

Address and Remarks

By

His Majesty King Hussein  
of  
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

At

The National Press Club  
Washington, D.C.

Thursday, June 19, 1980

Transcribed by  
TYPE-RIGHT  
*Transcribing Service*  
529 - 14th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20045

*Proceeds of this transcript will be donated to the National Press Foundation*

HUSSEIN: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

This is not the first time that I visit this place, nor is it, I hope, the last time. The close relations between Jordan and the United States for the last three decades make it natural. The challenges of the coming decade both in my region and in the world make it necessary. Nothing like steady and frank communication between my region and your country can build bridges and correct perspectives on both sides. A sector of Arab opinion has been led to believe in recent years that the differences between the United States and the Arab world particularly with regard to Arab rights and aspirations are too deep to be bridged by honest communication alone. They believe that United States policy has become too deeply involved in partisan support to Israeli expansionism to avoid open confrontation with Arab rights, and therefore with the Arab world.

I share the belief about Israeli expansionism. In Jordan we happen to know more than most about Israel's territorial record and the Palestinian agony. I also share in the recognition that there is danger of major confrontation in our region involving the United States. But I believe, with most Jordanians and many thoughtful Arabs and Americans, that the confrontation can be avoided, can be channeled into constructive cooperation between America and the Arab world. And that peace can prevail in the Middle East. The key to it is honest and frank communication.

It is no strange phenomenon that many Arabs are skeptical of this method when it comes to Arab-American relations and their outstanding issues. Since 1967 we have had scores of American envoys and fact-finding missions visiting our area and investigating the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arabs believe that most of these envoys have returned to America convinced that a great injustice had been inflicted upon the Palestinian people, that Israel was in illegal and unjustified occupation of Arab land, and that a just peace required withdrawal and justice to the Palestinian people. These successive envoys have not, however, produced any major change in the U.S. approach.

For the Arabs this is a perplexing phenomenon. The natural condition, they believe, is for the U.S. to take a balanced stand on the Arab-Israeli problem and to exert every effort to restrain Israel's expansionist policy and bring about a just settlement.

Common sense dictates this. Both the moral imperative as well as enlightened self-interest require it. For on a moral plane, how can anyone justify, in this day and age, a foreign occupation of the national soil of other countries and peoples for over 13 years, the enslavement under this occupation of over a million people, the denial of the right of this people to self-determination and freedom, and the demographic mutilation of the land by the occupying power through colonization and growing annexation?

Nor do I need to mention the deep question of human rights -- so dear to this country and its President -- involved in this fundamental situation and the shocking occupation practices flowing from it.

On a more practical plan, how can U.S. policy choose a course in the Middle East which would lead to the unjustified alienation of an essentially friendly people, the radicalization of moderates among them, the possible disruption of the normal exchange of interests in the major areas of trade, energy and culture?

All this because of a peculiar and indefensible interpretation of commitment to Israel's security that seems to equate security with conquests. Most Arabs can understand America's repeated insistence on Israel's existence and security. What they cannot understand is how Israel's security can be furthered by the acquisition of foreign territory and the consequent state of war it thus perpetuates with its neighbors. They cannot understand how Israel proposes to keep under its occupation indefinitely the Palestinian people of the West Bank and Gaza and to continue to deny them and their displaced brethren the right to self-determination and national independence. The Arabs do not understand how this can be justified on the basis of sheer future security, let alone long term peace.

In Jordan we share in such Arab concerns and we agonize over these questions. Since 1967 Jordan has been the most active Arab country in pursuit of a just and comprehensive peace. We have worked for a comprehensive settlement because it is the only enduring one. We have warned against partial and separate settlements. The Arab-Israeli conflict (is) a major confrontation which must be addressed totally and from the roots. It is a major confrontation,

which must be addressed totally and from the roots. The essence cannot be ignored. The link between the component parts cannot be cut off. Israel's withdrawal from the territories occupied in June (of) 1967 cannot be separated from the exercise by the Palestinian people of the right of self-determination and national freedom. The problem will not disappear. The problem will not disappear if Egypt alone regains its occupied land. Syrian national territories are occupied. Gaza and the West Bank are occupied. Arab Jerusalem is occupied and officially, according to Israel, annexed.

A separate peace between Egypt and Israel will not advance the cause of a comprehensive and lasting settlement, particularly when the Israeli leadership uses it, as it does, to intensify its activities in settling the other occupied areas, fragmenting their demographic composition and systematically destroying the national leadership.

From 1967 till today Jordan has advocated a just and peaceful settlement. We have cooperated with every U.S. envoy and U.N. mediator. We received Scranton and Kissinger, Jarring and Waldheim. We presented innumerable proposals, held dozens of international meetings. I visited the United States, during this period, a dozen times. I discussed this problem with four American Presidents. I was assured by all of them that they understood the essentials of the problem, that they recognized that a lasting settlement meant withdrawal, justice to the Palestinian people and mutual security guarantees.

I have, throughout this period, addressed from this forum and others the American "silent majority", to borrow a famous phrase. I am convinced that the American people, once they understand the facts of the situation in the Middle East, will demand of their government a balanced policy and will support a President seeking to correct past mistakes and re-establish a constructive relationship with the Arab world.

I wish to restate on this occasion our view of a lasting and just settlement. Jordan seeks a just and durable peace. The Arab countries want a just and durable peace. We believe it is achievable. We are ready to work for it. When the Arab countries met in Baghdad in the Arab Summit of November of 1978 they clearly defined its components and content.

They reaffirmed it in their summit in Tunisia last year. At one time, the Summit of Baghdad of 1978 was viewed in some circles here and in Europe as essentially negative. Most people now realize that it was not so. It was aimed at restoring Arab cohesion and reinforcing the Arab sense of purpose. In Tunisia the Arab Heads of State decided to send their high level envoys to explain to the world the Arab concept of a just peace and to open avenues for it.

This thrust towards peace has been thwarted by Israel's intensified policy of settlement and repression in the occupied areas in the last few months. Jordan and its close Arab neighbors are in continuous consultation regarding the future steps. We are also consulting with the PLO. Our purpose is to open avenues to peace, not close them.

In the ultimate solution of the problem, the Palestinian people must participate in constructing the just peace we all want. Their great energies and vigor must find a constructive national expression and not be suppressed to the point of violent explosion.

The key issue that must be addressed here is the right of self-determination. This right is endorsed and accepted by this country and by our fundamental international philosophy in this age, but is strangled by reservations when it comes to the Palestinian people. The Palestinians must find open before them the peaceful avenues to the making of their future. It is a right that need not contradict with the rights of others in the area.

Many Palestinians are living under occupation. Many are living in forced exile. Why shouldn't the Palestinian people be able to exercise peacefully the natural right of deciding their future on their own ancestral national soil? Why should the exiles not be permitted to unite with those under occupation to rebuild a free homeland? Why can't the international community, including the United States, focus its efforts and mobilize its resources to initiate, now and immediately, a process that leads to the peaceful liberation of the Palestinians and the emergence of a free and peaceful Palestinian homeland. This is the prerequisite to a lasting peace in our area. It is the major component of the peace we want and are ready to share in and support.

When peace is established, mutual guarantees for security can be built into it. It must also be obvious that a peace that embraces freedom for the occupied territories and national self-determination for the Palestinian people is one that is inherently secure and self-perpetuating. In it the cause of the conflict vanishes. This is the most significant fact about the prospects of peace in the Middle East and its genuine concept. The European nations, so deeply involved in the origins of Israel and the present situation in the area, have unanimously endorsed these basic ideas and principles. The overwhelming majority of the world finds such a framework reasonable, in fact natural and obvious.

I wish to repeat that we in Jordan, our Palestinian brethren and all the enlightened Arab opinion seek such an honorable and genuine peace. We believe that the United States has the ability and the resources to share decisively in its establishment. I am in this country to express this belief. The American people have a major role in backing all imaginative efforts by the leadership to steer U.S. policy in the Middle East toward the right goals and directions, thus toward freedom and peace.

Thank you.

Mr. Von Bergen: The first question, Your Majesty, is did President Carter seek to persuade you to join the autonomy talks? The questioner states that the President has said that neither of you tried to change the other's mind.

King Hussein: I am very grateful to the President of the United States for his kind invitation that enabled me to meet with him. I am gratified to him for the time we spent together, the opportunity to discuss as we have both expressed it, frankly and openly in a spirit which was constructive, a spirit of friendship, mutual concern, all the problems in our area, and some of mutual interest in this world.

Our friends in the United States have been known for a period of time and the President did express that, have known our position and our feelings regarding recent developments in our area.

The visit and our talks have enabled us to gain a fresh insight into the thoughts of our friends here. I believe we know the positions of each other better now than at any time in the past.

Beyond that we face a common challenge...and beyond that, I firmly believe as I have always done, that basically our objective is one and the same--the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

What emerges from the talks that we have had is hopefully a chance for us to look at what has occurred to this moment in time and to look at the problems as they stand, and to look at the future. I believe we arrive at some definite conclusions regardless of interpretations, thoughts, ideas. The problem is still with us. It is still unresolved in the way that we would wish it to be. A just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East has, to this moment in time, not been achieved.

Our hope is that we will, recognizing this fact, move beyond this point to study, to consult, to keep in touch as friends interested in a common objective, hopefully in time, maybe to make our contributions in formulating an approach which would end with a beginning.

And the tragedy that has beset our part of the world and is the root cause of instability there and possibly in many parts of the world, with the establishment of a comprehensive just peace, an enduring peace, one that will be accepted and defended by future generations, and the beginning of a new era to the benefit of all...those who will follow us in that part of the world and in the world as a whole.

Mr. Von Bergen: The next question, Your Majesty, what do you comment, or what is your comment on President Sadat's verbal attack on you and his calling you an opportunist who is running after money?

King Hussein: I have been asked this question once or twice and, I chose not to respond, really. But there could possibly be a couple of points that are worth mentioning here in regard to some points that President Sadat touched upon.

This past period of time has brought with it a degree of misunderstanding. First of all, when President Sadat was planning the leave the area to come to the United States and to Camp David, there was an exchange of letters between us.

We had a commitment from him on his ideas of what any process should involve and what the results should be. In fact, at a certain point in time, he put all those thoughts and ideas openly before the world when he addressed the Knesset on his famous visit to Israel.

I wrote to him and I wrote to President Carter at that time with our views on developments and in great detail. When he was at Camp David, he called me by phone and in any event, we were in touch. I was in London. And the impression he gave me was that the going was extremely difficult. That he was, in fact, on the verge of possibly returning to Egypt. Conditions at that time were such that they were contemplating possibly announcing failure and stating their respective positions.

After that point, I understood that his commitment was to his earlier position which I understood from his letter and from our previous contacts. There was a possibility of our meeting, since I was planning a visit to Morocco and he was planning a stop there. The Camp David Accords, in terms of their details, came as a total surprise to me. I was not aware of any of the steps that led to the finalization of these accords, and Jordan was not involved in any part of that process.

Beyond that, this is a statement of fact, and since this was the case, I don't see how I could have possibly been so anxious to join a meeting to which I wasn't invited in the first place, and under the conditions I described.

I regret very deeply all these contradictions that continue to appear in a way that takes us back to the past, and in an inaccurate manner. Beyond that, I believe that Jordan, throughout the many years that have passed, and this probably is best known to our American friends, has steered a very steady and clear course.

And our commitment to an eventual peace, a lasting peace, a just peace in our part of the world, and our belief that we should be friends, that we could be friends, because we share the same hopes and aspirations, we uphold the same ideas and the same principles are dear to us.

Opportunism does not come into that. We have faced many a storm and weathered it, with God's help, and the determination of our people and their courage. Opportunism might have taken us on a different course, throughout many years, and in the face of many problems.

I have never dealt with issues on a personal level. Where my person was involved or others. I wouldn't do so. I would not have even responded, today, had it not been for the fact that this question has arisen time and again and during my stay, during this visit to the United States, and had it not dealt with specifics in terms of events that occurred and in a manner that I believe is totally incorrect and inaccurate.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Von Bergen: The questioner states that much of the world seems distressed by what seems to be the Carter Administration's lack of continuity in foreign affairs. Do you share this concern? Do you feel comfortable that whatever you agreed to today with President Carter will be in effect tomorrow?

King Hussein: First of all, it seems that you have a communications problem with these mikes, here. Beyond that, I would like to say, with all due respect to whoever addressed this question, that I am fully gratified to the President for his kind invitation for me to visit here and, again, in the clearest possible terms. and to avoid any misinterpretation, I am not here to criticize the President of the United States.

I have known from the very beginning, what I have stated time and again, that he has courage, he has shown me an interest in the problems of our part of the world,

since our first meeting, and a sincere desire to contribute his utmost to the solutions of those problems. He has given me more time over the subject than was the case in the past with all the great people that held the office of President of the United States.

I hope that the future will see us working closely together, to achieve a dear aim and objective which I believe is that of all of us, of many of us, in our part of the world, in the United States in particular.

I am optimistic and I certainly hope that this will be the case. I can't comment beyond this statement.

Mr. Von Bergen: We have two somewhat connected questions. Since you are for peace, how can you support or be supported by the PLO whose charter is for the extinction of Israel by anything except peaceful means? And also, wouldn't the PLO be accepted faster by the United States and other countries if they had a leader like Hussein instead of Arafat.

King Hussein: I think people in different parts of the world have the right, which all of us obviously respect, of choosing their leaders.

As far as the PLO is concerned, I believe it is a body that has entrusted in it the hopes and aspirations of the people of Palestine for justice and basically for peace, dignity or the restoration of rights to the people of Palestine on Palestinian soil.

This is an issue that is difficult to answer. I believe that we tend towards the extreme in our attitudes and positions when hope diminishes. And a process that would lead us towards the resolution of problems that you confront. I believe basically that the overwhelming majority of Palestinians wish the chance to exercise their right of self-determination under conditions of freedom on their national soil, and to live in peace with all their neighbors and contribute their share for stability within the area and stability within the world.

It is a question of where did it start, really. It is a question of the denial of all these rights to a people. And one of their prolonged suffering, over a long, long period of time.

I am sure that one of the questions to come, probably, would be related to the PLO and their position regarding Israel, and recognizing Israel's right to exist, and Israel's security.

What I find so difficult is to find an answer of why whoever puts this question cannot look at the other side. The people of Palestine have practically lost all their rights. They have been denied them. The Israeli government practically doesn't even recognize that they exist, refuses to recognize that they exist as a people.

The whole of Palestine is under occupation for thirteen years. The Palestinian soil is not what it was. Every day that passes short of rapid progress toward a solution brings with it change. Changes in Jerusalem, changes in every inch of that land.

Autonomy--to the Israelis it is a question of an exercise dealing with people (with the idea) regarding Jerusalem, regarding the rest of Palestine--it's a part of Israel. And they are acting accordingly.

To the Palestinian, to us, it looks as if it is an attempt to gain time, to create with each day obstacles on the ground in the face of a final peace. Surely the Palestinians should recognize the rights of Israel to exist, but what is right? Where? And shouldn't Israel, also, recognize the rights of the Palestinians on their soil and their homeland?

Shouldn't the issue be addressed to both sides simultaneously? I hope that this will be the case. And once again, when you are in distress, that is when your actions are likely to be sometimes tinted with extremism when there is no hope.

I have been involved closely with the Palestinian cause and the suffering of the Palestinian people. If any of you were amongst them, I wonder what your positions and attitudes would be under similar circumstances.

Mr. Von Bergen: A questioner states that ABC News reported that President Carter agreed to sell Jordan the latest in American tanks. Is this true?

King Hussein: I hope that at some point in the near future we would receive word to that effect. I believe that the issue of equipment as you have known for many years, of weaponry, to enable us to meet our requirements for legitimate self-defense, and in terms of the role that we play in the area, as well, for stability and progress, has brought us to the United States time and again to seek replenishment of old equipment.

But if the question is that of the M-60 tanks, we have had M-60s in service in Jordan for many, many years. We have had the first versions of it--we probably

would hope that they would be updated in terms of modernization, and I believe there is an on-going discussion to see if we can secure additional numbers to serve within our armed forces as replacements for older tanks that are getting out of service.

Mr. Von Bergen: Your Majesty, even if there is an agreement on the West Bank on Gaza Strip autonomy, do you think that the half-million Palestinians who are now in Lebanon can return? And if they cannot, should the Arab countries share the responsibility in resettling the Palestinians in proportion to their population density?

King Hussein: Obviously, the plight of Lebanon is one of great concern to all of us, and in particular, that of Palestinian presence there. I can't venture an opinion at this point in terms of the future, but I believe that there is movement for a comprehensive settlement in the area. Obviously, the question of who would return and who would choose to stay where they were or live elsewhere is one that will be addressed adequately.

I have felt throughout the many years that have passed though, that what the Palestinian has sought all along is to express himself, to exercise his right--does he wish to return or otherwise stay where he is, or start a new life?

It is on this principle that the issue revolves regardless of what the future will bring in terms of actual solutions.

Mr. Von Bergen: Do you think the Iran revolution will spread to other Middle East countries?

King Hussein: I have no thoughts in this direction.

Mr. Von Bergen: The questioner states that it is his understanding that you wish the Soviets to participate in the peace process. Considering the Arab fear for communism, will the other Arab states support your position?

King Hussein: Will the other Arab states support my position? I can only take you back in time a short while before recent developments in terms of the Sadat visit to Israel and Camp David when the United States and the Soviet Union produced jointly a paper as co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference, when we were working on the idea of a joint Arab delegation representing all the parties concerned to go to Geneva, and to go there in search of a comprehensive settlement to the Palestinian problem, the problems of the area.

I can only say that it is hoped that with the help of the rest of the world, world community, we will make progress toward the establishment of peace in our part of the world.

Mr. Von Bergen: (At this point, Mr. Von Bergen awarded a National Press Club Certificate of Appreciation and a National Press Club jacket to King Hussein.)

One final question, Your Majesty. Rubin Askew who is the U.S. Trade Representative, was speaking here at the Press Club last week, and at the time he told a story about the first time that he met you while he was Governor of Florida and you were at a Cape Kennedy launching.

The questioner was wondering whether you would like to recount for us your view of that meeting?

King Hussein: Thank you very, very much indeed, for the certificate, which I treasure, together with those that I have received before. It is an honor, a privilege to meet with you, knowing the tremendous responsibilities that we share in carrying, upholding to bring better understanding between people. I am very sorry that circumstances don't permit me to wear my tie today. I didn't have a chance to bring it with me this time. I will treasure the jacket, and I will try to come to see you wearing it next time!

I don't know why my friend has told this story to you of what happened in Florida. I think it was Apollo 16. But I had a very red face on that day.

After the launching of Apollo 16 and everything going perfectly, we proceeded try to fly on earth after that. I was returning to Palm Beach and Jordan. And somehow, our airplane was in an area which placed it a distance from the takeoff run. The Vice President's aircraft was underway and a Pan Am aircraft was there with congressional leaders, and members of Congress and the Senate.

And we were cleared to taxi out. It looked a little difficult. It seems that the gap was too small. And I debated for a minute what to do. Of course, as luck would have it, I was in the Captain's seat. And then we started taxiing out, encouraged by the fact that I thought I saw an official marshall telling us to move forward and I thought he had an idea where our wings were and what was happening alongside.

I took particular measures to insure that at least the Vice President's aircraft was safe, but I thought the other side was safe also. And suddenly we had a crunch and I applied the brakes, and looked out and to my horror the wings, Pan Am's 707 and ours, were locked together!

Well, anyway, we got out and we found other transport, but I will always remember the kindness of some of our friends who took it with a laugh as well on the Pan Am aircraft, and one of the young ladies says, "Nice to bump into you, sir!"

We took the wing tips off and both aircraft were able to fly and they were repaired shortly, and since then, believe me, I look back every time to try to make sure where my wings are before I taxi, whether there's a marshall there or not!

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