

The Palestinian aspect of the Middle East crisis

Naim Ashhab
CC Member, Jordanian CP

The Palestinian problem is like a festering wound. And for all of a quarter of a century it has been methodically lacerated by the imperialists and Israel's Zionist rulers with plots against the Arab liberation movement. The problem is in the epicenter of the Middle East crisis. Its settlement must inevitably include a just accommodation for the national destiny of the Palestinian Arab people and assure it the right of self-determination. This was emphasized yet again by the fourth Arab-Israeli war, one of whose features, in contrast to the preceding three, was that the relevant Security Council cease-fire resolution was tied in with a political solution of the conflict and required fulfillment of the November 22, 1967 resolution. The worldwide concern for ending the Middle East crisis combines these days with unprecedentedly broad recognition of the need to ensure the lawful rights of the Palestinian Arab people. Behind this recognition is a chapter of history abounding in sacrifice and heroic struggle.

Ever since the turn of the century the Palestinian Arab people have been fighting ceaselessly against national oppression and foreign domination. And it may be recalled in this connection that it was chiefly Palestinians who were the founders of the League of Young Arabs in Paris in 1911, established to direct a movement against the Turkish yoke in the eastern part of the Arab world.

National resistance entered a new stage following the notorious Balfour Declaration (1917), which envisaged a 'Jewish national home' in the area, and the establishment of the British mandate over Palestine (1922). The British colonial authorities deliberately set out to ruin the peasants and thereby facilitate the transfer of their land to Zionist settlers. A series of armed actions and uprisings against British domination occurred in the 20s and 30s,¹ with thousands of Arab Palestinians falling in combat against the punitive forces. This was a struggle for national independence, and against plans of Jewish immigration and the mushrooming of Zionist settlements.

At that time, the heroic resistance did not succeed, in spite of the support of the brother Arab peoples and world progressive forces headed by the Soviet Union. The main reasons were: the balance of forces in the region and the rest of the world had not yet tilted in favor of the world revolutionary movement; the

military superiority of British imperialism and world Zionism in the Middle East; absence of a democratic leadership connected with the people;² Arab reaction, which predominated in countries bordering on Palestine, had come to terms with imperialism and Zionism and gave no real aid to the national movement of the Palestinian Arab people.

The next stage of the struggle began after 1947, when the imperialists and Zionists in collusion with Arab reaction denied to the Palestinian Arab people its lawful right of creating an independent democratic state thus violating the November 1947 resolution of the UN General Assembly.³ Palestinians were driven from their motherland, with Israel seizing more than half of the territory delineated to them by the UN resolution. The remainder, known as the West Bank of the River Jordan, was annexed in 1950 by Jordan, then a vassal of Britain.

The rulers of Israel displayed a profoundly hostile attitude towards the Arab people of Palestine, not short at times of physical annihilation. And to this day they continue to deny the very existence of the Palestinian Arab people. When the Israeli rulers launched their 1967 aggression one of the aims was to 'liquidate' the Palestinian problem by totally wiping out the rights of the Palestinian Arab people. To this end, following the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the Israeli authorities began to set up puppet political and administrative bodies in an attempt to distort the will of Palestinian Arabs and convert the captured territory into a protectorate.

But these attempts failed to achieve their objective. The Palestinian Arabs' national movement, whose resistance did not falter, could not be destroyed. On the contrary, it erupted with fresh force, touching off a mass struggle against the Israeli occupation, imperialism and Zionism, for the existence of the Palestinian Arab people and the restoration of its legitimate rights, including the right of self-determination. The Palestinian patriots did not spare their lives and energy in this fight.⁴ The resistance movement drew the full support of the population of other Arab countries, as demonstrated during the clash of the Palestine Resistance with the rulers of Jordan and Lebanon.

The anti-imperialist and liberative complexion of the Palestinian Arabs' national movement, the very fact that it exists, is now broadly recognized throughout the world. It has acquired such scope that now even U.S. President Richard Nixon is compelled to recognize it. The joint Soviet-American communique (1973) says, for example, that any Mid-East settlement 'should be in accordance with the interests of all states in the area, be consistent with their independence and sovereignty, and should take into due account the *legitimate interests of the Palestinian people*' (my italics - N.A.)

The worldwide recognition of the legitimate demands of the Palestinian national movement is clear evidence of the bankruptcy of Zionist and imperialist attempts, and those of certain

sections of Arab reaction, to ignore, formally or actually, the just Palestinian cause.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), is the sole lawful representative of the Palestinian Arab people.⁵ Despite its flaws and errors, it has won the support of the masses, is determined to restore their legitimate rights, and follows an anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist and patriotic line.

The Jordanian Communists have supported the PLO since its inception, and have expressed readiness to cooperate with it. Yet our Party has not hesitated to point out the harmful adventurist tendencies in the PLO and to criticize the chauvinist demagoguery of some of its leaders, especially during the period of Ahmed Shukeiry.⁶ This demagoguery has only been grist to the Israeli aggressors' mill.

Important changes began after the September 1970 massacre launched by the Jordanian rulers against the Palestinian Resistance,⁷ new and important tendencies have surfaced; crystallizing essentially in 1973.

First, with the majority of the Arab countries involved in the conflict gravitating toward a peaceful Mid-East settlement based on Security Council resolution No. 242 of November 22, 1967, and recognition of the rights of the Palestinian Arab people, a realistic standpoint began to gain ground in the PLO. Even before the October war more attention was paid to the UN resolutions concerning the Middle East crisis and the Palestinian question by certain influential circles in the PLO. This position was the beginning of the departure from the 'all or nothing' principle that has been harmful to our just struggle.

Second, the influence of Maoist and Trotskyist ideas and slogans, such as 'everything comes from the barrel of a gun,' is visibly waning in the Palestinian Resistance; there is a disaffection with adventurous actions that so strongly harmed its reputation, confused world opinion, and diverted attention from the crimes of the Israeli occupation authorities. The latter made the most of the situation as an excuse for new repressions against the population of the occupied territories and aggressive sorties against neighboring Arab countries and Palestinian refugee camps there.

A large-scale terrorist action was mounted at the end of 1973,⁸ at the very time when Tel-Aviv, Washington, and certain Arab reactionary quarters made a fresh attempt to prevent the PLO from representing Palestinians in the international arena. Official Tel-Aviv went to the length of saying that the organization did not personify a people, but 'guerrilla gangs.'

But let the Israeli rulers cling to their lies. What we are concerned about is the PLO's attitude towards the Rome incident, and to previous adventurist acts. And its attitude leaves no room for doubt. 'The Palestinian fighters could not commit such a terrorist act,' says a PLO statement on this score, 'because it is essentially aimed against the interests of the Palestinian people and suits the designs of its enemies.'

There is a growing understanding of the value of political struggle, a growing interest in it, spurred by the striving to define its specific weight in the general strategy of the Palestinian movement. The PLO is giving heed to world opinion and appreciates its support. Its delegation participated in the World Congress of Peace Forces in Moscow, the latest World Festival of Youth and Students in Berlin, and many other international actions. It pays attention to the struggle of democratic forces in Israel and appreciates it.

Third, though unity has not yet been forged between the main sections of the Palestine resistance movement, a number of joint steps have already been taken in such fields as propaganda and the matter of improving general relations between Palestinian organizations. There have been instances of them coordinating their activities. This led to clearly positive results during the savage clash between the Palestine Resistance and the Lebanese authorities last year and during the fourth Arab-Israeli war.

After more than six years since the June 1967 war, a Palestine National front was formed in Israeli-occupied territories on August 15, 1973. Its program says: 'The Palestine National Front is an inseparable part of the Palestinian national movement as represented by the Palestine Liberation Organization, a composite section of the All-Arab liberation movement.'

The Front was a direct result of the consolidation of different contingents of the liberation movement in the occupied territories. Communists, representatives of different resistance organizations, other bodies, and prominent public leaders took part in the negotiations preceding its foundation. These forces drew up a program of struggle based on the real situation in the region, the correlation of world forces, and the demands of the liberation movement. The program recognizes the necessity of uniting broad masses of the population in the occupied areas for struggle against the invaders in different forms—political, military, etc. During the latest war in the Middle East and after it the Palestine National Front proved its mettle.⁹

Fourth, the PLO firmly defends Arab-Soviet friendship against the stepped-up activity of Arab reaction and the Right-wing of the liberation movement, which are eager to sow doubts about this friendship. Understandably so, for it has seen the decisive role and significance of the friendship of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries in the liberation struggle.

Nowadays, the Palestine Liberation Organization is fully equipped to represent the Palestinian Arab people, whose support it enjoys in full. The PLO has been accepted as the lawful representative of that people by all Arab summit conferences. It has won the sympathy of progressive and anti-imperialist forces in the Arab Front Aiding the Palestine Revolution,¹⁰ and has been recognized by various international and regional organizations.

The communique of the November 1973 Conference of the Communist parties of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, says: 'Viewing

the right of the (Palestinian - N.A.) people as inalienable and holding that any imposition of guardians or artificial representatives is intolerable, our parties regard the Palestinian Liberation Organization as its lawful representative.' None but the PLO can speak on behalf of the Palestinian Arab people, whose right to self-determination is supported by all UN resolutions, beginning with that of 1947. The prestige of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and its ability to represent the Arab people of Palestine more effectively and to have its legitimate rights respected in any settlement of the Mideast conflict will grow as the various contingents of the PLO draw closer together, favorable changes come about in the national liberation movement (which, in particular, would enable the PLO to reflect the role and impact of individual resistance forces more objectively), realistic trends gain ground in PLO policy and the PLO establishes closer links with the Arab liberation movement, world socialism and other contingents of the anti-imperialist movement.

However, not everyone in the Arab camp welcomes the growing influence and prestige of the PLO. This applies, first of all, to the rulers of Jordan. What is the reason for their negative stand on the PLO?

Jordan's rulers say they recognize the existence of the Arab people of Palestine. 'The Palestinian people,' King Hussein stated in the proposal for a 'United Arab Kingdom' which he put forward in 1972, 'existed centuries before 1948. The Palestinian people continued to exist after 1948 as well.' However, the royal regime's real attitude to the Palestinian problem has not changed in the least since Jordan annexed the West Bank. Jordan's rulers resisted the Palestinians' attempt to regain their legitimate rights and tried to impose themselves on this people as trustees and to rob it of its identity. And when the Palestinian resistance became a really influential factor in Jordan the country's rulers did not shrink from attempts to physically destroy the members of Palestinian organizations, an important force of the liberation struggle in the Arab East.

The Jordanian regime's policy towards the PLO is prompted by disregard of the legitimate rights of the Arab people of Palestine and hopes of perpetuating the split in the liberation movement. The regime has been trying to disrupt the PLO ever since the first Arab summit (1964) acknowledged that the PLO was laying the groundwork for the political structure of Palestine. The Jordanian authorities went as far as to meddle in the PLO's internal affairs and, taking advantage of the fact that most Palestinians found themselves on Jordanian territory, resorted to outright terror and tried to influence the leading bodies of the PLO.

Lately Jordan's rulers have maintained widespread contacts with Arab reaction to bar the PLO from the Geneva conference on peace in the Middle East. 'Transferring the right to represent our people to others,' said King Hussein in parliament on December 2, 1973, 'makes it impossible for us to safeguard the rights of our people in

the West Bank.' The King even refused to attend the recent Arab Summit in Algiers (November 1973), apparently for fear that conference decisions on Palestine might tie his hands. The Jordanian rulers' position on this issue coincided with the official stance of Israel. Tel Aviv even threatened to boycott the Geneva talks if the PLO joined in them.

The Jordanian regime took the Algiers summit's recognition of the PLO as the only legitimate spokesman of the Arab people of Palestine as a danger signal. Realizing that its maneuver had miscarried, and faced with the threat of isolation in the Arab world and on the international scene, it embarked on new maneuvers. However, there are no indications so far that Jordan's rulers have given up their plan to nullify the right of the Arab people of Palestine to free self-determination. At this crucial juncture in history, when there is a prospect of settling the Middle East crisis, they again declare allegiance to the plan for a 'United Arab Kingdom' and try to convince everyone that the majority of the West Bank population backs the plan. In other words, the rulers are trying to misrepresent our people's will as in 1948.¹¹

To achieve this objective, the ruling classes of Jordan use those Palestinians in the West Bank, the eastern part of the country and the Gaza Strip who are loyal to them. It is not accidental that ever since the beginning of Israeli occupation these shady elements lacking popular support have been paid substantial sums from the 'tenacity' fund, whose nominal purpose is to ease the fate of the poor of the occupied areas.

What the project of a 'United Arab Kingdom' amounts to is an attempt to keep the principles of relations with the Palestinians which existed before the 1967 aggression of Israel and were based on annexation, national discrimination, suppression of civil liberties and loyalty to imperialism. This concept of 'self-determination' brings rightful protests from Palestinian patriots and all anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist forces in the Middle East. The policy of the Jordanian authorities is highly detrimental to the unity of the two fraternal peoples, the Jordanians and Palestinians, and brings grist to the mill of Israeli aggressors. Nor is world opinion on the side of the Jordanian regime. It is indicative that Britain, Pakistan and Iraq (under the Nuri Said regime) were the only states to have recognized Jordan's annexation of the West Bank as legitimate.

The Arab people of Palestine can win the right to self-determination only if the areas occupied by Israel are freed and they are free to exercise the rights to determine their political future. This, obviously, will be possible only when the Palestinian refugees are enabled to return to their homes.

There is no doubt that the Arab people of Palestine will win genuine national self-determination in a way beneficial to the liberation struggle in our region and the future of the Palestinian movement. This invites a logical question about the forms in which self-determination will eventually take place and its general principles.

We think it will take the form of establishing a Palestine state in the liberated areas. Afterwards the problem of its future relations with neighboring states: namely with Jordan, could be considered. In either case none but the PLO should be the lawful spokesman of the Palestinian movement, something which would make it possible to foil maneuvers aimed at distorting the people's will.

The rulers of Jordan should now declare the invalidity of the act of accession of the Palestinian territories which was promulgated against the free will of the Arab people of Palestine. This is first of all. Secondly, they must recognize the PLO as the sole legal representative of the Arab Palestinian people; thirdly, they must open negotiations with this organization to decide the nature of future relations between the two people – or the two states, after the Arab Palestinian people found its national independent state. In our opinion, the sooner the rulers of Jordan abandon their bankrupt methods of ruling and their servility to imperialism, the sooner these free negotiations would result in closer relations between the two peoples, both in form and in content.

The Jordanian rulers, however, are stepping up their subversive actions to the detriment of the genuine interests of the Arab people of Palestine. In these circumstances the Palestinian National Front in the occupied territories, as well as most guerrilla organizations, including El Fatah, have declared that any return of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to the rule of Hussein is out of the question.

Thus, as Jordan's rulers, prompted by purely selfish interests, persist in building their relations with the Palestinians on the old lines and as the Palestinian people aspires to establish an independent state, the Jordanian regime will have to bear the full responsibility for the resulting division.

The rise of an independent Palestinian state, if it came about, would lead to bitter resistance on the part of imperialist and Zionist quarters and the Arab reactionaries of neighbor countries. This would objectively encourage the choice of an orientation towards progressive Palestinian national forces – the Arab liberation movement and the progressive regimes of the area on the regional scale, and the world socialist system, primarily the Soviet Union, on the international scale. This state should become the exponent of the revolutionary aspirations of the Palestinian masses.

Such an independent Palestinian state, which would make common cause with the Arab liberation movement against imperialism, Zionism and reaction would set an inspiring example for the Jordanian people in freeing the country from imperialist influence and in upholding democratic rights and freedoms and the policy of laying the foundations for economic independence. Such a state could become the mainstay of the Jordanian people in its just struggle against the reactionary regime. Furthermore, it would have to provide the prerequisites of achieving unity of our two peoples, which have together shed their blood in battles against imperialism, Zionism and government terror. Hence it is safe to

presume that this unity would be brought about through secession, with a view of achieving a qualitatively new unity based on the principles of freedom, genuine equality and anti-imperialism. The record of the mutual struggle of the Palestinian and Jordanian peoples and their common aims offer a firm basis for furthering their brotherly relations regardless of the shape of their formal ties.

As for us, Jordanian Communists, we have fought for tens of years with self-denial for the legitimate rights of the Arab people of Palestine, for a just solution of the Palestinian problem. We take pride in our attitude of responsibility and sincerity to the problem. And we shall continue the struggle for the full and unconditional restoration of the legitimate rights of the Arab Palestinian people.

1. In 1936 the Palestinian Arabs staged a strike which lasted a full six months and was the longest national strike in history.
2. During the British mandate, the movement's leadership was mainly in the hands of members of the large landowning families and the upper crust of the national bourgeoisie.
3. It envisaged termination of the British mandate and the establishment in Palestine of two democratic states – one Arab and the other Jewish.
4. In the October 1973 war alone nearly a thousand Palestinian guerrillas (fedayeen) fell in battle. This was announced at the November 1973 Congress of the Lebanese Progressive Socialist Party by its Chairman, K. Jumblat.
5. A Palestine National Congress in Jerusalem on May 28, 1964, announced the founding of the PLO and adopted the Palestine National Charter.
6. Head of the PLO until 1967.
7. See N. Ashhab. 'To Overcome the Crisis of the Palestine Resistance Movement,' *WMR*, May 1972.
8. An airliner with passengers on board was set on fire.
9. See N. Ashhab, M. Osman, A. Haba. 'The Arab Front in the Middle East Conflict,' *WMR*, January 1974.
10. See K. Mroue, 'The Arab National-Liberation Movement,' *WMR*, February 1973.
11. On December 1, 1948, the Jordanian regime got together in Jericho a convocation of opportunists, time-servers and mercenaries who had gained notoriety by their willingness to serve the British. The participants included such men as Muhammad Ali Jaahari, the incumbent head of the Hebron municipality who today is zealously and faithfully serving the new, Israeli, occupation authorities. The contemptible gathering was dubbed the 'Palestine Congress' and ordered to recognize King Abdullah as monarch of the West Bank instead of holding a free, democratic referendum.

Call for solidarity

At the end of last year a delegation of the Argentine Anti-Imperialist Movement of Latin American Solidarity (MAASLA) was visiting in Prague at the invitation of the Czechoslovak Committee for Solidarity with Asia, Africa and Latin America. At the request of **WMR's** Latin American Commission the delegation members, MAASLA co-chairmen Dr. Juan Azcoaga and Dr. Rafael Marino, MP (Intransigent Party) and executive secretary Manuel Berquier visited our editorial offices and spoke of the movement, which expresses the democratic traditions of the Argentine people.