Israel, Jordan and Palestine: One State, Two States or Three?

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The Historical Setting

The areas of today's Middle East that form Jordan, the West Bank and Israel have been linked together by geography, demography, history and politics since time immemorial. The political destinies of Jordan, Israel and Palestine, as modern political entities have been inextricably linked since the very day of their creation.

Jordan and Israel have been intimately tied together through the Palestinian problem to the extent that it is virtually impossible to discuss Jordanian-Israeli relations in isolation from the Palestinian context; one cannot fully comprehend the Israeli-Palestinian inter-action if one ignores the Jordanian component, and likewise Jordanian-Palestinian relations are inexplicable if detached from the Israeli input. Both recent and more distant history and present-day demographic realities link these three protagonists together, perhaps considerably more than they would really like. Jordan is home to a Palestinian population that quite possibly constitutes more than half of the Kingdom's total of some six million. Moreover, the special ties linking the Arab populations on both banks of the Jordan River are anything but new, nor are they solely a consequence of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem.

The lay of the land has contributed to the merger of the peoples on both banks of the River since the earliest of times. Three rivers flow from East to West on the East Bank of the Jordan into the Jordan Valley, carving the East Bank into three distinct geographical segments: the Yarmuk in the North, on what today forms the border between the states of Syria and Jordan; the Zarqa in the Center flowing from its source near Amman into the Jordan Valley; and the Mujib in the South, which flows into the Dead Sea. In their flow westwards these rivers cut through the hilly terrain of the East Bank creating deep ravines and gorges, more difficult to cross than the Jordan River itself, which is easily traversed during most times of the year. Historically it was far less challenging
for people and goods to travel along the East-West axis across the Jordan rather than along the more daunting routes on the North-South axis.

It followed naturally that political, administrative, economic, social and family ties developed more intensively between the East and West Banks of the Jordan than between the northern and southern parts of the East Bank. Towns like Salt and Karak on the East Bank, that are part of the present day Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, were more intimately connected through a web of historical family and commercial ties with their sister towns on the Palestinian West Bank, Nablus and Hebron respectively, than they were to each other. In the administrative divisions of both banks of the Jordan River in Biblical times, then again during the Roman era, at the time of the Arab conquest, thereafter under the Ottomans, and finally with the initial formation of the British Mandate for Palestine, large areas on both banks of the river were united in the same provinces.

The Evolution of Polities and Collective Identities

It is frequently noted that the Middle East State order that came into being on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire was an artificial Imperial creation, designed to serve the immediate interests of Great Britain and France. While that is true, in the century that has passed, new authentic territorial identities have been forged in these Imperial creations. This is definitely the case in the triangle: Israel, Jordan and Palestine. Despite the strong historical ties between the East and West Banks and even though the British Mandate for Palestine originally spanned both banks of the River Jordan, separate Jordanian and Palestinian identities were soon to develop. In 1922 the East Bank was formally separated from Western Palestine as the Emirate of Transjordan was designated to become an Arab state where there would be no Zionist settlement or presence. This was seen at the time as a British concession to Arab nationalism in the form of a limitation on the Zionist enterprise.

As Zionist settlement was henceforth contained to Palestine west of the River, the conflict between Jews and Arabs was initially limited to this territory, where an indigenous nationalist movement began to develop as an outgrowth of the conflict with the Jews. However, up until 1948 the Arab
nationalist movement in Palestine saw itself, in the main, as an extension of the
general movement of Arab nationalism in the Middle East, of which the
Palestinians were an integral part.

In the aftermath of the 1948 War, the major rump of Palestine that
remained under Arab control, the West Bank, was annexed by Jordan with
Israeli acquiescence. (The Gaza Strip came under Egyptian military
government). Neither Jordan nor Israel was interested in the creation of a
separate Palestinian state or collective identity that might challenge either one or
both of them. Jordan conducted a policy of "Jordanization," i.e. an effort to
assimilate the Palestinians into the Jordanian state, in the name of Arab unity.

Following the defeat in 1948 the Palestinians generally adopted an
Arab nationalist stance, but instead of standing behind the King of Jordan they
tended to be enthusiastic supporters of Egypt's 'Abd al-Nasir in the belief that
his more radical anti-Western form of Arab unity, coupled with an alliance with
the Soviet Union, would eventually deliver Palestine. It was they who were the
most ardent proponents of the dominant Arab nationalist discourse in the mid-
1950s and early 1960s.¹

After a decade of Palestinian nationalist decline and devotion to pan-
Arabism in the wake of the disaster (nakba) of 1948, it was the identification with
the nakba itself, as a formative traumatic collective experience that was to
become the core of a reconstructed Palestinian national consciousness. In the late
1950s the “revival of the Palestinian entity” stemmed from two sources. One was
within the Arab League, as the Arab States led by Egypt (then still the United
Arab Republic, the UAR) and Iraq pressed for the creation of a representative
Palestinian political framework. These efforts eventually culminated in the
establishment of the PLO in 1964, in accordance with an Arab Summit
resolution, as the organizational incarnation of Palestinian nationalism. The
second source of Palestinian national revival was the initially clandestine
formation of a variety of organizations devoted to the idea of independent
Palestinian armed struggle. Of these Fatah turned out to be the most important
and long-lasting.

¹ Musa Budeiri, “The Palestinians: Tensions Between Nationalist and Religious Identities,” in James
Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (Eds.), Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East (New York:
After the War of 1967, when Jordan lost the West Bank to Israel the policy of "Jordanization" of the Palestinians came to an abrupt end. The War was also a catastrophic defeat for pan-Arabism which gave way in its declining appeal to two competing forces: narrowly based territorial nationalism and Islamic politics. In the Palestinian domain this was translated into the takeover of the PLO by the formerly clandestine Palestinian fighting organizations lead by Fatah. The newly constructed PLO promoted a particular independent form of Palestinianness that sought to mobilize the masses under the banner of armed struggle against Israel, which in the late 1960s was waged mainly from Jordanian territory. This soon led to Israeli retaliation against Jordan and to an eventual decision by the Jordanians to oust the PLO from their territory, in September 1970.

The civil war of 1970 was a traumatic and formative experience for the Jordanians. The policy of assimilation of the Palestinians had obviously failed. The Palestinians in Jordan were henceforth increasingly seen by the Jordanian political elite as a potential threat. From the 1970s onwards Jordan has consequently undergone an intensive process of "Jordanization," which now meant the almost total exclusion of Palestinians from positions of influence in the bureaucracy and the military, and the calculated promotion of a sense of Jordanianness. Thus, from the top down, by the regime, and from the bottom up, by segments of the East Bank population, an exclusive Jordanianism was fostered, defined implicitly and at times explicitly, against the Palestinian "other," with occasionally vicious anti-Palestinian overtones.

Jordan has weathered many storms, regional and domestic, and has undeniably acquired a Jordanian collective identity and stateness of its own. The Bedouin tribes in Jordan were well integrated into the state and gradually emerged as the key standard bearers of this newly articulated Jordanianness.

Thus, with the passage of time since the early days of the British Mandate, that is, nearly a century, the conflict between Zionists and Arabs has produced modern vibrant and authentic collective identities, amongst nationalist Israeli Jews, and equally nationalist Jordanians and Palestinians. These have resulted in conflict not between rival tribes, sects or ethnic groups within one single state but rather between new competing national movements and polities.
that have culminated in the formation of two states, Jordan and Israel, and one in the making, sandwiched between them, Palestine. Some people, some of the time, in each one of these three national polities may wish for one or both of the other two to evaporate into thin air, but that is not about to happen. These three identities and polities have come to stay, albeit with alternating measures of collaboration, competition or conflict between them.

Historical Fault-Lines: Israel—Palestine and the Conflicting Narratives

An unbridgeable abyss separates the Arab Palestinian and the Zionist historical narratives. Zionism, in the widely held Jewish perspective, is a heroic project of national revival, restored dignity and self respect. The rise of Israel as an act of defiance against the miserable predicament of the European Jewish Diaspora is deeply imbedded in the Jewish collective memory and self image. This sentiment has been cultivated for decades by the scathing critique of Jewish hopelessness and helplessness that has become an integral part of the collective consciousness. This pathetic manifestation of Jewish indignity and powerlessness was only the precursor to the culmination of all horror in the catastrophic destruction of the Jews in the Holocaust. Jewish national liberation, statehood and sovereignty was therefore the literal rising from the ashes, in self defense against the Jewish historical fate, to finally attain political independence and historical justice for the most oppressed of all peoples.

For the Palestinians, needless to say, the complete opposite is true. Zionism, in their view, had nothing to do with self defense or justice. It was the epitome of aggression from the start. The Palestinian "nakba" or catastrophic defeat, loss of homeland and refugeeedom are at the core of the Palestinian collective identity and their self-perception of victimhood. The war had ended not only in their military defeat, but in the shattering of their society and the dispersal of half of their number as refugees in other parts of Palestine and in the neighboring Arab states.

The "shared memories of the traumatic uprooting of their society and the experiences of being dispossessed, displaced, and stateless" were to "come to
define 'Palestinian-ness.'² The traumatic and formative series of events, leading up to the outbreak of war in 1948, and its tragic consequences for the Palestinians carried with them a powerful and pervasive sense of historical injustice to the innermost depths of the Palestinian collective soul.

The Palestinians yearn, therefore, to turn back the clock of history. The question is just how far back? Is it to 1967 or to 1948? The resolution of the so-called “1967 file” relates to the outstanding issues of borders and settlements on the West Bank and to the final status of Jerusalem. As thorny as these matters may be, they do not impinge upon Israel’s existence, nor do they conflict in any way with the principle of partition and a two-state solution. The “1948 file”, however, relates to two existential matters: 1) the question of refugee return to Israel proper; and 2) the issue of the national rights of the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel itself. Both could severely undermine Israel’s viability as presently constituted, i.e. as the State of the Jewish people, precisely because it is these issues that might irreversibly derail the inner logic of a two state solution.

It is the intractable nature of questions such as these in the "1948 file" that have put an "end of conflict" settlement out of reach. This was highlighted once again in the crisis between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state in the run up to the Annapolis meeting between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas under the auspices of US President Bush in late November 2007, and again after Prime Minister Netanyahu made a similar demand in his Bar Ilan University speech in June 2009. Israel's demand that the Palestinians issue a binding statement to that effect was firmly and flatly rebuffed by all Palestinian spokesmen from Mahmud Abbas and Saib Arikat down.

An article in the semi-official Palestinian daily al-Ayyam summed the matter up thus: "Such demands by Olmert and others coming from Israeli politicians … can only push the Palestinians with their backs to the wall…[which] would prompt them to redouble their efforts to regain at least the bare minimum of their legitimate rights as enshrined in the resolutions of international legitimacy [UN resolutions], which totally contradict Olmert's

recent provocative and impossible demand.' But, in the Jewish Israeli mind, Olmert's conditions were neither provocative nor impossible.

This was simply an attempt to obtain from the Palestinians assurances that a two state solution would remain the foundation for the peace process, and that all outstanding questions, including the refugee issue, would be resolved in accordance with the symmetrical two state logic. Israel was to be the homeland of the Jewish people and Palestine would be the homeland of the Palestinian people. It followed that Jews would have the right to return to Israel and not to Palestine and Palestinians would have the right to return to the state of Palestine and not to Israel. For the Israelis it was to ensure that the turning back of the clock would end in 1967, with the undoing of the occupation, and not proceed further to 1948, to undo the very existence of the State of Israel.

**Historical Fault Lines: 1967 vs 1948—Oslo and Back Again**

The Oslo accords created a new political dynamic. In accepting the Oslo accords the PLO leadership gained access to the West Bank and Gaza and created the Palestinian Authority (PA) in these territories, ostensibly on the way to the attainment of a final status agreement with Israel that would lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state. This lead to the formation of new, elected Palestinian institutions: the Presidency of the PA and the Legislative Assembly. These changes portended great historical significance. These new institutions were elected solely by the people of the West Bank (including Arab East Jerusalem) and Gaza and thus represented only them, as opposed to the PLO which claimed to represent all Palestinians everywhere, including in Israel and the Palestinian Diaspora. The PLO represented the claim to all of historical Palestine and was an organization that had functioned from the outset in the Diaspora. The PLO, therefore, had also tended to give high priority to the Diaspora constituency and its aspirations, above all, the demand for refugee return.

The PA, on the other hand, represented the West Bank and Gaza and focused on their most immediate concern, liberation from the Israeli occupation.

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This meant a certain downgrading, though by no means an abandonment of the primacy of the refugee question. The issue of Palestine, or so it seemed momentarily, was actually being reduced to the West Bank and Gaza and to the 1967 questions, at the expense of the 1948 file. Israel sought to achieve finality on that basis, i.e. the Palestinians would agree to end of conflict on the basis of a grand historical trade-off. Israel would concede on the 1967 questions, including Jerusalem, in exchange for closure of the 1948 file. But that was not to be. The Palestinians, and first and foremost Yasir Arafat, would not agree to an "end of conflict" unless the 1948 file, and its primary issues and grievances, were also addressed to their satisfaction.

The Camp David summit in the summer of 2000, therefore, failed and no agreement on "end of conflict" was actually reached. Instead Israel and the Palestinians were locked in the worst round of bloodshed they had ever experienced since 1948, with suicide bombers ravaging Israeli towns, and the Israeli military pulverizing the PA and the Palestinians in return. The weakening of the PA, the general degeneration of Palestinian governance and the disintegration of the peace process all served to strengthen the hand of Hamas in Palestinian politics, which reached a new peak of power in January 2006, when it handsomely won the elections to the Palestinian Legislative Assembly.

Hamas had never accepted the Oslo dynamic of ostensible prioritization of the 1967 file. In the years since the failure of Camp David Hamas has made a concerted effort to reverse the Oslo dynamic and refocus the Palestinian cause on the 1948 file and the Diaspora concerns to ensure that no finality could possibly be obtained on the basis of a resolution of the 1967 issues. A perusal of Palestinian documentation, formulated with Hamas input in recent years, reveals a very deliberate inversion of the Oslo dynamic, from the narrowing down to the West and Gaza, to the broadening out again to the Diaspora constituency and to a concentration on the primacy of the refugee question.

In June 2006, in what became known as "The Prisoners Document," Fatah and Hamas representatives, as well as representatives from other minor organizations, who were serving sentences in Israeli jails on a wide variety of security related offences, signed a Document of National Reconciliation. The parties emphasized not only the need to defend the rights of the refugees but also
to reorganize them and to "hold a popular representative conference" that would create organizations "that would demand the right of return and the abidance by it, urging the international community to implement resolution 194 [of the UN General Assembly of December 1948] stipulating the right of the refugees to return and [their right] to compensation."  

The policy statement of the Hamas led government of National Unity, that was formed by Isma'il Haniyya in March 2007, similarly emphasized the right of return, and the implementation of resolution 194, specifically noting the "the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to the lands and properties that they had abandoned," that is, to Israel proper. The statement also specified that any agreement reached by the PLO (which formally conducted the negotiations with Israel, not the PA) would have to be approved by the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and in the Diaspora. Any such agreement would have to be brought before a new Palestine National Council (the PLO's quasi parliamentary body, which represented all Palestinians everywhere, and would now have to include a significant representation of Hamas itself) or alternatively "a general referendum [on the agreement] would be held by the Palestinian people inside [the occupied territories] and outside [in the Diaspora]..."  

Even the Arab Summit, in its approval of the Arab Peace Initiative as passed in March 2002 and reaffirmed in March 2007, followed suit in this regard. The Arab Peace Initiative called for comprehensive peace between the Arab states and Israel on the basis of an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 boundaries and for an agreed solution to the refugee question based on resolution 194 and upon "the rejection all forms of resettlement" of refugees outside of Palestine. 

In the last two decades of negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians, on the various issues of the so called 1967 file, such as, borders, settlements and even Jerusalem, the gaps have narrowed significantly. At the same time, however, on the truly existential so called 1948 issues, that is, refugees, the status of the Arab-Palestinian minority in Israel, and the

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designation of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people, positions have hardened and the gaps between the parties are as wide as ever, if not even wider.

**The Newly Emphasized Religious Fault Lines**

The rise of Hamas is transforming the Israeli-Palestinian divide from a nationalist conflict, which at least in theory could one day be reduced to a conflict over boundaries (the 1967 file), to an insoluble clash over religions and belief in the holy word of God Almighty. For Hamas, Palestine was not the land of national liberation but of the eternal struggle of the believers against the infidels (matched on the Israeli side by the extreme right wing ultra-nationalist religious fringe that had a virtually identical world view). Palestine's sanctity, in the Hamas view, was also a function of its ostensible designation as a *waqf* (religious endowment) by the Khalifa 'Umar bin al-Khattab who had conquered Palestine in 638.

This depiction of Palestine as a *waqf*, however, was a Hamas invention which had no legal basis in the *Shari'a*. Legally it could not be, and historically it was never, all *waqf*. But that did not really matter. The designation had political value. It served as the religious foundation for the contention that not an inch of Palestine could be conceded to the Zionists. Moreover, as a *waqf*, Palestine did not belong exclusively to the Palestinians, but to all Muslims. Therefore, not in this, nor in any future generation, did the Palestinians or the Arabs have any right to concede any territory to an alien entity in Palestine.

Since for Hamas the Palestinian cause was not a struggle between two nationalist movements but between two rival religions, Islam and Judaism, the Palestinian cause was driven by an “Islamic essence” and was part of the larger war between Islam and Western civilization.7 Just as the PLO and Fatah had nationalized religion for their more secular vision, so Hamas Islamized nationalism. For Hamas, the first and second Intifadas were part of a *jihad* that emanated from the mosques and embodied the return of the Palestinian people

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to their “authentic Islamic identity and belonging,” a line of argumentation that was bound to resonate positively with a sizeable constituency.

The Fayyad Plan and the Attempted Resurrection of the Oslo Dynamic

With the rise of Hamas, the failure of the Oslo process, and after the passage of 17 years since the signing of the Oslo accords, the two-state solution has undoubtedly lost much if its appeal, legitimacy and practicality in the eyes of all concerned. On the Israeli side there has been an entrenchment of the settlements, abetted by the fecklessness of successive Israeli governments (with the surprising exception of Ariel Sharon) in contending with the challenge of the settler movement. The Palestinian side suffers from disarray, with the PA and Hamas operating at cross-purposes ever since the Hamas electoral victory in 2006 and the takeover of Gaza in 2007. Coupled with the dispirited condition and the concomitant ideological and organizational fatigue of Fatah there is very little prospect for a successful negotiation of a two-state agreement. Those who endorse a two-state solution "must acknowledge how much of the framework supporting it has collapsed."

However, the conclusion that some draw from this grim assessment, that a one-state solution is the viable alternative to the faltering two-state paradigm, is offering a remedy that would in all likelihood be infinitely worse than the present predicament. The "moral laboratory analysts" tend to assess reality not on the grounds of what it is but on the basis of what they believe it ought to be. Theirs is a world founded on morality, justice and legal rectitude and on the constantly disproved assumption about the rationality of political actors. It has little connection with the real world with its highly combustible mixture of power, emotion, identity politics, political culture and ideology which are of virtually no consequence to the "moral laboratory analysts'" scheme of things.

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As Nathan Brown has put it, the advocates of a bi-national state, or what he has so aptly dubbed as the "one-state non-solution" generally "fall into the trap of holding out an admirable utopian solution without analyzing what such a state would be like in practice or how entrenched adversaries could ever construct such a state. In a sense, the one-state solution resembles communism—a utopian idea many found preferable to the grim realities but that led to horrifying results in practice." One should have no illusions "that the final abandonment of a two-state agenda" will simply "give way to a campaign of non-violent resistance, boycotts and sanctions that will somehow succeed in bringing Israel to its knees." The real alternative to the two-state agenda is "crystal clear: increasing conflict, violence and occupation that is increasingly dominated by religious fanatics on both sides." The alternative to the two-state paradigm is not the utopian paradise of one-state, but catastrophe.

The evolution of a one-state reality might very well be the outcome of the final demise of the two-state idea, but that is very likely to be a horrendous reality of escalating conflict between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians, not only in the occupied territories but across the green line, in Israel proper, too. The clashes of October 2000 in Israel between the Israeli police and Palestinian demonstrators were just the foretaste of what the impasse might eventually produce. As Abba Eban once commented, "not for a single minute in a day do the ... Palestinians and the Israelis share a common memory, sentiment, experience or aspiration." Israelis and Palestinians locked together in one-state, with a history of such enmity, would more likely be a recipe for endless conflict rather than harmony.

Amongst Palestinians in the Diaspora and within the ranks of the Palestinian Arab intelligentsia in Israel there is strong support for the one-state agenda, far more than in the West Bank and Gaza. A two state solution would change little for the Arabs in Israel or for the Palestinian Diaspora, but it offers the people in the West Bank and Gaza freedom and independence in a state of their own. These three Palestinian constituencies, therefore, do not have identical

10 Nathan Brown, Sunset for the Two-State Solution.
interests. In the West Bank at present we are witnessing a desperate Palestinian effort to resurrect the fading two-state option. The Fayyad Plan for the creation of the institutions of a Palestinian State in two years was definitely part of an identifiable and coherent school of thought in the PA in the West Bank that believed in the securing of their own self interest first. This meant ridding themselves of the occupation and creating two states. The Diaspora intellectuals and the Israeli Arabs, with their utopian one-state ideas, were secondary and could wait, as could the refugees. This was not conceding the refugee cause but setting priorities and the most urgent cause was the saving of the two-state paradigm. The alternative was not "one state in wonderland" but hell on earth.

Fault Lines and Common Ground between Jordanians and Palestinians

Much is usually said, justifiably, about the contemporary nationalist division between East Banker Jordanians and Palestinians and especially of their suspicions towards their Jordanian compatriots who are of Palestinian origin. The original Jordanians are obsessed by the fear of their country being taken over by the Palestinians, who are about half, perhaps slightly more of Jordan's population, and transformed into an "alternative homeland" (al-watan al-badil) to Palestine. Therefore the Jordanians, as of the mid 1980s, became ardent supporters of the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, so that it be clear to all and sundry that Jordan was Jordan, on the one side of the River, and Palestine was Palestine, on the other.

At the same time, however, not enough attention is paid to the common ground between Jordanians and Palestinians. The great majority of Jordanians and Palestinians are Sunni Muslim speakers of the Arabic language, a collective cultural and religious identity which has bound them together for centuries. In this sense they are bound together more significantly than they are set apart by their relatively new and more shallow modern national identities, however real and authentic they may be. Marriage is a useful barometer to identify critical social fault lines. Jordanians and Palestinians marry each other as a matter of course. The decisive fault line in these matters is religion rather
than national identity, thus Jordanian Muslims invariably marry their Palestinian co-religionists as do Jordanian and Palestinian Christians.

There is no similar common ground between the Jews of Israel and either the Palestinians or the Jordanians. While the Jordanians and the Palestinians have had their bouts of conflict these pale in comparison to the virtually incessant bloodletting of Israelis and Palestinians. It is difficult to imagine Israeli Jews and Palestinians, after decades of horrific conflict and profound mutual distrust sharing a confederation or any other form of bi-national state. It would be extremely difficult to imagine Israeli Jews submitting to any political order in which they would not be protected solely by their own independent military power.

Confederation between Jordan and Palestine, however, would seem to be a more realistic proposition. First of all it is an idea that has been in the Jordanian and Palestinian political discourse since the early 1970s, and it has enjoyed considerable support by many if not a majority of Jordanians and Palestinians. There are, of course, various conditions that would have to be met for such a confederation to be accepted, and even then there will certainly be those in the Jordanian political elite and in certain parts of the intelligentsia who will continue to strongly reject the idea. Those in Jordan and Palestine who agree on confederation also agree that an independent Palestinian state must be established first. Palestinians want to guarantee their independent statehood and Jordanians do not want to be dragged into Palestine prematurely. Jordanians do not want to undercut Palestinian independence and leave Jordan vulnerable to an overly intimate relationship with Palestine. Such intimacy, the Jordanians fear, might eventually threaten the Jordanianness of the East Bank of the River.

However, if and when Israel disengages from the West Bank, that territory, landlocked between Israel and Jordan, will become more dependent on Jordan and the Arab world beyond. There are some Jordanian nationalists who instinctively reject any close association with Palestine as a potential threat to their political patrimony, but there are others, equally nationalist, who see in confederation an opportunity to create a political order between Jordan and Palestine that will enable Palestinians in Jordan to exercise their political rights
in Palestine rather than in Jordan, even though they will most probably continue to be residents of Jordan. The confederation could provide new formulas for citizenship and civil rights that would allow the Jordanians to feel more secure in their homeland on the East Bank by having Palestinians on the East Bank participate in the politics of the West Bank rather than the politics of Jordan.

Conclusions

Foreign powers would do well to come to terms with Middle Eastern realities for what they are rather than trying to engineer the peoples of the Middle East to become what they are not. Iraq and Afghanistan are good examples of what not to do and just how not to do it. One cannot cease to be amazed by the capacity of people to ignore the realities on the ground and really believe that culture does not matter and that all nations at all times are all the same. Thus crushing Iraq at the beginning of the 21st century was expected to produce the same result that was produced by the defeat of Germany and Japan more than half a century ago, that is, to turn Iraq into a vibrant capitalist democracy and bastion of the West.

That Iraqi society is for the most part not secular, but religiously sectarian to the core, in total contradistinction to Germany and Japan, was not factored into the calculations of the those who set forth to push over the first domino in the democratization of the entire Middle East. That Iraq degenerated into horrific sectarian strife, taking the lives of nearly one hundred thousand people, should not have surprised anyone, except those who chose to ignore the realities that should have been plain for all to see.

Setting timetables for the locals to start behaving themselves, is as patronizing as it sounds, and is not advisable either. If the negotiations have a good chance of succeeding one does not need a time table. If the chances of success are low, no time table is going to make any difference. The parties will not overcome their historical grievances and mutual suspicions and abide by these timetables just because they were set by someone. Nor can they be compelled to do so.

A timetable is usually a predetermined date upon which failure to keep to it will be solemnly pronounced. So why court failure? Failure is worse
than not trying at all. Great power intervention sends messages of hope to the local players that their aspirations will be met. Failure by the supreme umpires of the universe leads the parties to despair and to revert to the battlefield and to more bloodshed. Israelis and Palestinians have already been there, unfortunately, only too often.

All those involved should make it their business to study the limitations, constraints, desires, aspirations and red lines of the players and make their best effort to help them get to where they would like to go. That would be a preferable course to trying to coerce the locals to do what they have no intention of doing, in accordance with a timetable set by the political exigencies of the external powers, rather than the real interests of the protagonists.

There is a ubiquitous tendency to overestimate the powers of external players and to underestimate the power and resilience of local players as well as their customs, traditions and cultures and sheer grit and determination to fight for what they really believe to be their existential interests. The conflict in the Middle East was driven more by considerations of history, communal identity, collective dignity and other socio-cultural factors than by socio-economics or political economy. This was as true of the Zionists as it was of the Palestinians. Had the Zionists been driven by mainly economic considerations they would never have been quite as obsessed as they were with matters of identity, cultural revival and collective dignity. Their problem as individuals could have been resolved in America as many if not most of their fellow Jews did in fact believe. The same is true of the Palestinians. Had economics driven their behavior they could have conceded to the Zionists and profited accordingly rather than resisting them with all the suffering that their struggle eventually entailed. The causes of the conflict are not economic, nor will the solutions be founded either on largesse or economic retribution.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has its very specific causes and consequences. Israel-Palestine is not Northern Ireland or South Africa. False analogies obfuscate the specificity of every case and lead to misperceptions of the facts on the ground. False universalisms or the idea that one size fits all, lead to the making of these misplaced analogies, which may serve the propaganda machines, but they make real and realistic solutions that much harder to attain.
They introduce a host of new obstacles that make peacemaking much more difficult by creating paradigms that do not relate in the slightest to the realities at hand. Most Israelis and most Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza still prefer a two-state solution. The US and other external players would do all parties a service by assisting them to arrive, in the most realistic fashion possible, at the goal they themselves, for the most part, wish to achieve. This is, no doubt, a tall order. The alternatives are worse.