

Israel-Jordan pact a major breakthrough

by Hussein Al-Nadeem

The official signing of the agreement between Jordan and Israel will take place in Al-Aqaba on Oct. 26. King Hussein of Jordan and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin will be present at the ceremony, which will be attended by President William Clinton as well, who will be conducting his first visit to the Middle East as President of the United States.

This agreement comes as a major breakthrough in the context of deliberate British attempts to destabilize the whole Middle East and the Persian Gulf through launching a new "Desert Storm" and threatening the stability in Israel through terrorist operations, such as the Oct. 19 bus bombing in Tel Aviv.

The major issues settled in this agreement are water, recognition of borders, and Jordanian land. Specific details will come later on in the annexes of the agreement, yet the main aspects were made public. Concerning the water issue, Israel has agreed to divert 100 billion cubic meters of the water of Yarmuk and Jordan rivers to Jordan. At the same time, Israel will return about 300 kilometers of occupied land in the Araba Valley along its southern border to Jordan.

Both parties agreed that Israel will lease land in a farming area that belongs to the Sonufer settlement, for a period of 25 years. Another area in the northern part of the Jordan Valley, which previously was handed to the Israeli Electricity Company, will also be leased by Israel for 25 years. The total amount of land to be leased is reportedly 700 acres.

According to *Asharq Al-Awsat*, two dams on the Yarmuk and Jordan rivers will be built, if funding on the order of \$120 million can be secured. The water from the Arab Valley to be returned to Jordan will remain under the control of the Israeli water company Makurut, which will operate under a Jordanian license. Jordan will receive 15 million cubic meters of this water per year.

Anti-terrorist cooperation

Regarding security issues, according to the same Arabic press source, the two countries agreed to cooperate against terrorism, and to guarantee that no terrorist attacks would originate on one party's territory against the other. Neither of the two countries will join a military alliance that would constitute an adversary relationship regarding the other, nor will they allow a third force to operate against the other from their soil.

On the issue of refugees and displaced persons, both

countries pledged to adopt a humanitarian approach. The issue of the Palestinian refugees from 1967 will be tackled in four-party talks including Jordan, Israel, Egypt, and the PLO. The 1948 refugee problem will be discussed in the multilateral talks.

Within one month of the final signing of the peace agreement, Jordan and Israel will open embassies in the other country. The normalization of relations will include tourism, free trade zones, joint projects, and parks, around the Dead Sea and the Red Sea. On the Jerusalem question, Israel will, in conformity with the Washington declaration, accord a special status to Jordan in the holy city.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, referring to the leasing arrangement, characterized this agreement as an excellent model which can be applied in a future peace agreement with Syria, while Israeli Minister of Economy Shimon Shtreet suggested that his government should recommend a similar deal to the Syrians, offering to lease parts of the Golan Heights for 99 years.

Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad, however, reacted to such declarations in a press conference in Cairo together with President Hosni Mubarak on Oct. 18, saying: "This is our land and we consider the mere talking about leasing it to Israel as blasphemy. If anybody has the illusion that Syria would lease land to Israel, he is mistaken." Mubarak commented on the Israeli-Jordanian agreement saying, "We should not give away Arab land, because land is 'honor' and this issue is not to be discussed." He made clear in the press conference that he will not attend the ceremony in Jordan.

Further criticism of the agreement came from the ten Palestinian "rejectionist" groups based in Damascus, who said the recognition of a special Jordanian role in Jerusalem was tantamount to violation of the PLO-Israel agreement, and would provide legal justification for continuing occupation.

Assad still wants a deal

Although the negative reaction from the Syrian side was immediate and harsh, it is clear that Hafez Al-Assad still wants a peace agreement with Israel. While attacking Arabs—in this case, Jordan—for making a separate deal with Israel rather than coordinating a unified Arab position, Assad said he did not want to hinder the process.

The Israeli-Jordanian agreement, though expected to materialize by year's end, came much sooner for a number of reasons. First, Israel is thought to have felt public pressure following the failed attempt to release Israeli soldier Nachson Waxman, held by Hamas militants. Jordan was eager to provide momentum to the peace process, to generate support inside the country.

Also, pressure from the United States could account for the quickened pace of events. President Clinton's presence at the signing ceremony on Oct. 26 will provide him with a valuable foreign policy success shortly before the November elections.