

Israel, Jordan, and That “Peace Treaty” We Hear So Much About

by Hugh Fitzgerald



As talk of Israel’s annexation of part of the “West Bank” continues, it is important to recall that last November, the Kingdom of Jordan cancelled a component of its 1994 peace treaty with Israel. It evicted Israeli farmers from two tracts of contested land in the Jordan River Valley that they had been farming for more than two decades without incident. This move by the government of Jordan was prompted by King Abdullah’s need to show his people he could stand up to powerful Israel, by taking away this concession that had been considered part of the treaty. The story is [here](#).

This action by Jordan emphasizes the need for Israel to assert its necessary security rights in the Jordan Valley. Just as the Golan Heights are clearly vital to the security

of northern Israel in any foreseeable future, so too is the Jordan Valley for its eastern frontier.

No Israeli government would contemplate giving up control of the Jordan Valley and the heights of Judea. These are essential parts of Israel's defense against aggression from the east. Whether Israel formally annexes the entire territory of the West Bank is still to be determined, but the Jordan Valley will under no circumstances be given back. The Israelis, of course, need to keep reminding the world that the entire West Bank was assigned to the future Jewish state by the Mandate for Palestine. They need to also repeat ad nauseam that a separate justification for Israel holding onto the West Bank can be found in U.N. Resolution 242, by which Israel is entitled to hold onto any territories it won in the Six-Day War that it needs in order to have "secure and recognized boundaries."

Israel annexed the Golan in 1981 – a move recently recognized by the United States. It is time – especially in the context of an utter absence of a "peace process" and Jordan's less than trustworthy conduct – for Israel to annex the strategically vital parts of the Jordan Valley, or to formalize its perpetual control of this vital territory without the ambiguity of some future "final-status" resolution."

Israel has every legal right to annex the Jordan Valley; in fact, it has the right, under the Palestine Mandate, to the entire West Bank, and it should not be diffident about exercising that right, which it has been in a position to do since June 1967. If most of the world needs a lesson in history, so be it – the Mandate for Palestine, and the territory assigned to it, can be readily found, and our political and media elites should be shamed into studying them. They could also study the meaning of U.N. Resolution 242

as explained by its author, Lord Caradon. When it comes to Israel's rights to territorial adjustments, less hysteria, and more history, from our political and media elites all over the West, would be highly desirable.

Jordan's action doesn't mean the end of peace between Israel and Jordan, and the minor farming tracts in question have little more than symbolic value. But that value has until now been to underscore the ability of the two nations to live amicably in a spirit of mutual trust.

Jordan has been playing a paradoxical role in the Middle East for decades, but has become increasingly hostile to Israel in recent years. Underlying it all is the supreme irony that the Jordanian monarchy is almost totally dependent on Israel for its continuance in power. Israel provides enormous water resources to Jordan, without which it would shrivel and die. Further, Israel is Jordan's primary supplier of energy, and Israel's new Leviathan gas fields – coming online next year – will power the bulk of Jordan's industry and housing.

The two most basic requirements for any country are water for its people, and energy for its industry. Both of these are supplied in enormous quantities by Israel to Jordan, which has no alternative sources for either. The Jordanians may think that no matter with what contumely they treat Israel, those water and energy supplies will be forthcoming. But Israel can quietly convey to the Jordanian government that there are limits to what it will tolerate in a "partner" and that it can, at any time, if push comes to shove, shut off the water and natural gas pipelines.

As a result of the US-brokered Israel-Jordan peace treaty, Jordan receives enormous annual foreign aid sums from Washington. Not only is the kingdom's economic stability dependent on Israel, but the clandestine security assistance given by Israel to Jordan is crucial in maintaining King

Abdullah's control in the face of an unhappy populace and no shortage of Islamist and other challenges to his continued rule.

The American government's aid to Jordan was meant to encourage Jordan to stick to its peace treaty with Israel, in both letter and spirit. The billions Jordan has received in direct aid were part of that carrot. The other way that has benefited economically from the peace treaty comes from the Qualified Industrial Zones that were developed in Jordan. In these zones, companies that use a percentage of Israeli inputs can export duty-free to the United States. These zones have generated more than 40,000 jobs, and are the strongest engine for Jordan's economic growth. Like the American aid, this arrangement is dependent on Jordan's continuing to abide by the peace treaty with Israel .

King Abdullah's monarchy was inherited from a line of Saudi emirs – the Hashemites – who were placed on the throne in Amman by the British after World War I. Simply put, Abdullah and his family are foreigners to Jordan, inhabiting a royal house imposed by Western powers. The majority of the Jordanian population are Palestinian Arabs – those who came during the British Mandate, many who fled there during Israel's War of Independence, and still more who retreated there during and after the 1967 Six Day War. The bedrock of traditional Jordanian society has always been Bedouins, but they are now a minority in their own country.

The Bedouin resent the Palestinian "newcomers," and the Palestinian Jordanians are as concerned with their brethren across the Jordan River as [with] their fellow Jordanian countrymen. Above all, there is no natural love to be found either among Bedouins or Palestinian Arabs for the imported Hashemite house of King Abdullah.

He – like his father and great-grandfather – must curry favor

with his divided populace. Without Israeli financial and economic support, his regime would not have been among the few to avoid the chaos of this decade's Arab Spring throughout the region.

But his Israeli peace partners and benefactors are hated in Jordan more than in almost any other Arab nation. Abdullah is thus forced to play the anti-Israel card at every opportunity. The legislature in Amman – in theory subservient to the crown – is an echo chamber of anti-Israel invective, saber-rattling, and antisemitism.

The King has chosen to ride the wave of anti-Israeli sentiment rather than oppose it. This may keep him in power for the short run, but if he takes things too far, so that Israel – and the U.S. – feel he is no longer adhering to the spirit or letter of the 1994 peace treaty, he then faces the prospect of losing his supplies of water and natural gas from Israel, with no replacements in view, and losing both his direct aid money from America, and an end to the Qualified Industrial Zones that are Jordan's single biggest employer.

Furthermore, since 2013 Israel has facilitated Jordanian trade with Iraq and Turkey by allowing goods to be transported by truck via the Jordan River Crossing near Beit She'an. The goods are taken to Haifa Port and shipped from there to Turkey, with some goods remaining and others being sent on to Iraq. Previously this trade passed overland through Syria but that has been disrupted by the Syrian Civil War. That arrangement, too, would end if Jordan were to cancel its peace treaty in response to Israeli annexation of parts of the West Bank.

In short, King Abdullah is required to be anti-Israel in public and pro-Israel in private if he is to maintain his fragile grasp on power. For Israel and the Middle East, this is not the sort of dynamic that should inspire long-term

trust.

Unfortunately, the kind of double-cross King Abdullah recently perpetrated in the Jordan Valley's contested territories is becoming the norm in Israel-Jordan relations, and casts a long shadow over the cause of peace and the extent to which Israel can rely on its eastern neighbor as a joint defender of a secure border in the Jordan Valley.

Abdullah observed in his speech that "Israeli-Jordanian relations are at an all-time low.

Not quite.

Before the 1967 war, Jordan had illegally conquered and annexed the co-called West Bank, along with most of the rest of what was to be an independent Arab state, in 1948.

After his crippling defeat in the Six Day War, Hussein of Jordan renounced Jordanian claims to the territory – and officially designated the PLO under Arafat to take up cudgels against Israel in reclaiming the territory for the Arab world. The PLO took this opportunity to add the West Bank to the territories it was aiming to liberate – along with the rest of Israel.

Leaving aside the sheerchutzpah involved in a defeated nation deciding who should become sovereign in territory that it stole 20 years earlier, Jordan effectively took itself out of the power equation in deciding the disposition of the lands won by Israel in 1967.

The threat to Israel now is that Jordan is a very unstable partner in maintaining security in the Jordan Valley. In fact, after the 1967 war, Israeli statesman Yigal Allon proposed a plan for the territories that stated the necessity of Israel annexing the Jordan Valley if it ever wanted to have a secure eastern border at the Jordan River. This call has been repeated by candidates in Israel's recent elections

– including by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, among others.

While the Western media likes to formulaically describe those Israelis who support annexation of part or all of the West Bank as “right-wing,” the first major Israeli figure to propose this after the Six-Day war was Yigal Allon, a member of the Labor Party. Support in Israel for the annexation of West Bank territories for security – rather than religious – reasons has always had bipartisan support.

While the Islamic State no longer threatens a takeover in Jordan, other militant Islamist groups have their eyes set on Amman, and a combination of guerrilla and militia actions could undo Abdullah’s unstable rule.

Jordan has for many years been receiving intelligence from the Israelis on extremist groups. But it seems remarkably ungrateful for that assistance; nonetheless, Israel will keep supplying it, no matter what the King’s public attitude is, because Israel has a stake – and King Abdullah knows it – in Jordan not being taken over by the more fanatical Muslims. The King surely remembers how Black September members, a terrorist group that threatened Jordan’s existence, was destroyed inside Jordan by King Hussein’s Bedouin troops and, outside of the Middle East, by Mossad squads that hunted its members down. .

Abdullah, to maintain his throne, may opt to enter alliances with the more radical elements within Jordan. His cancellation of the Israeli leases in the Jordan Valley do not bode well for his willingness to risk popularity at home in exchange for Israel’s vital security interests.”

Any alliances of convenience the Jordanians made in the past with terrorist groups – mainly the PLO– have always ended in those groups fighting the monarch. King Hussein, having been

challenged once too often, went to war to destroy the PLO in Jordan; Yassir Arafat famously had to escape from Amman dressed as a woman. If Abdullah were now to enter an alliance with such "radical elements" he would have the same experience: the most fanatical will not be satisfied until they have overthrown the monarchy and turned Jordan into a kind of Gaza, a place run by terrorists and devoted solely to the destruction of Israel. Were these "more radical elements" to take power in Jordan, Israel would at once cut off supplies of water and natural gas; the U.S. would end all aid and the Q.I.Z. zones; Jordan itself would scarcely survive, and the Bedouin army, with possible help from Saudi Arabia, would rise up against those "radical elements" now attempting to rule in Amman, in order to return the country to the status quo ante.

Abdullah understands that among all the Arab states, hostility toward Israel is highest in Jordan, and especially so among the "Palestinian" portion of the population, while the Bedouins in Jordan are slightly less hostile to Israel. It is the Bedouin who form the backbone of the Jordanian army, and whom Abdullah and before him, King Hussein, have relied on to suppress "Palestinian" terrorist groups, like Black September, that threatened the monarchy.

The king has tried to appease his anti-Israel population by symbolic acts – such as ending an agreement that allowed Israeli farmers to use two small contested parcels of land that Jordan claims belongs to it – but he has not cancelled the peace treaty with Israel. And he won't, because he can't.

Israel's border with Jordan is a very vulnerable one, and a vital issue. In any "final" deal with the Palestinian Authority, the uncertainties about the survival of the Jordanian regime and doubts about King Abdullah's willingness to take risks to ensure a demilitarized Jordan Valley must be key components. One thing is certain: Israel will insist on military control of this territory – via annexation or

through a permanent, irrevocable agreement guaranteed by the Israel Defense Forces.

There is little that King Abdullah can now do against Israel – even if the Jewish state were to annex not just the Jordan Valley but also the entire West Bank. He must be very careful how he prepares his own people for that eventuality. He should leave it up to his prime minister, and cabinet members, to inform the public, again and again, of just how much the peace treaty benefits them. The Jordanians should be told how many billions of gallons of water Israel supplies annually, that cannot be obtained anywhere else, and how Jordan gains from its ten-year contract for Israeli natural gas, sold at preferential rates, and how much aid money the Americans deliver because of the peace treaty, and how many jobs in the Qualified Industrial Zones that are Jordan's largest employer would be lost were Jordan to pull out of the peace treaty. Then the king, as the concerned father of his people, can address the Jordanians, assuring them of his "steadfast support for the Palestinians" even while making clear that he is compelled, for the sake of "my country and my people," to continue to adhere to the peace treaty with Israel. Fortunately, no matter what Israel does or does not do in the West Bank, the Kingdom of Jordan – for entirely practical reasons, rather than any decrease in the hostility of its people for Israel– can do no other.

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