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ISRAEL-ARAB PEACE NEGOTIATIONS: A LONG AND WINDING ROAD

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Seeking Peace Since 1912

Israeli and Palestinian nationalism have been in conflict over essentially the same land for a century. Interest in the Oslo peace process has obscured the long history of earlier attempts to settle the Palestinian Arab-Jewish (or Zionist) and Arab-Israeli conflicts, dating back to 1912 when Zionist and Arab leaders, in what was then a province of the Ottoman empire, tried to find common ground. Scores of additional efforts have been made during the intervening years.

In the pre-1948 period, before the State of Israel was established, the struggle between the Arabs and Zionists focused on two issues. First, each group sought to secure independence from the Ottoman Turkish empire and later from the British Mandatory authorities. Second, the Zionists pursued their goal of Jewish mass immigration, opposed by the Arabs, to facilitate building a Jewish national

home in Palestine. The foremost issues since 1948 have been Israel's legitimacy and long-term security, juxtaposed against the Palestinian refugee claims and aspirations for national sovereignty. The players and their objectives have changed over time and, further complicating the picture, regional and international involvement by countries such as Syria, Egypt, Jordan, the United States, the USSR, France, and England has often functioned to aggravate the situation.

This *Jerusalem Letter* reviews the numerous proposals and negotiations held between the conflicting parties to date, and examines the issues and changing patterns that characterized the peace processes. To better understand where we are now and where we can realistically go, we must know where we came from and how we got here.

Contacts seeking reconciliation of Arab and Jewish interests in Palestine occurred as

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early as 1912 between the Jewish minority in Palestine and the Muslim leaders of the Ottoman empire. The possibility of a Turkish-Jewish coalition was raised by the Ottoman Liberal Union government, but the talks proved inconclusive. At the same time, an independent Arab-Jewish alliance was considered in 1913 at talks between Ibrahim Salim Najjar, a Syrian journalist and member of the Cairo-based Arab Decentralization Party, and Sami Hochberg, a leading Zionist and editor of the Jewish newspaper *Le Jeune Turc*, as both Arabs and Jews realized that through cooperation both might fulfill their aspirations of independence from the Ottomans. While these talks failed, the notion of Arab-Jewish cooperation remained a possibility for both sides.

Jewish-Arab Contacts During the British Mandate

After the British conquest of the region from the Ottomans in 1917, London issued the Balfour Declaration, announcing the British objective of creating a Jewish national home in Palestine. In March 1920, Yehoshua Hankin, acting on behalf of the Zionist Organization (ZO), held negotiations with the "Nationalist Group in Syria and Lebanon" with the idea of a Palestinian state based on equality. Soon afterwards, in 1921, private meetings between the Zionist Organization represented by Dr. Chaim Weizmann, and moderate members of the Palestine Arab Delegation, Mu'in al-Madi and Ibrahim Shammas, were arranged.

A seemingly serious attempt at rapprochement was undertaken in Spring 1922 in Cairo. A series of talks took place between the ZO, represented by Dr. Montage David Eder, Baron Felix de Menache and Ashen Cipher, and Arab delegates from the Congress of Parties of the Confederation of the Arab Countries, Riad as-Sulh, Rashid Rida and Kamil al-Quassab, who were mostly Syrian nationalists. After the Arab loss of Syria to the French, coupled with growing British opposition to the Balfour Declaration, the Cairo talks convened in 1922 to promote "the general idea of a union of the Arabs and Jews...bringing about a renaissance of the Near East." In late 1922 another attempt was recorded when Emir Abdallah of Trans-Jordan came to London and held conversations with prominent Zionists.

Throughout the decades that followed, mistrust and hostility between the Zionists and Arabs grew with the expansion of the Yishuv, which was perceived as a threat to the Arab position in Palestine. While prior to the early 1920s, a united Jewish-Arab struggle against foreign rule was a possibility for both sides, the motivation for contacts between Arabs and Jews after that time tended to be each side's claim to Palestine.

In 1934, Emir Abdallah approached the Jewish Agency (JA) to reach an agreement which would have unified Palestine under his crown. Muhammad al-Unsi negotiated with Moshe Shertok and suggested two entities with their own legislative councils and prime ministers, as well as Arab recognition of Jewish rights and agreement on land sales and immigration.

New negotiations took place between JA representatives and delegates of the Syrian Nationalist Bloc in Syria in August 1936. In exchange for Jewish support for Syrian nationalism, the Syrians would convince the Syrian National Bloc of the Jewish need for a national home in Palestine.

The next independent official contacts between Arabs and Zionists occurred only in August 1946, when Eliahu Sasson of the JA pursued relations with Isma'il Sidqi, the Egyptian Prime Minister.

The last attempt of the pre-state period made by Zionist officials to accommodate the Arabs was in 1947, when Golda Meyerson (later Meir) tried to avert war after the UN General Assembly vote for the partition of Palestine on November 29.

A second emergency attempt to avoid the ensuing Arab-Israeli war was made on May 10, 1948, five days before the founding of the State of Israel, when at a meeting in Amman, King Abdallah tried to convince Meyerson and Ezra Danin to postpone Israel's Declaration of Independence.

British Initiatives

After the establishment of the British Mandate at the end of World War I, Sir Mark Sykes, a leading British Zionist, sought to prevent Turkey from regaining influence by granting elaborate rights to the region's peoples — Arabs, Armenians, and Jews — and forming an Arab-Armenian-Zionist entente. However, his proposal never became a political reality, as it was replaced by British support for the establishment of a Jewish na-

tional home in Palestine as promulgated in the Balfour Declaration.

When the British established a military administration in Palestine in December 1917, Gilbert Clayton, the British Chief Political Officer in Cairo, set up a Middle East Committee to help deal with the growing estrangement between Zionists and Arabs. Increasing tensions finally led to the Cairo talks of 1918 between members of the Zionist Commission and a number of Syrian notables who were in exile in Egypt.

In late 1918 the Paris Peace Conference, which was to determine the postwar world order, presented another opportunity for Clayton to promote talks between the parties. On January 3, 1919, an agreement was signed between Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann and Emir Faisal, the prospective Hashemite leader of an independent Arab state on the territory of today's Jordan. (Faisal was the Hashemite claimant to the Syrian throne who, after being driven out of Syria by the French in 1920, was, in effect, appointed King of Iraq by the British in 1921.) The agreement recognized the Jewish aim of building a state in Palestine as mentioned in the Balfour Declaration. However, due to pressure from other segments of the Arab political leadership and Faisal's unfulfilled hopes for independence, he soon renounced the agreement.

Sir Herbert Samuel, appointed the first British civil High Commissioner of Palestine in 1920, proposed the development of an elected advisory council which "even though it remains advisory would go some way to satisfy public opinion as a further stage on the road to self-government."

On May 1, 1921, bloody Arab riots broke out in Palestine, which led to the massacre of thirteen Jews. The British arranged a meeting between an Arab delegation and members of the Zionist Organization at the Colonial Office in Cairo in November of 1921, with High Commissioner Samuel and then Head of the Middle East Department Winston Churchill acting as mediators.

Negotiations between Zionists and Arabs were to resume only on August 20, 1929, at a meeting aimed at ending a new wave of Arab riots over Jewish rights to worship at the Western Wall.

In February 1939, a conference in London was called by British Colonial Secretary Ramsay MacDonald representing a desperate British government in its final attempt to achieve a settlement

between Arabs and Jews through direct negotiations. After the British government offered its White Paper proposal, which was rejected by both sides, in May 1939 the British imposed the final version of the White Paper on the parties without further discussion.

The aftermath of World War II brought a growing American interest in finding a solution to the Palestine problem and led to the agreement of Britain and the U.S.A. on November 13, 1945, to form a joint Anglo-American Inquiry Committee "to study the question of Jews in Europe and the possibility of their immigration to Palestine, as well as to appraise the situation in Palestine itself." The Anglo-American Committee report called for the nullification of the 1939 White Paper.

The British government convened the London Conference of September 1946 in another attempt to find a solution to the Palestine problem through direct negotiations between the parties, presenting the British-American plan. In January 1947, a final attempt was made to bring the conflicting parties to the negotiating table. When this effort failed, the British saw no alternative and called on the United Nations for help in resolving the Palestine problem.

Unofficial Peace-Making Efforts

In addition to official attempts at settling the Arab-Jewish conflict made by the parties directly and/or officially involved, numerous unofficial initiatives have been undertaken by Jews affiliated with Jewish institutions, members of the Arab leadership, and British officials who initiated talks or offered proposals for peace agreements that reflected their personal ideas. Most of these people were politically active Arabs or Jews who were in close contact with representatives of the other side.

One of the first of these was Dr. H.M. Kalvarisky, who served within the Zionist Movement as an unofficial minister of Arab affairs between World War I and World War II. In 1919 he organized talks aimed at reaching an understanding with the Faisal group in Damascus. Early in 1930 Dr. Kalvarisky made another initiative, holding talks with Umar Salih al-Barghuthy, an opponent of the Arab Higher Committee (AHC) and the Mufti of Jerusalem.

In October 1929, Harry St. John Philby, a British convert to Islam and close friend of King Ibn

Saud, presented his draft of "an Arab-Jewish Understanding in Palestine" to Dr. Judah Magnes, the President of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and to Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem.

Pinhas Rutenberg, then President of the Va'ad Leumi and an influential industrialist in Palestine, presented his ideas to the British on ending Arab hostility toward Jews in May 1930.

Nahum Vilenski, manager of the Zionist-owned *Agence d'Orient*, held talks with journalists Amin Sa'id and Dr. Aba ar-Raman ash Shahbandar, both affiliated with the AHC, in July 1936. They worked out a proposal for negotiations that called for the Jews to favor and financially support an Arab Confederation, for equality in government and parliament, and for unlimited Jewish immigration up to a ceiling of 40 percent of the total population. This proposal led to the Cairo talks of September 1936.

In September 1936, Pinhas Rutenberg presented a 14-point plan to Emir Abdallah, which called for two semi-autonomous Jewish and Arab settlement regions in Trans-Jordan, which would be developed through a Jewish-financed company.

Proposals Based on the Partition Idea

As a result of the Arab general strike that persisted throughout 1936 and 1937, the idea of the cantonization of Palestine was revived. Cantonization of Palestine meant the geographical division into regions with some autonomous status, thus expressing the differentiated needs of the Arabs and Jews under one central government: British, Arab-Jewish, or joint.

Partition was first discussed in July 1934 when Dr. Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi, principal of the government Arab College, sent his cantonization plan to Dr. Judah Magnes, in order to test Zionist reactions. On June 26, 1936, Chaim Weizmann met with British Palestine government official Archer Cust to discuss Cust's ideas of cantonization.

In 1936 the Royal Commission of Inquiry headed by Earl Peel was charged with investigating the "underlying causes" of the violent disturbances in 1936 and preparing recommendations for a permanent, two-state settlement of the Palestine question.

According to the British Hyamson-Newcombe proposal of October 1937, not a Jewish but a Pal-

estinian state of both Jewish and Arab inhabitants was to be created that guaranteed "equal and complete political and civil rights to every Palestinian [in this context including Jews as well as Arabs], independent of race, religion and nationality."

Alternatives to Partition

Harry St. John Philby held negotiations with David Ben-Gurion in May 1937. As a British Arabist, he was opposed to partition and the two leaders agreed on a draft for an Arab-Zionist accord on May 26, 1937. However, Ben-Gurion felt that the unification of Palestine with Transjordan, as proposed by the draft accord, "ignores completely the rights and claims of the Jews," while it "gives complete satisfaction to the Arabs."

That same year at the Council of the Jewish Agency, Felix Warburg, an American non-Zionist Jew, called for "a conference of the Jews and of the Arabs in Palestine with a view to exploring the possibilities of making a peaceful settlement." Warburg later arranged meetings with Arab spokesmen in New York.

Lord Samuel, the former High Commissioner, argued that partition "implies a compulsory exchange of populations," which the Arabs would not accept. He made an alternative proposal in 1937, the core of which included a Palestine-Transjordan state settled by Arabs and Jews with the restriction of limited Jewish immigration, in order "to maintain the present balance between Jews and Arabs."

On July 14, 1937, Norman Bentwich, former Attorney-General for Palestine, met Jamal al-Husayni, a leading member of the AHC, in London to discuss alternatives to partition.

The Barghuti-Khalusi al-Khairi proposals of November 1937 called for Palestine to become an integral part of the Arab Confederation, political parity for Arabs and Jews for an agreed period, and Jewish immigration quotas to be set at 30,000 to 40,000 per year.

Emir Abdallah of Transjordan presented a memorandum to the Woodhead Commission in May 1938 that promoted the "Hashemite Option" of establishing a large Arab state embracing Palestine and Transjordan "under an Arab ruler, with autonomy for the Jews in their regions."

Adil Jabr, a young Arab municipal councilor in Jerusalem, formulated a series of written proposals based on binationalism and parity. Assisted by

H.M. Kalvarisky, he transmitted the plan to the Jewish Agency calling for the creation of an Arab Confederation including Palestine as a separate state.

Throughout the pre-state period, the Zionists sought British consent for extensive Jewish immigration and land purchases, which, according to political Zionism, were the foundations of a Jewish state. The Zionists well understood that the British, as the ruling power, were crucial to the realization of their plans. Thus, they followed a policy of good and close relations, which gave them the opportunity to influence decisions behind the scenes.

In contrast to the Zionists, the Arabs largely did not understand the political realities of Palestine, with a British Mandatory government that, although not consistently, supported the establishment of a Jewish national home. The Arabs perceived the Jews and the British as alien and insisted on their right to the whole of Palestine. Arab fear of Jewish dominance in Palestine grew in proportion to the expansion of the Yishuv. The stance shared by most of the Arab leadership was that a future Jewish state in Palestine could not coexist with their fundamental principle of an Arab Middle East.

The End of the British Mandate and UN Mediation

After the British had surrendered the Palestine problem to the United Nations on April 12, 1947, the UN Special Committee on Palestine ("UNSCOP") was formed to investigate the situation and formulate recommendations for a final settlement. Over Arab opposition, the UN General Assembly on November 29, 1947, voted 33 to 13 with 10 abstentions to partition Palestine into two states that were to maintain an economic union, with Jerusalem under UN trusteeship. The Arab League Council responded that the Arabs would take whatever measures necessary to insure that the decision would never be implemented.

By February 1948, the UN began to doubt the workability of implementing the Partition Resolution, as fighting between Arabs and Jews intensified and the Arabs seemed determined to block by force the formation of a Jewish state. On May 14, 1948, one day before the end of the British Mandate in Palestine, the UN General Assembly decided to appoint a mediator to "promote a peaceful

adjustment of the future situation of Palestine, assure the protection of the Holy Places, and arrange for the operation of common services necessary to the safety...of the population of Palestine."

The War of Independence started on May 15, 1948, and ended on January 7, 1949. A UN-brokered four-week truce was called in June 1948, and a second truce began in September 1948. When the UN offered its mediation in order to settle the conflict by means of an armistice agreement, both parties were ready to enter negotiations. Dr. Ralph Bunche, the appointed UN mediator, led the negotiations on the island of Rhodes between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, beginning on January 12, 1949.

An agreement between Egypt and Israel was signed on February 24, 1949. The Israeli-Lebanese talks ended on March 23 with an agreement that included Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon. Dr. Ralph Bunche played a decisive role in working out an agreement with Syria on July 29, 1949.

Realizing that his army was too weak to defeat Israel's military forces, King Abdallah initiated secret talks with Israeli officials in Amman. On March 31, an agreement was concluded that was incorporated into the framework of an armistice agreement between Israel and Transjordan signed at Rhodes on April 3, 1949. In it Israel acquiesced to Abdallah's annexation of West Bank areas that were already under his control, and of most of Samaria which had been held by the Iraqi army.

Great Power Interests During the Cold War

Further efforts to establish a lasting peace in the region were only made after the Six-Day War of 1967, as the Great Powers became increasingly involved in the region, an area of vital strategic importance during the Cold War. Consequently, both the US and the Soviet Union sought to strengthen their positions and alliances through mediation in the Arab-Israeli conflict and financial and military support of their allies.

Between 1949 and 1967 there was little motivation on either side to reach a settlement of the Palestine problem. Israel was concerned with absorbing immigrants into the fabric of society and making social and economic progress, while the Arab world was in disarray as a consequence of Egyptian President Nasser's ambitions for leadership in the Arab world and the awakening of na-

tionalism among the masses.

On November 22, 1967, Swedish Ambassador to Moscow Gunnar Jarring was appointed UN Special Representative, and charged with the task of mediating between the conflicting parties. By early 1968, negotiations were held between Israel, Egypt, and Jordan based on Security Council Resolution 242 of November 22, 1967.

Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union proposed a number of peace plans after the Six-Day War, the first of which was President Lyndon B. Johnson's Five-Point Plan, outlined in a speech on June 19, 1968. Thereafter, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk sought to give the Jarring mission new impetus with his own Seven-Point Plan on November 2, 1968, and met privately with Foreign Ministers Mahmud Riad of Egypt and Abba Eban of Israel at the UN in New York.

The Nixon administration initiated the Four Power Intervention of 1969, a behind-the-scenes initiative of the U.S.A., the Soviet Union, Britain, and France, aimed at reaching a resolution of the conflict.

The Rogers Plan, the product of dialogue between Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Joseph Sisco and Anatoli Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador to Washington, was published on December 9, 1969, after it had been secretly submitted to Moscow on October 28. Although both the Soviet Union and Israel rejected the scheme, it became the outline of U.S. policy in the Middle East conflict during the following years.

After Great Power intervention failed, the U.S. launched its own initiative known as the "Rogers Initiative" of June 19, 1970, aimed at achieving a ceasefire between Egypt and Israel in order to end a dangerous state of open warfare along the Suez Canal front. In early 1971 Israel resumed negotiations with Egypt, with the U.S. acting as the sole mediator. The meetings were held throughout 1971 and agreement was reached on an Israeli withdrawal from the Suez Canal area. However, President Sadat changed his mind prior to signing the agreement.

Other Peace Efforts

The Allon Plan of 1967, formulated by Israeli Foreign Minister Yigal Allon, called for Israel to withdraw from the densely populated Palestinian areas comprising approximately 60 percent of the

West Bank, but to annex strategic military positions around Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley. Never fully adopted by Israel's government, the Allon Plan was considered inconceivable to Jordan's King Hussein who turned down an Israeli proposal for a comprehensive settlement based on the plan.

The USSR proposed a Three-Point Plan on September 4, 1968, based on Israeli acceptance of UN Resolution 242 and a timetable for Israeli withdrawal from land captured in 1967. According to another Soviet peace proposal in December 1968, Israel was to withdraw to the pre-1967 lines and these borders would be guaranteed by the U.S., the USSR, Britain, and France. This Soviet proposal was met by the 12-point U.S. counterplan offered on January 15, 1969.

The 1973 Geneva Peace Conference opened in December of that year after the surprise attack on Israel in the Yom Kippur War, with the Palestinians represented by Jordan.

The Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty of 1979, long considered an example of what could be achieved in Middle Eastern peace-making, deserves mention with this list of failures, given its inability to facilitate a more comprehensive peace even after twenty years. At Camp David, there was an intention to establish a "self-governing authority" for the Palestinians as an interim arrangement, pending a final resolution of the issues of peace and territory. This autonomy was to have been negotiated by Egypt, Israel, and representatives of the Palestinians. Under pressure from the PLO, prospective Palestinian participants boycotted the negotiations from the outset. Egypt initially participated in the negotiations, but then walked out before an agreement could be reached. Subsequently, Israel, of its own accord, took a major step toward creating autonomy by replacing the military government in the territories with a civil administration.

Following the Israeli entry into Lebanon in 1982, U.S. President Ronald Reagan proposed his vision for "the peaceful and orderly transfer of authority from Israel to the Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza." This was followed by the Arab League's Fez peace plan of 1982, which focused on the creation of a Palestinian state.

The abortive May 17, 1983, Israel-Lebanon Peace Agreement never entered into force because it was not ratified by Lebanon. Lebanon, weakened

by a long civil war and shocked by the assassination of president-elect Bashir Gemayel, froze the U.S.-brokered agreement due to intimidation by Syria.

Israeli Foreign Minister Peres and Jordanian King Hussein conducted secret meetings in London in April 1987 and reached certain broad understandings. Israeli Prime Minister Shamir, who opposed even indirect negotiations with the PLO, rejected these understandings, and Peres was publicly accused of negotiating "behind the back" of the government and of conducting his own private, independent foreign policy.

In March 1988, American Secretary of State George Shultz proposed a modified version of the Camp David Accords to attract the participation of the Palestinians who, under pressure of the PLO, had boycotted the autonomy talks. This plan collapsed when, shortly after the intifada began, King Hussein relinquished his legal claim to sovereignty in the West Bank.

In 1989 the question of "who will represent the Palestinians in the negotiations?" remained unresolved. Egyptian-Israeli relations had improved, which led Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to propose a ten-point peace plan, with Egypt offering to host what became known as the "Cairo Dialogue."

The 1991 Madrid Conference, under the joint chairmanship of U.S. President Bush and Soviet Premier Gorbachev, was attended by all of the major states in the region, as well as a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation. Although not thought of as a success, the Madrid Conference led, albeit indirectly, to the breakthrough known around the world as the Oslo peace process.

Conclusions and Outlook

At this stage there can be few illusions about the future of the ongoing Oslo peace process. Despite prodigious efforts invested in reaching interim agreements, the zenith of the Oslo peace process has passed. From the perspective of 1999, the whole venture resembles more and more a messianic fantasy as the interim issues that were supposedly settled by earlier agreements fester as sources of conflict. In attempting to bridge the widely divergent Israeli and Palestinian interests, the critical internal contradictions of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process as a whole have become painfully

obvious. Little good faith is left to carry the parties through the permanent status negotiations, particularly within the limited one-year extension that was allotted by the United States. The one-year extension in negotiations, devised by the United States to stave off Arafat's threatened unilateral declaration of sovereignty, represents still another American attempt to prevent collapse of the process.

The recent election victory of Prime Minister Ehud Barak has been viewed by many as a second chance for the Oslo peace process. The difficulty with this perception is that, based on their platforms and statements, the differences between the positions of Barak and his predecessor are subtle, not revolutionary. In particular, there is little difference between their visions of a permanent status agreement with the Palestinians. Barak is committed to maintaining an undivided Jerusalem as Israel's eternal capital, considers the Jordan River valley as Israel's strategic border to the east, and opposes withdrawal to the 1949 armistice lines.

Barak's apparent willingness to concede a little more of the West Bank to the Palestinians, or to dismantle some small or isolated Jewish settlements and consolidate the others, is hardly likely to satisfy minimalist Palestinian ambitions. Although Barak and his cabinet will enjoy a honeymoon period in the press and improved personal relations with Arafat and his ministers, the gaps between Israeli and Palestinian positions remain deep. Despite early hints at incorporating the implementation of the Wye agreement into a final status settlement, Barak is planning on completing the IDF redeployments in the West Bank as agreed.

A generation ago, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the master of step-by-step Middle East diplomacy, opined that the objective was for the parties to the negotiation to gain confidence, become committed to achieving results, and be carried along by the momentum of peace-making to resolve issues that had previously seemed intractable. Yet despite his prodigious efforts, he learned that some issues were so complex and emotional that peace between the sides was unattainable in that generation. Kissinger concluded after much shuttle diplomacy that the diplomat aspiring to mediate between Arabs and Israelis would have to be satisfied with small achievements.

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