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The "New" PLO Or: Can the Leopard Change its Spots?

After more than 20 years of ostracism by most of the civilized world, Yasir Arafat, Chairman of the PLO, has finally uttered the "magic words" demanded by the U.S. It didn't come easy, and he didn't get it quite right. But it was good enough for Secretary of State George Schultz who, "the words" having been spoken, declared the willingness of the U.S. to talk with the PLO. One wonders whether that surprising opening will bring peace in the Middle East any closer to realization.

What are the facts?

■ Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, having wrung major concessions from Israel, promised that the U.S. would not deal with the PLO unless it fulfilled two conditions: (1) it would accept U.N. Resolutions 242 and 238; (2) it would recognize Israel's "existence". Congress added a third condition, namely that the PLO would renounce terrorism. Finally, after 20 years of obdurate resistance, Yasir Arafat, as spokesman for the PLO, did make those statements. Secretary Schultz decided therefore that the U.S. must establish contact with the PLO. Only a week earlier, the Secretary had refused Arafat a visa to enter the United States, because of his personal association with and personal responsibility for widespread terrorism all over the world.

■ What are the goals of the PLO, and is it likely that they have changed by the uttering of those three sentences? The PLO is a terror organization, created in 1964 by the Arab League. It has only one aim: the destruction of the State of Israel through force and violence. Any apparent deviation from this single-minded aim is a temporary tactical maneuver.

■ The basic charter of the PLO is the so-called "Palestinian National Covenant." Its main theme is that the State of Israel has no right whatever to exist. It states clearly that "Palestine... is an indivisible part of the Arab homeland" and that "the Arab-Palestinian people... reject all solutions that substitute for the total liberation of Palestine." Those PLO and Arab leaders who have from time to time ventured to propose a less inflexible approach have invariably paid with their lives for such deviation from PLO "orthodoxy."

■ The recent unilateral declaration by the PLO of a "Palestinian State with its capital in Jerusalem" on territory administered by and under control of Israel is an attempted step in that direction. The PLO was founded long before Israeli administration of Judea-Samaria (the "West Bank") and the Gaza Strip. Its avowed purpose was then, has always been and continues to be, not the establishment of a Palestinian state, but the destruction of Israel proper.

Can the leopard change its spots? It does not seem likely. And it does not seem likely that the PLO, engaged in unrelenting terror since its creation 24 years ago, could suddenly become a factor for peace, just because of the intonation of a few "magic phrases". It is comforting to think that peace in the Middle East can be achieved by bestowing respectability on the PLO. But the only way to bring about peace in the Middle East is by direct negotiations between Israel and representatives of the residents of the administered territories, as agreed in the Camp David Accord: a period of autonomy, after which the final disposition and status of the territories will be decided by the people involved. The PLO cannot be a party to the peace process, because its charter calls for war and destruction and because terror and peace cannot exist together.

■ The PLO is the kingpin of international terror. It maintains a complex network of relations with all of the main terror organizations throughout the world. It has written a blood-spattered record of unrelenting terror. Some of their more "glorious" exploits: the mid-air explosion of a Swissair jetliner (47 dead); the attack on pilgrims and passengers at Ben-Gurion International Airport (26 dead, 76 wounded); the attack on Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics (11 dead); attack on the Ma'lot school (24 dead, 62 wounded—mostly children); the hi-jacking of a passenger bus on the Haifa-Tel Aviv highway (35 dead, 80 wounded); the coordinated shoot-outs at the Rome and Vienna Airports (16 dead); and the murderous attack on the Istanbul Synagogue, in which 21 worshippers were killed.

■ In their attacks against Americans, the PLO hand is suspected in many of the kidnappings of U.S. hostages. American citizen Leon Klinghoffer was brutally killed in the PLO ship-jacking of the *Achille Lauro*. Some of the most brutal PLO attacks against Americans have been against U.S. diplomats. In the Sudan, in 1973, two American diplomats, Ambassador Cleo Noel and Chargé d'Affaires George C. Moore, were mercilessly machine gunned to death when blackmail demands were not met. *The Washington Post* reported on reliable evidence that Yasir Arafat personally was in charge of these executions. In 1976, Ambassador Francis Meloy, Jr. and Counselor Robert Waring were assassinated in Beirut, an attack widely believed to have been the work of the PFLP, a faction of the PLO. In March of 1988, a bomb-laden car was placed in front of the Hilton Hotel in Jerusalem in an attempt to assassinate Secretary George Shultz. There have been many bombings, hi-jackings, and terrorist attacks in virtually every Mid-East and European country, leaving countless dead and wounded. While the final verdict is not yet in, it is generally assumed by our government and by those who are investigating this terrible crime that one of the Palestinian factions patterned after and instructed by the PLO is responsible for the bombing of Pan Am flight #103, which cost over 270 mostly American lives.

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