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The Palestinian Entity at the Crossroads: the People, the Kings and Gromyko

The advent of spring in April of 1964 has brought us new hope after a long wait. The Palestinian entity has become an attainable objective. The Palestinian people have been looking forward to the creation of its political entity as a symbol of its struggle.

I have appeared before the coordination committee, which has been created at the behest of the first summit. I have detailed to the committee the conclusions I have drawn from my tour of the Arab world and my communication with Arab governments and various gatherings of Palestinians.

The members of the committee arranged the necessary logistical procedures to set up the Palestinian entity. I have briefed the committee that, based on what I have concluded from my discussions with Palestinians of various gatherings, a preparation committee has been created to choose members of the national council, which is set to take place on May 28, 1964 in Jerusalem. I have pleaded with the kings and presidents with whom I have met to send high-level delegations to witness the commencement of the summit, as it is a historic moment in which the people of Palestine will resume their national struggle following the catastrophe. The meaning of the Palestinian entity is this: "the entity would be weak and not worthy of the confidence of the Palestinian people and Arab public opinion if the entity did not include, as a main part of its platform, the military aspect of the Palestinian struggle. For this reason, I wish to be absolutely clear: the work I invest in the entity is wholly contingent upon the military capabilities that are furnished to this entity."

My reports make no references to Saudi Arabia, and the position of the emir "King" Faisal, who now wields power there. The reason for this is that emir Faisal did not grant me permission to meet with him to discuss the Palestinian entity. I have visited Saudi embassies throughout my tour of the Arab capitals in order to request permission to travel to Saudi Arabia and to establish contact with it and with the Palestinians who reside there (who are estimated to be at around 30,000). However, my cables to Saudi embassies have not yielded a single response. I find this to be puzzling, as I was at the beginning of my tour and I have not taken any actions that may have upset emir Faisal or any other Arab kings or presidents. Those who work with the

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Palestinian issue must necessarily burden those in power – regardless of how insignificant he may be – not in his demeanor but in his demands and his opinions!

Despite all this, I have kept my experience of dealing with emir Faisal to myself and have not shared its details with the coordination committee or the Arab public. I was intent on not upsetting the emir. Saudi Arabia could have played an enormous role in the service of the Palestinian issue. Consider the leverage that Saudi enjoys at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, which takes place annually in concomitance with the Hajj season, as well as influence Saudi has on Western policymaking thanks to its oil resource.

The discussions of the coordinating committee were uneventful, except when it came to the points raised by Mansoor al-Atrash, who represented the Syrian president, as he has expressed his dissatisfaction with the way in which the Palestinian entity was being created. Al-Atrash has reiterated the point of view of the Syrian leadership as regards the importance of holding general elections among Palestinians “in order for the Palestinian leadership to reflect the will of the Palestinian people.”

I have explained to al-Atrash the practical difficulties that may result in not holding elections. I have detailed these difficulties during my meetings with the Ba’ath leadership, as I have conducted nearly thirty popular Palestinian summits – that is, excluding conferences and other sorts of meetings – and that the “Palestinian people” with whom he’s concerned are quite satisfied with the way we have decided to conduct the entity’s affairs.

The Syrian delegate has expressed his disapproval and reservations once more. I was losing my patience with this conversation, to be frank, after having spent long nights discussing the very same topic in Damascus. I told Mansoor al-Atrash: “brother, when your father Sultan Pasha led the Syrian revolution, he did not do so as a result of electoral battle. He had elected himself to carry out the duty of struggle. What is more, the national movement in Syria did not function under the tutelage of others. Likewise, the Palestinian people refuse to be under the patronage or tutelage of others. We accept brotherly advice, but our people decide their destiny and build their entity. We consider the Palestinian entity to be an internal matter in which others ought not to interfere, just as we don’t interfere in the internal matters of any other Arab country!”

It was wasn’t my assertive tone or the logic of my argument that led Mansoor al-Atrash to be silent by this point; it was actually due to the fact that none of the coordination committee’s members have agreed with the position of the Syrian leadership at the time or even wanted to listen to al-Atrash!

I’ve announced, at the conclusion of my conversation with the coordination committee that the Palestinian summit will be held in Jerusalem on May 28, 1964, regardless of how difficult the surrounding circumstances may be. Let

whomever wants to come to come, and whomever wants to be absent be absent! The members have declared their governments' willingness to attend the summit, that is except the Saudi and Syrian delegations, who remained silent. Hasan Sabri al-Khooli said that he will represent president Abdel Nasser at the summit. The members looked at one another with bewilderment. The Palestinian entity was the talk of the hour, and the Palestinian people had anticipated the presence of Arab delegations of the highest level. I said: "the Palestinian people appreciate their Arab brothers but expect to see, in the Palestinian people's first summit, which is set to be held within fifteen years of the catastrophe, the presence of high-level Arab delegations." I added that president Ahmed Ben Bella has informed me, via his embassy in Cairo, that he is prepared to personally attend the Palestinian summit if any other Arab heads of state will attend as well.

After the meeting had ended, I admonished the representative of president Abdel Nasser, Hassan Sabri al-Khooli, and the United Arab Republic: "please let the president know that I expect to meet the vice president of the UAR at the Palestinian summit."

I returned to my home feeling confused regarding Cairo's position on the Palestinian entity. In fact, the Arab press and broadcasting services did not cover my long tour of the Arab world. It wasn't even reported, despite the fact that the entire Arab world was teeming with news of the Palestinian entity. Then Hassan Sabri comes to declare in front of the coordination committee that he will represent president Abdel Nasser at the Palestinian summit. I couldn't quite explain what was behind Cairo's position toward the Palestinian entity. Is it an attempt to protect the Palestinian entity from being perceived, by other Arab states, of being a project that Egypt was overly excited about – which, in turn, may imply that Egypt was interested in containing the entity at this time?

Whatever the reason may be, the Egyptian position has added to the many difficulties I was experiencing at the time. I packed my bags and travelled to Amman in order to be in the heart of what we aim to build.

Yes, I say "we build" because the creation of the Palestinian entity is building process in the literal sense of the word, as the sons of Palestine are its rocks and metal. I know that they are strong and resilient enough to see the process through.

But I found Amman to be quite different from what it was when I left it, as gossip now fill its coffeehouses and its streets and its homes, which say that King Hussain does not want to attend the Palestinian summit, and that he has traveled to Aqaba to be far when the summit commences. Prime Minister Bahjat al-Talhuni, it is said, will represent King Hussain.

King Hussain has taken this position for a number of reasons. First, the American embassy in Amman has warned against the creation of a

Palestinian entity, as it views it as an “obstacle in the way of peaceful efforts that the United States has undertaken over the years to end the Arab-Israeli conflict once and for all, for if the Palestinian entity must be created, then what does it mean for it to be headed by someone like al-Shuqairi, who has sold himself to communism when he worked at the United Nations?” This is a faithful translation of a verbal memorandum of the American ambassador in Amman, as conveyed to me by a friend at the royal court in Amman. The second reason behind King Hussain’s position is that, as various Palestinian and Jordanian officials have indicated, the Palestinian entity will put an end to the Jordanian entity and the unity across the two banks.

I’ve stayed in Amman and Jerusalem for a few days with my Palestinian comrades to discuss how to prepare for the national summit. During the first few days of May of 1964, the Jordanian Prime Minister Bahjat al-Talhuni and I flew, in a small plane, from Amman airport to Al Aqaba to meet with King Hussain in order to discuss the national summit. King Hussain greeted us at the airport, and we were transported in his car to his office in Al Aqaba amid large crowds of people who chanted in favor of the Palestinian entity as well as the kings and presidents. I was keen on not returning the salute that many have been expressing toward me so that King Hussain alone can enjoy this outpouring of popular sympathy. My sincere intention was to make the king not to feel threatened by me or the Palestinian entity, as I felt that Jordan is a home for the Palestinian issue and that the Palestinian people and those of Jordan are one. That has always been my belief. Based on this, I went along with King Hussain and flattered him until he caused the crisis between me and the organisation in his well known speech in Ajlun in June 1966 – a topic which I’ll discuss in my memoirs.

I asked King Hussain, after he brought up his “brother” president Abdel Nasser in the conversation: “why won’t he come to the national summit in Jerusalem?”

He replied: “Kings and presidents will send foreign ministry-level delegations, and I’ll send my Prime Minister.”

I said: “it’s different when it comes to your highness. The conference will be held at Bayt al-Maqdis in the Hashemite kingdom, and I fear that your absence may be maliciously misinterpreted.”

“In any case,” he responded, “you know the sensitivities of this country. We don’t want to separate the Jordanian family into Jordanian and Palestinian.”

I responded: “to the contrary, your majesty’s attendance would undermine any attempts to sow divisions, while your absence would lend credence to them. Despite this, I will deal with this matter in my speech in a way that agrees with our mutual interests.”

The King said: “then there’s the crisis in the country. I have been informed that the summit’s preparation committee has decided not to invite Palestinian ministers and members of parliament.”

I said: “I’m prepared to discuss this matter with the preparation committee and advise them to invite the ministers and members of parliament.”

He added: “this matter has been discussed during our meeting in the royal palace, in which senior officers were present. And we agreed that Palestinian brigades should form with the approval of certain states... despite this, I am prepared to visit military personnel of the Jordanian army to discuss the matter with them.”

King Hussain seemed like he was listening to my input with keen interest, except when I objected to his visit to the Jordanian army. I was aware that he was playing along, which left me with no choice other than to use my final card: “it seems to me – and I hope that I am mistaken – that your royal highness do not want the national summit to be held in Jerusalem. For this reason, I will announce postponing it until next month in order for it to be held in Cairo.” He didn’t let me finish before he interrupted me: “not at all, this isn’t my wish. We want the national summit to be held in Jerusalem. I have issued orders to all ministries to do make their utmost efforts to be at the service of the summit’s participants, and that is in order to ensure the summit’s success.” I suddenly rose up and said: “please excuse me, my highness, as I have to travel to Cairo tomorrow morning, where we will receive your highness’s delegation to the national council in Cairo with your “brother Abdel Nasser.” The king and al-Tahluni moved to a corner to whisper to one another for a few minutes, after which the king said: “we want Ahmed to be fully satisfied, and therefore I will personally attend the opening ceremony.”

I said: “I will receive in at Bait al-Makdis.” We left the king’s office using his car toward the airport, as masses of people chanted along the way “long live King Hussain” and “long live al-Shuqairi.” I stretched my neck out of the window and yelled at the top of my lungs: “Chant for King Hussain! Chant for Palestine!”

We arrived in Amman as I was praising the position of al-Tahluni – the “Jordanian” – on the issue of the Palestinian entity. I said to him jokingly: “you are Palestinian – among the sons of Am’aan (a place in al-Karak). The traveler Ibn al-Jubair al-Andalusi visited you seven centuries prior and referred to al-Karak as the most pleasant land in Palestine.”

Al-Tahluni went from the airport to premiership, while I went to Jerusalem to face little problems, behind which lay great meaning and purpose.

The first problem was deciding on where to hold the summit. I wanted to hold the summit in the Old City in Jerusalem, so as to imbue the summit with

the majesty of the past and the sacredness of struggle, which the hero Saladin took up to liberate Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the Jordanian authorities took issue with that matter. There are many institutions in Jordan that oppose the Palestinian entity and are working to sabotage it or to diminish its stature. The West Bank was saturated on that day – and especially Bait al-Makdis – with gossip that the allies of al Haj Amin al-Husseini was cause a disturbance in the country on the day of the summit, and that they will place time bombs in the meeting hall and they will do such and such... the allies of the American intelligence agency are present across the country to spread such gossip in cafes and clubs. But I didn't care about all this, as I know that the Palestinian people are far more aware than to be influenced by this cold war that's being waged against them.

But this manufactured controversy has served the Jordanian authorities well, as they suggested that we hold the summit in Amman instead of Jerusalem. The objective of this suggestion is obvious, and I rejected it forcefully. Then the men of the Jordanian intelligence agency suggested that the summit be held at the Dead Sea hotel, which is close to Ariha. It was clear that they wanted to kill the Palestinian entity at its infancy. The cleric/ imam and mayor of Jerusalem municipality interjected to suggest that the summit be held at the Intercontinental hotel at jabal zeitun in Jerusalem. I accepted the latter suggestion as a compromise. It suffices that this mountain played an important role in Jerusalem throughout the ages, and that the attendees may, from this elevated landscape, overlook both parts of the city of Jerusalem, old and new. Further, the location will serve as a good educational venue for the Arab delegations, as they'll learn about the Palestinian issue through the crucial lines that stretch as far as the eye can see, which separate us from our homes and our fields...all the way to the sea.

Then came another difficulty concerning the invitation cards to the summit. One of the Jordanian intelligence agency personnel insisted that we mention the name of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on the cards next to the word "Jerusalem." I was close to pack my bags and go home, as I was disgusted with this silliness, except I was quite determined to creating the entity at any price. I didn't have any leverage, and the people are not organized and don't have a leadership. On the other hand, Jordanian terrorism/ repression is in full swing and its prisons are full. The "revolutionaries" who have revealed their enthusiasm to me seem to disappear every time I rub the Jordanian authorities in the wrong way. In any case, Roohi al-Khatib has intervened to sort out the invitation cards, and they ended up concluding with the words: "Jerusalem – Jordan," and that was that.

As soon as I was done dealing with the Jordanian authorities' demands, I found myself in internal party disputes. A delegation of a concerned faction came to me and asked: "why did you invite the members of parliament? These are King Hussain's men."

I said: “we are in a difficult time now and there’s no need to argue over secondary matters. We shouldn’t lose sight of our objective and get carried away with controversy. These are Palestinian members of parliaments before they are the King’s men – that is, if your charge is correct.”

They said: “but these men won their elections were rigged.”

I responded: “I’m not responsible for that. Why were you hiding in your homes when the king rigged these elections?”

They said: “the Palestinian entity should be revolutionary. There’s no place in its for reactionaries and bourgeois characters.”

I said: “what matters to me at this stage is creating the entity. I’m not building either a bourgeois or a socialist Palestinian society. This is a fight for another day, which I leave to you to work on. The most revolutionary task at the present moment is to stand together and to build the entity together. I urge you to work with me instead of arguing over this.”

They said: “will Palestinian organisations be invited?”

I said: “yes, the invitation will be sent to everyone.”

They said: “and what are the ratios? These organisations can’t be represented equally, as they vary in size and power.”

I said: “that doesn’t matter to me either. When Palestine gets liberated and there’s a Palestinian government, then search for the right balance among parliamentarians and ministers. As for now, we’re at the stage of building an entity. I won’t deal with anything else other than the task of building the entity.”

They said: “we refuse to attend if everyone is represented equally.”

I said: “then I will build the entity without you... you’re free to attend or to be absent.”

The argumentative bunch left here so they can fill the hotel halls with controversy and gossip. The people were counting the days until May 28 arrives, day by day, and indeed hour by hour. We made the Intercontinental hotel into our headquarters for planning for the summit. Dr. Ezza Tannous (Jerusalem) and a few Jerusalem youth were took charge of supervising the preparations. Letters, cables and phone calls began to pour in regarding the summit. A phone operator called and said:

“Hello, the preparation committee in Beirut is on the line.”

I said: “right. What do you want?”

Beirut: “we would like to invite the representatives of the camps.”

I said: “alright. Whatever you see fit.”

Then the operator called again: “the preparation committee in Damascus is on the line.”

Damascus: “the government would like to invite seven Baathist Palestinians.”

I said: “okay. We welcome our Baathist Palestinian brothers. I hope that the Baathist leadership approves of the Palestinian entity, and that it continues to believe in the principles for which the Baath party was born.”

The operator called again to say: “the preparation committee in Cairo is on the line.”

Cairo: “the Jordanian embassy has refused to grant a visa for student representatives to attend the summit.”

I said: “I will call the ministry of interior in Amman.”

A phone operator called me from the Qalandiyya airport (in Jerusalem) to say: “Lebanese journalists are on the line. They don’t have a visa to enter Jordan. And some of them are barred from entering Jordan.”

I said: “I will talk to the minister of interior immediately.”

And so the days passed as problems followed one another until the date of the summit arrived. Delegations from across the Arab world began to arrive to Bait al-Makdis. The total number of the representatives of the Palestinian people amounted to around 450. These representatives were chosen by the preparation committees to represent the Palestinian people from the [Atlantic] ocean to the gulf. The phrase “from the ocean to the gulf” isn’t simply a metaphor, but an actual fact, as the representatives from the Palestinian diaspora came from Morocco to Qatar – and every country in between.

Arab foreign ministers were also present in the summit, that is except for that of Saudi Arabia, which not only did not attend, but also prevented the Palestinians who reside in that country to send representatives as well. Syria sent the highest level delegation, as it was made up of Mansour al-Atrash and Dr. Hassan Maryoud, both of whom are members of the presidential council. The delegation that the UAR sent wasn’t as high as I had hoped and wasn’t what the Arab nation expects of Cairo. The delegation was made up of the minister of foreign culture Dr Hussain Khalaf, alongside Dr. Hassan Sabri al-Khouli, who personally represented president Nasser in the coordination committee. The pain I’ve felt from Cairo was as big as my hope in it. And I didn’t want to bring up the topic with Nasser thereafter.

The West Bank seemed quite unusual, as it witnessed, for the first time in its history, a very large gathering of Palestinians, which included well known Palestinian personalities and students and workers, as well as Arab ministers from across the Arab world, all at the Bait al-Makdis.

There were two rival camps behind this historical event: the first was the the national groups on the Palestinian and Arab levels, which worked hard to make the summit successful. Whereas the other political actor was made up of the American intelligence agency, which is allied with some parties at its Jordanian counterpart, which was keen to see the summit fail. King Hussain took a centrist position: whereas he himself did not want to see a Palestinian entity, he wasn't able to announce his position because of public opinion, which supported the entity overwhelmingly.

The struggle between the two rival camps became clear when what was called the "general security procedures" was being carried out – while they had nothing to do with security. The location in which the summit was held was turned into a military fortress. And if it wasn't for the members of the Arab press, who frequented the site, one would think that this show of force may indicate enemy presence in the hotel.

The Jordanian tanks have militarized the streets that lead to the hotel. The military police set up a checkpoint at the main entrance of the hotel to prevent all but those with identity cards, who have been cleared, to enter. Many foreign ministers were made to wait for a long time before they were allowed to enter. Many Palestinian delegations were made to wait even longer, because they forgot their identification cards in their hotels. Many wonder: "why did Shaqiri invite us to Jordan? Wouldn't it have been better if the summit was held in Cairo or Damascus or any other Arab capital?" To this, I answer simply: "do you want the Palestinian entity to be born away from its home?"

The general security procedures did not stop at Bait al-Makdis, as the Jordanian tanks occupied "strategic positions" around Jerusalem, which prevent crowds from various parts of the West Bank from coming close. The Jordanian intelligence agency knew that masses of people would rally to greet the summit and the incoming foreign ministers, and that Shaqiri would use this rally to help him defy King Hussain.

The people were silent in the face of these untruths, as they were able to see, thanks to their inherent healthy political consciousness, that the Jordanian authorities should not be given a chance to muddle this venerable occasion.

The Arab and Palestinian delegations had finally arrived on the beautiful morning of May 28, filling the halls of the hotel. They've witnessed our immortal city with Jewish cars roaming newly built neighborhoods near Bait

al-Makdis, as well as the Israeli police stations that had an apparent presence in the city.

This was the first time for Arab delegations, as well as many Palestinian communities of the diaspora, to witness all this. They've posed incredible questions: how did this come to occur? How did the Jews occupy the new city of Jerusalem? How did a small number of Israelis manage to overwhelm the Arab multitudes? I explained to many Arab ministers the reasons for the Nakba/ catastrophe.

The royal delegation finally arrived. I waited at the main entrance to greet King Hussain, and I walked with him to the summit hall and escorted him to the platform, where we sat together with the Arab ministers and the general secretary of the Arab League Abdelkhaleq Hassouna.

And so the opening session began. Rouhi al-Khatib welcomed the delegations in the name of Bait al-Makdis. Then King Hussain gave the sort of fanciful speeches that Arab kings and presidents are known for when it comes to the Palestinian issue. Then, Abdelkhaleq Hassouna spoke and wished the Palestinian entity success. Now it was my turn to speak, and the Palestinian people wanted me to reflect their expectations of the Palestinian entity; King Hussain and the Arab ministers also wanted me to reflect their wishes as well regarding the entity. As the international community wanted to to understand what this entity is about, about which Shaqiri has made a big fuss.

My opening remarks addressed the Palestinian people, as they are the protagonists of the issue at hand. I said: "this valiant city of ours has witnessed, since Omar bin al-Khattab entered it on his camel, many glorious days, and it broke into Arab history and changed its course, and helped it rise to the summit of human achievement, such as the days of Salah ad-din. And today, this city is once again witnessing the unfolding of a historical event, which will return to the holy sites their Arab identity, and their freedom and their security and sanctity. Our holding this national summit carries a great deal of symbolism and meaning, as this is the first time we gather after 16 years since the Nakba. This is indeed a great occasion, because the valiant people of Palestine have gathered to resist the Zionist and colonial forces. Israel has been built on our land, and has plotted to drive us out of our homes, and then went on to make life difficult for the refugees year after year. Israel did not expect us to gather again after all of what it has done."

"But in this summit of ours, we come to declare to the entire world that we, the people of Palestine, are the legitimate owners of this land. We have gathered to liberate Palestine... and here we are, represented through many delegations, resilient and determined to defend Palestine on the front lines of battle. We witness our land and our home, our temples and our squares, our cities and our villages... not as Palestinians from Syria and Lebanon and Iraq and the Gaza strips; we're here as one people, of one homeland and of one

shared struggle... And our Palestinian brothers join us, in this summit. We represent them because they cannot reach us... brothers who also struggle to defend their Arabness and their language. We are with them and they with us. They're now listening to their radios with their hearts. We witness the day of the first Palestinian national summit, which is being held at a location close to the tracial line, to announce to the world that the Palestinian people have a rock solid determination to liberate their land, no matter how long that process takes... As I speak about the Palestinian entity, I find myself confronting a terrible reality... the Palestinian entity is a new concept to Arab and international audiences because it is alien to the history of Arab struggle. There are no such things as Egyptian or Syrian or Iraqi or Algerian entities, and nor did Asia witness the birth of an Indonesian entity, nor Africa a Nigerian entity, nor the Americas a Cuban entity. But Palestine represents a unique catastrophe. It is clear that the peoples that have experienced colonialism remained in their homelands, fighting for their land, from their mountaintops to their plains. But the Palestinian people have been uprooted from their homeland and have had their entity destroyed in the process. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to build an entity for the Palestinian people, in order for it to fulfill its duty of liberation and self determination."

"Now, sixteen years after the catastrophe, we face a new one: we are a people without an entity or a leadership. The great question is: where are the people of Palestine? Where are its organisations? Its militant movement? Therefore I, as a member of this valiant people, declare in this summit that we must train the abled men and women among us to take up arms. And if the Palestinian entity, militarily speaking, became all talk and bluster without an entity... it makes it a duty for us to prepare the sons of Palestine to liberate their homeland, as it is a shame for the energies of the Palestinian people to remain untapped. It is a shame for refugees to die in camps instead of becoming martyrs in the battlefield of honor..." This was some of what I've talked about in regards to the Palestinian people.

I also addressed King Hussain directly and indirectly: "I've had big meetings on both sides of the Jordan river. I've met Palestinian Jordanians and Jordanian Palestinians. All are equal are united in their struggle. I have been convinced that the people of al-Karak and Amman and as-Sult and Irbid are determined to liberate Palestine alongside the people of Akka and Haifa and Yaffa – not only side by side in struggle, but united in their hearts. The rise of the Palestinian entity from Jerusalem is not meant to carve the West Bank away from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, but to liberate our stolen lands west of the West Bank. We don't intend to challenge the Jordanian entity in any way, as this land has been historically one homeland for one people. The barriers that colonialism has put between us over thirty years have failed to separate relations that go back many years and generations. We will never forget that in the medieval ages, the battles of Palestine did not only take place at the gates of Akka and Jersusalem, but also at the gates of al-Karak too. And as we live in the age of rockets, we must refuse to divide ourselves. Therefore, whatever aid the Kingdom of Jordan receives, be it military or

political or economic, is at the same time military aid to Palestine. We ask the Arab governments and peoples to consider Jordan as the platform from which Palestine will be liberated. Here are shining plateaus and overlooking mountains, and on top of both are a people who are eager for revenge and martyrdom. Building the Palestinian entity is meant to add new energy to the Arab scene in general and the Jordanian one in particular.”

I have spoken to Arab ministers as I addressed kings and presidents. I said: “the Palestinian entity is being built by the Palestinian people, and the role of the Arab states is to facilitate its creation through cooperation and support. The Palestinian entity is a free and independent one that will cooperate with all Arab states inside the scope of the Arab League and outside of it. The Palestinian entity is not built by kings and presidents, as the Palestinian people are capable of building it themselves. The Palestinian entity is an Arab entity. But if Arab aid and support to it are weak, the entity will also be weak. But if they’re strong, the entity will be strong and revolutionary. The fate of the entity is contingent, in the long term, upon whether the Arab states will bear the burden of cooperating with and aiding the entity. I declare, quite frankly, that the people of Palestine will refuse to consider another path other than that of military struggle, as they’re tired, as the Arab peoples are tired, of the resolutions and statements that are not implemented. There’s no political or diplomatic solution to the issue of Palestine, nor is a solution possible through the United Nations or other international venues. The issue of Palestine will not be solved except by Palestinians, and will not be solved except by military struggle. Nor will it be solved in Palestine except through the mobilisation of the Arab nation, through its governments and its peoples, with those of Palestine in the forefront.”

I addressed the international community and said: “we know that the Palestinian issue, as an issue that has to do with liberation and, as such, can only be dealt with like other issues of liberation. Therefore, we declare from this summit that we refuse half solutions. We reject partitioning the land. We refuse internationalising the issue. We refuse settlement... I am certain, as we are today at the beginning of our path, that we will not stand alone, as the Arab countries are with us and we are with them. And secondly, the liberated countries in Europe and Asia and Africa and Latin America, especially the socialist ones. Thirdly, those with a free mind and conscience all around the world are with us. As you can see, I did not refer to any of the Western countries, and that’s because it is Western policy that created Israel and continues to aid it with militarily and economically. Western policy is determined to see Israel as a state that’s built to last.”

My speech ended, in which I have addressed everyone, and the opening ceremony ended with it. We left as we greeted King Hussain goodbye. He seemed to be relieved that we did not want to separate the West Bank from Jordan.

The summit participants convened again and it was decided that I should be elected president. The office of the presidency was also elected, and Hekmat al-Masri (Nablus) and Haidar Abdulshafi (Gaza) became vice presidents. Nicola al-Dur (Shafa Amro) became the convention secretary.

We then attended the working sessions. The summit became divided according to various political, military, public relations, organisational and financial committees. The sessions followed each other day and night, and the members worked tirelessly and without end with a determined spirit. The committees were also made up of those who like controversy and argue a great deal, as well as those linguists who are infatuated with what Arabs like or don't like to hear. But the general spirit was quite elevated. The committees submitted valuable reports about the issues on which they were assigned to work. As all of this was going on, I was busy in my room with the phone near my bed, as I was busy fending off rumors and conspiracies, of which there were many.

When the final day of the summit arrived, all participants convened again. A pact and a system were decided upon as I've suggested them to the convention after adding an introduction to it. In my opening speech, I made it clear that I meant to suggest the pact and not to impose it... and if others felt differently about how to build the entity, I am ready to follow them down that path. I was especially flattered to find that the convention didn't stop at adopting my pact, but has also adopted my opening speech as a clarifying statement to the concept of the Palestinian entity.

The summit discussed the reports that the committees have produced in an objective manner and have adopted them after making some changes. The summit's sessions were very organized and the participants were quite respectful, that is until one of them demanded to know the truth behind Saudi Arabia's position on the Palestinian entity, and the reason behind its non-participation in the opening ceremony like the rest of the Arab governments. The mood was sour regarding this issue, and I asked the participants to stop discussing the matter and to leave it to me to deal with it in a "brotherly" manner with the Saudi government, and that "we don't want to enter into a disagreement with any Arab government."

In the concluding session, the national summit has declared the formation of the "Palestinian Liberation Organisation" as the representative of the Palestinian people and the leader of their struggle for the liberation of their homeland. I was voted as the president of the executive committee of the Liberation Organisation, which granted me the power, according to a basic law, to select the members of the executive committee.

That was the day in which the Palestinian entity was born. It declared to the world the birth of a Palestinian character as embodied by a Palestinian leadership, a Palestinian liberation army, a Palestinian national fund as well as public relations, organisational and executive organisations. None of these

organisations existed for fifteen years, and now it is created out of nothing and starts from zero. They are driven by the determination of the Palestinian people to liberate their homeland and the faith of the Arab nation in its sacred issue.

I stood up to give the concluding speech of the summit, as I was made to bear the enormous burdens in the face of great challenges. Being full of pride for our people, I said: "we came to this summit elected by presidents and kings, but you have given me a greater honor, as I am now elected by the people of Palestine. I look forward to the next summit in Alexandria, and I will be glad to attend it in your name and to speak in your tongue as I rub shoulders with kings and presidents. I will take the issue to them and carry your voice to them... victory is within sight."

I returned to Cairo with my bag full of the summit's documents. It seemed as though the Himalaya Mountains were on my shoulders. Whoever knows the great challenges that face the Palestinian issue would know what I mean.

And among those who know what I mean is the Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko, who followed the Palestinian issue since 1947. I have met him on later occasions since the formation of the Liberation Organisation. He said to me:

"I don't know if I should congratulate you or express my condolences... it is the greatest courage to work toward liberating Palestine." And by that he meant it is "the greatest stupidity."

I responded: "yes, it is the greatest stupidity. But it is, my friend, a matter of one's homeland, and the greatest stupidity for the sake of one's homeland becomes the greatest wisdom. Love and wisdom are incompatible."

He said: "what do you mean? You are endlessly romantic."

I said: "when you return to the Soviet Union, ask the professor of Islamic studies at the University of Moscow to write you a Russian translation of what the poet of divine love, Ibn al-Farith, wrote:

I proceeded, without much wisdom, then, to indulge in the torment of this divine love. I proceeded to build the Palestinian Liberation Organisation in the next four months and declared to the kings and presidents at the summit in Alexandria in September 1964: "here is the Palestinian entity... Here's the Liberation Organisation... We did not come to tell you: "go, O you and your God, go and fight, but we are here to stay."

But we came here to say you and your God to fight because we will fight with you.

"God loves those who fight, united, in his name."