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My Initial Involvement in the Party

The Arab Ba'ath Party was newly established. 1947 was considered the year of its official foundation in Syria. Al-Ba'ath had recently started to spread beyond Syrian borders. The University of Damascus deserves credit for spreading the party in East Jordan as early Ba'athists graduated from there. We hadn't heard of the party in Palestine before 1948. The established, inveterate Palestinian parties were the Palestinian Arab Party, which I joined in 1947, the al-Defaa' (Defense) Party; and the al-Istiqlal (Independence) Party. Despite the fact that these parties had a pan-Arab outlook, they remained national and did not attempt to be pan-Arab in their organisation and presence. The only pan-Arab party that extended its presence outside its country of origin prior to the Ba'ath Party was the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP). The SSNP was founded in Lebanon by Antun Sa'adeh, and had a limited presence. At that time, the Arab Nationalist Movement was still just an intellectual trend. The Communist Party (National Liberation League) and the Muslim Brotherhood were other extensions of external organisations in Palestine.

When I joined the Ba'ath Party in July 1949, I was the only person in the West Bank to officially enlist. This is not to say that Mr. Abdullah al-Rimawi and others had not preceded me in reviewing and accepting the Party's principles. I therefore had a significant responsibility to expand the organisation in Palestine by recruiting new members and spreading the Party's principles in complete secrecy. Before I could begin, I had to absorb the Party's principles, and I made great efforts to do so.

I embarked on covert activities in various spheres of the Party. In a short period of time, I was successful in recruiting several members from Jerusalem. The first group I targeted was fighters who had participated in the armed struggle from 1947 to 1948. Among the first members to join the party were Hussein al-Kurd, Ali al-Ja'bari, Rafiq al-Nimri and Abd el-Jawad al-Halawani. The second group I targeted was the Ibrahimeih College community. Some of the first teachers to join the party were Jamil Abu

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Meizer, Abd al-Jabbar al-Ashqar, Sheikh Faris Idris and Sulieman Jarrar. Idris and Jarrar subsequently joined the Islamic Tahrir Party (Hizb ut-Tahrir). Amongst the first students to join the Party, I remember Muhsen al-Watha'ifi and Ibrahim al-Ttabji. The third place I sought new recruits was the Students Club, later known as Arab Youth Club. Members who joined the party included Anwar al-Daqaq, Munir al-Daqaq, Ishaq Ma'atouq, the well-known journalist Ibrahim Sakajha, Jadallah Ibrahim Jadallah and Abd el-Wadood al-Za'atari, who was the head of the cleaners syndicate at Jerusalem municipality. Most of the club's members supported the Party.

In Hebron, I began by contacting Abd el-Khaliq Yaghmour, a lawyer, activist and one of the city's most prominent figures. He refused to join the party and preferred to remain independent. He never joined any party in his life. The second person I contacted was Daoud Sonoqrott who joined the party and became the nexus between a large number of members. The Sports Club was a good place to recruit, and many of its members joined the Party later on.

Attempts to Form Political Parties

In late 1949 and early 1950, after Palestinian political parties had lost their foothold, the West Bank witnessed a flurry of efforts to form political parties. The decline of the Palestinian Arab Party, headed by Haj Amin al-Husseini, left a significant political vacuum. The PAP persevered in spite of this, resisting the establishment of new parties. That is why there was more than one attempt to establish new parties.

Musa *Beick* al-A'lami strove to become the spiritual leader of a new party that built on organizations he founded before Nakba, such as the Construction Project and the Arab Offices.

After Construction Project and Arab Offices initiatives fizzled out, a group led by Anwar al-Khatib, Burhan al-Djani and Wasfi al-Tal, became the focal point for several figures attempting to establish a political party that would be adopted by Musa al-A'lami and supported by Iraq. Anwar al-Khatib once told me that the American consulate in Jerusalem was monitoring their activity and trying to win them over. I kept track of this group as best I could through one-on-one meetings with Anwar al-Khatib, who didn't know I was a member of the Ba'ath party. I didn't attend any general meetings for group members. In any case, the group failed to establish a political party for a variety of reasons.

Abdullah al-Rimawi and Abdullah Na'was were the nucleus of another initiative that aimed to establish a political party called the Ba'ath Party in Jordan. They were not acting in cooperation with the Arab Ba'ath Party in Jordan or Syria, despite the fact that the new party adopted the same principles as the Arab Ba'ath Party. The group's point of view was to establish a party that was organizationally independent from the Party in Syria, in order to gain the license from the Jordanian government at the outset. When the name of this group, the Ba'ath Party in Jordan, became known, the national leadership asked me to publish a short statement in the Jordanian newspapers, almost all of which were published in Jerusalem. My statement read "To clarify the truth, the Arab Ba'ath is not related to what is called the Ba'ath Party in Jordan." I gave the statement to the newspapers and I remember it was published in al-Defaa' Newspaper at least.

I was in touch with Mr. Abdullah al-Rimawi throughout this period, encouraging him to join the Party officially. He asked me to wait until he knew whether or not his group would gain official recognition, as he valued its public and legal establishment. Eventually, the Jordanian government refused to license the group, and Abdullah al-Rimawi officially joined the Ba'ath Party.

After a strongly worded article was published by Abdullah al-Rimawi in his al-Ba'ath newspaper, he and Abdullah Na'was were arrested and sent to Bayer desert prison. The article was entitled "I See Ripe Heads Ready for Picking". The article was considered to be the basis for a campaign against King Abdullah. Their arrest caused provoked significant popular backlash. After a few months in prison, Rimawi and Na'was went on hunger strike, prompting further popular opposition that culminated in their release. This was in the early months of 1950. Soon after, general parliamentary elections were held in Jordan. Both men ran in the elections under the slogan "From Prison to Parliament". Both went on to win.

[...]

Unity of the Two Banks

When the Jericho Conference was held on the 1st of December 1948, very few people were knew that Tawfiq Abu al-Huda, Prime Minister of Trans-Jordan, and Glubb Pasha met with Ernest Bevin, the British foreign minister, in February 1948, that is to say before the Jordanian Army entered Palestine. They agreed to accept and implement the Partition Plan, and to annex the

territory the plan designated for Arabs to Trans-Jordan. Glubb Pasha revealed this in his 1957 book *A Soldier with the Arabs*.

The parties involved in the secret agreement knew this and had to face the Gaza Conference headed by Haj Amin al-Husseini on 1 October, 1948. This conference inaugurated the All-Palestine Government under al-Husseini's leadership. As a result, the Abu al-Huda-Bevin agreement had to be put into force publicly. To this end, the Jordanian Government did its utmost to encourage people to attend a large meeting held in Jericho on December 1st, 1948. Glubb Pasha ordered his men to support the initiative by circulating publicity materials and providing attendees with transport in army vehicles.

Sheikh Mohammed Ali al-Ja'abari was elected chair of this conference, the most important outcome of which was a pledge of allegiance to King Abdullah as the king of Palestine. Naturally, I was not did not attend the conference. On the contrary, I did everything I could to thwart it.

The announcement of East Bank's annexation of the West Bank was a forgone conclusion. It simply required a spectacle to be made public. The Jordanian Army, with the Iraqi Army's assistance, controlled the remains of Palestine. Jerusalem, Hebron, Ramallah and Nablus had military governors appointed by the Jordanian government. Meanwhile, the Israelis were threatening Arab presence at large. They were happy with the Partition Plan once they had they occupied twenty-six per cent of the Palestinian territory it had allocated to Arabs.

On the popular level, the Palestinian Communist Party (National Liberation League) declared refusal of the annexation, opposition to holding parliamentary elections and adherence to the Partition Plan. This was nothing more than "a declaration of position" that had no impact.

The figures of Ansar al-Iraq (Supporters of Iraq), clearly encouraged by the Iraqi Government, strongly supported the annexation and parliamentary elections. The majority of people saw themselves swept along helplessly in a process they didn't choose. Their reaction varied from indifference to participation especially from the families that had candidates running in the elections. Even though Jerusalem is the primary sphere of influence for Haj Amin al-Husseini, al-Husseini Family and the Palestine Arab Party I didn't feel any opposition their for this elections.

We, in the Arab Ba'ath Party, after studying the issue from all sides and despite our opposition to King Abdullah's policy and his government, which

is completely under British influence, practically and realistically found that we had no choice but to accept the annexation. Therefore we had to participate in the parliamentary elections. We were challenged by three factors:

1. Practically, it wasn't possible to establish an independent government in the West Bank. Any attempt to do so could result in Zionist occupation, especially given that such an attempt will not receive Arab or international support.
2. Based on our pan-Arab principles we welcome any unification of the Arab land and people
3. As a party believing in the necessity of liberating the entire Palestinian land we saw that this aim can't be achieved without broadening the scope of Arab struggle against colonialism and the Zionist entity. To that end we had to cause a drastic change in the Jordanian regime after which Jordan would become an entity that adopts liberation and serious work to achieve it. Especially if Jordan became part of a united Arab state that includes Syria, Iraq and Egypt, or at least some of these countries.

On these bases we decided to participate in the parliamentary elections. It was very clear to us that the elections will be a referendum on the unification of the two banks. Participating in it will give the annexation legal legitimacy.

Our comrades in the East Bank supported participation in the parliamentary election but were less enthusiastic than our comrades in the West Bank. That was, as they have explained, a result of their previous experiences in the Legislative Council elections for East Jordan. The elections will be a rigged formality where only supporters of the regime who were chosen previously win. They have reported to us on such miserable and bitter examples and experiences.

The attorney Abdullah al-Rimawi was the party's candidate in Ramallah district. From the onset his chance of winning was very clear. He won the elections achieving a high percentage of the votes. In Jerusalem Mr. Abdullah Na'was enjoyed a great chance of winning. Up until then he wasn't officially a member of the party even though he was associated with it. He also won the elections with a great margin.

Generally speaking, these elections produced a council representative of the prevailing social, tribal and family relations in the country at that time. The council didn't represent any factional forces or movements. Government's interference in these elections was limited compared to the elections held later on. I can say that al-Ba'ath Party's gain was great through the stands taken by Abdullah al-Rimawi and Abdullah Na'was in the Parliament.

As I have mentioned earlier, this parliament agreed to the "Unity Resolution" proposed by the government including the reservations included in the resolution.

This council didn't last for a long time and was dissolved on 3 May 1951; nearly a year after it was elected. This was due to lack of harmony between the council and the executive authority as well as the council's refusal to approve the government's budget.

National Conference In Jordan

In the spring of 1951 in Jordan we held a national secret conference in Ramallah at Abdullah al-Rimawi's House. Around 20 representatives representing all the branches of the party in Jordan attended the conference. We were keen to hold regular national conferences during the 1950s in Jordan. These conferences were schools where the members were educated intellectually and organizationally in addition to the principles, positions and decisions taken at these conferences.

The party's leadership in Jordan submitted a written comprehensive report to the annual conference. The report addressed political, administrative, organizational and financial issues as well as the future struggle program. The conference would then thoroughly discuss the national leadership's report and take the necessary decisions. The conference also elected a national leadership every two years. The conference would elect the leadership at one year and hold a vote of confidence the year after and so on.

In my opinion our conference in 1951 was one of the most important conferences that we held in Jordan. These were the most important decisions taken by that conference:

1. Electing a national leadership for two years consisting of the attorney Abdullah al-Rimawi, a member in the Jordanian Parliament, who was elected as the Secretary General of the National Leadership, the attorney Abdullah Na'was, a member of the Jordanian Parliament, the

pharmacist Amin Shqair the former Secretary General of the National Leadership, Dr. Abd el-Rahman Shqair the prominent popular leader, the attorney Suleiman al-Hadidi, Hussni al-Khouffash the prominent leader in the Palestinian Arab Workers Association in Nablus headed by Sami Taha, and Bahjat Abu Gharbeih the teacher at the Ibrahimeih College. I was assigned many duties related to fiscal affairs, printing publications and student affairs.

2. Choosing Abdullah al-Rimawi and Abdullah Na'was to be members of the pan-Arab leadership representing Jordan. Here I would like to mention that the party in Jordan was the second largest organization after the party in Syria.
3. The conference studied the party's internal rules of procedure and demanded amending it to make it more democratic. The conference noticed that the rules of procedure gave the pan-Arab Secretary General sweeping powers. Powers that might be necessary in the establishment stage but are not suitable after the spread of the party and the formation of its national leaderships and branches. Later on this topic was discussed in a pan-Arab leadership meeting. The amendments were approved and the branch in Jordan was assigned with providing a new proposal for rules of procedure. The proposal was submitted, approved by the pan-Arab leadership, circulated and adopted in all the party's branches.
4. The conference approved a political program for Jordan aimed at liberating Jordan from British influence. We saw that the march towards pan-Arab unity and towards liberating Palestine can't progress in Jordan unless it was liberated from foreign influence. On these basis the program consisted of three points:
 - a. Liberating the Jordanian Army and separating the police and gendarmeries from the army's command and attaching it to the Ministry of Interior.
 - b. Shedding the foreign financial assistance and replacing it with Arab assistance.
 - c. Terminating the Jordanian-British treaty.

In the first phase the party puts forward liberating the Jordanian Army in all possible ways. This can be done by dismissing Glubb Pasha, the English commander of the army, and all the other English Officers and appointing Jordanian Arab officers in their positions.

In the second phase the party puts forward shedding the annual financial assistance provided by the British government to the Jordanian Government and replacing it with an Arab assistance that the Arab states will be asked to provide. The size of the British assistance at the time was £2 million a year to the government's budget and £6 million to the Army's budget. Glubb Pasha received the assistance designated to the army.

We saw that if we managed to achieve the first and the second goals the Jordanian-British treaty will be considered abolished and it will be easy to terminate it officially. The third phase of the program was (terminating the Jordanian treaty and evicting the British army from its bases in Jordan). These bases were in Amman Airport, the camps in al-Mafraq and Port of Aqaba.

It was very clear that we considered these three points one complete program. It was necessary to implement it in different phases were each phase paves the way for the next. That's why our attention was focused on the first point. If we achieved the first point then we would focus our attention on the second then the third.

5. The Conference's fifth decision was to take the party from the phase of "secret activity" to the phase of "public unlicensed activity". That was to be done through highlighting the party's activity through announcing the membership of some of his members and disseminating the party's political newsletters publicly and widely.
6. The conference decided that the party, or any of its members, would not participate in any of the Jordanian ministries, if an offer were made, as long as the commander of the army was English. It was agreed that the most dangerous trap that the party can fall into, even the party's death, is to participate in a government under foreign influence. Even after liberation from foreign influence this dangerous trap will continue to exist if the party participates in or assumes the government before it is ready to do so. This is what happened to the party at a later stage in Syria and Iraq.

In addition to what have been said previously, before and after the conference we continuously struggled towards reaching a true representative democratic rule and free unrigged elections. This was to change the existing picture at the time, which was called by our representatives in the parliament "constitutional democratic false cover for the individual's absolute rule".

Holding this conference had significant impact on the increase of the party's activity and presence and establishing branches and sections in all the cities in the two banks.

A combination of various factors established the party's bases and its wide presence. The factors we mention here are:

1. Its adoption of brave and frank policies and positions opposing foreign domination of the country.
2. The party's position towards the Palestinian cause and the necessity of serious work towards liberating what has been occupied from it. This position has attracted wide segments of the Palestinian youth inside Jordan and the Palestinian scattered in the Arab countries. The Jordan branch recruited most of these youth.
3. Its call for pan-Arab unity and the presence of its organizations throughout the Arab world. This gave the hope of liberation, unity and recovering what have been occupied of Palestine.
4. Forming its pan-Arab, the branches' and sections' leaderships from very popular figures known for their true patriotism, devotion and struggle prior to joining the Party.

The circles where the party spread were farmers and refugees especially teachers and students, middle class intellectuals and professionals, trade unionists and workers.