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NEAR EAST REPORT

WASHINGTON WEEKLY ON AMERICAN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

VOL XXIX NO. 51 DECEMBER 23, 1985

EDITORIAL

Jordan's Path

On Dec. 16 the United Nations General Assembly voted on—and passed—Agenda item 38, which consisted of four pieces of anti-Israel rhetoric. For those who may have thought that the United Nations was going soft, it may be instructive to consider some of the language overwhelmingly approved by the world body.

Item 38 declared that peace in the Middle East can only be accomplished through “the complete and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem.” It stated that any peace agreement must “enable the Palestinian people, under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, to exercise its inalienable rights, including the right to return and the right of self-determination, national independence, and the establishment of its independent sovereign state in Palestine. . . .”

Item 38 condemned Israel's administration of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. It denounced its “increasing collaboration” with South Africa. It called Israel's treatment of the Palestinian Arabs a violation of international law. It urged member states to “cease forthwith, individually and collectively, all dealings with Israel in order to totally isolate it in all fields.”

Most ominously, it declared that Israel is “not a peace-loving state.” This phrase sounds fairly innocuous in view of

the rhetoric that preceded it. But it is anything but innocuous. According to its charter, the United Nations is only open to “peace-loving states.” By stating that Israel is not “peace-loving,” the United Nations majority has taken another step toward expelling Israel altogether. It isn't likely to take that final step—if only because the Reagan Administration has promised to walk out if Israel is expelled. Still, the signs are clear. The United Nations of the “Zionism is Racism” resolution is alive and well.

Perhaps it shouldn't be a surprise—although it is—that Jordan, which supposedly is seeking peace with Israel, voted for the harshest anti-Israeli rhetoric. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Libya, and Syria were the obvious leaders of the virulent anti-Israel onslaught. But Jordan—the Jordan which supposedly has embraced the peace process—also voted four times for a resolution which would deny Israel the right to exist in peace. It is not hard to appreciate the pressures Amman is under. After all, it can hardly afford to antagonize the militants who have about as much use for Jordan as for Israel. Nevertheless, peace does entail risks. In the Middle East, it certainly entails breaking away from the rejectionists who are set on a holy war to eliminate the “Zionist entity.” Amman seems to believe that it can have it both ways. It can send sweet signals to Shimon Peres at the same time as it strives to maintain its *bonafides* with the radicals. It can't. Peace will require hard choices. It doesn't appear that Jordan is ready for them. □

VIEWING THE NEWS

Taba Progress

Kol Yisrael (Dec. 17) reports major progress toward resolution of the Taba boundary dispute. According to the report, recent Egypt-Israel talks have produced a “package deal” under which Israel will accept modified arbitration of the dispute in return for Egyptian moves toward normalization. Under the plan, Egypt's ambassador will return to Tel Aviv after the arbitration bill is signed. A Peres-Mubarak summit will then be scheduled and commercial and cultural ties will be renewed.

Labor and Likud have been sharply divided on the Taba question. Prime Minister Peres and his Labor party have been willing to accept arbitration of the dispute, as demanded by Cairo. Foreign Minister Shamir has insisted on conciliation, as provided for in the Camp David peace treaty. *Kol Yisrael* notes that, because of their differences, both Peres and Shamir will avoid placing

Taba on the Cabinet's agenda. Peres has indicated that he might be ready to bring down the Labor-Likud unity government if Shamir blocks improved Egypt ties. Shamir is equally adamant. Neither, however, wants a government break-up yet.

Relations Renewed

Israel and the Ivory Coast announced after a meeting in Geneva between Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Ivory Coast President Felix Houphouet-Boigny that they will resume diplomatic relations. Peres said “that he expected ties also would be reestablished ‘in the very near future’ with two other African countries but declined to name them” (Associated Press, Dec. 18).

Israel now has ties with five black African nations: Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Swaziland and Zaire. Most African countries broke relations with Israel under pres-

sure from Arab oil suppliers after the 1973 Yom Kippur war. Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir has made restoration of ties with black Africa a major policy objective.

Fundamentalists Foiled

In Tripoli, Lebanon's second largest city, “all funds and property of a fundamentalist Moslem movement have been confiscated” (Reuters, Dec. 16). The news service reported that the assets of the Islamic Unification Front, known as Tawheed, were confiscated by Lebanese police backed by Syrian troops.

Tawheed—which demanded an Islamic government for Lebanon—lost a five-week battle for the city with Syrian-backed leftist militias in September. An estimated 500 people died and 1,500 were wounded in the fighting, which received little press coverage in the United States. □

PERSPECTIVE

Diplomatic Options Reviewed

A senior Administration official told reporters last week that the United States would have a clearer picture of the Middle East diplomatic terrain after imminent meetings between Jordan's King Hussein and Syrian President Hafez Assad and between Hussein and PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat. The official, who spoke on the condition that he not be identified, offered a cautiously optimistic evaluation of the Arab-Israeli "peace process" in 1985.

He noted that a "convergence" of views had developed between Jordan and Israel in four main areas: the need for prompt and direct negotiations; agreement that the outcome of talks could not be guaranteed in advance; acceptance of an "international forum" for the direct talks; and recognition that a preliminary dialogue between the United States and a Palestinian Arab delegation should be shelved "as an unnecessary complicating factor."

The two outstanding issues between Amman and Jerusalem, according to the senior official, remain the nature of the international conference or forum which would set the stage for direct talks and the composition of Palestinian Arab representation. "Neither of these are simple issues and I don't want to minimize . . . the difficulties involved. Nor am I standing here today to guarantee early resolution of either."

The official said that Hussein believes

that the PLO has not met its "historic challenge"—to give up terrorism in favor of diplomacy. He said that residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip resent the PLO for its past and present political failures but still identify with it. And while noting that "those who espouse violence don't have a claim to sitting at the negotiating table," he added that although Washington has "disagreements" with the PLO, it "is not at war" with the organization.

Amman's rapprochement with Damascus "does not mean that Jordan is 'backsliding' on the peace process, according to the official. "Jordan from the beginning has said that it is not looking for a separate peace with Israel. Jordan wanted to sit with a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, with an Israeli delegation but within an international framework to which Syria, Lebanon and Egypt . . . would also be involved." A recent Syrian-Jordanian communique which condemned any "separate deals" or direct negotiations with Israel left room for direct talks under some sort of international auspices, the official insisted.

However, other observers sound less hopeful than the Administration official. One, Rep. Larry Smith, (D-Fla.), a member of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, discounted what he said was the State Department's vague optimism. "The facts on the

ground are insufficient to warrant any expectation of change."

An unofficial Israeli source saw a plus and a minus for the peace process in the year's developments. "I don't believe there was real progress, but perhaps some psychological progress. King Hussein is seen more clearly now as the true interlocutor—potentially—with Israel." But that change is mostly one of images, he added.

This source also believes that there was "some erosion of the U.S. position regarding the PLO." Administration representatives repeatedly stressed the firm policy of not dealing with the PLO until it accepts U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, desists from violence and recognizes Israel's right to exist. But the source recalled that the Prime Minister's office said that some U.S. officials wanted Israel to accept the PLO in the peace process without the organization's explicit recognition of the Jewish state.

An Israeli diplomat, who never subscribed to the characterization of 1985 as a "make-or-break" year for the peace process, felt "we achieved some kind of limited progress between Israel and Jordan about the need for some political process between these two countries. Everyone is more aware of the other's problems and difficulties. . . . But on the practical level, not much happened." —E.R. □

HEARD ON CAPITOL HILL

Mike Barnes' Plea

Congressman MICHAEL BARNES (D-Md.) has urged President Reagan to pardon five Washington-area rabbis who were sentenced to prison for protesting at the Soviet embassy. The rabbis are serving a 15-day jail term at the Federal Correctional Institute in Petersburg, Va.

In a telegram to Reagan, Barnes said that the sentences imposed on the rabbis were "unusually harsh." He added that their jailing is "an outrage, particularly in the middle of Chanukah and in light of the government's refusal to prosecute demonstrators in front of the South African embassy."

Barnes, who says that he has introduced a bill urging a Presidential pardon for the rabbis, noted that "it offends the moral conscience that those who protest harsh Soviet treatment of Jews would be so treated in our own system."

The rabbis were convicted of violating a Washington, D.C. ordinance prohibiting demonstrations within 500 feet of an embassy. They chose prison rather than pleading guilty.

More Arms Cosponsors

Reps. JAMES BROYHILL (R-N.C.), PAUL HENRY (R-Mich.), PARREN MITCHELL (D-Md.), WILLIAM NATCHER (D-Ky.), HENRY NOWAK (D-N.Y.), CHARLES STENHOLM (D-Tex.), PAT SWINDALL (R-Ga.) and HAROLD VOLKMER (D-Mo.) have cosponsored the resolution disapproving the arms sale to Jordan.

The resolution currently has 286 cosponsors. Supporters have vowed to bring the resolution to a vote if "direct and meaningful" negotiations between Israel and

Jordan are not under way by early next year.

Markey Wins Freedom

Through the efforts of Rep. ED MARKEY (D-Mass.), 17-year-old Mikhail Stukalin will be allowed to leave the Soviet Union to join his mother and brother in the United States. Markey, a member of the Congressional Helsinki Commission, was in Moscow in September to discuss arms control and human rights issues and made a special plea on Mikhail's behalf.

Mikhail's mother had left the Soviet Union with her eldest son. His father, whose requests for an exit visa were repeatedly denied, died last June.

Markey said his intervention was "a simple humanitarian request."

Near East Report. Published weekly at 500 N. Capitol St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. Subscription \$25 per year.

Second Class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional offices

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Postmaster: Address changes to Near East Report, 500 N. Capitol St., N.W., Suite 307, Washington, D.C. 20001

ANALYSIS

Syrian Missile Moves

In the last few weeks, Syria has moved several SAM-2, SAM-6, and SAM-8 surface-to-air missiles close to the Syrian-Lebanese border. The new anti-aircraft emplacements will make it much more difficult for Israel to continue its surveillance flights over Lebanon—flights necessary to monitor PLO and Shi'ite terrorist infiltration in that country.

Initially, Israeli reaction to the Syrian move was vehement. Army chief-of-staff Moshe Levy noted that shortly before the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon a similar Syrian missile deployment had resulted in Israeli airstrikes against the SAMs.

Speaking on television, Levy said that Israel "requires freedom of flight over Lebanon because there is no government there that is capable of ensuring what every sovereign state must assure in its territory. And if there are terrorists there, we must maintain the capacity to attack them and know where they are."

Privately, many Israelis conceded that Syria's decision to move the missile batteries to the border came after Israeli fighter pilots downed two Syrian MIGs in Syrian airspace on Nov. 19. At that time, Israeli officials stated that the Syrian planes had behaved in a threatening manner. But Member of Knesset Abba Eban, chairman of the Knesset's Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee, now says that Israeli pilots made a mistake in shooting down the Syrian planes. According to the *New York Times* (Dec. 17), he believes that the Syrian missile deployment "apparently

is a reaction to an erroneous act on our part." He says that there is little Israel can do about the missiles.

Israel could, however, attack the emplacements—a course which may become necessary if Syria shoots down an Israeli reconnaissance plane. Nevertheless, Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin says that he does not expect a war. "In today's reality, given the existing lines between Israel and the confrontation states, I can see no political reason that would justify Israel's initiating a war," he said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shimon Peres said in Lod that he attributed Syria's military moves to Hafez Assad's "striving to attain leadership in the Arab world and to realize the age-old Syrian dream of 'Greater Syria.'" He said that Assad will seek "strategic balance" with Israel until he believes that strategic superiority is within reach. At that point, the fragile calm that exists between Israel and Syria could evaporate.

Not every Israeli shares the view that Syria's movement of the SAMs was provoked by the dogfight on Nov. 19. Military commentator Ron Ben-Ishai, writing in the Dec. 16 *Yediot Achronot*, said that "one can argue about whether the decision to shoot down the two Syrian MIG-23's . . . was correct" but it would be a "mistake to believe that this was the only reason the Syrians deployed the missiles" on the Lebanon border.

He pointed out that the anti-aircraft missiles require sites which are dug out in ad-

vance. Syrian preparation for the deployment "began far prior to the recent dogfight." He said that Syria's objective is not retaliation for a single incident but "to limit Israel's freedom to fly over most of Lebanon. The dogfight was only an excuse. . . ."

"The main motive behind Syria's move is political. The Syrians consider Lebanon their exclusive zone of influence, and as long as Israeli planes fly over Lebanon without interference, their control there is not total." He noted that there is also the "military motive—preventing Israel from obtaining essential information on the movement of terrorists and the Syrian army. . . ."

Ben-Ishai added that Israel has to view the Syrian move as serious. Jerusalem cannot forgo the information it obtains from its reconnaissance flights over Lebanon. On the other hand, it understands that taking out the missile batteries would entail serious dangers for Israel—including, perhaps, Soviet military involvement or a Soviet-backed Syrian attempt to use SAM-5's to threaten Israeli planes flying over Israel.

That explains why Israel now seems to be downplaying the significance of the "missile crisis." Neither Israel nor Syria wants war. Rabin spoke for the Israeli leadership when he said that there "is no reason to panic." Israel will do everything it can—probably with the help of the United States—to help Syria climb down from the brink. □

—M.J.R.

HEARD IN WASHINGTON

Reflections from Breger

Marshall Breger, the Reagan Administration's liaison to the Jewish community from December 1983 to October 1985, now works as the chairman of the United States Conference on Administration. And although he makes it clear he has no intention of second-guessing his successor, Max Green, Breger still follows closely issues of community interest.

A former staff member at the Heritage Foundation, Breger said that he took over as liaison at an opportune time. "I came in after the Shamir-Reagan summit in November 1983. There was a clear change in the course of the U.S.-Israel relationship, with the President rejecting the idea of linkage between assistance for Israel—economic, moral and political—and specific Israeli policy decisions."

The liaison's job is to keep the lines of communication between the Administra-

tion and the community open for two-way traffic, Breger said. He found a desire among senior Administration figures to "understand and be knowledgeable about the views and concerns of the Jewish community"—even if they did not always accept political positions based on those views.

Breger cited three actions as peaks in his term as public liaison. They were the rescue of Ethiopian Jewry; the passage of legislation creating a Free Trade Area (FTA) between the United States and Israel; and the deepening of bilateral relations in general—including strategic cooperation.

The most disturbing moment during his tenure at the White House was the President's decision to visit the German war cemetery at Bitburg, where Nazi S.S. troops are buried. Breger, members of whose family are Holocaust survivors, felt

the pressure from all sides. Acknowledging the strains the Bitburg visit created between the Administration and the Jewish community, Breger added that "the remarkable thing was that relations bounced back so quickly."

He said there was also a period of disappointment "in terms of our anti-terrorism policy, but now we are active. Some of the credit goes to Abe [Judge Abraham] Sofaer, the State Department's new legal adviser. We are moving to take strong action against terrorism," Breger asserted.

He defended the need for a public liaison. Praising the work Max Green is doing, Breger said, "It's important for the White House to know the pulse of the community. That's easy to lose in the welter of bureaucracy." □

BACK PAGE

Indicting the PLO

On Mar. 1, 1973, eight "Black September" PLO terrorists seized hostages at a reception at the Saudi embassy in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. The terrorists immediately issued a set of demands which included the release from San Quentin prison of Sen. Robert Kennedy's killer, Sirhan Sirhan. They also demanded freedom for imprisoned members of the German Baader-Meinhof gang and for a group of *Al Fatah* terrorists being held in Jordan.

Twenty-four hours later—their demands unmet—the terrorists selected three of their Western hostages for special treatment. They were U.S. Ambassador Cleo Noel, U.S. Charge d'Affaires George C. Moore and Belgian diplomat Guy Eid. The three were ordered to write farewell letters to their families, beaten beyond recognition, and then methodically murdered.

The terrorists then surrendered to Sudanese authorities who released two of them for lack of evidence. The other six were sentenced to life imprisonment but their sentences were quickly commuted. By November 1974, they were back with their PLO compatriots.

That might have been the end of the story. But it wasn't. It quickly turned out that the murders at Khartoum were not the random acts of Black September but were acts of premeditated murder which may have been ordered by none other than Yasir Arafat. Four weeks after the murders, the *Washington Post* (Apr. 5, 1973) was the first to report that Arafat was in Black September's command headquarters in Beirut when the order to kill the three diplomats was issued. The *Post*'s David Ottaway wrote that "it was not clear whether Arafat personally . . . gave the order to carry out the executions using the code word 'Cold River.' But there are reports that Arafat was present . . . when the message was sent and that he personally congratulated the guerrillas after the execution. . . ."

Today, almost 13 years later, declassified communiqués released under the Freedom of Information Act point to Arafat's direct involvement in the murders. According to Neil C. Livingstone, co-author of the just-published *Fighting Back: Winning the War Against Terrorism*, a confidential State Department cable sent to Washington from the U.S. embassy in Khartoum on Mar. 7, 1973 stated that the terrorists "did not murder Ambassador Noel and Moore . . . until receiving specific code word instructions" from the PLO's Beirut headquarters. Even more damning is the alleged existence of a tape recording on which Arafat is heard issuing the order to kill the diplomats. The former director of the Central Intelligence Agency (and current United

Nations ambassador) Vernon Walters said last month that it was "common knowledge at the time . . . that a tape existed."

Based on this evidence—new and old—several influential Washington organizations are seeking to indict Arafat for the murders of the two American diplomats. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Attorney-General Edwin Meese has received the "new allegations" about Arafat's role in the killings. His indictment is, again according to a *Times* article, "under active consideration."

In practical terms, an indictment of Arafat by the United States would seriously cramp the PLO leader's style. It would make it impossible for him to visit the United Nations in New York without fear of arrest. An outstanding arrest warrant by Washington might also make it difficult for him to travel in Western Europe without risk of extradition to the United States. International airports would also be off-limits to him.

But, even more significant, would be an indictment's symbolic value. Author Livingstone writes that an Arafat indictment would be "an affirmation to the world that the United States does not take lightly the murder of its public servants and citizens" and that "terrorists do not go unpunished. . . ." He says that it would also "strip away [the PLO's] carefully cultivated face of respectability" and expose it and its terrorist allies as "the criminal gangs they really are." He points out that "an indictment of Arafat would not represent an indictment of the Palestinian people." Rather, it would remind the world, including the Arabs, "that law must prevail over violence . . . and that Palestinian interests are best served by people who understand this." □

—M.J.R.

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ISSN 0028-176X



WASHINGTON WEEKLY ON
AMERICAN POLICY IN
THE MIDDLE EAST

VOLUME XXIX, NO. 51
DECEMBER 23, 1985

SUBSCRIPTION: \$25 PER YEAR

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Washington, DC 20001

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PRIME MINISTER PERES ON THE ARMS SALE

*peace
initiating*

"I will ask the U.S. administration not to supply weapons to Jordan as long as Jordan is in an avowed, or secret, state of war with Israel and I do not intend to retreat from that." (Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Jerusalem Domestic Service, 9/17/85))

"No speech can justify arms sales. Israel continues to oppose arms sale between the U.S. and Jordan." (Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Washington Post, 9/29/85)

"40 new F-16's will be received in three years and could strike many targets in Israel. It will be another heavy burden on the strategic shoulders of the state. Weapons are always being given to the Arabs and then we have to ask for balance in aid and arms. And the Mobile HAWK missiles are a serious military security problem." (Prime Minister Shimon Peres, 10/2/85, Israeli television)

"Hussein has not cancelled the state of belligerency with Israel. He is still in a formal state of war with Israel. I think the Americans tried to influence him to announce something about the end of belligerency but he would talk only about the atmosphere of non-belligerency. We are not a meteorological station. Our positions are still far apart. He was not even prepared to respond to the American request, let alone the ours." (Prime Minister Shimon Peres, 10/2/85, Israeli television)

"Arms are meant to serve policy. And if these arms are not intended to serve a policy of belligerence vis-a-vis Israel, this should be stated authoritatively, unequivocally and publicly [by Jordan]. Because the supply of American tanks to Jordan at the start of 1960's is till fresh in our mind: when Jordan undertook that those tanks would not cross the Jordan River and would not be employed against Israel. But once an "environment of opportunity" arose, Jordan used those tanks to attack Israel in 1967, without any provocation whatsoever on Israel's part." (Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Address to the Knesset, 6/11/85)

"I doubt whether three battle squadrons of F-20's and improved Hawk missiles will prevent Syria from going ahead with an attack on Jordan. And if an immediate Syrian threat has in fact arisen because of Jordan's possible move towards a strategy of peace, a different, immediate deterrent must be sought against such a threat." (Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Address to the Knesset, 6/11/85)

Reagan
on Jordan peace
initiative

Peace Initiative

New Orleans, LA, and now resides in New York City.

Don A. Sebastiani will succeed Robert Ivie. He has been a California State assemblyman since 1980. He is also a vintner at the Sebastiani Vineyards. He graduated from the University of San Francisco (B.A., 1975). He was born February 15, 1953, in Sonoma, CA, where he now resides.

Supplemental Appropriations Act, 1985

*Statement on Signing H.R. 2577 Into Law.
August 16, 1985*

I have signed H.R. 2577, the Supplemental Appropriations Act for 1985. The act provides additional funding for a number of important programs, including economic aid to several nations in the Middle East, essential humanitarian aid to the Nicaraguan democratic resistance, funding for improving security at our Embassies and facilities abroad, and start-up funding for several water projects.

H.R. 2577 provides funds that I requested to support the Nation's foreign policy. It will contribute significantly to our ability to provide urgently required aid to our friends in the Middle East and will support our efforts to bring peace to the region. I would note in particular the funds it appropriates for both Israel and Egypt, as well as for Jordan. All three of these nations have a vital role to play if there is to be peace in the Middle East.

Moreover, the act contains \$27 million in funding for humanitarian assistance to the Nicaraguan democratic resistance. While the program that has been approved is more modest than I believe necessary, we have clearly won bipartisan support on this very critical issue as well as recognition and humanitarian support for those fighting the Sandinista dictatorship. This is an important element in our overall effort to assist neighboring countries to defend themselves against Nicaraguan attack and subversion. Unfortunately, the provision unduly and unnecessarily restricts efficient management and administration of the program. Nevertheless, I will continue to work with the Congress to carry out the program as effec-

tively as possible and will take care to assure that the law is faithfully executed.

H.R. 2577 is also an important first step in reforming and revitalizing the Nation's water resources development program. Little progress has been achieved in recent years due mainly to the impasse over the proper Federal role in water projects and the amount of cost sharing that local project sponsors should assume. This act acknowledges that the traditional Federal role is no longer appropriate and that project beneficiaries must contribute a larger share of costs for water projects.

It allows for progressive and essential new approaches to the financing of projects, while retaining a significant Federal role and demonstrating commitment to implementation of viable water projects. I commend the Congress' efforts in this matter. The act represents only the first of two steps that must be taken to reform national water policy. I anticipate that the Congress will soon be addressing a comprehensive water policy and project authorization bill that could set national policy for years to come. This administration has already demonstrated flexibility in working out a reasonably implementable cost-sharing agreement with the Congress. I am confident that the Congress will act in this matter in a prompt and responsible manner.

I am concerned that the act mandates a specific and excessive number of new grants to be awarded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Such requirements not only undermine the flexibility essential to the continued success of the NIH but also threaten the long-run stability of biomedical research funding. In signing this bill, it is my understanding that the Congress will take future appropriations action to restore programmatic flexibility and budgetary stability to the NIH. This act authorizes the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to establish a national board to oversee an emergency food program. I am deeply concerned about the membership of the board. If read literally, the act would permit six private organizations to appoint members of the board. As members, these persons would be officers of the executive branch because the board will perform executive functions. Such appointments by

Previously he was vice president of technology, Sears World Trade, in Washington, DC, in 1983-1985. He was vice president of DGA International in Washington in 1977-1983. He served at the Department of Defense as Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (1976-1977); Special Assistant to the Secretary and Deputy Secretaries of Defense (1975-1976); and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (1975). He was Deputy Director of Presidential Personnel at the White House in 1974-1975. Prior to that time he was executive assistant to the Governor of Missouri in (1973-1974) and vice president of Bradley, Woods and Co. in 1970-1972.

He graduated from American University (B.A., 1964). He is married and resides in Washington, DC. He was born October 31, 1945, in St. Louis, MO.

Advisory Committee for Trade Negotiations

Appointment of 10 Members. August 16, 1985

The President today announced his intention to appoint the following individuals to be members of the Advisory Committee for Trade Negotiations for terms of 2 years:

Barbara McConnell Barrett will succeed Gerald J. Lynch. She is presently serving as special counsel in the law firm of Evans, Kitchel & Jenckes in Phoenix, AZ. Previously she was Vice Chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board. She graduated from Arizona State University (B.S., 1972; M.A., 1975; J.D., 1978). She was born December 26, 1950, in Indiana County, PA, and now resides in Phoenix, AZ.

John R. Faust, Jr., will succeed Vincent McDonnell. He is a partner of the law firm of Schwabe, Williamson, Wyatt, Moore & Roberts in Portland, OR. He is also a director of Western Savings & Loan Association. He graduated from the University of Oregon (B.S., 1953; J.D., 1958). He was born June 16, 1932, in Portland, OR, where he now resides.

Murray Howard Finley is a reappointment. He is president of the Amalgamated Clothing & Textile Workers Union. Previously he was general president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. He graduated from the

University of Michigan (B.A., 1946) and Northwestern University (J.D., 1949). He was born March 31, 1922, in Syracuse, NY, and now resides in Guttenberg, NJ.

Simon C. Fireman is a reappointment. He is chairman of the board of Aqua Leisure Industries in Avon, MA. Previously he was president and chief executive officer of Marine Hardware and Supply Co., Inc. He graduated from Harvard University (B.S., 1968). He was born September 10, 1925, in Boston, MA, and now resides in Avon, MA.

Leonard A. Lauder is a reappointment. He has been serving as president and chief executive officer of Estee Lauder, Inc., in New York City since 1972. Previously he was executive vice president of Estee Lauder, Inc. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania (B.S., 1954). He was born March 19, 1933, in New York City, where he now resides.

Kenneth A. Lazarus is a reappointment. He is a partner of the law firm of Ward, Lazarus, Grow and Cihlar in Washington, DC. He has served as an adjunct professor at Georgetown University Law Center. He graduated from Dayton University (B.A., 1964), the University of Notre Dame (J.D. 1967), and George Washington University (L.L.M., 1971). He was born March 10, 1942, in Passaic, NJ, and now resides in Lovettsville, VA.

Harold M. Messmer, Jr., will succeed Stanley Ebner. He is president of Pacific Holding corp. and vice chairman of its subsidiary, Cannon Mills Co. In addition, he serves as a director of Castle & Cook, Inc., and a partner of the law firm of O'Melveny & Myers. He graduated from Loyola University (A.B., 1967) and New York University Law School (J.D., 1970). He was born February 20, 1946, in Jackson, MS, and now resides in Pacific Palisades, CA.

Edmund T. Pratt, Jr., is a reappointment. He is chairman of the board and chief executive officer of Pfizer, Inc., in New York City. He is chairman of the New York State Council on International Business. He graduated from Duke University (B.S., 1947) and Wharton School of Commerce and Finance, University of Pennsylvania (M.B.A., 1949). He was born February 22, 1927, in Savannah, GA, and now resides in Port Washington, NY.

J. Steven Rhodes will succeed John T. Dailey. He is presently serving as vice president for public finance at Smith Barney in New York City. Previously he served at the White House as Assistant to the Vice President for Domestic Policy (1983-1985) and Special Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs (1981-1983). He was born September 29, 1951, in

POLICY PAPERS • NUMBER FIVE

**“THEY CANNOT STOP OUR TONGUES:”
ISLAMIC ACTIVISM IN JORDAN**

ROBERT B. SATLOFF



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POLICY PAPERS • NUMBER FIVE

**“THEY CANNOT STOP OUR TONGUES:”
ISLAMIC ACTIVISM IN JORDAN**

ROBERT B. SATLOFF



THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

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In memory of

Maurice H. (Marcie) Blinken

1900-1986

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Robert B. Satloff is a Fellow of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, specializing in contemporary Arab and Islamic politics. He is the author of *Troubles on the East Bank: Challenges to the Domestic Stability of Jordan*, and his articles on various Middle Eastern topics have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Miami Herald*, *Middle East Insight* and *Middle Eastern Studies*.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This paper is adapted from *Troubles on the East Bank: Challenges to the Domestic Stability of Jordan*, The Washington Papers Number 123, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies with Praeger Publishers, November 1986.

Field research for this paper was undertaken during two trips to Jordan. In the summer of 1985, I participated in an Arabic language program sponsored jointly by the University of Virginia and Yarmouk University. I traveled again to Jordan in July 1986, visiting Amman and Irbid.

I would especially like to thank Barbi Weinberg and Martin Indyk of The Washington Institute for their confidence in me and their support.

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PREFACE

Virtually all diplomatic frameworks for settling the Arab-Israeli conflict envision a central role for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. To date, however, Jordan has been unwilling to enter into direct negotiations with Israel.

Lacking in Palestinian, Arab and international support, the King was thought to be holding back because of his vulnerability in the face of external opposition. Accordingly, diplomats and statesmen have worked diligently to meet Jordan's conditions for engaging in peace talks. What they have tended to overlook, however, are the internal factors which constrain King Hussein.

The domestic scene has not remained static. Over the past decade, forces have been at work inside the Kingdom which may sorely undercut the internal stability King Hussein needs as a prerequisite for entering negotiations.

In this study, Robert B. Satloff presents the first scholarly analysis of the most ominous of these developments – the rapid expansion of an Islamic activist movement inside Jordan. Against the backdrop of a severe economic recession and stringent limits on political expression, Mr. Satloff argues that Islamic activism could produce the first mass opposition movement in Jordan since the 1970-1971 Jordanian civil war.

According to Mr. Satloff, Islamic activists do not yet pose a direct threat to Hashemite rule. But given the activists' virulent antipathy to peace with Israel, their growing numbers limit Hussein's room for political maneuver and add a new dimension to efforts to solicit Jordan's participation in the peace process.

The Washington Institute sponsored this study as part of its ongoing effort to provide the Washington based policymaking community with timely, expert analysis of current Middle East issues. It forms part of The Institute's wider purpose: to promote a better understanding of American interests in the Middle East and the means by which those interests can be promoted.

This Policy Paper is dedicated to the memory of Maurice H. (Marcie) Blinken, who supported the Institute from its inception and took a keen interest in its research and publications.

Barbi Weinberg
President
November 1986

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Islamic activism has emerged as one of the most dangerous and destabilizing forces inside Jordan today. The growth of the activist movement has come largely at the expense of a decades-old symbiotic relationship between the Hashemite ruling family and the traditional religious establishment.

Several external factors rankled domestic Islamic sentiment and contributed to the growth of Islamic activism, including:

- * Jordan's lukewarm opposition to Anwar Sadat's peace initiative in 1977;
- * King Hussein's personal support of the Shah of Iran in 1978;
- * Jordan's staunch backing of Saddam Hussein's campaign against Khomeini's Iran since 1980;
- * Jordan's use of the Muslim Brotherhood as a tool in the ongoing political contest with Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad.

Domestically, the collapse of the oil market provided a significant boost to the Islamic movement, especially among Jordanian youth. Islamic groups have been the prime beneficiaries of the anger and frustration of even highly educated Jordanians, whose expectations of rising social and economic status are left unfulfilled in today's climate of austerity, recession and mass unemployment.

The Islamic activist movement has expanded throughout the Kingdom. Islamic organizations are now entrenched at both major Jordanian universities and popular sympathy for the movement appears strong in metropolitan areas as well as in Palestinian refugee camps.

As the challenge has grown, the Jordanian regime's response has changed from cooptation to confrontation. At first, the Crown heightened the profile of its Islamic legitimacy and tried to coopt the popular tide of religious sentiment. But cooptation often provoked more opposition, so in 1985 Hussein changed tack and opted to confront the activists directly.

Given the speed with which it grew, the Islamic activist movement must be viewed as one of the most important and portentous developments inside Jordan today. The activists, however, still lack the strength to confront the regime directly or pose a serious threat to Hashemite rule. Yet, as the events in Irbid in recent months show, the Islamic movement has moved to the center of Jordanian politics.

Because of the Islamic activists' virulent antipathy toward accommodation with Israel, their new centrality in Jordanian politics further limits the Kingdom's room for maneuver on the peace process.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In a small, austere office in a building next to the Islamic Hospital, the shoeless leader of Jordan's Muslim Brotherhood brands Hafiz al-Asad an "American spy" and bemoans the puppeteer-like power of the resident U.S. Ambassador. From behind a desk in the chamber of the Lower House of Parliament, a newly elected legislator implores his colleagues to ban all commerce in alcohol involving Muslims and demands the imposition of *Shari'a* law. Across the street from Amman's largest church looms the colorful dome and imposing minaret of the capital city's new, multimillion dollar central mosque. The "new Islam" has arrived in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The "new Islam" is the Islam of challenge and confrontation. The charges of the Brotherhood leader represent the new stirrings of outspokenness within a movement that had for 20 years accepted the government's offer of relative freedom in return for political complacency. The parliamentarian's bold demands are just the first wave of a potentially massive tide that has already swept through Jordan's colleges and universities on its way to redefining the Kingdom's political debate. And Amman's majestic new mosque symbolizes the defensive actions of a regime that has begun to fear the inadequacy of its longstanding claim of religious legitimacy. In short, the threats and reverberations of "Islamic activism"¹ are coalescing into one of the most dangerous, and least studied, areas of instability in Jordan today.

Of course, Islam has always held a central role in Jordan's political culture. At the top of the social order sits the King, Hussein bin Talal, scion of the Hashemite family that traces its lineage to the Prophet Muhammad. Fealty to the King has always been bound up with his role as the Guardian of the *Haram al-Sharif*, the Holy Places in Jerusalem. Generous patronage of mosques and other religious institutions has strengthened the legitimacy the Hashemite royal family derives from Islam.

In many ways, Islam has helped fill the void of Jordanian nationalism. Its population split between bedouin tribesmen and the artisans and

¹ "Islamic activism" is my preferred terminology for that effort to define and order personal behavior and political expression under the rubric of Islam. "Islamic activists" may differ amongst themselves as to the means they employ and the tactical goals they seek. Those differences, however, do not blur the very sharp distinctions between Islamic activists and traditionalist, conservative Muslims.

merchants from west of the Jordan river, Jordan lacked a ready foundation for national cohesion. Moreover, the conservative, essentially pro-Western monarchy was, to say the least, not well-suited to adopt the Arab nationalist platform of the 1950s and 1960s. So the Hashemites clung to Islam, despite their flight from the Arabian peninsula and their loss of the two holiest sites of Islam to the al-Saud family in the early decades of this century.

Curiously, the Israeli capture of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967 strengthened, not weakened, the religious significance of Hashemite rule. Though he and his forebears are responsible for "losing" Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, Hussein has benefited from playing the role of *mujahid* – struggler in the name of Islam. Asked, for example, whether he would break the deadlock in the Arab-Israeli peace process by traveling to Jerusalem like Anwar Sadat, he responded: "Jerusalem has a very special place in my heart...as the last Arab and Muslim ruler to have had the responsibility of securing the rights of Muslims and Christians in the Holy City...I am not about to be the first under any circumstances to legitimize Israeli annexation by going there." Syria's Hafiz al-Asad has boasted that "Damascus is the heart of Arabism and Islam," but Hussein adamantly underscores the primacy of Jerusalem – a city, never Jordan's capital, lost to Israel nearly two decades ago.

The Hashemites' reliance upon the legitimizing power of Islam enabled them to reach a political accommodation with religious groups that eluded Arab nationalist regimes in Egypt and Syria. Prior to Hussein's forceful assertion of the royal prerogative in 1957, the Muslim Brotherhood (along with the more radical Islamic Liberation [*Tahrir*] Party) actively participated in Jordan's often tumultuous political life. Because the Brotherhood drew its inspiration and leadership from the movement's headquarters in Egypt, local chapters periodically clashed with the Jordanian government. In the 1950s, for example, Islamic activists, in tactical alliance with leftist parties, argued for Jordan's disengagement from Britain, just as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood hailed Abdul Nasser's demands for the evacuation of British forces from the Suez Canal. When organized parties were still an important part of Jordan's politics, Muslim Brethren competed and won seats in parliamentary elections. Typically, their platform called for the replacement of Jordan's Western-based constitution with one based solely on the Qur'an.²

² See Raphael Pata'i, ed., *Jordan: Country Survey Series*, (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1957), p. 71.

Despite their anti-government activity, the Muslim Brothers never sought to exploit Jordan's turbulent domestic situation in search of revolutionary change. Rather, they always preferred the more moderate route of evolutionary reformation by working within the Kingdom's political system. Their disdain for radicalism was symbolized by their siding with the King against leftist nationalists during the internal crises of 1957-1958. That fidelity was rewarded with an exemption from the otherwise across-the-board ban on organized political activity. Since then, Islamic activists in general, and Muslim Brothers in particular, have maintained cordial relations with the monarchy and enjoyed rights of political expression denied to other groups.³ Indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood is the closest approximation Jordan can claim to a political party; parties themselves were banned more than 20 years ago. The Hashemites' traditional "Islamic policy" has met with remarkable success. Except for a lone plot against the regime by the now-outlawed Islamic Liberation Party, uncovered by intelligence agents in 1969, Hussein has had little worry of security threats emanating from religious circles.

During the past decade, however, that symbiotic relationship between the State and Islam has deteriorated sharply. In terms of both personal piety and organizational growth, Islam has acquired a hitherto unknown sense of vibrancy and vitality. Not only is Islam no longer singularly associated with the Hashemite claim of prophetic lineage and defense of Jerusalem, but Islam may, in fact, be flourishing in opposition to it.

There are many components to the decline of the traditional accommodation and the growth of a confrontational Islamic activism: foreign and domestic, political and economic. Jordan's religious surge cannot be viewed in isolation from the activism that has swept through the Muslim world in the past decade; nor can the Jordanian case be understood without looking at Jordan's role in traditional inter-Arab political rivalries that, at first glance, have little to do with Islam at all. Similarly, the future course of religious activism depends as much on the gloomy forecasts of the Kingdom's economy as on the prospects for formalizing the state of tacit peace with Israel. It is the purpose of this paper to examine the role of these components in the dynamic relationship between the State and Islam in Jordan today, and, in doing so, to try to determine what impact Islamic activism is likely to have on the American-sponsored peace process.

³ See, for example, Peter Gubser, *Jordan: Crossroads of Middle Eastern Events*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), p. 111.

II. REGIONAL POLITICS

AND THE INCITEMENT OF ISLAMIC OPPOSITION

Not until the 1970s did the peculiarly Islamic dimension of Mideast politics play a significant role in Jordan's interaction with other Middle Eastern states.⁴ Islam was rarely an issue because it had always seemed to complement, not confound, the public policies adopted by the King. But with Sadat's peace initiative and the Khomeini revolution, Jordan found itself confronted with policy dilemmas exacerbated by their Islamic character.

In Iran, a mass movement led by Islamic clerics posed a mortal threat to a regime that, like Jordan's, was aligned fundamentally with the West. Moreover, in Hussein's eyes, the Islamic Republic's determined prosecution of its war against Arab Iraq laid the threat of religious revolution on his own doorstep. Egypt, on the other hand, spawned a devout Muslim statesman who journeyed to Jerusalem and opened up opportunities for a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict that the Hashemites had sought for decades. Yet Hussein realized he had to tread a cautious line lest he too, like Sadat, gamble with his Islamic credentials and find himself the victim of a fanatical Islamic assassin's bullet. In the end, Hussein adopted policies on both these issues that, perhaps inadvertently, rankled Islamic sentiment inside Jordan and helped provoke Jordan's own movement of Islamic activism.

IRAN

Hussein's backing of the Shah was the first target of Islamic-based dissatisfaction with government policy. Throughout 1978, Jordan was one of the Shah's staunchest defenders; the King himself visited Tehran three times that year to bolster the crumbling Pahlavi regime. At home, many took exception to what was viewed as support for an illegitimate, anti-Islamic ruler against a legitimate Islamic revolution. In February 1979, for example, even the state-supervised Jordanian press reprinted a message from *Ikhwan* (Muslim Brotherhood) leader Muhammad Abd-al-Rahman al-Khalifa to

⁴ Residual animosity between the Hashemites and the Saudis did linger long after settlement of their dispute over the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina and still exists today. But especially since the mid-1950s, their mutual interest in the survival of conservative monarchies in an increasingly radicalized region greatly overshadowed their differences.

Iranian Prime Minister Shapur Bakhtiar asking him not to obstruct the establishment of an Islamic government. Later that month, the city of Salt was the site of several small but significant demonstrations in support of Khomeini.

When Iraq sought to take advantage of Tehran's revolutionary disarray and invaded Iranian territory in September 1980, the internal Jordanian tension over the King's unflinching opposition to the Khomeini regime worsened. Two weeks after the attack, Hussein appeared on television to explain his support for Iraq's President Saddam Hussein. At first he argued for aligning with Iraq on security grounds, labeling his eastern neighbor the Kingdom's "strategic depth." But Hussein also tried to rationalize support for Iraq's invasion as the "beginning of victory in Palestine," as though Khomeini's anti-Zionist credentials were inferior to Saddam Hussein's. The inconsistency in Hussein's Islamic policy was glaring and popular opposition to Jordan's support for Iraq in the Gulf war became widespread. In a November 1980 interview with the Arabic magazine *al-Hawadith*, even the King conceded that "there exists in Jordan...an emotional gap, meaning that the Jordanian people are not in sympathy with the war because Iran is an Islamic state."⁵ As The Manchester *Guardian* reported a few weeks earlier,

[Hussein] has never been so out of tune with his people as he is today. The great majority see the Gulf War as Saddam's personal adventure and Hussein's intervention on his side as an adventure hardly less perplexing and disturbing.⁶

Within a week of the King's televised address, several mosque preachers were arrested for championing Iran's Islamic republic in their Friday sermons. In a speech broadcast on the Prophet's Birthday in January 1982, the King further accentuated the Islamic aspect of the Gulf war. Throughout the previous 18 months, Jordan's alliance with Iraq was primarily portrayed as a military necessity. By 1982, however, the King began to argue forthrightly for the *Islamization* of the war. In the January speech, Hussein challenged the Khomeini regime directly by distinguishing between enlightened and fanatical Islam.

Hussein was quick to translate his polemical assault into military terms. In late January 1982, he announced the formation of the volunteer "Yarmouk Brigade" to join Iraqi soldiers in their battle against Iran, purposefully choosing the name "Yarmouk" to evoke images of the 7th-

⁵ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, November 7, 1980.

⁶ The Manchester *Guardian*, October 10, 1980.

century battle between Arabian Muslim rebels and the Byzantine empire. At the same time, the King called for "an Arabization of the war against the idolatrous Persians."⁷ In fact, though, it was Islamization – not just Arabization – that formed the basis of Hussein's charge, for the King went beyond framing the Gulf War solely in ethnic terms. He claimed for himself and his Iraqi allies the mantle of Muhammad and the early righteous companions; Iran was branded with the mark of infidel.

Since 1982, the Gulf War has dragged on and Tehran has refused armistice offers that fail to include the resignation of Saddam Hussein. Khomeini's revolution itself has come under greater scrutiny as stories of executions, abuses and puritanical obsessions have become daily copy in the Arab press. As a result, the Islamic Republic has indeed lost some of the luster that seemed to flow from the almost supernatural force that overthrew the apostate Shah and replaced him with the Ayatollah. But, despite the tempering of public adulation of Khomeini, there remains in Jordan a genuine respect for the revolution's goal of re-orienting society away from the West and toward Islam. Especially in the revolution's early years, public opinion in Jordan did not focus on the Shi'ite aspect of Khomeinism. Rather, most Jordanians admired the revolutionaries simply for asserting themselves within an Islamic framework. By challenging Khomeini on religious as well as ethnic grounds, therefore, Hussein contributed unwittingly to the escalation of Islamic politics inside the Kingdom.

EGYPT AND THE PEACE PROCESS

From the moment Hussein labeled Anwar Sadat's mission to Jerusalem as "courageous" and his Knesset speech as "excellent," the goodwill he had built up with his Islamic constituents vis-a-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict began to dissipate. Compared with most leaders in the Arab world, Hussein's response to the Jerusalem initiative and the initial Egyptian-Israeli political talks was openly supportive of Sadat.

In the months leading up to the Begin-Sadat summit retreat at Camp David, Jordan found itself both delighted and frightened – delighted that it, and not the PLO, was the target of Egyptian and American efforts to expand the peace process to include other Arab parties; frightened that it might be swept into a process of negotiation and compromise that left Jordan without its minimum territorial gains from Israel. Throughout that period, Jordan inched closer to openly joining the peace process, only to decline when it

⁷ Cited in *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, January 28, 1982.

realized that no assurance of a satisfactory final result would be forthcoming. In the end, Jordan joined the majority of Arab states at the 1979 Baghdad summit meeting in condemning the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty and in ostracizing Egypt from the Arab world. Meanwhile, inside the Kingdom, throngs of students held violent demonstrations against the treaty, directing their anger against the regime for its relations with the United States and against Hussein's flirtation with negotiations throughout the previous year. In Amman, the government was compelled to deploy police and internal security forces to quell the demonstrations.⁸

An Amman meeting of the General Islamic Conference of Jerusalem, convened one week after the March 1979 demonstrations, pointed to the growing complexity of relations between State and Popular Islam. Chaired by Kamīl ash-Sharif, Minister of Islamic Affairs and *Ikhwan* supporter, the Congress approved two resolutions. First, it denounced the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty as a "stab to the Arab and Islamic nations" and endorsed Jordan's stance as a leader of Arab rejection to it. Its second resolution, however, "praised the stand of the Islamic Iranian revolution and its support for the Arab cause" – in particular, its adamant rejection of a negotiated settlement with Israel. By criticizing Sadat and praising Khomeini, one of Jordan's most influential religious bodies joined with the King on only one of the issues of prime relevance to Islamic activists.

Despite the banishment of Egypt from official diplomatic circles that followed the Baghdad summit, Jordan never felt comfortable in league with the "Rejectionist Front" states. In his summit address, Hussein criticized "the mentality of outbidding, incriminations and emotional and verbal reactions" that marked most Arab leaders' positions toward Egypt. Government statements and local media preferred to emphasize the necessity of joint Arab action rather than the self-satisfying urge to excoriate Cairo for breaking Arab ranks. Jordan complied with most of the summit's resolutions against Egypt, but ties with Cairo were never fully cut. Along with most Arab states, Jordan maintained a consulate in Cairo (in cooperation with Sudan), and both the Jordanian and Egyptian national airlines continued flights between the two countries. Moreover, the large-scale influx of unskilled Egyptian workers into Jordan's labor force was uninterrupted.⁹

⁸ Among those demonstrations was a mass sit-in by women at an Amman mosque.

⁹ Colin Legum, Haim Shaked, Daniel Dishon, eds., *Middle East Contemporary Survey [MECS]*, 1978-79, vol. III (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980), p. 642-643.

Over time, and especially following Sadat's October 1981 assassination, Jordanian-Egyptian relations lost their clandestine character. President Husni Mubarak's less iconoclastic leadership, his eschewal of Camp David autonomy talks in favor of Hussein's preferred route of the international conference and the blossoming of the Cairo-Amman-Baghdad axis paved the way for Hussein's restoration of full diplomatic relations with Egypt in September 1984. Though virtually all Arab states have inched their way back into some sort of relationship with Egypt, Hussein remains the only leader of a confrontation state to return his ambassador to a Cairo still loyal to Camp David. That symbolic step confirmed to many that Hussein had reconciled himself to a public accommodation with Egypt, separate peace and all.

DOMESTIC REVERBERATIONS

In retrospect, the events of February-March 1979 – rallies, demonstrations and riots in sympathy with the Iranian revolutionaries and in opposition to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty – had little direct impact on Jordanian society. There were no hordes of students and veiled women marching through the streets chanting "Death to the King," no vicious accounts of police brutality, no charismatic leaders to energize the opposition. Against the backdrop of the revolution in Iran, Islamic activism in Jordan was manifesting itself on a very low level.

But given Jordan's particular historical tradition and the relative intensity of the country's embryonic Islamic surge, those two months constituted a watershed period in the development of Jordanian domestic politics. In contrast to both Iran and Egypt, Jordan in the late 1970s was just beginning to experience a movement toward Islam. Only in 1978 did press reports begin to discuss the "new concern...about the recent Islamic revival movement."¹⁰ Various sources started hinting at what have come to be the tell-tale signs of "Islamicness" – men growing beards, women wearing conservative dress, and stricter adherence to Ramadan prohibitions.¹¹

During this period Jordan experienced great economic expansion. Though not blessed with oil reserves of its own, Jordan's economy benefited

¹⁰ New York Times, September 14, 1978.

¹¹ See, for example, Paul A. Jureidini and R.D. McLaurin, *Jordan: The Impact of Social Change on the Role of the Tribes*, The Washington Papers Number 108 (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies with Praeger Publishers, 1984), p. 89.

from the petroleum revolution almost as much as did the economies of the Persian Gulf states. Jordan's boom was fueled by the flow of remittance income from Jordanians working in oil-exporting Arab states, grants from Arab benefactors to subsidize Jordan's "steadfastness" against Israel, increased exports to those nouveau riche countries, and the transfer of commercial and financial concerns from war-torn Beirut to the relatively liberal economic climate of Amman. With that newfound wealth came a quickening of the pace of modernization and the spread of consumerism. Western fashion, taste, art and entertainment all became important Jordanian imports. In those years, when times were good, Islamic activism spread as a response to the shallowness of this Western invasion and as a plea for the return of the simplicity and tradition of the old ways. With strong popular sympathy for the Islamic revolutionaries in Iran, many Jordanians began seeking out Islamic answers to problems that nationalist and pan-Arab formulas could not solve.

The Hashemite regime clearly perceived this mood shift toward Islam and sought to place itself at the helm. Newspapers and magazines increased their reportage of religious issues; radio and television boosted their level of religious programming. Coverage accented the personal piety of both Hussein and his brother, Crown Prince Hassan, focusing on their regimen of prayer and patronage of religious institutions. In 1979, the government introduced a plan to encourage payment of the *zakat* tax, exempting all those who paid this religious levy during the month of Ramadan from 25 percent of their regular income tax. Moreover, the palace ordered a crackdown on some of the more flagrant violations of the Ramadan laws, directing provincial governors to close bars and night clubs and to order at least token arrests for eating, drinking and smoking during proscribed periods. In short, the state was quick to sense the growing Islamic sentiment and to escalate its own level of Islamic activity.

Islamic politics assumes greater significance, therefore, when viewed in light of the peculiar velocity with which Jordan experienced the Islamic phenomenon. In less than two years, the level of Islamic activity expanded from the relative irrelevance of beard-growing to public protests provoking state intervention. Viewed in a vacuum, the events of February-March 1979 were minor. But in a larger context, they signalled a swift transition in the level of Islamic activity from the predominantly personal to the overtly political spheres.

III. GROWTH AND EXPANSION OF THE ISLAMIC ACTIVIST MOVEMENT

The Muslim Brotherhood provided the lightning-rod for the surge in Islamic activism. At the same time, though, the Brotherhood and the government maintained their peculiar client-patron relationship. The development of that connection highlights the complexity of Islamic politics in Jordan.

For more than twenty years, the *Ikhwan* has operated as the only legally recognized political organization in the Kingdom. Its leader is Muhammad Abd-al-Rahman al-Khalifa, a disciple of Egyptian *Ikhwan* founder Hasan al-Banna. Although the Jordanian branch originated as an offshoot of the mass opposition movement in Egypt, its political fortune has always been tied closely to the Crown. Throughout Hussein's most desperate crises – in 1957, 1967 and 1970 – the Brotherhood has consistently defended the King.¹²

JORDAN, SYRIA AND THE IKHWAN

In recent years, the price of the *Ikhwan*'s relative freedom has been to act as Hussein's agent in his long-running feud with Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad. While the *Ikhwan* may on its own seek to disrupt the Damascus regime through assisting its fellow brethren in Syria,¹³ Hussein clearly dictates what it can and cannot do. For example, following the murder of cadets at the Aleppo Military Academy in June 1979, Asad blamed the Brotherhood and executed fifteen of its members. In response, Khalifa launched a propaganda campaign against the Alawite regime and boosted the level of support to Jordan-based camps training Syrian *Ikhwan* members for missions against Damascus. Three months later, these efforts were

¹² Gubser, *op cit*.

¹³ In Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood is the largest, best organized and most effective opposition group to Asad's regime. While the Brotherhood may agitate against Muslim rulers in various countries (Egypt and Jordan, for example), *Ikhwan* antipathy toward Asad is particularly virulent because of his adherence to the Alawite heresy of Shi'i Islam. Alawites, also known as Nusayris, comprise about 10 percent of Syria's population and are concentrated in the country's northwest region. For centuries they have filled the role of Syria's underclass. The Alawite religion deifies Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, and incorporates many Christian characteristics. Although the Alawites claim to be good Muslims, most Muslims – especially Syria's Sunni majority – consider them heretics. Most of the men Asad has appointed to positions of power in Damascus are Alawites.

halted, most likely on orders from Hussein. In a February 1980 interview with *Le Monde*, Khalifa expressed satisfaction with the Brotherhood's tethered connection with the throne: "We understand our government...We have accepted these constraints with a good face in order not to create internal dissension."¹⁴

Khalifa's statements came just weeks after the Brotherhood vigorously pursued allegations of sexual misconduct brought against high-ranking Jordanian officials. According to various published reports, at least two government ministers – including Interior Minister Suleiman Arar – were forced to resign after *Ikhwan* leaders presented Hussein with evidence of their guilt.¹⁵

A second instance of the use of the Brotherhood as a pawn in the festering Syrian-Jordanian conflict came to light in the summer of 1980. Hussein warned Iraq's Saddam Hussein of a Syrian assassination plot in August, leading to a raid on the Syrian embassy in Baghdad and a series of retributive executions. Asad retaliated against the King by threatening direct military intervention unless Jordanian-backed *Ikhwan* activities against his regime were checked. To avoid open conflict with Damascus, the King reportedly curtailed Brotherhood activities and ordered the re-appointment of two ministers known for their anti-*Ikhwan* attitudes, one of whom was Arar. Two months later, however, Hussein made the next move in his clash with Asad, executing two Syrians dispatched to Jordan to assassinate an exiled *Ikhwan* leader.¹⁶

Finally, the two countries moved close to war over the issue of military training camps the Jordanian *Ikhwan* was providing for its Syrian allies operating against the Alawite regime. Hussein adamantly refused to acknowledge the existence of such camps and rejected Syrian requests for the extradition of about 200 Syrian exiles that the Damascus regime claimed were responsible for a series of assassinations and bomb explosions. As Asad said:

¹⁴ *Le Monde*, February 26, 1980.

¹⁵ Government ministers were allegedly involved in "staging sex orgies with young girls (including high school pupils) at villas rented in exclusive parts of Amman" and with "extending their protection to a chain of brothels established over the past two years in the capital to cater for foreign dignitaries from Arab countries." See *Foreign Report*, November 21, 1979 and *India Today*, December 16-31, 1979. *Le Monde*, which named Arar as one of the accused, referred to the affair simply as a "morals scandal." *Le Monde*, December 21, 1979.

¹⁶ See *Le Monde*, December 21, 1979; *Quarterly Economic Review of Syria, Jordan* (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, Ltd., second quarter, 1980); *Middle East Intelligence Survey*, vol. 111, no. 16, November 16-30, 1980.

The dens from which plotting against Syria sprang and from which the sabotage acts were carried out in Syria remained in Jordan, in Amman and other cities ... I want to say that the Jordanian role has led to the treacherous murder of hundreds of people from all sectors of the Syrian population...¹⁷

Syrian rhetoric was backed up by the deployment of forces along the Jordan-Syria border while a handful of Arab heads of state convened in Amman for a truncated version of an Arab summit meeting.

After several tense days in December 1980, Saudi and American mediators persuaded Damascus and Amman to withdraw their troops. It is generally understood that one of the conditions for defusing the crisis was Hussein's promise to limit anti-Syrian *Ikhwan* activity inside the Kingdom. But other than stepping up surveillance of Brotherhood operations, Hussein did not restrict the *Ikhwan's* freedom of action.¹⁸ At the time, Khalifa declared:

Asad and his gang are not Muslims – they are Alawites, and we are not afraid of them...What can Asad do to us? He cannot kill all of us. If he kills me, I have seven children and twelve grandchildren. They will avenge my death.¹⁹

During the 18-month Syrian-Jordanian test of wills, Jordan's *Ikhwan* underwent profound change. Showcased by the government as its unofficial vanguard against a Syrian regime universally decried for its "un-Islamic" qualities, the Brotherhood gained new vitality. Though it was used as a tool of bilateral affairs, the *Ikhwan's* central role in shaping relations between the two countries appears to have emboldened it.

An aura of cautious but deliberate rebelliousness began to manifest itself in the statements of even the Brotherhood's top leadership, those most closely tied to the government. In February 1980, for example, Khalifa had minimized the significance of Jordan's nascent Islamic activist movement and praised the broadmindedness of Hashemite rule:

In Jordan, nobody worries about the Islamic movement...The Jordanian leaders are more wise than others...²⁰

¹⁷ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, December 8, 1980.

¹⁸ See New York *Times*, December 8, 1980; *Middle East Intelligence Survey*, *op. cit.*; for an account of the government's official response, see *MECS*, vol. V, p. 650-651.

¹⁹ New York *Times*, December 7, 1980.

²⁰ *Le Monde*, February 26, 1980.

Just ten months later, though, his remarks bordered on an open challenge to the King:

This is an Islamic government, but it is not wholly Islamic. We would like to see the teachings of the Qur'an followed much more closely. The government can stop us publishing, but they cannot stop our tongues. If they try to close our offices, we would go to the mosques. They cannot shut those.²¹

Playing a central role in Jordanian-Syrian brinkmanship apparently emboldened the Brotherhood. To Hussein, the *Ikhwan* was a tool in his contest with Asad. But to the Brotherhood and to the growing activist segment of the populace, the *Ikhwan* had become the legitimate instrument of Islamic advocacy.

The gulf between these two interpretations of the Brotherhood's role had far-reaching ramifications. While Hussein and the *Ikhwan* might have shared some tactical goals against Syria (e.g., disrupting the Alawite regime), they differed fundamentally on basic strategic issues (e.g., the place of Islamic politics inside the Kingdom). Adeed Dawisha stated succinctly the "Catch-22" of Hussein's Syrian policy:

The destabilizing influence of Iran's government on secularist and modernist regimes like those in Jordan can hardly fill the Hashemite monarch with confidence at the thought of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood gaining power in neighboring Syria.²²

EARLY COUNTERMOVES BY THE REGIME

Hussein's long-term interests could not be served by fueling Islamic opposition in Syria and he tried to fashion a response to the growth of an Islamic activist movement for whose creation he shared at least partial responsibility. Handcuffed by the legitimacy he inadvertently conferred upon the *Ikhwan* through his Syrian policy, the King could not challenge the traditional leadership directly. Instead, he pursued a policy aimed at minimizing the scope of popular Islamic activity.

²¹ *The Times*, London, December 8, 1980.

²² Adeed Dawisha, "Much Smoke, Little Fire," *Middle East International*, no. 144, February 27, 1981.

The regime tried to restrict the expanding influence of the activists by placing structural barriers in their way. In 1980, for example, the Jordanian cabinet established a new higher education authority headed by the rector of Yarmouk University. Some observers suggested that the authority was "a way of checking that the Muslim Brotherhood does not get too much of a hold on the campuses – as it has been threatening to do in Amman."²³ Moreover, Islamic activists won approval from Jordan University to hold prayers in specially-designated "prayer halls" away from the central university mosque. In practice, the new set-up facilitated surveillance of group activities.

Hussein also attempted to assert control of Islamic activists through government appointments. As a result of two cabinet reorganizations between January 1984 and April 1985, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs was transferred from the hands of a longtime *Ikhwan* supporter, Kamil Sharif, to a pillar of the old-line traditional religious elite, Dr. Abd-al-Aziz al-Khayyat. Khayyat represented that end of the spectrum of Jordanian clerics that had long accepted its relationship with the Hashemites. His appointment was clearly a signal that conservatism, not activism, was the only acceptable role for religion in Jordanian political culture. Khayyat was appointed to his position at least partly to exercise stricter control over the appointment of mosque preachers and religious establishment (*awqaf*) administrators, positions which had been filled with growing numbers of Islamic activists in recent years.²⁴

ELECTORAL SUCCESS

But if Hussein believed that the growing tide of Islamic activism could be stemmed by minor structural changes and a renewed effort to emphasize the regime's Islamic credentials, the success of Islamic activist candidates in the March 1984 parliamentary elections forced him to re-examine his strategy. Earlier that year, Hussein had moved toward the long-promised re-establishment of parliamentary life in Jordan by calling for an election to fill eight vacant seats in the House of Representatives. Although no organized campaigning was permitted and political parties remained banned, more than 100 individuals competed in the eight election races.

²³ *Quarterly Economic Review of Syria, Jordan*, first quarter, 1980.

²⁴ Similarly, in recent years, the government moved to exercise greater control over personnel in the Ministry of Education, in which a bloc of Islamic activists has become a strong and influential bureaucratic interest group.

Islamic activists, including at least two *Ikhwan* members, were winners of three of the six seats reserved for Muslims; the two other seats were reserved for Christians. Jordanian officials quickly dismissed the significance of the Islamic activists' electoral support, preferring to attribute their victories "more to structural than ideological factors." For example, one election official said that because of the high number of candidates,

...the middle class moderates took votes away from one another. Those who had a strong religious commitment tended to vote in a block, which, because of the diffuse vote, appeared stronger than it actually was.²⁵

Others cited the absence of runoff elections, pointing toward the unconvincing victory of one religious activist in Amman who won the winner-take-all vote while receiving only 18,000 out of 108,000 votes in his district.

Nevertheless, three issues could not be overlooked. First, the seats won by the Islamic activists spanned the geographic length of the country, from Irbid in the north, to Amman in the center, to Tafilah in the south. Popular support for Islamic activism could not be considered a phenomenon limited to the densely populated capital/metropolitan area. Second, the haste with which election officials tried to dismiss the final tally indicated their displeasure and probable surprise. The election results were obviously not welcome news. Third, regardless of all the structural arguments, Islamic activists rather than middle class liberals worked within the stringent electoral laws to gain victories. Elections enhancing the position of the Islamic activists – just weeks after Sharif's removal from the Islamic affairs ministry – were clearly not what the government had bargained for.

In parliament, the Islamic activists formed the most vocal opposition to the King's government. They criticized the prime minister's handling of basic national issues and moved for no-confidence votes on several occasions. Despite limited support from other lawmakers for these and other parliamentary gambits, they persisted in an effort to rally public opinion to their cause. Parliamentary debate receives wide and relatively uncensored press coverage in the Kingdom, which the activists have sought to use to their best advantage. By early 1986, 33 of parliament's 60 members were persuaded to call on the government to introduce the Qur'anic *zakat* tax and 22 backed the Islamic activists' demand for a total ban on the manufacture, sale and distribution of alcohol by Muslims.

²⁵ New York Times, March 14, 1984.

COUNTERMEASURES, PHASE II

In April 1985, the King moved again. After 15 months in office, Ahmad Obeidat, former chief of internal security, was replaced by two-time prime minister and long-time friend of Hussein's, Zaid al-Rifa'i. While most observers ascribed this change to the King's desire to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy, Islamic issues may have also played an important role. Reports at the time noted the King's displeasure with Obeidat's "lack of confrontationalist policies [toward] the Islamic fundamentalist groups" and pointed to the fact that some government ministers were even allowed to give "public sermons in mosques indicating their preference for the establishment of Islamic rule in the country."²⁶

Since taking office, the secular, Harvard-educated Rifa'i has not shied away from confronting the Islamic activists. In one parliamentary debate on the government budget proposal, he dedicated a hearty chunk of his speech to an attack on the maverick leader of the religious bloc, Member of Parliament Laith Shubeilat.

The government greatly regrets the words and methods used by the Honorable Representative Laith Shubeilat...His reservations are a violation of truth and reality, and his indiscriminate accusations against the government not only prejudice the government but your noble chamber as a whole.²⁷

In addition to confronting the Islamic activists inside parliament, the Rifa'i government has tried to circumvent the activists' popular support by rewriting Jordan's election law. In March 1986, a parliamentary majority approved detailed legislation overhauling the Kingdom's outdated electoral code. While the intent of the new law was largely to satisfy some of the demands of Jordanian liberals by expanding parliament's size and enfranchising residents of Palestinian refugee camps, the legislation was crafted to limit the chances for Islamic activists to succeed at the polls. First, increasing registration fees for parliamentary candidates to JD 500 – more than \$1,200 – was expected to dissuade the activists from fielding challengers in each district. Second, the government created for itself a potential safety-valve against anti-government activists by banning candidacies of persons belonging to "any illegal or other party which has aims, objectives and principles that clash with the Jordanian Constitution"

²⁶ *Middle East International*, April 19, 1985.

²⁷ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, December 18, 1985.

(Article 17). Third, and most importantly, the new law redrew election districts, effectively diluting the activists' electoral strength. In short, the new electoral system has constructed a series of structural barriers to prevent an overwhelming *Ikhwani* success at the polls.

A more direct approach to the problem of the Islamic activists was inaugurated in Fall 1985, when Rifa'i clamped down on the *Ikhwan* as the price for better relations with Syria. Although the rapprochement was dictated by external events, it provided an opportunity and justification for Rifa'i's moves against the activists.

Prime ministerial meetings between Rifa'i and his Syrian counterpart, Abd-al-Ra'uf al-Qasm led to a series of summit meetings between heads of state, highlighting the attempt to patch up differences between the two quarrelsome neighbors.²⁸ Immediately after the second Saudi-mediated meeting between Rifa'i and Qasm in October 1985, the Gulf press reported that Rifa'i had agreed to a Syrian request to deport opponents of the Damascus regime resident in Jordan.²⁹ That concession meshed with Syrian statements emphasizing the improvement in bilateral relations with Jordan. Muslim Brethren – on both sides of the frontier – appeared to have become pawns once again in the political chess game between Hussein and Asad. Rifa'i's key role in facilitating the move toward reconciliation was underscored when Asad dispatched a personal emissary to Amman that month to attend the funeral of Rifa'i's uncle, former prime minister Abd-al-Mune'em al-Rifa'i. Isa Na'ib, Asad's envoy and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, was the first high-ranking Syrian official to visit Jordan in five years.

While Rifa'i played troubleshooter in the contest with the Islamic activists, the royal family was free to take the high road on Islamic issues. Throughout 1985, the Crown placed a renewed emphasis on religious topics, foremost among which was the special Hashemite attachment to Jerusalem. On numerous occasions the King reaffirmed his commitment to regaining the Islamic holy places lost in the 1967 war. At the August 1985 Arab

²⁸ The Jordanian and Syrian prime ministers met under Saudi auspices in September and October 1985; in November, Rifa'i traveled to Damascus to see Asad and in early December, Qasm traveled to Amman to talk with Hussein. Hussein and Asad met in Damascus at the end of December. The two heads of state exchanged visits to Amman and Damascus in a flurry of diplomatic activity in May 1986.

²⁹ See Foreign Broadcast Information Service, October 22, 1985; November 13, 1985; and November 18, 1985.

Summit in Casablanca, for example, he spoke at great length on the religious aspect of the Palestine issue:

The talk about Palestine necessarily means talk about the holiest of the holy places. All of us know the acts to which the holy mosque has been exposed. All of us know what this means if it continues.³⁰

At the same time, Hussein began to speak ominously about the spectre of radical Islam spreading throughout the Middle East, bringing down states like Jordan in its wake. In a January 1985 interview, the King said that the dangers posed by Iran and "radical Islamic fundamentalism" were not limited to the possible destruction of Iraq, but rather included "greater fragmentation and greater tragedies [throughout the entire region] than what we have seen in Lebanon already."³¹ According to his brother, Crown Prince Hassan,

...one of the major aspects of concern is the possibility that the present situation [in the Arab-Israeli dispute] will lead to a primitive war between extreme confessional groups that actually threatens the fabric of our societies...[T]he grim possibility facing the Middle Eastern countries at present is that of sliding into a prolonged, fierce and all-destroying war.³²

³⁰ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, August 8, 1985.

³¹ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, January 29, 1985.

³² Foreign Broadcast Information Service, January 18, 1985.

IV. THE KING CRACKS DOWN

In November 1985, the King made an abrupt turnaround in policy toward the Muslim Brotherhood and personally entered the domestic battle over Islamic politics for the first time. Until then, the King's statements on the Islamic implications of policy decisions had been confined to issues of foreign affairs (support for the Shah, alliance with Iraq, re-establishment of relations with Egypt), with no reference to the effect those policies may have had in provoking Islamic-based discontent inside the kingdom. But now, Hussein began to meet the growing internal Islamic challenge head-on.

Jordan's policy of seeking better relations with Syria offered the King a prime opportunity to crack down on the Islamic activists. In his November 2 speech opening the parliament, the King lashed out at militant mosque preachers and called on the lawmakers to pass regulations banning "uncontrolled, exaggerated preaching and the deviation from the method of effective, objective preaching."

One week later, Hussein took the unprecedented step of offering Syria a public apology for underground opposition activity against the Syrian government conducted by the Muslim Brotherhood from Jordanian territory. In fact, Hussein's declaration fulfilled one of the demands Asad had issued during the tense border confrontation five years earlier.³³ The extent of Hussein's recantation of past statements regarding the Jordanian *Ikhwan* is quite remarkable. The following excerpts from the King's remarks are quoted from a front-page *Jordan Times* story headlined "King: Subversive elements plotted and caused Jordanian-Syrian rift:"

But all of a sudden we discovered the truth about the whole affair and we realized what was happening. It emerged that some groups which have had to do with the bloody events in Syria were actually living in Jordan, hiding behind religious groups and pretending to be adhering to religion. This group has been connected with international organizations based in foreign and Arab and Islamic capitals hatching plots against the Arabs. The group's members were in reality outlaws committing crimes and sowing seeds of dissension among people.

³³ New York *Times*, December 3, 1980.

I hereby announce that I was quite deceived along with a large section of the Jordanian people by this criminal group. I am pained by what had happened because I am not in the habit of denying the truth or condoning deception.

I warn all citizens against the evil designs of this rotten group and urge all citizens to prevent them from implementing their evil plans that aim at causing divisions among Arab ranks and sowing seeds of dissension in our midst through concealing themselves behind religious pretenses and through using our religion to achieve their goals.

I am confident that the vigilant Jordanian family is capable of exposing the evildoers, deceivers and conjurors and preventing them from achieving their goals.

I warn this group which went astray and which abused our trust that it has no room amongst us any more. We cannot harbor conspirators or deceivers or those who mean to do harm to our nation and we will not allow anybody to sow seeds of dissension between Jordan and any other Arab country. Anyone who causes harm to our brothers is an enemy of ours.³⁴

Rifa'i was almost certainly the principal motivator behind the King's extraordinary shift in policy. Hussein's statements were not written in the form of an apology directed to Asad or as a royal proclamation; rather, they were conceived as a policy directive addressed directly to the Prime Minister. Within days, foreign radio reports noted that Jordanian security forces, acting under orders from Rifa'i (who also serves as defense minister), had rounded up and extradited to Damascus hundreds of *Ikhwan* members active in the Syrian opposition. Soon thereafter, Rifa'i's cabinet approved a proposed law prohibiting mosque preachers from discussing political issues in their sermons and requiring them to submit drafts of sermons to government authorities prior to their delivery. Parliament approved the measure several weeks later, but only after pro-government sponsors and *Ikhwan* MPs agreed to a compromise in which the government dropped its insistence on the obligatory licensing of preachers.

Just after Hussein's parliamentary State-of-the-Kingdom address, Jordan's House of Representatives was the setting for a highly publicized attempt by the Islamic opposition to discredit the government-endorsed Speaker of the

³⁴ *Jordan Times*, November 11, 1985.

House. In a rare display of defiance, nearly one-quarter of the house members abstained in a vote to re-appoint Akif al-Fayiz to his speaker's post. (Fayiz had no opponent.) That same day, Laith Shubeilat, the militant Islamic activist and member of parliament, announced he would place his own name in nomination for House Speaker when Fayiz's term expired, thereby ensuring a direct parliamentary confrontation.

V. YARMOUK AND IRBID: 'NIPPED IN THE BUD'

Hussein's twin declarations – his call for legislation against militant preachers and his apology for anti-Syrian *Ikhwan* activity – underscored the magnitude of the Islamic problem facing the regime. Just five years before, the King had used the *Ikhwan* as a pawn in a gamble of military brinkmanship with Asad that nearly resulted in war. Islamic activists were, at worst, a nuisance. By 1986, in a complete turnabout from long-standing policy, the King was attacking them directly – both rhetorically and substantively. They had become much more than a nuisance.

Islamic issues have now moved to the center stage of Jordanian politics. In just seven years, the level of religious activism intensified from beard-growing and Ramadan-fasting to a level of overt opposition to government policies. Inside parliament, the activists have grown bolder each day; outside, tension has increased in the mosques and at the universities. Hussein's apology to Asad only highlighted the conflict of strategic goals guiding the King and the *Ikhwan* in their respective policies toward Syria in recent years. In short, the time-honored patron-client relationship between the King and the *Ikhwan* has begun to break down.

Events in the northern provincial capital of Irbid in the late spring and early summer of 1986 were the most telling symbols of the creeping disintegration of that relationship.³⁵ In May 1986, students at Yarmouk University, Jordan's premier science and technological institute, launched a series of protests and demonstrations. They cited a number of grievances, ranging from intramural issues, such as the lack of student participation in university governance and high laboratory fees, to more political issues, such as tacit Jordanian support for the U.S. air strikes against Libya. Although small-scale demonstrations at Yarmouk had occurred periodically over the previous two years, what set the May events apart was both the provocative role played by Islamic activists and the heavy-handed response of government authorities.

³⁵ For a more detailed account of the events in Irbid in May-June 1986, see my "Irbid: Raising the Stakes in Jordan," forthcoming in *Middle East Insight*, vol. 5, no. 1, January/February 1987. For the government's official version of events at Yarmouk, see Foreign Broadcast Information Service, May 15, 1986; for references to a higher death toll, see *Washington Post*, May 21, 1986; for additional reporting, see *The Middle East*, July 1986 and *Middle East International*, May 30, 1986. My account is also based on interviews conducted in Irbid, July 1986

In three days in May, a small-scale "warning strike" by a few dozen engineering students turned into a massive demonstration with 3,000 participants – nearly 20 percent of the university's student body. Classrooms were occupied and semester examinations were disrupted. At first, the students' demands focused on lowering enrollment fees and reinstating formerly expelled classmates, but the contest soon transcended purely university issues. By maintaining the protest against the express wishes of the university administration, the students were issuing a direct challenge to the university's authority and were implicitly challenging the Kingdom's martial law restrictions of assembly and freedom of speech. As such, the Yarmouk demonstrations soon acquired an overtly political character.

Though Islamic activists were not among the original organizers of the demonstrations, they played a pivotal role once the protests were underway. They were among the key provocateurs in expanding the protest, rejecting concessions and, in the end, resorting to violence. One proof of the activists' role in the Yarmouk incident was University President Adnan Badran's choice of negotiators in search of a peaceful solution to the crisis – Member of Parliament Ahmad Kohafi, a member of the Muslim Brothers, and Irbid Mayor Abd-al-Razzaq al-Tubeishat, who was known to sympathize with the Islamic activists.

At Yarmouk, social frustration assumed an overtly political character. Islamic activists, who had been successfully building their influence at the university for several years, transformed the frustrated anger of hundreds of future engineer with little prospect of employment into unprecedented political action. With the prodding of the core group of activists, those engineers (as well as chemists, physicists and business majors) finally vented their frustrations.

What the students did not expect was that the administration – and, by extension, the government – would react so vengefully. While talks between students and mediators continued, Badran prepared a second option in the event that a negotiated settlement of the confrontation could not be reached. He issued a request for a locally based contingent of Jordan's General Security Forces to take up positions on a hillside about a kilometer from Yarmouk's fences. Although a compromise settlement of the students' demands was well within the negotiators grasp, discussions finally broke off on May 14. As tensions rose, the students learned of the deployment of Jordanian troops and many began to vandalize university property and hurl stones and empty bottles at policemen near the university gate. Hundreds sought refuge in a women's dormitory near the economics building,

believing that was the one place on campus that soldiers would not dare enter forcibly. They were wrong.

Just after midnight, about 75 troops entered the campus and surrounded the dormitory building. Armed with night sticks and riot gear, the soldiers were ordered to root out the protesters. After tear gas canisters were fired into the building, soldiers fought the students in hand-to-hand combat. During the subsequent room-to-room search of the dormitories, soldiers beat and clubbed students – male and female alike. According to the Jordanian government, three students – two women and one man – died of asphyxiation; unconfirmed sources placed the number of dead at double that figure. Dozens of students and 18 General Security Forces soldiers were injured in the fighting. About 800 students were taken into custody, and the university was shut tight. The entire operation lasted 90 minutes.

Later that day, the Interior Ministry released a statement affirming that "no individual or faction will be permitted to tamper with the Kingdom's security and stability or to expose its institutions and accomplishments to sabotage and harm. The most severe measures will be taken against anyone who tries to tamper with the security of the homeland and the safety of the citizens."

In the effort to restrict the political after-effects of such a heavy-handed approach to student disobedience, King Hussein ordered the immediate release of nearly all the detained students and asked Yarmouk President Badran to open the university and reschedule end-of-semester examinations for the next week. He also appointed a high-level ministerial committee to investigate what went wrong.³⁶ At the same time, the government tried to divert attention elsewhere. The Yarmouk riots were blamed on the outlawed Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Jordanian Communist Party; leaders of the two groups, including nearly the entire Communist Party politburo, were rounded up and arrested.³⁷

In the immediate aftermath of the riots, official statements also hinted at the role of Muslim political activists and on that score, they were much closer to the mark.³⁸ But because of the complicated and tense relationship between the religious establishment and the Crown, the government did not

³⁶ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, May 19, 1986.

³⁷ *Ibid.*; New York Times, May 21, 1986.

³⁸ In describing the agitators at Yarmouk, the government spokesman used language remarkably similar to that used by Hussein in his letter to Rifa'i condemning Islamic activists five months earlier.

at first emphasize the Islamic angle of the Yarmouk protests and only a handful of Islamic activist leaders were detained.

However, with a parliamentary by-election in Irbid scheduled one month later, the Islamic angle of the Yarmouk affair continued to haunt the regime. In the 1984 elections, an Islamic activist candidate had won in Irbid and another, Abd-al-Majid Nuseir, was heavily favored to win this time around. But in the wake of the riots, the regime had decided that it would no longer sit idly by while Islamic activists used electoral means to expand their own influence and bolster the strength of their movement. Translated into policy, that meant that Nuseir would not be permitted to win the by-election. Interior Minister Mahmud Kayid took the highly unusual step of personally asking Nuseir to withdraw his name from the ballot. Nuseir, who was later dismissed from his post as mathematics professor at Yarmouk, refused and vowed instead to continue his election battle against pro-government candidate Jamal Obeidat, nephew of the former prime minister and mukhabarat chief. When this effort to intimidate the candidate failed, the government opted to intimidate the electorate. Throughout June, Irbid was teeming with mukhabarat agents; on election day, the town was flooded by them. In the end, intimidation worked so well that less than 20 percent of the eligible voters actually cast ballots. Perhaps it worked too well, because Nuseir was defeated by a margin of more than two to one – 22,366 v. 10,230.³⁹

In early July 1986, attention reverted back to the Yarmouk affair, when the ministerial investigating committee delivered its findings in a report that has still not been made public. Soon thereafter, in a move to spread responsibility for Yarmouk as widely as possible, Rifa'i ordered the removal of Yarmouk President Badran, six university administrators and 15 professors. Hussein offered his own account of the Yarmouk riots at a hastily convened press conference later that month. For the first time, he specifically labeled the culprits behind the Yarmouk uprising and the effort to tamper with the Irbid by-election as elements of an "unholy alliance" of Communists, Arafat's Fatah and "fundamentalist Muslims."⁴⁰

That such an "alliance" exists between these groups in Jordan is highly unlikely. Neither Communists nor Arafatists fare well with Jordan's Islamic activists. To the activists, the Communists have lost their soul while the Arafatists have lost their backbone to stand up to creeping accommodation with Israel. Like Rifa'i before him, Hussein was spreading

³⁹ *Christian Science Monitor*, June 23, 1986.

⁴⁰ *Washington Post*, July 16, 1986.

the blame as widely as possible. But this was the first occasion on which Hussein not only sanctioned military action against Islamic activists but also directly implicated them in anti-regime activity. By linking the activists with the Communists and the Arafatists, Hussein had clearly placed them in league with traditional opponents of his regime. His statements and his government's actions indicated that the regime had moved toward viewing certain aspects of the Islamic activist movement as rebellious and that the regime would resort to repression to quash it. Although his ministers publicly talked in terms of pursuing peaceful dialogue with Islamic activists, government policy was more accurately summed up in the words of one high-ranking official who said privately: "We're nipping this in the bud."⁴¹

⁴¹ Author's interview, Amman, July 1986.

VI. THE ISLAMIC ACTIVIST MOVEMENT:

PROGNOSIS AND PROSPECTS

Islamic activism (in the organizational form of the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated groups⁴²) has grown into the largest popular movement in Jordan. This essay has focused on two of the fundamental factors that contributed to the activist phenomenon – the role of regional politics and the escalation of domestic confrontation between the regime and the activists. Events in the Arab and Muslim worlds and Jordanian foreign policy decisions in response to them touched a chord inside that segment of Jordan's population for which religious affiliation is of special significance. Most importantly, the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Islamic opposition in Syria, though surely of different religious origin and character, were pivotal in sensitizing the populace to how religion translates into political activity. Similarly, the cycle of action-reaction that marked the relationship of Islamic activists to the regime was essential for the movement's growth. Through its various efforts to coopt the activists and to crush them, the Hashemite regime accorded the activists political weight and significance that, in the end, left them battered but undeterred.

Islamic activism has also been bound up with two other trends that have provided the framework for the growth of the movement. First, the wide, pendulum-like swings in Jordan's economic fortune exacerbated latent social and political tensions and created a ready stream of discontent from which Islamic activism drank voraciously. As Jordan's economy declined in recent years, the *Ikhwan* grew. For many, the demonic character of Western influence on Jordanian society was strongly confirmed by the sudden disappearance of the Kingdom's foreign revenue sources and the spread of a debilitating economic recession. After 1981, the oil boom began

⁴² Not all political Islamic sentiment is channeled through the Muslim Brotherhood. A corollary to the growth of the Brotherhood was the spawning of several small, underground Islamic groups. Many of these organizations endorsed more radical positions than the Brotherhood's long-term client-patron relationship with the state could allow. In 1981, *Le Monde* reported that Islamic activist students were split among a handful of organizations, including an extremist, predominantly Palestinian wing of the Brotherhood, the re-incarnated, anti-regime Islamic Liberation Party and a tiny group calling itself *Takfir wa-Hijra*, modeled after the Egyptian organization of that name. Because of the paucity of reliable information, it is impossible to gauge precisely the size and influence of any of these groups. But if the mainstream Brotherhood should cease to serve as a useful outlet for Islamic activists – as a result of regime cooptation or government crackdown – then radical Islamic groups will most likely assume greater significance.

to level off, and by 1985, the situation had become acute. Grants from friendly Arab states and workers' remittances have been in steep decline, and when oil prices plummeted 50 percent in just one year (April 1985-April 1986), Jordan's economy found itself nearing dire straits.⁴³

Probably the most significant impact of the turnaround in oil prices has been its effect on the Jordanian psyche. The expectations generated by easy money were now unfulfilled, as the tens of thousands of young Jordanians who had counted on continued prosperity faced a future of unemployment or underemployment, anger and frustration.

One-third of all Jordanians are students, yet neither the Jordanian economy nor the faltering economies of the Gulf states can today provide the jobs that these students were taught to expect. There are about 350,000 Jordanian nationals living with their dependents and working outside the Kingdom; thousands are returning home each year. Tens of thousands more Jordanians are students at universities and community colleges in the Kingdom and overseas. Jordan already lacks adequate job openings for the majority of job seekers, and the problem is likely to worsen in the near future. In 1985, Secretary of State George Shultz offered testimony before Congress in which he stated that, given current trends, Jordan may face a structural unemployment rate of 30 percent in five years. Many of the jobless and the underemployed – especially those trained in the highly prestigious fields of engineering, architecture and natural sciences – are turning toward Islam. Many Islamic activists, who declared their independence from the regime, so to speak, over the issue of Jordanian support for Iraq in the Gulf War, have begun to find their antipathy for the Hashemite regime solidified by their deteriorating economic condition.

The second trend from which Islamic activism has reaped benefits is a willingness among Jordan's Palestinian population to view the crusade for national rights within an Islamic perspective. To a significant degree, Palestinian nationalism has been subsumed within the Islamic movement; Palestinian youth now comprise an important element of the activists' new vanguard. Many Palestinian *Ikhwanis* dismiss much of the nationalist and socialist rhetoric of the old-line Palestinian groups, preferring to view the Palestinian issue within a more comprehensive, Islamic framework. It is difficult to quantify or to chronicle the history of the growth of

⁴³ Recent statistics indicating a rise in remittance income in 1986 should not necessarily be viewed as the light at the end of the oil-bust tunnel. Increased remittances may, in fact, reflect the final departure of accumulated savings from expatriate workers in the Gulf rather than an upsurge in Gulf employment or Gulf wage rates.

Palestinianism within the Islamic movement. The movement away from secular nationalism to religious nationalism has been evolutionary and it is by no means total. But it is not difficult to observe the effects of this trend among college-age Jordanians.

Nationalist and Palestinian-oriented organizations, which have traditionally been the dominant student groups, have lost much of their popular support to the Islamic activists. This is partly due to the structural impediments to organizing traditional Palestinian nationalist groups; in contrast to religious societies, the Hashemites view virtually all Palestinian nationalist organizations as enemies of the regime. But this phenomenon is also the product of a belief among many Palestinians that they are not forsaking their national aspirations by vowing allegiance to Islamic organizations; on the contrary, many simply believe that these groups offer a more effective way to reach their goals than do radical nationalist groups.

Islamic groups are the most powerful student organizations on the campuses of Jordan's two main universities, Jordan University in Amman and Yarmouk University in Irbid.⁴⁴ Few college students are able to find middle ground between the two movements – one is either with the *Ikhwanis* or against them. They control student electoral politics and oversee campus social activities, making sure they comply with traditional codes of behavior. At Yarmouk, for example, a cell-based organization of educational, activist and support groups has been established for both male and female students. Campus *Ikhwan* leaders lobby hard to convince female students to forego make-up and designer clothes for long skirts and headcoverings. Networks of Islamic activists – supportive of the *Ikhwan's* goals but not themselves official members – have spread out to the neighboring communities, while a loosely organized oversight committee coordinates activities between the two universities on a national level.

Viewed against the background of the growing Islamic activist movement, the events in Irbid are particularly significant. They suggest that Islamic activism has moved from the periphery to the center of Jordanian politics and that the regime has grown increasingly preoccupied with combatting the activist movement. Government information organs tried to rationalize the need for strong military measures by labeling the provocateurs Communists, but few believed that the handful of Communists at Yarmouk were possibly powerful enough to organize protests of thousands

⁴⁴ Information concerning *Ikhwan* activity on the campuses of Jordan's universities is taken from private interviews with students and faculty conducted during the summers of 1985 and 1986.

of students. The time will come when scapegoating the Communists (or even Palestinian nationalist radicals) to hide a crackdown on the activists will not be sufficient, and whatever public consensus there may be to act against Communists certainly does not carry over to the activists.

Analogies to the 1970-71 civil war are inaccurate. Unlike the Palestinian *fedayeen*, Jordan's Islamic activists are themselves products of the Hashemite system. Though the King moved slowly in confronting the *fedayeen*, there was a general consensus within the Kingdom (and especially among East Bankers) that the Palestinian militants were parasitical and, by their very nature, enemies of the state.

Islamic activists are not viewed that way. Indeed, Islamic activists will continue to build their credibility within Jordan by laying great emphasis on the social and educational aspects of their movement and by exhausting all legitimate means of political participation before venturing into that unknown field of open confrontation with the regime. It should be remembered that the 1985 crackdown on the Islamic activists was an act of the King's choosing and was not a direct response to any significant anti-regime activity on the part of the Islamic activists.

The Islamic movement in Jordan has not reached the stage at which open confrontation with the government is its only available course of action. There are still parliamentary moves to be made and, more importantly, much organizing to be accomplished. Yarmouk itself was not an organized attempt by Islamic activists to militate against the regime; the activists were surely not ready for such a confrontation and probably did not expect it to occur. Rather, Yarmouk was essentially an intramural protest that developed into a political contest of wills, with the activists using every opportunity to increase the stakes of the contest.

In short, it would be an error to overstate the extent to which Islamic activism currently poses a threat to the domestic security of the state. A re-enactment of Tehran 1979 is simply not in the cards. First, Jordanian clergy do not have the traditional status and independent power base that Iranian clergy enjoyed. Second, Jordan's middle class has not yet even begun to conceive of irreparably breaking with the regime. Third, the Kingdom's security services remain strong and loyal, though their reputation for efficiency was sorely tarnished by their bullheadedness in Irbid. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, Hussein's personality emotes very little of the Shah's aura of self-delusion; the King has been careful to avoid emulating the Shah's profligate and irreligious ways. The residual attachment that most Jordanians have to their King, despite the regime's faults, will most likely prove to be the most powerful deterrent to any sort of popular religious

revolution. But at the same time, the worsening economy, the flirtation with negotiations with "the Zionist entity," the reconciliation with the "murderous," Alawite regime in Damascus and the gradual build-up of the activists' moral and political authority inside the Kingdom will hasten a process of confrontation against the Kingdom's rulers.

As a result, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the use of parliament to deflect criticism of the Hashemite regime and to offer the semblance of democratic freedoms entails its own costs, measured primarily in terms of free elections and free speech. If those basic costs are not accepted in principle by the government, parliament adds to, not defuses, domestic tensions. The government's heavy-handed response to the prospect of an Islamic activist victory at the polls in Irbid suggests that the regime is unprepared to accept those costs.

Second, the conduct of the General Security Forces and the mukhabarat in Irbid raises questions about their ability to handle demonstrations efficiently, quietly and professionally. In contrast to Syria, where harsh and ruthless government oppression is a fact of political life, a relatively benign attitude toward political opposition has always been at the heart of the King's social compact with his subjects. Irbid was the first example in recent Jordanian history of the failure of implied government intimidation and the necessity of resorting to brute, naked force to quell a perceived internal threat to regime security. In the eyes of many Jordanians, a new threshold has been reached in the relationship between ruler and ruled.

Third, Hussein's political options in dealing with the Islamic activist movement are constrained. On the one hand, he could cease the game of one-upmanship which he has been playing with the activists for the past several years in order to prevent a further schism with that segment of the body politic that identifies itself with Islam. By continually portraying policy initiatives within an Islamic framework, the King permits the Islamic activists to determine the definitions of success and failure, thereby opening himself to attack and criticism. On the other hand, Hussein cannot surrender the Islamic issue to the activists without sacrificing an important element of his legitimacy. The Hashemite regime rests on too shaky a foundation for it to cede the Islamic high ground without a fight. The Guardian of the *Haram al-Sharif* has no other choice but to be an active, not reactive, player in the contest. As a result, Hussein is left a narrow path between the staunch defense of his policies in Islamic terms and the further escalation of tensions with the activists.

Fourth, Jordan's recent foreign policy maneuvers have taken a severe domestic political toll by placing the King at odds with the Islamic activists.

By siding with Iraq in 1980 and by settling with Syria on Asad's terms in 1985, Jordan paid a price in terms of domestic discontent. Specifically, Hussein's personal overture to Asad provoked resentment among Jordanian Muslim Brothers whose Syrian counterparts had sacrificed much in their opposition to Alawite rule. The irony is that Amman moved closer to Damascus precisely because it needed to cover its Arab flanks while pursuing the tortuous task of consigning Yasir Arafat to a role of junior partner in the peace process. In the end, that effort failed and Hussein was left without an Arafat subordinate to him but with both the Syrians and the Islamic activists more potent than before.

ISLAMIC ACTIVISM AND THE PEACE PROCESS

Lastly, and most significant for U.S. policy, the rise of Islamic activism may have its most important impact on Hussein's ability to maneuver in the peace process – potentially, the most explosive issue facing the regime. Nothing is more likely to provoke open, and perhaps violent, confrontation between the Islamic activists and the regime as public accommodation and negotiation with Israel. The King's much publicized efforts to negotiate a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict "before it is too late" leave him open to charges of treason and capitulation from Islamic activists weaned on the battle against Israel, Zionism and the occupation of Jerusalem. If Jordan were to engage in peace process diplomacy less clandestinely than it has in the past, the King can expect an even stronger backlash of domestic, Islamic-based reaction.

While few elements of Jordanian society have a vested interest in exchanging the current *modus vivendi* with Israel for a formal peace treaty, the Islamic activists would be on the front lines of opposition to such a move. Unless the King were able to assure his subjects that all territories occupied in 1967 were regained he stands little chance of winning even the acquiescence of the Islamic activists. Any attempt on his part to broker a deal that, for example, leaves the Arab sector of Jerusalem under the effective control of Israel would mark him as the Muslim leader who lost Jerusalem in both war and peace and would strip him of his remaining Islamic credentials.⁴⁵ In that light, Sadat's misfortune must bear heavily on Hussein's mind. Despite his success in regaining every inch of occupied

⁴⁵ See Aaron D. Miller, "Jordan and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Hashemite Predicament," *Orbis*, winter 1986.

Arab territory (Taba notwithstanding), Sadat was still the target of an Islamic militant assassin.

If Hussein is sincerely intent on taking up the offer of "territorial compromise" – the only Israeli bargaining position that even begins to approach Arab demands – his continual references to his responsibility for regaining every inch of the land are creating expectations that will be impossible to realize. Instead, he will have to prepare his people psychologically for the give-and-take that is the essence of negotiation and find a way of dealing effectively with the Islamic activist opposition to such a compromise. But given the structural weaknesses of the Jordanian regime, such a policy may be beyond Hussein's capabilities. Should that be the case, the constraining force of Islamic activism, coupled with the King's own powerful instinct for survival, may lead Hussein to a policy of informalizing the peace process and promoting tacit accommodation with Israel. Pursuing that route would permit the King to make progress on the Palestinian issue without exposing both his people and himself to a bitter, and perhaps regime-threatening experience.

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