

BANNA, Sa i

the middle east

p26-28 July 78 JF Pal

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## MOST WANTED MAN, ABU-NIDAL, SPEAKS:

- the uselessness of hijackings
- Arafat's capitulation
- revolutionising the PLO
- amputating meddlers' hands

(Sabri Khalil Banna), better known as Abu-Nidal, was born in Jaffa in Palestine some 40 years ago. He has become a legend in his lifetime to both friends and foes but in spite of this fame or notoriety he has remained virtually inaccessible to journalists and uninterested in publicity. His organisation is essentially an underground movement, even in Iraq where he is based, and maintains recognised offices only in Libya and Lebanon.

The Western media rank him with the late PFLP leader, Wadei Haddad, and the fabled Carlos as one of the most wanted "terrorists" in the world. Operations as diverse as those carried out in Munich, Khartoum, Fiumicino, the assassination of Youssef Sebai in Cyprus and even the killing of Italian Premier Aldo Moro have been laid at his door (see box). His group is said to have links with European guerrillas like the Red Brigades and the Baader-Meinhof organisation. Fact and speculation have been inextricably mixed and liberally spiced with sensationalism.

Abu-Nidal was one of the founder members of Fateh together with Yasser Arafat in the early 1960s. After being Fateh representative in Baghdad for some years, he became increasingly critical of the organisation's policies and was sentenced to death in his absence by a Fateh revolutionary court in 1974 for "inciting armed mutiny" and planning to assassinate senior Fateh officials. He has since then led a Fateh splinter group which preceives the struggle to be not only against Israel but also against conservative Arab regimes and "moderate" Palestinian leaders.

He told *The Middle East* that Arafat must bear the full blame for the split for having "betrayed the principles of the Palestinian resistance." In his secret headquarters just outside of Baghdad, with all the windows boarded up and covered by bullet-proof panels, Abu-Nidal talked about the aims of his organisation.

Of medium height, but lean and athletic with dark intense and determined eyes, he spoke with fervour after carefully weighing his words. He denied any links with other groups — either Arab or European — but expressed sympathy for all those fighting against American imperialism. He identified with all Palestinian operations carried out against the "Zionists" and "Arab reactionaries" but would not allow his name to be linked directly with any particular action.

Abu-Nidal's inaccessibility is easy to understand, for he is wanted not only by Israeli and Western intelligence organisations but also by the conservative Arab states and the Palestine Liberation Organisation. He told *Fulvio Grimaldi* that Yasser Arafat's "capitulationist" policies and constant willingness to compromise had placed the

☐ You organisation has been linked by the Western press with urban guerrilla groups in Europe and by Egypt with the killing of Youssef Sebai in Cyprus. Is there any truth in these charges?

○ The Egyptian charges are totally false, and were the ultimate frame-up. Colonel Hani Abdel-Aziz, chief of one of Sadat's secret services, had been given the task of infiltrating our organisation, which is seen by the Egyptian ruler as one of the most deadly threats to his political existence. Abdel-Aziz was acting under the direct orders of Vice President Husni Mubarak who gave unlimited assistance. He had two tasks — to liquidate one of the strongest centres of opposition to Sadat's plans for the Middle East conflict and to build an external scapegoat for Egypt's ills.

During the first months of the year, Abdel-Aziz established several espionage centres in the Arab world, the two most



After the Intercontinental Hotel raid (AP)

important of which were in Kuwait and Beirut. It took our militants only three months to smash these centres completely, sometimes physically, and to unmask the whole conspiracy.

This constituted a severe defeat for Sadat and his reaction was an irrational one, as in Cyprus. He arrested scores of Palestinians and European comrades with whom we did not have the slightest connection. As to the Red Brigades in Italy or the Baader-Meinhof group in West Germany, we do not have any links with them. We apply to them the principle of non-interference in the armed struggle of any other country or organisation. We would like to emphasise, however, that anyone who tries to take a hand in our affairs will have his hand cut off.

☐ Does this same principle of non-interference apply, for instance to George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and other radical Palestinian groups? The PFLP is known to have links with other revolutionary organisations.

○ I can't say whether such links exist or

not. I don't know. But I do know that when Arafat states that extremist Palestinian fringe groups could be connected with the Red Brigades or other terrorist organisations, there is no doubt that he is trying to draw attention to me and our forces.

☐ Why would Arafat do this, and why does your name get mentioned whenever there is a terrorist incident in Europe?

○ This is no more than an international campaign led by Arafat and Sadat, supported by Saudi money and Israeli collaboration, to discredit us and those who support us.

Did not Arafat go as far as having some members of Fateh killed in South Lebanon during the Israeli invasion because they were opposed to (Palestinian) withdrawal, although they had not raised their arms against those who ordered it?

☐ How do you evaluate the late Wadei Haddad and Carlos?

○ We respect martyr Wadei Haddad for he was a great revolutionary fighter but this does not necessarily mean that we agree with his ideas and activities. As to comrade Carlos, who fought side by side with martyr Haddad, I want to emphasise that ours is a large organisation with a progressive and popular political line. Of course, we also fight on many fronts and believe that armed struggle is the most important one. But of equal importance for us is mobilisation inside and outside the occupied territories. The enemy has often admitted the strength of our presence in the occupied territories.

☐ Are you saying that there is a contradiction between mass organisation and guerrilla activity?

○ I don't accept such a contradiction. Our struggle is for the liberation of Palestine where we want to build a secular and democratic state, and for revolution in the Arab world as a whole.

We believe that these aims require different means and methods. Hijackings and similar operations are not useful — they are individual actions without mass participation.

But if our first priority is the struggle against the Zionist enemy in the occupied territories — and our progress here can be seen from the rockets which rained onto Begin's residential district — our next priority is the destruction of the reactionary regimes in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. There is also the direct offensive against Saudi Arabia, as shown by the destruction of the Abqaiq (oilfield).

Just ask the imperialist powers what they will do with the Zionist state once Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan proceed to unite and a "new revolutionary" balance of forces exists.

☐ But Arafat has promised that the PLO will end military operations once it has a Palestinian state and that it will not constitute a threat to Israel.

## Operations attributed to Abu-Nidal

Operations attributed to Abu-Nidal and his Black June organisation began in 1976 and a clear political goal can be seen in all of them. The targets are Syria, Egypt and Jordan, and the aim is to stall any peace negotiations or contacts with Israel these governments may be involved in.

Abu-Nidal's name has also been linked with the Black September Organisation which staged similar operations from 1972 to 1974.

### 1976

**SEPTEMBER:** In an attack on the Semiramis Hotel in Damascus by four armed men, hostages were taken and the release of a number of prisoners in Syria demanded. The Syrian security forces stormed the hotel and one of the four guerrillas was killed as well as four hostages.

**OCTOBER:** Syrian embassies in Italy and Pakistan were attacked. In Islamabad one of the three attackers was killed and the other two arrested. Seven people were wounded. In Rome a Syrian diplomat was hurt and the three attackers eventually surrendered to the Italian police.

**NOVEMBER:** Four guerrillas occupied the Intercontinental Hotel in Amman and after five hours of fighting the Jordanian security forces managed to regain control. Three guerrillas, two soldiers and three civilians were killed and nine people injured. The fourth guerrilla was wounded and captured and executed a month later.

**DECEMBER:** Syrian Foreign Minister Abdel-Halim Khaddam was shot and wounded by a motorcyclist near Damascus.

### 1977

**OCTOBER:** Another attack was made against Khaddam at Abu Dhabi Airport but UAE Foreign Affairs Minister Saif Bin-Ghabbash was killed instead. The attacker surrendered to the authorities in Abu Dhabi after taking seven people hostage.

### 1978

**FEBRUARY:** Chairman of the Egyptian Press Syndicate, Youssef Sebai was assassinated in Cyprus, outside the Hilton Hotel in Nicosia. The two guerrillas took 11 hostages and were given a plane to leave Cyprus. They returned, however, after failing to find anywhere else to land, and Egypt sent a plane-load of troops to attack the guerrillas' aircraft. The Cyprus National Guard fired on the Egyptians killing 15 and wounding 17 others.

○ What does it matter? This only expresses the joint wishes of Sadat and Arafat which the Palestinian people will never share.

□ In a recent interview with *The Middle East*, Muhammad Sid-Ahmad suggests that there was an emerging alliance between Israel and some of the Arab conservative states aimed at stopping the Palestinians from becoming a subversive force in the Arab world. There is an unspoken assurance from the moderate Arab states that Palestinian guerrillas will not be permitted to attack Israel.

○ We believe that this is a correct analysis and we expressed this opinion long before Sid-Ahmad, in a book published by the General Union of Palestinian Writers. But I must add that we know Muhammad Sid-Ahmad is neither leftist nor progressive. He is in fact a spy and spends most of his time in London and Paris carrying out tasks related to Sadat's dealings with Israel.

□ How do you see the present radicalisation of the PLO? Will there eventually be a split?

○ Takeover by the radical wing is more likely than a split. Egypt and Saudi influence over the PLO will be broken and Arafat will end up in the rubbish bin of history. Palestinian revolutionaries will develop the PLO and its struggle for Palestine and the whole Arab nation.

□ Has the Iraqi Government ever shown any embarrassment over your organisation's activities?

□ We are tied to the Socialist Arab Baath Party by a close alliance. We agree on the main principle of liberating Palestine and the Arab world. We trust the political leadership of Iraq and this is the result of a long, common experience. Our Iraqi allies take part of the struggle on themselves and share the responsibility for the destiny of the masses.

□ How far does your influence extend outside Iraq?

○ We are capable of crossing all borders and overcoming all obstacles, even without technological aids. We are the best smugglers in the world. But when the Western press so frequently refers to Iraq in the context of terrorism, it is simply part of an effort to boycott the progress and autonomy of this country.

□ Have you ever been to Europe?

○ Yes, in the past.

□ Will you return there?

○ Well, it wouldn't be the right time now, would it?

□ How do you view the urban guerrilla groups of Europe?

○ We support any action directed against American imperialism, but we don't have accurate information. Besides, the consequences of these groups' actions must be judged by their own people. We cannot be the tutors of any other organisation or

## THE DELICATE BALANCING ACT

# WILL ARAFAT WEATHER THE STORM?

As Yasser Arafat's credibility as overall leader of the Palestinian movement sinks lower, he is facing increasingly strong challenges from the radical hardliners. Tewfik Mishlawi in Beirut looks at the pressure he has to face and the difficulties involved in continuing the delicate diplomatic balancing act he has performed so skilfully in the past.

The Palestine National Council (parliament in exile) is scheduled to meet next month (mid-August) against a background of what some regard as the most serious challenge yet to the leadership of Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) chairman Yasser Arafat.

So far, the 48-year-old leader of Fateh appears to be unruffled by his rivals' accusations that he has been acting autocratically. The allegation was made in May by five guerrilla groups, four of which are generally considered hardliners within the Palestinian movement — Dr George Habash's Popular front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Iraqi-backed Arab Liberation Front (ALF), the Popular Struggle Front (PSF) and the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), all members of the Rejection Front.

Significantly, however, the accusations against Arafat and Fateh, were fully supported by the Marxist Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) of Nayef Hawatma, which has hitherto always followed the PLO-Fateh line. All five

Arafat . . . a new challenge from Muhsen (below left), Habash (centre) and hardliners (Camera Press)

groups submitted a memorandum to the PLO Executive Committee, which stated in part:

"We feel that political decisions are being taken unilaterally and not by the var-

