

→ AJC  
R. COLES

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Prime Minister.

(2)

MIDDLE EAST

I had 1½ hours with Prince Hassan of Jordan this morning. The Foreign Secretary is seeing him this afternoon.

The bulk of our conversation followed the lines of the discussion we had with the Prime Minister yesterday and I need not record it. Specifically, Prince Hassan argued that the Americans and the Europeans had an important role to play in the long vacuum stretching ahead of us in order to, as he put it, "protect the Arab identity of the West Bank and Gaza". Apart from the obvious problem of the rapid expansion of Israeli settlements, he drew attention to the following factors:-

1. During the last three months the Israelis have started on a programme designed to resettle and to get rid of as many as possible of the Palestine refugees in the camps on the West Bank and Gaza. A large number had been moved to a camp very close to the Jordan River from which it would be easy for the Israelis to move them across to the East Bank.
2. Political polarisation was becoming serious. The rural population who were both losing their land to the settlements and having to work as day labourers in Israel proper, were becoming seriously affected by Islamic fundamentalism. The more educated population were moving to the radical left. Both sides were making life increasingly difficult for moderate, pro-Jordanian Palestinians. There had been a lot of beating up and intimidation.
3. The natural economy of the West Bank was collapsing and the population was turning into a reservoir of cheap labour for Israel.

If there were to be a vacuum of, say, 18 months without any progress towards a settlement, these trends would all intensify and change the political and actual geography of the region.

/Prince Hassan

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Prince Hassan's view is that, in the absence of a meaningful and determined American effort to break the central deadlock, and given that the turbulence in the Arab world may well preclude any rational consensus on the Arab side for some time to come, the Americans and Europeans should concentrate on redressing the plight of the West Bank and Gazan Palestinians. The objective would be to give them some political and economic hope and at the same time to discourage arbitrary Israeli action. Such a combination might help to arrest the creeping exodus from the West Bank and Gaza and reduce the internal political polarisation of the area. Thus, if and when the time ever came for a resumption of effort to solve the main problem, the situation on the ground would not make such efforts totally irrelevant.

Politically, Hassan believes that the Americans should be persuaded to set up a high level Congressional commission of inquiry to answer such questions as the legality of Israeli settlements, the international status of the West Bank, Gaza and its inhabitants, the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention, etc. An American consensus on these questions would be more effective than an Advisory Opinion from the ICJ which, because of the court's membership, would easily be discredited by the Israelis in the same way as they can denounce the prejudiced nature of action in UN bodies.

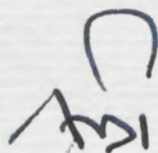
Economically, Hassan believes that the United States and the European Community should make a serious effort to find ways of channelling large quantities of aid into the West Bank without setting it at the disposal of the Israeli military administration. At present, the only aid going into the area came from UNDP (a tiny amount of technical assistance) from Jordan via private banks and a little from voluntary organisations. Revival of the West Bank economy through western help would, in his view, do a great deal to encourage morale amongst the inhabitants and to reduce the political polarisation.

Prince Hassan will be seeing the European Commission next week and will no doubt put these ideas to them. He thought that King Hussein would shortly be writing to President Reagan, the Prime Minister and other European heads of government, possibly incorporating some of Hassan's ideas.



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I do not under-estimate the difficulty of achieving anything - nor does Prince Hassan - but I think that his approach is right. The savage power struggle in the Arab world is obscuring everything for the moment. The storm may subside quickly or it may not. In either event, my guess is that it will leave the landscape bleaker than before. The Americans will continue to concentrate on the Lebanon, and I cannot imagine that they will launch a serious initiative on the Palestine problem until the beginning of 1985. I may be wrong, but even if they do have the courage to take another step, I cannot see them being able to keep it up. Hence, the outside world could do a lot worse than concentrate on alleviating the plight of the population of the occupied territories, rather than continuing on the path of declamatory statements etc. There will in any case be plenty of the latter with the General Assembly of the UN looming up in a couple of months time.



A.D. PARSONS  
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