

The Jordanian-Palestinian Peace Initiative: Mutual Recognition and Territory for Peace

King Hussein

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The movement toward peace in the Middle East has never been at a more critical crossroads than it is today, and . . . efforts to contribute to a peaceful settlement have consequently never been more needed. For the first time since Israel invaded and captured the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Golan Heights, eighteen years ago, there exists an unprecedented opportunity for the parties involved to reactivate the peace process, based on the return of territory in exchange for peace. This opportunity should not be missed. It is an opportunity that I know will never come again, if we fail now.

In February, we in Jordan, with our Palestinian brethren structured an initiative that represents an important breakthrough in the Arab search for peace. It is an initiative that holds enormous promise if it is received with the trust and good will with which it has been formulated and offered.

I refer to the Jordanian-Palestinian accord concluded in February between the Government of Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and recognized by the majority of nations.

*Excerpts from the address of His Majesty King Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, delivered at the 13th Annual Convention of the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA), May 4, 1985, Washington, D.C.

This accord represents an historic and unprecedented opportunity to resolve the Middle East conflict peacefully, through negotiations based upon the principles embodied in the United Nations Security Council resolutions.

For the first time, we in Jordan, with our Palestinian brethren, have structured an initiative representing the pursual of their goals of self-determination through peaceful means.

They have also agreed to the principle that a peace settlement should be based on the return of the captured territories of 1967 in exchange for recognition of Israel's right to exist within secure and recognized borders, as called for by United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338. The PLO has also ascertained that the right of Palestinian self-determination will be exercised within the context of a confederated state of Palestine and Jordan.

The circumstances which have created this opportunity for negotiation will not last indefinitely. For the PLO to have taken this step was an act of great courage. If the PLO continues to be denied a part of the peace process, and the creeping annexation of the West Bank continues, how long will it be before the Palestinians and Arabs conclude that peace in our time is unattainable and struggle is the only alternative?

In Israel, too, circumstances will not remain the same indefinitely. Despite some positive and encouraging signs among responsible elements, there are those who insist that not a single inch of the West Bank, Gaza, or the Golan should be returned. These include members of the Israeli cabinet who could assume power before long.

We do not believe that it is possible for Jordan and the PLO on their own to reach a settlement with Israel. Let me explain.

The Jordan-PLO agreement accepts the UN Security Council resolutions which include, among other things, the principle of the "inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war" derived from the United Nations Charter. These resolutions make clear that the territories captured in 1967 should be returned for Arab recognition of Israel's right to live within secure and recognized borders. President Reagan's own initiative of September 1, 1982 recommends essentially this same solution. The governing principle and negotiating formula must be: total peace for total withdrawal. All parties must be prepared to negotiate a comprehensive settlement on this basis.

It is essential for the United States, the co-sponsor of Resolution 242... and the author of President Reagan's initiative, to participate actively in

formulating a just and comprehensive peace to insure that the principles of both are fully honored.

I believe Jordan can be proud of its continuing efforts over the past eighteen years to settle the Arab-Israeli dispute peacefully. Despite frustration, isolation and setbacks, Jordan has not wavered in its purpose.

Let me review what Jordan has done in the last two years to advance the cause of peace. In 1982, in the wake of the tragic invasion of Lebanon, we welcomed President Reagan's courageous initiative, despite the fact that Israel flatly rejected that initiative within twenty-four hours. Two weeks later, the Arab League held its summit conference in Fez, Morocco. Our serious efforts there were rewarded when the summit agreed on a unanimous declaration which, in its call for the United Nations Security Council to guarantee the right of all states in the region to live in peace, was an implicit Arab recognition of Israel.

Jordan continued to work to restore unity and cohesion to the Arab world. We restored diplomatic relations with Egypt. In November 1984, we risked the wrath of some in welcoming the Palestine National Council to meet in Amman. This meeting allowed the Palestinians to persevere in their cause. Our efforts were rewarded when Jordan and the PLO signed the February 11 agreement, which I have already described.

The Fez resolutions and the Jordan-PLO accord are the expression of the Arab commitment to live in peace with the people and the state of Israel—but only if Israel makes a similar commitment to live peacefully and on equal terms with her Arab neighbors, and particularly with a Palestinian people granted the right of self-determination.

To those in the West who seek Arab recognition of Israel's existence, we say this Arab commitment offers mutual recognition of Israeli and Palestinian national rights. To those in the West who seek security for Israel, we say this Arab commitment would guarantee the security of Israel and the Jordan-Palestine confederation—as well as all states in the area and parties to the conflict—within the context of a final comprehensive peace based on justice for all.

Finally, I would like to clear up two points about our policies which I believe are not fully understood in the United States. First, the people who live in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza are Palestinians, and it is their legitimate right, along with their brothers in the diaspora, to make the decisions that will determine their own future. It is the consensus among Palestinians that the PLO is their legitimate representative in any negoti-

ations determining their future. We are their partners according to their choice. We will never take away their right to represent themselves.

The second point I want to clarify is the concept of starting peace negotiations under the auspices of an international conference. We believe that the Middle East crisis has such global significance that it cannot be settled in isolation. The area has often been said to be the powder keg that could set off World War Three. It is surely a legitimate interest of other relevant parties to participate in negotiations designed to insure such a catastrophe never occurs. That is why our joint agreement suggests that peace negotiations should be conducted under international auspices.

Moreover, UN Resolutions 242 and 338 are the foundations of our efforts for peace, recognized as such in every peace initiative to date. We believe that the achievement of a just and durable peace has the best chance if the negotiation process is conducted in a context where every power with a legitimate interest in the region—particularly the five permanent members of the Security Council—has an incentive to facilitate a settlement, not to block one. We feel that such participation will also add credibility to the international guarantees that will be required to implement whatever solution is reached.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize my belief that Jordan and the PLO, having labored long and hard on their February 11 agreement, have made a significant move in the peace process. We cannot continue alone. We hope the United States will assume her special responsibilities as a superpower to support our efforts.

II**

I will focus my remarks on where I think we stand today on the prospects for peace in the Middle East. This focus does not mean we are unmindful or indifferent to other problems we all face in the world: the nuclear threat, the famine in Africa, the danger-filled gap between the haves and the have-nots, and the other conflicts around the world which are threatening lives and freedoms. We are concerned about all of these problems but our major concern at the moment is peace in the Middle East, and that is what I wish to discuss with you.

Earlier this week, I met with President Reagan. I also met with Vice President Bush, Secretary Shultz, Secretary Weinberger and other senior

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American officials. There is one basic point on which we all agree: the world cannot afford to miss what may be the last opportunity for a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

So let us place this conflict and the struggle for peace in perspective. We observed this month the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II. Armed with the lessons of that war and determined to ensure it would not happen again and that all future conflicts would be resolved peacefully, the community of nations established an organization to achieve that goal, the United Nations. World consent and support was unanimous. The ideals, principles, framework and intentions were exemplary, indeed, noble. The principles established to govern national conduct embodied a standard of values, universal in their acceptance and in their application. The new world order was to be based on justice, the inviolability of human rights, the illegality of conquest, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. A new world order was born; but the child's growth has been severely stunted by self-serving parents. A superior concept has produced inferior results. We all share responsibility for the failure. Many in this world have been the victims of its consequences.

One cannot discuss the Middle East in a vacuum, divorced from power politics or accepted norms of national conduct. I have selected the United Nations Charter for such norms, because it is a common document we have all accepted and signed. There is thus no room to argue principles, only their application. It has particular applicability to the Middle East because more hours have been consumed, more documents produced and more resolutions enacted by the United Nations on the Middle East conflict than all other conflicts and issues combined. Specifically, the accepted principles for a peaceful settlement of that conflict are contained in two of those resolutions, 242 and 338.

You might rightly ask, "Do the Palestinian people, who are obviously a principal party to any settlement—since it is, indeed, essentially the problem of their lives, land and future we are attempting to solve—accept these two resolutions which are to form the basis for peace?" I will tell you what I assured President Reagan. The answer is yes, the Palestinians are willing to accept United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, and the principles they contain, as the basis for a settlement.

This is an historic breakthrough. It is the first time in the thirty-nine year history of this conflict that Palestinian leaders, with the support of their people, have been willing to accept a negotiated peaceful settlement.

The evolution of this decision over thirty-nine years has its answer in some of the events which transpired during that period. I wish to remind you of some of them, not because I care to dwell on history, but because it will help explain the import of that decision and the ramifications it has on the peace process. I will summarize them briefly. Despite what may be the views and opinions in the West, this is how the Palestinian people view this problem.

In 1917, when Britain's [Lord] Balfour promised a "homeland for the Jews in Palestine," Jewish residents formed only nine percent of the population. By 1947, waves of Jewish immigrants increased their share of the population to thirty-five percent. In that same year, the United Nations partitioned the country, creating a Jewish and a Palestinian state. Fifty-five percent of the land was given to the Jewish minority, most of whom came from Europe. Forty-five percent went to the Palestinian majority, all of whom were born there. There were no Jews in the Palestinian state. There were almost as many Palestinians as Jews in the Jewish state. The most economically developed portion of Palestine was included in the Jewish state. All this was done without Palestinian consent or consultation. The shock and rejection of the Palestinians should not be difficult to understand.

During the 1948 war, Israel captured more land, ending up with seventy-eight percent. In 1967, it captured the remaining twenty-two percent. The successive loss of land and lives, and the multitude of refugees it created caused the shock, resentment, frustration and rejection which persisted. The Palestinians' despair was coupled with dwindling hopes that the international community would somehow redress the injustice and restore their rights and land. It did not.

There has been a change of outlook over recent years and a change of attitude over recent months, which have combined to effect the change in Palestinian policy regarding a peaceful solution. The relative futility of armed struggle and the burdens of continuing military occupation, suffering and destruction, have increased the desire for a peaceful alternative. The new trust which has developed between Jordan and the PLO after the decisions of the Arab summit at Fez, culminating in the February 1985 Accord between the government of Jordan and the PLO, and the subsequent understandings, has provided the Palestinians and Jordan, for the first time, with the means by which a peaceful alternative can be realized.

In effect, the Palestinians are turning from a past—despite the injustices—to a future which will protect their lives, restore their liberty and

permit their pursuit of happiness—all of which your nation considers to be rights that are universal and inalienable.

These are the reasons why the new Palestinian position is such an historic breakthrough and opportunity. If we fail to seize this opportunity, the alternative is preordained: further shock, deeper resentment, greater frustration and sharper rejection not only by the Palestinians, but by the entire area. Failure is bound to encourage and strengthen extremism on both sides. That is why time is essential and success imperative.

The Lebanese tragedy has caused both Israelis and Palestinians to begin to reassess the validity of their previous policies. Both are now considering the need for a negotiated peace. Each is sceptical. The Palestinians need hope. The Israelis need trust. It is important for all of us to provide the hope and trust they need. If we fail to do so, hope will surely turn to deeper despair and trust to invincible suspicion. The dangers for all of us—including them—will be much worse than before.

We believe that as a result of Palestinian acceptance of the agreed principles by which peace is to be achieved, the stage is now set to proceed toward a peaceful settlement. We believe the process must recognize and incorporate the willingness of the Palestinians to enter that process, and that, as a principal party, they must participate fully. It is their land and lives which are a major subject of negotiation and a major object of the settlement.

The peace process should be conducted under the auspices of an international conference attended by the five permanent members of the Security Council, in addition to all the parties to the conflict, including the representatives of the Palestinian people, namely the PLO. The parties to the conflict must be the parties to the peace. If the PLO is not a party to the conflict, then who is? The conference will be based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, to conclude a final peace settlement which would ensure the Palestinian people their right of self-determination within the context of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation. This confederation has been approved by the Palestinian National Council in its 16th and 17th sessions. The ultimate outcome must include the exchange of territory for peace, defined and recognized borders, and a mutual commitment to peace and security by all the parties.

I believe this is a prescription for peace which is not only just, but also attainable. I also believe the next step should be a dialogue between the United States and Jordanian-Palestinian representatives to complete the understandings which must be reached in order to advance the process, and

prepare the ground for a negotiated comprehensive settlement under the auspices of an international conference.

I should make clear that when I speak of a comprehensive settlement and the exchange of land for peace, I am including Syria and the Golan Heights. The principles of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 apply to the occupied Golan with the same force and effect as to any of the territories under occupation. Its problem must be thus addressed in the context of peace.

Throughout the history of the Middle East conflict, most of the time and rhetoric has been devoted to the negative pursuit of analyzing the problem and objecting to obstacles. There is a positive pursuit which has been neglected, namely the vision of peace. If we achieve the miracle of peace, only our imagination will limit the horizons that will be opened to the nations and peoples of the area. Development of the resources, talent and energies, in an environment of peace and friendship, will assure all people in our area the prosperity and tranquility to make it the Holy Land God surely intended. This is my vision. This is my goal. It should be a powerful incentive for us all to redouble our efforts to achieve this goal.

Finally, the role of the United States is essential to the success of our peace efforts. America's ideals and moral leadership are being challenged and America's interests and reputation are at issue.

I have known no American who better exemplifies the spirit and values of your country or is more capable of exerting the moral leadership for which the world yearns, and our peace efforts demand, than President Reagan. I look forward to cooperating with him, as many others as are willing, in our endeavor to end the Middle East tragedy while there is still time.

Four months ago when your president addressed the American people he said, "We have come to a turning point, a moment of hard decisions." He went on to ask, "If not us, who? If not now, when?" Then he was talking about an American economic problem, but that same message and that same action applies now to the conquest of peace in the Middle East.

For our part—and I speak for both my own people and the representatives of the Palestinian people—we want peace. We are ready to pursue it now as earnestly and sincerely as is humanly possible. It is our hope and goal to turn our vision into a reality for all—Jews and Arabs alike. We want you as our partners in this sacred mission for peace. Let us attain our goal. Let us close the door on the bitter memories of the past, and let us look to the future, that after all, is the promise of peace.