

EIRFeature

Jordan debates the way to peace in the Middle East

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The saying goes that in Jordan, if there are 4 million inhabitants, 3.5 million of them are politicians. In this highly politicized land, located at the geographical, demographic, and political crossroads of the Middle East, bordering on Iraq, Israel, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, the fires of political debate have been stoked over the past two months by the dramatic developments issuing from the Israel-Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) agreement, ceremoniously sealed on Sept. 13, and followed, a day later, by a Jordanian-Israeli agenda for peace talks. The heated discussion over the implications of the momentous events was the stuff of electoral debate in the weeks leading up to the Nov. 8 elections, which ushered in a parliamentary majority firmly lined up behind the policies of the reigning monarch, King Hussein, and his government's commitment to the peace process initiated in Madrid in December 1991.

Yet, though the elections proceeded without incident and delivered a mandate to the king, the fires of controversy have not abated. Beneath the surface of the democratic process, hailed as exemplary in an Arab world otherwise characterized by outmoded autocratic regimes, passions still rage, and certain questions regarding the nation's proper role in the processes sweeping the region, still beg an answer. The response that the political elite, as spokesmen for the broad population, must formulate to these open questions may well determine whether the region enters an era of peace or turmoil.

Jordan is not merely one more piece of the Middle East's jigsaw puzzle of countries, carved up and fitted together in the post-World War I Great Powers' rearrangement of the political map at Versailles. It is also a political lever of the region, by virtue of the fact that 60% of its population are Palestinians, people who were driven from their land in the 1948 establishment of the Israeli state and who are kindred to the population placed under Israeli military occupation on the West Bank of the Jordan River in the 1967 war, an area which until 1988 (when it was handed over to the PLO) was under Jordanian sovereignty. Although a large



President Clinton and Yasser Arafat at the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian peace accord in Washington, D.C. on Sept. 13. While bitter opposition to the Arafat-Peres initiative exists in the Arab world, the momentum established by the initiative is currently determining the process.

number of the Palestinians in Jordan are fully integrated into the economic and social process of the nation, many holding Jordanian citizenship, there is a mass of Palestinians, about 800,000, housed in makeshift refugee camps under United Nations auspices.

Thus, when the PLO-Israel accords for limited Palestinian autonomy in the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho were made public, all hell broke loose in the Hashemite Kingdom, as hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and native Jordanians asked themselves what the secret negotiations conducted by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in Oslo might mean for their future.

EIR conducted a fact-finding tour in Jordan in the late October days of the election campaign's conclusion, in an effort to answer that question. What emerged from intensive discussions with Jordanians and Palestinians, ranging from the "rejectionist" front of the political leftists, Ba'athists, and the Islamist opposition grouping Hamas, to the official spokesmen of the negotiations in the PLO and Jordanian delegations to the peace talks, was a rich, multi-colored fabric of complicated, intricate design. Some colors clashed in their brilliance while others faded into the background; but certain clear strands stood out, identifying the *gestalt* of what the complex process toward real peace must become.

EIR's purpose in conducting the fact-finding tour was not akin to that of the plethora of international media which had descended on Amman, Jordan's capital. We were not

motivated by a sociological curiosity to profile the political spectrum or to conduct a statistical survey. Our purpose was not only to understand the process but to contribute to it, offering our perspective for making the peace process, as Lyndon LaRouche stated, into what it must become. Our attention was focused on the economic aspect of the accord for the simple reason which LaRouche, who has been campaigning for a peace-through-development approach since 1975, has articulated: without agreement on mutually beneficial economic cooperation as the premise for peace, there can be no solution to the political conflict. Thus, it was our aim to delve into the nitty-gritty of the economic arrangements made, offering our own contribution of what is economically necessary for peace to ensue.

The great debate

The Jordanian population today is polarized around the issue, divided between those who are "for" and those who are "against" the agreement, and the dividing line cuts through all institutions of society down to the single family unit. Politically, the division defines two camps: the parties and groupings constituting the majority which emerged from the Nov. 8 elections, and the minority, made up of the Palestinian movement Hamas, the opposition currents to Arafat's Fatah within the PLO (which have constituted themselves as a "Group of Ten" bloc based in Syria), and the Islamists, whether associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and its electoral arm, the Islamist Action Front, or identified with

sundry intellectuals.

The rejectionist front can be recognized by its dogmatic assertion of political doctrine, asserted with a heavy dose of frustration and rage. Arafat, in the words of one leading PLO member who has boycotted discussions on the accord, is “a quisling” who “capitulated to the Israelis” and declared “unconditional surrender,” in that he “abandoned the idea of an independent state” to be content with “a protectorate” made up of the Gaza Strip and Jericho. The newly declared autonomous area, in his view, is still “militarily occupied” by Israeli troops who will merely “redeploy out of population centers, not withdraw.” Khalil Haddadin, who was one of the 22 opposition members of Parliament elected on Nov. 8, running as a representative of the Iraq-oriented Ba’ath Party of Jordan, stated his party’s categorical stance: “We, as a party, are against [the] Madrid [peace conference] and any result which will come based on the Madrid talks, like the PLO-Israel agreement or the Jordan-Israel agenda, or the Syria-Israel talks, etc., because we believe that Palestine—the whole of Palestine—is Arab soil, which was occupied in 1948 and 1967.”

A strikingly similar assessment was given *EIR* by Khader Abdallah Hussein, of the Syrian-backed Saiqa within the PLO, who spent time in Israeli prisons: “The agreement gives us none of our rights. There is a people, called the Palestinians, who were driven from their land in 1948 and 1967. Any agreement should discuss how these people will return to their country. The Israeli leaders say this is their land according to the holy books dating back 2,000 years, but they didn’t have a state until 1948. . . . Our answer is that we were there until 1948, this land is our land, and we have documents to prove it.”

Mohammed Nazzal, of the Hamas movement, detailed his rejection of the accord on a list of “negative points”: 1) “that it does not give our people any guarantee to build a Palestinian state; 2) that there is nothing about Jerusalem, whereas Rabin announced that Jerusalem is the united capital of Israel; and 3) that it does not mention settlements. This means that Israel within five years will establish a new reality on the ground. They will continue the settlements, because there is nothing in the accord to stop them; 4) there is no guarantee for the refugees to go back.” In Nazzal’s estimate, a maximum of 100,000 refugees would be allowed to return.

To the extent that the rejectionist front addresses the economic side of the agreement at all, its assessment is more ideological than informed. It must be said that information in the public domain regarding the actual content of the economic program sketched in the annexes has been relatively limited. This has fuelled paranoia among the rejectionists, who conjure up murky scenarios based on the idea that, since Israel represents the relatively stronger party and enjoys American backing, it will impose its economic hegemony, virtually swallowing up the Palestinian economy, transforming it into a “Trojan Horse” through which it will enter

and dominate the lucrative Arab markets. As Ba’athist Haddadin put it, “Israel has agricultural technology. The Palestinian economy within the next five years will be in relation to the Israeli economy. Israel is changing its imperialist system to economic imperialism.” In a formulation shared by many rejectionists, Haddadin said, “Israel wants a Greater Israel from the Nile to the Euphrates; since they don’t have enough population to achieve this, they will pursue it through economic means.”

More often than not, those who oppose the accord skirt the economic issue altogether. Mohammed Nazzal of the Hamas said, “The agreement deals with Palestinians as a minority in a Jewish state, not as a people. . . . Israel wants to enter Arab and Muslim markets.” Referring back to expectations of economic betterment in the Camp David accord of 1978-79, he added, “Sadat told the population, we are poor because of war, and promised peace would bring meat and chicken. Arafat, like Sadat, is making promises only. It is only dreams. The Palestinian cause is not just economic, but is a feeling of national rights, citizens who want an independent state. . . . The Intifada [Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation] started not for economic reasons but for independence.”

Economic issues are key

Yet, it is the economic aspect of the agreement which is the crux of the issue, a fact which the opposition is either unwilling to, or incapable of grasping. In the best of cases, opponents of the agreement fall into the methodological trap of empiricism, arguing that since the Camp David agreement or the West’s promises of economic aid to post-communist Russia failed, it must fail again in the Middle East. In the worst of cases, the rejectionists rule out any agreement with Israel on ideological grounds, thus rendering any meaningful discussion futile.

In recent comments on the process, Lyndon LaRouche again drove the fundamental point home: “The reality is, that it is impossible to get an Israeli-Arab peace without *first, first, first* having agreement on an economic development of the science-driver, infrastructure development-based approach on which I’ve insisted over years. Without *first* introducing that program *by whatever means*, you will never get the conditions for peace. Because you must first transform the populations on both sides of the equation. You must transform the Israelis morally; you must *uplift* them morally in the way that only a science-driver infrastructure-based program will do, a dirigist program. And similarly on the Arab side, particularly since the crushing of Iraq, which was the only . . . approximately science-driver infrastructure-based economy in the region.”

To what extent do the economic annexes to the PLO-Israel statement of principles embody such a vision of economic growth? The rejectionist front is straightforward in its cynical response; as Khader Hussein put it, “It is difficult to

say, because we have no Palestinian economists. They will be chosen by the Israelis.”

Contrary to this assertion, *EIR* found that there are indeed Palestinian economists, who not only know their trade, but are doggedly determined to transform the initial agreement into the framework for a technologically advanced, viable Palestinian economy, as the foundation for meaningful statehood. The chairman of the PLO's Department of Economic Affairs and Planning, Mohammed Z. Nashashibi, who, unlike the opposition critics, has been a protagonist of the negotiating process, made clear in an interview with *EIR* (see below) that the primary concern is to translate the annexes into economic activity, immediately, to initiate the process of amelioration in the living standards of a Palestinian population subjected to poverty and misery over decades of occupation. Particularly significant in the discussion with Mr. Nashashibi was the role of advanced technologies in economic progress.

The role of advanced technology

In this respect, the application of nuclear energy to solving the water crisis is key, a point LaRouche has singled out for special attention. For example, in the annexes, mention is made of several canal projects, linking the Dead Sea to the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Initially, the canals were viewed as means to raise the level of the Dead Sea, thus replenishing the aquifers which have been virtually depleted, and as a means for generating energy. Yet, even with these projects, amplified by dam projects and various water-saving and purifying processes, the scarcity of water in the region, which represents a fundamental parameter in economic development, is not overcome. However, once the idea of nuclear plants is introduced, as the generator of energy to operate desalination units, which can create new fresh water supplies for agriculture, domestic use, and industry, then the bottleneck is broken. Not only does the introduction of nuclear technology provide a solution to this number one problem, but the possibility of building new cities, nuplexes, around such facilities, opens up the perspective of dealing concretely with the refugee question.

The problems involved with this perspective, which has been LaRouche's leitmotif over 18 years, are not few. The World Bank, which has established a position for itself in the Mideast economic programs, is categorically opposed to any advanced technologies, emphatically including nuclear energy. Furthermore, the outlook of the World Bank and Harvard Study has found credence among many of the participants in the peace talks. Dr. Fahed Fanek, an influential Jordanian economist and columnist who is close to the Jordanian delegation to the talks, made no bones about this in his remarks to *EIR* (see interview below). Fanek is brutally frank in his estimation that the tourist and trade sector will be privileged over high-technology infrastructure. He is as outspoken in asserting his view that the World Bank and International

Monetary Fund (IMF) will seek to exert pressure on economic policy, and that decisions over Palestinian economic policy will be determined by Israel, ironically confirming certain critical assessments voiced by the opposition. However, Fanek declares himself committed to the peace process, unhesitatingly, confident that it will open new economic vistas for Jordan and the region as a whole.

Mr. Nashashibi has no doubts about how to deal with attempted sabotage of advanced technologies on the part of the World Bank. Although the institution, through its control over credit, can withhold investments in projects it rejects, the World Bank cannot prevent such projects, such as nuclear-generated desalination units, from being implemented, if funding is available from alternative sources. Whether the World Bank likes it or not, there is a growing consensus among the leading protagonists of the accord for precisely such desalination plants. Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres has gone on record endorsing such technologies (see *EIR*, Nov. 5). The enthusiasm which *EIR*'s proposals for desalination projects elicited on the Palestinian as well as the Jordanian side leaves no doubt that this is *the* option which will be pursued.

The nuclear factor in this sense is crucial not only in its economic function, but in the cultural, moral sphere as well. As is the case historically when former adversary relationships are overcome by peace agreements (one should think of the suffering and animosity of World War II ingrained in the minds and passions of Poles, Germans, and the French), the new relationship must be predicated on a common struggle to harness the technological breakthroughs of human ingenuity to build a better world, for the benefit of all. Developing this concept with respect to the adversary relationship which has prevailed during this century between Arabs and Israelis, LaRouche emphasized that “if we can change that relationship . . . to one of sharing an actual infrastructure-based, science-driver development with which nuclear power and water are key, then it is possible through that means, to transform the state of mind of Israelis and Arabs to effect, in short, a cultural paradigm shift by means of economic development.” This means elevating man, “by dirigistic approaches to seizing the opportunities to thrust through those economic policies which are not only sound economically, but which have the effect of a cultural paradigm shift upward on the population. It is not the level of upwardness that decides the matter,” he stressed; “it's the fact that the direction of upwardness is *significantly* the direction in which things are changing. That is the source of the basis for morality, a basis for populations in general.”

A fight to push development through

It will take a fight to push this perspective through. The World Bank, IMF, and a clique of international financiers are going hell bent for leather to transform the region into a speculator's paradise, at the expense of the people living

there. Politically, the rejectionist front has announced its intention to sabotage the deal. Mohammed Nazzal made no attempt to camouflage his desire to mobilize the Hamas movement's support base in the Occupied Territories, which he estimated to be 30-40% of the population, to "continue the Intifada." The "military resistance in the Occupied Territories," which he characterized as "the strategic, not tactical alternative," is supposed to continue, with the aim of "leading to a failure in the agreement." Nazzal's view, shared by many Arab nationalists, is that "no war, no peace is a situation we can live with," even over generations. Although Hamas has stated it will boycott the planned elections in the Occupied Territories, on formal grounds that they are "part of the agreement," the Group of Ten, to which it belongs, aims to constitute an alternative leadership to Arafat's Fatah within the PLO.

Despite the rhetoric and the violence, it is not likely that the opposition will succeed, because it is the momentum established by the Peres-Arafat initiative which is currently determining the process. Among the populations on both sides, the desire to supersede the conflict and establish peace is profound and widespread. Those who, while supporting the agreement, are not blind to its limitations, like Fahed Fanek, argue pragmatically that "it is better than nothing because the alternative is even worse." Among the Palestinians who are leading the process, there is a deep-rooted conviction that the initiative can and must be used as the lever to effect fundamental, positive change, through real economic progress. These layers who have greeted Shimon Peres's public statements in favor of advanced technology-sharing, are asking, "Does Peres have the power to push this perspective through?"

One leading Palestinian-Jordanian writer characterizes it as "a challenge, to develop Palestine into something better than what the Israelis have achieved." Taking a long view of the effects that an economically progressive peace arrangement will have on reestablishing a cultural balance in the region, this writer said he was "very optimistic, perhaps naive, but in this context the Israel-PLO agreement should be supported. There is no guarantee it will work, but it is worth trying." Voicing the thoughts of other intellectuals in the country, he continued, "The deal does not give us what we want, but it will unleash processes which will give us what we want in 10-15 years."

What must be unleashed now so as to ensure peace and justice, are economic processes capable of generating real development—infrastructure-based, science-driver development. If the efforts of those committed to peace are focused, "like a laser," as LaRouche put it, on this point in the Middle East initiative, they can transform the process as a whole into what it must become.

If not, as LaRouche has warned, "there is no hope for the entire region; there is only Hell and the destruction of all the existing nations and most of the people."

Interview: Mohammed Z. Nashashibi

The World Bank kill infrastructure

Mohammed Z. Nashashibi is the chairman of the Department of Economic Affairs and Planning of the Palestine Liberation Organization. He has been engaged in the negotiations process for the Israel-PLO accord, particularly concerning economic matters. He gave the following interview to Muriel Mirak-Weissbach in Amman, Jordan on Oct. 27, before leaving for Tunis for meetings of the PLO leadership.

EIR: Many people have drawn the parallel between the PLO-Israel agreement and the events which changed eastern Europe in 1989. There is great concern that the errors made by the West, in imposing "shock therapy" and other free market policies on the East, not be repeated in the Middle East.

Nashashibi: Yes, we fear that that may happen, and we certainly do not want to see Arafat become another Gorbachov. Although there are similarities, there are significant differences between the two situations, not only because of the attitude of the donors, but also because the system there could not absorb quickly or efficiently the huge amount of investments, due to the lack of mechanisms and of personnel. Here we have the mechanisms and the personnel, we have the projects and the feasibility studies. What we need is vocational training and additional personnel. We have already had the benefits of technical support and training, provided by France, Italy, Norway, the U.K., and Canada.

EIR: What are the most important projects?

Nashashibi: The main projects listed in the World Bank report concern the development of infrastructure, namely, education, health, transportation, water (treatment of solid waste), marginal supplementary services for agriculture and technical assistance. Housing is mentioned, but on a very small scale.

EIR: There have been reports in the press about considerable differences in approach between the PLO and the World Bank, regarding projects.

Nashashibi: Yes, there are two approaches. At the World Bank meeting on Sept. 20, we discussed with them the necessity of funds for implementing a 10-year plan. And we said that the funds allocated for different programs were not enough. They were convinced, and raised their commitment from \$350 million a year to \$550 million a year. When the