

Mahjub, 'Umar. "September in South Jordan" in *Kitābāt*. Beirut: al-Dār al-'Arabīyah lil-'Ulūm Nāshirūn, 2009 (pp. 49-70). Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction*

[Whilst in Jordan, the medical services of Al-Asifa, the military wing of the Fateh movement, set up well-organised local clinics, specifically in the desert area of the South – in Maan, Tafila and Shoubak, where the population was largely tribal.

Through meaningful interaction with the surrounding community, the *fidai* shattered misconceptions and prejudices about the Bedouin population that were based on rumour and the media. They laid the groundwork for tactical political action on Palestine, underpinned by a revolutionary method that was premised on serving the people and sharing in their day-to-day worries. They connected with the local community, creating a cultural experience through which Bedouin and *fidai* values became closely interwoven. In the months leading up to September 1970, their painstaking efforts to prevent the Jordanian Government from crushing the resistance seemed to elevate the work of the *fidai* in the south of Jordan to a moral level, underpinned by the following principle: **We will not fire on the masses, even if they fire on us.**

Last month witnessed the seventh anniversary of September 1970.

Since 1970 the events of that year have been dealt with in all manner of ways: they have been quoted, explained, analysed, commented upon and recalled. In spite of this, they have yet to be chronicled, and in fact many of their secrets have yet to be uncovered.

The following pages deal with an aspect of 'September' that no one has touched upon before, except in a short commentary published by Fateh Newspaper a year after the events of September. This commentary was called *September began on 18<sup>th</sup> June* and it discusses the protests orchestrated against the Palestinian revolution on 18/06/1970 by Jordanian Special Branch in the city of Maan, in the south of Jordan.

Yet aside from that, what is known about September in the south of Jordan amounts to little more than rumour-mongering and exaggeration. For example, it is said that the Bedouin massacred the *fidai* with their own

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weapons, or that Fateh officials were beaten to death with sticks or hanged from trees, or that the Bedouin double-crossed the *fidai* and were in fact being loyal to the king, who used them to kill and massacre. Stories like these abound, no details are given and after telling them the narrator goes on to draw strange conclusions, such as, 'It's not safe with the Bedouin', 'All Bedouin are loyal to the king' or 'What did Fateh do when they armed the Bedouin? They betrayed Fateh with their own weapons', and so on...

The truth is, everything that has been said thus far has been based on nothing but inflammatory radio or newspaper commentary, broadcast and written hundreds of kilometres from the where events actually took place, with no investigation or scrutiny. While the Bedouin were swayed by and passed on some of the rumours, they actually helped create others themselves, exaggeration and poetics being a natural component of their own storytelling.

I have recorded the facts that I shall try to recall and establish here twice before: the first time was in a detailed report on names that was presented to the revolution's command in Amman on 15/09/1970, immediately after our arrival from the South (this report was lost, and no one knows what happened to it); and the second time was in an effort to bring together all the facts, which were collected, organised and analysed in the valuable book *The Palestinian Resistance and the Jordanian Regime* (1971), published by the Palestinian Research Centre. I do not know what happened to certain pages that I wrote in a hurry, which included certain facts that were lost from the book. And this is the third time.

Writing them down this time has its advantages and disadvantages. One drawback is that time erases the memory, even though the facts remain the same. On the other hand, time has also alleviated my anger, allowing the facts to become clearer.

Perhaps what eased the writing process for me was that I was not going to touch on anything too controversial, nor on everything that had happened during and prior to September. Instead, the scope was limited with respect to time, place and people, and I was writing about an experience that was not prevalent at that time, albeit a dry run for what came later.

Moreover, what I will relate is neither a report nor a novel; rather, it serves to complete a picture that has become a part of history, and as such it may prove beneficial.

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## On the road to September

The south of Jordan barely felt the crisis between the Palestinian revolution and the Jordanian regime that took place in February 1970. All that changed in the South was the peaceful movement of some Asifa units towards the capital in the North and the assumption by certain groups of positions at key junctions on the southern roads, without them actually appearing on the roads or obstructing anyone. Apart from this, life carried on as normal, despite the news brought by minibus drivers about what was unfolding in the capital.

It is likely, though, that the residents of the South were exchanging news of the February 1970 crisis; most of the villages and tribes of the South had sent young men to fight in the Jordanian Army and were undoubtedly following the news to reassure themselves about their children. What is certain, however, is that no one living in the South of Jordan showed any sign of hostility or resentment over the *fidai* presence in their area.

There were, of course, reasons for such a stance. The failure by residents and tribes of the South to support the king with telegrams, demonstrations and delegations (as was customary) did not mean that they had abandoned all support for the monarchy or changed their position on it; rather, this stance can be explained by a number of different factors, the most important of which are:

1. The relative independence (both financial and moral) from the Jordanian Government enjoyed by the peoples of the South-east, whether from the city or desert – up until then, at least. The majority owed their loyalty to the tribe and had no interaction with central government except through the tribe's sheikh. Most of the residents were nomads, and even the cities were governed by tribal law.
2. The small number and limited distribution of residents, the relatively small number and distribution of *fidai*, and the strict rules and measures imposed by Asifa's southern command. The most important of these was that no bases were to be erected in any of the villages, under any circumstances, and no fighters were to wander about, whatever the reason, in cities and villages. This was so as to avoid putting a foot wrong and creating friction, for any individual mistake could immediately turn into a tribal feud. This meant that over the three years the *fidai* spent in the South, hostility and friction with the local population were completely avoided.

3. With the exception of the city of Karak, the Palestinian *fida'i* organisations – apart from the Asifa forces and the Palestine Liberation Army (the Ain al-Helweh brigade) – had no presence in the area. This significantly limited opportunities for the king's supporters to exploit irresponsible behaviour, or disputes or struggles between organisations. Even in the case of Karak, the Asifa forces, unmatched in number, preparedness and status, were effective in clamping down on breaks of tradition and political wrangling, and could rectify the consequences straight away.
4. The participation of some of the southern leaders in government and army command (such as Bahjat Talhoni<sup>2</sup> and Major-General Mashhour Haditha), and the fact that they adopted moderate positions during the crisis. This had a significant impact on the residents of the South during this crisis and its aftermath.
5. The success of the *fida'i* in winning the admiration of the local population with their legendary patrols in the Arba Valley – the graveyard of the [Israeli] convoys – and their withdrawal after the Israeli air raids, which was the opposite of what the enemy intended, aroused pride and honour in the tribes and villages and motivated them to support their brothers fighting for the sake of Palestine. Finally, despite geographic and demographic difficulties, the intense activity, which included the establishment of 14 well-organised local clinics, a mobile cinema unit, a mobile emergency services unit and organised propaganda activity, made it possible for them to explain the aims of the revolution, gain their trust and serve them. It also allowed them to establish close ties with some of the tribal sheikhs, in accordance with their existing customs.

This, then, is the most important explanation we have for the 'neutral' stance, if you will, that pervaded the South during the crisis of February 1970.

While the *fida'i* noted this stance with satisfaction, the Jordanian Government did so with concern. It seems that a decision had been taken to deal with this situation, for information began to leak back about suspicious visits being carried out by senior officials to tribes and villages, during which they would present the locals with armaments and offer membership of what was known as 'the popular resistance', and of course people were arming themselves. Since they were not required to hold any position on the *fida'i* presence at that time, why would they not be armed? 'The rifle is the best weapon.' The most

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<sup>2</sup> Served as Jordan's Prime Minister from 1960 to June 1970, originally from Maan

prominent of these visits was undoubtedly that of the heir apparent Prince Hasan to the cities of the South.

In the summer of 1970 Prince Hasan arrived at Tafila, where he met the local sheikhs and the mayor of the district, Sheikh Abdullah al-Auran. The meeting took place in the electricity and water generator building less than fifty metres away from a small house that acted as a local *fida'i* clinic and base for the military leadership of the Ain Jalut brigade. During the meeting, Prince Hasan tried to stir the emotions of the sheikhs, saying, "We thought you were a noble-minded people, and you have handed your daughters over to outsiders," meaning doctors. Whereupon one of the sheikhs responded: "They are the most honourable people of all". As the conversation went on, the prince asked the sheikhs to work on expelling the *fida'i* from the region, to which the mayor responded, 'When you expel them from Amman, we will expel them from here'. Prince Hasan left the meeting angry.

Despite that, news arrived about the activities of Sheikh Faisal al-Jazi, the Sheikh of Huweitat, who had played a key role in mobilising anti-*fida'i* sentiment in the tribal meeting that took place in early May 1970 in the town of Sahhab, near Amman. Sheikh Faisal al-Jazi was the most influential and ambitious of Jordan's tribal sheikhs and the uncle of Major-General Mashhour Haditha, Chief of Staff in the Jordanian Army. The Jordanian Government had constructed a newly built village for him and his tribe called Husseiniya, which stood on the international highway between Amman and Aqaba, between the Jarf Daraweesh triangle and the Aniza triangle.

Efforts to strengthen ties with the tribes and village and city residents were redoubled. A number of *fida'i* positions were moved to more suitable locations, where they were able to form a *fida'i* base for medical services and political and tribal relations, attracting young residents and, "creating a state of social activity around the base". Between the crises of February and the events of September 1970, the number of workers in the medical services of the Asifa forces doubled, while the number of organised local clinics tripled. Moreover, a number of special resolutions were passed on organisational mobilisation in the villages.

The notorious events of 6-9 June 1970, known as the June crisis, then took place. Like the previous crisis, this one passed without any movement in the South. Two weeks passed before the customary telegrams of support reached the radio stations and the palace, following an agreement between the palace and the resistance. When a delegation from the tribes of the South headed to the royal palace to express their support for the king (customary protocol), the

king refused to meet the delegation, and after waiting for over an hour Prince Hasan met with them and blurted out, 'You're late!'

Of course, the tribal leaders gave us no outward show of support, and neither did we demand any, given the circumstances. One of the tribal sheikhs said to us, "The problem is that you clash with the king, and it's us who are stuck in an impasse. If we support him, that means taking a position against you, and if we keep silent, he will get angry. In either case, you will make an agreement with him, and we will be faced with his anger."

But the Jordanian Government had made up its mind. It had lost hope that frictions would spontaneously lead to clashes between the people of the South and the *fidai'i*, so decided to fabricate a protest against the *fidai'i* in the town of Maan. This demonstration turned out to be the most serious warning of what was to happen in September. On 18/06/1970 in Maan, the southern Jordanian border city, the Jordanian Government was able to orchestrate a protest by off-duty soldiers (!) with a number of government agents, led by Sabah Krishan, a man who had leapt up the social ladder from bus driver to hugely wealthy landowner. The *fidai'i* organisations at that time only had three offices: one for Fateh, one for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and one for as-Sa'iqa,<sup>3</sup> all operating in the occupied territory. Maan was located on the historical convoy route between Hebron and Hijaz, and between Gaza and Hijaz. This explained its strategic importance for the *fidai'i*.

For the first time in Arab history, voices were being raised against the *fidai'i* and their presence. The plan of the protestors soon came to light, since they were heading for the houses of Palestinians living in the town, immigrants who had been moving there since 1948. Most of them were from Yata, in the district of Hebron, and some were from Gaza.

The protestors hammered on their doors, cursing the Palestinians and demanding that they leave the country, all the while firing shots into the air. The atmosphere in the city became tense, and gunfire (also into the air) was exchanged, as were accusations. This state of orchestrated turmoil lasted for three days, after which control was restored through cooperation between the Asifa leadership in the southern sector; Maan's mayor, Sheikh Ma'n al-Sharari; and the Governor and Police Chief of Maan, both of whom made a great effort to bring together points of view and take control of the security situation.

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<sup>3</sup> A Syrian-led political and military faction and member of the PLO

It should be recognised that this alarming incident event took place without attracting much attention, which was all focused on Amman. Yet it was after this incident that the southern command decided to step up its political activity in Maan.

We began looking for someone who would rent us a place in which we could set up a local clinic – not an easy task after what had happened. But we finally came across a teacher, returning from overseas, who had inherited an old house in the Sharariya quarter in Maan and was prepared to offer it to us free of charge. We refused point blank to accept anything without paying for it and insisted on drawing up a lease and paying upfront. He finally agreed, and we began to make preparations. But a few hours later he contacted us to let us know that his entire tribe was refusing to let the house to us. This was our chance: we requested a meeting with the sheikhs of the tribe to discuss the matter. The meeting took place, and we talked for over two days. We had resolved to secure their permission to rent out the space. Rather than citing our rights as tenants when drawing up the contract, we asserted our right as *Arabs*, striving for the sake of Palestine, living in this country and working to protect their people too... After two days the sheikhs of the tribe consented, and we rented the house unconditionally.

The work in the clinic began three days a week. It was an intense system, as it was a city and we wanted to pre-empt the enemy forces, who were conscripting new soldiers. Before long we had moved from medical work to setting up mass political seminars. The group working in the city was supported by a number of trained staff members who were simultaneously performing medical or social services.

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### **Significant events in Maan before September**

After one particular mass seminar attended by officials from Amman and the southern command of the Asifa forces, the brotherhood paid personal visits to certain prominent figures and sheikhs, as was customary, and accepted their invitations to come in and drink coffee. During one such visit, one of the attendees from Maan noted disapprovingly that a *fida'i* comrade had sent his military uniform to the laundrette to be washed and ironed and had paid 40 piastres for the service. It was decided straight away that the officer in question should be transferred out of the whole area. We thanked the sheikh for his observation.

In another incident, the daughter of a Mufti from the Jordanian Army who had played a prominent role in mobilising anti-*fida'i* sentiment within the army was wounded and suffered severe bleeding which required immediate surgery in Maan Hospital. The doctors then decided it was necessary to transfuse 1000cc of blood before the operation. There was no one there but the *fida'i*, who did not hesitate to do what was necessary, prompting the Mufti to praise them in public during the following Friday prayers.

Using one of its agents, the government contrived to provoke the *fida'i* in the villages of Wadi Musa, which is part of Maan. Unfortunately some of our comrades fell into their trap and detained the agent who had instigated the provocation by firing his gun into the air and cursing Palestine, the resistance and the *fida'i*. Before dawn the next day, he had been released and an apology made. That did not prevent a number of sheikhs from Wadi Musa heading over en masse to Maan to complain. Once they arrived there, however, they found a number of *fida'i* officials in the governor's office, in the presence of the mayor, presenting a tribal solution to the problem. The governor and mayor co-ordinated the effort, the whole group went over to the village of Wadi Musa, and the issue was resolved.

So it was that whenever government agents attempted such provocation, the position was to use both people power and local custom to contain things, without falling into the trap of using violence or reacting to the provocation.

Until August 1970 the situation continued along these lines: activities and interaction [with the local community] expanded to the point where a local clinic was opened up in Husseiniya, the stronghold of Sheikh Faisal al-Jazi; another clinic was opened in Idrah, the residence of a large tribe from Huweitat; and an important custom was put into practice, namely solving individual problems by means of *tribal* law, thus doing away with central government and its people, and preventing them from exploiting such situations.

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## The first signs of September

In the middle of August 1970, the Asifa general command decided to consolidate its military force in Amman with units from the southern sector. This came after the sector's command made it clear that it would be too risky to withdraw from the South completely, since that would disrupt the balance in place between tribes allied with the revolution and those loyal to the king,

and would encourage the proxy forces there to openly agitate against the *fida'i* there.

The fighting units were withdrawn one by one, as peacefully as possible, and Bedouin militias from the Azazma and Tiaha tribes took their place. These tribes lived all along the mountain range but came together to contend with the new situation.

Aside from these groups, what remained in the South was a unit from the medical services body, along with some supply centres and one of the Ain Jalut brigades belonging to the Palestinian Liberation Army. The last of these was stationed in Tafila and Karak.

At that time the special branch, the body charged with implementing the Jordanian Government's plan to break the resistance, had so far failed in their bid to instigate 'spontaneous' clashes between the southern residents and the *fida'i*. As September 1970 approached, and these kinds of spontaneous and orchestrated incidents increased in Amman and other northern cities, strange, provocative incidents were also observed in the South.

Once, Sheikh Faisal al-Jazi suddenly announced that twelve sheep heads had been stolen from his house in Husseiniya (!) and that there were signs they had been moved by Land Rover to outside the area. People who heard the story – for the Bedouin had spread the news – did not believe that anyone, having reached the al-Jazi residence in Husseiniya, could have done any such thing, since the place was guarded and housed dozens of armed slaves (actual slaves!). This would have made it impossible for a stranger to approach the house. Despite that, the mere announcement of this incident was a big drama. A few days later, a few sheep heads really were stolen. They belonged to someone called Huymel al-Awran, whose land was on the Tafila road, and who had close ties with its mayor. The *fida'i* and their superiors who had remained in the area stepped up efforts to find the perpetrator. It was perfectly clear that the intention behind this act was to discredit the *fida'i* and embroil them in clashes with the local population. Traces of sheep were then found in a Land Rover that had been rented, which was traced back to someone from Maan who had links to Sabah Krishan, the government agent mentioned above. But establishing the truth was impossible given the conditions in the South. All Land Rovers and all cars, in fact, transported sheep!

What happened next was that a *fida'i* car ran over and killed a child from Tafila. The way the problem developed very nearly went against all custom; it

was customary for this kind of problem to be resolved through tribal law, but on this occasion government officials tried to encourage the family of the child not to do so. They nevertheless failed owing to the swift action of the *fida'i*; the problem was resolved, and blood money was paid within hours.

There is no doubt that attempts were being made to sow discord between the remaining *fida'i* and local residents. It did not escape our notice that Sheikh Faisal al-Jazi was spending a great deal of time that month in Husseiniya and various southern villages, having previously spent most of his time in Amman.

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### **The final five days**

Daily incidents in Amman reflected the general state of affairs in the South, in terms of the tension, anxiety and rumours that were being passed on by drivers on their return from Amman. Driving on the roads became a rare thing, even on the international road between Amman and Aqaba. Yet no overt action of any kind was taken against the *fida'i* presence, and their private movements continued as normal, albeit to a lesser extent since the departure of most of their forces to Amman.

Feelings of tension became heightened after news spread of an attempt to assassinate the king and a revolutionary radio broadcast which then denied the allegation. This perhaps marked the beginning of a wider anti-*fida'i* movement on the grounds of support for the king. Despite that, 31 August and 1 September passed peacefully, without incident, denials, or backlashes. This was crucial in demonstrating that the government's agents were incapable of inciting the local population against us.

### **Until 02/09/1970...**

That Wednesday, like all Wednesdays, the doctors working in the South met in the Tafila clinic to present any delayed cases that required joint consultation or surgical intervention.

That day, the daughter of the president of the municipal council was complaining of breast inflammation. It had previously been advised that she undergo surgery, but she had refused and tried to go to Amman, where she found the situation to be less than peaceful. By the time she returned, it had become necessary for us to carry out surgery.

Our colleague, Dr Yasri Hashem, performed the surgery and I assisted him with the anaesthesia. Whilst we were in the government hospital, where the surgery was taking place, someone came and told us of what drivers coming back from Amman had been saying: that a Jordanian soldier from the Shoubak region had been killed by the *fida'i* while returning from Amman to his village and that there was palpable tension across the whole of the South.

Once the news had been confirmed, we told our comrades to avoid using the roads until we could establish what had happened. I left Tafila and hastened to Shoubak in a Land Rover (the driver was a fighter who had previously been wounded in his thigh and preferred to remain in the southern sector). This is how my time in Tafila ended.

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We did not encounter anything of note on the road, although we did notice that it was totally empty, and we expected it had been cut off somewhere to the north of the Jarf al-Darawish triangle.

Upon our arrival at Najal, the directorate's headquarters in Shoubak, we noticed a gathering of sheikhs at the post office and local store. This meant that they were expecting some serious news or were meeting to discuss the same.

The news soon arrived, and the story of the soldier's killing was confirmed to be true. It is a strange and suspicious tale, and what actually happened remains unclear:

A minicab was leaving Amman for Maan carrying the soldier, his brother, his brother's wife and young daughter, and a fifth passenger, along with the driver. They came to a checkpoint of armed men wearing *fida'i* uniforms at what was at that time called 'the care home' or the base of the martyr Hasan Salameh. It was around ten in the morning, and the soldier was carrying his rifle as per the army's orders at the time. The armed men ordered him to get out of his vehicle and shot him right in the middle of the street. They took his rifle and threw it into the forest nearby, then ordered the car to continue on its way with the rest of the passengers, namely, the soldier's family, the other passenger and the driver. The fact that this incident took place has been confirmed. However, certain aspects remain unclear: Who were the armed men? Why did they take such action? Why did they let the car move on with the victim's family still inside, who would surely recount the incident as soon as they escaped the threat of being shot?

The car continued on its journey and spread the news all over; it even stopped cars on their way to Amman to tell them what had happened. Then cars journeying back began passing on this terrifying tale, and before long, every mountain, village, hamlet and house in the South had heard the news.

The first reaction came from the Arabs of al-Hujaya, who moved to cut off the international highway in the al-Qutran area. By chance, a Fateh supply car passed through with two armed fighters, and both they and their car were detained. (The fact that they were merely detained and not killed is evidence that the reaction was spontaneous rather than serious. They were released the next day and, as far as I know, the car remains in the hands of the sheikh of the Arabs of al-Hujaya.)

The subsequent reactions were centred in the region of Shoubak, since the soldier who was killed had come from the tribe of al-Rawafaa, from the village of Bir Dadad in the Shoubak region.

The region of Shoubak lay on the outskirts of Wadi Araba but was a rich agricultural area with a higher agricultural school. It contained scattered villages populated by urban tribes, while Bedouin nomads wandered through and around it. It also housed the famous Shoubak crusader castle. The Asifa forces had three bases in the area, combined into one following the departure of the forces there. This one base contained no more than fifteen armed Bedouin militiamen... In addition to that base, in one of the villages (Abu Makhtoub) there was a supply warehouse and just two fighters. The village of Najal contained the premises of the local clinic, which housed the doctor, the driver and a young trainee nicknamed 'the cub [*shibal*]'. Then, on 02/09/1970, a comrade joined us from the organisation. He was working as a teacher, so we will call him 'the professor'. Four kilometres from the clinic was the agricultural school, which included a number of Palestinian and Jordanian teachers sympathetic to the Palestinian revolution who were living with their families inside the school.

In the area of Shoubak there were also residential agricultural projects built by the Jordanian Government and owned by army officers, specifically armoured infantry officers, most of whom were from the tribes of Huweitat. There was also a farm in the area belonging to a former leader of the Royal Guard known as Abu Jamil.

Abu Jamil invited the tribal sheikhs in Shoubak to a meeting on the evening of 02/09/1970 to discuss the soldier's killing.

Before sundown one of them came to ask me for news, and I told him that if the incident were in fact true, the perpetrator was a spy and an agent, and could not have been from Fateh or any part of the *fida'i*.

The sun set. Only four of us remained, and the normal silence became loaded and tense. We did not light the lamps in the command post and we split up into twos to keep guard. The post consisted of a hut with a roof and three walls, the fourth wall being the mountainside, and in front of it stood a courtyard, fenced off by a wall of stones arranged in rows. At 11pm, 'the cub' brought two young men from Shoubak whom he had found following us. I knew them, and they sat with us and told us what the sheikhs had decided at their meeting, which they had heard from their fathers. The sheikhs had decided as follows:

- To evacuate the *fida'i* bases from the area.
- To evacuate Palestinians from the agricultural school and humiliate them.
- To avenge the killing of the doctor.
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However, they assured me that these were all Abu Jamil's suggestions and that the sheikhs could not oppose them openly out of fear, and because of their relationship with the palace. The two young men assured us that none of that would be carried out, and in fact no one would actually let it happen. I sent them to the school to warn our comrades there, telling them to stay put and decide who would be able take a letter to Amman without anyone standing in their way.

At midnight, a number of comrades arrived from Maan who had heard about the incident and were worried that an immediate response would be launched against us in Shoubak. They came with an armoured car fitted with a Grinov machine gun. This was a mistake and a provocation that would not help us one bit. We deliberated for a while before agreeing as follows: despite our critical situation and limited means of communication between the different areas, and between us and the leadership in Amman, we had to avoid acting like suspects and consider the feelings of the local population. We were not to withdraw from any location, whatever the risk, because withdrawing meant putting an end to what we had built. We were not to fire on the masses, even if they fired on us. Finally, we were to use our weapons to defend our positions in the event of an attack by the security forces or army.

It was not easy for us to reach this agreement. Some of us believed that we could somehow 'tame them', while others did not see the use in that, believing instead we should withdraw to Amman. Nevertheless it was settled that we were not to interact with the people in an oppressive or violent way and that we would not withdraw from our locations (which were, in fact, more political than military) – even if we incurred losses, and when the masses realised they were mistaken they would come to us in droves.

At dawn the next day, 3 September, two comrades travelled to Amman on minor roads that were still open. They took a letter to the fighters there, which explained the situation and suggested that we deny any government agent the chance to ask for what is known as *'Aṭwat taftīsh*, a Bedouin custom whereby we accept an accusation but demand an investigation by the sheikhs, rather than acting as if nothing had happened. Unfortunately, the reply that came back two days later was that such action would not be necessary. It also warned, in incendiary terms, of the consequences for anyone who tried to touch us. I preferred not to inform the rest of the comrades about the contents of the reply. In fact, I still do not know who sent it!

**03/09/1970:**

The first half of the day was spent in strained dialogue with the tribal sheikhs, both one on one and as a group. Separately, they each confirmed that they had not consented to the previous day's decisions (once they had learned that I knew what those decisions were). As a group, however, they were insistent on the need to do something that would salvage the situation following the killing of the soldier.

The armoured car that the comrades had brought from Maan was still parked next to the clinic and had not escaped the notice of the locals. But when our young trainee went and took down the Grinov machine gun, they came one by one and saw the move as proof of our good intentions there, and of our trust in them.

That afternoon, with slightly more traffic moving between Shoubak and Maan, there was an opportunity for the comrades to take their car back, but with the machine gun removed until they reached the international road, i.e. outside the Shoubak area. We were also able to send another letter to Amman, which I despatched with one of the agricultural school students after he had assured me that he would pass safely, given that he was part of a large Jordanian tribe in the North.

At dusk, I went to visit the nearby base in the area (7km away), and on passing the village of al-Jaya I was invited in by its sheikh. We sat down together and the locals gathered around us. When he told me it was better for us to leave in safety, rather than stay and face problems, the village locals became divided and began to shout at one another. I gave him my assurances that we had done nothing wrong and that I acted only under the orders of the leadership.

That night, we made a phone call to Tafila. The situation was tense but nothing actually happened. In Karak, however, we learned that there had been an attempted provocation by soldiers dressed in civilian clothing ('off-duty soldiers', let us call them), who had tried to stage a protest against the presence and activities of the *fida'i*, and had begun firing into the air. But the force stationed near Karak (the Liberation Army squadron and some fighters from Fateh, as-Sa'iqa and the PFLP) quickly positioned itself in Qal'a. At the same time, the national forces in the city – forces that had both political and tribal influence – moved in and stopped the attempted provocation, driving the soldiers who had instigated it out of the city, thus calming the situation.

**04/09/1970:**

It was a Friday, and there was a meeting of the Maan clinic, as well as the tribal conference, a larger meeting to which Sheikh Faisal al-Jazi in Husseiniya was invited. I had to head to Maan so that the closure of the clinic that day was not interpreted as a sign of withdrawal, and to keep track of tribal tensions as they developed.

I arrived in Maan at noon, having encountered nothing on the road from Shoubak. We noticed that day that the number of patients coming in had reduced to a third, and most of those who did come brought warnings of what had been planned for us. The reports from our 'observatory' confirmed that there were many unknown faces in the area and that armed Land Rover cars carrying gunmen were patrolling the town and provoking Palestinians with verbal insults and abuse. News of the tribal conference arrived at six that evening.

We convened a meeting at the Fateh headquarters in Maan and discussed the situation; we learned that the tribal conference had decided on the evacuation the *fida'i* from the South, amongst other decisions in support of the king. One of the sheikhs announced that if their demands were not met, they would "split from Qatraneh and the South and join Saudi Arabia". We assessed that in the event of any attack the area of Shoubak would become a target, given

that there was a *fida'i* base there. We reaffirmed our previous agreement: no withdrawal, no disappearance and no firing on people. I headed back to Shoubak, arriving in the evening. There, I learned that the body of the dead soldier would reach the area the next day. It was as if it had been planned so as to coincide with the decisions of the tribal conference.

**05/09/1970:**

Since early morning, rumours had been circulating about anti-*fida'i* protests and gunfire in the South on the streets of Maan, and about a similar protest gathering in Tafila Square, but they did not manage to draw a crowd.

In Shoubak, meanwhile, the tribal sheikhs arranged a meeting in the square in front of the local clinic at the post office, and invited me to come along.

I went and came across someone who was introduced to me as 'Major Ali' – he was a local resident and member of the army. There was talk about the requirement to do something (namely, demanding an '*Atwa* and the payment of blood money) with regard to the death of the soldier, in order to take away any opportunities from those 'bastards'. It was not possible, or rational, for me to oppose this immediately, but I did say the following: 'If four reasonable men swore that the killer was from Fateh, or even from the *fida'i*, I would be prepared to demand the '*Atwa* straight away; I would even authorise them as a *jāha* [group of honourable men] to demand it from the family of the victim.' Of course, none of them would swear to what I had proposed, since none of them had witnessed the event themselves, and the details were still unverified. At the end of the meeting, I say my goodbyes and left them deliberating, and returned to the clinic. The day was spent talking with the locals of Shoubak, whose behaviour indicated that they wanted a solution that would ensure the *fida'i* would not be harmed. At the same time, we had to assuage the anger of the victim's tribe and prevent those trying to destroy the area of Shoubak from the outside.

All the while, rumours were arriving about violent incidents taking place in Maan.

At sundown, the governor of Maan phoned me and informed me, his voice downcast, that terrible events had taken place and that four *fida'i* had been killed and seven injured. He asked me what should be done with the bodies: should they be buried in Maan or moved to Amman? I asked him who the victims were and he told me, after some hesitation, that one of them had worked with me as a nurse. It was Samir Azzam. On hearing this, I could not

control my emotions. I cried, and refused to allow the martyrs to be buried in Maan. I told the governor I needed to be brought quickly to Maan so that I could see the martyrs and the wounded, before anything could be decided.

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### The Maan incidents

The following is an account of the events that took place in Maan, as I was informed by those who took part in the second day's incidents:

At seven-thirty in the morning on 05/09/1970, around 150 soldiers in civilian clothes (off-duty soldiers) entered the city, including Sabah Krishan and a number of his men in armoured cars. They marched through the town proclaiming anti-*fida'i*, anti-revolutionary slogans, and shouting 'Long live King Hussein!' Schools were closed and streets were empty, out of fear of what would happen next; a number of school pupils had gathered around the protest heading for the governor's headquarters. There, the governor came out and started talking to them, trying to calm them down and asking them to return to their work and cease their provocative actions. He promised them that he would pass on their demands (namely, to evacuate the *fida'i*) to 'their master' (the king). But the protest simply left the governorate building and headed towards the Fateh office.

The governor asked the army forces present near Maan to come down, but this was not implemented straight away and a decision on it was delayed. Meanwhile, fighters from the offices of the PFLP and as-Sa'iqa (who were three altogether) had moved to the office of Fateh, increasing the number of people present there to eleven.

The soldiers' protest began to fire shots and '*anirga*' missiles towards the office, while a group of schoolchildren was passing in front of it. No-one present in the office opened fire. This was not possible, but not only because we had agreed not to fire on people; as one of the injured comrades said the next day, 'who were supposed to shoot at, small girls and boys?!'

The shooting carried on for half an hour. During that time, Samir Azzam, who was from Fateh's student organisation, and had joined the southern strip at the beginning of June 1970, before being sent to Maan to support the activities there in the cadres, shouted our message about not firing on the masses. Two comrades were martyred. Samir got down from the roof of the office, opened the door and walked towards the protestors until he was

standing among them. The shooting stopped, and Samir was heard to say, in a loud voice, 'We are brothers. We came here to fight Israelis and to liberate Palestine...' Then a gunshot was heard. One of them had fired a shot into his back. Samir fell to the ground and one of the instigators came forward and stepped on his neck with his military boots and ordered him to say 'Long live our master'. Samir tried to raise himself up onto his arms, but the agent shot at him and he died.

At once, gunshots were fired all over the city. People came out of their houses, the *fidai* who had not been killed came out of the office, and families started to force them home. Security men began firing on each other, on *fidai* and on protestors: it was turning into civil war. At that point, an army battalion came and enforced a curfew. The four martyrs and seven wounded were taken to hospital. Communication was set up with the tribal sheikhs in order to take control of the situation. And the licensed soldiers withdrew.

The martyrs from the massacre were: Samir Azzam (previously introduced), Sabhi Jibrayel (a pharmacist's assistant and a cadre member in the southern strip), Hasan Salim (from Fateh's student organisation in Maan, and of a Palestinian family which had lived in the area since 1948) and Mahmoud Hasan (also from Fateh's student organisation in Maan, and of a Palestinian family which had lived in the area since 1948).

It should be mentioned that all the comrades in the office were armed with individual weapons, in addition to a medium-sized machine gun with its ammunition, 10 rockets of 3.5 inches. The volume of weapons was great enough, if used, to cause serious damage to assailants. Likewise, no looting was carried out in any headquarters or offices other than the one that was attacked and burnt as a result of the *anirga* missiles. No-one had approached the clinic and it remained unharmed.

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## The Tafila incidents

A similar attempt took place in Tafila as in Maan, but the circumstances there were different. Since the beginning of the *fidai* presence in the south of Jordan, Tafila had been a centre of activity and leadership. Its residents were non-Bedouin tribes, it had a national history, and it contained politically active elements of a number of ideological parties.

On the morning of 05/09/1970, there were only four guards present at the clinic and the headquarters of the Palestinian Liberation Army command. A group of 'licensed soldiers' entered from outside Tafilah and began protesting in the town square against the *fida'i* presence. They then fired shots towards the clinic and command headquarters. The streets emptied of people completely, and it was clear that this group of soldiers was totally separate from the townspeople. The *fida'i* used a loudspeaker to call for the provocative action to come to an end; but the 'licensed soldiers' continued to shoot. An ordinary man was fatally injured while in the garden of the town hall, which stood between the town square and the clinic. The four *fida'i* tried to get to him in order to take him to the clinic to get treated, but the soldiers fired at them. Just then, the comrades fired a B7 missile, which exploded in the air (the clinic was located at the bottom of a hill with the square in the middle of it) and then shouted through the loudspeaker. The shooting stopped. A woman then came to the clinic and informed those who were there that the chief sheikh of the town had asked them to not to shoot, and that he would drive the 'licensed soldiers' out of the town.

At that time, one of the groups from the Liberation Army present on the Karak-Tafilah road had been informed about what had happened in Tafilah, and had headed for the Tafilah triangle, which stood on the top of the mountain, in order to block road access to it. When a bus came arrived at Tafilah from Karak, they detained it along with its passengers. They shot three rockets at the neighbouring valley of Tafilah as a warning, then sent some of the bus passengers as a delegation to the town, carrying a letter for the town's sheikhs.

Then, a number of prominent comrades, among them a medical doctor with the Asifa forces present in Tafilah and Karak, arrived in Karak. This helped prevent more shooting, and succeeded in calming down the bus passengers, who were allowed to carry on their journey to Tafilah.

A meeting was then convened in Tafilah's directorate building, attended by representatives from the *fida'i* (including the doctor), Tafilah's tribal sheikhs and the chairman of the municipal council. It came to light in this meeting that what had happened was all part of a plan by forces outside Tafilah to implement the decisions of the tribal council that had taken place the previous day. But the town's residents firmly backed the presence of Fateh and the Liberation Army, and resolutely opposed those calling for their removal. So this was agreed upon, since there was only really Fateh and the Liberation Army left present in the area. But owing to a reason I only now understand, the Liberation Army decided it was necessary to withdraw all

those present in Tafila to Karak, the excuse being that, in present circumstances, it was better to have everyone together in the city of Karak rather than being dispersed in different areas.

And so the *fida'i* left the town, which led – as one of Tafila's sheikhs later told me – to the position of the pro-*fida'i* tribes being weakened, and the king's supporters being allowed to wreak havoc and corruption in the town. They attacked and looted the clinic and neighbouring headquarters. When the municipality chairman tried to stop them, one of the 'licensed soldiers' slapped him in the face right in the town square. The chairman was ordered to withdraw to his village outside Tafila, a punishment from the palace for his previous stance.

**06/09/1970:**

Before dawn, a general security jeep arrived at the Shoubak clinic from Maan carrying four armed men. The agreement had been made with Maan's governor that the four martyrs were not to be buried before I saw them. The car was sent then to take me to Maan. The soldiers were tense, asked me to come fully armed, and told me to remain watchful on the road. They sat me in the back seat between two of them. It was clear that soldiers had been chosen carefully according to their position on the *fida'i*. Two of them were Palestinians and the other two were from the North.

We reached Maan and headed straight for the governor's police chief, Major Nawaf Saud al-Qadi. There, I dropped off my weapons and headed in the same car with the same soldiers to Maan hospital.

I was very familiar with the hospital, as well as the staff and even some of the patients. I rushed to the room allocated for the young people who had been wounded the day before. One of them had had his lower leg amputated, and the rest were in a relatively good state. One of them started crying when he mentioned Samir Azzam and what had happened to him, and another said: 'We didn't shoot, and we couldn't shoot – who were we supposed to shoot at, the children passing in front of us?!' One of them asked me to reassure his family about him, informing me that the revolutionary radio had broadcast the previous evening that all those stationed in Maan had been killed and his family knew he was in Maan. I reassured him and promised him that I would come back again. I then headed for the place where it was said the martyrs were laid.

It was a relatively large room on the ground floor. It was not the hospital's morgue, and must have been a hastily emptied storeroom. There was nothing in it, nothing except the four martyrs, who had been placed on the ground next to one another with about a metre in between each one. In front of the door which opened directly onto the back square of the hospital was Sabhi Jibrael, with his red hair, freckled face and well-known severity. A small circle of blood lay directly under his head. To his left was Samir Azzam. His face was darker and more peaceful. His arms were folded over his chest but not crossed, his trousers were stained with blood on the right side. His outer and inner shirts had been partly pulled away from his chest and waist, and you could see where the deadly bullet had exited his body. To the left of Samir was one of the two martyrs Mahmoud Hasan or Hasan Salim, whose face was facing the left-hand wall. I could not see him very well because he was in the far, dark corner of the room. But the back of his head was completely smashed in. Behind him was the fourth martyr.

I approached Sabhi and Samir and stood between them. But before I could bend over them I heard the voice of a nurse calling me from behind: 'Follow me doctor, follow me, there's someone giving birth and she's bleeding badly'. I turned around and followed her out. On the second floor, in the delivery theatre, a woman was lying on the birthing table, pale-faced, and next to her lay a new-born baby. She was bleeding. I realised that the umbilical cord had been cut by the nurse during labour. I asked the nurse to get medical gloves, and I hurried to connect the umbilical cord to the baby with surgical forceps. I stroked the woman's head pacifyingly, and she muttered prayers I could not hear. I then put on the gloves and tried to hold onto the other end of the umbilical cord that had withdrawn into the mother's heavily bleeding womb. After a few minutes I got hold of it and connected with more surgical forceps and I asked the nurse to prepare a vaccine for the woman. When I removed the gloves I heard her muttering prayers out loud. I turned before leaving the room and said to her: 'Praise be to God, you've made it through'.

I went to the hospital entrance where the soldiers were waiting for me. I heard them talking about trucks carrying a large number of Bedouin from the Wadi al-Quweira (we had not reached there yet and had no means of communication). The trucks were heading to Shoubak, where they were going to surround the base and the clinic. I asked the soldiers if we could hurry back, so they took me to the house of the leader Nawaf al-Qadi (Abu Arab) where I had left my weapons. He tried to persuade me to stay at his, but I convinced him that my presence in Shoubak was necessary in order to protect the rest of the comrades there, and that, in any case they, would worry if I failed to return. I told them to take me back speedily and carefully. When

we cross the Abu Makhtoub triangle on the Aniza – Shoubak road, I saw one of the comrades from the Bedouin militia, who were presumed to be four kilometres from there. He was alone and heading towards the South. I realised that something must have happened to the base.

Upon my arrival at the clinic, we had become four: the driver, the young trainee, the professor and myself. The base was seven kilometres away, close to that was the store warehouse, and four kilometres to the south was the agricultural school, which was the closest non-tribal dwelling.

In our arsenal were four automatic rifles (each one with two holsters) two pistols and an 'Alpha' machine gun with seven magazines. We had preserved food and potatoes, and no bread.

The sun came up from behind the hill rising over the clinic. It was about seven in the morning. The district officer came to offer condolences about the Maan martyrs, asked me, kindly, if we would control our nerves, and said that he would do everything he could.

When he left, on the road in front of the clinic he saw a tractor pulling a truck full of Bedouin who had entered the town from elsewhere; he indicated to them to stop, and they answered by shooting into the air.

We noticed from the clinic courtyard that the gunmen were spread out in the forest of the hill which stood in front of the clinic. We heard far-off gunshots being fired until ten o'clock, yet not from the forest...

After about half an hour, we heard cries and serious disturbances coming from the road, and noticed an increase in the number of gunmen in the forest in front of us. Shots were fired repeatedly into the air. Someone then came and informed us that our base had been empty since that morning, and that the army had emptied the warehouse and arrested the comrades present there.

An elderly man approached us, carrying an old English rifle. He was not a local of Shoubak. The four of us were distributed inside and outside the clinic room in the shadows and behind the walls, and it was difficult for those standing outside in the sun to see us... I quickly took off my chest holster and put my rifle to one side and went out to meet with the man.

When he reached the clinic courtyard he asked about the doctor, and when I replied he started threatening me, waving his rifle around and asking us to

leave. His words were: 'Get out, get out', which he said again and again as if that was all he knew how to say.

Within seconds, I found a number of men and women of Shoubak who surrounded me, as if heaven-sent, so as to prevent those on the hill from firing and wounding me. They raised their voices together, asking the man to leave, putting our minds at rest, and advising us to get out of danger. When the man left, threatening, a number of the locals of Shoubak stayed with us.

It was then that I realised this was the decision of the people of Shoubak. We stayed in the clinic until one in the afternoon. We saw armoured cars arriving – those of the security forces, the army, and the Bedouin. We found out from the people of Shoubak tribal sheikhs and the governor and police chief of Maan were all gathered in the directorate's headquarters about two hundred metres from the clinic.

A first lieutenant called Riyadh then came to the clinic, in a car equipped with a 500mm machine gun, and informed me that His Excellency the governor requested my presence at the directorate's headquarters.

#### **A conclusion without details:**

We stayed for nine days at the 'invitation' of the governor. We were 'detained' in terms of movement, but we kept our weapons and received visitors and were given food from supporters and tribes we were on good terms with.

Almost all the tribes' sheikhs we were connected with paid us visits, denouncing what had happened and expressing their renewed support for us. Our most distinguished visitor was Sheikh Muhammad Abu Tayeh, whom we had not contacted before, since his large tribe stood east of the international road in the desert stretching towards Iraq.

A number of comrades who had left the hospital, recovered, also met with us in our room. Two others were in hiding.

On 09/09/1970, we learned from the revolutionary radio that a general strike had been called for, to continue until a democratic, national government in Jordan was established. This meant I had to get to Amman quickly, before the inevitable clash happened while we were still in isolation in Maan.

We insisted to the police chief that he facilitate our arrival there before the start date of the strike (17/09/1970), which he did. He set us up with an armed convoy and chose Bedouin soldiers and officers in order to ensure that we would be protected on the long, broken up, deserted international road to Amman. We finally got there on the afternoon of 15/09/1970. We were moved at once to the command headquarters of the armed struggle, and then to the command headquarters of the Asifa forces, and from there each of us joined his unit and sector.

As for the remaining fighters in Karak, near the end of Black September and after the fighting had stopped, they left, for a reason that is not clear even to me, and centred in Wadi al-Mawjib al-Sahiq. Jordanian planes launched raids against them and they agreed to move to Amman under the auspices of the Arab council.

### **A necessary apology:**

Some of the details in this account were crucial to mention, while I intentionally neglected other details, even if I remembered them perfectly. Black September in the south of Jordan was not the fruit of particular individuals' efforts. Rather, it was the product of efforts put in by comrades in their collective capacity. Some of them still carry out their responsibilities, and some of whom led their lives on the road, during and after that September. Likewise, if I failed to mention locations and names of those who joined the *fiida'i* in the south of Jordan, it is only out of fear for their safety, since they are still there, still with us. We have not been separated from them, nor them from us, and some of them have paid the price of their comfort, freedom or livelihood.

'Experts' say that the Bedouin only have respect for the two red treasures: blood and gold. But the knowledge of the Palestinian revolution in the south of Jordan says there is something else which commands greater love and respect by the Bedouin, and that is the active belonging to the people, the earth and the cause.