“In the Hour of Arab Revolution”

Tricontinental and the Question of Palestine

Research Project

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Abstract

This essay seeks to challenge the absence of the Arab world within the emerging literature on “the Global Cold War,” which considers the Arab-Israeli conflict and thus Arab history to be driven by exceptional circumstances. In order to demonstrate the connections between Arab politics and other decolonizing contexts, I look at the ideological work undertaken to forge the Palestinian cause into a Third World principle outside of the Arab world. This paper examines the coverage of the question of Palestine in the Cuban revolutionary journal Tricontinental between the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973. While the June 1967 war is traditionally understood as merely an Arab defeat, I show that many anticolonial and leftist revolutionaries around the world understood the June 1967 war as a reverse for the Third World project as a whole. The conflict was portrayed as an important scene in a global struggle between Western capitalist imperialism and colonialism, on the one hand, and anticolonial revolutionary nationalism and communism, on the other. Tricontinental recorded the journeys of Cuban journalists to fida’i (guerrilla) training camps in Jordan and Syria, the travels of Palestinians to the revolutionary Caribbean capital, and exposed the material links between counterrevolutionary forces in a number of colonial situations. Tricontinental’s coverage consistently transcended ideological platitudes and boilerplate comparisons, though these were indeed also present. Through close readings of selected articles, we can begin to see the potential of using this journal as a major source in the history of transnational circulation of ideas, personalities, and movements during the second half of the twentieth century.
In the first week of June 1967, Israel destroyed the military capabilities of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, conquering territories held by all three states in a war lasting less than six days. The Israelis’ preemptive war radically altered the political map of the Eastern Mediterranean, more than tripling the area under control of the Israeli state through the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai peninsula, Golan Heights, and the island of Tiran.¹ For the Zionists, this conquest of territory came with the conquest of undesirable people. In their second act of mass expulsion since 1948, the Israeli army threw out an additional 300,000 Palestinians from their homes – many of whom now twice displaced – and acquired rule over several million non-Jewish Arabs in the West Bank, Gaza, and Sinai.² In the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, Israelis forced out more than 120,000 people, seized their assets, and demolished their villages.³ In all cases Israel began colonizing the occupied territories with Jewish settlers from around the world.⁴

The defeat of the Arab armies dealt a crushing blow to the prestige of the Arab nationalist project in its statist phase, opening a crisis of legitimacy in the vanquished

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states and indeed in the Arab region as a whole. On the one hand, the leaders of the authoritarian, developmentalist military regimes of Egypt and Syria were called into question for their battlefield incompetence, intelligence failures, overblown rhetoric, and lack of decisive action despite lavish military spending. The staunchly pro-Western Jordanian monarchy and the idle Lebanese government, on the other hand, were chastised for their perceived conservatism and weak commitment to the struggle. But, “like a phoenix out of ashes,” the defeat of the Arab states unleashed a wave of popular anger at both Israel and the Arab governing classes: many young men and women from every Arab country looked to the coalescing Palestinian guerrilla movement as their only potential deliverance.

In the late 1960s, Arabs were not alone in their rebellion. Traditionally understood as merely an Arab defeat, many anticolonial and leftist revolutionaries around the world understood the June 1967 war as a reverse for the Third World project as a whole. The global reverberations of an-Naksa – “the setback,” as the defeat was known in Arabic – became one of the central themes that the Cuban revolutionary journal *Tricontinental* would have to deal with upon its launch in July 1967. *Tricontinental* published some of

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5 For an intellectual history that focuses on this conjuncture, see Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

6 In the long run, the absolutist, Western-aligned, oil producing Gulf monarchies were strengthened. See Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2013 [2011]). For the struggle between the so-called “radical” and “conservative” Arab regimes of the 1950s and 60s, see Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1971).


the most important twentieth century thinkers in the anti-imperial, anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist traditions, such as Frantz Fanon, Ho Chi Minh, Jean-Paul Sartre, Amilcar Cabral, Che Guevara, Gabriel García Marquez, Malcolm X, Huey P. Newton, C.L.R. James, Yasser Arafat, George Habash, Paul Sweezy, Angela Davis, Nguyễn Thị Bích, and many more figures both major and minor. Because the practices of internationalism for the Havana-based organ were just as important as the theories, the journal was simultaneously published in Spanish, English, and French – in identical editions – with a circulation of around 50,000. This essay examines *Tricontinental*’s coverage of the question of Palestine between the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars in order to show that the conflict was portrayed as an important scene in a global struggle between Western capitalist imperialism and colonialism, on the one hand, and anticolonial revolutionary nationalism and communism, on the other. In this reading, the Palestinian cause was not only a cornerstone of politics in Arab societies, but also a lynchpin that galvanized and connected the Third World project. *Tricontinental* was an important vessel of these relations, as it brought together intellectuals and militants – as well as intellectual militants – from around the world in a tangible forum of ideological exchange.

Cuban revolutionary internationalism played a major role in keeping the Third World project alive both theoretically and practically, and the island hosted a number of institutions in which these connections were developed and reproduced. *Tricontinental* was edited and published by the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, 25,000 in Spanish, 15,000 in English, and 10,000 in French. Richard Frick andUlises Estrada, *The Tricontinental Solidarity Poster* (Bern, Switzerland: Commedia-Verlag, 2003), 72. The magazine was also briefly issued in Italian. Frick and Estrada do not mention figures of the Italian edition.
Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL), established in January 1966 at the “First Conference of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.” The Tricontinental” – as the conference was informally known – largely symbolized the ascent of the second generation of postwar anticolonial leaders, and was the first international forum dedicated to opposing Western imperialism and promoting independent economic development that combined representatives from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Prior to 1966, the institutions of the Third World project were practically limited to Africa and Asia, and were embodied by the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization and the Non-Aligned Movement. In general, the leadership of the first generation of postwar Afro-Asian nationalists – Nasser, Nehru, Sukarno, Nkrumah – emphasized the unity of all classes under the rubric of the nation. In recognition of the shortcomings of the independence regimes in addressing social inequality and continued foreign economic domination, as well as the ongoing, brutal wars waged by Western empires to retain their remaining colonies, the second generation – Castro, Cabral, Neto, Habash – pushed the Third World project further to the left by emphasizing Marxism, social revolution, and armed struggle. As the organizer of the Tricontinental, the Moroccan dissident Mehdi Ben Barka, put it, the conference represented the attempted unification of “the two great contemporary currents of the World Revolution…the current which started with the October Revolution in the Soviet Union, and which is the current

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10 For the making of this conference, see Nate George, “‘Solidarity Means to Step Across Continents’: Mehdi Ben Barka and Arab Routes to the Tricontinental,” unpublished research paper.
12 For how the generational divide played out in the Arab world, often in the body of the same person, several times, see Fadi A. Bardawil, “When All This Revolution Melts Into Air: The Disenchantment of Levantine Marxist Intellectuals” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2010); Walid Kazziha, Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World: Habash and His Comrades From Nationalism to Marxism (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975); in general, see Westad, Global Cold War, 108, 207-8.
of socialist revolution, and the parallel current of the revolution for national liberation.”

Shortly following the conference, OSPAAAL decided to establish a journal covering the issues facing the various ongoing national liberation struggles against imperialism, the newly consolidated independent states in the Third World, as well as revolutionary movements in the United States and Europe. The Organisation Committee set the second meeting of the Tricontinental for 1968, to be convened in Cairo, Egypt. However, the second conference never came to pass. It was buried in the defeat of the Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian armies in June 1967.

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This essay seeks to challenge the absence of the Arab world within the emerging literature on “the Global Cold War,” which considers the Arab-Israeli conflict and thus Arab politics to be “governed more by their very specific regional rationale than their Cold War context,” to use the language of the field’s leading proponent. This paper suggests the opposite: that the ideological, social, and military content of the Arab-Israeli

13 Executive Secretariat of OSPAAAL, First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America [Conference Proceedings] (Havana: OSPAAAL, 1966), 4. Ben Barka was abducted off the streets of Paris and never seen again on 29 October 1965. Ben Barka’s assassination implicated a number of state intelligence agencies and became a political scandal inspiring books, films, and, for a brief period, the severing of relations between France and Morocco. “Investigations by a French magistrate, who took evidence in France and Morocco, revealed that Ben Barka had been tortured to death in a house in Paris, with the complicity of renegade French security men and that the body had then been taken back to Morocco where it was destroyed. It seems that [Interior Minister Mohammed] Oufkir saw Ben Barka as a threat to the regime that increasingly he dominated. The extent to which the king himself was involved remained unclear.” C.R. Pennell, Morocco: From Empire to Independence (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 169. CIA and Mossad involvement has been alleged but not proven. See Henrik Krüger, The Great Heroin Coup: Drugs, Intelligence, & International Fascism (Boston: South End, 1980) 59-74; Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, The Israeli Connection: Who Israel Arms and Why (New York: Pantheon, 1987), 46; and Daniel Guerin, Les Assassins de Ben Barka: dix ans d'enquête (Paris: G. Authier, 1975).


15 See the acrimonious exchange of letters between Yusuf El Sebai, Secretary General of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee of the United Arab Republic (Egypt) and Osmany Cienfuegos, Secretary General of OSPAAAL in Tricontinental Bulletin 29 (August 1968), 12-13.

16 Westad, The Global Cold War, 4. While this book provides a sweeping overview of the superpower conflict in the Third World with a sharp eye on the ideological motivations driving the Americans, Soviets, and many Third World revolutionaries, the Arab world is conspicuously absent from his account, as is most of Latin America.
conflict place it squarely within the realm of the global civil war over sociopolitical reconstruction fought in the wake of the Second World War. While the idea that the Middle East was not a unique space sealed off from the global politics of the era may not sound particularly novel, the preceding quote demonstrates that a persistent exceptionalism has pervaded and hindered scholarship on the region. In 1978 Edward Said identified this tradition as “Orientalism,” or “a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts,” which naturalizes particular representations that are “produced and [exist] in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power.” Following Said, in his survey of the field of US-Arab relations, Ussama Makdisi argued, “whereas the impetus for the current, inclusive, and transnational study of American history has come at a time when U.S. involvement in Latin America has become less contentious than what it was during the Cold War, and long after the end of the Vietnam War, it coincides with an extraordinary U.S. military posture in the Middle East.” While political decolonization has run its course in most of the Third World – notwithstanding the continued economic domination of these regions by Western capitalist structures – the Middle East, particularly the Arab east, remains in what has been called “the colonial present.” As Eqbal Ahmad observed, 

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17 For arguments that the term “Cold War” is itself a misnomer that conceals the political, as opposed to military, nature of the conflict, and erases the very “hot” violence produced by the rivalry, much of it in the Third World, and that the period instead should be conceptualized as an “international civil war” that began in 1917, see Arno J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918-1919* (New York: Knopf, 1967); and Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1945–1954* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).


“at the dawn of decolonization, Palestine was colonized.”

The combination of ongoing US military intervention and the widespread purchase of Zionist interpretations of Arab and regional politics have made Orientalism resilient. Bringing the history of the Arab world into the politics of “the Global Cold War” thus carries special significance because the current political stakes are high and due to the long history of historiographical shortcomings.

While there is evidence that recent scholarship on the international history of the Middle East in the post-World War II era is beginning to be enriched by non-Orientalist historical studies that emphasize multiarchival work in the languages of the region, the focus has been overwhelmingly on the actions of state actors, rather than social, cultural, or intellectual history – let alone a combination of these approaches. Of these works, Paul Chamberlin’s more recent The Global Offensive – which claims to provide an international history of US-PLO relations in their global context – is most relevant to this paper. However, despite its avowal to demonstrate that “indigenous non-Western peoples were active participants in the complex set of negotiations that created the modern world,” the overwhelming focus of his narrative reflected his source base – US Department of

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22 “There is... an intense U.S. partisanship in the Arab-Israeli conflict that very clearly impinges radically on how the Arab world is depicted, and more pertinent, how U.S. relations to the Middle East are understood. Because the creation of Israel has been often understood in the United States as a moral reaction to a pernicious history of anti-Semitism and to the Holocaust, that is, as the antithesis of injustice rather than a story of colonialism in Palestine and a denial of Arab self-determination (as Arabs see it), the American identification with Jewish Israelis remains strong.” Makdisi, “After Said,” 21-22.

State archives – while the substantiation and analysis of the PLO’s transnational relations are remarkably thin.\textsuperscript{24} Indeed Chamberlin picked up the story of the Palestinian revolution at its peak, quickly glossing over the years of work it took to forge Palestinian link in the Third World project. Chamberlin’s work was also more interested in how the Palestinians ingratiated themselves with Third World leaders, paying less attention to how the reverse was also the case.

Instead, this paper emphasizes the cultural work undertaken to forge the Palestinian cause into a Third World principle outside of the Arab world. It is divided into two sections. The first, “Outside Looking In,” considers the understanding of the question of Palestine by writers outside of the Arab world. It demonstrates that within the pages of *Tricontinental*, non-Arab writers viewed Israel as a racist European settler-colony that played an active role as a counterrevolutionary interventionist power, not only in the Arab region, but also in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The second section, “Inside Looking Out,” considers how *Tricontinental* provided a unique platform for Palestinians to narrate their own personal and collective histories, as well as the space to advance their own political aims.\textsuperscript{25}

*Outside Looking In // Palestine in the World*

The following section considers how writers from outside the Arab region conceptualized the question of Palestine within the pages of *Tricontinental*.

**The Setback and the Future of the Third World**

\textsuperscript{24} Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*, 7.

\textsuperscript{25} Though *Tricontinental* is filled with Arab voices from other nationalities, who often invoke the Palestinian cause, in the interests of space this paper will limit itself to considering Palestinians, the population most directly affected by Zionist colonization.
Owing to the immediate circumstances in the wake of the June 1967 war, the first issue of *Tricontinental*, published in July 1967, heavily emphasized the struggle in the Middle East. From its outset, the journal’s discussion of the ongoing Arab-Israeli war argued that the dynamics of the conflict reflected conditions prevailing across the Third World at the close of the 1960s. The independence coalitions in the postcolonial states were riven by opposing class – and often cultural – interests in the making of internal and external policy. In general, the commercial bourgeoisie and old social classes were becoming increasingly impatient with the populist, state-oriented developmentalism then in vogue, and began to challenge redistributive policies. On issues of foreign policy, these states faced difficult questions of how to support the ongoing national liberation struggles similar to their own in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Palestine. From the beginning, *Tricontinental* took a definite position and analyzed the question of Palestine with an eye toward these larger debates.

In the article “5 Days With A Future,” an anonymous author surveyed the brief but decisive war’s immediate political fallout, heralding that “for each military defeat” there would be “a resurgence of revolutionary spirit.” After opening with a recap of the events leading up to and including the June war, the author went on to forcefully situate the history of the Arab-Israeli wars within a history of an escalating world struggle between anticolonial revolution and imperial counterrevolution.

The historic Bandung Conference (the five principles and the concept of

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26 Prashad, *Darker Nations*, 119-206. For a contemporary critique of the postcolonial bourgeoisie, written on the eve of Algerian independence, see Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004 [1961]).


non-alignment) was held in 1955; in 1956 the second Arab-Israeli clash took place. The First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America was held in Havana in 1966; in June 1967, Israel Invaded the United Arab Republic [Egypt], Jordan and Syria, gaining a great deal of territory.\(^{29}\)

With every victory came a setback, every setback became a gathering of purpose, every step toward recovery produced obstruction, and every obstruction would be superseded.

“History has shown,” the article added, “that each military defeat of the Arab peoples – pitted in unequal conditions against Israel’s polished war apparatus, tenaciously built up with U.S. and European aid – has always been followed by a resurgence of revolutionary spirit and action in the Middle East.”\(^{30}\) In other words, “those 5 days have a long, uncertain future.”\(^{31}\)

Only weeks removed from the defeat, the author could offer little in the way of tangible evidence for this assertion other than “a clean sweep is being made among Egyptian officers.”\(^{32}\) While such a triumphalist conclusion in the wake of a crushing defeat may seem quixotic, the histories of modern revolutions record an intimate link between defeat in war and revolutionary reconstruction.\(^{33}\) After all, a society may experience few more tangible and conclusive revelations of a social order’s limitations than military defeat. Defeat abroad may also weaken or remove an entrenched ruling

\(^{29}\) “Middle East: 5 Days With A Future,” 51.

\(^{30}\) “Middle East: 5 Days With A Future,” 52.

\(^{31}\) “Middle East: 5 Days With A Future,” 50.

\(^{32}\) “Middle East: 5 Days With A Future,” 52.

order that the internal opposition may have been otherwise unable to overturn. This is no less true in the Arab world, as the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War galvanized nascent Arab nationalist movements, which were further mobilized in the wake of Israel’s first victory over the Arab states in 1948. The rise of the fida’iyin movement after the June setback would vindicate the author’s view.

However, no defeat automatically produces an opposition able to raise particular demands that speak to the general concerns of people. The political questions facing anticolonial revolutionaries were many. Among them, what was the proper strategy for winning independence, consolidating power, and building a state that satisfied the needs of the masses? Who were the agents that would carry through this revolution? “5 Days With A Future” closed with some rather pointed advice regarding the formation of an Arab revolutionary movement against Zionist colonialism and Arab conservatism. In the author’s view, the conditions for a protracted war of liberation was brewing in the Middle East, and it was essential for Arab revolutionaries to assimilate what they considered to be the lessons of the anticolonial movement up to 1967. “Like any other ‘pan’,,” the article stated, “Pan Arabism cannot avoid discussion of the class struggle within each country under its compass, much less after a hot war and on the eve of another war, longer and inevitable.”

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35 “Fida’iyin” is Arabic for “those who sacrifice.” The members of the Palestinian guerrilla movement were referred to as fida’iyin.

36 “Middle East: 5 Days With A Future,” 53.
postcolonial world – as in a multi-class alliance centered on the nationalist bourgeoisie – was “going through a virtual ordeal by fire,” as evidenced by recent events in Indonesia and Ghana. In both countries, left-wing governments were overthrown by right-wing military coups between 1965-66. For *Tricontinental*, such coups were not only setbacks in the internationalist cause, but matters that revealed the depth, ferocity, and interconnectedness of the counterrevolutionary forces on all continents. In the case of Indonesia, General Suharto’s US-backed military coup was inaugurated with the extermination of approximately half a million Indonesian communists, fellow-travelers, and suspected sympathizers. For those involved in the anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggle, the stakes could not be any higher.

*Tricontinental* argued these setbacks were not only externally generated by imperialist intervention, but were internally underwritten by the failed strategies of the nationalist leadership in newly independent countries. The author again insisted on the centrality of the dynamics of class struggle, warning the Arab revolutionaries of “the impossibility of a ‘single front’ with antagonist classes and interests.” In both Indonesia and Ghana, the so-called “national bourgeoisie” turned violently on the laboring classes and the political forces and policies supporting them. In other words, by the late 1960s the politics of nationalism and “non-alignment” – which had dominated the Third World project in the post-WWII era – were not enough to protect against collusions between imperial and local capital interests against peasants, urban workers, and the more

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38 “Middle East: 5 Days With A Future,” 53.
precarious. The Tricontinental conference and its journal sought to reverse this alignment by attacking it head on. The Arab defeat exposed the tremendous weakness of the Third World project in the face of the brute force of the imperialist powers and their Israeli ally. In addition to internal polities riven by uneven development, the fractured relations between the Arab states led to their demise, demonstrating more than ever the need for durable international solidarity. “In the hour of the Arab revolution and eleven years after the Bandung Conference,” the author argued, it would be “worthwhile…to redefine the concept of non-alignment.” The models put into place at Bandung and Belgrade needed to be replaced with Havana.39 “If the major contradiction of the third world is between imperialism and national liberation, it is now time to move – or run – from the traditional Afro-Asian non-alignment to total tricontinental alignment.”40

Clearly, from the very first issue, the question of Palestine was conceived as another front in the world struggle against Western colonialism and capitalism. The politics of Palestine within the Third World project, especially the strand of the movement promoted by Havana, was free of the ideological bias in favor of Zionism that characterized much of the Western liberal and leftist establishment.41 Europeans and Americans tended to see Zionism and the State of Israel as a liberation movement of a besieged, oppressed people constantly threatened with genocide at the hands of the Anti-Semitic, anti-modern, backward Arab peoples. In other words, as the exact opposite view of Tricontinental and most of the Third World as a settler-colonial, racist, and

39 The Non-Aligned Movement was formed at a summit in Belgrade in 1961. See Jansen, Nonalignment; and Prashad, Darker Nations.
40 “Middle East: 5 Days With A Future,” 53.
counterrevolutionary state. The contrast in perception could not be any starker.

However, “5 Days with a Future” is also notable for what is missing in its coverage of Palestine. While the article clearly placed Israel on the side of Western imperialist counterrevolution, it had nothing to say on the circumstances of Israel’s establishment in 1948, or regarding the conditions of the dispersed Palestinian refugees. As we will see, this important lacuna would be addressed in subsequent issues, but its absence here is striking for its ambiguity. The article notes the proximity of the 1945 victory of the Allies in the Second World War and the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, the specific relationship between these two events is left vague.

**Exploding the Myth of Anti-Zionism as Anti-Semitism**

To cater to elements of the readership unfamiliar with the historical context of the contentious conflict, the July-August 1969 issue featured a 21-page piece covering the main events from the Balfour Declaration of 1917 through the post-1967 political landscape. Written by the American journalist Tabitha Petran, “Palestine, the Arabs, and

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43 “The Second World War ended in 1945; in 1948, the first Arab-Israeli war took place.” Later in that paragraph, we see this slightly less ambiguous, though still mystifying explanation: “A new balance of power had followed the defeat of Nazi-Fascism in the Second World War. From the ashes of the conflict arose the socialist camp of Eastern Europe, backed by the now much stronger Soviet Union. The problems of the colonial and neocolonial world of that time – China, the Middle East, Indonesia, the Asian subcontinent, Southeast Asia – would be considered in the light of the new correlation of forces. Israel came into being in part of the British mandate of Palestine as a result of a United Nations agreement that was rejected by the Arab monarchies and that precipitated the first armed clash.” “Middle East: 5 Days With A Future,” 50, 51.
Zionism,” was designed to challenge Zionist mythology point-by-point. The article was a remarkable distillation of the conflict, especially considering the limitations of American discourse of the time – when even mentioning the words “Palestine” or “Palestinians” was considered tantamount to Anti-Semitism. By invoking the latest scholarship in Arab, European, American, Jewish, and Zionist sources, Petran, who was Jewish, attacked head-on two of the most consequential contentions of Zionism: that Zionism and the State of Israel represent all Jewish people in the world, and that Arab opposition to Israel was driven by anti-Semitism.

In order to establish the separation between Zionism and Judaism, Petran particularly highlighted Jewish criticisms of Zionism and Israel made by Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt, Raul Hilberg, Erich Fromm, and others. Following intellectuals both Jewish and otherwise, Petran provocatively argued for the symmetry between anti-Semitic and Zionist positions on Europe’s so-called “Jewish Question.”

Racialist logic underpinned Zionism, Petran argued, reversing a popular conception of Zionism as the absolution of the history European anti-Semitism. Even more to the point,

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Petran continued to describe that connections between the two European racial nationalist movements went beyond ideological similarity and into the realm of active collaboration. The Zionist movement vigorously opposed campaigns to rescue European Jews that called to place them anywhere but Palestine. Petran quoted Hannah Arendt’s argument that “the price for this Zionist-Nazi collaboration was...inevitably paid by non-Zionist Jews, the non-selected majority who found ‘themselves confronted with two enemies – the Nazi authorities and the Jewish authorities.’”

The remainder of the article targeted the conception of Arab resistance to Israeli occupation as being driven by anti-Semitism, instead of anti-colonialism. Petran described the Zionists’ military conquest of Palestine in 1948, the accompanying expulsion of the Palestinian inhabitants, the usurpation of Palestinian property, the numerous Israeli violations of the 1949 Armistice Agreements with the Arab states, and the ongoing expansionist projects of the state that culminated in the conquests of June 1967. Indeed, even the Commander of the United Nations Mixed Armistice Commission, tasked with monitoring the truce between Israel and the Arab states, could only describe the conflict thusly: “Every step in the establishment of a Zionist state had been a challenge to justice.”

Petran also shed light on the relationship between Israel and its major foreign backer: the United States. A US State Department official was cited as relaying that “Israel has probably done more for the US in the Middle East in relation to

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money and effort invested than any of our so-called allies and friends elsewhere round the globe since the end of the Second World War.

To highlight the transmutation of Western anti-Semitism to a newfound anti-Arabism, Petran opened with an acknowledgement of the effectively racist double standards of Western media and public opinion on Palestine and Zionism. “It is not difficult to imagine the reaction of Western opinion if in the June 1967 war the roles of Israel and the Arabs had been reversed, if the Arab states had made a blitzkrieg attack on Israel, if Arab armies had forcibly evicted Israelis from homes and land in Israel as the Israeli Army ruthlessly evicted Arabs from their homes and lands in occupied Jordan, Syria, Gaza, Sinai, and has continued to do ever since.” The Western image of the conflict of Israel as a David fighting an Arab goliath, in other words, was the reverse of reality.

Having demonstrated the racist and settler-colonial nature of the Zionist project, as well as its reliance on European and American imperial protection, the article closed by contextualizing the question of Palestine within the movement of decolonization. The Palestinian national movement, Petran argued, was analogous to the struggle of other colonized and oppressed peoples – particularly the South African struggle against apartheid.

The Arab peoples, above all the Palestinian people, will not and cannot accept the existence of Israel, a colonial-type creature imposed by forces outside the area. This does not mean – and the Zionists know this – that they plan the genocide of its Jewish inhabitants. Theirs is a political goal

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50 Petran, “Palestine,” 35.
no different in character from the goal of the liberation movement in South Africa. In this goal, they have the support of all democratic and progressive peoples, including the Jewish masses, who have also been victims of Zionism, and are being led by Zionism towards another disaster.\textsuperscript{51}

**Israel’s Racialized, Counterrevolutionary Foreign Policy**

The conclusion that the Palestinian movement had a natural analogue and ally in the South African liberation movement likewise implicated Israel as the equivalent to the colonial powers. However, there was much more than similar modes of governance that connected Israel to the colonial counterrevolution. The rapid growth of Israeli activity in sub-Saharan Africa was the first item in the news roundup in *Tricontinental*’s initial issue. Beginning in the early 1960s, Israel began to promote itself in sub-Saharan Africa by offering loans, technical assistance, and scholarships to the new African states. It also began to promote itself as a tourist destination, running contests for trips to the Israel.\textsuperscript{52}

Taken in isolation, such activities were seemingly the most banal and benevolent methods utilized in the building of friendly relations between states. However, what made these policies interesting and relevant for *Tricontinental* was their wider context, and what such policies reveal about Israel’s deeply racialized foreign policy ideology and practice.

Quoting *Revolution Africaine*, “the central organ of the NLF of Algeria,” *Tricontinental* argued the Israelis were actively currying favor “for the purpose of wooing support away from the Arab countries and introduction of a wedge between the Arab countries of North Africa and so-called ‘Black Africa.’” This argument was expanded upon two years later in the 1969 article “Israel: Imperialist Mission in Africa: The Untold

\textsuperscript{51} Petran, “Palestine,” 51.

\textsuperscript{52} “News Behind the News,” *Tricontinental* 1 (July-August 1967), 107.
Story of Israel’s Counterrevolutionary Role in Africa.” Penned by the Africa Research Group, a group of left-wing researchers and intellectuals based in the United States, the article argued that “For over ten years, Israel has played a relatively invisible but strategically important role in Africa as a servant of the US organized ‘free world’ empire.” In this reading, US state planners actively cultivated an image of Israel as a “third force” between “the free world” and the “Communist bloc” in order to penetrate Africa for the benefit of US policy. Evidence for this view was widespread and was marshaled from official US government documents published by USAID, Foreign Affairs, university theses, and more. According to their reading of such documents, it was wrong to see US policy merely as unrestrained antagonism between the US and the newly independent states in Africa and Asia. Instead, Third World revolutionaries needed to be wary of US influence being invited through the backdoor: “Only the right-wing hardheads in the State Department grouped around [Secretary of State John Foster] Dulles saw in this nationalism a serious threat to US interests. More sophisticated strategists understood that nationalist proclivities toward neutralism and nonalignment could be shaded to mask dependency and Western control.” Israeli aid programs targeted areas such as counterinsurgency, military, and police training; military-style youth mobilization; the foundation of anticommunist labor unions; as well as technical

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53 Africa Research Group, “Israel: Imperialist Mission in Africa: The Untold Story of Israel’s Counterrevolutionary Role in Africa,” Tricontinental 15 (November-December 1969), 39. About the authors (from the same page): “[The] Africa Research Group [ARG] specializes in economic research concerning Africa. Its informative material, published in the United States and other countries, is gathered without financial support from government agencies or large foundations. Its aim is to present new information indicating the global magnitude of the United States’ racist and exploitative policies; and at the same time, to contribute to a sharpening of the anti-imperialist struggle.” For more information on the Africa Research Group, see http://africanactivist.msu.edu/organization.php?name=Africa+Research+Group (accessed 6 April 2014).

54 The most significant sources the article draws from is Leopold Laufer, Israel and the Developing Countries: New Approaches to Cooperation (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1967); and Sanford Silverburg, “Israel Military and Paramilitary Assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa: A Harbinger for the Role of the Military in Developing States” (MA thesis, American University, 1968).

development training and assistance. Clearly, US foreign policy planners had no reason
to object – and every reason to support – such activities on behalf of the Israeli
government.

Studies on Israeli intervention in Africa were corroborated in *Tricontinental* by
first hand reports by African militants, such as the leaders of the national liberation
movement in so-called “Portuguese Guinea.”56 In an interview conducted in the
OSPAAAL office in Havana, Luís Cabral, a member of the Political Bureau of the
African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), reported that
“the bombs used against us belong to the North American army. All the communications
the Portuguese have are British made. The warships are French, and most of the arms are
Israeli.”57 Cabral went on to explain that Israeli efforts to contain his movement went
beyond material support and into the realm of strategic and tactical guidance.

Portugal has a strong alliance with Israel…Israel’s action is not limited to
giving the Portuguese the means they need to destroy our people. Israel is
also trying to sabotage our struggle by using small groups of people
originally from our country who call themselves nationalists and who,
nevertheless, are agents of Portuguese colonialism. These people are sent
to Israel and we have reports of Israeli-trained agents trying to infiltrate
our ranks. We are vigilant. If anything is true, it is that every victory of the
Arab people, of the Palestinian people against Zionism is also a victory for
our people, for our liberation struggle.58

Cabral’s statement helps to demonstrate that ecumenical Third World solidarity was not
cultivated and sustained through mere internationalist platitudes. In most cases, the

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56 For the history of decolonization in the Portuguese colonies, and Southern Africa more
generally, see Westad, *Global Cold War*, 207-249; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana,
Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and
57 Luís Cabral, “‘Portuguese’ Guinea: United Front Against Imperialism,” *Tricontinental* 15
(November-December 1969), 145.
58 Cabral, “‘Portuguese’ Guinea,” 146.
adversaries locked in combat in every arena were each connected to opposing networks of material and ideological sustenance that spanned the globe. Political alliances were formed out of necessity: one was either with the forces of revolution or the counterrevolution. Stated in Cabral’s terms, “the same enemies form a front to continue dominating and repressing.”

Luís’ half-brother, Amilcar Cabral, the noted pan-African intellectual who founded and led the PAIGC, had earlier expressed full support for the Palestinian people in the pages of *Tricontinental*. His statement was notable for its clear view of what drove the Palestinian cause, which he unmistakably saw as an anticolonial struggle against an occupying power that had dispossessed the indigenous population of their homeland.

We have as a basic principle the defense of just causes… On this basis we believe that the creation of Israel, carried out by the imperialist states to maintain their domination in the Middle East, was artificial and aimed at the creation of problems in that very important region of the world. This is our position: the Jewish people who follow the Jewish religion have the right to live and have lived very well in different countries of the world. We lament profoundly what the Nazis did to the Jewish people, that Hitler and his lackeys destroyed almost six million during the last World War. But we also understand that this does not give them the right to occupy a part of the Arab nation. We believe that the people of Palestine have a right to their land. We therefore think that all the measures taken by the Arab peoples, by the Arab nation, to recover the Palestinian Arab homeland are justified.

In this conflict that is endangering world peace we are entirely in favor of and unconditionally support the Arab peoples. We do not wish for war; but we want the Arab peoples to obtain the freedom of the people of

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59 Cabral, “‘Portuguese’ Guinea,” 146.
Palestine, to free the Arab nation of that element of imperialist disturbance and domination which Israel constitutes.\(^{61}\)

As we have seen, the themes Amilcar Cabral touched upon were well represented within the pages of *Tricontinental*: Zionism was not equated with Judaism and Jews; Israel was seen as a western, settler-colonial regime indebted to imperialist interests; the Palestinians have a right to resist occupation by any means necessary; and Palestinians constituted a nation with rights to a homeland and to recognition by the international community.

The idea that Israel sought to build an anti-Arab alliance through building relations with non-Arab states cannot be dismissed as an Arab nationalist or Communist conspiracy theory.\(^{62}\) Israeli scholar Yoram Shapira noted that in the early 1960s, Israel adopted a “policy of striving to cultivate ties with radical and neutralist regimes in an effort to mitigate their potential or actual pro-Arab tendencies.”\(^{63}\) As another political scientist put it, “Israel gives military aid to African states because she would like the support of their leaders in her struggle with the Arab states.”\(^{64}\) In doling out such aid, Israel placed a special emphasis on arming and training African military and police forces, and *Tricontinental* did not fail to notice such practices. The first issue carried a report on how “the intelligence and counterintelligence corps and armies of countries such as Uganda have been organized and are advised by Israeli officers. The repressive force of

\(^{61}\) Amílcar Cabral, “Determined to Resist,” *Tricontinental* 8 (September-October 1968), 125.

\(^{62}\) For the view that the PLO was “the brainchild of the KGB,” and that Romanian intelligence services provided Arafat with “unfortunate preteen orphan boys” to fuel his “voracious pedophilia” and that secret videotapes of these acts were “the key to the Soviets’ control over him” and thus the Palestinian national movement, see David Meir-Levi, *History Upside Down: The Roots of Palestinian Fascism and the Myth of Israeli Aggression* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007), 18-35.


Ethiopia and the Congo were also trained and are today advised by Israeli officers.”65

Besides the obvious intelligence benefits reaped by constructing a state’s surveillance infrastructure, as well as the material benefits gained through military contracts, assisting the construction of the repressive apparatus of new states came with the additional benefit of disproportionately influencing the political structure, as military men frequently assumed control of the state in postcolonial Afro-Asia.66 Indeed a number of the right-wing military dictators of Africa, such as General Joseph Mobutu of the Congo and General Joseph Ankrah of Ghana, were trained in Israel prior to taking power in coups against left-wing governments. Unsurprisingly, Israel’s strongest alliances were with the enemies of *Tricontinental*’s global leftist network: the repressive, non-Arab monarchies of Iran, Ethiopia, and Cambodia – all on the eve of revolution; apartheid South Africa and its dependencies Swaziland, Malawi, Botswana, and Lesthoto.67 While the Israeli effort to join the Third World project would later end nearly in complete failure, such an outcome was unclear at the time. A number of states began backing away from Israel after the mid-sixties, and its some of its strongest allies were overthrown, like the Shah of Iran in 1979-80. However, Israel’s alliance with the apartheid regime in South Africa remained strong and they would become increasingly involved in training and funding counterrevolutionaries in Latin America throughout the 1980s.68

Viewed from afar, *Tricontinental* saw the question of Palestine as intimately linked to the wider struggle for decolonization and the autonomous economic development of the Third World. The June 1967 war exposed the weaknesses of the Arab nationalist states, demonstrating not only the lack of coordination between them, but the lack of participation within them. For its part, Israel was seen as a racist settler-colonial state comparable to the white government of South Africa. The Zionist state’s international relations further drew the ire and suspicion of *Tricontinental*, as Israeli arms, training, and funding could be found shoring up European and US interests in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These things considered, it should be of little surprise that the anticolonialist leftists writing in *Tricontinental* found kindred spirits in the Palestinian national movement, the coverage of which we will now turn to.

*Inside Looking Out // The World in Palestine*

Now that we have seen how the Israel and the ongoing war for Palestine was viewed from without in the pages of *Tricontinental*, this section turns to look at how the journal covered the Palestinians. To use Edward Said’s memorable phrase, *Tricontinental* gave Palestinians “permission to narrate” their own experiences and aspirations – a rare opportunity in the late 1960s and 1970s. In some cases, this meant that Cuban journalists traveled to the Middle East to cover the war in person, and in others, Palestinian and Arab figures traveled to Cuba or submitted articles to the journal.

The Guerrilla Movement Revealed

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Cuban journalist Teófilo Acosta traveled to Syria to interview and photograph the guerrillas of al-Fatah for the third issue of *Tricontinental*. Arriving on the heels of the June 1967 watershed, and prior to the takeover of the Palestine Liberation Organization by the guerrilla generation, Acosta encountered the fighters – known in Arabic as the “fida’iyin,” those who sacrifice themselves – at the very beginning of their ascent to prominence. Although the article claims to be the first time a journalist has been granted access to the training camps, this is unlikely in light of the intense attention the guerrilla movement attracted in the Arab world. When he got there, he found men bursting with zeal and ambition, yet acutely aware of the limits of their own power.

At a secret camp in the Syrian countryside, Acosta was able to interview two leaders of Fatah. A Damascus-based political leader, codename Bashiri, regaled Acosta with the history of the PLO and the necessity of conducting a guerrilla war of national liberation. In his view, Palestinians were caught between Arab states hopelessly committed to conventional warfare, and the cruel ignominy of inaction amidst destitution.

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69 Following a thaw in US-Cuban relations in the late seventies, Acosta was later employed at the Cuban Interests Section in Washington DC. The section was based out of the Czech embassy and was established in September 1977. See [http://cubaconfidential.wordpress.com/tag/teofilo-acosta/](http://cubaconfidential.wordpress.com/tag/teofilo-acosta/) (accessed 3 May 2014).


71 There were almost certainly accounts of the training camps, interviews and photographs published in the Arabic press prior to this, however there is no way I can access this at this time. However, Rosemary Sayigh mentions that there was a ban on reporting on guerrilla actions prior to the June defeat. It was only after the ignominious defeat that Palestinian resistance “groups were allowed openly to recruit, train and publicize their existence.” Sayigh, *Palestinians*, 149.
“Life has shown,” he emphasized, “that the sad scene of refugee camps, publicized throughout the world since 1948, solves nothing.” Yet as Bashiri went on to explain his plan to restore Palestinian national rights through a popular war against the Zionist state, Acosta noted Bashiri was visibly affected. As Bashiri relayed his hopes, he sensed the audacity of his own vision: the odds were against him. Pausing to deliberate on how he got there, Bashiri stroked his hair, and summed up the perspective of a generation of Third World militants:

We know that this is not an easy undertaking but we refuse to regard it as impossible, as do the poor in spirit. Those who hold that point of view say that we are mad, that we are a group of adventurers. The eleven men who, together with Fidel Castro started off in the isolation of the Sierra Maestra shortly after the Granma landing should be asked what they think about this. The heroic Vietnamese combatants or veterans of the Algerian war of liberation should be asked. Go back to the example of the Bolsheviks to determine whether or not we can attain our objectives. This is a question of application of inviolable revolutionary principle: faith in the power of the masses, organized and armed. Always it is a minority that initiates the battle and dies, if necessary; and we are that that minority in the Middle East. The masses, sick of UN resolutions and empty talk, will soon follow us.

Bashiri’s soliloquy indicated how the Palestinian national movement drew considerable sustenance from the revolutionary experiences of others, and the mobility of certain ideas and practices in this period of great upheaval. His basic idea was an echo of Che Guevara and Régis Debray’s “foco theory” in the Middle East. In the foco schema, held to be legitimated by the experience of revolution in Cuba, aspiring revolutionaries need not wait for clear “objective conditions” to make revolution. Instead, a revolutionary

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73 Emphasis in original. The Granma was the name of the ship that Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and 80 other revolutionaries used to travel to Cuba from Mexico in 1956. Their landing in 1956 inaugurated the Cuban revolutionary war. Their opponents were immediately aware of their arrival and only a dozen men survived the initial battle. On 1 January 1959 the reinvigorated and wildly popular rebel army marched victoriously into the capital, Havana. Acosta, “al Fatah Commandos,” 74.
situation can be made through the focused instigations of a small guerrilla vanguard (the *foco*), which takes daring armed action toward insurrection, in turn inspiring the masses to rise up in support of the armed struggle.\(^{74}\) While the *foco* theory has often been dismissed for its failures to produce successful revolutions after Cuba, it must be said that in 1967, this process was underway in the Levant.\(^{75}\) Indeed, it would be a mistake to categorically dismiss the notion that armed struggle could spread revolutionary defiance and invigorated social conscience. Fatah’s first armed operation, carried out on 1 January 1965, immediately captured the attention of Arab society, through its demonstration that actions could be taken, beyond the rhetoric of Arab regimes, against the seemingly invincible Israeli occupation. But more importantly than this, Palestinians transformed *themselves* through guerrilla action, altering their self-image from passive refugees into revolutionaries responsible for their own destiny.\(^{76}\) The legitimacy and urgency of guerrilla action only increased following the June 1967 defeat of the conventional Arab armies – the second defeat in less than twenty years.

Acosta’s second subject expressed similar motivations in acting to make the revolution. Abou Amer, a man of forty years: “there is no war without casualties, but it far better to die bringing down the enemy, knowing that final victory will be ours than to await a slow, miserable death sitting in a tent in the desert.”\(^{77}\) He lamented that, “in reality, we have had very little assistance” from anyone – Arab or otherwise – and their hands were tied by the authority of the various Arab regimes Palestinians were forced to


\(^{75}\) See, for example, Westad, *Global Cold War*, 177-180.


\(^{77}\) Acosta, “al Fatah Commandos,” 74.
live under. “If we had a strong movement within Israel,” Abou Amer speculated, “the history of the June events might have been different.”\textsuperscript{78} “There can be no compromise or conciliation with the enemy,” he continued, “we must fight to the last man, showing the same courage in battle as the Vietnamese patriots.”\textsuperscript{79} Abou Amer then took Acosta outside to observe the guerrillas in training. “With bared torsos, they entered a tunnel full of dirty water and swam to the exit, twenty meters away.” Swimming, jumping, fighting, and shooting, the men engaged in actions of questionable utility, but displayed unquestionable determination. The spirit was infectious, and Acosta appeared accustomed to scenes from guerrilla life. “After leaving the camp in a jeep,” Acosta concluded, wistfully, “from afar I still seemed to hear the gunfire and the vigorous cries: Commandos! Commandos!”

Men and women like Bashiri and Abou Amer clearly drew inspiration from the march of struggles they saw were kindred to theirs. The perseverance of the Vietnamese and the victory of the Bolshevik, Algerian, and Cuban revolutions against seemingly impossible odds – against counterrevolutionary forces that sometimes consisted of a combination of several empires – nourished the Palestinians, nearly two million of whom had been living in refugee camps for twenty years by this point. They had been dispossessed of their homes and stripped of their civil and political rights; wherever they traveled they were seen as potentially dangerous aliens.\textsuperscript{80} After the Arab regimes’ defeat

\textsuperscript{78} Acosta, “al Fatah Commandos,” 75.
\textsuperscript{79} Acosta, “al Fatah Commandos,” 76.
\textsuperscript{80} This point is lucidly stressed in Ghassan Kanafani, \textit{Men in the Sun & Other Palestinian Stories} (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999).
in June 1967, the only people they could turn to were themselves – and their scattered comrades across the globe.\textsuperscript{81}

**Little Fidels**

A year later, in 1968, Cuban journalist A. Zapata traveled to an undisclosed Arab country (likely Jordan) to interview and photograph the guerrillas based there. “Crowded into a small car” with a member of Fatah’s Political Section, Zapata recounted, “we began to leave behind the false peace which is so widely preached in today’s world and to draw closer to war, the only road which really leads the peoples to the winning of their most inalienable right.”\textsuperscript{82} Brought into a tent at a guerrilla camp in the mountains, Zapata was introduced to Abu ‘Ammar, the nom-de-guerre of Yasser Arafat, the secretary-general of Fatah.\textsuperscript{83} As they talked under a gas lamp, Zapata was impressed with his hosts’ awareness and hospitality, “Warm greetings welcomed us: questions on the struggle in Bolivia and in all of Latin America and the situation in Cuba were their first phrases, demonstrating that these fighters have room in their hearts and minds for the struggles of other peoples.” “Your revolution, Castro, and Che,” Arafat told him, “are very familiar to our fighters. You will be able to see that there are many who have let their beards grow in honor of the Sierra Maestra fighters, including some who have adopted Castro’s name, like this boy.”\textsuperscript{84} The sixteen-year-old fighter told Zapata his training captain “wanted us to be like Castro,” and that he adopted this name after the martyrdom of his teacher. As

\textsuperscript{81} The view that there was “no other road to take” other than armed struggle against a foreign imperial power determined to maintain its domination was the common view of most anticolonial revolutionaries by the late 1960s. For a view from Vietnam, see Nguyen Thi Dinh, *No Other Road to Take: Memoir of Mrs. Nguyen Thi Dinh*, trans. Mai V. Elliott (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Dept. of Asian Studies, Cornell University, 1976). See also her interview in *Tricontinental*: Nguyen Thi Dinh, “Viet-Nam: Nixon’s Manuevers,” *Tricontinental* 15 (November-December 1969), 4-11.


\textsuperscript{83} He is never referred to as Arafat in the article.

\textsuperscript{84} Zapata, “Palestinian Rebellion,” 62.
the boy left, the Cuban journalists affirmed his wish, telling him, “you are already beginning to be like Fidel.”

Despite this warm exchange of fraternity between two struggling peoples separated by language, continents, oceans, and history, the limits of internationalism were also apparent in this encounter. In contrast to Arafat’s enthusiasm and confident charisma, Zapata was confronted with the many particularities of the struggle for Palestinian self-determination while speaking to another founding member of Fatah. The unidentified, impressive young man was a hospital director in the area, and Zapata found him “expressive; with an affable personality, broad knowledge, and an interest in international affairs.” Over the course of their dialogue, the director identified the many obstacles facing the development of the Palestinian revolution.

Our movement must face many difficulties. It differs greatly from the national liberation movements of Latin America in some aspects, and from all the other national liberation movements in others. For example, we cannot count on the support of workers, peasants, or any group of people whatsoever in Israel; they have all declared themselves to be our enemies, although our struggle is against imperialism and for the liberation of our country. Another aspect is the terrain. As there are no mountains or wooded plains, we must carry out commando actions in zones completely lacking in vegetation; this is why we have not been able to make better use of the revolutionary experiences of other peoples. We must create our own methods, our own tactics, constantly.

Far from leaving Zapata deterred, such a frank and precise discussion left him feeling more confident that such problems would be overcome in “the development of the armed struggle.” As Zapata’s two days in the camp came to an end, “The future commandos of

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85 Zapata, “Palestinian Rebellion,” 63.
86 Zapata, “Palestinian Rebellion,” 64.
Al Fatah took leave of us with heartfelt shouts of ‘Long live Palestine!’ and ‘Long live Cuba!’”

Acosta and Zapata’s transnational journeys connected one successful guerilla struggle, Cuba’s, with another, just getting its start among the Palestinians. Theories, experiences, and even cultural practices made the journey along with them. It is important to note that not all activists and militants in the Palestinian revolution were guerrilla fighters. The movement produced numerous writers, scholars, politicians, poets, doctors, filmmakers, teachers, and artists whose work was committed to the cause. This too was covered in *Tricontinental*, and aside from reportage from Cuban correspondents in the field, Arab voices in *Tricontinental* included articles and interviews with political leaders visiting the island, or writing in from abroad.

**Shafiq Speaks**

Born in Jaffa on 13 January 1932, Shafiq al Hout was forced out of Palestine on 23 April 1948. Seeking refuge in Lebanon, he studied at the American University of Beirut, where he became submerged in nationalist political activism. After graduation, al Hout became an influential journalist and the editor of the Beirut magazine al-Hawadath (*The Events*), as well as a founding member of the Palestine Liberation Front, an important early Palestinian nationalist party. Because of his high profile as a journalist in Beirut, as well as his Lebanese ancestry, he was eventually tapped as the PLO’s Representative to Lebanon and was made director of the Beirut office upon the organization’s founding in 1964. A popular figure amongst Palestinians and many

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87 Zapata, “Palestinian Rebellion,” 69.
88 The following biographical details are culled from al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*. 
Lebanese, he maintained his political independence from any of the major Palestinian factions. An on-and-off member of the PLO Executive Committee, he resigned in protest to the 1993 Oslo agreement secretly concluded between Israel and Arafat. He passed away in Beirut in 2009, unable to return to the home he lost and so vigorously committed himself to restore.

al Hout’s life is notable for our purposes because he visited Cuba many times during his tenure as both a journalist and PLO representative.89 He recalled how the island, “which was often closer to our thinking than many Arab and Islamic nations,” had been an isolated bastion of support for the beleaguered Palestinians since the revolution of 1959.90 In January 1971, al Hout attended the International Organization of Journalists’ seventh conference, held in Havana to show support for the Cuban revolution and the ongoing struggles against imperialism underway across the globe.91 While in Havana for the IOJ conference, al Hout stopped by the offices of *Tricontinental* and gave an interview covering the “history and future” of the Palestinian struggle.

al Hout had plenty to say on the ill-treatment of the Palestinians, not only by the British, US, UN, and Israel – each of which systematically excluded Palestinian political rights on numerous occasions – but by the Arab states.92 While the abuses of the latter

89 For his accounts of several of his trips to Cuba, see al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, 140-146.
91 According to al Hout, the IOJ was established to deepen progressive journalists knowledge of global struggles: “Although progressive and socialist reporters know more than the average person about freedom fighters, their knowledge remains basic. That was why an international journalists’ organization had been established. This was its seventh international conference and the reason for our presence in Havana,” al Hout, *My Life in the PLO*, 144.
were commonplace in *Tricontinental*, the specific troubles Palestinians faced with the Arab states had not been adequately described. As al Hout put it: “I am sorry to say it…but we were treated as if we were in concentration camps, especially in Jordan and Lebanon, where there are large numbers of Palestinians. We lived in encampments under military regulations, and were never taken to a civilian court before being sent to jail.”

The situation was particularly bad in Jordan, where upwards of 60% of the population were (and remain) Palestinian refugees expelled in 1948 and 1967. Since 1948 al Hout claimed some 25,000 Palestinians had been imprisoned for political activity in Jordan, and that “Whoever fights against imperialism is considered a communist and is consequently sent to jail.” The inevitable conflict between the Jordanian absolutist monarchy and the Palestinian revolution brewing under its gaze erupted into armed conflict in September 1970. “The culminating point of the conspiracy,” al Hout narrated, took place last September when we were surprised by a military government formed in Amman and it was expected that we would surrender to it. We had to resist but it was impossible. We had not thought the Jordanian regime was so cruel and barbarous. The bloody week of last September was incredible because we did not doubt that it would attack our bases, kill our guerrilla fighters, imprison our leaders, but we never thought it would permit its artillery to bomb the cities and encampments indiscriminately; moreover, the majority of the losses we suffered were unarmed and peaceful citizens, older persons, women, children. They cut off the electricity, they cut off the water, but the people resisted heroically; the casualties were around 20,000 among the wounded, dead, and missing.

By early 1971, Palestinians were under siege from all directions. Summarizing the difficult corner the Palestinians were backed into, al Hout continued: “We have a

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95 For historical treatments of the events that would come to be known as “Black September,” see Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 243-283; Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, 105-127.
confrontation against the imperialists, the Israelis and the reactionary Arab regimes, we face napalm, cannons, concentration camps and we are surrounded by censorship of information.” As one scholar memorably put it, the Palestinians faced “too many enemies.”

Commenting on the international environment, al Hout went to the heart of the obfuscations of the so-called “Peace Process,” another development of the 1967 war. The territories captured by Israel in the war could be returned to the Arab states (not the Palestinians) in exchange for recognition of and peace with the State of Israel within its 1948 borders. In response to the talk of “peace” in the so-called “international community,” al Hout drew sharp observations on the legal and linguistic gymnastics being performed to dance around recognition of the Palestinians’ lot and their national rights:

[US president Richard] Nixon says he wants to give the Palestinians their legitimate rights; [Israeli prime minister] Golda Meir says she wants to give the Palestinians their legitimate rights, but what are these legitimate rights? We are not a company asking for legitimate rights, we are a nation fighting for national rights, for liberty for the reunification of the homeland…The Rogers Plan might satisfy the problem of 1967 with respect to the new territories occupied, but it does not satisfy the basic problem which is the territories occupied in 1948. Moreover, if we study the Rogers Plan, we note…the Rogers Plan was not directed to nor did it recognize the Palestinians, [it] offers a solution only to the Arab states.

al Hout then contrasted these American and Israeli diplomatic measures designed to brush the Palestinians under the rug with the much more favorable position of the Cubans.

97 This problem only increased with time. Rosemary Sayigh, Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon (London: Zed, 1994).
At the IOJ, Cuba and other national liberation movements present were adamant that the final resolution of the congress included a statement on the national rights of the Palestinian people. He praised of Cuban Foreign Minister Raúl Roa’s speech to the conference, which also used the language of “legitimate rights.” “But when one speaks of legitimate rights,” al Hout contended,

it is very important to know who is speaking of them…Raúl Roa represents the Cuban Revolution and his concept of legitimate rights is different from legitimate rights according to the way the North Americans in Washington understand them. That is why Raúl Roa, in his speech described the Palestinian people as heroic, sacrificing, and said that their revolution is an inspiration for all revolutionary peoples; if one speaks of legitimate rights, and it is Raúl Roa who is speaking, it is fine, but when stated by Nixon I do not believe it and cannot trust it.  

Cuban support for Palestinian aspirations at international forums, from the UN to the IOJ was a major boon to the budding national movement. In the 1960s and 70s, few states had a better reputation than Cuba amongst global progressive opinion, widely seen as having carried out and defended a necessary revolution for social justice against US political and economic domination. That is, outside the United States, where the revolution was – mostly, but not totally – demonized and Fidel Castro personified the “man North Americans loved to hate.” That the US so detested the Cuban revolution only increased its prestige for anti-imperialists everywhere, especially the Palestinians,

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100 al Hout, “History and Future of a Right,” 132.
who were well aware of the US role in underwriting the State of Israel politically, militarily, and economically.  

Conclusion

The struggle over Palestine was one of the foremost themes taken up in the first years of the Cuban revolutionary journal *Tricontinental*. The magazine’s launch immediately followed the June 1967 setback, allowing it to both witness and participate in the rise to prominence of the Palestinian revolutionary movement in the Arab world, as well as among the partisans of the Third World project more generally. As an outlet committed to the struggles of national liberation movements and postcolonial states, the journal was one of the most significant forums within which the situation of the Palestinians was analyzed, discussed, and disseminated. Not only did the journal highlight the Palestinian cause, but it afforded Palestinians with the valuable opportunity to speak to a sympathetic audience.

Unlike many contemporary observers, *Tricontinental* never saw the Arab-Israeli conflict as an isolated regional phenomenon. Instead, the struggle was seen as a clear site of the ongoing process of decolonization. Just as the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli war reflected conditions prevailing across the Third World; the Eastern Mediterranean was not the only arena in which the Arab-Israeli war played out. Israelis and Palestinians worked hard to build alliances with like-minded political forces around the world, and the side each took in every conflict was remarkably consistent: the Israelis continually found themselves on the side of the imperial powers and their local collaborators, while

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Palestinians constantly threw their lot in with the colonized. Palestinians were actively concerned with the development of revolutions in Latin America, Africa, and Asia and self-consciously appropriated not only their military tactics, but their iconography. Young fida’iyin grew beards to appear more like Fidel and Che’s guerrilla army in the Sierra Maestra, while Palestinian kuffiyya scarves became a familiar sight among leftists around the world. Like everything in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the degree to which each side could offer their allies support was starkly uneven. As stateless refugees, the Palestinians could offer little but moral support, while the Israelis presented copious arms, training, and funding to their clients. While the Israelis seem to have won every battle so far, they may yet lose the war. *Tricontinental* was a pioneer of the global perspective that exposed Zionism from the standpoint of its victims.