

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

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The **Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)** (Arabic: الجبهة الشعبية لتحرير فلسطين, *al-Jabhah al-Sha`biyyah li-Tahrir Filasṭīn*) is a secular Palestinian Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary leftist organization founded in 1967. It has consistently been the second-largest of the groups forming the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the largest being Fatah. PFLP is described as a terrorist organization by the United States,^[8] Canada,^[9] and the European Union.^[10] It was founded by Marxist and Palestinian Christian George Habash.

From its foundation the PFLP sought both superpower and regional patrons and early developed ties with the People's Republic of China, the former Soviet Union and, at various times, with regional powers such as Syria, South Yemen, Libya and Iraq. When that support diminished, or stopped, in the late 1980s and 1990s, the PFLP sought new allies and developed contacts with Islamic fundamentalist groups linked to Iran. The relationship between the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Islamic Republic of Iran has fluctuated – it strengthened as a result of Hamas moving away from Iran due to differing positions on the Syrian Civil War. Iran rewarded the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine for its pro-Assad stance with an increase in financial and military assistance.^[11]

The PFLP has generally taken a hard line on Palestinian national aspirations, opposing the more moderate stance of Fatah. It opposes negotiations with the Israeli government, and favours a one-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The military wing of the PFLP is called the Abu Ali Mustapha Brigades. The PFLP is well known for pioneering armed aircraft hijackings in the late '60s and early '70s.^[12] According to Politburo member and former aircraft hijacker Leila Khaled, the PFLP does not see suicide bombing as a form of resistance to occupation or a strategic action or policy and no longer carries out such attacks.

Currently the PFLP is boycotting participation in the executive committee of the PLO.^{[13][14]} It considers both the Fatah-led government in the West Bank and the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip illegal due to the lack of new elections to the Palestinian National Authority since 2006.^[15]

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine



Founder	George Habash
General Secretary	Ahmad Sa'adat
Founded	1967
Paramilitary wing	Abu Ali Mustapha Brigades
Ideology	Palestinian nationalism Socialism ^[1] Secularism ^[2] Marxism–Leninism ^[3] Anti-imperialism One-state solution ^[4] Anti-Zionism ^{[5][6][7]}
Political position	Far-left
International affiliation	Affiliated to the former Arab Nationalist Movement
Legislative Council	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;">3 / 132</div>

Party flag



Website

www.pflp.ps (<http://pflp.ps/english/>)

Politics of Palestine
Political parties

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History

Origins of the Palestine army

The PFLP grew out of the *Harakat al-Qawmiyyin al-Arab*, or Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), founded in 1953 by Dr. George Habash, a Palestinian Christian, from Lydda.

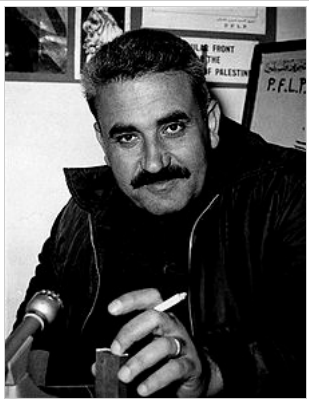
In 1948, 19-year-old Habash, a medical student, went to his home town of Lydda during the 1948 Arab–Israeli War to help his family. While he was there, the Israel Defense Forces attacked the city and as a result most of its civilian population was forced to leave. They marched for three days without food or water until they reached the Arab armies' front lines.

Habash finished his medical education in Lebanon at the American University in Beirut, graduating in 1951.^[16]

In an interview with US journalist John K. Cooley, Habash identified the Arab defeat by the Zionists as "the scientific society of Israel as against our own backwardness in the Arab world. This called for the total rebuilding of Arab society into a twentieth-century society."^[17]

The ANM was founded in this nationalist spirit. "[We] held the 'Guevara view' of the 'revolutionary human being'," Habash told Cooley. "A new breed of man had to emerge, among the Arabs as everywhere else. This meant applying everything in human power to the realization of a cause."^[17]

Formation of the PFLP



George Habash — Secretary General of the PFLP at its beginning – he had been influenced by the ideas of Constantin Zureiq and Sati' al-Husri, Arab nationalists of the 1940s and 1950s

The ANM formed underground branches in several Arab countries, including Libya, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, then still under British rule. It adopted secularism and socialist economic ideas, and pushed for armed struggle. In collaboration with the Palestinian Liberation Army, the ANM established *Abtal al-Audah*, Heroes of the Return, as a commando group in 1966. After the Six Day War of June 1967, this group merged in August with two other groups, Youth for Revenge and Ahmed Jibril's Syrian-backed Palestine Liberation Front, to form the PFLP, with Habash as leader.

By early 1968, the PFLP had trained between one and three thousand guerrillas. It had the financial backing of Syria, and was headquartered there, and one of its training camps was based in as-Salt, Jordan. In 1969, the PFLP declared itself a Marxist-Leninist organization, but it has remained faithful to Pan Arabism, seeing the Palestinian struggle as part of a wider uprising against Western imperialism, which also aims to unite the Arab world by overthrowing "reactionary" regimes. It published a newspaper, *al-Hadaf* (The Target, or Goal), which was edited by Ghassan Kanafani.

Operations

The PFLP gained notoriety in the late 1960s and early 1970s for a series of armed attacks and aircraft hijackings, including on non-Israeli targets. Their Abu Ali

Mustapha Brigades also claimed responsibility for several suicide attacks during the Al-Aqsa Intifada. See #Armed attacks of the PFLP below.

Breakaway organizations

In 1967, Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF) broke away from the PFLP.

In 1968, Ahmed Jibril broke away from the PFLP to form the Syrian-backed Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC).

In 1969, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) formed as a separate, ostensibly Maoist, organization under Nayef Hawatmeh and Yasser Abd Rabbo, initially as the PDFLP.

In 1972, the Popular Revolutionary Front for the Liberation of Palestine was formed following a split in PFLP.

The PFLP had a troubled relationship with George Habash's one-time deputy, Wadie Haddad, who was eventually expelled because he refused orders to stop attacks and kidnapping operations abroad. Haddad has been identified in released Soviet archival documents as having been a KGB intelligence agent in place, who in 1975 received arms for the movement directly from Soviet sources in a nighttime transfer in the Sea of Aden.^[18]

PLO membership

The PFLP joined the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the umbrella organization of the Palestinian



A PFLP patrol in Jordan, 1969

national movement, in 1968, becoming the second-largest faction after Yassir Arafat's Fatah. In 1974, it withdrew from the organization's executive committee (but not from the PLO) to join the Rejectionist Front following the creation of the PLO's Ten Point Program, accusing the PLO of abandoning the goal of destroying Israel outright in favor of a binational solution, which was opposed by the PFLP leadership. It rejoined the executive committee in 1981.

After the Oslo Accords

After the eruption of the First Intifada and the subsequent Oslo Accords the PFLP had difficulty establishing itself in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. At that time (1993–96) Hamas enjoyed rapidly rising popularity in the wake of their successful strategy of suicide bombings devised by Yahya Ayyash ("the Engineer"). The fall of the Soviet Union together with the rise of Islamism—and particularly the increased popularity of the Islamist groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad—disoriented many left activists who looked towards the Soviet Union, and has marginalised the PFLP's role in Palestinian politics and armed resistance. However, the organization retains considerable political influence within the PLO, since no new elections have been held for the organisation's legislative body, the PNC.

The PFLP developed contacts at this time with Islamic fundamentalist groups linked to Iran – both Palestinian Hamas, and the Lebanon based Hizbullah – a detour from its avowedly Marxist orientation. The PLO's agreement with Israel in September 1993, and negotiations which followed, further isolated it from the umbrella organization and led it to conclude a formal alliance with the Iranian backed groups.^[19]

As a result of its post-Oslo weakness, the PFLP has been forced to adapt slowly and find partners among politically active, preferably young, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, in order to compensate for their dependence on their aging commanders returning from or remaining in exile. The PFLP has therefore formed alliances with other leftist groups formed within the Palestinian Authority, including the Palestinian People's Party, the Popular Resistance Committees of Gaza.

In 1990, the PFLP transformed its Jordan branch into a separate political party, the Jordanian Popular Democratic Unity Party.

Elections in the PNA

Following the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004, the PFLP entered discussions with the DFLP and the Palestinian People's Party aimed at nominating a joint left-wing candidate for the presidential elections. These discussions were unsuccessful, and the PFLP then decided to support the independent Palestinian National Initiative's candidate Mustafa Barghouti, who gained 19.48% of the vote. In the municipal elections of December 2005 it had more success, e.g. in al-Bireh and Ramallah, and winning the mayorship of Bir Zeit.^[20] There are conflicting reports about the political allegiance of Janet Mikhail and Victor Batarseh, the mayors of Ramallah and Bethlehem, they may be close to the PFLP without being members.

The PFLP is powerful politically in the Ramallah area, the eastern districts and suburbs of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the primarily Christian Refidyeh district of Nablus, but has far less strength in the rest of the West Bank, and is of little or no threat to the established Hamas and Fatah movements in Gaza.

The PFLP participated in the Palestinian legislative elections of 2006 as the "Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa List". It won 4.2% of the popular vote and took three of the 132 seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Its deputies are Ahmad Sa'adat, Jamil Majdalawi, and Khalida Jarrar. In the lists, its best vote was 9.4% in Bethlehem, followed by 6.6% in Ramallah and al-Bireh, and 6.5% in North Gaza.

Successors to George Habash

At the PFLP's Sixth National Conference in 2000, Habash stepped down as general secretary. Abu Ali Mustafa was elected to replace him, but was assassinated on 27 August 2001 when an Israeli helicopter fired rockets at his office in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

After Mustafa's death, Ahmad Sa'adat was elected general secretary on 3 October 2001.

Attitude to the peace process

When it was formed in the late 1960s the PFLP supported the established line of most Palestinian guerrilla fronts and ruled out any negotiated settlement with Israel that would result in two states between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Instead, George Habash in particular, and various other leaders in general advocated one state with an Arab identity in which Jews were entitled to live with the same rights as any minority. The PFLP declared that its goal was to "create a people's democratic Palestine, where Arabs and Jews would live without discrimination, a state without classes and national oppression, a state which allows Arabs and Jews to develop their national culture."

The PFLP platform never wavered on key points such as the overthrow of conservative or monarchist Arab states like Morocco and Jordan, the Right of Return of all Palestinian refugees to their homes in pre-1948 Palestine, or the use of the liberation of Palestine as a launching board for achieving Arab unity – reflecting its beginnings in the Pan-Arab ANM. It opposed the Oslo Accords and was for a long time opposed to the idea of a two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, but in 1999 came to an agreement with the PLO leadership regarding negotiations with the Israeli government. However, in May 2010, PFLP general secretary Ahmad Sa'adat called for an end to the PLO's negotiations with Israel, saying that only a one-state solution was possible.^[21]

The PFLP opposed the 2007 conflict between Hamas and Fatah and believes that the Salam Fayyad government is not helpful in solving the conflict.^[22]

In January 2011, the PFLP declared that the Camp David Accords stood for "subservience, submission, dictatorship and silence", and called for social and political revolution in Egypt.^[23]

In December 2013, the PFLP stated: "Hamas is a vital part of the Palestinian national movement, and this is the position of the PFLP."^[24]

Membership profile

The PFLP's armed wing, in the West Bank and Gaza, the Abu Ali Mustapha Brigades, draws much of its support from student organizations in universities like Al-Quds University (eastern Jerusalem), Bir Zeit University (Ramallah area), An-Najah National University (Nablus), and the Arab American University. The movement has thousands of active or passive activists in the West Bank, and a few hundred behind bars in Israeli prisons. In December 2009, around 70,000 supporters demonstrated in Gaza to celebrate the PFLP's 42nd anniversary.^[25] The PFLP's leader in Gaza is Rabah Muhanna.^[26]

Armed attacks of the PFLP

This is a list of armed attacks attributed to the PFLP. It is not complete.

Armed attacks before 2000

The PFLP gained notoriety in the late 1960s and early 1970s for a series of armed attacks and aircraft hijackings, including on non-Israeli targets:

- The hijacking of an El Al flight from Rome to Lod airport in Israel on 23 July 1968. The Western media reported that the flight was targeted because the PFLP believed Israeli general Yitzhak Rabin, who was Israeli ambassador to the USA, was on board. Several individuals involved with the hijacking, including Leila Khaled deny this. The plane was diverted to Algiers, where 21 passengers and 11 crew members were held for 39 days, until 31 August;
- Gunmen opened fire on an El Al passenger jet in Athens about to take off for New York on 26 December 1968, killing one Israeli – this prompted a reprisal by Israel destroying airliners in Beirut;
- An attack on El Al passengers jet at Zürich airport on 18 February 1969, killing the co-pilot and wounding the pilot;
- Bombings by Rasmea Odeh and other PFLP members killed two Hebrew University students, roommates 21-year-old Leon Kanner of Netanya and 22-year-old Eddie Joffe of a Tel Aviv suburb, on 21 February 1969.^{[27][28][29]} The two were killed by a bomb placed in a crowded Jerusalem SuperSol supermarket which the two students stopped in at to buy groceries for a field trip.^{[30][31][32]} The same bomb wounded 9 others.^[33] A second bomb was found at the supermarket, and defused.^[28] Odeh was also convicted of bombing and damaging the British Consulate four days later.^{[34][35][36][37]} In 1980, Odeh was among 78 prisoners released by Israel in an exchange with the PFLP for one Israeli soldier captured in Lebanon.^{[27][30][31]}
- The hijacking of a TWA flight from Los Angeles to Damascus on 29 August 1969 by a PFLP cell led by Leila Khaled, who became the PFLP's most famous recruit. Two Israeli passengers were held for 44 days;
- Three adult Palestinians and three boys aged 14 and 15 years old threw grenades at the Israeli embassies in The Hague, Bonn and the El Al office in Brussels on the same day, 9 September 1969 with no casualties;
- Attack on a bus containing El Al passengers at Munich airport, killing one passenger and wounding 11 on 10 February 1970;
- On 6 September 1970, the PFLP (including Leila Khaled) hijacked four passenger aircraft from Pan Am, TWA and Swissair on flights to New York from Brussels, Frankfurt and Zürich, and failed in an attempt to hijack an El Al aircraft which landed safely in London after one hijacker was killed and the other overpowered; and on 9 September 1970, hijacked a BOAC flight from Bahrain to London via Beirut. The Pan Am flight was diverted to Cairo; the TWA, Swissair and BOAC flights were diverted to Dawson's Field in Zarqa, Jordan. The TWA, Swissair and BOAC aircraft were subsequently blown up by the PFLP on 12 September, in front of the world media, after all passengers had been taken off the planes. The event is significant, as it was cited as a reason for the Black September clashes between Palestinian and Jordanian forces.
- On 30 May 1972, 28 passengers were gunned down at Ben Gurion International Airport by members of the Japanese Red Army in collaboration with the PFLP's Waddie Haddad in what became known as the Lod Airport massacre. Haddad was ordered to stop planning operations, and ordered the attack without the PFLP's knowledge.
- On 13 October 1977, the PFLP hijacked Lufthansa flight LH181, a Boeing 737 flying from Palma de



PFLP May Day poster

Mallorca to Frankfurt. After various stopovers the pilot was killed. The remaining passengers and crew were eventually rescued by German counter-terrorism special forces see Mogadishu hijacking.

- On 12 April 1984 a bus from Tel Aviv was hijacked. Bassam Abu Sharif in Damascus issued a statement in the name of the PFLP claiming responsibility.^[38]

Armed attacks after 2000

The PFLP's Abu Ali Mustapha Brigades has carried out attacks on both civilians and military targets during the Al-Aqsa Intifada. Some of these attacks are:

- The killing of Meir Lixenberg, councillor and head of security in four settlements,^[39] who was shot while travelling in his car in the West Bank on 27 August 2001. PFLP claimed that this was a retaliation for the killing of Abu Ali Mustafa.^[40]
- 21 October 2001 assassination of Israeli Minister for Tourism Rehavam Zeevi by Hamdi Quran.
- A suicide bombing in a pizzeria in Karnei Shomron, on the West Bank on 16 February 2002, killing three Israeli teenagers.^[40]
- A suicide bombing in Ariel on 7 March 2002, which left wounded but no fatalities.
- A suicide bombing in a Netanya market in Israel, on 19 May 2002, killing three Israelis. This attack was also claimed by Hamas,^[40] but the Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades have identified the perpetrator on their website as one of their members.
- A suicide bombing in the bus station at Geha Junction in Petah Tikva on 25 December 2003 which killed 4 Israelis.^[41]
- A suicide bombing in the Jordan Rift Valley on 22 May 2004, which left no fatalities.^[42]
- A suicide bombing in the Carmel Market in Tel Aviv on 1 November 2004, which killed 3 Israeli civilians.^[43]
- 14 April 2009, PFLP militants fire a homemade projectile at the Kerem Shalom border crossing, HaDarom.^[44]
- 23 October 2012, A PFLP roadside bomb detonated targeting an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) patrol near Kibbutz Kissufim, Southern, Israel. An IDF commander was seriously injured in the blast.^[45]
- 10 November 2012, PFLP militants fired an anti-tank missile towards Karni Crossing in Gaza Strip, West Bank and Gaza Strip. The explosive device struck an Israeli Givati Brigade jeep, injuring four soldiers and destroying the vehicle.^[46]
- 18 November 2014, the PFLP took responsibility for the 2014 Jerusalem synagogue massacre in which four Jewish worshipers and a Druze policeman were killed with axes, knives, and a gun, while seven were injured. the attacks were done by relatives of a PFLP member and the PFLP accepted it as its operation. ^{[47][48][49][50]}
- 29 June 2015, the PFLP claimed responsibility for an attack in which Palestinians passed by an Israeli car with a vehicle and shot it. 4 people were injured, one was severely injured and died the next day in hospital. ^{[51][52]}



PFLP graffiti in Bethlehem

See also

- Arab Socialist Action Party

- List of political parties in the Palestinian National Authority
- Palestinian domestic weapons production
- Rejectionist Front
- Mohamed Boudia, Carlos the Jackal
- Revolutionäre Zellen
- Blekingegade Gang
- Japanese Red Army
- Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
- Palestinian Islamic Jihad
- Hamas
- Palestinian Popular Struggle Front

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Other sources

- [1] (<http://psi.ece.jhu.edu/~kaplan/IRUSS/BUK/GBARC/pdfs/terr-wd/plo75a.pdf>), [2] (<http://psi.ece.jhu.edu/~kaplan/IRUSS/BUK/GBARC/pdfs/terr-wd/plo75c.pdf>), [3] (<http://psi.ece.jhu.edu/~kaplan/IRUSS/BUK/GBARC/pdfs/terr-wd/plo75d.pdf>) Secret documents regarding 1974 cooperation between the KGB and the PFLP against Israel and arming PFLP – (in Russian) from the *Soviet Archives* [4] (<http://psi.ece.jhu.edu/~kaplan/IRUSS/BUK/GBARC/buk.html>) collected by Vladimir Bukovsky

External links

- PFLP website in English (<http://www.pflp.ps/english>)
- Interview with imprisoned PFLP General Secretary Ahmad Saadat (<http://www.fightbacknews.org/2003-3-summer/pflp.htm>)- Fight Back! News, Summer 2003

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