

**Abu Ta'an. Interviewed 2011. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.<sup>1</sup>**

*Liberation of the Camps in Lebanon in 1969*

I started my military life as an officer in the Palestinian Liberation Army. After the '67 war and the formation of the Popular Liberation Forces, which was the *fida'iyeen* wing of the Palestinian Liberation Army, I became the commander of the Middle Sector, the Karameh Sector in 1968, and during the Karameh Battle.

In March 1969, I was appointed Commander of the Popular Liberation Forces in Lebanon, a new formation which hadn't existed previously. Some brothers from Fateh preceded me to the Arqoub district in south Lebanon. So I went to the Arqoub, and began creating the Popular Liberation Forces, and there was a huge influx of Palestinian youth coming from the refugee camps.

We stayed in Arqoub until the end of 1969. The area became too crowded; there were too many fighters. Also the intensity of military operations led the Israelis to heavily reinforce the area facing Arqoub with patrols, barbed wires, and landmines. This made it very difficult for us to attack Israeli posts. I considered transferring to the Western Sector, but the Lebanese Army had a huge presence there, and they would prohibit guerrilla activity in those areas. I then thought of reinforcing our position in all the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, especially in the south, hoping to gradually reach the Western and Middle Sectors. So I gathered a large force, around 300 fighters, and transferred them to the Shouf district of Mount Lebanon, mainly around Kamal Jumblatt's Mukhtara Palace.

I had a meeting with Kamal Jumblatt before, explaining to him the plan by which I aimed to achieve this. He commended the plan and approved it. His help was a key factor in the success of our plan. He used to shelter the fighters I would send to his palace for long periods, and he gave them the necessary provisions.

Then I gradually began moving to the camps of the south, in Sidon, with help from the late Marouf Saad. Both he and Kamal Jumblatt used to give us their cars, which had parliamentary license plates. We used them to transport weapons and fighters and we created a large force in Ein El Hilweh. But Ein El Hilweh wasn't the real goal. My goal was the southern refugee camps in

---

<sup>1</sup> This work is made available under a Creative Commons 4.0 International Licence, and must be used accordingly. Please see citation guidelines on the About Us page.

Tyre, Rashidyeh, Burj al-Shamali, Qasmieh and Jul El Bahar. Since it was difficult to send patrols from Ein el Hilweh camp to the Lebanese border, I decided to reach the south by sea. I rented large boats, and on a December night in 1969, we carried out an amphibious landing in Rashidyeh camp. It was the first naval experience for the Palestinian fedayeen. I took 200 fighters with me. Earlier I had established a militia in the southern camps and smuggled weapons to arm them. Their role was to receive the fighters that were being transferred to the camps.

This is how we established our presence in the refugee camps. This led to disputes with the Lebanese government and army. The disputes resulted in the Cairo treaty, which permitted the presence of Palestinian militias in Lebanon. We later met with Lebanese officers and we agreed on the protocols so as to avoid clashes between the Lebanese army and the fedayeen.

Abu El Zaim was there, and the late Sheikh Fahed Al-Ahmad Jaber Al Sabah, and there was an official from the PFLP, and officials from all the Palestinian political factions, I don't recall all the names. But everybody was there. The officials from all factions would meet and decide on objectives and needs, then proceed to meet with the Lebanese government, and carry out negotiations with officials from the Lebanese army. This is how we made the agreements, which were later called the protocols of the Cairo treaty; a treaty signed between the Lebanese government and the PLO.

Our bases in the South now had regular forces and guerilla forces. We also had militias in the refugee camps, and we opened training camps. The people in the refugee camps gave us an extraordinary welcome. They had been under a lot of pressure from the Lebanese Intelligence, the Military Intelligence, as it was called the 'Second Bureau'. There was immense pressure and they saw us as a reprieve.