

Between Amman and Jerusalem: Reflections on Making Peace . . . And Making Peace Work

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Brief Analysis

Jordan's ultimate strategic objective is peace in the Middle East. While the Jordan-Israel treaty remains seminal in importance for the Middle East and beyond, the continued bloodshed in the region sobers the anniversary celebration.

The Jordan-Israel treaty reflected the courage and vision of King Hussein and Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. Reaching agreement on this treaty was not always an easy process. The initial talks between the two countries in September 1993 resulted in a stalemate. The second round of talks in April 1994 was more successful, but when the United States was invited to serve as a guarantor, Washington balked at the idea of a Jordan-Israel treaty. Nevertheless, throughout the negotiations, Hussein and Rabin both demonstrated farsighted leadership and deep convictions about the absolute necessity of peace. They understood that they had to view each other as partners, not adversaries, and deal with each other directly. There is a place for third-party mediation and negotiation, but only when all other options have been exhausted and talks are at a standstill. The Jordan-Israel treaty and the Oslo negotiations are good examples of the efficacy of direct communication in peace talks.

Indeed, a key to any successful peace negotiation is the involvement of the people affected. Unless all of the relevant players are involved in the discussion from the outset, negotiation efforts are certain to fail. After the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, a pathway to Middle East peace was opened with the convening of the Madrid conference. Yet, the Oslo agreement emerged as a bilateral arrangement with the Palestinians. The lack of a comprehensive framework was a fundamental barrier to reaching a wider peace in the region. Consequently, Jordan and Israel had to proceed on their own.

In the current climate of extremist factions and action-reaction violence, peace cannot flourish. Today the Middle East is riddled with intolerance, but peace is still possible in the future if leaders are as tenacious in its pursuit as were Rabin and Hussein. Arab nations have a long way to go before they will be ready for multilateral peace discussions. Collective recognition of Israel continues to be a problem among Arab states outside of Jordan. Fundamentalists aside, there is some sympathy for Israel in the region, especially as a victim of suicide bombings. Unless Israel withdraws from the occupied territories, however, this sympathy will not produce any tangible changes. And for all too many people—including numerous Palestinian and Israeli leaders—violent acts are seen as the only way to respond to violence.

EFRAIM HALEVY

There are two fundamental challenges facing all Middle East peace negotiations. First, the people of the region must be involved; otherwise, any treaty is merely a formality. King Hussein was stalwart in his belief in the necessity of popular support for the peace process.

Second, negotiations must begin with direct communication between the parties involved. Such a process is likely to be protracted and fraught with problems. For example, Prime Minister Rabin and King Hussein could not agree on a

draft treaty when they first met in 1993. Neither party abandoned the idea of a workable treaty, however, and when they met again in 1994, they reached the agreement that would become the Washington Declaration—the basis for the eventual peace treaty. It is striking that most of the successful Middle East negotiations to date—e.g., the Israel-Egypt peace treaty that began with direct contacts in Morocco, the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the Palestinians in Oslo, and the Jordan-Israel peace treaty—were initially conceived in direct talks, without mediation by outside parties. Indeed, the historical and current context cannot be ignored, especially when dealing with the Middle East. A guarantor should not be brought in until the final implementation stages of a treaty. Instead, the interested parties should aim to hold discussions among themselves rather than designating the United States as the initial peace broker. As many of the affected parties as possible should participate in the planning and negotiation stages.

Although there have been definite improvements in the Israel-Jordan relationship since the signing of the treaty, expectations for close relations have gone largely unmet. Israel had hoped that the treaty would be the start of innumerable joint ventures such as massive development projects, but this has not been the case. One reason is that Jordanian attitudes have not always been conducive to positive interaction with Israel in recent years. The Palestinian Leadership bears even more responsibility for the untapped potential of the Israel-Jordan relationship, Yasser Arafat in particular. His policies and influence have most notably affected trade between the two countries, and he is, overall, the most irritating and disruptive element in the region.

Ideally, peace treaties can become a pattern in the Middle East. After one peace deal has been established in a region as volatile as the Middle East, the question becomes how to continue the pattern. Many hoped that the Israel-Jordan treaty would extend beyond the bilateral relationship. Although it did in fact allow both countries to develop their strategic interests, the treaty did not serve as a springboard for other peace dialogues in the region. Jordan could have been the template for peace between Israel and Syria, which could in turn have set a pattern that other Arab leaders would have followed. Indeed, Prime Minister Rabin believed that if peace could be established with Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, a more solid foundation would be laid for a resolution with the Palestinians. Negotiation is a delicate matter, however, and the current Palestinian leadership is not supportive of a positive Jordan-Israel relationship or any treaty involving Israel.

In light of these factors, the Quartet Roadmap would benefit from a broader approach wherein all of the region's major issues and conflicts are viewed together. Similarly, Arab leaders missed an important opportunity to further the peace dialogue when they rebutted Sharon's offer to attend the 2002 Arab Summit in Beirut. Had that situation worked out differently, it could have jumpstarted peace talks in the region.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Deanna Befus. ❖

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