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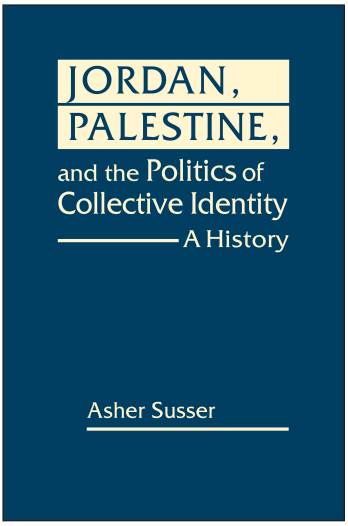
Jordan, Palestine, and the Politics of Collective Identity: A History



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The Makings of a Fateful Triangle

Transjordan (later Jordan) and the Jewish community in Palestine (later Israel) developed common cause on the question of Palestine from the very beginning of the British Mandate for Palestine in the early 1920s. Israel consequently acquiesced in Jordan's annexation of the West Bank after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War as the two countries jointly contained the defeated Palestinian national movement. The post-1948 political architecture was undone by the June War of 1967 and Israel's occupation of the West Bank. Though common cause on Palestine between Israel and Jordan had never been complete, it was now far less so, as Israel and Jordan no longer agreed on the dispensation of what had become the occupied territories.

The post-1967 reality of Israeli occupation revitalized the Palestinian national movement, which posed an existential challenge to the Jordanian kingdom, with its large Palestinian population. The clash of interests between the Hashemite Kingdom and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) culminated in the 1970 "Black September" civil war in which the Jordanian military crushed the Palestinian fighting forces that had deployed on the East Bank of the Jordan River after 1967.

The Jordanian-Palestinian clash was a catalyst for the evolution of a unique Jordanian national identity and the complex relationship between Jordanians and Palestinians in the kingdom restricted to the East Bank in the post-1967 period. The political developments in the Palestine of the British Mandate and in the West Bank under Jordanian rule until 1967 provide the historical context of the emergent existential

challenge posed to the Hashemite Kingdom by the post-1967 revival of the Palestinian national movement. The major effort of the Jordanians to "Jordanize" the Palestinians after 1948 failed for the most part. A steady outflow of Palestinians from the West Bank to the other side of the river from 1948 onward resulted in the eventual creation of a very large Palestinian community, probably a majority, on the East Bank.

Instead of "Jordanizing" the Palestinians, the original Jordanians now faced the threat of the "Palestinization" of Jordan, exacerbated by the argument from some on the Israeli right, and others in the Arab world too, contending that essentially "Jordan is Palestine." The rejuvenated Palestinian national movement in the post-1967 era became the major propellant behind the evolution of the new unique sense of Jordanian national identity. The East Bankers developed their own particular identity versus the Palestinian ultimate other as they struggled to protect their patrimony.

Jordanian identity issues affected the *problématique* of peace with Israel and were at the root of the acute sense of disappointment in Jordan with the results of the peace treaty. For the Jordanians, peace with Israel was expected, albeit unrealistically, to deliver on two critical issues: one was settlement of the Palestine problem in the form of a two-state solution that would finally clarify to all and sundry that "Jordan is Jordan and Palestine is Palestine," with the latter being in the West Bank and Gaza and not in Jordan; and the other was final extrication, through the "fruits of peace," of the kingdom from its perennial economic woes. But neither of these materialized. Jordan's economy remained in the doldrums, and the Palestinian issue persisted unresolved, with the attendant domestic tensions in Jordan and the Jordanians as insecure as ever.

The reign of King Abdallah II has therefore been shaped to a large degree by the consequences for Jordan of the unfulfilled expectations for peace with Israel. Under Abdallah, as the peace with Israel failed to deliver solutions for Jordan's major difficulties, internal tensions between Jordanians and Palestinians heightened against the backdrop of the country's unrelenting economic crisis. Jordan continued to suffer from its failure to find a solution for the inherent imbalance between population and resources, and Abdallah's determined neoliberal policies produced escalating political fallout. Many East Bankers, who felt that they were constantly getting the short end of the stick, developed an animosity toward the king, though not necessarily toward the monarchy.

The neoliberal economic solutions that Abdallah believes in, also under constant pressure from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, have exacerbated the Jordanian-Palestinian cleavage. The East Bankers, the traditional bedrock of support for the regime, are

deeply dependent on the public sector for their employment and economic well-being and are consequently far more reliant on the largesse of the state. The Palestinians, on the other hand, have generally tended to be integrated into the private sector and are less directly affected by the reforms that cut into government spending. Among the "angry tribes" of the East Bank there is a growing sense of socioeconomic vulnerability. There is no obvious alternative to the regime, and East Bankers still remain basically loyal servants of the state, the armed forces, and the security establishment. But an aura of uncertainty prevails.

The areas that presently form Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza, and Israel have been linked together by geography, demography, history, and politics since time immemorial. The political destinies of Jordan, Israel, and Palestine, as modern political entities, have been inextricably linked since the very day of their creation. The main thesis of this study is that Jordan and Israel, after failing in their shared effort to contain Palestinian nationalism, in recent years sought political formulae to disengage from Palestine lest it eventually consume them both. Disengagement, however, was easier said than done for both Jordanians and Israelis. Jordan had vital interests in Palestine that it could not ignore. Likewise, Israel had security concerns in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as domestic political and ideological issues, that made withdrawal from these territories, however desirable, extremely difficult to actually implement.

A subsidiary thesis is that, while Jordan and Israel still shared considerable common cause on Palestine and had thus been able to make their peace, the two states simultaneously diverged on the ultimate resolution of the question of Palestine. As for Israel and the Palestinians, no similar set of mutual interests bound Israel and the Palestinian national movement. Their respective national narratives were separated by an unbridgeable abyss, which, thus far, has made a lasting agreement between them unattainable.

Another subsidiary thesis is that while Palestinian identity was shaped to a large degree by the ongoing conflict with Israel, Jordanian identity has been shaped in no small measure by the competition between Jordanians and Palestinians that has resulted from the fallout of the conflict with Israel. Palestinian refugees and migrants radically altered the composition of Jordan's population, with the Jordanians eventually defining themselves largely in opposition to this ultimate Palestinian other.

Jordan and Israel have been intimately tied together through the Palestinian problem for decades. It was virtually impossible to discuss Jordanian-Israeli relations in isolation from the Palestinian context: one could not fully comprehend the Israeli-Palestinian interaction if one

ignored the Jordanian component; likewise, Jordanian-Palestinian relations were inexplicable if detached from the Israeli input. Both recent and more distant history and present-day demographic realities linked these three protagonists together, perhaps considerably more than they would really like. Jordan is home to a Palestinian community that probably constitutes more than half of the kingdom's total population. Moreover, the special ties linking the Arab populations on both banks of the Jordan River were anything but new; nor were they solely a consequence of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem.

The People and the Lay of the Land

The lay of the land has contributed to the merger of the peoples on both banks of the Jordan River since the earliest of times. Three rivers flow from east to west on the East Bank of the Jordan into the Jordan Valley, carving the East Bank into three distinct geographical segments: the Yarmuk in the north, on what today forms the border between the states of Syria and Jordan; the Zarqa in the center, flowing from its source near Amman into the Jordan Valley; and the Mujib further south, which flows into the Dead Sea. In their flow westward, these rivers cut through the hilly terrain of the East Bank, creating deep ravines and gorges more difficult to cross than the Jordan River itself, which is easily traversed during most times of the year. Historically it was less challenging for people and goods to travel along the east-west axis across the Jordan rather than along the more daunting routes on the north-south axis.

It followed naturally that political, administrative, economic, social, and family ties developed more intensively between the East and West Banks of the Jordan than between the northern and southern parts of the East Bank. Towns like Salt and Karak on the East Bank, which are part of the present-day Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, were more intimately connected through a web of historical family and commercial ties with their sister towns on the Palestinian West Bank, Nablus and Hebron, respectively, than they were to each other. In the administrative divisions of both banks of the Jordan River in biblical times, then again during the Roman era, at the time of the Arab conquest, and thereafter under the Ottomans, large areas on both banks of the river were united in the same provinces, and the river did not serve as an administrative boundary between them.

Biblical Gilead, in central Transjordan, was the home of the Israelite tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Menasheh. Virtually every Israelite polity in ancient times, from the Kingdom of David and Solomon (tenth century BCE) to Herod's Kingdom (37–34 BCE), included parts of the East Bank of the Jordan, up to the outskirts of Rabbath Ammon (today's

Amman). In the Roman period, by the fifth century, the two banks of the Jordan River had been divided into three provinces: Palestina Prima, the central part of the country administered from Caesarea; Palestina Secunda, to the north ruled from Scythopolis (Beth Shean of today); and Palestina Tertia, the arid south, of which Petra was the capital.[1] All three included vast territories in Transjordan. The administrative order of the Arab conquest in the mid-seventh century more or less followed the Roman lines, but the provinces were renamed. Palestina Prima became Filastin (Palestine) and Palestina Secunda was called Urdunn (Jordan). "In the Arab as in the Roman periods, the division between Palestine and Jordan was not, as in modern times, vertical between west and east, but horizontal, between north and south, with both districts extending, one above the other, from the Mediterranean across the Jordan River to the eastern desert."[2]

This administrative logic carried over into Ottoman times when districts on the East Bank were on occasion placed under governors whose seats of authority were on the West Bank. Thus, for example, in the 1880s the Balqa region on the East Bank, that area between the Zarqa and Mujib Rivers, was included in the district (first a *sanjaq* and then a *mutasarrifiyya*) of Nablus and remained so until 1905.[3] But the close association was not just the technicality of administrative boundaries. It was the intensity of the social and economic interaction.

Since the lay of the land made social, commercial, and administrative ties along an East-West axis far more natural than along the North-South one, the relations between the Hawran in the north and adjacent Palestine to the west were far closer than those between the Hawran and the Balqa to the south. Similarly strong, or even stronger, were the social and commercial ties that linked Salt with Nablus, the Balqa with Jerusalem, and Karak with Hebron and Gaza. In comparison, relations between the Hawran and Karak were almost nonexistent.[4]

The magnum opus of renowned Palestinian historian Ihsan al-Nimr, *Ta'rikh Jabal Nablus wal-Balqa*,[5] records, as its title suggests, the history of Nablus on the West Bank and the East Bank province of Balqa, of which Salt was the capital. The two towns were so intimately attached that their histories could not be written separately. Eugene Rogan quotes a Damascene visitor to Salt who had written in 1906 that economic migrants from Nablus had flocked to the town in such great numbers, for trade, construction, and government employment, that "it could almost be called 'Nablus the Second.'"[6]

Karak and Hebron had similarly close ties. The Majalis, one of the most powerful clans in Jordan and time-honored stalwarts of the Hashemite monarchy, hail from the southern town of Karak. But the origins of the family are actually in the Palestinian West Bank town of

Hebron, from whence they immigrated to Karak as merchants in the mid-seventeenth century. With the passage of time "a succession of brilliant political leaders [was] able to raise the tribe from a virtually powerless position to that of the leading power of the region and a mover in the whole of Transjordan." Karak traded much with Hebron and Jerusalem, and it was also a tradition in Karak to reserve a seat for a Hebroni on the municipal council.[7] Other Transjordanian towns had Palestinian connections of their own. The northern town of Irbid, usually noted for its links to Damascus, also had its share of families whose origins were in northern Palestinian towns, such as Safed.[8]

The 1910 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defined Palestine rather loosely as a territory whose limits could not "be laid down on the map as a definite line," except in the west where the country was bordered by the Mediterranean. "Eastward there is no such definite border. The River Jordan, it is true, marks a line of delimitation between Western and Eastern Palestine; but it is practically impossible to say where the latter ends and the Arabian Desert begins."[9] Upon their occupation of Palestine at the end of World War I, the British unsurprisingly observed that "Palestine is politically and economically closely interested in all that passes beyond the Jordan." The two areas were "economically interdependent," and "Palestine has ever looked to Transjordania for surplus supplies of cereals and cattle." The development of the two areas, therefore, ought to be "considered as a single problem."[10] With all the above in mind, it made sense for the British to include both banks of the Jordan within the boundaries of their mandate for Palestine.

The Making of Jordan and Palestine

In 1921 Jordan was carved out of the mandate in the hope that what was then the Emirate of Transjordan would develop into an independent Arab state, as the Zionist project would be restricted solely to Palestine west of the River. Thus created, however, Transjordan was intimately associated with the question of Palestine from its very inception, and it remained part of the Palestine Mandate until granted independence in 1946. The emirate was placed by the British in the hands of Hashemite prince, or emir, Abdallah, son of Hussein ibn Ali, the sharif of Mecca, who had launched the Arab Revolt, in cooperation with the British, against the Turks during World War I.

At the end of the war, the Hashemites, led by Abdallah's younger brother Faysal, were ensconced in Damascus, from where they ruled over the short-lived Arab Kingdom of Syria, which lasted only until July 1920. Faysal was then unceremoniously ejected by the French, who had come

to claim their zones of influence, as agreed with their British counterparts in the notorious Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916. After Faysal's ouster, the French took Syria, but Transjordan, part of the British zone of influence and no longer governed as a province of Faysal's kingdom as it had been hitherto, was now an area that the British did not quite know how to administer. When Abdallah came up north from the Hijaz to Transjordan in late 1920, ostensibly on his way to Damascus to coerce the French to reinstate the Hashemites, a solution to the British quandary about Transjordanian government had just presented itself.

After talks in Jerusalem between Abdallah and the British colonial secretary, Winston Churchill, Abdallah agreed in early April 1921 to remain in Amman as the prospective ruler of Transjordan and to abstain from pursuing his initial objective of confronting the French in Syria. During the talks, even before the boundaries of Transjordan had finally been drawn, Abdallah repeatedly asked Churchill to have Palestine included in his realm. But Churchill turned him down.[11] Thus, it was agreed that Abdallah would take control of Transjordan for an initial trial period of six months. He undertook to prevent both anti-French and anti-Zionist agitation to the best of his ability, and he was promised a stipend of £5,000 in return.[12] Abdallah could hardly remain on his seat of power in Amman without British support. It goes without saying, therefore, that he also accepted the British Mandate for Palestine, of which his emirate was but a part. What began as a temporary stopgap measure became the most stable political entity in the Levant.

Acceptance of the British Mandate was not to be taken lightly. It also meant accepting the Zionist enterprise, which the British were committed to fostering in terms of the mandate they had obtained for Palestine from the League of Nations. The Arabs of Palestine never accepted the mandate precisely because of its Zionist agenda. Thus, from the outset the emir of Transjordan was at loggerheads with the embryonic Arab nationalist movement in Palestine and its first leader, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni. Conversely, potential common interests between the emir, the British, and the Zionists were already in the making. This was not a question of ideology, just pragmatic political expedience.

Abdallah was not enamored with his swath of desert in Transjordan. Likened to a "falcon trapped in a canary's cage," for Abdallah Transjordan was but a stepping-stone to greater prizes in Syria, Iraq, or Palestine. He even disliked the name Transjordan (*Sharq al-Urdunn*) and preferred *al-Sharq al-Arabi* (the Arab East), but the British would not countenance a name for the emirate that signified an express desire for expansion, particularly so as not to fall afoul of their French allies in Syria.[13]

Abdallah envied his younger brother Faysal, who received the throne of Iraq, seated in Baghdad, a glorious city of antiquity and capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, on the banks of the great River Tigris. Abdallah, on the other hand, was quartered in Amman, the dusty and almost desolate remains of Roman Philadelphia, now a nondescript, predominantly Circassian village of some 3,000 souls. Transjordan was very sparsely populated and had only one town with over 10,000 inhabitants—Salt, just northwest of Amman. The northern district of Ajlun was the most densely populated, and its two principal towns, Irbid and Ramtha, both had less than 5,000 inhabitants.[14]

Encountering resistance in the long-established market town of Salt, Abdallah preferred to make Amman his capital, a choice that "radically reconstructed the political geography" of Transjordan. Amman rapidly outgrew the other towns of the East Bank, and by the time of independence in 1946, it had reached a population of 100,000. The city gradually developed into the sprawling, metropolitan, political and economic center of the kingdom, with a population that exceeded 5 million by 2020.[15]

After 1948, Amman became a city with a predominant Palestinian majority, after hundreds of thousands of Palestinian migrants and refugees settled in the capital. The original Transjordanians, who populated the country's periphery, were placed at a built-in socioeconomic disadvantage that would deeply influence Jordanian politics in later years. They resented the wealth that was being concentrated in Amman to the benefit of the Palestinians, who also enjoyed the upgraded services and infrastructure in the capital. In more recent times many East Bank communities have turned to protest, feeling neglected and excluded from the "state's geography of neo-liberal investment and development."[16]

Hashemite Ambition

Abdallah was initially disappointed with his desert principality. Just a few months after his arrival, in the summer of 1921, the deeply frustrated emir declared that he had "had enough of this wilderness" of Transjordan.[17] Syria was Abdallah's obsession until his dying day. Despite all his intrigue in Syria and his pleading and maneuvering, the British never had any intention of installing Abdallah in Damascus. At best, they treated him with patronizing disinterest. At times they were irritated or embarrassed by his machinations, which only complicated their relations with the French and some of their other Arab allies.[18]

Palestine, in contrast, was not an obsession. It was primarily about *realpolitik* and rational state interest. Considering the historical ties between both banks of the Jordan River, whatever occurred west of the

river had immediate ramifications for the East Bank. He who ruled Transjordan ignored events in Palestine at his peril. Transjordan's links to Palestine were therefore naturally strong. Many of Abdallah's cabinet ministers and civil servants hailed from Palestine. More significantly, the three most prominent prime ministers of his entire reign were of Palestinian origin: Ibrahim Hashim from Nablus, Tawfiq Abu al-Huda from Acre, and Samir al-Rifa'i from Safed.[19]

Abdallah constantly meddled in Palestinian politics, courting Hajj Amin's enemies. Palestinian Arab society was deeply divided between two rival camps: Hajj Amin and his allies, the Husaynis, and their opponents, the Nashashibis, otherwise known as the "opposition" (*al-mu'arada*). Abdallah and the Husaynis were to become mortal enemies, driven by conflicting political interests that even carried over to future generations. Abdallah's grandson, King Hussein, would be similarly entrapped in conflict in later years with the founder of the PLO, Ahmad al-Shuqayri, and with his successor at the helm of the Palestinian movement, Yasir Arafat.

As Hajj Amin was the bête noire of both the Hashemites and the Zionists, it made sense for Abdallah to forge close ties with the Jews. Abdallah's links to the Jewish Agency, the official leadership of the Jews in Palestine, were both political and financial. Abdallah met with nearly all the senior Zionist leaders, usually in secret.[20] Though the emir received regular payments from the Zionists, it would be wrong to infer that his relative moderation was simply bought. The Zionists and Abdallah had many genuine common interests. Moreover, Jewish financial assistance granted Abdallah a much-needed measure of leeway in his overly dependent relationship with his British patrons and some extra means to manage East Bank local politics too.[21]

Competing Nationalisms and the Idea of Partition

The Arab Rebellion erupted in Palestine in April 1936. It was to become a critical turning point in the history of the triangular relationship between the Hashemites, the Zionists, and the Arabs of Palestine. Clashes between Arabs and Jews spread rapidly throughout the country in the hitherto most sustained Arab opposition to the British Mandate and the Zionist enterprise. The British appointed a royal commission to ascertain the causes of the rebellion and to make recommendations for a way out of the Palestinian conundrum. The commission, headed by Lord Peel, former secretary of state for India, presented its report in July 1937.[22]

The report noted that "an irrepressible conflict [had] arisen between *two national communities* [author's emphasis] within the narrow bounds

of one small country." The British had come a long way from the formulations of the Balfour Declaration, which had recognized only the Jews as a people with national rights, regarding the Arab population as no more than the "existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine," with civil and religious but not national rights.[23] The Arab Rebellion imposed new modes of thinking about Palestine, coercing both the British and the Zionists to recognize the Arabs in Palestine as a national entity.

It was now more readily apparent that there were two national communities in Palestine, one Arab and one Jewish, and both equally deserved to exercise their right to self-determination. But, the report observed, the lesson of the rebellion was "plain, and nobody . . . will now venture to assert that the existing system offers any real prospect of reconciliation between the Arabs and the Jews." The obligations that Britain undertook toward the Arabs and the Jews had proved irreconcilable. "To put it in one sentence," the commission concluded, "we cannot—in Palestine as it now is—both concede the Arab claim to self-government and secure the establishment of the Jewish National Home."[24] The commission, therefore, recommended that the country be partitioned.

One area would become a new British Mandate for the Holy Places and would include an enclave of Jerusalem and Bethlehem with a corridor to the sea via the towns of Lydda and Ramle, terminating at Jaffa. A second area, encompassing much of the Coastal Plain, as far south as Majdal, the Valley of Jezreel, and the Galilee, just less than a fifth of the country, would become an independent Jewish state. The rest of Palestine, the Negev, the West Bank and the Gaza area, and the southern Coastal Plain, would be united with Transjordan to form an independent Arab state under the Hashemite crown.[25]

The majority of the Zionists, though disappointed by the amount of territory allotted to the Jewish state, accepted partition. It was better than nothing and an important victory in principle, having secured British support for the establishment of an independent Jewish state, a safe haven to which the oppressed Jews of Europe could immigrate freely. Emir Abdallah, just as he had accepted the mandate, supported partition. It would seem to have been the eminently sensible thing for him to do. Considering his most impressive territorial endowment, coupled with the political exclusion of his nemesis, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, who had fallen out of British favor with the outbreak of the rebellion, this was hardly an offer he could refuse.

But in so doing he was not only accepting Arab Palestine as part of his realm; he was also acquiescing in Jewish statehood in part of the country. That was an unforgivable concession, completely at variance with the Arab consensus. In the eyes of other Arabs, it was a betrayal

of their cause in Palestine, and Abdallah was vilified by all and sundry. The Arabs of Palestine adamantly rejected partition, and in the late summer of 1937 the rebellion was renewed with a vengeance. On September 26, Lewis Andrews, the acting district commissioner of the Galilee, was murdered by Arab assailants. The Palestinian leadership, the Arab Higher Committee, headed by Hajj Amin al-Husayni, was outlawed, and warrants were issued for the arrest of its members. Hajj Amin first went into hiding and subsequently, in mid-October, managed to slip out of the country by boat to Lebanon.

From then onward the recognized Palestinian Arab leadership functioned in exile. The absence of their leadership and its inherent illegitimacy in the eyes of the powers that be would haunt the Palestinians for decades, giving their Zionist and Hashemite rivals a secure advantage. Continued contacts between Abdallah and the Zionists during the rebellion further enhanced their relationship in preparation for future cooperation.[26] This severe Palestinian handicap was only finally overcome with the signing of the Oslo Accords and the return of the Palestinian leadership to the homeland in the early summer of 1994 for the first time in nearly sixty years.

In the face of Arab rejection, at the end of 1938, after yet another commission of inquiry, the British retreated from the idea of partition, arguing that it was unworkable. The British summoned a conference of Arab and Zionist representatives in London in February 1939. The conference ended, as expected, in failure after a few weeks of fruitless negotiations, in which Arabs and Jews talked not to each other but solely to the British. At the conclusion of this dialogue of the deaf, an exasperated British government issued a new white paper in May 1939.

The rebellion had run out of steam by then, and as the clouds of war collected over Europe, it was opportune for the British to appease the Arab states, which were of immeasurably greater strategic and economic importance than the Jews of Palestine and their supporters in the Diaspora. The white paper severely limited Jewish immigration to Palestine, restricted land sales to Jews, and promised independence to Palestine within ten years. In such circumstances independence could only have meant an independent Arab state in which the Jews would have been relegated to the unenviable position of a permanent minority. Had this white paper ever been fully implemented, Jewish statehood would never have come to pass.

The outbreak of war in Europe with its catastrophic consequences for European Jewry reconfigured the political context of the Palestine problem. The plight of the Jews imposed itself on the conscience of the international community, reorganized in the newly formed United

Nations. More than ever, in the wake of World War II and the Holocaust, the notion of Jewish statehood appeared to most fair-minded people in the West to be both timely and inherently just. The practicalities of Palestine were forced into the background by the plight of the Jews, and the inner logic of partition resurfaced again. But Jewish and Arab positions remained irreconcilable. The Jewish Agency insisted on partition, while the Palestinians would have nothing less than Arab majority rule and independence in all of Palestine.

By now British energy and interest for the intractable conflict in Palestine had been exhausted. Once they had made up their minds to finally part with India, the jewel in the crown of empire, the passage to India, in which Palestine was an essential link, had lost its inherent strategic value. In February 1947, unable to impose a solution of its own, His Majesty's government decided to hand the issue of Palestine over to the United Nations. The General Assembly established yet another committee to study the problem—the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). In September, after having traveled to Palestine and then to Europe to meet with Jewish Holocaust survivors, the majority on the committee recommended partition. On November 29, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 181 endorsing the plan to partition Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, with Jerusalem and Bethlehem and their holy places, as an international enclave, to remain under UN supervision.

Throughout the world war Abdallah had tirelessly continued to cultivate his relationship with the Jewish Agency and to enhance his influence with the mufti's rivals among the Palestinian Arabs—the Nashashibis and their allies. With Jews and Arabs and with the British, of course, he probed relentlessly for common ground on variations of the notion of union between Palestine and Transjordan under his crown. Winston Churchill's government revived partition as a viable option, and in late 1943 a special cabinet committee recommended resuming discussion of the Peel Commission proposal. With the end of the war, the idea of partition and annexation of the Arab state to Transjordan became one of Abdallah's favorite subjects of conversation with his British interlocutors. He was, however, careful not to make his opinions known. Forced to endure universal Arab opprobrium in 1937 for having supported partition, he was now doubly cautious.[27]

Actually, Abdallah's preference was not for partition. He would rather have had all of Palestine attached to his kingdom, with some form of autonomy for the Jews. But he was realistic enough to understand that this was not attainable.[28] In May 1946 Abdallah became the newly crowned king of the independent Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

He and the Zionists soon resumed their efforts to establish common ground on the future of Palestine, where neither side had any interest in a separate Arab state under their common enemy, Hajj Amin.

During talks between Abdallah and the Jewish Agency in the summer of 1946, both sides came to the conclusion that partition and annexation served their respective interests.[29] After UNSCOP's recommendations of September 1947, partition was clearly becoming the most realistic option. As Abdallah told the representatives of the Jewish Agency in November, he sought the incorporation of the Arab part of Palestine into his kingdom. He was determined to prevent the mufti from returning to Palestine to upset his plans and have Hajj Amin and the other Arabs ride him ragged. "I want to be the rider, not to be ridden," Abdallah explained.[30]

The 1948 War and Its Aftermath

The passage of the UN partition resolution resulted in war, which came to an end in a series of armistice agreements signed between the State of Israel and its Arab neighbors, which had invaded Palestine the day after the Israelis had declared their independence on May 14, 1948. The agreements were signed in 1949 with Egypt (in February), Lebanon (in March), Jordan (in April), and Syria (in July). The Palestinians were notably absent. The war had ended not only in their military defeat but in the shattering of their society and the dispersal of half of their number as refugees in other parts of Palestine and in the neighboring Arab states. The Palestinian people were no longer an autonomous player in what had now become the Arab-Israeli conflict. The "shared memories of the traumatic uprooting of their society and the experiences of being dispossessed, displaced, and stateless" were to "come to define 'Palestinian-ness.'"[31]

This collective consciousness would later energize the Palestinian national revival, but after the disaster (the *nakba*) of 1948, the fate of the Palestinians was entirely in the hands of others. The West Bank, captured by the Jordanians in the war, was formally annexed, with Israeli acquiescence, to the Hashemite Kingdom in April 1950. Israel and Jordan now sought to contain and constrain the remnants of Palestinian nationalism between them. Though Abdallah enjoyed a variety of practical advantages over the mufti in the struggle for dominance in Arab Palestine, he had one major deficiency: his lack of legitimacy, in the eyes of the Palestinians and the other Arabs, to represent Palestine.[32]

In late 1948, as the war was coming to an end, Jordan, with the help of the military forces of the sister Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq, was in effective control of the West Bank. In October, in a futile effort

to challenge the reality on the ground, Hajj Amin declared the independence of Palestine and set up the All of Palestine Government (*hukumat umum Filastin*) in Gaza, under the protection of the Egyptian military occupation. The Palestinian government was an empty vessel. Not only was Hajj Amin unable to establish control in all of Palestine, but he was in practical control of none of it. The declaration had hardly been made when the government was evacuated by the Egyptians to Cairo.

But the declaration, which was well received by the people in the West Bank too, was intended to delegitimize Abdallah and the Hashemites. Abdallah had to respond in kind. He waged a relentless campaign of defamation against the All of Palestine Government. But he was most desperately in need of an explicit Palestinian appeal to him to annex the West Bank to Jordan. On December 1, 1948, the Jordanians convened a Congress of Palestinians in the West Bank town of Jericho. Abdallah's political objective was to obtain a democratic vote of approval from a representative body of Palestinians that would endorse the unification of the West Bank with Abdallah's kingdom in an ostensible act of Palestinian self-determination.

The Congress, however, had dubious representative credentials. Estimates of the number of participants varied from several hundred to 3,000, most from the Hebron area. Representation from other areas of the West Bank, where the Husaynis were still relatively strong, such as Jerusalem and Ramallah or Nablus, was disappointing. Even so, Abdallah failed to get the conference to do his bidding.

The king sought an unconditional authorization to do as he saw fit—that is, to annex the West Bank and, in practice, to accept the partition of Palestine. He had no interest in resuming the war with Israel. The Congress would not hear of it. It was quite willing to recognize Abdallah as the "King of all Palestine," emphasizing that Palestine was an "indivisible entity" and that any settlement that contradicted this principle could not be considered final. The conditionality was unacceptable to Abdallah. He had new resolutions drafted that authorized him to solve the Palestine question as he saw fit, and these resolutions were broadcast over Jordanian radio as the resolutions of the Jericho Congress. The problem was that the Congress had dispersed in the meantime, and the resolutions published in its name were not those it had adopted.[33]

The conference was a farce, but no more so than Hajj Amin's maneuvers in Gaza. As opposed to Hajj Amin, the Jordanians really were in full control of all that remained of Arab Palestine (except for the snippet in Gaza), and that made all the difference. According to the official Jordanian narrative, their armed forces had saved the West

Bank from the Zionists. The Jordanians would subsequently also contend that the first parliamentary elections held on both banks of the river in April 1950 were actually a Palestinian act of self-determination. The parliament elected then, representing the people on both the East and the West Banks, formally endorsed the unification of the two banks on April 24, 1950.

In practice Jordan became the inheritor of Palestine, and the West Bank, politically, administratively, and economically subordinate to the East Bank, was tightly integrated into the Jordanian kingdom. Since the capital was Amman, the entire state bureaucracy was centered there. All the heavy industry and then the first university were also situated on the East Bank, partly for security reasons, stemming from the fear that Israel might occupy the West Bank, and partly just to ensure that the West Bank never developed into an independent power base that might challenge the regime in Amman. These policies produced a steady outflow of Palestinian migrants from the West Bank to the East Bank in search of jobs and higher education.

This was all part of a grand design to Jordanize the Palestinians through integration into the Jordanian state. The constant migration between 1948 and 1967 from the West Bank to the East Bank, in addition to the Palestinian refugees who had settled on the East Bank in 1948, steadily increased the Palestinian population of the East Bank. Initially the migration may have appealed to the Jordanians as a facet of their project of de-Palestinization or Jordanization by integration. But the Jordanization policy met with only limited success, and in later years relations between Palestinians and original Jordanians would become a source of much controversy and tension in Jordanian domestic politics.[34]

The large numbers of Palestinians, refugees and others, settled down in Jordan fairly rapidly in the first few years after the war, establishing themselves and their businesses in Amman and elsewhere—so much so that there were early signs that "far from the Jordanians colonizing eastern Palestine, it [was] the Palestinians who [were] colonizing Jordan." According to Alec Kirkbride, Britain's minister in Amman and stalwart of the Hashemite order for decades, Jordan was undergoing a "peaceful revolution" as the Palestinians extended their political and economic influence over the whole country.[35] The relationship between the East and West Banks was never one of equals. The Palestinians, though the decisive majority in the country as long as it included both banks of the river, were underrepresented in all walks of political life. The East Bank and East Bankers were systematically preferred over the West Bank and the West Bankers, and this all remained true until Jordan lost the West Bank to Israel in 1967.[36]

Notes

1. Susser, *Israel, Jordan, and Palestine,* 5–11; Lassner and Troen, *Jews and Muslims*, 47, 50.
2. Lewis, "Palestine," 155–156.
3. Salibi, *Modern History of Jordan*, 37; Rogan, "Bringing the State Back," 40.
4. "Domestic Dimension," 5.
5. al-Nimr, *Ta'rikh Jabal Nablus wal-Balqa*.
6. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 98.
7. Gubser, *Politics and Change in al-Karak, Jordan*, 15, 26.
8. Salibi, *Modern History of Jordan*, 38, 45.
9. Quoted in Lewis, "Palestine," 158–159.
10. W. Deeds (Jerusalem) to John Tilley (Foreign Office), October 18, 1920, in *Palestine Boundaries, 1833–1947*, 3:675. Extract from the conference on Middle East affairs on the position of Transjordan in relation to the Palestine Mandate, February 26, 1921, CO 732/3, in *Records of Jordan, 1919–1965*, 1:292.
11. Nevo, *King Abdallah and Palestine*, xiii.
12. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan*, 53.
13. Shlaim, *Politics of Partition*, chap. 1; Salibi, *Modern History of Jordan*, 94. The emirate's first official newspaper bore the name *al-Sharq al-Arabi*, and piles of the paper were stored in the upper floors of the Jordanian National Library.
14. Schwedler, *Protesting Jordan*, 74; Alon, *The Making of Jordan*, 26–29, 64.
15. Schwedler, *Protesting Jordan*, 68, 74, 231.
16. Schwedler, *Protesting Jordan*, 94, 249.
17. Salibi, *Modern History of Jordan*, 95.
18. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan*, 158; Pipes, *Greater Syria*, 71–81; Gelber, *Jewish-Transjordanian Relations*, 167, 222, 231.
19. Nevo, *King Abdallah and Palestine*, 9.
20. Podeh, *From Mistress to Known Partner*, 74 (Hebrew).
21. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan*, 120; Podeh, *From Mistress to Known Partner*, 77–78.
22. Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 135–138.
23. Geddes, *Documentary History*, 38, 154.
24. Geddes, *Documentary History*, 157–158.
25. Geddes, *Documentary History*, 165–169; Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 138–139.
26. Podeh, *From Mistress to Known Partner*, 79.
27. Nevo, *King Abdallah and Palestine*, 48–49, 54–55.
28. Gelber, *Jewish-Transjordanian Relations*, 207, 211; Nevo, *King Abdallah and Palestine*, 56–59.
29. Nevo, *King Abdallah and Palestine*, 60–62; Gelber, *Jewish-Transjordanian Relations*, 207, 211, 214.
30. Nevo, *King Abdallah and Palestine*, 72.
31. Doumani, "Palestine Versus the Palestinians?," 52.
32. Susser, *Israel, Jordan and Palestine*, 172–173.
33. Nevo, *King Abdallah and Palestine*, 167–171.
34. Susser, *Two-State Imperative*, 173–174.
35. Sir Alec Kirkbride, "Jordan: Annual Review for 1949," January 2, 1950, in *Political Diaries of the Arab World, Palestine and Jordan*, 472; Sir Alec Kirkbride, "Jordan: Annual Review for 1950," January 3, 1951, in *Political Diaries of the Arab World, Palestine and Jordan*, 521–523.
36. Susser, *Two-State Imperative*, 174.