

**al-Hut, Shafiq. *Bayna al-waṭan wa-al-manfá : min Yāfā bada'a al-mishwār.*
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Al-Shuqairi started to build up this new entity from scratch. He equipped it with civil organizations, institutions, and military forces. Shortly thereafter, he headed to Jerusalem, where he raised the Palestinian flag over the official headquarters of the PLO. He also announced the names of those who were going to assist him in creating the organisational structure, beginning with its various units and offices in the Arab host states; and finally he declared the foundation of the Palestine Liberation Army (the PLA).

In addition to the chairman, Ahmad al-Shuqairi, and the President of the Palestinian National Treasury, Abdul Majeed Shouman, who were to be directly elected by the Palestinian National Council, the first Executive Committee included the following members: Bahjat Abu Gharbiyah, Hamed Abu Sitteh, Nicola al-Durr, Haidar Abdul Shafi, Khaled al-Fahoum, Farouk al-Husseini, Abdul Khalek Yaghmoor, Falah al-Madi, Walid Qamhawi, Qosai al-Abadleh, Qassem al-Rimawi, and Abdul Rahman Siksik.

Early in October 1964, the Executive Committee decided to appoint me as its representative to the Lebanese Republic and as director of the PLO Office in Beirut. We, in the PLF (Palestine Liberation Front - Path of Return), had already declared our support for the PLO and our determination to place all our facilities at its disposal. Accordingly, I accepted my appointment, resigned from my post at *al-Hawadeth*, and moved to my new office on Corniche al-Mazraa, one of Beirut's main thoroughfares.

Having brought in some new members to the PLO, I immediately set about organising the office. At that time, there was no financial inducement to dedicate oneself to the PLO, and other Palestinian factions had not yet even admitted the principle of cooperation with the newborn organisation. From the very start, I was keen on establishing positive diplomatic relations between our office and the Lebanese government, in a manner similar to all other Arab embassies. This was not an easy task, and it required popular support by both Lebanese and Palestinians. We had to invest a great deal of effort in convincing the Lebanese government of our right to raise the Palestinian flag over the front entrance of the building. Thankfully, the then Prime Minister, Hajj Hussein al-Oweini, was cooperative, and we reached an agreement: the office of the PLO would be considered a diplomatic mission like any other Arab embassy, with all privileges and obligations prescribed by

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normal diplomatic protocol. The PLO Beirut Office was the first in any Arab capital to acquire this status.

We took it upon ourselves to unite the various and disparate Palestinian factions, believing that the PLO was not a conventional organisation, but rather a temporary homeland pending the liberation of the Occupied Territories. We believed that its civilian and military units were the proper framework for the emancipation of our people, regardless of their intellectual or political differences.

On January 1, 1965, Fatah was officially launched, This caused a great deal of political turmoil in Palestinian circles. Our mission to achieve Palestinian unity became more complicated, especially when the dispute over the nature of the military struggle was brought up in discussions. The United Arab Command had warned against the dangers of skirmishes with Israel without prior coordination with the Arab states, as its chairman, Brigadier Ali Ali Amer, has recorded. In the PLF, we were always against the theory of "entanglement" and we did not tolerate anyone trying to goad Nasser into action. After the breakup of the Union, several of Nasser's enemies started to take advantage of the presence of United Nations peacekeepers in Sharm al-Sheikh and the Gulf of al-Aqaba, and challenge Nasser by questioning his patriotism in terms of the Palestinian cause. Even some Nasserites at the time were seduced by these calls for military struggle, and filled the newspapers with bellicose articles which seemed to suggest that all Cairo needed to do was to declare a war against Israel in order to be victorious. Even worse, it was suggested the newborn PLO, along with other Palestinian factions, was immediately capable of standing up to Israel all by itself, with no official support from even a single Arab nation!

As a result of this internal struggle, we in the PLF, as well as some others, felt as if we were caught, as the old Arabic saying goes, between a hammer and an anvil: the hammer was the conventional al-Shuqairi policy and the anvil the newly born struggle of the Palestinian fedayeen. This impossible situation persisted until the June 1967 War, when our worst fears became painful realities. What had been left of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, was lost, along with the Sinai peninsula in Egypt, and the Syrian Golan Heights.

In the meantime, however, al-Shuqairi tried to absorb the inter-Palestinian problems by forming a new Executive Committee, which was intended to bring in the two generations - the traditional bureaucratic one and the young

revolutionary one which was keen on initiating new practices - and to be capable of absorbing the factions that were still refusing to participate in the various elements of the PLO. On August 10, 1964, the second Executive Committee was formed, and, in addition to al-Shuqairi and Abdul Majeed Shouman, it included Ibrahim Abu Sitteh, Sayyed Bah; Jamal al-Sourai, Najib Rshaidat, Ahmad Srouri, Paez Sayegh, Daoud al-Husseini, Said al-Ezzeh, and Abdul Hameed Yassin. Unfortunately, however, this committee lasted only for a year and failed to heal the wounds between the two generations. During the third round of the Palestinian National Council, held in Gaza, in May 1966, debates intensified between the conventionalists and the newcomers, and finally al-Shuqairi was forced to accept new members of the Executive Committee from the younger generation. The new committee consisted of: al-Shuqairi (President), Abdul Majeed Shouman (President of the National Treasury), Said al-Ezzeh, Ibrahim Abu Sitteh, Jamal al-Sourani, Nimr al-Masri, Abdul Fattah Younis, Shafiq al-Hout, Ahmad al-Saadi, Ahmad Sidqi al-Dajani, Ussama al-Naqeeb, Abdul Khaleq Yaghmour, Bahjat Abu Gharbiyeh, and Rifaat Awdeh.

We did our best in this leadership to implement some of the PNC resolutions adopted during the third round, particularly those related to the configurations within the Palestine Liberation Army, which was scattered between the Gaza Strip, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. The army's commander, Brigadier Wajech al-Madaui, largely agreed with us. We often coordinated military activities with him through an underground unit known as Abtal al-Awda (Heroes of Return). During this period, Israel perpetrated a massacre in the West Bank village of al-Samou, which strained the relationship between the PLO and the Jordanian government.

Things went from bad to worse within the PLO as a result of al-Shuqairi's autocratic methods. He single-handedly initiated a virtual coup within the organization when he announced from the PLO Radio Station in Cairo that the Executive Committee had been relieved of its duties and replaced by a secret Revolutionary Council. He then announced a series of decisions that affected several officers of the Palestine Liberation Army who had opposed his coup. As for me, al-Shuqairi went as far as threatening to remove me from Beirut and relocate me, choosing India of all places, where the PLO did not even have an office. On February 15, 1967, Ahmad al-Saadi, Ahmad Sidqi al-Dajani, and I sent a telegram to al-Shuqairi protesting against his actions and declaring them illegitimate. We appended to the telegram a memo explaining the reasons we had rejected his decisions and what we saw as his violations of the Charter, and we expressed our respect for democracy and collective decision-making.

In conclusion, we asked him to nullify his decisions and initiate the formation of a new Executive Committee.

The magnitude of the opposition increased, and several new members joined the Executive Committee, including Dr Haydar Abdul Shafi, Dr Rifaat Awdeh, Dr Salah al-Dabbagh as Director General of the Foreign Affairs Unit, Khalil Owaidah, Director of the Education Affairs Unit, and Raji Sahyoun, a senior official at the Media Affairs Unit.

On February 17, 1967, two days after we sent the memo, I was subjected to the first attempt on my life; a gunman fired from a car parked front of my house, hitting me in the leg. I feared that our people, especially those living in the camps, would draw a link between this cowardly attempt and my conflict with al-Shuqairi. Consequently, the first thing I did upon my arrival at the American University Hospital was to reiterate what I had said to the Lebanese Gendarmes who had delivered me there, that I blamed Jordanian Intelligence for the attempted assassination. My hunch turned out to be correct, as Egyptian Intelligence managed to intercept a phone call that night between the Jordanian ambassador and one of the participants in the attack. I later heard from trustworthy Arab sources that the Jordanian intelligence official in charge of the operation was so angry at its failure that he sent someone to the hospital to finish me off, but the Lebanese government had tightened security around my hospital room and I was spared.

After leaving hospital, I spent some time recovering before beginning going back to my office in Beirut. (I did not go to India).

It was only natural that the 1967 war would have dramatic repercussions throughout the Arab world, including for the PLO. Several Arab capitals rushed to take advantage of the situation and avoid taking responsibility: the PLO became the scapegoat, as if it had been responsible for the massive defeat. We therefore chose to suspend our internal divisions and reunite behind the PLO leadership, and al-Shuqairi in particular, in defense of our newborn entity, the liquidation of which seemed alarmingly imminent. We had also noticed that some Arab states had been trying to prevent the PLO from participating in the next Arab summit, which was scheduled to take place in Khartoum at the end of August of that year. Earlier al-Shuqairi had sent me a letter through the Head of Foreign Affairs at that time, Mohammad Nimr al-Masri, in which he informed me that he had deferred his decision to transfer me to India, and that I should return to exercise all my privileges as director of the PLO office in Lebanon. He then asked me to go to the Sudanese

capital to participate in a preliminary meeting of the Arab ministers of foreign affairs, in preparation for the anticipated summit.

The Khartoum meeting in early August 1967 was my first political mission at such a senior level. It was during those meetings that I lost my political virginity: I discovered that the first basic fact of Arab politics is that the highest official in any Arab state, regardless of whether he is king or president, is the sole decision maker, leaving very little margin in which his ministers could manoeuvre. I also found out that there was no black and white in politics: grey was the prevalent colour. What hurt me most however, were the mutual grudges between Arab states, which were more intense than those against the common enemy. The only thing that saved me from complete despair was the thundering demonstrations of the Sudanese people, who had come to Khartoum from all parts of the country to receive the Arab leaders and encourage them to fight back and avenge the defeat.

The meetings lasted for five days, and produced two resolutions: the first set up a meeting for the Arab ministers of economy, finance and oil in Baghdad, in an attempt to consider strategic retaliatory action; and the second called for another meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs to precede the summit by just a few days, this time to finalise its agenda. Although the Sudanese prime minister reassured me that the PLO was going to be invited to the summit, I still had my doubts, especially when I learned that we were not even invited to participate in the Baghdad Conference, under the pretext that "the Palestinians had neither money nor economy nor oil!" I returned to Beirut deeply worried that we would not participate in the summit, especially after I heard the statements directed against al-Shuqairi, who was continuously being targeted on a political and personal level. I shared my concerns with the Executive Committee.

The date of the meeting of the Arab foreign ministers came, but we had still not received an invitation to the summit. In reaction, al-Shuqairi sent me to Khartoum again, with a message to Prime Minister Mahjoub, and with special instructions to be followed in the event the Sudanese government did not go back on its decision.

The night was cold, and I was extremely tense; my heart would skip a beat whenever the plane experienced turbulence. I just could not stop thinking: Is it possible that the people of Palestine would not be invited to participate in an Arab conference that was going to be held in the name of Palestine and the Palestinian cause?

Khartoum finally started to appear on the horizon, like an ebony-coloured beauty with a diamond necklace. Two people were waiting at the airport, my dear old friend, fellow student, and fellow prisoner Mustafa Madani, who was then an ambassador at Sudan's Foreign Ministry, and Said al-Sabe', the PLO representative in Khartoum. The latter immediately launched into a description of the pressures being applied to Sudan not to invite the PLO. When I asked about Mahjoub's position, Mustafa said: "Mahjoub is cornered, but he is doing his best to sort things out, especially as Sudan is the host state. But for now he is keeping silent, trying to put off the declaration of his government's position till the last moment". He then added: "In any case, he is waiting for you". I asked: "When? Tomorrow, inshallah?" It was already past midnight, but Mustafa smiled and said: "Right now!"

Mahjoub received me in the main hall of his home, feigning anger at the Palestinian position: "What's with this al-Shuqairi of yours? Always firing off at us in the press and broadcasters. What the hell does he want?" I answered: "He's not asking for anything that is not just. He only wants the Palestine delegation to be invited to the Conference."

He then took me by surprise: "Have you had your supper?" He ordered snacks and then said to me: "Done, my friend. We shall ask our embassy in Beirut to extend an invitation to the chairman of the PLO." Mahjoub then recited the names of all the countries opposed to the participation of the PLO and he expressed his concerns about their likely reactions to any change in the decision not to invite us.

My mission ended at that point, but Mahjoub's troubles were far from over. He still had to convince Syria to reverse its stance and he had to pull off a miracle to bring together President Nasser and King Faisal, in order to stop the war between Egypt and Saudi Arabia in Yemen. In the end, Mahjoub proved that he was more of a statesman than a poet, perhaps contrary to his own wishes or beliefs.

I shall not dwell on the details of the 1967 Summit Conference, but will focus on the important points:

- The results of the conference reflected the change in the balance of power within the Arab states following the 1967 war, and that was clearly detectable in the phrasing of the resolutions. The famous "Three Nos" - No Conciliation, No Coexistence, and No Negotiations with Israel - were in fact compromised by the goals that the Arab regimes agreed upon, which were the elimination of the consequences of the

Israeli aggression and the liberation of the "recently occupied Arab territories." This was the first official indication in Arabic of an indirect and implicit recognition of Israel's existence in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948.

- The Palestinian delegation withdrew from the summit conference in the closing session, because of its reservations about the decision of the Three Nos, mentioned above. In the original Palestinian proposal there were four Nos, but the fourth was dropped from the final document. Al-Shuqairi, in an immediate press conference, announced the substance of the fourth No - No unilateral acceptance by any Arab state of a solution for the Palestine question. Such a solution should be subject to discussion at high-level Arab meetings, which should and must include the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Now, more than 40 years later it is only fair to note that al-Shuqairi's reservations were entirely justified, as his fears at the time were later borne out. Egypt acted alone in 1978 when it signed the Camp David Accords. And 15 years later, ironic though this may be, the PLO itself also unilaterally signed the 1993 Oslo Agreement. Last but not least, Jordan acted on its own by concluding the 1994 Wadi Araba Agreement.

- Israel's Foreign Minister at the time Abba Eban considered the conclusions and resolutions of this summit a "declaration of war against Israel".

Which of the various evaluations and analyses of the outcome of the 1967 summit, or of the three Nos, was true? It is not easy to arrive at an answer to this question: herein lies the importance of language in politics. The presence or absence of a single word may uncover dangerous intentions or expose positions to the possibility of misinterpretation.

The 1967 Khartoum summit conference was a critical turning point in the course of the Palestinian struggle and it put an end to al-Shuqairi's era. Four months after the conference, in a broadcast on PLO Radio in Cairo on December 25, 1967, al-Shuqairi submitted his resignation to the Palestinian people. There followed a new phase in the history of the struggle that might be called "the phase of factionalisation."