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MY FIRST IPT (NOT TO ALL):

PEACE PROCESS: VISIT OF YASSER ARAFAT

SUMMARY

1. SUCCESSFUL VISIT WHICH APPEARS TO HAVE STRENGTHENED JORDANIAN/PLO COORDINATION. KING HUSSEIN AGREES TO RECONSIDER SOME STEPS TAKEN AFTER DISENGAGEMENT WITH A VIEW TO HELPING WEST BANK PALESTINIANS. HIS VIEWS ON CONFEDERATION.

DETAIL

2. WHEN I SAW KING HUSSEIN ON 1 JANUARY, I ASKED ABOUT ARAFAT'S VISIT TO AMMAN (19/20 DECEMBER). I SAID THAT ACCOUNTS FROM SOME PALESTINIAN SOURCES OF THIS VISIT APPEARED TO SEE IT AS MARKING A NEW AND WARMER PHASE IN JORDANIAN/PALESTINIAN RELATIONS. WAS THIS ALSO THE KING'S OWN VIEW?

3. THE KING REHEARSED, IN STANDARD TERMS, HIS CONCERNS ABOUT THE BAKER FIVE POINTS AND THE RISKS WHICH THIS POSED FOR ARAFAT. HE SAID THAT ARAFAT HIMSELF WAS EXTREMELY WORRIED ABOUT HIS PRESENT SITUATION AND WAS LOOKING TO JORDAN FOR SUPPORT. ALSO, AS THE SUFFERING OF THE PALESTINIANS ON THE WEST BANK INCREASED, ARAFAT WANTED JORDAN TO GIVE THEM AS MUCH HELP AS POSSIBLE. THE KING HAD AGREED TO LOOK SYMPATHETICALLY AT VARIOUS PRACTICAL STEPS WHICH MIGHT HELP ALLEVIATE THE PLIGHT OF THE WEST BANK PALESTINIANS. A MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE HAD BEEN SET UP FOR THIS PURPOSE.

4. IN REPLY TO MY QUESTION, HE CONFIRMED THAT ONE SUCH STEP MIGHT BE TO RECONSIDER THE QUESTION OF THE QUOTE TEMPORARY UNQUOTE TWO-YEAR PASSPORTS WHICH HAD BEEN THE STANDARD ISSUE TO WEST BANK PALESTINIANS SINCE DISENGAGEMENT. ANOTHER AREA WOULD BE THE PRESENT RESTRICTIONS ON TRANSIT ACROSS THE BRIDGES BOTH FOR THE PALESTINIANS THEMSELVES AND FOR SOME EXPORTS FROM THE WEST BANK, MAINLY AGRICULTURAL. BUT JORDAN COULD NOT AFFORD TO HAVE AN ADDITIONAL

INFLUX OF PALESTINIANS FROM THE WEST BANK.

5. IN THIS CONTEXT, THE KING REPEATED HIS CONCERN ABOUT THE QUOTE JORDAN IS PALESTINE UNQUOTE THEME BEING INCREASINGLY PROCLAIMED BY CERTAIN ISRAELIS, AND ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF FURTHER LARGE-SCALE EMIGRATION TO ISRAEL FROM THE SOVIET UNION. HE ALSO MENTIONED THAT ARAFAT HAD SOUGHT JORDANIAN HELP OVER THE FUNDAMENTALIST MESSAGE BEING PREACHED BY SOME OF THE WEST BANK MOSQUES. SINCE JORDAN CONTINUED TO PAY SALARIES OF THE IMAMS, ARAFAT WAS HOPING THAT SOMETHING COULD BE DONE TO CURB THIS PROPAGANDA WHICH WAS CLEARLY GIVING SUPPORT TO THE HAMMAS MOVEMENT. THE KING DID NOT MAKE CLEAR WHETHER HE WOULD IN FACT TRY TO TAKE ANY ACTION, AND IF SO, HOW. (COMMENT: IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE WHAT THE JORDANIAN AUTHORITIES COULD DO, ESPECIALLY HAVING RECENTLY LIFTED BANS ON CERTAIN PREACHERS IN JORDANIAN MOSQUES AS PART OF THE BADRAN GOVERNMENT'S GENERAL LIBERALISING PROCESS).

6. I ASKED WHETHER ARAFAT HAD PRESSED ON THE ISSUE OF CONFEDERATION. THE KING CONFIRMED THAT HE HAD MENTIONED IT SEVERAL TIMES AS AN ESSENTIAL OBJECTIVE FOR THE PLO. I SAID THAT, SPEAKING ENTIRELY PERSONALLY, I WONDERED WHETHER THE KING MIGHT FIND IT POSSIBLE, AT THE RIGHT MOMENT, TO SOUND A MORE POSITIVE NOTE OVER CONFEDERATION. I WELL UNDERSTOOD THE REASONS FOR HIS CAUTION ON THIS ISSUE AND IT WAS TRUE THAT SHAMIR'S PRESENT POLICIES OFFERED NO INDUCEMENT TO BE MORE FORTHCOMING. HOWEVER, IT COULD BE ARGUED THAT THE JORDANIAN POSITION THAT A PALESTINIAN STATE SHOULD BE SET UP IN ADVANCE OF ANY DISCUSSION ABOUT CONFEDERATION TENDED TO GIVE SHAMIR AN ADDITIONAL PRETEXT FOR INTRANSIGENCE. MIGHT IT BE POSSIBLE AT SOME STAGE TO MAKE CONFEDERATION THE IMMEDIATE GOAL OF ANY NEGOTIATIONS RATHER THAN ONE WHICH COULD ONLY COME AFTER THE SETTING UP OF A PALESTINIAN STATE?

7. THE KING SAID THAT HE HAD ALREADY GIVEN MUCH THOUGHT TO THIS ISSUE: BUT AS I HAD IMPLIED, THE MATTER WAS ENTIRELY ACADEMIC AT PRESENT GIVEN ISRAELI ATTITUDES. THE RISK HE SAW AT PRESENT WAS MORE THAT THE PLO MIGHT BE ENTIRELY REMOVED FROM THE GAME. HIS OVERRIDING CONCERN WAS TO DO NOTHING WHICH MIGHT MAKE LESS CLEAR-CUT THE ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT FOR THE PLO TO SPEAK ON BEHALF OF THE PALESTINIANS. HOWEVER, HE WOULD BE VERY READY TO MAKE ALL THE NECESSARY CONTINGENCY PLANS WITH THE PLO IN PREPARATION FOR A CONFEDERATION, AND THIS IN ITSELF WOULD NO DOUBT STRENGTHEN THE PLO'S POSITION IN ANY NEGOTIATIONS.

COMMENT

8. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE LATEST MEETING WITH ARAFAT WAS OF SOME IMPORTANCE TO BOTH SIDES. THE FACT THAT THE JORDANIANS ARE PREPARED TO RECONSIDER SOME OF THE STEPS EG OVER PASSPORTS TAKEN AT THE TIME OF DISENGAGEMENT IS IN ITSELF A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT, AND ONE WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN INCONCEIVABLE EVEN SIX MONTHS AGO. MUDAR BADRAN'S INFLUENCE MAY BE PART OF THE EXPLANATION: HE IS CONSIDERABLY MORE SYMPATHETIC TO THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE THAN EITHER ZAID RIFAI OR ZAID BIN SHAKER WERE. MOST PRESS COMMENT HAS ATTRIBUTED THE DECISION TO REVIEW THESE QUESTIONS TO THE BADRAN GOVERNMENT - WITH A HELPFUL EFFECT ON THE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE WHICH IT RECEIVED IN THE LOWER HOUSE ON 1 JANUARY. BUT THERE ARE OTHER FACTORS: FOR EXAMPLE, THE PARLIAMENT IS NOW ADDING TO THE PRESSURE THAT JORDAN SHOULD SUPPORT THE INTIFADA MORE ACTIVELY. THERE ARE ALSO FINANCIAL/ECONOMIC PRESSURES. THE KING MAY HOPE THAT CLOSER RELATIONS WITH THE PLO MAY HELP TO RESTORE CONFIDENCE AMONG JORDANIANS OF PALESTINIAN ORIGIN WORKING IN THE GULF AND THUS TO INCREASE THE FLOW OF REMITTANCES. BOTH SIDES NOW SEEM MORE AWARE THAT THEY NEED EACH OTHER AND I WOULD EXPECT TO SEE FURTHER ATTEMPTS AT CLOSER COORDINATION, PARTICULARLY IF CURRENT US-SPONSORED EFFORTS RUN INTO THE SAND.

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