

INTERVIEW WITH FAISAL AL-HUSSEINI

By Mark A. Bruzonsky

Gazette today runs the first part of a lengthy discussion with the Palestinian representative in the occupied Jerusalem. Faisal Al-Husseini is of the view that the Palestinians are strong enough to *paralyse* any solution which will not take their interest into consideration

No solution without PLO

■ IF I may, let me begin with the cosmic question. What is it that makes you and the Palestinian leaders here have expectations that now – when the Palestinians are even weaker than they were before the recent war with Iraq – that the diplomatic process the Americans are leading is really an honest peace process that is likely to result in something for the Palestinians?

● It is not at all whether the Palestinians are weak or strong...

Our stand is coming from something else... Necessity... We are necessary to any solution in the Mid-east.

Let me put it another way. We are weak so that we cannot oppose any solution. We are strong enough to paralyse any solution which will not take our interests into consideration.

The picture now is like this. Even though, as you say, we are weaker now than before the war, but before the war no one was really interested in solving this problem, no one was worried about the stability of the Mid-east. After the war, everyone is interested about the stability of the Mid-east and everyone is interested about the stability of the Mid-east; and everyone knows that without solving the Palestinian problem there will be no stability in the Mid-east; and everyone knows that without dealing with the Palestinians, with the PLO, there will be no solution to the Palestinian problem so there will be no stability in this area.

I believe this is why we are saying that we are in a better condition because we are needed.

Palestinian of the moment



Mark A. Bruzonsky (right) interviews Faisal Al-Husseini in the occupied Jerusalem.

FAISAL Husseini is the Palestinian of the moment. With a famous father who fought the Zionists and membership in one of the prominent Jerusalem families, Faisal Husseini is the man everyone so far has been able to agree upon.

The Israelis are willing to deal with him – although usually at a distance and probably for his own sake – because he's not only a so-called "moderate" interested in making some kind of a deal that might end up being closer to autonomy than independence, but because he lives under their occupation and can be said not to be

I am ready to give personal answers. But the moment that they will ask for negotiations...

■ It's not the way it looks if you sit as I do in Washington. If you sit where I sit it looks like Yasser Arafat was tricked in 1988, it looks like the Americans wasted two years of precious time squandering the gains of the Intifada while Ambassador Peltre sat with Abed-Rabbo in Tunis, it looks like now the Americans have downgraded relations with Palestinian nationalists and are only talking with leaders in the occupied territories because that's what the Israelis want them to do. And it looks like the stage is being set for Camp David II.

● No, I don't agree that it will go this way. I am looking at it from another point-of-view. They are sitting with the people that are appointed by the PLO. When I am sitting with Mr. Baker I am no more a local personality, because the decision is not coming from a local decision-maker. The decision is coming from the highest national level within the Palestinian people. Questions and answers – questions from outside and answers to questions come directly from Tunis. And they know this very well, including Mr. Baker...

■ Do you really tell Mr. Baker anything that he already doesn't know? I mean American officials have been meeting with people in the PLO as long as I've been involved with these issues? What more... Don't you worry that Camp David II is what is planned by both the Americans and the Israelis?

Nigeria races to prepare new 'unity city' for OAU summit

By Tunde Obadina
CONSTRUCTION
workers have been sweating day and night to complete a \$10-million conference centre – glass-fronted and dominated by a gold-domed mosque – in time for next month's organisation of African Unity summit.

Other workers have been racing against the clock to finish a bridge and the second side of a dual carriage-way between Abuja's international airport and the centre.

Everyone preparing Abuja for its biggest conference appears confident Nigeria's future capital, dubbed "unity city", will be ready for the June 3-5 African heads of state summit.

"We will finish in time," said a European worker organising armchairs in the conference centre where the African leaders will try to find solutions to their continent's many problems.

But doubts remain about accommodation for the expected 3,000 delegates, several hundred journalists and a host of diplomatic observers in a city which has only three major hotels with a total of 1,700 rooms.

"We are prepared for the OAU (Organisation of African Unity)," said Duro Onabule, President Ibrahim Babangida's chief press secretary, dismissing reports that Nigeria had requested a postponement of the summit.

Extra security is being put in place in this normally sleepy city of up to 400,000 people, mainly civil servants, scheduled to grow to 3.2 million in the first decade of the next century, the external affairs ministry official said.

Although much work has been done to prepare Abuja for Nigeria's first OAU summit, this less than a decade old city is not inexperienced in staging major conferences.

"Abuja has been the place for conferences since 1986 when we organised the Ecowas (Economic Community of West African States) summit," the official said.

Abuja, serene and set among rocky outcrops, contrasts with congested and chaotic Lagos, Nigeria's present capital.

The construction of Abuja started in 1976 but work only began in earnest during the oil boom of the early 1980s.

A lack of finance following a sharp drop in world oil prices slowed down work on the city, designed as a melting pot for Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious groups.

"Abuja is a symbol of Nigeria's unity," Mohammed Gado Nasko, minister of the federal capital territory, told a recent regional oil meeting in the city.

Abuja appears to be forging the unity that has eluded Africa's most populous nation

Well, if I have your permission to be very candid. I agree with you, I think it's very important that Mr. Baker get his picture taken with Palestinian leaders so that he can say to people in the Arab countries and people in America that the Palestinians are involved. But the last time the Palestinians were involved the leadership in Tunis was involved and the question of Palestinian nationalism was involved. Now it looks to me like its only leaders in the occupied territories who are involved and the issue is not Palestinian nationalism but the issue is autonomy.

That is what others want. But that is not what is going on because they will not succeed in doing it without us, and if they want to do something with us, than it must be in the way that we want it.

It didn't happen that the United States sits with a Palestinian delegation or a group in an obvious way as now they are doing with the appointed group by the PLO who are holding the views of the PLO who are taking questions and answers, moving them between the PLO leadership and themselves.

Before this it was Egypt that was doing this.

Even this channel with Pellatreaux (referring to the so-called "dialogue" in Tunis during 1989 with American Ambassador Pellatreaux) the Americans didn't use it and the Palestinians didn't use it. And the channel was really either the Swedish one or the Egyptian one.

For the first time there is a Palestinian channel open between the PLO and the Americans.

Are you really sure?

Yes.

Because I've been in Washington



Yasser Arafat

cause he lives under their occupation and can be said not to be a member of the PLO.

The Americans need some recognisable Palestinian to talk to, and Hussein, with his pleasant and aristocratic manner fits the bill.

And for whatever reasons Yasser Arafat too is willing, for now at least, to rely on Hussein. For Arafat, the goal of the moment seems to be to portray the Israelis as the ones holding back any peace process; and thus, even with the Americans again refusing to deal with the PLO, having them talk with Hussein who keeps saying he supports the PLO is better than nothing and fits that strategy.

But there's another side to why Faisal Hussein is the Palestinian of the moment. No one is really afraid of him.

Arafat doesn't have to fear Hussein will strike out on his own. He lacks the popular base for that, in addition to the will and the smarts.

The activists who run the Intifada, the "uprising", think they have Hussein under control; i.e., he won't do anything of which they seriously disapprove.

The Israelis, and their American friends, need someone to talk to and to be photographed with; so for the time being at least Hussein does quite nicely.

Down the road Hussein could of course become everyone's scapegoat - and he does seem aware of that though willing to take the risks.

Whether or not Hussein really envisions himself someday as a Prime Minister of Palestine, who knows? But one thing is for certain, Faisal Hussein, for all of his charming qualities, is no David Ben-Gurion.

I spoke with Faisal Hussein at his modest home in the occupied East Jerusalem just a day after Secretary of State Baker was forced to return to the US due to his mother's death thus concluding his third regional shuttle since the war with Iraq.

since 1975. I've watched PLO people come and I've different channels. I remember Isam Satawi and Sabri Jiryis back in the mid 1970s. I remember Carter and the Palestinian homeland speech in Clinton, Massachusetts; the "joint statement" in 1977. There had always been discussions with the PLO. But as you say...

What joint statement in 1977?

October 1, 1977, when the Soviets and the Americans said....

OK. But I am talking about direct meetings, continually, and consistently between the Americans and the Palestinian. I believe it is the first time.

Well it maybe the first time because it's the first time you've been willing to do it in this way, the first time you local leaders have been willing to step in and conduct negotiations with the Americans. So that's why it's happening.

But it's clear that that... The Council here (referring to the American Consul General in East Jerusalem), Mr. Baker, and the whole media in this area were waiting, phoning me every day, six and seven times in a day, and an answer "Tunis did not decide yet, we are waiting for a decision Tunis."

Then I told them, "OK there is a decision. Who will go there? We are waiting for a list to come from Tunis. And no list will be put before Tunis will give the names."

But then the papers papers all over the world they don't discuss what we are discussing. Rather they put a picture of you and Secretary Baker and they say, "is this an attempt to consolidate an alternative leadership" (quoting from the caption underneath a published picture in Israel).

The answer is no.

But maybe the fact that the question is printed here...

OK, they can say whatever they want.

If they would like to fool themselves let them fool themselves. But in the end, if they are to look to me as a Mickey Mouse... so they can call me whatever names they want and then at a certain moment they can put me aside... And I believe there is no one else.

Or they will accept me as I am and in a certain moment they will not deal with me but in the way that I want them to.

So, from your point-of-view, sooner or later, you're in a position to say to them: "Now it's time for you to deal with Mr. Arafat."

Yes.

And from their point-of-view...

As far as things going like this, a dialogue, we are ready for this "dialogue." If it is questions and answers,

If we give a chance for them to implement it, they will implement it as Camp David Number 2. But we will not.

You didn't implement Camp David Number 1. They frankly didn't care that you didn't! They simply went on and did what they wanted to do. And still in America Camp David is considered a tremendous success.

But it succeeded in the matter of Egypt. It didn't succeed in the Palestinian case. It didn't succeed in the matter of the war. The worst wars we experienced was after Camp David, not before Camp David. The first time that an Arab capital was occupied it was after Camp David, not before Camp David. The highest casualties of the Israelis it was after Camp David, not before.

Yes, but look what the Israelis accomplished. Before Camp David there was an American President who insisted on a Palestinian homeland and who insisted that the Palestinian issue had to be dealt with. After Camp David the Israelis have had more than a decade to increase settlements, to build more road, to take more lands...

There were a lot of changes in this world...

We are no longer living in a two superpower world; we have now only one superpower. The other superpower, the one the Palestinians were trying to get aid from to face Israel, now it is bringing aid to Israel to face the Palestinians with the Soviet Jewish emigration.

So, don't build on these things because of Camp David but you must remember we are living in a changeable world.

To be continued tomorrow



Issam Sartawi

A Nigerian appeal to the OAU's 51 members on May 7 to limit delegations to 20 people raised fears of a shortage of accommodation in this city, where according to one resident "it's easier to get a job than accommodation."

An external affairs ministry official said such an appeal was not unusual before major conferences and stressed that Abuja could accommodate all delegations.

"Every country has been accommodated, we may even end up with excess room," said the official, helping to supervise preparations in Abuja, straddling Nigeria's predominantly Muslim north and the mainly Christian south.

The military government has requisitioned the three major hotels for the summit week and is making available 300 housing units.

Heads of state will stay at the 797-room Nicon Noga Hilton Hotel, where staff are undergoing extra training to handle the influx of dignitaries.

"We are fully ready for the big show. Our business is to spoil people a little, we intend to do that," said hotel executive Olu Usim-Wilson.

A government official said Abuja, boasting the most sophisticated telephone system in a country noted for indifferent telecommunication links, would provide adequate communication facilities.

Abuja's international airport has the best landing facilities in the country, the official said.

But the independent *Guardian* newspaper said on Monday that key navigational aids broke down last week, raising fears they may not be repaired by Sunday when African foreign ministers start arriving for a meeting before the OAU summit.

independence from Britain in 1960. "I am seeing a lot of inter-marriage which is a very good way of bridging the gap between the different ethnic groups," said hotelier Usim-Wilson, a southerner.

General Babangida, expected to become OAU chairman after the summit, is likely to move his office from Lagos to Abuja before a pledged handover to civilian government by the end of 1992.

At least seven government ministries, including external affairs, already have their headquarters here and more are expected during the next few months.-Rtr.



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