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## Interview: Yasser Arafat

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# Syria is out to partition Lebanon

*Excerpts of an interview with Palestine Liberation Organization Executive Committee Chairman Yasser Arafat, by Chief Editor Ibrahim Nafi in Amman, Jordan, appearing in Al-Ahram International Edition, July 25, 1985 (translated from the Arabic by the Foreign Broadcasting Information Service):*

**Nafi:** I would like to begin by talking about the recent political situation and to ask you what cards you hold in your hands and how able you are to move at the Arab and Palestinian levels?

**Arafat:** There is no doubt that the most important thing that we should take note of at present is the united stand of our people both inside and outside the occupied territories and their rallying around the PLO. All the attempts to shake this stand have failed; on the contrary, our people have always proved that they are the protective shield of their revolution and the leader of their struggle, the PLO.

The attempts to liquidate the PLO began with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the siege of Beirut, whose aim was to strike at the PLO infrastructure and liquidate it politically and militarily in order to liquidate the Palestine problem and remove once and for all the Palestinian element from the Middle East equation.

I would say that it is not easy, indeed it is impossible, to achieve our objectives without changing the Arab balances of power. . . .

The first of these constants is that Egypt should reassume its natural and leading position in the Arab world; the Iraq-Iran war should be ended; the sectarian cancer that is ravaging Lebanon and invading the body of our Arab nation should be halted; and a state of solidarity should be achieved in North Africa.

. . . [W]e are approaching the most dangerous stage, that is the day when the two superpowers come together now that Nov. 2 of this year has been fixed as the date when the meeting between President Reagan and CPSU General Secretary Gorbachov will take place.

I must tell our Arab nation that unless we can reach at least a minimum agreement and minimum Arab solidarity we will have no place in the "new Yalta."

**Nafi:** What do you think of the claim that the Arab regimes are remaining silent over the Syrian regime's actions because it is capable of imposing a solution in Lebanon?

**Arafat:** It has been established that Syria has one single solution for Lebanon, that is the sectarian solution and sectarian partitioning as well as striking presence. I must remind the Arab nation that it was the Palestinian presence that prevented the sectarian ghoul from sinking its teeth into Lebanon's body. If this cancer can penetrate our nation's body in Lebanon it means that it will penetrate the whole of our Arab nation's body. . . .

I have the right to tell those who make such claims that it was the Palestinian presence that prevented this crime from taking place, while the Syrian presence is the one now implementing it.

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*I ask why the U.S. administration ignores Kissinger's conditions and his no's when it needs us and regards these conditions as sacrosanct when it does not?*

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**Nafi:** Will the Syrians actually be able to reach a solution as some of the Western countries say?

**Arafat:** If some European countries say so then they are involved in planning partition. The partitioning plan is a U.S.-Israeli

**Nafi:** Still some people believe that the cards are in Syria's hands. Do you agree with this view?

**Arafat:** I would like to recall what the Syrian foreign minister said at the recent Arab foreign ministers meeting in Tunis: We are not able to find a solution.

But this does not prevent the Syrians from imposing a solution in their own way, which is not a solution. The Syrians want to distribute Lebanon like an inheritance. Did we as an Arab nation agree that Lebanon is finished?

I have the right to ask the Syrian regime at any future summit: Where is the unity of Lebanon now and where is your pledge to preserve the resistance and the PLO? In any case, just as we reject the Israeli solution to partition Lebanon we reject the Syrian solution to partition it. We are against this solution as an Arab nation and as strugglers; we are against it as nationalists, as Muslims, and as Christians.

**Nafi:** Let us once again go back to Jordanian-Palestinian relations and their position within the Arab perspective. There has been talk about amendments to and acceptance or non-acceptance of the Palestinian-Jordanian agreement.

**Arafat:** Whatever is said, what matters is that we have agreed. And because we are serious about these relations, we agree on certain points and disagree on others. This is because we do not look at this as a secondary matter but as a matter of strategic importance to us. I would like to make it clear that the agreement represents a Palestinian will which was endorsed by our PNC in Algiers.

**Nafi:** During our meeting with King Hussein a short while ago he said that agreement has almost been reached on the names of the Palestinians who will participate in the joint delegation and that a date will be fixed for the meeting with Murphy.

**Arafat:** . . . The purpose of the agreement is not to meet with Murphy but to reach a Palestinian-Jordanian formula that would contribute to the liberation of the occupied territories and create a mechanism for the Fez resolutions and at the same time become a common ground that would generate Arab support for the achievement of these objectives.

. . . Our objective is an international conference to be attended by the parties concerned, including the PLO, and the Security Council permanent member states on the basis of two principles: the Arab legitimacy which was endorsed at the Fez summit and the international legitimacy endorsed by the United Nations.

**Nafi:** How do you visualize the first Jordanian-Palestinian-U.S. dialogue?

**Arafat:** Several and frequent Palestinian-U.S. dialogues have taken place in the past. But the U.S. administration does what it likes; sometimes it inclines toward this dialogue and other times it inclines against it. Sometimes it needs Kissinger and other times it ignores him.

In 1974 there was official contact between a Palestinian delegation and a U.S. delegation. At that time the United States was represented by its present U.N. representative, namely General Walters. I have met with a number of U.S. officials and twice I met in Cairo with foreign relations committee chairmen. Talks were also held during the evacuation of U.S. citizens from Beirut, and Palestinian-U.S. cooperation took place over several long weeks during the evacuation of these citizens, once by sea and once by air.

More important still, discussions were held between high-level U.S. officials and Palestinian officials for the release of the U.S. hostages in Iran. The first 13 hostages were released through Palestinian efforts. Official and close contacts between the two sides on this subject continued. There were also discussions between Andrew Young and Zuhdi al-Tarazi [PLO U.N. representative]. There was also the agreement between Philip Habib and myself in 1981, and later I had open talks with Philip Habib in his capacity as U.S. presidential envoy during the siege of Beirut. The talks resulted in the signing of an agreement which exists at the U.S. State Department. A U.S. force then came within the multinational

force in order to implement this agreement. . . . I therefore have the right to ask why the U.S. administration ignores Kissinger's conditions and his no's when it needs us and regards these conditions as sacrosanct when it does not?

**Nafi:** Regarding your recent statements to the *Washington Post* concerning Resolution 242 and the subsequent improvement in the U.S. reaction and the toning down of this reaction by Shultz—is there anything new on this level?

**Arafat:** Our stand is clear. The 12th PNC in Cairo said we will have nothing to do with Resolution 242 because it deals with our Palestinian people not as a people with a problem but as refugees.

We are not against the resolution as such but against its Palestinian context, which deals with our people as refugees. . . . What negated 242 as far as the Palestinians are concerned was the second U.S.-Israeli working paper which was signed on Oct. 1 and which immediately followed the U.S.-Soviet agreement between Vance and Gromyko—the agreement which Dayan described as the 6-hour agreement on the grounds that it was a triumph [for Israel], thereby reminding the world that he was the hero of the 6-day war. The U.S.-Israeli paper even went as far as interpreting the clause on refugees as meaning the Arab and Jewish refugees and not just the Palestinian refugees.

**Nafi:** How do you view your demand for an international conference, to which the United States is opposed, and how do you view the Soviet attitude to the problem prior to the coming U.S.-U.S.S.R. summit meeting?

**Arafat:** Recently the United States accepted the principle of an international conference but did not approve of the formula we proposed. I believe—and as the Americans said—that this has become a U.S.-U.S.S.R. issue and not just a problem of the Middle East. This was one of the fundamental points raised between Shultz and Gromyko and Poliyakov and Murphy; it will also be brought up between Reagan and Gorbachov.

**Nafi:** But is the convening of an international conference still possible?

**Arafat:** At least there is agreement on an international conference by the two parties although there are differences over its formula. For the first time there is an agreement in principle.

**Nafi:** What is your purpose behind convening an Arab summit to discuss the Palestine problem?

**Arafat:** Our objective is not to discuss the Palestine problem in particular but to try to stop the camps war and the attempts to evict half a million Palestinians from Lebanon as part of the plan we are now witnessing, the conspiracy to divide the country on a sectarian and communal basis. This is our purpose behind convening an Arab summit.