

Fatah, Arm of the Arab People

Nick Medvecky

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Special to the Fifth Estate

Editors' Note: Nick Medvecky, former News Editor for the WSU *South End*, is currently touring the Middle East and will send back periodic on-the-spot reports from his travels.

He will visit Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Israel, visiting with revolutionaries, student groups and government officials.

A GUERRILLA CAMP, SOMEWHERE IN JORDAN—Around me sit 40 or so commandos (Fedayin) of the Palestinian guerrilla organization, Al Fatah.

None are over 25 years of age and with their pencils and notebooks it appears that they are, as their commander says, all university students or graduates. Now, of course, they are full-time guerrilla fighters in the services of the Palestinian liberation, their espoused goal.

They are listening intently to Abu Said, Political Director of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (P.L.O., recently merged with Al Fatah). The topic for today: "The Strategic Policy of Al Fatah."

We're gathered in the shade of some trees on the side of a hill in a guerrilla political-training encampment deep in the rugged mountainous terrain of Jordan, about 15 miles from Amman. A Fatah spokesman tells me that all Fedayin receive this training as well as their military studies.

To these men and wherever I go in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, guerrilla warfare is a serious and learned military-political art. An art in the ability to effectively strike their enemy, articulate precisely their goals and to continue to nourish the necessary "sea" for all of these "fish" to swim in.

During the 1968–69 season of the *South End*, Wayne State University's daily student paper, we (the editorial staff) assumed a political position in support to Al Fatah. Not only the *Detroit News*, defender of truth and justice (the American Way), but virtually every media and power group in society attacked us by every means at its disposal. We were even accused of being the living representatives of the rise of Hitlerism.

If we had thought that we were met by stiff opposition in our support to the revolutionary state of Cuba and our denunciation of the criminal war in Vietnam, we were soon to learn that support to any Arab group met crashing head-on into the most massive power wall yet devised in American society.

The usual criticism of us was along the lines that we were anti-semitic. Aside from the fact that the Arabs are Semites, we were greatly surprised to see those institutions in society that are the very epitome of racism, anti-semitism, and purveyors of white, upper-class oppression attacking us for their crimes. Perhaps not so surprised.

When we met with and talked with individuals and groups throughout the Detroit community and showed them our articles, they were greatly surprised. They found no similarity between the stories in the *Detroit News*, the *Jewish News*, TV channel 2, etc., and our stories.

We articulated very carefully a political position supporting the Palestinian organization of Al Fatah whose stated goals were a free and democratic state for all people. We find it impossible to support any exclusivist state so long as we remain revolutionaries, that is, so long as we remain in the struggle for human dignity and freedom. High sounding words? Think of it merely as an abstract description of what many of us try to live.

In my coming dispatches I hope to deal with all of the major questions raised about the Middle-East struggle.

Two of the major criticisms of Al Fatah have been 1) that it is an extension of the Arab governments (reactionary for the most part) and/or 2) that it is, not part of the people.

Fatah is not only the complete opposite of the interests and goals of the-Arab governments, but it follows, as all guerrilla organizations (successful ones) must, the basic principle of guerrilla-to-people relationship. In fact, Al Fatah seems to have carried this relationship even further than had the Cubans, Algerians, Chinese or Vietnamese.

All of these groups had and have great support among their people. Al Fatah has the overwhelming support of the Arab peoples, but they also have direct material ties with them.

The Fedayin have built and supply medical clinics, hospitals, schools and other facilities beyond what they receive from either the United Nations or their respective governments. Make no mistake, these services are small and minute when faced with the gigantic need of the Palestinian refugees and their Arab brothers and sisters. But the identification between the Fedayin and the people is total and complete. No home, no public wall, no sign, no thoroughfare is without a poster or flag or photo or leaflet of the guerrillas.

As I travel throughout the countryside I see Fedayin everywhere I look. Every government roadblock or checkpoint contain, not only the Army or Police personnel, but a commando in the familiar camouflage dress with his machine gun, usually a Kalashnikov model.

One time, just outside of Amman on the road to El Karameh, we were refused permission to proceed. The Army guard required written permission from the Jordanian Ministry to allow us to continue. Our Fatah guide produced a letter from the Fatah Information Office and after making a call to that office the guard waved us on.

On another occasion we were delayed from entering the thriving civilian-military complex of Salt by a police officer. After his obvious interest in me was apparent by his furtive glances (I obviously looked like a foreigner), our own guide said to him that we were "going to see our comrades." He asked "What comrades?" at which our guide replied "Fatah." He waved us on without a further word.

One must not take this to mean that Al Fatah enjoys governmental sanction. On the contrary, both the Lebanese and Jordanian governments have tried their best to suppress the guerrillas. Al Fatah's first martyr was killed by the Jordanian Army.

King Hussein has ordered the Army against the commandos on two occasions (at least) and was only prevented from succeeding by the massive support of the people to the commandos. This support extends even into the rank and file of the Army and the Police.

Whereas the Fedayin now freely operate in Jordan they are still pretty much underground in Lebanon. From Beirut southwards the support to the Fedayin is fairly complete. The Army and the Police in Lebanon are much more in the control of the ruling bodies.

I have heard the expression many times that Al Fatah is a state within a state. This is true, but let it be known that Al Fatah is the State of the People, virtually all of the people.

Not only in interviews with men and women, young and old, but also talking to small children I find complete support to Al Fatah. The Fedayin are their heroes and they grow very excited when describing how they're going to become commandos when they turn 15.

Many of them belong to Ashbal (formerly the Boy Scouts) groups which is the youth arm of Al Fatah. In order to belong they must be registered and going to school. In addition to receiving physical training they are taught to handle weapons as well.

I can't overstate the amount of misery and degradation these people continue to live under. I also can't overstate the extent to which these people are rallying behind and joining Al Fatah. Their pride in themselves is tremendous; I've encountered no begging whatsoever in the refugee camps and both Fedayin and governmental spokesmen tell me that there is virtually no crime.

The Fedayin and their leaders say that they have waited over 20 years for a solution, waited for the Arab governments, the United Nations and the peoples of the world. All have failed. Palestinians unanimously say that Israel

discriminates against them and uses every conceivable approach to force them to leave. Many I spoke to have recently become refugees. All say that they're willing to live with anybody in freedom and democracy.

In every interview I endeavored to get at the full and correct answer. On most occasions I had two translators, one a close friend of mine. I quickly learned the Arabic words for Jew and Israeli and could easily pick them out in their answers.

Al Fatah claims they want an equal state for all people, regardless of religion and they certainly seem fully convinced and firm in their own belief.

On many occasions my interviews were conducted without those around me being aware of it. This led to an episode where my friend used the term Yahoodi (Jew) to a young Fedayin in a relaxed conversation and was immediately criticized for it.

The political training at this encampment lasts for about two months. The strategy for the revolution is a part of every Fatah member's itinerary. Before I left this camp I asked my hosts what the writing on plaques on the cave walls meant. He replied that every group contributes a slogan before leaving, one of the recent slogans is "Our Revolution is a Drop of Ink, A Drop of Sweat, and a Drop of Blood."

Al Fatah's stated goal is "...to create a democratic Palestinian state in which Jews, Christians and Moslems can live in peace and justice equally."

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