Interview with His Royal Highness Prince Hassan of Jordan*

His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal served as the closest political adviser, confidant and deputy of his brother King Hussein of Jordan until King Hussein's death in 1999. He has founded, and is actively involved in, a number of Jordanian and international institutes, organizations and committees. He is president of the Arab Thought Forum, a former president of the Club of Rome, chairman of the Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues and a member of the expert group, appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to implement the Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance that was made in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. A graduate of Oxford University, he holds numerous honorary doctorates in law, letters, theology, and oriental and African studies, and has received many awards, including the Abu Bakr Al-Siddique Medal of the Organization of Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies. His most recently published books are To Be a Muslim *(2003),* Continuity, Innovation and Change: Selected Essays *(2001) and* In Memory of Faisal I: The Iraqi Question *(2003, in Arabic).*

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What is your assessment of the humanitarian consequences of the conflict in Iraq?

A major problem is the lack of empirical data. Let's take the battle around Fallujah. I am a member of the board of Peace Direct, which conducted the research on which the play, *Fallujah*, was based.[1] In this play, which was performed in London, and featured Imogen Stubbs and other leading actors, over seventy violations of international humanitarian law, committed by all parties, were depicted.

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*   The interview was conducted on 2 March 2008 by Toni Pfanner, editor-in-chief of the *International Review of the Red Cross*, and Paul Castella, head of the ICRC delegation in Amman, Jordan.

Curiously, it did not result in any suits being brought against anyone. Much of the death and the suffering that took place in Fallujah was the result of unambiguous violations of humanitarian law. I feel that the case of Iraq necessitates an international code of humanitarian principles. One of the greatest obstacles for humanitarian law is the absence of a reliable database. If we are to have accountability, we must go back to facts.

Is the establishment of empirical databases practicable in wartime? Having examined the Lancet ***study and having followed the Iraqi Body Count project on casualties in Iraq, you must be aware that casualty figures are often given a political twist.***

If the parties to a conflict are willing, some form of accountability is a possibility. For instance, Oxford University and Johns Hopkins University and a number of international organizations have monitored the effects of the war. They have made use of a number of different tools for acquiring casualty figures, during and after the main military action (by coalition forces) and during the continuing war of attrition, the suicide bombings and so forth. This is important. Regular armies, with an attorney general at home and a lawyer in each army unit, are, presumably, more capable of calculating loss of life in such circumstances than nascent civil administrations that simply don't have the experience.

But the figures that have been given are very contradictory.

Yes. This was made especially clear by the reporting of the Iraq Body Count project, which was founded in 2003 when the invasion seemed imminent. Compare their figure of 2,500 Iraqi deaths, as a consequence of the initial phase of the war, with US estimates of coalition deaths (around 114). This disparity cannot be explained away as collateral damage.

Roberts and Burnham and others in the *Lancet* medical journal in 2004 confirmed suspicions that the United States had downplayed the number of Iraqi deaths. Of course, when I say this, I don't want to get myself into hot water with anyone. As Richard Horton, the editor of the *Lancet*, said, "Whatever figure is quoted for deaths, it seems that the civilian casualties of the war in Iraq run into many thousands and the number is still mounting." This is what I find extremely frustrating, whether it's Palestine, Darfur, Afghanistan or Iraq. We have a saying in Arabic: "Its causes are many, but death is one."

I feel full of admiration for the Open Society Archives – started in Munich and transferred to Budapest – for their detailed information on eastern and central Europe during the period of the Cold War and in the years that followed. The lesson, it seems to me, is that while the people living in the hinterland of the

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1   Written and directed by Jonathan Holmes, *Fallujah* draws on research and interviews carried out by the playwright and nominee for the Nobel Prize, Scilla Elworthy. It presents testimony from Iraqi civilians, clerics, members of the US military and US politicians, journalists, medics and aid workers and the British army. None of this testimony has been heard before. Every word of the play is taken, verbatim, from such testimony.

Middle East are of little importance, those who inhabit the hinterland of western Europe are of consequence, because they are, potentially, members of a wider Europe.

Such data, then, are generally unreliable, exaggerating or minimizing casualties for political reasons?

When the Iraqi government issues statements of casualties, they are not checked against international estimates. Obviously, an organization like the ICRC would be jeopardizing its ability to function if it were to go public with figures. If you speak out about loss of civilian life, you are immediately suspected of bias or, in the case of Iraq, of being anti-American. The Iraqi war is not a conflict between two parties, between one foreign coalition force here and the Iraqi people there. If one is objective about civilian casualties, one sees that many of them have been attributed to non-state actors and to the "privatizers" of war, such as Blackwater and other mercenary firms.

Displaced persons seeking refuge inside or outside Iraq: are they affecting people in the whole region?

The Levant is witnessing major displacements. These affect the whole region and its capacity to recover. Again, there needs to be empirical data that analyse the physical, economic and human aspects of the situation, in order to ascertain how many people are affected. This applies to Palestinians, it applies to Iraqis, it applies to Palestinians within Iraq, and it applies to all the different parties to the various conflicts in progress.

Let me quote what UNHCR has to say: "As of September 2007 there were believed to be well over 4 million displaced Iraqis around the world, including some 2.2 million inside Iraq and a similar number in neighbouring countries, in particular Syria and Jordan. And some 200,000 further afield." If we want to discuss the situation of displaced persons, let us first recognize that those 4 million fall into a great many different categories.

An important issue is the large number of widows. In Iraq, we estimate that about three million women have been widowed as a result of all the wars. Because of the cultural attitudes of the region, many of them have become "second-class citizens". They cannot travel abroad in search of a living because they are not legally entitled to be in charge of a family, particularly if they move to another country.

What is happening today is that the cultural capital of Iraq has been bankrupted. Its most skilled citizens have gone abroad. Those who stayed have done so simply because they don't have skills that can be exported.

Inside Iraq, the security situation in many areas is still very precarious. And despite being, culturally and ethnically, a very varied place, Baghdad is now a largely divided city. Is there a sectarian logic at work here?

There is no sectarian logic. I would draw your attention to "Us and them: the enduring power of ethnic nationalism", an article by Jerry Muller in the March–

April 2008 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. He says: ''America generally belittled the role of ethnic nationalism and politics. … Within two or three generations of immigration, their ethnic identities are attenuated by cultural assimilation and intermarriage. Surely things cannot be so different elsewhere.'' This sounds like a simple proposition. I want to make it very clear that the sectarianism in our part of the world has been consistently aggravated by the multifarious, incoherent, disconnected and always combative influences of outside forces. A proxy war, on top of the ethnic conflicts and sectarianism, is being fought in Iraq and, potentially, in Lebanon, not to mention other parts of the region.

But sectarian divisions are a fact in Baghdad?
People might be ostensibly Sunni or Shia. But, really, when you talk about Sunnis and Shia, in Mecca or Najaf where such discussions belong, you realize that there are no inevitable antagonisms between Sunnis and Shia. An atomization of groups is taking place and it includes the separating out of ethnicities: Kurd against Arab, Iranian Shia against Arab Shia.

Terrorism fills the vacuum that is then created. And terrorism as a tactic is undiscriminating. It thrives on destruction and on the perpetuation of fear. At the moment, I think that the hatred industry is winning. It's there on the ground, demanding lives. What has all of this got to do with religion? I personally don't know. The conflict is between the local and the foreign, between groups that are fighting for or against both.

What has been the effect of the large number of civilian casualties?
Generally, that people who seek change are becoming more and more nihilistic or apathetic. They either do nothing or they become exclusionist. This means that a growing number of people are becoming radicalized, either by actually preparing to lay down their lives or by becoming involved in developing an alternate economy. Look at the planting of opium in Iraq, for example. This is the alternative economy, the economy of despair and the economy of greed.

Carrying out justice is also an important issue in Iraq. The Iraqi Special Tribunal has charged the former leaders of the Baath regime and there is, in addition, the requirement to grant all detainees a fair trial.
Under the guise of liberating Iraqis from an autocratic system, the Baath system in this instance, they've finally sentenced the last of the leaders. The question is whether the security and legal agendas are going to be limited to the former Baath leaders, or whether, after the incidents in Abu Ghraib and other Iraqi prisons, they are going to start establishing some standards of civilized behaviour.

In Henri Dunant's time, the great question under discussion was how to lessen the brutality of war. Today we're saying that incarceration in prison should become more humane. The debate in the United States is now centred on the humanity or inhumanity of those detention centres, and, even more, on the technical issue of the forms of torture the United States will permit. The United Kingdom's complicity in the rendition process is well documented. But in the

United Kingdom at least, there are those like Helena Kennedy who protest against this new culture of state-sanctioned infringement of civil rights. In her brilliant book, *Just Wars*, she reiterates that torture is always immoral and that if the United Kingdom resorts to torture, it will lose its moral authority and become ineffectual.

Basically, my question is this: how can we ensure that human rights are protected? Everyone talks about the fundamental rights of all people but in this ongoing, extraordinary, undefined, so-called war on terror, these count for little. After all, the intimidation – we don't call it terror – exercised in the jails that serve that war on terror is not permitted by the codes of moral conduct that we all share. Is there no hope of realizing a common humanitarian order?

What role do such fundamental rights, as part of international law, particularly of international humanitarian and human rights law, play in your vision of an international humanitarian order?
We should begin a debate on the idea of violating the law of war, which should be gradually replaced by the idea of violating the law of peace. And, perhaps, instead of making statements about a war on terror, we should be thinking of creating a template for citizenship and developing a law of peace. That might concentrate minds on specific aspects of our global situation that have not yet been discussed.

What would be the consequences of what you call the "law of peace"?
Again, I go back to the Open Society Archives. When reporters are "embedded" at the outset of the war and only a few of them dare to leave the safety of the Green Zone, then they are there basically to find stories that are saleable. But when one talks of the law of peace, one is talking of embedding scholars, human rights experts, legal experts and others who will be under no obligation to anything but the truth. That should make for accurate reporting.

You have referred several times to the Middle East as a "black hole."
It's to do with basic security. Why do I call the Middle East a "black hole"? Is there the readiness, the institutional infrastructure to tackle the west Asian region as Carl Bildt did the Balkans, by creating an OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] mission for this region? Is it for us, the countries of the region, to open up, to widen the parameters? Or is it for the international community, and particularly the Security Council and the Quartet (United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations), to recognize that this region is a black hole in the sense that it is not systemically represented when it comes to questions of basic security? Consider this fact: American destroyers are sent to stand off the shores of Lebanon without any explanation and for no purpose other than to demonstrate their mastery of the seas. But what will this lead to? Should we not make possible the creation of a regional treaty organization, a conference for security and co-operation in the region, whereby we tell the countries in the region to shoulder their responsibilities for their collective security?

I would like to refer to a Canadian initiative on human security which replaces the classic concept of safety based on military force with a new approach

that emphasizes the safety of individuals. It stresses that the first duty of the state is to protect the individual and to ensure that human rights can be enjoyed in peace and tranquillity.

And this would possibly also be a way out of the conflict in Iraq?

Yes, that is one possible way out. The economy is another. A third way is the creation of a culture of legal rights. And, perhaps, we can then emerge from this black hole to make a major contribution, with the assistance of the international community and of those who have expertise in conflict management, to the development of a new instrument of hope, which is this law of peace.

Is Iraq in danger of fragmentation or partition?

Much of the discussion over the last few years has been about what I described as ''let's go federal, let's go administratively federal''. A divided Iraq would be the end of our own Westphalian system, the end of the Middle Eastern community of states and the beginning of a Balkanization that would lead to a longer and more widespread war.

Let's look at eastern Europe, for example: ethno-nationalist ideology calls for the oneness of the state and the ethnically defined ''nation''. The consequences of this are always explosive. In 1862 the English historian Lord Acton declared that ''By making the state and the nation commensurate with each other in theory, [nationalism] reduces practically to a subject condition all other nationalities that may be within the boundary … According, therefore, to the degree of humanity and civilization in that dominant body which claims all the rights of the community, the inferior races are exterminated or reduced to servitude or outlawed or put in a condition of dependence.'' The English writer Aldous Huxley defined nationalism as ''a common misunderstanding of history and a common hatred for your neighbour''. Let us not forget the Balkans: the Balkans have contributed an adjective to the political dictionary. This is what is happening in our region today.

In his book, *The Grand Chessboard*, Zbigniew Brzezinski talked about breaking up the Russian Federation, into Siberia, the Baltics and the Caucasus, about the possibilities of China also disaggregating. My view is that progressive co-operation – from the APEC region to south Asia, to west Asia, to the Euro-Atlantic community – is better than inviting Kosovo today, Nagorno-Karabakh tomorrow, and others the day after tomorrow, to be independent states. How many problematic cases are going to announce themselves in the future? We already have almost 200 nations in the United Nations system.

And Iraq?

Ernest Gellner's views on nationalism are not going to be manageable unless we look at the facts. First, the United States forced Al Qaeda out of Afghanistan. Chaos in Iraq provides a richer and more political and salient background: it is the Iraqis who pay the price for this farcical strategic move. I don't know how we can talk about stability in Iraq in terms of a proxy war that is being fought on their soil and which is based on a flawed human security logic: if Iraq remains a zone of turmoil, then, perhaps, the United States and Europe will remain zones of peace.

When you play Byzantine politics by micromanaging a situation from Washington or from NATO headquarters, you're following Ernest Gellner's thinking, as elucidated by Jerry Muller in his article in *Foreign Affairs*: "Military competition between states create[s] a demand for expanded states resources and hence continual economic growth. Economic growth, in turn, depend[s] on mass literacy and easy communication, spurring policies to promote education and a common language – which led directly to conflicts over language and communal opportunities."

Religious fervour is fuelling the violence. But can religion also have a positive influence on the situation?

Islam, Christianity and Judaism are all universal religions. When I talk about the Conference on Security and Co-operation in the region, or the development of a Citizen's Charter, I base my views on the principles of these three faiths. I refer those who are secular to the principles of human dignity and to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Jews, Christians, Muslims are all being terrorized by the privatization of warfare, and the time has come for us to begin to give people some hope. In my opinion there is no war between Islam and the West. To speak of a Western "crusade," or of a battle between a democratic jihad and an Islamic jihad, is simply wrong. Bush's idealism and his universalist fervour mirror Bin Ladin's; their conflict is not to be understood as a conflict between Christianity and Islam. In fact, I think it an aberration that only serves to exacerbate the conflict between the West and Al Qaeda.

What is the role of Islam in the Iraqi situation?

What we need to be doing is to recognize that progressive Muslims, liberal Muslims, secular Muslims and the like are all interested in promoting the common good. But how can that be done without developing a systemic approach to health, education, welfare, empowering the poor, developing dialogue at the grass-roots level? This is part of the pacification programme.

It worked in Vietnam. Vietnam was not a Muslim land, but it suffered similar devastation. And progressive, socialist Vietnam today is a prospering member of an Asian community of nations that includes traditional Thailand, a monarchy.

When will religion be raised above politics so that the institutions that can be financed by religious organizations through their ample resources, whether schools or hospitals, are built up and a shared peace corps established? How will oil revenues be distributed? Two years ago, I wrote an open letter to the Iraqi press asking, "Isn't it time that those who have lost mosques and churches, as happened when the black stone of the Kaaba[2] fell, rediscovered a shared commitment in

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2   The ancient stone building which Muslims must face when they pray. It is in the centre of Masjid al-Haram, the Grand Mosque, in Mecca.

order to restore not only the places of worship, but also the role of religion in policies for creating, for example, a *Zakat* fund?"[3]

How would such a fund work?

I have been calling for the creation of an international *Zakat* fund for over a quarter of a century. Such a fund could also lead to the creation of an international non-denominational peace corps. Many people who were contacted said that they had no professional institutional capacities for bringing this about. They came to see me and said, "Do you have an organization that would supervise such funding?"

My response was, "I can offer you only my name, but I'm not a professional fund or trust manager." I spoke to Mike Moore, the former prime minister of New Zealand and director-general of the World Trade Organization, and I said to him: "Is there any chance of your heading this?" He thought it was Islamic in character, but I told him that the Islam I was talking about was universal in character. For instance, the British government is accepting loans based on Islamic rules, from Islamic banks. Why is it that we can't call in the finest minds to work on what Paul Volcker, the former president of the US Federal Reserve Bank, called for: a Middle East Development Bank? This would be an asymmetric development bank: asymmetric from the very beginning, meaning that it would focus only on the needs of the poor. However, 9/11 put an end to this, it put an end to altruism and alms-giving.

At present we are giving legitimacy to an altogether different endeavour, one in which a privatized religion has taken over the expenditure for destruction. Enormous sums have gone to private actors during the war: KBR/Halliburton Co. has received, in single-source contracts for work in Iraq, some US$19.3 billion! Now consider these figures: one trillion dollars could have paid for eight million housing units or 15 million public school teachers or health care for 530 million for a year or scholarships to universities for 43 million students.

Policymakers should be prepared to consider a strong and coherent response to Iraq. Today, a barrel of oil costs US$102: individual countries in the Gulf are earning US$1 billion and more every day. This money should be made available for empowering the population to develop pacification, a stabilization programme that would immediately dampen the nihilism which breeds only confrontation.

Could this lead eventually to reconciliation in Iraq?

The general public can't wake up and decide that Iraq will be fully independent on, say, the 31st of next month. Reconciliation is still unattainable because, clearly, the centrifugal trend is stronger than the trend towards centralization. But breaking the cycle of violence is absolutely essential.

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3   *Zakat*, the Islamic concept of tithing and alms, is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. It is required of all those Muslims who have accumulated more than a certain prescribed amount of wealth, and its purpose is to better the condition of the deprived.

The only way to move from confrontation to shared responsibility is to find the means for people to exercise that shared responsibility. My feeling is that the present approach, the allocation by the central government to the new bourgeoisie of the new money, to those who have catered to the international forces, those who have made money out of the current situation, who are keen on laundering their money, is wrong.

We have to build from the bottom up. What is going on today seems to be a conversation between the new middle class and the politicians, whereas what we need is a commitment from the general public to express themselves about their real needs in terms of relocation, reconstruction and reassimilation, whether it's building a house, or adding to one, or moving to a different location. And these reconciliation talks require good listeners.

Who should be involved in it?

I don't see any good listeners among the international organizations, each of which operates – with all due respect – within their own narrow framework. International figures, particularly those with experience of similar crises, should help leverage this endeavour; they should be invited to monitor the reconstruction process, and to encourage it by listening attentively. In the past I have suggested such names as Suleiman Demirel from Turkey, Mohammed Khatami from Iran, Ahmed Ibrahimi from Algeria, Ibrahim Bin Ali Alwazir from Yemen (which is after all a Sunni–Shia country), and your humble servant, people of that ilk.

How do we involve the Iraqis?

The greatest issue with vulnerable groups is their inability to speak for themselves. That is their real vulnerability. We talk about vulnerable groups patronizingly, as though they were pawns on a chessboard who require our kindness, our largesse, our generosity. We don't talk about them as potential citizens of a new Iraq. There is a basic contradiction between talking about a new, independent, more democratic Iraq, and our inability to communicate with the humblest people.

The Arab Thought Forum is putting together a West Asia and North Africa questionnaire, which we are distributing to Arab medical associations and Arab professional associations (doctors, lawyers, educators and so forth). It asks, for example, about the average weight of an infant at birth, the health of children at the age of five, and why so many of them are dying at such an early age. The aim is to begin to humanize the relationship between the middle classes and those below them, instead of continuing to ignore the people in the name of the people and in the name of peace.

When the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights falls in December 2008, we hope this west Asian region, particularly with Iraq and Afghanistan in mind, can make an impact by saying, ''This is the impact of war, and these are our unbiased recommendations.''

We don't know the direction that events in Iraq will take. A Pandora's box has been opened, releasing all the evils of mankind and leaving behind only hope inside the closed box.

Absolutely. And as Greek literature tells us, hope exists at the bottom of the barrel.