

# Middle East International

## From our Correspondents

### Young Helps PLO Gain Ground in US

*The Andrew Young affair could well mark a turning point in American Middle East policy. Mark Bruzonsky in Washington describes how it is pushing Americans and their government towards recognition of the PLO.*

Black Americans have taken the lead in breaching the dam which has long held back latent sympathies in this country for the national aspirations of the Palestinians. The "Palestinian problem", along with the PLO itself, is fast becoming a perfectly legitimate subject for discussion here. Indeed, coupled with the well publicised Security Council debate on Palestinian rights, the Young fiasco may turn out to have been an important reverse for Israel's strategy of delay and obfuscation, and a kind of landmark for the PLO in terms of American acceptance.

The Palestinian cause was also advanced at the UN by tactful diplomacy. By not forcing a vote on the controversial resolution updating 242 with a call for Palestinian "self-determination, national independence and sovereignty" [see Document File 107.1], the Arabs presented a new image of maturity and reasonableness. Besides showing diplomatic restraint, the Arab manoeuvre (said to have been personally authorised by Yasser Arafat in Beirut) will now keep the whole question of American policy over Palestine in the spotlight of US media attention.

For the first time in its history, the Palestinian cause, with the PLO as its spokesman, now appears to have a growing constituency in the US, one going

beyond the few thousand active Arab Americans and their sympathisers among scattered intellectuals and radical fringe groups. In this sense, the PLO can be said to have achieved a kind of *de facto* recognition in the United States.

Establishment figures like former under-secretary of state George Ball have resumed, more loudly than ever, their pleas for a basic shift in American thinking. "Israel is paralyzed... and is incapable of doing what is necessary to bring about peace", Ball stated in an interview with *US News & World Report*. "No durable Arab-Israeli peace is possible without PLO participation in the negotiations", Ball added in an article in the *Washington Post*.

Church groups, black organisations, academic figures and some leading journalists are joining in a chorus urging a re-evaluation of American interests and policies in the Middle East. Such rethinking has been under way for some time — at least since the Ford/Kissinger 'reassessment' of March 1975 and the publication of the Brookings Report in December of that year — but never before has it been so widespread. Nor have pro-PLO sentiments been so openly expressed.

Inadvertently, it seems, the Carter administration finds itself assailed by voices calling for policy shifts similar to those it has wanted, but been much too weak, both internationally and domestically, to pursue. "It is clearly time that the government unequivocally communicated to Israel that our foreign policy is not formulated at the sufferance of Israelis," a New York law professor wrote at the end of August in the *New York Times*. "For more than a decade,

Israeli action has eroded the basis for our respect and acceptance," noted the leaders of *TransAfrica*, a new black foreign policy lobby supported by most major black organisations.

Taken all together, August 1979 has become a watershed for the PLO in its quest for recognition by the one power having the potential strength to move Israel towards an accommodation with Palestinian nationalism. The political defences, so elaborately constructed by Israel and her American partisans to prevent just such pro-Palestinian developments, have been damaged, probably beyond full repair.

Barring a major shift in the constellation of Middle East politics, a trade-off, involving the PLO's eventual public acceptance of the long-discussed two-state formula — which clearly implies some kind of explicit recognition of Israel — for American willingness to give the PLO some sort of formal recognition and a role in the 'peace process', seems all but inevitable.

Still, the precise time-table for this scenario remains hazy. With the American election campaign already under way, pro-Israeli forces will surely attempt to force commitments from the major candidates and in the party platforms, which would be binding on the next administration. The Israeli counter-attack will also aim for a backlash against Arab pressures, by emphasising the charge of Arab oil/petrodollar blackmail.

So the PLO can chalk up a few giant steps towards its new goal of a state in Palestine, co-existing with Israel. But that goal remains far on the horizon and the entire process can still be derailed. □