Palestinian Offices in the United States: Microcosms of the Palestinian Experience

MICHAEL R. FISCHBACH

The September 2018 decision by the administration of U.S. president Donald Trump to close the offices of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Washington and expel the PLO ambassador and his family was the latest chapter in the long and difficult history of Palestinian efforts to maintain information and diplomatic offices in the United States. From the opening of the first Arab information office in the United States in 1945, to the establishment of the first specifically Palestinian information center in 1955, to the creation of the first PLO office in 1965, the Palestinians' twin goals of representing their people and providing information about their cause on the soil of Israel's greatest ally has been hindered by challenges and threats from a variety of sources. Indeed, the long saga of trying to maintain an official presence in the United States is a microcosm of the wider Palestinian national drama of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, replete with Zionist attacks, debilitating inter-Arab and intra-Palestinian rivalries, political ineptitude, the struggle to achieve diplomatic legitimacy, and hostility from the U.S. government and its pro-Zionist politicians.

Early Information Efforts

Official Palestinian attempts to influence the U.S. public date to the 1940s. With the renewed global attention being paid to Zionism and the question of Palestine after World War II, the Arab League decided to open an information office in Washington. Formed in the fall of 1945, and mainly supported with funds from the Iraqi government, the Arab Office (AO) was staffed by a number of Arab intellectuals and professionals, notably Palestinians such as Musa Alami, Izzat Tannous, Anwar al-Nashashibi, Ahmad Shuqayri, and Khalil Totah.[1] It was not long before the AO's efforts to articulate Palestinian aspirations ran into trouble. Pro-Zionist forces were quick to attack it, and starting in May 1946, accusations were made that the AO was anti-Semitic, accusations that attracted the attention of Zionist congressional figures and that culminated in a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) raid on the organization's offices in March 1947.[2]

Nor were Zionist attacks and FBI raids the only factors that hindered the AO's effectiveness. Like the Palestinian national movement more broadly, the AO's work suffered from inter-Arab and intra-Palestinian rivalries. The fact that the Iraqi government was the main source of the AO's funding alienated both the Egyptian government and the Egyptian heading the Arab League, Abd al-Rahman Azzam.[3] Making matters worse was the hostility toward the AO displayed by Haj Amin al-Husseini, Palestine's preeminent politician and head of the Arab Higher Committee (AHC). The AHC in fact announced in early 1947 that it intended to open its own information office in New York, and did in fact send a delegation there to lobby for the Palestinian cause before the United Nations (UN).[4] In December 1947, the AO announced that it would close its doors, the month after the Arab world failed to stop the UN from partitioning Palestine.

The setback was short-lived, however. In 1954, the Arab League began contemplating reopening an office in the United States, and once again, Palestinians played a disproportionately large role in its creation and functioning. Arab League secretary-general Muhammad Abd al-Khaliq Hassuna contacted Fayez Sayegh and asked him to develop a plan for Arab information services in the United States. Sayegh was a brilliant scholar and diplomat. The son of a Syrian father and a Palestinian mother, Sayegh attended the American University of Beirut before leaving for the United States where he completed his doctoral studies in philosophy at Georgetown University in 1949. Stranded by the 1948 war and unable to return home to Palestine, Sayegh worked for the Lebanese embassy in Washington from 1949–50 until he moved to New York and worked for the UN until 1954 and, thereafter, for the Yemeni delegation to the UN.

As a result of his discussions with Hassuna, Sayegh and three others—Fakhri Shihab, Kamal al-Sha'ir, and Hasan Sa'b—met on 2–3 April 1955 at the New York home of economist Charles Issawi to discuss establishing an Arab information service in the United States. Sayegh drafted a comprehensive study of such a public relations mission, arguing that the main objectives of an Arab information center should be to present a full portrait of the Arabs and offer more detailed pictures of Arab life. Interestingly, Sayegh felt that there was no need at that point to bring up Palestine constantly or attack Israel at length. Among his other recommendations was that they should not try to match Zionist propaganda, as this would only draw more attention to Israel. Above all, he stressed, the Arab Information Center (AIC) should aim its efforts at Americans in a way that worked for them, not in a way that pleased Arab audiences back home. Sayegh argued that this had been the cause of the AO's failure.[5] The Arab League accepted the study.

On 15 June 1955, Sayegh sent a "Dear Sir" letter out to media and other sources introducing the new AIC in New York. In keeping with Egypt's dominant role in the Arab League, the league assigned a venerable Egyptian diplomat, Kamel Abdel Rahim, to direct the office; Sayegh served as his deputy and head of the AIC's research section.[6] The AIC began expanding its operations fairly soon thereafter. In January 1956, it hired a Palestinian, Saadat Hasan,[7] and the following year tasked him with opening a new AIC office in Chicago. Later that year a third AIC office opened in San Francisco under the directorship of another Palestinian, Aziz Saliba Sahwell.[8] Others were eventually formed in Dallas, Washington, and Coral Gables, Florida, and in 1960 the Arab League decided to put Sayegh in charge of all AIC offices in the United States.[9] It seemed to represent an auspicious beginning for Arab information efforts.

Distinctly Palestinian Information Offices

Yet it was not good enough for some Palestinians, who decided to set up the first specifically Palestinian information/public relations office in the United States the same year that the AIC was created. The Palestine Arab Refugee Office (PARO) was opened by Tannous, a Palestinian who possessed impressive nationalist and public relations credentials. He received his MD from the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut (which later became known as the American University of Beirut) in 1918, and during the 1930s was a spokesman for the Palestinian cause while heading the Arab Information Office in London. Tannous later worked at the AO in Washington. Unable to return home after the Nakba in 1948, he created the Arab Palestine Office in Beirut in 1949.

In 1955, the Iraqi government began giving Tannous an annual sum of $28,000 for the new PARO in New York. Tannous described the work of the PARO as a mission "to defend the cause of the Arab inhabitants of Palestine and to regain their rights in their homeland; to alleviate the sufferings of the refugees; and to seek equality and justice for the Arab Moslem and Christian inhabitants who are now living in the Israeli-occupied territory." To assist him in his work, Tannous hired fellow Palestinian Sami Hadawi in 1956. Hadawi had worked for several agencies in the British Mandatory government in Palestine before being stranded as a refugee by the 1948 war like Sayegh and Tannous had been. He then worked on matters relating to land and property in Palestine for the Jordanian government and, from 1952–56, did the same for the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine in New York. According to their division of labor, Tannous spent most of his time at the UN, meeting with delegates or setting up meetings with church groups, the media, and other organizations. Hadawi ran the office's day-to-day operations, monitored the press, responded to negative press articles, and starting in early 1956, publishing a monthly newsletter, the *Palestine Arab Refugee Newsletter*.[10]

Whereas Sayegh had advised the AICs not to focus too much on the Palestinian problem, Tannous and Hadawi felt that was their precise goal, and produced a number of pamphlets on the topic, including *Land Ownership in Palestine*, *The Expulsion of Palestine Arabs from Their Homeland: A Dark Page in Jewish History*, and *The Persecution of Arabs in "Israel": Facts That Every American Should Know about the Tragedy of the Holy Land.* The PARO also shrewdly tried to convince American audiences that American policy in the Middle East had both alienated the Arab world and invited Soviet inroads into the region.

Much like the problems that had bedeviled the AO in Washington in the late 1940s, the PARO almost immediately suffered from intra-Arab disputes. After all, the PARO was in New York, the same city as the Arab League's new AIC. During Tannous's first-ever meeting with the AIC's Abdel Rahim, the latter told him that it would be better for the Arabs to maintain just one office in New York: his. Abdel Rahim added, however, that although he was proposing that Tannous join the AIC, he still could keep both his separate office suite and his Iraqi money. Tannous declined the "offer" inasmuch as he wanted to retain his independence. However, his efforts were crippled three years later in late 1958 when the new republican Iraqi government ended the former royal government's financial support of the PARO and gave the money instead to the AHC. Hadawi then left to work for the AIC in New York in January 1959, leaving Tannous and the PARO to limp along until 1961. The first specifically Palestinian publicity office quickly came and went, having barely survived six years.[11]

That same year, however, an 18 July 1961 announcement heralded the opening of a new Palestinian information/public relations office in New York: that of the Palestine Arab Delegation (PAD). The PAD represented the AHC, and marked its efforts and those of Haj Amin al-Husseini to assume the mantle of official spokesman for the Palestinian cause in the United States. Yet by 1961, the AHC was a remnant from a bygone era despite the fact that it still maintained offices in Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad, in addition to its headquarters in Beirut where al-Husseini lived in exile.

The PAD's New York office was directed by Issa Nakhleh, who had obtained his LLB from the University of London, become a lawyer in Palestine, and then represented the AHC delegation in New York from 1947–48. In addition to writing press releases, Nakhleh entertained diplomats at the UN and began issuing a newsletter titled *Palestine*. He spent relatively little on postage, indicating that the PAD did not extend its activities much beyond meetings at the UN. Beginning in February 1962, Nakhleh was assisted by acting director Omar Suleiman Azzouni until the latter's death in 1968.[12]

The PAD continued its work in the early 1960s and proved quite prolific in turning out pamphlets it hoped would sway American public opinion. While well written, many of the pamphlets used language whose distinctions were lost on the average U.S. reader. For example, PAD material studiously avoided using the words "Israel" and "Israeli," preferring "Occupied Palestine" for "Israel," and "Zionist" or even "Jewish" for "Israeli," coded wording that would not resonate with their audience. Making its attempts to reach the U.S. public even harder, the PAD also produced clumsy writings with tendentious, provocative titles like *Zionist Leaders Conspire to Railroad the United States into a Third World War* and *Jewish Neo-Colonialism and Wars against the Arabs*. Such heavy-handedness did not bode well for presenting the Palestinian cause to the young generation just coming of political age in the United States during the 1960s and tired of the sloganeering of older generations.

For all the inter-Arab and intra-Palestinian rivalries that affected the AO, AIC, PARO, and PAD, they all shared one fate: surveillance by pro-Israeli forces. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith started intelligence gathering efforts—what it called its "information-gathering operation"—against Arab offices in the United States as far back as 1948. The ADL's Milton Ellerin, director of its national fact finding board, was in fact an old hand at intelligence gathering who previously had served with the FBI from 1934–46 before beginning work for the ADL in 1948. The ADL monitored Arab countries' consulates and UN delegation offices, AIC offices, the PARO, as well as the various branches of the Organization of Arab Students. The ADL was also happy to share its files with governmental agencies at home and abroad, and boasted in 1961 that it "has been of great value and service to both the U.S. State Department and the Israeli Government. All data have been made available to both countries with full knowledge to each that we were the source."[13]

New Environment Created by the 1967 War

The June 1967 war marked the beginning of an entirely new information era in the United States when it came to the Arab-Israeli conflict. For Palestinian information specialists, the new space

opened up after the war by anti-Israeli opinions among black militants and white leftists presented them with a golden opportunity. This is best symbolized by the fact that a pamphlet Sayegh wrote for the research center of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Beirut in May 1965, *Do You Know? Twenty Basic Facts about the Palestine Problem,* was quoted extensively by the black power group the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in an article about the Arab-Israeli conflict it published in its August 1967 newsletter. That article was one of the first instances of American youth publicly condemning Israel and siding with the Palestinians. SNCC's article also quoted another PLO pamphlet, *The Enraging Story of Palestine and Its People*, which Tannous had written in 1965.[14] Pro-Palestinian U.S. radicals finding and using such English-language Palestinian documents was a fortuitous event that offered Palestinian information operatives in the United States a valuable opportunity.

The PAD in fact did increase its activities during and after 1967, yet failed to rise adequately to the occasion. A pamphlet it published after the war once again reflected the heavy-handed and self-defeating tendentiousness of its earlier material. Titled *Indictment of the International Zionist Gang of Tel-Aviv for War Crimes, Genocide and Crimes against Humanity*, the 1967 document not only used inflammatory language but even claimed that the Israelis had used the hallucinogenic drug LSD against Arab soldiers during the war. Another publication put out in 1969 was titled *Diary of Crimes by Zionist Jews in the Gaza Strip*. Increasingly marginalized by such bombast, Nakhleh and the PAD continued to exist for years thereafter in New York despite their diplomatic irrelevance and inability to produce material appropriate for American audiences. Its ongoing existence belied the new realities in the Middle East and in the United States.[15]

Strangely, the 1967 war did not lead to a huge increase in AIC activity on behalf of the Palestinians despite the emergence of a new discourse within the American Left heralded by the publication of SNCC's article. Shrewd Arab observers should have noticed that the times were changing and yet the AIC's annual budget actually declined from 1966–68. It then increased significantly in 1969, but this was two years after the war had ended.[16] Then when the AIC in New York finally hired a U.S. public relations firm in 1968 to study its operations and issue recommendations, it ended up rejecting them. The AIC's information efforts seemed paralyzed by indecision right at the time when they could have proved influential.[17]

One person working for the AIC in New York wanted to do things differently: Randa Khalidi al-Fattal. At thirty-three, she came from a younger generation of Arab publicists. The daughter of the famous Palestinian educator Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi and the noted Lebanese feminist and translator Anbara Salam,[18] al-Fattal obtained her MA in English from the University of Oxford in 1957 and began teaching at Damascus University that same year. She became involved in diplomatic work when she started working in New York as editor of the AIC publication the *Arab World* in July 1968.

Under her leadership the magazine began shifting its focus from Americans in general to those holding dissident opinions. It started featuring poetry and fine arts, and also began concentrating on the Palestinian national movement. In the May 1969 issue of the *Arab World,* for example, al-Fattal wrote an article titled "Palestine Liberation Movement." The Washington AIC also picked up on this trend and began issuing a newsletter in 1970 called *Palestine Digest,* which contained articles about the Palestinians from the American and international press. Al-Fattal also noted that by the late

1960s, public requests for AIC speakers increasingly had begun to include specific requests for a Palestinian speaker.[19] In fact she spent a good deal of time addressing young people on college campuses starting in 1969, becoming one of the AIC's main speakers.

Al-Fattal also made a particular point of reaching out to black Americans. For example, she accompanied SNCC's Stokely Carmichael during his September 1967 trip to Syria. Al-Fattal also contacted activist Paul Boutelle in 1970, and the two of them organized a delegation of young blacks that traveled to Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan in August 1970.[20] Looking back on her experience decades later, al-Fattal noted: "I started one of the very first efforts to get to know black Americans. When [they] finally politicized their cause they looked around for allies, and I was one of the Arabs in America who felt that they may very well fall under Israeli influence. . . . It was then our duty to draw their attention—of the Black Panthers and other groups—to the fact that we had a very legitimate cause."[21]

Despite these small successes, the AIC's efforts on behalf of the Palestinians suffered significantly as a result of Arab politics. First, the AIC sustained a major blow in 1971 when Sayegh resigned. In mid-July 1971, the Jordanian army launched a major attack against those PLO forces still ensconced in northern Jordan after the bloody events of Black September the previous year. The Palestinians were crushed. As someone of Palestinian heritage working for the Arab League, which included Jordan, Sayegh decided he had had enough. On 30 July 1971, he sent a letter to the Arab League secretary-general announcing his resignation. In it, he cited the "paralyzing contradictions" between the Arab League member states' professed efforts to serve the Palestinian cause and what they actually were doing.[22]

Other dimensions of Arab politics militated against the AIC's success in cultivating American audiences. Al-Fattal felt that the AIC was too conservative and unwilling to explore new approaches. In November 1970, she was promoted to head the AIC office in New York. Like the position of secretary-general of the Arab League, the top officer who oversaw that operation had always been an Egyptian until then. Years later she recalled that simply because she was a woman heading an AIC office caused consternation in the Arab League, let alone her ideas about how best to reach impressionable Americans:

> I was a member of the Arab League. At one time, actually, I headed the Arab League in New York. This didn't last long. The Egyptians who ran it didn't like the fact that there was a woman heading it. You see, the Arab League offices are very conservative and they don't allow for any kind of revolutionary ideas—and I did [have some ideas] at the time. So I think for them it looked as if I was changing the fact of the offices. Yes, in a sense [I did want to change them], because I thought they were useless.[23]

First PLO Office and Pro-Israeli Attacks

The 1967 war was a turning point in other ways for Palestinian information efforts in the United States. It highlighted the rise of a new generation of Palestinian nationalists, represented by a new organization, the PLO, which was ready to present the Palestinian story to Americans. The office that the PLO opened in 1965 proved to be the most important of all Arab information offices, yet

it too suffered from the same challenges and threats faced by earlier attempts to publicize the Palestinian problem.

Shortly after he left the PARO and returned to the Middle East, Tannous became one of the founding members of the PLO in May 1964 and served on its first executive committee with former AO official Shuqayri as its first chair. It was not long thereafter that the PLO dispatched him to return to New York and set up an office. He registered the PLO with the U.S. Department of Justice in January 1965, according to the Foreign Agents Registration Act, and then secured and opened an office in March 1965 for what he called the Permanent Delegation of the PLO. The office was located in the same building that housed the PAD offices. The Jewish landlord who owned the building told the FBI that he was on friendly terms with Tannous, who was a perfect gentleman and an "excellent tenant."[24] Setting up the PLO offices in the same building as the PAD office no doubt stirred the ire of the AHC and Haj Amin al-Husseini, who had strongly condemned Shuqayri and the PLO at the time of its formation.

Under Tannous' leadership, the new PLO office quickly set about distributing English-language materials that were much more suitable for American audiences than the diatribes produced by the PAD. One of the first was Sayegh's *Do You Know? Twenty Basic Facts about the Palestine Problem,* which as noted, SNCC later obtained and used extensively in its article about the Arab-Israeli conflict in the summer of 1967. The office also began publishing a newsletter titled *Palestine Issue*.

In October 1968, the aging Tannous left his position and was replaced by Saadat Hasan, who had much prior diplomatic experience with the AIC offices in Chicago and New York. The PLO office served as more than just an information office; it also was the PLO's unofficial embassy in the United States and marked the beginning of a new direction for the PLO in the United States. Americans of all stripes who wanted to contact the PLO leadership in the Middle East worked through Hasan. Like the AIC's al-Fattal, some younger personnel in the PLO office were more adept at knowing what issues would resonate with American audiences in the 1960s— particularly young people and the New Left. In January 1969, Hasan hired Rashed Hussein,[25] a young Palestinian citizen of Israel who was a respected poet. According to al-Fattal, Rashed Hussein was critical of Hasan's approach to public relations, which was to spend most of his time at the UN.[26] Rashed Hussein wanted to deal with American youth instead, as he told an interviewer in March 1970: "Today's university students will be the leaders of tomorrow in the United States. . . . Many people, especially Jews, sense that something is wrong. They want to know why we are fighting. They come to us and we share our points of view. We don't usually reach agreement, but a dialogue is starting."[27] It was not just inter-Arab problems that hurt Palestinian information efforts, but intra-generational ones as well.

The PLO office also attracted the attention of pro-Israeli forces, with the result that representing the PLO proved to be dangerous work. Hasan's tenure as director was noteworthy for several violent assaults on the office between 1969 and 1974. The first incident occurred on 29 August 1969, when three men walked into office, tied up the secretary and a visiting professor conducting research, placed tape over their mouths, and confined them to a sofa. The men kept asking the secretary, Nimati Jaouni, where the records of the PLO's financial contributors were before finally stealing some files and fleeing. Hasan himself was not there at the time, but later suspected that the attackers were from the radical Jewish Defense League (JDL) based on slogans they left behind.

The FBI suggested a more specific Israeli connection, reporting that the attackers spoke in both Hebrew and English and referred to themselves as "Tsahal"—the Hebrew-language acronym for the Israeli army.[28]

The second incident occurred on 22 May 1970, just hours after a Palestinian attack on an Israeli school bus near the Lebanese border. At 2:10 P.M. that day, a black man knocked on the door of the PLO office. Hasan's secretary was expecting a student to stop by, and after looking through the door's peephole, opened the door. The man and three white men thereupon burst into the five-room suite and began attacking Hasan who was in another room speaking by telephone with the AIC's al-Fattal. The assailants beat him with sticks, stabbed him with knives, upset furniture and files, and fled. They left behind a leaflet bearing Hebrew letters and the English-language inscription, "'An eye for an eye.' The Bible. For murdered Jewish children. Never again!" Hasan was taken to Bellevue Hospital, where he was kept for three days. Doctors had to place over sixty stiches to close his wounds.[29]

Investigators focused on members of the JDL as the assailants, whose motto was "Never Again!" The FBI had an undercover agent who had infiltrated the JDL, Richard Rosenthal, who claimed that he was told that Hasan's attackers took with them some documents containing the names of PLO-associated students studying at American colleges and gave them to the Israeli government. The New York City Police Department assigned Detective James J. Porter to investigate the attack. As part of the investigation, Hasan later was taken to a demonstration—probably a JDL demonstration, although the records do not specify—at the UN plaza to see if he could identify any of his assailants, which he could not.[30]

From the Middle East, PLO chairman Yasir Arafat darkly threatened retaliation. "The Palestinian revolution cannot keep silent or accept such crimes," he said about the attack. "The opportunities for retaliation are deep and wide."[31] Apparently those plotting against the PLO office were nonplussed, for just over four months later it was attacked a third time in a more serious way. After the assault on Hasan, the PLO had moved its offices. At approximately 11:00 P.M. on the night of 6 October 1970, a bomb detonated at the group's new offices, causing extensive damage. A person who telephoned United Press International about the attack used the phrase "Never again!" in the call. Hasan later called a press conference where, like Arafat, he hinted at retaliation. This was, he said, "a game two can play; we have fanatics too." The extensive damage to the building was repaired, and the PLO resumed operations but without a name or even a number on the office door.[32]

U.S. Government Surveillance

Other forces began focusing attention on the PLO office as well. The FBI began surveilling it in early 1966, just months after it opened.[33] In September 1968, it obtained information that Fatah intended to establish a "liaison office" at the site. This was based on information gathered from an informant who attended a meeting of the Fund Raising Committee for Palestine that was held at Columbia University on 8 September 1968. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) knew about that meeting too, which supposedly included high-level Fatah official Khalid al-Hasan and a "Dr. al-Alami," a reference to Zuhayr Alami.[34] However, by the mid-1970s, the FBI determined that the claim probably was not true despite the fact that pro-Israeli sources kept repeating it.

The FBI wrote that there was "little pro-Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) activity on the part of [name redacted] other than that of a publicity nature."[35]

The government did not merely surveil Palestinians' offices; it also employed illegal methods. In 1971, the FBI came to believe that Seif al-Wady Ramahi, a Palestinian who headed the AIC in Dallas, had become Fatah's new leader in North America.[36] Ramahi then became the target of an illegal FBI "black bag" job the following year, in September 1972, after the attack on Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games.[37] Permission to break into Ramahi's office and home appears to have come straight from the top: L. Patrick Gray III, acting director of the FBI, authorized the burglary in order to obtain a list of names of Fatah agents allegedly planning assassinations in the United States. The FBI's second highest official, W. Mark Felt—the "Deep Throat" of Watergate fame—also apparently approved of the operation.[38]

The break-ins occurred on 7 and 9 September 1972, when Ramahi was abroad. Agents broke in and photographed documents, including a list of names, which Ramahi later claimed was the AIC's mailing list containing the names of professors and students to whom the AIC sent pamphlets.[39] The FBI believed that he was abroad at the time in order to meet with Fatah agents, and after advising the State Department, U.S. consulates overseas were told not to issue a reentry visa to Ramahi. Ramahi managed to come back to New York City in November anyway, but the government revoked his visa and he left the United States voluntarily on 6 December 1972.[40] The FBI's Felt claimed that the operation was a major success that had put the alleged Fatah agents "out of circulation."[41] That was not the entirety of the matter, however. On 14 September 1972, shortly after the FBI break-ins, U.S. attorney general Richard G. Kleindienst approved the installation of bugging devices in Ramahi's home and office, which agents placed surreptitiously six days later. After Ramahi left the United States, the bugging of his home was discontinued on 1 January 1973, and that of his office at the AIC on 15 June that year.[42]

Another Palestinian information specialist whom the FBI spied on was Hatem I. Hussaini,[43] an academic working at the AIC in Washington. In 1971, a source informed the FBI that Hussaini was a member of Fatah, and the bureau did everything imaginable as part of its investigation: checking telephone company records, credit bureau reports, interviewing Hussaini's associates, and staking out his house. Agents followed him, observing him lunching, walking to work, and entering the Israeli embassy for the purpose of obtaining a visa.[44] They also followed him to and from airports and even tracked the registration of his Ford Mustang automobile. On 26 June 1972, FBI agents interviewed a cooperative Hussaini at his home in Hyattsville, Maryland.[45] After later interviewing him while he was walking down the street near Washington's Dupont Circle, Hussaini once again voluntarily met with agents a third time on 4 October 1972, this time at the FBI's Washington field office. The FBI pointedly told him that he had been identified by one of their sources as a member of Fatah, something he categorically denied despite being told twice that he was being "less than candid."[46] The FBI kept monitoring Hussaini for a number of years thereafter.[47]

The PLO's UN Office and U.S. Hostility

The PLO's presence in the United States underwent a dramatic change early 1975 when it opened up a diplomatic office for the organization's newly accredited observer mission to the

United Nations. In October 1974, the UN General Assembly invited the PLO to address it, and PLO chair Arafat shortly thereafter spoke to the body in New York. Nine days later, on 22 November 1974, the assembly adopted Resolution 3237, according the PLO observer status in the assembly and in all conferences held under the auspices of UN organizations.

On 17 December of that year, the head of the PLO's political department and its de facto foreign minister, Faruq al-Qaddumi, wrote to UN secretary-general Kurt Waldheim stating that Saadat Hasan would head up the PLO's Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations. On 25 February 1975, Hasan himself wrote to Waldheim confirming that the PLO would establish the mission but that it would be located in the existing PLO office. For the time being, Hasan would be wearing two hats: head of the PLO office, and permanent observer to the UN. He also had a new assistant director, Hassan Abdel Rahman. Four months earlier, on 29 October 1974, Abdel Rahman had been injured in yet another violent attack on the PLO office when three men entered the premises, shot at him (they missed), and then beat him with a lead pipe. Telephone calls to media claimed the "Jewish Armed Resistance" was responsible.[48] Hasan resigned from his dual duties in May 1975, and the information office thereafter functioned under Abdel Rahman's direction.

The PLO appointed Zehdi Labib Terzi as the new representative to the UN. A longtime diplomat, Terzi had been appointed PLO envoy to Brazil in 1964. He would become one of the most influential and well-known of all the PLO's diplomats in the United States. He was never on Abdel Rahman's payroll, and his duties (and budget) representing the PLO at the UN were separate from that of the regular PLO information office. There now were in the United States two officials representing the PLO in two different ways. Terzi remained at his UN post until 1991, when he was replaced by Nasser al-Kidwa.

It was shortly after Terzi's appointment that the PLO attempted to open a second office, this one in Washington, in November 1976. The PLO first examined the idea of a Washington office pursuant to a suggestion made by General Vernon Walters in 1974 to PLO official Khalid al-Hasan while the two were in Morocco. (At the time, Walters served as deputy director of the CIA.) Walters apparently told al-Hasan that the organization would be able to better court U.S. opinion if it established an office in the country's capital.[49] The PLO dispatched two valued officials to the United States to do so: Issam Sartawi and Sabri Jiryis. After arriving in the country, the men located office space in Washington, and Jiryis formally registered the office with the U.S. Department of State on 19 November 1976. The PLO executive committee decided eight days later to appoint Jiryis as director of the Washington office.

Yet the PLO's attempt to establish a second office immediately became embroiled in controversy. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger—who had less than two months' time left in his position following President Gerald Ford's defeat in the November 1976 elections—reportedly found out about the move and put an end to the idea. Allowing the PLO to maintain an office in New York as part of the United States' headquarters agreement with the UN, as it did for countries it did not like such as Cuba, was one thing. However, allowing an organization that the United States was officially ignoring, in accordance with a pledge given to the Israeli government in 1975, to open an information office in the nation's capital was something else.

A few days later, on 23 November 1976, the State Department told Jiryis that he would have to leave the country when his visa expired seven days later because of a technicality: he had provided U.S. authorities with false information about his place of birth on the visa application he filled out in Cyprus. Jiryis traveled on a Sudanese passport listing his place of birth as Sudan, not Palestine. In order to avoid discrepancies with his passport, Jiryis had listed Sudan as his birthplace on his visa application. He later explained why and freely admitted that he in fact had been born in Palestine, but U.S. officials remained firm, and he left the country as requested. Thus ended the first attempt to open a PLO office in Washington.[50] With the assumption of Jimmy Carter to the presidency a few months later in January 1977, Kissinger was gone. The PLO managed to open an office in the capital the following year, and on 1 May 1978, it formally announced that the Palestine Information Office (PIO) would commence functioning under Hatem I. Hussaini, who remained its director until 1982.

Constantly Changing U.S. Attitudes

Hatim I. Hussaini and his replacement, Abdel Rahman, were free to operate the PIO throughout the late 1970s and into the mid-1980s but eventually became embroiled in more controversy when the U.S. government tried to shut down the office in 1987 under the administration of Carter's successor, Ronald Reagan, who was decidedly hostile to the PLO. In September 1987, the State Department sent Abdel Rahman a letter informing him that it was changing his designation from a "foreign agent" to head of a "foreign mission" and closing down the PIO given the lack of official U.S. recognition of the PLO. Pro-Israeli forces once again played a major role in the affair; U.S. senator Charles E. Grassley admitted that the government took the step after working with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the main pro-Israeli lobbying group in the country.[51] Abdel Rahman, a U.S. citizen, raised a lawsuit charging that the government's actions were a violation of free speech, but the PIO officially ceased functioning in 1989. Abdel Rahman thereafter ran the office under the aegis of the Arab League, calling it the Arab League's Palestine Affairs Center.

Congress gave the administration more ammunition to shut down PLO offices by enacting the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1987. It forbade the PLO from establishing any office in the United States except where such was governed by treaty—a reference to the headquarters agreement by which the government permitted the PLO's UN office in New York to function. In March 1988, the administration moved to shut down the PLO mission to the UN in New York anyway but shortly backed down after protests from the UN. Reagan's decision to initiate an official "dialogue" with the PLO in December 1988 was also a factor in the volte-face.

The onset of the Oslo peace process led to another change in U.S. attitudes toward PLO offices in the United States. In the wake of the 1993 Oslo Accords, Congress adopted the Middle East Peace Facilitation Act in October 1994, which allowed the government to suspend legislation forbidding the PLO from maintaining an office in Washington now that it was a partner in the U.S.-led peace process. The government then declared that the PLO's premises in Washington constituted an official foreign mission, and in 1994, the office accordingly changed its name to the PLO Mission to the United States. In July 2010, the office, by then under the leadership of Maen

Rashid Areikat, again changed its name to the PLO General Delegation to the United States and was allowed for the first time to raise the Palestinian flag at the facility, which it did in January 2011.

Pro-Israeli forces within Congress did not give up their decades-long fight to throttle Palestinian efforts to maintain an official presence in the United States, however. In 2011, and again in 2015, Congress adopted legislation to force the PLO to close its Washington office should the organization join any UN bodies or try to take action against Israel at the International Criminal Court. Congress also linked the PLO's ongoing ability to keep an office in Washington to its participation in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. The administration of President Barack Obama was allowed to certify Palestinian compliance with the legislation in order to keep the office open, which it did. With the 2016 election of President Donald Trump and the presence in his administration of viscerally pro-Israeli and anti-Palestinian officials like Jared Kushner, John Bolton, and David Friedman, however, the administration's attitude swung in the opposite direction and willingness to certify the PLO began to wilt, prompting the 2018 order to close the office. PLO Ambassador Husam Zomlot did so on 13 September 2018, but assured Americans that its mission would continue: "We vow to double our efforts to strengthen our partnership between the two peoples."[52] The U.S. government cancelled his visa and that of his family, froze their bank accounts, and ordered them to leave by 13 October.[53] Despite insisting that it had the "deal of the century" planned for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Trump administration was turning its back on decades of U.S. policy vis-à-vis the PLO.

A Future of Palestinian Persistence

The history of Palestinian efforts to establish and maintain information and diplomatic offices in the United States mirrors the wider challenges that have buffeted the Palestinian national movement over the past century. Whether it came in the form of inter-Arab and intra-Palestinian rivalries, Zionist attacks, political ineptitude, or hostility from the U.S. government, these offices have faced the same problems that have bedeviled Palestinians the world over. It is a familiar theme in Palestinian history. Yet that same Palestinian history highlights the resilience of Palestinians. Trump's policies notwithstanding, the United States doubtless will see the emergence of new Palestinian voices that carry on the tradition of self-representation in creative ways in the digital age. Such efforts will continue a process begun decades ago, for the words of a PARO pamphlet remain as true today as when they were written in 1956: "And because we feel that we have been misunderstood, we are making this direct appeal to the American people in particular, and to the people of the West in general, in the hope that your better understanding of us will help you to realize the injustice that has been inflicted upon the Palestine Arabs and so open a new era of cooperation for our common interests."[54]

About the Author

Michael R. Fischbach is professor of history at Randolph-Macon College in Virginia. He is the author of *Records of Dispossession: Palestinian Refugee Property and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) and *Black Power and Palestine: Transnational Countries of Color* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018). He is coeditor of *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians,* 3rd edition (New York: Facts on File/InfoBase Publishing, 2017).

ENDNOTES

1 Rory Miller, "More Sinned against than Sinning? The Case of the Arab Office, Washington, 1945–1948," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 15 (2004): pp. 303–25.

2 Miller, "More Sinned against than Sinning?," pp. 311–13.

3 Miller, "More Sinned against than Sinning?," p. 319; Walid Khalidi, "On Albert Hourani, the Arab Office, and the Anglo-American Committee of 1946," *JPS* 35, no. 1 (Autumn 2005): pp. 66–67.

4 Miller, "More Sinned against than Sinning?," p. 318.

5 Sayegh to Garland, 5 February 1954; Mahdar Ijtima'i, 2 wa 3 Nisan 1955 [meeting minutes, 2 and 3 April 1955], box 233, folder 2, Special Collections, Fayez A. Sayegh Papers (hereafter cited as FSP), J. Willard Marriot Library, University of Utah; "Arab Information Center, New York: Resume of Report of Survey, 1955."

6 U.S. Dept. of Justice, Supplemental Registration Statement [for persons and organizations registered under the Foreign Agent Registration Act] for 6 Month Period Ending 3/3/56 through 9/3/56.

7 His full name, in Arabic transliteration, was Sa'dat Hasan Abd al-Latif.

8 U.S. Dept. of Justice, Supplemental Registration Statement [for persons and organizations registered under the Foreign Agent Registration Act] for 6 Month Period Ending 9/3/56 through 3/3/57.

9 Abdulrahman Abdulla Zamil, "The Effectiveness and Credibility of Arab Propaganda in the United States," (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1973), pp. 70, 72, 291.

10 Izzat Tannous, *Persecution of the Arab Minority in "Israel,"* 2nd ed. (New York: Palestine Liberation Organization, 1968), p. 3; Sami Hadawi, "The Story of My Life" (unpublished manuscript), pp. 301–2, 303.

11 Hadawi, "The Story of My Life," pp. 303–4, 308–9, 326.

12 U.S. Dept. of Justice, Supplemental Registration Statement [Pursuant to Section 2 of the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938] as Amended for 6 Month Period Ending 12/3/61.

13 ADL document, Epstein to Joftes, 7 July 1961. Online document at the Institute for Research: Middle Eastern Policy, "The Israeli Lobby Archive," available at http://www.irmep.org/ila/ADL-CA/ExhibitA.pdf.

14 For more information about SNCC's article, see Michael R. Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine: Transnational Countries of Color* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018).

15 Nakhleh in fact continued to operate in the United States until his death in 2003.

16 U.S. Department of Justice, *Annual Report of the Attorney-General to the Congress of the United States on the Administration of the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1936, 1955–1972,* in Zamil, "The Effectiveness and Credibility of Arab Propaganda," pp. 141–42.

17 Zamil, "The Effectiveness and Credibility of Arab Propaganda," pp. 118–19.

18 Randa Khalidi al-Fattal, interview by the author, Beirut, Lebanon, 24 June 2012.

19 Randa Khalidi El-Fattal [sic], "Palestine Liberation Movement," *Arab World* 15, no. 5 (May 1969): pp. 21–23; Zamil, "The Effectiveness and Credibility of Arab Propaganda," pp. 167, 186; Susan Croft Bernstein, "Arab Propaganda in the United States, 1965–1970: A Case Study in International Communications," (MA thesis, George Washington University, 1971), p. 33.

20 See Fischbach, *Black Power and Palestine*, for more about these trips.

21 India Stoughton, "Randa Khalidi on Palestinians, Black Panthers, and Dramaturgy," *Daily Star* [Beirut], 16 February 2013.

22 Sayegh to Secretary-General of the Arab League, 30 July 1971, box 244, folder 3, FSP.

23 Stoughton, "Randa Khalidi on Palestinians"; al-Fattal, interview, 24 June 2012.

24 Report of 20 June 1969, attached to Special Agent in Charge, New York to Director, FBI, FBI file 105-188122-13, FBI office in New York.

25 His full name, in Arabic transliteration, was Rashid Husayn Mahmud Ighbariyya.

26 Al-Fattal, interview, 24 June 2012.

27 Bernstein, "Arab Propaganda in the United States, 1965–1970," p. 80.

28 Sa'dat Hasan, "Al-haraka al-sahyuniyya fi amayrka wa mumarisat al-'unf" [The Zionist movement in America and the use of violence], *Shu'un filastiniyya* no. 8 (April 1972), p. 62; New York FBI office to Director, 9 October 1969, FBI File 105-188122-19.

29 New York City Police Department records; William Burrows, "The City Politic: Hard Days for the Arabian Knights," *New York Magazine*, 22 February 1971, p. 8; al-Fattal, interview, 24 June 2012.

30 New York City Police Department records; Thomas F. Brady, "Three Arabs Beaten near U.N. after Bus Is Attacked in Israel," *New York Times,* 23 May 1970; Richard Rosenthal, *Rookie Cop: Deep Undercover in the Jewish Defense League* (Wellfleet, MA: Leapfrog Press, 2000), pp. 63–64, 82.

31 Robert D. McFadden, "Police Are Posted outside Arab National and Business Offices Here Following Beating of 3 Activists," *New York Times*, 24 May 1970.

32 Rosenthal, *Rookie Cop,* pp. 142–43; Burrows, "The City Politic," p. 8.

33 New York FBI office to Director, 9 June 1966, FBI file 105-188122.

34 The two men's trip was also discussed in another FBI document, "The Fedayeen Impact—Middle East and United States," June 1970, pp. 24, 29.

35 "The Fedayeen Impact," p. 24; Frank J. Rafalko, *MH/CHAOS: The CIA's Campaign against the Radical New Left and the Black Panthers* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011), p. 179; New York FBI office to Director, 9 June 1970, FBI File 105-188122-28.

36 Baltimore FBI office to Director, FBI, 30 July 1971, FBI file 105-203076-50; Baltimore FBI office to Director, FBI, 24 March 1972, FBI file 105-76176-164.

37 "Junior G-Man vs. Supercop," *Newsweek,* 18 June 1973; Nicholas M. Horrock, "New Senate Panel May Study FBI Drive on Arab Terrorism," *New York Times,* 13 February 1975; "Arab Terrorist Activities. Internal Security—Middle East," 20 February 1975, FBI file 105-186336-4347, www.intelwire.com.

38 Felt later claimed that a unit chief in the domestic intelligence division approved the break-in, that Felt and Gray did not find out about it until afterward, and that he then publicly took the fall by stating that *he* had authorized the illegal entry himself. W. Mark Felt, *The FBI Pyramid from the Inside* (New York: Putnam, 1979), p. 325.

39 Al-Wady to Jabara, 20 March 1975, box 10, folder: "Hunt Oil Investigation, 1973-1975," Abdeen Jabara Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

40 "Arab Terrorist Activities. Internal Security—Middle East," 20 February 1975, FBI file 105-186336-4347, www.intelwire.com; FBI director to Attorney General, 21 February 1974, FBI file 105-233838-2662, www.intelwire.com.

41 Felt, *The FBI Pyramid,* pp. 325–26, 330.

42 "Arab Terrorist Activities. Internal Security—Middle East," 20 February 1975, FBI file 105-186336-4347, www.intelwire.com.

43 Arabic transliteration: Hatim Ishaq Husayni.

44 Telegram from Washington to Acting Director, 22 September 1972, FBI file 105-10372.

45 Baltimore FBI office memorandum, 29 June 1972, FBI file 105-208222-50.

46 Telegram from Washington to Acting Director, 5 October 1972, FBI file 105-208222-82; Description of interviews, 16 October 1972, FBI file 105-208222-87.

47 San Diego FBI office to Director, 13 March 1978 and 5 April 1978, FBI file 105-208222.

48 Judith Cummings, "Aide Beaten Palestinian Office Here," *New York Times*, 30 October 1974.

49 Mohamed Rabie, *U.S.-PLO Dialogue: Secret Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), p. 85.

50 Bernard Gwertzman, "Palestinians Preparing to Open Office in Washington," *New York Times,* 20 November 1976; Rabie, *U.S.-PLO Dialogue*, p. 85.

51 Associated Press, "U.S. Orders Washington PLO Office Shut," 16 September 1987. For more about the attempts to close all PLO offices in 1987–88, see Rajai M. Abu-Khadra, "The Closure of the PLO Offices," *JPS* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1988): pp. 51–62.

52 A clip of Hussam Zomlot's speech can be viewed on Mondoweiss. See: Allison Deger, "As PLO Office Closes in Washington, Palestinian Ambassador Says Trump Is the Problem not America," Mondoweiss, 14 September 2018, https://mondoweiss.net/2018/09/washington-palestinian-ambassador/.

53 Jack Khoury, "Palestinian Envoy in D.C. Says U.S. Revoked His and His Family's Visas, Ordered Them to Leave," *Haaretz*, 17 September 2018, https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-palestinian-d-c-envoy-zomlot-claims-u-s-expelled-him-and-family-1.6479668.

54 Palestine Arab Refugee Office, *Tension and Peace in the Middle East: Facts That Every American Should Know about the Tragedy in the Holy Land* (New York: Arab Information Center, 1956), p. 1.