



## Memories of Palestine (ca. 1989)

‘Abdallāh ‘Azzām

**Thomas Hegghammer & Alaaeldeen Nabil Soliman (translators)**

*Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) / Cairo*

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[...]

The battle of 1967 finished with this remarkable defeat, never previously seen in History. There was a group of Fedayeen called Fataḥ, and faced with the defeat of all the Arab states, Fataḥ declared that it wanted to fight the Jews and that whoever wanted to should come forward: “Oh Muslims, come forward, oh Arabs come forward, whoever wants to save Palestine, come forward”. But nobody came forward except young school dropouts, most of whom were trying to escape conscription.

They came, and the truth became more obvious, and the cadres continued: “Oh Muslims, come forward”, but the Muslims didn’t come; “Oh wise people, come forward”, but the wise people didn’t come. A year after 1967 the Muslims tried, but the Muslims were asleep of course. As for the embattled Islamic movement in Egypt, Sayyid Quṭb had been executed nine months before the Nakba, and seventeen thousand were imprisoned for life. A decree had been issued banning the release of anyone from the Islamic movement; those whose prison terms were over were transferred to house arrest.

In Syria, where the Ba‘th Party was dominating, one would say: “I believe in the Ba‘th, our only Lord, and in Arabism, our only religion.”

In Jordan, the Islamic movement tried to restore its power again and heal its wounds, and officials travelled the Islamic world and Arab world saying: “O Muslims, wake up! Palestine!” But Muslims were in a deep sleep. Only a few groups came forward; these groups were preceded by cadres from Fataḥ, from the Democratic People’s Front of Nāyif Ḥawātima, or from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine led by George Ḥabash. They all represented different factions; ‘Abd al-Nāṣir adopted George

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\* The following excerpts were translated by Thomas Hegghammer and Alaaeldeen Nabil Soliman. The source text was a PDF version of the book titled *Ḥamās... al-Judhūr al-Tārikhiyya wa-l-Mīthāq*, available at [http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/special\\_files/entelaqa/10/hamasroot.pdf](http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/special_files/entelaqa/10/hamasroot.pdf) (accessed 30 August 2013). The excerpts are from pages 20-24, 34-37, and 40f. of the PDF document.

Ḥabash, and each country offered their own atheist groups. Syria adopted the Syrian al-Ṣā'iqa and Iraq adopted the Iraqi al-Ṣā'iqa. They all came to the Jordanian-Palestinian arena to spread their ideology. In this atmosphere Muslims were not able to raise a banner in the name of Islam. They looked to the arena asking which of the factions is the closest to God's religion, or which is the least infidel, criminal or evil, and found that it was Fataḥ. They said to Fataḥ: We will work under your banner, provided that our bases, weapons, and everything else be separated from you. They said OK, and we went to the training camps, and the training lasted for four months—of course God has blessed Man with the opportunity to taste jihad. I do not recall ever being full during those four months. Throughout the four months we had half a loaf in the morning, afternoon and evening, it was this puffed-up Levantine bread, and you would stop at an olive grove and allow yourself ten olives and then walk without tea. Your only thought is to stay and drink tea till it comes out of your nose!! Yes, we did suffer a lot from hunger, but it was pleasant, in fact, the most pleasant days of our lives. One of us [said he] felt like the king of the world, that he had been liberated from everything, with nobody having authority over him, in addition to feeling that the Lord's satisfaction was on him, filling our atmosphere with tranquility, calm, and love. We felt that there was nobody in the [battle]field except us, that there was no Muslim bothering you, saying "you are like this", that "your ideology is like that", that "your creed is like this", or "your ideas are like that." Praise to God, there were no other Muslims and we felt at peace. The only thing disturbing us was the bases of the secularists around us, the Democratic [Front] and the Popular Front. The people of the East Bank, the East Bank folk are like in this area, it's a tribal area, and like the people of Afghanistan they value bravery, manliness, and Bedouin culture. They adopted us and opened their gardens for us, because we used to live in caves, each group in one, and I remember that when we entered this cave I said to them: "Then seek refuge in the cave, your Lord will open a way for you with His mercy and will make your matter easy for you".

The Jordanian army on the border, just like the Pakistani army, knew us and called us Shaykhs, and our bases were called "the Bases of the Shaykhs". I still recall the order of the General: There were three battalions protecting the Jordan Valley, and commanding them all was a Bedouin man called Khalaf Rāfa', a man of Bedouin manners, Bedouin manliness, and Bedouin honour. Whenever he met any of us, he would stop his car and say "can I be of assistance, Shaykhs?" even to our young men, who would respond "God bless you" and walk on. The army respected us, unlike other people. The truth is that other people would insult the Army. The Army was on the border of the East Bank, and one of them would come, and the commander, the commander of the battallion, would ask them (he was Palestinian who suffered for being Palestinian, a Palestinian who loved jihad in Palestine): "where are you going, guys?" Each one was wearing al-Ṣā'iqa clothes and a Kalashnikov over the shoulder and a Dushka in the car, and a Zikwik, another Russian weapon. They would say "to an operation", and the commander said "there's an entrance across the river." They said "how is this any of your business?" And he said "listen, you want to enter across the river, I will protect

you and cover you and fire gas cannisters for you so you can withdraw beneath it. [If you] do the operation from the east of the river and shoot in the air, then in the morning Israeli aircraft will light us up and bury us, which we don't want." Then one of the young guys with no manners or faith came and said: "you are a traitor like your king, and they have no authority, and neither do you, right?" "Never, but we are here working for Islam, and Islam prevents us from saying bad words or insulting people." If the commander said another word the young guy would spit in the commander's face, and if he kept insisting he would shoot and kill him, just like that.

They [the Army] looked to us differently. When we passed they would ask: "where are you going, Shaykhs?. We would say "to an operation", and they would say: "East of the river or west of the river?" Then we would tell him our plan and they would say "You are good people, be our guests". They respected us greatly. I remember once we were conducting an operation at the east of the river, and a patrol was passing by the river to the west, and set up an ambush to the east, and thanks to God we were able to strike them. Then the planes bombed us, and the artillery kept shooting at us, and we were unable to withdraw. We were at the river bank, completely unable to move. We stayed till the evening under a small bridge, unable to move. The planes were hitting us and the artillery was hitting us, and in this battle two of our brothers were wounded; they were both from Syria. Then the battalion commander came in the midst of the bombs and took our wounded brothers in his car, and the commander was wounded too, but he picked up our brothers, put them in the car and took him to the city hospital. I remember that day that the Army waited until sunset, and then they came over our heads. We were wounded and could not carry our weapons nor our injured brother. They carried him and our weapons, and they made us the best dinner we ever tasted during our time in the camps, and then they drove us back in their cars.

The Army began to boil [out of anger] of course; the Arab countries did not want any Fedayeen operations, and their intelligence agencies were at work and began recording all these errors, which caused tension. A soldier would be taken, a soldier would be detained, and the Army Command would write that soldier so-and-so had been kidnapped, his number was this-and-that, and this would be disseminated to the entire army until the latter was boiling with anger against the Fedayeen, and the tensions increased. The Army began taking some Fedayeen, and the Fedayeen began taking some soldiers. But the Fedayeen had no organized authority or court or anything of the sort, so they would take a soldier and cut off his ear or nose, and he would go back to his wife with a cut-off ear or nose, or to the Command, and the Command would write that the ear of so-and-so was cut off and the soldier is in brigade so-and-so. The Army began to boil with anger, and in the end the officers met with the King and told him: "We can't take this any more", and they put down their star and said, "we will go back to our tribes and protect our honor." He said to them: "I've had it up to here or just below it". They wanted to push it further, but he said: "No, we are all Fedayeen and those are our brothers. That day General Khalaf Rāfa' stood before all the Army officers as well as the king and said: "Listen, your Excellency, if you want to crack down on the Fedayeen, do not hit the Muslim Brotherhood, they are good people." In the end he

printed copies of the Qur'ān and distributed them to the army and told them: "Those Fedayeen are infidels and communists and worse. They want to bring communism to the country, and those communists do not differentiate between mother and sister and can marry either, to mention one of the principles of communism." As I said before, those guys are tough, just give them a signal and they will charge without hesitation. They would slaughter any Fedayeen in their path. They assaulted the bases with tanks, but when they entered the main base, the villagers came out before the tanks and said: "They taught us religion and protected our honour, so a strike at them is a strike at us." The tank commander said "we will not touch them". They did arrest two of our brothers, but they were released safe and sound after two days. The Army had not seen anyone [of the Fedayeen] pray and they could not believe it. "You are a Fedayeen fighter and you are praying? It's unbelievable, we can't believe you are a Fedayeen fighter." He said "yes, I am a Fedayeen fighter". They said "No—the Fedayeen are communists who marry their mothers and sisters." They [the soldiers] were illiterate of course, and this was what they had been told. So the movement was hit, and the cities were hit with artillery, bombs and missiles. What was this? Pure horror.

I remember on that day I was in Irbid, because our base was near Irbid, and my family was living in Irbid, and I was on leave and sitting at home the day when the crackdown began. We took the women to a shelter under the house, I mean, we took the women of the neighbourhood to the trench or to the shelter, and the men stayed in the rooms. The missiles fell on the house and destroyed it.

I remember that we had a neighbour who drunk, and when the missiles began, he threw himself in with the women, and this woman told him "get out", while another spat in his face. My family left the ditch and said: "we will go out and you can stay there. Then they went out and came to me in the room. The man died, died out of fear, and we prayed for him, his heart having stopped beating out of fear.

Amman was destroyed, [as was] Irbid and other cities. The Summit gathered and whenever the Summit gathered they would say: "Save the Palestinian people". They all came, Albāhī al-Adgham, al-Numayrī, and Sa'd al-Šabāh (the current Prime Minister, he was foreign minister at the time), they came to Jordan during the crackdown and tried to reach the king, the prime minister or even the military ruler (one of the useless offices), but their cars were hit by bullets and they almost died along the way. They found the Jordanian Army taking out the injured, the injured Fedayeen, out of the hospitals only to crush them with tanks. Al-Numayrī went back home and held a press conference attacking Jordan, the king and the whole world. During the summit he assailed 'Abd al-Nāšir saying he was an accomplice in this conspiracy and that 'Abd al-Nāšir had planned it. 'Abd al-Nāšir was poorly in the same Summit session and he died the same day. 'Abd al-Nāšir was the head of the Summit and would say "how dare he do this, how dare he do that?" and so on. When it was revealed that he was the man who had planned the crackdown on the Fedayeen, he fell ill and died after three hours. That day he died with shame in this world and the next. When 'Abd al-Nāšir died, all the presidents returned to attend the funeral, all except King Fayšal, who refused to participate in his funeral when he discovered that he was the instigator of the conspiracy. He never returned and never visited his grave.

Anyway, 'Abd al-Nāṣir died and the Fedayeen were crushed. Conferences were organized [in which people said] "People, stop the crackdown on the Fedayeen." But Prime Minister Waṣfī al-Tal said "We will not stop beating them until they withdraw from the cities, we will let them live in the forest. For those who stay in the cities the crackdown will be relentless. We will not let them stay in Jebel Amman." [He said] "Hey Fedayeen, why don't you leave and live freely in the woods?" They said "We'll leave", and they left for the woods, but the tanks and the planes attacked and incinerated them in the forest, because they were not able to kill them in Amman and Irbid so they assembled them in the forest and brought down the artillery and the airplanes. Some of them entered Israel and became Israeli citizens, saying "we will rather be with you than with the Arabs."

[At the time when] the Fedayeen were crushed in Jordan, we would drive a car and we would have a machine gun with us, a revolver next to us, and a Kalashnikov over our shoulder. Those were the days!

Then the bullet became a crime that sent its owner to military court. These mines and bombs were like sweets, like they are here today. You can go to the Tarmanjal market and they will sell you an anti-tank mine for twenty rupees, twenty rupees, a mine that weighs fifteen kilos for twenty rupees, four riyals, the price of a sandwich. It was like that with weapons, and we were living this blessed situation as a small group of Muslims, and all other Muslims were deprived of it, and when we were also deprived of it, our pain increased, because we had not seized this opportunity to build ourselves up, and to take as much information as possible from it. We blamed ourselves harshly, saying "If only we had known this, if only we had known that." Everything ended, and all of us, men and women, returned back extremely disappointed. There was no difference between you and the woman in the house; there was nothing, no weapon, you could not even move. Later on, they banned sermons, and then they banned [religious] lessons. Then they started searching for Muslim teachers in the Ministry of Education and excluded them. Then the Army got rid of all the Muslims, and then there were no Muslims anywhere. Then what do you do, you have no bullet. The whole Arab world was like that, except a small number. We blamed ourselves a lot and we stayed from 1970 to 1979, and we returned back to paperwork and to dealing with papers and books and speaking about jihad in books. We would write about it; if there was a jihad we would write about it on our desks between *mansaf*, *qatifa*, and *knifa* cakes. But he who has tasted the sweetness of jihad, the heat of his desire keeps igniting the fire of his longing for jihad.

As for me, I was blessed by God; I was a professor in the University of Jordan, and I was dismissed from the University of Jordan—praise the Lord—by a decision from the General Military Ruler, the Prime Minister, according to article 24 or 27 (I do not remember) because of my personal beliefs!! Dr. 'Abdallāh 'Azzām was dismissed by decree from the University of Jordan, this was the work of the Prime Minister, for my personal beliefs. He told him: I will slap you so hard you land in Mecca. He said: here is a pretext for you. So those guys slapped us and expelled us from the University of Jordan, and I came to Afghanistan. Praise the Lord, I searched for an area; in Yemen

there was a jihad, and there was a jihad in Afghanistan. I said, let's go to one of the two fronts and go back to practicing our vocation, because the vocation was Jihad. When one is in Sada, one feels, by God, great comfort and deep tranquility, peace of mind, serenity, emotional stability. The only thing that would sadden me would be a letter from Peshawar saying, "Come, we need you for some work in Peshawar for the Bureau" and the like.