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PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS

NEW WEST BANK DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY DISCUSSED

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[Article by Mazin Mustafa: "Development on the West Bank Is a Political Decision Taken by the Arabs Unanimously: New Palestinian Initiative To Obstruct Bush"]

[Text] What is historic about the West Bank positions is that they force all the sides to reorder their priorities, even the Palestinian side itself. This is the secret of the quick and consistent harmony between the Palestinians and their legitimate leadership, the Palestinian Liberation Organization. This time in light of the new elements of the relationship between the PLO and Jordan, after the closing of the doors of Fatah's offices in Amman, King Husayn's announcement of a fifth development plan for the West Bank, and the efforts to appoint Arab mayors, the West Bank's position becomes more insistent on the necessity of deepening the Arab dimension in determining its future, whether through development plans or through international political negotiations that are sure not to be made without the PLO and without its legitimate leadership. As for why the Arab dimension has become more urgent, there is, in the opinion of the local leaders, more than one reason, including:

1. The return of Jordan to the West Bank, whether through development projects or through the reactivating of the administrative activities it had before the occupation, is a political decision of the first order and goes beyond the decision to link the issue with the unity of the legitimate representation of the Palestinians and their right to self-determination. Likewise this decision originates from an Arab legitimacy, for compliance with it means that all the Arab states are responsible for the fate of the occupied territories and that this right is not Jordan's alone.
2. The most important aspects of Arab interests aim at establishing a unified position concerning the urgent national issues of the burning front on the Arab gulf and of the front of the conflict against the American Zionist enemy in Palestine. Logic requires the presence of the PLO at the center of these interests and its absence means nothing more than the relinquishing of the Palestinians' accomplishments of the last 20 years and a concentration on local interests at their expense.

3. What is happening now on the West Bank is a result of the decision to support the Baghdad summit conference for steadfastness and resistance of 1979, when the conference decided to support the steadfastness of the inhabitants under the occupation without a clear strategy that leads to a combination of positive and negative results in such a way that permits many people to fish in muddied waters. The way to clean up these waters is an Arab decision and Arab responsibility. A study on "Ways To Embark upon the Process of National Development in the Occupied Territories" that will be published soon in Jerusalem indicates that the Arab error of the decision of the steadfastness and resistance conference was the setting aside of funds to support and distribute shares among the participating Arab countries without making strategic rules linked to the fate and future of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. The only measure, which the conference contented itself with, was to require that both Jordan and the PLO set up a joint committee to support steadfastness, so that the Jordanian and Palestinian sides were missing a clear plan, while the rest of the Arab countries were themselves relieved of the responsibility of following up and supervising, and had contented themselves with financial participation.

The study, which was presented also as a working paper to the Palestinian National Fund in its meetings in June in Rabat, exposes the painful realities of the results of the strategy of steadfastness from 1979 to 1985, which now form elements of conflict and contention between Jordan and the PLO and which confirm the necessity that they be resolved in a responsible and committed Arab framework from the most precise daily details to the level of national decision.

The first reality is the economic reality which can be summarized by the fact that the funds of Arab support have, with the best intentions, guaranteed the lightening of the burdens of the Israeli occupation. As for how this was done, the study says that the West Bank, until 1977, was considered a source of pure profit to Israel, since it is a market for its products and a source of cheap manpower, inasmuch as an Arab laborer in Israel pays taxes amounting to 40 percent of his wages, which to begin with are half the wages of the Israeli laborer, without getting any return in welfare through social security (education, health, housing). The economies of the Palestinian countryside have partially assisted the worker by reducing the total deficit, in what is called "social restitution of the worker's production" or what allows him to return to work virtually the next day. However, this did not last, since in 1977, it became clear that Israel had stricken the rural-peasant sector and that the "goose that laid the golden egg" needed its own fodder, which means that Israel began to build a system of social security financed by taxes collected from Palestinian workers, taxes that up to that time had gone for the purpose of Israeli military expansion or internal Israeli projects. At this point, Israel found it opportune to allow Arab assistance funds to enter the West Bank, on the condition that how much was spent and how it was spent were made known to the Israeli military government, which undertook to funnel them to the social welfare sector (education, health, housing, municipal services, and social affairs), the sector that the Israelis should have been paying for themselves, since they employ the Arab workers.

The statistical study of the sectors that received the largest portion of the assistance from 1979 to 1983 shows that 125 million dinars were spent in the following way: education, 21 percent; housing, 19 percent; municipal councils, 18 percent; social development (orphanages, charitable associations, needy families), 8.4 percent; or a total of 66.4 percent for social welfare; then 9 percent for agriculture; 3 percent for industry; and 3 percent for electricity.

Add to this the approximately 40 international development agencies (28 of which are American) and the assistance of some of the consulates, which also fund some social welfare but not the creation of a productive economic industrial and social structure that has the goal of separating the economies of the West Bank from Israel and that uses Arab manpower in productive Arab projects.

The second reality is social and in this context, the study relies on all the popular criticisms that are raised in the occupied territories against the method of Arab economic support of steadfastness, for the lack of a clear strategy has led to its becoming a form of "haphazard support," which is an alternative strategy, whereby the most influential and well-connected people on the West Bank, whether on the Jordanian or Palestinian side, are able to use the assistance money and a large sector, especially that of peasants and laborers, is deprived of it, and it is these latter who are most directly harmed by the occupation. The study indicated that the assistance had been concentrated in the urban sector, which reflected a bad distribution of revenue and an increase in the disparities between the rural sector and the city. In addition, wealth was concentrated in the hands of the big tradesman and contractors, who increased their activity, especially in the construction materials trade.

No less important are the criticisms that were directed at the swelling of the bureaucratic sectors in the universities, for example, represented by an increase in their number (six universities) and in the number of specializations, in addition to the assistance to free education, without there being a return, whereby the graduate would fulfill basic needs in his community, without taking into consideration the reality of the occupation and the necessity of confronting it in the future and without the existence of a development plan in which the graduate could be employed after graduation, except for emigration to countries that have oil, which is no longer abundant. This lack of a plan explains the existence of more than 12,000 unemployed college graduates on the West Bank.

In the cases where assistance was given to the rural agricultural sector, it led to an increase in mechanization without creating new employment for manpower. Mechanization in turn imposed a kind of production for export, not for local consumption, since the high cost of production prevents this. In addition, Arabs could not export Arab products from the West Bank, a fact which subjected them once again to the fleecing of Israelis who export to Europe. In addition to this, the process of linking low-income people with housing loans from the joint committee created a new debt gap with these classes. This fact is confirmed by the hunger in the West Bank.

and in Gaza for productive projects and an increase in the negative effects of being linked to the Israeli economy, whether they are from the rise in the cost of living, the increase in inflation, or the falling value of the Israeli currency. Moreover, the occupation has taken control of the basic natural resources of the Arab lands.

In the end, the sectors that have benefitted most from the housing projects are the professionals (lawyers, doctors, engineers, university professors) and this is a very narrow class, the assistance of which does not greatly affect future development for the sake of steadfastness. As for the manufacturing sector, which received 3 percent of the total assistance, its situation is no better than other sectors, since it faces historical structural problems dating from before 1967, and it is more a family craft or business sector than an industrial sector. Where there have been successful models the problem of competition with the Israeli market and obstacles to export to the Arab world have also remained.

With regard to the current political situation on the West Bank, the study indicates that the most serious problem the former strategy of assistance has caused is the creation of a pattern of luxury consumption that is not at all an expression of normal economic development. This is itself embodied in the many luxury items (cars, large houses, imported furniture, expensive foreign-made electric appliances). Israeli statistics indicate, for example, that the number of new cars increased by 60 percent from 1980 to 1983!

The danger of this pattern of luxury consumption that this study points to is its link to socially parasitic classes on the fringe of the movement of steadfastness funds. These classes are extremely fragile because they do not derive from economically productive activity and they express themselves politically with positions that are more fragile and commonplace and less coherent and stable. They no doubt realize that they are a product of a parasitic relationship with external assistance. Therefore they are the classes most eager for the continuation of the external assistance, whatever the political cost, sometimes with the slogan "save what can be saved" and other times with the slogan "develop new capabilities" or "improve living conditions."

In the end, the aforementioned study draws its conclusion that calls for an increase in the Arab commitment to the future of the occupied territories, led by the PLC through an Arab development plan that resolders the West Bank reality, which is behind the accomplishments realized in the Arab world during the former era of oil development, that is missed. This plan can be achieved through unified Arab pressure on the European Common Market, which is currently trying to expand its joint agreements with a number of Arab countries and which brought Spain, for example, into its fold and forced it to recognize Israel without securing in return pressure on Israel for the sake of the issue that was the reason for their break in relations, i.e., the occupied territories; on the contrary, the European Market make a retreat even from the Venice statement issued in 1980.

The study suggests that the Arab states use an economic boycott of the United States in order to pressure it into permitting the implementation of

national development programs that will end by giving Palestinians the right to establish their own independent state.

With regard to recent Palestinian activities in light of the meetings of the executive committee of the PLO in Tunisia, a Palestinian source told AL-HAWADITH that the designing of a total Palestinian development plan has begun and that the PLO will present it to the Arab states to get support for it and to make sure it succeeds. The source said that this issue is at the top of the list of matters for dialogue among the Palestinian factions, as a reflection of the dialogue that currently exists among the wings of these factions within the occupied territories for the sake of preserving the gains of the previous struggle, because agreement on a clear and viable development plan in the occupied territories requires that national unity, both at home and abroad, be achieved. The renewal call of the president of Algeria, Chedli Ben Jedid, for the convening of a conference for Palestinian dialogue and Algeria's willingness to host it once again no doubt reflects the fact that the negotiations have reached a positive stage that the Algerian government believes sufficient to begin the dialogue.

With regard to Arab activity, a Palestinian source said that Abu 'Ummar had sent a number of envoys to various Arab countries in addition to his visits to Iraq and Sudan and his meeting with the secretary general of the Arab League, and that the basic issue was the call for an Arab conference that guarantees that Arab interests be fulfilled in a way that preserves the Palestinians' political and tangible achievements.

This source indicated that the statements of the Palestinian leader to the German newspaper DER SPIEGEL, in which he showed that he was prepared to absent himself from the international conference, if it was agreed to put the occupied territories under the mandate of the United Nations as a transition phase in the process of establishing the Palestinian state, are part of a politically and economically integrated plan on both the Arab and international levels; that Abu 'Ummar will announce this before the arrival of George Bush, the American vice president, in another tour of Jordan, Israel, and Egypt in the beginning of the coming August; and that this plan is based on Arab unanimity, which needs to be affirmed in a summit conference that confirms and supports the decision of the Rabat summit.

The Palestinian source says that Bush's upcoming visit is a practical attempt to consolidate the gains that have occurred in America's and Israel's favor, that were a result of the termination of the Jordanian-Palestinian agreement, and that there is a race with time to present an Arab Palestinian plan that must be completed before the end of the summer.

The question is: Will rain fall from Bush's cloud this summer or...will milk be lost there?

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