

# Israel and the Jordanian Question

By [Mordechai Nisan](#) (June 2022)



During a visit to King Abdullah II in Amman early January 2022, Israel's Minister of Defense Benny Gantz referred to "the strategic importance of strong and enduring relations between Israel and Jordan." We shall suggest reasonable justifications for Israel's positive orientation toward the Hashemite Kingdom; thereafter we will offer counterarguments for an alternative perspective to reassess the policy.

## **Jordan is an Israeli Interest: Four Reasons**

1. Jordan has sustained a stable regime in contrast to the political chaos afflicting the Arab world in recent years. Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Lebanon, experienced political polarization and domestic violence; rulers were overthrown and many thousands were murdered. Jordan and her king have weathered the political storms across the region. Amman did not face a popular uprising, revolution, or a coup d'état.

While the Hashemites demonstrated firm control of the country, Palestinians over the years sought to undermine the regime, fomented dissension and havoc in Lebanon and Kuwait, created a corrupt rogue Authority in Judea and Samaria, and an Islamic terrorist entity in the Gaza Strip. Jordan is a better political option to any Palestinian version to replace the Hashemite monarchy.

2. The historic Zionist-Hashemite connection offers a whiff of romance and nostalgia to an otherwise utilitarian relationship. Chaim Weizmann conversed with King Faisal in 1919, Golda Meir visited with King Abdullah in 1948,

Moshe Dayan negotiated an armistice with El-Tell in 1949, Yitzhak Rabin conferred with King Hussein, Naphtali Bennett met secretly with King Abdullah. The Israeli leadership partially coordinated the conduct of the war in 1948 with Jordanian counterparts, and concluded a peace treaty in 1994. Over many years, the two sides discussed the feasibility of a "Jordanian Option" to contain or neutralize the "Palestinian Question" and block Palestinian statehood. Already in the 1930s, this had been a shared Zionist-Hashemite goal.

3. Jordan serves as a buffer state to hamper a possible Arab military onslaught from the east. This establishes a tacit alliance between the two countries: Jordan guards the eastern approaches to Israel, and Israel serves as a guarantor for Jordan's existence. Any potential aggressor from the east would encounter Israel's military intervention to thwart or preempt ground forces traversing Jordan and advancing toward Israel. As a buffer state in Israel's strategic calculations, Jordan is a first target for the armies of Syria, Iraq, Iran, and ISIS, in the event they plan to cross the river and invade Israel; alternatively, to use the East Bank as a territorial platform for missile attacks against Tel-Aviv. An Arab incursion into Jordan or proximate military advances toward the Jordanian border would therefore ignite a trip-wire Israeli response to secure *Jordan and Israel* in one stroke. Meanwhile, military cooperation, training, aerial exercises, intelligence information, and border security coordination are some partially veiled aspects of the Israeli-Jordanian nexus.
4. American military aid and support for both Israel and Jordan gives the two Mideast countries a superpower strategic umbrella for common interests. They are both

considered allies of the United States, certainly aligned with her, and this found an expression in the economic domain with the Qualifying Industrial Zone arrangements. After the 1994 treaty, Washington assisted Amman by implementing debt-relief arrangements to assist Jordan's economic solvency. While America maintains an on-the-ground military presence in Jordan, she considers Israel an important partner for weapons systems development and broad strategic purposes in the region. Washington has diligently cemented the Israeli-Jordanian connection. A seemingly minor incident in May illustrated this point, when a planned civil engineering conference in Amman refused to allow the participation of Israeli researchers, and it took American intervention to overturn the Jordanian boycott. On a high political note, we recall that at the signing ceremony of the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty in 1994 in the Arava desert, President Clinton stood smiling on the stage as the political facilitator of this historic event.

## **Jordan is not an Israeli interest: Four Reasons**

1. Although Jordan has the geographic, political, and national features of a Palestinian entity, it fails to assume the role of the Palestinian state. The formula of a two-state solution to the Palestinian problem bypasses Jordan by placing the Palestinian state in the West Bank contiguous to Israel. In the eyes of the world, Jordan is neither the problem nor the solution. If however there would be a Palestinian state on the East Bank, across the Jordan River from Israel, it would flesh out the geo-political formula for conflict-resolution. A Palestinian state, yes; not one that threatens Israel's existence but one that replaces the Hashemite Kingdom of

Jordan. We have here exposed the political elephant in the room.

2. The visible and public bilateral Israeli-Jordanian relationship does not convey public trust and political calm. It is a “cold peace” and Amman sabotaged normalization from the start. No people-to-people peace, declining Israeli exports to Jordan, harassment of Israeli tourists, few official Jordanian visits to Israel – His Royal Highness King Abdullah II never came to the Jewish state. Israel gives/sells water and gas to Jordan; Jordan, for her part, publicly humiliated Israel by terminating the leasing of agricultural lands at Tzofar.

In the wake of Palestinian riots on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in April, Jordan lauded and incited the violence. Prime Minister Bisher al-Khasawneh “saluted every Palestinian...who throws rocks at the Zionists who pollute the Al-Aqsa Mosque.” Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi accused Israel of aggression and intrusion, as the police quelled the riots at what is Israel’s holiest site for the Jewish people. The Jordan Bar Association called on the government to sever diplomatic ties with Israel. Israel’s policy since 1967 to concede the daily administration of the mount to the Muslim Jordanian-controlled Waqf proved to be a gesture with debilitating consequences. Alas, Israel gives, then gets politically blooded in return.

3. Jordan’s King Abdullah II brings an intensity to his call for a two-state solution. This featured in his pre-recorded address to the United Nations General Assembly in 2021, as when addressing the European Parliament. He earns applause and accolades from international audiences untrained in the political sub-text: that is, Jordan is exempt from contributing to a solution to the

Palestinian problem.

When the king calls for “genuine security” for all parties, he conceals the indubitable truth that a Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria would be a lethal menace to the political and territorial integrity of the Hashemite Kingdom. A tiny Palestinian state would immediately look westward to annihilate Israel and eastward to swallow up Jordan. Palestinian irredentism could destabilize the two countries, both historically apprehensive of the explosive potential of Palestinian statehood.

Visiting President Biden at the White House in 2021, more recently in May 2022, Abdullah earned praise for his promotion of peace. However, the elusive peace and the squandering of enormous diplomatic energy owes much to Jordanian duplicity in escaping responsibility and in diverting attention from the obvious and just solution. If Jordan will be Palestine, then the Palestinian problem dissolves at once. The international community would finally realize that the Hashemite Kingdom was all along the real obstacle hindering a solution for the so-called “stateless Palestinians.”

4. A Palestinian state in Jordan would accelerate the migration from the West Bank to the East Bank of Palestinians seeking a sense of homeland, physical security, and economic opportunity. There has been a constant flow of emigration from west of the river eastward as a human wave for a century, culminating in the emergence of Amman as “the largest Palestinian city in the world” and of Jordan as a Palestinian-majority state. This migratory movement for a distance of just tens of kilometers led to the Palestinization of Jordan in all areas of life. It also contributed to ameliorating Israel’s demographic balance between Jews

and Arabs locked in an ineluctable struggle. From the earliest days of Zionism's birth, Jewish leaders proposed peaceful population transfer of Arabs who endangered, certainly hindered, the establishment and realization of a secure Jewish state.

A Palestinian state on the East Bank, enjoying financial investment, economic development, and housing projects, offers a scenario more attractive for prospective Arab migrants than remaining under the rule of the rogue Palestinian Authority and the terrorist Hamas regime. It would also offer Palestinian citizens in Israel the proximate alternative by choosing to live under Arab, not Jewish, rule. Re-defining Jordan as Palestine is good for the Palestinians and no less good for Israel too.

## **Conclusion**

It is true that Israel needs Jordan and Jordan needs Israel. They have overlapping and intertwining interests beneficial to both countries. This is an unobjectionable conclusion rooted in reality.

In the end, the Palestinians may never reach the stage of independence and sovereignty. They are barking up the wrong political tree west of the river: the incompatibilities with Israel are too formidable, the power differential too great, the level of mistrust too high, and the shortcomings of Palestinian nationhood too debilitating, to enable the Palestinians to overwhelm Zionism and destroy Jewish statehood. Israel, entrenched and resolute, will not capitulate even in the face of widespread terrorism and/or global pressure.

As we ponder the conundrum attending the Israeli-Palestinian

impasse, we can do no better than quote words from Eric Voegelin writing on another topic: "There can be no peace, because the [Palestinian] dream cannot be translated into reality and reality [Israel] has not yet broken the dream. No one, of course, can predict what nightmares of violence it will take to break the dream."

In Jordan, the story is different. For Jordan has talked its way out of an existential Palestinian menace, deftly maneuvering Israel to take the political rap. It is a giant irony that after Israel secures Jordan, the Hashemites throw Israel under the Palestinian bus.

However, the story is not over. The Nakba process is on track. In 1947-48, the Arabs of Palestine rejected compromise and a two-state solution, choosing to conduct warfare against the Jews, that culminated, unexpectedly for the Palestinians, in massive Arab flight facing Zionist advances. Igniting the fighting, the Palestinians paid a heavy human price in creating the refugee problem.

Now in 2022, sensing their moment in history has arrived, the Arabs in Israel have again set their sights high on defeating the Jews. They are pushing Israel to the wall. They steal and harass, demand and threaten, extort and betray every decent moral dictum. Arabs are disloyal to the state, hate the flag, despise the soldiers, and scuffle with the police.

The unfolding of this situation can have but one singular causal result: Nakba 2. An explosive confrontation has been seething for years, with recent Palestinian murders of Israelis in Tel-Aviv and Beersheba, Bnei-Brak, Hadera and Elad. Confrontation, military and otherwise, will likely cause Palestinian flight/migration eastward to the East Bank –as in 1948. The present flow of events will further magnify Jordan as a Palestinian state. Forcing Israel's hand to respond vigorously, the escalation of things will bring about a just result.



The Nakba of 1948 was just, but not enough. The secret hand of the logic of history will provide its dialectical answer to the policy dilemma at the root of our inquiry on 'Israel and the Jordanian question.'

*\*This essay is based on the author's talk at a Zoom conference on "Jordan: Past, Present, and Future: The Jordan Option Revisited," May 15, 2022.*

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