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Moscow and the Crisis in the PLO



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An Intelligence Assessment

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*SOV 84-10223X
December 1984*

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An Intelligence Assessment

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**Moscow and the
Crisis in the PLO**

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Key Judgments*Information available
as of 20 December 1984
was used in this report.*

The crisis in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)—one of the Soviets' most important clients in the Middle East—has created problems for the USSR's political position in the region:

- The animosity between PLO leader Arafat and Syrian President Assad has complicated Soviet relations with both. In the aftermath of the 1982 war in Lebanon, the fragility of the Soviets' relationship with Syria—their primary client in the region—and their concern about Arafat's reliability persuaded them to side with Damascus in its dispute with Arafat. The Soviets, however, oppose Assad's attempt to control the PLO because this would force them to deal with the Palestinians through Damascus and thus eliminate an independent Soviet asset.
- Arafat's setbacks have led him, in turn, to consider a political solution to the Palestinian problem through some form of cooperation with Jordan. This would weaken Soviet leverage in the Arab-Israeli peace process because a decision by the PLO and Jordan to adopt a joint position would facilitate US-sponsored peace talks with Israel that almost certainly would leave the USSR and Syria out. It will be difficult for the Soviets to achieve a major role at any Arab-Israeli peace conference without close ties to a strong PLO that cooperates with Syria.
- Moscow's inability to prevent these setbacks to Arafat not only strained Soviet-PLO ties but also weakened the USSR's claim to patronage of the "national liberation process" and may have harmed Soviet credibility among the Arabs.

We believe Moscow has serious reservations about Arafat, especially his willingness to consider solutions to the Palestinian question that would not allow for a Soviet role. The Soviets almost certainly still view him, however, as a more effective leader for the PLO than any likely replacement from the rebels in his Fatah wing of the organization or from the leftist Palestinian factions. He is willing to consider a negotiated settlement, while the rebels and other pro-Damascus Palestinian groups call for a solely military solution, which the Kremlin has long viewed as unobtainable and out of step with the mainstream of Arab and international thought.

The Soviets apparently want Arafat to remain as head of a unified PLO but are seeking to increase leftist influence in the organization to curtail his independent tendencies. They look, in particular, to the Democratic and

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Popular Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP and PFLP) and the Palestinian Communist Party. Moscow's long-term strategy is likely to center on expanding the power of the leftists so that they will eventually be in a position to take control of the PLO. For now, however, the Soviets appear to be counseling the leftists to bargain hard with Arafat for a greater voice in PLO decisionmaking but to give first priority to reuniting the Palestinians.

The Soviets are likely to continue working discreetly for a reconciliation among Palestinian factions and a rapprochement between Arafat and Assad, although they probably are not optimistic on either score. Especially troublesome for Moscow is the possible formal split in the PLO wrought by Arafat's decision to convene the 17th session of the Palestine National Council in Amman in November despite the absence of the leftists and the Fatah rebels. Soviet officials have stated privately that, if the split is not repaired, Arafat's wing will emerge as the more influential. They probably suspect that, without further need to accommodate the leftists and radicals, Arafat would be more likely to strike a deal with Jordan allowing it to represent the Palestinians at US-sponsored peace talks.

Regardless of who wins control of the PLO, the Palestinian issue will remain central in the Middle East. The Soviets undoubtedly will continue seeking to use the issue to improve their relations with Arab countries and undermine US regional interests, particularly Washington's efforts to achieve an Arab-Israeli settlement that excludes the USSR. Soviet policy toward the PLO is likely to continue to be characterized by numerous shifts that reflect the tactical nature of the PLO's place in Moscow's overall Middle Eastern policy. We believe the Soviets will not allow their ties to the PLO to threaten their more important regional relationships, above all, the one with Syria.

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Moscow and the Crisis in the PLO

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Introduction

The crisis in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), one of Moscow's most important clients in the Middle East, has been a major setback to Soviet fortunes in the region. The PLO has been driven out of southern Lebanon by the Israeli invasion and rent by a violent rebellion within Fatah, its largest faction. The animosity between PLO leader Arafat and Syrian President Assad has resurfaced, with Damascus expelling Arafat from Syria, helping PLO rebels drive him and his forces out of their last stronghold in Lebanon, and attempting to oust him as leader of the PLO. As a result of the almost complete loss of the military arm of his organization, Arafat has been toying with a political solution to the Palestinian problem through some form of cooperation with Jordan. He has even gone so far as to meet the president of the former pariah in the Arab world, Egypt. These moves have led to further dissension within the PLO, culminating in the possible formal split of the organization at the 17th session of the Palestinians' parliament-in-exile in Amman, Jordan, in November. Moscow has been powerless to prevent this turn of events.

This paper examines the USSR's response to these developments. It begins with a discussion of the PLO's importance to Soviet policy in the Middle East. After looking at the events of the past two and a half years, it assesses the current Soviet view of Arafat, the prospects for the leftists in the PLO, and the influence of Syria on Moscow's policy toward the Palestinians.

The PLO in Soviet Strategy

The Soviets see support for the PLO as a means of increasing their influence in the Middle East and reducing that of the United States. By identifying themselves with the Palestinian cause, the Soviets gain:

- Enhanced stature among the Arabs, most of whom regard a country's position on the Palestinian issue as a litmus test of its support for the Arab world.

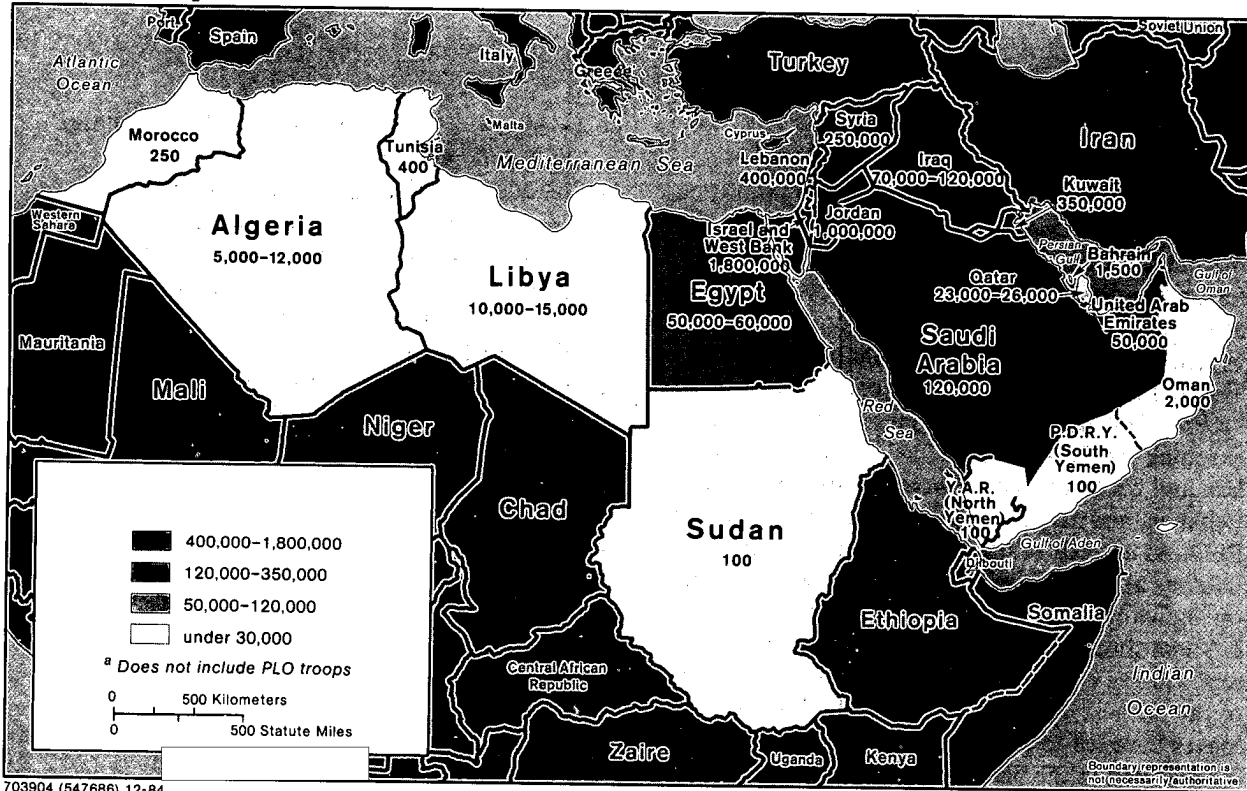
- An edge with the Arabs over the United States, which does not recognize the organization.
- An added means of leverage on Israel.
- A potential tool with which to hinder a US-sponsored Arab-Israeli settlement and a right to claim for themselves a role in any such settlement.
- A source of influence in the region beyond established Arab governments.

Backing the PLO also allows Moscow to burnish its image in the Third World as a defender of "national liberation" movements. Soviet assistance to many liberation movements in the Third World is modeled on experience gained in supporting the PLO. And, in a region lacking influential Communist parties, the PLO is one of the most prominent groups with Marxist members.

The Soviets jumped on the Palestinian bandwagon relatively late. Between the PLO's creation in 1964 and Arafat's first visit to the USSR in 1968, Moscow paid little attention to it and, at times, described it as extremist. The Soviets increased their rhetorical support during the next few years but continued to maintain their distance, especially after the PLO's attempt to overthrow Jordan's King Hussein in 1970. According to what appear to be authentic minutes of a meeting between Soviet and Syrian Communist Party leaders published by a Palestinian journal, the Kremlin believed as late as 1972 that there were dangers in seeing the "solution of the Palestine problem . . . [as] the most important task of every Arab country."

Moscow has never been comfortable with the ideologically diverse PLO, which depends on support from such conservative, anti-Soviet Arab governments as Saudi Arabia. As one scholar noted in a 1980 study of the Soviet-PLO relationship, the PLO is "far too unstable, uncertain and divided, far less Marxist and

Figure 1
Palestinian Population^a



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yet far too extremist to be Moscow's preferred partner."¹ Palestinian disunity, in particular, has contributed to the USSR's hesitation to take a definitive stance and led to its numerous shifts in policy toward the PLO. Despite the PLO's importance to Moscow, the fact that it is not an established government allows the Soviets to pursue a more tactical policy toward the organization than they can toward the governments of the region. [redacted]

The deterioration of Soviet-Egyptian relations beginning in 1972, the PLO's increased international prestige following the October 1973 War, and US attempts to broker separate peace settlements between Israel and its neighbors all combined to induce the

¹ Galia Golan, *The Soviet Union and the Palestinian Liberation Organization: An Uneasy Alliance* (N.Y.: Praeger, 1980), pp. 253-54. [redacted]

Soviets to step up their support for the PLO. During the rest of the 1970s, the Soviets:

- Began to receive Arafat officially and call for the creation of a Palestinian state (1974).²
 - Opened a PLO office in Moscow (1976).
 - Started to grant Arafat meetings with Soviet party leaders (1977).
 - Recognized the organization as the "sole legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people (1978).
- At the same time, Moscow increased its military support for the PLO, with almost all weapons flowing to PLO forces in Lebanon through Syria. [redacted]

² Prior to 1974, when Arafat came to the USSR he was received by the Soviet Committee for Solidarity With Asian and African Countries. [redacted]

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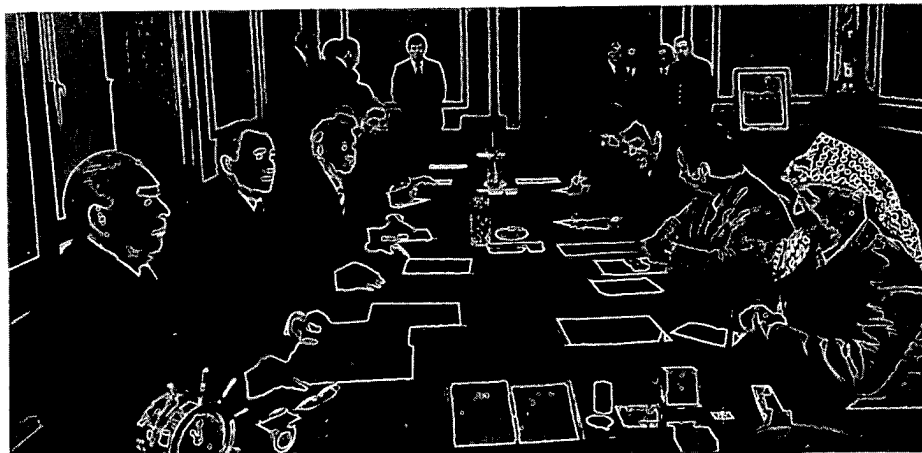
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Figure 2. Former Soviet President Brezhnev, PLO leader Arafat, and aides during discussions in the Kremlin, October 1981



The Soviets apparently hoped to counter Washington's success in wooing Egypt toward a US-negotiated peace settlement with Israel by strengthening those Arabs opposed to such a course. The PLO was an important member of what evolved into the "steadfastness and confrontation front," which rejected the Camp David accords negotiated by the United States, Israel, and Egypt in 1978. More by default than design, Syria and the PLO became the USSR's most important clients in the Middle East.

The Soviets were the PLO's primary source of arms from the mid-1970s until its defeat in Lebanon in 1982. The dispersion of Arafat's fighters throughout the Middle East has decimated Fatah's military forces, but some Soviet arms reportedly are still reaching his men. The weapons and the training Moscow and its East European and Cuban allies have provided over the years have boosted Soviet influence in the PLO. But the Soviets have been largely unable to translate that into leverage on PLO policies because the weapons have had to transit Arab states—in particular, Egypt and Syria—which have manipulated the flow for their own interests.

Moscow also has been a source of funds for the PLO, but its subventions have been dwarfed by those of the Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia's.

The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon: Turning Point

Israel's thrashing of PLO and Syrian forces in Lebanon in the summer of 1982 has had major repercussions for Moscow's relationships with both of its allies, particularly the Palestinians. The serious weakening of the PLO reduced its usefulness as an ally to the USSR. The PLO's military arm was all but severed, as the organization lost what had been its base of operations since its expulsion from Jordan in 1970. The PLO no longer could claim to be confronting Israel directly, for the only way it could now attack Israeli forces, aside from minor raids in southern Lebanon, was through Syrian lines. Damascus, of course, was not eager to give the Israelis a pretext for another attack.

The USSR's cautious reaction to the invasion strained Soviet-PLO relations. A Soviet Embassy officer in Damascus told a US counterpart shortly after the invasion that Moscow's reaction was "too slow" and acknowledged that this angered the Palestinians and other Arabs. Many PLO leaders publicly criticized Soviet inaction. Whatever Arafat felt personally, the Israeli siege of his forces left him in no position to engage in public recriminations with one of his most important backers. After he left Beirut, however, he

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Table 1
Milestones in Soviet-PLO Relations

Date	Event	Remarks
1964	Creation of PLO	Soviets openly label its first Chairman, Ahmad Shukeiri (1964-67), an extremist
1967	UN Security Council Resolution 242 adopted treating Palestinians as "refugee problem"	Soviets endorse it; PLO rejects it
1968	Arafat becomes head of Fatah, and it joins PLO	
	Arafat makes first visit to USSR	Unpublicized; Arafat part of Egyptian delegation
1969	Arafat becomes Chairman of PLO	
1970	First publicly acknowledged visit to USSR by Arafat	Invited by Soviet Committee for Solidarity With Asian and African Countries
	First mention in Soviet media of Palestinians' "national" rights	Still sporadic; not an official endorsement
1972	Third Arafat visit to USSR	
1974—July-August	Fourth Arafat visit to USSR	Soviets agree to open PLO office in Moscow (not done until 1976)
1974—September-October	First Soviet endorsement of Palestinian "homeland" or "national home"	
1974—November	Fifth Arafat visit to USSR	First time hosted officially by Soviet Government; first meeting with Soviet leader (Premier Kosygin)
1975—April-May	Sixth Arafat visit to USSR	Meets with Foreign Minister Gromyko
1975—November	Seventh Arafat visit to USSR	In joint statement both endorse an independent Palestinian state
1976	PLO office opened in Moscow	
1977	Eighth Arafat visit to USSR	First meeting with Soviet party chief (Brezhnev)
1978—March	Ninth Arafat visit to USSR	Meets with Brezhnev and Gromyko
1978—July	10th Arafat visit to USSR	No publicized high-level meetings
1978—October-November	11th Arafat visit to USSR	Soviets officially endorse PLO as "sole legitimate representative" of Palestinian people
1979	12th Arafat visit to USSR	Meets only with Gromyko and candidate Politburo member Ponomarev
1981	13th Arafat visit to USSR	Soviets accord "full diplomatic status" to PLO office in Moscow
1982	Arafat attends Brezhnev's funeral in Moscow	No announced meetings with Soviet officials
1983	14th Arafat visit to USSR	Meets with General Secretary Andropov; first official communique issued at end of talks
1984—February	Arafat attends Andropov's funeral in Moscow	No announced meetings with Soviet officials; Soviets later announce publicly that Arafat did not have talks with General Secretary Chernenko
1984—October	Arafat meets with Gromyko in East Berlin during East German National Day ceremonies	First Arafat meeting with high-level Soviet since Fatah rebellion and Arafat-Assad feud erupted in 1983

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told Monte Carlo Radio that the Soviets during the invasion had respected the US sphere of influence in the Middle East "more than we expected." He was much more explicit in criticizing the Soviets in private discussions.

Arafat's military defeat led him to explore some form of confederation with Jordan. The timing of his move, following as it did President Reagan's 1 September

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Figure 3. Arafat with PLO tank crew during Israeli siege of Beirut, July 1982



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1982 speech calling for Jordan to represent the Palestinians at peace talks with the Israelis, almost certainly heightened Soviet apprehension about the PLO leader's reliability.

The Fatah Mutiny and the Arafat-Assad Feud

The Soviets have been torn by conflicting interests in the Arafat-Assad dispute. The USSR sympathizes with some of Assad's and the Syrian-backed Fatah rebels' criticism of Arafat, but it does not want to see the PLO come under Syrian control.

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The PLO's defeat, which Arafat blamed partly on the Syrians' "desertion" of his forces in Beirut, and its turn toward Jordan exacerbated latent tensions in the Arafat-Assad relationship. This animosity made cooperation between the USSR's two most important allies in the Middle East all but impossible and put Moscow in the difficult position of attempting to preserve its ties with both while alienating neither.

Moscow's conflicting interests have been reflected in its response to the Fatah mutiny, which began in May 1983. The Soviets avoided taking a definitive public stance. They periodically issued statements implicitly critical of Syrian support for the move against Arafat, but at no time have they criticized Syria by name.

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The invasion also led to a significant shift in the USSR's relationship with Syria.

The Soviets apparently began working behind the scenes to reconcile Arafat and Assad right from the outset of the rift.

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Assad and senior Syrian leaders concluded that Israel's victory was due to the failure of Syria's Soviet weaponry. The Soviets were in a position where they had to restore their ally's trust in their willingness and ability to be a reliable military patron.

Andropov sent Assad a letter in June 1983 expressing support for Arafat. The PLO publicly claimed that Andropov sent a similar message to Arafat about the same time. But by July Arafat was expressing disappointment with Soviet "pressure" on the PLO to resolve its differences with Syria.

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Moscow's response was to revamp the entire Syrian air defense system and provide Damascus with more sophisticated Soviet equipment and, most important, with Soviet air defense personnel to man it. In doing so, the Soviets were qualitatively increasing their commitment to and stake in Syria and taking a greater risk there than ever before. This called for reconciling political differences with Damascus and avoiding new frictions, even if it meant looking the other way as Assad tried to crush Yasir Arafat.

The Syrian-backed attempt by the Fatah rebels in November 1983 to push Arafat's forces out of Lebanon compelled the USSR to become more involved. Soviet media coverage of Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam's talks in Moscow with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko in November suggested that the

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**Soviet Attitude Toward
the Fatah Rebels**

Moscow has kept its distance from the Syrian-backed rebels. The few times it has taken note of them in Soviet media, it has done so without comment. We know of no meetings between Soviet officials and rebel leaders. Nimr Salih, one of the two anti-Arafat leaders, lamented publicly in October 1983 that the Kremlin's other commitments in the Middle East prevented it from supporting the rebels. The Soviet stance stems from reservations about some of the rebels' goals, a desire to prevent Syrian domination of the PLO, and the realization that Arafat commands far more loyalty among the Palestinians and more international recognition than any other PLO figure. [redacted]

The Soviets, like the rebels, have serious misgivings about Arafat's dealings with Jordan, oppose his willingness to consider President Reagan's Arab-Israeli peace plan, and deplore his feud with Assad. The Kremlin, no doubt, also welcomes the rebels' call for closer ties with the USSR and their unmitigated hostility toward the United States. [redacted]

The rebels' rejection of a political solution to the Palestinian question and their emphasis on a military solution, however, fly in the face of more than a decade of Soviet advice to the PLO and strike Moscow as self-defeating. An article published in the Czechoslovak Communist Party newspaper Rude Pravo on 3 March 1984 by an official of the Palestinian Communist Party (almost certainly reflecting Moscow's views) stated that the rebels' "extremist rejectionist" view "isolates in practice the cause of our people and deprives it of . . . recognition on the international scale." [redacted]

The rebels' declining fortunes since they forced Arafat to evacuate Tripoli, Lebanon, in December 1983 have made them even less appealing to Moscow. A Soviet radiobroadcast on the June 1984 talks in Aden between Arafat's wing of Fatah and some of his leftist rivals in the PLO noted that "all the principal Palestinian organs" were represented. The rebels were not participants. [redacted]

Soviets expressed their displeasure with Syria's attempt to crush Arafat. [redacted]

[redacted] the rebels began their final push on Arafat's headquarters north of Tripoli a few days after the Syrian Foreign Minister left Moscow. [redacted]

The Soviets, in any event, did not allow the issue to damage Soviet-Syrian relations. The communique released after the Gromyko-Khaddam talks contained no allusion to Syria's role in the dispute with Arafat and emphasized the close ties between Moscow and Damascus. Subsequently, an authoritative unsigned editorial in *Pravda* on 19 November 1983 gave the clearest public indication that the Kremlin's ties to Syria are the primary determinant of its position on the Arafat-Assad feud. The Soviet stand on the dispute, according to *Pravda*, is based on an understanding of the "important" role played by the PLO in the struggle against Israel and the United States and on solidarity with Syria, which is now the "most important" force in that struggle. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] Moscow's unwillingness to press Damascus harder probably prompted Arafat's rare public outburst of dissatisfaction with the Soviets in late November. In an interview with an Egyptian

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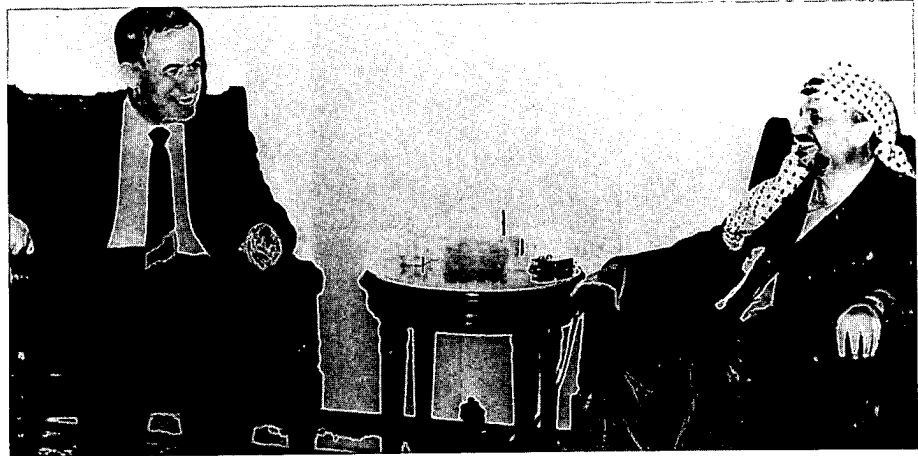
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Figure 4. Arafat and Syrian President Assad in Damascus in May 1983, a few days before Syrian-backed Fatah rebellion against Arafat began [redacted]



newspaper, Arafat said that, forced to choose between its Palestinian “friend” and its Syrian “ally,” the USSR was “siding with Syria.” [redacted]

During Politburo member Geydar Aliyev’s visit to Syria in March 1984, the Soviets reiterated that Arafat, not Damascus, bore the primary responsibility for repairing ties. The communique issued at the end of the visit repeated the advice Gromyko had given Qaddafi in November: the PLO must increase cooperation with Syria. It also echoed Khaddam’s public warning to the PLO, during a speech at a dinner for Aliyev, against “separate deals” like the Reagan plan. Moscow’s willingness to sign a joint document with Syria containing this language underlined its tilt toward Damascus in the dispute. [redacted]

Arafat the “Phoenix”

The Kremlin’s tilt toward Syria is no longer quite as pronounced. Arafat’s display over the past year of an uncanny ability to survive Syrian efforts to bring him to heel, coupled—ironically—with the improvement in Soviet-Syrian relations, has prompted Moscow to signal support for the PLO leader. [redacted]

The Soviets kept their distance from Arafat for a long while after his evacuation from Tripoli in December 1983. His name was hardly mentioned in the Soviet media. For example, the Soviet Government’s June 1984 message to the PLO commemorating the 20th anniversary of its founding was addressed to the PLO

Executive Committee. (A similar congratulatory message in November 1983 had been addressed to Arafat.) An article in the Czechoslovak party organ *Rude Pravo* in March by a Palestinian Communist Party Politburo member—almost certainly reflecting Soviet views—contained specific criticism of Arafat’s policies. The article condemned the Palestinian leadership’s courting of “rightwing and reactionary regimes” (read Jordan and Egypt), its split with Syria, and its pursuit of “the illusion of an American solution” to the Palestinian problem. It charged that these policies amounted to a tilt toward “upper strata of the Palestinian bourgeoisie.” [redacted]

There were a few signs even then, however, that the Soviets were not ready to write Arafat off:

- Nikolay Shishlin, an influential consultant to the CPSU Central Committee’s Secretariat, stated on a Soviet television program in December 1983 that Arafat’s departure from Lebanon was a loss for the Arabs. “Some” believed that his days were numbered, but Shishlin contended that Arafat had shown great political skill in extricating himself from Lebanon and implied that he still had political life left in him.
- At a public foreign affairs lecture in Leningrad in February 1984, a Soviet academic told his audience that “we shouldn’t rush to bury Arafat. He is like a phoenix.”

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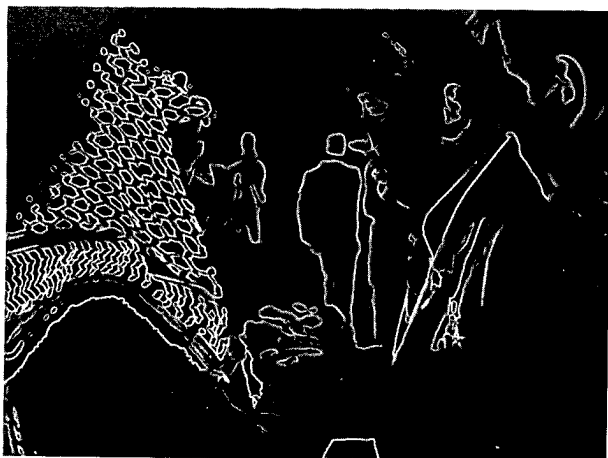


Figure 5. Arafat and Soviet President Chernenko on receiving line during lying-in-state ceremonies for former President Andropov in Moscow, February 1984. [redacted]

- The Soviet Ambassador to Syria told his British counterpart in March that the USSR still regarded Arafat as the legitimate leader of the PLO. [redacted]

By late summer, the Soviets began to end their public silence on Arafat. A brief *Izvestiya* article in August mentioned him by name, the first time he had been noted in the official Soviet press since February. The article's endorsement of a PLO-Syrian reconciliation—at a time when Damascus was pulling out all stops to prevent the convening of the Palestine National Council, which probably would have solidified Arafat's leadership—appeared to be a signal to Assad to cease his efforts. [redacted]

The clearest sign that Moscow had not abandoned the PLO leader came in October, when Gromyko met with him while in East Berlin for East Germany's National Day celebrations. It was Arafat's first meeting with a high-level Soviet since his session with Andropov in January 1983. An Egyptian diplomat in Moscow told US Embassy officers that Gromyko had lectured Arafat about the latter's past political and military mistakes but emphasized that Moscow still favored a united PLO under his leadership. Whatever Gromyko said, the meeting itself showed that the Soviets are now less worried about offending Assad, who continues to seek Arafat's ouster. Paradoxically, the fact that Moscow has repaired the damage to its

Arafat's Manipulation of the "Soviet Card"

Arafat no doubt recognizes the importance the Soviets attach to the PLO, and this provides him with some leverage on them as long as he is the organization's recognized head. The Soviets often have tried to keep their contacts with the PLO discreet, especially when it has been at odds with Syria. Arafat, on the other hand, has a vested interest in publicizing—and frequently exaggerating—his dealings with Moscow. Having the "support" of a superpower enhances his stature and influence within and outside the PLO. Publicizing his contacts with the Soviets also tends to limit their room for maneuver, particularly vis-a-vis Syria. [redacted]

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Thus, PLO radio stations always advertise Arafat's meeting with Soviet envoys in the Middle East and usually claim that he exchanged "important messages" with Kremlin leaders. Moscow almost invariably keeps silent on these meetings, presumably in order not to antagonize Damascus. Even at the height of the Soviet "tilt" toward Syria in its dispute with Arafat in early 1984, the PLO leader was publicly claiming he had the USSR's support. The Soviets were in no position to deny it in public. [redacted]

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Arafat has derived more benefits than Moscow from their relationship over the years. He has received both military support in the form of weapons and training, and recognition as the sole legitimate Palestinian representative from one of the two superpowers. But Arafat also needs the Soviets more than they need him. Despite tensions in their relations since Israel's June 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the PLO leader has been careful not to cut his ties with the Soviets. He almost certainly believes continued contacts with Moscow will help him eventually to improve relations with Syria and mend the rift with the leftwing PLO groups. [redacted]

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relations with Damascus may have made it less concerned about catering to Syrian sensitivities than it had been since June 1982. [redacted]

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Assad's meeting with General Secretary Chernenko in Moscow in October provided further evidence of the Soviets' more evenhanded stance in the Arafat-Assad dispute. The communique issued at the end of the visit stated that the leaders had an "in-depth exchange of opinions" on the Palestinian issue and, as during Assad's talks with Aliyev in March, called for an end to the discord within the PLO. Missing was the implicit slap at Arafat contained in the March communique, which said that the Palestinians' national aspirations could not be achieved without close cooperation with Syria. Moscow's failure to send an observer to the November session of the Palestine National Council, however, underlined its unwillingness to take a definitive stand behind Arafat. [redacted]

The Leftist Alternative

Arafat and other Palestinian leaders have acknowledged publicly that the USSR—along with Algeria and South Yemen—has been involved in continuing attempts to reunite the PLO and mend the rift between Fatah and Syria. Leftist, pro-Soviet Palestinian factions are playing a key role in this reconciliation process. These factions—the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP), and the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF)—joined forces in March 1984 to create the "Democratic Alliance." The group has been conducting negotiations with Arafat's Fatah wing, as well as with the Syrian-backed "National Alliance," made up of the Fatah rebels, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), Saiqa, and the Popular Struggle Front (PSF). [redacted]

Moscow has long maintained support for the Palestinian leftists, even while its relations with Arafat were good. The PCP, for obvious reasons, is the faction closest to Moscow. Its influence among Palestinians has been limited, but its membership in the "Democratic Alliance" may have slightly boosted its stock recently. [redacted]

The much more influential Marxist DFLP has cooperated closely with the Kremlin for years. DFLP leader Nayif Hawatmah speaks out often for greater

The Palestinian Communist Party

The Soviets endorsed the formation in February 1982 of the Palestinian Communist Party. It is made up of Palestinians who formerly belonged to the Jordanian Communist Party (JCP). Palestinians who live in Jordan proper—the East Bank—remain in the JCP, while those who live in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, or elsewhere outside Jordan belong to the PCP. The PCP, headed by General Secretary Bashir Barghuti, cooperates with the Israeli Communist Party and has some influence among Palestinian labor unions on the West Bank. Its strictly pro-Moscow line—including support for the USSR's call for a negotiated Arab-Israeli peace settlement—has limited its appeal among most West Bankers. [redacted]

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The PCP is not a member of the PLO but has sought admittance. The PCP's first declaration stated that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and insisted on the party's right to be represented in the organization. An article by a PCP Politburo member published in the Czechoslovak Communist Party newspaper Rude Pravo in March 1984, however, charged that the Arafat leadership has consistently been hostile to the PCP. [redacted]

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The PCP has its own splinter factions—the PCP/Leninist Cadres and the PCP/Provisional Command. Both are small, more radical than the PCP, and presumably more independent of Moscow. The Provisional Command is based in Damascus and dependent upon Syrian support. [redacted]

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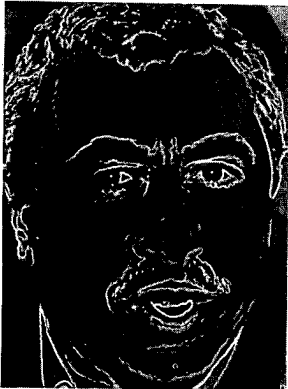


Figure 6. Nayif Hawatmah, head of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)



Figure 7. George Habbash, head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)

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Palestinian reliance on the USSR. [redacted]

[redacted] The DFLP supports Moscow's call for a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian question. [redacted]

The Marxist PFLP, on the other hand, until 1981, rejected negotiations and called for the "liberation" of all of Palestine, not just the lands Israel occupied in the 1967 war. It softened its position slightly in 1981 but essentially still regards a negotiated settlement with skepticism. This radical stance has led to frictions in Soviet-PFLP relations over the years. PFLP leader George Habbash, however, has adopted a more pro-Soviet stance since the late 1970s. [redacted]

The DFLP and PFLP are—after Arafat's Fatah—the two most influential PLO factions. Hawatmah and Habbash have received wider international attention than any other PLO leader except Arafat and have increased their factions' influence since 1982. They have managed to keep their organization independent of foreign control, unlike many other PLO factions. The DFLP and PFLP both maintain close ties with Syria, however, and this link has greater influence on their policies than their relations with Moscow. [redacted]

The Soviets have said very little in public about the Democratic Alliance, but it is evident from its composition and platform that they support it. Among its goals are the rejection of the "capitulationist" Camp David accords and the Reagan peace plan and the strengthening of ties with the USSR and Syria. [redacted]

We believe Moscow does not view the leftists at this point as a replacement for Arafat. A Soviet Foreign Ministry official told a US Embassy officer last year that neither Hawatmah nor Habbash seemed ready to step into Arafat's shoes. This assessment probably still holds. [redacted]

Nonetheless, the Kremlin probably sees the leftists' membership in the PLO³ as a corrective influence on the "bourgeois" Arafat and as a base from which they might someday dominate the organization. Soviet support for the leftists seems designed to reunite the PLO on a basis that curtails Arafat's ability to pursue talks with Arab moderates.⁴ Moscow also apparently hopes that the leftists can help mend the rift between Arafat and Assad. [redacted]

As yet, however, little progress has been made toward realizing these goals. The leftists were unable to persuade Arafat to postpone the convening of the 17th session of the Palestine National Council (PNC), the PLO's parliament-in-exile, in Amman in November. Both the Democratic and National Alliances boycotted the session, and Democratic Alliance leaders made quick trips to Moscow on the eve of the session. The Soviet aim during these talks may have been as much to prevent a falling out between Hawatmah and Habbash as it was to avoid a split within the PLO.

³ The PCP is the only Democratic Alliance faction that is not a member of the PLO. [redacted]

⁴ Not all the Democratic Alliance members share this limited goal. Habbash still calls for Arafat's ouster. [redacted]

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Table 2
Groups Within the Palestine Liberation Organization

Group	Leader	Politics	Size of Militia
Pro-Arafat			
Fatah loyalists	Yasir Arafat	Palestinian nationalism; main goal is to secure Palestinian political demands; largely nonideological.	6,000 to 8,000
Arab Liberation Front (ALF)	Abd al-Rahim Ahmad	Controlled by Iraq.	300 to 500
Democratic Alliance (neutral) ^a			
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)	George Habbash	Revolutionary, Marxist-Leninist movement committed to elimination of conservative monarchical Arab regimes as well as Israel. Uses support for Arafat as PLO leader to press him for more radical policies.	1,500 to 2,000
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)	Nayif Hawatmah	Marxist-Leninist; most "ideological" group; generally supports Arafat and mainline PLO policy.	1,200 to 1,500
Front for the Liberation of Palestine (FLP)	Taalat Yaqub	Militant opposition to Israel.	300 to 500
National Alliance (anti-Arafat)			
Fatah rebels	Political: Nimr Muhammad Salih (Abu Salih) and Sami Abu Kuwayk Qadri Military: Said Muragha (Abu Musa)	Reject negotiated solution with Israel.	2,000 to 2,200
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC)	Ahmad Jibril	Lacks clearly defined political ideology; emphasizes military struggle; follows anti-Israel policy.	800 to 1,100
Popular Struggle Front (PSF)	Samir Ghawshah	Militant advocate of armed struggle to eliminate Israel.	200 to 300
Saiqa	Issam Qadi	Controlled by Syria.	500 to 1,000

^a Includes a non-PLO member, the Palestinian Communist Party.

Hawatmah announced upon his return from Moscow that he was not prepared to implement the DFLP-PFLP joint command that had been established in the spring. [redacted]

The Soviets are frustrated by this continuing dissension within the Palestinian left. [redacted]

One potential byproduct of increased leftist influence in the PLO might be pressure for greater use of terror by the Palestinians. The PFLP is the leftist faction that has been most involved in terrorism in the past, although its use of that weapon has declined in recent years. The Palestinian groups that are currently most actively involved in terrorism are the PFLP-GC, the Popular Struggle Front, and Abu Nidal's organization. The Soviets maintain contacts with the PFLP-GC, but it is primarily a Syrian-dominated group, as are the PSF and, at the moment, Abu Nidal's faction.

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Indeed, Moscow might encourage the wide-scale use of terrorism by the Palestinians inside Israel if it concluded that the split between Arafat and the leftists was permanent and that Arafat planned to enter peace negotiations that excluded the USSR. The Soviets might attempt to sabotage such a move by Arafat by supporting some spectacular Palestinian terrorist acts against Israeli targets. Moscow and Damascus presumably would calculate that terrorist tactics would undermine any US peace initiative that they did not support.

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The Soviets have long been ambivalent about the utility of terrorism for the Palestinian cause. They distinguish between international terrorism and acts against targets inside territories occupied by Israel in 1967. For instance, an article in *Novoye Vremya* in March 1974 asserted that:

One must draw a clear-cut moral and political dividing line between acts of international terrorism and the use of force in the struggle for national liberation, such as that waged by the Palestinian patriots on territory unlawfully occupied by Israel.

Moscow regards the latter as a legitimate form of struggle, &

The Soviets also probably realize, however, that a return now to wide-scale use of terrorism would only play into Israel's hands. It would provide pretexts for Israeli strikes against Palestinian targets, just as Tel Aviv used the shooting of the Israeli Ambassador in London as justification for its invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Moscow might be even more concerned that such terrorism could trigger an Israeli military move against neighboring Arab states, particularly Syria.

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the Soviets believe some operations in the occupied territories are suicidal and have questioned their worth.

A return to terror also would further split the PLO—because Arafat's mainline Fatah opposes such a move—and thus retard Moscow's efforts to achieve Arab unity. The Soviet goal is leftist dominance of a unified PLO, not a fractionated organization. The Soviets may calculate that the influence of the DFLP, backed by the PCP, neither of which has been heavily involved in terrorism, will be sufficient to counter any PFLP appeal for a return to a course that relies primarily on terrorism.

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Soviet officials have argued with the Palestinians over the years, both publicly and privately, that acts of international terrorism by Palestinians are counter-productive.

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Outlook

The Soviets did, in fact, improve relations with the PFLP in the late 1970s after it sharply reduced its involvement in international terrorism.

In the past, despite problems within the PLO and between the USSR and the Palestinians, Moscow was able to maintain a close relationship with a powerful, unified Palestinian organization. The difference today is that the decimation of the PLO's military arm, the rift within Fatah and the PLO, and the falling out between Arafat and Assad have all gone further than before and may be approaching a point of no return.

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The USSR, in our view, probably calculates that continued sporadic terrorist operations inside Israeli-occupied territories are a useful means of pressure on Tel Aviv. If this were the policy of a leftist-dominated PLO, Moscow almost certainly would countenance it.

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The Jordanian Connection

The Soviets have taken a purposefully ambiguous stance on the issue of links between Jordan and a new Palestinian state. Their public comments suggest they oppose the idea of a confederation but are unwilling to say so openly for fear of damaging relations with Arafat and Hussein. [redacted]

Back in 1974, when Soviet ties to both were not as extensive, Moscow was more outspoken. The editor-in-chief of Izvestiya wrote an article criticizing confederation as an attempt to "extinguish the revolutionary spirit of the Palestinians." By 1979 the Soviets were taking the line that they viewed a Jordanian-PLO connection with "understanding"—a polite form of nonsupport. Andropov used the same term in his January 1983 talks with Arafat in Moscow. A month later, the CPSU's top Middle Eastern specialist, Karen Brutents, recited Andropov's phraseology to a Lebanese newspaper but added that the Soviets "understand" the confederation idea only on the basis that Jordan and the PLO proceed with "full awareness and caution," safeguarding the right of the Palestinians to establish their own state. Moscow's Arab-Israeli peace proposal of 29 July 1984 acknowledged the right of the Palestinians to form a confederation but did not specify with whom and emphasized that this "possibility" could be considered only after a Palestinian state is formed.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Moscow's skepticism about a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation stems from several factors. First, the Syrians oppose the scheme, fearing it would facilitate peace negotiations with Israel that exclude Syria.



Figure 8. Jordan's King Hussein greets Arafat in October 1984, shortly before convening of the Palestine National Council in Amman [redacted]

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Second, the Soviets have no wish to see the PLO co-opted by Jordan, which is linked historically, financially, militarily, and ideologically to the conservative Arab regimes and the United States. [redacted]

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Finally, the Soviets evidently fear that a confederation would breathe life into the Reagan plan, which calls for Jordan to represent the Palestinians at peace talks with Israel. In January 1984, for example, Pravda noted that candidate Politburo member Boris Ponomarev and Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumbatt emphasized during their talks in Moscow the importance of stopping "imperialist intrigues" aimed at imposing on the PLO "capitulationist solutions similar to the anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian 'Reagan plan.'" Moscow's greatest objection to the plan is its exclusion of a Soviet role. [redacted]

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Moreover, the Soviets have become even more dependent upon Syria as their primary ally and avenue of influence in the Middle East and thus have less room for maneuver. The need to protect this relationship after the damage it suffered during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon accounts, in large part, for the difference between Moscow's publicly displayed irritation with Syrian moves against the PLO in 1976 and its unwillingness to take the same step in 1983-84.

[redacted]

The Palestinian issue is likely to remain the central one in the Middle East, regardless of who wins the power struggle within the PLO, and the Soviets will continue championing the cause. But the PLO's value as a vehicle for advancing Soviet interests in the region probably will remain much diminished, especially if the organization fragments. The PLO's internal rifts and feud with Syria put the attainment of the Arab unity the Soviets always place so much emphasis on even further away. It will be difficult for the Soviets to achieve one of their primary goals in the Middle East—a major role in an Arab-Israeli peace conference—without close ties to a strong PLO that cooperates with Syria.

[redacted]

A long-term Soviet aim remains leftist control of the PLO. The Soviets have long had misgivings about Arafat's close ties with conservative Arab governments and his attempts to establish a dialogue with the United States. Being realists, however, they apparently still believe he is the best available choice to head the PLO because he is the only Palestinian leader on the scene today with the ability to appeal to a wide spectrum of Palestinian views and the international standing to represent the PLO effectively and keep it independent of Damascus. Moscow is likely to continue its behind-the-scenes efforts to reconcile the PLO's factions but on a basis that gives the leftists a greater say in policymaking and curtails Arafat's ability to pursue solutions to the Palestinian question that exclude the USSR or favor the United States.

[redacted]

The Soviets are also likely to continue discreetly urging a rapprochement between Arafat and Assad. They probably are not sanguine about the prospects of this occurring, however, and they have shown there are clear limits on their willingness to anger Assad in order to achieve it. Maintaining their position in Syria will continue to take precedence over the Soviets' support for the PLO. But the Soviets probably will press Damascus a bit harder on the issue than they have over the last two and a half years.

[redacted]

A formal breakup of the PLO would be one of the worst possible outcomes for the Soviets.

[redacted]

It remains to be seen whether Arafat's holding of the PNC in Amman in November has made such a split unavoidable. Moscow would worry that Arafat might take his wing and strike a deal with Jordan, allowing the Palestinians to be represented at US-sponsored peace talks that exclude the USSR. To prevent such a development, the Soviets probably would attempt to maintain their ties with Arafat, even if this meant further tensions with Damascus, which would be likely to field its own PLO. At the same time, Moscow probably would step up efforts to strengthen the Palestinian leftists in the hopes that the split would provide an opportunity to increase their influence among Palestinians.

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