

THEN: PALESTINE — NOW: JORDAN & ISRAEL**WHAT IS PALESTINE?**

The geopolitical entity to which the Romans in the second century C.E. gave the name "Palestina" (in a futile attempt to eradicate the Jews' link to this land) entered history as the sovereign homeland of the Jewish nation more than 3,000 years ago. Since that time, Jews have continuously lived there, though often under foreign conquerors. In fact, for over 3,000 years the one common demographic denominator in "Palestina" has been the Jews. Concurrently, no ethnic or national community -- except the Jews -- has claimed Palestine/Israel as its distinctive home.

Until the early twentieth century, Palestine was considered a geographic concept, covering the area both west and east of the Jordan River; the term "Palestinian" must therefore refer to all the inhabitants of this area. And the "right of self-determination for the Palestinians" is a right to which Palestinian Jews as well as Palestinian Arabs are entitled -- and which both, in fact, have attained.

In 1922, recognizing "the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine" and "the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country," the League of Nations granted Britain a mandate over Palestine pending the establishment there of a Jewish national home.

One of Britain's first acts as mandatory power was to divide Palestine, giving over 77 percent to the Emir Abdullah, who, in 1946, established Trans-Jordan -- later renamed Jordan. (King Abdullah originally had wanted to call his country "Palestine" but was persuaded that the name "Jordan" would emphasize the King's rule over both banks of that river.) Thus, in the greater part of Palestine -- the area east of the River Jordan -- the right of Palestinian Arabs to self-determination was realized.

Yet the Jews' concomitant right to self-determination in the remaining 23 percent of Palestine was not to be granted so readily. Arab posed the fulfilment of Jewish national aspirations in any part of Palestine whatsoever.

ISRAEL IS JEWISH PALESTINE

In 1947 the United Nations sought to settle the conflict by another division (this time of western Palestine) into Jewish and Arab states. In May 1948 Jewish Palestine (Israel) proclaimed its independence. The neighbouring Arab states, however, joined in a massive assault on Israel. Though Israel succeeded in repulsing the invasion, Judea and Samaria were captured, and later annexed, by Jordan; only Britain and Pakistan recognized this annexation. The Gaza district was taken (though not annexed) by Egypt.

Since mid-1948, then, two independent sovereign states have existed in the area once known as Palestine: the Arab-Palestinian state of Jordan, in eastern Palestine, and the Jewish-Palestinian state of Israel, in western Palestine. For this very reason another Arab Palestinian state was not established in western Palestine (the so-called "West Bank", i.e., Judea and Samaria) during the 19 years it was controlled by Jordan. It made no sense then; it makes no more sense now. On the contrary, a glance at the map will show that the establishment of a potentially hostile third state within the narrow

(50 - mile - wide) area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River would be a constant threat to Israel -- and therefore a totally unacceptable notion.

JORDAN IS ARAB PALESTINE

All non-Jewish inhabitants in the area conquered by Jordan in 1948 were granted Jordanian citizenship, and there was free and unhampered movement between the areas on the two sides of the river. Over 400,000 Palestinian Arabs from Judea and Samaria moved east of the Jordan River -- mainly to be closer to Amman, Jordan's capital, and the improved social and economic opportunities offered there. Ethnic, social, religious and linguistic similarities between the Arab populations on both sides of the river, and the extremely short distance, made these migrations merely a "change of address," as one writer put it.

Today, Jordan's population -- even without the western area it lost in its abortive attack on Israel in 1967 -- is still composed mostly of Arabs of west-Palestinian origin (the rest are Arabs of east-Palestinian origin). As Jordan's King Hussein said in an interview for the Paris-based An-Nahar al-Arabi w'al-Daouli, on 26 December 1981, "The truth is that Jordan is Palestine and Palestine is Jordan."

THE SOLUTION: CAMP DAVID

The conclusion is inescapable: The problem is not the absence of a homeland for the Palestinians. The homeland exists -- and, in it, both Arabs and Jews have found national self-expression. The problem now focuses on a 2,000 - square - mile area called Judea-Samaria, whose political future is yet to be determined. And that is where the two - part Camp David Agreements come in.

The Camp David autonomy plan, negotiated by Israel, Egypt and the United States in 1978, is an interim measure -- a transition stage between the present situation and the permanent status of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza district to be worked out in negotiations towards the end of the five - year transitional period. With a half-century of hostility between the parties, this interim period is extremely important to build up mutual confidence, tolerance and understanding, as well as to try out new political arrangements.



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So far, it has been Israel that has made the lion's share of material, social, economic and strategic concessions in order to make the realization of the Camp David Agreements possible. In April 1982, Israel voluntarily gave Egypt the entire strategic 150-mile-wide Sinai Peninsula, for an Egyptian-Israeli peace based on those agreements.

Having staked everything on a settlement based on the Camp David peace package, which includes the autonomy plan, Israel cannot now be expected to re-negotiate its future and that of the region on the basis of new "peace plans" containing provisions that had been deliberately excluded from the Camp David Agreements.

The formula for a peaceful resolution of the conflict is there. Its principal ingredients are mutual recognition, direct negotiation and the determination to abandon war as an instrument of policy and to embark on the road to peace. It is a formula that works: it has worked for Israel and Egypt. With a measure of good will and a genuine aspiration for peace, it can be adapted -- with changes as appropriate in each case -- to other states in the region, states that so far have shown no inclination to join the peace process.

MISSING PARTNERS

Under Camp David, the ultimate disposition of Judea, Samaria and Gaza is to be made, after a three - year "running-in" period for the autonomy, through negotiations conducted among representatives of Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the inhabitants of those areas. The latter two groups have also been invited, as stipulated in the agreements, to participate in the current talks on the autonomy, but until now they have refused, yielding to pressure from the PLO and the Arab rejectionist camp -- elements that have, all along, violently opposed the peace process.

With the route of the PLO in Lebanon, as a result of Israel's Operation Peace for Galilee, and the removal -- hopefully -- of the PLO's intimidating influence on the Middle East political scene, the prospect has now emerged of truly moderate elements among the Palestinian Arabs joining the peace process and, with that very act, contributing to a freely negotiated peace settlement.

Certainly every effort should be made to prevail upon them to do so -- not by enticing them to the peace table with premature concessions but, rather, on the basis of the vision that brought a far-sighted Egyptian leader to Jerusalem, with the simple, straightforward message: No more war! Let us sit down and negotiate peace with security for all.

(This article is from "The Palestinian Labyrinth," by M. Aumann, Israel Academic Committee on the Middle East 1982.)

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