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Author(s): Sheila Ryan and Joe Stork

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U.S. and Jordan: Thrice - Rescued Throne

by SHEILA RYAN and JOE STORK

On the afternoon of November 28 last, in the lobby of the Sheraton Hotel in Cairo, a volley of revolver shots rang out. Wasfi Tal, the Prime Minister of Jordan, fell dead.

When the news of Wasfi Tal's assassination reached Lebanon, the Palestinian refugees in the camps there fired rifles into the air in a traditional gesture of celebration. The dead man shared a reputation with King Hussein as "the butcher of Amman." He was the king's most constant counselor during August and September 1970, when Hussein threw his army against the Palestinian population in Amman and the refugee camps. Appointed Prime Minister when the fighting was over, Tal formally took charge of the monarch's continuing political and military offensive to crush the Palestinian resistance forces operating in the country.

When the news of Wasfi Tal's assassination reached the San Clemente White House, Presidential Press Secretary Ron Ziegler called it "disturbing news." While Jordan was a British colony, Wasfi Tal had served as a British military intelligence agent. Many Arabs say that when the U.S. replaced Britain as the main prop of the regime, Tal likewise transferred to the CIA. Whatever the details of his relationship to the U.S. apparatus in Amman, Tal's hardline policies against the Palestinians in Jordan ably served American interests by crushing the main source of "instability" in the Middle East.

Architect of Repression

Tal's central role in eliminating the main threat to "peace" in the area was ironically confirmed by the reaction to his death in Amman, where he was hated most. There were no outward signs of jubilation. The posture of mourning among the Palestinian population shops shuttered, black-bordered pictures of Tal in windows - was a monument to the success of his repressive policies. In

Jordan all expression of resistance has been driven underground. The desert prison of Jaufe is filled with fedayeen and militia. Executions of Palestinian militants are routinely announced. Bedouin patrols arbitrarily shoot people in the streets. A recent dispatch to the Manchester Guardian reports:

One hears more and more stories of people who just disappear for months at a time - they usually show up again, released, sentenced or expelled from the country. Occasionally it seems, they die under interrogation.*

Black September Movement

Tal was shot by four Palestinians who said they were members of the Black September movement, an organization of dissident militants in Fateh which emerged in July 1971, after the last fedayeen detachments were driven from northern Jordan in a final series of battles with the Jordanian Army. The Black September movement was a reaction against the failure of the resistance strategy in Jordan, specifically the policy of retreat and reconciliation which characterized the Fateh leadership's attitude toward Hussein's regime since September 1970.

This division added a new dimension to the basic split among the resistance forces as a whole, represented by Fateh on the one hand and the Marxist-oriented Popular Front and Democratic Popular Front on the other. The slogans of these latter groups (e.g., "The road to Tel Aviv is through A Amman") and actions such as the hijackings of August 1970 expressed the tenet that a struggle in the Israeli-occupied territories and a struggle against the Arab regimes should be waged simultaneously, and that Palestine could be liberated only in the context of social revolution in the surrounding Arab states.

* Manchester Guardian Weekly. Jan.1,1972

The left groups, as they moved toward Marxism from an Arab nationalism best typified by Nasser, came to define the enemies of the Palestinian people as Zionism, imperialism and Arab reaction. In Jordan, this meant the overthrow of the monarchy, the seizure of state power, and the creation of "liberated zones."

Fateh, on the other hand, restricted the definition of the enemy to Israel. They inveighed against imperialism but avoided discussion of the ties between the U.S. and client regimes such as Hussein's. Since September 1970, many Fateh cadre moved closer to the position of the Marxist groups toward Hussein, but the dominant line within the leadership has consistently sought to avoid confrontation with the Jordanian regime and other Arab states. Fateh slogans like "Revolution until Victory," along with a stated policy of independence from the regimes, have been the wellsprings of the dissident factions: whether or not the slogans were "correct," they expressed and nourished the belief that armed struggle, even against the Arab regimes, was the only means of securing Palestinian self-determination.

The Road to Jeddah...

This debate most recently came to a head over the issue of whether the resistance should attend talks of reconciliation with Hussein which were held in the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah this fall, sponsored by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Both "progressive" Egypt and "conservative" Saudi Arabia have reasons for wanting a contained commando movement that can be turned on and off against Israel at their discretion.

For the resistance leadership, not to attend would mean loss of funds and freedom of movement. Despite the opposition of left groups and Fateh dissidents, the Palestine Liberation Organization representatives were sent to Jeddah. The talks were recessed in November so that participants could attend Arab strategy meetings in Cairo. It was this occasion which brought Wasfi Tal to the Sheraton Hotel in Cairo. Since Tal's death Hussein has refused to resume talks with the resistance.

...Is Through Washington

The Jeddah talks served to provide some legitimacy in the eyes of non-Palestinian Arabs to Hussein's regime after his distinctly unpopular campaign against the Palestinian people. As such they represent the most recent phase of the American strategy that was launched in the summer of 1970 with the promulgation of the Rogers Plan. By proposing a cease-fire in order to implement the UN resolution calling for Israeli withdrawal to the pre-June 1967 borders in return for formal Arab recognition of Israel, the United States called upon Jordan (and Egypt) to get control of the situation vis-a-vis the Palestinian movement in order to secure their state interests (Israeli withdrawal).

In Jordan this strategy did not work by virtue of its persuasiveness, but only by the military and economic support provided through the years to the Jordanian regime. For one who was in Amman during the bloody days of September 1970, it is hard to escape the conclusion that Hussein is the Thieu of the Middle East. When the cease-fire finally came after ten days of death and destruction, the streets of Amman were literally knee-deep in discarded empty ammunition crates from the royal tanks. This trash was all stamped "Made in U.S.A." and here and there a red-white-and-blue emblem announced that the shells were the gift of the "People to People" program.

At a superficial glance, it would seem that U.S. policy is at cross-purposes with itself. The U.S. arms and subsidizes Hussein; the U.S. arms and subsidizes Israel. Is the U.S. arming Hussein to defend him against Israel, and arming Israel to attack Hussein?

The U.S. is arming Hussein to defend him not from Israel but for Israel. The contingency planning in September 1970 between the U.S., Israel and Jordan demonstrates this. A scenario was worked out in non-stop consultations in the White House on September 21. Among the principals in the drama in the President's Situation Room were the Israeli and Jordanian ambassadors, along with Henry

Kissinger, Richard Helms from the CIA,
David Packard from the Defense Department
and Admiral Moorer from the Joint Chiefs.*



David Levine in the N.Y. Review of Books
Oct. 7, 1971

It was agreed that if the King appeared to be losing to the resistance, Israel would attack the Syrian tanks which had entered northern Jordan to assist the fedayeen. According to the Israeli Chief of Staff, Haim Bar-Lev, his troops were ready "... to take important steps to crush the fedayeen if Hussein does not succeed in doing so himself."** The U.S Sixth Fleet, which was steaming toward the area, would protect Israel's rear and flank from Egyptian or Soviet a attack from the Suez Canal front. Airborne troops from the Eighth Infantry Division

would parachute into the Amman airport in a "holding operation" until reinforcements stationed in West Germany or the States could arrive. According to a recent article in Military Review, "perhaps the most demonstrative individual act was the rather ostentatious dispatch of a surveillance plane from the US 6th Fleet to Tel Aviv '...with the unconcealed mission of exchanging air-target information.'"***

American and Israeli collusion to save Hussein's throne took a form more concrete than a contingency plan. There was only one air route to Jordan which did not require the consent of an Arab government: flight over Israel, for which permission was granted. American intelligence had estimated before the fighting started that Hussein's forces had about three weeks worth of ammunition. They expended so much firepower in their attempt to exterminate the Palestinians that these estimates were quickly revised sharply downward, and the rearming process began before the ink was even dry on the truce agreement. David Packard of the Defense Department remarked, after the extent of the slaughter became known, that Hussein's troops had demonstrated what American-armed and American-trained troops could do, and that their re-equipment was a high U.S. priority.****

Why Jordan?

The U.S. attraction to Jordan is strategic rather than directly economic. Jordan itself possesses no known exploitable resource of tempting magnitude, such as Saudi Arabia's oil. The U.S. policy there, built on foundations laid by the British, has been to use Hussein and his state apparatus to keep the Palestinian refugees who make up 65% of the population in check and pre-

* New York Times, October 8, 1970

** Military Review, September 1971 ,p.46.

*** Ibid. The quote within the quote is from Joseph Alsop, International Herald Tribune, Sept.26-7, 1970.

****New York Times, Oct.14, 1970 and Washington Star, September 26, 1970.

vent the emergence of a radical-nationalist state that would threaten either Israel or the reactionary but profitable regimes in Saudi Arabia or along the Persian/Arab Gulf.

When Britain first achieved hegemony in the Middle East after World War I, then Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill installed Abdullah, Hussein's grandfather, to rule the strategically important territory east of the Jordan River. Abdullah's brother, Feisal, had been installed in Iraq to disguise the reality of British control there. The French had taken over Syria and Lebanon. Palestine, of course, was being administered by the British and colonized by the Zionists. All of these operations were actively resisted by the Arabs in those territories, and the area which became Transjordan served as a sort of no-man's-land from which guerrilla raids and forays were organized and led by those resisting European rule. Moreover, Abdullah had to be enlisted to rule that area for the British lest he become the focal point and leader of an organized Arab insurgency.*

Given the opportunity to rule with a lavish subsidy from London, Abdullah accepted. British soldiers helped build an army, the famed Arab Legion, to consolidate the monarchy and maintain security. The soldiers were drawn primarily from the Bedouin, the nomadic tribesmen of southern Jordan, whose economy based on caravan transport was destroyed with the advent of the Europeans with their railroads, highways and airports.**

This had immense long-range significance. Even today, 75 to 80% of the Bedouin male youth go into the army. They have no alternative, since virtually nothing has been done to develop productive opportunities for the tribes. Because the Jordanian Army is a professional one, with soldiers serving twenty-year hitch, its impact on East Bank culture has been enormous. The army is the peasant's and tribesman's means of livelihood: the king is his benefactor who supplies all his needs.

Transjordan's Special Utility

Even in the early days of the Palestine Mandate there was a prominent notion among the British that Transjordan could have some special utility beyond that of

providing security along the common border. Sir Alec Kirkbride, a British political agent in Palestine and Transjordan, recorded in his memoirs that Transjordan's "remote and underdeveloped areas which lay to the east of the River ... were intended to serve as a reserve of land for use in the resettlement of Arabs once the National Home for the Jews in Palestine, which /the British government/ were pledged to support, became an accomplished fact." The British socialist leader Harold Laski was a close friend of Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann. In 1931 he wrote to Justice Felix Frankfurter in the United States that Palestine's "economic problem" seemed insoluble "unless the British Government uses Transjordan for Arab settlement."

The Zionists were interested all along in using Transjordan for their own settlement, but most of the movement reconciled itself to the Mandate area after the British creation of Transjordan. The principle of the transfer of Palestine's Arab population had been articulated often among Zionist strategists. A good example comes from a recently published letter of Chaim Weizmann which states that

There can be no doubt that the picture in the minds of those who drafted the Balfour Declaration and the mandate was that of a Jewish Commonwealth in Palestine. Palestine was to be a Jewish State, in which the Arabs would enjoy the fullest civil and cultural rights; but for the expression of their own national individuality in terms of statehood, they were to turn to the surrounding Arab countries.***

* The best account of British motivation and strategy is Arnold Klieman, Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World (Baltimore, 1971).

** One of the first applications of air power against popular insurgency was by the British in Iraq. For references, see Ibid.

***Alec Kirkbride, A Crackle of Thorns (London, 1956), p. 19; and Erskine Childers, "The Wordless Wish" in Abu Lughod, ed. The Transformation of Palestine (1971)

In the Palestinian peasant rebellion of 1936-9 against British occupation and Zionist colonization, the British used Abdullah's Arab Legion to patrol the Jordan River against gun-running to the rebels, and Abdullah cooperated by outlawing the possession of firearms in the border areas.

In 1948, when the state of Israel was established in Palestine, the Arab Legion moved into the West Bank and occupied it for Abdullah, bringing its Palestinian inhabitants and the refugees who crowded there under the rule of the British-controlled monarch. The occupation of the West Bank by the Arab Legion was based on an understanding between its British commander, Sir John Glubb, and the British Prime Minister, and on an agreement reached in more than 15 secret talks between Abdullah and Zionist leaders, including Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan. Abdullah was assassinated by a Palestinian in 1951, and after a brief period his young grandson Hussein was installed on the throne.

leading up to that crisis marded the transfer of the imperial role in the Middle East from Great Britain to the United States.

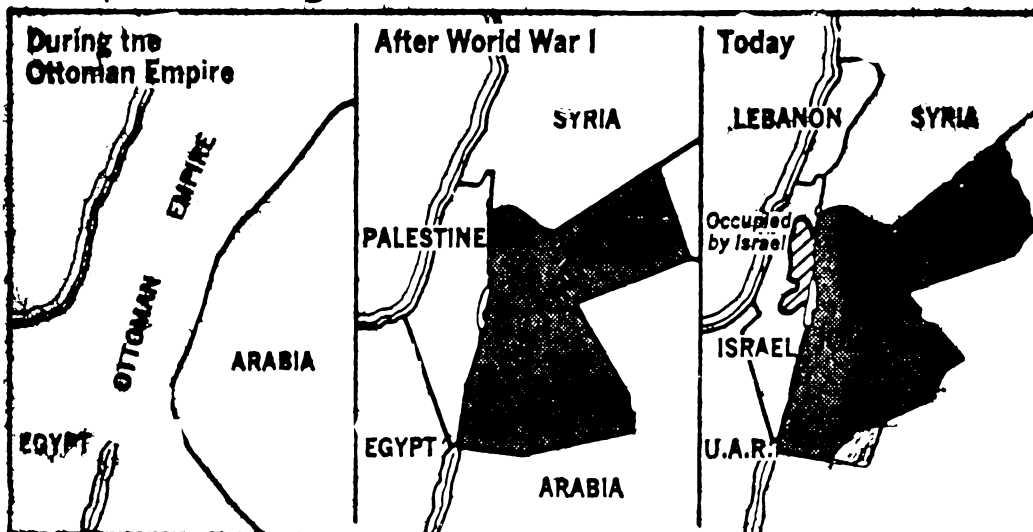
The Eisenhower - Dulles policy of signing up allied and client countries into anti-Communist alliances went under the name of the Baghdad Pact in the Middle East. Britain was assigned the job of securing Jordan's adherence, and in December 1955 the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Gerald Templar, was despatched to Amman with offers to revise the 1946 treaty, which unequivocally asserted British control of Jordanian affairs, and increase the subsidy to the throne. "Official reaction," predictably, was favorable. Then negotiations were upset, according to one account, by "thunder from the streets, toppling two governments within a week... The 'old reliable' leaders and the young king could no longer control the situation... local nationalists and the 'mob' sounded the knell of British tutelage in Amman."* The king was forced to dismiss Glubb as commander of the army. The notorious treaty

Guns & Dollars: Act One

April 1957 was the first occasion when Hussein's regime was saved by a combination of American guns and dollars. The events

* John C. Cambell, Defense of the Middle East, rev. ed. (New York, 1960), p.59. This study was sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, of which the author was study director at the time. All other quotes and references concerning the 1957 period are from this book.

Evolution of the Kingdom of Jordan



of 1946 and concomitant British base rights were soon terminated.

Elections were held in October 1956, resulting in the victory of nationalists and leftists under the leadership of 'Sulieman Nabulsi, who became Prime Minister. Nabulsi was regarded in the West as being pro-Nasser, at a time when Nasser was regarded as some combination of Adolph Hitler and The Red Menace. The Suez Canal had been nationalize, and within weeks Israel, France and Britain launched their tripartite invasion of Egypt. The United States took a public stand against the invasion, along with the Soviet Union. As if to emphasize that this presaged no sharp reversal in American policy, in January 1957 the Eisenhower Doctrine was issued to assure Middle Eastern client governments of U.S. support in the event that they were menaced by International Communism.

In February 1957 Hussein declared his vigilant opposition to International Communism, thus qualifying himself for U.S. assistance. In April he denounced, then dismissed, his Prime Minister, "with the support only of his loyal Bedouin troops and a few veteran politicians." On April 24, Eisenhower and Dulles issued an official statement that referred to the independence and integrity of Jordan as "vital." The next day the Sixth Fleet was ordered to the eastern Mediterranean. Several days later Washington announced an emergency grant of \$10 million to the monarchy.

All this represented a considerable commitment on the part of the United States. According to an analysis sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, the story had a "happy ending": "...the young king defeated his enemies, arrested Nabulsi, dissolved the Parliament and the political parties, and established martial law." The Council study concludes that "the American stand was dramatic and effective... The outcome was a setback for President Nasser, although he had not fully committed his prestige to the overthrow of Hussein..." It seems that the Council itself was not convinced by this serendipity, for it went on to say that the U.S. "had placed itself in a position hardly distinguishable from that which the British had just been forced to relinquish. Henceforward Jordan was to

be kept alive by American instead of British guarantees, by dollars instead of pounds. Would America be any more successful over the long run in combatting Arab nationalism by these methods than the British?"

Another \$10 million was dispatched soon afterward "in recognition of the steps taken by his majesty... to maintain the integrity of the nation." United States assistance, which had previously been subsidiary to the British, amounted to \$33 million between 1951 and 1956. From 1957 to 1961, over five times that amount was granted under the Mutual Security Act, plus some \$50 million worth of surplus food. The most pressing needs of the regime were for food and lodging (mainly allocated to the army) and internal security. Even U.S. aid to the refugees through UNRWA was allocated under the Mutual Security Act. According to a State Department memo presented to the Senate in 1958, "failure of UNRWA efforts to meet the minimum requirements of the refugee needs would, in all probability, cause civil unrest which could have far-reaching political repercussions in Jordan." *

US aid continued at a high level until 1967, averaging around \$40 million per year, most of this under the category of "supporting assistance." This is thinly disguised military aid which has gone mainly to South Viet Nam, Laos, Korea, Jordan and the Dominican Republic.

Guns & Dollars: Act Two

The second opportunity for a "dramatic and effective" American stand came in November 1966, when "thunder in the streets" again threatened to topple Hussein. Violent demonstrations broke out, especially on the West Bank, after an Israeli attack on the border village of Es Samu which, by U.N. figures, left 18 Arabs dead, 134 wounded, and 125 houses, a school and a clinic in ruins. The demonstrations approached the dimensions of an uprising, demanding that people be permitted to defend themselves against Israeli attacks. The insurgents called for arming of the border villages, and a lifting of the government ban on the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The State Department responded quickly with a statement that it was considering a request for an arms shipment to Hussein - not for the actual defense of his country against Israel, but to reinforce his authority. The New York Times headlined its account *

New U.S. Arms May Go To Jordan In Wake Of Attack. Goal Would Be To Bolster Hussein Regime. U.N. Asked To Condemn Attack." The story went on to say that the major American concern was with the undermining of Hussein's authority. Their remedy was to demonstrate continuing American support of the regime. "There was no indication among Administration officials that with additional military aid Jordan could be made a match for the Israeli army."

The army is Jordan's main industry, main employer and main consumer. Between 1957 and 1967, the U.S. supplied 40% of the total Jordanian government expenditure. Eleven per cent of the U.S. aid went directly to the army. Eighty per cent poured into the general coffers of the Jordanian government (i.e., a New York bank account, to pay U.S. arms manufacturers).

Act Three (continued)

Hussein got at least \$30 million from Nixon after a visit to Washington in December 1970. This wasn't enough, and the king applied for more in the fall to carry him thorough 1971. It still goes to the same place. According to Bill Wooley, the acting head of the AID program in Jordan, in an interview in June 1971: "The Jordan military gets a slice of everything that comes into the country. Where its funds actually come from is just a bookkeeping

measure... We know full well that whether you say the money that's going to the army is coming from internal revenues or foreign assistance just depends on the way you keep the books..." The sums mentioned by the way, do not take into account the value of military equipment given directly, a figure which has been kept classified by Washington.

U.S. aid to Jordan did not cease entirely between 1967 and 1970. The Food for Peace Program, which functions primarily to provide Hussein with blandishments for the tribes continued. Some of the food is sold, to provide funds then used to purchase arms. This "development" aid generally facilitates the continued development of good relations between Hussein and the tribal sheikhs rather than general development of the economy for the benefit of the people.

A year ago, for example, the first stop on a Jordanian Department of Agriculture tour to demonstrate programs for settling the tribespeople was the home of Faisal Ben Jazzi, head of one of the two most powerful tribes in southern Jordan, and a member of Parliament at the appointment of the king. The sheikh's home is located on the desert highway. The proceeds from the Food for Peace program, the reporters were told, paid for the fountain in front of the sheikh's home, which sends streams of water yards high into the dry desert air. Nearby, the Department of Agriculture is developing a farm for the sheikh, and one next door for his cousin, a general. At some distance in back of the sheikh's home,

The Jordanians are learning from the Israelis about dealing with the fedayeen. The Israelis blow up the houses of those who help the fedayeen, and now the Jordanians are doing that too. The Israelis refused to be put in an awkward position by women's and children's demonstrations. They went in and beat them up, and soon you didn't see so many women's and children's demonstrations. And the Jordanians are following a similar policy. When about seventy women tried to demonstrate against Rogers' visit down at the Hussein Mosque, the police just went in and beat them with truncheons.

Hume Horan, head of the political section of the U.S. Embassy in Jordan, interviewed in June 1971.

members of his tribe are settled in shanties. At some unspecified date in the future, the Department of Agriculture may provide irrigated land "over there," said the official with a vague gesture toward a stretch of desert.

The other aid program which continued was the Public Safety program. In June 1970 the U.S. moved many AID officials out of Amman, and failed to replace others when their tours of duty were completed. The fedayeen's takeover of Amman and much of Jordan made it unsafe for non-essential personnel (by June 1971, families of embassy staff began to return). The only "essential AID official left in Jordan was Joseph Lynch, the Public Safety advisor. He is responsible for maintaining liason with the Jordanian police forces, to provide training and advice. Lynch explained his role in an interview in June 1971:

In the long run, having an army in town really isn't the way to do things. They don't have the training to do police work. They don't know how to deal with civilians. There are inevitably some excesses, and this keeps things stirred up. So the sooner the police can take over, the better...

Since 1964, more than 65 Jordanian police officers have received training in Washington at the International Police Academy. According to Lynch, "the courses at the International

International Police Academy have a problem-solving approach. We don't say that we have all the answers. But we think it's useful for some of these people in Jordan to talk to people in Latin America, where they also have insurgency problems and talk about how these things should be dealt with..."

A 1965 graduate of an "executive training" course at the Academy is Ma'an Abu Nuwar, who was chief of internal security in Jordan for a number of years. Now he heads the Department of Moral Guidance - i.e., propaganda - a post from which he whips up tribal animosities and religious fervor against the Palestinians and the resistance. In an interview in November 1970 he outlined how he countered "the new wave of Marxism" represented by pictures of left-

wing resistance leaders with copies of quotations by Mao Tse-Tung:

We printed up 60,000 copies of the Koran and dished them out to all the Moslem soldiers, and pretty soon we hope to dish out copies of the Bible to all the Christian soldiers. Now every soldier has his identity card in one pocket, the Koran in the other. We made them pocket size so they can carry the Koran like the Marxists carry the Red Book. I think the army is immune to this Marxism now.

Later he said that "our Marxists and the Israeli Marxists get together. They say they want to build a secular democratic state, where all three religions will live in peace. It's too bad that the Marxists are the ones getting together, not us conservatives. ...I imagine that in 30 or 40 years we and the Israelis might be fighting our Marxists together."

Meanwhile, Jordan's potential usefulness to the United States in its attempt to maintain hegemony in the Middle East and South Asia received further testimony in the "Anderson Papers," the secret memos from U.S. strategy sessions during the India - Pakistan war in December. The Washington Special Action Group, the same high-level group that planned out the U.S. and Israeli roles in the September 1970 crisis in Jordan, considered a proposal by Henry Kissinger to transfer arms and aircraft from Jordan to Pakistan. Kissinger's tactic was not acted upon because it could not have affected Pakistan's fate significantly. Had the outcome lay more in the balance, it likely would have been tried. Jordan certainly wouldn't have objected, in light of the fact that Pakistani advisors had directed the tactical operations of the Jordanian air force against tanks from Syria in September 1970. *

The Nixon Administration has requested \$40 million in military assistance for Jordan this year, part of a \$120 million, 3-year package. In a Senate speech which cited Israel, Jordan and South Korea as noteworthy examples of the success of U.S. military assistance, Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kansas) assured

* Washington Post, Dec. 21, 1971

his colleagues that the F-5 aircraft and tanks to be provided would pose no threat to the Phantoms being supplied to Israel.

Hussein, with continuing American and Israeli help, remains precariously imposed upon the Palestinians. The assassination of Wasfi Tal, and more recently the purge of the Jordanian armed forces, including a former chief of staff and the commander of the air force, reveal the tenuous character of his success.*

*Washington Post, Dec. 21, 1971

*The pleasure of your company
is requested at the*
state of israel
commendation dinner

at which
The Honorable
RONALD REAGAN
Governor of the State of California
will be accorded the
Medallion of Valor of the State of Israel
by
His Excellency
ABBA EBAN
Minister for Foreign Affairs, State of Israel

Saturday, September 25, 1971

Century Plaza Hotel

Reception: 6:30 pm

Dinner: 7:30 pm

Black tie

R. S. V. P.

Governor Reagan was honored at an Israel Bonds dinner for signing a bill permitting a state-controlled finance company to purchase Israel Bonds.

From the Manchester Guardian (weekly),

January 8, 1972

UK troops fighting rebels in Oman

by Anthony McDermott and Peter Harvey

British troops in Oman are playing an important role in leading Government forces against highly organised bands of guerrillas in the Dhofar area. Two Special Air Service men have been killed and four wounded in clashes with the rebels in recent months, it has been disclosed in London.

Twenty-two members of the SAS — with their sky-blue berets — have been in Oman for 14 months. All are experts in desert warfare and all speak Arabic and a number of tribal dialects fluently.

Their official function is to advise the Sultan's troops battling against Communist guerrillas in Southern Oman but, as the civil war has steadily worsened over the past year, there is a growing suspicion that the SAS men are fighting the rebels.

This apart, there is no doubt that the SAS troopers frequently lead Government forces into rebel areas "searching for realistic training conditions."

The SAS men killed were: Sergeant John Moores, aged 27, of Wembley, who died in October, and Trooper Christopher Loid, 22, of Ringwood, Hants, who died in November. Cause of death in both cases was given as gunshot wounds.

There was a major campaign against the Dhofar rebels at the beginning of November. At the time, reports from Oman indicated that between 125 and 500 rebels were killed, with the loss of about 34 Government troops in battles in the southern sector.

Officials are secretive concerning the presence of the SAS and the civil war. The Sultan, Qabous bin Said, is reluctant to admit that he is dependent on outside forces to lead his troops, and the Oman Government is trying to play down the size of the rebel problem.

But it was learned this week that the British soldiers have figured prominently in all major actions against the rebels. And they are also responsible for most of the intelligence and military planning of the war.

The Dhofar guerrillas — thought to number about 2,000 to 3,000 — are trained by the Chinese, and use Chinese and Russian rifles, machine guns, rocket launchers and bazookas.

They are led by a group of about 400 veteran rebels, all of whom have received insurgency training from Chinese instructors and

who pass on their expertise to new recruits.

The guerrillas are believed to have bases along the frontier between Oman and the pro-Peking People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. There are large numbers of Chinese engineers in the Yemen, where Peking has a large road-building operation.

There are a number of militant Left-wing groups operating in the Gulf area, and all are linked by the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Arab Gulf. Western intelligence believes the organisation is financed directly by Peking, and it is feared that its activities could cause immense harm to oil supplies for the West.

Within the Sultanate there are signs of a political battle. On Saturday Sultan Qabous said that the Prime Minister, Tariq bin Taimour, had resigned and that he had taken over his duties.

An acting Prime Minister, Assem Jamali, was, however, also appointed. On Oman Radio the Sultan said that the Prime Minister was resigning for health reasons and that he had ordered "some ministerial changes to be made in our Government for the benefit of all."

The Sultan abolished the Ministry of Information, Social Affairs, and Labour. The Ministries of Justice were amalgamated, and new Ministries were formed for land affairs, communications, and labour. A new Department for the Government Adviser for Internal Affairs was also formed. Appointments were announced to all the positions.

There have been considerable differences between Tariq and the Sultan. Qabous appointed Tariq, his uncle, to be Prime Minister in August, 1970, shortly after overthrowing his father.

The differences stem from the gap in their ages — the Sultan is in his early thirties. Inter-family disputes which dogged the old Sultan's reign still persist, and are reflected in the differences between Tariq and the younger Sultan.

Qabous is Sandhurst-educated, while his uncle comes from a more traditional background. Since Tariq became Prime Minister, there have been wide differences on how the country should be run.

Arab sources said there had been a prolonged power conflict between the two men, and Sultan Qabous had won.