

Can Jordan make peace?

It's time Hussein got serious about his peace rhetoric

Seven years ago, I tried to go from Jordan to Israel where I was supposed to meet my wife. My plan was to go across the Allenby Bridge, which spans the Jordan River, only I could not. My papers were not in order and so, knowing I would be late, I lifted the hotel phone to call my wife in Jerusalem. It was then that I learned the difference between Jordanian rhetoric and reality. Israel, I was more or less told, did not exist.

The operator said a call to Israel was illegal. Click. I called the telex operator and said I wanted to send a message to Israel. There was another gasp. Impossible, Sir, she said. It was illegal. She, too, hung up quickly. I went down to the lobby to see the travel agent. I said I wanted to fly to Greece and then on to Israel. She said she could book me to Greece but not to Israel. It was... you guessed it — illegal.

The next day, having booked a flight to Cairo, Egypt, I drove into the Jordanian desert to the Roman ruins at Petra and then went over to the Dead Sea. You could see Israel from where I stood and, if you were on the Jordan River, you could throw a stone across or maybe yell to someone. But you could not call and you could not telex. And you could not get information on a flight.

I recall those days from time to time because Jordan always is described as a moderate Arab government that wants only peace with Israel. And I recalled it just the other day when Shimon Peres, the prime minister of Israel, spoke before the United Nations. He outlined a peace plan. He said he would, in his

own way, accept the Jordanian suggestion for an international peace conference. He said he would talk with the Jordanians directly at any time. What was Jordan's response? Its delegation was not in the hall. It had walked out.

It is, I grant you, a small event in the scheme of things. It is, moreover, the sort of thing all Arab states except Egypt routinely do. Joined by some fellow travelers in the international community of Israel haters (Nicaragua, for one), these countries greet any speech by a representative of Israel by shuffling off to the lounge. This is a United Nations way of saying drop dead.



Richard Cohen

Routine or not, it's time Jordan behaved as if it were serious about its own rhetoric. There is something absurd about a country that pleads for \$1.8 billion in U.S. arms on a pledge of never using the missiles, planes or other weapons in an offensive war against Israel, and then displays an inability to stay in its seats when the prime minister of Israel goes before an international forum to make a speech. That sort of action, besides being just plain rude, indicates that Jordan does not have the courage of its own convictions. It will, as usual, go along with the crowd.

There is historical precedence for

this analysis. Moderate or not, Jordan nevertheless went to war against Israel in 1967. The reason Israel now occupies East Jerusalem and the West Bank is not because it attacked Jordan, but because it was the other way around. Neither Jerusalem nor the West Bank would be issues today, and dilemmas for Israel, if King Hussein had been able to keep his finger off the trigger. As they say in the Old West, he drew first.

Where and when Israel and its enemies finally sit down to talk peace is, of course, important. But the important condition for talking is mutual confidence. The question for the Arabs is whether any Israeli prime minister can find it politically possible to do what has to be done: swap occupied territories for a guarantee of peace. And the question for the Israelis is whether an Arab government, Jordan in this case, really intends to recognize Israel and let it live in peace. Since Jordan is, by the grace of God and the imagination of the British Colonial Office, a kingdom, the ultimate question has to do with Hussein himself: Does he have the courage to cut a deal?

History awaits the answer to that question. But it is hard to be optimistic when the Jordanian U.N. delegation steps on the peace process by marching out of the United Nations at the appearance of an Israeli speaker. It was petty, rude, insulting and, above all, childish. War is for kids. Peace is for adults. It's time Jordan grew up.

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Cohen writes an editorial column for the Washington Post.

\$8,000 later, Sadie still praying for a husband

ROYKO from Page 4

Well, what about her marital goals? Is anything cooking on your end?

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tives."

You have a code of ethics. "Ours is a reputable ministry. And believe me, that woman is speaking with a forked tongue. She is engaging in a smear campaign. Goodbye."

So it looks like Sadie is out of luck. And it's a shame. For \$8,000, if that's

what she really sent, she ought to get a new husband.

And at those prices, the preacher should have made sure the guy had his own teeth.

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Royko is a Pulitzer Prize winning columnist for the Chicago Tribune.

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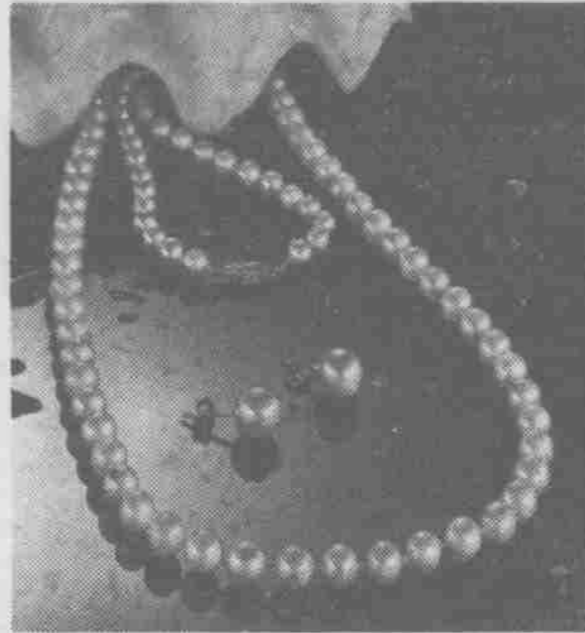
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