

Abstract:

This study discusses the image of the state in the Palestinian official political discourse, as reflected in the declarations, decisions and pronouncements made by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and later the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

The study examines Palestinian discourse in three stages:

The first stage is the period of 1964-1974. During this period, the overall Palestinian discourse can be described as revolutionary at all levels, but the concept of state was absent from it, as the pan-Arab nationalistic dimension was predominant. Moreover, the Palestinian discourse in these years included a high level of negation of the other, particularly Israel, colonialism and imperialism. Indeed, it could be said that the overwhelming Palestinian emphasis in this period was on liberation of historical Palestine from the River of Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea through armed struggle. As such, the image of the state in this period was a state with a pan-Arab dimension.

The second stage is the period of 1974-1993. This period witnessed a transformation in the official Palestinian discourse, which started to focus on the issue of the state. In this period Palestinian nationalistic dimension had priority and precedence over the pan-Arab dimension, and Israel remained the ultimate contradiction. Moreover, the PLO began acting as a quasi-state or state in the making, with the PLO leadership appointing ambassadors in foreign capitals, receiving ambassadors and envoys and granting military ranks and insignias. Furthermore, this period witnessed the combination of strategy and tactics through the adoption of diplomacy and armed resistance, viewed as complementary rather than contradictory. As for the concept of state, the discourse stressed the state as a form lacking any substance. Indeed, the quest for statehood during this period had more to do with formalities and little with actual liberation from Israeli occupation. This in turn made the Palestinian leadership sacrifice some of the national goals under the slogan of state, as culminated in the Independence Declaration, which actually recognized Israel and accepted the UNSC resolution 242. These steps were considered unthinkable two or three decades earlier.

The third stage is the so-called Oslo era, which represented a serious and radical departure from the two previous periods. During this period, there was a clear split between form and substance and between public pronouncements and reality on the ground. In this period, the Palestinian National Authority devoted much effort and energy to institutionalization, such as promulgating laws and legislations governing various aspects of Palestinian life in various political, economic and cultural spheres. Besides, the pan-Arab dimension continued to recede in favor of Palestinian nationalism and the PLO effectively declared its

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disengagement from its regional and pan-Arab depth. Moreover, the US and Israel became “partners for peace” after decades of hostility and inherent contradiction. In short, Peace became the strategic choice.

In conclusion, the study illustrates the following: In the first period, there was harmony between form and substance, namely between official discourse, stressing liberation, and national resistance on the ground. In the second period, there was a clear contradiction between official discourse and actions on the ground as the PLO left the liberation program and adopted the independence program. In the third stage, the Oslo era, the split between form and substance became deeper as the PLO signed the Declaration of Principles with Israel with little consideration for the consequences of this policy.