המכון ליחסים בינלאומיים
ע"ש לאונרד דיוויס
The Leonard Davis Institute
for International Relations

Konrad
-Adenauer-
Stiftung

The Jordanian-Israeli Peace Negotiations: The Geopolitical Rationale of a Bilateral Relationship

Asher Susser

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The Jordanian-Israeli Peace Negotiations: The Geographical Rationale of a Bilateral Relationship

Asher Susser

Davis Occasional Papers
The Leonard Davis Institute

This booklet is part of a series published by the Davis Institute on **Peacemaking and Negotiations in the Arab-Israeli Conflict** based on the November 1998 Jerusalem conference bearing the same name.

For information about other papers available from the conference, contact the Leonard Davis Institute of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Davis Occasional Papers, No. 73, August 1999
The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Israel

The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Leonard Davis Institute.

The Leonard Davis Institute of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations was established in 1972. As the only research institute in Israel dedicated solely to international affairs, the Institute plans its programs in accordance with three broad aims:

1. To promote scientific research in the theory of international relations, adopting a broad interdisciplinary perspective.
2. To present the universal themes of international politics to the Israeli public, thereby enhancing the national discourse on these matters.
3. To put our expertise and consulting capability at the service of national institutions conducting the security and foreign affairs of Israel.

The Leonard Davis Institute has long served as a center where researchers from the International Relations, Political Science, and related departments at the Hebrew University, as well as at other Israeli universities and academic centers, can develop and coordinate research programs. To this end, the Institute is by its nature and statutes an interfaculty and interdisciplinary body, though formally anchored in the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The Institute's programs aim at deepening our understanding of Israel's foreign relations and diplomacy, Middle Eastern affairs, and the subject of world order. This embraces, particularly, the critical choices that Israel faces as part of the international community–in such domains as international political economy, the environment, human rights, global security and conflict resolution, and international organizations.

The Konrad Adenauer Foundation

The example of Konrad Adenauer and the ideals that guided the life and work of this great statesman constitute the guidelines and principles of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. In its work both in Germany and abroad, the Foundation is committed to the principles of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) of the Federal Republic of Germany, the ruling party of the Federal Chancellor, Dr. Helmut Kohl.

The Konrad Adenauer Foundation was established in 1964 by the Eichholz Political Academy, itself established in 1956, and is exclusively dedicated to the pursuit of nonprofit-making objectives for the pubic good, setting as its tasks:

- The provision of political education
- Research and documentation of the historical development of Christian democracy
- Building on scientific foundations for political action through research and advisory services
- Promoting the unification of Europe
- Cultivating international understanding by disseminating information and organizing conferences
- Providing aid through the development of programs and projects
- Assisting politically persecuted democrats
- Supporting the scientific training of talented young people
- Promoting arts and culture

While being committed in its politics and ideology to the CDU, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is legally, organizationally, and financially independent of the party. Its income is derived from the state, donations, contributions from participants, and the proceeds of the sale of publications. Its budget exceeds DM 200 million, and the Foundation is active in more

than ninety countries throughout the world, having a similar number of German representatives abroad coordinating its work.

Konrad Adenauer's constant concern for the region of the Middle East guides us in our cooperation with Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The Foundation's dialogue and cooperation with organizations in Israel are an integral part of the special relationship between the state of Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany. Our projects aim at addressing both Israel's domestic and international concerns. Together with Israeli academic and political representatives, the Foundation hosts national and international conferences to disseminate knowledge and promote understanding.

Through its participation in joint projects, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation endeavors to make a contribution toward the furtherance of the peace process in the Middle East and the mutual understanding of Israelis and Palestinians.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Between Israel, Palestine, and Iraq	2
Jordanian Perceptions of the Israeli Threat	3
Jordan, Israel, and the Gulf War	6
Jordan's Post-Gulf War Strategic Environment and the Peace Imperative	8
Jordan and the Oslo Accords	10
Strategic Anxieties and the Israeli-Jordanian Treaty	14
The Protective Umbrella of the United States	25
Jordan, Israel, and the Aftermath of Peace	27
The Rekindling of Old Fears and the Potential Swing of the Strategic Pendulum	30
Conclusion	33

Introduction

The Jordanian-Israeli negotiation differed substantively from the negotiations between Israel and the other Arab states involved in the peace process. This was not a negotiation that related primarily to strictly bilateral issues such as borders or security arrangements in the conventional sense. (The territorial problem between Jordan and Israel was so inconsequential that it was never even mentioned before the beginning of the Madrid process. As for conventional security arrangements, such as demilitarization, early warning stations, and so on, these are nonexistent in the Jordanian-Israeli treaty.)

The negotiations between Israel and Jordan were a reflection of their shared regional geopolitical and strategic concerns relating to a series of third parties, such as Iraq, Syria, the Palestinians, and the United States. Common interests in these matters had led to political understanding between Jordan and Israel long before the peace negotiations. Except for some aspects of the Palestinian question (Jerusalem and refugees), the peace treaty itself made no overt mention of these third parties, referring to them only very briefly by implication, or not at all.

Jordan's negotiating tactics were also influenced by calculations related to third-party interests. The Jordanians were constrained in their determination of the pace of the negotiations by anxieties about the potential Syrian response, and by their unwillingness to outpace the Palestinians, lest they be condemned for deserting their cause. On the other hand, their desire for improved relations with the United States and Israel after the Gulf crisis had the effect of impelling them toward a treaty.

Sections of this paper are based on a larger work on *Jordan as a Pivotal State* to be published by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Asher Susser is senior fellow at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Tel Aviv University and associate professor of Middle Eastern history at Tel Aviv University.

The Jordanian-Israeli negotiations, rooted so profoundly in a strategic agenda external to the treaty, were intimately related to the personal rapport established between Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and King Husayn. Rabin's sudden tragic departure from the scene, and his replacement by Israeli leaders (first Shimon Peres and then Binyamin Netanyahu) who did not enjoy the same measure of Jordanian confidence, had an unsettling effect on the Jordanians.

Between Israel, Palestine, and Iraq

Situated on the doorstep of Palestine, Jordan had always had a vital interest in the Arab-Israeli struggle over the fate of this territory. Over the years Jordan had been deeply involved in the struggle and profoundly affected by its consequences, particularly by its revolutionary demographic impact on the kingdom in the wake of the wars of 1948 and 1967. The conquest of the West Bank in 1948 resulted in the transformation of Jordan into a state with a large Palestinian majority (about half of whom were refugees from what had become Israel). The constant migration of Palestinians from the West Bank to the East Bank, during the period of Jordanian rule until 1967, continued during much of the Israeli occupation. Moreover, some 250,000–300,000 Palestinian refugees fled from the West Bank to the East Bank in 1967, and an additional similar number of Palestinians left Kuwait for Jordan during the Gulf War. By most accounts the Palestinians had, by the early 1990s, become a majority on the East Bank, with a population more or less equal to the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza combined (i.e., over two million). Geographic proximity and demographic reality make it virtually impossible for Jordan to evade the potential impact of any settlement, or conflict, related to the Palestinian question.

Sandwiched between Israel and Iraq, Jordan has sought to protect its interests in the Palestinian question by strategic vacillation between these two mighty neighbors. When at war with Israel, Jordan had always sought

Iraqi military assistance (as in 1948 and again in 1967). More often than not, however, Jordan sought to protect itself and its Palestinian interests through some sort of tacit understanding, or modus vivendi, with Israel. Thus, in the early 1990s, it was true to a historical pattern, when relations with Iraq declined as Jordan advanced toward peace with Israel. And as relations with Israel improved, so Jordan could further afford to distance itself from Iraq. This was hardly surprising, bearing in mind that Jordan's alliance with Iraq in the 1980s had in the first place been intimately connected to the Jordanian perception of a new form of Israeli threat.

Jordanian Perceptions of the Israeli Threat

After decades of common understanding based on mutual interest with successive Labor governments in Israel, the rise to power of the right-wing Likud in 1977, and especially its reelection in 1981, had an unsettling effect on the Jordanian-Israeli relationship. In the Jordanian view, the fact that Menahem Begin's government was returned to office was ample proof that a sizable majority of Israelis approved of his policies, something Husayn found very ominous for the future. Jordanian leaders in the early 1980s publicly expressed their fear that Israel, under the Likud, had no intention of ever withdrawing from the West Bank and Gaza. Since Israel also enjoyed unchallenged military superiority, it might seek to solve its own demographic problems by expelling large numbers of Palestinians from the occupied territories to Jordan, as a forerunner to, or consequence of, annexing these territories.[1]

Ever since the violent struggle with the Palestinians in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Jordanians had expressed the fear that some in the Arab world or in Israel actually sought the establishment of an "alternative homeland" for the Palestinians in Jordan. Jordanian nerves were so frayed by this notion that even the United States was not above suspicion. When in

1 Asher Susser, "Jordan," *Middle East Contemporary Survey (MECS)* 1981–82, p. 677.

early 1977 the newly elected president, Jimmy Carter, spoke in favor of a Palestinian homeland, possibly connected with Jordan, the Jordanians were immediately concerned that Carter might have accepted the idea that the East Bank should become a Palestinian state. It took some effort by the Americans to reassure Husayn that this was not what they had in mind.[2]

Jordanian anxieties were, therefore, easily exacerbated by the idea promoted by some in the Likud government that Jordan was in fact a Palestinian state, implying that the solution of the Palestinian problem lay in the formal transformation of Jordan into Palestine, a notion that became known in Jordanian political parlance as the "alternative homeland conspiracy" (*mu'amarat al-watan al-badil*).[3] When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, and Defense Minister Ariel Sharon made reference to the creation of a new Middle Eastern map, Jordanian concerns were heightened all the more. Husayn concluded that it was not only Lebanon that Israel had in mind, but probably Jordan as well. He even expressed the fear that Israel might trigger another war in which Jordan could very well be "the next target," to pave the way for the establishment of an "alternative homeland" for the Palestinians in Jordan.[4]

Although such an act of mass expulsion by Israel was hardly a realistic possibility, Jordanian fears were genuine. Throughout the 1980s the Jordanians seemed obsessed with what then-Crown Prince Hasan described as potential Israeli "demographic aggression." Husayn's analysis was as follows: Israel was rapidly approaching a serious dilemma if it chose not to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza. It would either have to forfeit its Jewish character if it granted citizenship to the Palestinians in the occupied territories, or abandon its democratic nature and be forced to adopt the

2 *MECS* 1976–77, pp. 487–488.

3 Sa'id al-Tall, *Al-Urdunn wa-Filastin wa-mu'amarat al-watan al-badil* (Amman: Ministry of Culture and Youth, 1981).

4 *MECS* 1981–82, pp. 677–678; 1982–83, p. 632.

apartheid model of South Africa. The Israelis, he feared, might seek to solve their dilemma by evicting large numbers of Palestinians to Jordan. This last option, Husayn seemed to believe, was gaining support in Israel, "coloring the current Israeli political vision with an extremist right-wing hue."[5]

At the end of the decade, against the background of expected massive Jewish emigration to Israel from the Soviet Union, Husayn and Hasan charged that Israel was posing the "threat of transfer" of Palestinians to Jordan. Israel, they said, sought to "drive them across the river into Jordan and other Arab countries in a bid to make way for newcomers." This was reported at the time to be the king's "worst nightmare" and concern among Jordanian officials was reputedly "bordering on panic." Husayn subsequently regarded the formation of a new, purely right-wing government in Israel (in place of the National Unity–Labor and Likud–government that dissolved in March 1990) as patently threatening. He expected the continuation of "attempts ... to uproot [the Palestinians] or force them to abandon their land. Officials in Israel might also think it is opportune to change the status quo, not just in the occupied territories but also in the neighborhood, in order to guarantee [Israel's] security and safety for a very long time to come."[6]

Jordan concluded that time was not on the Arabs' side. This prompted two different, but complementary, responses: one was to appeal for an urgent resumption of the Arab-Israeli peace process, before Jordan might be "swept away by a tide of radicalism" that could overtake the region if no progress was made;[7] the other was to seek strategic protection by cementing the alliance with Iraq.

5 *MECS* 1983–84, p. 517; 1986, p. 451.
6 *MECS* 1989, p. 467; 1990, pp. 476–477.
7 *MECS* 1983–84, p. 517; 1986, p. 451; 1991, pp. 505–506.

Jordan, Israel, and the Gulf War

In the Gulf War (1990–1991), prevailing circumstances hardly appeared conducive to any form of strategic understanding between Jordan and Israel. Jordan had by then established especially close ties with Iraq, including elements of military cooperation, which Israel found particularly disconcerting. However, while Husayn had sought Iraqi protection against Israel, he was equally cautious not to provoke the Israelis.[8] From the onset of the crisis Israel expressed its concern about the possible deployment of Iraqi forces in Jordan, warning Jordan that such a development would not be tolerated and that Israel would use force to prevent it. The Jordanians declared that Jordan would "not [be] a passage for anybody, one way or the other," and would protect its sovereignty "against all comers." If there were no Israeli intentions to attack Jordan, there would be no need for any outside forces to be stationed in the country. Israel repeatedly assured the Jordanians, in public statements by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Chief of Staff Lt. General Dan Shomron and through third parties, that it had no intention of undermining Jordanian stability. Despite these assurances, the Jordanians remained apprehensive that Israel might exploit the crisis as a pretext to forcefully impose the "Jordan is Palestine" solution.[9]

However, when faced with the immediate threat of a major conflagration in the region, Jordan and Israel, the right-wing government notwithstanding, were still capable of establishing a modus vivendi to secure Jordanian stability and territorial integrity. In January 1991, on the eve of Operation Desert Storm, Husayn and Shamir met secretly in London. Husayn was extremely concerned that Jordan might be dragged into a regional war it did not want. Keenly aware of his country's vulnerability and "geopolitically thankless position," his objective was to ensure that

8 Amatzia Baram, "Baathi Iraq and Hashimite Jordan: From Hostility to Alignment," *Middle East Journal* 45, 1 (Winter 1991): 65.

9 *MECS* 1990, p. 490; 1991, p. 504.

Jordan would be spared the ravages of war. Husayn feared that Jordan could become "the killing ground" in a confrontation between Israel and Iraq, and that Israel might exploit the situation to force Palestinians out of the West Bank into Jordan.

Husayn assured Shamir that Jordan was no longer engaged in military cooperation with Iraq; that it would not permit the deployment of Iraqi forces in Jordan or the passage of Iraqi aircraft through its airspace. He, in return, sought an Israeli commitment to refrain from any infringement of Jordan's territorial integrity, on land or in the air, in the conduct of military operations against Iraq. Husayn's request from Israel was based on the hope that he would be able to extract a similar commitment from Saddam Husayn. Shamir acceded to Husayn's request, but added that Israel reserved the right to respond as it deemed fit in the event of an advance of Iraqi forces into Jordan.[10]

When it came to war, Israel laid no blame on the Jordanians for the Iraqi Scud missile attacks, through Jordanian airspace, on Israeli cities. It was obvious that there was nothing Jordan could have done about it. Apart from considerations related to the sensitivities of the Arab partners in the American coalition against Iraq, one of the reasons for Israel's decision not to respond to the missile attacks was Shamir's determination not to draw Jordan into the fray and to keep his commitment to Husayn. Israel clearly had no desire to provide any pretext for an infringement of Jordanian sovereignty by an Iraqi military intrusion. Husayn was subsequently said to have been encouraged by Israel's restraint and by the fact that Israel had done nothing to exploit the situation to implement the "Jordan is Palestine" notion, which Jordan had feared so profoundly. Moreover, months after the war had ended, Shamir made a point of impressing on Secretary of State James Baker the need for the United States to provide more generous aid to

10 *MECS* 1990, pp. 488–490; 1991, p. 504; Moshe Zak, *King Hussein Makes Peace: Thirty Years of Secret Talks* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1996), pp. 47–51.

Jordan, and to continue to uphold its stability for the sake of long-term peace in the region.[11]

Jordan's Post-Gulf War Strategic Environment and the Peace Imperative

In the aftermath of the Gulf War, Jordan was strategically and economically beleaguered. Its Iraqi strategic and economic hinterland had been crushed and, after having refused to join the coalition against Iraq, relations with its traditional allies in the United States and the Gulf had been seriously ruptured. The Saudi and Kuwaiti sense of betrayal was difficult to overcome. Jordanian approaches to the Saudis were initially rebuffed, and the Kuwaitis made it quite clear that they were not about to put aside their resentment. Only in late 1995, when Jordan's rupture with Saddam's Iraq had become more pronounced, did relations with Saudi Arabia begin to show signs of real improvement.

The Jordanians, however, did not entertain high expectations for renewed aid from the oil-producing Arab states. These were not as wealthy as they used to be in the heyday of the oil boom. The Gulf states were not even expected to resume the former levels of aid to Jordan even if relations with them were restored to their earlier warmth.[12] Moreover, Saudi Arabia was not and had never been Jordan's "strategic depth." The Syrians could not be trusted and, in the aftermath of the Gulf War, Iraq could no longer fulfill this role either. Jordan desperately needed to work its way back into the United States' good graces, for strategic protection and economic security as well. When Secretary Baker met with Husayn for the first time after the war, in April 1991 in Aqaba, they quickly agreed to "let bygones be bygones," provided the Jordanians enlisted actively in the U.S.-

11 Zak, pp. 50–51; *MECS* 1991, pp. 504–505.

12 *MECS* 1991, p. 511; 1992, p. 560; 1993, p. 479; 1994, pp. 418, 429; 1995, p. 420; 1996, p. 447.

sponsored peace process. Spokesmen for the administration explained that Jordan was "critical politically [and] geographically" and its stability was important to the region as a whole, to Israel, and to the advancement of the peace process. Thus, while Congress remained displeased with Jordan, particularly because of its violations of the sanctions against Iraq, the administration chose to turn a blind eye, dismissing the violations as negligible.[13]

Jordan needed defense cooperation with the United States, strategic protection, the reduced threat of conflict with Israel, and enhanced opportunities for trade, investment, and economic development. Averting disaster with emergency economic aid (which Jordan had received from Japan, Germany, and other Europeans) was one thing; security, and stable, sustainable progress and prosperity, were quite another. In these circumstances, peace with Israel had become an urgent imperative. As Jawad al-Anani, a former cabinet minister and leading economic analyst put it, Jordan's entire future depended on the Middle East peace process.[14]

Shortly before the signing of Jordan's treaty with Israel, Husayn elaborated on his strategic rationale for peace. In the aftermath of the Gulf War, he explained, Jordan was in a critical predicament. It lacked a sense of stability and also suffered from severe economic difficulties. The kingdom was threatened from every direction, at a time when it enjoyed no superpower protection, nor the protection of any international alliance or organization. Even in the Arab arena, Jordan was still suffering from the consequences of the Gulf crisis. If the kingdom were endangered, he warned, it had "nobody to back it." The future of Jordan, he seemed to be saying, hung in the balance. Jordan was urgently in need of U.S. support in general, and of the modernization of its armed forces, as well as debt relief,

13 James A. Baker (with Thomas M. De Frank), *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York: Putnam, 1995), pp. 450–451; *MECS* 1991, pp. 512–513.

14 *MECS* 1991, p. 489.

in particular. This, however, would not be forthcoming without congressional approval–no easy matter after the Gulf War, and congressional support was clearly dependent on Jordan's participation in the peace process.[15]

What was King Husayn to do, asked a Jordanian analyst, if his country, cash strapped and militarily weak, refused to play ball with the Americans and the Israelis? "Turning to Europe and Japan was hardly an option. These took their cue from Washington anyway . . . all of which left the king no option but to compromise long held principles if his country was not to disintegrate." Jordan's problems, according to another Jordanian observer, had generated "a frantic willingness to do whatever [was] required of it to survive."[16]

Jordan and the Oslo Accords

Of Jordan's two policy options in dealing with the challenge of Israel–an alliance with Iraq or the furthering of the peace process–in the aftermath of the Gulf War it was only the second alternative that had any validity at all. In the Jordanian analysis the regional balance of power had, on the whole, shifted in Israel's favor, as a result of the Gulf War, the loss of the Arab oil weapon, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Since the United States was now the "only country that decides matters," and was committed to deal effectively with the Arab-Israeli conflict, Husayn argued, there was "no room for procrastination." There was a window of opportunity and no alternative to peaceful settlement "except disaster."[17] Indeed, the initiation of the Madrid peace process in October 1991 set Israeli-Jordanian relations on a new course of formal reconciliation, as Jordan now sought reassurance from Israel itself rather than the consolation and deterrence of Iraqi "strategic depth."

15 *MECS* 1994, p. 416.
16 Ibid., p. 417.
17 *MECS* 1991, pp. 505–506.

The accession to power of the more flexible Labor Party in June 1992 added impetus and confidence to the process, eroded only briefly by the surprise of the Oslo accords with the PLO. Jordan and Israel had already reached an essentially agreed agenda in October 1992. The Jordanians, unwilling to face accusations of outpacing the Palestinians, repeatedly clarified that they would not formally ratify the agenda until similar progress was made on the other tracks, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian one. Jordan, they said, would not enter into a separate peace treaty with Israel. Although agreements could be reached in the bilateral negotiating tracks, the implementation of such agreements would have to be within the context of a comprehensive settlement. The "final ratification of peace," according to Husayn, had "to come together" for all parties, or, as Premier 'Abd al-Salam al-Majali noted, all had to "move forward in tandem."[18]

The Oslo accords changed all that. Jordan had genuinely supported "independent Palestinian decisionmaking" and direct PLO involvement in the process. But an agreement reached in secret negotiations between Israel and the PLO, to the total exclusion of Jordan, was considerably more than the Jordanians had bargained for. They were stunned if not shocked by the Oslo accords, which appeared to be designed, at least by the PLO, to cut the Jordanians out of any influential role in regard to the future of the West Bank.

Jordanians have since complained that their Israeli interlocutors have not always understood the nuances of Jordanian positions, because of the style and manner of negotiation and conversation practiced by Husayn. Especially sensitive matters were often not spelled out and much was left to the intuition of the Israeli counterpart to grasp without further clarification. Subtle messages were not always understood. Silence in conversation instead of an explicit refutation was sometimes taken by the

18 *MECS* 1993, pp. 468–469.

Israeli party to mean acceptance, when in fact it did not.[19] The complexity of the Jordanian position on Palestinian representation on the one hand, and the precise measure of desired Jordanian involvement on the other, seem to have been among the casualties of this less than totally explicit mode of communication.

Jordan favored PLO participation in the process and genuinely believed that it was in Jordan's own self-interest that the Palestinians bear full responsibility for any settlement on the Palestinian question. The Jordanians had had more than enough of being condemned in the past by their Arab brethren for their own efforts to resolve the Palestinian issue. In these circumstances, the Jordanians were not interested in negotiating in place of the Palestinians. This, however, did not mean that they expected to be ignored and marginalized on matters so crucial to their own vital interests. On the contrary, they sought, and continue to seek, coordination and consultation, and wherever possible, strategic understanding, with both Israel and the Palestinians. Since Oslo the Jordanians have developed a more forthright posture, making their positions more explicit and letting their Israeli interlocutors understand (in Netanyahu's case with an unusual bluntness) more clearly their interests and concerns and their consequent expectations for a say in the final-status negotiations with the Palestinians. There are a variety of final-status issues that affect Jordan directly, such as borders, refugees, Jerusalem, and water. Indeed, the entire Palestinian solution affects Jordan directly more than any other regional player besides Israel and the Palestinians themselves. Most recently, Husayn's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Wye Plantation in October 1998, and his participation in the signing ceremony at the White House, were indicative of the special status the Jordanians seek.

In the immediate aftermath of the signing of the Oslo accords, the Jordanians concluded that their previous policy of waiting for progress on the other tracks had not paid off; it had, indeed, produced most undesirable

19 Conversation between a senior adviser to Prince Hasan and the author.

consequences. The time had come for Jordan to abandon "its docile image." It could not wait passively for the "future [to] unfold itself." The fate of the kingdom was at stake, and as Prince Hasan observed, it was time for Jordan to put itself first. He told the London *Observer* that: "The world is going to turn around and say 'bugger you' unless you get your act together."[20] On the day after the PLO and Israel formally signed the Oslo accords at the White House on 13 September 1993, Jordan and Israel signed their agreed agenda, which had been left in abeyance since October 1992.

Above all else, the Jordanians were most immediately concerned about the possible impact of the emerging Palestinian entity on the sensitive and potentially volatile relationship between Jordanians and Palestinians on the East Bank. Husayn was perturbed by the surfacing tensions between citizens of Palestinian origin and their East Bank compatriots on the issue of ultimate Palestinian loyalties. In the East Banker elite, there was an emerging perception that the time had come for Palestinians in Jordan to begin to consider exercising their political rights in their embryonic homeland in Palestine rather than in Jordan. In the first few months after Oslo, Husayn's public statements emphasized national unity with unusual intensity. He warned all and sundry that anyone tampering with national unity would be his "enemy until doomsday." Palestinians in Jordan, the king noted, enjoyed all the rights of citizenship and would continue to do so unhindered unless they themselves freely elected to leave for Palestine. The king's forceful stand did not solve the problem nor eliminate the sensitivities, but the issue has, for the meantime and for the most part, been removed from the openly debated public agenda.

Jordan was similarly troubled by its assessment of the economic ramifications of the Israeli-Palestinian agreement. Fearing its permanent exclusion from the compatible and potentially lucrative Palestinian market, Jordan sought to convince the Palestinians that close ties with the Jordanian

20 *MECS* 1993, p. 471.

economy instead of with Israel's would be both politically and economically advantageous, reducing Palestinian dependence on the much more powerful Israeli economy. The Palestinians, ever suspicious of Jordanian ulterior motives, were not convinced.

Jordan's other economic concerns related to the international community. The Jordanians were worried about the possibility that much international aid to the region would now be channeled to the Palestinians, possibly at Jordan's expense. They were, therefore, eager to make the point that Jordan had to be taken into account in the allocation of aid, considering the hardships it had undergone as a result of the long years of the Middle East conflict and the more recent Gulf crisis. Moreover, the economic well-being of the newly born Palestinian entity, the Jordanians argued, could not be achieved in isolation from Jordan.

The Jordanians were obviously concerned that Oslo might mean the beginning of a process whereby Jordan would gradually lose its geopolitical value to Israel and to other players in the international community. Strategic interest in Jordan's well-being had, at least in part, been a function of the moderating influence Jordan had exercised through its involvement in the Palestinian arena.

Strategic Anxieties and the Israeli-Jordanian Treaty

Jordan desperately needed a new platform of strategic understanding with Israel. Apparently at Husayn's request, he and Prime Minister Rabin met secretly just a few weeks after the signing of the Oslo accords. The Jordanians vented their displeasure about the Oslo surprise, but also sought reassurance from Israel. For half a century, Israel's inability or unwillingness to come to terms with the Palestinian national movement had created a vested Israeli interest in a stable Jordan as an anchor of containment of Palestinian militancy. The Jordanians were now apparently concerned that Israel's historical interest in Jordan was under reassessment, in light of the breakthrough with the PLO.

Rabin reportedly reassured Husayn that Israel's traditional policy toward Jordan had not changed and that Israel sought the rapid incorporation of Jordan into the peace process as well as a strong link between Jordan and a future Palestinian entity.[21] Trust between Israel and the PLO was, after all, far from complete. (When difficulties surfaced between Israel and the PLO, Jordan's role increased commensurately. This has actually been more evident since the accession of the Netanyahu government.)

Hasan and Foreign Minister Peres met publicly, for the first time ever, in Washington in early October 1993 where, together with President Clinton, they declared the establishment of the Jordanian-U.S.-Israeli economic working group to advance regional economic development. Clearly linking its economic security and its ability to obtain foreign aid with progress in its negotiations with Israel, Jordan stepped up the pace in the Jordanian-Israeli track. In early November, Peres and Husayn met secretly in Amman. Israeli sources subsequently reported that the two leaders had agreed on the principles of a peace treaty and economic cooperation, and had also discussed a number of Jordanian requests relating to the West Bank. These reportedly included the prevention of PLO control of the bridges crossing into Jordan; the continued use of the Jordanian dinar as legal tender in the West Bank and Gaza; and the assurance that Jordan would also benefit from aid to the Palestinians, and have a share of the trade with the West Bank.

At the time, however, the Jordanians were not ready for a treaty. They were still uncertain whether the agreement with the Palestinians would, in fact, be implemented. They were similarly wary of Syrian opposition to a separate Jordanian deal. Jordanian officials denied that the Peres-Husayn meeting had taken place.[22] Moreover, they were extremely unhappy with the publicity given to the meeting in Israel, and refused henceforth to

21 *MECS* 1993, pp. 472–473.
22 Ibid., p. 474.

negotiate with Peres. From this point on, Rabin and his emissaries handled the Jordanian track exclusively.

Israel and Jordan approached this post-Oslo phase of the negotiations with different perceptions as to their immediate objective. The Jordanians consistently reaffirmed that they would not sign a separate peace treaty with Israel and that they were committed to a comprehensive peace between Israel and all of its Arab neighbors. The novelty in Jordan's position at this juncture was, however, that it no longer believed that it had to wait for progress on the Syrian or the Palestinian tracks before progressing substantively in its own talks with Israel. As Husayn himself put it, Jordan's objective was to reach comprehensive peace, but "in no way should this mean that we have to wait until progress is made by all, and until they achieve their objectives before we in this country embark on our own endeavors." According to Prime Minister Majali, if Jordan could reach a satisfactory solution to some of its problems with Israel, such as concerning borders and water, it would go ahead, without committing itself to a final peace treaty. This seemed to suggest that progress on the different tracks no longer had to be in tandem; only the signing of treaties was expected to be simultaneous.[23]

Israel, however, proposed quite the opposite: instead of partial agreements eventually leading to a treaty, the Israelis suggested that a treaty enshrining general principles should be signed first, to be followed by negotiations on the details. Husayn rejected the idea. He argued that Jordan would "not ratify a piece of paper and then begin to negotiate what it means." The treaty was to be the culmination of the negotiating process, not its beginning.[24] The massacre of Muslims at prayer in Hebron by a Jewish extremist in February 1994 led to a hiatus in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations for the implementation of the Oslo Declaration of Principles

23 Ibid.
24 *MECS* 1994, p. 409.

(DoP), and, consequently, in the negotiations with Jordan as well. The latter were resumed in earnest only in May.

Three main external factors seemed to have prompted the Jordanians to move ahead:

1. *The Palestinians.* Israel and the Palestinians signed an economic agreement in late April (in Paris) and another agreement in early May (in Cairo) for the implementation of the DoP on Gaza and Jericho. This had the dual effect of reassuring the Jordanians that the Palestinian agreement was indeed being implemented, but also of arousing anxieties that Jordan was being excluded and marginalized on political and economic issues of major interest to it in the West Bank. Jordan, it was argued, could hardly wait for progress on the Syrian track to actually bear fruit if this entailed meanwhile losing ground on the all-important Palestinian issue. There was no real Arab coordination in any case. The Palestinians were doing as they pleased, choosing to inform the Jordanians only after the event, without showing the slightest concern for Jordanian interests. The Jordanians were exasperated by Palestinian procrastination in arriving at any form of strategic understanding. Husayn concluded that "enough is enough" and that the time had come for Jordan to take control of its own destiny. As Husayn put it, considering "its interlinkage with the Palestinian issue," Jordan could not lag behind. Or, as another "leading Jordanian figure" explained, Jordan was compelled to protect its "strategic interests threatened by the ramifications of the Palestinian-Israeli agreement." Moreover, Husayn was "anxious to maintain some influence on the embryonic Palestinian state emerging on [Jordan's] borders."[25]

2. *The Syrians.* Jordanian spokesmen repeatedly contended that there had been substantial progress on the Syrian track as well. In a closed meeting with members of the Jordanian Chamber of Deputies in early June 1994, Prime Minister Majali told his audience that there was already an agreement between the United States and Syria on the "basic contours" of

25 Ibid., pp. 409–410.

an Israeli-Syrian settlement. It was never quite clear whether such pronouncements reflected a genuine assessment or merely served as a justification for going ahead of the Syrians. In any event, with the Soviet Union's demise Syria had lost much of its regional influence. It no longer held a veto power over either the Palestinians or the Jordanians. Jordan now resented the Syrian tendency to dominate their relationship whenever Husayn sought coordination. According to Husayn, Jordan had sought coordination on equal footing but this proved unattainable. The king said that he and Asad had reached an agreement to move ahead together; however, Asad could apparently afford to bide his time whereas Jordan could not.[26] Jordan was not prepared to wait for last and enter negotiations in a much weaker bargaining position.[27]

3. *The United States.* The Jordanians expected that a treaty with Israel would pave the way for debt relief by the United States (and its allies) and for aid and equipment for the modernization of the Jordanian armed forces as well.

Rabin's chief emissary to the Jordanians, Ephraim Halevi, the deputy director of the Mossad, and Elyakim Rubinstein, the head of Israel's delegation to the talks with the Jordanians since the inception of the Madrid process, paved the way for the resumption of the negotiations in secret talks with Husayn and Hasan in April and early May. These contacts were capped by Rabin himself, who met secretly with the king in London later in May.[28] A new round of formal talks was held in Washington in June. These produced an agreement to move the venue of the negotiations to the region, to a meeting point on the Israeli-Jordanian border. This in itself was progress, representing a form of normalization of the negotiating process.

26 Ibid.

27 Marwan Mu'ashshir, spokesman for the Jordanian delegation and presently Jordanian ambassador to the United States, in conversation with the author.

28 Zak, pp. 293–294

Israel accepted the Jordanian order of negotiating priorities: to deal first with the issues of border demarcation and water rights (which, despite their relative lack of strategic import, were high on the symbolic agenda of the general public). Jordan agreed to postpone negotiations on the refugee question. This, they explained to their domestic constituency, was intended to facilitate rapid progress, which the complexity of the refugee issue would not serve. Moreover, the refugee problem was multilateral and would have to involve the Palestinians and the Egyptians as well, in accordance with the Israeli-Palestinian DoP.[29]

As the negotiations gained momentum, Peres issued reassuring statements in mid-July clarifying that, for Israel, "Jordan is not Palestine... Jordan is Jordan and Palestine is Palestine." Israel, he stressed, had no intention of altering the nature of the Hashemite kingdom. For the Jordanians, Peres's statements were a welcome reaffirmation of Israel's interest in Jordan's stability. The highlight of the new atmosphere of progress was the landmark meeting on 25 July in Washington between Husayn and Rabin, who conferred in public for the first time. This was followed the next day by the two leaders' joint appearance before both houses of Congress. Jordanian officials explained the Washington meeting as a means to mobilize congressional support for a commitment given by the administration to write off Jordan's debts and to provide military aid. Indeed, the administration had urged the Jordanians to make a high-profile gesture of goodwill to Israel as a precondition for such congressional approval. Rabin noted that American aid was a decisive factor on the Jordanian track.

At the White House meeting on 25 July, Husayn and Rabin issued the Washington Declaration. The two leaders announced the termination of the state of belligerency between Israel and Jordan and reaffirmed their commitment to "vigorously continue" their negotiations to "arrive at a state of peace." Israel also declared its respect for the "present special role

29 *MECS* 1994, p. 410.

of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in Muslim holy shrines in Jerusalem" and undertook to "give high priority to the Jordanian historic role in these shrines" in future final-status negotiations. From this point onward, it was clear that a full-fledged peace treaty between the two countries was just a matter of time and timing.[30]

The negotiations on the peace treaty continued apace at three different levels in Israel and Jordan. The first was that of the official negotiating teams headed by Elyakim Rubinstein and Fayiz al-Tarawina. The second was a secret channel handled by Ephraim Halevi and Rubinstein and Hasan and Tarawina. The third was the occasional meetings at the highest level, between Rabin and Husayn. The official channel was the least important of them all. In the second channel, solutions to complicated matters that arose in regard to sectors of the border or the water issue were ironed out, essentially cutting through bureaucratic red tape. These were subsequently approved by the two leaders.[31] Just three months after the Washington Declaration, Israel and Jordan had concluded their peace treaty, which was signed on 26 October.

On border demarcation it was agreed that the international boundary between the two states would be delimited with reference to the boundary definition under the British Mandate, and would be demarcated accordingly within nine months of the signing of the treaty. Special regimes (not leasing arrangements, as was incorrectly reported at the time) were established at Naharayim/Baqura (at the confluence of the Yarmuk and Jordan rivers) and at Zofar/al-Ghamr (in the Arava/Wadi 'Araba). Israel agreed that both areas were to be under Jordanian sovereignty. Jordan recognized Israeli "private land ownership rights and property interests" at Naharayim (about 0.83 sq. km., dating back to the pre-1948 period and adjacent to the now defunct Rutenberg hydroelectric plant) and "private land use rights" at

30 Ibid., pp. 411–412.

31 Zak, pp. 297–298; *MECS* 1994, p. 412; conversation between the author and a senior Israeli negotiator.

Zofar (relating to a small cultivated area of about 1.3 sq. km., in the territory of over 300 sq. km. taken over by Israel in the late 1960s and now being returned to Jordan). Jordan undertook to allow without charge the unimpeded entry and land usage to the landowners and land users for a renewable period of twenty-five years.[32] The border demarcation also included minor land exchanges, involving some 30 sq. km., at various points in the Arava/Wadi 'Araba in which Jordan and Israel exchanged an "inch for [an] inch," according to a senior Israeli official.[33]

On water, the parties agreed to recognize the "rightful allocations of both of them in Jordan river and Yarmuk river waters and 'Araba/Arava ground water" and to cooperate in regional and international projects to increase the availability of water for the benefit of both parties. In practical terms, this meant that Jordan would now receive a larger share than before of the Yarmuk and Jordan waters.[34]

As for security-related issues, the parties undertook, in the General Principles of the treaty, "to recognize and respect each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence" and to recognize and respect "each other's right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries." They would consequently refrain from the threat or use of force or weapons, conventional or nonconventional, against each other. Since the parties did not regard each other's armies as major threats to themselves, the treaty makes no reference at all to bilateral security arrangements such as demilitarization, early warning stations, or foreign supervision, so central to the Israeli-Egyptian treaty and to the Israeli-Syrian negotiation.

Instead, the treaty relates to Jordan and Israel's perennial, regional

32 State of Israel, *Treaty of Peace between The State of Israel and The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 26 October 1994* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem), Article 3 and Annexes I(b) and I(c).

33 *MECS* 1994, p. 413.

34 *Treaty of Peace*, Annex II.

strategic anxieties, which were not only ever present in the negotiations but are arguably the treaty's main substance. Jordan's preoccupation with the specter of Palestinian expulsion by Israel, so-called "demographic aggression," on the one hand, and Israel's fundamental interest in the preservation of Jordan as a stable buffer between Israel and Iraq on the other, were both key issues crafted into the treaty. Thus, in reference to Israel's concerns about Iraq (and Syria), the parties agreed to refrain from joining or promoting any coalition with a military or security character with a third party, "the objectives or activities of which include launching aggression or other acts of military hostility against the other Party." They also agreed to refrain from "[a]llowing the entry, stationing and operating on their territory, or through it, of military forces, personnel or materiel of a third party, in circumstances which may adversely prejudice the security of the other Party."[35]

Although addressing an Israeli concern, this component of the treaty also served to formalize Israel's longstanding role as a deterrent against Iraqi or Syrian military threats against Jordan. For decades Israel had let it be known that it would react to forestall the military intervention of Jordan's powerful neighbors in the kingdom, situated along Israel's longest and most vulnerable border. The treaty may not have been a novelty in the substantive sense, but it lent the added weight of a formal and public understanding that could hardly have gone unnoticed in Damascus and Baghdad.

Assuaging Jordanian demographic anxieties, the treaty noted in its General Principles that the parties "[f]urther believe that within their control, involuntary movements of persons in such a way as to adversely prejudice the security of either Party should not be permitted."[36]

After the conclusion of the treaty the Jordanians were eager to point out that, at long last, they had put paid to the "Jordan is Palestine" theory,

35 Ibid., Article 4.
36 Ibid., Article 2.

since Israel had finally recognized the borders of the Hashemite kingdom. According to Hasan, this signaled an end to the "talk of Zionist expansion to the east of the River Jordan and about obliterating the East Jordanian identity." Hasan had also met with the leader of the Likud, Binyamin Netanyahu, twice before the signing of the peace treaty, in London in May and September 1994, and he and Husayn met with Netanyahu again in Amman in December that year. In all these meetings the Jordanians had sought, and received, reassurance that the Likud did not support the "Jordan is Palestine" formula. Netanyahu assured Husayn and Hasan that the Likud fully endorsed the peace treaty with Jordan and was committed to the country's stability and integrity.[37]

Moreover, signing the peace treaty before the final-status negotiations began between Israel and the Palestinians would provide Jordan with greater leverage, through its partnership with Israel, over the determination of the future of the West Bank and Gaza.[38] Jordan's interests in two of the four issues left for the final-status negotiations (Jerusalem, borders, settlements, and refugees) were explicitly recognized.

The treaty reaffirmed Israel's respect for Jordan's special role in Muslim shrines in Jerusalem, as was already recognized in the Washington Declaration–thus, according to one of Israel's key negotiators, providing a symbolic recognition of a foothold for Jordan in the final-status negotiations.[39] Since Jordan had become the adopted home of most of the Palestinian refugees outside of historical Palestine, its special status in this regard could not be ignored. In the treaty, it was agreed that the fate of the 1967 refugees would be addressed in the quadripartite committee, together with Egypt and the Palestinians, as already envisaged in the Oslo accords. As for the resolution of the 1948 refugee problem, it was to be dealt with by the Multilateral Working Group on Refugees, as established in the

37 *MECS* 1994, p. 415.
38 Ibid., p. 419.
39 Conversation with the author.

Madrid process. It was further agreed that Jordan would be party, in a framework to be negotiated, to the final-status discussions between Israel and the Palestinians on the refugee issue. Jordan and Israel also agreed to implement UN and other international programs concerning refugees, "including assistance to their settlement." This, in effect, included the possible resettlement of refugees in Jordan, thus assuaging Israeli fears of a massive return of refugees to Israel proper.[40]

The parties' undertaking not to allow the "involuntary movements" of people was intended primarily to put to rest Jordan's longstanding fear of an Israeli "transfer" of Palestinians to the East Bank. It was, however, also designed to relieve Israeli anxieties about a possible expulsion of Palestinians from Jordan to the West Bank.

The Agreed Minutes of the treaty took cognizance of Jordan's economic interests in the West Bank, in reference to which it was agreed that the two governments would consult with each other with the aim of eliminating or mitigating adverse effects on their economies.[41]

In fact, all of the four Palestinian-Israeli final-status issues were linked in one way or another (and the border question could not but affect Jordan directly, at least in reference to the ultimate dispensation of the Jordan Valley). Once Jordan's role had been formally recognized in two of the four, it would be difficult to prevent it from having some say on the others, particularly if Israel and Jordan understood that it would be so.

Above and beyond the purely bilateral issues, the treaty's importance clearly stemmed from Jordan's geopolitical centrality. Situated at the core of the Fertile Crescent, between Israel and Iraq, and at the heart of the Palestinian question, the main strategic significance of the Israeli-Jordanian

40 *Treaty of Peace*, Article 8. In the Arabic version of the treaty the word used for settlement, *tawtin*, had always been understood to mean resettlement outside the refugees' original homes in Palestine.

41 Ibid., Agreed Minutes, p. 1.

treaty involved its relation to other states and to the Palestinians. Israel had secured the formalization of Jordan's role as a stable buffer on its long and sensitive eastern front. Jordan, for its part, had established a solid platform of strategic understanding with Israel from whence it could protect its vital political and economic interests in relation to the emerging Palestinian entity, well ahead of the final-status talks. Israel's undertaking to give "high priority" to Jordan concerning the Muslim shrines in Jerusalem, and to consult with Jordan on its economic interests in the West Bank, as well as its commitment to Jordan's demographic equilibrium, were all gestures of Israeli goodwill emanating from a basic interest in the stability of the Hashemite kingdom. Moreover, they reflected an Israeli proclivity to defer to Jordanian concerns on the Palestinian issue. King Husayn and Prime Minister Rabin had established not only a personal affinity but a strategic rapport as well.

Peace with Israel also meant "full rehabilitation" with the United States, after the rift resulting from Jordan's pro-Iraqi posture during the Gulf War. This, in turn, enhanced Jordan's regional stature and paved the way for eventual reconciliation with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. More important, though Iraq was still of great economic interest to Jordan, the treaty signified the culmination of Jordan's shift away from Iraq as its "strategic hinterland." This was now replaced by the formal strategic protection of the United States, and the informal protection of Israel, against potential regional threats and rivalries, originating in Syria, Iraq, or from the Palestinians.

The Protective Umbrella of the United States

Jordan's peace treaty with Israel was intimately associated with the kingdom's relations with the United States. As Jordan shifted away from Iraq after the Gulf War, the United States enhanced its defense and economic commitment to the kingdom, while Israel increasingly lobbied on

Jordan's behalf in the United States, urging the administration to accede to Jordanian economic and military requests. Joint U.S.-Jordanian military exercises were held regularly as of late 1992.[42] However, from the outset it was clear to Jordan that debt relief and further military assistance would be commensurate with the kingdom's role in advancing the peace process. In the wake of the Washington Declaration, and after legislation was passed in Congress at an "unusually rapid pace," an agreement was reached in September 1994 on the phasing of debt relief over a three-year period, in tandem with progress toward peace with Israel. The United States also undertook to supply Jordan with new military hardware, including F-16 aircraft. These, however, were only supplied after the conclusion of the peace treaty with Israel.[43]

After the signing of this treaty, Jordan's historical association with the United States was fully restored. The Jordanians were relieved that the kingdom had recovered its "natural place on the political map," and that they had finally broken out of their "bottleneck of isolation."[44] The rift created by the Gulf War was now a thing of the past, and relations with the United States, according to Husayn, were "better than ever." In his speech before the Jordanian parliament, President Clinton reaffirmed that the United States would meet Jordan's legitimate defense requirements and give it the security it deserved.

The Jordanians had requested no less than $2.5 billion for ten years to revamp their military and revitalize their economy, though they could not possibly have believed that they would actually receive such amounts. They were nonetheless disappointed by the levels of aid they did receive and by the congressional hurdles they had to overcome, "cap in hand," before the U.S. commitment to debt relief was actually implemented. Various forms of U.S. aid to Jordan in 1995 amounted to over $375 million (including $275

42 *MECS* 1992, p. 561; 1993, pp. 479–480; 1995, p. 421; 1996, p. 448.
43 *MECS* 1994, pp. 409–410, 431.
44 Ibid., p. 419.

million to finance the debt relief). Aid to Jordan has since been gradually increased, and the United States has also been instrumental in securing assistance for Jordan from its European allies and from the IMF and the World Bank.

Disappointments with aid notwithstanding, what was crucial for Jordan was the fact that the United States continued to view the kingdom as a stable ally and linchpin of Middle Eastern security and stability. In November 1996, underlining the two countries' "strategic relationship," Jordan was accorded the status of a major non-NATO ally.[45]

Jordan, Israel, and the Aftermath of Peace

In the run-up to the peace treaty and thereafter, King Husayn and Prime Minister Rabin, as noted, developed an extraordinarily warm personal relationship and strategic rapport, based on Israeli consideration for Jordan's regional interests as well as its vital concerns in the Palestinian question. After Rabin's assassination in November 1995, Israel's new prime minister, Shimon Peres, resumed the close contact with Husayn. However, these two men did not enjoy the same level of rapport and trust,[46] and with the passage of time the critical importance of the personal relationship between Husayn and Rabin, as a linchpin of the Israeli-Jordanian treaty, became ever more apparent.

In the aftermath of Israel's Grapes of Wrath operation in southern Lebanon in April 1996, Peres's credibility in Jordan was said to have reached its nadir. The Jordanians were reportedly not only infuriated by the extent of destruction wrought by the military campaign, but by a number of other crucial components of Peres's regional policy that the Jordanian leadership found exasperating.

Well before Grapes of Wrath, there were indications of Jordanian

45 Ibid., p. 431; *MECS* 1995, p. 421; 1996, p. 449.
46 *MECS* 1995, pp. 404–405.

concern that Israel's pursuit of an agreement with Syria might undermine Jordan's regional role. Subsequently, Israel's preference for Syria rather than Jordan as the key Arab intermediary in bringing an end to the campaign in Lebanon "was seen as a blow in the face that could hardly be tolerated." Even more important, the Jordanians were troubled by the possible impact of the emerging Palestinian entity on the stability of the kingdom. The Labor Party leadership conducted further secret negotiations with the PLO leadership on final-status issues (the Beilin-Abu Mazin talks), without consulting or coordinating with Jordan. From the Jordanian point of view, Israel "was clearly disregarding Jordan's strategic interests in the West Bank." Moreover, this contravened statements that had been made by Foreign Minister Ehud Barak on Jordan's key role in the permanent settlement with the Palestinians.[47]

Furthermore, Jordan had developed exaggerated expectations to make the most of its "political and geographic location" to enjoy the dividends of peace. Its geographic location and unique interaction with Palestine would transform Jordan into a bridge for Israel's future integration into the region. Transport and transit trade were expected to increase, and the West Bank market would enable Jordan's exports to grow rapidly. In the longer term, the major factor would be new investment by Arabs, foreigners, and locals in what would become a more secure environment.[48] But in the first few years of peace, little of this had materialized.

Jordanian officials complained that whereas Peres had spoken much about the economic underpinnings of peace, Israel had in fact implemented policies that were overprotective of its own business interests. Complaints were raised in Jordan on a range of economically related issues, leading to the conclusion that the Israeli market would not be a likely substitute for declining trade with Iraq. Husayn was said to be particularly critical of Peres, describing him privately as a man of empty promises.[49]

47 *MECS* 1996, pp. 435–436.
48 *MECS* 1994, pp. 418–419.
49 *MECS* 1996, p. 436.

Considering their criticism of Peres, the Jordanians were not particularly disturbed by his defeat in Israel's elections in May 1996. The official Jordanian response to Netanyahu's election victory was singularly sedate, as opposed to the immediate alarm expressed in much of the rest of the Arab world. Moreover, the Jordanians may even have expected that Netanyahu's tougher negotiating stance toward the Palestinians would result in greater Israeli consideration for Jordanian interests in this crucial domain.

The Jordanians were, however, soon to become disillusioned and concerned about the consequences of an Israeli-Palestinian impasse. Gradually, Jordanian anxieties about Netanyahu began to surface. Jordanian commentators began to refer to him as a "slippery politician... telling all his different interlocutors what they want to hear." Netanyahu had to understand, they averred, that Jordan could not be taken for granted. The continuation of warm peace, irrespective of the impasse on the other tracks, was not a realistic option.[50]

Matters came to a head in late September 1996, following the opening of the Hasmonean tunnel in Jerusalem and the subsequent outbreak of violent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. Jordanian-Israeli relations entered their worst crisis since the signing of the peace treaty. Husayn joined Netanyahu and Arafat at the summit convened by President Clinton in Washington in early October in an effort to get the peace process back on track. At the summit, Husayn was unusually direct in his devastating criticism of Netanyahu, although in interviews to the media he was less acerbic. But his lack of confidence in Netanyahu was obvious, as he accused Israel of fueling militancy by failing to honor its agreements with the Palestinians. The Jordanians made it clear to Israel that : (1) Jordan could not accept deadlock in the negotiations with the Palestinians; and (2) Jordan not only rejected Israeli settlement policy as posing "the gravest

50 Ibid., p. 438.

danger" to the peace process, but also as a direct threat to the kingdom's own security and stability.[51]

The Rekindling of Old Fears and the Potential Swing of the Strategic Pendulum

This apprehension about the kingdom's security was based on the rekindled fear that Israeli policy might eventually lead to a displacement of Palestinians to make room for new Israeli settlements; or, alternatively, that it could provoke violent Palestinian-Israeli conflict. A flare-up of such violence, it was feared, might "trigger a Palestinian exodus" and thus spill over into the kingdom and inspire the revival in Israel of the dreaded "Jordan is Palestine" theory. According to Hasan, because of its "geographic and cultural proximity to Palestine," Jordan did not have the luxury of "isolating [itself] from the economic and political pressures generated in the Palestinian territories." It supported stability in the West Bank, because the kingdom "did not want to have to deal with a fourth wave of refugees."[52]

So long as the Jordanians believed in Netanyahu's willingness and capacity to continue the peace process, they cautioned their fellow Arabs against an overreaction that might force Netanyahu into a defensive and uncompromising posture. But once their confidence in the Israeli premier had been eroded, their tactics changed dramatically. Ever-increasing pressure was exerted on Netanyahu to produce the tangible progress the Jordanians felt was absolutely essential to protect their own domestic and inter-Arab interests.

Shortly after the eruption of the Har Homa/Jabal Abu Ghunaym crisis in early 1997, Husayn sent two unusually strongly worded messages to Netanyahu. The first was sent on 26 February, before the Israeli

51 Ibid., p. 440.
52 Ibid., p. 437.

government's decision to go ahead with the Jerusalem construction, warning against the negative repercussions of such a decision. In the second message, sent on 9 March, Husayn expressed his deep and genuine distress "over the accumulating tragic actions" that Netanyahu had initiated, making peace "appear more and more like a distant elusive mirage. ... You cannot send me assurances that you would not sanction any further construction of settlements ... and then renege on your commitment." The king went on to accuse Netanyahu of seemingly seeking to humiliate the Palestinians, by the settlement policy and the relatively minor further redeployment offered at the time by Israel. Husayn went on to echo the longstanding Jordanian anxieties about the creation by Israeli force of an "alternative homeland" for the Palestinians in Jordan. He expressed the fear that Israeli policies were deliberately designed to maneuver the Palestinians "into inevitable violent resistance," which would eventually result in a major confrontation, "creating yet a fresh exodus of hapless Palestinians" from their homeland. "How can I work with you as a partner and true friend in this confused and confusing atmosphere when I sense an intent to destroy all I have worked to build between our peoples and states."[53]

Husayn told an interviewer that some of Yitzhak Rabin's qualities, such as his understanding of "the pulse of the region" and his ability to place himself in Husayn's position, were "sadly missing at this time."[54]

The crisis of confidence between Husayn and Netanyahu had a corrosive effect on the very foundations of the Jordanian rationale for peace with Israel. Jordan had hoped to use its relations with Israel as a lever for "an influential role in overall peacemaking in the Arab world," especially on the Palestinian track. It was along these lines that Rabin and Husayn had established their strategic rapport. This understanding, however, now seemed to be unraveling. Although there did not appear to be any danger

53 Jordan TV, 26 February (DR) 1997; *Jordan Times*, 1, 12 March 1997.
54 Jordan TV, 12 March (DR) 1997.

that Jordan would abrogate the treaty, Husayn's confidence in Israel as a reliable strategic ally that really understood, shared, and considered Jordan's regional and Palestinian interests was being seriously undermined. Inklings of Jordanian strategic anxiety were already apparent during Peres's brief tenure as prime minister. Under Netanyahu, the strategic rapport of the Rabin era appeared to have all but evaporated.[55]

As the strategic understanding with Israel seemed to erode, Jordan's attitude toward Iraq began to shift accordingly. Despite occasional expressions of discontent with the Saddam regime and some minor crises in relations, Jordan increasingly sought to normalize relations with its powerful neighbor to the east. The Iraqis, for their part, still dependent on Jordan as their most secure outlet to the outside world, had been unusually restrained in their reaction to Jordan's undoing of their alliance since the Gulf War. When the Iraqis finally decided in May 1996 to accept Security Council Resolution 986, allowing for oil exports to finance food imports, Jordan welcomed their decision. Jordanian disappointment with the economic dividends of peace with Israel was an added inducement to seek out new trade deals with Iraq. The Jordanians began to tone down their anti-Iraqi rhetoric, as they prepared to benefit from new trading opportunities.

Such policy shifts were not entirely detached from domestic constraints. Among the ultra-Jordanian nationalists there are those who contend that Jordan's regional importance has not derived primarily from its involvement with the Palestinians (and Israel), but from Jordan's geopolitical centrality. Moreover, many in Jordan believe that the peace accord with Israel has isolated the country from its natural, wider Arab-Islamic hinterland, by overemphasizing Jordan's dependence on Israel and the United States. Both of these arguments serve an Iraqi orientation, not to mention the self-interest of the influential economic lobby and Saddam's continued popularity in Jordan. Possibly with such considerations also in

55 *MECS* 1996, pp. 440–441.

mind, Husayn now began to pursue a new balance between Jordan's desire to see Iraq return to the Arab fold and its interest in preserving and promoting the peace with Israel.

All of these factors combined to produce a shift in Jordan's pronouncements on Iraq. Sometimes there were temporary deviations from the more conciliatory tone. For example, when the Jordanians accused the Iraqis of ostensible, and hardly substantiated, involvement in the bread riots that occurred in southern Jordan in August 1996, the recriminations did not last for long and, in September, Jordan disapproved of the U.S. missile strikes against Iraq, denounced external interference in Iraq's domestic affairs, and criticized the U.S. policy of dual containment. More significant, Hasan now spoke of the need for a regional security network that would not exclude Iraq, citing Jordan's "new worries about Israel" in this context.[56] After Jordan's peace with Israel, remnants of the historical pattern governing the swing of the strategic pendulum in the Iraqi-Jordanian-Israeli triangle were still evident.

Conclusion

Jordan's geopolitical centrality has been both a liability and an asset and has long been recognized as such by the regime. References by the leadership to the kingdom's "geopolitically thankless position" reflect the fact that Jordan is surrounded by relatively more powerful neighbors capable of inflicting a wide array of extremely damaging penalties on the vulnerable kingdom. These might include anything from political subversion, to economic sanctions or blockade, to outright military invasion and conquest. The country is therefore dependent on the maintenance of strong

56 Ibid., p. 446; Tariq al-Tall, "Al-ustura wa-su al-fahm fi al-alaqat al-Urdunniyya-al-Filastiniyya," *al-Siyasa al-Filastiniyya*, no. 12 (Winter 1996), p. 160; Kumar Malhotra, "Jordan Learns to Live with Iraq," *Middle East International*, 20 December 1996, pp. 19–20; David Butter, "Economic Recovery Puts Down Roots," *Middle East Economic Digest*, 3 January 1997, p. 5.

political and economic ties with an external power and at least some of its neighbors to ensure its survival. After the Gulf War, the Israeli-American orbit of influence was the only available option.

As Hasan has often put it, "being a small nation in the heart of a volatile region inclines one towards moderation and the middle ground ... chart[ing] a consistently moderate and centrist course."[57] This has meant avoiding the potential hazards of its location by eschewing provocation, while developing political alliances, bilateral economic ties, and transit trade that can all serve to maintain the kingdom as a secure *terra media* in strategic, political, economic, and philosophical terms.

Yet it is precisely this very same geopolitical centrality, in the role of asset rather than liability, that has afforded Jordan the essential room for maneuver to secure its interests. Jordan's leaders, analysts, and commentators refer time and again to the advantages inherent in Jordan's location, lending the kingdom an importance, in terms of regional security or trade, that is greater than its size, power, or wealth would normally suggest. To quote Hasan again:

> Historically, Jordan attained most of its importance because it was part of a wider area; it was the hinge, so to speak, that linked the sharply contrasted zones that lay to north and south, east and west. The political developments that began with the advent of the twentieth century once again placed Jordan at the centre of events, and brought into high relief its potential regional role as a "middle ground," in more senses than one, in the Arab East.[58]

Jordan's intimate and multidimensional relationship with Palestine has always been, and still remains, one of the most crucial of these "hinges."

57 Text of speech by Hasan in Prague on 29 October 1996, *Jordan Times*, 31 October-1 November 1996.

58 Hassan Bin Talal, *Search for Peace: The Politics of the Middle Ground in the Arab East* (New York: St. Martin's, 1984), p. 75.

Jordan was born out of the Palestinian question and has been tied to its fortunes and misfortunes by an undetached umbilical cord from the very beginning of the Jewish-Arab struggle for Palestine. The lay of the land has been conducive since time immemorial to the development of strong administrative, social, and commercial relationships between the peoples on both banks of the Jordan River. Indeed, historically, relations on the east-west axis, between northern, central, and southern Jordan and the corresponding areas in Palestine, were far closer than those that linked these areas between themselves on the north-south axis.[59]

Jordan's interests in Palestine, devolving from its proximity coupled with the expansionist ambition of King Abdallah, led to Jordan's involvement in the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948. Although Abdallah achieved his political ambition, with Jordan succeeding in occupying and subsequently annexing the West Bank, the war resulted in a demographic and political transformation of his kingdom. Jordan has suffered more than other states from the demographic fallout of the conflict, as hundreds of thousands of Palestinians took refuge in Jordan (on both banks) in 1948 and again in 1967. There are today far more Palestinians in Jordan than in the West Bank and possibly almost as many as in the West Bank and Gaza combined. It is, therefore, virtually impossible to conceive of a lasting and stable solution to the Palestinian question that does not forge some form of association between the East and West banks of the Jordan. The West Bank is landlocked between Israel and Jordan, and the more Israel disengages, and the more the Palestinians wish to reduce their dependence on Israel, so the West Bank will become increasingly dependent on Jordan. There are simply no other alternatives–if Israel and the Palestinians do indeed choose to pursue this course of so-called "separation."

From the outset Jordan, because of its proximity, demographic composition, historical involvement in the Palestinian issue, and relative

59 Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, *The Jordanian-Palestinian Relationship: The Domestic Dimension* (1996), p. 5.

moderation toward Israel, was seen by the United States "as an essential part of the solution" to the Arab-Israeli conflict. "The attention and solicitations directed toward Jordan by the United States because of the Arab-Israeli conflict ... have given Jordan a stature nearly equal to that of much larger, more powerful states, like Egypt, or vastly more wealthy ones, like Saudi Arabia."[60]

Jordan was similarly indispensable in American preparations for the Madrid conference in late 1991, providing the essential umbrella for Palestinian participation. The Oslo accords were not the doing of the United States, and are therefore no indication of American attitudes toward Jordanian centrality. Moreover, even though the agreement with the PLO was initially feared by the Jordanians to have signified a major historical shift in Israel's attitude toward Jordan, they were apparently reassured by Rabin.

Jordan's geopolitical centrality has accorded the kingdom strategic importance that has remained intact despite frequently shifting circumstances. Since Transjordan initially had "little meaning beyond its importance to British strategy and imperial communications," its significance was bound to decline "when British interests changed or when British power itself receded." But the struggle for Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict reaffirmed Jordan's pivotal role, for new and different reasons.[61] Jordan's utility to Israel as a *cordon sanitaire* was almost equaled by the importance attached to Jordan by Israel's adversaries in the Arab world, as a platform for the invasion of Israel, or, alternatively, as an indirect approach for an Israeli invasion of Syria. Although Jordan's army is by no means the most powerful in the region, it is certainly the most respected and

60 Adam Garfinkle, "Jordan in World Politics," in Joseph Nevo and Ilan Pappe, eds., *Jordan in the Middle East, 1948–1988: The Making of a Pivotal State* (London: Frank Cass, 1994), p. 285.

61 Mary Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 213–214.

professional military force in the Arab world. The strategic importance of Jordan's territory, and its military power, have therefore been almost as crucial to Syria as they have been to Israel, albeit for diametrically opposite reasons.

The deescalation of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the end of the Cold War might have diminished some of Jordan's former regional significance to the United States.[62] The signing of the Oslo accords clearly altered Jordan's role as indispensable partner for Israel in the pursuit of a settlement of the Palestinian issue. Yet Jordan remains a key, in the eyes of both Israel and the United States, to a moderate, stable overall Palestinian solution, albeit in its altered status.

The 1990s have, however, been a period of strategic discomfort for Jordan. The United States remains Jordan's protector of last resort, but alliances in the Fertile Crescent are far more difficult to form. Jordan's Arab neighbors have lost much of their political, strategic, and economic alliance potential. Syria has hardly ever been a reliable ally, Iraq has been incapacitated by the sanctions regime, and the Saudis are less willing than before to help with financial handouts. This reality made peace with Israel an almost unavoidable option. As the Jordanians would have it, Israel at peace with Jordan and the Palestinians is neither a military nor a demographic threat, sparing Jordan the need to seek strategic depth (and dependence) in Iraq or Syria. Peace buttressed by a strategic understanding between Israel and Jordan on the contours of a Palestinian solution, which would not threaten either of the two, would provide Jordan with an even more profound sense of security.

This appeared to be in the making between Husayn and Rabin, but eluded Husayn and Netanyahu. With Husayn's death in 1999, both of the statesmen whose personal rapport had given the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty its unique sense of intimacy had passed from the scene. The web of

62 Garfinkle, pp. 300–302.

mutual state interests between Israel and Jordan remains intact, and there appears to be no doubt about both sides' continuing abidance by their treaty obligations. But the added value of the personal chemistry and the strategic rapport at the highest political level, so difficult to maintain between Husayn and Rabin's successors, Peres and Netanyahu, might prove elusive in the future. It would require the leadership, drive, and emotional commitment such as were displayed by senior warrior-statesmen like Husayn on the one hand and Rabin on the other, for the much-vaunted "warm peace" to become a reality.

In the meantime, the economic dividends of peace have also fallen way below Jordanian expectations. If Israel was supposed to provide the essential strategic and economic compensation for the shortcomings of Jordan's Arab hinterland, it has yet to do so.

This has been doubly distressing for the Jordanians, whose strategic discomfort of late has been coupled with socioeconomic travails. Jordan's economy is struggling to make ends meet, hampered by a chronic imbalance between resources and population whereby economic growth can only keep apace of the population increase with much difficulty if at all. Whatever Jordan will not be able to obtain from its association with Israel, it is bound to seek from the United States on the one hand, and/or from a shift toward the Arab hinterland (Syria or Iraq or both together) on the other.

Considering the historical record, the inherent volatility of Middle Eastern politics, and the external dependence on the area's resources, it is most likely that Jordanian stability will continue to be of paramount interest to the major powers in the region and further afield. For most states in the region and elsewhere, the Hashemite regime is preferable to any of the possible alternatives, fundamentalist or otherwise. Moreover, Jordan's collapse and the likely ensuing violent scramble for the spoils between Syria and Iraq, or between either one of them, or both combined, against Israel, could have potentially horrendous consequences for the entire region. Few, if any at all, have an interest in such a catastrophic turn of events. Jordan is no longer needed as a barrier to Arab revolutionaries nor to Soviet

expansionism. But Jordan's role as regional stabilizer, between the states of the Fertile Crescent and between Arabs and Israelis, remains as crucial as ever. The rallying of the international community to Jordan's side on the occasion of King Husayn's death suggested that the recognition of Jordan's regional importance has not changed.

The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Alfred Davis Building, Mount Scopus, Jerusalem 91905, Israel
Tel. 972-2-5882312 Fax. 972-2-5825534
e-mail: msdavis@mscc.huji.ac.il
http://atar.mscc.huji.ac.il/~davis