

The PLO and the Politics of Survival, by Aaron David Miller, Washington Papers, vol. XI, no. 99, New York: Praeger, 1983. 132 pages. \$6.95.

BY DANIEL PIPES

Aaron David Miller has written a cool, analytic study of the Palestine Liberation Organization, a topic that is (along with nuclear weapons) the most impassioned in the U.S. political debate. His short book provides an excellent introduction to the PLO, unencumbered by personal bias or a political agenda.

He concentrates on two subjects: the organization's history (chapters 2 and 6) and the factors that influence its decision-making (chapters 3 to 5). The historical section is the less original; Mr. Miller provides a reliable but entirely standard account of the development of Palestinian nationalism in the 1910s, its subordination to Arab nationalism from World War II to 1967, and the subsequent emergence of the PLO as a major actor on the Arab stage. He leads the reader through the thickest of events since 1967—the conflict with Jordan, the use of terror, the Lebanese civil war, Camp David, and the Israeli incursion into Lebanon in 1982—with clarity and skill.

More stimulating, however, are the three chapters dealing with the constraints that face the PLO and that shape the context in which it makes decisions. Mr. Miller notes three constraints: the internal makeup of the PLO, its dependence on the Arab states, and Israeli power.

The PLO itself is in reality many distinct organizations—Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and five others. For this reason the PLO Executive Committee includes representatives from six autonomous organizations, each with its own notions about the way to achieve a Palestinian state. "Power resides not in the overall PLO framework but in the various groups that constitute the resistance movement" [56]. While Fatah is by far the largest and most powerful group, it often accommodates the smaller ones in order to keep the Palestinian movement together; "the history of the PLO is very much a story of Fatah's efforts to dominate and unify the resistance movement." [43] Consequently, the other groups can exert an influence disproportionate to their size. The result is what Mr. Miller calls "the politics of the lowest common denominator" [61]—an almost total inability to take decisive action.

The second constraint, the involvement of Arab states, has even more complex ramifications. Arab governments support the Palestinian cause partly out of genuine sympathy, partly to exploit it for their own purposes. This mix leads to paradoxical and unpredictable results. On the one hand, the Arab governments "fill PLO coffers, facilitate delivery of most of its Soviet and Eastern bloc military equipment, house the majority of its constituents, and plead its case in world capitals and international forums." [66] On the other, "the interests of the Arab states and the resistance movements

have frequently collided—often violently." [70] How Arab leaders manage "to protect and advance their own interests and still discharge their emotional and political responsibilities to the Palestinian cause" [69] makes up the bulk of this engrossing chapter.

Third, "the PLO's greatest challenge and most formidable constraints has come from Israel." [83] Mr. Miller points out the enormous difference in the strength of these two enemies by noting that "in 1964, the year the PLO was created, Israel had already waged two successful wars and . . . was in the process of developing a nuclear reactor." [85] In the author's view, Israel's strength is so overwhelming that "military success against the Israelis was probably less important than the act of resistance itself." [86] He therefore interprets PLO actions against Israel primarily in the light of their symbolic value.



The departure of the PLO from Beirut. (M.E.I.)

In the final chapter, "Whither the PLO?", Mr. Miller notes that, as a result of the 1982 war, the PLO faces "the most severe crisis in its 18-year history." [110] He argues that "time is no longer on the PLO's side" in its conflict with Israel. The dilemma facing PLO leaders is having "to decide whether the need to maintain a unified organization outweighs the importance of making progress toward their goals." [120] More specifically: if the PLO continues to avoid the question of tactics (destroy Israel militarily or deal with it politically?), it will lose any chance of establishing a state of its own. To take steps forward, he concludes, the PLO must establish links with Jordan; otherwise "it is doubtful if the PLO will ever participate in negotiations or accomplish any of its goals." [124]

Although Mr. Miller wrote *The PLO and the Politics of Survival* while an international affairs fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, he is usually employed by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the Department of State. His dispassionate, self-restrained, clear-headed, and practical approach convey an idea of what writing by government analysts is like at its best.

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