

الثورة الفلسطينية

THE PALESTINIAN REVOLUTION

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THE RESISTANCE

HOW DOES IT THINK AND ACT?

HOW DOES IT FACE THE PRESENT?

HOW DOES IT SEE THE FUTURE?

A Dialogue between Al-Fateh and Al-Tali'ah*

Lutfi al-Khouli: I think that it would be beneficial to start the discussion from the present state of the battle with the enemy. Can we find out something of Al-Fateh's attitude about this? Perhaps you agree with me that to know this we have to know the enemy's and our own strong and weak points. I mean in particular by "our," Palestinian, and in more general terms, Arab.

Abu Byad: Naturally any scientific analysis must include both what is weak and what is strong, i.e., the positive and negative. If we start the discussion with the Palestinian attitude, in Al-Fateh's opinion there are a number of positive things which have been achieved, but at the same time we do come across negative approaches.

Among the positive factors has been the coming together in guerrilla action of large effective groups. This has found expression in the Armed Struggle Command following the reorganization of the PLO. If this is able to function in an atmosphere devoid of the earlier emotionalism, it will have a great effect in unifying guerrilla action.

The Armed Struggle Command has taken the place of the Military Bureau of Coordination and the guerrilla organizations inasmuch as it is the real unified leadership of four large groups of the guerrilla movement, the Popular Liberation Forces, al-Sa'iqah, al-Asifah and PDFLP; if the forces

(*) A dialogue between Abu-Byad, member of Al-Fateh's Central Committee, and Lutfi al-Khouli, editor-in-chief of the Egyptian monthly magazine *al-Tali'ah* in its June 1969 issue, concerning the Arab-Israeli struggle and the Palestinian resistance movement.

of PLA are added, in accordance with the last decision of the Executive Committee of PLO, this means that 90 per cent of the fighters are under the command's leadership. This is clear indication of the participation of the revolutionary fighting groups in a national front within the framework of the PLO. In reality these positive developments have deprived the enemies of Palestinian action of the justifications with which they used to point out the strife among the Palestinian factions. But this position is still opposed—and here I want to make it clear that I am not referring to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). For we judge that it will ultimately agree to the new formula, if it understands the reality of the situation. Since the question is not that of Al-Fateh or others dominating the leadership.

Khouli: 'Would you explain what you mean by "understanding the reality of the situation?"'

Abu Eyad: It's well known that PFLP's refusal to join the command is based on the principle of percentage of representation. Of course, there are some trying to exploit this to maintain the status quo and keep PFLP out of the command. Therefore they are putting forward an illusory argument that Al-Fateh and others want to monopolize the leadership and organization. Here I want to make it clear that the question is not one of monopolization but, to be exact, it is one of conformity to Palestine and Arab public opinion. Our aim is to group the largest possible number within the framework of a national front and a unified command.

Khouli: Don't you think that it has become absolutely necessary to demand and insist on unity of action at least, if not complete unity on tactics, strategy and aims?

Abu Eyad: Exactly, we must understand that the outward differences, with regard both to the enemy and to calculations of profit and loss in building up the national front of the Palestinian people, will be ultimately eliminated if our brothers in PFLP understand the real attitude they should adopt towards the organization and the Armed Struggle Command. On the whole building up the national front through the organization, and also the unified military command for action are the essence of positivism in the present phase.

Khouli: What about the negative aspects?

Abu Eyad: In our opinion the negative aspects are confined to the stands adopted every now and then by the small organizations, in attempts to destroy the principal forces of Palestinian action. What can I say? I think this is enough.

Khouli: I don't think it is enough. What you are saying is very important. In my opinion the Arab people have the right to know all about this matter so that they can view from a position of awareness. It's not enough to talk in general and abstract terms because this would mean that this accusation would be without any substantiation and would not indicate who was responsible. The war of liberation cannot endure such things and we should avoid them. What have you to say?

Abu Eyad: Yes, it really is important. For example there are a few groups, such as Fateh al-Islam, who have mobilized reactionary elements under leaders who have been rejected by the Palestinian people. The aim behind Fateh al-Islam or similar organizations is the destruction of guerrilla action. They have no allegiance with the resistance movement and they were formed to support certain regimes.

Khouli: How do you meet this situation?

Abu Eyad: If we complete the building of the front and the Armed Struggle Command and if these two occupy their true places in Palestinian action, we are sure that this abnormality will be destroyed by the convictions of the people concerned. If we don't succeed, then we will have to use other methods.

There are other negative factors connected with aid which is distributed at times, and at other times heavy conditions are put on it. In addition certain quarters attempt to link Palestinian action with the official Arab position. This entails many dangers: first, imposing a mandate by limiting financial aid unless those receiving the aid adopt the official Arab position, and at the same time isolating guerrilla action and the Palestinian revolution from the Arab masses. It is not necessary to have a tax collector who collects money from the people. But it is necessary and important that the Arab citizen should feel that he is participating in the revolution by personal contacts with the active guerrilla forces. In addition there are certain Arab regimes which are waging a psychological war concentrated against the guerrillas,

and I mean Al-Fateh in particular. Believe me, and I am not saying this with any conceit or narcissism, but as a result of actual facts, they think that if they can destroy Al-Fateh, they can destroy all guerrilla action. This is because of Al-Fateh's size and popularity. The strange thing is that this campaign has grown more intense following Al-Fateh's entry into the PLO. Al-Fateh was called upon to achieve national unity as it was the basic force in Palestinian action hindering unity. Al-Fateh's duty—and this is true—was to achieve unity. This unity could have been achieved in different ways. A national front could have been formed in which PLO could have been one of its members and not the framework of the national front as its National Charter stipulates. Al-Fateh could have overlooked this stipulation and considered PLO like any other organization such as PFLP, and then Al-Fateh would have entered the national front on the basis of full equality with PLO. Al-Fateh did not oppose this tendency, on the contrary we were ready to go along with it till the very end. However, there was a different way of viewing the question of the PLO... an objective way which took into account the interests of the Palestinian people before those of Al-Fateh. Thus, the PLO, for the first time, is considered as the representative of the official Arab commitment to the Palestinian people. Considering the PLO as a special force implies weakening it and breaking the commitment. The PLO could become the general framework of the national front, especially so because since its establishment the PLO has not had any political organization but it has had a military force—the Palestine Liberation Army, and basically the Forces of Popular Liberation. If we had insisted on joining the PLO on the basis of the principle of equality, although such an attitude might be unrealistic, it would have paralyzed the PLO. Paralyzing the PLO implies that the equal forces should unanimously agree to enable the PLO to move or take a decision. If a unanimous agreement is not reached this implies that any small organization can veto any decision and we will be going in a vicious circle. The opinion agreed upon was that the PLO should have a steering committee, or what others call a leading force. This does not at all imply that the other organizations will lose their identity in the PLO or the national front. This is the case because what determines the taking of decisions is not the fact that the PLO has four members and Al-Fateh five members, but the size of the latter in the Palestinian field and its effects on the front. The voice of the representative of any organization will be influenced by its actual size in the field of action. In other words if we decide to carry out a big operation, the one who decides and whose voice will have more weight is the

one whose material size is effective in what it offers the operation. Thus the question put forward is not one of voting or imposing an opinion, but it is a question of what the organization in question offers and what its actual size in the field is. I believe, if good intentions, objectively and subjectively, prevail in the relations of a sound front, then it is possible for the organization whose representatives are a minimum, in the event of their putting forward a good proposal which can be executed, to have their way adopted irrespective of other considerations.

This is the case with regard to the Palestinian position. We can summarize this by saying that there are strong positions; guerrilla action has become more popular; Palestinians are joining it in a manner which supercedes the present ability of their organizations; the size, quantity and quality of the operations are developing. I believe that the future will enable the Armed Struggle Command to adopt more positive positions and thus impose itself.

The present program which, I think, is linked with the solutions put forward for the area, is the question of the small organizations, and this is a new danger facing guerrilla action.

Khouli: I notice that in your discussion of the negative aspects you concentrate on the phenomenon of the establishment of new resistance organizations. No doubt this is not a healthy sign and causes continuous restlessness among the Arab people who are looking forward to both the military and political unity of the Palestinian people. It is noticeable that this phenomenon comes at a time when efforts are made to establish the national front of the Palestinian people and their commando forces. These efforts have given positive results. There must be a quick and final solution to this phenomenon. Here it does not suffice to say that these organizations exist but their causes, roots and aims must be known. Would you clarify for me how Al-Fateh explains this phenomenon? How does Al-Fateh evaluate it and what is its solution?

Abu Eyad: Of course it is an unhealthy sign, and we think that it is linked, in different forms, to the internal situation of guerrilla action in order to destroy it. The method of destruction is not overt and direct, but covert and indirect. The small organizations are well-known for their intelligence. Each organization carries special slogans, as if it attempts to convince the masses that these slogans are not found among the other Palestinian groups. For

example the organization of Fateh al-Islam carries the slogan of Islam for a special and particular aim, and it attempts to point out to the masses that Al-Fateh is not Muslim or that it does not stem from Islam. Thus Fateh al-Islam appears as if it complements this missing part in the Palestinian action in accordance with its claims which are ill-founded. There are also other organizations. I referred to Fateh al-Islam because it uses the particular name Fateh. However, there are other small organizations which are founded on the basis that Al-Fateh, and other real guerrilla organizations, have a regional or unclear view of matters, and still others outbid each other in leftist claims lacking any reality.

Khouli: To determine the size of this phenomenon, how many new organizations have been formed during 1969?

Abu Eyad: Three organizations have been formed, one on the basis of religion, another regionalism, and the third on a leftism which makes gross claims. If we analyze this phenomenon, we notice that our people do not believe in force as a principle and basic method; especially since Palestinian action has not yet taken final form. As a result we have followed, and we are still following, the method of persuasion and direct dialogue. In our opinion the cadres of these organizations are honest but the deviation comes from the leaders. Thus it is necessary to go over the heads of the leadership and contact directly the cadres and make them understand the harm that these small organizations can inflict upon the Palestinian movement. We should not get tired of discussing with these cadres until we negate all justifications put forward by their leaders for the establishment and existence of such organizations.

Khouli: How do you carry out this discussion ?

Abu Eyad: It can be carried out through information or direct contact. It is our conviction that the revolutionary struggling youth, when they know the truth, will come back and join one of the real branches of Palestinian action which have proved their real existence in the struggle against the enemy.

Khouli: Have you achieved any positive results in this way?

Abu Eyad: Some positive results have been achieved and more will be achieved as a result of increasing the contact and deepening it.

Khouli The method which you have adopted to solve the phenomenon of small organizations in the Palestinian field leads us to the following question: Why do you not use the same method with the PFLP since you consider it to be a real guerrilla organization, in order to overcome the obstacles hindering it from joining the PLO, or the national front, or the Armed Struggle Command? I believe I am right when I say that it is Al-Fateh's responsibility to achieve this since it is the biggest organization in the Palestinian field of action?

Abu Eyad: As far as the PFLP is concerned we have always carried on a dialogue with it, and we will never disrupt it. We started the dialogue before PFLP was divided into three different groups. The first division resulted in secession of the National Liberation Front which is known as Ahmad Jibril's group. This was followed by ideological differences within the PFLP which resulted in its division into two groups. One of these groups proclaimed that it was Marxist-Leninist and was led by *al-Hurriyah** group and Nayef Hawatemah. It called itself the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP). The other, which also proclaims Marxism but differs in its method of application, is led by Dr. George Habash. These circumstances—the internal divisions of the PFLP—continuously hindered the dialogue. Instead of carrying on a dialogue with PFLP with regard to its participation within the framework of Palestinian unity of action, the dialogue pertained to the resumption of talks among the two splinter groups. Frankly speaking this was a matter of great importance and took a long time. When events took the shape of a struggle between the two groups, great effort was required from us to put an end to the resort to arms by the quarrelling fighters in the streets of Amman and other places. We had to exert every effort to prohibit armed struggle among the different splinter groups of PFLP. Thus the dialogue was continuous; but it could not bring about the unity of PFLP with Al-Fateh, or PFLP's joining the Armed Struggle Command, unless the principal problem among the members of PFLP was solved. As a result, discussing the unity of PFLP took long days and nights. It is true we succeeded in hindering armed struggle; differentiating between PDFLP, PFLP which basically represents the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), and the Ahmad Jibril group which distinguished itself by the name of General Command. In the first phase which took almost three months of

(*) *Al-Hurriyah* is a Beirut weekly which used to be the organ of the Arab Nationalist Movement.

discussion, we succeeded in differentiating between the three groups by giving them different names. Actually when the question of the last National Congress of the PLO came up, none of the PFLP members was in a position to discuss this question. Some groups in the PFLP requested the postponement of the date of the congress, others, such as Ahmad Jibril's group, requested increasing their percentage of representation, the third group, namely PDFLP, rejected the principle of considering the PLO as a meeting ground for the different Palestinian organizations. Later PDFLP withdrew from its position and joined the Armed Struggle Command. As you can see the dialogue with PFLP has never been discontinued, but has been related to questions of primary importance pertaining to the PFLP itself. In spite of all this, after matters had been settled in the PFLP and after the convening of the National Congress and the election of the new Executive Committee we undertook to contact the three branches of PFLP. PDFLP asked to join the Armed Struggle Command. The condition put forward by the Executive Committee was that PDFLP must recognize, in writing, the National Charter of the PLO. PDFLP complied with this condition and declared that it adheres to the contents of the National Charter "as a minimum program" to govern the internal relations of the Armed Struggle Command. As far as Ahmad Jibril's group is concerned, negotiations center around an important subject of a special nature which must not be discussed now. It includes a definite attitude which needs clarification after which we decide to continue negotiations or not. As for the ANM group, the PFLP, we have contacted them through the PLO Executive Committee. All the reservations of PFLP regarding the PLO were put forward. As I understood there were no differences on the question of PFLP joining the PLO except with regard to general unspecific matters. It was agreed to prepare for another meeting to discuss specifically all these matters. Another meeting between Al-Fateh and PFLP was held to convince the latter to join, as a first step, the Armed Struggle Command, since it does not have any conditions or aspects which involve sensitive issues. The Command's field of activity is that of unified military action which is not directly linked to the PLO in its present form. Our brothers in the PFLP declared that the nature of the composition of the National Congress must be reviewed to enable them to join the Armed Struggle Command. The implication being, as we have said before, that the meeting inside the National Congress will be granting PFLP an equal percentage along with the other organizations. As the discussion progressed to the subject of the small organizations and the method of their representation, PFLP put forward

a condition that all the small organizations should have an equal percentage of representation in the congress. This brings back anew the question of the national front and its formation. On the whole the dialogue is still going on and will continue.

Kbouli: This is what we want, and we hope that you will achieve positive results through such a dialogue, the minimum of which—in my opinion—is unity of action. There are other points pertaining to the Armed Struggle Command which I would like to tackle. As I see it, this Command came after what was known as the Military Coordination Bureau. The first question is the following: Is the Armed Struggle Command, as its name implies, a more developed formula, with regard to the unity of resistance action, than the Coordination Bureau? The second question is: If the Armed Struggle Command is more advanced than the Coordination Bureau, what are the more advanced features? The third question: Is the Armed Struggle Command—in the opinion of Al-Fateh—the final step on the road to unity of action of the resistance or are there other steps, and what are they in the light of what can be published and announced?

Abu Eyad: The Armed Struggle Command is an important step on the road to the unity of guerrilla action. It is also—without any doubt—more advanced than the Coordination Bureau.

The Coordination Bureau was a committee composed of representatives from the different organizations. Also I frankly tell you, we believe that we must discuss our problems frankly, the bureau's activities were limited to coordinating relations among the guerrilla organizations and attempting to solve the problems that might arise among them. The bureau did not discuss, in any of its meetings, a military operation or plan, or a common act to be planned and executed under one leadership. Yet the different organizations, independently, carried out common operations on the battlefield in the face of the enemy's challenges.

It is true that the Coordination Bureau was a first step on the right road, yet—I believe and scientific experience has proved—it was not enough, unsatisfactory, and the wrong way to achieve a general command for armed struggle for the Palestinian people. When the new Executive Committee of the PLO was elected, it was interested in drawing up a new basis for establishing strong relations among the organizations participating in the National

Congress and the leadership of the PLO. Care was taken to ensure that the leadership would not only be on paper or nominal with a flashing name, nor would it only inherit the Coordination Bureau. It must be a real leadership in action for all the participating groups in the leadership.

As we know any action must be studied in detail and objectively: firstly, the reality and the potentialities; secondly, a plan should be drawn up on the basis of this reality and these potentialities; and thirdly, the actual execution of this plan. It can be said that we have almost completed the first two steps and we are embarking on the third.

Khouli: Can we understand from the above-mentioned that we are on the verge of carrying out common resistance actions in which all the forces of the organizations who have joined the PLO participate under the unified leadership of the Armed Struggle Command ?

Abu Byad: Yes. There will be common training in the operations under a unified leadership in which side by side the fighters of al-'Asifah, PLA, al-Sa'iqah and PDFLP will participate. All the fighters will carry out common operations according to a unified system of allocation, ability, sufficiency, and work conditions. This means that at times—and within the framework of the plan—a group, from e.g. al-'Asifah, would be chosen to carry out a definite operation, or a group from al-Sa'iqah and al-'Asifah, or al-'Asifah and the Popular Liberation Forces, etc. In other words operations would be carried out according to what the leadership sees fit from the point of view of training, sufficiency, experience with the land, etc.

I am not telling a secret when I say that the Armed Struggle Command will start its activities at an important level in the near future,

And I do not tell a secret when I say that the latest "Himmah" operation was carried out according to plans drawn up by the Armed Struggle Command, in spite of the fact that al-'Asifah forces carried it out alone, yet the planning for the operation resulted from a new way of thinking among the members of the Armed Struggle Command.

this operation represents—in your opinion—a new development in resistance action?

Abu Eyad: There is no doubt that the Himmah operation represents a point of departure and a new development in guerrilla action.

Khoulî: How?

Abu Eyad: As you know, our commando action remained limited to the general classical theory of guerrilla warfare "hit and run." In spite of the necessity of adhering to this general theory, especially in the early stages of guerrilla action, we have actually carried out a kind of limited confrontation with the enemy in certain phases which were not dominated by the theory of "hit and run." An example of such a confrontation, on a wide scale proportionally speaking, is the Israeli aggression on al-Karameh in March 1968.

After al-Karameh we carried out other operations of the nature of limited confrontation such as that of Wadi al-Qilt and others.

These limited confrontations were an introduction to the Himmah operation. What does the latter operation mean? It means the occupation of a post under the control of the enemy for a limited period to clear it of the enemy forces and their capabilities. Thus with the Himmah operation we are embarking on a new phase of guerrilla warfare, namely, occupying certain positions and completely clearing them of enemy forces. Of course, we choose these posts very carefully and according to very complicated considerations in order to inflict the heaviest losses on the enemy in addition to the political, military, economic and psychological effects that will result in the enemy front.

In turn this phase is a preparation for the next one, namely, the permanent occupation of the enemy posts. Such a phase will start after we complete the movement of our bases into the occupied territories, when the act of organic link becomes total, deep, and moves effectively among all the forces inside the occupied territories.

Khoulî: Does it mean control of "liberated areas" as known in guerrilla warfare?

Abu Eyad: Exactly.

Khouli: There is no doubt that if the resistance was capable of taking "liberated areas" from the enemy by force then it would enter the phase of total liberation. But allow me, since we have agreed to face our problems frankly, to ask a question. The question takes into consideration what has been reiterated by observers, foreign correspondents and Israeli sources that Israel has been successful in combatting the resistance movement's operations as a result of its use of electronic devices and electric wire in certain occupied areas. Moreover Israel has discovered many cells of the resistance movement inside the occupied territories. I am sure that this news is exaggerated for psychological reasons, yet it is true that electronic devices and electric wires have been set up and that a number of cells have been discovered by the enemy. Thus the question is to what extent has this actually affected commando operations and the required development toward the phase of liberated areas that we have talked about? Naturally historical experiments have proved to us that the progressive resistance movements have been confronted with these difficulties and finally have been able to overcome them.

Abu Eyad: Naturally, not everything the enemy or foreign observers say is true. Exaggerations are made on purpose for psychological effects.

Yet honesty and responsibility require us to say that some of what is said is true. We do not deny or hide this fact; on the contrary we face it and try to overcome it. We cannot compare our human, technical and military capabilities when we embarked upon the armed struggle before the June 1967 war with our present state of readiness. What I want to point out is that we are aware of the enemy's strength and capabilities, especially since the experience of imperialism in the area is put at its disposal. The enemy benefits from Nazism and the American experience in Vietnam. We all know that Dayan stayed with the American army in Vietnam to benefit from its experience there in confronting the Vietnamese Liberation Army and guerrilla warfare. In addition the enemy acquires new weapons all the time, and benefits from the colonialist experts in combatting popular armed resistance all over the world. As a result we are facing an enemy which has well-developed education, technique and experience. Thus, we are aware that the resistance movement must have these three basic conditions.

I would like to raise the complicated question of Arab support of the resistance movement. The latter now depends solely on itself, in the sense that the Arab mentality, education and experience are far from actually and effectively participating in solving the problems that they face. They are now called upon to participate in Palestinian resistance. For example, the electronic line and the fortifications which Israel has set up along the borders, the narrowness of our land, the regulations pertaining to the occupied territories such as dividing Palestine into security zones. The first thing that Israel has done in the West Bank and the other occupied territories is to open roads to make it easier for its security units to move quickly to any area where a clash or a guerrilla operation takes place. This is the reason behind the quick movement of Israelis and not the result of the strength of its intelligence services. I can affirm here, from experience and with total responsibility, that the rumors about the strength of the Israeli intelligence services is a myth. Israel is not particularly advanced in its intelligence as such. But this is not to deny the fact that it benefits from the simple information it gets and immediately diffuses it among its units to get the full benefit from it.

The truth that we must stress here is that the resistance movement is in need of Arab support on the level of education and technical experience in order to confront and defeat the well-advanced Israeli education and experience.

Khouli: Naturally this is the duty of all the educational establishments and technical experts in the Arab world. In this connection the resistance movement could have its technical experience bureau composed of Arab volunteer scientists and experts. But you have not answered my definite question pertaining to the effect of the electronic devices and electric wires on guerrilla action. What is the extent of their effect? And does it greatly prohibit the entry to the occupied territories ?

Abu Eyad: No it does not. Naturally it has affected the entry, and thus we changed our tactics. We still enter the occupied territories, the proof is the daily operations of our forces inside the occupied territories.

Here I would like to point out a fact which you have always referred to in your articles, namely, the exaggerations in the resistance movement's