

**“Press Interview Statements by PLO Executive Committee Chairman Arafat Discussing Israel's Invasion of South Lebanon, Late March 1978”, *Free Palestine*, (London), Volume XI, Issue 3 (April 1978, p. 6).<sup>1</sup>**

*Q. Did you expect such a massive Israeli attack in South Lebanon after your raid outside Tel Aviv?*

A. This was not an attack; it was a war, the fifth Middle East war. I say war because the Israelis used every arm of their service and all their weapons. They used tanks, artillery, warships and warplanes. We did expect it and we expected it in this strength.

*Q. Do you think the attack was a straight reprisal by the Israelis for your raid on Tel Aviv?*

A. No, it was long planned ... They used all their strength against us and against the civilian population, even the F-15s, that the US had just given to Israel. I am astounded that the US gives weapons like that to the Israelis and then lets them be used in these barbarian attacks. Surely it is a condition ... that planes like these should be used for defensive purposes alone, and not for attacks on Lebanese and Palestinian civilians and towns, which they attacked quite apart from our military forces and bases. The Tel Aviv raid and the invasion of south Lebanon have no connection with each other.

*Q. You say these were 'barbarian' attacks, but many people say that your guerrilla attack near Tel Aviv was also barbarous.*

A. It is important to say that our commandos were not trying to kill anyone. The civilian deaths in that operation could have been avoided if the Israelis had just freed the five men that our commandos were trying to release. But instead they attacked the bus and the people died ... This is typical of Begin's terrorist mentality - kill the commandos regardless of how many of your own civilians you kill with them.

*Q. Are you happy about the way your men fought in South Lebanon?*

A. We are very happy. Our men fought for eight days until the Israelis, not us, asked for a ceasefire. Our tactics worked; we fell back in front of their advance, then turned back to strike at them from the sides. For us it is a new dawn because we have destroyed the myth of Israeli military superiority. The

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<sup>1</sup> From an interview conducted by Tony Clifton, Newsweek (New York – International edition), April 3, 1978.

world has seen the little David, the Palestinian people, stand up and defeat their Goliath, which is the mighty power Israel supported by the superpower America.

*Q. Do you think the Israelis will leave Lebanon now that United Nations peace-keepers are moving in?*

A. I think they will stay in south Lebanon. They have ambitions for the waters of the Litani River, and as always with them, we see expansion and more expansion. It is all part of the plan for Greater Israel, the Israel that stretches from the Nile to the Euphrates.

*Q. You still have the forces in place in South Lebanon. Will you tell them to fight on even if the United Nations peace-keepers are there?*

A. If the Israelis remain, I will continue fighting in the south with my colleagues in the Lebanese National Movement. I could not leave my Lebanese colleagues to face Israel alone. The United Nations resolution concerning the peace-keepers is clear - Israel must withdraw from the south.

*Q. After this fighting, do you think there is any hope for Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's peace initiative, and if not, what will Sadat do?*

A. The Sadat initiative died this week, under the tracks of American tanks and under the bombs of American planes. As for President Sadat, what he does is up to him to decide.

*Q. Do you have any hope at all for peace in the Middle East?*

A. If America is willing to have a just peace in this area, then we can have that peace. But while we look for that dream, America encourages her policeman, Israel. I do not think we can have peace while the Israeli leadership has this gangster mentality. I do not always look for the moon; I am a freedom fighter who has to deal with facts and realities. And I cannot see why the Israelis should not continue their aggression while they have American military and financial support.

*Q. But don't you think it is a hopeful sign for you that President Carter seems to have made great efforts this week to make the Israelis change their present policies on the West Bank as well as in Lebanon?*

A. No, I do not think it is a hopeful sign. Carter has tried to put pressure on Begin in the past, and it has always been Carter, and not Begin, who has retreated. Remember Carter's big words at the beginning of his term - his big words about freedom and human rights. But where are those big words now that the people of the south of Lebanon are suffering so fiercely under the Israeli invaders with their American guns and warplanes?