

## **Palestinian-Syrian Relations**

### **Abstract**

The observer of Arab-Arab relations is likely to conclude that such relations are characterized by a great deal of political disorder and mutual distrust. This is mainly, the result of the negative interaction which characterized the relations between the two sides over a long period of time.

This study endeavors to show the cooperation and conflict, crises and détente, rupture and reconciliation in Palestinian-Syrian relations throughout the various stages they went through.

These relations have undergone many moments of tide and ebb for since the establishment of the PLO, Syria presented itself as the main supporter of the Palestinian cause. In fact, the Syrian leadership played a major role in the recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and demanded that the PLO must have sovereignty over Palestinian land. Later Syria tried to impose its will on the Palestinian national decision-making.

When the PLO lost its military base in Jordan and, as a result, moved to Lebanon, Syria seized the opportunity and tried to impose its political will on the leadership PLO. The aim was to influence the PLO in its political and military course. During the early phase of the PLO's political and military

activities in Lebanon, Syria tended to approve of all kinds of Palestinian commando operations, but a later stage, the complexity and ramifications of Syria's relations and interests in Lebanon created a collision the PLO. In addition at the end of the civil war in Lebanon, the Syrians organized a revolt against Yaser Arafat within Fateh and the PLO. During the period after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Syrians supported the secession in Fateh due to their resentment of the new approach that the PLO adopted regarding a political settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The ultimate break in Palestinian-Syrian relations came after the Oslo agreement in 1993, which Syria regarded as a serious concession to the minimum Arab political requirements for a fair solution to the Palestinian issue. The Syrian leadership could not accept Arafat's decision to become a party to the Oslo agreement without its agreement and blessing. In reaction, the Syria launched a fierce political campaign against Arafat, and gave full support to all factions of Palestinian opposition, regardless of their political orientations, including Islamic Hamas.

An improvement in Palestinian-Syrian relations began to take root after the death of the Syrian president Hafez Al-Asad in 2000, and at a later stage, when Yasser Arafat took a strong stance in the final status negotiations in Camp David, confirming his intention not to make any further concessions. This development in Arafat's position played a role in lessening the negative position of the Syrian government towards the Palestinian leadership and furthered an improvement in Palestinian-Syrian relations.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Intifada (Al-Asia), which broke out in 28/9/2000, was an important turning point in Palestinian history and serious a blow to Oslo, which can be considered as the main cause behind the deterioration in Palestinian- Syrian relations.

We can say that the apparent failure of Oslo was a main factor in the relative improvement of Palestinian- Syrian relations, although Syria is still supporting Palestinian opposition factions, including Hamas.