

# Peace and a Palestinian State

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**B**elieve me," President Sadat understated recently, "we are in an era of wonders." Despite all the hopeful allusions to pensive deserts, moody mirages, monumental pyramids, and life-sustaining rivers, it is still hard to express the sheer audacity of President Sadat's pilgrimage to Jerusalem—not primarily a pilgrimage to Al Aksa for Greater Bairam, but one to the Knesset for peace. We will not likely in our lifetime see again an event so Tolstoian; a single man, a single act of will, and a history that, with the unlikely exception of an assassination followed by a complete and immediate reversal, can never be quite the same again.

But if the status quo ante is unlikely, a new, even more intractable sullenness, born in futility and rejection, is not quite so improbable. Five major issues divide the Israelis and the Arabs. Several—the Golan, the Sinai, and, if President Sadat is right, the security and legitimacy of Israel—seem ripe for negotiated agreement. It would be ironic if East Jerusalem, a place of strategic significance for no one but a primordial attachment for everyone, were to become the only obstacle to settlement. It would not be the first time the City of Peace was the cause of war or that its spirit of brotherhood became the passion of fratricide (or, rather, patruelicide). But both sides have indicated a flexibility about Jerusalem that allows hope for some kind of resolution.

That leaves the West Bank and Gaza. However justified the Israeli fears and anxieties, it does not seem possible to imagine a stable solution in the Middle East without the *possibility* of some kind of Palestinian state. The Palestinians themselves say they will be satisfied with no less, and the Palestinians seem to have the ability to subvert any peace that fails to satisfy their demands. Moreover the entire moral basis of Israeli society requires some ultimate settlement of the Palestinian problem. A nation of refugees whose international appeal was based on centuries of persecution, displacement, and periodic expulsion must surely find it troublesome to

have secured its own haven in a way that displaced others. Whatever the confused calculations and intimidations that produced the Palestinian refugees in 1948, or the necessities and provocations that resulted in the Israeli extensions of 1967, Israel would now become a colonial power. Retaining control over the land it presently occupies and continuing settlement by Israelis of land owned, certainly until 1967, by Palestinians and occupied in 1967 by force would transform a temporary, administrative regime into a permanently colonial one. It would be a transformation wrought now by Israeli design and will no longer be one of resignation and regret.

Prime Minister Begin's justification by history cannot be sufficient. For one thing the force of the historical argument—who took what from whom, who lost the land when, whose title is therefore the legitimate one—can lead only to a cul-de-sac, because the whole argument depends on when the counting begins. But however many thousands of years ago one begins, the fact of Arab settlement (not to say ownership) is indisputable for a hundred generations prior to 1948 or 1967.

And whatever their legitimacy, the very existence of the refugees and the residents of the West Bank (call it Samaria and Judea, the result is the same) defines a reality. Not only are the confrontation states unwilling to make peace without an acceptable settlement of the Palestinian issue, but even if they were willing, it is not at all clear that they would be able to do so. Over two and a half million Palestinian Arabs live in those confrontation states, and even under the most optimistic Likud plan one million of them would become citizens—or colonial subjects—of Israel. The former would threaten the stability, already precarious, of whatever state they resided in, and the latter would constitute a military, social, and demographic threat to Israel itself. For Prime Minister Begin, who eulogizes the repatriation of Jews to Zion, to suggest that the Palestinians simply accept absorption into the states in which as a result of conquest they now reside seems unrealistic if not hollow. Surely a man who daily celebrates the end of the diaspora must understand the passion that suffuses the Palestinian drive for a homeland. Ultimately the Arab diaspora is likely to be satisfied with no less than the Jewish one: a political

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entity with integrity, which in the current political system means an independent nation-state.

But the legitimacy of the Palestinian objectives apart, Israel would itself benefit from a Palestinian state more than it would lose. Israel's overriding concern is with its own security, integrity, and legitimacy. "Everything else is negotiable," Prime Minister Begin has repeated on a variety of occasions. "The only thing Israel will not negotiate is its own destruction." Far from destruction, a Palestinian state would help to secure a legitimated Israel. It would do so in at least three ways.

*First*, it would concentrate the refugees within a single area. Spread now between Lebanon, the West Bank, Gaza, and Syria—and, since the "black days of September," to a lesser extent in Jordan—they would now be localized. Insofar as they constitute a threat to the stability of these other countries, all of Israel's neighbors would be more serene, if not also more secure, if the Palestinians departed. In the last eight years alone the Palestinians have been the cause of two civil wars and two invasions. The Palestinians have been a source of opposition to the Hashemite throne ever since the 1948 annexation of the West Bank by Transjordan. And if there is one thing all Lebanese seem to agree about, it is, as President Sarkis said on January 6, that the Palestinian "refugees," somewhere between 400,000 and 600,000 of them, must leave after a peace agreement has been reached. So the confrontation states' insistence on a West Bank state for the Palestinians may not be undiluted altruism.

The Palestinians are a volatile ingredient in an easily inflamed area. Removing the cause of their volatility should stabilize the entire region. And if it does not, their concentration will make it easier to control their volatility. Instead of a nefarious underground with secret arms networks, loose travels over international borders, welcome "safehouses" in four countries, and a disdain for national sovereignty and international agreements, the Palestinians would be contained in a single national state.

*Second*, the existence of such a state has itself certain probable consequences. Perhaps the Palestinians would create a new kind of state. Perhaps theirs would not conform to the general pattern that, utopian revolutionary manifestos notwithstanding, still seems to characterize most states. Perhaps their revolution and the vision that informs it would not become routinized, normalized, and to some extent bureaucratized. Perhaps it would be truly revolutionary. But so far there is no reason to expect such a remarkable departure from the norm. A Palestinian government would probably worry about internal security, national sovereignty, national territory, national resources, economic development, and international relations. Governing an area of 3,300 square miles with between 1.5 and 3.5 million inhabitants, a per capita income of no more than \$250 per annum, it would have plenty to do. It would not likely spend its energy fomenting revolutions among or war with its more powerful neighbors.

And if it did spend its energy that way, it would

necessarily pay the price. Military, economic, and political retaliation are much easier to inflict on a state than on an amorphous collection of refugee camps or an underground movement. Israel itself has had a continuous problem in responding to the *fedayeen*, while its ability to retaliate against its national neighbors has assured it some measure of coexistence with them. Even on the basis of Israeli security considerations, a Palestinian state might therefore be easier to live with than a Palestinian movement. Any required response could be directed at the appropriate party, and no third party—Lebanon, Jordan, or even Syria—need necessarily be implicated. In the place of an amoebic network would be a territorial structure, a state, a clear, unambiguous target with valued resources.

*Third*, that state, at least the West Bank heartland, would be landlocked. It would be entirely surrounded by a more compact Israel and by a worried, wary Jordan. It would not share a border with any country that, for the moment at least, would encourage "adventurism." All its neighbors would have more to lose than to gain if the Palestinian state were to achieve military or political capacity. Especially in the Middle East, where skepticism, suspicion, and fear of betrayal have become veritable art forms, no one is likely to nurture a covetous or avaricious neighbor. The Chinese may have coined the proverb about the hazards of riding a tiger's tail, but the lesson has not been lost in the coup-ridden, assassination-prone Middle East.

Gaza, to be sure, would provide some rather limited access to the sea and therefore to military supplies, but the only land route between Gaza and the West Bank crosses Israel. Gaza has no substantial harbor facilities, and even if it did, Israel is not likely to permit military transshipment. The only other access would be by air or across the (demilitarized) Sinai, over the Gulf of Aqaba and from Aqaba three hundred miles through Jordan to Amman—hardly a convenient or even accessible military route. Moreover, any military shipments through an as-yet-to-be-built harbor (or, even more unlikely, an airport) in Gaza would be extremely easy to detect and, given the proper international agreements, to prevent. Of course it would be possible to supply the West Bank directly by air, but that would be expensive and easily detected. And no plane could get to the West Bank without flying over either Israeli or Jordanian air space. So the growth of a credible military threat to Israel or to Jordan is not likely to occur, certainly not without considerable forewarning.

However, the Israelis are worried about more than a modern standing military force. Tel Aviv is only eight miles from the western border of the West Bank, and Jerusalem borders directly on it. Mr. Begin has pointed out that both would be vulnerable to even a single terrorist armed with a mobile missile launcher. No one, he argues, can guarantee the safety of Israeli targets at so close a range. But apart from the possibility of an interim ban on such weapons, probably unenforceable, the same danger exists at present. Though more difficult certainly, a missile can now be launched from the shoulder of a determined terrorist on the West Bank. The extra forty miles to the western border of the West Bank



Photo: Laurel Stradford

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provides shallow security, if it provides any at all. Whoever can construct a mobile missile with an eight-mile range will probably be able to construct one, perhaps a bit more complex and cumbersome, with a twenty, forty, or even fifty-mile range.

Moreover, the same considerations that underlie Israeli desires for a buffer zone on the east would necessitate additional Israeli acquisitions to the north. Haifa lies only twenty miles or so from the Lebanese border, and while Israel has played a direct role in the balance of power within southern Lebanon, there were not until March, 1978, any official claims that Israeli security requires the annexation of Lebanese territory. And even the invasion of March 15 was directed at the PLO camps in retaliation for a guerrilla raid upon a bus, not as a preemptive strike to assure an additional margin of safety for Haifa. Still, in a small country of three million people, in which any loss is painful and in which military losses routinely occasion national mourning, the populations of Haifa and Tel Aviv do remain hostage to the Palestinians—though Palestinian populations would now similarly be hostage to the Israelis (and a revanchist movement by Palestinians would be subject to retaliation in kind). There can be no doubt, however, that *any* territorial or political concessions on the West Bank or anywhere else constitute an additional threat to Israel.

**B**ut retaining the West Bank, were it even possible, would carry its own threat, most obviously the continued threat of war. President Sadat has made it clear that Israel can have peace or territory, but not both. Israel may now have a military superiority,

but that edge is hardly guaranteed. The Israelis themselves point out that the Arabs can lose many wars but the Israelis only one. Israelis are outnumbered—the usual figure is 60-1, though it is not entirely clear how that figure is derived—and against the support of Libya, Saudi Arabia, and the Emirates they are certainly outfinanced. Even were Europe and North America to stand firm, a most unlikely assumption, these undeniable disparities must soon begin to take their toll.

But leaving war aside for the moment, annexation itself has certain costs and poses certain threats. Demographically the Palestinians already outnumber the Israelis, and the Palestinian population, growing at 3½ per cent a year, is doubling every twenty years or so. That is 40 per cent faster than the rate of Israeli growth. Apart from the nearly million Palestinians living on the East Bank today—some of whom would presumably be able to return even under the terms Prime Minister Begin announced—the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and pre-1967 Israel will outnumber the Israelis sometime within the next sixty years, the lifetime of Israel's present generation. Keeping the West Bank and Gaza, Israel would itself become something very different from what it now is. Another Lebanon, but worse. Prime Minister Begin's single nonnegotiable principle, the survival of Israel, would then become a matter of sheer electoral weight and demographics. Unless, of course, the residents of these newly incorporated (not to say annexed) areas were perpetually to be denied citizenship in any state—Israeli or independent—in which case Israel would become, not another Lebanon, but another Rhodesia.

Militarily the consequences of "incorporation" may also weigh against Israel. Against the cost of patrolling a longer and more irregular pre-1967 border would be the continued cost of an army of occupation. In a recent article on this very issue General Mattityahu Peled has argued that the defense of the new territories requires tens of thousands of troops against the few thousand of pre-1967; that new fortifications require "many billions of Israeli pounds," whereas "before 1967 not one cent was deemed necessary for such a wasteful enterprise"; that the cost of maintaining forces in the previously demilitarized desert is "tremendous"; and that defense spending accounted for 12 per cent of GNP prior to 1967, whereas it now requires 36 per cent and even that is "considered hardly adequate for present defense needs." To be sure, most of the occupation expenditures are allocated to the Sinai and Gaza rather than to the West Bank, but President Sadat has maintained his commitment to a comprehensive rather than a bilateral settlement. Unless that position is changed, the Sinai expenditures cannot be reduced without a resolution of the West Bank problem.

In any case, General Peled argues, none of these expenditures, no matter what their size, has increased Israeli security. And he adds that, "additional improvements may be gained by the establishment of a Palestinian State": A Palestinian state would presumably be precluded from maintaining the two divisions Jordan previously stationed on the West Bank, it would be required to maintain the same *de facto* restriction on armor and defense materials maintained in Gaza by Egypt and on the West Bank by Jordan, and it would be subject to reprisals—war, if necessary—by Israel if, contrary to the nature of such a state, it permitted private guerrilla forces to operate from its territory. Now Israeli generals, even those as atypical as General Peled, are not noted for their undue willingness to give up strategic advantages.

What General Peled did not take into consideration were the internal patrols, the nonborder costs of occupation. In addition to the normal costs of policing a stable state of unquestioned legitimacy, policing a contested area costs considerably more—as a quarter of a century of war in Vietnam made clear. At the most obvious level, a continued Israeli occupation would almost certainly incubate a guerrilla movement. The standard estimate for maintaining security is ten soldiers to each guerrilla, though that is guesswork. No need to guess about a guerrilla war within the "incorporated" territories and within Israel proper; it is a certainty. What Israelis will experience is the development of an anticolonial movement that perfects the kind of terrorism pioneered by the *Irgun* when Prime Minister Begin was its head. Every mailbox, every marketplace, every street corner, automobile, bus, and public utility will be a potential and often actual trap. The whole population of Israel will be the movement's hostage. A web of spies, counterspies, military police, surveillance operations, and, of course, occupation troops would turn Israel from an open democracy to an armed camp, and an armed camp under siege at that.

This transformation would be only part of the political

price Israel would pay. The internal arguments about colonialism, citizenship, identity, and militarism would be augmented by waning international support, increasing isolation, and a consequently growing paranoia. One foresees, ultimately, a domestic wariness with the civilian casualties of a protracted guerrilla war and, possibly, acceleration of the present rate of emigration, which even now apparently reflects economic and political demoralization. The Israeli population, with its remarkable record of economic development, would be forced to accept the continuous corrosion of its own resources, the annual allocation to the military of a third of its GNP and about half of its national budget, the unavoidable inflation, the growing national debt, the unrelenting fear that one day a war will be lost, and, of course, the pervasive psychological cost of the siege mentality. What sort of people will the Israelis be if generation upon generation is nurtured in this sort of environment?

If the moral, political, social, and economic cost of retaining these areas is so high and the probability of continued success in maintaining an occupation over an unwilling people with strong allies is so low, there are only two obvious options, and they are variants of one another: the *first* is an independent nation state; the *second* is some kind of "connection" between a Palestinian "entity" and Jordan. They are variants of one another because the choice, ultimately, will be up to the Palestinians. Jordan will not want, nor will it for long be able to force, a federation, confederation, or even association against the will of the Palestinians.

For one thing, any "connection" carries risks for Jordan itself because the Palestinians would outnumber the non-Palestinians in such an entity, no matter what its political structure. The Palestinians slightly outnumber the non-Palestinians on the East Bank alone, and the ratio would be more than 2:1 if the West Bank and Gaza were added. Numbers are not the only ingredient of power or control, of course, but when an impassioned ethnic majority holds such an edge, it cannot easily be countervailed. This is especially the case since King Hussein's Hashemite rule rests largely on the loyalty of his Bedoin troops and on the non-Palestinian, so-called Transjordanian, part of the East Bank population. Given the postindependence history of most pluralistic societies, the addition of at least one million and up to two and a half million ethnically self-assertive Palestinians would certainly have some destabilizing influence on Jordan.

Next, if those Palestinians are forced into an association with Jordan, they are going to take their identity crisis with them. It seems unlikely that a Palestinian claim for national independence and integrity could be denied by Jordan for very long. King Hussein's acceptance of and constant reference to the decisions of Rabat would make any insistence on Jordanian sovereignty appear pure expansionism, if not colonialism. But Rabat aside, it would be extremely costly (both in lives and treasure) and extremely difficult (if not impossible) to keep the Palestinians enveloped in a political structure they defined as foreign, colonial, or illegitimate. Hus-

sein is not likely to want to put Jordan in Israel's place.

Looking ahead a decade or two it is hard to see how any negotiated settlement could deny a persistent Palestinian commitment to a separate political identity. However dubious its future in an ever more Balkanized world, nationalism has not only swept away powerful European empires, but has more recently dismembered Pakistan, Ethiopia, and were it not for enormous international pressure, Nigeria. Yugoslavia, India, the Philippines, a host of African countries, and even Canada are on precarious ground. If the Palestinians continue to demand a state, it is not clear how Israel could prevent it, morally, militarily, or politically, and it does not even seem to be in Israel's interest to do so.

Of course it is not for Americans to tell the Israelis what their best interests are. It is their country and their future, and they have an undeniable sovereign right to structure a policy that seems best to them. But by the same token they do not have an undeniable sovereign right to our support. We cannot allow ourselves to become prisoners of Israeli vital interests as the Israelis define them. We should not ask Israel to sacrifice its vital interests, but we must retain the sovereignty to limit our own involvement to the protection of our own vital interests and of Israel's vital interests as we—not they—define them. The Israeli insistence on sovereign and independent judgment works both ways.

The Israelis have attempted to place us in a kind of political Catch 22. If we state our position publicly, they say they cannot make concessions because it would look as if they had capitulated and that they must maintain at least the appearance of complete independence and sovereignty. If we say nothing, their independence and sovereignty seem to require that they make no concessions at all. On the surface it would seem easier for Israeli politicians to make concessions under some external pressure so that the onus would be placed on forces beyond Israel's control. But one way or the other the Israelis cannot be allowed to presume that we will sit by, doing and saying nothing now but supporting Israel in the crunch to come.

Could we give Israel the necessary support? We were barely able to replenish supplies in 1973, when our European allies refused to allow military transshipments; and the Franco government, which finally did permit the transshipments, is no longer in power. Had it been a protracted war, we might not have been able to maintain the supply line. Moreover, the same oil boycott that affected our allies might have effected a reversal in our own policies as well. If continued unconditional support for an intransigent Israel were to produce another boycott, we might not be able to supply Israel even if we wanted to.

And it is not at all clear that we should *want* to. Unless we believe a Palestinian state would be fatal for Israel, we should not support an Israeli veto over such a state. Quite apart from our own economic and political interests, we should not allow ourselves to deny to Palestinians the principle of a homeland that we supported for

Jews. It is simply nonsense to say that the Palestinians have all those other Arab states. Those are not Palestinian states. The same antagonisms that have thwarted a pan-Arab state, and on which Israel depends to divide its enemies, make the other Arab states unsatisfactory as receptacles for Palestinian nationalism. We ought not oppose, in principle, the formation of a Palestinian state on land that was indisputably occupied by Palestinians before 1967 and that Israel itself agreed to return when it voted for Resolution 242.

On the other hand we do not have to support the immediate creation of a Palestinian state. Nor does Israel. Israel is only asked not to reject the idea *in principle*. Israel could agree to a gradual withdrawal; it need not be immediate. Israel could agree to an independence whose growth would be contingent on a peaceful relationship with its neighbors. Israel would certainly have the right to require recognition of its own legitimacy and guarantees for its own security by the emerging Palestinian leadership and state before it relinquished its position on the West Bank. Israel might encourage a Palestinian link with Jordan, and, with Jordan, it might encourage the moderate politicians and forces on the West Bank. We might join in such encouragement. All these possibilities are negotiable. But what neither we nor the Israelis can or should do is to reject out of hand the principle of a Palestinian state. Israel is now in a position to negotiate, if not determine, the terms of a Palestinian settlement, including, possibly, such a Palestinian state. It is not clear just what sort of stable solution the Israelis have in mind even if they were asked to dictate one; so far the Israelis have not produced a viable, long-range alternative. In the future, however, Israel could find itself with an imposed solution.

The distance between "home rule," "self-determination," "participation in the determination of their future," and "statehood" is not great, especially when the evolution is measured in decades. Israel has been under a state of siege for the entire thirty years of its existence. Its children have known nothing but war. Here, now, is a chance for peace. At *most* what is required in exchange for "a welcome chance to live in peace and security" is a return to boundaries that Israel itself was more than willing to accept prior to the Six-Day War, and the acceptance of the principle of some kind of self-determination in territory then controlled by Jordan...a self-determination Israel would presumably have done nothing about had it been granted by Hussein and accepted by the Palestinians in May, 1967. It would be a sad irony if what would surely have been hailed as a wonder of wonders in 1967—Arab recognition for the status quo—were to be rejected in 1978 as completely inadequate. It would be a tragedy, not just an irony, if a people as exquisitely sensitive to moral issues as the Jews were to deny in principle to the Palestinians what they demanded as a moral right for themselves: a homeland.

We should not allow ourselves to be protagonists in such a tragedy.