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PLO IN PEACE DILEMMA*

Introduction

The Palestinian problem created with the establishment of the Zionist state of Israel in 1948 is considered as one of the most lengthy and complicated issues in modern history. Being the victim of Zionist aggressions, intra-Arab rivalries and superpower politics the 4 million people of Palestine have been transformed into refugees roaming around the world particularly in the Arab world. On the other hand, the Zionists immigrating from Europe and America have established a state in the land of Palestine and are continuing the policy of aggression not only against the Palestinian people but also against the entire Arab world. But over this period, no comprehensive peace initiative was undertaken to end the age-old tragedy of the Palestinian people. The Israeli leaders including Allon, Rabin, Sharon and Begin put forward their own versions of solution to the problem, albeit unacceptable to Palestinians and Arabs. In August 1981 the then Saudi Crown Prince (present King) Fahd came forward with a 8-point peace plan demanding total Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territory and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, implying an implicit recognition of Israel. But because of the opposition of the radical Arab states the Saudi plan had to be dropped in the Arab League Summit at Fez in 1981.

The US President Ronald Reagan put forward a peace proposal in September 1982, which called for the formation of a "Self Government" of the Palestinians in the occupied areas "in association with

* In the present article the peace plans refer to the Reagan Peace Proposals announced on September 1, 1982 the Arab League Peace Plan adopted at Fez in Morocco on September 9, 1982 and Brezhnev Plan announced in Moscow on September 15, 1982,

Jordan" and demanded freezing of all settlements in West Bank and Gaza. The Arab League in its Summit at Fez in Morocco just after a week of the announcement of Reagan's proposals adopted a -8-point Peace Plan for the solution of the Palestinian problem. The Arab League Plan called on Israel to withdraw from all occupied territories and to create an "independent" Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. The Plan also accorded its indirect recognition to Israel. The late Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev on September 15, 1982 announced a 6-point peace proposal for Middle East which called for an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. PLO endorsed the Arab League and Brezhnev plans but also did not outrightly reject the Reagan Plan because the moderate section of the Organization was convinced that PLO should enter into a direct negotiation with the United States. But the radicals supported by Syria and Libya were insisting on the total rejection of the Reagan Plan. So PLO was in a dilemma, at one stage they proceeded with the Reagan Plan and started negotiations with Jordan but at another, the process grounded to a halt.

The present article is an attempt at examining the nature of the dilemma and finding out the options for PLO in between the above mentioned peace proposals.

Reagan Peace Proposal

In early September 1982, when the PLO forces were withdrawn from Lebanon and the Multinational Peace Keeping Forces of USA, Italy and France took the control over Beirut, President Reagan announced a "fresh start" toward a lasting peace in the Middle East. It was the first time that the USA, the main ally of Israel in Middle East crisis, came forward with specific proposals for peace in the Middle East (Outlines at Annex. 1). The President set forth an American blueprint for the next phase of Middle East diplomacy after the Camp David Accords—a full scale effort to revive the stalled talks on Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Reaffirming America's strong commitment to Israel's security, President Reagan called for the formation of a self-government by the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza "in association with Jordan". At the same time he called on Israel to create confidence in the peace process by immediately freezing settlements in the occupied territories and repudiating any intention to annex these lands. About the future of Jerusalem the Reagan Plan proposed that Jerusalem must remain undivided and its final status should be decided through negotiations. But question may arise why President Reagan came forward with the Middle East peace proposals in September 1982 or in other words, what were the compulsions of the United States to come forward with a peace initiative at that time.

Firstly, the US Government supported the Israeli aggressions in Lebanon in June 1982 and by getting all supports from the USA the Israelis committed the atrocities in Beirut. Add to these the fact that the US Government not only supported Israel but also defended her in various international forums. The US administration continuously vetoed the UN resolutions calling for Israeli withdrawals from Lebanon. For all these policies and total support to Israel the US credibility in the Middle East was seriously undermined and her Arab allies were offended. The Israeli demand for PLO withdrawals from Beirut sponsored by US was also implemented. So the entire world was expecting some positive steps from the Reagan Administration for the solution of the Palestinian problem. And the Reagan Plan was a response to that expectations and an attempt to mend fences with her Arab allies.

Secondly, the Western allies of the United States were not satisfied with the US policy in the Lebanese war because they had a fear that if the US would continue the policy of total support to Israel, the Arabs might adopt any serious step against the West including oil embargo which would severely affect the economy of West Europe and Japan. It was the first time that the West Europe and Japan voted in favour of the UN resolutions (where they usually abstained) calling the Israeli withdrawals from Lebanon. As a result, the US

was totally identified with Israel and her relations with the allies were complicated. It was also reported that the West Europe expressed its desire to continue the peace initiatives in Middle East on the basis of their Venice Declaration adopted in June 1980, where they demanded to include PLO in the negotiation process. So Washington was afraid that her total support to Israel in Lebanon might provoke the Europeans to revive their own peace initiatives. So to avoid the confrontation and to remove the misunderstandings among the members of the Atlantic alliance, President Reagan came forward with the peace proposals which could obviously ease the tense relations between USA and her allies over the Lebanese issue.

Thirdly, in the tripartite agreement (Lebanon-Israel and US) the US assured the security of Palestinians in Beirut but subsequent events proved that US failed to fulfil her commitments. The Palestinians in various refugee camps were killed and seriously tortured by the radical Christian groups supported by Israel. In Washington the Reagan Administration was convinced that it was, in no way, able to assure the security of the Palestinians in the refugee camps in Lebanon, unless they would have a self-government in the occupied areas and the refugees would be able to return back there. So for the security of the Palestinians by forming a self-government in the occupied areas, a peace drive was required which resulted in the announcement of Reagan's Peace Proposals for Middle East.

Fourthly, the USSR was indifferent in the Lebanese crisis and Moscow threw the ball of the Middle East game to the American court by requesting the US administration to take necessary steps to stop the bloodsheds in Lebanon. So America as a Super Power and a main contender of the Middle East crisis could not sit idle. It was her compulsion to take some peace initiatives to solve the crisis in Lebanon and to revive her credibility in the region.

Fifthly, the Arabs were going to hold a Summit at Fez in Morocco (September 1982) and the US had a fear that the disillusioned Arabs might take a strong anti-US decision in the Summit. So the

Reagan Administration felt the need to announce a Middle East peace plan before the Summit to influence on its decision.

Lastly, the US public opinion was very critical of the Government's policy in the Middle East and a continuous demand from the mass was coming to start direct negotiations with the PLO.

All these factors compelled the Reagan Administration to think seriously over the issue and to come forward with some sort of peace initiative which could, if not fully but partially, ease the situation in the region and satisfy her Arab and European allies.

The Reagan Plan contained some positive elements: It was the first time that the US came forward with a concrete peace proposal and recognised that the Palestinian cause is more than a refugee problem. The unity of Jerusalem was recognised and its future was open to negotiations. The proposal also called for immediate freezing of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.

But it had also some basic shortcomings. Though President Reagan described his peace proposal as a "fresh start" for Middle East diplomacy, in fact there were no such substantive elements in the proposal which might speed up the solution of the crisis. Firstly, the proposal did not recognise the inalienable right of the Palestinian people, the right of self-determination and to form an independent Palestinian state. The terms "self-government" and "association with Jordan" were not clearly explained. The Plan did not mention whether the "self-government" meant a sovereign government or government having only minimum autonomy under strict control of Israel. Again the Reagan Plan did not clarify what it meant by the term "in association with Jordan", whether with the help of Jordan, under the control of Jordan or a confederation with Jordan. Secondly, the Reagan proposal did not recognise Jerusalem as an occupied territory and there was no mention of returning it to the Palestinian people or to associate it with West Bank. On the contrary, it was proposed that "Jerusalem must be undivided" without mentioning its future status. The proposal for undivided Jerusalem indirectly strengthened Israeli position because the Israelis were occupying

both parts of Jerusalem. Thirdly, the Reagan proposal did not mention anything about the Israeli occupied Syrian territory of Golan Heights and its future status.

The Reagan proposal, as it was assumed earlier, was outrightly rejected by Israel. In an emergency meeting the Israeli cabinet officially rejected Reagan's initiative, declaring that, "the Government of Israel has resolved that on the basis of these (US) positions it will not enter into any negotiations with any party."¹ The Israelis not only rejected the Reagan proposals but also maintained its resolve to continue new settlements in the West Bank and pressed for resuming the autonomy talks under the Camp David formula. At the same time the Israeli leaders also adopted various steps to undermine the US proposal and to divert the Administration's attention elsewhere. They continued their presence in Lebanon and set up preconditions for withdrawal which, in no way, was possible for Lebanon to accept. Since the US was working as a mediator in the Lebanese crisis it created an uneasy situation for the Reagan Administration itself. It was the objective of the Israeli Government to throw the Reagan proposals aside by complicating the problems in Lebanon so that the whole attention might be concentrated there.

The Arab countries, which were busy in holding a Summit at Fez in Morocco just after one week of the announcement of President Reagan's proposals, were not in a hurry to make any comments on it. Egypt praised the US initiative and called upon PLO and Jordan to join in the peace process. It also seemed that Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Morocco had a positive response toward the Reagan Plan.

The Russians, who took an indifferent stand during the Israeli aggression in Lebanon seemed to be liberal on the confederation plan with Jordan and officially announced that they would agree with "anything the Palestinian people agree with".² But obviously the Russians were not favourably disposed toward the plan, because they were quite aware of the fact that if Jordan and PLO would join in

1. *Newsweek*, 13 September 1982, p. 18

2. *Newsweek*, 24 January 1983, p. 17

the negotiations on the basis of the Reagan Plan, gradually they might be eliminated from the Middle East political scenario. So they proposed their own peace plan and were provoking both Syria and Libya to exert influence on PLO to reject the Reagan proposals.

The Arab League Peace Plan

The Arab League Plan adopted at Fez, Morocco in September 1982 called for Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied since 1967 including Arab Jerusalem and the removal of Israeli settlements from Arab land. The Plan recognised PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and called for an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. The Plan also implicitly recognised Israel and proposed that the Security Council should guarantee peace for all states in the region including the independent Palestinian state (*See outlines at Annex. 2*).

The Arab League Plan, like the Reagan Plan, had its own compulsions. In the history of the Palestinian liberation struggle the Arabs are also responsible to a certain degree for the sufferings of the Palestinian people. Though the problem was originated in 1948, the PLO was not formed until 1964 and only in 1974 it got an all Arab recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Wherever they went they either became the victims of internal politics of that country or the object of intra-Arab rivalries. Thus they were the victims of civil wars in Jordan and Lebanon in 1970 and 1975 respectively and became the target of Israeli atrocities in Beirut and later on in Sabra and Shatila. But the Arab world was indifferent to the Lebanese issue and did not come forward to help the Palestinians. They expressed their verbal support and criticised Israeli aggressions only in rhetorics to display their sympathy with the Palestinians. They were not even able to hold a meeting within the framework of Arab League until September 1982 to discuss the situation in Lebanon. This created a myth in the Arab world and the Arab public was disappointed with the policies of their governments and the leaders were caught in an uneasy situation

for their indifferent posture and ineffective attitude toward the Lebanese crisis. So in the long run a feeling of obligation was grown which prompted the Arab leaders to come forward with some sort of peace initiatives to satisfy their own people on one hand and the Palestinians on the other. The Arab League also decided to launch a diplomatic offensive to get support in favour of their own plan. In this respect an Arab League delegation visited the five permanent member countries of the Security Council to discuss the future of the Palestinian issue. But details of their discussions were not made public. But it seems that the initiatives taken at the initial stage by Arab League have come to a stalemate and the process has been jeopardised.

The Brezhnev Plan

The late Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev unveiled a 6-point peace plan on September 15, 1982 for the solution of the Palestinian problem (See outlines at Annex. 3). It recalled the 1947 UN decision which provided for the creation, on the former mandated territory of Palestine, of two sovereign states, Arab state and a Jewish state. The Plan called on Israel to vacate all territories occupied since 1967 and mentioned the Golan Heights and Lebanese lands as occupied in addition to West Bank and Gaza.

The Brezhnev Plan, though differed from Reagan Plan on the basic question of the right of self determination to the Palestinians, was similar to the Arab League Plan. So question may arise why the Russians instead of giving support to the Arab League Plan launched a new peace offensive. As it was mentioned earlier Moscow adopted an indifferent stand during the Lebanese crisis in keeping with her recent low key role in Middle East politics. So not only the Palestinians but the Soviet allies in the Middle East were frustrated with Moscow's role in the region. Her low key role tended to confirm the doubts among the Arabs as to whether Moscow, as a superpower, was at all able to play a role in the region. So the Kremlin leaders felt the need of coming forward with peace initiatives for Middle East to revive their prestige in the area, to restore the lost confidence of the

allies and to create a favourable political atmosphere so that the Arab public could think that the Russians did not leave them.

Another important point is that since the Arab League Plan was based on the Fand Plan of Saudi Arabia with which the Soviets have no diplomatic relations so Moscow could not support it. Rather to enhance her credibility in the region she came forward with a new peace proposal. In fact the Brezhnev Plan which was launched just after 15 days of the announcement of Reagan's Plan was an attempt to counter the US Plan and to demonstrate that Moscow also did not lag behind in finding out the solutions of the Middle East crisis. Because Russia had a fear that the Reagan initiative would enhance US credibility in the region and in the process of negotiations she (Russia) might be cornered in the Middle East politics. But analysing the subsequent events in the region one can easily come to the conclusion that the Brezhnev Plan was rather a political propaganda and diplomatic manoeuvre than a sincere move toward the solution of the Palestinian problem. The Plan was kept in a very low key profile without any publicity in the press and there was hardly any diplomatic drive to implement it.

Options for PLO

All the three proposals came out within 15 days and the PLO was in a dilemma. Israel outrightly rejected all the three proposals. Although PLO did not reject any of the proposals, the Arab League Plan and the Breshnev Plan were more acceptable to PLO because both the proposals recognised the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to form an independent state of their own. PLO endorsed both the proposals considering the importance of Arab soildarity, the financial assistance they are getting from the oil rich Arab states and military and diplomatic supports from the Soviet Union. But they had little reason to be optimistic about the outcomes of these proposals and therefore got relegated to sccondary importance.

After the Lebanese war a major portion of PLO's leadership felt that the ball of the Middle East game was in the American court,

so without US's active involvement the Palestinian problem could not be solved properly. Some of the leaders were in favour of adopting more moderate stand, abandoning the path of armed struggle and exploiting the ways and means for peaceful solution of the problem on the basis of the Reagan Plan. PLO did not reject the US Plan outrightly rather the PLO Foreign Minister Farouk Kaddoumi expressed his reaction like this, "I hope that there's some scope for discussion with that."³ The PLO was also concerned of King Hossein's over-enthusiasm about the Plan, because they were afraid that if he (Hossein) would enter into the negotiations with US over West Bank, PLO might be eliminated from the process. They had also the consideration that the Palestinians in West Bank living under long Israeli oppressions might prefer to join and live with Jordan than to continue their struggle with the PLO. So despite the bitter experiences of Black September of 1970 and enmity with Jordan PLO took an initiative to accommodate with Jordan and started negotiations to find out a joint strategy over the Palestinian issue. On the other hand, King Hossein was trying to persuade PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat to recognise Israel's right of existence explicitly and to join in the Camp David process. Hossein felt that his approachment with PLO leader should be completed very quickly before their common antagonist, Syria would organise, as one senior Arab diplomat called "coup within PLO", to replace Arafat with more radical leader.⁴ He also warned the PLO leadership that the US Administration would be preoccupied with the presidential election in 1984, and they should speed up the process so that the problem might be solved instantly. But it was difficult for PLO to recognise Israel explicitly, rather they referred to the Arab League Plan which called for guarantee of peace of all states in the region, PLO's argument was that since PLO signed the Arab League Plan, it indirectly recognised Israel.

In mid October 1982 Arafat visited Jordan with a view to working out a peace strategy with King Hossein for the future of West

3. *Newsweek*, 13 September 1982, p. 9

4. *Newsweek*, 11 October 1982, p. 10

Bank and Gaza. The radical PLO groups in Syria, though not opposed the move, did not endorse the Hossein-Arafat talks either. They were adopting a policy of wait and see. Syria, where most of the PLO leaders were living after evacuation from Beirut, championed the rejectionist cause and challenged Arafat's authority to speak for the PLO as a whole. Syria had also a fear that if Arafat-Hossein talks became successful she might be left isolated and the possibility of getting back of Golan Heights would be reduced. Hossein insisted that the Palestinians in West Bank should join with Jordan in a federal form whereas Arafat was emphasising the need for the establishment of an independent state and declined to give him (Hossein) a mandate to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians. Washington was very optimistic about Hossein's initiative and President Reagan was planning to hold a second Camp David Summit with the inclusion of Jordan.⁵ But it was not easy for Jordan to join the negotiations without getting mandate from PLO because it might isolate her in the Arab world. Characterising Jordan's position one Western diplomat said, "Hossein is not going to become another Sadat living on American money as opposed to Arab money. Jordan is too small, too vulnerable in the middle of the Arab world, and Hossein too clever a politician for that."⁶ Jordan was creating a pressure on PLO for being more moderate and on the United States to put pressure on Israel to freeze the expansion of Jewish settlements in West Bank. The PLO leaders were also not satisfied with the Syrian role during the Lebanese war in June 1982, when her forces in the Bekka Valley did not participate in the war which ultimately gave Israel a free hand to attack the PLO positions in Lebanon. But PLO was trying to balance between Syria and Jordan and Yasser Arafat was in favour of continuing the dialogue with King Hossein.

In the month-long discussions the two leaders exchanged their views on many key questions: whether the PLO should recognise Israel, whether Hossein should be allowed to speak for the Palesti-

5. *Newsweek*, 25 October 1982, p. 12

6. *Ibid*

nians; what sort of an alternative Palestinian delegation might be acceptable etc. The Americans and Jordanians suggested that the Palestinians who were not the PLO officials and not the members of the PLO but were "known to the PLO" might sit as part of an Arab delegation.⁷ The basic question of the Hossein-Arafat talks was whether PLO would accept the Reagan Plan without forgoing the demand for an independent state. But apparently none of these questions were resolved.

King Hossein set a precondition that he would enter into the peace negotiation on the basis of the Reagan Plan after the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. But Syrian President being afraid of Jordan's influence on PLO and friendly relations with US, was delaying the withdrawal of his forces from Lebanon, strengthening the military build-up in the Bekka Valley with the help of the Russians and complicating the situation with a view to undermining Hossein's peace moves. Yasser Arafat had a fear that about 9000 PLO forces were with the Syrian troops in Bekka Vally and the bulk of the Palestinian guerillas evacuated from Beirut were in Syria, so in any show-down Syria might try to split PLO to undermine his (Yasser Arafat's) leadership. Washington was trying to strengthen its fragile links with Syria to avoid the Syrian opposition to the Reagan Plan and ultimately to diminish Soviet influence in the region.

In that situation of Super Power rivalry and regional political complicacy the PLO held its National Council in Algiers in February 1983. It seemed that Yasser Arafat had relatively moderate view on the Reagan Plan and tried to convince the radical leaders of the organization in favour of his stand. But the radical leaders including Dr. George Habash and Naif Hayatmeh insisted on total rejection of the US Plan and were in favour of the Arab League Plan. For the sake of the unity of the organization a rapprochement was required and the parties came to a consensus by rejecting the Reagan Plan and endorsing the Arab League Plan. The Council also refused to accept the idea of a joint Palestinian-Jordanian negotiating team which

7. *Nswsweek*, 3 January 1983, p. 4

seriously affected the future of Hossein-Arafat talks. Thus the decision of the Algiers Summit was, no doubt, a set back to the Reagan peace initiative in the Middle East.

Though Hossein was disappointed by the Council's decision in Algiers, but was pressing on PLO to continue the peace negotiations. PLO leader Yasser Arafat agreed to resume the talks and in April 1983 it seemed that King Hossein achieved his goal to get a mandate from the PLO to negotiate the fate of West Bank and Gaza Strip. Even the final communique was ready and it mentioned that the Reagan Plan "recognised the legitimate rights" of the Palestinian people and therefore could be used as a "point of departure for negotiations."⁸ Arafat studied the communique and instead of signing it he flew to Kuwait, South Yemen and North Yemen—ostensibly to seek final support from other PLO leaders. The Jordanian Monarch was very optimistic and was eagerly waiting for Arafat's return to Amman to sign the final document. But events developed in a different way. Arafat did not come back to Amman and sent two of his aides to Jordan to inform Hossein that he could not sign the document endorsing the Reagan Plan. Such an unexpected decision of PLO leadership embarrassed Hossein and with an angry tone he announced that he would not join the Middle East peace talks proposed by Reagan and it seemed that in tones of weary exasperation he (Hossein) washed in hands of the Palestinian problem. The US Administration put the total blame on PLO for the failure of the peace process.

But for a clear understanding of PLO's position and to identify its options in between the peace proposals, problems and constraints existing in the organization should also be taken into consideration. This is because PLO, being the Organization of multiple elements has a number of constraints and the manoeuvrity of the leadership in its activities is strictly limited.

Firstly, PLO consists of about 14 organization (See Annex. 4) ranging from extreme rightists to extreme leftists. Every group has its own views and ideas and also different perceptions to the problem.

8. *Newsweek*, 25 April 1983, p. 8

Most of the groups were either formed directly by external powers or had the backing and support—moral and material—from outside sources. So Yasser Arafat had only a little room to manoeuvre and his options in the peace negotiations were strictly limited.

Secondly, as it was discussed earlier the Reagan Plan was obscure and had no articulated position about the future of the Palestinian people, Jerusalem and Golan Heights. So it was difficult for Arafat to convince the Palestinians and the Arab world to get support in favour of it (Reagan Plan).

Thirdly, Israel the main party of the whole Middle East problem had outrightly rejected the Reagan Plan and inspite of President Reagan's appeal to freeze the jewish settlements in West Bank and Gaza, promptly announced plans to expand new settlements in the occupied areas to increase the jewish population there. But the US did not take any step or put hardly any pressure on Israel. Even if PLO would accept the Reagan Plan there was no guarantee that Israel would recognise PLO and the US would hardly be able to force Israel to sit in the negotiating table.

Fourthly, when the PLO leader was conducting the peace negotiations with Jordan and it was reported that they came to a consensus on a joint Palestinian-Jordanian settlement about the future of West Bank and Gaza, a member of a Syrian backed Palestinian faction headed by 'Abu Nidal' killed Issam Sartawi, a leading PLO moderate in Portugal, where he had been attending a conference of the Socialist International. His assassination was a clear warning to Arafat that he had a limit of being moderate.

Fifthly, a group of the Fatah Organizatinon in the Bekka Valley and Syria revolted against the leadership of PLO which was reportedly supported by Syria and Libya. But whatever would be the source of external assistance to the rebels, it was clear that a dissatisfaction and discontent gradually nourished and growing up in the organization against the leadership and the moderate policy orientation. The left wing elements within Fatah strongly opposed any settlement that would give the Palestinian less than a wholly sovereign and

independent state, however difficult the struggle might be. So it seemed that Arafat had been facing a serious challenge to his leadership and the PLO was more vulnerable and the external influence in the organization was more evident than ever before.

The PLO leadership has been seeking help from different Arab states and trying to mend fences with the radicals with a view to reconciling the various rival groups and to keep the organization united. At present it seems that the PLO leadership has two possible options before it: either to reject the Reagan Plan, to freeze the negotiations with Jordan and to take more radical stand to satisfy the leftist elements in the organization or to go ahead with the Reagan Plan taking the risk of a civil war within PLO which may split the organization and the leadership of Yasser Arafat may be seriously undermined. What course of action the PLO leadership will follow is difficult to say because if the PLO would accept the demands of the rebels, rejects the Reagan Plan and adopts more radical stand, it will be a serious defeat for the moderate section of PLO which will ultimately strengthen the radical posture of the organization and the possibility of a peaceful solution of the Palestinian issue on the basis of the Reagan Plan in cooperation with Jordan will be diminished that may affect PLO's relations with Jordan as well as with other moderate Arab states. On the either hand if PLO would proceed with the Reagan Plan the organization might be splitted and the chances of civil war within PLO may be increased which will seriously undermine the organization's credibility and ultimately weaken its moral, political and military strength. It will also seriously undermine PLO's international prestige and status.

And it is not unlikely that, taking the opportunity of the internal clashes of PLO and being supported by her allies, Israel may annex the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip which will abolish the hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people for ever to establish an independent state. Considering internal, regional and international bindings and compulsions, PLO should take very cautious and calculative steps in its future course of actions otherwise any wrong step

taken by the leadership may seriously affect the organization as well as total political scenario of the region. What options are open for PLO and how it will come out from this dilemma is a difficult question. But it seems that Yasser Arafat, as a moderate, will be more acceptable to the conservative Arabs as well as to the West than any other leader and a rapprochement may be made in such a way so that a status quo in PLO may be maintained.

Conclusion

Out of all the three peace proposals discussed in the paper, the Arab League and the Brezhnev Plans were more acceptable to PLO because both the Plans recognised the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and called for the establishment of an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. But in the light of their past experience PLO had a very big doubt about the outcomes of these proposals. From the very beginning of the conflict the Palestinian problem more often became the subject of political fluctuations of the Arab political scene and in a number of occasions they became the bargaining cards, conveniently used by some Arab governments for their own interests. The events in Jordan in 1970, in Lebanon in 1975 and 1982 and in Syria in 1976 and 1983 proved that the PLO in the course of their armed struggle very often became the victims of internal conflicts and intra-Arab rivalries. The subsequent events in the region and policies adopted by various Arab states regarding the Palestinian issue created a sense of frustration and most of them (Palestinians) were convinced that they were betrayed by their Arab brothers. So generally PLO had no reason to be optimistic about the outcome of the Arab League plan and had doubts on joint Arab efforts for its implementation.

The Brezhnev Plan, which not only recognised the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent state but also specifically mentioned Golan Heights and Lebanon as occupied territories by Israel, was kept in a very low key profile by PLO. This is because the Soviet policy in the Middle East, in general, and their indifference

in the Lebanese war, in particular, dissatisfied the Palestinians and many of them started thinking that they were being used by Moscow for the sake of global Soviet interest in the region. The Reagan Plan, which neither recognised PLO as a sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people nor admitted the inalienable right to establish an independent state, was moderately accepted by some section of PLO. After the Lebanese war a general perception was nourished and developed that without US's active involvement the Palestinian problem could not be solved properly. Even negotiations were started on the basis of the Reagan Plan to form a confederation with Jordan and to sponsor a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation for talks with US. But the process was halted for the rebellions in Al-Fatah, the biggest group in PLO, which were reportedly supported by Syria and Libya.

It is really a tragedy for PLO that whenever the leadership tended to take any specific step for the solution of the crisis the process was disrupted by the opposition of some or other groups. Sometimes the internal conflicts in PLO was so serious that it threatened the unity of the organization and weakened the moral and material strength. PLO is a conglomeration of various heterogenous elements having different political and ideological point of views. So it is very difficult for the leadership to hold all the diverse elements together and to channelize all the efforts in the struggle of national independence. Even after 19 years of its existence PLO has not yet been able to find out a common strategy in their struggle against Israel, rather it has become the victims of superpower politics, intra-Arab rivalries and internal clashes. The organization is in a dilemma, because at present too many parties are involved in the crisis and PLO is not simply able to balance all the elements and satisfy the interested parties concerned. If it satisfies one party and fulfils their conditions the others either withdraw their supports or work for splitting the Organization. So as long as the tug-of-war politics will continue in the region PLO will be in a dilemma and will hardly be able to take any independent effective step to solve the age old tragedy of the Palestinian people.

ANNEXURE-1

Excerpts from President Reagan's Speech in Washington on September 1, 1982 :

The question now is how to reconcile Israel's legitimate security concerns with the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.

Palestinians feel strongly that their cause is more than a question of refugees. I agree.

Peace cannot be achieved by the formation of an independent Palestinian state in those territories (the West Bank and Gaza), nor is it achievable on the basis of Israeli sovereignty or permanent Israeli control. It is the firm view of the US that self-government by the Palestinians--on the West Bank and Gaza, in association with Jordan -- offerst the best chance for a durable, just and lasting peace.

Our view on the extent to which Israel should be asked to given up territory will be heavily affected by the extent of true peace and normalisation of the security arrangements offered in return.

We remain convinced that Jerusalem must remain undivided, but its final status should be decided through negotiations.

The US will not support the use of any additional land for the purpose of (Israeli) settlements during the transition period. Indeed the immediate adoption of a settlement freeze by Israel, more that any other action, could create the confidence needed for wider participation in these talks.

Source : *Middle East Review* 1983, World of Information (London), p.13.

ANNEXURE—2

Arab League Peace Plan (9 September 1982) at Fez called for :

Withdrawals of Israel from all the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Arab Jerusalem.

The removal of the settlements, built by Israel, in the Arab lands after 1967.

The guarantee of free worship and the practice of religious rites in the holy areas by followers of all religions.

The assertion of the Palestinian rights to self-determination and practising their national and inalienable rights under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, as their sole and legitimate representative and compensating those who do not wish to return.

Subjecting the West Bank and Gaza Strip to a transition period, not exceeding a few months under the supervision of the UN.

The establishment of an independent Palestinian state with its capital at Jerusalem.

The Security Council to provide guarantee for peace among all the region's countries including the Palestinian dependent state.

The Security Council to guarantee the implementation of these principles.

Source : *Dawn* (Karachi), 11 September 1982, p. 1

ANNEXURE-3

Six Points for a Middle East Settlement-USSR 15 September 1982-proposed by President Brezhnev demanded:

The return to the Arabs of all the land occupied by Israel since 1967.

A guarantee of the right of the Arab people of Palestine to self-determination and to establish their own independent state.

The return of East Jerusalem to the Arabs as an inalienable part of the Palestinian state.

Guarantees of the right of all states of the region to a secure and independent existence.

An end to the state of war and the establishment of peace between the Arab nations and Israel.

International guarantees of the Middle East settlement under the aegis of the UN Security Council.

Source : *South*, November 1982, p. 15.