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SOVIET VIEW OF PALESTINE LIBERATION MOVEMENT

REMAINS AMBIGUOUS

Summary: At the moment when the four great powers are attempting to resolve peacefully the Middle East crisis, the Soviet press has published two diametrically opposed appraisals of the extremist Palestine guerrilla movement. One can only hope that Soviet negotiators possess a clearer understanding of their nations' policy toward this troubled area than does the Soviet press.

One of the most ambiguous aspects in the Soviet role as protector of the Arab states in the perennial Middle East crisis is Moscow's stance toward the extremist Palestine Arab guerrilla movement. First indication of this ambivalence came in an official Chinese news agency report. (1) According to Hsinhua, the Soviet delegates to the Second International Conference in Support of the Arab People (January 1969) were severely chastised by representatives of the Palestine National Liberation Movement. "If you are sincere in supporting the Arab people," one Arab delegate was reported as saying, "why do you not support the Palestinian peoples' armed struggle for national salvation"? The Soviet representatives, Hsinhua claimed, were "dumbfounded". The uncertainty of the Soviet position has received new conformation in two recent articles which express diametrically opposed views toward the extremist partisan movement.

On April 16, Trud, the organ of the Soviet Trade Unions published a flattering photo of six Arab guerrillas followed by a laudatory editorial statement. These are manly faces, the caption stated, and they have recently achieved a new stage in their clandestine operations. "The creation of a united command which will coordinate the activities of the four largest Palestine partisan groups is a new step toward uniting the participants of the liberation struggle. The usurpers [i.e. Israel], must sense each day the growing activity

of the partisans." Trud noted with satisfaction that on April 10, and 12, partisan groups infiltrated into Israeli territory to engage the enemy. "On the faces of these warriors," Trud concluded, "stands the decision to struggle to the end. Nothing can stop the peoples' avengers."

In sharp contrast to Trud, a lengthy article in Sovetskaya Rossiya took a dim view of the partisan movement in general and its leading participant, "El Fatah" in specific. (2) Its author, Georgii Dad'iants of the Novosti news agency, recounted his recent trip to Syria and remarked that he had come away with "mixed feelings of sympathy for the Palestine resistance movement and certain doubts about their method of struggle." "It is clear," the author noted, "that the aim of 'El Fatah,' and certain other organizations, which is the liquidation of the Israeli state and the creation of a 'Palestinian Democratic State' is not realistic." One can hardly turn history back now and create a united Palestinian people out of the Jews and Arabs." Equally upsetting to Dad'iants was the absence of a distinct social program among the partisans. "We do not find ourselves at the stage of an ideological struggle," confided one "El Fatah" member to the author. "When we return to the land of our birth we will be able to look more deeply into social problems and define the goals of future struggles." Dad'iants summarized the philosophy of "El Fatah" as "neither peace, nor war," a slogan he quickly connected with Trotsky in 1918, and which he noted "brought no results whatsoever."

The Partisans, however, were not the only recipients of Dad'iants critique. Reflecting upon the role of Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, he noted that "it is well known that rich states of the Arab east liberally support the organizations of Palestinian resistance. But the aim of this support is unclear". Among the conflicting motivations Dad'iants listed Arab solidarity, and "...attempts to complicate the situation in order to strike a blow against the more progressive [Arab] regimes". Journalistic information on the exact reasons for this aid is incomplete since it is based only upon third hand sources, he concluded.

In conclusion, Dad'iants poses the question--will there be peace or war in the Middle East? "It is necessary" he adds, "today to seek an answer at the conference table in order this time to avoid the cannons."

The opposing views expressed by Trud and Sovetskaya Rossiya at the very moment when the big four powers are attempting to reach a negotiated settlement to the Middle East crisis can only cast doubt on the sincerity of the oft-proclaimed Soviet desire for a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. One must hope that Soviet negotiators in New York, and in the Middle East capitals possess a clearer understanding of their countries policy than do the organs of the Soviet press.

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(2) Sovetskaya Rossiya, 15 April 1969