

3. Black September: An Organized Retreat

Interview with Yasser Arafat

The implications of the September events in Jordan are a subject of heated debate. Fateh's optimistic view is presented here through an interview with Yasser Arafat published in its official English language organ, Fateh, on March 23, 1971.

Fateh: What is your evaluation of the Eighth National Assembly held in Cairo in early March?

Arafat: The Eighth National Assembly was not expected to be historic—particularly since a number of “time bombs” and “mines” had been planted for us there. It was part of the plot being waged against the Palestinian revolution for these time bombs and mines to explode during the Assembly meeting.

What we succeeded in doing was to prevent this from happening.

We prevented the explosion of any crisis.

What actually took place in the Assembly was totally different from what was carried by the news agencies.

The Eighth National Assembly was more positive than any of the previous assemblies for the following reasons:

1. It was the first assembly to ratify a formula for Palestinian (national) unity through ratification of a comprehensive political plank. The political plank was discussed for four hours in the Unity Commission and was subsequently approved by the National Assembly. The Assembly also approved the Organizational Skeleton—with the exception of two points dealing with the manner in which the Executive Committee would be elected—by the Political Bureau or the National Assembly at large.

2. A genuine, democratic atmosphere prevailed throughout the deliberations and allowed all points of view on the Palestinian scene to be expressed. This, in itself, is one of the most genuinely democratic expressions in the Arab homeland.

3. For the first time, the Palestinian National Assembly endorsed Fateh's slogan calling for the establishment of a democratic state in Palestine. Although previous assemblies had discussed this objective, they had not endorsed it. This is an unprecedented, great achievement. It is a cultural event.

4. Another positive aspect of the National Assembly is that it convened the enlarged Popular Congress which was attended, among others, by some one hundred ten Jordanian nationalist leaders. The significance of this is important. It reflects the ability of the Palestinian revolution to attract such leadership while being subjected to an extermination war by the Jordanian regime. The Popular Congress, in other words, was a slap in the face to those who claim that the revolution is losing ground in Jordan.

Fateh: What is the Palestinian revolution's answer to the political solution or so-called Rogers peace plan?

Arafat: The answer lies in the survival of the revolution as a basic and determining element on the scene. Israel will never accept any peace formula as long as the Palestinian revolution remains an effective factor because in such a case Israel would not have achieved its basic objective: security.

The Palestinian people have the only and final say in their historic, cultural, settler and property rights. World Zionism and imperialism realize fully what this implies.

Fateh: The Palestinian revolution celebrates this week the third anniversary of the battle of al-Karameh which took place on March 21, 1968. Would you comment on that?

Arafat: The revolution which was able to restore *al-Karameh* (i.e., dignity) at the Battle of al-Karameh despite all the adverse conditions which confronted it at the time is capable of plowing its way despite all plots and "mines" and of achieving victory.

Fateh: Addressing Palestinian Youth in Amman on January 30, 1970, you said: "Nineteen hundred sixty-nine was the year of Arab plots and 1970 will be that of international conspiracies." This was reported in the English edition of *Fateh* dated February 6, 1970 (vol. II, no. 3). Time proved that your revolutionary flair was correct. What does the year 1971 have in store for the Palestinian revolution?

Arafat: The year 1971 will be that of epics. In its course, the fate of the whole Arab nation, and not only that of our Palestinian people, will be decided—and for generations to come.

Fateh: What exactly took place last September in Jordan and how did this affect the revolution?

Arafat: What took place in Black September was not simply an attack by the Jordanian military regime against the revolution but an attempt at genocide against the Palestinian population as a whole. The attempt was written, produced and directed by the Central Intelligence Agency. Delivering his "state of the world" message to the U.S. Congress in late February, Nixon confessed that the gravest threat to peace in the world since he took office in 1968 were the September events in Jordan. This reveals the forces which the revolution confronted and defeated last September. Nixon's confession is six months late. He was six months late in substantiating

our charge of U.S. involvement when we seized in Ashrafieh Hospital in Amman the identification card of a U.S. Marine corporal (Mark Lanners England of the U.S. Marine Corps, service number 2356949).

The Palestinian revolution was not defeated last September—neither militarily nor politically.

The confrontation showed that the Jordanian Army could not destroy the resistance despite its use of the equivalent of 120,000 tons of TNT.

This quantity of ammunition could not have been used by the Jordanian Army against the Palestinian revolution had it not been for unlimited U.S. supplies.

The Palestinian revolution forces inflicted about seven thousand casualties on the Jordanian Army. In other words, 18 percent of the whole Jordanian armed forces were felled by the Palestinian revolution in September. King Hussein himself admitted two thousand serious injuries in the ranks of his army. In Amman alone, the Jordanian Army lost ninety-one tanks, mostly of the Patton type: thirty-eight were destroyed completely and fifty-three were damaged.

These figures were confirmed by U.S. replenishments. The U.S. has replenished the Jordanian Army with forty-five Patton tanks and fifty tank engines. The army also lost one hundred twenty other vehicles.

Had it not been for emergency shipments of ammunition from the U.S., including unprecedented and uninterrupted airlifts, the Jordanian Army could not have been able to bear the brunt of the fighting.

The burdens borne by the revolution in Black September were also heavy.

The revolution took it upon itself to care for the families of over 3,400 killed and to treat some 10,800 injured.

It undertook to rebuild the (refugee) camps which were shelled with artillery, such as the Wahdat Camp in Amman, where destruction was about 80 percent complete.

It shouldered the responsibility of twenty thousand Palestinians who were detained from one to six months and that of their families.

It took it upon itself to look after the people who fled from Zarqa, Irbid, Amman and Ramtha as a result of the barbaric assault.

The Palestinian revolution's material losses amounted to £ 10.5 million sterling. Only part of this loss was compensated for through Arab contributions—mainly from Algeria and Libya. The Arab Relief Committee, on the other hand, started its work with a four-month delay.

Meanwhile, military and financial aid is being pumped to the Jordanian regime. The Jordanian regime has received—since September—the equivalent of \$105 million in military and financial aid. This excludes the value of ammunition stocks delivered in September.

Fateh: Do the figures of 3,400 killed and 10,800 injured refer to casualties in the ranks of the revolution's military cadres?

Arafat: No. Most of the casualties involved civilians. To give you an idea, our fatal military losses included nine hundred and ten fighters. Of these, eight hundred and twenty-six came from Fateh.

Fateh: Why did the Palestinian revolution agree to end the fighting in Jordan and to conclude an agreement with the Jordanian regime in Cairo September 27?

Arafat: As I told you, the September assault was not only directed against us as Palestinian revolutionaries but it was an attempt at genocide against the Palestinian population as a whole.

When they shelled the camps with artillery fire their intent was to exterminate our people, our women and children.

We had to prevent the genocide and to avoid the creation of "two Yemens." And it is a characteristic ability of a revolution to retreat one step in order to advance two. The

important thing is that the retreat should be organized and calculated.

Moreover, it goes without saying that the regime cannot coexist with us as the events have proved and that a revolution of the people can never be defeated.

Fateh: How would you comment on claims that the Palestinian revolution has ended, or at least been brought to its knees?

Arafat: The assault on the Palestinian revolution has many facets. Besides the military assault, there is a financial, informational and psychological assault aimed at leading the people to believe that the revolution has ended, or that it has completed its role, or is unable to fulfill the hopes pinned on it.

But six months have elapsed since September and the revolution is here to stay with all its leadership and struggling cadres.

Of course, there are those who mourn the revolution.

The so-called peace plan cannot be implemented as long as the people adhere to the revolution. So it is part of the plot to lead the people to believe that the revolution has ended.

The forces of the revolution have increased in number since September. To cite just one example: we lost nine hundred and ten fighters in September but four thousand five hundred fighters have since deserted the Jordanian Army and joined the ranks of the Palestinian revolution. This is over and above the graduates of our military training camps.

On February 11-12, five months after Black September, the Palestinian revolution proved it was staying put and defying. This is what took place in Mt. Hamalan (in Amman), after it was claimed that the Palestinian revolution had relinquished the arms of the militia. At 5:30 A.M. that day, about two thousand troops sneaked into Hamalan to lay their hands on arms stores of the militia. They discovered that we could not have been deceived into giving up our arms. We

counterattacked. We struck with rockets and heavy artillery. We closed down Amman airport for forty-eight hours and hit three planes. Our losses were thirteen killed. Theirs were seventy killed and many injured.

In other words, the revolution which was begun in the late 1950s and launched in 1965 when the people were still sleeping; the revolution which continued in 1967 when people were still stunned; and the revolution which was able last September to withdraw its head from under the guillotine—this revolution will never end or be brought to its knees.