
Interview: Dr. Fahed Fanek

What is standing in the way of peace?

A member of the Arab Thought Forum, Dr. Fanek is a syndicated columnist in Jordan whose political commentaries appear in major newspapers like al Ra'i and the Jordan Times. His views often reflect those of government circles. This interview was conducted by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach in Amman, on March 6.

EIR: What is your overall assessment of the peace process?

Dr. Fanek: I think the present problem facing the peace process is the Israeli government. We had the Labor government, which campaigned in the elections on the basis of peace, and they were given the vote of confidence by their people to implement peace. But they are not doing it. It seems that the Israeli government is getting weaker and weaker, and it cannot stand the opposition from the right, so in effect the Labor government is operating on the agenda of the Likud Party. So it's only the persons from Labor, while the policy is from the Likud. That's why they are unable to make any concessions, even those stipulated in the agreements. For instance, they are trying to delay elections, to delay redeployment in the West Bank. They are refusing to deliver the West Bank to Arafat, and the [Palestinian] prisoners are still in prison, for no good reason. All these things were supposed to be settled, according to the written commitments of Israel, but the Israelis say that the timetable is not sacred.

This creates a problem for Jordan also. We signed a contract with the Israelis, on the understanding that they would respect their commitments. So if they give an example of not respecting their commitments [with the Palestinians], maybe that disrespect will also extend to the Jordanian side. We should know whether we can rely on the Israelis' signature or not. So far Israel has been giving the wrong example, giving confused signals on whether it will go ahead in the peace process with the Palestinians or just stop with Gaza, and maintain the West Bank.

EIR: At a recent Mideast conference in Paris, Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres was adamant on the question of security. Yet, other Israelis there stated that they would be willing to give back 92% of the occupied territories, essentially accepting the perspective of a Palestinian state. How do you evaluate this?

Dr. Fanek: There are different directions within the Israeli

government. Sometimes the doves are outspoken to give cover for the others to do what they want. So they would go to Paris and say, "We'll respect commitments, not confiscate any more land, not build any new settlements"—that's what Peres was saying. But what's the difference between building new settlements and enlarging the present settlements? It's the same. It seems that there are 25% more settlers than there were when the Oslo agreement was signed. So I don't see good faith on the side of the Israelis regarding the Palestinian question, and I feel that their problem with security is becoming an obsession. They are asking for absolute security, while they continue to occupy the land. And those who cause the insecurity do so for one reason: the occupation; so as long as the Israelis maintain the occupation, they can't tell Hamas or Islamic fundamentalists not to disturb their lives. When you occupy the land of others, you'll have to expect anything.

On the other hand, I don't think Arafat has the means to stop any security problem regarding Israel while he is in Gaza. The West Bank is a large place, and it is not under his control. Even when Gaza and the West Bank were under full control of the Israelis, they couldn't stop these things. They will continue as long as the Israelis continue to occupy any part of the West Bank and Gaza. So the best way to guarantee security for Israel, to eliminate what they call terrorism, is to end occupation and to implement the agreements.

EIR: What progress has been made in negotiations regarding the modalities for Israeli troop withdrawals, prior to Palestinian elections?

Dr. Fanek: The redeployment is meant for elections, so elections are delayed because redeployment is delayed. Now it is ten months late. Redeployment and elections should have taken place in July 1994, but nothing is happening. The Israelis are suggesting now, "You can have the elections while we are there, for security reasons"—this security is the magic word to justify anything.

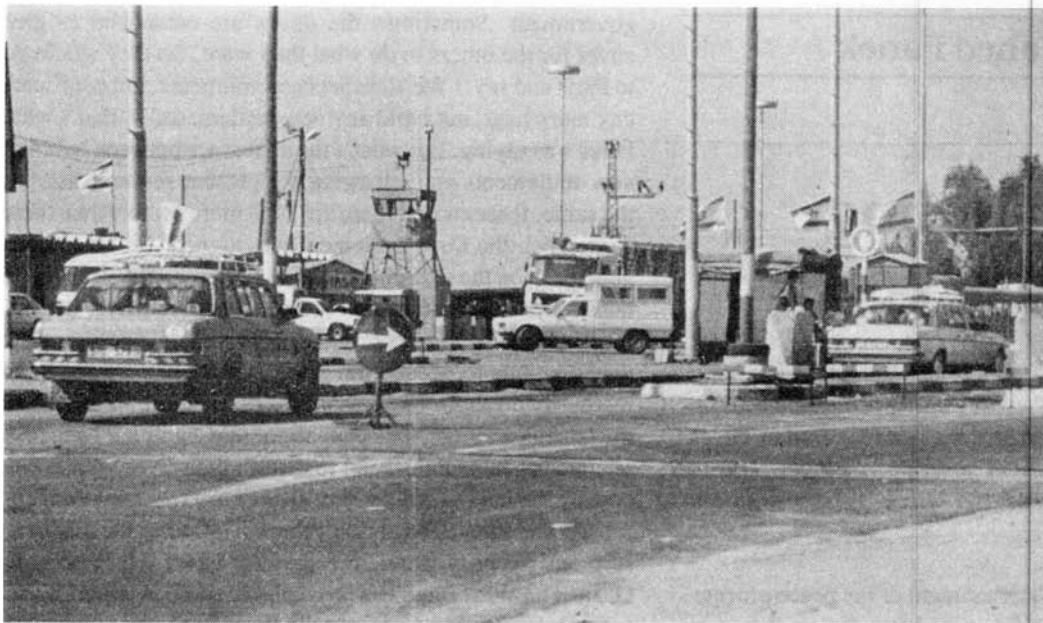
EIR: The objection is that elections could not be carried out in the presence of the Israeli military.

Dr. Fanek: That's what the Palestinians say, but I don't know if they have options. The Israelis are suggesting that elections take place under international supervision, for instance, to guarantee their freedom.

EIR: Would that mean the Israeli military, in that case, would move out of the populated areas?

Dr. Fanek: No, they say, "We can't stay out because of security, and since you want us to stay out to guarantee the freedom of the elections, we will conduct them under international supervision." This is an attempt to find a way around their commitment in the written agreements, to withdraw.

EIR: That is unacceptable to the Palestinians.



The Erez border crossing between Israel and Gaza, 1993. Since the peace accords, security has become even more restrictive, and borders are now closed for thousands of Gaza residents who need to travel to Israel or the West Bank to work or study.

Dr. Fanek: It shouldn't be acceptable to anyone, but the problem for the Palestinians is that they don't have any alternatives, any options. They are the weak party and the whole world is trying to play observer without interfering, including America, the sponsor of peace. The U.S. says, "We don't interfere, we leave it to the parties to negotiate," so it's the wolf and the lamb who are negotiating.

EIR: President Clinton did intervene, when he decided to freeze the accounts of groups in the United States funding the extremist Israeli settlers.

Dr. Fanek: I think that was a symbolic step by Clinton to freeze the accounts of what they call the terrorists on both sides. It seems he has not frozen one penny, so it is a political move, it has a political meaning, but it has no financial consequences, because those groups have no official accounts in the name of their organizations.

EIR: That's not precise. The Kach and Kahane Chai have support networks in the United States, albeit under different names.

Dr. Fanek: I think the Americans have more to do. They should say, when there is an impasse, which party is responsible. In that case, I think both parties would behave properly.

EIR: How do you see the economic side of the process influencing developments? How is the economic situation in Jordan?

Dr. Fanek: Here in Jordan, the inflation rate is below 5% officially. But it is that low because of the recession. Economic activity is low as indicated by the financial markets; prices are depressed, and in the trade sector, imports are not growing for the first time. It seems that the standard of living

is not improving as people had expected.

The peace process came with high expectations and promises, which were promises, but everyone took them seriously, believing that the man on the street would feel the difference in an improvement in his standard of living. This is not happening, and even the debt forgiveness, which was promised by President Clinton here in the Jordanian Parliament, has run into a problem now with the Republican Congress. This is disappointing to the Jordanian people, who don't understand the partisan games in America but think of America as America, and feel that it is not fulfilling its promises. It seems also that there's no aid for Jordan this year; whatever aid from America there is, is below \$20 million. So in general the economy is the same. Peace is not having any effect, positive or negative, on the Jordanian economy. It's only causing a lot of disappointment.

EIR: What about the great projects envisioned in the peace treaty?

Dr. Fanek: We went to the Casablanca Conference [Oct. 31-Nov. 2, 1994] with projects costing \$18 billion, but it had only an educational function. Not one project is moving. There are no peace projects, in fact, except on paper.

EIR: What do the numerous delegations do that come here, then?

Dr. Fanek: They want to keep in the picture in case there are projects. They're interested in implementation. But the question is the *financing*, not the implementation. Everyone is interested in doing business, but no one is interested in financing the projects.

Here they don't even want to write off more than \$50 million of Jordan's debts, which are not payable anyway.

Whether they write them off or not, it's almost the same, because Jordan will not be able to pay its debts. The question is, will they be written off now as a good will gesture, or later, when reality asserts itself?

EIR: What is Jordan's total foreign debt?

Dr. Fanek: The original debt to America was \$705 million, of which \$225 million was written off last year and \$275 million was to be written off this year. And with that, the whole \$705 million would be written off, because of internal reserves. So, had the \$275 million been written off, the official debt to America would have become zero. The total foreign debt is \$6.9 billion, assuming the American debt is zero.

Interview: Hon. Freih Abu Middain

The peace process is going to hell

Hon. Freih Abu Middain is the minister of justice of the Palestinian Authority. Muriel Mirak-Weissbach interviewed him in Gaza on March 11.

EIR: What are the main obstacles to the peace process?

Abu Middain: The main problem is financial. The Palestinian Authority lost its credibility, and lost its majority. Credibility depends on showing improvement, whereas the situation now is worse, not better than it was before. Prices are up 30-40%, prisoners are still in prison. It is like waiting for Godot. We have a Palestinian flag, a television and radio stations, Chairman Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. But what about the empty stomachs? If we can't give children a shekel to have something to eat, we cannot convince citizens that peace is worthwhile.

EIR: How do you see the security problem?

Abu Middain: This is all linked to the security question. Unemployment here in Gaza is at 60%. In this situation, it is easy to recruit someone for \$50 to throw grenades. These two elements are linked. When we signed the DOP [Declaration of Principles] in Oslo and in Washington, the U.S.A. and Europe put pressure on Arafat. We were promised \$720 million for infrastructure. We were starting, not from zero, but from below zero. We have received almost nothing. A further aggravation to the economic crisis is that the Israelis have closed the borders, so tens of thousands of Palestinian workers can no longer earn a living. Morally, I think the Israelis should open the borders. For 27 years they have

used Palestinians for menial labor, now they are harping on "security." Israel controls *all* checkpoints, so it is their responsibility, not ours. We have no tear gas, no sophisticated weapons.

EIR: How do you see the future?

Abu Middain: If the economic situation is not improved, in the future it will be very bad. I blame the donors, the World Bank. They talk about accountability. We have no time for that. If we are not qualified in their eyes, we say to them, to the European Union, for instance, "You have a \$259 million project for a sewage system, for waste water treatment; fine, come here and do it yourselves."

The real challenge for the Palestinian Authority is how to create 30,000 jobs. Right now, everything is coming from Israel, all products we use, and we have nothing of our own. When the British and French left Africa, they left behind some infrastructure, but here the Israelis have taken everything, even ripping up the rails. What was left behind were the 2,000 settlers here who are provoking our people.

Oslo is going to collapse, the whole peace process is going to go to Hell within three or four months, if things don't change. Rabin's two ears listen to the military, who do not believe in peace. All their negotiations are conducted from the military standpoint, by military, not civilians. The situation has in many cases worsened since the peace treaty. To give you some details: We have problems in sending students from Gaza to the West Bank, or in sending people to the airport in Tel Aviv, or to a hospital in Israel. Before, under occupation, there were no problems like this.

EIR: How do you see the problem of the settlers?

Abu Middain: The main obstacles to peace are the settlers and the settlements, and Jerusalem. Hamas, Islamic Jihad, in Gaza, how many of them are there? Certainly fewer than the settlers here. They, the settlers, are the real terrorists. They stole our land. This is the source of the security problem. Unfortunately, Rabin is no de Gaulle. Now Rabin wants to prevent elections. The DOP demands withdrawal of Israeli troops before elections, which Rabin does not want. What we have now are ghettos, bantustans on the West Bank; he wants three on the West Bank and one in Gaza.

The new idea that has come up recently is that of "separation." What that really means is isolation of the Palestinian people. But, if he is ready to talk about the final status, then so are we.

After the DOP was signed, confidence has decreased. We need a new era to be opened. Let us go then to the final settlement. Rabin was elected by his people to make peace, but he is wasting time. He is taking one step forward and two steps backward. I fear they are looking to the 1996 elections in Israel and in the U.S. In the meantime, everything will be frozen in the peace process, and it will be a golden chance for extremists.