

Mallouh, Abdel Rahim. Interviewed 2012. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.

My name is Abdel Rahim Mallouh, and I'm a member of the PLO's Executive Committee and Deputy Secretary General of PFLP. I will talk to you today about a 10-year period between the 1970s to the early 1980s.

In 1972, I started working in the Occupied Territories Bureau in Beirut. The bureau was responsible for directing the PFLP inside Palestine – including the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the territories occupied in 1948. Many renowned figures worked at the bureau, some of whom were martyred, such Dr Said Hammoud, Abu Nidal Maslami – who was the head of the bureau– and Ghassan al-A'jami. There were many leading figures in this bureau.

I later became head of the bureau. My initial focus was on how to move the command to Palestine, since it was inappropriate for the PFLP's Palestine command to be outside Palestine, especially given the difficulties we faced in terms of travel, communication, coordination and every other aspect of our work. We gradually moved the command to the homeland, and eventually succeeded in making the occupied territories an essential part of PFLP policy. The presence of our command structures in the occupied territories would allow us to connect with the people's concerns, aspirations and visions for the future.

In 1975, I went to Jordan under an alias, using a fake passport. I lived in Jordan for some time, until I was arrested and imprisoned from June 1977 to June 1978. Sadat visited Jerusalem at the time and signed the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty; we knew this from a few leading figures in prison, who were summoned and told the news. In the intelligence cells in Abdali prison in Jordan, we were not allowed any visitors or access to news, so we did not know of anything outside of our cells. When we were told the news, some of the comrades made comments condemning the treaty, while others were supportive, surprised and sceptical; I was suspicious and thought the whole thing was fabricated.

I remained in prison for a year, and I was interrogated few times. In 1978, I chose to go to Baghdad because there was an unresolved problem between the PFLP and Syria, which started with the arrest of George Habash in Syria and his subsequent escape from prison to lead the PFLP again. The problem remained unresolved until the 1979 Arab Steadfastness and Confrontation

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Conference in Damascus. Between 1968 and 1978, we had no relations with Syria, only tensions.

I went to Iraq and from Iraq I went to Lebanon where I continued my life. I was still single then, and could travel wherever I wanted.

The work we undertook in the occupied territories was serious, and its results in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem were evident when the first Intifada started in 1987. One consequence was the formation of a unified national command. After the 1988 Declaration of Independence, George Habash said the Palestinian state was a real possibility, not a theoretical one. The Intifada in the occupied Palestinian territories created the genuine possibility of a Palestinian state. During the preparations for the fourth PFLP national conference in 1981, I left the occupied territories, passing on my work to other comrades. I can say that our most important achievement was moving the command to the field of struggle. Outside Palestine, we had good relations with all the factions working for the Palestinian cause. With Fateh and the late Abu Jihad, this culminated in the formation of a joint organisation for the occupied territories in 1973. Munir Shafiq, who was the head of the Arab-Nationalist-Islamic Congress, and Hani al-Hassan attended the meetings and participated in the joint work outside Palestine. The PFLP's main mission was practically supporting our people's struggle in Palestine, regardless of factional affiliation. We supported our people militarily, financially, and through training and educating cadres; we sent instructions to the PFLP in Palestine; we also received messages from the organisation in Palestine about their work and activities inside the homeland.

In the 1980s, another problem called the "Village Leagues" surfaced. These leagues emerged following the signing of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. Menachem Begin appointed Ariel Sharon minister of agriculture when Likud won the elections in 1977, and Sharon's first act was supporting the establishment of the "Village Leagues" in the occupied territories. All the Palestinian factions organised in opposition to these leagues, which were seen as a political alternative to the PLO and collaborators with the occupation, who armed them. It was necessary to confront these leagues and the role they were playing. Our people opposed these leagues and gave them no support. This was a few years before the Intifada in late 1981 and early 1982; Sharon left his position as minister of agriculture and was appointed minister of defence and launched his infamous war against Lebanon. I recall there were PFLP cadres such as Omar al-Ghoul, the late Abu Nidal Musallam, Jamil al-Majdalawi, Kayed al-Ghoul and others from the West Bank, Gaza, and all the

villages. Our main concern was providing everything the struggle inside Palestine needed, especially after we moved our command to Palestine.

Outside Palestine there were various committees. One of them was dedicated to studying political and social issues inside Palestine, and one of its subcommittees was dedicated to media work. Our work was organised geographically, with some of us monitoring the territories occupied in 1948, others monitoring Gaza, the West Bank and so on. However, there was a single leadership directing the work and raising awareness; we maintained constant contact with our people inside Palestine through the media, the PFLP, or the PLO and its Department for the Occupied Territories. The PLO had a department headed by a member of the PLO's Executive Committee responsible for work inside the occupied homeland; we organised welcomes for cadres exiled by Israel. I clearly remember welcoming Abdel Jawwad Saleh, the late Abdel Mohsen Abu Meizar, the late Suleiman al-Najjab, Mohammad Melhem, and Sheikh Rajab al-Tamimi. Israel exiled leaders from the occupied territories in the early 1970s, especially after the formation of the National Guidance Committee. We all remember when Father Elias Khoury was exiled in 1967, along with Sheikh Abdel Hamid al-Sayeh and Ibrahim Bakr. These were some of the leaders exiled at this early stage, and this was Israel's tactic from the beginning – to destroy the national movement, expand the settlements and confiscate our lands.

All this talk of peace is *parole* as Italians say; it's a waste of time. The world was led to believe there is peace, but the Palestinian people don't believe it. It is their land that is confiscated daily, their land the settlements are built on; they are the ones under siege, the ones beaten daily; their sons are prevented from going to hospital; they are the ones stopped at checkpoints. They cannot believe there is peace when this is all they see; it is very simple really.

The PFLP was keen on unity inside the occupied land. Work within each faction should be limited to internal and ideological work, but national work in the occupied territories should be unified. We were part of the Unified Command of the Intifada formed in 1987 because we wanted to work within a united national framework against the occupation. Our main mission was confronting the occupation, and, as was common in the era of national liberation, this led us to commit to national unity. This is why, from the start, our work was unified political and military work - except for some functions undertaken by factions independently.

In the Palestine bureau, we were supervised by Dr George Habash; Abu Nidal al-Maslami and Mohammad Ramadan from Gaza; the General

Secretary Ahmad Sa'adat, who is currently in prison; Abu Nasr al-Burini in Palestine; Dr Said Hammoud; Hani al-Hindi for a period of time; and Jamil Majdalawi from outside Palestine and Jordan. There were many changes in the command, as some cadres passed away and others became ministers, such as Omar al-Ghoul and the current foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki, who was a member of the Palestine bureau and one of our spokespeople. There were a large number of cadres inside and outside Palestine.

The view of prisoners in Palestine is that they have been imprisoned unjustly, and have sacrificed their freedom for our people's freedom. We saw that the plight of prisoners would continue as long as the occupation continued. It's a simple equation: as long as there is occupation, there will be resistance and arrests. The PFLP had a number of leaders and cadres in prison such as Adnan Mansour Ghanem, Umaiya al-Nemrawi and Abdullah al-A'jami. This is why the leaders inside Palestine kept changing, as some were arrested, and others were martyred in prison, such as Mohammad Abu Khadija and Moustafa Akawi. Some of our comrades died as a result of torture, such as Ishaq Maragha from Silwan; a number of leaders were imprisoned in the occupation's prisons and then released. We are talking about 44 years of occupation from 1967 to now, so a significant number of our comrades were imprisoned or martyred. Our contact and defence of their rights continued, and the first prisoner exchange took place in Lebanon in 1983, when Fateh exchanged the bodies of dead Israeli soldiers for Palestinian prisoners and the closure of Ansar 1 Prison, though the Naqab prison remained open. A number of *fida'iyeen* were freed when the PFLP-General Command exchanged prisoners following the al-Nawras Operation. Our people's struggle continued, and we continued our dedication to their cause. A number of the comrades whose arrest I spoke of earlier interview, such as Walid al-Husseini and Kamal al-Nemri, assumed leading positions in the PFLP or became freedom fighters upon their release. They had all been imprisoned for a few years before eventually being released.

It is hard to say in which areas our work was most prominent. The Palestinian people are few in number, but I would say the most active locales were Gaza, Hebron, Jerusalem and Ramallah. However, this changed in accordance with Israel's policies their attacks against the PFLP. The importance of each area in the PFLP's political calculations altered over time. For example, when Israel attacked an active area and arrested the cadres, the people would be subdued. Work in a certain area would cease for a period of time, but could be activated again a year or two later. So our priorities shifted according to the situation in each area.

We educated cadres and communicated with them; we offered training and gave them political and organisational instructions. Each period of time and political juncture dictated our priorities. For example, our situation before Beirut or Amman differed considerably to what came after. Daily occurrences have often dictated our priorities; our only constant has been the occupation.