

*Palestine problem  
seen in West  
as question  
of refugees*

countries were not allowed to return to their towns, villages and farms. The two remnants of Palestine not taken over by the Israelis, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, were annexed by Jordan and governed by Egypt respectively. And the Palestinian problem, in both its human and political ramifications, was taken custody of by the Arab governments. In the West it was projected not as a political issue having to do with a people's aspirations for nationhood but rather as a refugee problem, to be solved in the context of settling or resettling groups of refugees in underpopulated regions of the Arab world or elsewhere. Abstracted thus, the Arab-Israel conflict became one purely between the nation states in the area — namely Israel and the Arab countries.

Indeed this oversimplified view of the struggle for Palestine was given credence at the time, in the middle Fifties, by no less a personage than the American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles. While on an official visit to Lebanon, he gave a speech at the American University of Beirut in which he asserted that the Palestinian problem would be solved only when a new generation of Palestinians had grown up in their respective host countries with no attachment to the land and none

of the passion or the intangible links of the older generation.

### **Palestinian nationalism**

For a meaningful grasp of Palestinian nationalism, and an equally meaningful grasp of the reciprocal links that bind the past to the future vision and ideological construct of the PLO, it is crucial to take into account at least two important facts. From the outset, long before their re-emergence in 1967 as an organized group, the Palestinians themselves were the ones to be in violent opposition to schemes aimed at integrating them into host countries. This writer recalls graphic images from his days in a refugee camp in Beirut when manifestos would be issued and spontaneous demonstrations by Palestinians would erupt to denounce attempts to delay, impede or block their return to their homeland. This passion, sustained to this day, can be ascribed to many factors, not the least of which is that the Palestinians looked upon themselves as a nation in exile whose essential repertoire of consciousness was derived from Palestine. The notion of the "ancestral land" (as was starkly demonstrated in Vietnam) has always exercised fierce exigences on the metaphor, the myths and the idioms



As leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Yasser Arafat was recognized as spokesman for the Palestinian people when the PLO was granted permanent observer status at the UN in November. The PLO leader's speech was given wide coverage. He said "I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighter's gun." Other photographs revealed that this was not a figure of speech, as he was carrying a gun at his right hip