

result might be a resurgence of internal violence in Palestinian Diaspora communities. Another may be a realignment of international support for the Palestinians. While some countries will adhere to the PLO as the locus of Palestinian sovereignty, others, including Iran and perhaps Syria, will more likely recognize the Hamas-based organization as the Palestinians' "sole representative." Still others will ignore both organizations completely and address the PNA as their diplomatic counterpart.

The most plausible outcome, however, is that the PNA—the Palestinian parliament and government in Ramallah—will gradually become the main political organ of the Palestinian people as the PLO slowly withers away to become a bureaucratic fossil of limited scope. Abbas's scramble to endow the PLO with renewed vigor as the official channel for peace discussions with Israel may enjoy temporary success, and if Israel cooperates the PLO may indeed return to the limelight for a while. But in the longer run, its claim to represent the Palestinian people will be met with growing political resistance.

If that does, in fact, come to pass and the balance of power gradually shifts in favor of the PNA, the coming years will witness a silent struggle for authority between the PNA and the PLO, mainly with regard to Palestinian representation abroad and control over funds. The power shift will of necessity lead to less representation for the Palestinian Diaspora, and therefore to it becoming less of a priority for Palestinian negotiators. Though any Palestinian government will surely bring up the issue of refugees as part of any attempt at a negotiated settlement, the main concern of the PNA will be the establishment of a viable state in the West Bank and Gaza.¹⁴ Even though a Hamas government is now in charge, in the long run such a development will facilitate negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

(Endnotes)

- 1) Wafa Palestine News Agency "Israel Should Give Up Claim That There Is No Palestinian Counterpart," *Al-Quds* (May 22, 2006). (author's translation).
- 2) "Text of Palestinian Prisoners' Document - National Conciliation Document of the Prisoners - by Marwan Barghouti, Abdul Khaleq al Natsheh and Coalition of Prisoners," *One Voice* (May 26, 2006).
- 3) For a history of the PLO, see Sayigh, Yezid, Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993, (Oxford University Press, 1999); and Sela, Avraham and Moshe Ma'oz, eds., The PLO and Israel: From Armed Conflict to Political Solution, 1964–1994, (St. Martin's Press, 1997). On Nasser and the PLO, see also Aburish, Said K., Nasser: The Last Arab, (Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), pp. 223–25.
- 4) This was only part of Israel's strategy. Another goal was to help the mainly Christian Lebanese forces assert their control over the state.
- 5) Khalidi, Rashid, Under Siege: PLO Decision-making during the 1982 War, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 126–28.
- 6) "Declaration of Independence," *Palestinian National Authority* (Sept. 9, 2001).
- 7) Sayigh, Armed Struggle and the Search for State, pp. 549–50.
- 8) He later moved to Damascus, where he is based now.
- 9) "PLO criticises Hamas' programme: The Palestine Liberation Organisation has urged Hamas to reconsider its agenda for government, after its sweeping election victory in January," *BBC News* (March 22, 2006); and Myre, Greg, "P.L.O. Rejects Proposed Platform of Hamas, Now Set to Take Power," *New York Times* (March 23, 2006).
- 10) "Hamas to ask for parliament confidence despite PLO dispute," *Al Bawaba* (March 22, 2006).
- 11) al Hussaini, Jihane, "Hamas FM Mahmoud al Zahar Talks to Asharq Al-Awsat," *Asharq Alawsat* (April 20, 2006).
- 12) See the Palestinian prisoners' document referenced in footnote 2.
- 13) See a MEMRI translation of the highlights of Mahmud Al-Zahhar's extensive October 2005 interview on www.elaph.com, and of his November 10, 2005 interview to Al-Sharq Al-Awsat: "Hamas Leader in Gaza Dr. Mahmoud Al-Zahar: We'll Join the Legislative Council – and Keep Our Guns" *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series* No. 1028 (Nov. 18, 2005). In this interview, conducted several months before the elections, Al-Zahhar, the current Hamas foreign minister, refers to plans for reconstructing the PLO. In fact he is talking about the establishment of a new organization with the same functions: