

How to Influence Israel

Sari Nusseibeh, 39, is a teacher of philosophy at the Bir-Zeit University in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. A respected representative of young, college-educated Palestinians as well as a supporter of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Nusseibeh was one of 15 Palestinians who refused to meet U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz during his recent peace-seeking mission in Jerusalem. Recently Nusseibeh discussed the Palestinian situation with NEWSWEEK's Milan J. Kubic in Jerusalem. Excerpts:

KUBIC: Why have the Palestinians joined Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in rejecting the Shultz peace plan?

NUSSEIBEH: From our point of view, there were two important elements missing in the U.S. proposal. One, it was not addressed to the PLO, which is our sole representative. And two, the plan contained no reference to our national right of self-determination. We also object to Mr. Shultz's refusal to talk with the PLO leaders, or at least with Palestinians whom the PLO selects as our spokesmen.

Isn't King Hussein the formal representative of the occupied Palestinians?

King Hussein relinquished his role as spokesman of the Palestinians after the Rabat conference of the Arab League in 1974, which entrusted that role to the PLO. Since only the PLO can assume a commitment for the entire Palestinian nation, it should be in the interest of everybody, including the United States and the Israelis, for the PLO to sit at the negotiating table.

Does Hussein still have any following in the occupied territories?

Almost 70 percent of the

West Bankers who are now living were either not born or too young to be involved in the political life of Jordan before 1967, when Israel occupied the territories. They have no sense of loyalty to the Jordanian regime. The Gazans, who until 1967 were under Egyptian administration, have even fewer ties with Jordan. We're all Palestinians. We have our own national identity and our own ideas how to settle the conflict between us and Israel.

the early 1960s, when it was drawn up. Since then, there have been 18 conventions of the Palestine National Council, the highest legislative body of all Palestinians, whose decisions take precedence over the covenant. And in 1983—after a decade-long discussion—the 16th PNC congress fundamentally changed the PLO policy by endorsing the so-called Brezhnev peace plan. Its key importance was that it called for a final settlement

stream PLO led by Yasir Arafat and various radical opposition groups. Ironically, we've paid the price for the new doctrine by our internal divisions, without reaping the benefit of international recognition of our new stand. And I think this now ought to be changed.

What do you propose to do?

We should use our readiness to recognize Israel to influence the attitude of the Israeli voters, and through them change the official Israeli rejection of the PLO and of a Palestinian state. We should address ourselves to the Israeli man in the street and tell him that we do not want to throw him into the sea, but that we don't want to be expelled into the desert, either. That we do not seek to destroy his state, but that we want to establish our own, alongside Israel. That we don't want him to die, but that we, too, want to live. It is a legitimate message which must be delivered in clear, unambiguous language.

Would the Israelis listen to a message of peace while they're fighting an uprising?

I believe they would, precisely because the uprising has given them an unprecedented shock. They are now aware that they have a huge problem which they'd ignored for 20 years, and which has to be dealt with, urgently. Our people in the territories have captured international attention, placed our problem on the agenda of the superpowers and given us a new sense of pride. It is now the task of the PLO leadership to define, as the goal of the uprising, a compelling peace program. The ordinary Israeli must be reassured in unequivocal terms that we want live with him in peace.

Sari Nusseibeh



SHLOMO ARAD

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Do your ideas differ from those of the rest of the Arabs?

The traditional Pan-Arab position used to be that the Palestinian problem can only be resolved through the destruction of Israel. But since 1974, when the Palestinian question became our own responsibility, the Palestinian community has developed a new approach to redressing past wrongs. We want to end the conflict by establishing—alongside Israel—an independent Palestinian state in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem.

If this is the case, why does the PLO covenant threaten to destroy the Jewish state?

The covenant is a historic document which reflects the Arab political thinking in

of the Arab-Israeli conflict through the creation of two states, one Jewish and one Palestinian, along the 1967 border. The two-state solution has been our official policy ever since—just like the decision, taken by the same congress, that the future Palestinian state would become confederated with Jordan.

How come these positions are not generally known?

That's because the PLO made a tactical decision not to openly recognize the State of Israel until Israel gives us something in return. In my view, this was a mistake. The revolutionary decisions of the 16th congress split the Palestinian community and brought to a climax the bitter fight between the main-