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## **Yale-UN Oral History Project**

Said Kamal  
Jean Krasno, Interviewer  
March 12, 1998  
Cairo, Egypt

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**Jean Krasno:** To begin, for the record, Ambassador Kamal, could you explain something about your background, where you were born and educated, and something about your diplomatic career?



**Said Kamal:** Well, thank you very much, I will arrange for you a copy in English here, but I can tell you now that I was born in Nablus City, in the West Bank, in 1938, and I graduated from the School for the Young, Najah, which is now a university, Najah College. At that time there was no university in the West Bank, either in Gaza in Palestine, only one in Jerusalem. When I finished my graduate matriculation in 1957, I took a trip to Baghdad. I was in prison after six months, in Baghdad, and then I was expelled from Baghdad to Syria where we met President Nasser. At that time there was a unity between Syria and Egypt in 1958. And it was from there I went to the University of Alexandria, because I was to study economic and political sciences, which was only in the Alexandria University, not in Cairo. So, I graduated from Alexandria University in economics and political science in 1966. Meanwhile, I was one of the establishers of the General Union of Palestine Students, and a member of the Arab national movement too. It was a big party, headed by Dr. George Habash.

JK: Very interesting. In your capacity as the PLO representative to the UN, and your work on Palestinian issues here at the Arab League, I would like to talk to you about the role of the Palestinians and the PLO in various Middle East crises. That's just the beginning. But I think it would be very helpful to have your view of some of the history, because that would be important. What was the Palestinian view of the partition plan that the UN proposed in 1947, to partition Palestine into a Palestinian state and an Arab state?

SK: Well, first of all, let me correct your information. I am not the PLO representative to the UN. I was *attending* the UN on behalf of the PLO delegation, and the PLO representative to the UN was, first of all, Essa Naklah before the PLO was established, and then Mr. Saadat Hassan who was there, and then Mr. Zuhdi Trzi, and then now we've got Naser Al.Akaddoi, who is the observer-representative to the UN. But I was attending the General Assembly since 1974 as... Let me frankly speak to that: my role with Dr. Nabil Shaath. I was representing the political department headed by Farouk Kaddoumi and Dr. Nabil Shaath, who was representing the Chairman Arafat, from the PLO, both of us, who went with our two wives to New York. It was the first time in my life, because I am black-listed, but I got this visa on behalf of the Egyptian list, headed by the late Ismail Fahmy, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and also Nabil Shaath, both of us, we went on the Egyptian list as advisors, to prepare for the invitation to Chairman Arafat to address the UN (GA) in 1974 and plus aid the resolution that had been issued for that. And then we continued, or at least myself, I continued at the political department, which concerned the activities of the PLO outside of the area. So,

Nabil Shaath representing PLO to the UN and then I continued with Mr. Kaddomi and others, of course, to the United Nations. So I am not a representative of the PLO at the UN, but I was representing the PLO with the delegation.

JK:... as a member of the delegation, yes. OK. That's a good clarification.

SK: If you go back to the history of the UN, you will find my name as a member of the delegation. But I started as an advisor to the Egyptian delegation, in 1974.

JK: In 1974...



SK: But this is a story that starts here where I start to go. That was a proposal given by Ismail Fahmy, who was authorized by President Saadat, who was behind the idea that the PLO should go there, because we have now full membership in the Arab League, full membership in the Islamic Conference, observer, at that time, in the Non-Aligned Movement, observer in the African unity movement--he said, "So, that leaves only the UN. So we should go there." Of course, there was a political need for us which accepted the PLO from the top to bottom. Let me say that there were some rightist, leftist, extremist wings in the PLO that were against it, but later on, they participated when they saw it was interest and fruitful for the Palestinians under Chairman Yasser Arafat..

Now, according to the previous question of yours, I think about the partition plan.

JK: Yes, the view of the Palestinians of the partition plan.

SK: Yes, let me tell you. Indeed, we were against it. From the start, we were being asked why we were against the partition plan. Because if a people, and the leaders of the people, and the Arab nation, accept that an occupier would have part of your country, your homeland, which it has had for centuries, could you accept that, for national reasons? Not for *human* reasons, –say now we had an Israel that was Palestine, totally. We were against the partition of Palestine. But we were in good relations and living with the Jews in Palestine. Exactly as what they had been treated everywhere in the Arab world. So, that's the basis of why we were against it, a political reason. And you know, the Arab countries, there were seven Arab countries, as a member in the Arab League too—now we are twenty-two—but at that time the seven Arab countries, before the Palestinians rejected it, also they rejected it. And they started to promise that they would pool their efforts to solve this problem on the basis of the right of the Palestinians to return to their country and not to be occupied by the Zionist movement, the acting Israeli strategy.

Let me tell you, in 1946, if my memory has it right, there was a committee, Anglo-Saxonite committee, it was not on the behalf of the UN but the American and English to come to the area to understand the realities.

JK: Fact-finding, yes. And that was in 1946.

SK: 1946, yes. But before, when they started to feel something unstable there and wanted to remove the British mandate. And the Zionist movement started to call for

Palestine as a national homeland, and they were accepting at that time [of a plan] which they now reject for the Palestinians. This committee came and was met by all the Arab leaders except those who were not independent but they were struggling for independence from the Maghreb Countries. Bourgiba, who was in exile, among leaders from Libya. And they met this committee in Cairo. I've got this record from an old record in the Arab League Library confirmed by President Bourgiba later on when he became President of Tunisia. It's fantastic.

They convinced this committee of Anglo-Saxons and Americans, that to solve the Jewish problem, not to divide Palestine, or to divide any Arab country, but the Jews should go back to their homeland from where they came, and they started to be increased in Palestine for political reasons, to establish this national homeland for the Jews. And this is why Bourgiba said, after twenty years at that time, that, "You should accept the partition plan." Not that the Palestinians refused, or the Arabs at that time, but it was a human solution for this committee to avoid troubles that happened from time to time. And that's why Bourgiba as a President of Tunisia, while he called for the Palestinian people to accept the partition plan, in 1948, and we were against him, all the Arabs in the eastern part, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, of course, and the Gulf, protesting and shouting against him. But indeed, let me speak frankly, when we go to these documents from 1946, and he convinced me, "Look how we three, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco, and in exile, representing our people, are afraid that Tunisia could be divided," he said, "We were against that. But now Israel is a fact. How could you go back again to Palestine, old Palestine? So, you should accept the international legality of Israel." That was his advice.

Now, going back, when we started to prepare ourselves for going to the United Nations, this question was asked widely among the PLO leadership: “When Chairman Arafat goes to address the General Assembly, what should he say?” There are division inside the PLO and the Central Council. The Central Council at that time had around 45 members, from all the organizations of the PLO, plus independent personalities. We met in Damascus. And after my going with Nabil Shaath to the United Nations, and we succeeded in getting the resolution welcoming Chairman Arafat to address the General Assembly, so we had come to say our view which was that Chairman Arafat should address the General Assembly by presidency of Abdelaziz Bouteflika that was the foreign minister at that time, clearly on the Palestinian history for political and human reasons, to live together under the partition plan, which is 181 and 194 resolution.

Indeed, there was a wide discussion from 6:00 in the evening time, in Damascus, up until 1:00 a.m., differences in which Chairman Arafat very cleverly said, “We should use that resolution and give the international community a signal that we are ready to accept it, because we don’t trust the Israelis that if we said yes to the partition plan, that they would accept it.” And that’s what’s happened now. Even 242, they are playing on that. So at that time, Chairman Arafat’s idea was you can use it in my speech, for example. It was the solution among all the members of the Central Council. He used it, but the Jews, the Israelis, the Americans, the Europeans, when they listened to him, they said, “that it’s a clever tactic by the Palestinians, that they are mentioning the partition plan as the legal base—that *you* decided, not us, not ourselves, not the Palestinians.” In a way, he let there be a gap between the acceptance of the international legalities and our

Rejection. But diplomats understood that we were ready, without any precommitment. That's the story of Palestine.

Some of the important views later on said that we would like to create a government in exile, we should base it on the partition plan. But because it is not accepted by the Palestinians, let's say by a majority of the Palestinians, inside the PLO, so this was effectively impossible. You remember when Sadat said, "We are ready to welcome a government in exile for the Palestinians," he didn't say, "You should accept it on the partition plan," or "on 242." He said, "created." But, you know, I believed at that time that if it had been created, no more than forty states would recognize it, because twenty or twenty-two Arab states, and the twenty from the Islamic countries, which is nothing. So, you should work on a deal with others to recognize the partition plan and the PLO as a government in exile. It was pretty difficult at that time. For Palestinian reasons, and the circumstances in the Arab world.

JK: I wanted to ask you a little bit more about the history. You seem to know a lot about the history.

SK: I do.

JK: ... and I think it is very useful because people who haven't been involved in it and don't understand it very well. So, at the time that the British left Palestine, and they had announced that they were going to give up the mandate and leave—so in 1948 they left—what was the circumstance when they left? War broke out, and what were the

arrangements, or what kinds of conversations went on between the Palestinians who lived there and the Arab states that surrounded Palestine?

SK: First of all, after the occupation, 1948 or 1949, part of the refugees went to the West Bank, which was kept in the Arab's hands, you remember the Jordanian army and Iraqi army, and they left a unit of the Egyptian army in the West Bank, and the Egyptian army went to Gaza. So, a part of the Palestinians from this part had been occupied, let's say expelled, been pushed, by massacres, here and there, to the West Bank and Gaza, and Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, very shortly came Egypt, from Jaffa, from Haifa. About 35,000 came to Egypt. But the big amount was in Jordan, West Bank and East, and then Syria and Lebanon. Of course, then, later on they expanded in the Arab countries. After that happened, as a *de facto* state, there was a government established, headed by Hajami Hussein, and they were leading the jihad of the Palestinians against the British mandate and vis-à-vis the Zionist movement, and they started to talk to the Arab surrounding countries. They were promising the Palestinians that they would do their best, or their efforts, through the international community, even through the war, to let the Palestinians return to their homelands. For the Palestinians, I don't understand if that was a mistake or not, to accept this promise. I don't want to make a judgment, because maybe now I am in the court of the events, and my son, after twenty years, he said, "My father was wrong when he accepted Israel in 1948, and Oslo." So, I don't want to judge from this point whether they were right or wrong, our leaders, but you know that when you feel that everybody puts the responsibility on your shoulders. So, everybody said, "That was their mistake."

JK: But they have to make the decision within the circumstances of the time.

SK: Ah, but don't forget that at that time the influence of Britain and France still existed, and Britain and France were behind the Israelis in calling it the 'exile state,' and so they had their influence in these Arab countries. And so maybe they used their tactics to convince Arab leaders to convince the Palestinians to accept. But the Arabs, as I told you from the beginning, they rejected even the partition plan, and that they gave promises to the Palestinians that would give the political efforts a chance and otherwise they would go back to war. Since that time, we faced the same problem: that the Palestinian West Bank is empty, no administrative and military forces. So, the Palestinians had a meeting in Jerico City, which is a part the West Bank. And with some of the refugees from the families of the area, and they were in a very big dilemma: no state, no government, there is a Jordanian army, an Egyptian army, an Iraqi army, who were kept after the cease-fire. By a majority of those that were in attendance at this meeting, they favored calling King Abdulla of Jordan, for uniting the West Bank with the East Bank and uniting the Kingdom of Jordan. In the Arab League, they considered, "We accept your domination, your control of the West Bank, provisionally." Vis-à-vis Egypt, also, to Gaza, to be accepted provisionally. And Egypt was at that time a kingdom, under King Farouk, before the revolution. They insisted that this is a provisional administration under the Egyptian kingdom and that it was something temporary.

JK: OK—so the Palestinians agreed to that because...

SK: No, no. Let me talk frankly, the Palestinians in the West Bank, feeling they had lost everything needed somebody to take control. They asked for a meeting with East Jordan, under the united Arab world, but the Palestinian government in exile, Islamic Jihad, which is under Aj-rumein Hussein, in the Arab League at that time; they had insisted that it be a provisional responsibility, temporary responsibility, and all the Arabs, including Jordan finally, accepted that resolution. In the beginning the Jordanians didn't understand: Why did those people accept, while calling for unity? But the government in exile insisted, at that time when it was a hot issue in the Arab world.

Over time it became a cold issue. There were resolutions in the Arab world, in the Arab League, in the United Nations—nothing. The Palestinians lived under these promises and got nothing. I am telling you the story, the history. I am not here as a judge according to the Arab states.

JK: Now, when Ralph Bunche negotiated the armistice agreements, and did it separately with each of the Arab countries, with Egypt separately, with Jordan separately, with Syria. Were there any provisions for the Palestinians in those armistice agreements?

SK: Only the refugee problem, I think. There was something in there for solving the refugee problem. They considered the problem a refugee problem, which it is not, of course, really. But this is what was the intention of the world, that after time it would be

seen as a refugee problem, so solve it. Israel is Israel, it's done. Now here, the revolution among the Palestinians was that they started to change their minds. They were suffering!

JK: How was the United Nations regarded by the Palestinians at the time? What did the Palestinians think of the UN?

SK: The problem is, the new generation started to feel, "Where's the mistake?" We don't ask, "Who's behind this mistake, Palestinian or Arab?" But the UN: we have our documents, the resolutions of the honoroi and the refugees debated at the UN, calling for a Palestinian state here. Except Essa Naklah, who was representing the Haj Aamen Hussein. He's alive, by the way, you should go to see him in New York.

JK: Oh, he's in New York.

SK: Yes, he's 85 years old, but a very important man. You know, of course he is going to defend his generation. That is normal, as I am doing now. But he has a lot of information. They were still against the partition plan: "No way to live in this territory called Palestine, old Palestine, the Palestinian people. Never live with those people, the Jews." And the contrary, the Palestinians, when they've been educated, start to understand the international language, the political language. Let's say they have my experience, myself. When I started to be in the Arab national movement, headed by Dr. George Habash, we had one goal for us—revenge! The communists, they were more practical, the leftists. They were able to see it from a difference view, that we should find

a solution, a durable solution, an equal solution for the Jews and the Arabs. When we had grown up, our generation, we started to understand this fact, and immediately there was a very wide dialogue with the USNSA, the organization of American Students, and the NEF in France, and we are the hosts, the Union of Palestinian Students. Through the COSEC in Leiden, the Netherlands, those international western students activities. And with the IUS, the International United Students in Prague. They were the communists. We started but it was difficult for us to understand, “You should solve this problem.” It’s not enough to say “Israel into the sea. We would like to throw the Israeli people into the sea.” So, we think a lot, and reached a conclusion, as students and as a new generation, calling for a democratic state, one democratic state that everybody can live in, a Palestinian democratic state. That Jews, the Muslims, the Christians, they are on an equal footing in this state. And that was accepted by the USNSA. A new generation, affected by these organizations. And these organizations were affected by the establishment in this country. Either in Prague or in Washington. And by ‘establishment’ you know what I mean? So, according to us, there is no establishment in our consciousness and our minds. That’s why you find that some Arab countries were against us. I will tell you, King Faisal, he said, “You are a traitor.”

So that’s why I said Fatah later on because a part of the leadership of Fatah, a part of my generation, our generation, started to call for a Palestinian democratic state, and that had convinced King Faisal of that. For three years, 1965-1968, the students held this position. Fatah was established after the 1967 war, and in 1968 Fatah started to control the PLO after Shukari and they had a good and wide meeting at the palace, in Saudi Arabia, with King Faisal with his family. He said, “Well, this is your alternative; I am

pro. This is your alternative.” He used a very important wise saying. I don’t know how you can translate it... “If you decide that, I will support you. You are a Palestinian, you choose so I support it.” But not just “OK, you explain to me.” So, after 1965 to 1968, three years, Saudi Arabia changed its view. And let me tell you frankly, Saudi Arabia is the latest Arab country to recognize Israel. And that’s on the record, I can tell you because I am sure of that.

JK: OK. That’s a fact.

SK: For different reasons. Not because they are against peace, no. But, there are other reasons, strongly they are for peace. So, this is the idea of giving support to the democratic state.

JK: I’ve been interviewing various people, including Ambassador Ashraf Ghorbal, about the 1956 war, and I just wanted to ask you what was the effect on the Palestinians? Was there an effect on the Palestinians of the 1956 war?

SK: Of course. They were pro-Egypt. Egypt had wide support in the Arab world. Whatever Ambassador Ghorbal told you about the war itself, because he would know better than me. But to us, to the Palestinians, to the Arabs in this area, in the Gulf, everywhere in the Arab world, were pro-Egypt, pro-Nasser, widely. Why? Because you remember King Hussein? He called Nasser, “Would you like me to open fire?” He said, “No. I don’t want you to open fire because I’m afraid that the West Bank will be

swallowed by the Israelis.” He was most clever in 1956, but he didn't repeat it wrongly in 1967. But King Hussein offered because he felt the public opinion.

JK: OK. So let me just go over that again so I get it right. King Hussein asked Nasser, should he open fire on the Jordanian side? And Nasser said, “Don’t do that.”

SK: “Don’t do that because I don’t want the West Bank to be swallowed again. Enough, what the Israelis have, I don’t want them to occupy it more.” That was clever, and this is the message at the mosque, the big mosque on one Friday day. He went to address the Egyptians and the Arabs from Al-Azhar mosque here. If you go back to this, it is registered. Now, the public opinion considered, like me—I was still young in 1956, I was 20, 21—to find a leader who challenges Britain, France, and Israel, to us it was unbelievable, and everybody stood behind him. After that, we started to listen, to feel that it was political game, which had been played well by Nasser with America's help. I don’t know. I don’t know, but I hear it. There’s a difference. You can check it anyway. But Eisenhower stood behind him, too.

JK: That’s right. Oh, completely. No, that’s true, that’s very true. In the UN, and everything. OK, now I’m kind of moving chronologically forward. In 1964, the PLO was established. Now, what was the role of President Nasser in the establishment of the PLO?

SK: I will tell you. In 1963, the Palestinians in their camps, in their exile in the Gulf, in Lebanon and Syria, and secretly in Jordan, I mean in the West Bank and Jordan, in Gaza, started to say, “No way are we going to listen to the Arabs, even to the international community. We should fight.”

This monopolization, we would love to know who is behind it at this point. Even President Nasser was kept in secrecy. That’s the reason, when a lot of Palestinian intellectuals went to Nasser and convinced him that we should create an organization to take the place of Helmi Basha, which was representing these two governments that had been from 1951 to 1963 or 1964. So, Nasser sent his Special Envoy Dr. Hassan Sabri Al-Kholi. He went to Lebanon, to Syria, to Jordan, and to the Gulf countries, and started to study the case: what’s going on behind the Palestinians? Why had they started to feel that they were in despair—why were they in despair? Why were they saying, “We should fight on our own? We should not wait for permission from the Arabs, surrounding Israel. We should break the security barriers, army barriers, et cetera.” And that gave, in 1964, to Egypt, approved by Jordan and Syria and Lebanon and Iraq, permission to create the organization which is the PLO. Let me tell you, they chose the right person to lead the PLO, and he was an international man, important, loyal Ahmed Shukiri. Ahmed Shukiri, he put the system of this organization together, and he put together the PLO--Palestinian Liberation Organization. And if you read about all the process inside this organization, it’s an acting government, in a way. And that’s why he, acting here, replaced, as the representative of the Palestinian people in the Arab League.

But at that time, Fatah has started their military operations, headed by Abu Jihad. You know, they were calling for an armed struggle, indeed from two places: Kuwait and

Abu Jihad in Saudi Arabia. He was in Saudi Arabia as a teacher; Farouk Kaddoumi was in Kuwait and chairman Yasser Arafat, that's what I'm telling you. They started to call for an armed struggle, and the first operation (Al Asafa) had been, I don't remember if it was from Gaza or the West Bank in 1966, that went well. The village of Samoua had been occupied by the Israeli army.

JK: I wanted to move up to the 1967 war, because at that time President Nasser sent a message to the UN to remove the UN peacekeeping force, the UNEF, that had been there since the 1956 war. So, he asked that the UN remove them. What was the PLO's view of that decision to withdraw the UN troops.

SK: The PLO? Look, the PLO's view was different than that of Fatah, at that time.

JK: Oh, all right, then tell me the two different views then.

SK: The PLO was pro-Egypt, because the PLO could not live with that, even if Syria could do it, it could not go against Syria or Jordan. But practically, Shukari was informed by the Egyptian presidential office about everything. So, you remember he was in Jerusalem, with King Hussein I think, so he flew from Jerusalem to Amman with him, and he came from Amman to Cairo. So, the PLO was completely pro-Nasser, because this was his plan. Fatah, of course, was pro-Nasser too, but for a different reason. The reason was that, Fatah was against UNEF.

JK: Against them being there?

SK: ...being there. Their presence would never let the Palestinian question move forward actively. That would keep it silent. For that reason, they supported us. And they prayed that he would succeed. So, what happened?

JK: So, in your view, or in the Palestinian view, did they feel that Nasser was planning to attack, and that Nasser and Syria were planning to attack Israel in 1967?

SK: I am not a military person, but I can say my reservations. There is of course a joint Arab command, one command, which was established in the Arab League, and Egypt is the head, as it is the head of this defense department, which is now frozen. But it was very active. I was in attendance at that meeting twice a year where the foreign ministers or the ministers of defense would gather. So, Egypt was the head. Then, the operational members were Syria and Jordan, only. Lebanon considered as non-aligned country, neutral, for local reasons. So, when Nasser started doing that, if you remember they expelled the UNEF.

[End of side 1]

[Beginning of side 2]

SK: ... the Syrians were very happy, because they also would like to fight and put an end to the crisis in the area.

JK: Because then, shortly after Nasser called for the removal of the troops, he closed the Strait of Aqaba.

SK: And the Syrians—you asked about Syria. The Syrians stood beside Nasser with the Golan Heights occupied, plus Gaza and Sinai, and Nasser was starting at a very, very dim situation.

JK: So, the result was that Israel then gained more territory. And how did that affect the Palestinians?



SK: First of all, armed struggle, I am telling you. Politically, Shukari resigned and then Arafat came to lead the ship of Fatah, plus other organizations established in the Arab countries, mainly Syria and Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, etc.—and they united themselves as a front inside PLO, accepting Arafat to be the president, as he is the spokesman of Fatah.

JK: So, the 1967 war had a direct effect on the whole change of that structure?

SK: Yes. And that's why the ninth round of the Palestinian National Council (PNC), was held here in Cairo. The PNC elected Arafat to be the chairman of the Executive Committee at that time. So, this is one other thing that the Palestinians started to live with this ideal: the armed struggle for the liberation of Palestine. Until 1968, from when

we started, everybody asked us, “What do you want?” Everyone answered, “We would like to have Israel out, thrown to the sea,” as I explained. So in 1968, we started to say officially, that the PLO was for a Palestinian democratic state. This is our solution, which had been rejected by the Americans at that time, meanwhile they were playing with us for this project and their student affairs. Officially, I am telling you, because I lived with that.

I should make a phone call to New York to give you the names, because I have a friend of mine there. But Ron Story was a legal officer in the White House with President Johnson; if you look for him, ask him about that, because he was a lawyer in the Department of Legal Affairs. He was in the USNSA, the student affairs, with me, but it was in Palestinian affairs, he was an American officer. In the COSEC, when the COSEC was in Leiden in Holland, was the Western student organization which was against the Eastern student organization OIS –the Cold War, you know... anyway. So, when we started working for the Palestinian democratic state, the West and the Israelis tried to say no. And we lived with that, even when we went, in 1974 as we explained, to the General Assembly, and we then said yes to the partition plan—we put it in a different way. So, we kept our target, our goal: a democratic Palestinian state.

JK: OK--now, I wanted to ask you about the conflict in 1970 in Jordan. Were you there?

SK: No, I was here.

JK: You were here, in Egypt.

SK: I was there before the events started.

JK: Could you explain to me the circumstances of that 1970 civil war, and the effect that that had on the PLO?

SK: With both, we lost time. And now the relations are very good. They started to be good in 1977. If I go back that far, I can give you the reason: the Jordanians, I think, realized that they were losing time for nothing. The PLO was kicked out for security reasons and for political reasons. We hoped that at that time the Jordanians could liberate by political means the West Bank and get the PLO out. Even the PLO lost time, why should they fight the Jordanians? So, this is my view, and I will insist on my view. Maybe others from the Palestinians might not like it, but this is the truth. It was a lost effort.

The extremist Palestinian organizations gave the Jordanians the right to attack, for a civil war, because they were calling to change the system, the Kingdom, you know. But of course, the central organization, Fatah, was completely against it and the Jordanian government knew that well. Even though they knew that, these extremists had a louder voice than the organizational establishment of the PLO, so the Jordanians went for a war against organizations. And the armed struggle of the PLO lost time.

JK: Let me ask you a question that I've never completely understood. Because when I was going to school in New York, I had a Palestinian friend and he told me that he was not able to get citizenship anywhere. And that it was just a very big problem for him because it meant he really didn't have a home to protect him, because he had no citizenship. Can you explain to me the extent to which that was true for Palestinians, that they didn't have citizenship in Jordan or Egypt or whatever, and why?

SK: You will still find that now. You'll find it and now I have a problem with two girls studying in Beirut University, connected with Jordanian University. They have Jordanian passports. Their mother is in jail because she came in the country here illegally, and they put her in jail, and stamped it on her passport, and the Jordanians came to straighten it out. I think that I solved this problem with them, with the Jordanians. They said that the Jordanians give a two-year passport for the Palestinians, you know, two years, not five, the five-year is for the Jordanian citizens. They are from a village in Gaza. Everyday I have three phone calls to the embassy and to the Arab League, and they are escaping here from every place, here in Cairo. They could not live in one house because when they catch her they put her into prison.

JK: Because they are not citizens?

SK: Right. They are not Egyptian citizens, they are Palestinian. But there is not even an identity card. They are Palestinian; we know their mother, we know their father, the father is an American, and he wrote to the Jordanian side saying, "Please give my

daughters a passport,” and they are not approved even. I will solve it, finally, but look how they are suffering! So, this gentleman, whom you know, did he have a birth certificate, saying that he is Palestinian? Or not?

JK: That I don’t know.

SK: Who did—did the Americans give him something?

JK: Not yet, no—he is not a citizen anywhere. He has a visa.

SK: A visa—on what? On the passport?

JK: On what passport, I don’t know. But his problem is that he is always fighting the paperwork because he doesn’t have citizenship in any particular country.

SK: I will tell you the story of Palestine: now, after 1949, the Arab League organized for the Palestinian refugees in the Arab host countries, a document, an Egyptian document for refugees, Palestinian refugees; a Syrian document for Palestinian refugees; Lebanese document for refugees; Iraqi; except Jordan, at that time they said no. But they organized and started a provision in the constitution for the refugee.

JK: OK, but it’s always considered a ‘refugee?’

SK: In Jordan, not really. A refugee is someone in the refugee camp, but they have the passport for five years. As they are Eastern Jordanian, the Bedouin, at that time. I am telling you of that time, which was good. But the Palestinian refugees in these countries, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, got this document, plus a resolution or a decision in the Arab League which said that no one in an Arab government should give a nationality to any Palestinian and slowness to grant the nationality. This was to keep the entity of the Palestinians together.

JK: Well, that's what I was getting at. That's what I wanted to understand.

SK: But not to damage his entity, or to damage his life! This was a protocol which allowed them to organize their life in the government, in the private sector, the university, the health system, everything, but not as a citizen because he is a Palestinian, a refugee. Some of them, who moved to Kuwait, to the Gulf, to Libya, to Saudi Arabia. But this government, they did not renew their passports.

So, they escaped, some of them. They escaped to America. As your friend said, in the last year of his document, he got a visa for studying. Let me tell you, the Palestinians are suffering a lot for their identity to be recognized by others. Now, it's not recognized by the host country, because everyone believes that the PA in Gaza and West Bank has the right to that. Israel is saying, "No, we don't want anyone to get citizenship." To go to my city, Nablus, I am pro-peace and I am very well known. It takes two years to get me a license to go there, because I give my application through the PA. And I am in this position [at the Arab League]. Imagine those two girls who could

not go to Gaza, even though they are from Gaza, their father from America. They can not go to America until their father gets them a green card. They cannot go to Jordan. They do not live in Egypt, even, and yet the police are looking for them. So, this gentleman, who lived in America, he lived there legally, because he was a student.

JK: He had a student visa.

SK: But he didn't have his passport—he was looking for a passport or for a nationality. So, the only way, if he is from Gaza, he should go the Egyptians now. If he is from the West Bank, he should go to the Jordanian embassy. Tell him that I said so. If he has troubles, let him send me his problem and I will try to solve it.

JK: It plays into the whole frustration of the Palestinian people, because there is not a real sense of your country or your home, where you can live and vote and have all of your rights. It adds to that. I just wanted to ask that.

After the war in 1970, then the PLO leadership left Jordan for Beirut, to Lebanon.

SK: In Lebanon, by the help of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iraq, and the Lebanese national movement. Let me tell you, maybe indeed all the Lebanese at that time, in the beginning, they hosted them. But after that, the divisions started between, let's say, reactionaries and leftists, between unfortunately some of the religious groups, the Christians against the Muslims. For one reason, because in Lebanon, they didn't want to

be affected by the increasing of the number of Muslims, you know this is the composition.

[Interpreter: it has to do with the internal composition of the Lebanese society, between Muslims, the Shia, the Sunnis, the Maronnite... and they don't like to upset it.]

JK: There was a balance.

SK: So, this had been invested well from those who would like to push for another civil war, which has happened. But this time, half of the Lebanese were with us and half were against us, which I don't think was for the benefit of the Palestinians, because we would like all the Lebanese to stand behind us.

JK: So, the years in Beirut, for the PLO, those were difficult years for the PLO in Beirut?

SK: No, some people say it was the most important part of their lives.

JK: In what way was it most important, then?

SK: Israel would not sleep, worried about being attacked. And with the Lebanese watching, and fighting, some of them, beside the Palestinians. A lot of battles happened over there, and many murders and massacres. So, indeed this is a part of the history. Now, the Lebanese, I think, maybe I am wrong, they said, "Where are the Palestinians?"

But let me tell you, that the war still exists. There is now the Shias, the Hezbollah, and the divisions among themselves. I hope that Lebanon will be united again, 100 percent, because this is for the good. But I think now, Lebanon is a part of the battle, and they moved from neutralization to confrontation. When they started in the Arab League they were voting always “No, we don’t have the right to vote on such military questions.” But they were listening well. The Minister of Defense came to the meetings, listened, but when it came to the vote, they would not vote.

JK: So, we were talking about Beirut, and the PLO in Lebanon, in that period of time. And I need to ask you some more questions in terms of the relations with the United Nations, but what was the PLO view of the United Nations operation in Lebanon, UNIFIL?

SK: We had a good relation with them, according to my information. Chairman Arafat was very clever in how to deal with them, and they started to give a good security to the PLO and the Lebanese. And the Israelis started to say that we bribed them, and they started to attack UNIFIL. We were having good relations with the UN.

JK: OK--so Arafat and the PLO had a good relationship with UNIFIL.

SK: You should believe that. That’s the cleverness of the leadership of Fatah and the PLO. They would like to have the UN recognize them, because to recognize the PLO, the Palestinians, slowly, slowly, step by step, it would become a fact that the PLO was

representing the Palestinian people and their aspirations. So, that is what we wanted on this front, Lebanon.

JK: OK. So, you were mentioning that these were important years in Beirut. In what way?

SK: The Palestinians had big differences with Egypt when Sadat made his visit to Israel. I don't want to say 'before that', because before that the goal was to control any divisions, Sinai II, Sinai I. But after that, the Palestinians were being put in a position with two options, which were the interests of geography [fighting over land] and fighting, or political, to create a political strategy, towards Egypt because Egypt is a political world. So, it was too difficult for the Palestinians to have their political options, which they would like without a guarantee that they were going to align with Sadat. So, I lived with this as a constant fact, because I kept myself here.

JK: ... because you stayed in Cairo.

SK: Yes. But, I was struggling, and it will appear in my book, one day, in documents. If Chairman Arafat with his troops of 30,000 people came from Lebanon to live in Egypt, and to struggle with the Egypt politically, what would we guarantee? This is my first question and second question and last question. They said, "No answer." We will fight with you. So, we will fight with the Jews, with the Israelis, we know them; so they preferred Lebanon. It means: fight; geography. The second option was too difficult for

the Palestinians. The one obligation was to fight the Israelis until they recognize you as their enemy, or they can recognize you through political means. If the Americans had given this flag to Sadat, that the U.S. would recognize the PLO, "We recognize the right of self-determination for the Palestinians." Everybody would have come here; we said, "We are pro-Sadat, we are pro-peace, we are pro-his trip to Jerusalem."

JK: You were talking about working politically, and in 1988, the PLO did then finally meet with the U.S., and at that point, I understand that the PLO did decide to accept Resolutions 242 and 338. Why was there a change? What objections did the PLO have before to those two provisions, and why did they change?

SK: I will be frank with you. In 1976, Mr. Cyrus Vance was dealing with Egypt towards the PLO in accepting a formula saying to the Palestinians, "I have this formula in mind." From Cyrus Vance, when he was in Alexandria, there was the PLO delegation headed by Kaddumi and about seven leaders with him, and I was present with him at that time. This document said that the PLO accepted 242 and 338, in the framework that the Palestinians had the right to establish their homeland. So, it means they give recognition, or a definition, to the 242 that the political end is the homeland. Well, at that time, we said, "OK. But we needed to say, "national homeland." They said no.

JK: OK—explain to me the difference then, in "homeland" and "national homeland."

SK: The Americans said, “‘Homeland,’ it means under the full control of Israel,” or {Arabs}, I don’t know. So,...

JK: So, ‘a place to go.’

SK: Not a national... ‘national homeland,’ it means independent state, you know that. When you leave here you say, “I am flying today to my home.” But that’s the United States. You are not going to say, “I am flying to the United States.” You are going home. So, they don’t like a *homeland*. There is a big difference between "national homeland," which had been rejected by Cyrus Vance, in front of us. We were in a place on the beach in Alexandria, it was Ismail Fahmi with his two aides, Osama Al-Baz and Amr Moussa, now he is the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Prime Minister Mamdoh Salm was sitting close to Mr. Cyrus Vance, around 100 meters or less, and I was sitting with the PLO delegation headed by Farouk Kaddoumi. We were seven. And we had a verbal exchange dealing with national or non-national. He said “No ‘national.’” So, Cyrus Vance, a lawyer, understood what was the meaning of that. Of course, the Egyptian, listening to Mr. Vance, but had his heart with us. They tried to say, “Let’s have it step by step.” And Mr. Cyrus Vance now, in 1976, “we are talking about ‘homeland,’ maybe in 1980 we will see about the ‘national homeland.’” So, it was rejected. I am just describing what happened.

My view at that time was to accept this formula. I am not a leader at that time—still now, I am not a leader. At that time the leaders of the PLO, all of them, they said no. Then, what are the events between 1978 and 1982? First, Egypt lost its political weight

in Arab world. Second, the Iraqi-Iranian war. Third, troubles among the Lebanese with us, including the Sabra and Shatila. Today, this country has taken the side of the Palestinians—tomorrow, it is against us. We lived with that, constantly. Even all of these massacres and the political pressure here and there, and a big battle against us—why Mr. Philip Habibi is coming to deal with this battle. And eleven units from the Israeli army, behind every soldier was a Rabbi, telling him why he is going to Lebanon to kill those who are terrorists, because no one in the Israeli army believed in going to Lebanon to fight in Lebanon. They were told that, “You treated us, you educated us that Israel is our homeland, not Lebanon, so why are we going to fight in Lebanon and around Beirut?” And the Rabbis behind them, organized by Sharon, told them, put behind their ear the idea that, “You are going just for a trip to remove those terrorists who are against Israel and then you’ll go back to your homeland.” They said, “two weeks.” But it happened to take three months. I will tell you, three months—it could be six months, but the problem we live with is the pressure from the Lebanese people, all the Lebanese, not even one part of the Lebanese, everyone. So, please. They were bombing Beirut like hell. And Mr. Philip Habibi, sitting on the mountain—he is Lebanese originally, you know, American and Lebanese. He is drinking alcohol, waiting for the Palestinians to come on their knees to him to say, “please!”

But at the end he started to believe that he should negotiate, so he used the Lebanese government, he requested the Saudis, he requested the Egyptians, even through me. The Egyptians, they were boycotting the PLO, but they started to feel the public opinion here in Egypt. They sent a big popular delegation to support Arafat. That was the beginning; it is exactly the beginning of Iraq. When they started to go to Iraq, the

Egyptians and tell stories between states. Well, I think with these factors taken together, the PLO moved to Tunis, and even then the Israelis were bombing Hamam a-shat, where Arafat was living. Do you remember the scandal, coming from Italy to kill Arafat and the Palestinians over there? Abu Jihad, and then *intifada*, here we started to think that the international public opinion started to stand with us and we don't want to lose it at this point.

JK: OK. I wanted to ask you that. So, the timing of the *intifada* was to not lose that momentum.

SK: Yes. That was one major reason, a major factor. But all of these factors together, with this, pushed us to think reasonably, but not under pressure.

These are all the factors. In 1976, I told you, there were two different media battles between PLO and Egypt, Sinai I and Sinai II, but we overcame them. In the first case [after Camp David] I told you that we lost Egypt as a member state. Second, the Iranian-Iraqi war, third, the differences in Lebanon. And then in 1982, with this big three month action. And you know, the committee, headed by the late head of the Jewish organization, my friend in New York, it was Steve Shalom, Stephen Cohen, both are very well known... Jewish American organization presided by Howard Squadron. He was the head of the investigation committee of the White House to investigate this big liar, Sharon. He gave them their two weeks to finish the PLO out, and they start to see that on the ground nothing was finished. Howard Squadron, to mention this name, for history, is a big lawyer, a Jew, and he is the head of the World Jewish Organization in New York,

and he had been nominated by President Reagan to investigate Mr. Menachim Begin and Sharon and those people. Menachim Begin started to say, "The big liar, Mr. Sharon, he gave me this impression." And he became crazy, Menachim Begin. But after three months, they lost a lot—you know the value of the person to the Israelis, you know. So, these factors, together, despair and hope, courage and fear for the future, combined together to make us practical and realistic when dealing with the international community, and we invested well in Madrid.

I don't consider the position of the PLO towards the Gulf war to be a part of this. All of these factors, before the Gulf war, ...

JK: ... really came together before the Gulf war...

SK: Before. We were on the edge of recognizing 242 and 338, and the same formula had been addressed by Chairman Arafat in Geneva, to the United Nations, which was a part of this statement, an agreement with Mr. George Shultz, through the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the JDL [Jewish Defense League], the Jewish American Committee, Rita Hauser. It had been adopted by the State Department, Mr. Shultz and Mr. Richard Murphy. So, this is the reason. I put you between 1976 and 1988. So, everybody who reads that will understand that it is not enough to say no. We can't say no, but we are going to lose. We came to a point, not to say no. Because we don't want to repeat what happened when they said, "no partition plan."

JK: One question, though, is that I understand the various different pieces, except the Iran-Iraq war--what effect did that have?

SK: The Iraqis being...

[Interpreter: Iraq got tired of the war with Iran, so many of its resources and its soldiers... and Iraq and Syria were the decisive factors, if there was going to be a military intervention, a military war. Everybody was counting on Iraq and Syria.]

SK: So we lost weight of Iraq.

JK: So you lost weight of Iraq.



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SK: After we lost weight of Egypt, what is left? Now Syria could not go alone in the war, it could defend but it could not also attack without Egypt or Iraq, or both. Iraq was behind Egypt and Syria, always, in all the wars and we should not forget the support of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Algeria and other Arab states.

JK: So the strategy of the *intifada*, just to go back a bit to December 1987, when the *intifada* began,

SK: ... the end of December, right.

JK: ... so the strategy was to build on the momentum that had been created at the time, because you then needed to take the momentum yourself.

SK: First of all, I would like to tell you this story, and this is the end. When I met, for the first time in my life, in 1964, Abu Jihad in Algiers, I was at that time in a movement, a party that was against Fatah, but myself inside this party, I was completely against my leadership's position. So, I wanted to listen to them, to know them, those Fatah people, so I met Abu Jihad. Second time, I convinced one of the leaders to go with me to Algeria, and he went. It was one of the leaders, of George Habash. That's the idea behind it. I still remember what Abu Jihad told us: "You are waiting for Egypt to fight officially. But we are in our small size, we would like to throw a stone against the Israeli soldiers. Why don't you do it? What is it going to cost you? Vance will never let Egypt get into a position to start a fight or overrun the country. So come and throw with us a stone against the Israeli army and police. You are throwing a stone, I will throw a bullet against the Israeli soldiers." I reminded Abu Jihad in Tunis in 1986 of that story in the residence of Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi. I told him, "Abu Jihad, you should go back to what you mentioned for us in 1964, encouraging people to throw a stone, because the international world will understand that after our struggle in exile, and to start inside with this symbol, or symbolic resistance to occupation, with these factors of events, that Arafat is still here, still alive, he is still with his leadership, after all of this. Even in Tunis they are fighting. It makes sense. And the world will recognize the PLO."

Without that insight, we still have something wrong. Believe me, I said that at Mr. Kaddoumi's residence, before lunch, and you know he was laughing, he said, "You

remind me of something important.” Because Abu Jihad started to think about the tanks, you know. I said, “No, you go back to what you mentioned to us in 1964.” The people inside, it is better than to give them weapons because Israel finally will win. Look, how can you confront the Israeli soldier with his big weapons, and fight a student or a baby or an old man, without something in his hand to defend him, but just this stone which we have by god, this good wealth of stones. You don’t find stones in Egypt; on the West Bank, you find a lot! This is the theory, which I think later on he was very happy with that, and we worked together after that until he died, assassinated by the Israelis. So, he recognized that and I would like to add that the next plan against Israel will be civil disobedience.



JK: You need to go?

SK: I have five minutes—you have something, I’m ready!

JK: I think maybe we are at a logical stopping point, so I can get this transcribed and send it to you for your comments so you can add more. But this has been very, very helpful, very interesting. Thank you.

**Yale-UN Oral History Project**

Said Kamal,

Jean Krasno, Interviewer

March 12, 1998

Cairo, Egypt

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