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The JEWISH VETERAN

JEWISH WAR VETERANS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



In this issue...

INSIDE JORDAN

by a special correspondent



National Commander Ben Chasin and Past National Commander William Carmen present Edward R. Murrow with the JWV "American Citizen of the Year" (1956-57) Award.

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INSIDE JORDAN

by A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

“**J**ORDAN is negotiating peace terms with Israel and has thereby finally broken away from the common Arab cause.

“A secret meeting took place in Nablus between Jordan’s Foreign Minister Samir a-Rifai and Israel’s Foreign Minister Golda Meir and Ben Gurion who reached Nablus in a UN aircraft.

“The meeting lasted eighty minutes during which details of a separate Jordan-Israel treaty were discussed. Later on, reliable circles in Amman disclosed that the meeting was a direct result of the \$30 million bribe which Jordan received from United States Zionists.”

This is the gist of a cover-page report in “A-Shahab”, one of Cairo’s leading dailies. Were it at least true and not just another missile of Egypt’s propagandist war against Jordan, King Hussein might have been able to retain his throne and thereby save his country from imminent disintegration. In fact, however, Jordan’s situation is ominously different.

The amalgamated efforts of the Red Middle East Block to overthrow King Hussein and to establish a leftist regime in Jordan are finally reaping the first fruits of success.

The continuous bombardment of Jor-

dan’s population with anti-Hussein propaganda over Cairo’s “Saut al-Arab” broadcasting station, and over Radio Damascus, is now being heavily supported by a daily two-hour broadcast in Arabic from Radio Moscow; and the country’s chronic unrest is accelerating at such a pace that only far reaching security measures are still able to hold it in check. But nobody knows for how long.

Armed to the teeth, units of Circassian cavalry and Bedouin squads of the King’s Own Guard in armour cars, frequently patrol the restricted areas, their weapons ready and their faces blackened with charcoal.

The blackening of a Bedouin warrior’s face is both practical and symbolic. The latter advertises that he is ready to kill. The former protects him from being recognized and thus involved in a blood feud with the relatives of those whom he may kill in action.

Police and Army Intelligence squads encountered severe resistance when they raided a refugee camp East of River Jordan, searching for Czech arms that were reported to have been smuggled in from Egypt for an imminent revolt, overthrow and assassination of King Hussein.

No such arms were found, but violence almost broke out again when some 50 suspects were detained for interrogation.

At the same time still greater resentment which almost flared up into clashes, was caused among former Palestineans by police units which carried out a series of searches in Zerqa, Irbid, Nablus, Amman, Ramallah and Old Jerusalem. They were looking for an underground press which is supposedly financed from Syria and began functioning shortly after the memorable Zerqa incident. At first it used to distribute only a weekly communist pamphlet, but in recent weeks it expanded into a regular daily underground publication which penetrated deep into the rank and file of the Jordanian Army and began to cause perturbing unrest even among the hitherto, if not exactly loyal, then at least neutral, Arab Legion. The attempt to seize the press and to capture the editors of the prohibited publication failed, and next day the six-page pamphlet reappeared.

In Amman proper, the portrait of King Hussein is prominent everywhere: in shop-windows, on balconies, on windscreens of private vehicles and of taxis. But now it is not any more a sign of the population's devotion to their ruler. No, the portrait is merely a protective shield against any possible onslaught by the trigger-happy Bedouins of the King's Own Guard, who roam the streets of the Capital, looking for and ready to shoot it out with trouble at sight.

Gone are the days of cheers for Hussein. Now, wherever he turns to he encounters—at best—indifference. As a rule, however, he had to face either direct opposition or the malignant silence of a frustrated mob which is prevented from rioting only by the Guard's fixed bayonets.

Hussein is well aware of the fact that the already scarce number of his supporters is shrinking daily. Some of them abandon him for fear of what may happen to them when Hussein is no more; others sell themselves out to his enemies and leave Hussein hanging over the cliff of his arid Kingdom on a fraying rope.

Hussein knows that this rope will last only as long as there are enough loyal troops left to hold the country together until some drastic economic change will cure its poverty. The chances for such a cure are very slight. Yet "I am not defeated as easily as that!" claims Hussein and he seems determined to fight to the last drop of blood for the survival of his artificial State.

Some thirty five years ago Britain manipulated into being this geo-political entity: 36,000 desolate square miles of which only 5% were cultivated. Its population consisted of merely 250,000 permanent inhabitants and 50,000 nomads. In due course 17,000 of them joined the Arab Legion forming an armed desert-camp: the British watchtower in the center of oil-fields which Britain ruled in all but reality.

British Pounds, Pashas and Politicians

traced on the sand the boundaries of their newly erected protectorate and ignored the fact that the extravagant political, military and financial help could not convert a synthetically contrived body into a meaningful, organic State.

But Britain was not interested in Jordan as a State—only in Jordan as the British foothold in the Middle East. And as such, this once docile ward served its purpose.

In 1948, however, Israel's War of Independence converted Jordan at one stroke, from a picturesque yet obscure little Bedouin Kingdom of no true national identity, no political history and no economic visibility—into an empire of refugees.

Old Abdullah nibbled off 1,800 square miles of rocky Palestine which harboured 982,000 people.

453,000 of his newly acquired citizens were permanent residents of former Palestine who needed no rehabilitation. They felt no particular loyalty to Abdullah and none at all to his British sponsors. The remaining 519,000 were destitute refugees who felt no loyalty whatsoever to their new ruler and hated the Britons.

Having so unfortunately tripled his population, Abdullah had swallowed the poison which killed him, and is now destroying Hussein.

Better educated and more sophisticated than the native Transjordanians, the Palestinians took over Jordan's trade and most of its administration. They demanded and got the right to vote. Thus they elected

half the members of Parliament, infusing the Egypt-inspired, leftist trends into Jordan's politics. They inlisted into the Arab Legion in hordes, until they outnumbered the loyal Bedouins two to one. The discipline of this, once famous force slackened greatly. Its morale collapsed.

Aware of this deterioration, the Palestinians formed Jordan's National Guard, organized by Egyptian officers and manned mainly by Palestinian refugees. But during the recent crises it was evident that this 40,000 strong force is more of a threat than a help to the Legion.

Savouring their power, the next demand of the Palestinians was "Out with the British imperialists!" Realizing that if he ignored it, he would run the risk of a civil war, and in preference to his abdication—Hussein yielded. But having abrogated the treaty with Britain, he left his country with an empty treasury and with little excuse for existence.

Most of the State enterprises, such as the Zerqa cement works, the cigarette factory in Amman, the Royal Transport Company and the Amman-Hejaz railway line, are suffering great losses and unless something drastic is done to subsidize them, they will have to cease functioning. But nothing drastic can be done.

Since the Cairo Pact, Hussein depends mainly on the personal generosity of his ex-enemy King Saud. And most of the Saudi Arabian allowance was spent on Defense. Consequently, also all Jordan's de-

velopment projects came to a standstill due to lack of funds.

Jordan's Minister of Economy, Khalusi al-Khairi, shocked even the most pessimistic observers when he submitted the Trade balance of the first half of 1957. The account revealed a financial gap of \$323,246,812 as well as the country's absolute dependence on the general import of all essential goods which amounted to \$102,813,404, as against exports of olive-oil, vegetables and phosphates worth \$6,196,000.

To add salt onto the wounds, the Royal Office of Statistics released a survey which disclosed many hitherto only suspected reasons for Jordan's unrest, growing corruption and recurring paralysis of the State Administration.

The survey showed that unemployment runs to the fatal figure of 83,622 which constitutes 28.3% of all the population with earning capacity. And those who are employed, are so grossly underpaid that they cannot make ends meet without running into debt, or onto the allowance lists of Hussein's opponents.

Jordan's Civil Service is merely one example.

The average salary of a Civil Servant with four dependants is \$96 per calendar month. With this sum he must not only feed, clothe and house his family, but also send an average of two children to school—to be paid for, of course.

Hardly any Civil Servant can afford

more than two rooms per family, for which the monthly rent is \$17 in the provinces and \$56 in Amman. Excluding the rent, the minimum monthly cost of maintenance per family of five is \$108 in Amman, \$97 in the South and \$101 in the North. As a result, Jordan's Civil Service is the most corrupt one in the Middle East because it is more vulnerable to bribery than that of any Middle East Arab country—a perfect situation for the incubation of communism inside Jordan.

Nevertheless, communism is, at the moment, the lesser of King Hussein's two major fears. A civil war is what worries him more; not so much because of the possible outcome of such a war to the benefit of either side, but because he is well aware that when the first gun-shots inside the country ring out, Jordan will fall into four parts: to Saudi Arabia in the South, to Syria in the North, to Iraq in the East and in the West into Nasser-ruled Arab Palestine—or to Israel.

Nobody can tell whether Hussein is right in tightening his ruling first and following the pattern of autocracy which was so successful with his grandfather, King Abdullah. Jordan has changed very much, since. And among the growing irritation which Hussein causes by personally intervening in virtually all State Affairs, he will not be able to get far, and definitely not for very long. But "If need be, I shall fight!" he declares, and there can be no doubt that he means it.

Yes. He is brave. A boy with a man's courage. "Nerve", he prefers to call it; and this is apparently with what he kept Jordan from falling to shreds and what made him survive hitherto. Sheer nerve.

As a man, Hussein can only be admired and respected. As a King, he could perhaps be pitied. As a person, he has not changed much since Harrow. He is still the same simple-minded youngster with frank eyes, straightforward questions and sincere answers, he used to be at the Hampsted Heath parties, during the "sneaks" from Sandhurst, or at Kirton's snack bar, sipping cider. A boy with greying hair on his temples.

As opposed to most of the present-day Arab leaders, Hussein is refreshingly candid and pleasant to talk to; especially when he gets a chance to leave the Royal burdens for an hour or two, fling himself behind the wheel of his favorite Lincoln, and heedlessly race out into the open country, outside the seven hills of Amman.

While in office, he conforms to the required patterns and does his best to cope with the ever mounting complications of State policy. Privately, however, he admits that hardly any of the Middle East Arab countries have a cohesive policy at present. "That's why they are so vulnerable to undesirable indoctrination, as was the case with Syria and Egypt. The Arab world has still a long and hot way to go through, until it will truly find the path it is seeking. Meanwhile it uses big words which mean

nothing!"

Hussein himself loathes the pompous words he is forced to use in his speeches and official declarations of solidarity etc. etc. He hates hypocrisy. When answering corny questions of Foreign Correspondents at press conferences, or during exclusive interviews, Hussein acquired the habit of dodging traps by explaining Jordan's policy as "based on the habits of absolute Arab unity, complete Arab National sovereignty, independence, non-interference and struggle for liberation and true positive neutrality". Asked once what all this meant, Hussein snapped: "I gave this press conference in order to clarify issues and not in order to teach terminology!" And the conference was over.

Officially Hussein maintains that "there can be no question of peace as long as there is the problem of Israel". Privately, however, he does admit that "Israel is there to stay for good, and the sooner 'everybody' realized this and helped to find some sort of satisfactory settlement and a just solution of the refugee problem, the better for all".

These surprising words of the King actually represent the sparks of a new school of Jordanian thought. A great number of Jordan's half a million refugees tired of waiting and gave up hope of ever reconquering Israeli land. They were prepared to face facts. And that was when new voices let themselves be heard. Strong,

influential voices.

Columnist Youssuf Ha'anna of *Al-Jihad*, switched over to *Falastin*, Jordan's most influential newspaper. In his first column in *Falastin* Ha'anna wrote:

"Why cannot we learn from the the Jews across the border how to exploit meagre funds and speed up the national development projects? Just look at what the Jews have done in a few years of organized work. We need the development of our country more than the Jews need that of theirs, for ours will last while they are building it merely for us to take over. But at the moment this is still irrelevant. Meanwhile until we are ready to take this pilot plant of modern industry, inclusive of its pipeline from Elat to Haifa, with its flourishing agriculture and with its biggest shipping fleet in the Middle East, until we can take it over, let us copy it, let us copy it before it is too late."

Unfortunately for Jordan—it is too late.

The overall impression is that Hussein manages to maintain Law and Order in his country by rallying virtually the entire army behind him. But by now this impression is obsolete, because the neutrality of the Army, although still existing, is malignant; and Hussein feels that in case of a showdown he could rely only on the units of Bedouins whose loyalty to the King is reinforced by strong traditions of tribal allegiance.

But even these units, devoted and efficient as they may be, do not quite constitute the force which Hussein would need in case of an uprising. They form only five and a half of the Army's twelve infantry regiments, and only two of the four armour cars regiments. Of the latter one is stationed between Amman and Zerqa and the other in Aqaba. Three Bedouin infantry regiments are stationed on the West bank of River Jordan, acting as buffer against Israel and simultaneously keeping a sharp eye on the refugees.

Hussein's strongest arm, stationed in Aqaba, is the single tank regiment, now re-equipped with US donated Patton tanks. It is also manned by Bedouins, but unfortunately for Hussein, it is officered by less reliable elements.

It would be impracticable for Hussein to concentrate the loyal forces round him and to leave the rest of the country to the wolves. On the other hand, he will find it most difficult to concentrate quickly enough a sufficient force of loyal troops to suppress the possible uprising of a considerable part of the Army and of the refugees who are incited and supported not only by Syria, Egypt and indirectly by Russia, but also by Hussein's opponents inside Jordan.

Hussein is aware of all this, and he realizes that the days of his reign are counted. Yet, if he is to go down—he is determined to go down fighting to the end. And the end may come tomorrow.