

Jordanian-Palestinian ties — the core and the evolution

By Nermeen Murad
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AMMAN — The two men have held important public posts in the government and dealt with the future of Jordanians on the local scene and abroad. A foreign minister and an interior minister presented and debated Sunday their assessments of the development of Jordanian-Palestinian relations and the effects of policies and measures on the Jordanian people in view of the bi-origins of the Kingdom's populations.

The debate, the first of its kind in Jordan dealt specifically with the psychological and social effects of the Palestinian problem, Palestinian refugees and later Jordanian citizens, and the leaderships (of the now two states), on the composition of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

A crowd of around 600 people filled a lecture room at Abdul Hamid Shoman Foundation to hear Sulaiman Arar, a former interior minister, and Taher Al Masri, a former foreign minister, discuss what is definitely a "very sensitive issue" to many citizens of Jordan.

Taher Al Masri

Masri, who opened his presentation by pointing to the sensitivity of the issue, said that his argument would "come from my heart." He divided the development of the Palestinian problem and its relationship with Jordan into four stages, beginning at the onset of the 20th century at around 1917 until today following Jordan's decision to sever administrative and legal ties with the West Bank.

stability among Palestinians." Masri added that this declaration was followed by Jewish emigration into the land which resulted in conflicts and open clashes between Palestinians and Jews.

This first stage, according to Masri, ended in 1948 when a Jewish state was established in Palestine and "a whole population was removed from its land and thrown into refugee camps which did not offer the basic foundations for decent living." This again escalated the tension and the sense of instability among Palestinians.

Masri pointed out to the period between 1948 and 1967, when the West Bank was under Jordanian rule and, "a sense of unity between the two banks was established and the Palestinians in Jordan began to feel safe and secure."

The third stage, between 1967 and 1974, was described by Masri as a stage of "mutual fear (Jordanian and Palestinian)." This stage, according to Masri, witnessed the evolution of the Palestinian national feeling which culminated in the Palestinians beginning to assume control of their destiny through the Rabat Arab summit resolutions.

From 1974 until the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1979 "there was a new stage in the relationship between the two nations which indicated a positive and correct route although there were remnants of tension."

Since 1974, Masri said, "there have been plans and efforts to find a form for the relationship between the two sides." The basic factor in this relationship is a common feeling and agreement that this is "a strategic relationship which cannot be separated in any real terms."

vision of the relationship stumbled in 1983, but efforts continued until Jordan's decision to sever legal and administrative links with the West Bank, Masri said.

Masri concluded that the Jordanian-Palestinian relationship "is an eternal and integral relationship that cannot be separated regardless of the developments which would have to culminate in at least a confederation between the two sides after the liberation of the occupied lands."

Sulaiman Arar

Arar opened his presentation by asking whether he should discuss the historical and geographical relationship, the relationship in modern times, or the effects of the 1948 war or the relationship from the period of unity between the two banks in 1967 and until today.

He pointed out that the historical facts could not be ignored and that the first fact was that Greater Syria is a demographic, geographical and historical union. "At that time there were no regional sentiments and until the 20th century they did not exist. Everyone was from Greater Syria."

He blamed the European invasion for creating what he described as "different entities."

Although the European occupation of parts of Greater Syria lasted for only 30 years, ending in 1948, "one could see some misunderstanding of Jordan and its role."

During this time, according to Arar, the Palestinian people fought great wars which also affected the Jordanians. "This is

researcher at Al Ra'i Arabic daily, out of 27 prime ministers in Jordan 12 were of Palestinian origin and seven out of 14 parliament speakers were also of Palestinian origin. In the period between 1921 and 1989, there were 322 ministers, 166 were East Jordanians while 140 were of Palestinian origin, and 16 were from other Arab origins.

But the negative aspect of this contact between the Palestinians and Jordanians was "the large numbers of armed men in the cities and villages. There was contact and then a clash. Until things turned out the way they did."

The outcome of these factors, according to Arar, resulted in:

— Growing regional Palestinian sentiments for the first time. The Palestinian people are Arabs who sing the achievements of Arabs and cannot be separated. The leadership was unable to coordinate this Arab sentiment with the need to highlight the Palestinian identity as a necessary step to prevent diluting the Palestinian identity. The Palestinian leadership was also unaware of the Jordanian people's feelings and based its actions on the Egyptian media which were hostile to Jordan at that time.

— Jordanian sentiments grew calling for a Jordanian identity. This sentiment was not deep-rooted and did not apply practically when it came to inter-marriage and intercultural interaction. This feeling was used by the enemy by posing projects such as "an alternate land for Palestinians in Jordan."

But, according to Arar, "the dignity of the Jordanians and the awareness of the Palestinians were always able to quickly ignore these malicious foreign projects."

Arar explained that there were other factors which surfaced at that period which also contributed to a rift between Palesti-

to highlight the Palestinian identity.

— The Constitution should prevail and laws have to be applied to giving Palestinians public jobs.

— Punishment should be handed out to those who work on creating a rift between Jordanians and Palestinians.

— An effective parliament should be established and political parties should be allowed.

Both Masri and Arar agreed that Jordan's decision to sever legal and administrative ties with the West Bank was "a wise political decision" which will help Palestinians highlight their identity and carry responsibility for their political strategy for liberation.

— The interests of the Jordanians and Palestinians differed. While Jordanians were looking to establish political parties and a Lower House of Parliament, Palestinians were primarily interested in the Palestinian issue and gave priority to this issue.

— Dual representation in conferences and seminars. According to Arar, situations have come about where a Jordanian delegation was represented by a Jordanian of Palestinian origin whose interest did not centre on Jordanian national interests. This representative, according to Arar, reflected a Palestinian opinion which was already represented within a Palestinian delegation attending the same conference or seminar, "which caused embarrassment among Jordanians."

Another contributing factor to the rift between the Jordanians and Palestinians, according to Arar, was that the Palestinian leadership was "haunted with fear that Jordan would take over its political role."

Two particular features, according to Arar, prevailed in the Palestinian leadership's rela-

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Masri, also condoned the government's decision to arrest the PFLP members but added that "this type of military move at this time of the Palestinian uprising will not have the effect it requires and will only contribute to a deviation in purpose, since the Arab efforts now are centred around highlighting the Israeli atrocities and their violation of human rights."

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