

Schirin H. Fathi

*THE PALESTINIAN
COMPONENT IN
JORDAN'S 1989
PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS*

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Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs

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Introduction

Jordan's resumption of parliamentary life in November 1989 after an absence of over two decades received widespread attention within the Arab world. Arab countries were, on average, weary of the developments in Jordan, fearing possible repercussions in the form of liberalization demands at home. Yet, the elections were borne out of several uniquely Jordanian factors on the domestic front that climaxed in the April 1989 unrest - in addition to Jordan's regional role as a key actor in the Arab - Israeli conflict.

Different yardsticks may be used to scrutinize Jordan's recent elections. Thus, they could be analyzed under the aspect of a beginning structural change within Jordanian society, including the diminishing importance of tribalism, the role of women, and - of course - the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism. Moreover, attitudes and motives of the governing elites: the Palace, the Army, the Intelligence, and the Financial sector were all instrumental in effecting the democratization process. And lastly, Arab neighbours, such as Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia as well as Israel and the United States influence to a considerable degree Jordanian domestic politics.

However, the aim of this paper is to focus specifically on the Palestinian component in Jordan's parliamentary elections and to present it in a comprehensive manner, depicting the underlying facts that led to the decision to hold elections, as well

as their timing. The Palestinian factor is a controversial one and was downplayed in relative terms during the pre-election campaign. Some commonly heard comments should be cited in order to illustrate the controversiality of this topic:

"The Palestinian question is the core problem, it had everything to do with and was directly responsible for the Jordanian elections".

"The Palestinians and particularly the PLO were afraid and apathetic and did not get involved in the elections".

"The Jordanian elections were a purely domestic affair and have to be seen as such only".

"The Jordanian elections can only be analyzed and explained within the regional context, specifically the Palestinian question".

These are but a few of the statements one would hear regarding Jordan's parliamentary elections and despite their contradictory nature, all of them are correct in some regard. The differences depend on whether one looks at the elections as an isolated incident or as the culmination of a historical process. Moreover, the conflicting comments are accounted for by the stress on domestic or on regional factors, and finally by the outlook and political motives of their respective protagonists.

Historical Background: Disengagement

It is generally accepted that Jordan's disengagement from the West Bank in July 1988 and the holding of elections, barely a year and a half later, manifest a strong cause and effect relationship. While some maintain that disengagement was directly responsible for the elections, even the most strongly motivated East-Jordanians admit that the resumption of parliamentary life is connected to and facilitated by the disengagement decision. The difference is one of emphasis.

In order to present a well-rounded and consistent picture, it is necessary to backtrack slightly and to recall the developments that prompted King Hussein to relinquish his ambition of being "King of the Palestinians".

The outbreak of the Intifada in December of 1987 can be seen as the beginning of the end for King Hussein's ambitions, the latest version of which was formulated in the "Jordanian Option". Jordanian influence had been corroding in the West Bank at least since the 1970 Civil War. It became limited to a relatively "well-delineated group of pro-Jordanians" among the Palestinian population under occupation, "while the man on the street identified with the fedayeen"¹. Yet, there were historical, geopolitical, but mostly domestic and financial considerations

¹ Helga Baumgarten, "Discontented People" and "Outside Agitators' - the PLO in the Uprising" in: Jamal R. Nassar & Roger Heacock (eds.), *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads* (Praeger Publ., New York, 1990), p. 216.

that effected Jordan's continued involvement with the Palestinian cause. Jordan's decision - makers had to, at least outwardly, maintain the appearance of upholding their Palestinian responsibilities. Even though other issues had gained in priority, which can be seen most clearly during the Arab summit in Amman in November 1987 where the Palestinian question was relegated to the bottom of priorities of the summit agenda.

Less than a month after the Amman summit the Intifada erupted. It was recognized as a major development at the Arab foreign minister's meeting in Tunis at the end of January 1988 where all Arab governments pledged funds to the Intifada². And it was at the extraordinary Arab summit in Algiers in June 1988, where the Intifada propelled the Palestinian issue to the top of the agenda again, thus superceding the Amman summit. In Algiers it was once more reiterated that the PLO is the sole representative of the Palestinian people and it neglected Jordan's role. It was there that the King admitted that it is the wish of the Palestinian people's representatives to separate from Jordan³.

Prior to Algiers, the PLO had embarked on a serious reassessment of its relationship with Jordan. Furthermore, as was disclosed later, already two weeks before King Hussein's statement on disengagement, leading Palestinians - mostly activists from the mainstream Fateh movement inside the

² Ghana Talhami, "A Symmetry of Surrogates - Jordan's and Egypt's Response to the Intifada" in: Nassar & Heacock, p. 230-1.

³ From King Hussein's address to the extraordinary Arab summit in Algiers, June 8, 1988.

occupied territories - were discussing a draft declaration of independence⁴. Whether the King was aware of the draft declaration or not seems irrelevant. Hypotheses abound, and if King Hussein had any knowledge of the draft it would have only determined the timing of his disengagement decision. Hence, it might have had a temporal effect to advance the announcement of disengagement in an effort to save face publicly and not to be confronted with a *fait accompli*. Yet, the actual decision to disengage had been forthcoming for some time and had become a political necessity.

There are several theories on why Jordan severed legal and administrative ties with the West Bank. I believe several of these can now be discounted in view of recent developments. Among them is the "trick theory", namely that it was a tactical move on the part of the King that aimed at eventually being asked back to the peace process as a representative of the Palestinians. The Jordanian elections sharply delineated Jordanian identity and do not allow for formal representation of Palestinians in the occupied territories anymore. Likewise, there is a theory that disengagement was intended to embarrass and discredit the PLO. There is some evidence for this theory. For example, there have been reports that US officials had been privately informed of King Hussein's decision in advance - not, however, the PLO⁵. Nonetheless, this intention has been

⁴ Daoud Kuttab, "Plans for an Independent Palestine" (Middle East International <MEI> No. 332 - August 26, 1988).

⁵ Wolf Blitzer, "US Says King Hasn't Upset its Policy" (Jerusalem Post - August 3, 1988).

invalidated due, not least, to the political manoeuvring of the PLO in the aftermath of the disengagement. Putting the PLO on the spot and leaving it with no other option but to act may have been a motive, but one that backfired.

Mostly, the disengagement was borne out of three parallel developments. In the first and foremost development, the decision to disengage represents the climax of a trend that began in 1974 in Rabat. Although the trend slackened at times and almost was lost in oblivion for a period of time, it was reaffirmed and made indisputable in Algiers due to the Intifada. The Intifada had restored Palestinian self-esteem and asserted the absolute right to self-determination. But more important for our purposes, it exposed the idea of a "Jordanian Option" as an illusion. Ever since Jordan lost its monopoly over the West Bank in the aftermath of 1967, pro-Jordanian forces have competed with the PLO over influence in the occupied territories, especially with economic means, the latest example being the \$3 billion five-year development plan. Yet, like the whole Israeli-cum-US idea of "improving the quality of life", this plan, too, failed to be fully implemented and it did not sway sympathies in the occupied territories towards Jordan.

Moreover, the broad freedoms that pro-Jordanian notables were accorded by the Israelis and the comfortable status quo they mutually settled on began to have negative reverberations among the Palestinian populace. Needless to say one of the first outcomes of the Intifada was a significant change in the Jordanian-Palestinian balance of power within the West Bank, one that gave a complete backing to a local, more pragmatic

new leadership. Significant in this regard is Communique No. 10 of the Unified Command of the Uprising which called for the resignation of Palestinian members in the Jordanian parliament⁶. So, for all practical purposes, the Intifada was a clear vote of no confidence to the King. Seen in this light, the King's decision to disengage reflects his pragmatic reassessment of policy vis-a-vis the newly found alignment of forces in the West Bank.

Parallel to that, a second development was taking place on the domestic front. Since the Mandate, pressure groups have existed within Jordan that advocated the "Jordanization" of their country. Due to the economic crisis that started in the mid-80's, the King has been unable to continue co-opting these groups as before. As a consequence, they became more dissatisfied, more vocal and their demands gained momentum. Many Trans-Jordanians resent the top priority given to the Palestinian question and perceive the need and importance to concentrate more on domestic and economic issues and the task of nation-building the East-Jordanian nation. It is well-known that the most vocal proponent of this school of thought is Crown Prince Hassan who, lacking the King's "romantic" attachment to Jerusalem, has been advocating a reduction of Jordan's West Bank role and a stress on "consolidating the state East of River"⁷. Concurrent was a perceived fear that the Intifada could flow over to the East Bank, thus threatening its security and stability - the twin tenets of Jordanian policy-making.

⁶ As quoted in Talhami, *op.cit.*

⁷ Paul Lalor, "The Internal Debate in Jordan" (MEI No. 332 - August 26, 1988).

And last, but certainly not least, there is Israel and the peace process. Israeli intransigence and the King's frustrations with the stalemated peace process contributed in a very direct way to his disengagement. Changes on the Israeli political scene and the continued rise to power of Likud and hardliners made the "Jordanian Option" look more like the "Jordan is Palestine" option. And in fact, more and more voices were heard within Israel who advocated this solution under the euphemism "transfer solution". The spectre of yet another wave of Palestinian refugees who would then inexorably tip the balance in the Kingdom loomed large. As can be seen in the King's subsequent speeches, the decision to disengage was prompted by this fear.

Immediately after disengagement, several steps were undertaken on the domestic Jordanian front in order to consolidate the decision and to dispel any lingering doubts. Jordan had already cancelled the West Bank Development Plan and dissolved the Lower House of Parliament a few days before the King's speech announcing disengagement. Now on August 6, 1988, a minor cabinet reshuffle took place in the course of which the Ministry of Occupied Territories was disbanded. Henceforth, a department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to handle all matters regarding the occupied territories, clearly signalling that the West Bank had become a foreign relations issue.

Three days later, a decision was announced to change the electoral law. The 1986 law which was never applied in a general election was to have increased the number of seats to

142. The change of law is significant in two respects. First, the 1986 law provided for 11 seats specially designated to Palestinian refugee camps on the East Bank. Interesting enough, these 11 seats were part of the 71 seats allotted to the West Bank. The new law was to integrate the camps into other constituencies of the East Bank, aiming at preventing any "purely Palestinian" candidate to enter the Jordanian parliament.

Secondly, changing the electoral law - which implies holding elections in the foreseeable future - just barely ten days after disengagement discredits those voices that maintain the elections were a purely domestic affair. Disengagement removed the obstacle and common excuse for not holding elections in a period of over two decades. It is true, that the food - or as some call it, fuel - riots in April 1989 finally determined the timing for elections. And it is true that those riots were a purely East-Jordanian affair, while the Palestinian populace exercised absolute self-imposed restraint. But it can be assumed that - hadn't it been for disengagement - the Ma'an unrest would have effected partial liberalization and the resumption of the National Consultative Council, for example, not full-fledged parliamentary elections. Thus, the Ma'an riots had the two-fold effect of accelerating the representative process, making it an urgent matter, and of providing for a democratic atmosphere that allowed for free elections.

The Domestic Debate

After the initial surprise had worn off, disengagement had in effect no great material impact on Palestinians within the occupied territories. In retrospect, it was a positive step that turned into a major political boost. The situation, however, was different in Jordan.

Unlike any other Arab state in the region, for Jordan the Palestinian question is both a foreign and domestic policy issue. The Palestinian population of Jordan was adversely affected psychologically by the disengagement decision. Immediately, questions arose regarding their future status within Jordanian society. The government tried to allay those fears by repeatedly stressing that Jordanians of Palestinian origin are an integral part of the "Jordanian Family". And in the cabinet reshuffle on August 6, 1989 three additional Palestinians were appointed⁸. This move was a deliberate, symbolic act to demonstrate that disengagement only affected Palestinians in the occupied territories. Nonetheless, insecurities persisted and resurfaced during the national debate preceding the elections. This time of increased liberalization - including the release of political prisoners and easing restrictions on the media - was conducive to open dialogue and increased the political sensitivity on the part of the citizens. Several issues that had been inherent in Jordanian society crystallized and turned into open topics of discussion. In the absence of popular participation for over 22

Jerusalem Post - August 7, 1988.

years, these elections could be regarded as a general public opinion poll. In this way, the election campaign acted as a focal point or microcosm, concentrating intensely the currents, beliefs, grievances and issues of the electorate. One of the issues that was openly discussed was the relationship between Palestinians and Jordanians within Jordan. Comprising around 50% of the population - with guestimates ranging from 35% to 65% - the Palestinian component of the population is of utmost importance, even in purely East-Jordanian elections. In the domestic sphere, the Palestinian issue revolved mostly around questions of identity, unity, participation and representation.

The thorny issue of Palestinian representation, already at least two decades old, was triggered by the decision of some West Bank deputies of the 1988 dissolved Lower House to run again - this time as candidates of cities in the East Bank. These candidates maintained that since the disengagement they reserve their "right to run in Jordan as representatives of cities in what is now considered the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan"⁹. This kind of jingoism naturally produces a similar extremism on the other side. Thus, some voices were also heard putting forth an argument against allowing Jordanians of Palestinian origin to even vote. Yet, the overwhelming majority of candidates, as well as official government releases, emphasized the unity of the two peoples, urged them to overcome their "ill-feelings,

⁹ Nermeen Murad, "The Identity Factor in November 8 Elections: (Jordan Times <J.T.> - October 8, 1989).

The candidates referred to are Taher al-Masri - former deputy from Jerusalem, Carlos Demes - former deputy from Bethlehem and Wahid Jabery - former deputy from Hebron.

suspicious and mistrust", and cautioned to "reconcile what appears to be contradictory aspirations and objectives" lest sectarian allegiances result in the so-called "Lebanon syndrome"¹⁰.

The debate as to the extent of Palestinian participation in the Jordanian elections reached its height during a dialogue between two prominent candidates: Taher al-Masri, a former foreign minister of Palestinian origin and Suleiman Arar, a former interior minister of East-Jordanian origin. The debate centered around their respective assessments of the development of Jordanian-Palestinian relations and the psychological and social aspects that stem from the dual origin of Jordan's population. Still, the taboos inherent in the issue were not tackled there either. No one dared respond to the remaining questions around the 1970 Civil War - whether it was a clash of interest or identity - the questions of leadership in the occupied territories and the possible territorial ambitions on either side¹¹.

Verbal reassurances aside, the fact remains that the distribution of seats according to electoral districts was devised in such a way as to prevent a high representation of Palestinians, according to their population strength. The revised 1986 election law expanded the number of seats from 71 to 80, allowing for population increases and a reallocation of seats. There are no specifically allocated seats for Palestinian refugee camps, as was mentioned before. They were incorporated into other

¹⁰ Waleed Sadi, "Children of Divorce Need not Suffer" (J.T. - October 2, 1989).

¹¹ Abdullah Hasanat, "Not Exactly Black and White" (J.T. - October 12-13, 1989).

constituencies with the aim of diminishing their voting power and diluting the incidence of any exclusively Palestinian candidate.

The allocation of seats became a controversial issue as it blatantly favored rural and nomadic areas. This claim is easily verified: Amman, Zarqa and Irbid City, the three major urban centers in Jordan with the highest concentration of Palestinians (estimates reach up to 80%), account for over 65% of Jordan's total population; yet, they were allocated only 36 out of 80 seats, approximately 45% of the total. The anti-Palestinian bias becomes even more striking when one contrasts the populace second district of Amman - predominantly Palestinian and home to the Wihdat refugee camp among others - with over 73,000 registered voters and a mere allocation of three seats to the Governorate of Ma'an with 28,000 registered voters and an allotment of five seats. To put it differently, every deputy from Ma'an represents 5,600 voters, while a deputy from the second district in Amman represents 24,333 voters - the voter in Ma'an is accorded over four times more representative clout and voting power.

Although official proclamations asserted that the distribution of seats was done in accordance with proportional representation based on population density, the facts point in a totally different direction. It is widely assumed that by giving more representative power to the rural areas and especially to the south, the regime aimed at reconciling and strengthening its traditionally loyal supporters. And conversely, to underrepresent

the politically more aware and active urban population that could be prone to wide-ranging ideologies and political currents, namely for the most part Palestinians.

To further illustrate the complexities of Palestinian representation it is noteworthy to cite the examples of two aspiring candidates. The first is the case of Nimr Sirhan al-Tamimi, a candidate in the fifth district of Amman. Nimr Sirhan, a Palestinian, was the head of the International Committee for Palestinian Folklore for several years¹². Although not a Palestinian diplomat, he was barred from running due to his work at the PLO office in Amman. Officially his prohibition was explained by the fact that he was holding a two-year Jordanian passport which implies that he is originally residing in the occupied West Bank. All exiles and members of the PNC were not allowed to become candidates. Incidentally, these are the well-known Palestinian personalities who would have been able to garner many votes among the Palestinian population.

The second cause involves Mashur Haditha al-Jazi, a former Jordanian chief-of-staff. Although a member of the Howeitat tribe, Haditha is very popular among the Palestinians due to his role and participation in the battle of Karameh in 1986 and his resignation as chief-of-staff in protest of the military confrontation with the PLO in 1970. He was planning to run as a candidate in the second district of Amman, expecting wide support in the refugee camps. His application, together with Naif Quraisha's - another Jordanian of bedouin origin who

¹² Lamis Andoni, "Jordan: Mixed Signals" (MEI No. 361 - October 20, 1989).

is well-known for his support of the PLO - was dismissed on the basis of stipulations in the 1986 election law which assigns a certain number of seats to religious and ethnic minorities and bedouins. The bedouin nominees were told to contest seats in their assigned bedouin districts. These cases raised the issue of the outdated election law and questioned its constitutionality. Yet, what this case underlines for our purposes is once again the intricacy of Jordanian - Palestinian relations. It would have been untenable for the government to have a "pure", tribal East - Jordanian represent a predominantly Palestinian district on the basis of his support for and by the PLO. What all this indicates is that the relatively low participation of Palestinians in Jordan's elections was not only caused by a direct appeal of the PLO - which will be discussed further down - but also by barriers and stumbling blocks inherent in the election law. Thus, it does not seem like a coincidence to many that eventually only 12 deputies of Palestinian origin entered Jordan's Lower House of Parliament a number corresponding to the 11 seats originally reserved for refugee camps prior to the revision of the election law.

The Palestine Question as an Election Issue

The Palestinian question was not the highest in priority among election issues. Concerns of a domestic nature took precedence, such as the restoration of democratic processes, abolition of martial law, repealing the 1957 law that banned political parties and establishment of a free press, just to

mention a few. Naturally, slogans dealing with the worsening economic situation and the fight against corruption were also of top priority. Still, almost all 652 candidates had at least the slogan "support for the Intifada" among their catalogues of election issues. Even if it was simply meant as mandatory lip - service, the inclusion reflects the fact that the Intifada and the Palestinian problem were perceived as important among the electorate - even in purely East - Jordanian electoral districts. Some candidates in an obvious effort to capture the Palestinian vote, made the Intifada and national unity their major concern. And yet others performed political "overkill" by focusing their entire platform almost exclusively on the problem of Palestine, forgetting that even in refugee camps voters were concerned with the economic crisis which affects Palestinians no less and with mundane issues that affect their lives on a daily basis¹³.

In most cases, slogans dealing with the Palestinian issue ran along the lines of "support for the Intifada", support for the heroic Palestinian people" and "Jordanian - Palestinian unity" - not transcending flowery rhetoric and certainly not suggesting practical steps to be implemented. However, comparing the platforms, certain differences in outlook are to be distinguished. Those candidates that would fall into the categories of Independents and Traditionalists roughly reflected the official government proclamations of condoning disengagement, of attributing the holding of elections to the severance of legal and administrative ties with the West Bank (for example, campaign flyer of Mohammad Attiyeh al-Ma'ani), reaffirming the PLO as

¹³ Mariam Shahin, "Common Identity" (J.T. - November 8, 1989).

the sole representative of the Palestinian people and stressing the strong personal bonds between the Jordanian and Palestinian peoples. Suleiman Arar's catalogue of election promises represents this line of thinking; he even went as far as dealing with the Palestinian cause as a "foreign affairs" issue - thereby clearly signalling its removal from the domestical scene.

Nationalist and leftist candidates were, on average, more differentiating towards the Palestinian issue in their election platforms. Nationalists tended to stress the popular Arab character of the Intifada and to refer to the struggle in Palestine as the number one defense line for the Arab nation as a whole. Within the leftist camp, different attitudes were to be discerned. The Jordanian Communist Party emphasized domestic political and economic issues and limited itself to statements of material, ideological and political support only (campaign flyer of Dr. Ya'qoub Zayadin). Other leftist candidates went as far as demanding military support for the Intifada (campaign flyer of Nizar Ahmad Kayed). In general, the left camp focused on the unity of the two peoples and their common struggle. Although the Jordanian disengagement was approved in principle, leftist candidates distinguished between political, economic and cultural disengagement. Politically, the move was perceived in positive terms as it was a boost to the PLO, yet economic co-operation should persist and culturally there is no possible disengaging.

It was the fundamentalist Islamic candidates who departed sharply in their point of views. The Muslim Brotherhood attacked the PLO for its two - state solution and criticized the

Jordanian government for its disengagement decision. Dr. Ali Hawamdeh, one of the speakers for the Muslim Brotherhood, was quoted as saying on the issue: "We (Arabs) are nationalists, so how could we divide the most honest Arab unity in the history of the Arab world? We insist that Palestine is Muslim Arab land"¹⁴. The Brotherhood's call for Jihad to liberate all of Palestine "from the sea to the river" appealed particularly to camp residents, most of the refugees since 1948 who have been critical of the PLO's conciliatory stand. For them, a two - state solution would not address their needs, instead the Islamists' platform represented a viable alternative.

The Muslim Brotherhood's all-encompassing simplistic slogan "Islam is the Solution" drew support in all of Jordan, not necessarily only in areas with a high concentration of Palestinians. The reasons are manifold and it is not within the scope of this paper to speculate on the causes for the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism all over the Arab world. Suffice it to say that, particularly in the Jordanian case, their victory is due partly to the absence of and ban on all other political parties over the last 32 years which gave a virtual political monopoly to the Islamic party-disguised-as-charity. Other often-cited causes refer to their close-knit organizational structure, the failure of secular ideologies to deliver and, especially in times of crisis, decreasing material benefit and a feeling of lost identity caused by the clash of modernity with traditionalism - a yearning for a promising, easily accessible and understood alternative.

¹⁴ Nermeen Murad, "Second District Candidates ..." (J.T. - October 23, 1989).

Nonetheless, it is no coincidence that out of a total of 12 Palestinian deputies, 10 achieved their victory as Muslim Brotherhood or independent Islamic candidates. The disproportionately high margins of victory that the Islamic candidates achieved in predominantly Palestinian districts has to be attributed to additional circumstances. The uncompromising stand taken towards Palestine is certainly a major contributing factor. On the material side, it can be assumed that the monies distributed within refugee camps as part of the Zakat Fund had helped to sway votes in favor of the Islamicists. And finally, it is argued that the policy of non - involvement that the PLO propagated had the direct, unforeseen effect of facilitating it for the Islamic movement to gather additional votes.

PLO Attitude Towards The Elections

During the pre-election campaign rumors circulated that such and such a candidate was a PLO candidate, PLO-supported or affiliated. In order to stem this tide of rumors, the Embassy of the State of Palestine in Amman issued a statement on November 1, 1989 urging all candidates to refrain from involving the PLO in an effort to win votes. The statement went on to read: "... The PLO highly appreciates Jordan's position at the official and public levels, and its support for the struggle of the Palestinian people in their uprising against Israeli occupation and for self-determination on Palestinian soil ... The PLO also appreciates the serious responsibility taken by the Jordanian government to hold election as a purely Jordanian

affair to reorganize Jordan's domestic affairs and an endeavour to confront the common enemy and its expansionist designs, specially in the wake of Jordan's decision to sever legal and administrative ties with the occupied West Bank The PLO appeals to all candidates to refrain from exploiting its name in the current campaign in favour of any candidate and stresses its determination not to interfere in the internal affairs of any Arab country"¹⁵.

Why did the PLO, as an organization, not get involved? Several reasons account for this decision. For one, the PLO did not want to disturb the recently patched up relations with the King. Meddling in Jordan's domestic affairs would raise the spectre of another 1970. Secondly, non-involvement in Jordan's elections followed from and cemented effectively the disengagement and the proclamation of an independent Palestinian state. And lastly, to have Jordan's legislative body be dominated by Palestinians would spell political dynamite. On the one hand, the PLO was aware that this could give Jordan the needed justification to represent Palestinians in peace negotiations and to annul disengagement if the King wished to do so. But more importantly, it would lend credibility to the Israeli concept of a substitute homeland. Thus, the fear of the "Jordan is Palestine" solution not only determined King Hussein's actions, but also loomed large in the PLO's thinking.

While this was the stated position of the PLO, not all Palestinian organizations acted in unison. Ideological differences

¹⁵ As quoted in the J.T. - November 2-3, 1989.

of the political groupings within the PLO were reflected in their attitudes towards the Jordanian elections. Fateh looked at the elections only from a Palestinian point of view and the overriding political thought was that Jordan is not Palestine and that it is the PLO that represents Palestinians, not the Jordanian parliament. Therefore, if Fateh supported anyone, it would have been individual East - Bankers who are known friends of the Palestinian cause, such as Laith Shbeilat, Mamdouh al-Abbadi and Fares al-Nabulsi, for example.

It was a different situation with the leftist Palestinian organizations. These factions see unity of the Arab world and progressive Arab governments as a prerequisite to the liberation of Palestine. Thus, they felt promoted to participate in Jordan's elections.

Particularly, the Jordanian wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) which formed a new independent Jordanian political party prior to the elections¹⁶, was aware of the conflict of preserving a separate Palestinian identity and still participating constructively in the political regeneration of Jordan. The new party "Hashd", tried to solve this conflict by filing only East - Jordanian candidates. However, this principle was not consistently applied, so that Hashd ended up with seven candidates, East-Jordanians and Palestinians, of which only one Bassam Haddadin, a Christian East Jordanian from Zarqa, was elected.

¹⁶ Lamis Andoni, "Palestinians in Politics" (MEI, No. 356 - August 4, 1989).

Similarly, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) supported nine candidates of which one Dr. Dheeb Marji, also a Christian East - Banker from Irbid, succeeded. Unlike Hashd, the PFLP made no distinction between candidates from the East Bank and Palestinian origin and supported both equally from the beginning.

The PLO's policy of non-interference, although dictated by valid political and strategic considerations, was nevertheless criticized following the outcome of the elections. It is argued that especially Fateh's restraint -being the largest organization within the PLO - caused a majority of the Palestinian population to become apathetic towards the elections and not to use their voting rights sufficiently. Furthermore, speculations arose maintaining that the election law fixed in such a way that even if Fateh had participated in a major way, they would not have been able to arrive at more and a maximum of 30% representation within the parliament. This percentage would still be low enough to safeguard Jordanian sovereignty while at the same time it would have reduced the Islamic fundamentalist dominance, reasserting that Fateh's position was the main cause for the Islamicists' victory.

All hypotheses aside, the fact remains that Fateh's position in Jordan was weakened in the aftermath of the elections. Thus, for example, the PFLP and Hashd are currently opening party offices in Amman under the name of their respective deputy while Fateh remains restricted to official PLO offices, such as the embassy, the PNE and others.

Conclusions

To come back to the introductory statements, the Palestinian issue was instrumental in the advent and timing of Jordan's elections, yet it was of minor importance as an integral issue during the election process. Even where I have demonstrated Palestinian voting behavior resulting in either apathy or a turn towards Islamic fundamentalism it was a reflection of a trend that was prevalent among all of Jordan's electorate.

Palestinians did not figure prominently during the elections due to a deliberate policy of non-interference on the part of the PLO and also due to an attempt to diffuse the Palestinian political potential on the part of the Jordanian government. The underlying motive for both converges in an attempt to clear up any misgivings on who represents Palestinians and ultimately to prevent the "substitute homeland" scenario. In an exclusive post-election interview, King Hussein reiterated his belief that the major threats confronting Jordan stem from the impasse in the peace process and Israeli claims that "Jordan is Palestine". During the interview it crystallized that he has reached "the conclusion that democratization is a prerequisite for strengthening the home front in the face of pending external threats"¹⁷. It might be too late, though, for these preventive measures in the light of new developments and

¹⁷ Lamis Andoni, "King Hussein Leads Jordan into a New Era" (MEI No. 363 November 17, 1989).

new fait accomplis created by Israel, the most important of which is the current massive Soviet Jewish immigration and settlement policy.

On the domestic scene, the elections and the nascent democratization process have had many positive side-effects for Palestinians within Jordan. Passports that had been impounded for several years were returned to their owners. Palestinian groups are allowed to work and operate in the open again after years of having been confined to the underground. Furthermore, the process of repealing martial law has "removed many of the pressures and security constraints on Palestinians, especially in the refugee camps and on political activists"¹⁸. The easing in the relationship between the PLO and Jordan has the additional effect that PLO officials who had ignored the Jordanian domestic scene for too long, are making more frequent visits to Amman "to get acquainted with the political map and with the general mood"¹⁹.

The most visible manifestation of the democratization process in Jordan, however, is the frequent demonstrations of solidarity with the Intifada that have taken place recently. The culmination was the "Right of Return March" to the bridge on May 14, 1990, the most spectacular and biggest display of solidarity yet. After years of suppressing popular sentiments and protests, it is significant for the Jordanian authorities to permit

¹⁸ Lamis Andoni, "PLO & Jordan - Defining the Relationship" (MEI No. 374 - April 27, 1990).

¹⁹ Ibid.

a potentially explosive show of support. It restored Jordan's status as a front-line state as opposed to the "buffer" status quo that had persisted for over two decades. And finally, the Palestinian population of Jordan feels encouraged to participate once more. The recent, sometimes violent, anti-Israeli protest in the wake of the Rishon Letzion massacre occurred for the most part in Palestinian refugee camps - a scenario that would have been unthinkable just over a year ago, if one recounts the Ma'an unrest.

The future of Jordan's democracy seems uncertain. Unless basic structural changes in the governing system are effected, it may remain a short-lived transitory phenomenon. In addition, the current deliberations to formulate a National Charter (Mithaq al-Watani) with the participation of all political groupings and designed to be approved by public referendum, are likely to be aimed at countering the role of parliament and limiting the democratic experience. And lastly, the current regional situation represents an accelerated momentum towards confrontation. This could become the pretext for abolishing democratization in Jordan altogether.

