

Interview With Imprisoned PFLP General Secretary Ahmad Saadat

July 30, 2009



The following interview was done by Fight Back! News in July 30, 2009. Fight Back! Is affiliated with Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

From Wikipedia: Ahmad Sa'adat (also transliterated from Arabic as Ahmed Sadat or Saadat; Arabic: أحمد سعدات; born 1953), also known as Abu Ghassan, is a Palestinian militant and Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a Marxist–Leninist Palestinian nationalist organisation. Sa'adat graduated in 1975 from the UNRWA Teachers College, Ramallah, specializing in Mathematics. Sa'adat was elected General Secretary of the PFLP by its Central Committee in October 2001, to succeed Abu Ali Mustafa after his assassination by Israel during the Second Intifada.

Sa'adat had spent ten years in Israeli prisons, on eight separate occasions. He was accused by Israel of organizing the assassination of Israeli tourism minister Rehavam Ze'evi, and took refuge in the Muqata'a headquarters of PLO leader Yassir Arafat, which was then besieged by Israel after Arafat refused to hand him over to Israel. As part of an agreement with Israel, Sa'adat was tried by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and imprisoned at the Jericho prison in 2002. In the Palestinian elections of January 2006, Sa'adat was elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council. On 14 March 2006, Hamas announced their intention to release Sa'adat from prison. The US and British team monitoring Jericho prison left, citing poor security conditions. On the same day, Israeli forces carried out Operation Bringing Home the Goods, taking Sa'adat and five other security prisoners into custody. In December 2008 he was given a 30-year prison sentence by an Israeli military court. He was held in solitary confinement in an Israeli prison and his health deteriorated after frequent hunger strikes, in protest of Israeli policies. Since 2012 Sa'adat is no longer in solitary confinement.

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Fight Back! interviewed the imprisoned General Secretary of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Ahmad Saadat, on May 20. At a time when the eyes of the world are focused on the Middle East, we are grateful for the opportunity to bring you, our readers, the thoughts of one of the key leaders of the Palestinian resistance in

his own words.

The PFLP is the second largest political group within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). It is a revolutionary, Marxist-Leninist organization that advocates the creation of a democratic, secular Palestine. Formed in 1968 by Dr. George Habash and other leading members of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), the PFLP has been at the forefront of the Palestinians' political and armed struggle for national liberation, the right of return and an end to the illegal Israeli military occupation of Palestine.

Following the Israeli assassination of PFLP leader Abu Ali Mustafa in August 2001, the Central Committee of the PFLP elected Saadat as his successor. In retaliation for the murder of Mustafa, a special unit of the PFLP shot the racist Rehevam Ze'evi, the Israeli Minister

of Tourism who openly promoted the killing and exile of Palestinians.

Acting under pressure from the United States and Israel, Saadat and four other members of the PFLP were arrested by the Palestinian Authority for the killing of Ze'evi in January 2002. In exchange for lifting the military siege on Palestinian president Yasser Arafat's compound, the Palestinian Authority gave in to Israel's demand that the five be transferred to a prison in Jericho under the supervision of the Palestinian Authority - with the oversight of U.S. and British military personnel.

Fight Back!: Could you tell us a bit about your history with the PFLP? How and when did you join, and why did you feel the need to join a revolutionary organization at that time in your life?

Saadat: I began my life in the national resistance in 1967, the year of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In that year, I joined the PFLP-led Palestine Student Union, and then officially became a member of the PFLP in 1969. The motive to join the national struggle was to fight against the Zionist occupation. At that time, the general Palestinian milieu was strongly influenced by Nasser's nationalist thoughts, which helped me choose the PFLP over other organizations.

Although nationalist sentiments and hatred towards the occupation were the overriding motives to join any nationalist organization, my social



class as a refugee who suffered the consequences of the Palestinian Catastrophe, Al Nakba [the founding of the state of Israel and the exile of 750,000 Palestinians], and being the son of a poor worker led me to the socialist, Marxist thoughts that were spreading throughout the PFLP's mass organizations. This spread of Marxist thought was a step forward, a progressive development of ANM [Arab Nationalist Movement] theories, and a consequence of the Israeli defeat of Arab nationalist, bourgeois forces in the 1967 war.

I should also say that the time spent in prison in my early years of activism [Saadat was jailed by the Israelis many times, spending a total of over 10 years in prison] also introduced me to Marxism and helped consolidate my commitment to the PFLP and the national movement.

Fight Back!: You have been imprisoned in Jericho for over a year now. The Palestinian High Court has deemed the arrest illegal under Palestinian law. Why do you feel that the Palestinian Authority - the PA - refuses to release you and your comrades?

Saadat: Since the so-called 'Jericho Agreement' placed us - the five prisoners - under the supervision of Israel, the U.S., the PA and England, the only way that we could be released would be to terminate the agreement. The PA cannot take this position, especially after the Israeli invasion of the West Bank in April of last year and the siege of Al Moqata'a - the PA and Arafat's headquarters. Now the PA accedes to all Israeli and American demands.

The 'Jericho Agreement' is one of the demands that the PA sees as commitments, which might be more important to Israel and the U.S. than the appointment of a prime minister or a new minister of finance or interior.

Therefore, my release and the release of my four comrades require a solid Palestinian position that refuses to continually submit to American-supported Israeli demands. The issue of our release, therefore, is very difficult and is not solely in the hands of the PA.



In conclusion, I want to speak to the PA's claim that we are being detained for our safety: this is utter nonsense used to justify the PA's compliance and submissiveness to Israeli security demands.

Fight Back!: The war and occupation in Iraq seems to be an effort by the U.S. government to institute an imperialist plan to consolidate its hegemony over the entire Arab world. What are the specific plans of the U.S. for the Arab world, and how do the conditions in Iraq affect Palestinian aspirations for

national liberation and independence? Is there a real danger that Israel may implement a policy of forced removal, or 'transfer,' of Palestinians from their homes and land?

Saadat: The U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, declared that the American scheme for the Arab region will be nothing less than the re-drawing of the political map of the region to best serve American interests. Additionally, controlling the oil reserves in the region is the central link that will enable the U.S. to control the world, and therefore enforce the American view of the international order in this stage of imperialism. This scheme was made possible by post-September 11th conditions - because prior to 911, it was resisted in UN Security Council negotiations.

Although the first step in the scheme was to provide political cover and international support for Sharon and Israel's criminal war against the Palestinian people, the central target was always Iraq. Powell's declaration provided the political framework for the scheme, uncovering the American program to 'democratize' the Arab

region and 'protect human rights' in the Middle East in general, and the Arab region in particular. The American imperialist scheme is not simply based on politics, economy, or military strength. Even culturally and ideologically, the U.S. intends to control and re-shape the region, with Israeli partnership, to acquire long-term security for its imperialist interests.

Fight Back!: The PFLP has its two top leaders in prison. Many others from its Central Committee and the Political Office, as well as mid-level leaders, have also either been arrested or killed. Why does Israel see the PFLP as such a major threat to its control over the Palestinians, and why hasn't the public been made aware of these devastating attacks in the same way that we hear about the attacks on Hamas, the Islamic Jihad or Fatah?

Saadat: Objectively, and without any narcissistic assessment of my experience, there is published testimony from the leaders of Israel's security apparatus, the Shabak, and from journalists close to and affiliated with the Shabak, like Ze'evi Sche've, that describe the reasons for Israel's concentrated repression of the PFLP.

The Israelis discovered in the 1980's and during the first Intifada of 1987-1993, that the PFLP has a solid, ideological and unyielding organizational structure. It was impossible for them to detect the secret activities of the PFLP, or defeat the will of the PFLP's cadre and members, even with their brutal and illegal interrogation methods. The PFLP also has a very dynamic organizational structure that can transform and modify itself quickly, especially in emergency situations.

The continuous attacks by the Israelis against the PFLP, especially between 1991 and 1995, together with the severe financial crisis it faced beginning in 1994, led the Shabak to assume that the PFLP had gone from the proverbial intensive care unit to the grave. So, the speed in which the PFLP reconstructed its resistance apparatus after the 6th Congress and the beginning of the September 2000 Intifada surprised Israel and the Shabak.

This surprise explains why the first Israeli assassination attempt against the PFLP targeted Abu Ali Mustafa. The assumption was that murdering Abu Ali would drive the PFLP back to the intensive care unit. But, instead, the PFLP responded with similar force by killing the racist Rehevam Ze'evi, one of the members of Sharon's cabinet.

Although most of the PFLP's activities are absent from mainstream media outlets, the Israeli Shabak knows these activities well, and has greatly stepped up its attacks on us. The media, concentrating on the competition between the PA and the Islamic forces, may ignore us, but the enemy does not. And even though the PFLP lacks the backing of a regional, political power, and relies mainly on the local support of working and poor people, its actions and political significance are recognized throughout the region.

Fight Back!: Does the PFLP have a specific political program developed in response to the current objective conditions of the Intifada, or Uprising? If so, how is the PFLP implementing that plan on the ground?

Saadat: The PFLP sees the current Intifada as a popular initiative and an expected response to the crisis created by the Oslo Accords and other negotiations based on Oslo. The final collapse of the



accords occurred after the Camp David summit, and allowed for the restoration of the alternative of popular resistance.

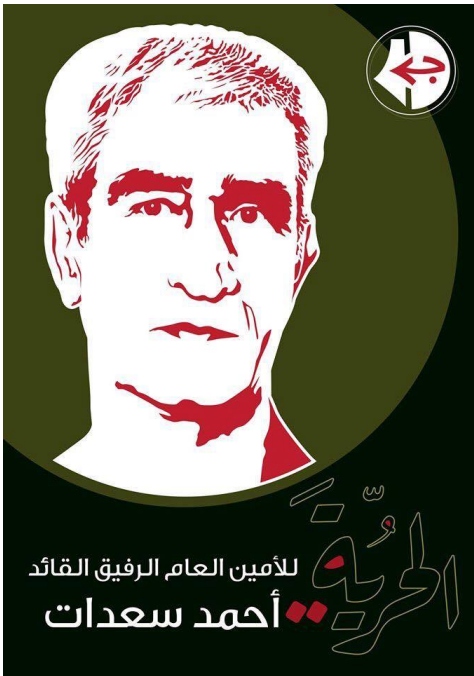
The Intifada not only reflected the internal contradictions of the Oslo agreement and its inability to resolve the conflict, but also showed the importance of reordering Palestinian internal structures and reconsidering the Palestinian leadership - based on the function of political resistance. This resistance itself is based on restoring the role of international legitimacy and the UN as a frame of reference, instead of accepting the U.S. stronghold on 'brokering peace.'

The Intifada aims at restoring the role of international institutions to the political process, as the bodies responsible for implementing resolutions and international law regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. The PFLP supports the role of the Intifada in seeking to reinforce the Palestinian leadership structure with popular structures - from popular committees responsible for activating local institutions in the cities, villages, refugee camps and neighborhoods; to a media mechanism that stresses a political discourse that supports the legitimacy and legality of resistance and the criminality of Israeli practices and violations of human rights and international law. Additionally, the Intifada promotes Arab and global popular support networks in its quest to achieve the just national rights of the Palestinian people.

The Intifada, together with Arab and international popular support, could place the enemy under siege and pave the way for achieving our national goals, which the PFLP has suggested on more than one occasion of national dialogue. However, this has not been the agenda of the bourgeois Palestinian Authority, which distributed its efforts between resistance (to immaturely exploit it) and negotiations based on the same old frame of reference (Oslo). This situation produced a state of political schizophrenia. This dual political discourse by the PA - with the Intifada/resistance at one end, and with Israel at the other - led to the weakening of the Intifada, especially when the PA would classify aspects of the resistance as 'terrorist activities' that must be condemned and fought.

Fight Back!: The popular support for the Palestinian struggle is always high among the masses of the Arab world, but the majority of their governments have not taken a strong political stance against Israel or U.S. support of Israel. The PFLP continues to express that Palestinian freedom is inextricably linked to Arab freedom. In this climate of Arab government repression against the Arab masses, what can the Palestinians expect from these masses in terms of real support for ending the Israeli occupation?

Saadat: The unity between the Arab nation and the Palestinian nation exists due to the connection of the interests of the Arab people, and their collective need for security, social progress, development, social justice and unity. However, these interests and goals, which represent the underlying basis for Arab unity and interconnection, cannot be translated into deeds without the political tools that can stimulate popular action and unify it in an Arab center.



The slogans for the different Arab national currents and parties are not commensurate with programs that will make the Arab national struggle the basis for struggle in each specific Arab country. On the contrary, the struggle of the nationalist parties within each country remain focused on local issues and isolated from the general Arab question. This is why the popular Arab support of the Intifada and the popular protest against the war on Iraq remained limited. The nationalist instruments - the Arab National Conference, different Arab nationalist parties, and the Arab-Islamic

Conference - lack the agenda that links the local issues in each country to the general Arab issues.

Since the American military occupation of Iraq represents the central point of attack on the Arab and the Palestinian liberation scheme, it becomes crucial to reconsider the mechanisms, agendas and methods of the popular, Arab national movements in order to defend national interests, independence, self-determination, culture and resources; and recognize the dialectical connection between the popular national struggle and the international struggle.

The American globalization of war established the conditions for its antithesis - globalizing the popular struggle - at two levels. First, the tactical and immediate level: the U.S. challenge to international will and international institutions, and its violation of international law through its war on Iraq, created a sort of 'rejectionist' front consisting of the countries that opposed the war and united to defend the UN. This provided an 'official' setting to face the illegal war and occupation of Iraq. Second, the strategic and long-term level: prior to the war on Iraq, the popular resistance (anti-globalization forces) to imperialism and its policies toward the poor nations increased significantly. The popular movement, in Arab countries and throughout the world, provides the strategic foundation for fighting imperialism, and needs to address these new conditions and re-conceptualize its agenda to fight imperialist policies locally and globally. This movement from Arab and world masses is what will help the Palestinian cause the most.

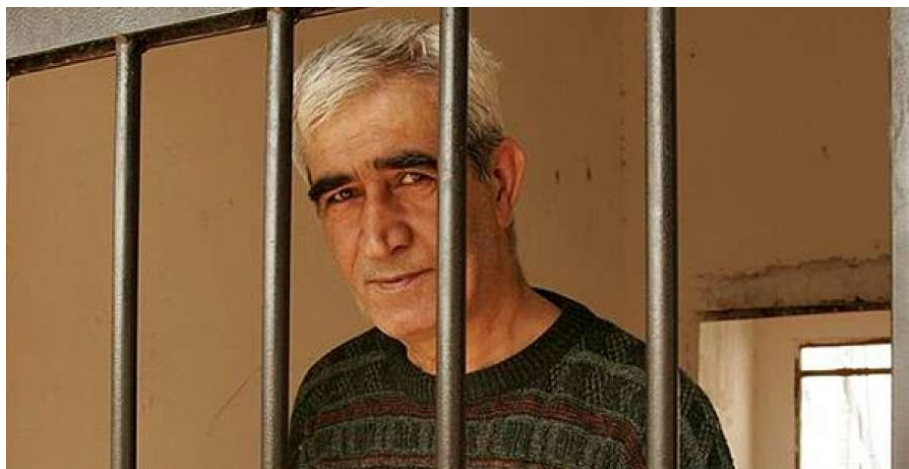
Fight Back!: The PFLP's vision for all of Palestine includes living in a society free of the control of the capitalist ruling classes of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. You also stress that a comprehensive peace cannot be achieved without the implementation of the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees. Once the refugees return and the Israeli occupation has ended, what political system must be in place to uphold your vision for a Palestinian state? And what specific role must the PFLP and the oppressed classes of Palestinian society play in this state?



Saadat: The Right of Return for the Palestinian refugees is a legitimate and central Palestinian right, and the most important part of the Palestinian liberation scheme. When the PFLP insists on its commitment to the Right of Return, it simply insists on its commitment to the Palestinian national agenda that was approved in numerous meetings of the Palestine National Council.

The Right of Return is neither a knee-jerk emotional reaction, nor an abstract legal right, nor right-wing chauvinism. On the contrary, it is realistic, and constitutes the only basis for a permanent and everlasting peace.

Furthermore, the upholding of the Right of Return is not, as some intellectuals and academics have argued, an impractical position, representing an inability to understand political realities and the composition of local, regional and international forces. On the contrary, this commitment to the Right of Return is the by-product of a scientific and objective assessment and reading of the historical struggle between the Palestinian national liberation movement and



the Zionist colonial movement. Any solution that ignores the Right of Return as a basis for a permanent peace between the Palestinians and the Jewish settlers who forcibly expelled the indigenous people of Palestine and colonized the land may produce short periods of quiet and calm, but will not eliminate the objective conditions that produce the conflict between our people and the Zionist movement.

Therefore, the implementation of international resolutions and international law pertaining to the Right of Return, as a first step, may prepare the foundation for a permanent peace and end the struggle in Palestine and around Palestine. This right, as the essence of the Palestine question, represents the bridge for a democratic and comprehensive solution of the conflict between the Jewish settlers and the Palestinian people.

Some have argued that the current reality is pushing towards a two-state solution - an Israeli state next to a Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders. Of course, this solution involves ignoring the Right of Return, or replacing it with reparations. We in the PFLP argue that forcing such a solution on the Palestinian people will not end the struggle, because the facts and reality contradict such a solution. The two-state solution that is based on the racist notion of 'a national, homogeneous Jewish state' totally disregards the fact that over 1.3 million Palestinians - 20% of the entire population - live inside 'Israel.' This will continue to permit the causes of conflict to

remain inside Israel. Therefore, the solution based on two states is a myth.

Our people's quest, like any other people, is a democratic and free society. This democratic state - the only state form that can produce social and economic development - cannot be led or dominated by the parasitic and comprador bourgeoisie, but by a unity of the popular forces that share structural interests in national independence, return to the homeland, popular democracy and economic development. This is, simply, our view in the PFLP, and the view of the national, democratic liberation movement.



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