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Arafat: Palestine exists

The PLO will take over full responsibility for the West Bank, and the Palestinian flag will fly over Jerusalem soon, 'whether they like it or not,' says the Palestinian leader

Yaser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, said this month that the PLO was ready and able to take over full administrative and financial responsibility for the West Bank in the wake of the Jordanian decision to relinquish those responsibilities.

In an interview with a Saudi Arabian newspaper shortly after the announcement of Jordan's King Hussein that he was severing legal and administrative ties with the West Bank, Arafat said the PLO was fully equipped to fill the vacuum if the Arab states made good on their financial commitments to the organization.

The PLO chairman said that the *intifada*, backed by the end of the Iran-Iraq war and the victories scored by the Palestinians in Lebanon during the Israeli invasion of that country, had brought the Palestinian revolution "out of the tunnel."

For one thing, he said, it had drawn the proposed international Middle East peace conference "much closer." Arafat, stressing that no such conference could lead anywhere without PLO participation, said that the organization had dropped the idea of attending the conference as part of a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation long before King Hussein made his disengagement announcement. The PLO, he said, would attend as part of a unified Arab delegation or conceivably as part of a joint Palestinian-Egyptian team.

In any case, he said, "the Palestinian state exists and its flag will fly over Jerusalem whether they like it or not. It's only a question of time."

He said the Palestine National Council, the Palestinian legislature, which is scheduled to meet in Algeria within weeks, would discuss the implications of

the Jordanian move and the possibility of establishing a Palestinian government-in-exile.

In the meantime, the *intifada* would continue and escalate, moving from its current fourth stage, the stage of partial civil disobedience, into a fifth stage of general strike, which would be followed by total civil disobedience, he said.

The *intifada*, he added, would continue at least until a new president took over in the U.S. next year, and possibly well beyond that.

A translation of the full interview follows:

Did the recent Jordanian measures take you by surprise?

They were not a surprise in the full sense of the word. Jordanian officials had spoken about them behind the scenes and leaked them to the press, so we cannot say they were a surprise. But we must point out that the Palestine Liberation Organization, despite the fact that it is the party primarily concerned, was not consulted or officially informed until after the announcement of the measures. It must be taken into consideration that King Hussein, as he himself said in his speech, made contacts with a number of Arab states before undertaking those measures, and only after that did he officially inform the PLO, which received a letter to that effect during the Central Council meeting in Baghdad. The letter was delivered by Abderrazzak al-Yahya (PLO Executive Committee member based in Amman).

Didn't the Arab governments with which King Hussein had advance consultations inform you of the king's intentions before they were announced?



No one told us anything officially. I received nothing official from any Arab party on this subject.

Jordan has said that those steps and measures were taken upon the request of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Did you submit any request on this matter?

Not to our knowledge, and no one consulted us.

What is the significance of the timing of the announcement of the measures?

True, the timing has many meanings, but in keeping with the decision of the PLO's Central Council about the importance of avoiding a hasty response, I would prefer to postpone my answer in order not to detonate the situation with Jordan.

Jordan's disengagement from the West Bank entails a great responsibility for the PLO. The question is, is the PLO prepared to shoulder the responsibility administratively, institutionally and financially?

Give me one instance in which we shirked our responsibilities. We have shouldered all our responsibilities courageously and manfully.

For example, the Arab nation officially gave Syria a billion dollars to arm itself, but when the Israeli invasion of Lebanon came, we fought alone. Four days after the invasion began, (Syria) signed an agreement with Philip Habib, America's special Middle East envoy. The next day, when I announced my endorsement of that agreement, Habib informed me through His Excellency (Lebanese) Prime Minister Saeb Salam, who was serving as go-between, that the Syrian-American agreement on a cease-fire, which was announced on June 10, had nothing to do with the PLO. We fought on for 84 days. We shouldered our responsibility.

And in 1973, I would like to remind you that those who declared war on Israel were three parties: Egypt, Syria and the PLO. Despite our meager resources, we took over a full front, the Lebanese Front, single-handedly, in addition to our full participation in the Syrian and Egyptian fronts through the Yarmouk Brigade of the Palestine Liberation Army, not to mention those of our forces that were fighting behind enemy lines. We shouldered our full responsibilities. And of considerable importance to us was the step taken then by our Palestine National Council, which for the first time issued a resolution of 10 points, one of the most important of which was the decision to establish our Palestinian state on any part of Palestinian soil that is liberated or that Israel evacuates.

And in 1976, when we were besieged by the Syrian forces on one side and the Kataeb (Lebanese Phalangists) on the other, we shouldered our responsibilities.

And now, in the occupied land, in the face of the Israeli assault, we have shouldered and continue to

shoulder our responsibilities.

The Jordanian government has fired 25,000 employees whose salaries it was paying in the occupied territories...

No, 18,000.

The question is, is there any institution or administration in the PLO that is financially and administratively capable of meeting those people's needs with the required speed?

The PLO infrastructure is capable of absorbing anything if the means are made available. I would reassure my people in the occupied land that we will shoulder our responsibilities -- we cannot but do so. And I sincerely hope that in my forthcoming tour of the Arab countries I will be able to implement the commitments that were agreed upon at the Arab summit conference in Algiers, where it was decided to pay the PLO \$128 million immediately to meet urgent needs, with an additional sum of \$43 million to be paid monthly. I hope I will be able to reach a prompt understanding with my Arab brothers on these commitments.

The initial U.S. reaction to the Jordanian measures has been a continuing insistence on considering Jordan a partner in the (peace) negotiations. How do you view the future of this partnership?

Yes, Jordan will be a partner in the negotiations, just as Lebanon and Egypt will be partners. And the same goes for Syria. The important thing is the participation of the surrounding countries plus the Palestinian people, who are represented by the PLO.

Do I take this to mean that the idea of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation is dead?

The idea of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation had been deleted from our dictionary for some time, although it was being referred to by Jordan. We have been calling for a joint Arab delegation. And we are still prepared to accept the idea of a joint delegation with Egypt.

And with Jordan?

No.

In the last session of the Central Council, you called for a meeting of the Palestine National Council. Will that Council discuss the Jordanian measures?

The PLO Executive Committee's recommendation for a Palestine National Council meeting was aimed at escalating the *intifada*. Now, the Council's agenda will include the new (Jordanian) measures, which affect the *intifada* to the core.

How do the Arab states evaluate the Jordanian measures? Surely, some of them must have contacted



you after the measures were announced.

You must read Leaflet 23 by the Unified National Command of the Uprising. Our people in the occupied land consider the confinement of Palestinian representation to the PLO to be one of their achievements. It is the Palestinian people that holds the power of decision. A few voices belonging to some Palestinians on the East Bank are expressing fears about what may befall the Palestinians as a result of these measures.

Every now and then, the passport issue is brought up. One of the fears of the Palestinians has been that the Jordanian government will withdraw the West Bankers' passports after the recent disengagement. Should this happen, what alternatives do you have?

This is indeed one of our problems. But I would point out that the Palestinians in Lebanon have a passport problem, as do the Palestinians in Syria, the Gaza Strip, Egypt and elsewhere. Let all the Palestinians share the same problem.

Haven't you thought of a practical solution to this problem?

Yes, there has been a plan to solve this problem. It is now at the Arab League, where it has been approved by the Arab foreign ministers, and the gist of it is that a Palestinian passport will be issued with the endorsement of the Arab League. The plan has been held up pending the provision of enough guarantees from the Arab states that they will accord this passport full and serious recognition.

Is it not time to reactivate this plan?

I believe that the Jordanian measures will be among the factors that will stimulate thinking on this matter and prompt major steps in its direction.

Don't you think that the time has come to declare a Palestinian government-in-exile to assume responsibility for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip?

At the beginning of the *intifada*, a proposal to that effect was made by some of my brothers in the Executive Committee, and the matter was referred for study to the legal and political committees, which have since completed their study. I don't want to anticipate events. A subject of this kind must be studied by the Palestinian leadership before I make any statements about it, in keeping with Palestinian democracy and with the rule that every important step must be taken by consensus.

Does this mean that the step is being considered?

Yes. It is one of the things that we must always think about.

Will you table it at the forthcoming National Council meeting?

It is supposed to be put to the National Council, because the Executive Committee, when the subject was raised at the beginning of the *intifada*, referred it to the political and legal committees, and those committees are duty-bound to submit the findings of their studies to the next meeting of the Palestine National Council.

The intifada has changed many perceptions, and there are some who believe that the Jordanian measures were one of the results of those changes, but the question is, to what extent has the intifada affected the Palestinian course of action and the Palestinian policy on war or peace?

Israel had always said that the Palestinian revolution was an external revolution. It had even described military operations in our occupied land as the work of outside forces. For a long period, it had succeeded in spreading the illusion among world public opinion that the Palestinians in Israeli-occupied areas were satisfied with those conditions, and that the matter required no discussion on the Arab, international or Israeli levels.

Then came the *intifada*, and it jarred (into the open) many things that, where Israeli thinking was concerned, were taboo. It challenged the Zionist ideology. Israel is now at an impasse: If it follows the path of (Trade Minister Ariel) Sharon and (Prime Minister Yitzhak) Shamir to annexation, it will end the Jewishness of the state. There are 3.4 million Jews in Palestine, and of these 800,000 have left Israel to live in the United States and Europe. So in effect, on the ground, there are 2.6 million Jews facing 2.2 million Palestinians, and the projections indicate that the Jewish and Arab populations will be equal in 1992. And there's another thing, a marvelous thing (to consider), and that is that we have the world's highest birth rate. Of course, part of this is attributable to the human survival instinct. After wars, male births increase as nature strives to restore its equilibrium. So we do have this weapon, which we consider one of our major weapons, in our psychological, cultural and political makeup. (The late Israeli Prime Minister) Golda Meir used to say she was concerned about the number of Palestinian children being born.

So the Zionist idea of a Jewish homeland has been shaken.

And where is this democracy of the Jewish state that Zionists around the world used to boast about? This state has been exposed before the entire world as a racist, fascist state ruled by a class of bigots -- worse than what is happening in South Africa.

The other important thing has been the Palestinian's discovery of his strength and his enemy's weakness. The powers supporting this enemy, which were once European and have now become American, had fortified him with all the prerequisites of strength. Then came the Palestinian stone to expose the Achilles' heel of this armored body, this most advanced war machine. We



discovered our strength and their weakness. This sharp division in Israeli society between extreme right and extreme left, between progressive forces and the forces of fascism and racism, is no coincidence.

The *intifada* has brought the Palestinian back to the Arab mind, and restored the glitter of his cause.

The Beirut epic was stolen from us by the so-called secession (of Syrian-backed Palestinian dissidents). It was in fact not a secession but a battle that was waged against us. We lost the opportunity to benefit from the Beirut victory, which came after the longest Arab-Israeli war, in which the (Palestinian) resistance stood its ground against the most massive of forces. There is a certain party that stole the victory from us.

Does that mean you are afraid someone will steal the achievements of the intifada?

Yes, there are attempts under way to steal the *intifada* and its triumphs. The assaults on the (Palestinian refugee) camps, the assassination of (PLO Deputy Military Commander Khalil al-Wazir) Abu Jihad, and now the hit list aimed at the assassination of Palestinian leaders -- all these are attempts to steal the *intifada*.

Who prepared this hit list?

I have in my possession the plan of an operation code-named "Best Hit," prepared by the Israeli Mossad (intelligence agency) and a number of Arabs, to assassinate me. On the list are the names of a number of other Palestinian leaders.

The Algiers (Arab summit) conference, with all the statements that issued from it, was a unanimous Arab response given in the name of all the Arabs at their highest levels, and it has its historic and political implications. But we must keep in mind that continuous attempts are under way to strike at us and rob us of our achievements.

The intifada has entered its ninth month, and its struggle has gone through several stages. What is the next stage, as you see it? More specifically, my question is: is the stage of military action approaching?

Be a little patient with us.

(Soviet leader Mikhail) Gorbachev asked me when I visited the Soviet Union, "Will the *intifada* endure?" I told him, "How long do you want it to last?" He said, "Two months." I said, "In other words, until your meeting with President Reagan." He said, "yes." I told him, "It will last."

You will recall that when Algeria called for an emergency (Arab) summit, there was much foot-dragging, from February until June. When the Arab foreign ministers, who met toward the end of March, told me that they would prefer to hold the summit after the end of Ramadan -- in June, in other words -- I said, "If there are some who believe that postponing the summit for two more months will give some critics of the *intifada* the opportunity to say that this spectacular

popular revolution, the revolution of the stones, will end, it will not end. If you would like to hold the conference in September, we will hold it in September. If you want it at the end of the year, let it be at the end of the year. The *intifada* is continuing, and it will continue.

We have now entered the fourth stage, which is the stage of partial civil disobedience. After the fourth stage, there will be a fifth, which will be a general strike. After the general strike, total civil disobedience will begin.

We know there is now a vacuum created by the American and Israeli elections, so the revolution must continue until the new president takes over in February. And if you would like to keep it going another year, rest assured that we will. We have assumed the worst and are working accordingly.

I would like to remind you of something. Before 1982, I said we were approaching a dark tunnel, but no one believed me. When I said we would be besieged in an accordion war in Beirut, they said, "What kind of talk is that? Abu Ammar seems to be taking to music -- he's talking about accordions." On March 16 (1977), when (Lebanese National Movement leader) Kamal Junblatt was assassinated in Aley, I said that I would wait here in Aley to fight Sharon, and some Palestinian leaders came to me after the ceremony (in honor of Junblatt) and said, "You've made dangerous statements. How is it conceivable that Sharon will reach Aley?" I said I wasn't a seer or a fortune-teller. The enemy was saying that he was coming to take back Damour and return it to (the late Lebanese President) Beshir Gemayel. Would any army take the coast without taking the mountain overlooking it? If it contented itself with coast, it would be whipped going and coming. If he said he was going to occupy the coast, it was natural that he should occupy the mountain.

During the siege of the Beirut camps in 1986-87, the people of the camps requested a *fatwa* (religious edict) allowing them to eat cats and dogs. The *intifada* started on June 24, 1986, when the people of the camps asked for that *fatwa*. That was when we called on our people in the occupied land to stage demonstrations in support of the besieged Palestinians, and the demonstrations have not ceased since then. I said that day this was the year of hope. I said I saw the light approaching. I said the RPG heroes and the children of the stones were fighting side by side. And in fact, the occupied land has not rested since then.

Has the intifada brought the international conference (for Middle East peace) closer or has it pushed it farther into the future?

It has brought it much closer. Suffice it to say that it placed the Palestinian issue on the agenda of the superpower summit in Moscow and on the agenda of the European Community summit, and it was behind the adoption of UN Security Council Resolutions 605 and 608 (of December 22, 1987 and January 14, 1988).



The PLO accepts the West Bank challenge

and underscores the special relationship between the Palestinians and Jordan

The Palestine Liberation Organization's Central Council issued an official statement on August 3, 1988 declaring the organization's readiness and ability to fill the West Bank vacuum left by Jordan's administrative and legal disengagement from that part of Palestine.

Noting that King Hussein of Jordan had neither consulted nor informed the PLO prior to his disengagement announcement, the Central Council underscored "the PLO's commitment to shoulder all its national and patriotic responsibilities as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."

The Palestinians and their leaders, however, reaffirmed their special relationship with the Jordanian people, as stated in successive resolutions adopted by the Palestinian parliament, the Palestine National Council (PNC), the Central Council said.

SESSION

An urgent session of the PNC would be convened, the statement added, to consider these latest developments and means of supporting and escalating the *intifada* until its goal of ending Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza was achieved. To that end, additional efforts would be made to mobilize more international support for the uprising and push for a UN-sponsored international peace conference to be attended by the PLO on an equal footing with all other parties concerned.

Running parallel with those efforts, measures would be taken to

protect those of the Palestinian people's acquired rights that could be jeopardized by the Jordanian move, and to preserve the unity of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and the diaspora toward the achievement of their inalienable rights to repatriation, self-determination and independent statehood on their national soil, the Central Council said, stressing the need for "collective action" in this "important stage" of the Palestinian revolution.

Expressing the Palestinian people's gratitude for the growing international support of their cause, especially the support of European Jewish communities, the Central Council directed the Executive Committee, the Palestinian "inner Cabinet," to step up contacts with Arab states to implement the decisions taken at last June's Algiers Arab summit, which pledged financial and other support for the *intifada*.

CRIMINAL

Turning to the situation in Lebanon, the Central Council condemned the "criminal destruction" of the Palestinians' shanty towns in Beirut and the displacement of their people by Palestinian dissidents mobilized and backed by Syria.

Rejecting all guises under which the attacks were carried out, including the guise of inter-Palestinian disputes, the Central Council said that "the Syrian leadership bears full responsibility" for the assaults, which came at a time

when the Palestinian people had expected Damascus to support the PLO and the Palestinian refugee camps as they threw their weight behind the uprising against Israeli occupation. The assaults on the camps, it added, had come despite genuine PLO efforts to "close the dark chapter" in PLO-Syrian relations, and they had given Israel an opportunity to escalate its oppression and terrorism against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

Demanding that the Palestinian refugees be allowed back to their homes in the devastated camps of Shatila, Burj Brajneh and Sabra, which it said must be rebuilt, the Central Council called on Syria to end "the abnormal conditions" in the camps and on the Arab world to implement its summit resolutions on the protection of Palestinian camps, especially those in Sidon and Tyre, South Lebanon, whose inhabitants were next on the list of death and displacement.

The Central Council paid a warm tribute to Iraq and its president, Saddam Hussein, who it said had given the Palestinians moral, political and financial support despite his country's involvement in the war against Iran.

Praising the Iraqi performance on the battlefield, the Central Council said it was looking forward to a speedy end of the Gulf war that would restore neighborly relations between the Arabs and Iran and enable Tehran to play its role in support of the Palestinian struggle against Israel.

The most important thing about Resolution 605 is its emphasis on (Israeli) withdrawal from all the occupied territories. In other words, this resolution corrected the flaw in Resolution 242. It made use of the word "the" (in "the occupied territories"), which had been the focus of dispute before. The *intifada* also made the Toronto

summit (of the seven industrialized countries), which once supported the American initiatives, demand an international conference.

Do you think the American initiatives will continue?



As long as the *intifada* continues, I am sure that America will keep moving -- not for our sake, but because the continuation of the *intifada* means the continuation of Israel's political and historic impasse. The Americans can solve the economic problems, but not the rest.

The Americans have asked Abu Ammar to endorse the article of Bassam Abu-Sherif ("Prospects for a Palestinian-Israeli Settlement"), the parts of which about negotiations and the future settlement they found favorable. But you have made no comment on this article whatsoever, and some are saying you have abandoned it, washed your hands of it. What is your answer?

I am not an amateur. I am the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Anyone who has a question to ask me is invited to put it to me directly.

The Americans have not asked you officially?

No, not at all. Would you have me volunteer an answer? I am not the director of a charity. I don't answer through the press.

There have been contacts between you and American officials, as you mentioned in your interview with Playboy magazine. But the American administration is denying this. What is your response to this denial?

Such deceit is regrettable. I will mention some, not all, of those contacts.

Ask President (Jimmy) Carter if his official representatives did not contact me during the Tehran hostage crisis.

I have in my possession an official letter from (former Secretary of State) Henry Kissinger thanking the Palestine Liberation Organization for rescuing thousands of Americans who were in Beirut in 1976. We had official political and military talks through the American embassy in Beirut, and we helped the Americans out, once by sea and once overland along a mountain road.

But the Americans have denied this.

I refer the official American spokesman who made that denial to President Carter. Let President Carter deny it. The first 13 hostages released in Tehran -- who had them released? Let them deny it. I have letters signed not by Carter but by American officials. Let them deny those.

Official American envoys used to come to me in Beirut. There are Lebanese and Palestinian witnesses who would attest to that. We're not given to lying.

There was also an official meeting in Morocco between Khaled al-Hassan and (the late) Majed Abu-Sharar on the one hand and Vernon Walters on the other. Walters was a roving American envoy at the time.

The examples are many.

Many were taken aback by the quick withdrawal of the fighters from the Burj Brajneh (Palestinian refugee) camp (in Beirut). The withdrawal went counter to all expectations because of the camp's perceived ability to stand fast since it differed from Shatila in fortifications and number of fighters. Why this easy surrender? Did they just run away?

There was a (Syrian) decision to destroy Shatila and Burj Brajneh, and that meant putting an end to Palestinian presence and camps in Beirut. We had to make a move. I notified (Algerian) President Chedli (Benjedid), (Libyan) President Moammar (Qadhafi), and the Soviets. I told them that (Syrian) President (Hafez) Assad wants us out of the camps, and we will leave, but that does not mean that we have been weakened. The martyr Abu Jihad and I once left Damascus, but we both returned. Abu Jihad's funeral (in Damascus) was the biggest Syrian -- not Palestinian -- referendum on the importance of the Palestinian revolution to the Syrian people. We were not present in Syria, but our absence did not mean that we were not deeply entrenched in the mind of the Syrian people. We are not in the occupied land either, but does it follow that we are not actually very much there?

There are some, unfortunately, who do not ready history.

There are some who expect a flareup in the Sidon camps.

Yes, we expect it very soon, because there is an American plan to end Palestinian presence in the South and move it to the Bekaa, north of Baalbeck, near Wadi Khaled, "to gather all the people without nationalities together," as President Moammar remarked. Because the Arabs of Wadi Khaled are known as people whose nationality is "under consideration."

Will this plan go through easily, as the Burj Brajneh plan did?

Who would have imagined that anyone in his right mind would seek the fall of a symbol like the Shatila camp?

I repeat my question: will the scheme succeed in Sidon?

No, it won't be easy, and they know it. However, preoccupation with the Lebanese elections and the new president may delay things.

Who will the Lebanese president be?

I don't interfere in the Lebanese game. I refused to interfere in it even when I was in Beirut.

Who in your view really chooses the Lebanese president now?

The agreement between U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz and President Hafez Assad was that they would each have a 50 percent say. Now, however, after



his operation, the Syrian's share has shrunk to 25 percent.

What operation?

The operation of Burj Brajneh, and Shatila before it. The East side (of Beirut) now holds the veto, and it is under American control.

What are the Palestinian specifications for the next Lebanese president?

The most important thing is for him to preserve the existence of Lebanon, and we are ready to abide by any decision arrived at regarding all armed people in Lebanon.

Do you think any of the present candidates can carry out that mission?

I don't play that game.

Back to Syria. Your visit to Damascus (last April) had raised many hopes, coming as it did in response to an official invitation.

No, there was no official invitation. There was mediation by President Moammar Qadhafi, and that is why I was accompanied to Damascus by Mustapha Kharroubi.

Didn't your meeting with President Assad in Damascus and later in Algiers create some common ground that could lead to a reconciliation?

You ask me how the camps of Burj Brajneh and Shatila fell, and I say to you that they fell in a moment of truce. Otherwise, they could not have fallen. The camps are protected not only from the inside but also by a political Arab and international shield. The meetings with Assad defused the charge, and that is how we lost the camps in a moment of truce.

A truce on your part?

Yes. There had been a decision. We buried Abu Jihad in Damascus and I met with Assad in Algeria. In that moment of truce we lost our cover and the camps were pounced upon.

Do you regret your visit to Damascus?

Not at all. What happened was that some people believed there was room for reconciliation, and I proved to those Arab friends that, if the goal was to turn all guns toward the enemy, I was ready to go anywhere. I am neither a president nor a prime minister. I am the leader of a revolution, and for the good of that revolution I am ready to open a dialogue with all my brothers.

Where there no points of agreement in your talks with President Assad?

There were many, and he could have built on them had he wanted to, but he didn't want to, because his agreement with Shultz was more important than his

agreement with the Palestinians -- at least temporarily, not strategically, because agreement with one's kinfolk is the more important strategic agreement.

Turning to Palestinian action, don't you think the time has come to get new blood into the Palestinian leadership?

I believe it is. I hold with the theory of revolution within revolution, of the rotation of generations -- all my brothers know this about me. And I swell with pride when I speak about the new generals in the Palestinian revolution.

Do you anticipate changes?

Of course. The new generals will assume their posts.

You have often warned about the continuation of the Iraq-Iran war and its negative effects on the Palestinian cause. That war is now going into a cease-fire stage. What is your first reaction to this new development.

We were the first to pay the price of that war, so we will be the first to reap the benefits of its cessation. We paid the price, and now we will cash the price.

Do you think the cease-fire will last?

Yes, I believe it will. Three weeks before Iran's announcement of its acceptance of the Security Council resolution, I said in a speech in Iraq to some Iraqi brothers, "You are now in the final quarter-hour." I am among those who have followed up on this war, and I have been a member of several committees formed to put an end to it.

To what extent will the end of the war change the political map of the region?

The region's entire political map will change.

What will the changes be?

For the better, God willing. They must understand that the Iraqi fighter who fought on the eastern front and the Palestinian fighter who fought inside the Occupied Territories and in Lebanon have scored new victories and realized new dreams: ending the Iraq-Iran war and drawing the Iranian people back into the Jerusalem circle.

How do you visualize post-war Iran? Will it be a friendly country, or will it continue its aggression in other forms?

The Iranian people have always been friends with whom we have shared long, historical treks. Our problem was with those who insisted on continuing the war.

Many observers were surprised when you wagered on Iraq from the very beginning, although some believed it to be in the weaker position. Did you expect this outcome from the beginning?



A unified cheer from the intifada

The Unified National Command of the Uprising has hailed Jordan's decision to disengage from the West Bank as a confirmation of the Palestine Liberation Organization's standing as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories and the diaspora.

In its Leaflet Number 23, distributed in the Occupied Territories on August 4, the UNCU called on Jordan and all other Arab states to give the Palestinians everywhere all the help they needed to continue their revolt against Israeli occupation.

The *intifada*, the leaflet said, considered the Jordanian disengagement one of its major achievements, along with the \$2 billion loss it had inflicted on Israel and the passage of three UN Security Council resolutions in support of Palestinian rights. One of those resolutions

specifically called for a total Israeli withdrawal from all Arab lands occupied in 1967, it noted, thus ending the debate on the subject that had been sparked by the vague wording of Security Council Resolution 242.

The leaflet, which mapped out the next few days' action plan for the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, praised the Jewish doctors who had defied the Israeli authorities' instructions not to treat Palestinian *intifada* casualties and the Jewish journalists who were enduring Israeli persecution for their support of Palestinian rights.

More praise went to the European Community, whose parliament had refused to ratify trade accords with Israel because of the Jewish state's failure to abide by an agreement to allow Palestinian farmers to sell their produce to Europe independently.

It wasn't a matter of a wager. Leadership is vision, and vision comes from information.

Did you have information?

Let me be clear about this. From the very beginning I made my views known with candor to the Iranian leadership, and everyone knows how extensive my relations with them were at that time, and I still have the strongest of ties with the learned among them. But I was frank with them, and I did not stand on ceremony. I said to them: "This war is against you and against Iraq, and we are among the parties most injured by it." I counseled with honesty. I did not try to spare any feelings. I tried my best to stop the war. There were four Palestinian initiatives -- some were made public, some remained secret -- to stop it.

You were the first to visit (Iraqi) President Saddam Hussein after Iran announced its acceptance of the international resolution. What did you say to him?

I spoke with him at length, and I arrived with him at certain views relating to the importance of establishing Security Council Resolution 598 and establishing the cease-fire, one of my goals being to put a stop to the fighting quickly and end this conflict.

It has been noted that you have not visited Egypt officially recently. Is there any misunderstanding in those relations?

No. I met with President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa, and when I went to Cairo for the funeral of my brother Mustapha, I held official meetings with President Mubarak and a number of Egyptian officials.

We have heard that you mediated between the two sides of Yemen to end their border dispute.

I am proud of the effort I made to mediate between the two sides, and they themselves generally say that the Palestinians are the third side. I did my duty toward both and I am happy that I contributed to the settlement of the dispute, which had escalated into a military clash. Now, the borders (between the two Yemens) are open and people need only their personal identity cards to cross them.

You used to say you could see the light at the end of the tunnel. How close is that light?

We came out of the tunnel with the end of the Iraq-Iran war, the *intifada* and our steadfastness in Lebanon. We are now in the final quarter-hour, and it is the most perilous period. In this final quarter-hour we have lost Shatila and Burj Brajneh, and Abu Jihad has been martyred. So we must be alert and vigilant. For us, it's now a question of time. The Palestinian state exists and its flag will fly over Jerusalem whether they like it or not. It's only a question of time.

Speaking of flags, I was surprised to discover, when I was visiting an Arab consulate once, that the British prime minister, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, travels on an ordinary passport and gets visas to the countries that she visits officially. What kind of passport does Yaser Arafat carry?

My passport is my keffiyeh (headdress). You may be surprised to learn that my passport has expired. It is an expired Algerian passport. My Algerian brothers would not deny me a renewal, but I don't want to renew it. Sometimes they (customs officials) tell me that my passport has expired, and I tell them, "I know. Would you like me to go back where I came from?"

In the Arab world I need no passport. I have not used a passport on my visits to the Arab states.