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PLO TERRORIST GRANTS RARE INTERVIEW ON 'RED BRIGADES'

Rome L'ESPRESSO in Italian 21 May 78 pp 54-56

[Interview with PLO terrorist Abu Nidal by Fulvio Grimaldi]

[Text] Barely 1 week after the tragic epilog of the Moro case, people continue to talk about the Red Brigades and about their international connections. And the most disparate hypotheses are being made, sometimes without any foundation. After the Cairo arrests (of a few Europeans who, according to the Egyptian police, served as liaison between the Red Brigades and the Palestinians) and after an interesting interview with Arafat, the more extremist groups of the Fedayeen have been placed under indictment. They are said to be charged with shipping a cargo of bazookas unloaded recently on the Ravenna coast. But everything is based on suspicions, inferences and connivances. To break the wall of silence, this interview was granted to Fulvio Grimaldi by Abu Nidal. Or rather: Sabri Khalil Al Benna. An ex-follower of Arafat, he left the PLO after the battle of Amman in 1970. Three years later, Abu Nidal was being sponsored by the Iraqis. And in Baghdad, he publishes a newspaper identical to that of the PLO and it is the seat of his small group that he calls the true Al Fatah. "In all," says his ex-comrades, "a few dozen members, of them recruited for a single terrorist act and not even all of them Palestinians. So..."

But Abu Nidal's group is alleged to be the secret protagonist of many of the more serious attacks of the last few years. Among them even those against the UN troops in Lebanon in order to embarrass the other Palestinians. In this interview, Abu Nidal states many things, some of which should be taken with reservations. For instance, he denies any ties with the Red Brigades, but he admits a basic political identity. And

then he supplies a rather singular key for the interpretation of plans for destabilization in Italy. And his resume shows that he is an expert in destabilization.

Abu Nidal, the head of the most intransigent and most bloodthirsty group of the Fedayeen, has met with a journalist for the first time. He spoke of Italy and of the Moro crime, denying ties with the Red Brigades. But they have something in common.

Bagdad. He is inaccessible to journalists, he lives underground, even in Iraq (that is in the very country which has given him refuge and which supports him), certainly he is among the targets most sought after by the Israeli and Egyptian secret services but he is hated as well by the PLO Palestinians for his extremism. But he is also the man who, according to the Egyptian secret services, encourages and aids the Red Brigades and Terrorists of every sort and degree. We are speaking of Abu Nidal, former head of the most intransigent small group of the PLO and subsequently condemned to death by Arafat for "armed revolt, disobedience and scissionism."

Abu Nidal, whose legal name is Sabri Khalil Al Benna, a Palestinian from Jaffa, is part of what has been for some time now considered in the West the triumvirate of international terrorism, along with Wadi Haddad (the leader of a dissident faction of the Popular Front of Georg Habash, who died of cancer in East Berlin last month) and the Venezuelan Carlos, the man responsible for, among other activities, the abduction of the OPEC petroleum ministers who were meeting in Vienna, but from whom there have been no signs of activity for some time. The name Abu Nidal has been associated with all sorts of terrorist activity throughout the world, from that of the Black September organization to that of Fiumicino and Khartoum, in which the American ambassador to Sudan was assassinated. There is no disruption or terrorist act of any importance in which the press does not find the opportunity to involve Abu Nidal and those who are considered his godfathers, that is the leaders of the Iraqi BATH Party. The last operation attributed to his group is the murder of Sadat's advisor in Cyprus.

The rupture between Abu Nidal and the PLO has occurred precisely over the type of violence to be used in the confrontations with the enemy. Arafat was, as he is today, always inclined to look for ways of negotiating and mediation. Abu Nidal, instead, judged this line to be "surrender-minded" and he advocated for years the necessity of sabotaging by any means the overtures of the moderates. In short, a full-fledged "hawk." He does not lack the physique for the role, a physique that only a few intimates know. We met Abu Nidal in an office in Baghdad which flies at its entrance the flag of Al Fatah and is filled with Fedayeen in combat uniform: about 40, tall, lean, in military uniform. He speaks with fervor and resolution, while smoking one cigarette after another. He had never been interviewed and he did not consent to be photographed. Besides, the poor lighting conditions would not have allowed it: the windows are covered with heavy metal plates.

is it true, we ask Abu Nidal, that you help the Red Brigades and the Europeans recently arrested in Cairo by the Egyptian police? "Absolutely false," he responds immediately. And he goes on to give an explanation all his own of the Cairo arrests, "mounted by the reactionary propaganda to involve the Palestinian resistance in the offensive against subversion in Italy." "Colonel Hani Abdul Aziz of the Egyptian secret service," maintains Abu Nidal, "had received from Sadat the task of organizing an infiltration against us and he was acting under the direct command of the Egyptian vice-president Mubarak, who supplied him with substantial funds. The purpose? To eliminate a strong opposition to Sadat's plans in the Middle East and to find an external culprit for the social tensions in Egypt. Aziz had established many centers of espionage and infiltration in the Arab World, in particular in Beirut and Kuwait. But within 3 months our militants have managed to liquidate, even physically, such centers and to unmask the whole plot. For Sadat, it was a serious defeat and his reaction was precisely to arrest the Cairo comrades, with whom, nevertheless, we had no relations. As we do not have any with the Red Brigades, we do not intervene in the armed struggle of other organizations. And whoever tries to involve us in actions which are extraneous to us and whoever attempts to so characterize our struggle, will be punished."

However, the political relations between the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and revolutionary groups in Europe and in the world, are known. Yasir Arafat has not excluded the same type of ties with other Palestinian radical organizations, in an interview on Italian television. What do you think of that? "I cannot say whether such relations exist or not," answers Abu Nidal. "However, when Arafat says that extremistic Palestinian fringes have any relations with the Red Brigades or with the German RAF /Red Army Fraction/, there is no doubt that he is attempting to draw attention to me and to our group."

But why would Arafat do this and why, whenever terrorism manifests itself in a noisy way in Europe, does the name of Abu Nidal crop up? "It is nothing but an international campaign led by Arafat and Sadat in the pay of Saudi Arabia and with the complicity of the Zionists."

Since they broke off with Arafat, Abu Nidal and his followers have been using Iraq as a base, which has given that country a reputation of complicity. Outside Iraq, Abu Nidal's organization claims an official presence only in Libya and in Lebanon. "But," states the Palestinian leader, "we are in a position to overcome all limits and all obstacles, even without advanced technological means. We are the best smugglers in the world. However, the special attention the press gives to Iraq is part of a great effort to sabotage the progress of that country, its autonomy and to term criminal everything that is opposed to the Israeli and American plans in the world."

Abu Nidal denies the effectiveness of disturbances and similar actions, because "they are individual and not mass actions." He does not deny that

sabotage must be carried out against the conservative Arab regimes. "If the priority task of us Palestinians is the struggle against the Zionist enemy, right after comes that of the destruction of the reactionary regimes in Syrai, Arabia, Jordan and Lebanon. Even with direct attacks--such as our attack on the Abquaiq well a short time ago--against Saudi Arabia."

Let us turn to the Italian and European terrorists. Apart from their choices of struggle and their affirmations of estrangement, how does Abu Nidal see the Red Brigades or the RAF? He has no doubts in matters of principle: "We support every direct action against American imperialism, but we do not have accurate information. Besides, the consequence of the actions of these groups must be judged by their own people and by them alone. I think that the Italian people are among the most exploited and oppressed and Moro's assassination is part of a dangerous game which is being played out over his life. Perhaps the United States, which does not trust the PCI and trusts the Italian masses even less, is hoping for a turn toward authoritarianism, which would permit it to impose rigid controls, even military ones, on the country which constitutes the most forward position facing post-Tito Yugoslavia and the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The Italian Right will certainly use the Aldo Moro case for that purpose. For its part, the USSR, which does not trust the PCI either, has an interest in seeing the PCI-DC /Christian Democratic Party/ alliance not becoming strengthened and, therefore, a non-pro-Soviet front facing tomorrow's Yugoslav vacuum. A situation of endemic conflict that would push the PCI toward the opposition and open up room for Soviet political intervention, creating at the same time splits in the middle class, would suit the USSR. The situation tends to snowball and it is easy to foresee bloody civil war both in Yugoslavia and in Italy, two countries which are decisive even for us Arabs."

Have you ever been to Europe? "Yes, and I know Rome very well." Do you intend to return there? "Now is not exactly the time." Abu Nidal, then, then, remains in Bagdad. And from the Iraqi capital, he coordinates the actions of his group. For this reason, from all sides, Iraq is being accused of harboring terrorists and promoting terrorist activities in the world. How does the Baghdad government respond? Here is what the minister for information, Saad Hassen Hamoudi, says: "We have nothing to hide concerning our support of the Palestinians. It has been in effect for years and they make use of all our resources. So, all the accusations that Iraq is involved in terrorist activities, disturbances, abductions and so forth, do not have the slightest foundation."

Some newspapers have mentioned Iraq also in relations to the Red Brigades, affirming that the Red Brigades are associated with Palestinian elements with a base in Bagdad... "According to what I know about it, not even Abu Nidal has anything to do with the Red Brigades."

Because, according to you, there is an effort being made to involve Iraq in a campaign against international terrorism?

"Iraq represents the greatest political, economic, demographic and military power in this region and it is led by a socialist revolutionary party. Iraq supports with seriousness and zeal all the movements of liberation and those who fight against imperialism, Zionism and reaction. Iraq, for that reason, is judged a revolutionary stronghold that worries and disturbs very much the imperialists and the reactionaries."

Do you believe that the Italian order will be radically modified by the latest developments "Not through the Red Brigades. Whoever has an interest in obstructing peace in the Middle East also has an interest in keeping it out of Italy..."

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INTER-ARAB AFFAIRS

ARAB LEAGUE SECRETARY INTERVIEWED ON RESOLUTION 242

Paris AL-MUSTAQBAL in Arabic 27 May 78 pp 20-21

[Interview with Mahmud Riyad, Arab League secretary general, by Hamdi Fu'ad; 'Washington Told Me Resolution 242 Means Full Withdrawal; A Summit Without Good Preparation Will Make Current Arab Situation More Tense']

[Text] Cairo--Mahmud Riyad, who was at the top of Egyptian diplomacy during the darkest periods between the issuance of the 1967 resolution [Resolution 242] until al-Sadat's first initiative to open the Suez Canal in February 1971, who was the first Egyptian officer to negotiate with Israel under the U.N. flag in Rhodes, who was also 'Abd-al-Nasir's minister of foreign affairs and al-Sadat's minister of foreign affairs and political adviser, speaks about the delicate moments that face the Arab destiny.

Mahmud Riyad said: Sudanese President Ja'far Numayri has started with a visit to Damascus. This is natural. However, I don't expect a quick response due to the fact that there has been no change in the positions of the parties involved. Each party (Egypt and Syria) has taken a position and each position is backed up by a strong information campaign. President Numayri and the Arab Reconciliation Committee, and I with them, believe that the problem starts with Egyptian-Syrian relations. Egypt and Syria are two frontline states who waged the war together and reached temporary agreements. We cannot move in the direction of clearing the Arab atmosphere and preparing for the summit conference unless we start with Egypt and Syria, each of whom has its position.

Egypt believes that it embarked on a new peace initiative that has gained the Arab cause international support and that it cannot, and that it is unreasonable, to renounce the initiative. Moreover, it is impossible to renounce the initiative, because it has already taken place, and a fait accompli cannot be abolished.

Egypt also believes that it cannot close the door of negotiations if the United States or Israel comes up with something new.