

Taher Nash'at Masri, a member of parliament representing the Third District of Amman, is one of the most experienced and articulate political personalities in Jordan in the field of foreign affairs. Born in Nablus, in 1942, he first represented Nablus in the Jordanian parliament in 1973-74, and again in 1984-88. He also served in several key ambassadorial and ministerial posts during the period 1973-1989, most recently as Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1984-88 and as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Economic Affairs in 1989. He currently serves as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Lower House of Parliament, and is member and rapporteur of the Royal Commission for Drafting the National Charter. Mr Masri was educated in Nablus and received his B.A. degree in business administration from North Texas State University. He is married with two children.

Q. How do you interpret the large-scale, American-led military presence in the Gulf?

A. Ever since President Carter established the Rapid Deployment Force, it has been an American objective to assure the protection or even the control of the oil fields of the Gulf. The United States has used the present crisis to achieve a military presence in virtually all the Arab oil-producing states of the Gulf, giving it virtual control of Arab oil. However, I believe this will lead to longer term contradictions with European and Japanese interests, especially in the field of oil pricing.

Q. How will the American move impact on relations with the Arab world as a whole?

A. If the Americans are thinking of an open-ended military presence in the Gulf, and not only the security of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, I believe this will irritate Arab sentiments on a massive scale. The danger now is that the American strategy will accentuate Arab divisions and lead to a deep, permanent schism, with the Gulf oil producers lined up with the U.S. and most of the rest of the Arab states vehemently opposing American policy.

Q. How do you see the long-term impact of this crisis on the Arab political order?

A. A major realignment of Arab political forces is likely in the coming years, including the unfortunate scenario of the wealthy Arab Gulf states united with the U.S. and the

a major impact on the political identity and alliances of the Arab World for many years to come.

Q. What would you suggest the western powers do next?

A. Besides working for a peaceful resolution of the present crisis, the western world, mainly the United States, Europe and Japan, should strive more emphatically for a just and permanent resolution of the Palestine issue and the broader Arab-Israeli conflict. The West should also appreciate the long-term ramifications of the North-South divide, because social and economic imbalances, poverty, unemployment and unfair terms of trade could cause future



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eruptions in the region. This is particularly relevant because the Arab World and the Mediterranean basin are the back door of Europe, and Europe is not immune from the effects of social and economic pressures in the Arab World, especially the North African Arab states.

Q. How do you evaluate Jordan's role in the Gulf crisis?

civilised world needs the efforts of a man like King Hussein, who has tried to rally the Arabs to find an Arab solution which is acceptable to Iraq, the other Arabs, the U.S. and the entire western world.

Q. How do you assess the experience of the Jordanian parliament to date?

A. Overall, democratization is gaining momentum and moving in the right direction in Jordan, and the Gulf crisis has clearly shown the benefits of democracy. Free expressions of public opinion, the role of the free press, and the sentiments expressed by elected parliamentarians have all helped King Hussein and the Jordanian government to withstand the strong pressures exerted on us. Democracy has given the King and the government added confidence and support during a very important stage of our life.

Most MPs are inexperienced in matters of state or diplomacy, but I believe we have all learned a lot in the past year. We have paused several times to evaluate our efforts, and I believe we have established the credibility of parliament as an institution in a democratic and pluralistic context. The legislative and executive branches of government are still involved in a process of give-and-take which will determine a new balance of power in public life.

Q. In retrospect, do you feel there was justification for the initial concerns expressed by some domestic and international quarters about the strong showing of Islamic fundamentalists in last year's parliamentary elections?

A. I believe there is a fundamentally sound and natural balance in the political forces in the country, though the fundamentalists scored well in the November elections because they were better organized than other political groups, and could present the electorate with a clear ideology and objectives. It is now evident, though, that the fundamentalists have