

# The Palestinian Resistance Movement

(in early 1969)

*A report by Gerard Chaliand, published by Le Monde Diplomatique,  
March 1969, containing descriptions of commando training,  
the background and ideologies of the different groups,  
interviews with commando leaders and with rank-and-file,  
and a historical summary of the Palestine conflict.*

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The Fifth of June Society has translated M. Chaliand's report on the Palestinian Resistance Movement because of its exceptional comprehensiveness and objectivity. The statements by individual Palestinians alone make this report a valuable departure from the usual presentation of the refugees as a faceless mob. The Fifth of June Society does not necessarily endorse all M. Chaliand's views.

## BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE ARAB STATES

THE SCENE is an al-Fateh training camp in Syria, about forty miles from Damascus. In a stony plain, in the open country, are two large buildings. A short distance away are bare hills. It is here that a hundred and twenty men, dressed in camouflage and rubber boots, are being trained: they run in close formation, led at a fast pace by an easy-striding instructor. Every morning they have two hours of physical training: long-distance running, combat course, ju-jitsu, and karate. The standard of work is good and, in spite of severe weather conditions, some of the future *fedayin* are stripped to the waist. The course, which lasts for two to three months, is quite a difficult one with strict discipline and a very full timetable. It is strictly forbidden to take alcoholic drinks and meals are eaten standing up. The meals are sometimes interrupted by one of the leaders, at whose order the trainees immediately come to attention.

This winter is bitterly cold with strong winds blowing but, whatever the weather, the training is interspersed with long night marches. All the individual arms which, like the famous "Klashnikov", are usually of Soviet model and Chinese manufacture, are carefully greased. The leaders in charge of military training have to break the habits inherited from a backward society and to inculcate into their men a sense of discipline in which precision, efficacy and punctuality have their place. In this sense the training of the commandos introduces a modern element into a traditional society. Weapons are plentiful and the course aims at forming combatants capable of using the rifle, the F.M., the machine gun, the bazooka and the rocket. There are also specialised classes dealing with the techniques of dynamiting.

All the leaders are Palestinians, most of them under thirty. The greater part of them come from comfortable backgrounds and have studied in Arab countries. Apart from the military instructors—of which there are five—and the physical training instructor, there is a leader who is responsible for general discipline in the camp and a political commissar. The recruits are young—from seventeen to twenty-five years old—and, apart from two Turks and a Yugoslav, they are all Palestinians. The Turks are left-wing and are close to the Turkish Workers Party. For them the Palestinians' struggle is a just one and they take part in it out of a sense of internationalism, not out of Islamic solidarity. The Yugoslav, a Serb, preferred not to be questioned. In principle the simple trainee has the right to criticise his leaders but I did not have occasion to witness a concrete example of this. Political formation is of a much lower standard than military training. Certainly there are political books: Castro, Guevara, Mao Tse-Tung, Giap, Rodinson, General de Gaulle's memoirs, and also *Mein Kampf*. In view of my surprise at the inclusion of the latter work, the political commissar explained that it was necessary to read everything and that, as the Israelis behave like Nazis, it is useful to know something about the Nazis.

The general intellectual level is underdeveloped, and if we do not consider the presence of revolutionary books as the expression of an integrated political culture, it can be seen during discussion on precise points (not in general declarations and stock phrases) that the theoretical tools are embryonic and the ideology confused. From Fanon they take the description of the psychology of the colonised and the need to resort to violence; from Guevara, the texts advocating the need for armed conflict; from Mao, the concept of the prolonged war; from Debray, whose works are extensively translated into Arabic, the idea that the party is useless, for "the guerilla nucleus is the party in gestation". The only elements which are in some way integrated are those that can be integrated by a national movement, which is what al-Fateh really is. On the other hand, there is a very strong feeling of national identity among both staff instructors and Palestinian militants and, although the Palestinians claim to be an integral part of the Arab world, they consider that most—if not all—Arab regimes have dodged the Palestinian problem while pretending to solve it.

It is easy to cross the frontier between Syria and Jordan if you are in the company of al-Fateh militants; there is little or no control, either by the police (wearing a uniform which is clearly of British origin, and a spiked helmet), or by the Bedouins of the royal guard in their traditional dress with a straight dagger in their belts. Al-Fateh also has offices at the frontier. The countryside belonging to what is left of Jordan is very beautiful: mountain roads winding between narrow gorges, hills eaten away by erosion, narrow valleys with sparse vegetation, leafless poplars, white and fragile like birch trees. Sometimes we skirt a camp of refugees who are spending this winter of wind and heavy rains under canvas. The country is dotted with sad little towns as far as Amman, which itself is nothing but a large, desolate market-town, flanked by low houses. The main street brings to mind those seen in "Westerns". At some distance from the town centre, in a building guarded night and day by armed *fedayin*, al-Fateh has its public relations offices, modestly furnished, with maps on the walls. Here al-Fateh leaders, speaking English and French, welcome visitors, answer questions, and arrange programmes according to individual demands. For myself, I was only refused one thing, which was to take part in a commando operation: all my other requests were granted.

The east bank of the Jordan river—the present State of Jordan—is riddled with Palestinian resistance bases. Most of them are bases of al-Fateh which is, without doubt, the backbone of the resistance. For greater security some visits take place at night, by Landrover. Often, where the nature of the land permits, a base will dispose of one or more caves which are used for meetings. Ammunition, which is always plentiful, is also stored there. There is, among the *fedayin*, a considerable number of Palestinian students who have recently returned from the countries in which they were studying. Many of them have studied law, commerce, or the arts. Those who have been educated in Western Europe seemed to me to be the least inclined to consider the Egyptian experience under Nasser as an example of socialism, while most of the others regarded the structure of the United Arab Republic as revolutionary.

There are no political commissars attached to these bases where the young *fedayin* have been for some months—since the end of their military training—but sometimes there are discussions and

explanations with a visiting leader. Daily life in the bases is less arduous than the intensive training received by the recruits. But discipline is still very severe. During discussions with the *fedayin*, the shock caused by the defeat of June 1967, and by the exodus from the West Bank which many of them experienced, is clear. The difficult living conditions of the Palestinians prior to June 1967, which were then endured with a kind of bitter resignation, are now deeply felt and are regarded as absolutely intolerable. On many occasions, I noticed that the *fedayin* in no way consider themselves as an élite, nor do they disdain the refugee population. They do not have a commando mentality, but a very clear awareness and feeling that they are fighting *for* the refugees, of whom they themselves form an organic part. This feeling is a guarantee for the continuation of a close relationship with the mass of refugees.

#### NEAR THE RIVER JORDAN

**T**he bases which are closest to the territory occupied by Israeli troops are less than three miles from the river Jordan. It is possible to drive through the region during the daytime, and the frequent checks made by the Jordanian police do not apply to al-Fateh vehicles. On the way we passed Iraqi units whose tents were well hidden but who drew attention to their presence by spreading out their multi-coloured washing in the open only a few yards away. Many petrol pumps have no petrol and this is only one of the numerous signs of the economic upheaval that Jordan has suffered since the last war. Not far from El-Shuna—a large village almost completely destroyed by Israeli planes—lower down on the other side of the Jordan river, Jericho can be seen through field-glasses. Cars arrive, coming from the West Bank after having crossed the Allenby Bridge, which the Israelis have left open to allow the West Bank Palestinians to come and go freely.

Away from the road, everything is mined in this no-man's-land which extends on this side of the river Jordan. Not far away, carefully hidden beneath thickly branched trees, an al-Fateh commando section has dug solidly constructed shelters deep enough

for a man to stand up in. This camp was set up less than fifteen days beforehand and will soon be abandoned to prevent its position becoming known. Around the camp, mounted on jeeps, are heavy Czech and Chinese machine guns as protection against air attack. Like all the other bases I visited, this base also has rockets. About twenty *fedayin* live here and these take part in physical training every morning and in operations at night. The latter were much reduced during the month of January as torrential rain had swelled the waters of the Jordan, making it very difficult to cross the river. Before each operation, a reconnaissance patrol is sent out so that, if there is an Israeli ambush waiting for them, losses will be kept to a minimum. Political explanations made to visitors always—regardless of who they may be—insist that the combat in which the Palestinian resistance is engaged is not directed against the Jews as such, but against the Zionist state, which has deprived the Palestinian people (who for centuries lived in the territories now occupied by the Israelis), of its just rights.

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What do these young *fedayin* think? Why are they fighting?

Ismail Sirhan, a *feda'i* aged seventeen:

“Before 1948 my parents lived in a village near Bersheba called Zacharia; my father was a peasant and had 150 dunums and some cattle. Afterwards the family went to live near Hebron where we had a lot of difficulties but I was able to go to school. In 1967 the Zionists came and we had to leave for a second time. Of course we could have stayed but my father didn't want to live under the occupation of foreigners who had once already taken his land. So we set out and crossed the mountains and during the march we were bombarded and some people were killed. There is still a part of my family in Hebron but I am not able to see them. When I arrived in Amman I wandered through the town looking for some people I knew. I met a friend who was a member of the al-Assifa commandos and we spoke together. I already knew of al-Fateh's existence and, after two months in Amman, I joined the movement. I think that al-Fateh will free my country.



"I underwent three months of training and then I became a combatant. I took part in the battle of Karameh. Israeli planes bombarded the entire town and then their soldiers followed with tanks and artillery. They crossed the river in great numbers but we held out for twelve hours; we didn't let go and the Israelis left some tanks behind them and we captured some NATO weapons. I myself brought back a good Belgian rifle, a Herstal. Here there is no political commissar but the leaders spent a week with us last month explaining the revolution to us. What is the difference between the Jews and the Zionists? The Jews, that's a religion and we have nothing against them. The Zionists are those who took our land, they are aided by the imperialists and they try to convince the whole world that they have a sacred right to Palestine, but it isn't true."

Ibrahim Youssef, a *feda'i*, aged sixteen:

"Before 1948 my parents lived in Jaffa and then they came to Djebel Amman near the town. My father works there and earns 40 dinars a month (about 125 dollars). In 1967 we were living in Amman so we weren't directly involved in the war. I myself was not born in 1948 but my parents told me about Palestine and they said that we were exiles. When I was twelve I wondered why I had no country. Is there anybody in the world who has no country? I wondered and I asked those about me and I was told that the Zionists had driven us out of our country so that they could settle there. All the time I listened to the radio and I read in the papers that the Arab armies were one day going to free my country. But twenty years have gone by and no Arab country has helped us. They didn't even give us arms. My eyes were opened by a Palestinian teacher who said: 'The Arab countries are bound to the imperialists and the great powers and they can do nothing for us if we don't take things into our own hands! So I think that the struggle now depends on us.'

"I had heard of al-Fateh and I tried to join it in the beginning of 1968 when it wasn't so easy to make contact with the movement. I asked to join and I was trained and became a combatant. Those of us who need financial help receive 15

dinars a month but, as my father earns 40 dinars, I don't get anything and I think that's as it should be. For his part, my father contributes 5% of his salary to the movement. I took part in the battle of Kraima near Toubas and I have made several patrols into occupied territory. Twice it has been my mission to get explosives and mines into the occupied areas and I was able to hand them over to our brothers and to come back."

### THE ASHBAL

In addition to the bases and the training camps, al-Fateh has set up two camps for the *ashbal* (young tigers), boys of ten to fourteen years, to give them political and military training. We were able to visit one of these camps not far from the al-Bakaah refugee camp. This camp trains three hundred young boys, with the consent of their parents, and in most cases there is already a member of the family in the *fedayin*. The boys are split into two groups, one of which comes in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The other camp, which was opened seven months previously, has a hundred and fifty boys. It is led by two instructors. According to the instructors, many parents still feel some reticence with regard to these camps and the numbers catered for could be much greater as there is no lack of instructors. The *ashbal* are young boys who do not go to school: those who follow the UNRWA classes (the UN organism responsible for the refugees) are not accepted—they must carry on with their studies. Reading and writing are taught in the camp. In this way and taking into account the triple programme—sports, political and military—the boys spend most of their day at the camp before returning to sleep with their families in the refugee tents. The very first members of the *ashbal*, who started on the course seven months ago, continue their training and should, in principle, join the *fedayin* when they reach the age of fifteen. Meanwhile they are an active ferment of militant nationalism in the refugee camps and especially in the midst of the other young people whether at school or not.

The group that we visited trains for three hours every

afternoon. Monday: shooting practice with the Chinese sub-machine gun; the "Shmaisur"; judo; history of Palestine. Tuesday: close combat; lessons about the refugees and the action of al-Fateh; football. Wednesday: target practice with the "Klashinkov"; history of Palestine; obstacle race. Thursday: target practice with the Belgian F.M.; free sport. Friday: fifteen-mile march. Saturday: close combat; combat course; rifle practice (Egyptian model); political formation. Sunday: close combat; machine-gun practice; political formation; football.

Alaeddin, aged fourteen:

"Before this I didn't do anything but now I go to school in the morning and I come here in the afternoon. My parents live in the camp opposite. They were driven out of their homes in 1948 and again in 1967. This lack of stability is totally unacceptable and life under canvas is very hard. When it rains the rain gets into the blankets and we shiver and try to make ourselves as small as possible. I want to join the *fedayin* to free my country and I think that everybody should join the commandos to finish with this intolerable life.

"I come here every day at half past two in the afternoon after school. I practise shooting, hand-to-hand fighting and we also practise crawling, walking along tree trunks, jumping over obstacles, climbing and walking in the mountains. In the classes we talk about Palestine, the lost country, and of the life we lead. We are reminded of our duty towards our country and guerilla warfare. And if we didn't learn that I wouldn't come here any more. My parents encourage me and send me here to prepare for the future so that we can make an end of this wretched life that they have been living for twenty years and that I cannot accept."

Hamid, aged thirteen:

"My father is a member of the *fedayin*. My mother lives in the camp opposite with my sisters and small brothers. The life there is far from pleasant. When the wind blows during the daytime, the sand gets into all the food; when it rains, the rain seeps in under the tent and it is cold in winter. We eat mostly rice and vegetables and, only very rarely, meat. I

have been here for seven months; before that I spent my time doing nothing. I have learnt to handle a rifle and many other kinds of arms because we have been told that we can't fight Israel by discussion. Before 1967, my family lived in Jericho and that is why I joined al-Fateh. Why don't the other boys do the same? Because their family situation doesn't encourage them to join—some parents are afraid and some of the boys who have lost their fathers have to work to provide for their families' basic needs. But our numbers will grow because we shouldn't rely on any Arab army; the disaster of 5th June 1967 proved that the Arab armies can't help us!"

Shedad, aged fourteen:

"My father is employed in the public works department—he is a housebuilder. He is also a member of the political branch of al-Fateh. My mother lives in the camp with the rest of the family. In winter, the tent leaks and the rain gets into our food and on our blankets and the earth is very damp. It's a cruel life and it's better to join the commandos than to live in such conditions. Here I've learnt to fight and I've been taught the necessity for political violence. Political violence is the struggle led by the commandos. Everyone should join the commandos instead of talking, because there has been nothing but talk for twenty years and nothing has been achieved. Outside public opinion has only begun to change since our movement went into action. We would rather belong to the *fedayin* than wait around for gifts from UNRWA. We want to free Palestine and we don't want to rely upon anybody for that, neither Nasser nor any other Arab leader, because they do nothing but talk and they don't really want to help us. Israel claims that the new generation of Palestinians has forgotten its fatherland but this isn't true. Israel also says in its propaganda that Palestinian Arabs are not civilised—do they mean by this that we have no right to a fatherland?"

## AL-FATEH'S VICTORY

Recently in Cairo an election was held to choose the eleven members\* of the Executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. This election marked a victory for al-Fateh over the other Palestinian resistance movements. The conference was boycotted by the PFLP (the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) and the PLA (Palestine Liberation Army) as a protest against the authoritarian distribution of seats at the conference (out of the hundred and five seats in the Palestinian National Assembly, al-Fateh had thirty-three seats, whilst the PFLP had only twelve and the PLA five). In spite of this al-Fateh has managed to impose itself officially as the major resistance movement and a significant proportion of the Palestinian forces now centre around al-Fateh in a national front which has re-adopted the initials PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation). This organisation, which was first created by the Arab states in Alexandria in 1964, has shown itself to be lacking in every way. The first gesture of Yasser Arafat, the newly-elected president of the PLO, was to sell the two limousines which had been at the disposal of his predecessor Yahya Hamouda. Naturally this unification is delicate and necessitated difficult compromises. In principle, the organisations which make up the new PLO are: al-Fateh, Saeqa (a Baathist organisation linked to Syria), the old Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), and a certain number of independents, more or less closely connected with one or other of these movements.

But we have to go back a little in order to separate the different elements which make up the Palestinian resistance. On the eve of 5th June 1967 there were only three Palestinian organisations: the PLO, created by the Arab states, al-Fateh, and a small organisation called the *Abtal al-Aouda* (Heroes of the Return) which was one of the nuclei of the future PFLP. Another nucleus of

\* The executive committee is composed of: Yasser Arafat (president, al-Fateh), Mohamed Najjar (al-Fateh), Farouk al Kaddoumi (al-Fateh), Khaled al Hassan (al-Fateh), Youssef al Bourji (Saeqa), Ahmed al Chehabi (Saeqa), Ibrahim Bakr (indep. pro-Fateh), Kamal Nasser (indep. pro-Fateh), Hamed Abou Sitta (indep. pro-Fateh), Yasser Amr (indep. pro-Saika), Abd al Mejid Shuman (treasurer, independent).

the same front was the Palestinian section of the Arab Nationalist Movement.

## THE OLD PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANISATION

The PLO was founded in 1964 at the Arab summit meeting in Alexandria, at a time when Israel had just made it clear that it intended to change the course of the tributaries of the Jordan river. Jointly created by President Nasser, King Feisal, Colonel Boumedienne and President Bourguiba, the PLO, under the leadership of Ahmed Shoukeiry, was financed by the Arab States. It was attached to the Arab governments and its offices had to rely upon this or that state. Its army, the PLA (Palestine Liberation Army), was an integral part of the Arab armies and, in June 1967, it was stationed in Baghdad.\* The PLO was regarded by the other Palestinian organisations as a stateless foreign ministry and it was unambiguously called "a sponge to soak up Palestinians". Corruption and nepotism were some of its major components.

There was great confusion in the PLA after the defeat of June 1967. A commando movement was created on the fringe of the classical army—the Popular Liberation Force. Until the recent congress, a member of the executive committee was paid as much as a U.N. official†; the members of the bureau were treated like ambassadors and they were paid in hard currency. Those who lived in the United Arab Republic came to collect their salary in Beirut so that they could double its value on the black market. Strong contingents of the PLA were not—and still are not—stationed in Jordan but in the UAR and other Arab countries and they are only moved by agreement with the governments concerned. A PLA officer used to earn £ 60 a month (about \$ 180), plus

\* The P.L.A. was never stationed in Baghdad. Its headquarters moved between Amman, Damascus & Cairo; and its units are divided between Syria, Jordan & Egypt. (Editor/FJS)

† M. Chaliand must have been misinformed. According to a PLO source, the highest paid officials get £100 per month. (The Chairman gets £150.) (Editor/FJS)



various bonuses—the maximum operations bonus being £ 20.

After Ahmed Shoukeiry, who found fame through his declaration on the eve of the June war, the PLO was led by Yahya Hamouda. Whilst it had a considerable proportion of its forces in Jordan, the PLO had practically no popular foothold among the Palestinian population. Within the organisation there was a hidden struggle between the partisans of Yahya Hamouda in alliance with the Shoukeiry faction (which constituted the official apparatus of the PLO) and the faction of Abu Gharbiya which tried to form an alliance with the officers of the PLA. The latter wished to control the apparatus of the PLO but did not succeed, and consequently the PLA refused to take part in the Palestinian congress in February 1969.

The Popular Army is about 15,000 strong. There is no doubt that in coming months the Palestine Liberation Organisation recreated around al-Fateh will try to rally as many of the PLA troops as possible. But the possibility that some Arab states will continue to finance an army which divides the Palestinian resistance cannot be excluded. In fact the original PLO was, for a long time, a means of controlling the Palestinian problem.

#### TEN YEARS TO CREATE AN AUTHENTIC PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE

**A**l-Fateh was the first real Palestinian movement after the 1948 exodus. Palestinian society which found refuge in Jordan no longer had any traditional organisation. Up to 1952 there was a void because a United Nations settlement was expected (in 1949 the United Nations had invited the refugees to return to the former Palestine but this return was opposed by the Israelis on the grounds that it endangered the principle of a national state with a Jewish majority). From 1952-53 there were Palestinian branches of political parties operating in the Arab Near East, such as the Baath Party and the Arab Nationalist Movement (Harakat Al-Komiyin Al 'Arab). The defeat of 1948 also led to the setting up of a Palestinian section of the Muslim Brotherhood and to Palestinians joining the Jordanian communist party. Up to the Tripartite

Aggression against Egypt in 1956, there was still no embryo of a Palestinian national organisation. The Gaza strip was then occupied for several months by Israeli troops and it was during this time that the first nucleus for the future al-Fateh was set up. It consisted of students and people from the lower middle-classes who became gradually convinced that the Palestinians must take their cause into their own hands. Initial progress was slow and against the mainstream. Slogans and aspirations to unity, strongly promoted by the Nasser regime, made themselves felt strongly during the years 1957-58, culminating in the union between Syria and Egypt, which was the foundation for the United Arab Republic.

Arab unity was never so much in the air as during the period 1957-1967 but, at the same time, rivalry between the Arab governments became ever more acute. But aspirations to Arab unity are so deeply popular that they constitute a reality which must be taken into consideration. Regardless of their country of origin, the interaction and confusion of the political movements themselves (Nasserist and Baathist tendencies, the Arab Nationalist Movement, etc.), is also significant. In this context, the Palestinian national question was not a simple one; even more so because, with the ideal of unity, the existence of Israel made it possible for many Arab governments to redirect popular aspirations towards external objectives and an outside enemy. Soon, al-Fateh leaders were accused by some states of being agents of the CENTO Pact.\* The strict secrecy which surrounded the various Palestinian resistance movements up to 1967 was due not so much to the Israeli enemy, as to the attitude of some Arab states where Palestinian militants were subjected to house arrest, prison, and sometimes even worse treatment. Al-Fateh still remembers that its first partisan lost was killed in 1965 by a Jordanian soldier.

Two important events took place in 1961-62 which were to give a real impetus to the movement: the rupture of the union between Syria and Egypt in 1961, and Algerian independence, which was obtained in 1962 after a long armed struggle. At this date numerous small Palestinian nationalist groups began to make

\* This replaced the Baghdad pact and is composed of the non-Arab Muslim states which have connections with the United States (Turkey, Iran, Pakistan.)

an appearance. As in the years 1958-1961 al-Fateh had tried to set up the nucleus of a political organisation, so from 1962 onwards the movement concentrated all its efforts on the setting up of a military organisation; the nucleus of al-Fateh, *Harakat Al-Tahrir Al-Falastini* (Movement for the Liberation of Palestine), gave rise to the nucleus of the military organisation al-Assifa (the Tempest). In 1963-64, while the United Nations was examining the refugee problem and the Arab summit was deciding to set up the PLO (after the first Palestinian congress, held in Jerusalem in May 1964, in which al-Fateh took part) the movement, having realised that it could not bring weight to bear by formal preparations, decided to go over to armed action.

#### THE STRATEGY OF THE "FOCO"

Al-Fateh decided to by-pass the heavy machinery of the PLO by entering the armed struggle as a Palestinian national movement, independent of the Arab governments. Its first commando operation was announced on 1st January 1965. Armed action was undertaken in difficult conditions of secrecy by a small nucleus without any popular support and without any mobilisation of the Palestinian population. The Arab states opposed this action in proportion to their own lack of readiness—or willingness—for a military confrontation with Israel. The mass of the Palestinian people remained passive, awaiting a solution to their problem from the Arab states and especially from the UAR. Al-Fateh was an isolated movement trying to prove that Palestinians could fight, could pose their own problem, and could escape the control of the various Arab states, especially Jordan, which was hostile to any possibility of a change in the "status quo". Jordanian police checks on the refugee population made any political activity extremely difficult. In Cuban terminology, the Palestinian resistance began as a "foco", as a nucleus employing armed violence, without any political preparation of the population it is trying to involve. But while the strategy of the "foco" as applied within the framework of *class struggle* has shown itself to be ineffective in Latin America, the armed nucleus of the Palestinian resistance, thanks to the

military collapse of the Arab states, has been successful within the framework of a *national movement*. Naturally this strategy was not deliberately chosen but was imposed by the circumstances and by the nature of the national movement of which al-Fateh is the nucleus. Al-Fateh took nearly two years to establish a commando group and to assert itself as an element not to be disregarded on a regional level. Towards the end of 1966 two other groups made their appearance: a small organisation, Heroes of the Return, and the Palestinian branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement. In the following November, these groups set up the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine). With the official PLO, three Palestinian movements had made a gradual appearance on the scene and the wall of silence which had surrounded the Palestinian question slowly crumbled. At the beginning of 1967, al-Assifa and the military branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement, Avenging Youth (Shebab Al-Tha'r), intensified their operations. Up to that time the Palestinian population was not very interested in the resistance movement. The Israelis, for their part, following a strategy that they continue to use, but which will doubtless soon be modified, hit at the Arab states to make them in their turn strike at the Palestinian resistance movement (attacks against the West Bank, threats against Syria, etc.).

#### AFTER JUNE 1967

Undoubtedly the future will uncover tangible proof that President Nasser only committed himself to the blockade of the Tiran Straits and the verbal escalation which ensued for tactical reasons, without any intention of starting hostilities. The fact remains that the Arab armies were defeated, some of them—like the Syrian army—without having really fought at all. Apart from strictly military considerations, there were, as some observers noticed, social and political reasons for the defeat: in Syria, a precarious regime which preferred not to risk the military apparatus which was the guarantee of its survival; in the UAR, a caste of officers belonging to the largely privileged administrative middle class who had little desire for any change in the status quo. Taking



into account the social structure of the Arab countries, it is not possible for any of the regimes to undertake a popular struggle similar to that taking place in Vietnam.

On 30th June 1967, al-Fateh held a clandestine conference and decided to resist. Al-Assifa trained an ever-increasing number of volunteers. Operations were re-opened in September and the armed struggle soon aroused a feeling of belonging to a national collectivity among the Palestinian people. Al-Fateh operations were at first directed against towns in west Jordan: Nablus, Ramallah, Jerusalem. Within the occupied territories themselves there was very little popular support; everything had collapsed under the shock of the defeat. The commandos could only get into contact with relatives, friends, or former neighbours. Very soon Israeli repression disrupted the embryo of a resistance network. Palestinians who helped the resistance had their houses blown up. Al-Fateh had to modify its strategy, but the struggle had given it prestige, and the repression—though at first discouraging—heightened the tension with the occupying power which the Israeli authorities, by the introduction of liberal measures, had tried not to provoke.

To limit its losses, which were numerous because of the Israeli use of helicopters and lack of cover, al-Fateh decided, in a second stage, to send in its commandos from the outside—namely from Jordan—for rapid harassing operations that would keep the enemy always on the look-out, oblige him to mobilise all his human resources and to threaten his economic life. At the beginning of 1968, after Ahmed Shoukeiry had left the direction of the PLO in December, al-Fateh invited the resistance movements to unite, not at the top but at the level of active combat. But in spite of the fact that a bureau of coordination was set up, no progress was made towards this unity until February 1969.

On 21st March 1968, the battle of Karameh took place. A sizeable Israeli column, preceded by tanks and with air cover, crossed the Jordan. The Palestinian commandos, who could have avoided a confrontation, received the order to stand fast and they held out for twelve hours. Israeli losses were not inconsiderable and some tanks were left behind on the field of battle. According to the Israelis this battle was of small importance; but for the Palestinian resistance, Karameh represented an important turning

point. For the Arab states (King Hussein had his photograph taken mounted on a ruined tank), as well as for the mass of the Palestinian people, Karameh was an act of *armed propaganda*. The Palestinian resistance organisations, who had knowingly broken the rules of guerilla warfare, wanted to prove that even without tanks or planes it was possible to fight against the victors of the six-day war. The Israelis, who only drew up a military balance-sheet of this battle, ignored the psychological importance of this *fedayin* victory, however modest, for the defeated Palestinian masses.

### CONSOLIDATION

It seems that from this time propaganda was intensified among the refugees with the aim of rediscovering their Palestinian identity. It was also about this time that the resistance was able to consolidate its military bases, the state of Jordan included, and to turn them into relatively secure bases, first of all in the Ghor mountains where a great number of fighters have been trained. While it had taken al-Fateh seven years (1958-1965) to complete the structure of its first politico-military nucleus, in only eighteen months the movement was able, in the void left by the 1967 defeat, to train thousands of fighters, to assert itself in the Arab world, to oblige Israel to take account of its existence, to begin to mobilise the Palestinian population, and to set up the beginnings of a sanitary and administrative infrastructure.

The armed struggle, intended to win popular support, began to bear fruit. Soon, the impression made by the resistance on Arab public opinion overtook the influence of Baathism and Nasserism and imposed itself upon the mass of Palestinians. The spontaneous support resulting from this still recent change has not yet been harnessed, and the control exercised by the Palestinian organisations over it is far from being assured. But sympathy for the *fedayin* was strong enough for the refugees to manifest their support for these organisations on 4 November 1968, when there was a confrontation with the royal Jordanian troops.

On 4th November, Tahir Dablan, a Palace agent who had set up an armed group, The Battalions of Victory, provoked an

incident with Jordanian security forces to provide them with a pretext for opening fire on the Palestinian organisations. The confrontation took place around the camp of al-Wahdat and lasted for several hours. In spite of their use of heavy artillery the Jordanian troops were not able to carry the day. So King Hussein summoned Yasser Arafat to negotiate a compromise. Shortly afterwards a Palestinian emergency council was set up which, in principle, was composed of all the Palestinian unions, parties, organisations and armed movements.

This council included a bureau of military coordination which was dependent upon it. The Palestinian organisations were driven to tighten up their ranks by the political context, as well as by the necessity of uniting to form a national force in the face of Israel. The Palace made the various Palestinian movements sign an agreement in fourteen points which, among other things, stipulated that there should be coordination between the military strength of the Palestinians and the Jordanian forces, and which called for the formation of a unified staff and prohibited commando operations south of the Dead Sea. Except for the latter point, the agreement has remained a dead letter, mainly on account of the relative strength of the forces concerned. In January this year, the Jordanian authorities instituted compulsory military service.

#### AL-FATEH'S PRIMORDIAL AIM: THE STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY

**A**l-Fateh's principal leaders are: Yasser Arafat, Salah Khalaf, Khalil Wazir and Farouk Kadoumi. A regional committee has been established in each region where there are refugees and each region is organised as a complete unit with its own political bureau, information bureau and military bureau. On the local level there are the cells which are to be found in the camps, in the universities for the students, and in the factories for the workers. Liaison with the regional committee is made through the intermediary of a refugee committee responsible for all refugee camps within a given zone, a student committee responsible for all Palestinian students in a given country, and a workers' committee

responsible for all the workers in the factories of the region.

The central committee groups all the regional committees; the executive is formed of the political bureau, the number of whose members is not known. Representatives of the military branch of al-Fateh, al-Assifa, sit on both the central committee and the political bureau.

All al-Fateh's officers have a two-fold role: political and military. According to the movement, there is a school for leaders giving ordinary military training and advanced political formation. Officers on a higher level are given intensive military training. As it is a national movement, al-Fateh consists of leaders of different social origins—its PFLP rivals reproach it for being composed of right-wing and conservative elements, especially at the top—and on the ideological level it draws its inspiration from certain principles drawn up in 1958 by a commission appointed by the central committee:

- revolutionary violence is the only way in which the fatherland can be liberated;
- this violence must be exercised by the mass of the people;
- the aim of this revolutionary violence is to liquidate the Zionist identity, in its political, economic and military forms, from all the occupied land of Palestine;
- revolutionary action must be independent of any control either by state or party;
- this revolutionary action will be of long duration;
- the revolution is Palestinian in its origin and Arab in its extension.

#### A MEETING WITH YASSER ARAFAT

**Y**asser Arafat enumerated these principles to me indicating the general line of the movement, during a much-interrupted conversation in a cave some score of miles from Amman and not far from a large town. At night we climbed a steep path guarded by look-outs hidden behind the rocks. The large cave was furnished with tables and chairs and was equipped with a telephone which rang at least half a dozen times in less than an hour. Yasser Arafat

was taking leave of quite a big delegation. On the table there was a "Klashinkov". Arafat is of small build, with a quick eye and an economy of gesture. His thinking is precise and flexible and he is not verbose. During our conversation he recalled the difficulties that the Palestinian resistance had experienced before emerging as an autonomous force. He considers as a very positive development the fact that not only Arab public opinion but also world public opinion has begun to be aware of Palestinian national reality. This is a reality that the state of Israel has tried to conceal, because if the threat which hangs over Israel, according to Zionist propaganda, is aimed at sensitizing an opinion which quite rightly remembers Nazism, the Palestinian people has *in fact* been wronged by the establishment of Zionist colonisation. The Israeli authorities, Arafat said, call our commandos "terrorists" but all national resistances have been called this—in France, for example, during the Nazi occupation. Our aims are military and economic; reprisals against civilians have only been made in answer to Israeli attacks: it was after the bombing of Irbid and Kafr-Kasr that a bomb was left in Jerusalem, and after the bombing of Salt that the attack on Tel-Aviv took place. As regards the extension of commando operations, Arafat thinks that these will very shortly be multiplied, as soon as the mobility of the commandos enables them to strike more deeply into the occupied areas. The *fedayin* are gaining increased experience as they improve their level of combat. Operations such as those against the phosphates factory at Sodom, the plastics factory at Bersheba, the petrol refinery at Elath, and the Dodge assembly plant at Nazareth will become more numerous. According to Arafat, what gives Israel its strength is the fact that for it the war is decisive. But, he added, we offer the population the choice of remaining in Palestine. Israel's weak spot is the fact that it is engaged in an unjust war—our struggle is beginning to prove this to the world. When I asked him if the Palestinian resistance would accept a compromise imposed by the Great Powers, with the agreement of the Arab countries, Arafat pointed to the machine gun and replied: "We will carry on the struggle."

At the beginning of the year, while the Israeli air force continued its policy of trying to turn the Arab states against the resistance movement, by bombarding Naga Hamadi (UAR), south Jordan,

and Beirut airport, the movement was establishing itself and becoming a force to be reckoned with. Private and state aid given to it has become increasingly important. Well-informed circles in Lebanon estimate that the annual collections receipts of al-Fateh are worth at least two million pounds sterling.

With the organised mobilisation of the Palestinian population—which has still to be developed—one of al-Fateh's problems is to raise the political quality of its middle level cadres, which is at present a weak spot. At the moment they are hurrying to organise the refugees, because the time factor is all-important in this year, 1969, when the Great Powers must try to intervene. At the same time, the movement is trying to create an atmosphere of permanent military mobilisation within the population. And the recent steps towards unifying the Palestinian organisations are aimed at creating a national popular army. In effect, at the moment, the resistance only asserts itself on the level of commando operations and it will require an organised—and thus political—action to reach a stage of greater effectiveness. Certainly the conflict is a national one, and it is natural for al-Fateh to be a broad national movement whose first interest is national identity. In any case the political context of the region would not long tolerate any other kind of movement. But it seems that the distrust of political bargaining and of verbalism has been turned, in the case of many leaders, into a refusal of all politisation, leaving the movement's ideology—both conscious and unconscious—impregnated by the region's conservatism. Officially the nature of the future state is defined in a simple formula: **"The land will belong to those who liberate it"**.

In spite of the accusations by rival groups denouncing its right-wing tendencies, there are also Marxists in al-Fateh, but in an individual capacity, not as part of a current or group. As far as I know, none of these has a key post—except possibly one of the "independents" who was elected to the PLO Executive Committee last February. With regard to the Arab states, al-Fateh's position is clear: no intervention in the internal affairs of the Arab states as long as the states do not intervene in the affairs of al-Fateh. So it seems unlikely that the movement will, at the moment, take the initiative of calling into question the status quo in Jordan, especially as such an action would be sure to worry the other Arab



states which harbour refugees, and where a considerable number of commandos are stationed. Also such an action might eventually incite Israel to occupy the east bank of the Jordan.

#### THE CRISIS WITHIN THE POPULAR FRONT

Known mainly for the diversion of an El Al plane to Algiers and the attacks at Athens and Zurich airports, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) split up in February 1969 into two rival factions which oppose each other. There is a "moderate" majority wing which was behind the Zurich airport attack and a Marxist minority wing which is in process of setting up an autonomous organisation, the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

The first nucleus of what was later to become the Popular Front was formed in Syria around 1959-60. It was the Arab Nationalist Movement which, like the Baath, is an inter-Arab movement. At that time, the Palestinian branch of the Arab Nationalist Movement thought that Arab unity was the only solution to the Palestinian problem, so the movement showed some sympathy for Nasser's policies. But, after several years, the movement realised that it was waiting in vain, so it began to organise itself around some basic principles:

- The responsibility for the Palestinian cause rests first upon the Palestinian people, and second upon the Arab people;
- The Palestinian problem is a national problem which should be independent of political quarrels between Arab states, and no one state can take this responsibility upon itself.

In August 1965, six months after al-Fateh, what was then called the Palestine Liberation Front, began to launch commando operations from the Syrian and Jordanian frontiers, with three military groups: the Abdel Kader Husseini, Izzedin Al-Kassam and Abdellatif Chrourou groups. These operations include the action at the Bichum stadium, the cinema Royal at Haifa, and the train in Jerusalem. Like al-Fateh, the Front at first had difficulty in gaining popular support among the refugees.

It was after the defeat of June 1967 that the PFLP was created out of three existing organisations: the Heroes of the Return led by Ahmed Jebril, the Arab Nationalist Movement created and led by George Habash, and the military organisation of the movement Avenging Youth (Shebab Al-Tha'r). The Movement of Free Officers, a fourth group which had been set up in Jordan, joined the Front in 1968.

The PFLP's first military operation was launched on 1st November 1967. Then, from a small mainly military organisation, the Front developed into a political organisation with its foundations in the mass of the people. Divergencies soon became apparent when the elements in the Arab Nationalist Movement—which was joined between 1967 and 1968 by numerous "progressives"—began to attack the governments of the Arab states, with the aim of creating by means of the Palestinian struggle a revolutionary climate in the Arab countries. The PFLP took part in the Palestinian National Assembly in Cairo in June 1968. The first split took place in November when the group of Ahmed Jebril, the Heroes of the Return, split away. Then in December and January 1969, disagreement between the right wing, whose best known figures are George Habash, Waddi' Haddad, Ahmed al Yemeni and Adib ard Rabouh, and the left wing became more acute. In February the two groups met in violent opposition and the rupture was complete. Meanwhile the PFLP refused to attend the Cairo conference at which the Executive Council of the Palestinian organisation was chosen, because it was only offered twelve out of the hundred and five seats in the Palestinian National Assembly.

Although George Habash's group, which has retained the initials PFLP, considers that al-Fateh is right wing, there do not seem to me to be any serious ideological differences between them. But ideological reasons hardly ever explain the antagonisms between organisations whose aims are relatively similar. The PFLP has quite an important military organisation and some popular bases but its financial means are fairly limited. The recent attack at Zurich airport, which was disclaimed by al-Fateh, was intended to draw attention to the PFLP, but it is doubtful whether the Front can assert itself by the use of such methods only. The struggle of the Palestinian organisations is twofold: on the

one hand, in the field itself and, on the other, for world public opinion.

### THE MARXISTS

On the road leading to the north of Jordan, with members of the Marxist faction of the PFLP, we passed next to the Roman ruins of Jarash and ended up at a refugee camp not far from Irbid. The youngsters gathered round the *fedayin* and went with us up to the camp. Here, two large tents had been set up by a group of *fedayin* who had been living on the spot for over a month in a campaign to mobilise the refugees. As far as I know this is the only group that lives with the refugees and shares their daily life. In so far as its means permitted, this group, which consists of about twenty five *fedayin* for six or seven thousand refugees, first tried to improve the material conditions of the refugees. Then it began to organise and train the camp's youngsters. About two hundred young boys take part in this training, which consists of learning to march, physical education, the rudiments of close combat, and the repetition of slogans. They have lessons every day. In this way, contact is gradually made with the population and new fighters are recruited. Apart from three intellectuals, all the fighters are refugees. During discussions that I had with them, they seemed to be solidly formed on a political level and they were not satisfied simply with repeating stock phrases. On the other hand, their supply of arms is far from plentiful; this group of the PFLP has no financial means of its own.

We continued along the road as far as a base situated less than ten miles from the river Jordan. The countryside was rough and we had to continue on foot, amid poplars and waterfalls, to climb up into the mountains, covered with vegetation thick for the region. It was raining when, having passed by five lookouts hidden in the rocks, we finally reached a cave whose entrance was invisible from the narrow path. This is one of the main bases of the group, and it is here that they finish the military training of their *fedayin* and give them advanced political formation. There are two phases to this formation. First of all for the beginners,

explanations are given about the Palestinian problem, its history, present situation and future possibilities. They also study texts relating to revolutionary violence and the problems of armed combat by authors such as Guevara, Castro, Mao Tse-Tung, and Giap. Each text is placed in the social and historic context of which it is the expression and the theorisation. The fighters whom we questioned had a fairly good knowledge of Cuba, Vietnam, and China.

The second phase, like the first one, lasts for six weeks. Questions relating to the revolution are dealt with; the class struggle, the transition period, etc. They study Lenin; what ought to be done; the state and the revolution; experience of building in China, and Vietnam. There are also animated discussions about national revolutions that have not brought about a radical transformation of society (Algeria). The elements of economics are explained, using the works of M. Dobb, P. Baran and C. Bettelheim. Formation includes one hour's daily reading.

All the leaders of the group have pseudonyms but some of the figures connected with the group have not maintained their anonymity. Among the latter are: Nayef Hawatmeh, Jalal Kishk, and Muhsin Ibrahim and Mohammed Kishli of the newspaper Hurriya (Beirut).

It was in August 1968, during the first congress of the PFLP, held in secret in Jordan, that the split with the Habash majority took place. At this congress the group presented a programme and some propositions, among them:

- The nature of the national democratic revolution in a backward country. Role of the classes. Incapability of the lower middle classes to carry the revolution through successfully.
- A review of the Palestinian national movement through its various organisations. Review of their relations with the body of Palestinians and with the mass of the Arab peoples in general. Review of the attitude of the Arab states to the Palestinian national problem.
- Proposition of creating a National Front based on a minimum programme—on condition that it should be independent of any control.



- The struggle against Israel and Zionism for the creation of a democratic state in which the cultural and religious rights of the Jewish population would be guaranteed.

Although a minority group, the left wing was able to get its views accepted by the congress, but they have remained a dead letter. Shortly after this, the PFLP drew closer to the Egyptian and Iraqi regimes.

#### A VALUABLE ARMED NUCLEUS

In a general way, this group considers that all the Arab states, above all Jordan, have prevented the Palestinians from settling their own problem, and consequently from arming for the struggle, and that this is due to the nature of their regimes. But it thinks that the Palestinian problem cannot be separated from that of the Arab countries and from the social revolution which must be achieved in them. The group also thinks that it is an illusion to believe that if they do not intervene in the internal affairs of the Arab states, then the states will not intervene in the Palestinian conflict. One of the basic elements in the Palestinian problem is precisely the intervention of the Arab states. On the other hand, the group thinks that many regimes willingly or unwillingly, have already been affected by the Palestinian problem. It also considers that these states should be openly criticised, that they should be shown up as regimes bound to imperialism, or as “petit bourgeois” regimes incapable of conducting a revolutionary struggle against Israel and against imperialism. The group, which is criticised by al-Fateh for being sectarian, in its turn, criticises al-Fateh as right wing and as “tolerable to the Arab regimes”. It reproaches al-Fateh with not working sufficiently among the mass of the Palestinian population, and does not consider it capable of transforming the present commando struggle into a popular war. Criticism is not spared either (and here the group finds itself in company with other Palestinian organisations), of the Jordanian communist party (composed of both Palestinians and Jordanians), for its reformist line, its blind adherence to Soviet policy, and for its acceptance of the Resolution of 22nd November 1967, open

door to a compromise which would damage the Palestinian people.

On the political level, the group has tried to create a nucleus of militants of working class origin, who have received political training and who are given neither rank nor salary. We were able to see for ourselves that their meals were frugal, and conditions and means were both modest. But, sectarian or not, this is a fighting nucleus of indisputable value. Certainly the group has committed some errors of the leftist type, such as the agitation at Amman University in mid-January 1968, when elements of the group participated so actively that the Palace had a pretext to strike, with the balance of forces in its favour. It seems that al-Fateh brought pressure to bear to moderate this agitation, considering that a confrontation with royalist troops would be harmful. The group also forms mobile units which are sent to live with the refugee population to gain practice in working with the masses. It also has elements in the West Bank who carry out political agitation, and it sends out its commandos with the aim of attacking the Israeli economy and communications system.

The initial nucleus consisted of some hundreds of militants. To form this nucleus, the group went through difficult ideological struggles, in which its sectarianism helped at first to preserve it from compromises which could have led to a rapid loss of homogeneity. But now that it is established as an autonomous group, its political maturity will be measured by its tactical ingenuity in the complex—and contradictory—conditions in which it is placed. It has practically no financial means. But, in our judgement, the greatest handicap of the group is the fact that it was set up too late. Perhaps it was not impossible, in the Palestinian context, to organise a national movement, based on the masses and under revolutionary leadership; this liaison between a national movement and a revolutionary movement with social aims has already been successfully achieved in other countries. But for this the group would have had to be the first one to appear and rapidly win the masses. Above all—and the Palestinian Marxists are not responsible for this—it would have had to be the only group capable of mobilising the population towards objectives which would have had to be the only ones. In fact, all the Palestinian national movements put forward the struggle to re-conquer the lost country. It is often forgotten that in Vietnam—and also in China—the revolutionary

movement has made headway because of the incompetence, the failures and the successive elimination of the other nationalist movements, which were unable to offer a response to national aspirations and social needs. So it can be asked whether this group was set up too late, or rather whether it is not, in fact, *premature* in relation to the objective level of consciousness of the Palestinian masses, who are at the moment satisfied with a national movement like al-Fateh.

#### WHO HELPS WHOM?

The most recent Palestinian organisation is the Saeqa (Thunder), which was founded in Damascus after the defeat of June 1967. This is a Baathist organisation closely connected with the Syrian regime. Mahmoud al Maaita is one of its principal leaders. This movement fights for the liberation of Palestine and for Arab unity under the banner of Baathist ideology. It has some well-trained commandos who do not operate from the Syrian frontier but from Jordan, and possibly from the south of Lebanon. Its military bases in Jordan are fairly important and it has excellent equipment but, up to the present time, it has practically no links with the Palestinian population.

Like the original PLO, this movement joined with al-Fateh to set up the new Organisation for the Liberation of Palestine. If this organisation succeeds in cementing its precarious unity, it should become by the end of the year an organisation comparable to the Algerian FLN's importance in the national movement. There is no doubt that the PLA (Palestine Liberation Army) will have to re-join the PLO, and that will leave only two movements still outside its control: the PFLP of George Habash, and the PDFLP (the Marxists).\*

Which movements are helped by which states? Between the defeat of June 1967 and the congress of February 1969 the attitude of most states towards the Palestinian resistance underwent some

\* The PDFLP participates in the Command of Armed Struggle, set up in April 1969, to unite all the major groups with the exception of the PFLP. (Editor/FJS)

modifications. The Arab states had financed the original PLO, whose different sections were controlled by the country in which they were stationed. Syria mainly helps the Saeqa but, also, to a certain degree, al-Fateh, which has offices and training bases in Syria. But it was opposed to the PLO on the grounds that it was dependent on too many reactionary governments. Syria's relations with the PFLP are bad. During the year 1968, according to well-informed sources, there were no commando operations in the Golan Heights (Syrian territory occupied by Israeli troops). The United Arab Republic supports the PLO and has cordial relations with al-Fateh and, to a lesser degree, with the PFLP. Iraq supports al-Fateh and also the "moderate" wing of the PFLP. Algeria supports al-Fateh and no longer has any relations with the PFLP since the diversion of the El Al airliner to Algiers. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait both give financial help to al-Fateh. Jordan, willingly or unwillingly, puts up with the different organisations in its territory, which has just been declared a prohibited zone. Important financial contributions from private sources come from several Arab countries, notably from Libya.

#### AL-FATEH AND THE REFUGEES: HOSPITALS, SCHOOLS ...AND MEN

Since 1968, al-Fateh has begun to set up a network of public health installations. There are seven clinics under the direction of doctors and surgeons, seven social centres directed by nurses, and a convalescent home where there is also a clinic for performing serious operations. The hospital we visited not far from Amman is called "Palestine" and it was opened last November. The doctor in charge is a Palestinian who was in practice in Saudi Arabia up to 1967, when he returned to put himself at the service of the resistance. He does not receive any salary for his services. The hospital has a surgical block and a blood bank. There is another one at Salt. According to the figures I was given, these hospitals each receive about five thousand patients each week. Treatment, medicines and operations are all free. The UNRWA hospitals and dispensaries, although they provide important services, are

inadequate to meet the medical needs of the Palestinian population and al-Fateh is trying to make good this lack. Among the numerous diseases requiring treatment are: malnutrition, dermatosis, anaemia, and tuberculosis. Infant mortality is 32 per 1,000. According to al-Fateh's doctors, the food that the refugees receive from UNRWA is far below the 1,500 calories officially announced by the United Nations. There is a serious lack of proteins. The medicines most used in the movement's clinics are multi-vitamins, antibiotics and dermatological products.

Each clinic has a social centre consisting of four nurses who make regular visits to the camps to explain the principles of hygiene to the women. The medical staff, including the doctors, try to pin down the refugee population in order to eliminate diseases, but there are many problems. The refugees move their tents quite often, either because of climatic conditions or because of the instability inherent in being refugees. Sixty nurses have just been trained by al-Fateh doctors, who give training consisting of a month's theory and a month's practical work, with four hours' study each day.

Apart from the health problems of the refugee population, al-Fateh naturally has to provide for the medical needs arising from commando warfare. Before he is finally accepted, each future combatant undergoes a series of physical and psychological examinations, the aim of the latter being to determine the candidate's degree of combativeness and will power. Thirty to forty kilometres of mountain have to be covered alone, without food, carrying arms and a pack. After this test, the men are examined and accepted or rejected.

Along the whole length of the river Jordan, close to the frontier, al-Fateh has tried to create small underground medical posts, with a doctor-surgeon to each post. These are for the treatment of the wounded who are brought back on stretchers by their comrades. These posts, of which there are still only a few, are equipped with plasma and are able to give blood transfusions; each *feda'i* carries a disc with his blood group upon it. The surgeon of the post can perform quite difficult operations but the most serious cases are transferred to hospitals in the interior.

A concrete two-story building on the outskirts of Amman is the school "Jerusalem" set up by al-Fateh for the orphans of combatants who have died in action, the Shouhada (martyrs).

The refectory, kitchen, dormitories and class-rooms are all kept very clean. There are six teachers who each earn 14 dinars per month (about \$ 40). Fifty-five girls aged six to twelve are boarded at the school. They are all very neatly dressed. They have been chosen because they have no families and had been living in the refugee camps. According to age, they have four to six hours of lessons each day and the rest of the time is taken up with organised leisure activities. They are taught Arabic, arithmetic, the history of Palestine from the Ottoman occupation to the present day, and the geography of Palestine and the Arab world. During the year another school will be opened to accommodate a hundred girls and also a school for boys. The teachers are young and speak quite good English.

Fatma Issa Hamoud, teacher, aged twenty-two:

"My father lived in Palestine. In 1948 my family emigrated to Gaza and we lived there for six years. Then we settled in Jericho. In 1965, when I had finished secondary school, we went to work in Saudi Arabia. My brother was already a member of al-Fateh and he was killed on 6th June 1967. Soon after that we came back to place ourselves at the service of the revolution. But for the war of June 1967 I would certainly not have come back so soon but now I think that we must do all we can to get back our lost country and to enable our people to live in dignity. So we should go on fighting as long as needs be."

The "Jerusalem" orphanage is the first school set up by al-Fateh. As yet there are no classes given by the nationalist leaders in the refugee camps themselves. The movement hopes to establish some in the future but this presents some difficulties, mainly lack of personnel. Moreover the creation of a double power in so many areas by the Palestinian organisations in Jordan raises problems. Unlike the UNRWA schools, the orphanage diffuses a nationalist ideology: the girls follow special courses to become nurses, and the older ones are taught how to handle arms. On Fridays (the weekly holiday), the children pay visits to the movement's bases round Amman.



Khadija Mustapha, orphan, aged eleven:

"I lost my father in the war in a battle in the valley of Bethshinan. Before my father was killed, we lived at Irbid where we had a house which was destroyed. My father was a house-painter. I went to school and life was very pleasant. Now the only family I have is an aunt who lives in a camp at Irbid. I like being here because the teacher is like a sister and a mother to us. I work hard to become well educated but what I really want to do when I grow up is to join the *fedayin* like my brother."

#### AT THE SCHNELLER CAMP

The Schneller camp, which is about eight miles from Amman, houses about fifteen thousand refugees. It is one of the biggest camps and its tents stretch out from the road right up to the bare hills. There are few flat surfaces in Jordan; few tents have the good fortune to be on really flat land. Multi-coloured washing is drying in the winter wind. There is only one water pump for the whole camp and corrugated-iron toilet cabins have been put up some distance away. Usually refugees coming from the same village put their tents together so that they will continue to feel some sort of group security. The tents are meant to house five to six persons but sometimes there are eight sleeping in them. Some of the children go to school regularly, the rest go only sporadically depending upon the season, their family, and the UNRWA schools. Very few of the adults have any work; the majority of them live on the spot and have no other activity but that of existing. There is a clandestine organisation in the camp, linked to al-Fateh: a reliable nucleus of leaders who can, when necessary, mobilise the whole camp, as happened when there was a confrontation with Jordanian troops on 4th November 1968. However, there is not at the moment a systematic organisation of the camp into sections with active participation by the population.

In the middle of the camp, al-Fateh has—with the help of the population—built a medical centre of corrugated iron which, according to the figures I was given, receives five thousand patients

a week. The small clinic is full of people and outside several hundred more are waiting. The clinic is run by a young Palestinian doctor and three nurses. Surgery hours are from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. each day. By 10.45 the number of patients received is close upon a hundred. The doctor, who got his degree in Cairo, is not paid any salary. He joined the movement at the beginning of 1968. Most of the cases examined are due to malnutrition. There are many cases of dermatosis, rheumatism and numerous infantile diseases. The clinic has a good supply of medicines which are carefully set in order. Thanks to this clinic, al-Fateh also asserts its political presence.

Haniya, refugee, aged seventeen:

"I come here to be treated because it is our own hospital. The doctor says I have rheumatism in my hands and that is why I am in pain. It hurts me to close my fists and this is because it is damp in the tents. We don't pay anything here: everything is given by the *fedayin*. May God give them long life!

"I came here in 1967. Before that I lived in Jericho. Then my father died and we left with my brother. Before, we had a house and I went to school. Now I don't go to school any more and we are beggars. We left everything behind us and came from Jericho to Amman on foot. My brother was without work for eleven months. Now he earns 30 piastres a month and we are able to survive. What I want more than anything is to go back home."

Khitam Abdellatif, refugee, aged forty:

"At that time (in 1948) we lived near Ramallah. We were a peasant family: the land was ours and we cultivated it ourselves. We also had some cattle. Then we were attacked and had to flee. I remember that we spent the night in a cave in the mountains. After a time, when we had walked a long way, we were put in an UNRWA camp at Ramallah. Quite a long time afterwards, we found some very poorly-paid work but we were able to eat and we survived, thanks be to God. Then, when we had begun to earn a little more and the family was in good health, suddenly the same thing happened

again. They came back and took everything and we left with just our shoes, the veils for our heads and very little else. We walked for three days.

"We arrived in Amman like street beggars and we knocked on the doors. My eight children were hungry. Soon the smaller ones fell sick with parasites in their intestines and they had to sleep on the floor with a shawl for their only blanket. Then we were sent to the camp of Jarash and we were given bread. If you could manage to get the bread it was all right but if you couldn't it was just too bad. A few days later they gave us flour and we made our own bread. This flour was our only food and I made a paste from it and gave it to the children with water. Two months afterwards, winter arrived and suddenly there was torrential rain and even snow, and the tent let everything in. My youngest child died of cold in the snow and mud.

"The leader of the camp met the authorities who got into contact with the King but all we got was to be taken by lorry near to a river close to the Kasr-El-Damia bridge, where the Israelis fired on us. So we fled and hid in the Salt mountains. We waited and then we came back to Amman on foot, walking for a whole day. Then we were brought by lorry to this place. At first they didn't give us anything either for eating or sleeping. Then somebody, a German called Schneller, said: "What's that! Are you leaving them here without anything?" Then UNRWA sent us tents and food. Life isn't easy here. My oldest child who is fourteen goes to the UNRWA school. My husband is sick but he would like to work, even if he is badly paid. We eat the hard broad beans and the kidney beans given to us by UNRWA with a little oil and some bread. For my youngest child, I also receive a little milk each day. We depend on God and the *fedayin*. It is enough for us that they bear arms because they are going to give us back our country. After what we have already suffered we can willingly put up with more in order to be able to live with our heads held high."

\* \* \*

Let us take a look at the refugee situation as it was prior to June 1967.

UNRWA (United Nations Relief & Works Agency, for the welfare of Palestinian refugees in the Near East), set up in 1950, notes: "No solution has appeared as regards the Agency's fundamental problem: the growing gap between its resources and the needs it has to meet."\* The number of registered refugees continues to increase. At the end of May 1967 it had reached a total of 1,344,576. The Agency reports, "The distribution of food-stuffs has remained limited by the ceiling imposed for rations, and the number of children registered who do not benefit from the distribution of rations has reached 284,304".

Not all the registered refugees live in the Agency's camps. Those outside the camps live in the towns and villages of the host country but they have roughly the same food and health services. The Agency points out: "From an economic point of view their situation is no different from that of the refugees living in the camps."

## THE NEW EXODUS

It was against this background that the war of June 1967 provoked a new exodus involving at least 350,000 refugees. This is in addition to the 350,000 persons who were displaced from the occupied regions of southern Syria, the west bank of the Jordan and the Gaza strip. The Agency reports that the elementary needs of most refugees have only just been met in the "villages" under canvas. "The inhabitants of the camps set up in the Jordan valley were also exposed to the physical danger of military operations and they fled once more to the high plateaux, far from the valley. For many of them it was the fourth displacement within a year". After the exodus towards east Jordan, the office estimated that there were still about 245,000 registered refugees on the west bank of the Jordan. In addition to the 494,000 registered refugees in East Jordan, the Jordanian authorities have counted 246,000 displaced

\* From the General Commissioner's report to the United Nations 1st May 1966—30 April 1967.



persons. This means that the total number of refugees and displaced persons in East Jordan is 740,000. In 1968, 590,000 refugees were receiving UNRWA rations, which means that 150,000 refugees were left without any help. Six tent "villages" have been set up on the high plateaux of east Jordan, accommodating a population of 78,400 persons.

The Agency's report says that in Gaza "the sequel to the war has been painful and prolonged and the Agency's services have suffered the consequences of repeated incidents and security measures such as curfews, interrogations, and detentions, sometimes followed by the demolition of houses. In addition, economic activity, always precariously balanced in Gaza, is stagnant and the Agency's services, especially food rations, are in ever greater demand. It is thought that between 40 and 45 thousand refugees have left Gaza since the hostilities (this was the figure given on 30th June 1968). The Agency estimates that there are still about 265,000 refugees living in Gaza. At present it distributes 206,638 rations to those enrolled on its registers, and another 2,435 to hard cases." During the second half of 1968, there was a steep increase in the occurrence of acute poliomyelitis in comparison with the level for the previous two years. Other diseases, including measles and tuberculosis, have also shown a marked rate of increase in 1968 among refugees in east Jordan and in Gaza. Finally, the report points out that "in the villages under canvas, where schools have been set up in tents, winter storms, flooding and a series of military actions (resulting in a new exodus of refugees in February and March 1968) have interrupted the education programmes."

#### THE HEART OF THE ISSUE: A NATIONAL CONFLICT

If Zionist ideology is one of the products of modern anti-semitism, it can be said that the conditions which made possible the foundation of the state of Israel are, to a large extent, the consequence of Nazism and its domination of Europe. The development of Zionist nationalism is also derived in some measure from the failure of Stalinist Marxism with regard to the Jewish problem. In order to bring about the creation of a Jewish state in

Palestine, to which the Jews had no historic right save that of a messianic ideology, Zionism has made use of a colonial situation created by imperialism. Certainly the Jewish agricultural colonies had purchased 6% of the land of Palestine, but this fact alone cannot serve as the foundation of a state to the detriment of a population which was in no way responsible for European anti-semitism or German Nazism. We, in the West, cannot be insensible to the fact that Israel was built by communities which, during the last world war, paid the highest price for the simple right of survival. But we can also, with full awareness, admit that the Palestinian people has been deprived of its basic rights and uprooted and we can be disturbed to find that the Israeli government, which so strongly desires recognition as a state, has not yet even recognised the Palestinian national problem of which it is the cause.

The developed western nations are also highly conscious of Israeli achievements within the framework of national construction, which are not due to a "miracle", but to three essential factors: the fact of being a "quasi-nation" which, strengthened by being surrounded by hostile countries, has been rapidly able to forge a national homogeneity; the foreign capital that has flooded into the country; and, lastly, the fact that the Jews coming from Europe brought with them a capital of technical knowledge which straightway guaranteed Israel's rapid development. But can we leave out of the picture the fact that the Palestinian Arab minority is subject to discriminatory measures in the Zionist state even if it offers them a higher level of material prosperity than that of their refugee and Arab compatriots?\*

Zionism, which tried in its own way to resolve the Jewish problem by creating a national state in Palestine (in fact it has not really solved the problem, and the immense majority of Jews do not live in Israel), could not fail to clash with budding Arab nationalism. The pressure which the Arab masses have stirred up against the state of Israel is not only, as is often believed, the product of governmental propaganda or the expression of simple European-style anti-semitism. Certainly at the present time the frontier

\* The income level of the Arabs of Israel is considerably below the national average, owing to expropriation and discrimination in educational opportunities (see Sabry Jiryis's *The Arabs in Israel*). The idea that Israeli Arabs are better off than their compatriots outside is a myth. (Editor/FJS).

between anti-Zionism and anti-semitism often seems badly marked. It is also clear that the anti-Zionism of many Arab states serves to draw attention away from the negligence and corruption of the governing classes by canalising pressures against an outside enemy so that unemployment and poverty will be forgotten. But, whether we like it or not, in the eyes of the mass of Arabs, the resentment that Israel has aroused in the region is the result of interference coming from Europe, dispossessing the Arabs of part of their territory with the consent, and often the help, of the western imperial powers.

The state of Israel is not a colonial state in the classic meaning of the term. The Israelis do not constitute a master class, living on the surplus-value produced by the natives. But the state of Israel has usurped by force a land in which an Arab community had been established for centuries. In this sense, the Arab-Israeli conflict (or more precisely the Palestinian-Israeli conflict) is a *national one*. And it would be too much of a generalisation to designate Israel as the "agent of imperialism" in the Middle East. Would she be the only one? Many Arab states are politically, economically and militarily bound to the United States. In the three principal Arab oil-producing countries—Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq—the interests of American monopolies are worth 50%, 100%, and 25% respectively. And the income which these states receive from oil represents 70%-90% of their total revenue. In Jordan, the Hashemite Monarchy's dependence on American aid is greater\* than that of Israel, whose economic development allows it a considerable margin of political autonomy, as recent events in the Middle East have shown.

But it cannot be denied that Israel is closely bound up with the world market which is dominated by imperialism and that, for its own national consolidation, it needs to keep on the best possible terms with the United States. Almost from the very first creation of the state of Israel, Zionist nationalism has tried, taking into account the balance of international forces and the sources from which it could hope to obtain external aid, to present itself as a bastion against "communist penetration" in the Middle East.

\* American government aid to Israel is, on average, 50% higher per capita than to Jordan. (Editor/FJS).

That is what M.H. Heykal meant when he wrote, after the French embargo decision, in the desire for a diplomatic rapprochement with the western powers and especially with the United States, "Thanks to France's attitude, Israel can no longer show that the Arabs supported by the Soviet Union are on one side and the whole western world is on the other side. Israel can no longer transform the conflict between Arab nationalism and Zionist racism into a conflict between East and West".\* In fact, Israel is bound to the imperialist powers because it is a *developed state* and that is why the conflict between the Arabs and Israel goes beyond the Palestinian question.

### THE REVOLUTION AND THE ARAB STATES

The Arabs have been more humiliated by colonial domination, perhaps, than other peoples because they are still acutely conscious of the greatness of their past. The conservation of Islam as an ideology of resistance safeguarding their identity is a moment of Arab consciousness; it implies a mixture of the ideology of resistance and that of conservatism which is an obstacle to the scientific and rational spirit necessary for economic progress.† The passionate exaltation of unity is a reaction against the balkanisation imposed by colonial domination.

There have been important changes since the end of direct domination in the Middle East, especially the collapse of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq, but also changes in the United Arab Republic since 1956 and especially since 1961, and changes in Syria since 1963-65‡. But no real step has been taken along the

\* *Al-Ahram*, 31st January 1969.

† On the crisis in contemporary Arab thought, see the remarkable work of Abdallah Larroui: "L'Idéologie Arabe Contemporaine", preface by M. Rodinson, Maspero, Paris, 1967.

‡ On this period: Patrick Seale: "The Struggle for Syria, a study of post-war Arab politics (1945-1958)", Oxford University Press, 1965.—Malcolm Kerr: "The Arab Cold War, a study of ideology in politics" (1958-1964). — Michael Ionides: "Divide and Lose: The Arab Revolt" (1955-1958), Geoffrey Bles, 1960. On economic construction: Hassan Riad: "L'Egypte Nasserienne" ed. Minuit, Paris 1964.

path of unity and no real economic progress has begun in spite of some efforts on the part of Egypt. There has been no profound revolution in the Middle East. The tragedy of Arab nationalism is that, so far, no social force has emerged which is capable of overcoming the social, political and cultural obstacles which clash with national construction, modernisation, and the aim of unity. The traditional feudal and mercantile governing classes, which were incapable of fulfilling their role, have been replaced in many countries (UAR, Syria, and, at the present time, Iraq) by the administrative middle classes which have also, in their turn, shown themselves incapable of bringing about the necessary social transformation in order to emerge from their state of underdevelopment and humiliation. The defeat of 1967 was a clear demonstration of their incapacity.

"Arab socialism" was the expression of the rise of the "petite bourgeoisie" capable of nationalising the dominant peaks of the economy (banking, foreign trade, industry), and of carrying out a certain degree of agrarian reform (productive of a rural "petite bourgeoisie") but incapable, in as far as they present a picture of corruption and nepotism, and consume a large part of the national income, of mobilising the masses for the construction of the country. Their nationalism goes no further than the survival of the regime. This is the context of the Palestinian problem in 1969.

#### THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE AND THE ARAB MASSES

Certain Middle East regimes are threatened by the combined actions of Israel and the Palestinians. If we consider the nature of the national movement, it is very unlikely that the Palestinian resistance can, on its own, radically modify the situation of the region. But the Palestinian struggle extends beyond its promoters to the extent that it mobilises the Arab masses. In addition, certain Arab nationalists have transferred to the Palestinian Resistance the hopes which they formerly placed in Nasserism and in Baathism. For the moment, the Palestinian Resistance can only have an *indirect* influence on the Arab countries: it is a

ferment, but it is limited by the fact that it is a national movement. Is it possible, at this stage, for it to be more than a national movement? The Jordanian regime has everything to lose by the extension of the Palestinian Resistance. The least external shock could disturb the delicate equilibrium of the Syrian ruling group, surrounded by rival clans. The Nasserian regime, representing the most important Arab country (in which national cohesion is strongest), has begun since the defeat to swing to the right. The legend surrounding the Head of State is crumbling and he is trying not to be outflanked by his right-wing. He has no other alternative. This situation is the direct result of a deliberate policy, continued for many years, which has only strengthened the importance of the middle and lower middle classes. The Baathist regime in Iraq is the only one not to suffer the defeat of 1967 since it came to power a year later. Considering its relative geographical distance and the regime's need to win popularity, it is highly likely that, simultaneously with a series of nationalisations, it will make a high bid for the nationalist lead, the more paying because it will thus supplant its Baathist rival, which has lost the Golan heights.

All these factors will weigh upon the Palestinian organisations and resistance (quite apart from the financial pressures that can be exerted by states that provide subsidies), in the context of the efforts towards conciliation to be made by the Great Powers, on the basis of the Resolution of 22nd November 1967. The possibility of a large-scale reprisals operation by Israeli forces cannot be excluded. Nevertheless, world peace does not seem to be in any real danger in the Middle East\*. Neither of the Great Powers is directly involved in the conflict and they have the same interest in maintaining the status quo in this part of the world. It is hard to see why the Soviet Union is more likely to intervene in this conflict than in Vietnam.

Moreover it must be pointed out that, at the present time, the balance of military strength is greatly in Israel's favour. Formerly it was the Arab states which refused the mediation of the Great Powers: now it is Israel. The Arab governments, especially the UAR, are in favour of a negotiated settlement, because they

\* It should be noted to what extent the special interest which western opinion takes in the Middle East conflict is bound up with Europecentrism.



need peace in order to recover, by diplomatic means if possible, the territory lost during the war. So that, apart from Israel, the only element which is strongly opposed to the intervention of the Great Powers is the Palestinian resistance.

Israel's preoccupation with obtaining secure frontiers, and if possible recognised ones, gives it at the present time an expansionist posture which it will soon have to confirm or deny. It is well-known that there is a strong tendency towards an expansionist direction within the ruling strata, feeding on the Israeli population's need for security. The population is kept in a state of mobilisation by every possible means, for "the maintaining of a climate of national quasi-unanimity is essential to the pursuit of the Zionist aims"\*; thus the gap between "hawks" and "doves" is very narrow.

The development of the Palestinian resistance has put an end to any possibility of creating a Palestinian state on the West Bank against the will of the fighters, as some Israeli leaders wanted. The Palestinian resistance, regarded by the Israelis from a purely military angle, has been underestimated. At the beginning of the year, the Israeli authorities did not think that they would have to face Palestinian popular demonstrations in the occupied territories. After eighteen months of relative calm, widespread strikes and street demonstrations against the occupation have exploded. These are the *political* consequence of the occupation and of the armed action of the commandos. This is the normal cycle in any occupation. In spite of their efforts to create a certain economic well-being, the Israeli authorities have not escaped it. All experience has proved that nationalism is a more powerful lever than prosperity. *The essential effect of the armed struggle has been to re-structure an uprooted and atomised society which had lost the desire to struggle.* In this sense, the resistance, by its action, has re-created a sense of identity, and awakened the Palestinian national consciousness.

In the short term there seems to be very little possibility of a negotiated solution to the Palestinian conflict. Given the relative strength of the forces concerned, the ultimate aims of the Palestinian resistance seem unattainable. But a Palestinian state will come into existence, the result of a compromise, certainly, but not of a yielding. Apart from the Palestinians themselves, the

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\* Machower: "Pour un Etat judeo-arabe" *Le Monde*, Jan. 1969.

strength of the Palestinian resistance lies in the fact that it enjoys the undivided support of the people of the Arab states. This means that any pressure which might be exerted on the Palestinian resistance by the governments of the region, to bring about a compromise which would be detrimental to the Palestinian people, has very little chance of succeeding.

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