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THE LETTER SHIMON PERES DID NOT SEND TO KING HUSSEIN

Zalman Shoval

Your Majesty:

May I commend you on your gracious statements at the United Nations about "the sons of Abraham," Moses, and other connections between our peoples. I was also greatly impressed by your vision of the day "when the parties to the conflict will till the soil, reap the harvests, plant trees and enjoy the fruits of their labor in peace, tranquility and security." So as not to spoil the pleasant atmosphere, I will not even remind you that had you not started the war against us in 1967 or had you granted some rights to the "West Bank" residents before 1967, while they were still under your control, then the idyllic picture painted by your Majesty might have been realized long ago. Nonetheless, I definitely view your speech as a positive development; although, I may add, that two newspapers which can hardly be described as "hawkish" (*Ha'Aretz* and *Davar*) have written that you merely repeated your well known stand on negotiations with Israel. I, however, am prepared to be a little more generous and say that nevertheless, there is a difference between

that which is said not in private talks or at carefully staged press-conferences, but before the entire world at the United Nations. Although we both understand that the connection between your speech and your requests for U.S. arms was not entirely coincidental, let us hope that it will also have a positive effect on the dynamic of peace just as the words of the late President Sadat had in 1977.

Now to the speech itself. Please allow me to relate both to the things you said, as well as to some that you did not say. For instance, I have noted that you are prepared to conduct "direct and immediate negotiations." We are ready to meet with you anywhere at any time, and to talk about any relevant subject, without preconditions from either side and within any framework whether it be that of the Camp David Accords, to which you are not a signatory, or some other. What do you mean, however, when you say that negotiations must be held under "appropriate auspices," adding that it is

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Jordan's position that the appropriate auspices are "an international conference hosted by the Secretary General of the U.N., which includes the five permanent members of the Security Council and all parties to the conflict?" If, in fact, this was only a declaration of intent on your part (paying lip-service to your previous stance) that is one thing. But if you are going to insist on it as a pre-condition for talks, then I am afraid nothing good will come of it.

"Direct negotiations" mean just that; we will not agree to meet under the auspices of a body where all the cards will be stacked against us in advance. I do appreciate your need for wider international backing of your actions, but between the two of us, do you really believe that a conference with the participation of the Soviet Union, Syria's friend and ally, will allow you to take any action that does not suit the objectives of those two -- objectives which undoubtedly are not identical with your own aims? If we actually do engage in those "direct negotiations," you may, of course include whomever you wish in your delegation: Jordanians, Palestinians from the East Bank or from Judea, Samaria and Gaza (even some that maintain ties with the PLO). When I say your delegation, I am referring to people who accept your policies and your leadership, not to those who see themselves as the representatives of a separate national entity.

True, you avoided mentioning the possibility of a separate Palestinian state, but let me reiterate our position quite clearly. The main objective of negotiations is to reach a peace agreement between the two existing states -- Israel and Jordan -- and not a formula which could lead to the establishment of a third state, whose very existence will forever preclude peace and stability in our region.

Nevertheless, it is clear to me that we must also reach a *modus vivendi* with regard to Judea and Samaria (what you call the "West Bank"), and Gaza. In our opinion this is not so much a Palestinian problem as one of determining the future of the territories; two issues which are not completely identical. I fully understand that you walk a tightrope in this matter, considering that the majority of your population even on the "East Bank" of the Jordan River is Palestinian. While I do not accept Messrs. Shamir's and Sharon's slogans and formulations on this subject, I must remark that it is

not only as you stated that "since the inception of the Palestinian problem at the end of World War I Jordan has been closely connected with it," but rather, Jordan is the Palestinian problem! Historically speaking, the country to which your grandfather was brought from distant Hejaz after World War I by the British and over which you rule today was founded following the Balfour Declaration in order to provide an Arab national home in the eastern part of Palestine, parallel to the Jewish national home in the western part of the country. It is a pity, for reasons which I will not go into here, that the opportunities for fuller identification between "Jordanianism" and "Palestinianism" and between the Hashemite dynasty and most of its citizens were wasted.

In your speech, you also list four U.N. resolutions on which, in your opinion, a just settlement should be based: Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, but also Partition Resolution (181) and the General Assembly Resolution on Arab refugees. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the latter two resolutions are entirely irreconcilable with Resolutions 242 and 338. One could even say that the very mention of the partition borders is a breach of Resolution 242, which refers to the 1967 lines and not to the lines of the 1947 partition resolution, which Arabs did not accept at the time, choosing instead a course of violence and armed force. Even if your inclusion of Resolution 181 was to assuage the PLO and the so called Arab world, you also succeeded in reinforcing the position of those amongst us who detect a certain duplicity in your professions of peace.

However, let us not digress. I readily acknowledge the fact that both Israel and Jordan have a vital interest in reaching an arrangement with respect to Judea, Samaria and Gaza. Therefore, in addition to a peace agreement between our two countries, we also need to find a way that will enable the Arab residents of these areas to manage their affairs to a substantial degree. I am not concerned with semantic differences, as were some of my predecessors, and I do not care what it will be called: full or administrative autonomy, self-government, home rule, etc. We do, of course, have vital interests in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, not only confined to security considerations. In my

opinion, to protect them we have no need or interest in being the "landlords" of the Arab residents of these areas. Although my own party still officially advocates a territorial compromise, anyone of average intelligence can understand that this is impossible to achieve (at least in this generation). Furthermore, there is no possibility to bridge the gap between your minimum demands (which are, in fact, identical with your maximum demands) -- and our minimum demands.

In spite of all the difficulties, I believe it is important to all the parties (including Egypt) that some formula for solving the problem be found, even if it is less than perfect. It seems to me and to some of my friends that the best way to secure a framework that enables Jordan, Israel and the Arab residents of the territories to "get along" with each other (even if we all have to forgo many of our maximal aspirations) is the adoption of a functional compromise formula in some form. I believe that the Arab residents of the territories should be autonomous in any field that does not endanger our security or yours. To avoid misunderstandings in this matter, security will remain primarily in our hands but local forces, including your own, could also play a role. In economic matters, we will not hinder them from establishing relations with whomever they may choose, be it with you, with us or with both of us. (Who knows, perhaps one day it will be possible to establish a sort of free trade area for the entire region?)

The question of formal sovereignty in the territories can be solved through the establishment of a condominium or joint sovereignty, or if you prefer, this matter can also be left open. In any case, the Arab residents would be citizens of Jordan and would participate in its political life, while the Jewish residents would be citizens of Israel. Perhaps an added feature could be the establishment of Arab and Jewish cantons; by reaching a semi-territorial agreement of this sort which would make it easier to prevent unauthorized settlement initiatives in the heart of densely populated Arab areas, which we also oppose.

By the way, let me compliment you. Professionally speaking, your speech was a very clever *oeuvre*, both politically and psychologically. When you said that Jerusalem, rather than being "an insurmountable obstacle to peace" is the "key to

peace," adding that you look forward to the time when "all the children of Abraham can proceed to their holy sites"; you achieved several objectives simultaneously. First, you obscured the fact that your country's soldiers destroyed the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, demolished its synagogues and defiled its Jewish cemeteries. Second, you elegantly ignored the fact that Abraham's children by his wife Sarah could not reach their holy places for almost twenty years because the Jordanian government prevented them from doing so from 1948 to 1967. Under Israeli rule, every one of Abraham's children and others as well, can visit every holy place without hindrance. Third, you appealed to the sympathy of those Christians who, for reasons of their own, are dissatisfied with all of Jerusalem being in Jewish hands. Finally, you tried to bolster the illusion that the moral and historical claim to Jerusalem of the three great monotheistic religions is equal.

But let me tell you that I too believe that the matter of Jerusalem need not be an obstacle to peace, unless one desires it to be so. Even Mr. Begin, in his original autonomy plan, dealt with the special aspects of Jerusalem. I too am prepared to consider various ideas which will assure both the unity of Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel and the Jewish people, as well as its uniqueness as a city holding religious and spiritual importance to other nations and religions. One could, for example, think about special municipal arrangements for the city's Arab residents, or a special administrative status for the holy sites of Christianity or Islam. Possibly you, as a descendant of the prophet Mohammed, could be trustee for the Moslem sites.

As you can see, our intentions are serious. Now the ball is in your court. If you truly desire to further the cause of peace, the time has come to prove it by actions. I agree that in politics words alone can sometimes be considered actions, and therefore, I appreciate your speech at the U.N. and your added words in Washington, D.C., stating Jordan's acceptance of non-belligerency. But don't you think that your words would carry more weight if they had been said directly to us, the party concerned, and not only to the members of the U.S. Senate?

In one respect, however, your speech left a great deal to be desired and raised a question. How can one reconcile your "unwavering condemnation of

terrorism" with the fact that you allow the P.L.O. to maintain operational command posts in your country, from which the most vicious acts of terror are planned and directed? Terrorism is indivisible, and so is the fight against it. Your distinction between terrorism and the "rights of national liberation movements to resist occupation" sounded somewhat hypocritical. I think we have made it perfectly clear in recent weeks what our attitude is towards the P.L.O. and in the last few weeks America and even some of the Europeans have come to recognize Yasser Arafat's true face. Therefore, the sooner you rid yourself of your strange and harmful pact with him, the better the cause of peace will be served.

Now to another matter. As you know, my partners of the Likud are not enthusiastic about the idea of negotiations with you. For Mr. Shamir and Mr. Arens, who desire peace as much as we all do, the continuation of the status quo in Judea, Samaria and Gaza is certainly preferable. Thus, though the Likud cannot oppose direct and unconditional negotiations which are specified in the program of the National Unity Government, the list of government priorities is liable to change in less than a year when Mr. Shamir will become prime minister. In other words, we must grasp the moment and progress or we may lose it forever. I must tell you that time is not on your side. It is not only that facts are being created in the territories that make any compromise more difficult in the future, but there is a definite possibility that one day (and your intelligence people probably tell you the same thing) the Palestinian Arabs, despairing of ever achieving a settlement, will focus their aspirations on the East Bank of the Jordan River, at the expense of the Hashemite regime.

Finally, your Majesty, some sixty years ago, your great-uncle, Emir Faisal, signed an agreement with Chaim Weizmann, then leader of the Zionist Organization, which, had it been implemented, would have changed the whole history of the Middle East. Those two leaders believed in peaceful coexistence and cooperation between the Jewish and Arab nations, but their dream fell victim to British and French colonialist intrigue and to the fanaticism of shortsighted Arab leaders of the sort of Yasser Arafat and his cohorts in our own generation. Don't you think the time has come to try again?

Yours sincerely,

Shimon Peres
Prime Minister of Israel

P.S. Whatever you may read in the papers, and notwithstanding what some of my colleagues will say, do not expect me to break up the present coalition over this issue. Taking into account the climate of public opinion in Israel, it would be madness verging on a suicide wish for the Labor Party to contest an election on an issue that will enable the Likud to make it appear as though they are the true defenders of Eretz Israel while we are supposedly ready to sell out.

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