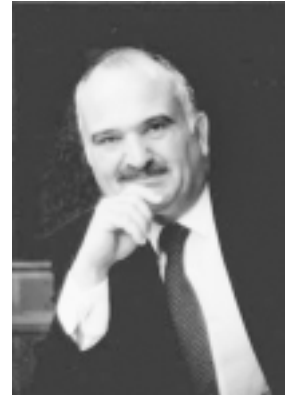


U.S. Can't Ignore Arab-Israeli Conflict

His Royal Highness, El Hassan bin Talal, was born in Amman, Jordan, on March 20, 1947, the youngest son of Crown Prince Talal bin Abdullah (later King Talal) of Jordan, and is the younger brother of the late King Hussein of Jordan. He was educated in Britain, and has been deeply involved in humanitarian and social projects aimed at resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and in improving the economic and social standard of



living for all peoples in the region. During the period of the Oslo Agreements, he had exerted his efforts, along with Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, in an effort to transform the brief period of political agreements by launching a program of economic development. Due to the short-sightedness of some of those Western financial interests involved in the economic side of the process, the economic cooperation never materialized, thus decisively undercutting the political progress that had been made. Prince Hassan is now working to create an Islamic World Forum among intellectuals in the Muslim world, as a Muslim movement for peace and a new humanitarian order.

Prince El Hassan bin Talal gave an interview to EIR's Bill Jones and to two other newspapers on Sept. 28, following his presentation at the Dwight D. Eisenhower National Security Conference, an annual event sponsored by several Washington-based foreign policy think-tanks and the Department of the Army.

EIR: I'd like to begin by discussing the situation in Iraq. Militarily, in spite of the upbeat propaganda coming out of the Pentagon, things are not going very well at all. Somehow there has to be a rethinking about how we're going to deal with this situation. Although it was a mistake to begin with, obviously we have to deal with it now. How do you view it, seeing it close up as you do from your position? What do you view as a possible resolution of the situation that now exists?

Prince Hassan: The recent visit by President Bush to the Pentagon again was a re-emphasis of the importance of not

taking a precipitate act of considering an untimely withdrawal from Iraq, because clearly a withdrawal would exacerbate the dangers, not only within Iraq, but the dangers of fragmentations in the region, but also the dangers in the region as a whole, given the fact that the Iranian issue is simmering, and that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is also passing through a delicate phase. So I think what was important yesterday was to develop a concept, away from the cameras, of how the region can develop, as in the case of the Balkans, a stability pact for a regional commitment to international norms.

In that regard I was heartened by the Pakistani-Israeli conversation, simply because here were two important powers in the wider region opening conversations, which might, just might, lead to a conversation of MAS, mutually assured survival. And I think as far as Iraq is concerned, mutually assured survival is important *within* that country, for Kurds and Arab Muslims, before we get divided into the facile [labels]—Muslim Sunni/Muslim Shi'a, Arab Muslim/non-Arab Muslim Kurds, and so forth. So we're at the crossing point, either towards pluralism and the constitution, or toward fragmentation and conflict.

EIR: And how do you view the development of this "stability pact" with regard to the various countries in the region?

Hassan: The Japanese parliament, the Diet, in 1998 pointed to this important oil-producing region, and said there could be no stability in the oil region without stability in the hinterland. And this "hinterland," of course, includes the eastern Mediterranean, the Arab-Israeli conflict. And the West Asian conflict borders, in terms of its potential instability, on South Asia, India, and Pakistan, on the one side, and Europe on the other. So, I think that ad hoc politics and piecemeal solutions—let's look at Afghanistan today, Pakistan tomorrow, and Palestine the day after—are simply not taking us very far. They are taking us from one crisis to another.

And in that sense, we are giving the initiative to the violent oppositions in Iraq, for example, or in Palestine. The danger is that these people are almost being made cult heroes. Every time there is a new attack, the more popular they become with the populists. And let's not forget that most of the population of this region is under 25; that we need to create 35 million job opportunities over the next ten years, or else we will be hot-housing the violence that we fear. So I think now, before the United States gets back into domestic politics, there is a window of opportunity for a discussion among the EU-3, who are talking to the Iranians, on the one side; the United States; and the countries in the region.

Anyway, I am dedicating my time to talking to leadership, largely non-governmental leadership, within the region, and to developing a concept, not least of all on creating a multi-denominational, gender-balanced peace corps that can begin

to tend to some of the human sufferings, given the vast monies available as a result of the rise in price of a barrel of oil.

Los Angeles Times: How do you see the Sunni-Shi'a divisions affecting the ultimate outcome in Iraq? Americans are indoctrinated with baby-talk. When the Shah left Iran, we were told that Shi'as that took over were terrorists who would be hostile to the U.S. By implication, Saddam Hussein was seen as a Sunni who was keeping the Shi'a terrorists in check. Now that we've gone in with the idea of democracy in Iraq, the logical conclusion is that the majority Shi'a should rule Iraq. And it appears to me that the insurgents are basically Sunni, who I guess want to drive the U.S. out of Iraq and then impose Ba'ath-party control over Iraq. What is your take on how this Sunni-Shi'ite split affects the possible outcome in Iraq?

Hassan: The Sunni Arab population have no intention of re-establishing a secular Ba'ath regime. They are very clear on the importance of recognizing that there are in excess of 10 or 11 opposition groups, and there is a coming together of the Islamic groups and the nationalist groups. At the same time, as far as the Shi'a are concerned, they are not all pro-Iranian by any means. And let's not forget that when Khomeini returned to Iran, and Saddam Hussein launched his war on Iran, he saw himself as, and was in many ways, representing Western interest in the war on the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Most of his soldiers, given the fact that we now realize that a large percentage of the population was Shi'a, fighting in the front lines, were actually Arab Shi'a. And today I don't think that the Arab Shi'a or the Arab Sunni would want Iranian domination. But the fact that the Iranians are in fact talking in Muslim terms rather than in Shi'a and Sunni terms, makes their appeal more effective. Ahmadinejad, their new President, is talking about the dispossessed, the disenfranchised, the poor, and so he is appealing to the constituency that good governance and the supporters of democracy, including the United States, should not ignore. So I think the "baby-talk" is basically to break up Iraq in terms of Kurdish, Sunni, and Shi'a, mixing apples and oranges, because after all, Kurdishness is not a religion. Kurds are both Muslim Sunni and Muslim Shi'a.

As far as federation is concerned, I think that the worry is more about oil than it is about either Sunni or Shi'a. Most of the oil falls either in the Shi'a areas in the south, or in the Kurdish areas in the north. So the concept of federation or cantonization of Iraq should be a win-win formula. And I think that a national conference is required before the constitution is promulgated, whereby all Iraqis express their views. And I believe there is a meeting being prepared in Baghdad on the 28th of this month to begin that process.

EIR: Your Highness, you have been looking with cautious optimism to the withdrawal of Israel from Gaza, seeing it as a possible prelude to further withdrawals, leading ultimately to a comprehensive peace. While Sharon has survived an at-

tempted coup within the Likud by Netanyahu, the situation on the ground in Gaza is becoming more and more precarious, with an obvious need by the Palestinian Authority to assert some control. How do you see the situation developing now?

Hassan: Well, clearly the Palestinian leadership, Mahmoud Abbas, was faced with the dilemma of, on the one side, being expected to instruct the Islamists to lay down their arms. They challenged him with a public demonstration of their weaponry and then they used that weaponry, attacking Israeli targets. And today I think the response and the possibility of real involvement of Israeli troops in Gaza actually builds up the Hamas and Jihadi groups as potentially deep layers on the ground, and undermines, of course, the leadership of the Palestinian Authority, particularly before the January elections.

As you know, President Bush called upon King Abdullah of Jordan to host a meeting of Prime Minister Sharon and President Mahmoud Abbas, which the King of Jordan readily accepted to do. But I think that the substance of negotiations, further withdrawals, the issue of security controls, the Catch-22 is, it's going to be very difficult to put on the table while the violence continues. So it is a very difficult period, over and above which, and what we have been discussing earlier, there is always the possibility of changing the whole context, particularly if the Iranian nuclear file goes to the Security Council, or instability develops inside Lebanon or Syria. So it is not a period without its dangers, and although we sympathize with the American people given Katrina and Rita, and I say this quite genuinely, I hope that this is not going to be introspection at the expense of unfinished business in terms of the Middle East region. In fact, our destinies seem to be so intertwined.

EIR: Lastly, on the issue of water, which you emphasized at this conference. In the 1970s, we put forth a program, which we later called the Oasis Program for the Middle East, which involved the Mediterranean-Dead Sea canal, desalination, and other projects to provide a greater source of water and water utilization. This was common sense during the 1960s, but the United States has since gotten away from it. You seem to be involved in reviving some of these projects, which are so necessary for an underpinning of a real peace in the region. How do you see this going, especially with regard to the overriding importance of the water issue in the Middle East?

Hassan: I think that any projects, however inspired they may be, must fit into an overall concept. In the case of Europe, the concept was coal and steel. In the Middle East, the concept is water, energy, and the human environment. So I say again, we have to remove the brand names, as difficult as that is, of the political conflict, Palestinian, Israeli, Syrian, Lebanese, Egyptian, and so forth, and start talking of producers and consumers of water. Start looking at the economic, the natural, and the human resources as a package.

And, in that sense, I do think there is a need for the development of a regional commission. Given the fact that the whole conflict is only 70 miles in radius and 17 million people, it's essential to the well-being of people in that region or to the possible humanizing of that conflict, which for too long has been waged under security or political slogans, without any real consideration for the fact that, in reality, wars have become water and resources wars.

Los Angeles Times: It seems that Israel had gone with the disengagement of Gaza largely because of the demographic problem: They don't want to be ruling an area with a growing Palestinian population. The question is, what is going to happen to the people of Gaza? It seems to me that Israel is still responsible for these people. It's maintaining a border which includes Gaza, so the Israeli government is responsible for these people. But what will happen to Gaza? Can it have an economy with severed ties with Israel?

Hassan: I would like to recall to mind the call which is documented, and I would be happy to send you a copy, of an international protectorate called The West Bank and Gaza. Because it seems to me that negotiations are going to be very difficult between West Bankers and the Israelis, and Gaza and the Israelis over final status issues, while at the same time, the day-to-day existential issues are so difficult to face up to. [Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement] Jim Wolfensohn, I think, has a very challenging task of establishing the economic viability of the Palestinian state in three years, but given the variables, in particular, the continued violence and tension, I don't see how it is going to be any more successful than it is, say, in the streets of Baghdad.

So I think that the concept of an international protectorate to attend to the rebuilding of infrastructure in the interests of, as I say, a win-win situation—Israeli needs, Arab needs—I think would facilitate the task of both Israelis and the Arabs. It has been suggested in the past. It is worth looking at again. And, at the same time, inviting the Palestinians and the Israelis to cool down the temperatures, to develop some form of a truce over issues which are basically a spin-off of the hatred industry. The level of hatred continues because of the continuous cheek-by-jowl confrontation. And therefore I think the concept of an international protectorate might give that needed breathing space.

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