

14 February 1986

REACHING OUT TO THE PLO

SUDDENLY last Monday the American State Department, in a statement described by *The Jerusalem Post's* Washington correspondent as “carefully worded,” proclaimed pontifically that “the Palestinian problem is more than a refugee question.” It went on to say that “there should be no confusion between Resolution 242 and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. They deal with different issues and are in fact complementary.”

This looks almost like the truth. The “Palestinian problem” was never a refugee problem. It existed independently before the refugee question was born. The refugee question was *created* by the Arabs to solve their Palestinian problem.

The Palestinian problem arose from the failure of the Arab nation to prevent the birth of a Jewish state even in a part of Western Palestine and incidentally to destroy the existing Jewish population.

That was why nascent Israel had to fight for its life in 1948 against the aggression of the Arab states; and that was why, in order to facilitate the hoped-for walkover victory by their invading armies, the Arab states called on the Palestine Arab population to leave the war zone temporarily, so as to return in two or three weeks after the victory and the promised slaughter of the Jews.

That is where the “refugees” sprang from.

However, as one of them subsequently told a Jordan newspaper (*Ad-Difaa*, September 6, 1954): “The Arab governments told us: get out so that we can get in; so we got out but they did not get in.” Thus the “refugee problem” was created.

IN THE first months and years after the War of Independence, the Arabs themselves affirmed and reaffirmed this truth. Characteristic for that crucial period was the statement by Emil Ghoury, secretary of the Arab Higher Committee, the official leadership of the Palestine Arabs:

“The fact that there are these refugees is the direct consequence of the action of the Arab states in opposing partition and the Jewish state. The Arab states agreed upon this policy unanimously and they must share in the solution of the problem” (*Daily Telegraph*, Beirut, September 6, 1948)

The Arab states, however, were cleverer than that. At the cost of much misery to the victims of their policy, they focused their continued campaign against Israel's existence on the demand that the refugees be allowed to “return” – in order to destroy the Jewish state from within.

A resolution adopted in 1957 by a “Refugee Conference” in Homs, Syria, declared that “any discussion aimed at a solution of the Palestine problem not based on assuring the refugees' right to annihilate Israel will be regarded as a desecration of the Arab people and an act of treason.”

President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt put it succinctly: “If Arabs return to Israel, Israel will cease to exist” (Interview in *Züricher Woche*, September 1, 1961).

It was one of the paradoxes of the age that while some 50 million real refugees in the world – that is, people who left their country either by deliberate expulsion or because of danger to their lives or safety – were absorbed by host nations, only the half-million-

odd Palestine Arabs living among their own people in several Arab states were maintained as “refugees” as a weapon to destroy a state and a nation.

The so carefully-worded statement of the State Department, pretending to enlighten the world on the difference between the “Palestinian problem” and the “refugee question,” serves only to conceal the real difference.

The Palestinian problem, correctly defined, lies in the failure of the Arab nation to destroy Israel and to take over all of Palestine. The refugee problem is the problem created by the Arab states as a means of retrieving that failure.

THE STATE Department declaration conceals this simple historic truth; but its significance is much deeper. It indicates a substantive shift in the guiding concept to which the U.S. has accustomed us since 1969.

Hitherto, U.S. policy – underlined from time to time in “plans,” from the Rogers to the Reagan – has identified itself in substance with the immediate demands of the so-called “moderate” Arabs. That is to say, Israel must withdraw from “all the territories” from which it was attacked in 1967 (with minor modifications), and concede them to Arab rule.

At this point in the doctrine, U.S. policy has in the past parted company with the “moderate” Arabs – who envisage a second phase: the “final” combined attack, *as in 1948*, on an attenuated Israel and its dismantlement as a state. (The “extreme” Arabs preach destruction in a single blow.)

The bulk of the refugees constituting the “problem” did not come from Judea, Samaria and Gaza. It was from Israel, as it emerged in 1948, that they left.

Indeed, perhaps the sharpest indication of the falsity of Arab claims and demands is the fact that from 1948 to 1967 they had the “West Bank” and Gaza all to themselves. Israel was not there and would not have prevented their setting up a state. Instead, they prepared for a further effort to destroy Israel; and the Palestine Liberation Organization established in that period (1964) had only Israel within the 1949 lines as its target.

NO STATEMENT of policy by any Arab state over the years has omitted the demand for “the right of return” of the refugees to the territory of Israel. Indeed, in April 1982 (three years after the peace treaty), Egyptian Ambassador (now Foreign Minister) Maguid, listing 11 Egyptian demands on Israel, placed the “right of return” (paragraph 2) before the right to an independent state in the “West Bank” and Gaza (paragraph 5).

The State Department declaration of February 10 now specifically identifies the U.S. with this concept of two separate problems. Setting up Arab rule (however named) in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, will solve only one of them. The other problem will require the separate fulfillment of additional “rights of the Palestinian people” – of which the “right of return” is the most important.

The declaration goes far to corroborate the claim, made some days earlier by Farouk Kadoumi, Arafat’s “foreign minister,” that there had been a significant change “for the better” in U.S. policy. With so cheering an acknowledgement by a terrorist leader, the State Department will now no doubt strain to reach out even further to the PLO.

THE U.S. administration has been creating the impression that if Arafat “accepts” Resolution 242 and thus “qualifies” for recognition and for participation in negotiations over the future of Israel, this will automatically commit Israel to “recognize” him and to negotiate with him.

This is an utterly erroneous impression. It may be the doctrine of the U.S. – which is not threatened by destruction. It is not the doctrine of Israel, whose destruction is the very reason for the PLO’s existence. No Israeli government has sanctioned negotiations, in any circumstances, with the PLO.

Quite apart from the PLO’s constitutional (and unchanged) commitment to Israel’s destruction and the dispersal of its Jews, recognition of the PLO as the representative of a *separate, second Arab nation* in Palestine, implies automatic recognition of its right to the separate territory it claims. “Recognition” of the PLO implies renunciation by Israel of Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

The government of Israel made it clear to the U.S. government that there will not be any such recognition – however sweetly such recognition would harmonize with traditional anti-Zionist and anti-Israel doctrines in the State Department.

Correction – 17 February 1986

CORRECTION

The final paragraph of “Reaching out to the PLO” by Shmuel Katz in Friday’s paper should have read: It is time that the government of Israel makes it clear to the U.S. Government that there will not be any such recognition of the PLO – however sweetly such recognition would harmonize with traditional anti-Zionist and anti-Israel doctrines in the State Department