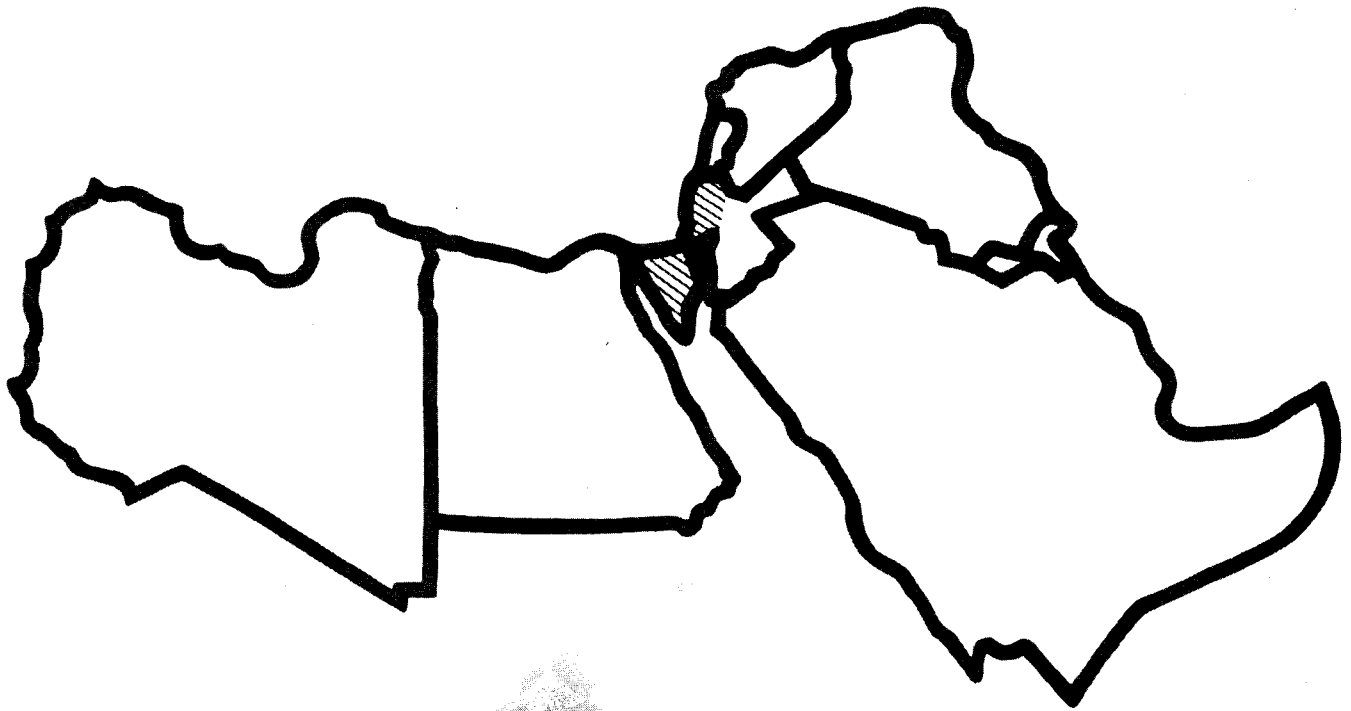


# **SPECIAL REPORT FROM THE MIDDLE EAST**



## **THE VIEW FROM TEL AVIV AND BEIRUT**

**by Paul Jacobs**



**"They are planning something," the young, well-dressed Palestinian Arab said to me, in a low voice, as we sat talking and drinking coffee at a table in an outside cafe in Beirut. I had met him first a few years ago when he was a full time official of Fatah, the largest of the Palestinian Arab resistance groups. Now, in the summer of 1972, he was back working, full time, at his job as an engineer. "I don't know what it is they're going to do," he continued, "but I hear it's something very big."**

**"They" were the Black September group and the "something" they were planning turned out to be the Munich kidnapping which ended, after agonizing days, as the Munich murders. That morning, sitting in the brilliant but not yet hot Beirut sunshine, Munich did not exist in my consciousness. Yet, in retrospect, the Olympic Games at Munich was the most obvious occasion for the Black September to do "something": world-wide TV and radio coverage of the act was guaranteed in advance.**

**S**erious political consequences flow from the fact that the current state of media technology gives the entire world instant and direct contact with events while they are actually happening. The knowledge that the politics of the deed can be acted out with millions of people being able to watch the deed as it takes place affects, in the sharpest way, the choice of what is to be done. Skyjacking an airplane is obviously going to bring out more TV cameras and radio microphones than a press conference announcing a boycott of the airline; kidnapping a group of athletes from under the noses of security guards and police is certain to bring about instant publicity, while an announcement that the group is trying to organize a group of people in a refugee camp is likely to bring a bored yawn from the media.

The media deed is now a fact and the character of political activity has been changed, in a fundamental way, by that fact. We can actually see a President assassinated and then hear the death grunt of his alleged killer being killed. Our eyes focus on a window, trying to imagine what can be going through the minds of the kidnapped athletes who are tied up inside the room behind the window. And, occasionally, we catch flickering, momentary glimpses of shrouded, sexless figures peering out at us from behind a terrace wall.

At Munich, the media deed began with kidnapping and ended with death. Surely, when the young Palestinian men and women sat together discussing what they were going to do, their plans grew from their sense of political commitment, but the character of the deed took on a life of its own, one devoid of political content. Once, a few years ago, I talked at length about the assassination of Lord Moyne with Nathan Yalin-Mor, one of the chief organizers of the Stern Group which had carried out the operation. He explained, in terms of political strategy, why the group had felt it was necessary to murder Moyne, pointing out that the two young Jewish terrorists had been caught and later executed only because they had

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WIDE WORLD PHOTO



been given absolute instructions that no one else but Moyne was to be harmed, not even if it meant their own capture. Those instructions were just as much a part of the politics of the assassination as the act itself.

But Moyne's death didn't have the benefit of television cameras, which have become, for groups like Black September, the substitute for a political ideology which accepts the necessity for the use of violence, together with the understanding that violence, by itself, merely for the purpose of attracting immediate attention, is destructive, anti-human and basically reactionary, no matter how well cloaked it is in the vocabulary of Marxism or nationalism.

Media deeds, like Munich, obscure the real issues, cover up the real grievances, throw a heavily charged cloud of emotionalism over injustices and allow micro-violence to be castigated, bitterly, while macro-violence goes unnoticed and unheeded. And so the true problems of the Middle East have been lost in the welter of charges and countercharges following Munich, as the tempo of reprisals and counter-reprisals escalates and the political situation becomes ever more desperate.

[SHIFT TO THE RIGHT]

Clearly, the entire Middle East, including both the Arab states and Israel, is moving rapidly to the right, with help from the super-powers. The latter have direct interests in maintaining the present regimes at the status quo, with perhaps a few minor adjustments to be made between Israel and its immediate Arab neighbors. Mao, Brezhnev and Golda all chose, consciously, to opt for a Nixon victory because, in their judgment, such a victory would mean a continuation of the order and stability they want at the moment. Guerrilla and resistance movements are in eclipse all over the world. And in the Middle East, the forces for order and stability are in the hands of the regimes in power, no matter what their political views may be: most of the Arab states are controlled by backward and reactionary, if not feudal, governments linked in some way to one or more of the super-powers.

The long-range effects of the American detente, both with China

and the Soviet Union, are still unclear; but obviously it will have consequences for the Sino-Soviet rivalry and for the future relations of the Arab states with each other, their relations with Israel and the struggle of the Palestinian Arabs for some form of self-determination vis-à-vis the Arab countries and Israel.

The Soviet military exodus from Egypt may have been forced upon Russia, but the action may also have been greeted with some relief. The success of Soviet policy in the Middle East has been contingent on the continuation of the no-peace, no-war status of Arab-Israeli relations. The Russians have been able to extend their power in the Middle East, but they understand that securing their economic and military influence depends on the maintenance of, if not the status quo, at least no more than a rearrangement of the status quo—a rearrangement which does not bring about another war between Arab countries and Israel, a war which the Israelis would be almost certain to win unless the Soviets were willing to run the risk of confrontation with the U.S.

China, too, has an important stake in the Middle East, both ideologically and because of the Soviet presence there. The tension in Chinese policy, the pulls and pushes in policy-making, derive from its analysis of the present situation coupled with the past Chinese commitment to the Palestinians, a commitment which manifests itself in the Chinese opposition to any Soviet-U.S. agreement, "bartering away" to quote the Chinese statement at the United Nations, the Palestinian and other Arab peoples' "right to existence and their national interest."

The Chinese have been open and covert supporters of the Palestinian resistance movements. The Chinese describe the Arab governments as "being victimized" by "Israeli aggression." But, in recent months, the Chinese support for the resistance movements has been tempered, somewhat, by such actions as were carried out in Munich. At the U.N., for example, where the Chinese defended the use of "revolutionary violence against the violence of imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, racism and Israeli Zionism," they also attacked "assassination and hijacking of individuals as a means for waging political

struggles." The Chinese said they were "also opposed to terrorist acts by individuals or a handful of people divorced from the masses, because they are harmful to the cause of national and people's revolution."

The Soviets have accused the Chinese of actually being willing to sell out the Palestinians, of having started, in the words of a Soviet news report, "a flirtation with the Israeli aggressor, the sworn enemy of the Arab peoples." The Chinese vehemently deny such charges and, at the official level at least, the Chinese icily reject any notion that diplomatic relations will be established between themselves and "the Israeli aggressor." Still, some informal contacts have been made, and since the U.S. has now put the kosher stamp on opening formal diplomatic relations with China, Israel is certainly interested in establishing such relationships.

Simultaneously, Israel's ties to the United States are as close and strong, militarily and politically, as they have been since the early 1950s, when Israel began its career as a junior partner to the U.S. (The history of Israel-China relationships is an excellent illustration of how the partnership operated: the possible opening of Chinese-Israeli diplomatic relationships in the 1950s was aborted by Israel for fear of U.S. disapproval. Today, the change in U.S. relations to China allows Israel to follow the lead of its senior partner and explore a new opening to China.) The Israelis are not always comfortable playing the subordinate role in the relationship, dutifully following the lead of the U.S., but no Israeli government has believed it had any other choice considering Israel's need for U.S. military and economic assistance. And the relationship has certain reciprocal elements: in the field of intelligence work, an area in which the Israelis excel, they have been able to provide the U.S. with information that might not have been otherwise available and they have even been willing to allow the U.S. to claim credit for Israeli feats. For example, the CIA's loud proclamation of its success in spiriting out of the Soviet Union a copy of Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing Stalin was only possible because the speech had been turned over to the CIA by Israeli agents who had actually procured it.

The Israelis help carry out American policy in other ways as well. Typically, in mid-December 1972 a South Vietnamese government official told an Israeli newspaper correspondent that the South Vietnamese government hoped it would receive "technical help in the military and security fields" from Israel if the American disengagement from the country takes place. And the South Vietnamese spokesman informed the Israeli journalist that the plan to replace American personnel with Israelis "was not only known to Washington but was inspired by it."

Israel, like America, has moved to the right, no longer even pretending to be the semi-socialist state it once claimed to be. Every poll of Israeli public opinion clearly shows that the political center of Israel has shifted, almost en masse, to the right in its choice of leaders, its view of a desirable internal economy and politics, the character of the country's relations with the Arab world and attitudes towards the super-powers, especially to the U.S. Notwithstanding public professions to the contrary, Israel's present leaders and much of the general public supported Nixon not only because he presented himself as Israel's friend and protector, but also because his political and economic conservatism matched Israel's own view of itself today.

Israeli political jokes, produced and distributed in Israel at a rate which qualifies them as one of the country's heavy industries, are almost always cruel. And such quips as "Moshe Dayan has the easiest job in the cabinet. He only has to fight Arabs. Every other minister has to fight Jews." accurately reflect both the slashing, bitter polemics characteristic of internal Israeli political life and Israeli contempt for their Arab antagonists.

The joke *cum* political commentary has its counterpart in the Arab countries. And in Beirut, as in Jerusalem, my introduction to the current political situation came packaged in wit. "Last year," I was told, "was the year of Sadat's decision and this is the year of Sadat's circumcision."

The bitter irony inherent in that joke mirrors the sense of Israeli domination and power felt in the Arab

world. A concomitant feeling is that the Arab states are incapable of dealing with their enemy and so are anxious to accept reality by some form of accommodation with Israel. But the forces of accommodation are restrained by internal pressures, political ones and, lately, religious ones too.

In the Arab world, reactionary Islamism is on the rise, bolstered by the present active Libyan leadership. And the result of this increase in the influence of Islam is that those who oppose the religious reactionaries in the Arab world are as fearful of the consequences of that opposition as are those who oppose the feudal or reactionary political regimes which still control most of the Arab states.

The present dire situation of the Palestinians is another illustration of the shift to the right within the Arab world. The Palestinian resistance movement has committed some of the most serious blunders made by any recent movement any place in the world and it can only blame itself for many of the disasters which it has encountered. But even without the movement's own grievous errors, the Arab governments' shift to the right means that almost every Arab state would be willing to sacrifice the long-range Palestinians' interest in favor of their own short-term gains. The Jordanian massacre of the Palestinian movement was only the overt manifestation of an attitude felt, covertly, by other Arab countries, too.

"But at least we're not ghosts any more," an official of the Palestine Liberation Organization said to me bitterly when we talked in his Beirut office. "At least the world knows we exist now."

He is probably right, but if the Western World does know that the Palestinians exist, it thinks of them only as anonymous, faceless murderers—insane fanatics who gleefully applaud the slaughter of Puerto Rican pilgrims at Lod Airport and the killing of Israeli athletes at Munich. Virtually nothing else is known about the Palestinians except among those who specialize in Middle Eastern affairs, plus those people identified with either the left or with Third World groups; in those two latter cases, the support given to the Palestinians is total and often totally thoughtless.

The fact is, however, that what remains of the Palestinian Arab movement today is split, involved in bitter internecine warfare and almost completely ineffective as a political movement. I had arrived in Beirut just a few days after the assassination by bomb of Ghassan Kanafani, the handsome and popular Palestinian novelist who had been the public spokesman for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Thousands attended his funeral which, according to one of my Arab friends, "was also the funeral of the movement."

No one is yet certain who was responsible for killing Kanafani, but the most prevalent rumor placed the blame on Jordanian intelligence, perhaps with some help from the Israelis. It is a plausible theory. In September 1971, King Hussein's soldiers killed hundreds of Palestinian activists and hundreds of others fled from the Jordanian Army to their other enemy, Israel. Most Palestinian activists are convinced that the refusal of other Arab leaders to intervene then demonstrates that the past policy of depending on the Arab states was incorrect, and that they have been "betrayed" by the Arab states. They believe that Egypt, which is becoming increasingly conservative, will sacrifice the interests of the Palestinians as quickly as Jordan if a satisfactory agreement can be reached with Israel; they know the Lebanese are their unwilling and unhappy hosts, that Iraq will not help them and that even Syria is no longer a dependable ally.

The Israelis, too have severely hampered the Palestinian groups' activities—by infiltration and by the use of military force, as was done in Gaza. Finally, the Palestinian movement is in extreme disorder because it failed to build a broad constituency among the masses of Palestinians, and especially those in the occupied territories. In place of developing such a base, the groups depended on developing tactics of violence, but without a long-range political strategy from which tactics could flow.

The judgment that Kanafani's funeral was also the movement's may be too harsh, but even if the movement isn't dead, it's badly disabled. Comparing the feverish pace of activi-

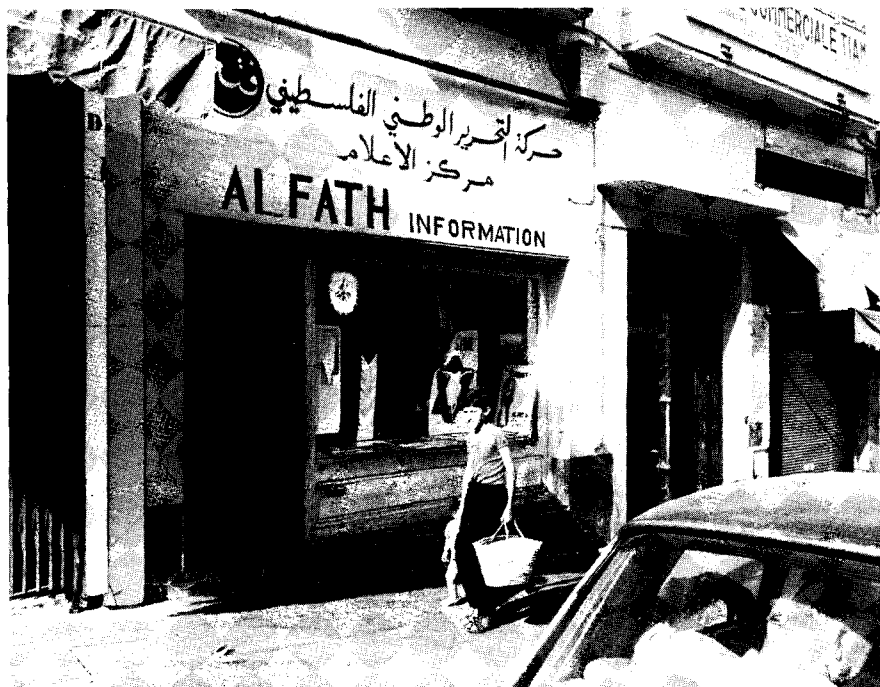
ties carried out by the Palestinian organizations in 1969, when I first encountered them, or even 1970, with today's lassitude and dispirited condition makes it clear that the four key groups are in almost total disarray.

# [GUERRILLAS IN DISARRAY]

**F**etah, which has always been the largest and most powerful group, is torn apart now by internal dissension. Arafat's leadership has been challenged from within his own organization, and even though he ward off the attempt to dislodge him, his prestige and that of the organization has suffered severely. No longer is he such a media darling, sought after by the press, radio and TV; no longer is he the welcome guest he once was in all the Arab capitals. The loudly heralded timetable for Fatah activities of 1969 is no longer even discussed. The first stage of that timetable was to be guerrilla raids from across Israel's border, followed by the organization of bases within the occupied territories which would then set the stage for "liberating" Israel. But Fatah never had a fully developed ideology which extended beyond the vague notion of setting up a "democratic, secular state" in which Moslems, Jews and Christians would live together. Its lack of a cohesive political philosophy and its failure to live up to the expectations it promised has caused a serious drop in membership and popular support.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine was hurt badly by the murder of its spokesman, Kanafani. Dr. George Habash, who identified himself as a revolutionary Marxist, has been absent from the Middle Eastern scene for many months, reportedly first in China and then in the Soviet Union. The PFLP activities have been focused on skyjacks and the support it once had among Palestinians living in the occupied territories appears to have been badly eroded.

The Popular Democratic Front, which originated in a split from the Popular Front, was never a large group. Its leader, Naif Hawatmeh, accused the PFLP of forsaking revolutionary principles but the PDF's overwhelming concern with its own ideological purity has led it to organiza-



*Fatah office in Algiers*

tional sterility.

The umbrella organization, the Palestine Liberation Organization, which tried to coordinate the activities of the separate groups, still functions publicly but reflects the difficulties its constituent elements are experiencing. Always in a difficult posture because of the conflicts among the resistance groups, the PLO is in a far worse position now: its officials know the reality but do not admit it publicly. Still, in Beirut one PLO official conceded to me quite readily that the Palestinian Arab resistance movements *have* committed grave and destructive errors and *have* made the most serious misjudgments about their own capacities and those of Israel. He also agreed that the Palestinian groups had allowed themselves to become so much the creatures of the media that they had even begun to believe their own press releases.

In other such discussions with Palestinian Arabs I felt a subtle shift towards a different appraisal of the present and future possibilities. I heard a tiny resonance of a feeling that perhaps the Palestinian resistance groups must accept the prospect of some accommodation with Israel.

If I am correct, such a prospect represents a fierce pressure on those more intransigent and militant Palestinian formations who have set them-

selves the task of carrying on the resistance in terms of armed struggle to eliminate Israel as a state. They must, then, undertake such violent actions as will prevent any accommodation from taking place and they must force the Israelis into carrying out more and more severe reprisals, inevitably involving the Arab states.

Visiting with another Palestinian Arab who had been a Fatah official when I first met him in 1969, I learned that, as a result of the disorder and sense of futility which hangs over the Palestinians, he had ended his full-time political activity. Other former secondary resistance leaders I knew have also returned to their private lives, working once again at being lawyers, engineers, architects, physicians or members of other professions. And those that still remain publicly active told me they are isolated, both from the general world in which they live and even from some activities of their own organizations. Still a third group of activists has gone underground, splitting from the publicly identifiable groups.

The split began after the Jordanian government's slaughter of the Palestinians in September 1971. That action convinced a number of resistance members that they were doomed if they remained in groups whose leaders continued to depend upon



Arab governments, especially since the Arab governments most directly involved in the struggle against Israel seemed willing to accept some kind of Palestinian state on the West Bank as a compromise solution to the Palestinian problem. Such a solution would mean placing in serious jeopardy the Palestinian attempt to achieve a direct form of power in the area which is now Israel. And so the Black September group began.

The Black September activists believed that only through terror, only through the most violent forms of action, could they make any impact upon Israel and, equally important, upon the major powers. It is clear to any realistic Arab that, despite the demagogic rhetoric which is the curse of the Arab world, no Arab state or combination of states can win a military war against Israel. And coupled with this belief is the conviction of every Palestinian with whom I talked that (a) Israel will not give up any of the occupied territories, except if it is forced to do so by the great powers, and (b) that no Palestinians will ever be allowed to return to their former homes in what is now Israel. Thus the educated, politically committed Palestinian Arabs are in a state of total depression; that depression combined with frustration either makes them movement dropouts or gives rise to the present desperado tactics of the Black September group.

The daring activities of the Tupamaros, the Uruguayan Marxist guerrillas, are one model for Black September. But crucial differences separate the Tupamaros from groups like Black September. The South Americans are very ideological. They operate within their own country, instead of outside it, as do the Palestinians. They are extremely careful, in almost all cases where they have kidnapped hostages, to make certain that the persons they kidnap and hold or, in a few cases, kill, are direct enemies, not merely innocent bystanders like people who happen to be on a hijacked plane or athletes participating in the Olympics. And above all, the Tupamaros are always aware of the necessity to maintain direct and continuous contact with the constituency they have developed.

These Black September terrorists—like many Palestinian Arab leaders—are refugees, but they have never lived in a camp, for they come from upper-middle-class Palestinian families wealthy enough to send their children to the United States or Europe to be educated. In the absence of an integrated, long-range political ideology, such class origins made it difficult to organize the Palestinian masses: many of the resistance activists were never completely at ease in the poverty-stricken camps. And as a substitute for the tedious, day-to-day effort required to build a constituency among the Palestinian masses, these activists developed a philosophy of militant action devoid of serious ideology.

Yet those very qualities and characteristics which were their weakness as organizers of the Palestinian masses—their education, upper-middle-class or even upper-class upbringing and habits—gave them the ability to function better as conspiratorial terrorists. Traveling around the world is easy for them: unlike most of the refugees in the camps they are familiar with airplanes and hotels. They know how to drive cars and order meals in restaurants. They can dress as well as they need to, without appearing conspicuous and ill-at-ease in public. They speak other languages besides Arabic—one of the Munich terrorists spoke in fluent German to a member of the group trying to negotiate the release of the hostages, explaining that he had learned the language as a graduate student in Germany. And they can pass themselves off as having other nationalities than Arabic, if they must.

Black September is thus a worldly group, and it has its admirers in other parts of the globe. The same posters of the Palestinian resistance I saw in Beirut are tacked up on walls in the Belfast headquarters of the militant IRA group. Because radical Japanese students are familiar with the Palestinians, it was possible to recruit members of the “Red Army” to carry out the Lod massacre. And it is even conceivable that a future anti-Israeli action might be carried out by Americans, including American Jews.

Again, too, the new technology has made cooperation and coordination much easier for such widely separated groups as the Japanese “Red Army”

and the Black September group: jet planes fly everywhere and the world has become accustomed to the sight of young people of different races and colors sitting in them or gathered together at such places as the Dam Platz in Amsterdam, the Spanish Steps in Rome or the Plaza in Berkeley.

International as it is, strong as its ties are to its counterparts in other countries, Black September has its own special character which derives from the Arab background of its members. I have never seen a Palestinian Arab wearing a *galabiya*, the long white or blue cotton robe worn by so many Arab men; no Palestinian has ever stopped arguing with me in order to obey the daily calls of the muezzin to pray to Allah or attend Catholic mass. Never have I heard a Palestinian Arab make a single reference to the Koran or the New Testament as a justification for a political position, and in all the meals I have eaten with Palestinians, few paid any attention to the Islamic or Catholic dietary injunctions.

Nevertheless, these irreligious Moslems and Christians, these intellectuals who have been trained either at Western universities or at the Western-influenced universities, *are* affected profoundly by their Arab backgrounds. Somewhere in their consciousness, the concept of *karamah*, the special sense of Arab honor, still exists, focused now on the need to reverse past defeats, to wipe out the humiliations of the past when their parents or grandparents fled or were expelled from what was once known as Palestine.

The Palestinians seem obsessed with the notion of identity; and for reasons which I do not understand, Americans and Israelis, who have such a clear, often arrogant sense of their own identity, cannot seem to comprehend the need of the Palestinians to search for *their* own identity.

“What do I tell my daughter when she comes home from school and asks me what she is?” one Palestinian living in Beirut asked me. “She comes crying because her schoolmates tell her they are Lebanese or Kuwaiti or Egyptian and she is nothing. I keep telling her she is a Palestinian but what is that?”

(When Americans or Israelis tell me

*(Continued on page 58)*



# Confessions of a Number One Son

I was born and last seen being carried off by alleycats into a dark neighborhood. William Bendix found me in the rubble of a village during a Japanese air raid at my dead momma's withered tit wailing hoarsely. The movie was *China*. I was the symbol of helpless, struggling China in the arms of William Bendix. He named me "Donald Duck."

The wail went from movie to movie. The Japs have tortured me into giving up the secret position and are driving the little life of me left in my little battered body in a truck full of Jap soldiers out to get the jump on John Wayne and my missionary

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teacher from Indiana and all my friends. I grabbed the wheel of the truck and pulled that truck right off the world and sent it down the darkness. My body rolled out to the burning truck to the feet of John Wayne and all my surprised friends working their stealthy way through the jungle. America saw my face by the flamelight of the burning truck full of Japs. They saw me trying not to cry out in pain while tears streamed down my cheeks.

"Don't try to talk," John Wayne said softly. And John Wayne and the Missionary teacher who'd failed to teach me how to properly spell A-M-E-R-I-C-A instead of A-M-E-L-L-I-C-A exchanged looks and sadly shook their heads. And all the soldiers and all my friends were getting

down on their knees around me. "I failed," I said. "I guess I'll never be promoted to sergeant now," and my eyes began to roll back into my skull and my breath, a quiet shriek from my lungs, was the sound of metal scraped with a long file. Now and then I coughed and blood rosebudded out of my mouth. John Wayne took the colonel's bird off his collar and pinned it on me.

By the light of burning Japs sputtering and sizzling in the background, women in the shopper's matinees with their paper sacks and red meat tokens saw tears in John Wayne's eyes. "You didn't fail," he said to me and had to gulp something back before he could say, "He-yeck! You got that promotion! I got orders from the Presi-

**by Frank Chin**