

guerrilla fronts

PALESTINE:

People's Revolution

Interview With
Yasser Arafat

By Osvaldo Ortega





THIS interview took place at a very special moment: the closing session of the Ninth National Palestinian Council held in Cairo, which for the first time gathered all the forces, organizations and trends of the Palestinian resistance movement.



● *What is the real situation of the Palestinian revolution at the present time?*

We believe that our revolution is now stronger than ever, after the furious clashes between us and the Jordanian authorities. They thought that they could crush the Palestinian revolution in six months — according to the estimates of the CIA. That is what the computers had indicated.

However, as you can see, ten months have elapsed, and our revolution is now stronger than ever; we have increased and doubled our military forces. We have obtained a very rich experience.

Our political situation is now stronger. The cohesion between us and our people is closer than it has ever been, and we have learned a very important lesson: there is no doubt that before last September we incurred in a series of errors.



It is true that we suffered over 20 000 casualties among our troops and the civilian population. Although this is a very high number of casualties in comparison with our small population of only three million, our people are ready to pay even more for victory.

● *Let us discuss the very important aspect of Palestinian unity. At what level is this yearn for unity now?*

It is important to know that some people speak of unity, unity. They do not use this word to save our revolution. It is true that unity among our organizations is very important — I would say essential — but we must understand the situation of the Palestinian revolution. There is interference between the Palestinian revolution and the Arab systems, because we are not facing a special enemy. We fight Zionism, imperialism and colonialism.

The danger is not facing only the Palestinian people, but we confront it with the help of the Arab people. These interferences cause a certain cloudiness in the relations among the Palestinian groups. Some of these groups have very strong ties with some of these Arab systems. Regardless of this, we believe that the Palestinian revolution has achieved unity; not a good unity, but rather a front through the Central Committee.

We have decided to follow the democratic system in order to establish this unity and are conscious that the construction of this system will require more time, but regardless of this delay, we are certain that we shall be able to establish our unity on a firmer and more concrete basis; with a greater effort we shall be able to advance on the road towards our unity. Unity means that all the organizations share



in the cost of the struggle. Those who are not willing to sacrifice themselves do not have the right to speak.

Al Fatah is now leading the Palestinian revolution, therefore it must pay a heavier price and exert more efforts to consolidate this unity.

● *You are stating that unity does not rest on formal aspects?*

That is correct. It rests on real facts and strong basis.

● *Is there an action program on which this unity would rest?*

Yes. In the previous National Palestinian Congress. All members, all the organizations, accepted the plans submitted by Al Fatah to attain unity. The political program and the framework of the organizational structure have been accepted by the congresses.

● *After the tragic events of September 1970 we have learned through the press agencies and newspaper reports, of the restriction imposed on the commandoes on military movements and attempts to infil-*

trate and operate in territory occupied by Israel.

It is true. After the confrontation between our fighters and the Jordanian authorities, our military operations against Zionism-imperialism on the Jordanian-Israeli frontiers have decreased, but the actions within occupied territory have increased. Perhaps you have heard recently of the operations carried out by our volunteers, in which Tel Aviv was bombed and two buildings in Jerusalem destroyed. This is only an example. The operations inside occupied territory have increased while those on the frontier have diminished. The situation is similar regarding the other frontiers. During the last ten months, large military operations have taken place between ourselves and the Jordanian army of King Hussein, and even now great battles are going on in Jerash and Ajloun. This means that we are fighting on two fronts against Israeli-imperialist-Zionism and the Jordanian authorities and imperialism. Six thousand of our fighters are currently confined in the Jordanian prisons, and 29 000 Palestinian volunteers are held prisoner in occupied territory.



● *You mentioned the brutal repression of the Jordanian troops and two large fronts — that of Israeli-imperialist-Zionism and the other, the Jordanian.*

...interrupting us with a smile, Arafat says: Jordanian-imperialist.

● *We are aware that due to the nature of the Palestinian cause, many soldiers in the Jordanian army have deserted and joined the resistance.*

Yes, some soldiers have done so.

● *Likewise, the Western press has reported a possible reincorporation of the Jordanian army to the Eastern front, perhaps considering this or other factors. Something similar was suggested by Anwar El Sadat during his inaugural speech at the Ninth Session of the Palestinian Congress.*

One of the principal aims of this conspiracy is to destroy the Eastern

front. They started their attacks against the Palestinian revolution and at the same time, the Iraqi army was ordered to withdraw from Jordan. The result of this was that the Eastern front was broken. I consider that the first requisite for the rebuilding of this Eastern front is to allow the Palestinian revolution freedom of movement and, later on, permit the Iraqi Army to return to its former positions in Jordan.

● *The Ninth Palestinian Congress held in Cairo made news throughout the world.*

Undoubtedly. It is important to know that this Congress had a new character. There were conspiracies aimed at preventing its celebration. The fact that this Congress took place was very important for the Palestinian revolution: it was a great triumph to at last be able to have all the organiza-

tions, all the important figures within the revolution and inside the Palestinian peoples join this Congress. Among the first matters for discussion were the extension of our operations, our revolution within occupied territory and the finding of ways and means for a greater unity among our organizations and groups.

● *We have heard that during the Congress a number of small groups joined Al Fatah.*

That is correct, three joined: the Palestinian Arab Organization, the People's Struggle Front and the Front for Liberation Action.

● *What similarity do you find between the Palestinian liberation struggle and the struggle waged by the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America?*

We wish all our comrades to see our revolution within this framework. We occupy the same trench as the fighters of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and are likewise side by side with those fighting for freedom in the United States. It is true that there are different trenches, but it is all one single battle. We are a part of this international liberation movement. The victory of the Vietnamese

people is our victory. The victory of the Tupamaros is our victory. The victory of Al Fatah is that of Laos. We are all in the same battle against imperialism, colonialism and Zionism.

● *Do the differences among the Palestinian organizations rest on tactical or on strategic aspects of the struggle?*

In my opinion, they are of a tactical nature. I think that as the political program was agreed upon during the last Eighth Congress this may give you an idea that the differences between these organizations were not strategic. They cooperate and participate on other aspects; all military forces are under the same command.

● *Referring specifically to the Al Fatah movement, there is an event that represents a milestone — I am referring to the Kerameh battle. Would you like to tell us something regarding this battle, the conditions of the movement at that time and how the organization started to develop afterwards?*

It was a battle against very superior forces, but, of course, I am not the most adequate person to speak of that.

I do not like to speak much of Al Fatah. I prefer to speak of the Pales-



tinian revolution. In 1965, everyone considered us a nation of refugees. However, at that time we were already working underground, training in the use of different weapons and in 1965 — after the Jordan River was deviated, which was considered of tremendous importance — we received instructions to penetrate into occupied territory. From that date on, the history of our people started to change. We changed from refugees into fighters.

I remember that those days were very difficult, very difficult indeed. We were only a few fighters with a few arms and small resources. What we really did have was a very strong will. That is why we were able to continue. After the June war, which was a tragic surprise for the Arab nation, everything was sunk in a dark and hopeless fog.

● *Are there contradictions between the eastern and western Jews? In what measure can this situation contribute to the objectives of the Palestinian resistance?*

We do not expect to obtain immediate results from this conflict. It is evident that there is a schism between these two sectors of Israel. We used to say that there were two nationalities in Israel: the Israeli nationality and the Arab. There are really three: the European Jews (Ashkenazim), the oriental Jews (Sephardim) and the Arab nationality.

● *Some kind of class struggle in Israel?*

Especially economic, and also, second in importance, racial. The Palestinian revolution offers the solution to this problem, since its aim is the establishment of a Palestinian state, where Jews, Christians and Muslims may live



in peace, with freedom and equality for all.

● *In case of a hypothetical political solution to the Middle East crisis, what would be the principal conditions of the Palestinian resistance?*

It is my belief that the Israelis are more concerned over the occupied territories than over peace. On behalf of the Palestinian revolution we would say that the only possible solution for us would be the establishment of a democratic Palestinian state, which is rejected by the other side.

Although there are several small groups in Israel, like the Matzpen, who are beginning to understand our principles, there is no political or military solution. There should be a just solution for the Palestinian people. We have been evicted from our homes and our lands. The largest part of our people live as refugees. That is the reason why we have the right to fight with all means at our disposal. Our revolution started before the June 1967 war.

Instructions were given to penetrate into occupied territory and start once more; we believe we were right in taking that decision at this critical time for the Arab world. Kerameh was an



example, a symbol for the prosecution of the struggle, for the determination not to die ever. In this battle we confronted a well-equipped army which had been able to defeat the Arab forces. We faced them with our small group, and gave them a very hard lesson. In my opinion, this was the first victory obtained against a superior army. To be more precise I will say that it was superior only numerically and considering its weapons. I have participated in very hard battles against this army. I participated in the battle of Kerameh and in that of Arkuk in Lebanon, which lasted 24 hours. We also met the enemy in Zarafan, on the Lebanese coast, only five months ago. We are able to win in these battles with only a small group, deeply confident in themselves, and in their arms and the objective of the struggle. We must understand that after the battle of Kerameh — which was the true birth of the Palestinian revolution — we have secured many other important victories. Among them, that of Amman. In this battle we confronted 45 000 Jordanian soldiers, tanks and armored cars during 11 days. During all that time, only small portions of the city fell into the enemy's hands, for example, the aristocratic suburbs, where we



did not have members of the militia, but in the other zones where we did have them, they were unable even to approach near those zones.

● *To what extent do you feel that the victories obtained by the Fedayeen in their battles against the Zionist and Jordanian troops are due to the fact that the guerrillas constitute a popular army?*

Without a doubt they are. That is the principal reason. That is the revolution of the people, whom no one can conquer. They may defeat our troops in tactical battles, but in perspective, the victory is on our side. They used 120 000 tons of ammunitions against us in Amman.

● *Which were the refugee camps most intensely bombed?*

Whadaf, the Hussein camp and the General Headquarters in Acharafie, located in a populous area.

● *Which corps of the Jordanian army fought more fiercely against the Palestinians?*

The Bedouins.

● *That is precisely one of the things we wanted to ask you: the composition of the Jordanian army.*

A fourth is Palestinian. The rest are Bedouins of the Eastern part of Jordan.



It is important to know that 5000 officers and soldiers of that army joined our revolution and are at present with us.

We have great confidence in our Cuban friends. We know that they are very close to our cause. Support is something very important for the kind of struggle we are carrying on. We look firmly toward the Cuban Revolution. Our fighters are learning much from it, from its experiences. We have very good friends in Cuba. It is possible to find in our bases and camps many of our guerrillas who identify each other among themselves with the names of Guevara or Castro.

To the people of Latin America I can say that we are in the same trench and in the same battle and we want to increase our cooperation and unity, coming closer to each other. There is no sense in distance. Inside, we are close — very close to each other. Together with the fighters of Asia, Africa and Latin America we shall achieve our purposes and objectives and we are certain that we will obtain our victory in the future.

The Palestinian fighters and volunteers vow to continue their struggle until victory is obtained.