



Alfred Friendly

Hussein's Time Grows Short To Make a Peace With Israel

AMMAN — "Isolation," the young man cried, his voice shaking. "Isolation—voice shaking. "Isolation—voice shaking. "Isolation—if only we were isolated!"

The appeal was unexpected from a nation so isolated already as to have no friends on its borders and almost none elsewhere in the Arab world.

What the young man meant—he was an important Jordanian government personage—was soon apparent. It was a fanciful wish that Jordan could be left alone, freed from the other Arab states that sit on its back like an Incubus. The Jordanian government, the nation's Establishment—its men of affairs, its small businessmen and traders, even its peasants—want peace so bad they can taste it. But in that objective, the government and its King are quasi-prisoners, the warders being the Palestinians who constitute more than half of its citizens and the governments of the Arab states around it. King Hussein cannot make peace alone—and remain King. Faisal of Saudi Arabia, who considers himself guardian of Islam's holy places, will sanction no settlement that leaves Israel in possession of Jerusalem.

SYRIA awaits any excuse to effect a revolution in Jordan. Iraq, uncertain which way to jump, keeps a division of troops in Jordan and Hussein cannot remove them. And on the other side of Israel sits President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, shaky at home but able, if the pretext is half-way valid, to rouse Jordan's Palestinians to revolt, or at least enough of them to do the trick. For the time being, and within limits, Hussein is master of his own house. His army, police and the Bedouins are fiercely loyal to him. He suc-

cessfully weathered what began to look like a threat from the Palestinian firebrands a few weeks ago. They had been riding high on what appeared as a Commando victory—they fought well and bloodied the Israelis—when the Fedayeen Center of Karameh was attacked on March 21. By all reports, Hussein has now brought the situation well under control. But he was obliged to do it by halfway siding with Fedayeen. He was powerless to extinguish them, much as he would have liked to. It is almost universally agreed that the internal political situation at present will permit Hussein to make a peace—if he can get it—within the terms of the Nov. 22, 1967, United Nations resolution. He would agree to demilitarize the West Bank when it is returned to him. All the other substantive issues between Jordan and Israel are relatively easily solved except Jerusalem. He cannot get away with a peace that left the city in Israeli hands, but he could with one that internationalized it. Nor—although the government, the "Establishment" and probably the majority of the rank and file, including the Palestinians, want a real peace and a final one—does he dare negotiate directly with the Israelis or enter a formal peace treaty with them as long as Nasser says no. Government figures and foreign observers think there is a now a chance, perhaps the last good one, for a negotiated settlement. They think that there is even a majority among the Palestinians who are fed up with a paralysis of 20 years, with a captivity to the demagoguery of politicians and the ideology of professional nationalists.

BUT THESE sources are also convinced that time is short and that prospects grow gloomier by the day. For whatever its reasons, Israel's refusal to express willingness to implement the U.N. resolution leaves Hussein with nothing to show for his appeals for pursuit of a negotiated settlement. "It will take an act of enormous political courage to make a moderate settlement even today," a Cabinet Minister declared in an interview. "And tomorrow, the moderates won't have a chance. Israel, all agree, has the power to make Hussein and his government weaker. But Israel is badly mistaken, according to the consensus here, if it believes that that weakening will make the King accede to more favorable terms for Israel—because if he attempts it, he will be overthrown, or worse. In that event, what kind of a govern-

ment would follow? A former Cabinet Minister makes the forecast of a united front of "the left of the left and the right of the right"—the Communists and the extreme Moslem nationalists. Or maybe something else, implicit in the comment of a Palestinian, a graduate in pharmacy from Cairo University, still in his 20s: "This government," he spat out, hands gripping his listener's lapels, "is despicable. You think it fought against Israel in the war? Let me tell you. It used training shells, dummies, on Jerusalem so as not to harm the Israelis." There's only one hope for the Arab World: Egypt. There's only one decent and honest man: Nasser. He's our leader."