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1982: The Experience of PFLP Fida'iyeen in the Sur Region

My *nom de guerre* was Abu Jalal Rashid Abu Jaysh. I'm Palestinian. I'll speak about my experience in the Tyre area in the south around 1982, and before then. Before 1982 the Israeli enemy was attacking on a daily basis with air strikes and air surveillance. We believed the enemy would rely on these daily air strikes and occasional small-scale invasions. The confrontation then turned into a full-scale war which the Israeli enemy launched against all of Lebanon. Ourselves, the leadership and even ordinary people had initially expected the enemy to invade through the Litani river, through al-Awali bridge. The second expectation was that Sidon would be targeted through al-Awali bridge. But Israel surprised everyone when it advanced all the way towards Beirut, close to the coastline, in a single day. Of course, as everyone knows, Israel has quite an arsenal while we had Kalashnikov rifles, P7s, and grenades. The heaviest weapons we had were artillery which fire up to ten or fifteen kilometers. The artillery were used for long range attacks, so we'd attack targets at sea and other times we'd attack settlements nearby and so forth.

So Israel surprised everyone by invading along the coastline, which terrorized people and distressed them - people were unsure whether to flee from al-Rashidiya to Sidon, or towards Beirut. After they absorbed the first hit (which in military theory is called "the first absorption"), people started to form groups along the coastline to fight. But there wasn't complete cooperation among the resistance in those areas, as each organization acted alone without coordinating. The resistance was paralyzed because the political leadership in Beirut had made Beirut the main location orders would be given from. There was no coordination between us and them, and our communications were jammed. This worried those in the operations rooms at these locations. The leaderships of different groups sustained attacks in Tyre, al-Rashidiya, al-Buss camp and the Burj el-Shamali. But after two or three days, we were surprised that the war was unfolding from An-Naqura all the way to Beirut, and we had military positions behind the so-called line of international forces. We used to visit these areas, such as A'nah and Deir A'mes on foot or by car. There was no fighting in the areas where international forces were positioned - just the areas along the coastline.

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The Israelis occupied the entire coastal road. They distracted people by attacking Beirut, Sidon and Tyre. Clashes took place only when they ventured outside the main road. As for al-Basateen and al-Biyarat, they had fighters. People took refuge in areas surrounding them. Of course we would enter behind those international lines. After two or three days the Israelis began to enter villages and camps to search them. They entered al-Rashiyida camp about 15 days into the war. Al-Buss is near the main road while al-Rashiydia is far. After three or four days of fighting the enemy we retreated towards the river. The projections of the leaderships was that retreating behind the river would help various forces regroup there, and there could be fighting with tanks and patrols in that area. But at that time we regrouped at the river in al-Safiya area. The place was called Jamajin. Forces from most resistance groups were present there. We began our first experiment: to make the Israelis worry, especially at night in order to lessen the pressure on the main street that the enemy used to attack Sidon and Beirut. We formed patrols and would attack using guerrilla tactics. We were like a conventional army in the beginning at Tyre. We wanted to confront the enemy directly - to stand in front of its tanks and attack its advancing forces. But the tanks on the outskirts of Beirut and in Sidon, made people consider a return to guerrilla tactics. We would attack and run as they say. We formed support bases in all the central areas, along the line between Tyre and Sidon: we'd attack and then return to these areas. The biggest support base in Tyre was Jamajin. It was far from the main road, and had a rugged and mountainous landscape, as well as groves and banana trees. We started collecting the weapons from groups and organizations that were retreating, and gathered them in Jamajin. After ten to fifteen days we were surprised to find the Israelis wanted to invade Jamajin. The people there began to leave the village and to raise white flags; they asked us not to attack from near the village or the groves around it. This was a critical moment for us: it weakened our position, because we couldn't resist while people were pleading with us. If we attacked from there, the Israeli air force would come and bomb the village. They were right, as these were the conditions Israel imposed upon everyone. After that, we considered returning to Tyre, and formed groups to start returning, everyday a group of ten to fifteen fighters would return. We knew the area well and stayed there for about 45 days. After that we were ordered to retreat to Mount Lebanon area. This meant we would have to walk for over ten or fifteen days and of course carrying our weapons. We had to pass through Druze, Christian and Shiite villages. In short, the entire affair made us very anxious. We had to lay low during the day and walk during the night. It took us around ten days to reach Mount Lebanon. We knew the area well. We had bases there, so we went to our nearest base. Then we moved to al-Beqaa area. That was good, as it became a place where our forces regrouped. We then returned to Mount Lebanon once

again. This time people were going to Beirut and others to Sidon and Tyre. Our organization pioneered the formation of nuclei of popular resistance committees and training people, based on our experience amongst the Lebanese national forces and the Communist party. There were no new organisations except for Hizbullah. We stayed at al-Beqaa. We would go out every day to patrol the Western Beqaa and Jabal al-Barook. We patrolled these areas almost everyday; launched attacks and then retreated. Of course we lost martyrs in Tyre and al-Barook, as we lost a lot of our dear comrades there - I still remember them, they live in my memory to this day... but I don't want to mention names. One's memory may not remember every single name. Its pointless to mention the *nom de guerre*, we didn't know the real names; only the leadership knew them.

After that was the siege on Beirut. We weren't in Beirut. Some people gathered to form groups in order to go on special missions to attack the enemy deep inside the territories they occupied and at the same time to cause confusion in order ease the pressure on Beirut. We would go into Sidon, especially with people who knew the area. We had IDs so we were able to move through these areas including through Israeli checkpoints. Of course we didn't have weapons. We knew there were warehouses full of weapons in the southern region. Not everyone knew that, but the main figures in the struggle at the time knew where to find weapons, I was among those who knew where to find them. We would use these weapons to arm the patrols, and we weren't bogged down by having to transport weapons from al-Beqaa to Sidon or Tyre. We kept on like this until the resistance left Beirut. There was near-approval, on the part of the national forces, of us moving to Sidon from al-Beqaa. I was among those who returned to Sidon, and if I remember correctly, Comrade Abu Emad was among us. We formed the nucleus of a special operations unit at the time. Things were working, but after the invasion of 1982 people were frustrated with the overall conditions of war, which we all had to endure. This, in a nutshell, was my experience in Tyre.

We were in the Middle Beqaa. I went through a number of experiences in the Middle Beqaa. I was in the leadership of the brigade. A comrade called Ahmed Amin was its commander, and after that comrade Abu Azab became the commander and I was his deputy. During the invasion comrade Abu Azab was in Beirut. I was leader of the Middle Beqaa brigade which was called Guevara Gaza Brigade. This brigade was stationed in the area from Sidon to an-Naqura along what is known as the Middle Sector next to the Western Sector. As fighters we had a number of bases, inside the areas under the control of the international forces, in Tyre, Burj el-Shamali, al-Buss, and along the coastline in Shabrihah. All this area was covered in coordination

with the resistance, but only the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine had the privilege to be based inside international lines. There was daily training at the bases, especially for new recruits, and we had comrades who came to do their 'revolutionary service': they were students in Russia, France, or Cuba. They did their military service for three months. They would gain military experience, brush shoulders with fighters, and within three months would become fighters themselves.

When a person came to join us they would be given special training. As for the weapons as I mentioned, they consisted of Kalashnikov rifles, P7s, grenades and explosives. This brigade was armed: it had anti-aircraft machineguns and rockets. Each base had 23 and 14.5. caliber machine guns. We also had daily political education; at the base we had a daily programme which was implemented A to Z 24/7. There would be comradely 'service duties', where each comrade would serve his other comrades during the day - for example, one comrade would take care of cooking, and so on, and serve the comrades in his group.

PFLP Student Brigades in 1982

In terms of revolutionary service during the period after 1982, the PFLP was on alert and recalled all students who had been pursuing education abroad in Russia, Cuba, Canada, and elsewhere. They were recruited and the forces gathered in al-Beqaa. I mentioned comrades who were students came to Tyre where we'd train them for three months to prepare them for battle. There's a difference between the student and the fighter, but students' skills were raised to comparable levels because of the training. They would stay for three months and travel to central, western and eastern sectors, as well as Beirut before returning to their studies. After they were recalled by the PFLP, forces were gathered in al-Beqaa, where our comrades were well trained. Students there would have been well trained and fully aware of the daily conditions at the bases. We differed from other organizations because others would send their new recruits to battle directly when they could barely fire a rifle. We recalled around a thousand students and gathered them at al-Beqaa, Ba'albak and the area of Jalalah, between Ba'albak and the western sector. In the brigade headed by Comrade Abu Emad al-Jindawi we were keen on ensuring we wouldn't send all students to the same base for fear of losing them to an air strike or something similar. We would send ten to one base, five to another, seven to another, twenty to another, and so on. This policy benefited us as well as the students, as we tried to protect those coming from abroad as much as we could. As I mentioned earlier, military supplies as well as consumables such as food, drink, and cigarettes, were available. Even during

the battles we, in al-Beqaa, were thinking of how we would send hot meals to the fighters on the frontlines every day. We didn't have permanent bases, as we were weary of being exposed to air strikes.

Revolutionary education

Concerning education, we used to bring newspapers every day, and would distribute them to all bases. Since we are a Marxist organization most of the books we used for education at the bases were Marxist. We would educate our fighters about ancient and modern Palestinian history. Of course, we had Arab fighters who joined us from Iraq and Syria: we couldn't introduce them to Marxist theory immediately. We'd begin with the history of Palestine from A to Z. This was our focus when it comes to education. Since 1967 up to this day our practice is based on educating our fighters. This means if you're going to stay at a certain village, you'd have to learn about it, because you'll be living alongside its people, and must learn how to be courteous to them and not offend anyone. We took a great deal of care on such matters, and we were strict in that way. For example, we didn't allow our fighters to meet women. We would make a special effort to participate, especially in Tyre, in harvesting oranges, lemons, olives, and tobacco during the harvest season. We would also participate in growing wheat, barley, olives, citrus crops and others. We made sure people liked hosting our bases near them. It was a very rich experience... of course these are general points. I can't get into too many details because so many years have passed since then.