

THE DFLP STAND

In this exclusive interview with I&P editor-in-chief Maxim Ghilan, Abu Leyla, Politburo member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), discusses the new democratic reforms within the Palestine National Council, calls for an international conference to mediate a Middle East peace, and accepts the existence of the state of Israel alongside an independent Palestinian state. The interview was conducted in Algiers on April 19, 1987, during the meeting of the Palestine National Council.

Abu Leyla (Kayss al Samarai) was born in 1940 and studied economics at the University of London. In 1969, along with Nayef Hawatmeh and Saleh Raafat, he was instrumental in creating the DFLP. In 1970, at the DFLP's first Congress, he was elected to the Political Bureau and placed in charge of information and the militia. He also then became editor of the front's official press organ, Al Sharara (The Spark). As one of the main theoreticians of the DFLP, he has participated in drafting most of the front's political and ideological documents. At the PNC, he co-drafted the political resolutions.

I&P: What has induced your organization to decide on the step to come back to the framework of the PLO?

Abu Leyla: The DFLP's stand since the end of the 1982 war, that is, since the Palestinian fighters left Beirut, was that Palestinian unity alone will allow the PLO to obtain the liberation of the Occupied Territories and the creation of an independent Palestinian state, the return of the Palestinians to their homeland.

I&P: However, until a few days ago, there were political reasons not to come back to the PLO. What has changed your strategy?

Abu Leyla: Our differences with the leadership of the PLO, before the last few months, were

centered mainly on the question of the Amman agreement. We held the view that the Amman agreement allows King Hussein to have a share of the Palestinian representation and puts a ceiling on the right of the Palestinian people to complete independence and self-determination. With the decision of our comrades in Fatah to annul the Amman agreement, to abolish it, the main obstacle that made it impossible for us to re-enter the PLO and the PLO Executive was removed. Our negotiations with Fatah (as well as with other Palestinian organizations) have been going on for quite a few months, based on this agreement that the Amman accords should be abolished.

I&P: The Democratic Front has been said to be the element which brought together the Popular Front (PFLP) and Fatah. Is that so in your opinion?

Abu Leyla: To some extent I think this is the role we have been playing since 1983, ever since the split in Fatah and in the PLO. We have always called on all independent Palestinian organizations to put aside political differences and come to the arena of unity on the basis of decisions of the Palestine National Council. We thought that the Amman agreement was an essential breach of the Palestine National Council resolutions, and this is why it was impossible for us to do that.

I&P: I understand that your organization is for an international conference.

Abu Leyla: We are certainly for an international conference which is to be based on the UN resolutions pertaining to the Palestinian question and which is to be attended by the permanent members of the Security Council and by the PLO as an equal and independent representative of the Palestinian people.

I&P: But in such a conference Jordan would probably also be a participant. Would you be against this?

Abu Leyla: No. We realize that this conference

will discuss not only the question of the Palestinians but also the questions of peace with all other Arab states that have been in conflict with Israel, and this is why the attendance of Jordan would be natural.

I&P: What are going to be, as far as it can be said now, the main strategic demands of the DFLP during the next year or so?

Abu Leyla: The main demands inside the PLO?

I&P: Yes. I ask because many people don't really know what the discussion is about, apart from the Amman agreement and of course the Egyptian problem, which I understand has not been totally solved yet.¹

Abu Leyla: Not totally, but the basis for solution has already been laid on, minutes ago, a half-hour ago.

I&P: How?

Abu Leyla: This resolution, or this draft resolution, will refer to the previous PNC resolutions, especially the 16th session, and also to the resolutions of the Arab summits, including Baghdad, Rabat and Fez. In our opinion, relations with Egypt should be, or, shall we say, should take a course that will serve the political struggle of the PLO and should be decided upon collectively by the newly elected Executive. This is a matter for which the basis has now been laid. The new executive will now discuss every step in this direction on the basis of the resolution taken.

I&P: I know that the Egyptian left has been allowed a bit more of a margin. For instance, I know that people from the World Peace Council are coming back to Egypt and others have been allowed to become active again. Wouldn't a resolution allowing some contact with Egypt help the Egyptian left? Is that a consideration?

Abu Leyla: The new resolution does not completely prohibit all contacts, but it will, shall we say, control them, and in a way that the Egyptian regime (which we, the Democratic Front, believe is still continuing with its policy of Camp David) will not make use of these contacts in order to strengthen its Arab position. Because strengthening Egypt's Arab position on the basis of Camp David could lead to other catastrophes, in Jordan, for example. This is our main reservation, shall we say, on the question of contacts with Egypt.

I&P: In the preliminary document signed a few days ago by six organizations, perhaps now by eight, there is a clause which speaks of the strengthening of the ties with democratic Jewish elements inside Israel. I know that the Democratic Front, in fact, was the first organization which had such a platform and was even attacked by other Palestinian organizations, at the time, for its stand. What is your position on that subject?

Abu Leyla: We believe that contacts should not only be made but should also be developed with every Israeli party or group that accepts the right of the Palestinian people to an independent state and accepts recognition of the PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. On this basis, we have also the national interest to help and to develop all the peace-loving forces inside Israel, because we are against Zionism but we are not against the Jews or the Israelis. We are against the policy of expansion, but we are not against the people of Israel.

I&P: At this stage, is the Democratic Front program identified with the 1976 resolution on the creation of a Palestinian national state in any part

of Palestine, or is your goal still a democratic multiconfessional state in all of Palestine at once or at any price?

Abu Leyla: No. We still stick to our position that the immediate aim on which peace could be achieved in the Middle East is the Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 and the creation of an independent state on these territories. But we believe that this, with the development of our struggle and the struggle of all peace-loving Israelis, would lead in the future to a united democratic Palestine, in which both peoples could live together in peace and in equality.

I&P: Can I understand from this that you recognize the existence of an Israeli Jewish people? Because you are talking about two peoples...not really, but you are talking about what?

Abu Leyla: I am talking about two peoples in Palestine.

I&P: When you say it will "lead to", you mean through peace? Through diplomacy? Through growing together? Or eventually through war?

Abu Leyla: I think this is a bit premature, no? Let's see what happens after the creation of the independent state and then we'll see.

I&P: What do you expect from this PNC meeting? What organizational things do you expect are going to be developed?

Abu Leyla: The organizational reforms have already been agreed upon, and the final draft is now being discussed by the Executive committee and by the legal commission. The main reform in this direction is, of course, the idea of an elected Central Council, a Central Council elected from the PNC and with the capacity to control and to decide for the Executive committee and also having the power to freeze the membership of any Executive committee member if he takes any stand or action which is negative or, shall we say, contrary to the PNC resolutions.

And the second main reform is the creation of a Secretariat of the Executive committee, presided upon by the chairman but also having the powers to take the daily decisions concerning all political, financial and military questions. We believe that this will bring in more democracy and more collective leadership inside the PLO, and this will make its political cause more sound and more in control.

I&P: Is there anything you would say to left-wing or liberal circles in the West, which are part of our readership?

Abu Leyla: I should say that the struggle of all peace-loving forces in the West, inside Israel and everywhere is to force the Israeli regime to recognize the PLO as the sole, legitimate Palestinian representative and the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to agree to the idea of an international conference for the solution of the Middle East conflict. This would greatly help, improve, the chances of world peace and would be to the benefit of all peoples, including the Western peoples and also the Israeli people. And it has been proved, also, that the present explosive situation in the Middle East is a very big danger to world peace, bringing the world to the brink of a new war. It is the main interest of all humanity to evade the possibility of such a catastrophic war. I think more effort should be put in, in order to remove this explosive detonator. ■

(1) The interview was taped before the PNC's final resolutions were adopted.