

Tactics for Reviving the Reagan Plan

When Jordan's King Hussein became the first Arab head of state to resume full diplomatic and political ties with Egypt, there was quick agreement among observers that the king was laying the ground for eventual negotiations with 'Israel' on the basis of the Reagan plan some time after the US presidential elections. For his part, Egyptian President Mubarak lost no time in capitalizing on the Jordanian offer. He visited Amman within days of Jordan's announcement of the resumption of relations, and confidently urged other Arab states to follow Jordan's lead. The Iraqi government extended an invitation to Mubarak to visit Baghdad and indicated it was only a matter of time before relations with Egypt were officially restored.

It appeared that the stage was rapidly being set for a formal end to Egypt's isolation in the Arab world, and that the Reagan plan, conceived by the US president as a mechanism for implementing the Camp David accords, was once again gathering momentum.

Yet as soon as Jordan's intent to reestablish relations with Egypt was made public, a number of statements by various Jordanian officials, including the King and Crown Prince Hassan, stressed commitment to a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This would imply rejecting bilateral or trilateral talks on the status of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, offering instead to participate in an international peace conference under the UN auspices. In fact, Jordan's move came against the background of repeated public statements expressing dissatisfaction with the US's Middle East policy, which in the words of King Hussein «is completely biased in favor of Israel». At the same time, Jordan was pressing its overtures to the Soviet Union and preparing for King Hussein to visit Moscow.

If Jordan's motive for unilaterally ending the diplomatic boycott of Egypt was to help reactivate the Reagan plan in anticipation of a fresh US Middle East drive after the elections, how then can

we explain other Jordanian actions and signals that indicate a desire to keep a safe distance from US-sponsored initiatives? Why would King Hussein risk what was certain to be a confrontation with Syria at a time when Syria's influence seemed to be at an unprecedented level?

It is a fact of history that the Jordanian regime has consistently acted in concert with the objectives of imperialism. Over the years, King Hussein has proved himself to be a close ally of the US and worked to insure Jordan's collaboration with every regional plan initiated or sponsored by the US. Jordan's overstated 'annoyance' with the Reagan Administration has in fact less to do with the king's lack of desire to accomodate the Reagan plan than with the failure of the US to deliver on its own promises. The US's unconditional support to 'Israel' under the Likud and failure to pursue its own proclaimed strategy, the Reagan plan, have left the Jordanian regime in a precarious situation and forced it to seek ways out of the impasse. It was also feared that 'Israel' might in the meantime enter and occupy the East Bank (Jordan) in order to create a new set of facts before negotiations got underway.

Royal Jordanian calculations

Jordan's initial strategy was based on the assumption that the Likud would be replaced by Labor in the last Israeli elections, and that Reagan would seek to reactivate his dormant plan soon after his own reelection. King Hussein was too politically vulnerable to act on his own, and a strong reaction on the part of Syria could be anticipated. Hussein thus proceeded to protect his flanks by cultivating eventual partners and preparing to seize the initiative. Quietly, he unofficially ended all boycott of Egypt and sought to get a majority of Arab League member states to formally restore ties with Mubarak's regime. He gave strong political and military support to Iraq in the war with Iran, in return for Iraq's abandoning opposition to the Camp David

accords and Reagan's plan. In the willingness of a number of right-wing elements in the PLO leadership to accomodate US strategy, King Hussein found a basis for bringing in the PLO as a partner in some form acceptable to the US and eventually to 'Israel'. This, of course, means a PLO in a form that would effectively do away with its status as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and bypass its demand for an independent Palestinian state. In addition, the king sought to normalize Jordan's relations with the Soviet Union which is the primary source of support for Syria, other Arab nationalist states and the PLO.

In effect, King Hussein proceeded to prepare for the anticipated fresh US initiative by seeking to encircle and neutralize Syria, by reinforcing Jordan's status as the legitimate party in any negotiations on the future of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and by linking up with Egypt as a prospective partner. Arafat's visit to Cairo provided the cover for Hussein to make his own Egyptian connection public. By inviting Mubarak to visit Amman, Hussein also served notice that Jordan intended to maintain its role of chief broker in the new alliance: At stake was the relative position of Jordan and the PLO in the developing partnership, and the King sought to make it clear that Jordan would certainly not be the junior partner. The most the PLO could hope for in fact was to name Palestinian members of a Jordanian delegation to the prospective talks, in return for conceding to the king the role of chief negotiator on behalf of the occupied territories. A Jordanian-Egyptian rapprochement would go a long way in insuring precisely that.

The PLO leadership, by opting for the Jordanian connection and failing to take the lead in confronting the US strategy, in cooperation with the national and progressive Arab forces and states and the socialist countries, is compromising the fundamental objectives of the Palestinian national movement at this stage, namely self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

It should be clear that the recent Jordanian decision to end the boycott of Egypt can only be seen in light of the regime's pursuit of a settlement of the conflict with 'Israel' that will allow Jordan