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Palestinians have come to the conclusion that, in the world they inhabit, might is right and the only way to survive and flourish is to be strong and violent.

Diplomatic missions and political initiatives don't mean anything to these young people, who have seen only more oppression as Israel speaks of peace. Although for the present time this generation has strong feelings for the PLO and its Chairman Arafat (the military resistance of the PLO in Lebanon helped a lot here), they have grown impatient with the niceties of political diplomacy. If they see that the political initiatives of the PLO are producing no results, they will force the PLO into a more radical posture or else they will go looking for a more radical leadership within the PLO.

As for the day to day life of Palestinians, the one strategy all are agreed upon is the need to stay put on our land and to work at building the infrastructure for the future Palestinian state. Because of demographic factors, Palestinians are in a much stronger position in the long run than Israelis. But in the meantime Palestinians know they must do everything possible to change the status quo. The continued absence of a solution only plays into Israeli hands, which gain from the occupation without being forced to pay the political price both locally and internationally for that occupation.

UNRWA Remembers 1967

The following report was prepared by UNRWA and published in al-Fajr, 31 May 1987.

Friday, 5 June will mark the twentieth anniversary of the Six-Day War of 1967 between Israel and her Arab neighbors, Egypt, Jordan and Syria. It uprooted about 145,000 registered Palestine refugees for the second time in nineteen years, and still affects many of their lives today.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency set up ten emergency camps for the displaced refugees east of the River Jordan, and these shanty towns are now the most visible sign of the conflict, although time has aged them.

Their inhabitants have rebuilt their lives in different surroundings, but they are still as uncertain of their future now as they were in 1967—or in 1948, when the Arab-Israeli war erased Palestine from the map, if not from the minds of the Palestinians.

Fateful Sequence

In 1966–67 a series of border incidents was followed by reports of troop movements and a rise in tension.

On 22 May 1967, Egypt declared that the Straits of Tiran, gateway to the Israeli port of Eilat, was closed to Israeli shipping. Israel's Premier Levi Eshkol said next day that interference with Israeli shipping would be regarded as an act of war. UN Secretary-General U Thant flew to Cairo, first meeting UN representatives, including UNRWA Commissioner-General Lawrence Michelmore. Then he held talks with Egypt's President Nasir. But U Thant's peace mission was doomed to failure.

A week later Jordan and Egypt signed a defense pact parallel to that which Egypt had already concluded with Syria six months earlier.

Moshe Dayan was appointed Israeli defense minister on 31 May and on 4 June the Israeli Cabinet adopted his proposal of armed action "to liberate Israel from the military stranglehold that was being increasingly tightened and to prevent the attack that was about to be launched against her by the forces of the United Arab Command," as Dayan was to write later.

"Just in Case"

The outside world, unaware of this plan, thought that tension was easing. At

UNRWA's field office in Jerusalem, there was a feeling that the emergency arrangements that had been made to maintain services to refugees would not be necessary after all. Nevertheless, three international staff members moved into a hotel to form the nucleus of an emergency field office, and UNRWA Field Director Bob Fisher decided to give his Amman representative a check for emergency funds "just in case they are needed." They were to be needed very soon.

UNRWA's area officer in the Jordanian capital of Amman at the time, Basil Ennab, recalls, "That was on the Friday. On the following Monday, 5 June, I was banking the check when I heard that the war had started." He was to need the money for relief and to pay salaries to stranded staff members who came in to the Amman office for help.

Another UNRWA staff member who had prepared for the worst was Kamal Habbub, now deputy relief services officer. On 5 June 1967, he was the agency's port officer for Aqabah in the south of Jordan, with responsibility for handling incoming shipments of relief supplies. He had spent the preceding days moving stocks of food commodities out of the port to safer locations, and he set off for Jerusalem, then UNRWA's field office for Jordan, to see to the related paperwork. He never reached Jerusalem; it was cut off by fighting.

Reporting instead to UNRWA in Amman, where Director Bob Fisher was using his home as an office, Habbub was told to organize 200,000 cooked meals daily for the masses of displaced persons who were crowding in from the war zone on the other side of the River Jordan. "We managed, somehow," he remembers.

Trail of Havoc

On the Mediterranean shore south of Tel Aviv, Administrative Services Officer of the Gaza Strip Mahmud al-Khatib was

attending an UNRWA meeting in Gaza Town. Heavy fighting had left a trail of havoc which grew worse toward the Egyptian frontier, but Khatib wanted to get back to his family in Rafah camp. He hitched a lift on a southbound army truck, but still does not know whose army it belonged to.

In Jerusalem on 5 June, UNRWA's Deputy Field Director Jeff Cassels learned from the radio at about 8:00 a.m. that Israeli aircraft had been bombing Egyptian airfields. From that moment, it became clear that full-scale war had broken out and that it would only be a question of time before Jordan became involved, he recalls.

At 10 a.m. Director Fisher arrived by car from Amman, having seen many tanks on the road. In Jerusalem he set the emergency plan into operation under Jeff Cassels and returned to the Jordanian capital in case the road should be cut—which it was, in due course.

Jeff Cassels was collecting a tape recorder from his Jerusalem apartment shortly afterwards when "the peace and quiet which had hitherto prevailed was suddenly shattered and all hell broke loose. Firing broke out everywhere. It was impossible to tell which direction it was coming from; nor did we waste time finding out." He made it safely back to the emergency office at Shepherd's Hotel and was still able to liaise with Fisher in Amman and other UN offices by telephone; but the line was soon cut.

Key Position

The UNRWA field office on Ammunition Hill had become a key position in the battle for Jerusalem with its command of the northern approaches to the city, and the area was pounded by aircraft and artillery. When Tuesday, 6 June dawned there were 300 bodies in and around it. "Fierce fighting took place from room to room in the UNRWA offices," according to agency staffer Muhammad Jarallah, who lived

through the battle in his home nearby. "Grenades and machine guns were used. Blood and corpses filled the place."

In the Jordan River Valley, near the biblical city of Jericho, more than 100,000 refugees of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war were living in camps. On 5 June 1967, they saw Arab troops moving westward on the Jerusalem road. By the evening of 6 June the troops were moving in the opposite direction, and rumors of massacres in the West Bank panicked the refugees.

They crowded toward the bridge in thousands and the stream of eastbound fugitives turned into a flood.

UNRWA's present area officer in Jerusalem and Jericho, Rashid 'Ariqat, was a deputy area officer in Jericho then. He says he was driving his office car between two Jordanian tanks on 6 June when each was attacked by a different Israeli Mirage fighter. The slip-stream flipped his car into a ravine, and he hit his head on the windshield. Jordanian troops took him to a hospital. That evening Israeli armor reached Jericho and the bridge was demolished.

No Communication

"After three or four days I formed groups to bury the bodies of people who had been killed trying to get away," 'Ariqat remembers. "There were no communications to my superiors. People were starving, and on my own authority I got three or four bakeries to start baking for the people who were unable to leave. I had the bread delivered by a head teacher, some clerks and others using two ambulances."

Another UNRWA staffer who had to act on his own was 'Atiyyah Mahmud, field education officer in Jordan, who was then principal of the Men's Teacher Training Center in Ramallah on the West Bank.

"We were cut off from Jerusalem," he says. "I told my 400 students to disperse, and gave a dinar or two to those who

needed it for the fare home." Later on 6 June, with the center deserted and the sound of gunfire drawing closer, he drove to Amman. Israeli troops captured Ramallah the next day. Eventually all the second-year center students graduated and those in their first year who did not remain in Amman returned to complete their studies successfully. The only sign of the war was a shell-damaged staircase.

Back in Jerusalem, UNRWA staff set to work to get the supply system working again, and within a few days they had moved about 200 tons of food from the battered field office to outlying distribution points, where it was desperately needed for an uprooted population. UNRWA mechanics worked wonders of ingenuity to get surviving vehicles back on the road, cannibalizing some of them for missing parts.

Schools As Shelters

Like his colleagues on the other side of the River Jordan, Basil Ennab in Amman was having to improvise to keep homeless Palestinian families sheltered and fed. "Luckily the schools were closed, because they were all occupied by refugees—twenty families had to squeeze into each classroom at Amman New Camp," he says.

But schools were not nearly enough to shelter all the displaced. Many were sleeping rough in the countryside, and UNRWA scoured the world for stocks of tents. It even got them from mail-order warehouses, Ennab recollects.

Jeff Cassels interceded with the Israeli authorities on behalf of the 15,000 people of Qalqiliyyah, west of Nablus, who were all living in the open. They were allowed to return to their homes a few days later.

On 9 June ground fighting spread to Syria, but on the following day all parties heeded the UN Security Council's increasingly insistent demands for a ceasefire, and guns fell silent everywhere.

UNRWA started to take stock of the situation. Civilian casualties were fewer than had at first been feared, it reported to the General Assembly later; but at least 100,000 registered refugees had crossed the river into Jordan; 16,000 had fled from the war zone in Syria and thousands more went from Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt. Only some 12 percent were to return.

"Bewilderment, Shock"

In that year's annual report to the General Assembly, UNRWA Commissioner-General Michelmore spoke of "the overwhelming sense of bewilderment and shock felt by the inhabitants of the areas affected by the hostilities as the cataclysm swept over them. The disruption of the lives and careers of countless persons, the anxiety caused by the sudden loss of earnings and remittances from abroad, the personal tragedies resulting from the separation of husbands and wives, parents and children, are only some of the problems which confront so many of the former Arab inhabitants of Palestine."

UNRWA clinics had been working from dawn to dusk throughout the emergency, but could not always prevent the terrible living conditions of the displaced refugees from affecting their health: polio, dysentery and other infectious diseases increased. And for the first time in UNRWA's history, the number of children in the agency's schools for Palestine refugees showed a decrease, from 187,000 to just under 180,000.

Tribute to Staff

Because so many UNRWA staff displayed resilience and initiative, services were soon under way again. As early as 11

June, ration distribution was resumed in the West Bank.

In Rafah, Mahmud al-Khatib had the word "UNRWA" cut from empty American flour sacks and used the scraps of sacking as UNRWA armbands to identify his laborers, so that they could move around freely despite general restrictions by the occupying Israeli forces.

In Jordan, UNRWA staff working round the clock had given shelter to 50,000 people in new tented camps by mid-August.

Former Deputy Field Director Jeff Casseles, now living in retirement in England, still remembers his staff's performance with pride. "For my part, I couldn't have asked for better staff," he says. "The local people were in a particularly difficult position—with their world turned upside down in a single night, and everything in a state of confusion. But they remained loyal and got on with the job."

Twenty Years After

Today the ten emergency camps built for displaced refugees in the post-1967 war period—six in Jordan and four in Syria—have grown into villages and towns with as many as 70,000 people. UNRWA has split the former Jordan field into two, with a field office in Amman for Jordan and one in Jerusalem for the West Bank.

The total number of registered refugees has grown from 1.3 million to more than 2.1 million, because of natural population increase.

And the Palestine refugees still wait for the opportunity to exercise their right to repatriation or compensation, which was recognized by the UN General Assembly in 1948.