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*Background to the Gradualist 10 Point Programme*

My name is Qais Abdel Karim. I'm better known as Abu Laila. I joined the Palestinian revolution in 1967. I didn't join the revolution when it was launched, but when it was becoming a mass movement. I will talk about the discussion that took place in the PLO and the Palestinian revolution about what was called later on the Gradualist Programme. This discussion led to a major shift in the Palestinian revolution's strategy and its vision for the solution of the Palestinian-Arab-Israeli conflict. The crisis that led to this transformation started in early 1970s. After 1970 the international attempts to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict focused on removing the effects of the 1967 aggression. This meant reaching a settlement between the Arab countries and Israel according to pre-1967 war status. Such attempts became known the Rogers Plan. Rogers Plan proposed by the US secretary of State to Egypt, Jordan and Syria. The plan was based the implementation of UN resolution 242 and the return to the 1967 borders with minor modifications, that was the term they used, in return for normal relations between these three Arab countries and Israel and a complete end to the state of war between them.

This plan in reality meant an end to the Palestinian revolution and the Palestinian resistance and a return to pre-1967 status. In other words it meant an end to the revolutionary phenomenon known as the Palestinian resistance. Back then the resistance depended mainly on the Palestinian mass and armed presence in the surrounding Arab states and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Both the West Bank and Gaza Strip were meant to be part of the settlement and the return to the 1967 borders with minor changes to these borders.

Until then the Palestinian revolution's strategy was based on its ability to expand in its Arab depth. This meant the Palestinian revolution depended on its bases that constituted its depth in the surrounding Arab countries especially the eastern front countries such as Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. This plan, which the Egyptian and Jordanian governments agreed to, threatened destroying the main foundations of this strategy. This is when the Palestinian revolution in general and the Palestinian leadership in particular started feeling the necessity of finding a solution for this strategic crisis. Initially this feeling wasn't as clear as it became after the events in Jordan and the regrettable incidents in September 1970 that led to the elimination of the

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public presence of the Palestinian resistance in Jordan. This placed the Palestinian revolution in a very difficult position. Its presence in Syria and Lebanon was threatened by many dangers and to a great extent limited strategically. In addition, in the light of the proposed Arab-Israeli settlement a question was raised whether it was possible to continue with a strategy based on the complete liberation of Palestine and the establishment of the democratic state. We started wondering if this strategic direction was realistic considering the balance of power the Palestinian people and Israel and the change that could happen if the efforts for an Arab-Israeli settlement achieve considerable steps forward. After the September incidents and what followed especially the Jerash incidents in July 1971 and the exit of the forces of the Palestinian resistance from Jordan the debate within the ranks of the Palestinian revolution about this issue intensified. Undoubtedly this debate took unclear and ambiguous forms in the beginning that were based on questions rather than solutions or possible answers. This made a rich debate free of any previous rigid molds. The debate was intense and in the first few months was more like brainstorming for the Palestinian leadership and cadres circles especially in Lebanon where the main center of Palestinian presence was.

## *Rethinking Palestinian Strategy*

In Lebanon, and especially after the Palestinian National Council was held in 1971, a question was raised about changing the Palestinian political strategy to take into account the new situation. The nature of this change wasn't specified. The process started, as I said, with ambiguity surrounding the point of views and the opinions. One element of the discussion was the nature of the Palestinian-Jordanian relations. There were two angles these relations. The first angle was the effects of the September incidents on the relations between the PLO and the Palestinian revolution and Jordan and its consequences on the popular level including the tension between the Jordanian and the Palestinian communities. The second angle was the relationship between the West Bank and Jordan since the proposed general framework for an Arab-Israeli settlement discussed the West Bank's fate and its future relationship with Jordan. The fate of the West bank was undoubtedly one of the issues that the Palestinian revolution needed to have a say in since it was related to the fate of Palestinian people, including the diaspora, and the fate of the land considering the West Bank was a huge part of it. This is why initially the discussion revolved mainly around this axis: What is the nature of the future relationship between Jordan and Palestine, between the Palestinian and Jordanian people, between the PLO and the Jordanian regime, and between the West Bank and the East Bank, and how

did the previous historic relation start? Back then a new current emerged in the Palestinian movement calling for renewing the unity between the two Banks. They meant re-establishing the relationship between the West Bank and Jordan on new foundations. It is known the relationship between the West Bank and Jordan before 1967 was one of total integration. There was no difference between the West and the East Banks and all Palestinian in both Banks were considered citizens of the Jordanian state. There was an initiative by the Jordanian government known as the United Arab Kingdom. This was the initiative of the late King Hussein Ibn Talal. It was an outlook for the future. King Hussein and his government were trying to move ahead of the events and answer, from their own point of view, the questions that many had about the future relationship between the West Bank and Jordan if the efforts for an Arab-Israeli settlement were successful. He proposed a federal union between two regions: a Palestinian one and a Jordanian one or between the West Bank and the East Bank. On the Palestinian side there were many questions around the project the King and the Jordanian regime proposed. There was an attempt to draft an alternative project based on unity between the West Bank and Jordan based on a free, voluntary and democratic popular decision and a national democratic regime. Let's say the alternative project would preserve for both peoples their uniqueness and their independent identity. Without any doubt this was the Palestinian revolution's initial response to the United Arab Kingdom project.

At the time a strategic thinking group was formed led by brother Abu Iyad and included many leading figures from the various Palestinian factions. I was a member of this group. We met away from the spotlight regularly sometimes once or twice a week. We discussed all the sides of the proposed issues. It was this group that proposed an alternative Palestinian project to the United Arab Kingdom project. The group drafted and proposed the project which was adopted by the Palestinian leadership. It was announced under the title "Renewing the Unity Between the Two Banks on a National Democratic Basis." This project answered one aspect of the proposed issue and that is the relationship between Jordan and Palestine and between the West Bank and Jordan in case of an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank or the return of the West Bank in the context of an Arab-Israeli settlement.

The issue was much bigger than this. If there was a settlement what would be the fate of the refugees not only in Jordan but in many other Arab countries? What would be the fate of the PLO that took a new form after the Palestinian factions joined it? As a result of this transformation in 1968 the PLO was no longer capable of returning to the role it played before the 1967 war. The discussion continued in other forms. I want to say that this discussion was

mainly between the leading circles in Fateh and the DFLP. A number of the other factions, especially the PFLP leaders, held on to the traditional view of the Palestinian revolution that called for the continuation of the armed struggle until liberating the entirety of Palestine and the rejection of any forms of settlement with Israel including working against the Arab regimes that could join such a settlement. It was clear that such strategy, which expressed a high degree of revolutionary ambition and purity, wouldn't have a place or roots in the new reality that was created after the incidents of 1970 and the continuous tension, which peaked in 1973, between the Palestinian revolution and the Lebanese authorities. This tension increased after Lebanon became the main base of the Palestinian revolution. Of course there was Syria but the presence of the Palestinian revolution there was shackled by the restrictions imposed by the Syrian regime. The relative freedom the revolution enjoyed in Jordan and then in Lebanon made them the two main arenas. With the absence of the Jordanian arena the Lebanese arena remained the main breathing space for the Palestinian revolution and the PLO to express its independent identity and independent decision. This gradually and naturally started to create a certain degree of friction between the Palestinian revolution and the forces of the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese authorities. Slowly this tension started to increase and peaked in 1973 when the Israelis launched a double raid in on Beirut on 10 April 1973. The raid was two parts. The first group attacked Verdun Street, where brothers Kamal Nasser, Kamal Adwan and Abu Youssef al-Najjar lived. Ehud Barak led this group and their mission, which unfortunately was successful, killing the three leaders. Amnon Shahak led the second group whose mission was attacking Fakhani. In Fakhani the DFLP's offices were less than 10 or 20 meters away from Fateh's and Abu Ammar's offices.

The attack of the DFLP's offices, which was my office back then, ran into the preparations that had been taken before and the Israeli weren't able to storm the offices. Storming our headquarters was necessary to storming the second headquarters and Abu Ammar's office. They couldn't achieve the first step and suffered significant losses. They lost two dead and five wounded I think. We lost five comrades in this confrontation. The five comrades were the offices first guards.

The Israeli forces were forced with withdraw without being able to control the headquarters. This double attack caused a Palestinian and Lebanese popular movement in support of the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon and demanded the Lebanese government allow the Palestinian resistance to protect itself against the intensifying Israeli attacks. This attack was the final straw as it resulted in the assassination of three of most important leaders of

the Palestinian revolution then and an attempt to storm the headquarters of the Palestinian revolution in Fakhani, which was close to Sabra and Shatila. This support, caused by the double attack, increased the tension between the Lebanese authorities and the Palestinian Revolution. This tension exploded in May the same year, I think a month and a few days after the Israeli attack, in clashes between the Lebanese army and Palestinian fighters. The clashes were around the areas where the Palestinian resistance leaders lived, in Fakhani, Sabra and Shatila, Tariq el-Jdeideh and the Arab League.

My office and house were right on the frontline. The fierce armed clashes had very important political consequences. It opened the issue of Palestinian-Lebanese relations and how to organise it according to the Cairo Agreement signed in 1970 for discussion. The implementation of the agreement was renewed and a new protocol was added in May 1970. Around one week after solving the direct problems between the Palestinian revolution and Lebanon through renewing the implementation of the Cairo Agreement the armed clashes started again. This pushed to the surface the question about the future of the Palestinian revolution in the absence of the ability to depend on the revolution's safe bases in the Arab countries surrounding Palestine. This added a new dimension to the ongoing discussion. The new element was not only related to the Jordanian-Palestinian relationship or the relationship between the Palestinian revolution and the Arab regimes and people in the surrounding countries but also to the path of the Palestinian revolution itself and its ability to achieve its ultimate goal of liberating Palestine and establishing a democratic state in all of Palestine including the elimination of the Zionist project in Palestine.

This dimension was added to the ongoing discussion back then. Another dimension was then added as a result of the continuous contact between Fateh leadership and the Egyptian leadership. In the contacts between the Egyptian leadership led by president Sadat and Fateh's leadership led by brothers Abu Ammar, Abu Iyad and Abu Jihad there were hints from the Egyptian side the situation of neither war nor peace created after the ceasefire between Egypt and Israel according to the Rogers Plan and the cessation of the war of attrition in 1970 can't continue for a long time. There were no clear hints that the Egyptian leadership was preparing, as it became clear later on in cooperation with Syria, a plan for the Egyptian army to cross the canal. But there were hints that this situation can't continue for a long time and the possible change will result in reviving the efforts for solving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Such efforts were frozen after the ceasefire on the Egyptian front and the developments on the Jordanian front in 1970 and 1971.

All of us in the Palestinian leadership started feeling that the current factors and the changing climate made answering the question about the future of the Palestinian revolution a pressing issue. The issue was no longer about the far future but about a few weeks or months. In the DFLP we discussed this issue extensively among the leadership committee in our central committee. Comrade Nayef Hawatmeh led the central committee. The central committee held a series of discussions for all its members and I think on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August reached a paper called the Gradualist Programme. The essence of this paper was that the Palestinian revolution can't achieve its ultimate historic goal of defeating the Zionist project in one go or militarily defeating Israel and the Zionist project through pursuing armed struggle only. This was especially the case since the material requirements for such a strategy weren't available and were unlikely to be available. Back then we were living in bipolar world and there was international consensus that any solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict needs to guarantee Israel's existence and recognise it on the 1967 borders. That's why proposed alternative was gradualist and called on the Palestinian revolution to protect its achievements especially the Arab and international recognition of the Palestinian people's unique identity represented by the PLO. This would be achieved through the PLO being not only part of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East between the Arabs and Israel but also through being part of the proposed solution or solutions for this conflict. This required the PLO to express its readiness to reach a solution based on the right of self-determination for the Palestinian people within the 1967 borders, this means the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, and the implementation of UN resolution 194 which guarantees the right of return. This would be a step to reach the strategic goal. This also required the PLO to seek Arab and then International recognition as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and therefore its responsibility to represent the Palestinian people in any future solutions for the conflict in the Middle East.

The Gradualist Programme was developed not only in this format but also in a format that states the Palestinian people have the right to self-determination and establishing a democratic state on the 1967 borders, i.e. the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and that the PLO is the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and has the right to represent the people in any negotiations about their future or the future of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East.

This is one side. The other side was related to our, and many other Palestinian cadres, realizing the futility of the strategy that is based solely on the armed struggle as the only form of struggle against Israel. With the closure of the

almost all the Arab main fronts against the Palestinian resistance we needed to think of forms of struggle. Our opinion was that we needed to mobilise the popular mass struggle in the West Bank and Gaza Strip considering most of our people in Palestine where in those two areas. We needed to find the venues through which the various groups of the people can organise, mobilise, and join the direct struggle against the Israeli occupier. Back then a new idea of a total popular Intifada was born. It was considered a unique form for struggle that can form the alternative Palestinian strategy to the singleness of the armed struggle. The two ideas, the Gradualist Programme and the popular mobilisation leading a total popular intifada, combined as a main tributary for the resistance and reduce its dependence on the armed struggle.

### *Producing the 10 point Programme*

The central committee asked two comrades to draft this paper. One was Yasser Abed Rabbo and I had the honor of being the second. Our efforts continued for several days producing many drafts. We worked in conjunction with comrade Nayef Hawatmeh who followed our work. Eventually we drafted a document with 10 points on around 3 pages. The document included all the elements we talked about as well as a reference that the Palestinian movement in Jordan should be part of the national democratic struggle while at the same respecting Jordan's sovereignty. It also mentioned that the future relationship between Jordan and Palestine must be decided according to a free and voluntary popular decision. This would be after the end of the occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the Palestinian People had practiced their right to self-determination including establishing their independent state. The programme also included a paragraph about Palestinian-Jordanian relations, and a role for the Palestinians in Jordan that respects Jordanian sovereignty and pushes towards a Jordanian-Palestinian relationship built on democratic foundation based on a free and voluntary public choice. As ideas as a I said were drafted. In the political and strategic though dominant in the Palestinian resistance these thoughts I can say were considered heresy. In Islam they say every heresy is a sin and every sin leads to hell. Announcing this document and these thoughts led to a huge shock in the ranks of the Palestinian resistance. Many, including people from Fateh, accused these thoughts of being treasonous and defeatism. A number of Fateh leaders, especially Aby Iyad and Abu Ammar, knew about the ongoing discussion. I mean there were contacts between us and we briefed about the course of the discussions. We need to engage in an intellectual struggle to defend these new ideas. Almost all our organisations and our central newspaper that was published in Beirut, al-Hurria, joined the debate. I was

asked to dedicate all my efforts to writing a series of articles for al-Hurria defending the new programme. These articles were signed using the name a Palestinian Leftist. I had the honor of being that Palestinian Leftist. This effort took two months of complete dedication to this mission, especially given that all the other periodicals and magazines published by the main Palestinian resistance factions in Beirut launched a total and ferocious attack against these thoughts. Even Fateh's *Filastin al-Thawra* joined the attack.

We made sure that Fateh's central figures didn't intervene. We were keen to leave the door open for discussion, allowing it space and giving it freedom. This is what happened for two complete months. I can say that the nature of the discussion didn't settle the decision for the Palestinian leadership but it helped highlight the strategic crisis we were living. It highlighted that this crisis was not temporary but rather structural, related to the nature of the Palestinian revolution and its relationship to its people and the Arab national liberation movement in general. The crisis wasn't temporary but chronic, and required a strategy that would protect the achievements of the Palestinian revolution especially after 1967.

During this debate I asked the DFLP's leadership for a few days leave to go and see my family in Baghdad. This was at the end of July 1973. I went to Baghdad on a personal visit that was meant to be two weeks long.

Two days after I arrived in Baghdad – back then we didn't have means of communication available today such as faxes, mobile phones or Internet – I received a coded telegram from the DFLP's leadership asking me to return to Beirut immediately. Based on the hints and signs from the brothers in Fateh who had relations with the Egyptian leadership, I guessed that the Egyptian-Syrian operation was close, or that there will some sort of explosion at the front. Nothing else would have required my immediate return.

The day after I received the telegram I arrived in Beirut, I think it was 4 or 5 October, and I was told that war was at the gates. There was the issue of the Palestinian revolution taking part in the battle and the results of the battle. Everyone knew that this battle, in the plans of the Egyptian leadership led by Sadat, was a step towards reviving the political process and efforts aimed at solving the conflict within the 1967 borders.

This led to a series of meetings where all the Palestinian leadership, especially Fateh, DFLP and the PFLP, took part. Most of them were in Beirut. The discussion revolved around how to confront the consequences of the new situation created the war. The war created a relative military balance. Israel



kept its military superiority, but this superiority wasn't absolute as it was after the 1967 war. It became clear that the military option wasn't exclusively an Israeli option, but an option for both sides. This created a new strategic balance in the region. It highlighted the necessity of the Palestinian revolution's role in the war itself. I remember the Palestinian revolution wasn't, as has previously been announced, limited to south Lebanon, but also on the Golan front, especially after the Israeli counteroffensive and the ceasefire on the Egyptian front. The counteroffensive led to a Syrian retreat from the positions it reached in the first stage of the war. Back then the Palestinian forces played an important role, including the DFLP's fighters, on the main Quneitra-Sasa axis, along with the Syrian army and the other Arab armies, including the Iraqi and the Moroccan armies. The Israeli advance on this axis was halted and then repelled, and the relative gains achieved by the Syrian army in its first attack on the Golan were preserved.

The military role wasn't important. What mattered were the political consequences. As was expected, international political efforts started immediately and centered on the Geneva conference for an Arab-Israeli settlement. Fateh's leadership, especially Abu Ammar and Abu Iyad, understood the importance of an independent Palestinian role. From our position, it was clear to us the PLO needed to play a role in the conflict and in the solution. When I say solutions, I mean negotiated solutions. Again we took the initiative and added a critical amendment to the document we announced earlier, demanding the PLO to represent the Palestinian people in Geneva as an independent and equal party to the Arabs and Israel. I remember we expressed this position through a petition with more than 70,000 Palestinian signatures from the various Palestinian communities. The petition was directed to the Secretary General of the United Nations demanding the PLO's participation in the Geneva conference as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. This completed the new strategy as detailed in the Gradualist Programme. Now, the battle for transforming this programme into the PLO's official programme started. This took five continuous months of debates and discussions, interrupted by some armed clashes. Unfortunately, some of the brothers, especially the PFLP-GC led by Ahmed Jibreel, used arms and assaulted our cadres in Ein al-Hilweh and in other places as a way of managing the struggle. We were up for defending ourselves, but wanted to keep the discussion in democratic and civil circles. In May 1974, the Palestinian National Council convened in Cairo and the Ten Points document was drafted. I didn't attend the session. The document was drafted by comrades Nayef, Yasser Abed Rabbo, Abu Iyad, Abu Ammar, other members of Fateh, and Comrade Zuheir Muhsin, who

was the head of al-Saiqa. After great efforts, the document was presented to the PNC, and adopted following a few amendments, with the agreement of all the factions. This document made the Gradualist Programme the official programme of the PLO. With this document, the PLO went to the Rabat summit in October 1974. The Rabat summit adopted this programme and acknowledged the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Based on the Rabat decision, Suleiman Franjeh, who was the president of the summit, went to the United Nations along with Yasser Arafat to gain UN recognition of the PLO and Palestinian right to self-determination, in resolution 3525 I think.