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**"The Jordanian Options" - Variations of a Jordanian
Role in an Israeli-Palestinian Settlement**

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The paper reflects the opinion of the author only

Introduction

Lately Jordanian involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has been discussed in Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian circles. Potential ideas for such involvement include: Jordanian trusteeship during an interim settlement, various levels of a link – federation or confederation - between Jordan and future Palestinian State in the framework of a final status agreement, Jordan as a “Motherland” for Palestinian “cantons” and a “Benelux” paradigm for a Jordanian-Palestinian- Israeli relationship.

The rationale of these “Jordanian Options” is that they could facilitate solutions that would be problematic in a bilateral Israeli-Palestinian context, enhance the gamut of options available to the Israeli and Palestinian sides to achieve their own interests, compensate the Palestinians for economic and demographic disadvantages inherent in the geography of an independent Palestine and allay some of Israel’s fears. This paper analyses the historic and current rationale, advantages, disadvantages and feasibility of these paradigms of “Jordanian Options”.

The Historic Perspective

Jordanian-Palestinian relations were fraught with complexities even before the West Bank was lost to Israel in the Six Day War. As early as the days of the British Mandate, King Abdullah, viewed Palestinian radicalism as a potential threat to his Kingdom to be dealt with by absorbing the Palestinians into Jordan and defusing the Refugee problem by implementing plans for refugee settlement. Jordan was also the only Arab country which saw the Palestinian refugee problem as one that could be solved by the “host countries” and floated ideas in this spirit as early as 1960.

The very name “**West Bank**” implied its political “de-Palestinization”. At the same time, the “Unity of the two Banks” brought about an irreversible creeping ethnic “Palestinization” of the East Bank. King Hussein’s own Palestine-effacing slogan “Jordan is Palestine and Palestine is Jordan” could be turned around to imply that Jordan could be a non-Hashemite “alternative Homeland” (*watan badil*) for the Palestinians.

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It was this threat along with the growing Arab and international acceptance of the principle of “self-determination” for the Palestinians that brought Jordan to field ideas for a “federative” link between Jordan and the West Bank; Jordan believed that it could block the idea of the “alternative Homeland” by demarcating the borders between the two entities, while maintaining control over the Palestinians through institutional ties.

This basic position did not change after the Arab Summit in Rabat recognized the PLO as “the sole legitimate representative” of the Palestinians. Jordan profited from the Israeli refusal to talk with the PLO and offered itself as a “sub-contractor” or a facilitator for negotiations through various mechanisms (Before Camp David in 1978, after the PLO was evicted from Beirut in 1982, the Hussein-Arafat accord of February 1985 and finally the joint delegation in and after the Madrid Conference of 1991). Israel brought an end to this option by recognition of the PLO as its negotiating partner in the Oslo Accords.

Jordan’s policy of **unilateral disengagement** from the Palestinians (“Jordan first”) began in 1974 as a tactic to demonstrate to the Palestinians and the Arabs that Jordan remains essential to any future settlement. However, it also expressed a growing East Jordanian trend to guarantee the future of the Kingdom by disassociation from the West Bank and even disenfranchising of the Palestinians living in the East Bank. Jordan’s “severance” of ties with the West Bank (1988) came out of Jordanian apprehension that the “Intifadah syndrome” - a meltdown of political and social authority – may “spill over” into Jordan.

The Jordanian apprehension of a “spill-over” of the Intifadah into the East bank grew in the wake of the “al-Aqsa Intifadah”, the accelerated disintegration of the PA and Palestinian society and Israel’s own plan for unilateral disengagement. As Israel disengages and “seals itself off” from the Palestinians, Jordan fears that it may come under domestic and Arab pressure to open its doors to the Palestinians. Without the traditional outlet of Palestinian immigration to the Gulf countries, the population of disgruntled and disenfranchised Palestinians in Jordan would swell and destabilize the country.

Future Options

The classic “Jordanian Option” had been a codeword in Israeli politics for a way to circumvent the existential national conflict between two claimants to the same land by re-engineering it as a border dispute to be resolved between two existing sovereign states, in conjunction with a subordinate Palestinian representation. Its primary source was Israel’s refusal to deal with the PLO. The classic “Jordanian Option” had lost its relevance in light of the wide acceptance of Palestinian nationalism and national claims in the international community and the Arab world, while the Israeli rationale was canceled with the Oslo accords. The death of Arafat – no doubt the most fundamental change in the Palestinian movement in the last four decades – along with Israel’s policy of disengagement and the lack of an effective Palestinian authority may warrant for a re-evaluation of this concept as well.

Any future “Jordanian Option” therefore would be based on the existence of an Israeli–Palestinian relationship and an assumption of Palestinian independence as the “end result” of the peace process. A future Jordanian role may be, therefore, support for the interim settlements and as an equal partner with Palestine in a federative or confederative link.

Any paradigm of a “Jordanian option” would have to address the basic interests of Israel, Jordan, the Palestinians and the international community. In this context:

- **Israel** would not benefit from Palestinian domination over a Unified Jordanian-Palestinian entity in lieu of the present Hashemite Kingdom. A “Jordanian Option” would, therefore, have to be based on the predominance of the existing regime in Amman, including concentrating defense and security authority in that regime (and not in the “local” Palestinian security forces in the West Bank) and providing the Jordanian element a status in Jerusalem (to moderate the Palestinian Islamic trend).
- **The Palestinians** have already received international (including American) acceptance of their right to an independent state. In the context of a link with Jordan, the main Palestinian claim would be for

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- clear expressions of national sovereignty, parity in the “federal” government, wide authority to the “local” Palestinian government and reduction of the authority of the Crown. They would also probably demand a self-defense capability, and the right of secession (e.g. unfettered implementation of the “right of self determination”); a solution to the refugee problem, which can be interpreted as implementation of the “right of return”; Recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Palestine and Palestinian sovereignty over the Temple Mount (al-Haram al-Sharif); continued economic links to Israel.
- **Jordan’s** primary interest is the survival of the “Hashemite Entity” and its protection against ideas of “Jordan is Palestine”. The **East Bank Jordanians** would probably oppose a link that would oblige them to give up their predominance (along the lines of South Africa) and bring about a majority of Palestinians with nationalist tendencies into the Kingdom and thus influence the Palestinians who have already been successfully absorbed in the East Bank. Therefore, it may be assumed that a Jordanian view of the link with the Palestinians would be based on a clear distinction between the two entities that would preclude future “Palestinization” of the East Bank. It is also doubtful that the present Jordanian leadership would accept a Palestinian demand to adapt the Jordanian regime to the link with a democratic Palestine by changing Jordan into a constitutional monarchy.
 - The **international community** – including the United States sees a Palestinian national entity as essential for a just and lasting solution of the Palestinian problem and at the same time is committed to the continued stability and integrity of Hashemite Jordan. A Jordanian-Palestinian federation would have to be perceived as clearly expressing the will of the Palestinians for it to receive international legitimacy.

Current paradigms of Jordanian Involvement

As a result of the developments outlined above, various circles in Amman and among senior Palestinians have called for a review of the future of the relations with the Palestinians, and possible re-engagement in the process through revival of ideas for a Jordanian-Palestinian federation, a trilateral “Benelux” type Jordanian-Palestinian–Israeli federation and even Jordanian involvement in an interim “trusteeship” period through a Jordanian military presence in lieu of or in support of the Palestinian security forces. Jordan’s proactive positions on reasserting its authority in the Mosques of *al-Haram al-Sharif* (the Temple Mount) were an expression of this shift.

Interim Settlement Options

A number of ideas have been raised for Jordanian involvement in interim settlements, some of which would imply a Jordanian–Palestinian link in the ensuing permanent settlement. These ideas include:

- **“Trusteeship”** – this model is popular in the international community as a tool for conflict resolution and has been successfully implemented in various conflicts in the world. In the Jordanian–Palestinian context, it has been raised lately in private by senior Palestinians as a proposal for Jordanian trusteeship of the PA along the lines of the NATO OSCE involvement in the Balkans, i.e. a temporary Jordanian military presence (Jordanian Palestine Liberation Army units) in lieu of the Palestinian security organizations and pending a referendum to decide on the future structure of the relations between the two entities.
- **Declaration of a “confederation”** prior to the founding of a Palestinian State as a negotiating mechanism – This concept is based on the “Joint Jordanian-Palestinian Delegation” which negotiated with Israel in and after the Madrid Conference or a pre-negotiation agreement on the future creation of a joint entity along the lines of the Hussein–Arafat Accord of 11 February 1985, which stipulated that the “inalienable right of self-determination” of the Palestinian people will be exercised “when Jordanians and Palestinians will be able to do so within the context of the formation of the proposed **confederal** states of Jordan and Palestine”.

Final Status Options

There are over one hundred different models of shared government, mixed government, trusteeship, power-sharing, and autonomies in effect in the world. Only a few of these have been investigated in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process. Possible “Jordanian options” run on a spectrum from restoration of the pre-1967 “Unity of the Two Banks” to a loose confederacy between two sovereign States and formal links between the Jordanian-Palestinian entity and Israel. The possible models available in the Jordanian-Palestinian context include;

1. **A return to the status quo ante before 1967** (with border modifications). This is not a feasible option and is not contemplated by either Jordanians or Palestinians.
2. **“Jordan is Palestine”** - This model would recognize Jordan as the embodiment of Palestinian self-determination, in essence eliminating the Hashemite Entity. For such a “Palestinian Jordan” to hold negotiations on borders with Israel it would have to have a legitimate “Palestinian” regime that would reflect the will of the majority (i.e. the Palestinians). The regime would have to be re-engineered accordingly. This would probably lead to the original Fatah and PLO design of the late 1960’s – the East Bank as a “Hanoi” for the liberation of all of Palestine; such an entity would have an adverse effect on the identification of Israel’s own Arab community with the State of Israel.
3. **Federation** – This model implies equality of citizens of both Banks before the federal government with no intermediary or qualification according to their religious or national origin. On the other hand, it provides a degree of national autonomy and political expression through the local governments. These would be answerable to locally elected Parliaments but limited in executive powers to those which have been constitutionally accorded to them or devolved from the central government. One possible existing model for such a Federation would be the “devolution” models of home rule in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; foreign, defense and security policy would remain in the hands of the central government (i.e. the Hashemite Regime). The

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- control of security by the Jordanian regime would be seen as an advantage from Israel's point of view. However, such an arrangement would favor the stronger party in the federation (Jordan) and may not satisfy the aspirations of the more radical Palestinians for true expressions of Statehood. The East Jordanian elite may also see in such an arrangement a danger to the "Jordanian" character of the country as the link between the two parts of the federation may strengthen the "Palestinization" of Jordan itself.
4. **Confederation** – This model represents a weaker association with greater freedom to secede. Each component State would have its own institutions and common areas would be agreed upon and subject to constant consensus. The basic divisions from which the State has been formed – Jordan and Palestine – would be preserved. This option implies a high degree of formal Palestinian separateness and ostensible sovereignty with only chosen key elements of control and actual sovereignty retained by the "federal government". This model goes further than any other "Jordanian Option" in satisfying the Palestinian demands for self-determination and in assuaging Jordanian fears of a Palestinian take over of the East Bank. From an Israeli point of view it is lacking in guarantees of control of the Palestinians by Jordan and in that it would be in constant danger of dissolution and, hence, would not contribute to stability.
 5. **Jordan as a "Motherland for Palestinian Cantons** – This model (proposed by various circles among the Israeli settlers and right wing) would designate Jordan as the "Motherland" for the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian population in these areas would be seen as autonomous expatriate areas or "cantons" linked with administrative ties with Jordan; they would vote for the Jordanian Parliament and be subject to Jordanian law within their own areas. Such an arrangement has no international precedent and would not assuage the sense of the Palestinians that they are under occupation, and hence it would not reduce the motivation for terrorism.

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6. **Tri-lateral Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian Confederation** – This model has been suggested by the Jordanians a number of times over the years in diverse variants: Federation, Confederation, Economic Union, etc. Palestinian circles have also adopted these ideas on various opportunities. Jordanians see the tri-lateral link as a way to diffuse Palestinian antagonism and to prevent it from being directed primarily at the Jordanian partner. The link with Israel also has economic logic for Jordan; opening Israeli labor markets for the Palestinians and even Jordanians would relieve the pressure – both economic and demographic – on Jordan. The link would also provide Jordan with a Palestinian legitimacy for close ties with Israel. From Israel’s point of view, the wide gap between the three economies in Israel’s favor would make it the natural magnet for economic migration. Since it is virtually impossible to prevent open economic borders from turning into open demographic borders, any tri-lateral link would benefit the other two parties and would have an adverse demographic effect on Israel.

Conclusion

Paradoxically, the Jordanian fear of a “spill over” of the Intifadah into the East Bank in the wake of a successful Israeli disengagement policy may galvanize Amman into upgrading its involvement in the WB and Gaza. Jordan’s domestic and Arab constraints do not allow it, however, to initiate such a re-engagement and it would probably expect the first step to come from the Palestinians.

The optimal model from the point of view of Israeli interests is a Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation, which would satisfy the Palestinian demand for statehood and self-determination along with Jordanian control. Both Jordanians and Palestinians prefer an economic link with Israel in the context of such a federation or even a “tri-lateral” confederation which would, in essence keep the Palestinian economy dependent on Israel and not on Jordan. Israel has no economic interest of its own in such an arrangement. For the foreseeable future the Israeli economy will continue to be significantly stronger than the Jordanian, and of course the Palestinian economies and a

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strong link would allow for immigration trends of both other parties into Israel.

All the models are based on the Jordanian link to the West Bank. But no viable settlement can ignore Gaza. Therefore any “Jordanian option” must incorporate a link with Gaza, as an affiliated or component part of the Palestinian entity in the West Bank. Implementation of the Gaza disengagement plan will strengthen the inherent divergence of interests between the two parts of the Palestinian entity and make such a link more problematic. Today, Jordan has little or no political leverage in Gaza and is reserved regarding extension of its links to Gaza.