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The Old Peace Treaties vs. the Abraham Accords

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Unlike Israel's earlier peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, the Abraham Accords involved Arab countries that do not border Israel, have never fought it on the battlefield, and are relatively unburdened by the Palestinian question. Accordingly, they were able to implement a "people to people" peace that eluded their predecessors.

The search for a peaceful settlement to the conflict between Israel and its neighbors reached a critical juncture in 1979 when Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and Israeli PM Menachem Begin signed the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Fourteen years later, in September 1993, Israel and the PLO signed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Agreements (DOP) after secret talks in Oslo, and in October 1994 a Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty was signed. In the subsequent two-and-a-half decades, no new Arab-Israeli agreements were signed until the conclusion in August 2020 of the Abraham Accords between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain, followed a month later by normalization agreements between the Jewish state, Sudan, and Morocco.

The Egyptian and Jordanian treaties were agreements between governments that focused to varying degrees on closing the book on military conflict with Israel, even as the Palestinian issue remained unresolved and normalization between their societies remained uncertain. The Egyptian and Jordanian treaties are no less people-to-people agreements than the Abraham Accords, but the Egyptian and Jordanian political leaderships failed to implement that aspect of the accords. In contrast, the Abraham Accords countries are free of past limitations, do not border Israel, and have never fought against it on the battlefield, so there is no sense of public trauma on either side. Accordingly, they were able to implement a genuine "people to people" peace.

What did Egypt gain from signing the Camp David Accords?

Israeli and Egyptian leaders managed to end years of hostilities. They found peace in a broken region by signing a historic peace agreement that rewarded PM Begin and President Sadat with a joint Nobel Prize for Peace. The benefits of peace with Israel have been considerable for Egypt:

- It restored the entire Sinai without going to war
- It gained decades of extensive aid from Washington. Cairo still receives $1.3 billion in US military assistance and $250 million in economic assistance annually. According to the Congressional Research Service, Egypt has accrued $69 billion from the US since 1979
- According to the World Bank, Egypt reduced its military budget by 18% of GNP, a reduction that allowed Cairo to reallocate military funds to economic development projects
- Egypt received military assistance from the US in the form of arms sales, regular joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, training, co-production of tanks, and regular military consultations with the US and Israel
- Egypt benefited from the Congressional mandate of 1996 for qualifying industrial zones, which created 120,000 jobs for Egyptians and worth $763 million of goods to the US
- Egypt enhanced its regional standing over the years due to its ties with Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas and its efforts to mediate conflicts.

What did Jordan gain from signing the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty?

On October 26, 1994, leaders of Jordan and Israel signed a peace treaty at Wadi Araba, ending the formal state of war between the countries. The treaty was far more than just a formalization of a *de facto* ceasefire; it fundamentally changed the nature of the Israeli-Jordanian relationship, enhancing mainly security and economy. Jordan benefited from the treaty in these ways:

A. Security

- Strong cooperation between Jordanian and Israeli security forces has repeatedly helped thwart potential terrorist threats to both countries
- A solid security arrangement and clearly defined borders weaken the "Jordan is Palestine" argument
- In 1993, Washington provided Amman with $35 million in economic support; in 2014, the figure was $700 million. In 1993, Jordan received $9 million in US foreign military financing; in 2014 it received $300 million. Jordan also received

58 F-16s and a state-of-the-art counterterrorism facility—the King Abdullah Special Operations Training Center (KASOTC)—which was constructed by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 2006-07

- The intelligence partnership between the US and Jordan became so close that the agency had technical personnel "virtually embedded" at Jordan's General Intelligence Directorate headquarters

- The agreement cemented the Jordanian kingdom's position on the roster of pro-Western Middle Eastern states, which enhances its strategic relationship with Washington.

B. Economy

- Strong US commitment to the treaty led to the forgiveness of $700 million in Jordanian debt and an increase in assistance to the point that Jordan is now one of the leading recipients of US aid in the world

- The establishment of Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ) boosted the economy. Created by Congress in 1996, the QIZs allow goods produced in Jordan to enter Israel duty-free. The QIZs in Jordan grew from annual exports of $18 million in 1998 to over $560 million in 2003. Between 1996 and 2010, 13 QIZs were established, providing tens of thousands of Jordanians with employment. The value of Jordanian exports to Israel for the same period totaled $60 million, up 15% from 2003

- Another relatively bright spot has been tourism. In 2013, 218,000 Israelis reportedly visited Jordan, while just over 18,000 Jordanians traveled to Israel. There were 24 weekly flights linking the Ben-Gurion and Sde Dov airports with Queen Alia Airport

- Israel signed a "nonbinding letter of intent" to supply Jordan with natural gas from its offshore Leviathan field. The 15-year deal, which requires a new pipeline, is reportedly worth $15 billion. In February, another agreement was reached by which Israel will supply $500 million worth of gas from the Tamar offshore field to two Jordanian industrial plants near the Dead Sea

- The peace treaty initiated Israeli-Jordanian cooperation in a range of strategically essential realms, including water scarcity. This cooperation stipulates that Israel would provide Jordan's capital with 8-13 billion gallons per year of fresh water from the Sea of Galilee while Jordan would deliver the same amount of desalinated water pumped from Aqaba to Israel's Negev desert region.

What were the shortcomings of the old peace agreements?

Despite the passage of decades since the signing of the agreements with Egypt and Jordan, genuine "people-to-people" ties have not come to fruition. This is because both countries fought wars with Israel that are still in their populations' collective memory. This was not a shortcoming of the treaties but a shortcoming of the Egyptian and Jordanian political leadership, which made little to no effort to implement "people-to-people" ties.

The populations of both countries also contain large Arab nationalist and Islamist contingents, making a warm peace difficult. Both countries also either ignored hostile anti-Israel and anti-Jewish rhetoric or openly allowed it to be disseminated by their media and educational systems. Neither country made any effort to prepare their people for a warm peace, whether through the media, the schools, or a model of coexistence and tolerance.

Anwar Sadat made a huge mistake by releasing scores of Islamists from prison. He did so to fight his country's leftists, and paid for it with his life. After his assassination, those radicals played a significant role in Islamizing Egyptian society, which made a "people-to-people" peace even more complicated. The negotiations of the accords were transactional, not transformational, and the result was a cold peace.

For Jordan, the persistence of anti-Israel sentiment is related to the fact that nearly 60% of the population is of Palestinian origin. However, even if Israel and the Palestinians were to settle their differences, it is unclear whether local attitudes in Jordan would change significantly. That is because the prevailing negative views of Israel in Jordan are not the product of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict alone but also of the anti-Israel and anti-Jewish diet fed to Jordanians through the media, educational system, and society in general (despite the Hashemite dynasty's century-long covert relations with the Zionist movement and the state of Israel).

Many Jordanians also believe the peace treaty stifled internal political reform. They claim that in order to defend its relations with Israel from widespread opposition, the government of Jordan stifled public dissent and clamped down on Islamists and other groups that want such reform.

How do the old peace agreements differ from the Abraham Accords?

The main difference between the old peace treaties and the Abraham Accords is that the latter is distinguished by a warm peace. The UAE is distinct from the other Abraham Accords countries, like Sudan or Bahrain, because it fought radical Islamists and their ideology by creating an exemplary model of tolerance in the region years before the Abraham Accords. The UAE hosted the Pope, built the Abrahamic Family House, signed the agreement of Human Fraternity for World Peace, built a Hindu temple, and added more than 200 nationalities to the country.

The country's ethos of coexistence and tolerance is supported by the media and the education system.

Morocco, another Abraham Accords country, contains a considerable number of Sephardic Jews and has historical ties to Israel. These facts helped it prepare its people for a warm peace with the Jewish State.

The road ahead

From a transactional perspective, in terms of a common need for security and economic prosperity, the Middle East is ready for relations with Israel. However, from a transformational standpoint, most of the region is not yet ready for full normalization. Few, if any, countries in the region embrace a UAE-style approach to coexistence and pluralism, and extremist ideologies are still widespread in most societies. The region is still full of hostile Arab nationalist and Islamist ideologies, and they continue to be disseminated by the media and among intellectuals—not only by radicals. For these societies to be ready for a warm peace with Israel, tremendous changes will have to be made in their educational and media systems.

To make the benefits of normalization clear to the general public in the Middle East requires a new educational curriculum. Teaching the history of the Jews in the region should not be constrained to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but should go much further than that—an effort in which the UAE is actively engaged. Another critical step is to establish a media outlet that stands up to divisive extremist ideologies and carves out opportunities for Arabs to get to know Israelis and Jews in person, without the interference of radicals, be they Islamists or Arab nationalists. The Middle Eastern public should understand or at least give a chance to the idea that normalization of relations with Israel is a prerequisite for conflict resolution. Many extremists and opportunists have used the Palestinian cause to fulfill their ends, and the general public has paid the price in decades of stagnation.

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