

Politics replace terror

Arafat's PLO adopts new look for the Palestinian movement

by Fawaz Turki

The initial response to the emergence of revolutionary movements and national liberation struggles round the world has traditionally been one of hostility and repugnance. Perhaps this is neither surprising nor unpredictable. Such movements and struggles have a proclaimed aim of destabilizing, restructuring or overthrowing the status quo.

To the French, in the Fifties, the vision of Algerian nationalism was one of the work of deranged terrorists — for who else would contend that Algeria was not a *département* of France and that its indigenous population were not loyal French citizens? Mahatma Gandhi was a “mendicant ascending the stairs of the Chancellery” with no legitimate claims to make on behalf of the Indian people's struggle for independence. The National Liberation Front in Vietnam, in those rare moments in the early Sixties when anyone dignified it by the use of its name, consisted of “peasants in black pajamas”, tools of the Communists in the North, bent on overthrowing the regime of the freedom-loving people of the South. The Palestine Liberation Organization, with their outrageous vision of a secular democratic state in Palestine, are a group of terrorists who do not really represent the Palestinians and whose goal is the destruction of Israel and its people. And so it is with other mass movements, in Africa, South America and Asia, round which it has always been found necessary to create a whole body of active mythology as a way of interacting with forces threatening revolutionary and fundamental change.

If we begin with the premise that the status quo in Palestine is equitable — that is, if we believe in the territorial and institutional integrity of Israel, its borders, its Law of Return, its arguments against the repatriation of Palestinians to their land, or its military occupation — then the existence and platform of the PLO is a dangerous political heresy. If we believe, conversely, that the Palestinian people have suffered injustice — that, as a con-

sequence of decisions taken over their heads and their pleas, they have been denied the basic right of national self-determination in their country —, then the phenomenon of the PLO is natural political orthodoxy.

Who or what the Palestine Liberation Organization is cannot be separated from its relation to the accumulated political and emotional experiences of the Palestinians over the past 26, or indeed 60, years.

Having failed in their 1936-1939 revolt in Palestine against the British mandate authorities (from whom they wanted to wrest independence and a limitation on the influx of Jewish settlers into the country), the Palestinians found themselves leaderless and in disarray. Further weakened by their fragmentation in host countries following the events of 1948, they were unable to become a determining force in their destiny or to deflect happenings from their preordained course. And, before they could begin to regain their voice, a lot had happened. Jewish settlers had created Israel out of their country. The three-quarters of a million refugees who had sought refuge in the neighbouring

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