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VI. PALESTINE, JORDAN AND ISRAEL IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Palestine in the Middle East

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This paper addresses the issue of the role and place of Palestine and the Palestinians in the Middle Eastern region. It starts by reviewing the emergence of the Palestinian national movement and its gradual transformation. This will be followed by a review of Palestinian goals and current perceived threats. The self-perceived role of the Palestinians and their possible contribution to the region is the subject of the last part of this paper. The latter will encompass the various factors that may affect the role of Palestine in the region.

Introduction

Since 1948, there have been three basic elements guiding the Palestinian decision-making process: Palestinian national ideology; Palestinian perception of the regional balance of power; and, the nature of the domestic balance of power, or the structure of Palestinian socio-political life. The respective weight given to these three elements in 1948, with an emphasis on ideology, prompted a fatal misjudgment that led to Palestinian defeat, making the Palestinians prisoners of the Arab balance of power.

The 1970's witnessed the weakening of ideology, the development of a more realistic assessment of the balance of power, the emergence of a new regional alliance system, and the transformation of the internal Palestinian socio-political balance of power. This last development is of particular importance: the formerly leading Palestinian mercantile class, pro-Jordanian in its attitude, lost power as a result of changes introduced by the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, particularly the proletarianization of the peasantry and the radicalization of the urban youth. The marginalization of the mercantile class led to the emergence

of a Palestinian national bourgeoisie, which gradually took over the leadership. The national bourgeoisie articulated the goal of the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

The 1980's witnessed more changes in the internal balance in response to Israeli initiative: the Likud government sought in the early 1980's to weaken and replace the national bourgeoisie with a rural-based elite, the so-called 'village leagues'. The national bourgeoisie was weakened but the 'village leagues' failed to gain any grassroots legitimacy. This again led to a transformation within the Palestinian national movement, which laid the foundation for a new leadership, a grassroots, national and fictional-based one. The second important Israeli contribution in the early 1980's came as a result of the 1982 war in Lebanon. The collapse of the PLO's mini-state in Lebanon made the focus of Palestinian politics shift to the inside. This had a tremendous effect on Palestinian national reconstruction efforts, which now focused on the Occupied Territories. The combination of the shift in focus and the emergence of the popular-based leadership led to the eruption of the *Intifada* in 1987. The next turning point came with the Oslo initiative. The Diaspora PLO leadership came to the inside and dealt for the first time with Palestinian national aspirations and demands from within.

Palestinian Goals

Palestinian priorities have changed during the past few decades. The most important change occurred in the mid-1970's when the PLO accepted the notion of Palestinian independence in a state in the West Bank and Gaza. Today, the Palestinian objectives for the coming decade can be summarized as follows:

- (1) *Independence*: The Palestinians seek to build an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza. This includes today's national reconstruction and state-building efforts, but it also implies the recognition and acceptance of Palestinian sovereignty and national identity by others, notably Jordan and Israel.
- (2) *Establishment of an open and stable political system*: The Palestinians seek to establish an open, democratic and stable political system. Palestinian elections have been seen as a first step towards this goal. Stability requires a balance between the interests of the

various socio-political strata (the mercantile class; the middle class or bourgeoisie; the factions; and the returnees). Another dimension of a stable balance seeks to protect the interests of the Palestinian Diaspora.

- (3) *Economic prosperity*: The individual standard of living has to be improved; the Palestinian economy has to be developed in order to reduce its dependence on Israel and, though to a lesser extent, on Jordan. Currently, the prospects for the Palestinian economy are not very promising and even deteriorating, not least of all because of the devastating impact of the Israeli-imposed closure.
- (4) *Relation with neighbors in the region*: The Palestinians see their interests lying in the establishment of stable and secure political ties within the region.

Elements of Perceived Threat

In seeking to achieve their goals, the Palestinians perceive the following threats:

- (1) *Threats to Palestinian existence within a state*: This is perhaps the most fundamental threat facing the Palestinian national movement. Palestinians long for an independent state but the recent victory of Netanyahu has reinforced Palestinian fears concerning their future. The result of the Israeli elections has confirmed the trend perceived by the Palestinians that the Jewish majority in Israel is becoming more radical, and is not willing to pay the price of peace.
- (2) *Threats to the integrity of the Palestinian Territories*: The unity of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is very crucial for the Palestinian entity. Threats, like the planned annexation of parts of the West Bank to Israel, have always existed under both Likud and Labor. According to Palestinian perception, Israelis seek to sever the links between the two geographically separated areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. For example, the opening of a safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank, as agreed upon in the Declaration of Principles (DoP), has been delayed for over two years and no agreement seems to be in sight.
- (3) *Threats to the right of return to the Palestinian state*: The fate of refugees, displaced persons and other returnees is still unclear. The recent Likud guidelines stated 'no return of Palestinians to the west of the river'. The Palestinians fear that such a position may lead to the de-Palestinianization of the Diaspora.

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- (4) *Security-related threats*: These threats emanate from the presence of armed settlers and the Israeli army.
- (5) *Threats to national identity*: The geographic separation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank also isolates the populations of these areas. This goes along with attempts by Israel to reintroduce the 'Jordan option' in an attempt to disunite the Palestinian people and to limit their common agenda. The Jordanian desire to play a role in the West Bank, and particularly in Jerusalem, goes far beyond the role the Palestinians are ready to accept.
- (6) *Outside intervention*: There is widespread anticipation that the political viability and existence of the Palestinian entity will always be questioned. Both Israel and Jordan are perceived as having a common interest in reducing Palestinian independence in all regards and will therefore seek to interfere in Palestinian affairs.
- (7) *Internal threats*: These include:
- economic strangulation and deterioration, which causes uncertainties and instability;
 - increased polarization within the society both religiously and politically;
 - rivalries among security services;
 - changes in public attitudes towards the peace process, violence, the opposition etc., which may negatively affect the state and institution-building process;
 - a stagnated peace process with no prospects, which may cause more dissatisfaction, more suppression, an increasingly authoritarian leadership and less chances for a transition to democracy .

Regional Role

With goals and perceived threats in mind, one can now turn to the possible role Palestine may play in the region and look at its potential contribution. There are three basic ways in which Palestinians can shape the future of the region:

- (1) minimizing the potential for conflict, violence and war by contributing to increased security and stability in the region;
- (2) contributing to political stability, mutual acceptance and recognition, and 'normalization' in the region, especially with regard to ways and means of dealing with Israel, Jordan and the issue of Jordanian identity;

- (3) resolving the Palestine Question and dealing with the above-mentioned threats will facilitate the process of normalizing political and socio-cultural relationships in the region and help facilitate building a base for economic cooperation and integration.

Factors Affecting the Regional Role

The Palestinian future role in the region and the way in which the Palestinian position within the Middle East will be determined depend on three main factors:

- (1) *The nature of the entity to emerge*: The three possible scenarios involve a sovereign Palestinian state, a self-rule entity, or Palestine as part of a confederation. The entity will also be shaped by other factors such as the nature of the political system (democratic or authoritarian) and the socio-political forces that will emerge. In other words, who will be the players? And what will be their roles? Today, we can distinguish four main groups:
- the commercial class that vanished during the *Intifada* but is now back;
 - the national bourgeoisie (predominantly middle class);
 - popular factions (mainly represented by the lower middle class and lower class); and the returnees (from all kinds of social/professional backgrounds).
- (2) *The nature of the regional structure*: The following four main components of the regional system will significantly contribute to determining the place and role of the Palestinian entity:
- What is the regional distribution of power and who will be the main political and military actors? For example, will they be Israel, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia? Or will the list include others such as Turkey, Iraq and Iran?
 - What will be the shape of the emerging alliance system? For example will an Israel-Jordan-Turkey axis be formed? And who might form an opposing alliance? Will an Arab bloc emerge?
 - With regard to the role and influence of outside powers, will the US remain the dominant power or will it disengage (e.g., as a result of ongoing attacks on its bases)? What will happen in either case? What role will Russia play? Will the EU/Europe play a more independent role or remain in the shadow of the US?
 - How will any outcome of the trilateral Palestine-Jordan-Israel relationship affect the region as a whole and/or the above mentioned Palestinian objectives and threats.

(3) *The nature of the regional challenges:* What are the challenges of today, and what will they be tomorrow? The following challenges mutually reinforce each other:

- First, security challenges in the form of proliferation of missiles and non-conventional weaponry. Limited war and terrorism represent another security challenge. Security is the most important and valuable commodity in the Middle East today. It is the guarantee for stability and the precondition for development. The question for the Palestinians relates to their ability to maintain security in the short term, despite the political and economic impediments.
- Second, challenges to political stability in radical forms of Islamic fundamentalism, demands for political participation and liberalization, and internal elite rivalries.
- Third, the ability of governments in the region to develop their economies, improve living conditions for their people, handle population issues, and reduce poverty.



Jordan in the Middle East

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Since the establishment of the state, Jordan's foreign policy orientation has been determined by the following three factors:

- (1) The key factor is the location of Jordan, which was also a main reason why the creation of Jordan as a new Arab entity had been encouraged. The geo-political significance of Jordan has been utilized as:
 - a buffer zone between Israel and Iraq;
 - a dumping ground for potential refugees/emigrants from Palestine;
 - an entity to separate Syria from the Peninsula (buffer);
 - a bridgehead from Egypt to Iraq.
- (2) Due to the lack of natural resources, Jordan was always obliged to search for supporters and aid in order to alleviate its financial crisis. Until 1966, the British provided the necessary means.
- (3) Jordan was set up as a counter power regarding the search for an Arab order. Continuously since 1920, Jordan's stand was that of a pro-West, anti-communist Arab state, which played a role in Arab summits and the formulating of common Arab resolutions.

The combination of all these factors also affected domestic issues, alliances and the efforts made towards political liberalization. The critical space between state and society, including civil society and opposition, was affected as well. Since the 1950's, public opinion became a new dimension and contributed its part to the formulation of policies, both internally and externally.

In more recent history, Jordan was unable to object to the Madrid Peace Conference and could not afford to stay away for obvious reasons, which also encouraged other states and parties to attend (e.g., the end of the Cold War, etc.). People started coming up with scenarios and predicting possible outcomes of the conference, but no one really had any idea of where it would lead to; we got on the train without knowing its destination. When we went to Madrid, we had no

separate peace treaty in mind. We could see no problem in going with the Palestinians but with separate delegations, representing separate entities. We went under one umbrella with two liaison officers - one each - who would be responsible for coordination.

Alongside other Arab states, Jordan insisted that the talks resume in Washington after Madrid for two main reasons:

- (1) to stress the non-normalization with Israel, symbolized through the geographic distance;
- (2) to mobilize and lobby the US administration and American public opinion.

When, after all the talks in Washington and elsewhere, the breakthrough in Oslo hit the news, Jordan panicked. The mood of that time can be best described as anxiety and fear of what might happen next.

During the negotiations, the Jordanian agenda was the Palestinian agenda, i.e., Jordan had no program of its own. In the first meeting with the Israelis, no bilateral topics were tackled, only issues such as water, settlements and refugees.

The King had intended to postpone elections until the Palestinian elections had taken place but he changed his mind following his September 25th meeting with Rabin. During their encounter in Aqaba, Rabin told the King to forget the Palestinian issue and stressed that Jordan was a priority for Israel. The US also put a lot of pressure on Jordan, which resulted in the Washington Declaration and subsequent peace treaty with Israel. The incentive offered to Jordan by the US was a reduction of Jordan's foreign debts.

Before the Washington Declaration was signed, there was much discussion about the bad state of US-Jordanian bilateral relations. Following the signing of the peace treaty, the new topic was the improvement of US-Jordanian relations. The perception then - from within - was that the King had got rid of his headaches, had made his deal, was at peace with himself and did not have to fear threats from outside anymore (especially from Israel); he did not care about what others thought. It was a courageous move, and the decision not to mobilize the masses too much in support of the peace process was a clever one. The King had positioned himself once more as a player on the West Bank. He also felt that gaining Israel's trust would help him in Washington. The Jordanians, on the other hand, thought that the

King was to lay the groundwork for more formal relations with the West, for example, that he could be a potential coordinator regarding US relations with Iraq. Today, however, it is apparent that he was misled with respect to this. This may explain the defection, re-defection and assassination of Kamal Hussein's brothers.

The new development resembled a return to the 1950's: the Jordanians felt free and safer than before; they felt they possessed the power to play a role not only on the West Bank but in any regional set up, be it in time of peace or war. And, of course, they hoped for more money. However, no dividends have yet been felt, not have there been any significant changes.

Other Arab states did not like the Jordanian move. The Egyptians (Amr Musa) accused the King most vehemently and attempted to put pressure on him. President Mubarak and King Hussein, and sometimes also Arafat, held frequent meetings. Their last meeting took place in Aqaba immediately prior to the Arab summit in Cairo.

Jordan's position in the region is manifold. The King is not interested in playing a functional role on the West Bank as this would negatively affect his image among the Palestinian public. We have a permanent pro-Palestinian lobby in Jordan, just as there is a permanent pro-Jordanian lobby in Palestine. The King compromised on Jerusalem and accepted the leadership role of Egypt, predicting a greater level of cooperation and coordination with that country. Coalitions and leverages have changed and there has been a complete reversal of premises as far as leadership is concerned. Egypt has taken over a certain role; of course, it is not comparable to the role it held 30 years ago. Jordan's attitude vis-a-vis Egypt has more to do with compromise than appeasement.

Jordan managed to present itself as the only Arab state that is capable enough to deal with Labor and Likud, and the other states, for the time being, were prepared to accept Jordan's role as bridgehead between Israel and the Arab World. The King made serious approaches towards the Gulf, Qatar, Bahrain and, more recently, the Emirates; even the relations with Saudi Arabian have improved. Turkey is still a problematic spot, about which not much is known, but Jordan has something to do with Israeli-Turkish security arrangements, which in turn, disturbs Syria. As for Iran, on a personal level, the King com-

plains about their politics but officially, he is more careful and attempts to end the boycott on and isolation of Iran.

Jordan is still vulnerable but not as much as before. Things have changed. Jordan is still a small state but it now has far more room to maneuver than in the past. The foreign policy resembles that of the 1920's, though different styles and types of language have been adopted. Following Oslo, the late King Abdallah probably turned in his grave. King Hussein's style is less inventory. On the Netanyahu front something will happen soon, I am sure, though I don't know what it will be. With regard to the wider region, I foresee some improvements unless something drastic happens, such as the Crown Prince's assassination by Syria or Netanyahu messing up on the West Bank.

Jordan's strategy involves more than a wish for self-preservation: it includes being one of the pillars of the West in the Middle East and playing a role in the region. with regard to the West Bank, it also involves trying to keep the West Bank Palestinians where they are in order to avoid demographic problems on the East Bank. For the time being, the King is not interested in playing a functional role but wants to have a say, to be able to positively influence developments on the West Bank. In the event of the King's resignation, the Crown Prince would continue on the same track. Predictions other than this for 'what comes after the King' depend on how the Syrian and Palestinian tracks develop. I do not see fundamental changes emerging in Jordan's foreign policy.



Israel's Place in the Region

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The Historical Setting and Corporate Identity

The British Mandate in Palestine and the Arab-Jewish conflict over the fate of this land led to the emergence of three distinct political entities: Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian community and national movement. Though distinct, all three have developed, in so small measure, as functions of the conflictual interaction between them, defining their respective corporate identities largely in reference to their adversaries in a perpetual interlock.

Since these corporate identities have evolved with the Arab-Israeli conflict, historical watersheds in the conflict have been of formative importance. These are, in the main, two: The War of 1948 and the War of 1967 and their respective consequences.

The war of 1948, for the Jews of Israel their war of national liberation, was for the Palestinians their traumatic defeat, which also resulted in their dispersal. This, more than any other single event, was the formative crucible of the Palestinian national identity, powerfully derived from their national setback and tragedy.

Jordan, initially carved out of the original British mandate over Palestine, and thus linked from its very inception to the Palestinian question, now because the home for most of the Palestinian people. The West Bank was unified with the Hashemite Kingdom, and all the Palestinians in the Kingdom, refugees and non-refugees alike, became citizens of Jordan.

Nevertheless, from the late 1950s onwards there has been a steady revival of the Palestinian entity and identity, symbolized by the establishment of the PLO in 1964 and further accelerated by the consequences of the War of 1967.

Jordan's loss of the West Bank to Israel in the War of 1967 arrested the process of 'Jordanization' of the Palestinians and 're-Palestinized' the Arab-Israeli conflict. The deployment of the PLO in Jordan and the tension this aroused with the government there, eventually led to the outbreak of the 1970-71 civil war. This was yet another traumatizing event that sharpened the distinctive corporate identities of both Jordanians and Palestinians. The armed conflict between Jordanians and Palestinians reinforced a separate sense of Jordanianism fueled by a powerful desire of the original East Bank Jordanians to preserve their own political patrimony. King Husayn's old slogan of 'Jordan is Palestine and Palestine is Jordan' was gradually replaced by a new concept of 'Jordan is Jordan and Palestine is Palestine.' Rather than assuming the historical role of inheritor of Palestine, Jordan now sought a partnership with the Palestinians, clearly reflected in Husayn's federation plan (1972), his agreement with 'Arafat on confederation (1985), and his formal disengagement from the West Bank (1988).

Jordanian policy and aspirations, since the early 1970s, have thus evolved from an attempt to restore total unity with the West Bank and to an acceptance of the separate Palestinian identity, to be satisfied within the framework of some form of federative or confederative relationship with the Hashemite Kingdom.

As Jordan's policy evolved so Israel was compelled to recognize Palestinian nationalism. The so-called 'Jordan option' gradually dissipated as a realistic policy and Israel, in coming to terms with the Palestinian national identity, had to redefine itself accordingly. From Camp David (1978) onwards Israel gravitated towards the acceptance of some form of disengagement from the West Bank and Gaza in favor of autonomy or statehood for the Palestinians.

The Oslo Accords and Their Significance

The Oslo Accords have set a process in motion which has essentially put paid to the notion of Greater Eretz Yisrael. After Israel's withdrawal from the main urban centers of the West Bank and from most of the Gaza Strip, Greater Eretz Yisrael now seems irretrievable. The logical dynamics of the Oslo process are paving the way for the establishment of a Palestinian state or entity of one form or another, if and when the final status negotiations are concluded.

The internal balance within the triangle of Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians is changing as Israel begins the arduous process of disengagement from the West Bank and Gaza. How this process will culminate is difficult to foresee but it is worth noting at this juncture some observations on the political and ideological priorities of the Israeli public. Polls conducted since the late 1980s have shown that a clear majority of Jewish Israelis value the preservation of their state as the state of the Jewish people (i.e., a state with a stable Jewish majority) more than they value the concept of Greater Eretz Yisrael. The cultural and national identity of the state and the preservation of this face of the Zionist *raison d'Œtre* is of greater importance to most Jewish Israelis than the eternal control of the West Bank and Gaza.

If, as a result of this proclivity, Israel chooses to disengage from much of the West Bank, whether by providing for limited Palestinian self-rule or for the establishment of a Palestinian state, this in turn, could have potentially far-reaching consequences for Jordanian-Palestinian relations. The West Bank is landlocked and geopolitically 'sandwiched' between Israel and Jordan. The more Israel detaches itself from the West Bank, the more dependent that territory will become on Jordan. The less integrated the Palestinian territories are with Israel, economically and politically, the more they are likely to develop political and economic links with Jordan, especially considering Jordan's massive Palestinian population and the fact that Jordan will always be the natural major outlet for the West Bank to the hinterland of the Arab East (*mashriq*). Indeed it is unlikely that, in the future, Jordan and the Palestinians will come to an agreement on closer economic and possibly confederative or federative political ties. One may safely assume that both parties would do their utmost to preserve their respective separate identities in such an association. At the same time, however, there is an obvious cultural and social affinity between these two Arab and, predominantly, Muslim peoples.

The Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian triangle is not symmetrical. Though all three parties are products of the struggle for Palestine, Israel, as the state of the Jewish people, does not share to the same degree in the cultural, linguistic and religious affinity that links Jordanians and Palestinians. It is therefore most unlikely that future bonds with Israel would ever be as close as those that may link Jordanians and Palestinians.

Israel's coming to terms with Palestinian nationalism was not only a function of the dominant proclivity amongst Jewish Israelis to preserve the Jewish majority of their state, and of changes in Jordan's Palestinian policy, but was also a result of the simultaneous transformation of the Palestinian national movement.

In the last decade or so the internal Palestinian political structure has undergone a major change. The 1982 war in Lebanon, the Intifada and the second Gulf War were all instrumental in shifting the center of gravity of Palestinian politics from the external establishment and the Diaspora, the 'outside,' to the 'inside', i.e., the West Bank and Gaza. The PLO suffered a severe military and political setback in the Lebanon war. Having lost its autonomous territorial haven, it lost some of its regional stature and political initiative, which now began to shift into the Occupied Territories. The Intifada was waged by the people of the West Bank and Gaza. Those who were in the past the passive bystanders were now at the forefront of the Palestinian struggle and those who were previously the vanguard now assumed the role of the passive onlookers. The PLO was no longer in an unquestionably morally superior position enabling it to issue dictates to the people in the West Bank and Gaza. It was compelled by events to create a more equal partnership between the outside and the inside leaderships. This was particularly the case in the aftermath of the Gulf War when the PLO's international stature suffered severely as a result of Arafat's support for Saddam Husayn. The PLO's agreement to the Oslo Accords was in so small measure a function of this relative weakness and of its desire to recapture total control of the Palestinian political arena. In so doing, however, the PLO leadership has moved from the 'outside' to the 'inside' for the first time ever. Indeed, never since the Mufti's flight from Palestine in 1937 has the leadership functioned on Palestinian territory.

These changes have greater historical significance than may be readily apparent. They are more than just a shift of the leadership's location. In the evolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict there are two most crucial watersheds: the wars of 1948 and 1967 and their respective consequences and ramifications. Israel, as the state of the Jewish people, will not, one may safely assume, negotiate the consequences of 1948, i.e., its existence as an independent state with a predominantly Jewish majority. It can, however, negotiate the consequences of the

1967 war, i.e., its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, without infringing upon its very being.

The PLO, as originally established before 1967, and as its name suggests, sought the liberation of all Palestine and totally rejected the right of Israel to exist. The organization sought, in other words, to undo the consequences of the War of 1948. Moreover, as an organization that functioned in the Palestinian Diaspora it tended to represent the political aspirations of that constituency, including their demand to return to Israel proper (to within its pre-1967 boundaries). Particularly during the last decade, PLO positions toward Israel have evolved with the gradual acceptance of a two state solution. However, the Oslo Accords and the movement of the PLO leadership into the West Bank and Gaza are in themselves major historical departures. The PLO as an organization is hardly a functioning body these days. The Palestinian leadership is now almost totally assumed by the Palestinian Authority (PA). What the PLO is rapidly being transformed into a West Bank/Gaza organization, attuned to and representative of this political constituency, rather than the Palestinian Diaspora, whose concerns have not been abandoned, but have been relegated to secondary importance. The elections held in the West Bank and Gaza in early 1996, by the people of these areas only, for representatives in the Palestinian Council from their own localities left Arafat with little choice but to include or co-opt at least some of the local leadership into the institutions of the PA. This has further institutionalized the condensation of the Palestinian question into a West Bank/Gaza issue. This has facilitated the transformation of the Palestinian question into a manageable problem from the Israeli point of view, as opposed to the situation in which the Palestinian Diaspora, whose national aspirations Israel could not satisfy, was the core concern of the PLO and the Palestinian national movement.

This, however, does not mean that the '1948 file' has become totally irrelevant. There are two main outstanding problems: that of the Palestinian refugees and the question of the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Considerably more is said about the first than about the second. This, however, may not truly reflect their relative importance. As for the 1948 refugees and their descendants, most are situated in the West Bank and Gaza or are citizens of Jordan. This is unlikely to change in any large degree. Israel will not agree to their return and man, if not

most, may not even wish to leave Jordan or the Palestinian state of the future. As for Palestinians displaced in 1967, some may return to the West Bank, but that will depend largely on economic conditions, and will probably not be of much consequence.

The Palestinian citizens of Israel are close to 20% of the country's population. Their nationalist Palestinian identity has been steadily reasserted since 1967. An irredentist potential of some sort or another cannot be discounted. In any event, Israel will have to address the question of its large non-Jewish population and seek ways of integrating them as full equals in what will remain the state of the Jewish people. This may give rise to some crucial questions in regard to Israel's national identity, especially with a Palestinian state right next door.

Integration, Disengagement and the Israeli Identity

The Debate on Identity

Israelis are deeply divided not only on the state's policies and choices in the peace process, but also on the essential nature and identity of the state. These two issues are intimately interrelated. The fundamental question revolves around the definitions of Israel as a 'Jewish State' or as the 'State of the Jewish People.' Zionism, in its originally secularist phase, sought the nationalization of religion and its subordination, as a cultural component of an essentially secular Jewish nationalism. The chief objective was the creation of a state with a stable Jewish majority - the ôState of the Jewish Peopleö.

In the aftermath of the Six Day War of 1967, Israeli politics underwent a profound change. The stunning victory, coupled with Israel's occupation of the core areas of the biblical Land of Israel, provided fertile ground for the growth of an extreme right-wing religious-Zionist trend, which believed in the transformation of Zionism into a vehicle of both religious and ultra-nationalist political revival. This trend is naturally less compromising than its secular predecessor on territorial issues, in its willingness to recognize Palestinian national rights and in its definition of the state as a 'Jewish State.' In the fundamentalist world view of this trend, Israel as a 'Jewish State' ought to show deference to religious law (*Halakha*) rather than the secular legislation and policy determinant of the democratically elected

institutions of the state. It is from the ranks of this trend that Rabin's assassin emerged, and the assassination itself was but the most extreme expression of the dissension in Israel on the very nature of the state: between secular democracy and religious fundamentalism and the obvious implications this conflict has on Israel's pursuit of the peace process.

The Jewish fundamentalists, like their Muslim counterparts are incapable of coming to terms with the dictates of pragmatic policies. In Israel's case, a major pragmatic consideration in the effort to maintain the state as originally founded is demography.

Demography and Disengagement

The Arab-Israeli conflict has evolved into two very different modes of confrontation: the inter-state conflict between Israel and the neighboring Arab states, and the intercommunal struggle between Israel and the Palestinians. The inter-state conflict is essentially a military one and its solution is therefore founded primarily on the military balance of power. In this conflict, one can, in theory, think in terms of conflict resolution, based on the equation of territory for peace, in an era of Israeli military advantage. Israel has returned territory to Egypt in exchange for what is hopefully a lasting peace and the end of their conflict, that is, 'point final'. The same may happen with Syria.

The inter-communal conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has always had a military dimension, yet it has been and still is primarily a demographic struggle, decided very much by the side that has had more people in the right place at the right time. Israel is in the process of withdrawing from the West Bank and Gaza. This is not, as is often argued, because it would be too costly militarily to maintain these territories, but rather due to the realization that demographically and thus politically, the occupation has become an undesirable burden. This withdrawal, however, still leaves major demographic/political issues unresolved: those from the so-called '1948 file,' such as the questions related to the large Palestinian population in Israel or the refugees. These may be the contentious issues of the future, leaving a measure of doubt about where precisely 'point final' of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will eventually be determined. Moreover, terrorism might remain a facet of reality even after a peace treaty between Palestinians

and Israelis, considering the close proximity of the two populations. Consequently, it is perhaps more realistic to think in terms of conflict management rather than complete conflict resolution, in reference to the Israeli-Palestinian track. This, in turn, might leave questions related to Israeli and Palestinian identity and to the place of the Palestinian minority in Israel, never quite fully resolved to the mutual satisfaction of both parties.

The Question of 'Normalization'

Precisely because of such differences and difficulties, the conflict with Israel has been so protracted, and its solution so problematic. Indeed, the peace process with Israel is much more of a 'pragmatic peace' than the product of an ideological transformation in the Arab World. The Arab World is coming to terms with Israel out of acquiescence in the regional balance of power, far more than as a result of a substantive change in the pervasive delegitimizing ideological perceptions of Zionism.

In the effort to build on this pragmatic peace the parties have to contend with conflicting self-images and a profound perceptual divide. Israelis tend to see themselves and their history as essentially defensive, viewing the Zionist endeavor as a heroic feat of self-defense and collective preservation in defiance of the Jewish fate and against the odds. Having endured the struggle, the Israelis therefore seek reassurance and ideological acceptance of their community and their collective identity in the family of Middle East nations.

The Israeli need for such ideological acceptance is also a function of perceptions of time. On whose side is time perceived to be? Israelis are far more confident about the short-term regional balance of power than they are about the long-term. If peace is but a function of the existing balance of power, and not the consequence of profound ideological change, how would this peace be affected by a shift in the regional balance of power in the longer term? This is more or less a mirror image of the radical Arab perception of time. It is the radicals in the Arab World, such as Hamas, who argue against the peace process, contending that in the long run Israel is doomed to ultimate defeat ('the disappearance of Israel is pre-determined by the forces of history' - *zawal Isra'il hatmiyya ta'rikhiyya*). Why, therefore, hinder this process

by concessions and peace treaties at a time of Arab relative weakness, which is bound to change in the future?

Israelis are consequently perturbed by Arab reservations about 'normalization' since these reflect a reluctance for ideological acceptance rather than just pragmatic, and possibly even transient acquiescence of an historical aberration. For Israelis, diplomatic, economic and cultural ties with the Arab states are of crucial importance as a reflection of Israel's long-term acceptance as a normal and natural member of the region, far more than any strictly economic or other benefit.

The Arab view of these matters, however, is markedly different. Even in countries that have made their peace with Israel, like Egypt and Jordan, there is a widely held view amongst intellectuals that peace with Israel is essentially an admission of historical defeat. Moreover, this is not simply a setback in the narrow confines of a territorial dispute, but yet another and even more resounding defeat in the cultural and civilization conflict in which the Muslim Arab Middle East has been engaged for the last two centuries with the West.

From this point of view, Israel is not a defensive enterprise of formerly oppressed Jews but an aggressive, intrusive, domineering outpost of the West that has imposed itself on the region through the use of force and in alliance with the Western powers. Israel, therefore, is not a 'natural' or 'normal' member state of the region, but a monument to Arab and Muslim failure to cope effectively with the challenges of the Western-style modernity. Israel's quest for normalization, when addressed in this frame of mind, is seen as no more than the thin wedge of further cultural, economic and political 'invasion' (*ghazw*) designed to ensure its own hegemonistic domination.

To Israelis this is cause for apprehension and concern that the peace is but a function of what might be transient political and strategic circumstances, that could be overturned in a different regional environment. Israel therefore deems it absolutely essential to maintain its military and technological edge over any combination of Arab states (and Iran), which is, in turn interpreted in the Arab World as positive proof of Israel's hegemonistic designs. Even economic cooperation is regarded in some not insignificant circles with suspicion as part and parcel of Israel's ambitions for regional domination. What is for Israelis

a defensive posture is seen as yet further evidence of Israel's inherently aggressive nature and thus another barrier to normalization. This is a vicious circle from which there is no simple and straightforward exit.

Israel, the Middle East and the European Union

Even if only out of pragmatic recognition of its military and economic staying power, much of the Arab World is coming to terms with Israel. Israel is no longer ostracized by the region. This poses some new questions for Israel about its collective identity, which it has not had to consider for half a century, since its foundation.

What is Israel exactly? A European state in the Middle East? A Middle Eastern state? Or perhaps a Mediterranean state? Israel is probably best described as a combination of all three, similar in many respects to the other non-Arab Middle Eastern states - Greece and Turkey. Israel is very much like Greece and Turkey in its mixture of Western, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cultural, social, political and economic influences, though perhaps only more extremely so because of the diverse European and Middle Eastern origins of its population. But to what extent can it integrate with the region and maintain its political, economic and cultural uniqueness? This remains an open question for Israelis to ponder.

In the meantime, however, through decades of conflict, certain realities have become part and parcel of Israel's international orientation. Decades of Arab boycott left Israel with little choice but to build an economy oriented to Europe, North America and the Far East. Moreover, Israel has always maintained strong political ties with the Western powers, both as a strategic necessity and as a function of its special relationship with the major communities of the Jewish Diaspora, especially in the United States. This is not likely to change dramatically.

Economic integration with the Arab World is therefore not a likely development. This is all the more so, considering economic trends in the Middle East. According to a World Bank Study, in the year 2010 the Arab states bordering on Israel will have a population of 130 million compared with Israel's 7 million. However, the GNPs of these states combined and that of Israel will be approximately the same. This does not bode well for a European type of integration. The European

model that would be more applicable is not the European Union of states (which have similar and compatible economies and standards of living, close cultural ties and comparable political systems), but rather the relationship between Europe and the Maghreb. Europe's association with the Maghreb is more akin to disengagement than anything else. A probable exception to this rule in Israel's case would be the Jordanian and Palestinian economies. These are very small economies in comparison to that of Israel. One could imagine an economic association that would be mutually beneficial and substantial in developing the Jordanian and Palestinian economies in the interest of a stable relationship within the Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian triangle.

Such a relationship would have to be based on the preservation of the distinctive identities of all these parties. Any infringement on the sensitive identity questions of one or more of the components is bound to have a destabilizing effect. Israel is Israel, Jordan is Jordan and Palestine is Palestine.

