

# الثورة الفلسطينية

THE PALESTINIAN REVOLUTION

Iyad, Abu (Salah Khalaf). *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the  
(Palestinian Struggle, New York: Times Books, 1981 (pp. 64-65).*

That same evening, a reception was given in our honor. The prime minister and the leaders of the opposition—the same ones who had been so vigorously denouncing him a few hours earlier—were there, and I was amazed to see them engaged in cordial, even friendly, conversation. Even the Muslim Brothers and the Communists seemed on good terms. The Communists scrupulously respected the religious beliefs of their compatriots, to the point that they interrupted their talks with our delegation to direct us to the mosque at prayer time! Thus, I was deeply shocked by the civil war which broke out in the Sudan exactly three years later, and ended with the execution of the major Communist party leaders.

Something else struck me during that same trip to the Sudan. At a public meeting organized by the Women's Union, the militant in charge of collecting woolen clothing for the fedayeen stood up and asked, "Don't you think these clothes will be unnecessary next winter if it's true you will have liberated Palestine by then?" This question gave me some idea about the extent of the myth created by the Arab press regarding our possibilities. It seemed inappropriate that day to publicly go into the weaknesses and failings—not to say betrayals—of certain Arab regimes regarding the Palestinian cause. How could I explain that our natural allies were purposely maintaining the balance of power in Israel's favor? I said something vague to the effect that one should never despair of an early victory, and let it go at that.

Now that we had improved our relations with the Arab regimes, we could turn our attention to the PLO. Ahmad Shukeiry had resigned, grudgingly, as president of the organization in December 1967 and had been replaced on an interim basis by Yahya Hammuda. Earlier that year, in June and August, Shukeiry had had two meetings with Fatah leaders. He tried to convince us that he had been betrayed by King Hussein, who, he said, had deliberately handed the West Bank over to Israel. He told us that he hoped to gain renewed confidence from the Arab chiefs of state, who were to meet at the summit conference planned for the end of August in Khartoum. But his hopes were deceived: Violently taken to task by many of the Arab leaders, he was left to his fate by Nasser whose protégé he had been until then.

From then on Nasser began pushing for the integration of the fedayeen movements into the PLO, which to his mind would kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, it would end the duality of power (the formal power of the PLO versus the legitimate power we

represented), and on the other, it would establish an appropriate framework for the unification of the Resistance. Indeed, a number of rival Resistance organizations had emerged since the 1967 war. Although they were a minority, they still constituted forces which should be grouped in one way or another.

At the beginning, we weren't unanimous in wanting to take over the leadership of the PLO. Some of us feared that the movement would become bureaucratized, that its revolutionary purity would be diluted. We set a number of conditions on our cooperation, including one we considered indispensable: The fedayeen organizations would have to have the majority of seats in the Palestinian National Council (PNC), a kind of PLO parliament. By mid-June of 1968, following arduous negotiations, we had succeeded in obtaining about half the seats. The fourth PNC, held in Cairo the next month, did not change the composition of the Executive Committee (the supreme body of the PLO) but it did adopt resolutions reflecting our policy. The National Charter, which had been passed in Jerusalem by the first council in 1964, was revised to stipulate that "armed struggle is the only road to the liberation of Palestine."

By the time the fifth session of the PNC met in February 1969, the various fedayeen organizations had gained the absolute majority of seats and the Resistance took over full control of the PLO. The newly elected Executive Committee designated as its president Yasir Arafat, who wept from emotion at the enormous responsibilities he would have from then on. It was during this same session that the PNC adopted Fatah's strategic objective (the one I had outlined at a press conference on October 10, 1968) of creating a democratic society in Palestine where Muslims, Christians, and Jews would live together in complete equality.

All the Arab countries, including those which were—and still are—suspicious of the extreme leftist fedayeen groups, greeted the PLO's takeover by the Resistance with satisfaction. This was because Fatah, which most of them trust, made sure of getting the overriding influence both within the PNC and on the PLO Executive Committee.

We could now concentrate on initiatives aimed at giving us an international base. Considering the hostility or indifference of the Western powers and their satellites in the Third World, our efforts were inevitably directed toward the socialist countries. The prejudices we harbored against Marxism and socialist countries in the early 1950's had gradually disappeared over the years, largely due to our everyday experiences rather than through readings.