

# Embassy of the State of Palestine

General Delegation  
of Palestine to Australia,  
New Zealand, and the Pacific



**INTERN POLICY REPORT**

**Engaging the Palestinian community: Clarifying the General  
Delegation of Palestine mandate and political positions**

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## Introduction

Public diplomacy is central to any diplomatic mission, as embassies and diplomats are required to communicate with and engage foreign publics to further their own objectives. When significant diasporic communities of the home country are part of these foreign publics, the importance of public diplomacy increases as not only will a diplomatic mission be attempting to influence the thought of these foreigners, but must also service them as part of their own people. A substantial, intimate relationship between the mission and its diasporic community thus becomes an indispensable asset to the diplomatic body. Developing mutual understanding, especially in the presence of political differences, is imperative in this effort.

Concurrently, the General Delegation of Palestine (GDOP) does not have a clear understanding of political positions on the issues of Palestinian statehood and self-determination within the Palestinian community. At present, the Palestinian community in Australia is diverse in political outlook and lacks consensus on strategies for obtaining self-determination, particularly on the question of the two state solution and the establishment of an independent, democratic and sovereign state on 1967 borders. Furthermore, many of these positions would conflict with the GDOP's own mandate, grounded in the principles of the Oslo agreements. Yet, the GDOP has not clearly defined the range of political positions and proposed strategies in the diaspora.

This lack of clarity prevents effective communication and engagement between the GDOP and local Palestinian communities. Ultimately, the questions of genuine and effective partnership between the GDOP and the diverse Palestinian community in Australia, remain unanswered.

This report attempts to partially fill the gap of knowledge surrounding political diversity within the Australian-Palestinian community, focusing on samples from Sydney and Canberra. Using this knowledge, the report will then explore public diplomacy theory and suggest directions for future public diplomacy strategies in the GDOP, especially while working with a diverse Palestinian diaspora in Australia.

The report will first outline the qualitative research methodology and embark on a review of existing literature on the Palestinian community in Australia, with a particular emphasis on its diasporic nature. Next, an analysis of interviews with Australian-Palestinians in Sydney and

Canberra will be undertaken, exploring political alignments and possible reasons for their diversity in orientation. Finally, public diplomacy theory will be explored in relation to the GDOP's unique situation, and improvements to its public diplomacy strategy will be recommended.

In sum, the paper concludes that the Palestinian community in Australia, as diasporically connected with their homeland, tends to replicate the diversity in political opinion found within Palestine proper. Support for the PA/PLO is far from universal, and various factors such as generation, personal beliefs, and negative lived experiences can impact the political alignment of these individuals. Recognising this reality and the necessity for two-way public diplomatic efforts, the GDOP is thus recommended to engage more collaborative projects with Palestinian community groups without stressing complete political convergence. Additionally, the GDOP would also benefit from increased engagement with Australian-Palestinians not necessarily in community leadership positions.

It is hoped that this paper will provide, at the very least, an introductory glimpse into the political identities of Palestinians in Australia and the complex reasons for alignment and support/rejection of certain policies. Using these conclusions to inform public diplomacy strategies, the GDOP can then move towards a more grassroots engagement strategy that can greater harness the collective capacity of the Palestinian community to greater influence policy in Australia, as part of its mission.

## Methodology

This paper will embark on a qualitative investigation of the personal attitudes of members of Australia's Palestinian community. The geographical scope of the research covers Sydney and Canberra, and uses interviews with members of the Australian-Palestinian community as a qualitative method. .

The interviews offer a comprehensive insight into political positioning and the rationalisation of these opinions. Participants were asked to explain which statehood solutions they prefer for Palestine and how they envisage its future, as well as their reasoning behind their responses. Their opinions on the PA's approach to negotiations and internationalisation efforts will also be gauged. As part of this, the participants were asked if they support or are affiliated with any political party in Palestine; however, given the sensitivity of this question not every participant responded, and those who did often requested anonymity. Moreover, the participants will be asked for their views on the GDOP, its current relationship, and how they believe it could be improved.

In total, the writer spoke to 21 Australian-Palestinians, 17 of whom were located in Sydney. Given this limited sample size this research should not, by any means, be understood as a representation of the entire Palestinian community in Sydney and Canberra. Regardless, trends were able to be established, and the in-depth conversations with each interviewee still unravel the processes through which they come to hold certain political positions.

This methodological approach, focusing on subject interviews, is especially crucial as it allows respondents to define their own identities and beliefs for the researcher, whether by through their own statements or the way they construct these statements. Ultimately, this in-depth primary research permits an understanding of Palestinian diasporic identity from within the community itself, ultimately benefitting evaluations of the Delegation-Community relationship.

## Review of Existing Literature on Australia's Palestinian Community

Existing literature on analysing the Palestinian community in Australia is limited, but useful as a foundation for this paper. Most pertinent to this research is a trio of scholarly works investigating the negotiation of Palestinian-Australian identity and the Palestinian community's diasporic characteristics, evinced in the publications of Aoude, Cox and Connell, and Mason. Combining the insights from these works will provide a solid foundation for this paper's investigation of the political diversity within the Palestinian-Australian community.

This literature concerned with analysing identity formation and conceptualising the Palestinian community as diasporic, is readily exemplified by Cox and Connell's work. The pair argues that statelessness and a communal sense of injustice is foundational to the Palestinian community in Sydney, allowing Palestinian identity to be "kept alive".<sup>1</sup> It is this continued identity – enlivened by memories and symbols of homeland – that illustrates the Palestinian community in Sydney as transnational and diasporic, re-territorialising Palestinian national identity into a place of exile.<sup>2</sup> However, Cox and Connell are also careful to recognise the impossibility of a singular Palestinian experience, echoing the similar assertions of Said.<sup>3</sup> It is argued that this is only expected, given that many Palestinians settle in other countries outside of Palestine before residing in Australia, and not every Palestinian exists within invariant familial and socio-economic contexts. Interestingly, Cox and Connell also build on el-Turk's efforts in describing the community itself. Settlement patterns of Palestinians in Sydney indicate a loose tendency to cluster around pre-1948 local communities and kinship ties, albeit "mediated by the cost of accommodation."<sup>4</sup> The same could be said about Palestinian community organisations, the authors argue, with membership tending to corral around regional and familial ties.<sup>5</sup>

Cox and Connell also characterise Palestinian exilic experiences are either largely influenced by "*alghurbab*, the experience of being a stranger separated from one's familiar home", and/or

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<sup>1</sup> Cox, J and Connell, J 2003, "Place, Exile and Identity: the contemporary experience of Palestinians in Sydney", *Australian Geographer*, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 340.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 333

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp. 336

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

“*awada*”, “the realisation of [the] dream – the return to their home and homeland.”<sup>6</sup> These two concepts become points of reference in defining Sydney’s Palestinian community as largely willing to stay in Australia while negotiating a uniquely Palestinian diasporic identity. *Alghurbab* informs this, symptomatic of the “transnational connections” they attempt to delineate, and *awada*, rather than signifying an ultimate goal of returning to Palestine, “[provides] a means of reaffirming that somewhere in the world there is a homeland.”<sup>7</sup> A firm base for investigating Palestinian diasporic identity is thereby found in Cox and Connell’s paper.

Where Cox and Connell lacked in explaining identity difference within Sydney’s Palestinian diaspora, Mason had expanded significantly, marking diasporic experiences as shaped by the number of generations lived in exile, rather than one’s birth generation.<sup>8</sup> At the core of her paper, Mason contends that Palestinian understandings of place and identity in exile are “contrapuntal,” (borrowing Said’s analyses) utilising *ghurbab* to encapsulate longing for one’s Palestinian heritage while recognising the dynamic interplay between diasporic Palestinian identity and lived experiences in Australia.<sup>9</sup> She further deconstructs these shifting identities by correlating them along exilic generation lines. Acknowledging that lived experiences in Palestine become less and less with each exilic generation, Mason concludes that feelings of *ghurbab* underline the experiences and understandings of home held by the first exilic generations and those expelled after *al-Nakba*, while second exilic generations are greater characterised by situational and “strategic hybridity” in negotiating their identity, moving between feelings of Palestinianism and attachment to the country where they have lived their entire lives.<sup>10</sup> Differences in identity conception can thus be attributed to the varying levels of lived experience in the Palestinian homeland, although Mason also argues, like Cox and Connell, that Palestinianism continues to exist in diaspora given the continued exchange of memories and symbols across generations, and implicitly, borders as well.<sup>11</sup> In delineating the differences in identity conception between exilic generations, Mason offers an insightful referential point for detailing diversity within the Palestinian community in Australia.

Another important addition to this body of scholarship is Aoude’s 2001 work that defines identity of Palestinians in exile as multifaceted and shifting, and also problematises the diasporic

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 338

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Mason, V 2007, “Children of the ‘Idea of Palestine’: Negotiating Identity, Belonging and Home in the Palestinian Diaspora”, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 271-285.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp. 274

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 277-278

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp. 163

characterisation of exilic Palestinians.<sup>12</sup> While Aoude safely confirms that Palestinians constitute a diaspora, he highlights the difficulty of defining ethnic and national identity, and underlines the struggle of Palestinians to identify themselves along ethnic/national lines in their host societies. In light of this, he asserts that “multiple identities [are] central to the diaspora experience, a fact to which the diaspora literature does not pay much attention.”<sup>13</sup> Citing an example from Australia, Aoude underlines how anti-multicultural currents in Australian society have increased the salience of the ethnic dimension of diaspora Palestinians, ultimately pushing a “negative production of diasporic consciousness.”<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, the issue of multiple identities within the diasporic experience finds resolution in constructing diasporic identity as a “composite,” where real-world experiences determine how individuals construct their own identities, usually from various inspirations.<sup>15</sup> Aoude also contends the usage of “transnationalism” as a device for understanding Palestinian communities. Used more to describe migration, he finds this term incomplete, and suggests using the term “diasporic interconnections” to illustrate exilic Palestinian communities with each other and with the homeland.<sup>16</sup> With his insights into identity conflicts and situational impacts within the diasporic arena, Aoude spotlights dynamics that must be considered in investigating how Palestinians conceive their political positions in Australia.

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<sup>12</sup> Aoude, I 2001, “Maintaining Culture, Reclaiming Identity: Palestinian lives in the diaspora”, *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 153-167.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. 155

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp. 163

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 165

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pp. 164

## **Political Identity and Orientation within the Palestinian community in Sydney and Canberra**

This section attempts to illustrate and briefly analyse the political diversity within the Australian-Palestinian community. As this community can be considered diasporic (as per Aoude, Mason, and Cox), the “diasporic interconnections” with the homeland result in a limited replication of the Palestinian political arena in Australia. This is unsurprising given the bond between home and exile, as delineated through the interplay between those bonds built upon experience within Palestine, and those built in experiences external to its physical place.

Interconnections bred by lived experience in the homeland constitute the first significant category of Aoude’s diasporic connections. Political identity is heavily influenced by real-world, direct experiences, informing political decisions and spawning biases for or against certain actors or ideas embedded within these experiences.<sup>17</sup> As the interviews have highlighted, political experiences in Palestine and long-passed contacts with home can inform the present articulations of an interviewee’s political identity. Yet, these factors alone cannot wholly explain the manifestation of political orientation in Sydney’s Palestinian community.

Diasporic interconnections must also be characterised by their externality to the geographical place of Palestine. This type of interconnection relies more on diasporic notions of “imagined community” to bridge between home and exile,<sup>18</sup> which in turn can inform certain political positions. If an ethnic Palestinian considers themselves “Palestinian,” and thus a part of a transnational, constructed “Palestinian” community, then it is likely that they would formulate a political position to fulfil a duty of nation – to care about Palestine simply because one considers themselves a Palestinian. Additionally, Mason alludes to the possibility of memories of home being transferred down the generations.<sup>19</sup> In this dimension of interconnection, political ideation springs out of a perceived commitment to a nation, rather than first-hand experiences within the homeland. This is particularly critical for Australian-Palestinians who were either very young when they left Palestine, or were born in exile, as a lack of lived experience results in political preferences

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<sup>17</sup> Oakes, P 1987, “The Saliency of Social Categories” in JC Turner (ed.), *Rediscovering the Social Group*, Basil Blackwell, New York, pp. 117-141

<sup>18</sup> Hall, S 1990, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, in J Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, pp. 231-232.

<sup>19</sup> Mason 2007, “Children of the ‘Idea of Palestine’: Negotiating Identity, Belonging and Home in the Palestinian Diaspora”, pp. 277.



being determined by home-exile information flows, perceived norms and principles, and familial connections, to name a few. Whatever they may be, for Australian-Palestinians with few direct experiences of Palestine, the determinants for political affiliation are usually exogenous to the physical place of home.

Australian-Palestinians are thus connected to Palestine, whether through lived experience, self-identification with the idea of a Palestinian nation despite not living within the occupied territories, or a blending of both. Hence, in political ideation surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict, the marketplace (or battleground, depending) of ideas in the Australian-Palestinian community tends to replicate that of Palestine proper. As Schiller et al have argued, the transnationalism of migrant communities (Aoude further developed this concept to include diasporas, hence his usage of “diasporic interconnections”) entails the concerned individuals developing political relations across borders, thus making the presence of Fatah or Hamas supporters in Australia an expected phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> However, by the same token, the internationalisation of the Palestinian diaspora and distance from life under occupation ensures that political ideation in the diaspora never completely mirrors the political landscape within Palestine, as the research will outline. Military occupation or siege simply does not impact the political opinions of a Palestinian living under it the same way it would a Palestinian living relatively comfortably in Sydney or Canberra. Furthermore, in an interview with the writer Khaled Abu Adnan, an Australian-Palestinian researcher (in Arabic), indicated that political views are related to where a diasporic Palestinian is from, and differentiated between Australian-Palestinians expelled from Palestine, those who came from Arab refugee camps, and those from Kuwait.<sup>21</sup>

The tapestry of political positions within the Palestinian community in Sydney and Canberra is varied, although most of the people interviewed were supportive of the PA/PLO with a significant minority positioned as independent from major political parties. Those who could be categorised as within the PA/PLO camp explicitly stated their support for the organisations, and sometimes identified as a member of a PLO faction (such as Fatah, PFLP, or PPP). Palestinians who stood independent were defined by their opposition to the PA/PLO program and especially their approach to resolving the issue of Palestinian self-determination. A small number of interviewees also expressed support for Hamas, although this was based more on their use of violent resistance

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<sup>20</sup> Aoudé, 2001, “Maintaining Culture, Reclaiming Identity: Palestinian lives in the diaspora”, pp. 164

<sup>21</sup> Interview, 16 April 2016

and not on religion. This diversity in Australian-Palestinian political orientations will now be explored.

### Political positions of PA/PLO supporters

Most of the interviewees supported the PA/PLO program and sometimes stated their membership in a PLO faction, although deviance occurred in relation to finer policy matters. Every PA/PLO-oriented interviewee expressed support for the two-state solution, although there was disagreement with the PA's policies, particularly regarding negotiations with Israel, openness to violent resistance, and the internationalisation strategy.

Regarding the two-state solution, all PA/PLO supporters viewed this as the most favourable resolution to the conflict. Justifications were based either on the practicality of the two-state solution in opposition to the one-state solution, and the foundations of the two-state solution in UN resolutions. One respondent believed the “two-state solution is the only realistic solution” as it was pragmatic, and Palestinians within the occupied territories were already learning the live with Israelis and understood their ties to the land.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, she opposed the creation of a one-state solution as “not what you want as a Palestinian” as it would not entail the recognition of a specifically Palestinian state or nation – “so we can be Palestinian, and not Israeli.”<sup>23</sup> Shamikh Badra, member of the PLO-affiliated Palestinian People's Party (PPP), was a proponent of the two-state solution “because international resolutions support this solution.”<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, he also noted that “this is the political programme of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, and the PLO is the representative of Palestinians all over the world, and all the supporters of Palestine should respect the PLO.”<sup>25</sup> This objective, a key component of the PA/PLO position, was universally agreed to by all interviewees who supported the PA/PLO.

Most interviewees expressed disdain with the negotiating process, but viewed it as a necessity if the two-state solution was to be established. Additionally, it was also stated in one interview with a Sydney Palestinian and in a focus group with the General Union of Palestinian Workers (GUPW) that the negotiation process should be contingent on Israeli actions, particularly its expansion of

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<sup>22</sup> Interview, 20 April 2016

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Group interview, 20 June 2016

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

settlements.<sup>26</sup> For example, while one member of the GUPW stated that negotiation was unavoidable, they felt it was “very wrong” to continue negotiations while settlements were expanding, in line with the official PLO position.<sup>27</sup> Regardless, the GUPW agreed that resistance to occupation should continue alongside this negotiation process, however stifled it may be.

Regarding the usage of violent resistance, some respondents believed that violence could be part of a wider strategy of opposition to occupation. One interviewee who supported the PLO believed that if violence was necessary to resist occupation, he would support it.<sup>28</sup> Abdul Qader Qaranoueh, representative of Fatah in Australia, said that he would support violent resistance “in the form of an Intifada.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, another Sydney PLO-supporter expressed that since Israel “closed all the doors... What are you going to do? You have to do something – they are going to shut their eyes, mouth, and ears [to our demands] so you have to open them up.”<sup>30</sup> Jamil Batshon also expressed openness to violent resistance as “the indigenous people can use any force to liberate their country,” basing his position on international law, although he acknowledged that Palestinians did not currently have the means to do so effectively.<sup>31</sup> All of these positions contrast with the PA’s current reluctance to support violence against Israeli forces in the occupied Palestinian territories, thus illustrating a nuanced divergence from the official PA/PLO position.

Minor differences also occurred on the issue of the PA’s internationalisation strategy of engaging international institutions such as the UN and the ICC in order to achieve statehood. The few PA/PLO supporters who expressed disdain with this process were frustrated with the inefficacy of the UN. One interviewee stated that the UN resolutions do not have “a legally binding nature” and are “useless” – she branded them as simply words, and not action.<sup>32</sup> At the GUPW focus group, while they agreed that the internationalisation strategy should be used in tandem with other resistance approaches, one interviewee expressed that “we’ve been with the UN for 64 years, and have achieved nothing.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, support for the internationalisation strategy, or parts of it, is not universal within the PA/PLO camp.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, 20 April 2016

<sup>29</sup> Group Interview, 20 June 2016

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Interview, 20 June 2016

<sup>32</sup> Interview, 20 April 2016

<sup>33</sup> Group interview, 20 June 2016

Diasporic interconnections, exilic experiences, and generational differences appear to have contributed to the formulation of these PA/PLO-oriented identities. Most significantly, the interviewees who identified as members or former members of a PLO faction were all born in Palestine, and were members of the older generation. A diasporic interconnection is formed between their exilic experience as a Palestinian in Australia and the original parties in Palestine. As mentioned, both Abdul Qader (62) and Shamikh (35) identified with Fatah and the PPP.

The case of Jamil (70) demonstrates the effects of political developments in Palestine and exilic experiences on the transformation of political identity. Head of the Australian Palestinian Club (APC), he noted it used to be affiliated with the PFLP. He stated that a few like-minded members still “believe the solution is the way of our beloved leader, George Habash. We believed in his solution and his policies.”<sup>34</sup> They were active members of the PFLP in the 1970s but shifted their support towards the Palestinian Authority as a whole after the Oslo Accords launched them into government. Moreover, Jamil acknowledged that he currently lived comfortably in Sydney. These two factors led to his withdrawal from a more partisan support of the PFLP to support of the Palestinian government and its policies. He continues:

“We are more in support of the government of the day for very good reason, because we have come to recognise the fact that the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza have suffered a lot... I’m not going to say to the people of Palestine, ‘we need you to do this, we need you to do that, this is the way we want you to struggle and if you don’t we’re not going to support you.’ No. What we said and what we say now is, ‘OK, now we’re here [in Australia], we’re going to play our part in supporting the Palestinian people and their representative at this moment.’”<sup>35</sup>

Yet, he concluded by acknowledging that his political ideas remained with Habash, the PFLP founder, likening the former PFLP members to “olive trees – our branches, our life, our root is with George Habash, and that cannot be changed.”<sup>36</sup> As illustrated, Jamil’s political identity is forged from his connection with political experiences and allegiances from within Palestine proper, and his perceived comfort living in Australia at the present moment. His political orientation

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<sup>34</sup> Interview, 20 June 2016

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

towards the PA's policies, away from complete partisanship with the PFLP, is a result of mixed influences from home and diaspora.

Deviation from the PA/PLO position by its supporters could possibly be explained by dissatisfaction with the Palestinian government from a diasporic or exilic perspective. Animosity towards some of the PA's approaches may be formed by personal experiences and feelings of abandonment of Palestinians in exile, according to Abu Adnan.<sup>37</sup> This is particularly reflected in frustrations surrounding the inefficacy of the UN's efforts over multiple decades. He also explains the few official political affiliations as a result of "different lifestyles" in Australia, disconnected from the political imperatives that exist in Palestine proper.<sup>38</sup> Further research into personal histories would perhaps shed light on these divergences.

### Political positions of independents and Hamas supporters

At the same time, a significant minority of the interviewees positioned themselves as independent of the PA/PLO, and three expressed sympathy with Hamas. All of these individuals favoured a one-state solution over the two-state solution, with many viewing it as the only morally-just option available in the long-run, as well as more practical than the two-state solution. One respondent stated that the one-state solution "is the ideal solution to have equality and equal rights for all the citizens, both indigenous and the Israelis who are there."<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, she believed the one-state solution "is the only practical solution" due to the increasing number of settlements.<sup>40</sup> However, not everyone agreed on the final character of the state. While most independents advocated a secular, democratic state for both populations, one interviewee believed that only indigenous Jews should be allowed in the final Palestinian state, and emphasised the return of "the whole country back to the Palestinians."<sup>41</sup> Regardless, support for the one-state solution is universal amongst those independent from the PA/PLO.

Everyone who identified as independent was dismissive of continued negotiations with Israel. Three respondents called the negotiations pointless, with one noting that "not only have they proven not to work, they actually tend to work against the Palestinians."<sup>42</sup> A respondent who

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<sup>37</sup> Interview, 16 April 2016

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Interview, 3 June 2016

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Interview, 19 June 2016

<sup>42</sup> Interview, 26 May 2016

identified as supportive of Hamas believed that “only negotiations on the basis of equality” would be effective, and thus criticised the current negotiation strategy.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, another Sydney Palestinian complained that “this Mahmoud Abbas, he gives [the Israelis] a lot, and they will get rid of him, and they will get a third person who can give them more. That’s what the Israelis do. There is no negotiation.”<sup>44</sup>

Support for violent resistance among the independents was varied. While all of the respondents recognised the right of Palestinians to resist occupation, and understood why some Palestinians would resort to violence, not all agreed on its practicality. Two respondents believed non-violent resistance was preferable as Palestinians are military inferior to the Israelis, and violence would only invite highly disproportionate responses. One Sydney Palestinian stated that “the narrative or rhetoric in the media” doesn’t understand the concept of violent resistance against an occupation, concluding that Palestinian violence would be interpreted as offensive, rather than defensive.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, another Palestinian argued that “whatever is taken by force, you should take back by force,” although he recognised that Palestinians lacked the military capacity to do so.<sup>46</sup> Moreover another interviewee, who stated his support for Hamas, defended violence against military targets as a “reaction” to Israeli aggression and humiliation of Palestinians.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, independent perspectives on violent tactics are diverse.

Support for the PA’s internationalisation strategy was also mixed. Three of the respondents viewed it as an effective strategy, although one of these complained that it was “long overdue.”<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, their approval of bringing the Palestinian cause to the UN and ICC was tempered by their distrust of the PA. “Palestinians do see a lot of corruption in the PA and from within Palestine,” one reported.<sup>49</sup> Another said “it is an effective strategy... unfortunately most of the PA leaders or management is corrupted.”<sup>50</sup> Two others completely dismissed the internationalisation efforts of the PA, with one saying “I don’t think the PA has any strategy, because they don’t really follow through with whatever they say they’re going to do.”<sup>51</sup> Like the perspectives on violence, support for internationalisation is spotted.

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<sup>43</sup> Interview, 30 June 2016

<sup>44</sup> Interview, 12 August 2016

<sup>45</sup> Interview, 16 June 2016

<sup>46</sup> Interview, 19 June 2016

<sup>47</sup> Interview, 30 June 2016

<sup>48</sup> Interview, 3 June 2016

<sup>49</sup> Interview, 16 June 2016

<sup>50</sup> Interview, 19 June 2016

<sup>51</sup> Interview, 23 June 2016

Diasporic interconnections and experiences in exile, as well as personal experiences emphasised by Abu Adnan, have also shaped these political identities. Interestingly, five of the eight independent/Hamas oriented interviewees had academic backgrounds in Australia, and these five were also the least favourable towards violent strategies within the non-PA/PLO camp. Additionally, seven of the eight non-PA/PLO interviewees were born and raised outside of Palestine, raising questions as to whether a disconnect with lived experience in Palestine during the height of PLO activity could correlate with their reluctance to support the PLO factions. Abu Adnan's aforementioned assertion that personal experiences and exilic abandonment creates antagonism towards the PA/PLO could offer an explanation for this. Additionally, most of these respondents were significantly younger than the PA/PLO-aligned interviewees.

A compelling case study can be found in Sidqi (not their real name), a Hamas supporter interviewed by the writer. Because he delved into his personal experiences, the manner in which diasporic interconnections and personal experiences shape political identity is duly illustrated. Sidqi was born in the occupied West Bank and spent much of his life there, and expressed disgust at how soldiers at military checkpoints intentionally disrespected Palestinian customs and Islamic traditions. His feelings of humiliation were reinforced when he related a story of seeing well-developed Jewish sport facilities during a school excursion, and lamented that "in the West Bank, we [children] had to play in the streets."<sup>52</sup>

Sidqi also revealed he used to be part of Fatah, but defected after the Intifada when Fatah's slow response and attempts at autocratic control "corrupted the Intifada."<sup>53</sup> He related a story from 1990 where he and a group of resistance fighters, many of whom were Fatah, camped away from home in order to evade Israeli forces. When the men began to smoke, he noticed that the Fatah fighters were using expensive, foreign-branded cigarettes, and interpreted this as a symbol of their corruption and external funding. His decision to support Hamas, who "captured the spirit of the Intifada," emerged from this event.<sup>54</sup>

Aside from this, he mentioned that he supports Hamas because of their purity in comparison to the PA. He argued that Ismail Haniyeh, Mahmoud al-Zahhar, and other Hamas political leaders

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<sup>52</sup> Interview, 30 June 2016

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

still live with their families in Gaza, and have children who are “shuhada”, in contrast with PA leaders who have gone from “freedom fighters to millionaires.”<sup>55</sup> These combined experiences have sculpted Sidqi’s political identity as a Hamas supporter, and the maintenance of this identity as a diasporic Palestinian in Australia attests to Aoude’s concept of diasporic interconnections. In addition, they also perfectly capture Abu Adnan’s argument that negative personal experiences can influence a Palestinian’s political orientation.

## Summary

Overall, the diversity of political opinion within the Australian-Palestinian community demonstrates the impact of diasporic interconnection, and the experience of diaspora itself, on political identities. The concept of diasporic interconnection can also be applied to understand how Palestinians in exile may formulate their political identities, eventuating in a political tapestry that is unique to the environment of exile but partly emulative of the Palestinian political landscape. Influences from Palestine and the Arab world intertwine with exilic experiences to direct individuals’ political orientation. Recognising that positions are diverse, it can generally be said that pro-PA/PLO interviewees are greatly informed by their personal experiences in the Arab world, at the height of the PLO’s influence. Simultaneously, independent interviewees can be characterised by the weight of their experiences outside of Palestine. Nevertheless, given the small sample size, sweeping conclusions cannot be made about Australian-Palestinian communities in Sydney and Canberra, although political diversity can still be attested to, and reasoning behind political orientations can be investigated.

## Advocacy and Relationship with the GDOP

Most interviewees engaged in advocacy for the Palestine issue in Australia, and a majority of them are currently or were recently involved in advocacy or community organisations. There was no correlation between the interviewees’ political positions and involvement in advocacy organisations, and it was noted by Abu Adnan that Palestinian groups in Australia tend to be more community than politically oriented.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, those who were not part of advocacy groups claimed that they still advocated for Palestine in a personal capacity, such as through academia, social media, or assisting advocacy groups on an ad-hoc basis. There were only two individuals

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Interview, 16 April 2016



who expressed overtly negative views on advocacy groups. The first claimed that none represented their views, although they were pessimistic towards most established Palestinian political entities overall.<sup>57</sup> The second did not engage in advocacy groups as they felt the associations were heavily influenced by personal politics and rattled by disorganisation and disunity, internally and with other Palestinian groups.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the majority were supportive of advocating for pro-Palestinian positions although, as outlined previously, a common vision on the future of Palestine is lacking.

Perspectives on the interviewees' relationship with the GDOP were more varied. The majority had a generally favourable view of their relationship with the embassy, and praised its professionalism and approachability. Multiple respondents cited family and friendship links as a major factor in their good relationship with the GDOP staff, across the spectrum of political positions. However, most of the respondents on good terms with the embassy noted areas where it could improve, and alignment with the PA/PLO position did not necessarily imply a flawless relationship with the GDOP staff. At a focus group with GUPW members, for example, they noted "there will always be hiccups" in the relationship.<sup>59</sup> One interviewee, while supportive of the GDOP, decried its lack of organisation in events and another lamented its human and financial resource challenges.<sup>60</sup> Even those who did not agree with the PA/PLO position still viewed the GDOP staff positively, and understood the professional requirements of the embassy to represent the PA.

Many interviewees also wished for the GDOP to further engage with the community. Two interviewees supportive of the embassy believed it had a major role in building a coordination committee for the various Palestinian associations in Australia, although they recognised the challenges in drawing everyone under one umbrella. Two others also called for the GDOP to both engage with regular members of the Palestinian community, regardless of political differences, and to relay their perspectives back to the PA. One of these interviewees stated that "[the GDOP] needs to understand the real view rather than the glossing – the view of what's happening and what people think of the [Palestinian] Authority."<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, all of these respondents ultimately viewed their relationship with the GDOP as positive.

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<sup>57</sup> Interview, 12 August 2016

<sup>58</sup> Interview, 20 June 2016

<sup>59</sup> Group interview, 20 June 2016

<sup>60</sup> Interview, 20 April 2016

Interview, 19 June 2016

<sup>61</sup> Interview, 23 June 2016

Only two Australian-Palestinians interviewed held completely negative views of the GDOP. Both were not aligned with the PA/PLO position. The first did not support the GDOP because it represented an unelected government, saying “Nobody elected them; nobody chose them to represent people.”<sup>62</sup> The other – a supporter of Hamas – did not view the GDOP staff themselves negatively, but felt that the GDOP could participate more in community events and took issue with the government they represented.<sup>63</sup> They did not trust the PA, and as a result held minimal trust in the GDOP. These were the only two encountered instances of Australian-Palestinians viewing the GDOP negatively.

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<sup>62</sup> Interview, 12 August 2016

<sup>63</sup> Interview, 30 June 2016

## Directions for the GDOP's Public Diplomacy

Political opinion within the Palestinian community in Sydney and Canberra is diverse, and opposition to the PA/PLO program exists, even if in a minority. Furthermore, while many viewed their relationship with the GDOP positively, they criticised certain parts of the GDOP's program and underlined the possibility for a better relationship. This raises the GDOP's public diplomacy approach into the spotlight – how do diasporic communities fit into public diplomacy theory and practice, and can improvements to the GDOP's public diplomacy strategy be made? Based heavily on Yun and Toth's thesis, this paper contends that the GDOP will need to consider its interaction with the diasporic Palestinian community as critical for its public diplomatic mission. Forced to engage with this politically diverse body of Australian-Palestinians, the GDOP must then rely on a grassroots and creative approach to public diplomacy that stresses cooperation on mutual interests and not convergence on a unitary political orientation.

### Theoretical Considerations

Scholarship on public diplomacy is nascent and definitions of this essential component of diplomatic practice vary. Delaney's early definition frames public diplomacy as the ways in which governments and private entities influence the publics that "bear directly on another government's foreign policy decisions".<sup>64</sup> Another early conception of public diplomacy by Malone understands the practice as communicating with foreign populations with the intent of swaying their thought, and by proxy, the policies of their governments.<sup>65</sup> However, Gilboa contends that public diplomacy cannot be viewed through a single-lens, and must take multidisciplinary approaches.<sup>66</sup>

Signitzer and Coombs take such an approach, arguing that public relations and public diplomacy theory can be synthesised.<sup>67</sup> Public diplomacy and public relations both aim to "affect public opinion for the benefit of their client/organisation," and thus public diplomacy and draw on public relations concepts such as information exchange, reducing misconceptions, creating goodwill, and

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<sup>64</sup> Delaney, RF 1968, "Introduction" in AS Hoffman (Ed.), *International Communication and the New Diplomacy*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, pp. 3

<sup>65</sup> Malone, GD 1988, *Political Advocacy and Cultural Communication: Organizing the Nation's Public Diplomacy*, University Press of America, Maryland, pp. 199

<sup>66</sup> Gilboa, E 2008, "Searching for a theory of public diplomacy", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 616, no. 1, pp. 55-77

<sup>67</sup> Signitzer, BH and Coombs, T 1992, "Public relations and public diplomacy: Conceptual convergences", *Public Relations Review*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 137-147.

the construction of positive images.<sup>68</sup> International Relations scholar Nye disagrees that public diplomacy can be viewed solely as public relations, and instead situates the practice in the framework of soft power, or “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment.”<sup>69</sup> For Nye, public diplomacy is a tool in intelligently asserting state power, and “requires an understanding of the role of credibility, self-criticism, and the role of civil society in generating soft power.”<sup>70</sup> He also defines public diplomacy as a “two-way street” of communication that emphasises information exchange rather than one-way propaganda.<sup>71</sup> Wang also draws from Nye’s formulation, and links public diplomacy to the maintenance of a good national reputation in the effort to influence foreign publics and increase a state’s international standing.<sup>72</sup> Separately, Zhang conceptualises public diplomacy as a “symbolic interactionist” process, whereby state actions become symbols that are interpreted by foreign governments and publics.<sup>73</sup> The ways individuals interpret and derive meaning from the actions of a foreign government are thus a core component of public diplomacy for Zhang.

However, many public diplomacy scholars have failed to consider the effects of mobile national communities, exile, and migration – central concepts in analysing the Palestinian community in Australia. Fortunately, Yun and Toth have filled this niche by understanding public diplomacy as a framework of “sociological globalism” that accounts for international migration. Yun and Toth argue that migrants are beginning to play a central role in public diplomacy, as modern international people flows create “domestic constituent[s] ‘inside border.’”<sup>74</sup> The migrant in these inside border constituencies, as “a powerful agent of intercountry and intercultural communications”, is central to maintaining a positive national image and an effective public diplomacy strategy.<sup>75</sup> Under this framework, a government’s public diplomacy must address foreign publics living within their own borders, and create genuine linkages with them in order to influence the policy of migrants’ home country. Adding onto Nye’s work, the work concludes that soft power rests on a state’s ability to negotiate and build trustworthy, communicative relationships with foreign publics, particularly

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, pp. 139

<sup>69</sup> Nye, JS 2008, “Public diplomacy and soft power”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 616, no. 1, pp. 94

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, pp. 103

<sup>72</sup> Wang, J 2006, “Managing national reputation and international relations in the global era: Public diplomacy revisited”, *Public Relations Review*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 91-96.

<sup>73</sup> Zhang, J 2006, “Public diplomacy as symbolic interactions: A case study of Asian tsunami relief campaigns”, *Public Relations Review*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 26-32.

<sup>74</sup> Yun, SH and Toth, EL 2009, “Future sociological public diplomacy and the role of public relations: Evolution of public diplomacy”, *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 53, no. 4, pp. 500

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, pp. 498

migrant bodies.<sup>76</sup> Hence, Yun and Toth situate migrant populations at the centre of contemporary public diplomacy.

The sociological globalist approach can be readily applied to the GDOP's engagement of Palestinian publics in Australia. While Yun and Toth's thesis emphasised the need for the domestic/receiving government (in this case, Australia) to build relationships with in-border foreign populations (the Palestinian Diaspora), the argument can be reversed to suggest that the Palestinian Diaspora in Australia should also be targeted by their home country's diplomatic mission. In essence, the State of Palestine's diplomatic corps must engage with Palestinian diasporas in foreign countries to project its own image and influence policy in Australia. The centrality of migrant bodies to the diplomatic communication process demands this.

### Perspectives of the Palestinian Community

Accordingly, the public diplomacy strategies used by the GDOP must account for the Palestinian diaspora in Australia and its unique characteristics. Firstly, as the bulk of this paper's research has demonstrated, political positions within the Palestinian community in Sydney and Canberra are varied, and not everyone supports the PA/PLO. Building genuine relationships with these people based on information exchange is crucial, as Nye argues that one-way, propagandistic communication from a diplomatic mission to the public can destroy trust and degrade the influence of a diplomatic mission.<sup>77</sup> Antagonising and alienating political opponents would therefore be unconstructive. An engaged, two-way, communicative relationship is therefore necessary for the GDOP's public diplomacy strategy.

Analysing interviewee perceptions of their relationship with the GDOP reveals a general understanding of the GDOP's mission in Australia, but also a desire for more collaborative efforts. Many interviewees were either supportive of the GDOP's political position or understood that the GDOP was simply taking the position of the government they represent. Regardless, they stressed the need for cooperation between the GDOP and other community groups in the diaspora. One respondent, while acknowledging that the Delegation would not waver from its official position, contended that the GDOP and other community groups should unite by viewing "the big picture"

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 501

<sup>77</sup> Nye, "Public diplomacy and soft power", pp. 103

– emphasising common Palestinian identity and desire for statehood.<sup>78</sup> Another group of PLO supporters also felt the GDOP had its own political mandate to follow, with one hoping to “achieve a coordination committee” under them.<sup>79</sup> However, they stressed that any umbrella organisation should be under the PLO banner.<sup>80</sup> The researcher Abu Adnan believed that the relationship should be two-way and collaborative, and that it must be reinforced by doing projects together: “You can get a small ambulance, but why not get a big hospital when you work together?”<sup>81</sup> He also suggested using common Palestinian culture as a bridging mechanism for political disagreements.<sup>82</sup> Another respondent felt that the onus was less on the Delegation to unite the community, but more on community leaders to be open-minded to the variety of political positions within the community.<sup>83</sup> They were particularly distressed by this because “as a result [the Palestinian community] doesn’t have the leverage to affect Australian elections or the decision-making process about Palestine.”<sup>84</sup> These individuals encouraging more collaborative community efforts formed the bulk of respondents.

A number of other respondents also suggested that the GDOP embark on more grassroots efforts to bolster the relationship. One interviewee from Canberra felt that the GDOP needed more community outreach especially in improving their event organisation capacity.<sup>85</sup> They suggested using local Palestinian families as a remedy.<sup>86</sup> Another Palestinian argued that the GDOP “should be able to harness the views of the community and send it through to the Authority that [it] represents,” and to be engage with “Palestinians at different levels, not just at certain leadership.”<sup>87</sup> Regardless, the respondents fitting this trend also recognised the GDOP’s limited resources. In addition to these people, there were only two others that had strong negative views of the GDOP, largely based on political differences they saw as irreconcilable.

Considering the theoretical discourse behind public diplomacy and the perspectives of the interviewees, the GDOP may benefit from a collaborative approach that builds connections with Palestinians not necessarily in leadership roles. As Nye emphasises, two-way public diplomacy is

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<sup>78</sup> Interview, 20 June 2016

<sup>79</sup> Group interview, 20 June 2016

<sup>80</sup> Ibid,

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Khaled Abu Adnan, 16 April 2016

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Interview, 20 June 2016

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Interview, 20 April 2016

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Interview, 23 June 2016

highly beneficial for a state's influence, and as Yun and Toth have implied, a critical arena for this public diplomacy to be located is the diasporic community. However, it also needs to be considered that the community is politically diverse, and does not necessarily agree with the GDOP's formal position. Nevertheless, as many interviewees have indicated, political positions do not need to converge in order to build a better relationship – drawing different stakeholders into collaborative projects may suffice. Genuine collaboration and consideration of the perspectives of regular Palestinians would thus benefit the GDOP's public diplomacy.

## Conclusion

Public diplomacy is a core component of a diplomatic entity's mission in the country, and it becomes imperative to understand the nature of the target population. This becomes even more pointed when a diplomatic body must engage with significant migrant or diasporic populations, and when the mission revolves around contentious political issues. It is also the issue that the General Delegation of Palestine must precisely face: having to engage the Australian government in policy relating to the occupied Palestinian territories while using public diplomacy to effectively engage with not only the wider Australian society, but with the Palestinian diaspora in the country as well.

Thus, in order to engage in effective public diplomacy with the Palestinian diaspora, a more nuanced understanding of political orientation within the Palestinian diaspora is needed. Not everyone agrees with the PA/PLO position, and various factors such as age and lived experiences in homeland and exile can impact individuals' political orientation. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for the GDOP to understand public opposition to finer policy details, such as the PA/PLO internationalisation strategy, negotiations, and the use of violent resistance.

This paper has attempted to address these two needs. Interviews were conducted with 21 Australian-Palestinians in Sydney and Canberra to investigate the various political differences within Australia's Palestinian diaspora. The community is indeed diverse in political outlook, with most interviewees supporting the general PA/PLO position but a significant minority taking independent or Hamas-sympathetic stances. Connections with Palestine proper – be it in terms of culture, identity, or politics – were key in determining political opinions, as were lived experiences in homeland and exile. Furthermore, even individuals who supported the PA/PLO disagreed on whether its current approach to negotiations and/or resistance was appropriate. Regardless, it can safely be argued that the diversity of political opinion within the Palestinian community is an environment the GDOP must navigate in its public diplomacy strategy.

Yet, most interviewees also held generally favourable views of the GDOP despite their political differences, and believed the relationship could be improved. Building upon these community perspectives, and public diplomacy scholarship that underlines the importance of genuine relationships and attendance to migrant communities, the GDOP's public diplomacy may benefit



from grassroots engagement and further cooperative work with community groups. Accordingly, this report recommends the following courses of action to address these conclusions:

- **Continue engaging in co-organised community events with other Palestinian groups regardless of political alignment.** The GDOP will have to contend with groups and individuals of differing political alignment in the community. However, maintaining an effective relationship with them is critical, and can be achieved by jointly organising community or cultural events as a means of building relationships on common grounds. This would be particularly important for community groups not engaged according to the 2015 annual report. While the GDOP may lack human resources, offering the Delegation’s professional connections and official prestige may be tools the GDOP can use in cooperative efforts with community groups.
- **Expand outreach activities to Australian-Palestinians who do not hold leadership positions.** Many interviewees, while not agreeing with the GDOP position, held favourable views towards the GDOP staff. Continuing to be present at community events would benefit this. However, as with the effort to build stronger relationships with various community groups, engaging regular Palestinians would be highly beneficial. This may be done through collaboration in student award nights, as was conducted in 2015, or encouraging “town hall” sessions where possible for GDOP staff to take in community perspectives in a relaxed, non-hierarchical environment. As one interviewee suggested, reaching out to families in event organisation may also be an option.

In the end, these modest steps may provide the GDOP a solid foundation for using its public diplomacy to greater harness the potential of the Palestinian community in Australia while remaining sensitive to its diverse nature. Appearing cooperative and empathetic to regular Australian-Palestinians would make relationship-building easier and reinforce the positive image of the GDOP within the community, to all of its members regardless of political orientation. Even more ambitious public diplomacy initiatives such as the previously attempted umbrella organisation for Palestinian groups will be made possible by first building a solid relationship with different players in the Palestinian diaspora. A two-way relationship and public diplomacy

approach such as this is incumbent upon the GDOP given the nuanced political environment it must operate within, especially in regards to the Palestinian diaspora.

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