

What Is Behind The Royal Decision?

In July 1988, King Hussein of Jordan announced the severance of Jordan's administrative ties to the West Bank. The decision came as a surprise to many observers of the Hashemite Kingdom's policy towards the occupied Arab territories and the Palestinian problem.

JORDAN'S decision should be put in an historical perspective. In April 1988 the Amman government suggested six principles as a basis for the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the solution of the Palestinian problem and handed US Secretary of State George Shultz a document reiterating the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and supporting the idea of all-embracing talks within the framework of a competent international conference on a Middle East settlement.

Presumably, such a démarche should have involved the close coordination of actions between Jordan and the PLO — but that was not the case. Tensions grew markedly in our country last spring due to the aggravation of Jordanian-Palestinian relations. The Jordanian leaders, especially the prime minister, contributed to the difficulties. Some commentators believe that those developments were a reaction to statements by Israeli officials to the effect that Jordan was 'the Palestinians' traditional homeland'; others pointed to a marked improvement of the Syrian-Palestinian relations and the resultant worry of the Jordanian leaders over the possible revival of the tripartite alliance of Syria, the Palestinians and the Lebanese national patriotic forces.

But still another point deserves attention. The Palestinian leaders' talks with the Soviet leadership in April 1988, the Soviet Union's solidarity with the Palestinians' struggle and its firm resolve to contribute to a Middle East settlement were very important to the Palestinian people. The backing of their just cause gave a fresh impetus to the liberation struggle on the occupied Arab lands. All that dimmed the prospects' of the so-called Jordanian option, through which the United States and Israel would like to exclude the PLO from the settlement process. The results of the Moscow

talks also helped promote Syrian-Palestinian cooperation which, though short-lived, opened up good prospects, especially after the Algiers emergency meeting of the Arab leaders.¹

As everyone knows, the reactionary Arab regimes, including the Jordanian one, did whatever they could to block that summit. While making statements in support of the uprising, they went out of their way to prevent the Arab countries from working out a common stand, in order to gain time for the US Administration and Arab reaction to stifle the Palestinians' uprising. The Jordanian newspaper *Ad Dustur* even floated the lie that the so-called Shultz initiative had been launched with the Soviet Union's consent.

The Algiers summit took note of the clearly controversial character of the Jordanian leaders' statements: while criticising the US for its refusal to recognise the Palestinians' rights, they backed Shultz's proposals. What then is Jordan's true stand on the Palestinian problem? It seems quite positive on the surface. But why wasn't the PLO consulted as the decision was taken?

The authorities' decision to cut administrative ties to the West Bank called for the dissolution of the House of Representatives, the suspension of the Senate, the scrapping of the development plan for the West Bank² and cuts in spending on salaries to civil servants and other employees.³ The government stated that the Palestinians living in Jordan were royal subjects and that 'Jordan is not Palestine'. The Ministry of Occupied Territories Affairs became a department in the Jordanian Foreign Ministry. The move as a whole is presented as a response to the Arab and Palestinian demands to consider the PLO the only lawful representative of the Palestinian people.

The decree on the severance of administrative ties is technically unconstitutional because it was not approved by the House of Representatives. But that is not the point. The onus of responsibility (legal, administrative and financial) for the occupied territories has now been shifted onto the shoulders of the PLO, which, as Amman hopes, will have to coordinate closer its actions with Jordan and become more dependent on it. And the fact that the break with the West Bank has not been formalised constitutionally leaves the loophole for reversing the decision if need be, say, under the slogan of 'Arab unity' or under another plausible pretext.

The finances are an important aspect as well: although the PLO has resources to support the uprising and give aid to the West Bank population, now these activities will depend on the 'goodwill' of the Jordanian authorities, to say nothing of the resistance of Israel, which continues to view the PLO as a terrorist organisation.

It is perfectly correct that 'Jordan is not Palestine'. But are the Palestinians living in the Hashemite Kingdom Jordanians? This approach in fact ignores the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination because it fails to recognise the right to return and to preserve national identity for the Palestinians living in Jordan.

Here the question arises anew: is all this Amman's concession to the PLO under the impact of the uprising or does it want in this way to put the

Palestinian patriots between the Israeli hammer and the Jordanian anvil to crush the uprising and prevent the emergence of an independent Palestinian state?

The popular uprising on the occupied lands undoubtedly changed the situation in the Arab world and the character of the struggle between steadfastness and the capitulatory mood, the rise and stagnation in the Arab liberation movement. The uprising flared up and is going on in controversial circumstances. It began at a time when the right-wing forces had achieved some success, as was evidenced by the decisions of the Amman summit. At the same time the region has seen some positive developments in the recent period: the Arab petro-dollars carry less weight, the Lebanese national patriotic forces have become more staunch, the Sudanese people have defeated the dictatorship, the Algerian summit was a success and a ceasefire was called at the Iranian-Iraqi front. The Palestinian uprising has dotted the i's, so to speak, by resolutely brushing aside the capitulatory slogans and sentiments. The Palestinians led by the PLO have seized the initiative and are demonstrating to the whole world remarkable staunchness in fighting for their national goals.

The Soviet peace offensive, the furtherance of the principles of peaceful coexistence within the framework of new political thinking and the Soviet Union's active role in the political settlement of regional conflicts are exerting considerable influence on the situation in the Middle East. All those factors put together have had an impact on the formulation of a common Arab stand and contributed towards the abandonment of capitulatory positions and one-sided deals. The positive trends undoubtedly have an effect on the reactionary Arab politicians; they were a major factor behind Amman's decision to drop the 'Jordanian option' of resolving the Palestinian problem.

Hussein's latest political steps cannot be attributed to the effect of any single factor. The specific economic and political circumstances of Jordan, a small country which is in constant need of foreign aid, have to be analysed in order to understand the situation correctly. The Jordanian economy is extremely vulnerable: its foreign trade is equivalent to its GNP, which cannot but have an impact on politics.

Jordan is exposed to a greater extent and more immediately than any other Arab country to the effects of the Palestinian uprising. Having severed administrative ties with the West Bank but retaining the constitutional ones, Amman has not abandoned its erstwhile ambitions, its dream of a confederation. Only the schedule of its establishment has been revised: it is to be put together *after* and not *before* the emergence of an independent Palestinian state. To all appearances, the King has not dropped the 'Jordanian option' altogether but merely attempted to adjust it to the changed circumstances.

The alignment of forces in Jordan's ruling alliance, worried by the upswing in the Arab national liberation movement under the impact of the Palestinian uprising, has also influenced the latest developments. The socio-economic and political crisis in the country is worsening. Under pressure from the masses the leaders of the uprising have demanded that

the West Bank deputies to Jordan's National Assembly resign, thus effectively scuttling the 'Jordanian option'.

The decision to break off administrative ties is meant to contain 'the epidemic of the uprising' and to pacify our people, who have always been in solidarity with the Palestinians. But the uprising cannot be simply exported into Jordan; what it can do is give an impetus to the maturing of appropriate conditions within the country.

We have to bear in mind also the heterogeneity of the ruling élite itself and differences within it on the Palestinian-Jordanian relations. The demands of members of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie range from the total rupture of all ties to the continuation of Arab aid to the Palestinians in their confrontation with Israel. The comprador bourgeoisie has a pragmatic, cosmopolitan approach to the problem. They have an interest in the formation of an independent Palestinian state only insofar as their continued influence is concerned. The 'liberal bourgeoisie', which accounts for a rather small segment of the hierarchy of power, is confused and undecided.

What are the prospects now? The uprising has passed the test of staunchness. In the course of it the Palestinians have built firm foundations for their future state and the PLO is ready to assume government. But the problem goes beyond the demands to form a government in exile or to proclaim a Palestinian state: what is important is the political programme of such a government or state.

It is absolutely clear that *the problem can be resolved only if the Palestinians exercise their right to self-determination*. Attempts to conclude separate deals and other palliatives, just as extremism, are useless and have no future. The only way out then is to convene a representative international conference with the participation of all the parties concerned, including the PLO. Such a move calls for unanimity at least among the Arab states directly confronting Israel. The self-determination of the Palestinian people cannot be allowed to become a contentious issue between Arab countries: meanwhile, it was not even on the agenda of the Amman summit, called pretentiously 'a forum of concord and understanding'.

The present situation calls for a higher level of cooperation between Jordan and the PLO on a principled basis. There is a need for a close alliance between the PLO, Syria and the Lebanese national patriotic forces; the lack of such cooperation is the main factor holding back a comprehensive settlement of the problem and enabling Israel and the reactionary Arab forces to manoeuvre.

The heroic uprising is opening fresh prospects for the settlement of the Middle East crisis and for the struggle of the progressive forces in Jordan itself.

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