

## AFTER TEHRAN

by

*Paul Wilkinson*

The profession of diplomat must now rank as one of the most dangerous in the world. Ambassadors and other diplomatic and consular officials have become increasingly popular targets for terrorist attack. Some have been shot down in cold blood in the streets of Western capitals. Many have been held hostage. Often members of their families have been victims of attack. Embassy and consular buildings have been bombed, set on fire, and subjected to attack by riotous mobs.<sup>1</sup>

One would need to search back to 16th century Europe to find an age when the lifestyle of ambassadors was comparably insecure. In those days they were not, as a rule, paid regular salaries by the governments they served. Yet as the personal representatives of their sovereigns they were expected to entertain on a grand scale to maintain status, often bankrupting themselves in the process. Worse still, as there was no recognised system of diplomatic precedence, they were expected to fight for their places at official occasions, and they frequently became involved in duels.<sup>2</sup> Yet even those discomforts pale in comparison with the threats faced by any present-day Western diplomat stationed in a region like Central America or the Middle East.

This increasingly physical danger comes at a time when diplomacy's *raison d'être*, aptly defined by Sir Ernest Satow as "the conduct of business between states by peaceful means",<sup>3</sup> is more important than ever. For while it is true that the prestige and influence of the resident ambassador and his mission has declined from its apogee in 19th century Europe, professional diplomats still play a vital part in helping to lubricate and improve relations between governments.

They devote patient effort to getting to know the ministers, officials and opinion leaders of other states, and their fellow diplomats. Because they are on the spot they can be far more effective at assessing situations and trends. A sagacious and well-informed ambassador may still play an influential role in shaping his own government's policy and in preparing the way for the negotiation of agreements. As a cultural representative and spokesman, he may help to increase mutual understanding between peoples. Another very important task nowadays is that of enhancing trade, and economic and technical co-operation. It is true that increasingly this kind of work is also handled through international conferences, and by direct contacts between governments. But the ambassador's role has certainly not been superseded, and it is worth noting that the more opposed governments become in ideology or interests, the more the burden of communication tends to devolve on the man on the spot.

The complex system of modern diplomacy rests on the universal (or near universal) acceptance by the international society of states of the fundamental

principle of diplomatic reciprocity. Simply, it is that the host states grant the immunity of diplomatic missions from constraint and take responsibility for protecting missions from molestation, while the sending states accept the rule that their diplomats must not interfere in the internal affairs of the host country.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly one of the major reasons why the modern system of diplomatic representation is under such strain is that many governments and political groups now believe that some states are not observing the rule of non-interference in internal affairs. It is foolish to deny that, since the Cold War, traditional forms of diplomatic behaviour have been increasingly undermined. There are innumerable well-substantiated cases of diplomatic missions being used as cover for subversion, terrorism and intervention, and of receiving states “bugging” embassies and harassing them in various ways.<sup>5</sup> In certain countries, and among certain political groups, the diplomatic representatives of major powers tend to be seen at best as mischief-makers, at worst as enemy spies and saboteurs. Thus, even if one did not take into account the recent spate of physical attacks on diplomats, one would have to admit that the institution of diplomatic representation is under severe strain and in urgent need of review by the international community.

The present system, embodied in the 1961 Vienna Convention, is all we have. In any case it is notoriously difficult to get any consensus on changes in international law. It would be still more problematic in the anarchic international relations of the 1980's. Whatever reforms may be introduced, it is hard to see how any diplomatic representation can be viable unless it meets two basic conditions: first, there must be some guaranteed minimum of security against attack for the persons and property of diplomatic missions; and, secondly, there must be genuine reciprocity, i.e., both sending and receiving states must honour their obligations. It is precisely because of the current grave threats on both these counts that it is hardly exaggerating to say that the whole system of diplomatic representation is under siege. Let me now briefly consider the nature of both types of threat, and how the international community might counter them.

The main threats to the safety of diplomats arise from the growth of terrorism. Extremist groups discovered that kidnapping diplomats was one effective means of winning tactical objectives, such as the release of prisoners from jail, large ransoms and enormous publicity. Success and boldness resulted in higher demands. The most popular targets for international terrorist attack have been American business executives, diplomats and property. Neo-Marxist terrorist groups see them as “legitimate” targets for “revolutionary justice”, because America is viewed as the leading “capitalist-imperialist power”. In regions like Latin America and the Middle East, terrorists know that there is a reservoir of anti-Americanism and that by hitting unpopular foreigners they are less likely to antagonise the population.<sup>6</sup>

Western diplomats make easy targets. By its very nature, diplomacy involves considerable travel, mingling with the local population, socialising and being accessible. What is the good of having an ambassador who has to be incarcerated in concrete pillbox, under constant, heavily armed guard? Foreign accents and appearance makes them easily identifiable. And even the wealthiest states cannot afford elaborate, round-the-clock security for all their diplomats.

Any determined and carefully planned terrorist attack has a good chance of succeeding. Furthermore, the increasing internationalisation of terrorism means that the more highly organized groups can strike in the heart of the Western metropolis or in third countries, whenever opportunity arises, sometimes in collaboration with sister organizations abroad. No government can be sure where the next point of attack will be.

The new scourge is the seizure of embassies and their staffs and occupants. This is a fairly easy operation for terrorists in countries where the security forces cannot protect missions adequately. In the resulting mass hostage situations the terrorists have many advantages which they exploit to the hilt to wrench large concessions from the local regime or the target government. At the same time, the government and security forces, provided they are not colluding with the terrorists, have one key advantage in a siege: the terrorists are themselves hostages, and part of the deal they seek will be a safe exit. This can be used as a powerful lever in police siege tactics.

When about four hundred Iranian students stormed the United States embassy in Tehran on November 4th, 1979, and seized 100 hostages, including 62 United States citizens, the Iranian regime totally failed to carry out its obligations under international law. The Islamic revolutionary authorities made no attempt to assist the United States diplomatic mission party. They provided no police or military protection for United States personnel or property; they made no attempt to return the embassy to United States control by expelling the insurgents. On the contrary, they compounded their offences against international law of diplomacy by "adopting" the siege as their own, and by not only giving it the official blessing of the Ayatollah Khomeini but also by manipulating the hostage crisis to inflict maximum international embarrassment and *humiliation on the United States*. This was the first time in recent history that any state had so flagrantly defied the norms and conventions of diplomatic relations. It is true that other regimes have been heavily involved in the sponsorship of international terrorists. States such as the Soviet Union, Libya, Syria and Iraq have long regarded this as an attractive weapon to weaken adversary states, on an opportunistic basis.<sup>7</sup> In the case of the Entebbe hijack, the Ugandan dictator, Amin, openly connived with the PFLP hijackers. But in recent times, no regime had seen fit to sanction the abduction of a whole diplomatic mission.

The second remarkable feature of the Tehran hostage crisis was the fact that the United States, by a narrow margin still the greatest military power, proved either unable or unwilling to use its massive military power to compel the Iranians to release their diplomats. The Pueblo incident apart, no single event in international relations since 1945 has so vividly demonstrated the crippling limitations of a superpower unable to risk using its giant's strength against a defiant and self-righteous minor power. The humiliation and vilification of the USA by Iran was all the more shocking and psychologically intolerable to the American public because until the demise of the Shah the United States had been the dominant external influence on Iran. Billions of dollars of United States investment had been poured into the development of the Iranian oil industry and the Shah's ambitious "White Revolution" modernisation

programme, and the build up of Iran's military power as a vital ally in South West Asia.<sup>8</sup> The American public had barely had time to come to terms with the toppling of the Shah. To most ordinary Americans, the hatred and abuse hurled at them by the screaming mobs paraded before their embassy in Tehran seemed quite incomprehensible. The feeling of helplessness and frustration provoked by these scenes, displayed on United States television screens, week after week, undoubtedly did much to undermine the domestic support and credibility of the Carter administration, and the reaction against it, inevitably, helped Reagan, with his more hardnosed and assertive stance, to win his overwhelming election victory. Nor should we underestimate the extent to which America's credibility as an ally was undermined both by the events leading to the Shah's fall and by the hostage crisis. Arab states, and particularly Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, looked uneasily around for other forms of security and greater regional self-help. The West-Europeans began to recite old doubts and fears about America's "reliability" and "failures of leadership".<sup>9</sup>

The West European reaction only added to America's feelings of frustration and desertion. For the unpalatable fact is that America's NATO allies did almost nothing tangible to assist the US in the hostage crisis. It now transpires that the British,<sup>10</sup> French, West German and Swedish embassies in Tehran all refused to shelter six US embassy staff who escaped capture when the US embassy was attacked. With allies like these who needs enemies? Canada alone acted with courage and integrity in sheltering and facilitating the escape of US personnel. Reluctantly and late in the day it is true that the EEC foreign ministers did agree to impose trade sanctions on Iran. But these modest measures were undermined by a revolt of backbenchers in the British Parliament who insisted on blocking the plan to involve retrospective economic sanctions. None of the EEC countries acted to freeze Iranian assets held in European banks. Not one state broke off diplomatic relations with Iran in protest at the hostage-taking. Iranian diplomats continued to enjoy all normal privileges and immunities in every West European state. Some of America's allies, it must be admitted, actually sought to capitalise on the Iranian crisis by doing private deals with Iran to fill gaps left by the American boycott: France, Britain, West Germany, and Japan were all guilty of this economic opportunism.<sup>11</sup> Once again commercial greed and fear of adverse consequences to future oil supplies seem to have been placed above principles of international law in the conduct of European foreign policy. Of course it is true that one can find a rationale for the EEC attitudes. Some argued that there was a real danger of Iran being pushed into alliance with the Soviets, and that this made it politic to soft-pedal pressure on Iran. But surely, in view of the bitter anti-communism evinced by Khomeini and the *ulema* generally, and the chastening effect of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on the Islamic world, this fear was exaggerated. Others argue that the EEC states were being helpful to the U.S. by keeping their embassies open, as this allowed channels of information and communication to be maintained. This sounds reasonable enough until one recalls the gravity of Iran's offence against international law, the fact that innocent British citizens in Iran were also being imprisoned without trial, and that other diplomatic missions were constantly in danger of occupation, on the model of the U.S.

embassy takeover.<sup>12</sup> To the Iranians the EEC states' behaviour must have appeared not only weak, but implicitly turning a blind eye to the abduction of US diplomats. In any case the key ultimate negotiations for the hostages' release were *not* conducted through diplomatic missions in Tehran, but in a third country, Algeria, thousands of miles away from Iran. Resolute action by the Western European NATO allies would not have in any way precluded or prevented US-Iranian negotiations.

It is easy enough to criticise the Carter Administration's own response to the crisis. At times they seemed almost mesmerized by the propaganda of humiliation and abuse heaped upon them from Tehran. When they were not actually paralyzed by their own indecision about what to do, for example over the fate of the Shah, they often appeared to be merely reacting to the propaganda ploys and initiatives of the fundamentalists in Tehran. The President and his advisers did not seem to have listened properly to the expert advice they were getting from their own team in Iran before the takeover, including the clear warnings that a takeover was imminent,<sup>13</sup> or to the best advice available in the U.S. and in allied countries on the special problems of response to international terrorism. Too many general administrators and senior U.S. politicians apparently *thought* they understood what was going on and how to cope with it: in fact they were not dealing with a totally unprecedented problem. The *scale* of the abduction was new, but the State Department had built up a rich fund of knowledge, indeed almost unrivalled experience in coping with the protection of diplomats and diplomatic premises and the problems of hostage negotiation and rescue. Yet some of the "old hands" with intimate practical knowledge were not even peremptorily consulted. Three of America's closest allies — West Germany, France, and Israel — had very recent experience of successful long-range rescue operations in terrorist situations: yet none of the lessons learnt in these cases were taken into account by the U.S. planners.

It is painful but necessary to spell out some lessons of the abortive U.S. rescue attempt of April, 1980. Some, though by no means all, of these lessons are implicit in the findings of the official Government inquiry into the failure of the mission.<sup>14</sup> First there is the vital matter of the decision concerning the feasibility and timing of the rescue attempt. Arguably the US Administration should have moved far more swiftly, in the very early days of the hostage-taking, if the rescue was to have any chance of success. A surprise assault at that stage would have caught the Iranians far less prepared: the Islamic fundamentalists had not had time to reorganize and deploy the Iranian armed forces, they were still establishing their hold over the country, and in the climate of general chaos a really powerful airborne assault might have had some chance of success. Of course it is true that the U.S. did not have a powerful military or naval presence, at that stage, in the Gulf area. But arrangements could have been made rapidly and easily with one of their traditional allies within easy striking distance of Iran, to use their airfields to launch the assault. Turkey or Israel would have seemed obvious candidates. Once this opportunity for a rapid response operation was lost there is a strong case for saying that the military option had become impracticable, dangerous, and hence potentially, politically and strategically counter-productive long before the actual April attempt.

Even supposing that these arguments could have been overcome, the operational planning proved an unmitigated disaster. The whole concept of using an improvised multi-service unit should have been discarded at the outset. Inter-service rivalries and suspicions are always a threat to such operations. It was essential to use a unit-in-being with established experience and the highest quality training in the airborne rescue mission role.<sup>15</sup> The April operation was disastrously weak in terms of aircraft and firepower, so that even if they had made it to their target it is highly unlikely that they would have survived opposition from the Iranian airforce, artillery and rockets. Again, it is almost incredible that there were not enough helicopters in reserve to make good the losses caused by technical failures, prior to the fatal collision.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the most striking deficiencies that emerged were those of command and control. The President and his staff appear to have had the ability to inhibit the scope and firepower of the operation, yet do not seem to have either been made aware by their top military advisers of the grave risks and problems of such an operation, or to have been in a position to control it and restore the situation once things had begun to go wrong. Contrast President Kennedy's crisis management of the U.S. naval blockade in the Cuban missile crisis, 1962. Relevant experience of America's allies on the problems and requirements for a successful long-range hostage rescue operation, for example the experience of Israel at Entebbe and the FRG at Mogadishu, does not appear to have in any way informed the U.S. military planners. In sum one must conclude that the failure of the U.S. rescue mission in April was *not* primarily due to deficiencies of military technology or equipment failure, as so widely assumed: it was mainly due to inadequate strategy, failures of military planning, and deficiencies in organisation, command and control. It is an appalling commentary on the failure of the top U.S. military and civilian officials to acquire the special knowledge and skills required to handle the tasks of countering international terrorism and other forms of low-level conflict. It confirms the judgement formed by experienced observers of this kind of unconventional conflict during the US involvement in Vietnam: the US, despite its huge armoury of nuclear and conventional hardware, has not yet mastered the arts of contending with terrorism and unconventional conflict.

At the end of the day the diplomats and foreign affairs experts in the State Department came out of the business with far less damage to their credibility. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance immediately set about diplomatic initiatives, at the UN, through the European NATO allies, and through friendly Moslem states, to bring pressure to bear on the Iranian authorities, and to concert international condemnation and isolation of Iran for its grave offence against international law. This diplomatic effort helped considerably in offsetting the propaganda tirade from Tehran which was attempting to extract maximum U.S. humiliation from the crisis.

Astonishingly, it appears that Mr. Vance did not participate in the crucial decision to send in a military rescue force.<sup>17</sup> Had he been properly consulted it is clear that he would have advised strongly against launching such an operation at that stage. In the event he had no option but to resign his post. His departure from office in this manner, almost unprecedented in recent American politics,

must be taken as striking evidence of the failure of co-ordination and communication within the U.S. Administration at the height of the crisis.<sup>18</sup>

Mr. Warren Christopher, the Deputy Secretary of State intimately involved in the negotiations for the release of the hostages through the good offices of Algeria, has perhaps not been accorded sufficient credit for the way he patiently worked to overcome the previous disasters, to achieve terms for the release of the hostages which are in themselves something of a *tour de force*. The U.S. did not, after all, pay ransom money to Iran. All the funds that the Iranians have recovered have been assets that were frozen by the U.S.. Iran has not been able to make good the losses she incurred as a result of the economic sanctions exerted by the U.S. and other Western states. Moreover, the fact that the hostages' ultimate release brought to light the prolonged terrorisation and mental torture of the hostages by their captors did much to offset the earlier psychological damage suffered by the U.S. The testimony of the hostages relayed on the world media only served to confirm the growing international impression that the regime of the mullahs in Iran was not merely obscurantist and anti-Western, but also that it had committed barbarities against the innocent. The ultimate release of the hostages on the day of President Reagan's inauguration was in a way a victory for patient diplomacy, and one for which President Carter himself, for all his earlier mistakes, must take considerable credit.

Even so it must be admitted that the moral and political costs of the hostage crisis are huge. There is the extensive damage to U.S. credibility both in terms of domestic and international opinion, and the undermining of the U.S. strategic position vis-a-vis S.W. Asia and the Gulf. Also very serious is the encouragement given to other "rogue" states to engage in or support acts of international terrorism against an adversary. More specifically, the abduction of the U.S. diplomats by Iran is likely to inspire similar acts by other states, however tin-pot their defences and however crack-pot their policies, as a means of giving vent to their rage and hatred against Western countries. The United States is likely to continue to be a particularly favoured target, though the United Kingdom, France and West Germany are also, for various reasons, highly vulnerable.

Moreover, the Iranian case sets an unfortunate precedent at a time when international law of diplomacy is being increasingly violated. In 1979 alone a record total of 26 embassies and consulates around the world were occupied, and a further dozen were occupied in the first two months of 1980. Diplomatic terrorism appears to have become just as contagious as aircraft hijacking was between 1969 and 1971.<sup>19</sup>

The US experience in Iran should greatly increase the urgency with which conscientious governments tighten up on their responsibilities of diplomatic protection, both in their roles as host and sending states. This involves improved intelligence and security co-operation between host and sending states, better resources, manpower and training for diplomatic protection personnel,<sup>20</sup> and a stricter adherence to the obligations of the Vienna Treaty on Diplomatic Relations (1961). Indeed there is a strong case for reconvening the Vienna conference with a view to strengthening the safeguards of the diplomatic community, and giving some better provisions for proper *enforcement* of the

Vienna agreement.

However none of these improvements in diplomatic security really assist in a case such as the Tehran hostage-taking, where a whole regime connives at an act of diplomatic terrorism. Where a state chooses to defy the norms and conventions recognised by the bulk of the international community much stronger weapons are clearly required by the latter to compel compliance.

Firstly, there is the need to develop and refine the military option. At the end of the day it may be decided that it would be wiser not to employ military intervention to mount a rescue operation, especially if the delinquent state is both fanatically ruthless and heavily armed. The resulting loss of innocent life and the danger of triggering a major war may rule out the possibility of a military rescue force option. However there may be occasions, as exemplified at Entebbe, when a military option is both feasible and desirable. For this purpose governments should be closely reviewing their contingency plans and improving the professionalism and training of their own elite rescue units. And in those regions of the world, such as the Gulf or Central and South America, where many smaller states do not have any elite military unit capable of this task, it is clearly an urgent necessity for regional organizations and groupings of states to establish units to carry out specialized hostage rescue on behalf of any member state where it is required. An alternative umbrella would be the United Nations: certain appropriate forces for hostage rescue could be earmarked by the UN for use on a regional basis. By agreement, the regional grouping could adopt arrangements to mobilize rescue operations even in the rare case of a state collaborating with the terrorists. As the UN Charter certainly envisaged peace enforcement, difficult though this may be to achieve in practice, surely one can envisage a more modest type of enforcement mechanism for the rescue of the innocent?

However, facing the realities of contemporary international relations, we must recognize that even a major power may balk at the wider risks of using the military option for hostage rescue, and where states fear to tread, the regional organizations and the UN may also be unwilling to act. Is there then no other sanction open to an aggrieved state where a delinquent regime commits an act of international terrorism against its diplomats, businessmen or ordinary citizens? Should we not consider some form of international sanction more powerful than expelling individual diplomats or breaking diplomatic relations, yet less risky than engaging in military action? One possibility that might be considered is to establish new forms of international retorsions — that is to say, international legal reprisals against the delinquent state. These might take the form of strong economic sanctions, though the record shows that these do not really bite unless they are applied by the entire international community. More realistically, the international community could agree to amend the code of diplomatic practice in the following way: in the event of a regime abducting a diplomatic mission, or in any other way seriously violating the immunities of foreign diplomatic personnel, the diplomats of the delinquent state posted in the state which they have victimized shall immediately forfeit their immunities and privileges and be liable for imprisonment until such time as the rights and immunities of the victimized state are restored. We may need exceptional inter-



national retorsions of this kind if we are to prevent a recurrence of Tehran-style abduction. It was patently unjust that Iranian diplomats in Washington were able to enjoy their full privileges while the Americans in Tehran were being so foully mistreated, and that the US authorities should have then allowed the Iranians to return home unhindered, when the formal breach of diplomatic relations occurred. The normal laws and rights covering the treatment of diplomats had surely been forfeited by Iran, and hence forceful diplomatic reprisals were more than justified. Of course the Iranian Mullahs would not have cared tuppence for the fate of their own diplomats. Nevertheless the symbolic and psychological value of strong action by the US would have been invaluable in signalling that Iran's behaviour had gone beyond civilised bounds, and in bringing home to Iran and any would-be delinquent states that the abduction of diplomats was not cost free. This is what deterrence is all about.

The Iranian experience shows that where diplomatic security and low-level violence are concerned we must learn to think in terms of more imaginative and psychologically dramatic and effective responses. Our very predictability and conformity to hidebound traditional responses almost certainly increases our vulnerability to international muggers.

#### Footnotes

1. See Brian M. Jenkins, *Embassies Under Siege: A Review of 48 Embassy Takeovers, 1971-1980* (Santa Monica, 1981).
2. Sir Charles Petrie, *Earlier Diplomatic History 1492-1713* (London, 1949).
3. Sir Ernest Satow, *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, 4th ed. (London, 1957), p. 1.
4. *Vienna Convention* (1961). See Eileen Denza, *Diplomatic Law: Commentary on the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* (New York, 1976).
5. See, for instance, David C. Martin, *Wilderness of Mirrors* (New York, 1980), p. 154; John Barron, *KGB: The Secret Work of Soviet Secret Agents* (New York, 1974), pp. 9, 158-192.
6. In 1979 at least 12 Americans died in such attacks, including one ambassador and members of the diplomatic, military, business and private interest communities. See CIA National Foreign Assessment Center, *International Terrorism in 1979* (Washington, 1980).
7. See Clair Sterling, *The Terror Network* (New York, 1981).
8. See Yonah Alexander and Allan Nanes, Eds., *The United States and Iran. A Documentary History* (Maryland, 1980); Michael A. Ledeen and William H. Lewis, "Carter and the Fall of the Shah: The Inside Story", in *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1980).
9. See, for instance, "Storm over the Alliance" in *Time*, 28 Apr., 1980.
10. The fact that, over this period, the British Tehran Embassy was also attacked by the mob, and the Consular building destroyed, may explain that country's refusal.
11. See, *The Economist*, 22 Dec. 1979; *Newsweek*, 21 Apr. 1980; *New York Times*, 27 Apr. 1980.
12. Three British members of the Anglican Church in Iran were imprisoned for six months on trumped-up charges of spying, being released on 27 Feb. 1981.
13. See series of articles, "The Fall of the Shah" by Scott Armstrong, *Washington Post*, Oct.-Nov. 1980.
14. Special Operations Review Group, US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Holloway Report on the Aborted US Rescue Mission to Iran* (Washington, 1980).
15. See David Charters, "Organization, Selection and Training of National Response Teams — A

- Canadian Perspective”, in *Conflict Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1981).
16. *Holloway Report*, pp. 38-40.
  17. See “Vance is reportedly resigning”, in *Boston Globe*, 28 Apr. 1980; US Department of State, “Muskie Named Secretary; Rescue Attempt Reviewed”, *Current Policy* no. 172; “Vance: Rescue Attempt ‘Self-indulgent Nonsense’”, in *Ottawa Citizen*, 6 June 1980.
  18. President Reagan’s decision to appoint the Vice-President, Mr. Bush, as head of a special crisis-management team may perhaps be seen as an effort to overcome the endemic problems of interdepartmental co-ordination in US crisis management. It appears that the Secretary of State is unhappy with this arrangement, and this does not bode well.
  19. Jenkins, *op cit.*
  20. For discussion of possible practical steps on diplomatic protection see Paul Wilkinson, “Diplomatic Relations?”, *Police Review*, vol. 88, pp. 1921-3.

## THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT: A NEW STAGE?

by

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The Arab-Israeli conflict is an extension of the conflict between the Arab national movement and the Jewish national movement over the territory of Palestine. As the political/strategic importance of the Arabs increased in the 1950’s and to a much greater extent in the 1970’s — owing to the west’s dependence on Middle East oil supplies — the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem which lies at its heart assumed an importance in the international arena out of all proportion to its true dimensions. It is doubtful that any other issue achieved the prominence of the Arab cause in world affairs in the 1960’s and 1970’s.

Modern Arab nationalism claims that its roots can be found in the second part of the 19th century, although most scholars consider the first decades of the 20th century to be the true beginning of this movement.<sup>1</sup> From the start Arab nationalism transcended political borders in the Middle East and by the 1950’s the Pan-Arabist movement was struggling to unify an Arab nation whose territory stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf. Early Arab nationalists and Western scholars describe Arab nationalism to be that of people whose language is Arabic, whose culture is the Arab culture, who consider themselves Arabs and who live, or wish to live, in the Arab homeland.<sup>2</sup> In recent years Islam has become a major criteria of Arab nationalism. This point has been hotly contested in the past by the Arab intelligentsia who felt that a modern national movement should be secular. Moreover, many in the movement were Christian Arabs, some of whom acted as ideologists. Nonetheless, in spite of divisions owing to administrative considerations and the ambitions and rivalries of local leaders, the Muslim *Umma* (community) had for centuries served as the politi-