

# International Security

SUMMER 1981  
VOL 6 NO 1  
ISSN 0162-2889 \$4.00

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# America's Palestinian Predicament: Fallacies and Possibilities

Mark A. Bruzonsky

A few years ago, a prestigious group of Americans, including a number of prominent American Jews who would later be identified with both the Carter and Reagan Administrations, held regular meetings in Washington and concluded that American interests in the Middle East urgently required a "workable, fair, and enduring settlement" of the Arab-Israeli conflict. "Comprehensive settlement" became the popular euphemism for the consensus reached by this group, a consensus which became the blueprint for the early efforts of the Carter Administration.

Known as the "Brookings Report,"<sup>1</sup> this remarkably prescient document's primary virtue was that, beyond the consensus, it outlined a feasible, overall political solution to the Arab-Israeli quagmire. It was admittedly a solution to be implemented in cautious stages. Yet the Brookings approach was more a critique than an endorsement of the Kissingerian step-by-step procedures, for it insisted that the contours of an overall settlement were to be agreed upon *in advance* of the implementation process. The Arab states and most especially the Palestinians were to be expected during the process to credibly prove their willingness to recognize and coexist with Israel; while Israel was to "agree to withdraw to the June 5, 1967, line with only modifications as might be mutually accepted" and to agree to "the principle of Palestinian self-determination and some generally accepted means . . . of putting that principle into practice."

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1. *Toward Peace In The Middle East—Report Of A Study Group*; The Brookings Institution, Washington, 1975. The report's signers: Morroe Berger, Robert R. Bowie, Zbigniew Brzezinski, John C. Campbell, Najeeb Halaby, Rita Hauser, Roger W. Heyns, Alan Horton, Malcolm Kerr, Fred Khouri, Philip Klutznick, William Quandt, Nadav Safran, Stephen Spiegel, A. L. Udovitch, Charles W. Yost.

There were hints at the time that this report was actually "officially sanctioned" by Henry Kissinger as one outgrowth of the early 1975 "Reassessment" of Middle East policy. Looking ahead to the first elected Ford term, Kissinger, it was thought, was eager to have such a bipartisan statement to defuse domestic political pressures sure to erupt if he should attempt to go beyond step-by-step diplomacy which had by that time run its course. The Israelis made major efforts to derail the report through Ambassador Dinitz in Washington and by sending emissaries from Jerusalem to urge a number of the panel's Jewish members not to sign. For background see my article "The U.S. & Israel: The Coming Storm," *Worldview*, Sept. 1976.

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*International Security*, Summer 1981 (Vol. 6, No. 1) 0162-2889/81/010093-18 \$02.50/0

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The delicate but inescapable Palestinian problem could be resolved in one of two ways according to this consensus—either through “an independent Palestinian state” or “a Palestinian entity voluntarily federated with Jordan” with “provision for the resettlement of those Palestinian refugees desiring to return” and “reasonable compensation for property losses.” The common thread of thinking at that time was that “Palestinian self-determination” simply could no longer be denied nor circumvented. Rather, resolving the Palestinian dimension of the Arab–Israeli conflict was considered an essential and inescapable element in any stable arrangement likely to ensure peace in the area and promote American interests throughout the region.

International diplomacy during the period from 1976 to 1980 underwent a bewildering series of shifts and false starts, mostly the result, initially, of domestic political influences on Washington politics and then of the Sadat initiative leading to the Egyptian–Israeli treaty. The Brookings Report—in many ways logical successor to the 1969 Rogers Plan and the 1975 Ford–Kissinger “Reassessment”<sup>2</sup>—had become the new Carter team’s Middle East road-map as two of its signers, Brzezinski and Quandt, took over Middle East matters at the National Security Council with fellow-travelers Vance and Saunders coordinating efforts at the State Department.

Early attempts to set the stage for implementation of the Brookings formula resulted in a badly managed, clandestine dialogue through intermediaries with the PLO;<sup>3</sup> substantial efforts to reconstitute the Geneva Conference, highlighted by the extraordinary Soviet–American “Joint Statement” of October 1, 1977; and some progress in creating an alignment of domestic political forces which would have given this ambitious attempt at a comprehensive settlement, perceived to be so vital, a reasonable chance of success.

Sadat initially hoped that his stunning November 1977 initiative toward Israel would “prompt [Israelis] to see the living reality of the Palestinian people and their inalienable right to statehood,” as Sadat insisted in a telegram sent to Israel just a few days before his own arrival.<sup>4</sup> His expectations

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2. For background into the pre-Carter period, especially Kissinger’s step-by-step diplomacy and the March 1975 “Reassessment,” see Edward R. F. Sheehan, *The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger—A Secret History of American Diplomacy in the Middle East* (New York: Reader’s Digest Press, 1976).

3. For background on the various attempts to reach some kind of understanding with the PLO see my cover article in the May 21, 1976 *Commonweal*, “The U.S., the PLO and Israel”; and my article in *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 17, 1977, “Carter’s Offers to Palestinians.”

4. Sadat said much the same thing to the Israeli Knesset a few days later: “It is incumbent on you to show understanding of the insistence of the people of Palestine for the establishment of their state on their land. . . . It is no use to refrain from recognizing the Palestinian people and their right to statehood and their right of return.”

were repeatedly confounded. There was an unshakeable refusal on the part of the Begin government to go beyond a separate Egyptian–Israeli deal coupled with convoluted discussions of “autonomy for the Arabs of the Land of Israel”—which so far has brought the Palestinians only greater repression and demoralization. The autonomy talks have now reached their inevitable stalemate and at present no satisfactory approach to the Palestinian issue seems within political grasp.

In the early months of 1981, in fact, a far different approach to the Arab–Israeli conflict was afoot under the sponsorship of a far different American Administration—an administration notably less understanding and tolerant of the plight of the Palestinians, the sensibilities and priorities of the Arabs, or the reasonable interests of the Soviets in a region bordering their own territory.

Indeed, on the evening of the November election a former “Jewish lobby” Capitol Hill lobbyist joyfully proclaimed to an Egyptian Minister, “We’ve finally scrapped that little purple pamphlet!” (referring to the Brookings Report). It was a widely shared glee. For many Israelis, and for a sizeable number of strategists associated with the Reagan Administration, there is now an opportunity to recast American Arab–Israeli policy away from that of the previous decade toward one in which Palestinian nationalism is firmly repressed, Resolution 242 no longer presumes near-total territorial return by Israel, and a far more Israeli-oriented view of Middle East conditions and American interest predominates. Yet, in these early months there is clearly a fierce competition within Reagan political circles over divergent strategies for approaching the Arab–Israeli conflict, over the importance of addressing the Palestinian national question, and over how to project American political and military strength throughout the Middle East area and the Gulf region.

Whatever one’s view of these developments, it is obvious that there is a major political effort currently underway to ensure that neither the comprehensive settlement thinking nor the notion of Palestinian self-determination gain a foothold in the planning of the new American government. Potent political forces are determined to ensure that there be no looking back to the basic approach which dominated U.S. government thinking in one way or another for the past decade and which culminated in the Brookings Report. With Egypt now perceived to be out of the Arab alignment, and as a consequence war against Israel beyond Arab capabilities, the argument is heard that the Palestinian aspect of the Camp David accords really need not be an American priority. American attention is now focused on oil and the Gulf, and a post-detente Soviet–American competition dominates. Accordingly,

the Palestinian national issue, it is argued, should no longer be a major focus of American diplomatic energies. Every imaginable argument is being propounded to discredit the PLO, Palestinian "extremists" who "demand" a state, and the very notion of a comprehensive settlement — in spite of the fact that the United States and Israel stand nearly alone against the world with these attitudes. It is in this context that so much discussion of the "Jordanian Option" is now being heard, and in this context that the "Jordanian Option"—which means different things to different people—is being so widely discussed. The essay by Amos Perlmutter in the previous issue of this journal provides an example of this approach and a welcome focus for critical (and skeptical) analysis.<sup>5</sup>

It is vital to examine both the logic and the semantics of those who claim that a Camp David-inspired "Palestinian entity" (read "Jordanian Option") is politically realistic and would defuse the Palestinian national issue, lead to a peace accepted at least by America's important Arab allies, and bring regional stability that would ensure American interests. On such an examination, it becomes evident that this "Palestinian entity" approach represents little more than a combination of the Camp David autonomy formula with the Israeli Labor Party's "Jordanian Option." For purposes of clarity and distinction, this approach might be called the "Hashemite-Jordanian Option." A very different approach—which I term the "Palestinian-Jordanian Option"—bears a semantic resemblance, but is fundamentally different in scope and content. Its implementation as U.S. policy for the region would strengthen American diplomacy dramatically.

#### *The "Hashemite-Jordanian Option"*

Should the Labor Party regain power in Israel, the orthodox "Jordanian Option" is its long-professed approach to the Palestinian problem.<sup>6</sup> Should Begin retain power, "Palestinian autonomy" is the preferred course since it leads, in Begin's mind, to Israeli control and probably sovereignty over the West Bank. Yet the entire notion of "autonomy" has been so discredited

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5. Amos Perlmutter, "A Palestinian Entity?" *International Security*, Spring 1981 (Vol. 5, No. 4).

6. For a basic summary of today's Labor position, see Shimon Peres, "A Strategy for Peace in the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Spring 1980). Former Foreign Minister Yigal Allon is credited with originating this basic position which was termed for some years "The Allon Plan." See Yigal Allon, "Israel: The Case For Defensible Borders," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (October 1976). See also the Israeli Labor Party 1981 campaign platform.

since Camp David, and pressures to outflank Palestinian nationalism through some form of Jordanian-Israeli condominium have grown so substantial, that *Likud* would have to at least feint in the "Palestinian Entity" direction.

Thus, whatever the outcome of Israel's June 30th election, a variant of the Hashemite-Jordanian Option will continue—with Labor stressing the possibility of partial territorial return, or *Likud* attempting some form of Jordanian cooperation without giving up Israel's claim to sovereignty.

Palestinian nationalism has achieved a rather remarkable following the United States in recent years. A Louis Harris poll, for instance, revealed the rather startling statistics reported in Table 1.<sup>7</sup>

These figures may explain why even advocates of some form of Jordanian Option increasingly use the terminology of Palestinian solution and even Palestinian independence, while offering proposals unacceptable to nearly all Palestinians. Perlmutter, for instance, writes of a novel "Palestinian entity" which "is in the long run, the best possible solution for the Palestinians and the problem."<sup>8</sup> Yet upon careful examination, such an approach degenerates into a clever, highly contrived attempt to give legitimacy to a discredited option through semantic confusion.

**Table 1**  
Attitudes toward an Independent Palestinian State on the West Bank

	Total Public			Total Jews		
	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
<i>Hypothesis:</i> The Palestinian people are now homeless and deserve their own independent state, just as much as the Jews deserved a homeland after World War II.	71	12	17	49	36	15
<i>Hypothesis:</i> There must be a way to guarantee Israel's security and also give the Palestinians an independent state on the West Bank.	72	11	17	59	26	16

7. *A Study Of The Attitudes of the American People and the American Jewish Community Toward The Arab-Israeli Conflict in the Middle East* (study No. 804011); Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.; prepared for Edgar M. Bronfman, Chairman, The Seagram Company Ltd., and Acting President, World Jewish Congress; September 1980; Table 42, p. 101.

8. Perlmutter, *op cit.*, p. 104.

A close reading of the various Jordanian Option approaches, including Perlmutter's "Palestinian Entity" proposal, reveals that they are hardly novel, but rather combinations of the autonomy prescription with the notion of joint Jordanian-Israeli involvement in the West Bank. Both "Palestinian Entity" and "Jordanian Option" advocates claim to be at least partially supportive of the Camp David autonomy concepts—though not as interpreted by Begin. Yet their plans usually include conversion of the West Bank mayors into the governance authority, similar to what Begin had discussed, using the term "self-rule." And like Begin, these advocates plan to go forward with "self-rule" without even considering the large Palestinian diaspora beyond the West Bank.<sup>9</sup>The major difference between the "Jordanian Entity" approach as typified by Amos Perlmutter's proposals and the Begin approach is that the former prefers (as does the Labor Party) to enlist Jordanian legitimacy in the plan to smother Palestinian nationalism, even if this requires some kind of return of much of the West Bank to quasi-Jordanian sovereignty. The similarities in all these approaches far outweigh the differences, especially from the Palestinian perspective, since no provision is made for the majority of Palestinians living outside occupied territories.

In short, simple use of the term "Palestinian entity" does not in itself distinguish what is being advocated either from Begin's autonomy notion or from Peres' advocacy of a West Bank partially under Amman's domination. Close study of the various proposed plans exposes no new approaches, but rather this curious blending of unworkable concepts in which neither the government in Amman nor the Palestinians have ever expressed any serious interest.<sup>10</sup>

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9. In "A Palestinian Entity," (*op. cit.*), for example, Amos Perlmutter erroneously asserts that "A majority of Palestinians live on the West Bank," when in reality only about one-fourth of the Palestinian people live there. For background see a three-part *New York Times* series, "The Palestinians: A People in Crisis—Scattered, Bewildered and Divided," February 19–21, 1978; and a *Time Magazine* cover story, "The Palestinians: Key to a Mideast Peace," April 14, 1980. The Perlmutter article, in fact, serves as an excellent example of the confused thinking involved in thrusting the concept of "Palestinian Entity" into the political vocabulary. At one point, Perlmutter even admits that his "novel" approach is really only a desire to "bend Begin's aspirations and even modify the Allon territorial compromise . . ." He further admits that what he is proposing is really "a Jordanian solution to the Palestinian problem," though at another point, he insists that "neither the return of the West Bank to Jordan nor an Israeli-Jordanian solution. . . . will work." And if doubt remains as to how little Perlmutter's vision offers Palestinians in reality, he concludes that "A Palestinian Entity already exists and is functioning"! 10. Proponents such as Perlmutter present a confused notion of a "Palestinian entity" which will have both "independence and autonomy," and will have "a sovereign, centralized form of autonomy." But "in the end, power resides not with the Palestinians but in Amman." Perlmutter

Although those who advocate the "Jordanian Option" employ the semantics of freedom, the reality of their proposals is Palestinian bondage. Moreover, notably absent from advocacy of the "Jordanian Option" is the crucial issue of the Palestinians living outside the West Bank (and one presumes Gaza as well), and their relationship to such a "Palestinian entity."<sup>11</sup>

Most misleading of all is the central assertion of these policy advocates that the Palestinian concept of *Kiyan* suggests eventual Palestinian acquiescence in these "Palestinian entity" formulations. Yet if one discusses *Kiyan* with knowledgeable Palestinians, the near-total misuse of the term in the context of contemporary affairs quickly becomes evident.

It seems, in summary, that both the "Palestinian entity" and "Jordanian Option" approaches are designed to place the Palestinians under an Israeli-Jordanian condominium that would smother Palestinian nationalism, befuddle the world's perceptions of what is taking place, and leave the Israeli-Palestinian tangle unresolved. Use of the term "Palestinian entity" in place of "Jordanian Option" seems designed to provide a kind of semantic smoke-screen for such a strategy—a smokescreen behind which autonomy can go forward in the face of both Palestinian and Jordanian opposition. It also provides a convenient device by which fault can be attributed to the Arabs rather than Israel should the likely happen and autonomy remain stillborn. As Peres has said of the "Jordanian Option," "We will negotiate with the Palestinians in the West Bank even without Jordan."<sup>12</sup> This can only imply Israeli determination to procrastinate and delay under the guise of "Palestinian intransigence." Should Begin remain at the political helm, there can no longer be any doubt that *Likud* intends eventual annexation of the West Bank, Begin believing he traded Sinai for it at Camp David. Meanwhile, Israel and the United States, it must be presumed, are to attempt to preserve

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further stipulates that there will be "a governing body" (subject, it appears, to both Israeli and Jordanian veto of its membership and powers) with "East Jerusalem as its *administrative* capital." But it will nevertheless be prohibited from self-determination, sovereignty, decisions on immigration, etc., even though the West Bankers may negotiate with Israel "independently."

11. As former American Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Egypt, Hermann Eilts, has recently warned, "Even if the current autonomy negotiations succeed . . . , this will *not* solve the heart of the Palestinian problem; namely the 1.5 million diaspora Palestinians." "Unless steps are taken to grapple with its core element, i.e., the refugees, [the Palestinian problem] carries the seeds of further deterioration of the Middle East area, including the Gulf." See Hermann F. Eilts, "Security in the Persian Gulf," *International Security*, Fall 1980 (Vol. 5, No. 2), p. 88. For background on the Palestinian refugees, see the new book by Jonathan Dimbleby and Donald McCullin, *The Palestinians* (Quartet Books, London, 1980).

12. Quoted in *The Washington Post*, 19 December 1980, p. A8.



the separate Egyptian–Israeli arrangement, with Sadat so eager to win and preserve return of the Sinai that Egypt will acquiesce indefinitely in the separate peace.

As one Palestinian intellectual, recently deceased, bitterly charged, the Camp David autonomy offer (and Perlmutter’s “Palestinian entity” approach clearly deserves to be included) means:

A fraction of the Palestinian people (under one-third of the whole) is promised a fraction of its rights (not including the national right to self-determination and statehood) in a fraction of its homeland (less than one-fifth of the area of the whole); and this promise is to be fulfilled several years from now, through a step-by-step process in which Israel is to exercise a decisive veto power over any agreement. Beyond that, the vast majority of Palestinians is condemned to permanent loss of its Palestinian national identity, to permanent exile and statelessness, to permanent separation from one another and from Palestine—to a life without national hope and meaning.<sup>13</sup>

To this, Columbia University Professor Edward Said has added,

The irony is considerably sharpened when the success of Palestinian self-rule is obviously made to depend upon the demise—or at least the disappearance—of the PLO, and the convenient appearance in its place of “reasonable” Palestinian quislings eager to negotiate their indefinite political emasculation.<sup>14</sup>

What is being “offered” by those who propose these concepts is not a real strategy for diplomatic progress or settlement of the dispute, but rather a highly contrived and politically assertive thrust at Washington policymakers that aims to convince them that the “Hashemite–Jordanian Option” can really be made to work if only they would accept the logic and the historical assessment that underpin it. The audience for such proposals, then, is not in the Middle East or among the Palestinians; it is in Washington. In the final analysis, this line of reasoning argues that although Jordan does not publicly accept to negotiate, this is still what she really wants; and although Palestinians refuse to cooperate, they can be forced to acquiesce. Consequently, Egypt, Israel, and the United States should have a Camp David II and do it all themselves.

It is precisely the confused logic and the mistaken historical orientation that render this approach to Arab–Israeli diplomacy so dangerous. It poses

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13. Fayeze Sayegh, “The Camp David Agreement and the Palestine Problem,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. VIII, No. 2 (Winter 1979), p. 40.

14. Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Times Books, 1979), p. 213.

considerable danger to American diplomatic credibility and risks not only regional destabilization but the unraveling of the accomplishments so far achieved with the Egyptian–Israeli arrangement. As former Ambassador Hermann Eilts has pointedly warned, “First and foremost” in order to promote American interests in the Gulf area, is “meaningful progress on the Arab–Israeli problem. This means serious tackling of the Palestinian problem *in all its aspects*—including, and especially, the diaspora dimension.”<sup>15</sup>

“An equitable solution to the Palestinian problem,” Eilts adds,

one satisfactory not only to Israel but also to the Palestinians, is essential if a political climate facilitating continual Western access to Gulf oil and optimum production levels is to be fostered. . . . For its part, the United States itself might ponder whether its interests are likely to be furthered through permanent resettlement and enfranchisement in the Gulf states of a totally embittered, anti-American Palestinian community.<sup>16</sup>

The United States is embarking on a major diplomatic and military strategy to ensure stability throughout the Persian Gulf region, hoping to convince countries in the area to accept American political leadership and American military protection (including the possible introduction into the region of American military forces). It would be folly at such a pivotal time for the United States to go forward with a post–Camp David strategy that does not insist on the goal of a comprehensive peace. Many conclude that it is America’s responsibility accordingly to provide specific guarantees for Israel’s security, including possibly a security treaty.<sup>17</sup> But nothing short of a comprehensive peace approach will result in maximum American influence and stability throughout the area. And any security relationship with Israel should be based on this understanding. Furthermore, continuing attempts to destroy, however delicately, Palestinian nationalism could cause the area to erupt in violent and destabilizing spasms with unpredictable consequences.

In short, it would be highly dangerous for the United States to adopt what is essentially an Israeli strategy on the Palestinian issue—one that is hamstrung by Israeli domestic politics and that is clearly not in keeping with

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15. Eilts, *Security in the Persian Gulf*, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

17. On this matter see Richard H. Ullman, “Alliance With Israel?” *Foreign Policy*, Number 19, Summer 1975; and Mark A. Bruzonsky, *A United States Guarantee For Israel?*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, April 1976.

American, Egyptian, Jordanian, European, Palestinian, or U.N. interpretations of what needs to be done and even of what happened at Camp David.<sup>18</sup>

"Camp David is like the Titanic and people like me are constantly ordered to keep stoking the boilers." That is how one dejected high-ranking State Department official of the Carter Administration summarized the American course as the autonomy talks began to fizzle. Any shove toward Camp David II should be recognized as potentially disastrous.

#### *The "Jordanian Option" Dead-End*

The diplomatic dead-end of the "Hashemite-Jordanian Option" has already begun to elicit considerable public opposition both in the Middle East and among America's European allies.

Jordanian Minister of Information Adnan Abu-Auda recently confirmed Jordan's refusal to oppose Palestinian self-determination, though Jordan of course wishes to coordinate efforts with the Palestinians and is taking steps to do so. "We believe strongly—and I repeat emphatically" asserted Abu-Auda, "that there can be no going back as far as Jordan is concerned. Any solution to the Palestinian problem will have to be brought about with the approval of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians."<sup>19</sup> Reflecting an important European perspective, British Minister of State Douglas Hurd has recently warned that "We have absolutely no intention of trying to use Jordan to bypass the Palestinians or the PLO. Self-determination for the Palestinians means what it says."<sup>20</sup> One EEC official echoed this attitude, warning that "Only when Reagan attempts his Jordanian option and fails can we be guaranteed success for our own vision of a comprehensive settlement."<sup>21</sup> "If the West is putting its hopes on the 'Jordanian Option' formula, it is in for a big surprise,"<sup>22</sup> wrote editor Raphael Calis from the Amman Arab summit in December 1980.

King Hussein himself has now declared the PLO to be the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." Addressing the first joint seminar

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18. See Hermann Eilts, "Improve the Framework," *Foreign Policy*, Number 41, Winter 1980–81.

19. Quoted in *The Middle East*, January 1981, p. 10.

20. Quoted in *The Middle East*, January 1981, p. 14. Furthermore, in the European Community "Venice Declaration," adopted during 1980, the EEC used the following language: ". . . the Palestinians and the PLO must be associated with the negotiations in any peaceful settlement."

21. Raphael Calis, "The Europeans—Can They Piece It Together?" *The Middle East*, January 1981, p. 11.

22. *Ibid.*

between the Jordan World Affairs Council and Georgetown University in early January, the King was quite specific in his assertions:

A solution to the problem . . . must guarantee all Palestinians the opportunity to exercise their legitimate right of self-determination . . . including their right to form an independent Palestinian state. . . .

"Palestinians alone have the right to determine their future. There are no other options acceptable to Jordan nor is there any substitute for the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the people of Palestine reflecting their hopes and aspirations in a comprehensive peace process.

The Egyptians as well are aware that the "Jordanian Option" being so widely discussed is more a perpetuation of Israeli unwillingness to deal with the Palestinian issue than it is a new approach. A Foreign Ministry spokesman put it clearly early in 1981 when he insisted that the much vaunted "Jordanian Option" "amounts to a liquidation, not a solution, of the Palestinian problem. If given the choice between Israeli military government there and a Jordanian administration, the latter does not represent to them the lesser of two evils."<sup>23</sup>

Another insight into Egyptian thinking about the Labor Party's approach can be gleaned from the following December 1980 exchange with former Egyptian Prime Minister Mustapha Khalil:

Question: Do you think that the Labor Party . . . would be better than a Likud coalition?

Answer: . . . Israeli parties simply cannot ignore the existence of the Camp David accords, Israel's commitment to a comprehensive peace, or Resolution 242 with one of its main articles calling for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. These are commitments made by Israel and not by Mr. Begin.

As far as the Labor Party is concerned, it advocates a kind of self-rule based on the Allon plan. But from our point of view the Allon plan was formulated before the Camp David agreement; hence it does not serve any good purpose. The Labor Party proposed a kind of federation between the West Bank and Jordan.

. . . We insist on the self-government authority being first formed so that the Palestinians can enjoy full autonomy; then they can determine whether they would like to join Jordan or not. . . .

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23. Quoted in *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2 January 1981.

Question: But Egypt has also been advocating this linkage between the would-be Palestinian entity and Jordan . . .

Answer: No, no, we do not advocate, we do not reject, we do not like to predetermine the future for the Palestinians. We believe that the Palestinians are the only party which has the right to determine its own future.<sup>24</sup>

Acquiescing in the "Palestinian Entity" à la Perlmutter, or in any variant of the "Hashemite-Jordanian Option" likely to be put forward by either the *Likud* or a Labor government in Israel is simply not a reasonable policy for the United States unless Washington is willing to disengage from the search for a viable, widely supported Palestinian solution. The explanation for the term's resurgence can be found more within Israeli and American domestic political considerations than in Middle East realities. If the goal of American policy is to further delay and obfuscate solutions to the deadlock, then the "Hashemite-Jordanian Option" can be a useful diversionary device.

But if the "Hashemite-Jordanian Option" is actually being taken seriously by the new policymakers in Washington, they are engaged in dangerous self-delusion. As one of Reagan's senior Middle East advisers wrote two years ago, "The Carter Administration's central assumption . . . that King Hussein should have motivation, by logic and self-interest, to enter these negotiations is fallacious. The opposite is true."<sup>25</sup> On this most basic issue, little has really changed since Camp David when London's *Economist* summed things up in this way: "A peace that ignores the central injustice done the Palestinians carries a cancer." "King Hussein," the *Economist* added, is willing to accept responsibility for the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, if he is asked by the Arabs, including the Palestinians, to do so; in any other circumstance, it would be madness for him to disturb the prosperous calm of his little kingdom. The West Bankers and Gazans differ from the Palestinians in the diaspora, [but] there is no serious alternative to the PLO as a political force.<sup>26</sup>

#### Creating a "Palestinian-Jordanian" Option

Still, the unworkable and dangerous "Jordanian Option" so much discussed within Israel and the Reagan Administration may yet offer a way out of

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24. Interview in *The Middle East*, December 1980, p. 39.

25. Robert G. Neumann, "The Middle East After Camp David: Perils and Opportunities," *The Washington Quarterly White Paper*, Washington, Spring 1979, p. 34.

26. *The Economist*, 23 September 1978, "If only . . .," p. 8.

today's deteriorating political impasse. It must first be massively transformed, and then used as a diplomatic cover for allowing the basic issues to be raised in an indirect and ambiguous way. Such a transformation will not require disregarding either the Camp David accords or the Egyptian-Israeli treaty. Rather, it will necessitate a willingness on the part of the United States and Israel to confront today's Palestinian reality, creating what can be termed a "Palestinian-Jordanian Option." Instead of a Jordanian-Israeli condominium over the Palestinians, this alternative would provide for a Palestinian state with at least the rudiments of political sovereignty, along with substantial economic and practical ties to Jordan (and eventually to Israel as well).<sup>27</sup>

The need to pursue discussion on creating a "Palestinian-Jordanian Option" under a diplomatic cover is clear. No Israeli government can deal with the PLO in a straightforward manner or accept creation of a Palestinian homeland that would be suitable to even the most moderate Palestinian nationalists. This is the simple reality of Israeli political life today in view of the stridency of the minority Israeli right-wing (which might soon be joined by the Begin coalition).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, American domestic politics still makes difficult if not impossible any major political initiatives that are firmly opposed by a coalition of American Jewish neo-conservative and Christian fundamentalist forces within the U.S. body-politic. For its part, the Jordanian Hashemite regime, while not willing to risk an Israeli-Jordanian condominium over the Palestinians, is not eager to see a Palestinian state that is fully independent from Jordanian influence and un beholden to Hussein for help in its creation. And Egypt expects credit with the Arab world and from the United States for having laid the foundation for what might now be possible.

Consequently, it is conceivable that political forces in all four countries (plus Saudi Arabia, whose influence is crucial) might be willing to use the

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27. An important new study discussing the desirability of moving toward "a fully-fledged and independent Palestinian state" rather than the Jordanian Option has just been published as an *Adelphi Paper* by The International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. In this pamphlet by Israeli scholar Avi Plascov, all the alternatives for dealing with the Palestinian issue are analyzed. Dr. Plascov concludes that "a Palestinian entity limited in certain respects by Treaty and guaranteed by outside powers is the least undesirable of the alternatives. But, unlike the other alternatives, it would provide the Palestinians, for the first time in their history, with their own country" (p. 51). See *Adelphi Paper* Number 163, "A Palestinian State? Examining the Alternatives," Spring 1981.

28. The possibility of civil insurrection should any Israeli government attempt such a policy has been discussed openly in Israel. Nahum Goldmann, former President of the World Zionist Organization and founder of the World Jewish Congress published an article last summer in *Ha'aretz* warning of a "very real risk of a civil war in Israel." See Nahum Goldmann, "Grim Prospects for Israel," *New Outlook*, September/October 1980.

"Jordanian Option" as a mask for bringing the Palestinians (read PLO) into the negotiations and creating the conditions for a Palestinian state that would be politically real, militarily impotent, and socially and culturally tied to Jordan, at least for many years. A joint Jordanian-PLO negotiating partner for Israel could be the best way to bring about such a political transformation.

Such a political charade 1) could allow Israel to insist that there is no negotiation with the PLO, *Likud* saying a joint delegation is the result of the Camp David process and U.S. insistence on involving Jordan, or Labor saying a joint delegation was always the goal of the "Jordanian Option"; 2) could allow the Americans to finally find a credible Palestinian partner for the long-delayed attempt at a comprehensive settlement; 3) could give the Jordanians substantial hope that a PLO-Hashemite arrangement sanctioned by Riyadh and Washington can work (partly because Amman would gain substantial credibility having midwived a Palestinian state); and 4) would allow Sadat to say that he had made all this possible and was wrongly ostracized.

Edward Said has summed up the Palestinian predicament succinctly: "The PLO is the Palestinian question."<sup>29</sup> For the basic issue today—whether discussed as Palestinian state, entity, autonomy, or as the Jordanian option—is how to give sufficient political expression to Palestinian nationalism to enlist Palestinian energies and interests in a new regional framework that will enhance stability and allow the United States to meld together a credible political and military alliance system. And the PLO, whatever its future form and whoever steps into leadership positions should a government-in-exile be created, is important precisely because it alone embodies the cause of Palestinian nationalism and symbolizes for the Arab world the injustice done by Zionism and the West.<sup>30</sup> Even were the PLO to be decimated with an Israeli military takeover of Lebanon or fractured by internal dissension, an-

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29. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

30. For an illuminating presentation of this point see Walid Khalidi, "Thinking the Unthinkable: A Sovereign Palestinian State," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 4, July 1978. As Khalidi states, "It is precisely the potentially constructive role of the PLO that the West (particularly the United States) is blind to . . . The cause (the Palestinian problem) has to be seen to have been adequately addressed before the effect (the Arab-Israeli conflict) can be resolved. Only representatives of the Palestinians have it in their power to transmit the relevant signal to pan-Arab sentiment. This cannot be done by quislings or Uncle Toms, present or future. It is here that the PLO, if willing (which it is), can play a crucial role. With pan-Arab sentiment apprized of the attitude of the PLO, the Arab incumbents, their political pudenda appropriately covered, could endorse the settlement. And with that endorsement such a settlement would have an excellent chance of survival." pp. 698-99.

other body would soon emerge to carry on the Palestinian cause. After nearly half a century of Palestinian national assertiveness (dating it from the 1936 general strike), that much should be beyond debate.

Edward Said may be excessively shrill in adding that "there is not the remotest chance that any alternative Palestinian leadership will ever emerge; the PLO is too legitimate and representative a body for that to happen."<sup>31</sup> But Palestinian nationalism as an issue will not simply evaporate or be rendered impotent with the creation of a dubious "Palestinian entity." Left unresolved, it will indeed be a cancer, overtaking whatever arrangements Israel (with American acquiescence) concocts.

If we are to be honest with ourselves, the basic issue has never really been whether Israel and the United States should deal with the PLO. Rather, the central question has been whether Palestinian nationalism as embodied in the PLO could be in some way circumvented or would have to be accommodated. A subsidiary issue has been whether to finally accept the PLO (with whatever fig-leaf mechanism can be devised) at this time in history when most of the pro-American Arab states as well as the PLO core—Fateh—claim (but still must prove) they are prepared to negotiate a settlement in which Israel's legitimacy would be accepted (however grudgingly) and forms of Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli coexistence would evolve.

The risks in returning to a comprehensive approach to the Arab-Israeli tangle are not slight. For the United States, there are the domestic political consequences which have bedeviled previous administrations. There would be heavy economic, diplomatic, and military commitments of considerable cost to the United States should such an approach succeed. For Washington, the tendency has been not to decide, but to delay and back off when resistance is met. Yet possibly in 1981 the dangers of further delay outweigh the costs of going forward and the new political climate worldwide now makes success a reasonable likelihood.

For Israel there would be serious internal political risks as well, and potential military problems down the road should the agreement disintegrate and the "guarantees" prove transient. In the meantime, to contemplate the recognition of Palestinian national claims risks bringing on a national moral and psychological dilemma that would disturb the very fabric of the Zionist state. The war-peace issue has been an effective means of enforcing political

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31. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, *op. cit.*, p. 215.



allegiance internally and from American Jewry, as well as, in recent years, of squeezing massive economic and military aid from the American government.

For Jordan, the legitimacy of the throne could be called into question in the future should the Palestinian government ever attempt to manipulate sympathies within the Jordanian populace against the Monarchy.

Finally, for the Palestinians, coming to grips with the reality of coexistence with Israel could be traumatic. Major fissures could rise to the surface between groups which today acquiesce in the leadership of Fateh.

By converting the unworkable "Hashemite-Jordanian Option" into a similar sounding but fundamentally different "Palestinian-Jordanian Option," the United States could get back on track toward the Brookings consensus. When American interests ever more urgently require a stable Middle East under American diplomatic influence and military protection, such progress is critical. To achieve this, American diplomacy must be seen to be potent and assertive, and American military arrangements must not be perceived as imperialistic and Israeli-oriented.

The last time such an American strategy was contemplated was during 1977 in the pre-Sadat initiative days. For the final years of his term, Jimmy Carter was far too busy nurturing the Egyptian-Israeli relationship and protecting himself from Israeli and American Jewish assaults as the election drew nearer. For all of Reagan's mistaken impressions of Middle East realities (as glaringly exhibited during the campaign), basic and fundamental American interests may yet propel him in the direction of the Brookings consensus. But before any specific steps are taken, a preparatory phase in Middle East diplomacy will be required.

### *Incubating Peace*

Though there is a need to move forward quickly from the Egyptian-Israeli treaty to a new strategy for achieving a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, it would be difficult and dangerous to do so without substantial preparations.

It is imperative not to expect any meaningful breakthrough in the autonomy talks (though it will be in the interest of some of the parties to claim this is happening), nor to get bogged down in the Hashemite-Jordanian Option, which will only result in major American-European and American-Arab divisions. To commit either of these mistakes could so entangle the Reagan Administration that it would be difficult to extricate itself when the time for a major push is right.

Before the United States embarks again on a major diplomatic effort to achieve an Arab-Israeli peace along the lines of the Brookings consensus, the mistakes of the past must be carefully analyzed. The Rogers Plan failed partly because it became embroiled in an ego contest between Kissinger and Secretary Rogers and partly because, though nicely conceived, it was poorly executed. The "Reassessment" in early 1975 failed because the government lacked the will to go forward in the face of massive public pressures and because Arab willingness to make the concessions needed to convince Israel to take the risks involved were in far greater doubt than they are today. The Carter Administration's attempt to implement the Brookings Report failed because of sloppy preparations and continual waffling which made it evident that the Carter government lacked both the self-confidence and the determination to follow through.

No comprehensive peace strategy can succeed until the United States comes up with a vision of American political and strategic interests in the Middle East that puts Israel in the context of *all* American concerns in the region.<sup>32</sup> Such a vision must then set into motion a long-term policy committing the United States to a comprehensive peace. The United States must then set out to create the overall conditions which would make such a peace reasonable (or at least palatable) for the moderate political forces in the region—especially in Israel and among the Palestinians. It must, in short, follow a policy of "incubating peace" rather than "imposing peace."<sup>33</sup>

The United States cannot afford another decade of attempting and failing to bring about a stable Arab-Israeli rapprochement. But to do so requires facing the Palestinian situation squarely. In the past decade, American Middle East interests and involvements have expanded considerably, as has the American financial and military commitment to Israel. The responsibilities of a great power to itself and to its friends require firm and bold diplomacy. Deference to the will of a vocal domestic minority should not interfere with the pursuit of national interests in a region of unsurpassed importance. Nor

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32. This has recently been outlined succinctly by a former aide to Henry Kissinger and a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Near Eastern affairs at a seminar on January 21, 1981 at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The title of Les Janka's paper is "U.S. National Interests in the Middle East: A New Approach for the 1980s." Also see the Middle East chapter by Dr. Peter Duignan and Louis M. Gann in *America In the 80's* (Hoover Institution, Stanford; 1980) in which the authors call for "creation of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank" and further conclude that if necessary the U.S. "should persuade Israel into concessions by threatening to withdraw essential military and economic aid."

33. A far-reaching article laying out the essence of such a strategy and the reasons for adopting it is: Ian S. Lustick, "Kill The Autonomy Talks," *Foreign Policy*, Number 41, Winter 1980-81.

should it compel the foreign policy machinery of a great nation to persist in the pursuit of unworkable schemes.

The "Jordanian Option" is such a scheme. But the path blazed by the Brooking consensus of 1975 is one from which American policy has strayed. Now is the time to find the way back to that path. The importance of doing so is paramount.