

Not All Palestinians Huddled in Camps

By Holger Jensen

BEIRUT (AP) — Palestinians who escaped the horror of refugee camps have taken a quiet back seat to the guerrilla leaders of today. But they are the statesmen of tomorrow.

Affluent, well-educated, more familiar with the Byzantine maze of Middle East politics, they have suffered less under the Israelis and learned to survive in other parts of the Arab world.

They share a common yearning with their millions of refugee cousins for a free and independent Palestine. But while the refugees have simply waited 26 years, Palestinian businessmen, doctors, lawyers, educators and civil servants have honed their professional skills and made adjustments.

They have carved a comfortable niche for themselves in trading centers, universities, offices and government ministries stretching from Beirut to Kuwait. Their ideas on a permanent settlement with the Jews tend to be more realistic than idealistic.

"We have to forget the past and start building again," says Hikmat Masri, the head of a large and powerful family in Israeli-held Nablus, "the guerrillas are just a passing phase."

The Masri family owns soap and match factories, a trucking firm and a vegetable oil company.

Hikmat is a former Jordanian government minister, his nephew, Taher, serves in King Hussein's present cabinet in Amman, his brother, Zafer, runs the Chamber of Commerce.

Hikmat Masri says there can be peace in the Middle East if Israel withdraws from the west bank of Jordan and the Gaza Strip which it captured in 1967.

He envisions a five-year "transition period" of international supervision in

these territories while the Palestinians hold elections and decide whether they want independent statehood or federation with Jordan.

"We have a limited choice and we will have to accept an imposed solution," he says. "Right now the Palestine Liberation Organization — PLO — is the only structure available to represent us, but we have plenty of leaders to choose from when the time comes."

Not so, says his American-educated nephew Taher, who administers the west bank in exile as Jordan's "minister of occupied territories."

"We have no leaders, only followers. I have to accept Yasser Arafat because the PLO is all that's available. If the guerrillas go to Geneva the most important issues will be decided before we Palestinians can elect any other representatives."

His reference to Geneva was to an upcoming conference of Arab and Israeli representatives to discuss ways of achieving a permanent peace in the Middle East. This was a condition of recent troop disengagement arrangement worked out with U.S. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger.

The future of the Palestinians and the possibility of an independent Palestinian state may be discussed at Geneva.

The younger Masri agrees with his uncle that a truncated Palestinian state in the west bank and Gaza would not be economically, politically and militarily viable. Both feel there would have to be some form of federation with Jordan after an initial period of independence — "long enough to give the Palestinians an entity and make them feel they can

negotiate with King Hussein as equals rather than subjects."

Can Palestinian refugees be persuaded to give up their claims to land which became part of Israel in 1948?

"If you make them hungry enough you can force them," said Taher Masri. "Let us face it. Whatever the superpowers impose will be accepted by the Palestinians and Jordan. The United States can easily topple King Hussein if they want to form a Palestinian-Jordanian state."

"Palestinians already own half of Amman. Why should we separate?"

Zafer Mazri, the businessman, and his brother, the mayor of Nazara, both noted that their companies' profits are inexorably linked to trade with Jordan.

"Our factories here are existing because we can sell our products in Jordan," said Zafer. "Israeli currency fluctuations have cut into our profits. They say I can sell in Israel but no Jew would buy my matches if he can get them from one of his own."

"The Israelis have curbed investment in the west bank, they have refused to build roads and they have not even given us direct-dial telephones. I bank my money in Amman and I see my future in ties with the east bank."

The Masris' power base in Nablus contrasts with that of Sheik Jaffar al Jabri in Hebron. He runs his city like a Chinese warlord, receiving supplicants in his mayor's office, settling local squabbles and trying to remain on good terms with Israeli occupa-

tion authorities without being branded a collaborator.

He, too, desires a peace settlement that will allow him to remain in power, and thus indulges in what the militants call "gradualism."

"If only those people would wait a little longer, they will find that the Arabs can 'ace up to Israel,'" said Yussuf Sayegh, a professor of the American University of Beirut. "I want to dynamite the Geneva peace talks."

"I do not envision anything except a military solution — not total defeat for Israel but enough to make them reassess the whole Palestinian question. We can do this with Arab support, but gradualism makes it more complicated, more costly."

Sayegh was one of the few independent members of the PLO executive committee before he resigned earlier this year, largely because his views were not shared by Arafat. He has been replaced on the committee by three moderate west bankers, of whom the most prominent is Mohsen Abu Maizer.

Often touted as the future "premier of Palestine," Abu Maizer was a west bank lawyer before his expulsion by Israeli authorities last December because of illegal underground political activity. He is a member of the Socialist Baath party and one of the founders of a clandestine Palestine National Front — PNF — which emerged in the occupied territories after the October war in 1973.

Abu Maizer now lives in Damascus, Syria. He supports Arafat's desire to ne-

gotiate for Palestinian statehood, but he feels that Palestinians should not be breaking down the doors to Geneva.

"Let the world come to us with a solution," he said. "We are the ones who have been wronged. Everyone knows there can be no peace until we are satisfied, so our attendance at a peace conference is not important."

Hadj Rashad Shawa, the de facto ruler of the Gaza Strip, points to Israel's paramilitary settlements in the occupied territories as a clear indication that Israel will not withdraw.

"The real aim of the Israelis is to take over every inch of land here," he said. "Anything short of a real partition similar to 1947 will lead us to another war. I doubt that there will be peace for 150 years."

"Giving us the west bank and Gaza would delay another war for 10 years at the most. The tide has changed in favor of the Arabs. It will take us two or three more generations to eliminate Israel and liberate Palestine, but eventually the Jews will have to assimilate."

"They cannot set up a European state in an Arab society."

Shawa has survived two assassination attempts by Palestinian guerrilla groups who felt he was collaborating with the Israelis.

"Some people misunderstand my historical perspective," said Shawa. "It is silly to think that an independent state can survive on the west bank and Gaza, just as Israel and Jordan cannot survive alone."

"The first step which would truly create independence would have to be reunification of ancient Syria, including Jordan, the west bank, Lebanon, Israel and Gaza. There will be many more wars before that comes about."