

## THE PLO AND THE CIVIL WAR IN JORDAN (1970)\*

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The June War<sup>1</sup> changed the regional balance in the Middle East, weakening the position of Arab states. The three Arab countries directly involved in the war with Israel lost an important and strategic part of their territories. After a swift air and ground attack, Egypt lost the Sinai Peninsula, which resulted in the closure of the Suez Canal, unfavourably affecting the Egyptian state budget. Syria was pushed out of the Golan Heights – an excellent vantage point for shelling Damascus. This military weakness led top governmental representatives to consider the possibility of a new Israeli attack. Jordan suffered a real loss, not only of territorial but also religious significance. It lost control of the whole West Bank of the Jordan River,<sup>2</sup> including East Jerusalem. Jordanian King Ḥusayn was aware of the fact that the Israeli seizure of the West Bank called for quick action as a long-term occupation could thwart the unification of the kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

**Key words:** Israel, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Gaza Strip, West Bank of the Jordan River, al-Fath, Black September, the Palestinians

The June War was a milestone in inter-Arab relations. The pre-war rivalry about who should gain hegemony in the Middle East region lacked significance in the post-war era. Israel had defeated revolutionary Nasserite Egypt, left-winged ba'athist Syria and Hashemite Jordan. In a wider context, Arab countries had been defeated as a whole; therefore, the loss was perceived throughout

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<sup>1</sup> The June War of 1967: It broke out on June 5 and ended on June 10, resulting in the growth of Israel's territory by a factor of three.

<sup>2</sup> The West Bank of the Jordan River: According to the UN General Assembly Resolution 181/II, this territory was to become a part of the Palestinian state; in 1950 it was annexed by Transjordan, which resulted in the creation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

<sup>3</sup> KEMRAVA, Mehran. *The Modern Middle East*, pp. 120 – 121; SORBY, K. Jún 1967. *Šesť dní, ktoré zmenili Blízky východ*. [June 1967. Six Days that Changed the Middle East], pp. 430 – 433.

North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. This atmosphere influenced the Arab summit (August 29 – September 1, 1967) held in Khartoum, which witnessed the presence of all Arab states, who unanimously adopted the “Khartoum Declaration” affirming their political attitudes toward Israel – no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiations with Israel.<sup>4</sup>

In the course of the June War, the UN became the scene of confrontation between the USA and the USSR. On the second day of the war, the USSR asked the UN for intervention. However, the USA did not support the resolution until it was clear that Israel had accomplished an indisputable victory. The situation was the same after the war. The USSR proposed a new resolution to the UN Security Council which denounced Israel as an aggressor and required the State of Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. The USA, of course, vetoed the proposal. In the course of June, July, and September, several proposals of resolutions were negotiated at special sessions, but they failed to obtain the required majority. In autumn, the Security Council managed to reach a compromise – on November 22, 1967, Resolution 242<sup>5</sup> was adopted. It called on all parties involved to respect their mutual rights and to live commonly in peace, security and within recognized boundaries, free from threats or violent attacks.<sup>6</sup>

Though the resolution gave rise to mixed reactions, it was finally adopted by both Egypt and Israel. Syria kept refusing it until 1973. Each party stressed only that part of the resolution which benefitted them. The wording of the document was so flexible that it allowed particular countries to change their attitudes without an obvious violation of the resolution.<sup>7</sup> Resolution 242 has had an impact on the Arab-Israeli conflict until today. It is based on the “territory for peace” principle which influenced all further negotiations led by the Arab countries affected by the territorial growth of Israel. However, the Palestinian Arabs were not mentioned in the resolution at all. The text referred to them only as the “refugee problem”.

Further waves of Palestinian refugees, the cruel measures of the Israeli administration in the occupied territories and the feeling of injustice from the international community resulted in the radicalization of the Palestinian resistance movement.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> QUANDT, W. B. *Peace Process – American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> The text of the resolution is available at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/240/94/IMG/NR024094.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>6</sup> KHALIDI, Rashid. *The Iron Cage*, p. 192.

<sup>7</sup> WANNER, J. *Krvavý Jom Kippur* [The Bloody Yom Kippur], p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> KEMRAVA, Mehran. *The Modern Middle East*, p. 122.

While the Palestinian Arabs living under Israeli occupation waited for the steps of the Israeli government, which declared that it would be a better “occupier” than Jordan or Egypt, the Palestinian Arabs living in neighbouring Arab states faced a different situation. The citizens of former Mandate Palestine, which had been split by UN Resolution 181/II into two states, were forcefully expelled from their homes as they were built on the territories ceded to the state of Israel. The Palestinian Arabs changed into refugees who began to call themselves “Palestinians”. Mostly, they fled to the neighbouring Arab states where they had various positions but a single goal – to take revenge against Israel for all the crime and humiliation and to return home. The people expelled from their homes and homelands formed groups, which later transformed into organizations. Many families were split and dispersed in surrounding countries and some did not meet their relatives again as many had died or had been killed. The Israelis captured whole towns as well as hundreds of villages. The call for justice, for undoing wrongs and for revenge became a question of national credit for the Palestinians.<sup>9</sup> The majority fled to Jordan and Lebanon. There was one thing they had in common – hatred toward those who had deprived them of their homes (referring to the citizens of the state of Israel), the occupiers of the whole territory of Palestine.

The PLO chairman, Aḥmad ash-Shuqayrī, was completely discredited during the June War. At the time of its outbreak he was in Jerusalem but as soon as he learnt about the Israeli attack, he fled to Amman and later to Lebanon,<sup>10</sup> taking no actual interest in the war. His position markedly popularized al-Fatḥ, the most prominent Palestinian resistance movement. It had reached people’s minds even before the war, especially by carrying out violent assaults on Israeli territory. However, it failed to gain such recognition by Arab governments as held by the PLO. Members of other armed groups increased their pressure on Aḥmad ash-Shuqayrī, who was from their point of view only a servant of some Arab states, focusing more on propaganda than on armed attacks. Aḥmad ash-Shuqayrī could not stand the pressure and in December 1967 he resigned and left for Lebanon.<sup>11</sup> At the end of the same year, he was succeeded as Chairman of the PLO by Yaḥyā Ḥammūda.

After the June War, the refugees from the West Bank headed mostly to the East Bank, i.e. to Jordan. While in 1948 Transjordanian citizens (even those from high society) had accepted and offered assistance to the refugees, in 1967 the situation was different. The reason was that Jordanian citizens were facing a difficult social position themselves and “hungry” refugees represented a deterioration of their own living standards. Not to mention the fact that the

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<sup>9</sup> SORBY, K. *Arabský východ (1945 – 1958)* [The Arab East (1945 – 1958)], p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> KERR, M. H. *The Arab Cold War*, p. 136.

<sup>11</sup> RUBIN, B., RUBIN, J. Colp. *Yasir Arafat: A Political Biography*, p. 35.

West Bank was the most fertile area of Jordan, which in addition to quality soil meant they had also lost such tourist attractions as Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Jordan thus not only lost the territory which had produced 40% of its GDP, but it also received a great number of new refugees.

Husayn, the King of Jordan, worried mostly about armed guerrillas who had been organizing attacks on Israel from Jordan even before the war. The West Bank was their traditional stronghold, and after the war the guerrillas (fidā'ijūn)<sup>12</sup> transferred their command to Jordan and nowhere else. The Israeli border moved closer to the capital, Amman, and the number of armed and unarmed Palestinians east of the Jordan River significantly increased. The leader of al-Fatḥ, Yāsir °Arafāt, felt strong enough to cross the river together with a few fighters and began to conduct paramilitary operations directly on the territory of the enemy. As he said: "We knew it would not be easy but we were prepared to pay the price."<sup>13</sup> Guerrilla operations followed the phrase: *to kill and to disappear*. As Abū °Alī Shāhīn, one of the guerrilla fighters, put it: "The best targets were those which enabled us to use the moment of surprise, e.g. moving Israeli patrol vehicles. Three men started to shoot; we threw two grenades at their vehicle and it was done. They were dead and we were safe."<sup>14</sup> At that time Yāsir °Arafāt was hiding mostly in Nābulus, where he recruited new guerrilla fighters for his organization. His intention was to establish a new base for his national-liberation war. He remained on the West Bank until the end of 1967 and made his escape disguised as an old woman. The guerrilla command was then transferred to the camp at Karāma, situated a few kilometres east of the Jordan River. From this spot they plotted and organized further attacks on Israeli territory.

King Ḥusajn endeavoured to keep a tight rein over the guerrilla groups by stressing military arguments. Referring to harsh Israeli measures, he attempted to coordinate the attacks across the Jordan River with the military operations of the Jordanian army, but the effort proved futile. The Palestinians declared that in their fight for liberation, they would not accept any "tickets of leave", refusing to take potential consequences into consideration.<sup>15</sup>

At the beginning, Israel officially underestimated Palestinian armed groups. In June 1967, Israel estimated that the number of al-Fatḥ members was approximately 200, an estimate not far from the truth since the movement itself claimed to have 300 members.

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<sup>12</sup> Fidā'ī / plural – fidā'ijūn – the Arab word for "guerrilla", literally "the one who sacrifices himself".

<sup>13</sup> Brian Lapping Associates and WGBH Educational Foundation: *The 50 Years War*, Yāsir °Arafāt. [DVD] Disc 1: 1 h. 39 min., 20 sec.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Lapping Associates and WGBH Educational Foundation: *The 50 Years War*, Abū °Alī Shāhīn. [DVD] Disc 1: 1. h. 40. min., 20. sec.

<sup>15</sup> WANNER, J. *Krvavý Jom Kippur* [The Bloody Yom Kippur], p. 35.

Guerrilla attacks still continued. On March 18, 1968, an Israeli bus hit a landmine placed by the Palestinians; two adults died and 27, including children, were injured. As a result, Israel decided to assault the Palestinian stronghold in Jordan – Karāma village. Here, the Israeli official underestimation of the Palestinian resistance force did not prove to be serious since in the operation they used 15 000 soldiers as well as various kinds of military equipment including tanks and fighter-bombers. General Uzi Narkis later admitted: “We were not really cautious. After the Six-Day War, we did not have a real enemy, and that is why we did not think it was necessary to protect ourselves as we were moving.”<sup>16</sup>

Even though the guerrillas had been warned about a strong retaliation, they decided not to retreat to the mountains – a frequent technique in guerrilla fighting. On the contrary, they resolved to stay in Karāma and face the assault, partially relying on the support of Jordanian military units.<sup>17</sup> At the time, the village hosted more or less all existing guerrilla forces – approximately 400 guerrilla fighters altogether.

On March 21, at 5.30 a.m., the Israelis opened the attack. While crossing the Jordan River, they were attacked by heavy fire from Jordanian artillery as the Jordanian army did not intend to ignore a foreign army operating on its territory. With air support the Israeli army finally reached Karāma. In the camp they came across furious guerrilla resistance, fighting tooth and nail. Heavy losses were inflicted on both sides, which was not a tradition for the Israelis.<sup>18</sup> In the evening, the Israeli forces began to pull out. They completed their withdrawal at about 9 p.m. under the constant fire of the Jordanian artillery. The losses of the Jordanian army amounted to 40 soldiers, while the losses of the PLO reached 200 men. Approximately 150 other men suspected of PLO membership were taken to Israel for interrogation. Israel declared 28 people killed and 69 wounded. They also lost 4 tanks and 2 armoured vehicles, and one plane was shot down.<sup>19</sup>

All in all, Israel gained nothing. By contrast, Palestinian self-confidence grew. They proclaimed that the battle was their victory. As Yāsir ʿArafāt put it: “It was the first victory of the Arab nation after the great defeat in 1967.”<sup>20</sup> The killed guerrilla fighters were buried as martyrs and refugee camps throughout

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<sup>16</sup> Brian Lapping Associates and WGBH Educational Foundation: *The 50 Years War*, Generál Uzi Narkiss. [DVD] Disc 1: 1. h, 42. min., 25. sec.

<sup>17</sup> SORBY, Karol, SORBY, Karol, ml. *Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike (1971 – 1991)*. [The Middle East in International Politics (1971 – 1991)], p. 117; TYLER, P. *A World of Trouble*, p. 115.

<sup>18</sup> BEN-AMI, Shlomo. *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace*, p. 137.

<sup>19</sup> HERZOG, C. *Arabsko-izraelské války* [The Arab-Israeli Wars], p. 255.

<sup>20</sup> Brian Lapping Associates and WGBH Educational Foundation: *The 50 Years War*, Yāsir ʿArafāt. [DVD]. Disc 1: 1 h., 44 min., 46 sec.

the Arab world celebrated the restoration of the Palestinian nation. Moreover, new volunteers rushed into al-Fatḥ recruitment centres, many of whom were not Palestinians. Approximately 20 000 Egyptians and 1 500 Iraqis offered their services. Training camps were founded in the mountains and valleys west of Amman. Specialized advanced training was then organized in Algeria, Egypt, China, and North Vietnam. The Karāma message reached outside the Arab world – the new force in the Middle East could be ignored no more. Yāsir °Arafāt became a new Arab hero and his photos began to appear on the front pages of influential Western papers. The Israelis themselves realized that although they had reduced the PLO influence on the occupied territories, the battle had sparked off a new type of war against them.<sup>21</sup>

The Al-Fatḥ victory in Karāma significantly weakened the position of the PLO leadership. The need for the reorganization of the Palestinian National Council was getting stronger, resulting in Yaḥyā Ḥammūda finally convening its session in May 1968. The Palestinian “parliament” accepted representatives of new resistance groups. The seats were distributed according to their estimated power and importance. Due to its strongest position and support from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, Algeria, and Syria, al-Fatḥ obtained the majority of seats. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) with its 3000 members gained significantly fewer seats, while other smaller groups, e.g. aṣ-Ṣā°iqa operating from Syria, obtained one or two seats. However, the PLO leadership gave resistance groups only half of the seats. The rest were given to PLO executives, the representatives of the Palestine Liberation Army, Palestinian National Fund, and student and trade union organizations. The following distribution resulted in scraps within the PLO as al-Fatḥ members were not satisfied with their position.

The al-Fatḥ movement strengthened its position among the Palestinians. The revolution attracted both male fighters and women. The social service network, including clinics, hospitals, schools and residential institutions for the children of “martyrs” witnessed rapid growth. Owing to the financial contribution from wealthy oil states, al-Fatḥ was able to employ people who worked in offices situated in lucrative residential and commercial areas of Amman and other Arab cities. International attention brought about the creation of the department for propaganda, which focused on publishing resistance literature in various languages as well as on accompanying foreign politicians, journalists, supporters or other interested parties. In all the top hotels, restaurants, and bars, one could encounter the traditional clients, usually businessmen from high society, but also small groups of guerrilla representatives accompanying their

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<sup>21</sup> BEN-AMI, Shlomo. *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace*, p. 137.

guests from abroad.<sup>22</sup> Yāsir °Arafāt quickly became the object of interest for the world media. In December 1968 his photo was printed on the front page of Time magazine. The fact of being well-known could be explained by his tactics of gaining for the Palestinians world-wide attention as an entity actively fighting for its national dream.<sup>23</sup> As a result, at the session of the Palestinian National Council in Cairo, on February 2, 1969, al-Faḥ succeeded in obtaining the majority and its representatives were elected to the PLO Executive Committee, while Yāsir °Arafāt became the PLO chairman.<sup>24</sup>

Another significantly strong organization, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), had a different character. Its main target was not only the liberation of Palestine, but also resistance against imperialism and the Arab reactionary movement.<sup>25</sup> Its chairman, George Ḥabash, wanted to gain a stronger position within the PLO than he had achieved in May. He strove to establish new contacts with foreign terrorist groups as well as to gain financial contributions from Arab states. However, his left-wing organization was not able to win much support from the wealthy oil states, although in the autumn of 1968 Iraq increased its financial contributions to this organization. This support did not come as a surprise since Iraqi politics at that time stressed strong anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian propaganda with the aim of eliminating critical claims against the political steps of Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr. Ideological scraps were gradually damaging the overall organization of PFLP and finally in November 1968 the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) was formed as a separate ultra-left fraction led by Nāyif Ḥawātma. There were various street clashes between the supporters of the two groups while al-Faḥ strove to bring order. Nāyif Ḥawātma publically referred to George Ḥabash as a “lower middle class prattler” while Ḥabash used force against the “turncoats”. Having finally settled the conflict, a new fraction led by Aḥmad al-Jibrīl formed from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, officially named The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC).<sup>26</sup>

These events were a source of anxiety for King Ḥusayn. While before the Israeli attack he had been seriously thinking about ways of diminishing the Palestinian influence in the country, now such an operation seemed impossible. Public opinion throughout the Arab world favoured the guerrilla fighters. As a result, on the Israeli border east of the Jordan River a new state within a state

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<sup>22</sup> HIRST, D. *Puška a olivová ratolest* [The Gun and the Olive Branch], pp. 393 – 394.

<sup>23</sup> ČEJKA, M. *Izrael a Palestina* [Israel and Palestine], p. 141.

<sup>24</sup> NAZZAL, Nafez, NAZZAL, Laila A. *Historical Dictionary of Palestine*, p. 149.

<sup>25</sup> JAMAL, Amal. *The Palestinian National Movement*, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> SAID, E. *The Question of Palestine*, p. 161.

was created. Its power was growing day by day. Therefore, a clash between this state on one side and Amman on the other side proved simply inevitable.

King Ḥusayn was the only Arab leader who believed that it was possible to regain the West Bank by peaceful means. At one and the same time, he was concerned about more intense Israeli operations against the Palestinian groups operating in Jordan. These groups did not hesitate to use violent and terrorist means to regain their lost territories. Therefore, on April 8, 1969, the King set out on an official visit to the USA, Great Britain, and France, endeavouring to find support for a political way of ending the West Bank occupation.<sup>27</sup> However, the negotiations led to nothing.

The Jordanian authorities were gradually losing respect in the Palestinian refugee camps. The PLO fighters were openly carrying weapons; they refused to coordinate their attacks on Israel with the Jordanian army, and, moreover, they even attempted to extort taxes from local residents.<sup>28</sup> In December 1968 a few agreements were made between the PLO and the Jordanian government, but these were respected only for a limited period of time by some groups while other groups did not respect them at all. King Ḥusayn exerted pressure on Yāsir °Arafāt to take measures against the groups which were disrespecting the agreements, but the effort proved unsuccessful. Despite the fact that Yāsir °Arafāt was the PLO Chairman and exercised formal control over half of the armed guerrilla groups, he was aware of the fact that a moderate form of politics toward Israel could lead to the loss of loyalty of some groups in favour of the militant ones, e.g. the PFLP. Therefore, °Arafāt did little to decrease the tension.

King Ḥusayn could not tolerate the operations of the Palestinian guerrilla organizations such as the PFLP and DFLP. Aircraft hijackings, kidnappings, and other terrorist attacks were not only damaging the reputation of the Palestinian resistance movement but also the reputation of the Kingdom of Jordan. Its territory was often misused by fighters and terrorists, who used it as a place for organizing terrorist operations, launching home-made rockets or landing hijacked planes. Though the hijackings were not approved by °Arafāt either, he was not confident enough to publically denounce them. In October 1968, the government in Amman issued “fourteen directives” forbidding the Palestinian militants to walk around cities armed and in uniform, ordering them to be subordinate to the Jordanian security forces. But the Palestinians refused to give over their heavy and light weapons.<sup>29</sup>

In February 1970 heavy clashes occurred between the Jordanian police and Palestinian guerrillas. King Ḥusayn warned the Palestinian groups against intensifying tensions. He tried to win support in the Arab League on July 10,

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<sup>27</sup> WANNER, J. *Krvavý Jom Kippur* [The Bloody Yom Kippur], p. 53.

<sup>28</sup> ČEJKA, M. *Izrael a Palestina* [Israel and Palestine], p. 142.

<sup>29</sup> KAPELIOUK, Amnon. *Arafat*, p. 113.

1970, but failed. In contrast, the Arab League session had a positive effect on Palestinian groups since a new code was adopted appealing to the Jordanian government not to carry out operations against the Palestinian resistance movement. The outcome of the session led Ḥusayn to ask the West for help.

From February 1970 onwards, the clashes between the Jordanian army and Palestinian resistance movements were more and more frequent. The “state within the state” issue proved to be even more serious and the Palestinian organizations got out of Jordanian control. The king was aware of the potential consequences of fighting against the Palestinians and therefore he gave in to their demands.<sup>30</sup> Not only were the Palestinian refugees present in the country, but they were also in the Jordanian army. The king could rely solely on his elite units, which had been trained by British officers and was formed mostly by Bedouins faithful to the king.

The attacks of the Jordanian army on PFLP refugee camps, which took place on June 9 – 10, 1970, resulted in hundreds of deaths. An armistice was signed by the Jordanian army and the PLO, which brought about further limitations to Palestinian operations.<sup>31</sup> The PFLP refused to accept the conditions. They occupied two hotels and took British, American, and West German guests hostage, threatening to blow up the building. The PFLP required the dissolution of the government and the appointment of a new one. Yāsir ʿArafāt, whose popularity among the Palestinians was diminishing due to frequently long negotiations, took their side and the king had to give in. The hostages were set free and the new government was formed by Zayd ar-Rifāʿī, a Jordanian general of Palestinian origin.

The proud Bedouin soldiers, who felt humiliated by such an appeasement policy, did not approve of what had happened. No more would they stand the so-called “fighters for freedom” who, instead of liberating Palestine, proudly walked along the streets of the Jordanian capital and, having in mind the Bolshevik idea of “Power to People”, openly proclaimed their desire to substitute the Hashemite Kingdom with their own revolutionary order.<sup>32</sup> The Bedouins asked themselves how long the king was going to put up with this situation.

The change came on September 6, 1970, when PFLP members hijacked four transport planes in four hours. The *Pan American* plane heading from Amsterdam was redirected firstly to Beirut and then to Cairo. All passengers were set free but the plane was blown up. An *El Al* plane was hijacked also heading from Amsterdam; security agents attacked the hijackers – one of them was killed and the other wounded. The latter hijacker was the notoriously well-

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<sup>30</sup> RUBIN, B., RUBIN, J. Colp. *Yasir Arafat: A Political Biography*, p. 48.

<sup>31</sup> KAPELIOUK, Amnon. *Arafat*, p. 115.

<sup>32</sup> HIRST, D. *Puška a olivová ratolest* [The Gun and the Olive Branch], p. 404.

known female terrorist Laylā Khālid. As soon as the plane landed at Heathrow airport in London, she was arrested. The other two planes landed at the old Dawson airport located in the Jordanian desert.

The aircraft hijackings sparked off the interest of the USA as the hijackers proclaimed that they would only release European hostages. The American hostages would be set free only in case Israel met their conditions. This pressure was clearly focused on the Americans and their support of Israel. The National Security Advisor of the American president, Henry Kissinger, linked these requirements with the Soviets, who after having provided Egypt with weapons endeavoured to obtain a dominant position in the region by separating Europe from America. Henry Kissinger and other representatives of US foreign policy did not perceive the conflict in the Middle East in the framework of “Arabs versus Israel”. They explained everything that occurred in the region through the prism of the Cold War and the “West versus USSR” rivalry, considering Israel their strong ally in this contest.<sup>33</sup> Thus, even though the USSR was not connected with the terrorist demands, due to Kissinger’s insistence the USA strengthened their forces in the region. Moreover, a decision was made to provide King Ḥusayn with moral and material assistance as a counterbalance to the Soviet-Palestinian cooperation.

The hijacking of the *BOAC* WC-10 plane on September 9, 1970, became the climax of the attacks. Heading from Bombay to London, it had 115 passengers on board. Thus, terrorists took a total of 421 people hostage. As a ransom they required the release of all Palestinian prisoners in Great Britain, Switzerland, Israel, and the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>34</sup> Later, they even included Laylā Khālid in their requirements. Another demand substantially influenced the course of events. The PFLP speaker called for an attack against the Jordanian government and the king. The king, despite his previous decision to tolerate the Palestinian resistance, could not do anything in the current situation.

On September 12, 1970, the hijackers took all the hostages out of the planes; 54 were released and the rest were hidden in the surroundings of PFLP camps. Again, the empty planes were blown up in front of TV cameras. At the time King Ḥusayn was already taking steps of his own. He dissolved the government and established military rule, asking the guerrillas to withdraw from Amman and to give over their weapons. They ignored this demand and stated that they were ready to fight. As a result, the king declared martial law in the country.

On September 17, 1970, the Bedouins got a green light from the king. With the assistance of tanks and air support, the Jordanian army attacked the Palestinian camps. The fighting was so brutal that many guerrilla fighters

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<sup>33</sup> TYLER, P. *A World of Trouble*, p. 112.

<sup>34</sup> KOLEKTIV AUTORU. *Encyklopedie – Světový terorismus*. [Encyclopedia – Global Terrorism], p. 292.

preferred to cross the Jordan River and get caught by the Israeli forces rather than face the Jordanian soldiers. The Iraqi military forces of 17 000 soldiers and 100 tanks<sup>35</sup> in Jordan at the time remained idle.

The PLO, al-Fatḥ, and the majority of other groups resided in the capital of Jordan. The Jordanian army surrounded the city with the aim of expelling them from the country. Yāsir ʿAbdrabbih, a representative of the DFLP later explained: “In the early morning of September 17, I was woken up by gun fire and explosions. Immediately, I headed to ʿArafāt’s office where I met ʿArafāt and the majority of other high representatives of the al-Fatḥ movement as well as George Ḥabash. We called Damascus to find out what was happening and to ask the Syrian government for intervention.”<sup>36</sup> Syria assisted by sending tanks, but without air support because the defence minister, General Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad, refused.

Two days later, it was reported that Syrian tanks were moving toward the Jordanian borders. The representatives of a radical wing of the Baʿth party headed by President Nūraddīn al-Atāsīm had decided to provide the Palestinians with assistance against the Jordanians. On the morning of September 20, PLO and Syrian units assisted by tanks entered Jordanian territory and defeated the elite 40th Brigade.<sup>37</sup> In the afternoon of the same day, the former Jordanian prime minister, Zayd ar-Rifāʿī, declared that about one hundred Syrian tanks were present on the territory of Jordan. The king contacted Dean Brown, the American ambassador in Amman, asking the Americans for help against the Syrian intervention. As Moscow was idle, Kissinger wrongly assumed that it was a conspiracy. In reality, the USSR had strongly refused any kind of foreign intervention in the inner affairs of Jordan because they had assumed that Israel could take advantage of the situation as it had done in the Suez crisis in 1956. King Ḥusayn was also concerned about Israel settling its bills with Damascus and extending its territory farther east of the Jordan River. Despite all this, Henry Kissinger sent a warning to both the Soviets and Syrians that the US military in Germany as well as the US Navy’s 6th Fleet off the coast of Lebanon were ready to intervene.<sup>38</sup> This was a clear demonstration of the American decision to intervene in favour of Ḥusayn.

On the evening of September 20, 1970, the king repeatedly requested air strikes against the Syrian tanks from British and American diplomats in Amman. Now he was even willing to accept Israeli air cover. Syrian tanks were

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<sup>35</sup> SLUGLETTOVÁ, M. F., SLUGLETT, P. *Irák od roku 1958* [Iraq since 1958], p. 153.

<sup>36</sup> Brian Lapping Associates and WGBH Educational Foundation: *The 50 Years War, Yāsir ʿAbdrabbih*. [DVD]. Disc 1: 1 h., 52 min., 55 sec.

<sup>37</sup> SORBY, K., SORBY, K. ml. *Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike (1971 – 1990)* [The Middle East in International Politics (1971 – 1990)], p. 71.

<sup>38</sup> TYLER, P. *A World of Trouble*, p. 109.

progressing and if supported by the Syrian air force, the Jordanian army would suffer defeat. Henry Kissinger, with President Richard Nixon's consent, asked Israel for intervention. Golda Meier agreed under the condition that in case of a Russian or Egyptian attack, the USA would intervene. Richard Nixon agreed and full mobilization was declared in Israel. In a short time, Israel had an operational group of 200 tanks available. Damascus was informed that Israel would not approve of a Syrian hegemony in Jordan and as evidence of this Israeli fighter planes began to fly over the Syrian tanks.<sup>39</sup> This demonstration of power was the first factor influencing the conflict in Jordan. The second one was associated with the Syrian minister of defence, Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad, who had not agreed with the intervention of Syria from the beginning and refused to permit air support.<sup>40</sup> The Jordanian army then managed to deal with the retreating tanks and intensified its fight with the Palestinians. The "fratricide" continued for ten more days.

"Black September", as the Palestinians referred to this disaster, was the beginning of the end of Palestinian influence in Jordan. The al-Faṭḥ movement lost its strongest political and military bases. The most tragic paradox was that it did not happen because of the Israeli army but because of Arab ones. Yāsir °Arafāt did not only blame Jordan but also other Arab countries. The civil war in Jordan started a new era of the Palestinian resistance movement but at the same time also a new epoch of notoriously well-known terrorism, the consequences of which were on their way.

Arab countries endeavoured to stop the killing by sending delegations to the king asking him to cease the fighting. But all of them failed. Therefore, the Egyptian president Jamāl °Abdunnāṣir took the initiative by inviting all Arab heads of states to Cairo with the aim of settling the situation in Jordan. Yāsir °Arafāt was invited as well, but had to leave Amman secretly as a warrant had been issued for his arrest in Jordan. King Ḥusayn joined the negotiations which had been opened on September 22 only after a few days.<sup>41</sup> Both Ḥusayn and Yāsir °Arafāt arrived in Cairo, sticking to their guns, so as to clarify their own view of the situation. The king blamed °Arafāt for an attempt to assassinate him and presented a recording of a PLO radio broadcast as evidence. On the other side, Yāsir °Arafāt maintained that the king had given consent for a massacre of thousands of innocent Palestinians.<sup>42</sup> Finally, an agreement of 14 points, embracing the main aspects of the peace plan, was signed on September 27, 1970. However, the PFLP released the hostages only after the Federal Republic

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<sup>39</sup> QUANDT, W. B. *Peace Process – American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, p. 82.

<sup>40</sup> RABINOVICH, I. *Waging Peace: Israel and the Arabs*, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> AS-SĀDĀT, Anwar. *al-Baḥṭ °an ad-dāt*. [The Search for Identity], p. 262.

<sup>42</sup> RUBIN, B., RUBIN, J. Colp. *Yasir Arafat: A Political Biography*, p. 53.

of Germany, Great Britain, and Switzerland had released all imprisoned Palestinians. In reality, the agreement was not in effect for a long time and the Jordanian army kept pushing the Palestinian fighters into pre-determined camps so as to limit their contact with local citizens. This still did not satisfy the king. He took the decision to cease any kind of Palestinian resistance on the territory of Jordan. As a result, after the defeat in the Ajloun Mountains in July 1971, the Palestinian groups were finally expelled from Jordan.

After the “Jordanian disaster”, the Palestinian organizations were to search for new bases for their operations. The peace that followed the Cairo agreements offered different interpretations for the parties involved. The guerrillas did not consider themselves defeated while the Jordanian leadership headed by the new Prime Minister Waṣfī at-Tall, a well-known opponent of the leftists, strove hard to completely diminish their influence on Jordanian soil. The guerrillas were thus gradually pushed out of the cities, often by force and at the cost of casualties – a process which by the end of 1971 ended their *de facto* presence in Jordan. From then on, the guerrillas were not officially allowed in the country.

After their expulsion from Jordan, the guerrillas were driven to the north to Syria. However, Syria was not willing to risk a conflict with Israel either. Therefore, the PLO had to tackle the same problem with Syria as it had done with Jordan: i.e. a confrontation with Syrian political representatives. Simultaneously, Syria was facing a change in its leadership when on November 16, 1970, the defence minister Ḥāfiṣ al-Asad and his supporters surrounded the Congress Hall, dissolved the newly elected Regional Command and appointed his own temporary one, with himself at the head.<sup>43</sup> In May 1971, after having initiated further changes in the important Baʿth Party structures, he was appointed the General Secretary of the party, while in August of the same year the National Congress elected him the President of Syria. Ḥāfiṣ al-Asad was an implacable opponent of Israel, and any negotiation with Israel was out of the question with the exception of the debate related to the unconditional return of the Golan Heights back to Syria.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, he was a great supporter of Arab unity and the Palestinian resistance movement. Syrian artillery assisted the Palestinian guerrillas in their attacks on Israel. At one and the same time on the territory of Syria these groups were under the strict control of the Syrian secret service.

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<sup>43</sup> SORBY, K., SORBY, K. ml. *Blízky východ v medzinárodnej politike (1971 – 1990)* [The Middle East in International Politics (1971 – 1990)], p.72

<sup>44</sup> QUANDT, W. B. *Peace Process – American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, p. 140.

Consequently, the Palestinian resistance movement could never fully develop in Syria. The situation was the same in Egypt. Libya and Iraq, which did not border Israel, provided the Palestinians solely with verbal support. For the above mentioned reasons, the leadership of the resistance movement with Yāsir °Arafāt at the head began to focus on Lebanon as the weakest state bordering Israel. They were trying to find a strategic point which would enable them to attack the north of Israel and simultaneously maintain their positions in case of Israeli reprisal attacks. Al-Faḥ combatants settled down in the rough surroundings of al-°arqūb Mountain in Southern Lebanon.<sup>45</sup> At the foothill of Mount Hermon, in the newly-founded semi-independent Palestinian enclaves, the population began to grow due to the new waves of refugees. Thus, further guerrillas were recruited – determined to fight for the return of their homeland currently occupied by Israel. Later, this location began to be known as *Fatahland*.

Even before 1971, new guerrilla groups organizing operations against Israel had been formed in Lebanon refugee camps. Due to Israeli reprisals inflicting deaths on Lebanese civilians, the Lebanese government strove to prevent the Palestinians from undertaking their operations. Because of intensifying conflicts, both parties attempted to come to a solution. Thus, a Lebanese and a Palestinian delegation met in Cairo so as to find a consensus. The negotiations resulted in the Cairo Agreement signed on November 2, 1969. According to the Agreement, the Lebanese government enabled the PLO to administer the camps in return for the promise that the PLO would coordinate every attack on Israel with Lebanese army officials.<sup>46</sup> The arrival of the Palestinians and the PLO command in Lebanon sparked off new guerrilla attacks on Israel. Israel replied by ground, sea, and air strikes targeted not only at guerrilla bases, but also at refugee camps and Lebanese villages. The strategy of Israel was obviously to afflict Lebanese civilians so as to incur their wrath against the Palestinians.<sup>47</sup>

The expulsion of Palestinian armed organizations from Jordan substantially decreased the possibility of a guerrilla war. The long border along the Jordan River was substituted by a short border between Israel and Southern Lebanon. After his arrival in Lebanon, Yāsir °Arafāt declared: “We accomplished a very important thing. We became new people by changing from refugees into fighters. This is very important. We had been homeless refugees and now we were becoming fighters, fighters for freedom. And what will be the next step?”

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<sup>45</sup> ABU SHARIF, Bassam. *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> WINSLOW, C. *Lebanon: War and Politics in a Fragmented Society*, p. 157.

<sup>47</sup> ABU SHARIF, Bassam. *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, p. 37.

We will see.”<sup>48</sup> Guerrilla operations continued. Assault groups carried out cross-border operations, launching rockets on Israel, frequently being assisted by Syrian artillery. However, the number of conventional guerrilla operations after the civil war in Jordan significantly decreased.

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