federate such a state with Jordan or conceivably with both Jordan and Israel.

Even if the parties acknowledge self-determination for both peoples in historic Palestine, leading to a two-state solution, as the most practical and desirable outcome, agreement on such a formula can only come at the end of extensive negotiations. Many issues will have to be resolved before the parties can feel sure that the solution meets their basic needs and concerns—issues, for example, such as the precise borders of the two states, the future of Jerusalem, the status of Israeli settlements on the West Bank, resettlement and compensation for 1948 refugees, mutual security arrangements, economic and diplomatic relations between the two states, the timing of Israeli withdrawal, and the details of the transition process. Beyond grappling with such necessities, the negotiations may also provide an opportunity for devising a mutually beneficial pattern of relationships between the two states. The discussions in our Israeli–Palestinian problem-solving workshop last spring demonstrated that a two-state solution may serve as the springboard for a creative vision of peaceful coexistence and cooperative relations between the two peoples in the land they share.

Who Needs To Be Negotiating

If the purpose of negotiations is to produce an agreement based on mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence, then it is essential that the Palestinian representatives in this process possess a high degree of legitimacy in the eyes of their various constituencies. Only leaders enjoying such legitimacy are likely to have the flexibility and confidence to make the concessions necessary to producing the agreement, and the credibility to elicit the acceptance and commitment of the majority of Palestinians to the agreement they produce. Whatever one's feelings about the PLO, it is the only Palestinian body that meets this criterion and therefore has the capacity to make peace with Israel.

Palestinians—both in the West Bank and Gaza and in the diaspora—do not see the PLO as a terrorist body. In fact, they do not see the PLO as merely an organization, military or political, but as the symbol and embodiment of Palestinian nationhood. It is the only representative agency that speaks for Palestinians as a people and that is widely recognized in this capacity, not only in the Arab world, but in the international community generally. Furthermore, it is the only agency that has established a variety of national institutions—including economic, cultural, educational, medical, and welfare institutions—in Lebanon and elsewhere. As the internationally acknowledged repository for Palestinian legitimacy, the PLO has a monopoly on legitimacy in Palestinian eyes.

This does not mean that the PLO is universally popular among Palestinians. Yasser Arafat himself seems to enjoy a special status as a personal symbol of the Palestinian cause and as an authentic voice to both traditional masses and more westernized elites. But not all Palestinians are enthusiastic about the PLO as an organization or about its diaspora leadership. Some of the West Bank and Gaza elites, for example, feel that the leadership is out of touch with the problems of the territories, or would prefer leaders whose family origins are in the West Bank or Gaza rather than Jaffa or Haifa, or continue to be interested in closer links with Jordan. At some time in the future, they may well challenge the incumbents for PLO leadership or demand greater representation in PLO councils. But they acknowledge that the PLO has acquired a monopoly on legitimacy and that, with the West Bank and Gaza

under occupation, the PLO is the functional equivalent of a government. They also seem to agree that, under conditions of occupation, the political interests of the West Bank–Gaza population are best represented by leaders outside of the territories—particularly since those leaders have already achieved a high degree of international recognition.

Some Israeli observers have proposed that the failure of an alternative leadership to emerge in the West Bank and Gaza is a result of PLO intimidation. I have no doubt that such intimidation occurs, and to the extent that it does, it undermines the moral standing of the PLO. There is no easy way to tease out just how much of a role it plays in individual decisions, but it cannot explain the widespread support for the PLO among the West Bank–Gaza masses and elites. The attempt to account for the phenomenon in these terms is based on a grossly oversimplified, unidimensional view of human motivation reminiscent of the attempt to ascribe American support for Israel to intimidation by the pro-Israel lobby. It is quite likely that fear of assassination or other forms of retaliation contributes to inhibiting local leaders from presenting themselves as alternatives to the PLO (although evidently not from criticizing the PLO, as some of the most obvious candidates for alternative leadership have done). But they are at least equally inhibited by their awareness that such an attempt would be perceived by their constituencies as illegitimate, collaborationist, and harmful to the national cause because, for better or worse, the PLO has preempted the right to speak for the Palestinians. In fact, it is likely that many local leaders who were originally and may still be unsympathetic to the PLO now themselves willy-nilly accept its status as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Under these circumstances, it appears neither possible nor helpful to find a substitute for the PLO to represent the Palestinians in negotiations with Israel. It is highly unlikely that any credible group of Palestinians would be prepared to enter negotiations as an explicit alternative to the PLO. Even if such alternative negotiators could be found, their lack of legitimacy would reduce the value of any agreement they would reach, since they would lack the capacity to commit the Palestinian community to it. I am not suggesting that the PLO in the precise form in which we know it today must necessarily be the interlocutor in every phase of an Israeli–Palestinian negotiating process. It is possible that an alternative leadership may develop within the PLO or that the PLO may be restructured or redefined. It is also possible that, at one or another stage of the process, the PLO may find ways of transferring its legitimacy to another agency that is especially suited to the task at hand—such as West Bank–Gaza leaders, or a government-in-exile, or an independent, specially created negotiating team. In the final analysis, however, I believe that only the PLO, or some agency that directly derives legitimacy from it, has the capacity to make peace with Israel.

If the PLO leadership were to be eliminated, discredited, or weakened in the wake of the Lebanon operation, it is very doubtful that an alternative leadership in the West Bank and Gaza—presumably freed from the restraints imposed by the PLO—would readily emerge and come to an agreement on the terms offered by the Israeli government. Such an alternative leadership might have been able to prevail before the PLO acquired its monopoly on legitimacy, but now it is too late. An assault on the PLO has come to mean an assault on Palestinian nationhood, and at least for the near future, no Palestinian leaders could maintain their credibility if they showed themselves willing to benefit from a PLO defeat. If anything, the mood, both in the territories and in the Palestinian diaspora, would probably be more rejectionist and less supportive of compromise. No doubt there would be some accommodation in West Bank–Gaza communities out of opportunism or out of necessity, but it is not likely that a new leadership would arise—in the territories or in the diaspora, within or outside of the PLO—with the will and capacity to make peace with Israel.

The Will To Make Peace

I have argued that Israeli–Palestinian peace requires mutual recognition of the other's national rights and an agreement to share the land between the two peoples—and that only the PLO has the capacity to make that kind of peace with Israel. But is there any evidence that the PLO has the will to do so? The difficulties in mustering the evidence faced by those who are convinced that the will is potentially there are well stated by Fouad Ajami (1982):

> Over the past decade, there emerged within the Palestinian community . . . support for a historic compromise between Israelis and Palestinians. To be sure, there was something frustrating about the way this view was put forth. The will to state it openly was not there. What was said on a given day was denied the next; what was said before a foreign audience was denied at home. But there was no denying that somewhere on the horizon loomed the possibility of a different future. (p. A19)

PLO leaders, and particularly Arafat himself, have repeatedly signaled their readiness to move toward a political accommodation with Israel. Even in the midst of the West Beirut crisis, Arafat responded favorably to the statement by the late Pierre Mendès-France, the late Nahum Goldmann, and Philip Klutznick, calling for mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestinian people, and granted an interview to the Israeli editor and former Knesset

member, Uri Avnery, in which he reaffirmed his support for a two-state solution. Although the PLO has been clear and consistent, in recent years, in its acceptance of the idea of a negotiated settlement leading toward a Palestinian state in part of Palestine, it has remained ambiguous on two crucial points: It has not unequivocally recognized Israel's right to exist or indicated willingness to accept a West Bank–Gaza state as a permanent solution to the conflict. While dropping many hints, Arafat has consistently evaded a direct answer to these questions. At the same time, some of his associates—and on occasion Arafat himself—have continued to make statements vowing that they will never recognize Israel.

Clearly, there can be no peace agreement—and probably no official negotiations toward such an agreement—until the Palestinian representatives recognize Israel and accept the permanence of the borders established by negotiation (along with reciprocal assurances by Israel of its recognition of the Palestinian people and readiness to relinquish part of Palestine for a Palestinian homeland). As long as Arafat and the PLO equivocate on these points, one cannot say with certainty that they are ready to negotiate an agreement; the evidence remains inconclusive. Nor can one be certain, however, that they are *not* ready to negotiate—that the hints and signals that they have been issuing are merely propaganda ploys, tactical maneuvers, or efforts at obfuscation. It goes without saying that explicit recognition of Israel would create a radically new political and psychological atmosphere, which is why many observers, who are convinced that the PLO is in fact ready to negotiate an agreement, are urging Arafat to take that step. Some ascribe his failure to do so at this time to a lack of imagination, of leadership quality, or of political wisdom. Without making a judgment here about what Arafat should or should not be doing, I would merely point out that explicit recognition of Israel is not a step that he can take easily or casually; it entails enormous costs and risks. Arafat's situation is not comparable to that of Sadat, whom he is sometimes urged to emulate. Even for Sadat, the trip to Jerusalem was an extremely costly and almost transcendent political act. Yet he had several advantages that Arafat lacks: He was considerably less constrained by his domestic constituencies; he was virtually certain that his initiative would meet with a positive response in Israel; and recognition of Israel was not an existential issue for him.

Arafat's reluctance to recognize Israel and accept a West Bank–Gaza state as a permanent solution can be broadly explained in cost-benefit terms, as long as we understand that his calculations refer to perceived losses and gains not only in political power and advantage, but also in fundamental national rights. For Palestinians, recognition of Israel amounts to relinquishing a central tenet of PLO ideology: that the establishment of Israel constituted a grave injustice to the Palestinian people, which must be undone by Palestinian recovery of their homeland. In explicitly announcing that he recognized Israel, Arafat would in effect be telling the Palestinian masses that this is the end of the struggle. For many of his constituents, especially in the refugee camps, such a message would mean that at least part of their dream—the dream of returning to their particular homes, which for most of them are in Israel proper, rather than the West Bank or Gaza—would never be fulfilled. Because of the sharp divisions within the Palestinian movement and the Arab world, Arafat would become vulnerable to the accusation that he has betrayed the national cause. The action might precipitate an intense power struggle. Even if he won that struggle, it might split the movement and break Palestinian unity.

Arafat may well be prepared to pay these heavy costs, but he would have to be confident that he would obtain commensurate benefits in return for his concessions. He would want assurance that at least his minimal demands would be satisfied. In particular, he would look for some reciprocal recognition of Palestinian rights, in order to make it clear to his own constituencies and to the rest of the world that recognition of Israel and acceptance of a West Bank–Gaza state as a permanent solution did not constitute abandonment of the Palestinians' own claims. Under such circumstances, he would be able to explain to the Palestinian masses that it was time to accept an honorable compromise and to expect their support. He would also be in a good position to neutralize his opposition or, if necessary, to absorb a split in the movement.

The often-repeated statement that recognition of Israel is the PLO's last card, which they cannot give up lightly, can be understood in the light of these cost-benefit considerations. It is not merely that Arafat is holding on to this card until he can get the best deal. Rather, he is afraid that if he plays this card and receives nothing in return, the game will be over: He will have lost both his leadership and his cause. I would speculate that he sees recognition of Israel as not just a concession, which can be withdrawn in the absence of reciprocation, but as an irreversible act: The moment he makes the statement, he has given away a central moral principle—and he goes down in history as the leader who has given away that principle. Thus, even though I believe he is prepared to play that card, he is unwilling to do so until he is assured of a positive response—and, in particular, one that safeguards the principle that recognition of Israel throws into doubt.

What would constitute a sufficiently positive

response for Arafat? He has signaled repeatedly that he would be prepared to recognize Israel in a context in which Palestinian rights are simultaneously recognized. In our first conversation, I asked him explicitly whether he would accept the concept of mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestinians. He replied that the PLO had already done so and cited two bits of evidence: In October 1977, the PLO endorsed the Vance–Gromyko statement, which referred both to Israel's right to exist in secure borders and to the legitimate rights of the Palestinians. Later, the PLO supported a working paper, prepared by the British and French UN delegations, that proposed amending Resolution 242 to include reference to Palestinian rights. In my second conversation with Arafat, he spoke at length about his consistent support, at great personal and political cost, for the Fahd proposals before, during, and after the 1981 Arab summit conference in Fez. The Fahd proposals indirectly recognized Israel in the context of a plan that called for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and establishment of a Palestinian state. In the Arab world, the plan was clearly seen by proponents and opponents alike as acceptance of a two-state solution. It was also known that Arafat supported the Fahd plan and played a role in its formulation. He was severely criticized for that by some PLO elements—including officials from his own group, al-Fatah—and for a while his leadership position was seriously threatened. By the time I saw him, in late December of 1981, he was clearly back in control and feeling vindicated.

As stated, the Fahd proposals (or the proposals adopted by the Arab summit conference at Fez in September 1982) clearly cannot serve as the text of a final agreement that would be acceptable to Israel. They must be seen as merely an Arab opening position for possible negotiations. Their significance derives not from the specific points proposed, but from the general message that there is some framework within which Arab recognition of Israel becomes possible. For present purposes, what is important is that Arafat endorsed these proposals, thus signaling his readiness to recognize Israel within a framework of mutual recognition. Furthermore, amid all the ambiguities, Arafat seems to have been consistent on this point, both in his public actions and in his private statements. This experience suggests that the U.S. government might find Arafat more responsive if, instead of asking him for unilateral recognition of Israel or acceptance of Resolution 242, it presented him with a broad formula for mutual recognition—one of its own choosing that would not be vulnerable to the criticisms which can be directed at the Fahd proposals or other earlier documents.

In sum, Arafat has signaled his readiness to make peace, not only in statements to various foreign visitors but also in politically consequential actions—largely in the form of endorsing proposals that imply recognition of Israel in a context of mutual recognition. Since he has avoided explicit commitments, however, one cannot conclude with certainty that the will to make peace is there. At the same time, his refusal so far to be explicit does not constitute conclusive evidence of a *lack* of will when one considers the enormous costs of such an action in the absence of any tangible indication that it would produce commensurate benefits by way of Israeli or American reciprocation. Perhaps his reluctance to make a bold, unequivocal move is a sign, as some have charged, of poor leadership, but it does not automatically discredit the very real signals he has sent. These signals have been sufficiently frequent, consistent, and persuasive to warrant more serious Israeli and American efforts to put them to the test than have been made so far.

A Methodological Question

The statements that Arafat makes to various Western visitors, including myself, are obviously subject to distortion. Clearly, he has an interest in presenting himself to Western audiences as moderate. How can one determine the genuineness of his pronouncements, particularly in view of the fact that in other contexts and to different audiences he and his associates continue to present hard-line positions? In keeping with the classical dynamics of intergroup conflict, opponents of the PLO tend to dismiss Arafat's signals of readiness for compromise (if they hear them at all) as totally irrelevant. They attribute them entirely to situational causes, regarding them as tactical and deceptive. On the other hand, they regard any hostile, uncompromising statements as reflections of his true feelings, consistent with his underlying character and with the PLO's ideological commitment (as expressed in the Palestinian National Covenant) to the "elimination of the Zionist presence in Palestine." Such suspicions are understandable and justified, but to disregard, discount, and explain away positive signals automatically, without a serious effort to put them to the test, is both unrealistic and dangerous. It is unrealistic because it ignores the immense changes that have already taken place in the Arab world and the Palestinian movement over the past 15 years (and especially since the Egyptian–Israeli peace process) and the possibility of further change in the face of changing realities and new incentives. It is dangerous because it risks passing up an opening for peace that may not present itself again for another generation.

There is no easy formula for determining which of two seemingly contradictory statements reflects a leader's "true" attitude. None of the rules that are

sometimes proposed, based on distinctions between public versus private statements or between statements to one's own constituencies versus statements to foreign audiences, have general applicability. Much depends on the circumstances; for example, a statement made to a domestic audience may at times be more subject to instrumental considerations—and hence a less reliable indicator of true attitudes—than a statement made to a foreign audience. Furthermore, it is not obvious what constitutes the true attitude in a political context. Is it what leaders would most prefer, under ideal but unattainable circumstances, or is it what they see as acceptable and realistically feasible? In my own view, it is quite possible—indeed probable—that both Arafat's signals of readiness for compromise and his reiterations of an uncompromising stance reflect his true attitudes.

In my numerous encounters with Palestinians during the past decade or so, I have been struck again and again by the fact that, in the course of the same conversation, they may make two kinds of statements that sound contradictory to me and yet appear to be equally genuine. They may say that nothing less than Palestinian rule over all of Palestine would meet their needs and, a few sentences later, they may indicate—without noting any inconsistency—that they would be satisfied with a West Bank–Gaza state. This pattern reflects the way in which ideological change characteristically comes about. It does not follow the orderly process of abandoning one set of beliefs and replacing it with another. Rather, a new set of beliefs develops within a different cognitive context—within a context, for example, of what is realistically achievable as against a context of what is historically just—and takes its place alongside the old beliefs. Which set of beliefs predominates at any given moment or prevails over time depends very much on the options and opportunities available to the individual. Thus, it seems quite plausible to me that Arafat may be genuine in his expressions of readiness for compromise, even though, on other occasions, he may continue to maintain (and believe) hard-line positions.

But is there any independent evidence that might help in assessing whether Arafat's readiness for compromise is genuine? A significant type of evidence is provided by consequential actions that are consistent with his pronouncements. I would attach special importance, therefore, to Arafat's support of various proposals that imply mutual recognition, particularly the 1981 Fahd proposals, which he endorsed at great personal and political risk. It is also well known that Arafat has fought hard, within PLO councils, to push for acceptance of a political option. The steady movement in the direction of accommodation in the resolutions adopted by successive Palestinian National Councils over the years (cf. Khalidi, 1981, p. 1060) must be credited largely to Arafat's efforts. These actions cannot be dismissed as public relations gestures. They involve intense political struggle and have concrete consequences for the directions of the movement and Arafat's own leadership position.

Another kind of evidence, derived from my own conversations with Arafat, is based on analysis of how he talks about the conflict, as distinct from the specific positions he espouses. What are the images of the enemy that he conveys? What are his visions of the future? What seem to be his salient concerns and preoccupations? My earlier experience in Egypt provides a simple illustration of what I have in mind. In December 1976, almost a year before President Sadat's trip to Jerusalem, my colleagues and I participated with a number of Egyptian social scientists in a roundtable on "Reciprocal Images in the Arab–Israeli Conflict." The meetings were held at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, which is the major political research organization in Egypt and has a variety of links to the policy process. Much that was said at these meetings—and the very fact that the center's president, Boutros Ghali (who has since become Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and a key figure in the Egyptian–Israeli negotiations), joined with me in organizing a meeting on this topic and with this particular set of participants—suggested that the Egyptian government was actively engaged in a process of reexamining its policy toward Israel. What struck us most, however, were the repeated references by our Egyptian colleagues to the "postsettlement period" and their active interest in the problems that might arise during that period. It seemed to us that Egyptians would not be so preoccupied with the postsettlement period unless they were seriously thinking about a settlement. Moreover, it would be difficult to pretend, repeatedly, an interest in the postsettlement situation in the course of discussions that spread out over several days. Thus, this kind of evidence was much more convincing than direct statements of support for a peaceful settlement, which are subject to deliberate manipulation for instrumental purposes.

In my conversations with Arafat, what I found most revealing were his remarks that gave me a glimpse of his image of Israel. A variety of attitudes and expectations can probably be predicted from this information, because the image of the enemy holds a central place in the cognitive structures of people engaged in an intense conflict (cf. Heradstveit, 1979). I am especially interested in assessing how Arafat's image of the enemy is structured: How flexible and differentiated is his view of Israel? To what extent does he perceive Israel as potentially

open to influence and capable of change? Does he attribute Israel's behavior primarily to situational or to dispositional causes? In addition, my analysis focuses on the specific contents of the image—on the characteristics Arafat imputes to Israel—that have implications for his own actions vis-à-vis Israel. The image we have of another typically conveys what kinds of actions toward the other we consider possible, necessary, and desirable. For example, from the images teachers have of an unruly class in a deprived neighborhood we can draw some inferences about the way they are likely to treat the students in that class. A teacher who sees the students as inherently vicious because of their backgrounds is likely to treat them in an undifferentiated way and to place emphasis on controlling them through close surveillance and punishment, whereas a teacher who sees the students as mostly bored because of a lack of stimulation and hence susceptible to a small number of troublemakers is likely to individualize the students and, whenever possible, to create an environment that provides constructive outlets for their energies and imagination. In a similar manner, examination of Arafat's image of the enemy allows us to infer what kinds of actions vis-à-vis Israel he contemplates and, in particular, whether he sees the enemy as someone he can influence or only as someone he must defeat.

The methodological advantage of this kind of analysis is that it focuses on cognitive style and on the characteristics that dominate images—outputs that are far less manipulable than explicit statements of policy position. Furthermore, this information is used not to infer policy positions but to understand how leaders approach problems and to infer what actions they are capable of taking, given the appropriate incentives and opportunities. The thinking and capabilities for action in the top leadership, on which this analysis focuses, represent significant realities in their own right, with potential relevance to the search for peaceful solutions.

Images of the Enemy

Several statements stand out in my reconstruction of Arafat's image of Israel, and I shall build my analysis around them.

They Are Not All the Same

Early in my first conversation with Arafat, I gave him my overview of the range of political thinking within Israel. I started out by remarking that not much movement on the Palestinian issue can be expected from the Begin government itself. He interrupted to correct me with these approximate words: You can't say that; they are not all the same. He was in effect chiding me for my failure to differentiate. He then proceeded to talk about differences within the Israeli cabinet. In particular, he described Ezer Weizman (who was Minister of Defense at the time) as different from the rest—as more open, more responsive to Arab concerns—and continued to discuss the evolution of Weizman's political views. His image of Weizman seemed to be quite similar to that conveyed by Sadat, who had developed a great rapport with Weizman from the beginning of Egyptian–Israeli negotiations. Arafat's ability to differentiate even among individual members of the ruling coalition in Israel is particularly remarkable when one contrasts it with the ideologically "correct" view expressed by so many other Palestinians. For example, earlier in the same day that I met with Arafat, I presented my analysis of the range of political thinking within Israel to several Palestinian intellectuals. One very knowledgeable scholar was unimpressed and told me: There is no difference between Begin and Matti Peled (a leading Israeli advocate of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza who for several years has been in communication with some PLO officials)—they are both Zionists.

Arafat also displayed an interest in other voices within the Israeli political mainstream that have expressed even a limited readiness (under specially defined circumstances) to talk with the PLO or to accept Palestinian sovereignty. In our 1980 meeting I mentioned that Yehoshafat Harkabi (former chief of military intelligence and now a professor at the Hebrew University, well-known for his analysis of the implacable character of the PLO) had come out in support of the Peace Now movement and against the Begin policies on the West Bank and Gaza. Arafat's first reponse was: That man has been telling lies about us! When I pointed out that, in the light of Harkabi's earlier writings, his current positions were of particular significance, Arafat conceded that I was right and expressed an interest in exploring Harkabi's ideas further.

In our 1981 meeting, Arafat showed some familiarity with and considerable appreciation of the dissenting statements made by various Israeli mainstream figures, including Weizman and Harkabi (although he still considered him anti-PLO), as well as Aharon Yariv (another former chief of military intelligence and now head of the Center for Strategic Studies at Tel-Aviv University), Motta Gur (former chief-of-staff and now a Knesset Member, representing the Labor Party), and Abba Eban (Foreign Minister in the Labor government). He also expressed confidence that, as circumstances changed, Israel's positions would change and the moderates would prevail in Israel's internal political struggle. Clearly, Arafat has a differentiated view of Israeli political figures, and he orders them on a scale of preference according to the degree to which they are

amenable to a compromise solution. He differs markedly from those ideologues who prefer their adversary to be extremist rather than moderate—from Palestinians who prefer the Likud to Labor, for example—because the extremists unambiguously confirm their view that compromise is impossible.

Arafat's differentiated, nondogmatic image of the Israeli political spectrum is consistent with the approach of someone who is looking for potential Israeli partners in negotiation—for people he can deal with, even if he does not entirely agree with them. The image that "they are all the same" effectively removes the possibility of negotiation and compromise: Since they are all Zionists and hence fundamentally at odds with our aspirations, there is no one to talk to and nothing to talk about. By contrast, the image that "they are not all the same" creates an opening for negotiation and compromise: It envisages the possibility of identifying elements on the other side with whom it may be possible to establish common ground, and of entering into dialogue with them.

We Know There Has Been Change

In my first conversation with Arafat, I pointed out that as a consequence of Sadat's trip to Jerusalem in November 1977 there had been a great deal of new political thinking within Israel, opening up new possibilities for resolving the Palestinian problem. I deliberately introduced the point in these terms because I knew from conversations with other Palestinians and Arabs more generally that the ideologically "correct" response was to deny any possibility that the Sadat initiative might have produced some positive outcomes. Once again, Arafat demonstrated his nondogmatic approach by simply replying: Yes, we know there has been a lot of change in Israel. Arafat's readiness to acknowledge change in the enemy's thinking is itself significant. It contrasts with the view of Arab ideologues that Zionism has not changed and never will change—a view that rules out any possibility of compromise because it portrays the enemy as utterly implacable. Recognizing the occurrence and the possibility of change in the enemy is a critical condition for movement toward negotiation. There is added significance in the fact that Arafat not only acknowledges change in Israel, but is willing to associate this change with Sadat's peace initiative (without, of course, explicitly endorsing Sadat's initiative).

In our second conversation, which took place after Sadat's assassination, I made the point that the new vision of the future which Sadat's initiative had evoked from many Israelis now seemed to be slipping away. Again, Arafat did not contest my linking a positive change in Israel with Sadat's initiative. In general, he did not convey hostility in his comments about Egypt, and he seemed to look forward to a future rapprochement.

Tell Them They Are Idiots

Arafat's parting words at the end of our first conversation were: When you go to Israel, tell them they are idiots. He was harking back to an earlier part of the conversation in which he had criticized Israeli policy for its shortsightedness in linking its fate so totally to American strategic interests in the Middle East instead of trying to make peace with the Palestinians. These comments again illustrate Arafat's nondogmatic approach, his image of Israel as changeable, and his readiness to deal with Israel. According to the view dictated by ideological dogma, Israel's links to American strategic interests are inherent in its objective nature: It is, after all, a creature and outpost of Western—and particularly American—imperialism, and although it may at times be the tail that wags the dog, its ultimate function is to serve America's imperialist interests. Arafat's image, in sharp contrast with this ideological view, posits an Israel that is able to make choices rather than an Israel held captive by inevitable historical imperatives. Israelis are idiots, in his view, because they fail to recognize their own long-term interests and to exercise the options that are available to them. The clear implication of this view is that it is possible to reason with the Israelis on the basis of their own interests, that they are potentially subject to influence and change, and that there is indeed something for the Israelis and the Palestinians to negotiate about.

Only the PLO, or some agency that directly derives legitimacy from it, has the capacity to make peace with Israel

Arafat's view differs not only from that of the ideologues, but also from that of some of his fellow pragmatists who place their emphasis almost exclusively on negotiations with the United States. Their strategy is aimed at first changing U.S. policy and then relying on the Americans to bring the Israelis around. Arafat himself, of course, pursues this strategy, but he also sees value in dealing directly with Israel. His parting comment to me in 1980 suggests the view that it might, in fact, be in the mutual interest of the Israelis and the Palestinians to work out a deal among themselves instead of relying excessively on American brokership (a view reminis-

cent of Sadat's strategy in November 1977). The potential openness to dealing with Israel directly is also reflected in the tone of Arafat's reference to the Israelis as "idiots." To be sure, "idiots" is an uncomplimentary term, but the choice of this particular uncomplimentary term and the spirit in which it was delivered convey an attitude of impatience and frustration rather than implacable hostility and rejection.

They Are Arrogant Because They Are Stupid

It became clear in my second conversation with Arafat that the term "idiots," which had dominated his image of Israel in the first conversation, was not just an epithet he had chosen at random. He again stressed the same characteristic, this time asking me to tell the Israelis that they were stupid. The issue arose particularly in a discussion of new opportunities for peace that now existed but that might be lost if the parties failed to take advantage of them. The Israelis are stupid, he said, because they are allowing these opportunities to slip away. An interesting exchange between Arafat and his aide ensued at this point. His aide added that the Israelis were arrogant, but Arafat insisted that they were stupid. His aide then proposed the compromise that they were stupid because they were arrogant, but Arafat replied: No, they are arrogant because they are stupid.

What can we make of Arafat's insistence on the primacy of stupidity in his image of the Israelis? From the tone and context of the remark, it seemed clear that he was not thinking of stupidity as a genetically based, unalterable condition. On the contrary, the statement again points to Arafat's image of Israelis as people who are not beyond redemption, as people who have the capacity to choose, who are potentially subject to influence and change. The contrast between arrogance and stupidity as the dominant theme in the image is particularly instructive, in that it suggests a major difference in the kind of interaction with the enemy that the image anticipates. If the Israelis' central flaw is arrogance, there is little you can do other than expressing moral indignation and waiting for the chance to humiliate them and cut them down to size. If their central flaw is stupidity, however, then you can reason with them on the basis of their self-interest and enter into negotiation with them. Thus, Arafat's insistence on the primacy of stupidity in his image of the enemy suggests that he thinks of the Israelis as people with whom he can deal and is prepared to deal in the pursuit of mutual interests.

We Know Who You Are

In asking me to tell the Israelis that they were stupid because they were letting an opportunity for peace slip away, Arafat seemed to be inviting the Israelis to enter into direct communication with him. The message was even clearer when he asked me to tell the Israelis that they were idiots because they were associating themselves so closely with American strategic interests instead of making peace with the Palestinians. As I have already pointed out, this statement implies that it may be more advantageous to both sides to work out a deal among themselves than to rely entirely on American intercession. Arafat also remarked, in our second conversation, that prior Israeli recognition of Palestinian rights was not an issue for him: When you sit down to negotiate, you are automatically recognizing each other.

Arafat's perception and treatment of me provide further evidence suggestive of an interest in dealing directly with Israelis. It was clear from the beginning that my own emphasis was on promoting Israeli–Palestinian communication. At one point in our second conversation, as we were exploring the possibility of Israeli–Palestinian meetings, I became concerned that Arafat might wrongly conclude I was conveying a message from some of the Israelis whose names were mentioned. I therefore said that I hoped he understood the status of what I was proposing: I was speaking only for myself, and I had no idea how the relevant Israelis would react to my proposals. Arafat assured me that he understood I was not there as anyone's representative and he went on to say: We know very well who you are; we know that your only interest is in the welfare of both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples. Clearly, he did not see me as a protagonist of the PLO or a potential convert to it; he understood and accepted my commitment to Israel. Nor did he treat me as a representative of the American Jewish community, although he definitely spoke to me as an American Jew. He seemed to see me, correctly, as someone trying to enact a third-party role, with a particular interest in promoting direct Israeli–Palestinian communication. The fact that he received me warmly (especially on my second visit) and volunteered that I would be welcome back at any time suggests his active interest in the process that I was trying to advance.

I specifically introduced the question of whether Arafat would be willing to meet with politically influential Israelis, if I were able to arrange such a meeting. He replied that he himself could not do so at that time because of his circumstances, but that others could participate in such meetings on his behalf. I considered it premature to press him on precisely whom he had in mind—whether he was thinking, for example, about PLO officials, members of the Palestinian National Council, or respected private individuals—because I had not yet explored the responsiveness to this idea among potential Israeli participants. It was clear, however, that he was open

to the idea; he entertained it in quite specific terms, and he encouraged me to pursue it in Israel. He expressed an interest in following up on this discussion after I had an opportunity to test Israeli reactions. As we ended the meeting, even Arafat's aide—who in earlier conversations with me had not shown much interest in Israeli–Palestinian meetings and had tried to persuade me instead to promote discussions between Palestinians and American Jews—seemed to sense Arafat's positive response and remarked that my proposal was extremely interesting.

We Can Live in Peace

In our first conversation, Arafat spoke about the history of good relations between Jews and Arabs in pre-Mandatory Palestine as evidence that peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians was possible for the future. At one point he told me that, while reading the Torah recently, he had come across the story of David, who was given refuge in his flight from King Saul by the Palestinians and lived among them for some time. (In Arabic, the word for the biblical Philistines is identical with the word for the modern Palestinians.) That he would cite this story as an instance of peaceful coexistence is surprising, in view of the fact that the young David's major claim to fame was his prowess as a slayer of Philistines. Perhaps the point of this story was that the modern Palestinians too were willing to forget the bloody past and to accept the Israelis in their midst.

In our second conversation, it was much clearer that Arafat's image of living in peace referred not only to Jews and Arabs (within, let us say, a secular democratic state), but to an Israeli and a Palestinian state. He told me directly that there was no question about his readiness for peaceful coexistence with Israel, but that he could not say so explicitly until he was offered something concrete in return. More important, the image of the future that he conveyed in at least two of his remarks seemed to anticipate a relationship of peaceful coexistence between Israel and its neighbors. Thus, Arafat cited favorably an article by Abba Eban (1980), in which he proposed a solution modeled after the Benelux union. In this article, Eban envisions a sovereign Palestinian state, based in parts of the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, that is integrated into a community with Israel and Jordan. I am not sure whether Arafat would agree with all of the details of the Eban proposal, but he clearly approved of the Benelux concept, proposing to amend it only by including Lebanon as the fourth partner in the community. At another point in the conversation, Arafat noted that a settlement of the conflict would enhance Israel's economic position by giving it access to the area's petroleum wealth. He seemed to be envisioning a post-settlement situation in which Israel was engaged in trade relations with the Arab world.

Policy Implications

A number of other observers who have spoken directly with Arafat have come away with impressions similar to my own—which contrast sharply, of course, with the general image of Arafat, at least among Americans. What I have tried to add to the descriptions by other observers is a more systematic attempt to anchor my impressions in some of Arafat's specific statements and actions, with special emphasis on his image of the enemy. By focusing on his cognitive style and on the qualitative features that seem to dominate his image of Israel—along with consequential actions that he has already taken—I have tried to infer the kinds of interactions with Israel that he anticipates and might be prepared to engage in.

It would be dangerous to attach much weight to an inference derived from any single remark or gesture. However, the cumulative impressions drawn from a series of statements in the course of two lengthy conversations, when placed in a broader informational context, merit serious attention as we evolve new policies toward the PLO and the Palestinian problem in the wake of the Lebanon crisis. From my encounters, Arafat emerges as a leader who is flexible, open, and nondogmatic in his thinking. He has a differentiated image of the Israeli political spectrum; he looks within that spectrum for leaders with whom it may be possible to negotiate and to achieve a compromise, and he concludes that, indeed, such leaders are to be found. In other words, he seems to believe that there is someone to talk to and something to talk about. He tends to attribute Israeli behavior in part to situational rather than entirely to dispositional causes. Thus, he sees Israelis as capable of choosing and feels that one can reason with them on the basis of their own self-interest. He recognizes that change has occurred—partly in response to Sadat's political initiatives—and perceives Israel as subject to influence and capable of further change. In short, his image of Israel suggests that he is open to negotiation and that he is looking for Israelis with whom he can conduct a dialogue in the pursuit of mutual interests. He conveys an interest in communicating directly with Israelis to find common ground. Finally, his image of the future seems consistent with a vision of peaceful coexistence based on mutual recognition.

The portrait I have drawn suggests that Arafat would be a good negotiating partner for an Israeli leadership that is genuinely interested in a peaceful and fair resolution of the conflict with the Palestinians. I believe this is so. At the same time, I am acutely aware of both the limitations of my evidence

and the reasons for caution. I therefore present my conclusion merely as a hypothesis—but one that definitely deserves to be put to the test, first through a process of communication and pre-negotiation, and eventually through the policy process itself. If my assessment of Arafat's thinking and his associated actions proves to be correct, it tells us a great deal, not only about the man and his potential, but also about the movement and its potential. Whatever one may think about the PLO and its numerous and often contradictory tendencies, it is significant that the man who has risen to the top of its leadership and managed to maintain his position for so many years has evolved the style of thinking and record of action that I have described. It is also significant for the future that this man has a good chance of retaining his leadership position now that the PLO has withdrawn from Lebanon—provided he receives outside encouragement and political support and is able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the political option he has been pursuing.

This last proviso is of crucial importance. Whatever Arafat's inclinations, his movement has always been divided and he has never had a completely free hand to pursue the political course. In many respects, his constraints may be tighter in the coming months. The loss of Beirut as the PLO's center of operations has made it more difficult for Arafat to exercise control over the various factions in the PLO. Moreover, the recent events have no doubt radicalized many Palestinians. The chances, therefore, that Arafat can gain the support of various Palestinian leaders and constituencies for the kinds of concessions necessary to enter into negotiations with Israel and to bring them to a satisfactory conclusion will depend, more than ever, on his ability to obtain something in return. Thus, if Arafat's capacity and will to make peace with Israel is to be put to a realistic test, he must have visible assurances that the concessions he makes will receive significant reciprocation from Israel and the United States.

United States policy can play a crucial role in providing a meaningful test of Arafat's will and capacity to negotiate a settlement. The policy shift announced by President Reagan in his national address of September 1, 1982, represents a promising step in that direction. By giving priority to "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people" and by clearly spelling out the American interpretation of U.N. Resolution 242 and of the Camp David agreements, the President has significantly increased Arafat's incentive to make concessions. The restatement of U.S. positions to the effect that the withdrawal provision of Resolution 242 applies to the West Bank and Gaza, that Israeli annexation or permanent control of these territories is inconsistent with peace, that the purpose of the transition period is the "transfer of domestic authority from Israel to the Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza," and that settlement activity in the territories should be halted immediately, makes it clear that the U.S. government envisages a solution based on sharing of the land between the two peoples. To promote direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations of the precise formula for sharing the land, however, the U.S. government ought to take several additional steps.

First, it should give more thoughtful consideration to the nature of Palestinian nationalism and the role of the PLO as the accepted representative of that nationalism. Thus, the categorical dismissal of an independent Palestinian state in the Reagan address was neither necessary nor helpful to Israeli–Palestinian negotiations, although it made the President's proposals more acceptable to many Israelis and Americans. It should be left to the negotiation process to discover whether it is possible to devise a plan for an independent Palestinian state—perhaps in some form of association with Jordan and/or Israel—that is consistent with Israel's security concerns. By ruling out this option in advance, we are depriving the Palestinians of the hope they need as an incentive to engage in negotiations, and we are making it difficult for the PLO to support and thus legitimize such negotiations.

Second, the U.S. government must begin to talk directly with the PLO leadership. There is no need to recognize the PLO formally at this point or to enter into official negotiations; thus, the U.S. would still be adhering to Kissinger's pledge of no recognition/no negotiation until the PLO recognizes Israel. Without direct communication, however, it is almost impossible to find out what it would take for the PLO to recognize Israel or to accept U.N. Resolution 242, as the U.S. government is demanding. Through direct communication, it will become possible to formulate appropriate tests of the genuineness of Arafat's signals of readiness for peace and of his ability to mobilize internal support for steps toward peace.

Third, the U.S. government must find ways of encouraging the pursuit of a political option within the PLO. To that end, it should strengthen the proponents of a political solution within PLO councils by helping Arafat and his associates maintain their political standing and credibility as they direct their efforts toward a negotiated settlement. Direct communication with PLO leaders would be one way of demonstrating that their pursuit of a political option bears fruit. Another way would be active U.S. responsiveness to actions and gestures through which Arafat appears to be signaling his interest in negotiation and accommodation.

Finally, the U.S. government should encourage

efforts at direct communication between politically influential Palestinians and Israelis. In the final analysis, Jordan cannot stand in for the Palestinians, nor can the United States stand in for Israel. Although they may be difficult to arrange at this time, direct talks at some level are an essential step on the road to negotiations. They should be deliberately geared toward setting a pre-negotiation process into motion.[1] Initially they would almost certainly have to be carried out at an unofficial level but through a series of successive approximations, they may eventually bring in quasi-official representatives designated by the relevant decision makers. The U.S. government can make a creative contribution here by promoting what has been called "track-two diplomacy" (Davidson & Montville, 1981–82).

Both Israeli and American policies at this critical juncture will set the future course of the Palestinian movement and of its conflict with Israel: They will determine whether the PLO's readiness for peace, signaled by Arafat, will be fully explored and exploited, or whether a violent, bitter conflict between an increasingly repressive Israeli government and an increasingly rejectionist PLO will destroy the hopes of the next generation. Policymakers who are truly interested in a peaceful settlement of the conflict, instead of trying to wish away the realities of Palestinian nationalism and to look for alternative (more compliant) Palestinian representatives, need to approach the PLO with a more open mind: They must entertain very seriously the possibility that the PLO, under Arafat's leadership, may be the most credible, legitimate, and willing partner for peace negotiations that is available to Israel. They need to test this possibility by presenting the PLO with proposals, based on reciprocity, that have a real potential for acceptability to the Palestinians—proposals, for example, that call on Palestinians to recognize Israel within a context of mutual recognition or to commit themselves to peaceful coexistence within a context of self-determination for both peoples in historic Palestine.

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[1] For a description of a systematic approach to the pre-negotiation process, see Kelman (1982), especially pp. 67–74.