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A JORDANIAN VIEW

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Not so long ago, Jordan was chained to the shackles of a cruel history and a precarious destiny. The country was embroiled in a state of war and, later on, a war of attrition with its neighbour Israel sapping most of its human and material resources. However, since the peace agreement of Wadi Araba in October 1994 with Israel, Jordan has embarked on a major paradigm shifting process, compatible with the new national and international realities. The Hashemite leadership of the country has instigated a top to bottom approach, laying the foundations of democratic institutions and civil society. The aim is to build more mature forms of political and socioeconomic life in the context of a decentralised government, ordered liberty, equal opportunity and freedom of the individual. Proceeding from the realisation that multi-party democracy and political pluralism are the core functions of the body politic, all shades of political opinion are represented in parliament, the seat of Jordanian democracy. Parliamentarians are elected on the basis of universal suffrage and a majority vote. The liberalisation of the economy has always shown responsiveness to developments in the economic system while maintaining democratic principles.

Government control over the daily working life of a people makes it, by extension, the master of their souls and thoughts. Therefore, Jordan has been striving hard to end all aspects of bureaucratisation of business in the country. The convertibility of the Jordanian dinar on the international financial markets has enhanced the possibilities of the export sector, and improved Jordan's comparative advantage regionally, as well as on an international level. The laws governing the monetary institutions and Jordan's financial market have been totally reformed, in addition to important changes in tax and foreign ownership regulations. The opportunities created by the atmosphere of peace and the long tradition of stability and continuity have placed Jordan in a unique position to attract international capital and to develop genuine partnerships, for example, in tourism, the establishment of a Red Sea trade hub and the development of the Jordan Rift Valley. With IMF and World Bank support, the successive governments in Jordan since 1988, have been following a restructuring programme designed to bring the budget and balance of payments deficits under control, reduce government spending and promote private investment, both local and foreign, as the major engine of economic growth. The programme continued despite the serious dislocations caused by the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and a second phase was launched in 1993 and will end in 1998. The programme is clearly achieving its major macro-economic goals. By 1995 the debt to GDP ratio had declined to 92 per cent, the balance of payments deficit had declined to three per cent of GDP, inflation was down to five per cent, the government budget was in balance and overall growth was a comfortable five to six per cent annually.

On the regional level, Jordan has always felt that it is most important to re-define the geographical

status of the area. It is often referred to as the Near East, the Middle East or even West Asia; geographical notions that are all inclusive, yet in political terms remain exclusive. It is not feasible any more to exclude Turkey and Israel from the identity of this geographical unit, for the common concerns that are shared by all override all other narrow nationalistic or ethnic perspectives. Jordan remains opposed to aggression as a means of resolving disputes, and advocates negotiations as the best realistic medium of achieving common agreements. However, it must be admitted that, the shifting policies pursued in the region, those of seeking alliances and counter-alliances, must not be allowed to undermine our common hopes and aspirations, for complementarity and co-operation among neighbours in the Middle East, to the benefit of all. There are important and serious challenges ahead of us all in the area, of which the most important is the scarcity of water. Within the first decade of the next century, this shortage is expected to reach a crisis point. And if efforts of good will and common concern do not find solutions on a collective regional level, the inevitability of war, once again, cannot be altogether discounted.

There have been plenty of warnings and criticism in Western policy-making circles over a long period of time about the dangers of the US policy of dual containment in relation to both Iraq and Iran. There is a feeling that different ideas must be introduced to the arena and the vacuum created by the attempted isolation of both countries, must be filled with new mechanisms of dialogue coupled with a qualitative change of perspective towards them. If an international paradigm shift is possible, and it should be possible, then it is high time that the international community realised that the area termed 'the Middle East' is not just a large reservoir of oil and energy resources. Nor is it just an area of accelerated demography that provides more market opportunities. Furthermore, the Iraqi people cannot carry on being punished for actions they have no power to alter (though on this point the Turkish role in acting to alleviate, the suffering of the Iraqi and Kurdish-Iraqi peoples must be acknowledged). Our shared common outlook must dictate the fact that we are a complementary region and that we desire to live in a partnership of peace with each other and with the outside world. There are some living examples in the international arena emanating from the Barcelona process, the Helsinki process and the process of European unification, that help us all articulate our regional identity.

As for the peace process in the Middle East, as we are all aware, Jordan has signed a bilateral peace agreement with Israel, which had restored all Jordanian rights, and offered a chance for normal relations between the Jordanian and Israeli peoples. It is a peace that Jordan intends to uphold and consolidate for the mutual benefit of both nations. Nevertheless, Jordan as an Arab country and an intrinsic part of the Arab world remains committed to comprehensive peace in the region and believes that the implementation of the UN resolutions regarding the Arab occupied territories is the only means of achieving a just and comprehensive peace for all the parties concerned in the area. It is hoped that ultimately Syria and Lebanon will be able to narrow the gap between themselves and Israel, and set in motion their respective peace tracks.

It is worth reminding the international community of its responsibilities towards the peace negotiations in the region. What has been achieved up till now has also been due to the positive efforts exerted by the major world powers, and it is very important that those powers continue to shoulder their responsibilities as catalysts to help bring the differing sides together. Unfortunately, it is not only stagnation that we are witnessing on the Syrian-Israeli and the Lebanese-Israeli peace tracks, but also an escalation of violence and rhetoric that is threatening the whole basis of what was started in Madrid. It is not reasonable to stand aside and watch the situation deteriorating to levels from which nothing can be salvaged. Overtures of goodwill from all sides must be encouraged and

positive steps must be supported, but that can only happen with a determined and concerted international effort. It is certain that Turkey, through its long standing friendship with the Arab world and its good relations with Israel, can play a major role in helping to bring about the aspired peace, built on the foundations of durability and justice.

On the Palestinian-Israeli peace track, Jordan observes with much concern the series of setbacks which are jeopardising the historic opportunity to achieve reconciliation which emerged with the Oslo agreements. The current impasse threatens a total collapse of the peace process, which would lead to the most serious consequences, not only regionally, but also on an international level. The warning should be repeated: the policies of degradation pursued against the Palestinian people can only lead to desperation and more violence. Jordan has given its unequivocal support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, and continues to work closely with all concerned parties in order to build once again the bridges of trust and confidence between the Palestine National Authority and the Israeli government.

There is an important legacy of the Arab-Israeli conflict that must be addressed in the final status negotiations, as stipulated in the Oslo agreement and the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, and that is the permanent solution to the Palestinian refugees problem. Jordan hosts the largest group of and is the biggest donor to Palestinian refugees. Out of the 3.2 million refugees registered with UNRWA, the UN Relief & Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, approximately 1.3 million live in Jordan. They have a full Jordanian citizenship, and enjoy the same rights and obligations as Jordanians have under the constitution. Nevertheless, the refugee problem is an overarching issue that does not only concern Jordan but also Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. Any solution to this problem must address the legal, political and humanitarian dimensions. Therefore, Jordan's position is that, the refugees' right to return or to compensation must be fulfilled in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and international law obligations.

As for the question of Jerusalem, Jordan's position in relation to East Jerusalem, is based on three main dimensions: the political dimension, the municipal dimension and the religious dimension. On the political level, Jordan considers East Jerusalem to be an integral part of the Arab territories occupied in 1967 war. Since international law does not permit the acquisition of territories by war and pronounces unilateral annexation as inadmissible, Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem is thus null and void. Jordan supports Palestinian efforts to obtain political sovereignty in the Holy City, but is mindful also that sovereignty can only be assumed by a sovereign state. Therefore, Jordan is determined that sovereignty over East Jerusalem will not be ceded into a legal vacuum, which would leave the position of Israel paramount as an occupying power. Regarding the municipal dimension, international law is emphatically clear about the prohibition against Israel altering the character, demography, cultural identity, heritage or the borders of the Holy City. The legitimate rights of the Arab citizens of Jerusalem must be fully respected and the Palestinian needs for decent housing must be met. There should also be a clear differentiation between politically motivated settlements and legitimate housing projects. Jordan calls for the protection of property rights belonging to the Arab citizens of Jerusalem, Jordanian individuals and the Jordanian government.

On the religious dimension, Article 9 of the Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty, stipulates that "Israel respects the present special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, regarding the Muslim Holy shrines in Jerusalem". As for the protection of the holy shrines, Jordan expects that such protection can be coordinated with the representatives of the three monotheistic religions and UNESCO. Jordan firmly believes that, the followers of the three monotheistic religions must be able to exercise their

religious rights under conditions of total freedom, and must have complete access to their religious sites.

As we approach the twenty-first century, there are many voices calling for the creation of different norms of international relations in the context of a New World Order. The latest has been that of Prof. Huntington's model based on the clash of civilisations. However, such a model tends to ignore the fact that civilisations have co-existed with each other for many centuries, have learned from each other and exchanged opinions with each other. It is time to call for the convergence of civilisations rather than their divergence; dialogue rather than confrontation. Jordan hopes that the next century will be a century based on anthropolitics, politics in which people matter, rather than what has been commonly experienced in the habitual terms of political expediency and political manipulation. Jordan has been most involved in advocating inter-faith dialogue in an effort to explain Jordan's moderate Islamic outreach to the world. Jordan is determined not to allow extremists to hijack the Islamic faith and distort it to suit their criminal ends. Conversely, Crown Prince el-Hassan bin Talal is exerting every effort, through the International Parliamentary Union to combat anti-Semitism as well as Islamophobia, the fear of Islam.

Jordan notes that peace, is an essential for human co-existence, therefore the Jordanian leadership underscores the importance of the Middle East as a zone of peace and development in which it can continue to foster confidence and security among all neighbours.
