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## THE BEGINNING OF ISRAELI RULE IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA

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**A Sudden Reassignment / Disbelief on Both Sides / A Local Arab Leadership Arises / Religious Autonomy / The Beginning of the PLO / Educational Autonomy / Autonomy Negotiations in 1968-69 / Was an Opportunity Missed? / Resettling the Refugees / The Uprising**

### **A Sudden Reassignment**

At the outbreak of the Six-Day War, I was serving as the commander of the district of Jerusalem. On the afternoon of June 7, 1967, I was riding in a half-track on the way to capture Bethlehem when I received a call on the radio to come back to Jerusalem because the Minister of Defense wanted to see me. I argued that I was in the midst of the campaign, but they repeated the message and kept insisting.

By the time I arrived back at headquarters, Dayan had already left, but the commander of Central Command told me to report to the Ambassador Hotel in East Jerusalem where the new headquarters of the IDF forces occupying Judea and Samaria had been established. I was to be chief of staff to Major General Herzog (our present President), who was appointed as the commander of IDF forces in the West Bank. In December 1967 I became

commander of the West Bank and in 1974 the Coordinator of Government Operations in the administered territories.

That same evening, on June 7th, the rule of military government by the IDF was proclaimed in Judea and Samaria, a rule now in its 22nd year.

### **Disbelief on Both Sides**

Both the Arab population of the area as well as ourselves were surprised by the fact that in 48 hours we had occupied the West Bank of Jordan. They were made to believe, at the outbreak of hostilities, that the Jordanian and other Arab forces were in no time going to occupy Israel. Suddenly they were overwhelmed by the IDF defeating the Jordanian army in a matter of hours. Such was their surprise that the Israeli forces that entered Nablus were welcomed by the population with flowers and with flags.

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because they believed that these were Iraqi forces that had come to support the Jordanians. We too were surprised because we believed and hoped that there would be no war with Jordan. Messages had been sent to King Hussein by Prime Minister Eshkol saying that if he would not start shooting, we shall refrain from shooting as well and there would be no war between us. But the Jordanian army started the war by occupying the UN headquarters located near Talpiot, and by shelling Jerusalem. The IDF counterattacked and in 48 hours the whole of the West Bank and Jerusalem was under our control. The liberation of East Jerusalem and the Western Wall and all the other holy places was greeted on our side with great rejoicing.

We did not believe that the Israeli rule of the territories would last more than a few months following our experience after the Sinai Campaign in 1956 in which by March 1957 we were compelled to withdraw from the whole of Sinai. Some preparations for a military government in the West Bank, in case of war, had been made, but these were minimal because the possibility that the Big Powers would allow the occupation of the West Bank seemed unreal. Therefore we had to start organizing the military government virtually from scratch in order to establish the rule of the IDF, assume the functions of a civil government, maintain law and order, organize and provide public services, look after all the other necessities of the population, restore life to normal, and especially to reconstruct the economy.

#### **A Local Arab Leadership Arises**

During 21 years of IDF rule in the West Bank, only in those first two years was the local leadership of the Arab population ready to take its own fate in its own hands and try to negotiate a settlement with Israel. The local leadership, which at that time was comprised mainly of the notables of the leading families, began to send out feelers to us to find out what role they might play in future peace negotiations.

In that first month of June 1967, the local Arab population was ready and willing to fully cooperate with the military government in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as well. As a result of the IDF occupation, the West Bank was cut off from Jordan, including the top administration of Islamic religious (Wakf) property and the court of appeals in religious matters, which were all located in Amman. Some local Moslem religious leaders approached us and requested the establishment, by an ordinance of the military government, of a religious court of appeals in Jerusalem as well as a local administration for Moslem religious affairs and property. This unqualified willingness to cooperate lasted only several weeks.

After the Knesset had enacted the act for the reunification of Jerusalem on June 28th and Israeli law had been established in East Jerusalem, the Arab leadership in Jerusalem ceased cooperating and began their first moves at resistance to the Israeli government. This fact had an immediate impact on the attitude of the population in the West Bank which at that time accepted and followed the Jerusalem leaders as their own.

In spite of that, some Arab leaders in the West Bank initiated some other political moves. At the beginning of July a certain notable from East Jerusalem brought me a petition signed by 200 notables of Jerusalem and the West Bank requesting permission to hold a convention to discuss their role in future peace negotiations, but the government rejected this request. Probably as a reaction to this refusal, the Jerusalem religious and political leadership began moves toward independent political action against the wishes of both Israel and Jordan. At the end of July 1967 we received a letter signed by 22 leaders, mainly from Jerusalem, telling us that they had decided to establish a Supreme Moslem Council which would take care of all religious and judicial matters and the administration of the Wakf property.

## Religious Autonomy

A Supreme Moslem Council had been established by the British Administration early in the 1920s and the infamous Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el Husseini, was appointed president of the Council until he fled the country sometime during the disturbances of 1936-39. After the Jordanians had annexed the West Bank in 1950, they dissolved the Supreme Moslem Council in Jerusalem. Instead they established in Amman a Ministry for Religious Affairs. This ministry was put in charge of all Arab religious matters in Jordan and in the West Bank formerly managed by the Supreme Moslem Council.

In 1967 the 22 local Arab leaders decided to reestablish the Supreme Moslem Council. They informed us, contrary to their earlier request, that foreigners such as ourselves, who were not Moslems (virtually heathens), could not control Moslem religious affairs, though the Jordanian law which prevailed in the West Bank obliged the military government to control and take care of all religious institutions. In addition they decided to establish an Islamic (Shari'a) religious court of appeals in Jerusalem for Jerusalem and the West Bank, and announced that hence they would nominate the justices of this court, and also the justices of the Shari'a courts in

Jerusalem and the West Bank. The Council led and inspired the resistance that started against the military occupation of the West Bank and the Israeli authorities in Jerusalem. Strikes started gradually in August-September 1967, and then built up to a crescendo in 1968 and 1969. There were widespread commercial and school strikes as it is today in the intifada, though they were not violent at first. It began more as a kind of civil, non-violent resistance until the beginning of 1968 when it developed into violent demonstrations.

The majority of the members of the Supreme Moslem Council were secular, not religious leaders. When they started leading the resistance, we expelled some of them and restricted the movement of others. As a result the Council's overt activities concentrated more on religious matters while their political and other anti-Israeli activities were covert. Since the Council had not been established by agreement but rather unilaterally, the military government did not formally or otherwise recognize it. The Council, to the contrary, did recognize the authority of the military government in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and tried to involve it in matters concerning Jerusalem. The Council was consistent in its refusal to recognize the Israeli civilian authorities in

dence. Our policy was not to intervene because we did not want religious matters to become issues of controversy between us.

### **The Beginning of the PLO**

In 1967-68 the PLO was in its infancy and had not yet reached the status that it reached later on. They had started operating in July 1967. A small quantity of explosives was found near the wall of a police station in central Israel. Only later did we discover that this was the first terrorist act by the PLO against Israel after the Six-Day War. Later on, by the end of 1967 and the beginning of 1968, they started infiltrating in great numbers from Jordan and tried to establish bases of operation in the hills of Samaria and Judea. The IDF had quite difficult problems fighting the PLO terrorists and infiltrators at the time. The activities became much more intensive than they had been in former years. The border along the Jordan River was wide open and men, weapons and explosives were smuggled in in great quantities. Only after the Karame operation in March 1968 when a barbed wire fence and other obstacles had been constructed and methods of tracking and combat tactics were developed did the situation come under control.

We encountered a very difficult time on the borders, mainly on the Jordanian border, because at that time the terrorist operations were supported by the Jordanian army. Our positions as well as our settlements in the Jordan Valley were shelled almost daily by Jordanian artillery for three years until September 1970. We had constant clashes with the Jordanian army and with the PLO terrorists infiltrating into the West Bank and the Jordan Valley, as well as into Israel. Even after we had established the fence along the Jordan River and installed other devices which made infiltration much more difficult, infiltrators kept coming and we had encounters with them in the West Bank and sometimes in Israel proper. Infiltration stopped almost entirely and terrorist

activities decreased substantially after the Jordanian army expelled the PLO gangs from Jordan in September 1970.

### **Educational Autonomy**

In September 1967 the resistance of the local Arab population came into focus with the start of the school year. Arab schools did not open because at the time the Israeli Ministry of Education decided that the Jordanian curriculum in West Bank schools was to be replaced by the Israeli Arabic curriculum. The local population were afraid, and I believe with good reason from their point of view, that we were going to intervene with their education, to be followed by intervention in their Arab culture, social and religious life. Therefore they vehemently opposed this move and started a strike which included all schools and part of commerce. The strike went on for three months. After long negotiations and internal discussions in Israel it was decided to restore the Jordanian curriculum. A committee comprised of local Arab educators was established, which virtually runs the education system to this day. Only anti-Israel textbooks or passages in such books were removed. Following these changes they stopped the strike and the schools were opened. Though the military government maintained a department of education headed by an Israeli officer, there were only four Israeli officials in the whole establishment of the military government who were assigned to supervise education. All the rest, teachers and administrative staff, were local Arabs. To the present day they run the whole system, and they do it according to the curriculum, programs, books and examinations announced by the Jordanian Ministry of Education. Though we provide the money to pay the salaries of the 8,000 local teachers, construct and furnish schools, print books, etc., education is another field in which the Arabs are virtually completely independent. Under the military government six universities were opened (before 1967 there were none) which run

their academic affairs without any Israeli intervention.

### **Autonomy Negotiations in 1968**

In those first months after the war, it was, strangely enough, the leadership of Nablus who were the first to approach us and ask what they could do in order to begin negotiations between Israel and King Hussein of Jordan. They offered to act as mediators. They declared their wish to be returned to Jordan, even though they had suffered heavily under Jordanian rule. As all know, Jordan dealt very harshly with them because of their frequent uprisings against King Hussein in the West Bank in the 1950s and early 1960s. Those uprisings had endangered Hussein's regime, his rule and his crown, and the Jordanians subdued them with brutal force.

The Nablus leaders' offer to mediate was not accepted, but they returned sometime later, together with leaders from Ramallah and later on from Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and suggested the establishment of a local autonomy to run their own affairs, which would eventually develop into a form of self-rule for the Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank.

Thus the idea of autonomy had been conceived and negotiations started. The Israeli government considered that it might

become a separate entity. Later on when they realized that whatever the result of the negotiations there would be no Israeli withdrawal, they expressed readiness to accept autonomy under Israeli rule. In such an autonomy they would manage all their own affairs except security and external affairs. The negotiations had their ups and downs and dragged on for many months during 1968. Moshe Sasson, at the time advisor to the Prime Minister, conducted the negotiations on behalf of the Israeli government.

Eventually a point was reached when a group of Arab leaders convened in Ramallah to answer certain questions that were put to them by the Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, on behalf of the government of Israel. Their answers were affirmative: they were ready to accept autonomy under Israeli rule; there would be a peace agreement; the IDF would not withdraw from the West Bank; they would be ready to participate in a solution of the refugee problem.

Then there was the problem of Jerusalem. They proposed that Jerusalem come under a kind of condominium of dual sovereignty -- Israeli sovereignty and Arab sovereignty -- provided that Jerusalem would remain united. Further, to avoid the sensitive problem of Jerusalem, it was

autonomy for the whole area or at first in the Ramallah-Bethlehem-Hebron areas (Judea) and later on in Bethlehem-Hebron only. By July 1968, agreement had almost been reached on the establishment of autonomy in the area of Bethlehem and Hebron and details were already discussed. Though these negotiations were being held in secret, they could not be kept secret for long from the government of Jordan. One day in July 1968 the Prime Minister of Jordan went on radio in Amman, revealed the whole story and warned and threatened all the leaders on the West Bank to stop. After the exposure the local leaders broke off negotiations for several months, and resumed them again only in 1969.

In 1969 the Hebronites initiated negotiations for establishing another form of autonomy by extending the administrative powers of the Arab mayors to become similar to those of local governors under Jordanian law. These negotiations again went on for some time and then they too stopped because both the local leadership and the government of Israel became quite hesitant regarding their continuation. Two years of Israeli rule had already passed, law and order were by and large maintained, the economy expanded, unemployment disappeared, and the population's cooperation with the military government increased. Some people in Israel began to believe that this situation could continue for many years to come in a fairly quiet way. Eventually it did, for over twenty years, until recently.

Those early negotiations were accompanied by constant doubts as to their chance to succeed. We often felt that the leaders were not serious enough and their ability to conclude and implement an agreement was very limited, in view of Jordanian and later PLO objections. These doubts deepened under the laborious stages of the negotiations. Only in July 1968 were there some grounds to the belief that the efforts were not in vain and that something might materialize. After that initiative had collapsed we became quite

sceptical about future prospects to strike a deal. However, whenever a chance to resume negotiations arose, we willingly joined. Notwithstanding the negative results, it is important to understand that at that time there was a genuine readiness on behalf of the West Bank leadership of the day to take the risk and negotiate with Israel in defiance of Jordan and the PLO. Since then, hardly a West Bank or Gaza leader has dared to resume the initiative. Later, whenever the question arose, the same leaders and others pointed to Jordan and the PLO as the only parties to such negotiations.

It is important to emphasize that the national unity government of Israel at that time was ready to negotiate with the local leadership. In the years 1968-69 all the parties that formed the government seemed to be ready to negotiate territory for peace with King Hussein. But he did not come. After the Arab summit in Khartoum, he could not come even if he wanted to.

Later in the early 1970s the local leadership used to say that they had learned their lesson from the liberal Israeli rule and when the time came to return to Jordan they would return on their own terms. When Hussein in March 1972 announced his plans for a federation with the West Bank, this was considered as recognition on his part that the pre-1967 relationship with the West Bank would have to undergo a change and that a new deal would have to be concluded with the Palestinians of the West Bank.

Some additional contacts took place in the early 1970s, but they were not of such intensity or form as the earlier negotiations. Practically speaking, from 1970 until December 1987, the Arab population of Judea, Samaria and Gaza never dared to try again to resume or respond to an initiative on their own. At first it was Jordan who quashed any sign of independent action. Then there was the upsurge of the PLO, mainly after the Yom Kippur War, when the Arab states recognized that organization's claim to be the sole

representative of the Palestinian cause and people. The result was that the more than one million Palestinian Arabs living in Judea, Samaria and Gaza could no longer dare or try to express freely their positions and wishes. Whenever a leader was suspected by the PLO of acting independently, he would be threatened and sometimes murdered.

### **Was an Opportunity Missed?**

We have asked ourselves all these years if we really missed an opportunity in those first years after the Six-Day War to reach a settlement. I recall that when I received the reports of these negotiations, I doubted that they might really achieve serious results such as the establishment of autonomy or some other agreement that would lead to a viable solution since there was always hesitation on both sides. But mainly it was the West Bank leaders who were the ones who hesitated and withdrew even when there were good prospects to succeed. In July 1968 and later on in 1969 we were quite close to an agreement but they backed out, not we. Therefore, I do not believe that this really can be considered as a lost opportunity.

Until the Yom Kippur War both sides believed that Israel would continue to rule the territories, not only the West Bank and Gaza but Sinai as well, for a very long time. After the 1973 war various Israeli governments tried to take the initiative and formulate a policy. The trouble was and still exists that we could not agree among ourselves which way we should go. Will it be a territorial compromise or a certain form of autonomy or annexation or keeping the situation as it is or something else? As long as we cannot agree among ourselves, there is no plan that may reflect the national consensus and may become a starter for serious negotiations.

### **Resettling the Refugees**

Time and again people have asked why the refugee problem was not handled separately. In the first place, this happened because since 1948 all the Arab states,

and the PLO later on, wanted the refugee problem to be kept alive and considered as a political problem, not as a refugee problem. The solution would come through the right of the refugees to return to their homes in Jaffa, Haifa and the rest of Israel. Israel had prepared some programs to solve the problem of refugees living in the camps. After the 1967 war we found in Judea and Samaria about 120,000 refugees out of a population of 800,000, as opposed to Gaza where out of 400,000, more than half of the population were refugees. The refugees, except for several thousand, had refused to leave the refugee camps since, according to UNRWA rules, whoever left the camps lost his refugee status. We did not think it proper to compel them to leave the camps against their will, though the alternatives we offered could improve their situation considerably. Facing this situation we tried to improve conditions as far as possible in the camps themselves, which we found in 1967 in a most deplorable condition. However, these improvements could not be very effective since UNRWA objected to plans which might have changed the camps' structure.

### **The Uprising**

In December 1987 the Arab population of the West Bank and Gaza made a move of their own to try to take their fate in their own hands. On December 9th they launched the disturbances that gradually developed into an uprising. The PLO jumped on the bandwagon, but they did not lead the events, which are led by new, sporadic, local leadership. They decide what to do and when to do it. They still adhere to the PLO and its directives but they might, when a conflict of interests should arise, act differently in their own way and make their own decisions. For the first time they have learned that they are in a position where they can, if they wish, form their own policies and even dictate them to the PLO. In the midst of stones and molotov cocktails a new leadership is growing. There is no reason to

expect that it will be moderate. If this leadership becomes strong enough to follow its own interests, then some schism may arise between it and the PLO. They may understand in the long run that nothing practical can be achieved through stones and molotov cocktails, and may try to find other ways, which include negotiating on their own with Israel.

One of the difficult problems facing the local leadership who may turn to negotiate with us is that they will be labelled as stooges of Israel, with tragic results. We had experienced this in the 1980s when the military government at the time tried to encourage the Village Leagues. In a situation where the population is hostile, on the one hand, and threatened by the PLO, on the other, it was a sheer dream to believe that Israel could succeed in developing an alternative leadership. True local leadership has to grow and rise naturally from the people and by the people. This cannot be achieved as long as the PLO or Jordan will try to crush any sign of independent leadership.

This experiment in independent behavior has started the uprising, but in the future it may culminate in some kind of negotiation. Then we shall see if they have matured to follow their own best interests and not be led by the interests of the other parties including the external PLO. They too know very well that there are differences between their own public and personal interests and those of Arafat's PLO, despite their repeated declarations that they are all PLO and that the PLO is their sole representative. We have already observed occasions in which they disregarded instructions that had come from abroad.

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