

al-Khalili, Ghazi. "Before Getting Out of Jordan: Facts and Events", *Shu'un Filastiniya* (Beirut), 1981. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.¹

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"...Monitor the situation carefully. Keep your fingers on the trigger. Await further instructions." These were the brief instructions that the military commander of the garrison in Jabal Amman conveyed to a group of fighters in an advanced barricade on the evening of Thursday, 17 September 1970. One of the fighters repeated, or rather mumbled, some of those words [ILL.], "Monitor... wait... trigger..." Then he burst out in a very clear voice, "Why wait? Everything is clear now, and the battle is inevitable. If we don't attack first and settle the matter, the royal forces will settle it for us; they won't give us any more time to think". He finished what he was saying and slumped onto the sand bags. The fighter sitting opposite him tightened his grip on his rifle and said, "What's the hurry? Aren't you used to this kind of thing yet? Haven't you learned that we won't be the first to start the battle? This is who we are and always have been. Anyway you won't be waiting long, comrade. Tonight is our date with death to create life."

"Stop talking nonsense and listen! I can hear a roar like tanks," said another fighter. Silence fell. Their eyes stared far off into the distance and their ears picked up on the slightest movement. Moments later the voice of the group commander was heard saying, "Comrades, the battle has begun. Get ready! Let's embrace our guns like we embrace our lovers. Let our love of death be surpassed only by our love for the land." Shells exploded, and the air filled with bullets and grenades.

It was 4:45am on Thursday, 17 September 1970, when the royal forces opened fire from all positions on all the positions of the revolution in Amman, Zarqa and Irbid. Ten days of bloody fighting ensued. During those ten days the royal forces were only able to gain control of a quarter of the capital. Ashrafyeh in Amman held on and continued to fight. Al-Hashmi, al-Taj and Al-Nasr, as well as Hai al-Masaourah in Jabal Amman, battled on tenaciously. The resistance forces maintained control over the entire area between Sweileh and the Syrian border, even after the withdrawal of the Syrian forces. The resistance only lost control of Zarqa and the south.

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The Cairo Agreement put an end to the fighting on 27 September but paved the way for a new battle, or perhaps many new battles.

From the first day of the announcement of the Cairo Agreement and the implementation of the ceasefire, the Jordanian 'regime' acted in a way that left no doubt that its accession to the Cairo agreement was but a pause they had to make and one that would not last for long. The King was forced to accept a ceasefire, even if the ceasefire took the form of an agreement that governed the relationship between the regime and the resistance, in the light of the outcome of the ten-day battle. The outcome was unexpected and fell short – far short – of what the regime wanted or aimed to achieve through the massacre it perpetrated. The regime estimated that the resistance would not hold out for more than three days. The outcome contradicted all estimates and expectations. The King could not continue the battle, not because the Arab governments only woke up over 48 hours after the start of the battle, but because our fighters in the capital displayed a great ability to confront and resist, and because the King's ammunition had run out or was running out. One Jordanian Army officer told me after the battle had ended, "Most of our soldiers became demoralised in the last three days of the fighting. We didn't have enough ammunition. If the battle had continued for another four or five days, maybe things would be totally different from what they are now."

Before the end of September 1970, al-Bahi al-Adgham, the head of the Supreme Follow-up Committee, Brigadier Ahmad Abdelhamid Helmi, head of the Military Oversight Committee, and most officers of the military oversight committees who had been chosen by certain Arab Countries, arrived in Amman. On 1 October 1970 the resistance and the regime signed an agreement to implement Article 2 of the Cairo Agreement. The said article provided for the withdrawal of all Jordanian and Fedayee Forces from Amman. On 13 October 1970 the Amman Agreement was concluded on the implementation of Article 8 of the Cairo Agreement. Article 8 states: "The Supreme Follow-up Committee shall prepare and conclude an agreement that is binding upon the parties and guarantees the continuity of Fedayee activity and operations, as well as respecting the country's sovereignty within the limits of the law, save for such exceptions as are required for Fedayee activity." On 22 October 1970 a protocol was prepared to organise the Fedayee presence in Jordan. All these agreements, and the protocols thereto, formed the groundwork on which the relationship between the Palestinian Resistance and Jordanian Regime was to be built following the September battle.

The Jordanian Regime's behaviour and activity throughout the preparation and conclusion of the agreements was characterised by relative flexibility on the official level, and preparation for a new confrontation on the operational level.

The regime needed to reassure the resistance whilst it reorganised. On the one hand, it replaced the government of Mohammad al-Daoud, who had resigned, with one headed by Ahmad Touqan, the head of the Royal Court. This was in order to give the resistance the impression that the regime was serious about ending military rule. On the other hand, the regime's agents were spreading rumours that the King would ask Shafiq Irshidat to form a new government following the signing of the agreements. Asking a person that the resistance trusted to form a government to oversee the implementation of the agreements was aimed at reducing the resistance's opposition to certain articles that the regime was working to include in the Amman Agreement, as well as giving the resistance the impression that the King was serious about organising the relationship with the resistance on new foundations.

This relative flexibility displayed by the regime contradicted all of its practices on the ground. On the one hand, the regime refused to grant an amnesty for all the incidents that were perpetrated before 27 September 1970, promising only to release the remaining prisoners. On the other hand, the regime closed the south to the resistance fighters indefinitely and transformed Zarqa into a military barracks, completing its control over the city by arresting anyone who had a connection, however flimsy, to the Palestinian resistance. In addition, the regime intensified its military presence in Amman under the pretext of opening new security stations in several of Amman's neighbourhoods.

Throughout this period the resistance displayed a keenness to implement the agreements it had signed and, through those agreements, to reach clear ground on which the relationship between the resistance and the Jordanian regime could be built in the future. This was more than keenness on its part to monitor the regime's movements on the operational level and put an end to such activity from the outset. The resistance was complacent on the matter of opening new police stations and did not raise many objections concerning the legitimacy of their presence in the south or in Zarqa, as the signed agreements stipulated. The resistance movement in that period was characterised by confusion and disorder. This was because it had just emerged from a fierce battle and needed some time to regroup and reorganise its forces. In addition, the resistance had not established a clear vision for the next phase:

would the ceasefire based on the agreements signed with regime endure or would the situation blow up again after a short period of time? In what way might it blow up? The answers to such important questions were lost in the daily grind. The issues of supplies and aid to the masses suffering from hunger and disease throughout these events occupied the most part of the resistance's efforts. Perhaps for these reasons, and many others besides, the Central Committee of the resistance movement only met to discuss the new situation and set the policies for the coming period on 4 December 1970, i.e. two months after the battle had ended. During those two months the Jordanian regime had substantially regrouped, militarily and politically, and was ready to renew the attack on the resistance movement.

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The ink of the agreements had not yet dried when several clear signs indicating that the regime would continue its attack on the resistance movement appeared. One of the clearest signs was the arrival of Wasfi al-Tal as Prime Minister, as well as the appointment of people who were known for their hostility towards the resistance as ministers, including Mazin al-A'jlouni and the intelligence officer A'dnan Abu O'deh.

Even though the resistance had information, even before signing of the Amman Agreement, that Wasfi al-Tal would be the person charged by the King to form a government to succeed that of Ahmad Touqan, the resistance was surprised at the speed of his appointment. His appointment was considered a challenge to the resistance and an indication that the regime would not adhere to any agreement and would continue the attack against the resistance that it had started in September. With the arrival of al-Tal, the policies of the regime became clearer still. It became evident to everyone that the conflict with the regime would continue and would take new forms. These would not necessarily have to be along the same lines as they were in September, i.e. a swift and decisive attack in a matter of days, and then reaping the political results of such an attack, if successful. The assessment was that the regime's offensive would be based on avoiding a decisive battle, but instead dividing it and targeting the weakest positions of the resistance, liquidating them, and then tightening the regime's control over those positions, as well as intensifying its military presence in the areas controlled by the resistance to create a sort of military balance. This would be followed by taking control of key points on the roads connecting the resistance positions inside and outside the cities, with the intention of tightening the noose on the resistance in preparation for a decisive battle in which the

regime would be guaranteed to prevail. The policy came to be known as 'nibbling and digesting', and it was adeptly executed by the regime, which profited by taking the political and military initiative after September and from the resistance's indecisiveness on whether to confront the new offensive or manoeuvre so as to avoid the battle. Between confronting and manoeuvring, the resistance lost its ability to decide on a clear policy with which to navigate the conflict. Positions were mixed up, the support base fractured and the masses disquieted. When the regime narrowed the scope of manoeuvre before us and forced us into confrontation, we appealed to the Arab states and the Arab Committee for help. If we confronted the regime, our confrontation would be limited by the activity of the regime and would lose any political significance. The regime would then make room for us to manoeuvre, once it had achieved the intended aim of its movements.

The regime was active on all fronts: political, military and the media, with near-perfect coordination. On the media front it drew a distinction between respectable Fedayeen and unrespectable ones; between Fedayeen working for Palestine and those connected with organisations working to topple the ruling regime in Jordan; between organisations that can be negotiated with and those that are dangerous, not only to the Jordanian regime but also to the resistance movement itself. Such dangerous organisations, the regime claimed, would drag the resistance into positions and policies that would not serve it. On the practical level the regime didn't distinguish between one Fedayee and another; it considered all Fedayeen to be hostile. The aim of this policy was to create divisions within the resistance by exploiting the different points of view of the various resistance organisations on certain issues. Adnan Abu Odeh, the King's Minister of Information, tried his luck at this policy. He attempted to set the Central Committee of the resistance movement against the PFLP following a disagreement that broke out within the resistance regarding the Militia Agreement that representatives of the Central Committee had signed with the Jordanian regime on 14 January 1971. The disagreements raged to the point where, on 15 January, the Central Committee issued a decision to freeze the PFLP's membership of the Central Committee because the PFLP had not adhered to the ceasefire. On the morning of 16 January 1971, under the Militia Agreement, a quartet made up of representatives of the Central Committee, the Follow-up Committee, the Jordanian Army and Jordanian security forces was scheduled to conduct a neighbourhood search to ensure that the weapons there were personal arms and were located in the areas specified by the agreement. When Adnan Abu Odeh was asked, "What would the Jordanian Government do if the parties that did not subscribe to the agreement were to stick to their positions?" he answered that he was leaving that issue to the Central Committee. What he

was trying to say was that he was waiting for an armed conflict within the resistance.

The minutes were precious and there was little time left. Just hours remained before the search was to begin. The fingers were on the trigger and everyone was mobilised. In moments the situation could explode. I remember that on that night, the night of 16 January 1971, brother Abu Ammar realised how dangerous the situation was. He stressed that any disagreement was possible except armed conflict and infighting. Meanwhile, Dr George Habash also realised how dangerous the situation was and he, too, stressed that anything was possible except armed conflict and infighting. Before we could reach the critical moment – or the tragedy, to be more accurate – Palestinian reason and the will for unity prevailed. The PFLP announced its commitment to the agreement, while the Central Committee issued a statement welcoming the PFLP back to its place on the Central Committee. Adnan Abu Odeh waited for Palestinians to burn Palestinian plains, but the will to protect Palestinian land from any tremors or earthquakes was stronger than anything else.

On the political level the regime was active on many fronts. It justified its military movements politically by saying that it was addressing the issue of 'lawlessness' in the country. The regime used individual actions by certain members of the resistance as a weapon with which to attack it politically. It claimed that there was only 'lawlessness' in the areas that were controlled by the resistance. The regime's claims reached the point where its media apparatus alleged that the presence of the resistance in the cities was the reason for such 'lawlessness'. Proceeding from this notion of 'lawlessness', the regime began attacking the resistance's militia and demanding that the militia be disarmed. First, it demanded that weapons should not be carried publicly in neighbourhoods and should be kept at home. Then the regime's requirements increased until it demanded that weapons should be collected in specific neighbourhoods guarded by the Palestinian Armed Struggle. After that the regime demanded that these collection points should be closed and their supervision transferred to Jordanian Public Security guards. To achieve this aim the regime's media apparatus exaggerated the issue of internal security. Eventually the regime was able to disarm the militias and collect their weapons in designated places. This aim was achieved following a number of military battles fought by the regime. The regime also resorted to arming east-Jordanian citizens under the name 'the Popular Resistance' in the areas where the resistance had a presence, such as the forests of Jerash and Ajloun. The regime commenced bargaining with the resistance over disarming the Popular Resistance and reducing the weapons in the police stations that the regime had established in the heart and at the entrances to

Amman neighbourhoods in return for disarming the militia. In addition, the regime justified its movements and actions to the Arab states by repeating the tune that the resistance was working towards toppling the ruling regime in Jordan and that the regime was forced to defend itself. At the Supreme Arab Committee the regime claimed that the resistance was not adhering to the Cairo or Amman Agreements, while all the evidence indicated that it was the regime that was not adhering to them. It is clear that any agreement between any two parties, when implemented, would be construed in the interests of the stronger party. The regime took advantage of its total control over Zarqa and the south, claiming that it was prepared to open offices for the resistance in those areas in accordance with the agreement, provided that the resistance committed to article such and such. The point of focus for the regime was the alleged heavy weapons that the resistance in Jordan possessed. The regime viewed grenades, B2 and grinov and dushka as heavy weapons! The representative of the Central Committee would sometimes agree to such compromises and strike new deals that would give the regime the right to collect whatever it called heavy weapons and to disarm the militias in return for allowing the Central Committee to open offices in the south or in Zarqa. In practical terms, however, such a compromise was not possible. The regime did not allow any member of the resistance, and sometimes even the Arab Committee, to enter the areas that it controlled. It stalled on the matter after it had got what it wanted from the new agreement.

On the military level the regime's actions were the most significant of all. The regime manoeuvred according to very precise calculations and within a general plan set according to its policy of 'nibbling, digesting and dismembering'. The policy was built on the following foundations:

1. Tightening its grip over the areas it took over during the September battle and spreading fear against all the national actors in those areas.
2. Intensifying its military presence in the areas controlled by the resistance in the cities. This included exerting military control over the buildings that had control of those areas, or buildings that are located at the entrances to such areas, as well as increasing the number of police stations in neighbourhoods and deploying soldiers, which the regime disguised as Public Security. Such soldiers were armed with heavy machine guns and pursuit vehicles. For example, in al-Masaourah Neighbourhood, a poor neighbourhood in Jabal Amman, the regime established four police stations that controlled all entrances to the neighbourhood and used firepower to gain full control over it.
3. Surrounding the cities with multiple checkpoints at every entrance and the entrances to the main neighbourhoods in those cities, and

continuously searching cars and pedestrians. Most of the time these checkpoints arrested normal citizens in order to intimidate them, or they arrested members of the resistance, despite the identity papers they carried.

4. Heavily patrolling the roads that overlook the resistance positions in the forests of Jerash and Ajloun as a form of provocation and flexing of muscles.
5. Controlling sites that overlook the resistance positions in the forests of Jerash and Ajloun or maintaining control over the roads leading to the resistance positions.

In order to implement this plan, the regime pursued a policy of concluding the battle in the cities first by ending the resistance's armed presence there. It was part of a plan whereby the regime targeted the weaker centres of the resistance whilst tightening the noose around the resistance outside the cities, i.e. in the forests of Jerash and Ajloun, thereby isolating the resistance from the masses. This became known as the policy of 'enclosing and squeezing'.

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The regime's military actions began with the aim of taking control of Thaghret A'sfour, a hill occupied by the resistance that overlooks the highway connecting Irbid and Amman. The royal forces occupied the hill on the pretext that the Amman Agreement stated that the resistance positions should be at least two kilometres from the highways. The resistance swallowed this operation silently. However, from there the regime went on to another site and set up a checkpoint on Zarqa Bridge on the Jerash-Amman road that connects Jerash to Gaza Camp. I remember that the setting up of this checkpoint caused great opposition from the resistance. The regime, however, fortified its presence at this site when the orders were: "Hold your nerve and do not respond". Two days after taking this site, on 6 December 1970, the regime's forces invaded Jerash and took control of it, thereby ending any overt presence for the resistance there. The occupation of Jerash was a relatively major blow. It put the regime in a stronger military position. The regime exploited this stronger position to impose a new agreement on the resistance. This is how the first Militia Agreement came to existence on 13 December 1970.

The said agreement was signed without the knowledge of all the resistance factions. The representative of the resistance to the Supreme Arab Committee is largely responsible for the agreement. It was rejected by the popular base of the resistance, as well as its factions, and could never be implemented.

However, the agreement made it possible for the regime to discuss the issue of the militia and its arms. The regime concentrated its efforts on this issue and was desperately trying to disarm the militia, and if it achieved this objective, then it would be guaranteed control over the cities. Since the agreement was not implemented owing to the opposition it faced, the regime waited another month to put it on the table again, after it had achieved another military victory.

Once the regime had tightened its control over Jerash and the other positions it took over Marhaab Junction that connects Jerash, Mafraq and the road to Iraq. By so doing the regime closed off all the roads that connected the resistance to Syria and Iraq. After that the regime claimed Tallouzah Mountain, one that has great military significance, as it overlooks al-Salt and al-Baq'a, and protected the resistance positions in Om al-Rumman from any advance on them by the royal forces. The regime raised the issue with the Supreme Arab Committee, claiming that the mountain was important for the protection of its forces in the Jordan Valley. Control over the mountain was handed to the regime under an agreement whereby the resistance and soldiers from the Jordanian Army would have a presence there. A feast consisting of the Jordanian traditional meal 'mansaf' was held in the mountain's castle to affirm the unity between the Jordanian Army and the resistance. But as the proverb goes, "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions". Having seized of Tallouzah Mountain, the King's representative made another demand: control over Om al-Rumman police station. The police station is located in the heart of the areas controlled by the resistance. It had complete control of the roads connecting the resistance bases in Jila'ad, al-Ramemen and al-Salt to the bases in the forests of Jerash. The resistance refused to meet this demand and so, on the morning of 8 January 1971, the regime claimed that some Fedayeen had kidnapped two of its soldiers in that area and started shelling all the resistance positions in the forests of Jerash, Debeen, Barma, Qazzazah, and Gaza Camp. After that, the regime's forces advanced and occupied the resistance positions in Jila'ad and al-Ramemen. In so doing, the regime eliminated the military presence of the resistance in the central Jordan Valley. Its military presence was now confined to Jerash and Ajloun forests.

The attack by the regime caused a strong backlash. The positions of the various parties in the resistance differed on how to handle and repel this attack. However, the regime had already secured a strongpoint by completing its control over the area, especially given that through its attack it had eliminated the resistance's presence in the areas of al-Rusaifa and Shnilar. This limited the military presence of the resistance to Amman, Irbid and the

forests. As a result of this attack, the regime imposed the second Militia Agreement on 14 January 1971. This one caused many disagreements within the ranks of the resistance. With this agreement the regime had moved to a stronger position and began preparing itself for a confrontation in the capital. But before that confrontation, the regime eliminated the resistance's presence in Irbid, which was now confined to Irbid Camp after the King's forces deployed in most parts of the city. On 26 March 1971 the regime launched its full offensive against Irbid Camp and ended the battle in its favour in two days. It transferred most of the resistance members that it arrested to the cells of al-Abdali and to the Barracks of al-Jafr Desert Detention Centre.

The blow in Irbid was an indicator that the next one would be in the capital. The armed presence of the resistance in the cities was now confined to Amman. When would the next strike come?

The King did not wait for long. He immediately started discussing the resistance's presence in Amman after he had eliminated its presence in Irbid. He demanded that all the fighters and militias be withdrawn from Amman and that the armed presence of the resistance in the capital be ended. In return, he offered a general amnesty and to keep the militia's weapons where they were in the neighbourhoods under the protection of Jordanian Public Security.

I remember in the few days before the withdrawal from Amman that the regime put it about that it would storm Amman and shell the resistance bases in the forests if the resistance did not withdraw from the capital peacefully. The King repeated his threats during a meeting with a delegation from the Jordanian Vocational Assembly. The information was so accurate and so copious that we were certain that its disclosure was intended to influence the political position of the resistance.

The masses in the camps followed the news of the royal attack on Irbid with pain. When the women amongst them organised a protest in Amman on 28 March to denounce what had taken place in Irbid, the royal forces did not hesitate to use live ammunition against the protesters. Meanwhile the resistance's leadership was living in a climate of withdrawal from Amman.

On 2 April 1971 the Central Committee of the Resistance movement met at its headquarters in Jabal Lwebdeh to discuss the situation and come to an appropriate decision. Before this meeting, another meeting between the representatives of the Central Committee and the Jordanian Government was held. That meeting was attended by Wasfi al-Tal, who submitted a new draft

agreement, according to which the resistance would withdraw from Amman in return for a general amnesty. No clear decisions were taken at the Central Committee's meeting; it only reaffirmed the general preparedness of the resistance to respond to any attempt by the Jordanian regime to storm Amman. The meeting also rejected any proposals to sign a new agreement with the regime. On the morning of 4 April the Central Committee held another meeting at which a draft statement by the resistance was submitted. In that statement the resistance pledged to withdraw all remaining heavy weapons from Amman to prevent any bloodshed and that it would hold the Jordanian regime responsible for putting the country on the verge of a new September. The members who proposed the draft explained their point of view, that a confrontation with the regime should be avoided at the resistance's weakest point since confrontation in Amman would be limited and weak, whereas it would be possible to conduct military operations from the resistance's bases in the forests or in Syria. It was clear that the prevailing attitude was one of withdrawal. On 3 April, one day before the meeting was held, trucks loaded with armed fighters from two resistance groups were seen leaving Amman from the front of the Central Committee, heading for the forests. Truth be told, all the resistance factions went with the mainstream and supported the statement except the representative of the PFLP who had reservations about the issue of the statement; and with exception of the PFLP General Command, whose representative did not attend the meeting. Some might condemn or criticise the decision to withdraw from Amman in this way, but condemnation, to reach its maximum expression and to reflect the truth, should include condemnation of all the policies that led to such result. Those who imagined that withdrawing from Jordan would not result in the resistance leaving Jordan altogether and claimed that moving to the forests would be beneficial, as it would allow many to undergo decent military training there, as well as exposing the regime before the Arab masses and regimes, bear the largest part of responsibility for what happened to the resistance in Jordan. I remember one of them saying, "He who cannot conceal a rifle is not a revolutionary".

The withdrawal of the resistance from Amman was the penultimate chapter in the series of forcing the resistance out of Jordan. It was the most significant waypoint in the climate of Jordanian oppression taking over the masses there. I remember that in the evening of 4 April 1971 I was standing with some comrades watching the depressing scene of the convoy of trucks pulling away from the front of the Central Committee's headquarters, carrying fighters and their weapons to the forests. Mothers and children were standing on both sides of the road, crying, "How can you leave us?" Some fighters took control of the situation by firing bursts of bullets into the air. In a moment of

despondency I whispered to my comrade standing beside me, "By God, how long, do you think: a day or a month, before we see the same crowds with different faces being driven in different vehicles to Al-Jafr Desert Detention Centre?" "Perhaps no more than two or three months at the most," said my comrade with great sadness, while swallowing to hold back the tears.

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My comrade, who was brought from the forests to al-Jafr Desert Detention Centre, said while holding his toes, which were swollen as a result of severe beating, "The Battle of the Forests began as soon as the regime had finished taking control of Amman. The King's forces had been intensively shelling us since mid-April 1971, tightening their siege and preventing supplies from reaching us. They closed all the roads leading to our positions in Jerash and Ajloun forests. They shelled Gaza Camp brutally, causing many casualties. On 13 July 1971 the final offensive was launched from several directions. They stormed Gaza Camp and advanced through the camp towards al-Qazzazah and Barma. They took control of Jabal al-Aqra' and then advanced towards Debeen. Abu Ali Iyad was a hero; he refused to surrender. Ajloun held out and the fighters held out in several positions. But.... We were gathered in cells and told that we would be transferred to new positions. They moved us to al-Mafraq. From there some were deported to Syria and a few others were taken to the cells of the intelligence headquarters in al-Abdali. I was brought here, to al-Jafr".

He looked to the sky through the leaves of a poplar tree where we were sitting. The sun's blazing heat was almost burning the sands of the desert. For a few moments he looked at the sun, which was in the middle of a clear blue sky. Then he turned to me and said, "The truth is quite clear and sometimes it really burns. We are here because we are part of the truth. No matter how cruel the sands of the desert, we will be stronger. The truth will come out eventually. That truth, or part of it, comrade, is that the thrill of climbing mountains killed us. It killed us when we tried to go against the masses in the cities. We shouldn't have compromised on defending our overt presence in the cities. The forests of Jerash and Ajloun are not the Sierra Maestra. It's a very small, surrounded and isolated area. I don't think, comrade, we will be repeating this bitter experience."