

Jerusalem Letter

Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

JERUSALEM INSTITUTE FOR FEDERAL STUDIES • CENTER FOR JEWISH COMMUNITY STUDIES

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ISSN: 0334-4096

JL #58 - 28 Adar 5743/March 13, 1983

THE JORDANIAN ESTABLISHMENT AND THE WEST BANK

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How Jordan maintains an independent role aside from its joint network. Continued Jordanian influence on West Bank through funding of religious institutions. The political role of the Chambers of Commerce. Palestinian Nationalists coopted into network.

The Religious Pipeline

Some might have assumed that the Arab League's Rabat Summit decision of 1974 dealt the final blow to Jordan's ties with the West Bank. The resolution adopted there determined that the PLO is the sole representative of the Palestinian people; but four years later at the Baghdad Conference, a new decision was made that, in effect, linked Jordan to the PLO. The practical outcome of that conference was the establishment of the joint PLO-Jordan Committee. The Committee was put in control of the flow of funds allegedly meant to aid the "firm resistance" against the occupier of the territories, but which in fact was aimed at buying off certain leaders and bodies in the PLO's favor, even if under Jordanian supervision.

The Committee put Jordan in an awkward situation. The need to consult the PLO and get its agreement on each and every dinar for the West Bank paralyzed the independent political activity which Jordan enjoyed until 1978. The PLO insisted on having its own way, and Jordan was forced to comply, even though it sometimes did not agree with the objectives to which the money was directed. But soon enough the Hashemite kingdom managed to find itself a bypass that preserved Jordan's central pillars of support and prevented the decline of those elements likely to support Jordan's political course in the West Bank.

"Money, money, and once again money," that is the axis around which revolves one of the most powerful institutions in East Jerusalem and the West Bank—the Waqf, which is supposed to handle everything pertaining to Moslem holy matters in these areas. The secrecy enveloping this institution and the Supreme Moslem Council, which is the highest religious body in the West Bank, enables their members to engage in activities whose connection with religion is at times purely coincidental.

There are nine members of the Waqf Department and the Waqf Council, among whom can be found such figures as Anwar Nusseibah, (formerly Defense Minister in the

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Jordanian government and the leading West Bank notable), Ibrahim A-Tawil (the ousted mayor of Al-Bireh), Dr. Abd El-Nabi of Hebron (who was associated with the Moslem Brotherhood), and Ibrahim Daqaq (member of the National Guidance Committee which was declared illegal and disbanded)—all of whose ties to religion were created more through the political education they received than through the prayerbook.

According to Jordanian law, these departments are supposed to take care of Moslem property, to enlarge and expand it as much as possible, and to foster religious awareness in the population. For that purpose, seven sub-departments were established within the Waqf to deal with the large amount of property, which encompasses about 1,500,000 dunams (about 375,000 acres) of land, hundreds of shops, dozens of dwellings, and a working staff which is responsible for about 100 mosques.

Needless to say, the Waqf Treasury Department enjoys the greatest importance. This department greases the wheels of this tremendous machine, located in an ancient building on the Temple Mount, whence its influence extends to all the towns and villages in the West Bank. To a visitor to the Waqf it may seem that the Temple Mount is constantly in the midst of a festival: villagers from Samaria come to receive allocations for building a new mosque; a man from Bethlehem wants to consecrate a plot of land for public benefit; a group of young boys wishes to protest against the contents of the sermon delivered by the preacher on Friday. Clerks scurry from office to office carrying requests for the appointment of teachers, muezzins, preachers, or cleaners. A print shop owner brings for approval the cover of the new Waqf monthly, called Huda Al-Islam. Visitors and curiosity-seekers, friends and relations of the office-holders fill the corridors of the run-down building, and telephones never stop jangling, interrupting "business" talks between claimants and the officials in charge.

Every such operation involves money. An additional preacher means an additional salary; a new mosque is worth an allocation of hundreds of thousands of dinars, according to location, importance, and proximity to the Waqf Treasury. Such a mosque also demands a new staff, a porter, a cleaner, a muezzin, a preacher—sometimes as many as ten people whose bread is paid for by the Waqf.

The livelihood of hundreds of families depends upon shops belonging to the Waqf which are rented on an annual or continuing basis. Relatively speaking, the rent collected by the Waqf is lower than that paid to private contractors; but when a cluster of stores and workshops is at issue, one can guess the income that the Waqf enjoys as owner—in addition to dozens of dwellings inhabited by hundreds of families who are almost entirely dependent upon the Waqf for low cost housing.

According to the Waqf Department director, Mr. Hassan Tahboub, what is at issue is a yearly income of 300,000 dinars (approximately \$700,000), but sources in the Department admit to income from property reaching a million dinars (over \$2.3 million). In addition, there is the regular budget provided by the Jordanian Government through the Waqf Ministry and which comes to about two million dinars a year. This budget of approximately \$7 million goes for the salaries of approximately 1,500 workers and for regular maintenance of mosques and educational institutions belonging to the Waqf, as well as for construction and expansion.

"We are constantly in the red," says Tahboub, whose brother is the director of the Waqf Department in Hebron and whose nephew is acting director of the Land Department, "but the Jordanian Government pampers us and makes up the difference." The "difference" is not necessarily deducted from the Jordanian Government's pocket, because other Arab countries also contribute a large part of the Waqf Department budget; but all the money passes through Jordanian ministry.

Above the Waqf Council is the Supreme Moslem Council, which represents the political aspect of religion. Its statutory basis was ended in 1951, when the Jordanian Government revoked the decree of the British Mandatory government which established the Council in 1921. Jordan at that time feared granting excessive authority to a religious institution with a long record of radicalism under its former Mufti (head), Haj Amin El-Husseini, and which was still very influential in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In place of that Council, a "Council of Elders" was established, whose members were all appointed by the Jordanians and which had no authority to make decisions without government approval. After the Six-Day War, the surviving members of the Supreme Moslem Council decided to re-establish the Council on the principle that the West Bank had become a new entity, separate from Jordan, which necessitated the creation of a supreme religious body to take care of issues pertaining exclusively to it.

This Council has never recognized Israel, nor does Israel recognize it; but in order to conduct orderly everyday religious life, unofficial arrangements have been established in the course of time—arrangements which excessive stubbornness on either side could easily shatter. The Council's 35 members, headed by Sheikh Sa'ad A-Din Al-Alami, constitute the omnipotent body on religious-political issues in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They are in charge of appointing Shari'a judges, convening courts, appointing heads of departments, channeling funds coming in from Jordan, and maintaining contacts with international bodies concerning Israel's activity in the territories. To a great extent they also constitute a reaction team, intended to give an establishment expression to the mood in the West Bank. Hundreds of memos, cables, and letters have been dispatched to embassies, heads of state, and institutions in response to archeological digs on the Temple Mount, land expropriations, blowing-up of houses, unauthorized Jewish prayers in the Cave of Machpela in Hebron, and the excursions of members of Israeli "nationalistic circles" to the Temple Mount for purposes of prayer.

The Council's press conferences serve as a platform for the expression of political opinions that do not necessarily have anything to do with religion, such as denunciation of the village leagues and expression of support for the PLO, as was the case after the Temple Mount events of April 1982. But above all, the Moslem Council is a channel through which funds are transferred from Jordan and the Arab states to the West Bank. It is true that the Council as a body has no statutory recognition from the Jordanian Government, nor even a budget of its own, but in fact it is seen by the Jordanians as the central instrument through which they can promote their policy and especially establish adequate ties with the right personalities, in order to continue the political connection between the two banks of the Jordan.

These ties, designed to create sympathetic public opinion and an administrative infrastructure that will serve the Jordanian Government, should it regain rule over the territories, are today being bought for exorbitant sums which are not registered in the books of either the Waqf or the Moslem Council. Thus, for instance Israeli security forces have lately confiscated a contract signed between the Jordanian Government and Mr. Anwar Nusseibah, member of the Council, for the building of a religious school. The sum which was mentioned there was \$5 million, a rather high figure for a school building. Lately a stream of mukhtars has been detected travelling to Jordan, and rumors are that Jordan has again started to give allocations to the Village Councils. If true, these allocations are significant because it was decided that every sum destined for the West Bank would first be approved by the joint PLO-Jordan Committee. Thus the Waqf and the Moslem Council play a decisive role, because they enable Jordan to feed very large amounts of money to the West Bank while bypassing the Joint Committee, and to create in this way strong direct links with those circles to which Jordan wants to grant special recognition, or from which it will, in due course, want to collect political debts.

Business as Politics

There are those who see the establishment of the joint PLO-Jordan Committee in March 1978 as something forced upon Jordan. Jordan was not only deprived of its title as the representative of the Palestinians, as was decided at Rabat, but the Arab states now stuck a new bone into its throat. The free flow of dinars, in order to strengthen those who "stood firm" against the conquering regime, ceased. From then on, authorization was required from the PLO representatives on the Joint Committee. But Jordan's agreement to participate in the Joint Committee, and the close cooperation it has maintained with the PLO ever since, makes one think that the coercion was illusory, and in fact Jordan did stand behind the decision. The desire to show the Arab states on the one hand and the Arabs of the West Bank on the other that Jordan saw eye to eye with the Palestinians' interests, was suitably dovetailed with the way in which the Committee operated. But none of this prevented Jordan from carrying out independent activity in the West Bank without the PLO's seal of approval.

In addition, to the Supreme Moslem Council and the Waqf Council, a second pipeline through which Jordan solidifies its political status in the West Bank is to be found in the local chambers of commerce. During the period of Jordanian rule, these chambers of commerce opened doors for the monied and commercial elites. According to Jordanian law, the chambers were supposed to represent the merchants to the government, to settle conflicts between merchants, and to verify licenses. Beyond this formal activity laid down in the law books, the chambers of commerce enjoyed political importance stemming from their ability to regulate commercial life in the districts where they operated, thus providing a breeding-ground for politically-oriented businessmen.

Following the Six-Day War, the Chamber of Commerce acquired even greater importance in East Jerusalem. In the absence of an Arab-run municipality, it became the address for anything having to do with links between Jordan and the city's Arab residents, without distinction of profession. In his book Facing the Closed Wall, Meron Benvenisti writes that:

From the end of 1969, the Chamber of Commerce in fact became the Jordanian Consulate in Jerusalem. It gave out quasi-notarized confirmations for nearly everything. Its stamp verified signatures on checks, powers of attorney, bills of car sale (for cars having both Israeli and Jordanian licenses), high school diplomas for students wishing to enter Arab universities. It handed out confirmation that merchandise for export had indeed been manufactured in "Arab Jerusalem" and implemented land sale contracts for recording in Jordanian property books (along with its recording in Israeli property books). It also affirmed declarations by Arab residents requesting Jordanian passports and identity papers. All the documents put out by the Chamber were recognized by the government in Amman. This was not secret activity. The bureau collected a fee for every service, which was recorded by law in its books. The bureau's services were vital for the continued free passage between Israel and Jordan.

The status and various rights given to the Chamber of Commerce in East Jerusalem by the Jordanian Government have not changed much since 1969. The Chamber has been able to exploit the dependence of its clientele and has expanded its influence. Through accepted bureaucratic methods, such as delaying the granting of permits, it has succeeded in imposing Jordanian-oriented political authority locally.

The eight chambers of commerce active in the West Bank enjoy far more limited rights; but a delay or refusal on their part to give a producer their authorization that his goods are indeed produced in the West Bank is enough to destroy the manufacturer economically, since without such a permit he would not be acknowledged by Jordan as an authorized exporter, permitted to transfer his produce from the West Bank to Jordan and from the latter to Arab states. This sword of Damocles, however seldom used, is the reason why a large class of merchants, who usually also constitute the local political aristocracy, abstain from quarreling with these bodies and even seek to strengthen them.

The chambers gained additional political significance after the 1976 municipal elections. When the picture became clear that most of those elected were of nationalistic views and PLO supporters, the military government decided to cut off contact with them and transfer the center of gravity to the chambers of commerce in which persons of the old guard were—and still are—serving. In contrast to the extreme public statements voiced by the new municipalities, the military government found the bureaus to be neutral, politically colorless bodies, whose business, superficially at least, was limited to the commercial-economic realm. In fact they were strong centers of pro-Jordan attitudes. Formally, the chambers draw their rights from Jordanian law, but even in areas where that law grants them full authority, the chamber heads, who are united in the Union of Chambers of Commerce, still prefer to consult Jordan.

In order to maintain the alleged political neutrality of the chambers of commerce, the military government decided not to hold elections for the chamber boards on their legal date which was scheduled around the time of the municipal elections. The explanation given then was that "since the merchants are not interested in the new elections, there is no need to rush them." (Interestingly, in the municipal elections the pretext of the citizens' will was not used. The law was enforced even in those places—such as Nablus—where the local residents refused to participate in the elections.) The real reason was, of course, the military government's fear that the elections would, like the municipal elections, replace the current economic leadership with pro-PLO personalities.

Thus the military government, followed by the civil administration, retained and protected these pro-Jordan bases with clear economic power, and their political potential which could be made use of in due course. The civil administration is already trying to harness the chambers of commerce to its political service. In Nablus, for example, the heads of the chamber of commerce were invited several times by the head of civil administration to undertake the management of the municipality, which, since Mayor Bassam Shaq'a was removed from office, is headed by an Israeli IDF officer. Similar approaches were made also to the heads of the chamber in Ramallah, whose municipal council was also dismissed. The current refusal of the chambers to assume such formal political roles, stems primarily from reluctance to cooperate with the Israeli regime, especially against the background of the dismissal of the elected city councils. Jordan's total objection to this plan was no less decisive.

Jordan on its part is making every possible effort to maintain the chambers of commerce as its semi-official representatives. While these are primarily economic links, through them Jordan can also extend its control to other sectors. For example, the marketing of agricultural produce is handled by the chambers. Sometimes Jordan imposes imaginary difficulties upon the marketing of agricultural produce from the West Bank, in order to force the chamber leaders throughout the West Bank or in certain subdistricts in which Jordan fears "deviation," to make a pilgrimage to Amman in order to soften the blow. This often happens in the grape season, which creates a surplus that is not absorbed in Israel while the export quota to Jordan is often not sufficient; or in the olive season, during which the heads of the Nablus Chamber customarily travel to the Hashemite Court in order to obtain good contracts.

Building Toward the Future

Meanwhile, the King continues to strengthen pro-Jordanian elements in the West Bank. Recently, Ibrahim Daqaq and Ibrahim A-Tawil, both members of the former National Guidance Committee, were appointed to the Supreme Moslem Council—sharpening its Palestinian national character. They were appointed despite their earlier anti-Jordanian statements. This was done in order to give this pro-Jordanian body wider public appeal and a political role that goes beyond mere religious matters, without undermining the Jordanian element.

The economic ties between Jordan and the West Bank continue to go through the chambers of commerce which continue to be controlled by people loyal to the Hashemite Courts. The actual and artificial difficulties occasionally imposed by Jordan are meant to demonstrate that "the oxygen of the Palestinians passes through His Majesty's Court." Thousands of teachers and government officials continue to receive salaries from the Jordanian Government as they have since 1967, regardless of the fact that Israel, too, is paying them. This step was initiated under the Jordanian law which does not recognize Israeli control and claims the West Bank as part of Jordan. The Amman Bank, which is controlled by the Government, gives mortgages to residents who want to build houses in the West Bank and even funds housing projects for select groups of government workers. This is in addition to control over some East Jerusalem newspapers and over the East Jerusalem Electric Company directed by Anwar Nusseibah, who is known for his pro-Jordanian position.

Since the war in Lebanon, Jordan has again started to draw closer to the rural population, something it had avoided since 1978 when the joint PLO-Jordan Committee was established which dealt exclusively with aid to the villages. (This, too, was stopped as a result of an Israeli civil administration initiative which sought to increase the power of the village leagues and therefore issued a decree saying that every sum above 1,000 dinars brought into the West Bank requires its authorization.) As mentioned above, many mukhtars have recently been invited to Jordan and offered new financial aid directly from the Jordanian Government, not necessarily through the Joint Committee.

This strong pull on the strings of the West Bank and control over the pro-Jordanian elements, in addition to the massive financial aid which has in fact not stopped since 1967, strengthen the opinion that Jordan does not intend to let the Palestinians play an independent political game in the West Bank and to slip away from the East Bank of the Jordan River. The King's most recent declaration in favor of a federation, his hints about recognition of Israel, and Jordanian activity in the area, all indicate that Jordan intends to enter the political vacuum created in the wake of the Lebanese War.

Zvi Barel is an orientalist who specializes in writing about the situation in the administered territories and East Jerusalem for the Israeli and world press. He is former Deputy Governor of Hebron and spokesman for the Judea and Samaria Regional Command (IDF), and is currently on the editorial staff of HaAretz, one of Israel's daily newspapers. He and JCPA associate Moshe Drori are presently undertaking a study of the village leagues for the Jerusalem Center. This Jerusalem Letter is adapted from a series of articles which appeared in Hebrew in HaAretz, October 20-24, 1982.