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Palestine's man of the moment Faisal Hussein:

We are strong enough to paralyze any solution which will not take our interests into consideration

Hussaini says Baker/Palestinian talks important

By Mark A. Bruzonsky
Special to The Arab American News

JERUSALEM - Faisal Hussein is the Palestinian of the moment.

With a famous father who fought the Zionists and membership in one of the prominent Jerusalem families, Faisal Hussein is the man everyone involved in the Mideast peace process so far has been able to agree upon.

The Israelis are willing to deal with him - although usually at a distance and probably for his own sake - because he's not only a so-called "moderate" interested in making some kind of a deal that might end up being closer to autonomy than independence, but because he lives under their occupation and can be said not to be a member of the PLO.

The Americans need some recognizable Palestinian to talk to, and Hussein with his pleasant and aristocratic manner, fits the bill.

And for whatever reasons Yasir Arafat too is willing, for now at least, to rely on Hussein. For Arafat, the goal of the moment seems to be to portray the Israelis as the ones holding back any peace process; and thus, even with the Americans again refusing to deal with the PLO, having them talk with Hussein who keeps saying he supports the PLO is better than nothing and fits that strategy.

But there's another side to why Faisal Hussein is the Palestinian of the moment. No one is really afraid of him. Arafat doesn't have to fear Hussein will strike out on his own. He lacks the popular base for that, in addition to the will and the smarts. The activists who run the intifada think they have Hussein under control; i.e., he won't do anything of which they seriously

disapprove. The Israelis, and their American friends, need someone to talk to and to be photographed with; so for the time being at least Hussein does that quite nicely. Down the road Hussein could of course become everyone's scapegoat - and he does seem aware of that though willing to take the risks.

Whether or not Hussein really envisions himself someday as a Prime Minister of Palestine, who knows? But one thing is for certain, Faisal Hussein, for all of his charming qualities, is no David Ben-Gurion.

I spoke with Hussein at his modest home in East Jerusalem just a day after Secretary of State Baker was forced to return to the U.S. last month due to his mother's death, thus concluding his third regional shuttle since the war with Iraq.

Q: What is it that makes you and the Palestinian leaders here have expectations that now - when the Palestinians are even weaker than they were before the recent war with Iraq - the diplomatic process the Americans are leading is really an honest peace process that is likely to result in something for the Palestinians?

A: It is not at all whether the Palestinians are weak or strong...

Our stand is coming from something else... necessity... We are necessary to any solution in the Middle East.

Let me put it another way. We are weak so that we cannot oppose any solution. We are strong enough to paralyze any solution which will not take our interests into consideration.

The picture now is like this. Even though, as you say, we are weaker now than before the war, but before the war no one was really interested in solving this problem, no one was worried about the stability of the Middle East. After the war, everyone is interested about the stability of the Middle East; and everyone knows that without solving the Palestinian problem there will be no stability in the Middle East; and everyone knows that without dealing with the Palestinians, with the PLO, there will be no stability in this area.

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Patriotism occupies Arab Americans over holiday

By M. Kay Siblani

DEARBORN - For the first time ever in this, the largest Arab community in the United States, Arab Americans comprised a significant and separate contingent in Michigan's largest, oldest Memorial Day parade. The parade in Dearborn was the city's sixty-seventh, and is known across the state for its two and a half hour length and unusual variety.

This year, the 50,000 spectators witnessed a contingent of proud Arab American veterans enfolded within a larger group of Arab citizens, some of whom were displaying their patriotism and others who modeled the native costumes of their homelands.

Under the leadership of the Lebanese American Club, the community participation in the parade marked its entrance into yet another mainstream activity for a



Arab feud is temporary

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I believe this is why we are saying that we are in a better condition because we are needed.

Q: The last time the Palestinians were involved, the leadership in Tunis was involved and the question of Palestinian nationalism was involved. Now it looks like its only leaders in the occupied territories who are involved and the issue is not Palestinian nationalism but autonomy.

A: That is what others want. But that is not what is going on.

It didn't happen before that the United States sits with a Palestinian delegation or a group as now they are doing with the appointed group, by the PLO, who are holding the views of the PLO, who are taking questions and answers, moving them between the PLO leadership and themselves.

Before this it was Egypt that was doing this...I am talking about direct meetings, continually and consistently between the Americans and the Palestinians. I believe it is the first time.

Q: Well it's maybe the first time because it's the first time you've been willing to do it in this way, the first time you local leaders have been willing to step in and conduct negotiations with the Americans. So that's why it's happening.

A: The consul here (referring to the American Consul General in East Jerusalem), Mr. Baker, and the whole media in this area were waiting, phoning me every day, six and seven times in a day, and my answer was "Tunis did not decide yet, we are waiting for a decision from Tunis."

Then I told them, "OK there is a decision. Who will go there? We are waiting for a list to come from Tunis. And no list will be put before Tunis will give the names."

Q: So, from your point-of-view, sooner or later, you're in a position to say to them "Now it's time for you to deal with Mr. Arafat."

A: Yes.

Q: And from their point-of-view...

A: We are ready for this "dialogue." If it is questions and answers, I am ready to give personal answers. But the moment that they will ask for negotiations...

Q: It's not the way it looks if you sit as I do in Washington. If you sit where I sit it looks like Yasir Arafat was tricked in 1988, it looks like the Americans wasted two years of precious time squandering the gains of the intifada while Ambassador Pelletreau sat with Abed-Rabbo in Tunis, it looks like now the Americans have downgraded relations with Palestinian nationalists and are only talking with leaders in the territories because that's what the Israelis want them to do. And it looks like the stage is being set for Camp David II.



Palestinian leader Faisal Hussaini (l) talks at length with columnist Mark Bruzonsky

Q: What if Mr. Baker comes to you sometime in the future - you've met him now many times and have some rapport with him - what if he comes to you and says: "All right. We've arranged a regional conference. Not an international conference; not the old what we were discussing with U.N. resolutions but something new, a regional conference. And you've always told me that the PLO has designated you and the other Palestinians here as representatives and that you take your directions from the PLO. And now we need you to come to this conference. You know the Israelis won't come if official PLO people come. So we need you to come and get this conference started."

It seems to me it would be very difficult for you to say no.

A: What are we going to discuss there?

Q: Each party has its own agenda. The Israelis certainly aren't going to discuss a Palestinian State!

A: This is what we discussed in the first meeting (with Baker). And the answer was, OK, what do you have?

Q: And he doesn't have very much, does he?

A: No, not yet very much. But given time, he is trying to come with...Everytime he is trying to come with something different, with something new, which we are not ready to accept it.

Q: How do you think he has done? He's been very busy. What kind of progress do you think he's made?

A: If in the first meeting the atmosphere was that the Americans are trying to find a way how to get rid of the PLO, but I can say that the other two

Q: In other words these meetings give you credibility as well as him. And its credibility that you can use at an appropriate time.

A: And this "no" of me it will be more strong after the third meeting than after the first or without any meeting.

Q: OK, this is true. But back to the key issue. My impression is that we are only in the opening phases of a very long and tortuous negotiation. There's no settlement likely to come soon. All kinds of things are going to happen. We're nowhere near a real peace conference. But the political, theatrics of all this have to be gone through because of what's happened in the region. Would you agree?

A: I can say like this. Nothing, long or short, can start without us. Nothing, long or short, can end without us.

Q: But if I were the Israelis I would respond by saying to myself that every year we can delay this we put more settlers, we build more roads, we take more lands, we demoralize more Palestinians.

How much time to do you have? You can't have two years "dialogue" in Tunis; now two years dialogue with Faisal Hussein, then the next President will come and have dialogues with someone else...

A: Maybe it will not take such a long time. Maybe we can be able to come to a conclusion, to a result. When this time. Shamir will say "No" maybe Mr. Baker will not say "here is my phone number".

Q: You think a confrontation can be created between the U.S. and Israel?

look at it from our point-of-view that (if we are) coming back to the jungle let us send the players who can play the game of the jungle.

Q: What do you mean by that?

A: He must sit with someone else.

Q: Who? You said earlier that there wasn't anyone else.

A: Someone with a bigger beard.

Q: A bigger beard? Much bigger?

A: Yes, much bigger...Maybe.

Q: Those people don't want to sit with Baker, they don't want to even sit with guys like me!

A: When they will feel their importance, they will meet. No one in this world is not ready to meet with the other side. No one. I can meet with the other side, in one of two cases: when I feel that I am strong enough to talk to him, or when he will force me to come to talk with him when my hands are tied behind my back. And now, we believe that we are strong enough to meet with them, with the Israelis, with Baker, and to talk and to negotiate and to give and to take.

Q: If you are strong enough to meet with Baker why aren't you also strong enough to welcome him to your country when he comes, to hold a meeting, maybe two meetings, and then to say in front of a press conference something like this: "Mr. Baker is engaged in shuttle diplomacy with all the leaders of the region and we've informed him that, as people who live under an occupation, we cannot be the negotiator under such conditions and I gave him the address and phone number of Mr. Arafat in Tunis and encouraged him, on his way back to America, to make a stop to see our leadership." Why didn't you say something like this?

A: It is the decision of Mr. Arafat to take.

Q: Mr. Arafat doesn't want to meet Mr. Baker anymore?

A: No, it is the decision of him when I will say such a sentence.

Q: You're suggesting that Mr. Arafat doesn't want the Secretary to include the PLO in this round of shuttling?

A: You don't understand me well. In the first meeting with Mr. Baker Mr. Arafat was isolated in Tunis. In the second meeting with Mr. Baker a lot of people, media and diplomatic people, they were ready to go and try to find from Mr. Arafat what is the real relationship between what is going on in Jerusalem and what is going on in Tunis. After the third meeting with Mr. Baker France was so anxious to invite Mr. Arafat and to have a meeting in Paris. If the mother of Mr. Baker had not died, then after this fourth meeting you would have seen Mr. Arafat, again, as in the old time, invited by more than one President and State in Europe, the same ones that were mad at him because of his position during the war.

And the Americans will be forced, and the Israelis will be forced...either to come quickly and accept Europe, telling them that you can enter the conference but not through Mr. Arafat who they are trying to isolate. But the price then is to have an

David II.

A: No, I don't agree that it will go this way. I am looking at it from another point-of-view. They are sitting with the people appointed by the PLO. When I am sitting with Mr. Baker I am no more a local personality, because the decision is not coming from a local decision-maker. The decision is coming from the highest national level within the Palestinian people. Questions and answers - questions from outside and answers to questions come directly from Tunis. And they know this very well, including Mr. Baker...

Q: Don't you worry that Camp David II is what is planned by both the Americans and the Israelis?

A: If we give a chance for them to implement it, they will implement it as Camp David II. But we will not.

Q: You didn't implement Camp David I and they frankly didn't care that you didn't! They simply went on and did what they wanted to do. And still in America Camp David is considered a tremendous success.

A: But it succeeded in the matter of Egypt. It didn't succeed in the Palestinian case. It didn't succeed in the matter of war. The worst wars we experienced after Camp David, not before Camp David. The first time that an Arab capital was occupied it was after Camp David, not before Camp David. The highest casualties of the Israelis were after Camp David, not before.

Q: Yes, but look what the Israelis accomplished. Before Camp David there was an American president who insisted on a Palestinian homeland and who insisted that the Palestinian issue had to be dealt with. After Camp David the Israelis have had more than a decade to increase settlements, to build more roads, to take more lands...

A: There were a lot of changes in this world...

We are no longer living in a two super power world; we have now only one superpower. The other superpower, the one the Palestinians were trying to get aid from to face Israel, now it is bringing aid to Israel to face the Palestinians with the Soviet Jewish emigration.

Q: Yes, the world has changed. The Arabs are now much more divided than before. The Arab regimes are less in support of the PLO than I can remember from before. The Americans are the only superpower.

But the Americans are largely, in Washington, controlled by forces antagonistic to the Palestinians. So whatever Jim Baker says to you the reality is that if Jim Baker comes home and tries to do certain things he is likely to be forced not to. The Congress is completely dominated by the Israeli lobby...everybody knows these things.

A: OK, I think I can explain to you about this. If at a certain moment the United States is going to think like they thought in Camp David...that they can overcome the leadership of the PLO in Tunis, they must do two things to come with such a plan. They must overcome or neglect those in Tunis and also the people here. And people here also are appointed by the PLO; they are part of the beginning of any game. And without us the game will not go on.

rid of the PLO, but I can say that the other two meetings were about how to increase the PLO without angering Israel.

Q: The issue isn't the PLO anyway, the issue is what's going to be negotiated at the table. The Israelis don't want to negotiate a Palestinian state, so they don't want to acknowledge a Palestinian nation, so they don't want to negotiate with the PLO.

A: If there will be a Palestinian delegation from the occupied territories...Ok, I will go tomorrow in a delegation to Washington or to Cairo as the representative of local Palestinians in the occupied territories and we will start discussing. What will happen when we reach difficulties? The Israeli delegation will say I must go back to my government. The American delegation will say I must go and discuss it with Mr. Baker. Where am I going to go? Can you tell me Mr. Baker? Do you have an answer for this question?

So the answer is starting to search for a way that I can go and discuss it with the PLO. I put another question. You (Mr. Baker) are talking about something that I will have - less than government, less than State, more than autonomy. This thing that you are talking about, is it authorized to give the right of return for Palestinians from Kuwait?

Q: Please, tell me what his answer is to this one.

A: The answer: "Excellent question, can anyone help me?"

Q: So, Mr. Ross then says...(Note: Dennis Ross is head of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff and frequently accompanies Mr. Baker to such meetings).

A: Resolution 194 is solving this problem. He (Mr. Baker) then says: "Excellent question, excellent answer." But I say then no. 194 is talking about the right of return of the Palestinians to Israel; I am talking about the right of return to Palestine. The right of return to Israel is there; and we are ready to negotiate about the implementation, not the right. How to implement this right? - compensation; return back; how many; how; when. This is what means the right of return in 194 resolution. But the right of return for the Palestinians from Kuwait and Lebanon and other parts, it is non-negotiable. It is a right, and I would like to know if this creation you are calling less than state has this right or not.

Q: And I bet they said they'd have to think about that.

A: Yes.

Q: They've only been thinking for 20 years... I hear what you are saying, and I understand what you are saying, but doesn't this all seem like political theatrics?

A: You can bluff part of the people all the time. You can bluff part of the time all the people. But you can't bluff all the people all the time.

Q: The Americans are pretty good at it though...

A: If he has one plus because he is sitting beside me, I will have one plus because I am sitting beside him. If he will say, "Look, I am sitting with this Palestinian." So this person became a little bigger than before. So if he will say that I will accept something and I am not ready to accept it I will say to him "no". After all this propaganda, my "no" is stronger than my no before I was sitting with him.

and Israel:

A: I believe there must be a sort of confrontation because if there will be no confrontation so it means for everyone that there is no new system in this world, no new order, that we are still there in the same jungle. And if the name of the game is not international legitimacy, if the name of the game is no new world order, if the name of the game is the jungle, then I will say to Mr. Baker "excuse me, but I must send another player".

Q: But look at the timing? We are almost in mid-1991. In a few months we go into the American election cycle. You know how American politicians are. One after the other they're going to talk about Saddam Hussein, and Yasir Arafat, and they're going to talk about this and that. Even an honest President, even an Administration like the Carter one that really wanted to do something honestly...

I mean the people in this Administration...sure they send you the nice guys to talk to you. They send you Mr. Baker and he smiles and talks to you, and they send you Mr. Ross. But Larry Eagleburger is their top political official in the State Department and he's been working with the Israelis and the Jewish lobby for years and years - and the same with Brent Scowcroft at the N.S.C. These Kissinger people are very strong in Washington.

A: Maybe you can look at it in this way. But we

trying to isolate. But the price then is to have an international conference which is the European demand. Or alternatively the Europeans will find that the only side who is ready to insist that Europe must be in the discussions is the Palestinians and so they will develop their relations with the PLO and that is what is happening now.

Now the PLO is not isolated, Arafat is not isolated...

Q: Really? Cut off from the Arab regimes, cut off from the money...

A: Egypt now is searching for a way to deal with the PLO...

Q: That's been going on for 20 years. And Saudi Arabia?

A: The enemy of Saudi Arabia is not the PLO. The real enemy is King Hussein. He changed his name, his title, to Al Sherif at the beginning of the crisis.

Q: If he's the enemy of the Saudis, is he your friend?

A: No. He is the main enemy of the Saudis, not the PLO. And the Saudis now decided to go and rebuild their relations with King Hussein so they will also rebuild their relations with us.

Q: So you think this is all a temporary little feud among the Arabs.

A: Yes.



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