

March 26, 1965

Palestine Delegation in Peking

Citation:

"Palestine Delegation in Peking", March 26, 1965, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Peking Review 13 (March 26, 1965), pp. 5-6. Contributed and annotated by Cyrus Schayegh. <https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/291053>

Summary:

Formed in 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was not the first Palestinian organization after the nakba (catastrophe), the escape from violence and the Israeli expulsion of a good half of Palestinians in 1948. The two most important earlier organizations were Harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-'Arab (Arab Nationalists Movement [ANM]) and Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini (Palestinian National Liberation Movement [Fatah]).

Founded in 1951 in Beirut, ANM became committed to Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970) and his version of pan-Arab nationalism, which it saw as the means to liberate Palestine, opening a separate Palestinian branch in 1959. (In 1967, it would give rise to the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which split in 1968, one wing forming the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP)).

Rejecting Arab states' tutelage, Fatah was officially born in 1959, though organizational activities began in 1956 and though it built on military cells operating from Egyptian-ruled Gaza from the early 1950s. After Arab armies' crushing loss against Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967 killed any remaining hopes, weakened since the early 1960s, that Arab armies would liberate Palestine, Fatah grew in strength. In 1969, it took command of the PLO. The latter had been founded in 1964 for several reasons. Nasser hoped to weaken Fatah and Syria, a state then in competition with him. Also, the PLO served (upper) middle class Palestinians some of whom—like Ahmad al-Shuqayri (1908-1908), Palestine's representative to the Arab League and the PLO's founder and first chairman—had played a Palestinian political role until 1948 and wished to do so again. And these men and women believed Palestinians needed their own statist entity, as Yezid Sayigh's monumental *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (1997) notes.

In 1965, PLO delegates led by Shuqayri for the first time visited the People's Republic of China (PRC), as reported in the English issue of the multi-language international organ *Peking Review*. Already in 1964 a small Fatah delegation led by Yassir Arafat (1929-2004) had accepted an invitation to visit Beijing, founding an office there. Sure,

upon its establishment in 1949 the PRC had de jure recognized Israel, following the lead of the Soviet Union that acted as its older brother in the communist camp. (Israel in turn was the first Middle Eastern state to recognize the PRC, in 1950.) But after the PRC and the USSR split in 1960, Beijing amplified its anti-imperialist rhetoric and policies versus the Soviet Union and the United States, as Gregg Brazinsky's *Winning the Third World: Sino-American Rivalry during the Cold War* (2017) has shown. It was in this context that it from the mid-1960s delivered arms especially to Fatah and the PLO—it soon also would train fighters—and that it politically embraced the Palestinian cause. The PRC framed this policy as that of one “revolutionary people” helping another one, a story strand in Paul Chamberlin's *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (2012). By the early 1970s, however, Chinese support became more lukewarm. Moreover, after the death of Chairman Mao Zedong (1893-1976), relations with Israel cautiously warmed, though remaining surreptitious until the establishment of full diplomatic ties in 1992.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

Peking Review

13

March 26, 1965

[...]

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE OF CHINESE NEWS AND VIEWS

[...]

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A delegation of the Palestine Liberation Organization led by Ahmed Shukairy [Ahmad Shukeiri], its President, arrived in Peking on March 17 for a friendly visit at the invitation of the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs. During its stay in the capital, Chairman Liu Shao-chi [Liu Shaoqi], Premier Chou En-lai [Zhou Enlai] and Vice-Premier Chen Yi received president Shukairy and other members of the delegation and had cordial and friendly talks with them. President Shukairy discussed with Premier Chou En-lai the Palestine question, and they had a frank exchange of views on the strengthening of solidarity between the Chinese and Arab peoples in the struggle against imperialism, the promotion of Asian-African solidarity and other important questions of common interest.

Peking held a mass rally on March 21 to welcome distinguished guests from Palestine. Premier Chou En-lai was among those present.

Saluting the Arab people of Palestine for their struggle against imperialism and to regain their legitimate rights and return to their homeland, Liao Cheng-chih [Liao Chengzhi], Member of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman of the Chinese Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity, sharply condemned U.S. imperialism which, in collusion with West German militarists, had provided Israel with large quantities of arms, thereby posing a threat to Arab countries. Referring to the Bonn government's recent announcement on terminating so called aid to the United Arab Republic and its decision to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, he said: "This is really going too far in bullying people." He reaffirmed the Chinese people's firm support for the Arab people in their struggle against U.S. imperialism and West German militarism and against the tool of imperialism, Israel.

Pointing out that U.S. imperialism was the Arab People's arch enemy threatening the security of the Arab countries, he said: "Seventeen years ago, the United States created Israel, and evicted one million Arabs from their homes to lead a miserable life as displaced persons. This is a tragedy in contemporary history and a most glaring instance of gross violation of human rights. It is a crime committed by U.S. imperialism. Israel is a dagger thrust by the United States at the heart of the Arab world." Liao Cheng-chi denounced U.S. imperialism for committing outrageous crimes all over the world. He stressed that so long as the people of the world "unite and rise to struggle against it, U.S. imperialism will be defeated."

Ahmed Shukairy was warmly applauded when he addressed the rally. He pointed out that, as a result of U.S. intervention and aggression, the Arab people of Palestine had been living a life in exile for 16 years. He told the rally that his people were determined to fight for their legitimate rights until final victory.

He described the Arab, Chinese and other peace-loving peoples as comrades-in-arms on the same battlefield, for the same destiny, to achieve the same victory, because their enemy is the same U.S. imperialism. "Together with the Chinese people," he declared, "we will go forward in this battle until we wipe out imperialism and colonialism from the face of the earth."

The Palestinian delegation had fruitful talks with Chinese leaders. A joint statement was signed in Peking on March 22 by President Shukairy and Chou En-lai, Honorary President of the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs, and Chang Hsi-jo [Zhang Xiruo], its President. It declared that "the essence of the Palestine question is sheer aggression on the part of Zionism and imperialism headed by the United States on the one hand and the struggle of the Arab people of Palestine and all the rest of the Arab people on the other." Support was expressed by the Chinese side for the Arab people in their great struggle against imperialism, old and new colonialism, and Zionism. Both sides also expressed support for the anti-imperialist, revolutionary struggle of the people of Viet Nam, the Congo (L) and other countries.

Referring to the mistakes made by the United Nations in relation to the Palestine question, the statement called for its thorough reorganization. It also called upon the people of the world to wage an unremitting struggle against imperialism headed by the United States in order to realize peaceful coexistence among nations.

To strengthen the mutual cooperation between the people of China and Palestine, it was agreed that a mission of the Palestine Liberation Organization would be set up in Peking.