

Nonaligned Yugoslavia and the Relations with the Palestine Liberation Organisation

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This article is the result of research conducted during the visit to the Archives of Yugoslavia, and the Diplomatic Archive of the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belgrade, where the Yugoslav Foreign Office material is kept today. The documents used for this article are mainly those by the Foreign Secretariat of SFRY, Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia (SAWPY) and Cabinet of the President Tito. The Yugoslav involvement in the Palestinian problem might be divided into two stages and three levels. The first stage refers to the immediate post World War II period when Yugoslavia, as a member of UNSCOP¹, was directly involved in UN's efforts to find a sustainable solution for the future of Palestine. The second stage started after 1955 when Yugoslavia started to implement its new foreign policy which aimed to align it with predominantly third world countries. Such efforts culminated in 1961 when the Non-Aligned Movement was created in Belgrade. The second stage had significantly more substance than the first one: it saw an active Yugoslav role in promoting the rights of the Palestinian refugees, and after the 1967 June war the promotion of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and statehood.

Yugoslavia's first involvement in the Palestinian problem started with the United Nation's initial efforts to solve the Middle Eastern crises which arose from the United Kingdom's decision to suddenly end its mandate in Palestine. As a member of UNSCOP, Yugoslavia backed the adoption of the so-called minority plan in August 1947, together with India and Iran, also members. The plan envisaged the establishing of a Federal State of Palestine that would comprise of an Arab and a Jewish State. In accordance with this, the population of Palestine would elect a constituent assembly, whose main purpose would be to adopt the Constitution of the new Federal State. The plan also included the creation of single Palestinian nationality and citizenship which would be granted to Arabs, Jews and other ethnic groups. Jerusalem would become the capital of this Federal State, and would be divided in two municipalities, with predominant Arab and Jewish population.

Such proposal resembled Yugoslavia's own historic path: the creation of a post war constituent assembly formally elected by the entire Yugoslav population, and the creation of a Federal State; the establishing of the Yugoslav nation and citizenship with emphasis on equality between the nations. Yugoslavia's proposal for Palestine was not adopted since the majority of the UN members -

¹ UN General Assembly at its first Special Session established the Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) in April 1947. Its member states were Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, India, Iran, Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay and Yugoslavia. UNSCOP's task was to prepare the proposals of possible solutions for the problem of Palestine. UNSCOP proposed two competing plans; a majority plan that envisaged a partition with the economic union, and a minority plan of creating a Federal State of Palestine, Jovanović 1985: 111. Kirisci 1986: 4-5; Pogany 1984: 21-22.

33 countries altogether, including the Eastern Bloc – voted for the partition plan at the General Assembly's second regular session. Yugoslavia abstained from voting with nine other UN members, and 13 members voted against the partition plan, 10 of which were predominantly Islamic countries. From then on, Yugoslavia was not politically involved in the Middle East crisis until the Suez crisis broke out in 1956. However, Yugoslavia was active in the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine) which dealt mainly with the problem of Palestinian refugees.

Yugoslavia put the question of Palestinian refugees to the UN General Assembly for the first time at its Fifth session. Yugoslav attitude was that the refugee problem needed to be resolved as soon as possible since the Israel state was already established and the relations with the Arab states were regulated by the Armistice. At the same time, Yugoslav attitude was that recommendations to bring the Arab refugees back to Israel should not be pursued at any price. Interestingly, in the pre-1956 period Yugoslavia's attitude to the Arab-Israeli conflict was neutral and, in some cases, Yugoslavia even preferred the Israeli claims over the Arab ones. Even Yugoslav diplomats acknowledged in their reports that the Yugoslav diplomacy at the time was more in favour of the Jewish than the Arab side. Similarly, Yugoslavia always supported Israel's right to existence, and in 1948 the Yugoslav representative in the United Nations declared that "*there is no justification for the Arab claim on the entire territory of Palestine. The Jewish state and nation exist and their existence cannot be denied. That nation has the right to independence and national state.*"

In the period between 1948 and 1954 Yugoslav history is predominantly marked by the Tito-Stalin split. During this time, Yugoslavia, pressured economically and politically by the Soviet Union and its satellite states, refrained itself from any major international activity, apart from its very close cooperation with the West. The only significant active foreign policy field was within the United Nations. The importance of this period for Yugoslavia lay in the transformation of its foreign and domestic policy orientation. The conflict with the Soviet Union obviously played a considerable role in this process. On the one hand, Yugoslavia had to justify its sudden shift towards intense economical and military cooperation with the West, since it was a communist country. On the other, it had to clearly show the differences between the Yugoslav and Soviet socialism. Therefore, from the early 1950's Yugoslavia embarked on a new path marked by the policy of Self-management and gradually started to develop the policy of Nonalignment, which replaced the earlier system that purely copied the Soviet model.

The normalisation of relations between the Soviet Union in 1955-56 did not change the Yugoslav unique path towards socialism. The Yugoslav regime realised that balancing the two opposing cold war blocs can be a much better guarantor of security for the Yugoslav independency and Tito's communist regime, than being a member of one of the blocs. The policy of peaceful coexistence, formulated at the Bandung conference, and the cooperation with the newly independent African and Asian states seemed to be a good way of promoting Yugoslavia's new foreign orientation.

Tito's month long trip to India and Burma in 1954 and his first meeting with the Egyptian president Nasser in early 1955 had a major role in the process of shifting Yugoslav foreign policy to the South, instead of the West or the East.

Yugoslav ties with Egypt, Tito's and Nasser's close friendship, and Nasser's strong anti colonial attitudes most certainly influenced Tito and the Yugoslav policy in the Middle East and North Africa. Yugoslav interest for the Middle East, and Egypt in particular, had much broader scope after 1955, comparing to the immediate post World War II period. Before 1953, not only did the conflict with the Soviet Union prevent any substantial relations between the two countries, but so did the anticommunist rhetoric of the Egyptian king Farouk. The military coup and the ascendancy of Colonel Nasser changed this: Nasser's aim to modernize Egypt and reduce the influence of former colonial powers in the Middle East and North Africa suited Tito's policy of promoting anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. Therefore, the two leaders quickly established a very close personal relationship that lasted until Nasser's death in 1970.

The first concrete situation in which the new Yugoslav role in the Middle East was realised was the Suez crisis. When Yugoslav attempts to mediate between Egypt and the West failed, following the Egyptian purchase of Czechoslovakian weapons, Yugoslavia offered Nasser its firm support in his decision to nationalise the Suez Canal. This included Yugoslavia's support against the aggression on Egypt that came subsequently.² As a member of the UN Security Council, Yugoslavia managed to bypass British and French vetoes in the Security Council by proposing the "*Uniting for Peace*" resolution that brought the Suez crisis to the General Assembly and therefore helped Egypt gain public support against the tripartite aggression.³

The Suez crisis was an important impetus to Yugo-Egyptian relation. It was also the first major political act by Yugoslav diplomacy after the reconciliation with the Soviet Union and its first attempt to act as a mediator in international conflicts. Another important consequence of the crisis was the change of Yugoslav attitude towards Israel. Israel's attack on Egypt in 1956, together with British and French aggression, was condemned by Yugoslavia. Since then Yugoslavia's relations with Israel will continue to fade until the complete break down of diplomatic relations in the 1967 War.

After the foundation of the Nonaligned Movement in 1961, Yugoslavia was dealing with the Palestinian problem on three levels: acting within the Nonaligned Movement and the United Nations; supplying direct material and logistics to the Palestinian organisations; and through its diplomatic ties with different international subjects in order to help legitimize PLO's position as the legal representative of the Palestinian people. All three were equally important. However, the last lever i.e. Yugoslav intermediary role, is the one that has been explored the least, as well as perhaps being the

² Petrović 2008: 465.

³ Willetts 1978: 4.

most complex one. Therefore, due to the complexity of this problem and the need to conduct a wider research, this aspect of the Yugoslav help to the Palestinian cause will not be explored in detail.

Yugoslav international reputation was rooted mainly in its involvement in the Nonaligned Movement. Along with Nehru and Nasser, Tito was one of the founding fathers of the Movement and one of its main wheels. The establishment of the Nonaligned Movement in Belgrade in 1961 institutionalized the principles which Yugoslavia had pursued since 1955, and created a platform for political and economic expression of the Third World countries. It also served as a good mean against the pressure of the Cold war blocks that quite often tried to simplify the complex nature of the newly freed societies and put them into a context of the existing bipolar world. The beginnings of the 1960's saw the peak of decolonization, both in Asia and Africa, and one of the natural goals of the newly founded Movement was to support the decolonisation and the national liberation movements that were arising in many countries fighting for the independence from their colonial masters. The best example and future model of the national liberation fight against the colonial rule was the Algerian struggle for independence from France. Yugoslavia actively supported the Algerian FLN against the French colonial rule, including the shipment of material and arms, and by the late 1950's the policy of supporting revolutionary and liberation movements across Asia and Africa was built into the Yugoslav foreign relation strategy in the Third world. Yugoslav policy in the Algerian war became a model for future policy towards the National Liberation Movements. The FLN was defined and recognized as the legitimate representative of the Algerian people, as was the case with the PLO a decade later.⁴ Since then Yugoslavia would offer political and material support to the liberation and revolutionary movements across Africa and Asia; in Indochina to the South Vietnamese PRG and Africa in Angola (MPLA, FNLA), Mozambique (FRELIMO), Guinea Bissau (PAIGC), South Africa (ANC, PAC), Namibia (SWAPO), Zimbabwe (ZAPU), Komori (MOLINACO), Somalia (FLCS). It was therefore not surprising that support for national liberation movements was one of the five criteria devised at the meeting of ambassadors from 19 countries assembled in Cairo in June 1961 to prepare the Belgrade Nonaligned Summit.⁵

The Palestinian liberation movement was no exception. It took some time before Yugoslavia, for its own political reasons, started to support the Palestinian cause politically and materially. However, explicit support for this kind of national liberation struggle was given at every Nonalignment summit: in Belgrade in 1961, Kairo in 1964, Lusaka in 1970, Algeria 1973 and Colombo in 1976.⁶ The Palestinian case was primarily linked to the Middle East conflict and its players. The main promoters of the Palestinian rights within the Nonaligned were Arab countries who sought the solution to the Palestinian problem as a part of the Middle East conflict solution. In the early phases of the Palestinian struggle, through 1950s and 1960s, the Palestinians saw their biggest supporter in Egypt. Since Egypt

⁴ Bogetić 2006: 145.

⁵ Jackson 1983: 41.

⁶ This only includes period until the PLO became a full member of the Movement. Palestinian problem was naturally the topic of every following Nonaligned Summit.

was one of the founders of the Nonaligned movement and Nasser tended to represent himself as the leader of the Arab world and protector of Arab interests, it was quite natural (and unavoidable from the very beginning) that the Palestinian question would have an important role in the Nonalignment agenda.

The first Nonaligned summit in Belgrade in 1961 supported the "*full restoration of all the rights of the Arab people of Palestine*". But this term was quite ambiguous and did not define the meaning of the Palestinian rights, as was the case with a clearer Casablanca resolution that called for the restoration of "*all the legitimate rights*" of the Arabs of Palestine. At the second summit in Cairo in 1964 more emphasis was given to the Palestinian problem by supporting "*the inalienable right of the Palestinians to self-determination in their struggle against colonialism and racism*."

The third summit in Lusaka in 1970 paid more attention to the Palestinian problem. Since the Cairo summit, the circumstances had significantly changed in favour of the Palestinian cause. Primarily, Israel's conduct during the 1967 war damaged its reputation with the majority of the Nonaligned countries and helped the Arab countries to link the nature of Israeli behaviour with the racist regime in South Africa. Equally important was a much broader activity of the Palestinian organisations and representatives after the 1967 war and Fattah's takeover of the PLO in the early 1969. The Summit in Lusaka brought the first full resolution on the Middle East and condemned Israel for the occupation of the Arab territories. At the same time, the Summit emphasized that "*respect for the inalienable rights of the Arab people of Palestine is a prerequisite to peace in the Middle East*." The representatives of the PLO were present for the first time at the Lusaka summit with the status of guest.⁷

The summit in Algeria, held immediately after the 1973 Middle East War, confirmed and strengthened the Nonaligned commitment to the Palestinian cause, and its condemnation of the Israeli regime, which was more closely linked to the situation in South Africa. Such decision was the result of the Israel's refusal to accept the OAU (Organisation of African Unity) mediation mission in November 1971, but also a compromise between the Arab and African participants of the Summit. The Algerian meeting recognised the Palestinian struggle as a genuine national liberation movement and was given the same status as similar movements for independence.⁸ The PLO became an observer with the powers to participate in the Summit's deliberations and the PLO representative was among 14 representatives of different national liberation movements recognized by the Movement. The Summit acknowledged the growing influence of the PLO by giving it the status of the "*legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and their legitimate struggle*".

At the Ministerial Meeting in March 1975 in Havana the Nonaligned brought its first separate resolution on Palestine, and confirmed the support previously given to the "*restoration of the*

⁷ Willetts 1978: 257.

⁸ Kirisci 1986: 82-84.

Palestinian people's national rights and its right to self-determination." Havana meeting clearly stated "its full and active support for the PLO in its struggle to restore the national rights of the Palestinian people, particularly their right to return to their homeland, the right to self-determination, sovereignty, independence and the creation of a national authority, by all means."⁹ Finally, at the August 1975 Foreign Ministers Meeting in Lima, the PLO was given the status of a full participant which was confirmed at the Fifth Colombo Summit in 1976. This decision was the final confirmation of Palestinian goals and the end of a long process, from the displaced Arab refugees to the political rights and national struggle for independence.¹⁰ The Lima meeting is a good example of Yugoslav attitudes to the Palestinian question, and also its foreign policy in general. Along with the decision to give PLO full participant status, the conference also discussed the proposal by some Arab countries to expel or suspend Israel from the United Nations. Yugoslav officials were firmly against it, and had suggested to the Palestinian representative that this decision would only have an opposite effect.¹¹

The deliberations of the Nonaligned summits were reflected and synchronised with their activities in the United Nations. The treatment of the Palestinian question in the United Nations was closely linked to the global trends that affected the world after the Second World War. In its early development, the United Nations was predominantly influenced by the Western bloc. This situation started to change in late 1950s and early 1960s, when many African and Asian countries gained independence and became members of the United Nations. Not surprisingly, this change benefited the emergence of new groupings within the Third World membership, of which the Nonaligned was the most influential because they were not limited to regional grouping, as were some organisations. Instead, it shared similar economic and political views in many aspects. Therefore, the Nonaligned has become the most numerous and most vociferous organised group within the United Nations that promoted Palestinian interests in the UN bodies. The base for the recognition of the PLO and other national liberation groups by the UN was Resolution 1514: "*Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples* brought by the General Assembly in 1960." However, it was only in late 1960s that the Palestinian question gained any political importance in the United Nations, apart from its refugee aspect. Even after the 1967 War, the General Assembly treated Palestinians as refugees, not a political entity. This was quite obvious in the Resolution 242 from 1967, which called only for the return of the Palestinian refugees to the occupied territories.

The Palestinian right to self determination was not recognized before 1970 by the General Assembly. Only then, Resolution 2649 called for the "*recognition of the right of peoples under colonial and alien domination to recognize and observe that right in accordance with the relevant international instruments and the principles and spirit of the Charter*"¹² The phrase "alien domination" was deliberately inserted to cover the Palestinian case. Following the 26th General Assembly session in

⁹ Kirsci 1986: 83-84.

¹⁰ Minić 1979: 183; Willetts 1978: 35-36.

¹¹ DASMIP, PA, 1975, fasc. 218, dos. 8, 438937, 13. 08. 1975.

¹² <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/349/14/IMG/NR034914.pdf?OpenElement>

1971, the intention of linking the Zionist regime in Israel with the Apartheid regime in South Africa had become a practice that started to gather support outside the narrow circle of Arab and African states. The General Assembly Resolution 2787 specifically emphasized “*the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to freedom, equality and self-determination and the legitimacy of their struggles to restore those rights.*” The same resolution also confirmed “*the legality of the peoples’ struggle for self-determination and liberation from colonial and foreign domination and alien subjugation, notably in southern Africa and in particular that of the peoples of Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea (Bissau), as well as of the Palestinian people, by all available means consistent with the Charter of the United Nations.*”¹³ By 1973, the General Assembly had become the place of unequivocal support for the Palestinian right to self-determination and after 1973 for the establishment of the independent Palestinian state. Although those demands got the support from the majority of members of the UN Security Council, in one form or another, these draft resolutions were never adopted due to US vetoes.

Regardless of the negative US attitude in the Security Council, the General Assembly Resolution 3236, of 22 November 1974 affirmed “*the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to national independency and sovereignty.*” At the same time the PLO was given an observer status in the General Assembly.¹⁴ In the scope of only five years, the Palestinian case was upgraded from a refugee problem to a claim for the independent Palestinian state. The Nonaligned had a major role in that process. In the same period the PLO was recognised as the representative of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian struggle had become the focal point of the Middle East conflict in the years to come. It is also possible to trace the way in which the attitudes of the Nonaligned members were changing over the years. This attitude had changed dramatically since 1969 24th General Assembly Session when, although the majority of the Nonaligned countries were pro-Palestinian, there were member countries that were more inclined toward Israel. In 1974, at the 29th General Assembly Session all member countries without exception were very pro-Palestinian.

It is not surprising that the first contacts between Palestinian organisations and Yugoslav government were established between 1956 and 1967 in the period of the strongest Yugo-Egyptian relations, because United Arab Republic was the main supporter of the newly founded Palestinian Liberation Organisation. In this period Yugoslavia observed the Palestinian question from a distance, but not without interest. Yugoslav diplomats in Cairo sent reports about the activities of Palestinian organisations and the United Arab Republic’s support for the Palestinian cause. An important event that raised the interest of Yugoslav diplomacy in the Palestinian question was the 1964 Arab Summit in Cairo, at which the Palestinian problem was brought to an international level and stopped being treated as a local Middle Eastern problem. Yugoslav diplomats were aware of the fact that the Summit supported the establishment of the Palestinian government, and of the efforts required to achieve

¹³ <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/328/03/IMG/NR032803.pdf?OpenElement>

¹⁴ <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/738/38/IMG/NR073838.pdf?OpenElement>, Kirisci 1986: 142.

international recognition, once the Palestinian state was established. Belgrade was particularly interested in the Summit decision to raise the Palestinian question at the next Nonaligned conference and demanded the recognition of the Palestinian government.¹⁵ Yugoslav diplomats also noticed a change in the Anti-Israeli rhetoric, especially in the Egyptian newspapers, since Arab states realized that explicit calls for the destruction of the Israeli state were counterproductive. Therefore the terms *liquidation and destruction* were replaced with more subtle phrases such as *the achievement of the rights of the Palestinian Arabs*. A general Yugoslav assessment was that the UAR was using the Palestinian question in order to reaffirm its international position with Israel. At that time, in spite of continuous objections from Arab governments to Yugoslav relations with Israel, primarily to trade expansion, Yugoslavia still maintained a formal level of political and economic relations with Israel. Yugoslav press, however, was pressurised to adjust its reporting on Israel, in the sense that affirmative writings on Israel should not be construed as support for Israeli domestic and foreign policy. In addition, Yugoslav diplomacy had a firm policy of discouraging radical moves of Arab countries and of supporting the realisation of Palestinian rights through legitimate means, particularly through the activities in the United Nations.¹⁶

The PLO had shown interest in establishing contacts with the Yugoslav government soon after its foundation in 1964.¹⁷ In November 1964 Ahmed Shuqairy, the first chairman of the PLO sent a message to the Yugoslav foreign secretary Koča Popović with the request to host a member of the PLO Executive Committee and the head of the PLO office in New York Izzat Tannus who was about to visit Yugoslavia. In his letter Shuqairy was asking Popović to approve of the establishing of the PLO office in Belgrade. Although the Palestinian request was rejected, Yugoslav government allowed contact with the PLO through Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia (SAWPY).¹⁸

In May 1965, Yusuf Abdo another PLO member visited Yugoslavia. Abdo studied in Yugoslavia from 1959 to 1963, and he came to Yugoslavia with a written recommendation from Shuqairy to Koča Popović. Abdo was chosen by the PLO leadership to be the head of the future PLO office in Belgrade. Considering the help Yugoslavia was offering to other national liberation movements, he was hoping to find the same kind of understanding for the Palestinian problem. Branko Drašković, Yugoslav foreign secretariat official tried to convince Abdo that there was no need for the opening of the PLO office in Belgrade, since there were other ways of establishing cooperation and contact. Yugoslavia dealt with similar organisations through formal cooperation, which depended on current conditions without this affecting their quality. The Yugoslav suggestion was that the PLO recommend one of the Palestinian students as a connection with SAWPY as an informal way of representing the PLO in Yugoslavia. At that moment, formal establishment of a PLO office had to be postponed indefinitely. Abdo was

¹⁵ DASMIP, 413029, Telegram 88, Bagdad, 15. 02. 1964.

¹⁶ DASMIP, PA, 1964, fasc. 124, dos. 12, 417594, Materijal o novim momentima u razvoju palestinskog problema, 19. 04. 1964; 428839, Telegram from the Embassy of SFRY to SSFA, 27. 04. 1964.

¹⁷ PLO was founded in May 1964 at the meeting of the Palestine National Council in East Jerusalem.

¹⁸ SAWPY was the main Yugoslav institution that held contacts with the world socialist and communist parties, as well as with national liberation movements.

obviously not satisfied with the Yugoslav attitude, and Drašković believed he would insist further on the opening of the office. Drašković thought this should not be accepted. He was convinced that the Palestinian representatives do not really mind about the office, but sought the public recognition from Yugoslavia, and therefore demanded the opening of the office as a way of achieving that goal.

Apart from the Arab countries, the PLO had no offices in Europe at the time and only one office in New York. Drašković was therefore expecting another demand from the Palestinians in the near future. His conclusions were: *"It needs to be expected, that in the future, material help will have a substantial place in our relations with the PLO. We can not exclude the possibility of asking for military help as well, and this already needs to be taken into consideration."*¹⁹

Abdo also met with Mihajlo Javorski, the Assistant to the Foreign Secretary. He repeated to Javorski the wish of the PLO Executive committee to open the office in Belgrade. He mentioned that PLO already had offices in Arab countries, New York, Geneva, Karachi, and plans for Washington, New Delhi, Beijing, and Moscow. Obviously, that was not entirely correct and it must have raised certain doubts with the Yugoslav officials about the sincerity of the Palestinian representatives. Javorski noticed Abdo's discontent with the unwillingness of the Yugoslav authorities to allow the opening of the PLO office, despite the assurances given by Abdo that the Office would closely cooperate with the Foreign Secretariat and the Socialist Alliance. He also apologized for not raising the matter earlier through diplomatic channels, explaining this with their lack of experience. They believed that the letter of recommendation from Shuqairy would be enough. It is hard to believe that the Palestinian officials were so naïve to believe that one letter would help with the Yugoslav authorities. That was probably, as Drašković mentioned in his report, an attempt to obtain public recognition from Yugoslavs²⁰ Interestingly enough, at that time there are no traces of any support given by the Arab governments to the PLO in establishing contacts with Yugoslavia at that time.

The shift in Yugo-Palestinian relations and the Yugoslav attitude to the Palestinian question came with the 1967 June war. On the one hand, the Arab defeat diminished all Palestinian hopes for a fast solution to their problems. On the other, it increased the number of organised Palestinian actions, both on occupied territories and in Israel, particularly as a reaction to the establishment of Jewish settlements in the Occupied territories and to the Israeli decision to prevent the return of Palestinian refugees.²¹ In January 1968, four biggest and most organized Palestinian organisations, Fattah, Palestinian Liberation Organisation, Front of National Liberation of Palestine and El Aika agreed to coordinate their military actions.²² In July 1968, at the meeting of the Palestine National Council in

¹⁹ AJ, KPR, I-5-b, Palestina 7. X. 1959 – 12. XII. 1976., Zabeleška o razgovoru Branka Draškovića sa Jusufom Abdo, predstavnikom Oslobođilačkog fronta Palestine, dana 26. III. 1965. godine.

²⁰ AJ, KPR, I-5-b, Palestina 7. X. 1959 – 12. XII. 1976., Zabeleška o razgovoru Jusuf Abdoa, predstavnika Palestinske oslobodilačke organizacije, sa drugom Mihajlom Javorskim, pomoćnikom dravnog sekretara dana 10. 4. 1965. g.

²¹ Hartley et al 2006: 74-75.

²² Kurz 2005: 58.

Cairo, Fattah, with Nasser's support, took the control over PLO, and its leader Yasser Arafat was elected as president of the Executive Committee of PLO.²³ The meeting also marked the change in the Palestinian struggle by giving greater emphasis on armed struggle "*as the sole means of struggle toward national self determination and sovereignty*". At the same time, the PLO adopted Fattah's view on the establishment of a secular and democratic state in Palestine.²⁴

Fattah's new influence on the PLO was very important both for the future relations with Yugoslavia and the political recognition of PLO and Fattah. Particularly important was the Fattah's proclaimed policy of establishing a democratic Palestinian state for both the Jews and the Arabs. A Yugoslav Foreign Secretariat Report from December 1968 underlined the fact that Fattah's main goal was the destruction of Israel as a state, not the Jewish community as such.²⁵ Although Yugoslav diplomacy never encouraged the destruction of Israel, this plan, in its elaboration and complexity, was different from the policies of other Palestinian organisations towards Israel, and it therefore must have caught the attention from Yugoslav authorities since it had many similarities with the Yugoslav 1948 proposal for the creation of a Federal State of Palestine. This was also a period when the PLO started an international offensive for the recognition of the PLO as a sole representative of the Palestinian people, as well as the Palestinian right for their own state. The PLO was supported by Arab states, and Egypt in particular. In July 1968, Arafat accompanied President Nasser on his trip to Moscow, and PLO offices were established in Arab countries and New York.²⁶

However, the fact that even after the war Arab states had no set plans for the foundation of a separate Palestinian state was a major problem. The Palestinian problem was still treated as a humanitarian, not a political one. Until the Arab defeat in 1967, the policy of Arab states was the destruction of Israel and therefore the question of a separate Palestinian state was not a priority. This defeat forced the Arabs to start accepting Israel as a reality, but it still did not change their attitude towards the Palestinian question. This was one of the reasons behind PLO and other Palestinian organisations' decision to achieve their goals independently, without being an extended arm of different Arab regimes and their interests. Disappointment with the way Arab countries handled the Palestinian problem brought the Palestinian leadership to the realisation that, instead of being just a collateral victim of the Middle East conflict, they needed to organize themselves in the fight against Israel, and demand political recognition from both the Arab countries and the world. That was particularly obvious with regards to the Security Council Resolution 242 from November 1967 that tackled only the problem of Palestinian refugees i.e. "*achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem*", instead of offering a solution to the Palestinian question as a whole.²⁷ By the late 1960's Palestinian actions started to change this attitude, which was particularly obvious in Egypt's case. In

²³ Shemesh 1988: 104.

²⁴ Ibid: 58; Smith 2006: 332-334.

²⁵ AJ, 507, Komisija za međunarodne odnose i veze, Palestina IX, 97/39, Palestinski oslobodilački pokreti, 20. decembar 1968.

²⁶ Ibid: 58.

²⁷ Mates 1976: 235-236; Pogany 1984: 105; Smith 2004: 331-332.

February 1969 Nasser emphasized for the first time that enforcing the Resolution 242 could solve the problem of the occupied territories, but not the (much broader) Palestinian question. He therefore accepted the fact that the Palestinian problem was not only a humanitarian issue, but also a political question on the position and status of Palestinian people.²⁸

At the same time, in January 1969, Yugoslav State Secretariat for Foreign Affairs (SSFA) identified for the first time the Palestinian liberation movement as an important political and military factor in the Middle East. SSFA underlined the importance of Nasser's acknowledgement of the Palestinian independence from any Arab country and their right to reject any decision unfavourable to them.²⁹

From 1967 onwards, Yugoslav contacts with Palestinian organisations went directly through Yugoslav embassies in Arab countries. After the war, contact was established with the three main organisations: the PLO, the Fattah, and in 1971 with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The Fattah's representatives had contact with Yugoslav embassies in Beirut and Damascus, and the PLO's with the embassy in Cairo. Unlike the PLO, there were no contacts with the Fattah before the June war. After 1967, the Fattah started to seek ways of establishing contact with Yugoslavia. During Nasser's visit to Yugoslavia in July 1968, one of the members of the Egyptian delegation was Yasser Arafat, who was also a representative of the Fattah.³⁰ He spoke with the Vladimir Bakarić, a member of the Yugoslav leadership expressing the wish to send a small group of Fattah commandos to Yugoslavia and train them in partisan warfare.³¹ His request was rejected, but the Yugoslav government agreed with his suggestion to train Palestinian commandos in one of the Arab countries.³²

According to Yugoslav documents, the first exclusive contact between Yugoslav authorities and the Fattah occurred in Belgrade in March 1969, when Abu Omar, a senior member of the Fattah leadership, visited Yugoslavia. He was in a semi-official visit to Yugoslavia and stayed with a Palestinian student who was representing the Palestinian Movement (presumably the Fattah) in Yugoslavia. Omar was trying to assess Yugoslav will to help the PLO with arms supply. He spoke to two Yugoslav officials, Josip Đerđa and Boro Mirković, from the League of Communists of Yugoslavia's (LCY) Commission for international relations. Omar was insistent that PLO was relying on an armed conflict in order to resolve the position of the Palestinian people. He was also very critical of King Hussein and especially of President Nasser, who was avoiding to tackle the Palestinian problem

²⁸ Shemesh 1988: 104.

²⁹ AJ, KPR, I-5-c, Bliski istok, 303, 1968-1980, Informacija o najnovijoj situaciji na Bliskom istoku, 3. septembra 1969.

³⁰ Arafat came to Yugoslavia incognito, as an unofficial member of the Egyptian delegation.

³¹ AJ, 507, Komisija za međunarodne odnose i veze, Palestina, 1976-1989, IX, 97/39, Palestinski oslobodilački pokreti, 20. XII. 1968.

³² AJ, KPR, I-5-b, Palestina 7. X. 1959 – 12. XII. 1976, Palestinski problem i kriza na Bliskom istoku, 31. 12. 1969.

publically. Yugoslav officials got the impression that Omar was quite reluctant to give any information on the Movement itself or its goals, international links or strongholds.

He criticized the United States and Great Britain, but was less critical of France. As far as the Soviet Union was concerned, Omar was quite unsatisfied with the Soviet behaviour in the Middle East. He believed that the Soviets were getting false information from Arab governments or Arab communist parties. The Soviet Union did not offer any material help to the Fattah, although the Soviet press was more favourable to them than it had been in the past. Omar expressed an explicit goal to liberate Palestine of Zionism, and to create a state where both Jews and Arabs would be equal.

He was also very critical of Arab countries' past behaviour, because of their patronizing attitude towards the Palestinians. Unlike the PLO, which was created as a façade to the involvement of other Arab states in Palestinian matters, the Fattah had a mission to liberate the country by on its own. Omar claimed that the Fattah was the only remaining resisting Arab force after the June war. It paralysed the Israeli forces on the Occupied territories and brought hope back to the Arabs. Only then did the Arab countries, including Egypt and Syria, start to support the Fattah. He understood that Egypt and Syria could not support them because of their relations with the Soviet Union.

Omar was underestimating the influence and the power of the Arab League in solving the Palestinian problem. Therefore he did not accept Yugoslav advice to take advantage of the League's support in order to increase their international reputation and influence in Arab states. But the Yugoslav officials got the impression that Omar was purposely trying to undermine the position of the Arab League in order to move the attention away from the failure of the Fattah in gaining the support of the Arab states.

Omar made it clear that he only expected military help i.e. arms supplying and training, as well as the funding of Palestinian students in Yugoslavia. He was not interested in any kind of financial or material help. He was not very clear on the way in which military supplies would be delivered to the Fattah, although he vaguely implied that arrangements were in place with certain Arab countries. His suggested the delivery to be organised directly between Yugoslav side and the representatives of the Fattah, without the presence of the representatives of the recipient country. The Yugoslavs were explicit that the delivery of weapons was possible only with the permission of the country where the material was supposed to be delivered.³³ He was unwilling to explain why the Fattah did not ask any of the Arab countries for help (in particular Egypt, since it had the resources and allowed them to import weapons), nor did he give the information whether any European country had already supplied them with weapons. The Yugoslav officials got the impression that none of the socialist countries had done so. Omar was quite disappointed when the Yugoslav officials failed to immediately reply positively to

³³ Yugoslav documents show that by late 1974 this kind of arms delivery still hadn't been achieved, probably due to the fact that Palestinians regarded the arms delivery as an example of Yugoslav political support, AJ, KPR I-3-a/91-2, Palestina, Poseta Predsednika PLO Jasera Arafata, Saradnja s Palestinskom oslobodilačkom organizacijom, 21. novembar 1974.

his demands and postponed the decision until more information on the matter was available. His suspiciousness, insistence on arms supplies and reluctance to discuss openly, left a very negative impression on the Yugoslav side. They concluded that Omar simply wanted to get the weapons or to find out what the Yugoslav attitude to the Fattah was.³⁴ Following the visit, it turned out that Abu Omar was in fact Yasser Arafat. Yugoslav authorities in Belgrade discovered this only after Danilo Lekić, Yugoslav ambassador to Cairo, revealed his true identity. It seems that Arafat wanted to test Yugoslav attitudes on the Palestinian problem as a preparation for the official Fattah delegation visit to Yugoslavia.

In May 1969, Yugoslav diplomats in Cairo spoke to Mustafa Arafat, the brother of Yasser Arafat. He proposed a Fattah delegation visit to Yugoslavia and the establishing of formal cooperation. However, Lekić was more inclined to postpone the visit, due to internal conflicts within the Palestinian movement and its relations with different Arab countries.³⁵ In spite of this, the SSFA decided to accept Fattah's request and organize a visit, primarily because further postponement could have a negative effect on Yugoslav relations with certain Arab countries, UAR in particular.³⁶

Further contacts with the Fattah representatives were established in July 1969 at the consultative meeting of the Nonaligned countries in Belgrade. The representatives of the Fattah inquired about Abu Omar's request to the Yugoslav government. But the issues discussed previously with the Yugoslav officials had still not been resolved. The delegation further expanded their demands with a request to open a Fattah Information Bureau in Belgrade. Yugoslavs suggested to Fattah representatives that the PLO should be the main point of contact, since it represented Palestinian interests in the Arab League, and it was recognized by most of the Arab states, as opposed to sending representatives of different groups with contradictory demands. This was partly based on the information from the Syrian BAAS Party, which suggested that cooperation be established exclusively with the PLO, as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, recognized by the Arab League.³⁷ The Palestinians admitted that it was impossible to send a delegation that could represent all groups, only representatives of different organisations. In November 1969, the problem of who was in charge of representing Palestinian interests made Josip Đerđa, the head of SAWPY Commission for International Relations, quite reluctant to openly support Palestinian organisations, or establish connections with them. He was afraid of getting involved in internal conflicts among different Palestinian groups. The issue could also affect the Yugoslav relations with Arab countries because different Arab states had their own favourites within the Palestinian movement. This was emphasized

³⁴ AJ, 507, Komisija za međunarodne odnose i veze, Palestina, 1976-1989, IX, 97/42, Informacija o boravku u Jugoslaviji Abu Omara, člana rukovodstva palestinskog pokreta "Al Fatah", 21. V. 1969; AJ, KPR, I-5-b, Palestina 7. X. 1959 – 12. XII. 1976, Informacija o saradnji SSRNJ sa palestinskim oslobodilačkim organizacijama, 12. 11. 1969.

³⁵ DASMIP, PA, 1969, fasc. 131, dos. 2, 417109, Mustafa Arafat, član rukovodstva palestinske organizacije El Fatah – Vujoviću, 12. 05. 1969.

³⁶ DASMIP, PA, 1969, fasc. 131, dos. 2, 417109, Zabeleška o tra enju El Fataha da primi njihovu delegaciju, 10. 05. 1969.

³⁷ DASMIP, PA, fas. 131, dos 2, 441957, 24. 11. 1969.

through direct contacts that different Palestinian groups and representatives tried to establish with Yugoslav diplomatic and trade missions in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. The SAWPY therefore decided to establish co-operation with the representatives of the Fattah alone, as they were the most influential organisation within the PLO.³⁸

The first official meeting between President Tito and the Fattah representatives took place in November 1969, during his the visit to Algeria. Two members of the Fattah mission in Algeria met with the President and Nijaz Duraković, a member of the LCY Executive Bureau. They reinforced their request to open a Fattah office in Belgrade and to arrange the delivery of Yugoslav weapons. According to the Fattah, the opening of a mission in Belgrade would increase its influence in Eastern Europe. Arms supply issue was discussed previously with the Yugoslav military attaché in Cairo. Tito agreed with their demands and made it clear that Yugoslavia always helped revolutionary movements around the world, and the Fattah should therefore not be an exception. He also agreed with the opening of the Palestinian Information Bureau in Belgrade and promised to handle it on his return. This was the first favourable reply to the Palestinian attempt to open an office in Belgrade.³⁹ Fattah's representative reiterated that their goal was the creation of a democratic Palestinian state, but also the liberation of Jews from Zionism. They made a distinction between Jews, whom they regarded as good cohabitants of over 50 years, and Zionism which was connected to imperialism and colonialism. They wanted a free Palestine as a home for Jews, Arabs and Christians, and also made it very clear that they have no intention of throwing Jews into the sea. They were not interested in a particular Arab country, but only the best interest of Palestinians.⁴⁰

Soon after the Algerian meeting, Abu Omar (alias Arafat) visited Yugoslavia again in December 1969. This time he had more concrete conversations with Yugoslav officials. They successfully negotiated Yugoslav help to the PLO in medical supplies, medical treatment of Palestinian fighters in Yugoslavia, forming of Information Bureau in Belgrade. But, Yugoslavs were still quite reluctant to offer more than humanitarian help, since it was not very clear who the real representative of the Palestinian movement was.⁴¹

Mirko Aksentijević, Tanjug's correspondent from the Middle East, spent a month in May in 1970 in the PLO camps in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. His writing offers a good overview of the change in the nature of Palestinian struggle, but also in the change of Yugoslav attitude towards it. The main issue noticed by Aksentijević was the process of unification of different Palestinian groups. There were around 40 disunited and inefficient groups in 1968. By 1970 they were integrated into 12 organisations, the majority of which were active within the PLO. The biggest and most influential

³⁸ AJ, KPR, I-5-b, Palestina 7. X. 1959 – 12. XII. 1976, Informacija o saradnji SSRNJ sa palestinskim oslobodilačkim organizacijama, 12. 11. 1969.

³⁹ DASMIP, PA, 1969, fasc. 124, dos. 12, 445664, Telegram from SAWPY to Embassy in Algeria, 28. 12. 1969

⁴⁰ AJ, 507, Komisija za međunarodne odnose i veze, Palestina, 1976-1989, IX, 97/43, Zabeleška o razgovoru predsednika Tita sa predstavnicima palestinske organizacije Al Fatah, 11. 11. 1969.

⁴¹ DASMIP, PA, 1969, fasc. 124, dos. 12, 445730, 31. 12. 1969.

organisation in the PLO was the Fattah, followed by ten other smaller organisations, and the general orientation of the movement was arms struggle. They were against the nature of Zionism in its aggressiveness, and unwillingness to compromise and negotiate. The PLO was purely a nationalistic, not a class movement, and it was not based in one country, but within one People who were expelled from their own country. The PLO's main goal was therefore to liberate Palestine and to return to it. Considering the nature of Israel, no one believed a peaceful solution was viable, and a war was therefore inevitable.

The most important Aksentijević's impression was the change in the perception of Palestinian struggle. *"Until recently the Palestinian man was barely surviving in refugee camps. Now, he has taken a rifle in his hands and has become a member of the force that has regular supplies of food and clothes. The pride of a nation is restored and it is hard to believe that anyone can put those people back in the camps. They have nothing to lose and by joining the commandoes they gained a lot."* Therefore, one could not talk only about the Palestinian problem and Palestinian refugees, but about the Palestinian nation that supports the arms struggle. It was not a Problem anymore, but an Issue.

There were several reasons why the Fattah was refusing a political solution: it would legalise the Israeli aggression, present a dangerous precedent since the UN recognized the right of every nation to live freely and decide its own destiny; and the Political solution did not recognize the existence of a Palestinian nation, as it was the case with the recognition of Israel. Finally, as Aksentijević pointed out, such solution would prevent the Palestinians from solving their problems themselves, as opposed to allowing the big powers to do it for them. Together with the military struggle, PLO's political platform included the creation of the Palestinian democratic state where all citizens would have equal rights. This implied the disintegration of Israel and the replacement of an aggressive system with a democratic one. The word "*disintegration*" had a purpose to justify the arms struggle component in a political fight, but also to make a shift from the earlier proclaimed policy of "*throwing Israel into the sea.*"⁴²

In September 1970, immediately after the Jordan events, SSFA's African Department analysed the Palestinian problem and possible solutions, and it identified the real nature of the Palestinian struggle and its impact on Arab governments very precisely. According to Yugoslav estimates, the Palestinian problem ceased to be the only humanitarian issue, but it became a political question. The position of UAR was particularly complicated, since Cairo wanted to remove the obstacles that the Palestinians put on the political solution to the Middle East Crisis. On the other hand, the UAR could not simply withdraw its support to the Palestinian cause, since that would severely harm its prestige in the Arab world. The USSR also had a negative attitude towards the Palestinian independent position. Therefore it forced its clients, Syria and Iraq, to withhold their support for the Palestinian groups, in particular because they feared confrontation with the USA.

⁴² AJ, KPR, I-5-b, Palestina 7. X. 1959 – 12. XII. 1976, Palestinska revolucija – Neki novi momenti, 15. 06. 1970.

Taking all this into consideration, Palestinian prospects were not good. This was concluded from the assumption that the USA and USSR would insist on the solution of the Middle East problem without the solution to the Palestinian problem. Therefore, Yugoslav diplomacy saw the solution in the establishment of a Palestinian state in Gaza and on the West bank, instead of insisting on a maximalist programme of replacing Israel with a Palestinian state. The Yugoslav Report concluded that such a solution would satisfy all parties involved: Jordan, Israel and Palestinians. Otherwise, the Palestinian problem would continue to be the source of instability in the region.⁴³

By 1971 the Yugoslav feelings for the Palestinian struggle had become much more favourable. The Palestinian demand for arms supply was granted, but only on commercial basis, and not as a donation. Material help from Yugoslavia included purchasing military equipment through Yugoslav export company *Yugoimport*, shipping medical supplies, including a fully equipped mobile medical unit, medical treatment of wounded Palestinians in Yugoslav hospitals, education grants for Palestinian students in Yugoslavia.⁴⁴ At the same time, contacts were established between the Yugoslav Unions Federation and the Jordanian Labour Federation, that represented the Palestinians; Yugoslav Red Cross and the Palestinian Red Crescent; Yugoslav and Palestinian Student Unions; Yugoslav information agency Tanjug and Palestinian News Agency Wafa, etc.⁴⁵ The same year, following a visit of an official PLO delegation headed by Husam Hatib and Abu Lottof, members of the PLO leadership, the Yugoslav authorities finally accepted the request to open the PLO Information Bureau in Belgrade. Suleiman Taufik was the first head of the Bureau.⁴⁶

Shortly after, in March 1972, the PLO chairman Yasser Arafat, together with fellow Palestinian leaders Zuheir Mohsen, Farouk Quddoumi, Taisir Kuba, Majid Sharara and Tawfik Suleiman, paid his first public visit to Yugoslavia. The Palestinian delegation included the representatives of the Fattah, Al Saika and PLFP. Arafat met with the representatives of the SAWPY, but did not meet with President Tito.⁴⁷ It was the first Palestinian delegation of this kind that visited Yugoslavia. The fact that the three most important organisations within the PLO managed to agree on a visit and had similar attitudes in separate conversations with Yugoslav officials was received positively by Yugoslav diplomacy. Arafat emphasized Yugoslav help in the promotion of Palestinian struggle, and he expected help from Yugoslavia relating to the contact "*with our mutual Arab friends.*" Arafat also requested help for Palestinian students, a diplomatic status for the Information Bureau in Belgrade and military training for their soldiers. The goal of the Palestinian delegation was two folded; the PLO leadership expected

⁴³ DASMIP, PA, 1970, fasc. 261, dos. 3, 436053, Palestinski problem, 30. 09. 1970.

⁴⁴ During this time several hundred Palestinians was studying at the Yugoslav universities.

⁴⁵ AJ, 507, Komisija za međunarodne odnose i veze, Palestina, 1976-1989, IX, 97/45, Informacija o Palestinskoj oslobodilačkoj organizaciji i saradnji sa Saveznom konferencijom SSRN Jugoslavije, 25. Januar 1972.

⁴⁶ AJ, 507, Komisija za međunarodne odnose i veze, Palestina, 1976-1989, IX 97/46, Informacija o poseti Jasera Arafata i delegacije Palestinske oslobodilačke organizacije, 28. III. 1972; PLO office in Belgrade was the first Palestinian Representation in a European country (outside Arab countries), DASMIP, PA, 1975, fasc. 218, dos. 6, 43550, Promena statusa predstavništva PLO u Beogradu, 27. 01. 1975.

⁴⁷ AJ, 507, Komisija za međunarodne odnose i veze, Palestina, 1976-1989, IX 97/46, Informacija o poseti Jasera Arafata i delegacije Palestinske oslobodilačke organizacije, 28. III. 1972.

diplomatic help from Yugoslavia in its contacts with the Arab countries, as well as with the US and USSR in advance of Nixon's trip to Moscow. The second goal was to show their unity and their good relations with nonaligned Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav side offered their support to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and independent national existence. The Yugoslav report stressed that Palestinian delegation should be satisfied with the level of Yugoslav support, as well as with the political effect the visit will have in other countries. During the visit Arafat was not insistent on any radical solutions nor did he reiterate his usual "*black and white condemnation of Zionism and imperialism.*" Yugoslav diplomats presumed that he wanted Yugoslav help in order to avoid international isolation and assure his participation in the dialogue between the Great powers in the Middle East.⁴⁸

In December 1973, during the visit of Abu Lotof, member of the PLO leadership, to Yugoslavia, Yugoslav officials clearly confirmed that the definition of legitimate national rights of the Arab people of Palestine included the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent state.⁴⁹ Miloš Minić, Yugoslav Foreign Secretary, had an extensive conversation with Abu Lotof about the nature and future of the Palestinian fight. This was immediately after the 1973 Middle East war, so the conversation primarily touched on the prospects of the Palestinian cause at the coming Peace Conference. Minić was frank about Yugoslav attitudes. He mentioned the messages from President Tito to the heads of states, including Nixon, Brezhnev, Pompidou, Brandt, Indira Ghandi, Kenneth Kaunda, Bandaranaike, Bumedian, Waldheim, Sadat and Assad. Tito reiterated Yugoslavia's old attitude in his message, namely that the prerequisites for a long-standing peace in the Middle East were the withdrawal of Israel from the territories occupied in 1967, and successful realization of legitimate national rights of the Arab people of Palestine. He also emphasized that it was down to the Palestinians themselves to define what those rights are. According to Minić, Yugoslavia helped create a favourable international climate for the Palestinian cause, but the rest had to be done by the Palestinians. Minić was also quite critical about American support for Israel. In opposition to the US view, Yugoslavia regarded Israel as an aggressor that threatened the integrity and freedom of Arab nations. This was mainly why Yugoslavia allowed a Soviet airlift carrying supplies for Egypt and Syria, similar to the 1967 situation. Finally, Minić discussed the Tito-Brezhnev Kiev meeting in November 1973. He clearly emphasized that Soviets accepted the Yugoslav formulation on legitimate national rights of Arab people of Palestine, which was included in the Yugo-Soviet Communique. This was the first public document in which Soviets explicitly recognized Palestinian national rights.⁵⁰

At the same time, the Tenth LCY Congress recognized the PLO as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Another Palestinian delegation that visited Yugoslavia in

⁴⁸ AJ, KPR, I-3-a/91-1, Palestina, Prijem delegacije PLO na čelu s Jaser Arafatom, Izveštaj o boravku Jasera Arafata i delegacije Palestinske oslobodilačke organizacije /PLO/ u Jugoslaviji od 25. do 30. III. 1972. god.

⁴⁹ AJ, KPR, I-5-b, Palestina 7. X. 1959 – 12. XII. 1976, Stavovi Palestinskog oslobodilačkog pokreta u vezi sa rešavanjem problema Bliskog istoka, 14. decembra 1973.

⁵⁰ DASMIP, PA, 1973, fasc. 152, dos. 27, 456347, Zapisnik o razgovoru potpredsednika SIV-a i SS Minića sa predstavnicima Palestinske oslobodilačke organizacije, 7. 12. 1973.

August 1974 openly acknowledged that the progress of Soviet attitudes to the PLO started following Tito's meeting with Brezhnev in Kiev in November 1973. Miloš Minić used this opportunity to present Yugoslavia's attitude that a new document on the Palestinian problem needed to be drafted, as opposed to simply revising the Resolution 242.⁵¹

Arafat third visit to Yugoslavia was in December 1974. This time he met with President Tito and it was their first meeting in Yugoslavia. According to Yugoslav diplomats, the PLO had already achieved its full affirmation and international recognition at this point. Arafat had plans to visit Moscow before Belgrade, and Yugoslav diplomats had information that he would try to obtain material help from the Soviets, and consult with them on the establishment of the Palestinian government. The same source reported to Yugoslavs that Yugoslavia would be asked for political, as opposed to material help, due to its unique position within the international community.

Belgrade expected Arafat to inquire about Yugoslav attitude on the recognition of the future Palestinian government. Yugoslav diplomacy also expected the question on the status of the Information Bureau in Belgrade. The Palestinians wished to upgrade the Bureau to the status of diplomatic representation, but the SSFA was reluctant to do so before the establishing of the Palestinian government and clearer plans on the future of the Palestinian state.⁵² Yugoslavia was apprehensive of potential Palestinian plans to influence the Nonaligned movement and its members at the forthcoming UN General Assembly, in order to exclude Israel from the UN should Israel refuse to withdraw from the Occupied territories and hence not recognise the rights of the Arab people of Palestine. The SSFA estimated that the PLO had more chances of achieving its goals if it did not insist on radical solutions. Arafat's speech at the UN General Assembly emphasised the creation of the single Palestinian state, and negated Israel's existence. This was not received well, and consequently had negative effects on the adoption of the General Assembly resolution on Palestine.⁵³

In his meeting with the Yugoslav Prime Minister Đemal Bijedić, Arafat emphasized the Yugoslav's role in drafting the resolution on the Palestinian question at the Nonaligned summit in Algeria. Arafat particularly wanted to emphasise Tito's role in influencing the Soviet attitude, which was clear when the Palestinian national rights were mentioned for the first time in an official Soviet-Yugoslav Communiqué following the meeting in Kiev.⁵⁴ He also asked for Yugoslav advice on the formation of the Palestinian government, since Yugoslavia had a major role in the Nonaligned Movement, and could influence the socialist, the Western and the Latin American countries. Tito

⁵¹ AJ, 507, Komisija za međunarodne odnose i veze, Palestina, 1976-1989, IX, 97/53, Izveštaj o poseti delegacije Palestinske oslobodilačke organizacije Jugoslaviji – od 11. do 14. avgusta 1974. g., 30. avgust 1974.

⁵² Yugoslavia established diplomatic relations with the State of Palestine in April 1989. At the same time the PLO Information Bureau acquired the status of an Embassy.

⁵³ AJ, KPR, I-3-a/91-2, Palestina, Poseta Predsednika PLO Jasera Arafata, Podsetnik za razgovore sa Predsednikom Palestinske Oslobodilačke organizacije Jasera Arafata, 1. Decembar 1974; General Assembly Resolutions 3236 (XXIX), *Question of Palestine* and 3237 (XXIX), *Observer Status for the Palestine Liberation Organisation*, voted on 22 November 1974.

⁵⁴ *Doprinos daljnjem jačanju prijateljstva i suradnje*, Borba, 16 November 1973.

advised Arafat to wait with the proclamation of the Palestinian government which Arafat accepted. Tito also emphasized the new post 1967 situation, especially in the UN, and reiterated his remarks to Nasser that the policy of throwing Israel into the sea was a mistake, which was undoubtedly a message to Arafat and a reaction to his speech at the United Nations.⁵⁵

A similar situation occurred in 1975 when the PLO started an initiative at UN General Assembly to accept the amendment of Zionism as a source of racial discrimination, as part of a Resolution on a decade of fight against racism and racial discrimination. Diplomats from Yugoslav UN Mission clearly emphasized to the Palestinian delegation that this action should have been coordinated with other Nonaligned members and that such direct comparison of Zionism to racial discrimination would only harm the Nonaligned efforts to further isolate Israel.⁵⁶

The Question of terrorism was always current when dealing with the Palestinian problem. Namely, Palestinian struggle was more a partisan warfare than a conventional war. Yugoslavia made a very clear distinction between the Palestinian armed struggle against Israel, in the Occupied territories, and the classic terrorist action such as airplane hijacking. However, Yugoslav and Palestinian official bilateral meetings show no mention of the terrorist problem, in spite the fact that Palestinian terrorism obviously drew Yugoslav attention. During his visit to Yugoslavia in September in 1970, President Richard Nixon discussed this issue openly with Yugoslav officials. He requested that Yugoslavia influence Palestinian leaders to stop with the airplane hijacking practice. Mirko Tepavac, Yugoslav foreign secretary clearly stated that Yugoslavia had issued a note to Palestinians warning them that these acts would harm their cause before world public opinion. Tito also remarked that such activities represented criminal acts and should not be allowed to continue.⁵⁷ This was probably one of the reasons why the Yugoslavs were careful in establishing relations with Palestinian organisations. Although they were aware that certain organisations within the PLO, such as the PLFP, and even the Fattah, with its alleged links to the Black September organisation, were involved in terrorist actions, it is clear from available document that the Yugoslav government did not approve of such actions, nor did it sponsor them in any way.

Conclusion

The Yugoslav policy in the Middle East was primarily conditioned by two factors. On the one hand, with the realities of the Cold War world; On the other, with the transformation of its foreign policy following the 1948 split with Stalin. After the 1956 Suez crisis, when the Mediterranean became fully

⁵⁵ AJ, KPR, I-3-a/91-2, Palestina, Poseta Predsednika PLO Jasera Arafata, Zabeleška o razgovoru druga Predsednika sa Jaserom Arafatom, predsednikom Izvršnog komiteta Palestinske oslobodilačke organizacije koji je vođen 3. decembra 1974. godine na Brdu kod Kranja.

⁵⁶ DASMIP, PA, 1975, fasc. 218, dos. 9m 448048, Problemi oko amandmana PLO cionizmu u trećem komitetu.

⁵⁷ FRUS, Vol XIX, Foreign Relations, 1969-1976, Eastern Europe; Eastern Mediterranean, 1969-1972; Yugoslavia, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/97933.pdf>

exposed to the Cold war, these new aspects of Yugoslav foreign policy started to show significant results, followed by increasing influence and reputation among the Third world countries. The greatest Yugoslav contribution to the affirmation of Palestinian rights was undoubtedly related to its activities in the Nonaligned Movement.

Yugoslavia's true strength in dealing with the Palestinian problem, and the Middle Eastern crisis in general, lay in its impartial position. As a European country, it had no direct interest in the Middle East, nor was it burdened with colonial heritage, unlike the majority of Arab countries directly involved in the conflict. In addition, its independent position towards both Cold War blocs allowed it not only to pursue a consistent policy in the Middle East, but also to act as a mediator between the two conflicting sides. This was particularly obvious when the relationship between the Arab states and the Palestinians on the one side, and the Great powers on the other side, was concerned. President Tito's only error of judgement was in disrupting Yugoslavia's intermediary position when the diplomatic relations with Israel broke down in 1967. Not only did this move disrupt Yugoslav relations with the West, but it also deprived Yugoslavia of its role as a direct mediator between the Jews and the Arabs.

Another important aspect of Yugoslav policy in the Middle East was its moderate stance. This was most apparent at Nonaligned summits and at UN General Assembly sessions, where Yugoslavia's moderate policy provided a good balance to radical solutions from some Nonaligned members. A good example of this was the Yugoslav position on the question of the existence of the Israeli state. It consistently opposed the proposals leading to the expulsion of Israel from the United Nations. This consistent approach to the Palestinian problem undoubtedly contributed to its international affirmation.

The relations between Yugoslavia and the Palestinian organisations represent only a part of a broader Yugoslav activity in the Middle East in almost fifty years of its existence. Archival sources would suggest that Yugoslav diplomatic activity had a much bigger impact on the Middle East politics, than it was thought. This is particularly true relating to the formulation of the attitudes of Great Power on the Middle Eastern situation. However, in order to confirm this and fully understand Yugoslavia's role in solving the Palestinian problem, a broader study of its involvement in the Middle East needs to be done in future with an emphasis on the importance of Yugoslavia's intermediary role as well as a detailed study of President Tito's role in the Nonaligned Movement and Yugoslav diplomatic activities in the United Nations.

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