
Programme for National Palestinian Unity

NAIM ASHHAB

Political Bureau member, CC Jordanian Communist Party

The latest moves by US imperialism, Zionism and Egyptian reaction, which culminated in the signing of the separate Egyptian-Israeli "peace" treaty, have shown yet again that these forces will not stop short of the foulest schemes with respect to the Arab people of Palestine, whose future and national destiny is now at stake. The Israeli-Egyptian treaty and the documents annexed to it, says Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the PLO Executive Committee, "legalise the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and doom the Arab Palestinian people to eternal exile".

The Palestine problem has been and continues to be the cardinal issue in any Middle East settlement, and it mirrors the various shades and characteristic features of the struggle going forward in our region. It is the starting point of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The lands of the Palestinian Arabs were the first to come under Zionist expansion and, as in the past, the Israeli rulers continue to pivot their anti-people's plans on the trampling of the legitimate rights of the Arab Palestinian people. Recent events once again reaffirm these intentions, which are now served by the US-Israeli-Egyptian deal aimed against a real and lasting settlement in the region.

Broad recognition in the Arab countries and all over the world that the Palestinian problem is pivotal to the Middle East crisis shows why so much attention was given in the various countries to the National Palestinian Council meeting in Damascus in mid-January. Before analysing its results, it is worth while to describe the general conditions in which the Palestinian national movement now has to fight.

In the past several years, the Palestinian people have had to act in a more complicated situation than before. This situation is characterised by the mounting moves on the part of Arab reaction in an effort to wrest the initiative from the Arab revolutionary and national-liberation forces. The withdrawal of Egypt, with its weight and potential, from the front of resistance to the imperialist-Zionist alliance has had the most dangerous consequences for the

destiny of the peoples of our region. The Sadat regime is now an active participant in this alliance.

The conditions of the Palestinians' struggle against the Israeli occupation have also changed for the worse and become more complicated: since the 1967 aggression and the events of Black September in 1970¹ in Jordan, a kind of security belt has been created round Israel's territory and the Arab lands it is occupying, with the addition of the south of Lebanon in the mid-seventies. Having provoked the crisis in that country, imperialism, Zionism and Lebanese reaction have involved the Palestinian resistance movement in yet another bitter fight which is designed to divert its attention from the struggle against the Israeli aggression. In this situation, changes have taken place in the structure and military organisation of the Palestinian resistance movement: the lightly armed and mobile units have been partially changed into combat units similar to those of other classic armies. These changes were imperative, because the Palestinian fighters had to defend themselves against incessant raids by the Israeli aggressors on the positions of the resistance movement on the territory of Lebanon, and to join the Lebanese patriotic movement in resisting the right-wing forces, which teamed up with the Israelis in order to wipe out any presence of the Palestinian movement, whether on the territory of Lebanon or elsewhere.

While carrying out this restructuring, the Palestinian national movement, led by the PLO, sought simultaneously to defend its legitimate and natural right to take independent political decisions. In the period under review, some Arab regimes and circles repeatedly made attempts on this right, including the use of their influence in some Palestinian organisations and frequently resorting to the use of brute force.

The Palestinian national movement justly recognises the role and importance of the assistance coming to it from the fraternal Arab states. This assistance is highly important also because the Palestinians' struggle is closely tied in and interlaced with the struggle of the other Arab peoples and countries, above all those which are in direct confrontation with the Israeli aggression. Together with other forward contingents of the Arab liberation movement, the Palestinian contingents are holding forward positions in the anti-imperialist struggle, and Palestinian fighters have been fighting the Zionist aggressors in the frontlines for decades. So when the traitor Sadat claims that Egypt and its people sacrifice themselves for a solution of the Palestinian problem he misleads public opinion. Up to now, it is the Palestinians who have suffered the greatest losses in the battle against the enemy. The progressive and democratic Arab circles supporting the Palestinian liberation movement regard their support of it as a fraternal duty and obligation to the Arab Palestinian people and its liberation contingents.

However, it is totally inadmissible for anyone to try, in "return" for such assistance, to meddle in the internal affairs of the Palestinian movement, to try to establish tutelage over it, or to take steps designed to deprive the movement of its right to take independent political decisions bearing on the Palestinians' national destiny. Let us recall that whenever anyone has interfered in the Palestinian movement's internal affairs, its struggle has suffered heavy defeats. That is what happened in 1936, when the Arab monarchs managed to end the Palestinian people's historic political strike, and frustrated its revolutionary action against the British mandatory power and its Zionist partners.² The entry of the Arab monarchies' armies into Palestine in 1948, under the pretext of liberating the whole of Palestine, was also an attempt to solve the Palestinian problem behind the backs of this people. As the result of a deal between the Israeli rulers and the Arab reactionaries, a part of the territory of Palestine on

which an Arab state was to have been set up was partitioned between Israel and Jordan (the Gaza strip was put under Egyptian administrative control). In this way, the Palestinian people were prevented from establishing their independent state in accordance with UN resolutions. If there is now a fundamentally different situation in the Middle East, as compared with that which had existed after the 1948 disaster, when the United States, Britain and France, in league with the Zionist rulers of Israel and detachments of the ruling Arab reaction, managed to turn things in the region to their own advantage, the Palestinians' selfless struggle constitutes a main factor in this change.

Since the Israeli aggression of 1967, the imperialist-Zionist alliance has failed despite every effort to neutralise the influence on the situation in the region of the two fundamental factors: the role of the Palestinian movement, and that of the Soviet Union. That is quite natural. Concerning the Palestinian factor, its growing importance is determined by the decades of persistent battles by the Palestinian masses for their inalienable national rights: return to their homeland, the right to self-determination, and the establishment of an independent national state. The role of the Soviet factor springs from the internationalist nature of the USSR's foreign policy, which rests on the sound basis of fraternal solidarity with the Arab peoples which have fallen victim to imperialist-Israeli aggression, with the Arab Palestinian people in the first place. It is only natural that, as a country directly neighbouring on the region, ~~the USSR should be gravely concerned and vigilant over the existence in the area of a chronic hotbed of tension, and of permanent bloody conflict resulting from the imperialist Israeli conspiracy against the Arab liberation movement.~~ This great country truly wants to see a just peace in the Middle East re-established, for the benefit of all its peoples, all the consequences of the aggression eliminated, and the Palestinians' legitimate national rights secured.

Life has reaffirmed that imperialism and its Israeli ally see "peace" in the Middle East as an enslaving and humiliating "peace", whose fruits are devoted to their selfish interests. The way to it was paved by Sadat's betrayal, while the Carter Administration's pressures and promises enabled him to take the first steps along this way: his trip to Jerusalem, then Camp David, and finally, the present Egyptian-Israeli separate "peace" treaty. Shortly before its signing, similar tactics or pressures and promises were used with respect to the Palestinian national movement in an effort to influence the whole course of its struggle, including the outcome of the January meeting of the National Palestinian Council. Before and during it, the imperialist-Zionist alliance carried on intense subversive activity in an effort to spread confusion in the ranks of the Palestinians, to produce illusions among them, and to sharpen the differences.

Saudi Arabia was used as a mouthpiece to spread rumours about Washington's alleged readiness (especially in the light of the events in Iran) to reappraise the whole of its foreign policy in the region, and that the architects of the present US policy do not rule out the possibility of US recognition of the PLO. The price for this would be removal of representatives of the left-wing forces from all the key posts. These imperialist promises were addressed above all to the right-wing elements on the PLO National Council.

A statement by the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Andrew Young, was designed to add plausibility to the rumours about a possible US recognition of the PLO. Young deliberately extolled the merits of the PLO representatives at the United Nations, and said he hoped that these delegates would assume leadership of the PLO, rather than other PLO figures who have favoured terrorism and the destruction of Israel. In the light of these demagogic statements by US spokesmen on the Palestinian issue, it was no accident either

that Israel's Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan declared that while the PLO was "not a state, we (the Israeli rulers—N.A.) cannot deny their position or their value". He added that the PLO "is not just the terrorists or the terrorist organisation, it is also the civilian part of it—that is to say, the Palestinian refugees."

Behind these statements lurks a common and probably concerted policy. Both Young and Dayan used the so-called differentiated approach to the PLO, whose purpose is to oppose different Palestinian contingents to each other, to pit the military against the civilians, the "terrorists" against the "moderates", the "sober-minded" against the "implacables". While seeking to split the Palestinian organisations and to divide the PLO's contingents, the imperialist-Zionist circles would ultimately like to crush the whole Palestinian movement and make it incapable of fighting. That is an old vision of theirs, but it now seems to be their main and overt stake. Although the Israeli rulers try to show that their views on the Palestinian issue have undergone some fundamental changes, the Zionists' premise actually remains the same: they refuse to recognise the unity and destiny of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories and in exile, and consequently, intend to continue denying its natural right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent state.

The subversive acts of the imperialists, Zionists and Arab Palestinian Council did not produce the desired results. Despite their hopes for a split and weakening of the Palestinian movement, the Assembly approved the current political and organisational *Programme For Natural Palestinian Unity*. Its decisions say that the revolutionary contingents and patriotic Palestinian forces "take part in the organs of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and, above all, in its National Council, the Central Council and the Executive Committee on the basis of the front's democratic principles". Its recommendations emphasise the importance of "maintaining a democratic dialogue, always observing its revolutionary moral rules and norms, and non-resort to force in settling any differences".

We feel that such an approach to Palestinian unity helps to establish more advanced relations between the various patriotic and revolutionary forces within the PLO. The new organisational forms approved at the last meeting of the National Palestinian Council are an important achievement on the pan-Arab scale as well, especially now that attempts to undermine progressive national fronts in some countries of our region have been stepped up. Consistent use of these forms will give a new impetus to the struggle of the Palestinian masses and will enhance the PLO's prestige and influence in the Arab world and beyond it.

The demands for the re-establishment of the legitimate rights of the Arab Palestinian people to return to their homeland, self-determination and the establishment of an independent national state, worked out at the Council meeting and written into its programme, should be seen as an important achievement. It is true that unrealistic aims have also been written into the Preamble to that document. That is why, while endorsing the correct formulation of the Palestinians' fundamental rights, the Jordanian Communist Party believes, nevertheless, that at the present stage there must be full clarity, as never before, with respect to the Palestinian people's patriotic tasks. Such an approach would help to rally and unite it round a realistic and feasible programme, preventing any division of the people's forces by prompting them to fight to attain a goal which, however just it may appear to be from the standpoint of absolute law, cannot be regarded as realistic and feasible with the present correlation of forces in the Middle East. One should also bear in mind that the Israeli aggressor makes use against the Palestinians themselves of any

extremist slogan they may put forward, in an effort to denigrate their struggle and justify its annexationist and aggressive policy. These slogans allow even the capitulationists to argue that their policy is a "realistic" one.

At the same time, one should undoubtedly take a close look at that part of the new Palestinian programme which designates the "main field of battle against the Zionist enemy". According to the document, this is the West Bank of the Jordan, the Gaza Strip and the Arab (Eastern) part of Jerusalem. The Palestinian movement firmly intends to continue and extend its armed struggle and all kinds of political mass action, above all on that territory, which Israel occupied in 1967. Judging from the results of the people's mass meetings, which rejected the Camp David plot, and the memorandum addressed to the January meeting of the National Palestinian Council, the population in these areas and the progressive and patriotic forces operating there are fully resolved to fulfil their people's national tasks, to put an end to the occupation and the anti-Palestinian plots. The Jordanian Communist Party advocates the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank of the Jordan, in the Gaza Strip and in the Arab section of Jerusalem after their liberation, and works for the solution of the problem of the Palestinian refugees expelled from their homeland after 1948, for their return to their homes, as many UN decisions require.

The correct definition of the role of the occupied territories within the overall Palestinian struggle, as reflected in this programme, appears to be all the more important in the light of the views of some Palestinian leaders who were inclined, after the signing of the ignominious Camp David agreements, to regard these regions as among the "weakest elements" of the Palestinian front. It is true that the abstract theoretical formulation of this problem sounds plausible. After all, these territories are under the direct control of the invaders, who practice fierce terrorism and persecution, and endeavour to convert some traitors (one will find such people in any nation) into "loyal" Palestinian leaders. But in life things are very much more complicated than that, and the situation there is completely different. Massive popular resistance is now truly developing on these lands. This was clearly shown by the sharply negative reaction of the Palestinian population to the Camp David agreement, and the powerful wave of protest on the West Bank and in Gaza against the projects for so-called Palestinian autonomy. The very latest events connected with the conclusion of the separate Egyptian-Israeli deal under US patronage also indicate that the liberation movement and active resistance in these areas have continued to grow. They have been the scene of mass demonstrations and strikes. The Palestinians declared Monday—March 26 (the day the separate treaty was signed in Washington)—as a day of national mourning. In other words, there is no ground for considering the occupied territories a weak element of the Palestinian front.

The programme of the national Palestinian movement formulates tasks in providing all-round support—political and material—to the fighting population on the occupied territories to a patriotic Palestinian front which is to be revived there. In the past, such assistance sometimes failed to reach the right address. A part of it even went to those whose ties with the occupation authorities should have aroused suspicion. To avoid abuse of assistance designed for fighters on the occupied territories, the Palestinian members of our Party on the National Palestinian Council demanded the right of full control over its distribution to be subsequently vested in the Patriotic Palestinian Front.

Palestinian-Jordanian relations, which in the past were darkened by differences and hostility, should be specially considered. A majority of the

members of the National Palestinian Council reaffirmed their responsible stand on this question and formulated a number of norms regulating any future contacts between the PLO Executive Committee and the Jordanian government. These measures are designed to prevent any neglect of the basic rights of the Palestinian people, above all of its right to set up an independent state, and the PLO's right to act as that people's only legitimate representative.³ At the same time, the new programme stresses that the PLO "confirms the existence of special ties between the two fraternal peoples: the Palestinian and the Jordanian". In the opinion of the Jordanian Communist Party, Palestinian-Jordanian relations should be arranged in the light of the interests of the two fraternal peoples and their joint struggle against imperialism and the Israeli occupation. It is inadmissible that the important patriotic and political gain which the Palestinian people have won in the course of their hardest struggle should be sacrificed for the sake of their development.

Finally, a few words on the attitude of the National Palestinian Council which it took on some international issues at its January meeting. Its programme and political report expressed the profound conviction, which is rooted in the decades of painful struggle, that the United States leads the camp of the Palestinian people's enemies, and this was reaffirmed by its engineering of the Israeli-Egyptian separate deal. At the same time, the PLO recognises the importance of its alliance with socialist countries, the Soviet Union in the first place, and regards its role in the Middle East as a most important factor for successful resistance to US-Zionist plots.

It should also be noted that whenever the Palestinian movement's international alliances were considered in the past, the USSR and China were frequently mentioned together. However, the present Chinese leadership's revolutionary movement, including the Arab national-liberation movement. Peking's support of Camp David and the Sadat-Begin separate deal in Washington have finally opened the Palestinians' eyes to the Maoist elite's treacherous role. In the Palestinian movement, they are now supported only by those who use leftist slogans as a screen for joining the Camp David agreements and supporting the separate "peace" treaty produced by the US-Egyptian-Israeli alliance.

The January meeting of the National Palestinian Council undoubtedly has major achievements to its credit, as expressed in its historic decision on political and organisational matters. It was a resounding defeat for the right-wing forces' attempts to impose their line on the PLO as a whole. However, one must note the negative fact that these forces succeeded in their attempts to block the formation of a new Executive Committee of the organisation that would truly represent *all* the forces fighting for a just solution of the Palestine problem and for the removal of conciliatory and opportunistic elements from the PLO. In the exceptionally alarming situation produced by the separate Egyptian-Israeli deal, the central executive organ must have a composition which is up to the level of the political achievements of the session, the tasks it has set, and the challenge of combating the deal. The right-wing elements make it easier for the reactionary Arab states to effect their schemes in their efforts to disrupt the PLO mechanism, to establish their tutelage over it, to tame it, or to swallow it up altogether. The failure of the attempt to form an executive committee representing all the truly patriotic contingents may be regarded by imperialism, Zionism and Arab reaction as a highly encouraging signal, and they may try to step up their subversive activity.

Especial importance now attaches to the solidarity of all the forces within the PLO working to solve the Palestinian problem on a just basis, to their constructive acts aimed to correct the serious shortcomings mentioned above

as soon as possible. Our comrades on the National Palestinian Council urge the need for Communists to take part in the Executive Committee. At every stage of the Palestinian movement's struggle, the Communists have taken an honest and open stand. Today, they have an outstanding role to play in many sectors of the struggle, above all in the occupied territories. Our Party will continue to advocate that the Communists and other militant Palestinian forces should have their representatives on the Executive Committee of the PLO. This will merely go to strengthen the PLO, consolidate its political independence, and unite the patriotic forces.

Our Party believes that since the conclusion of the Camp David agreements, and especially of the latest US-Israeli-Egyptian separate deal, the need to overcome organisational and political shortcomings within the PLO's activity has become a task which brooks no delay. The main purpose of the Camp David participants now is to do away with the Palestinian national movement. That such a sinister scheme does exist will be seen very well from the recent resumption of Israel's escalation of its aggressive acts in the south of Lebanon. The attitude taken by Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf emirates and Sudan, which have withdrawn their military units from the inter-Arab forces in Lebanon, is also a clear sign of this intention. Nor does the danger lie in the military consequences of such an act (for the main contingent of these forces is Syrian), but above all in its political consequences, for it will undoubtedly encourage the Israeli invaders and the right-wing Lebanese separatists. As a result, Syria, being left as the only country representing the inter-Arab forces, will be subjected to fresh pressure by the imperialists and their allies, seeking to change Syria's consistent and steadfast stand and to involve it in Sadat's treacherous policy.

Unity of the contingents of the Palestinian resistance movement acquires especial importance in the light of the existing situation. Unity alone will help to muster all its forces and potentialities, cut short the moves by its enemies, who intend to provoke contradictions between Palestinian contingents, including armed clashes between them (like those which, unfortunately, occurred in the summer of last year). And if the situation itself, which is extremely complicated—in terms of extending the armed struggle against the Israeli invaders—makes these contingents give greater attention in political and even ideological struggle, the absence of unity between them becomes a motive for the suicidal extremist acts to which some Palestinian organisations resort from time to time in order to make known their existence.⁴

The Arab Palestinian people are now a force that has been seasoned in the hard battles against imperialism and Zionism. The grave trials which have fallen to their lot have helped them to develop high steadfastness and resolution to fight to the last against their enemies' plots and to frustrate their moves. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the PLO Executive Committee, said: "The Palestinian people tends to be higher than its leadership". Indeed, the Arab Palestinian people has the great mission of carrying of a sacred battle for its legitimate rights, for noble national goals. It will not be deflected from this struggle.

¹On that occasion, the Jordanian authorities resorted to bloody terrorism in order to wipe out the bases of the Palestinian resistance movement on the territory of Jordan. See, Naim Ashhab, "To Overcome Crisis of Palestine Resistance Movement", *WMR*, May 1972.

²The general strike in Palestine lasted for six months, and involved hundreds of thousands of workers, fellahs, artisans, merchants and intellectuals. The population stopped paying taxes. Street demonstrations developed into clashes with troops of the British imperialists. In October 1936, the strike was stopped on the insistence of four Arab monarchs: the kings of Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Yemen, and the Emir of Trans-Jordan.—Ed.

³The importance of these measures will be seen from the official negotiations between the PLO and the Jordanian government, at which two draft documents were adopted: Framework of Joint Action, and Memorandum on Mutual Understanding. However, after these were discussed by the National Palestinian Council, they were rejected by an overwhelming majority because they contained highly suspicious provisions which could be used by conciliatory Arab elements to put pressure on the PLO and the Palestinians so as to induce them to accept collaborationist, pro-imperialist decisions.

⁴Since 1967, the number of Palestinian organisations has nearly doubled, and not mainly as a result of new ones appearing on the scene, but of splits and divisions in some existing ones.