

16.04.2014

The 'peace process': what now?

At the time of writing, the 'peace process' initiated last July by John Kerry appears to have run aground, a seemingly inevitable outcome widely predicted by numerous commentators. However, we should be cautious of assuming that the framework negotiated so far, and described by some Palestinian representatives as 'the worst-ever version', will be allowed to wither on the vine or that Kerry will simply walk away from an initiative that both he and Barack Obama have defined as a 'legacy issue', and one that has been seen as critical to the rebuilding of the USA's standing in the Middle East.

As an aid to understanding the issues that have led to current impasse we attach an article from 'The Economist' of April 12th which summarises the situation as follows:

The latest seemingly terminal glitch was a row over Mr Netanyahu's refusal to free the fourth and final batch of around 100 Palestinian prisoners, previously promised to help lure Mr Abbas back into negotiations eight months ago. The Israeli prime minister retorts that Mr Abbas has reneged on his part of the deal by failing to negotiate seriously and by them breaking a pledge not to take its campaign for full statehood to the UN. ...

Mr Netanyahu has made a number of extra demands. He refuses to start with the borders that existed in 1967 between Israel and what was then the Jordanian-controlled West Bank as "the basis" of a redrawn line between Israel and Palestine. He does not agree that Jerusalem should be shared between the two states. He is calling for Israel to control the whole of the Jordan Valley militarily. Despite accepting a moratorium on permitting the building or expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank in 2011, he is now allowing them to be built at the fastest rate for many years. And before talks start in earnest he wants the Palestinians to say they will be willing to talk about recognising Israel as a specifically Jewish state.

Moreover, on the borders question, Mr Netanyahu is coming under pressure to ask for much more. A growing number of leading lights in his coalition, such as Mr Elkin, are calling for Israel to annex Area C, which encompasses 62% of the West Bank (including the Jordan Valley) and is home to a shrinking and scattered minority of the Palestinian population. Mr Kerry says no. But Mr Netanyahu, even at his most flexible, is said to be demanding that Israel retain twice as much land in the West Bank as Mr Olmert proposed: perhaps 10-12%, compared with the 6.5% suggested, along with territorial swaps of equal area and quality, by Mr Olmert.

Israel-Palestine

A peace process that is going nowhere

John Kerry's dogged bid for a two-state solution has faltered

Apr 12th 2014 | JERUSALEM AND RAMALLAH | From the print edition

ZE'EV ELKIN, Israel's 43-year-old deputy foreign minister, who emigrated from eastern Ukraine in 1990, chuckles about the rise of "Russians" into his country's highest posts. The foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, hails from Moldova, once part of the Soviet Union. "Recently the ministers of tourism, absorption, diaspora affairs, the head of the Jewish agency—they've all been Russians," jokes Mr Elkin. Most Russian-Israelis, he notes approvingly, are "right-wing", meaning that they are hawks on Palestine.



Mr Elkin openly opposes—under any circumstance, he breezily asserts—the stated desire of his prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, for a Palestinian state to co-exist alongside Israel, something John Kerry, America's secretary of state, is failing to achieve after nearly eight months of frenetic diplomacy. A Palestinian one, however hedged about, would, says Mr Elkin, "threaten the existence of a Jewish state." Better, he adds, to annex a chunk of the West Bank, the core of the Palestinians' would-be state, to Israel. These days the West Bank, he adds with another chuckle, is "the most stable part of the Middle East".

Mr Elkin is not an oddity in flatly opposing his prime minister from within his ruling Likud party, on what is still the most contentious issue in Israeli politics. A sizeable majority of Likud's central committee and most of its 20 members in the 120-seat Knesset, Israel's parliament, also oppose the idea of two states, though Mr Netanyahu formally endorsed it, albeit tepidly, five years ago. Indeed, says Mr Elkin, only "two or three" Likudniks in the Knesset back the prime minister wholeheartedly on this issue. Yet Mr Elkin ran the foreign ministry for a year when Mr Lieberman, under investigation for corruption, stood down from the office until last November.

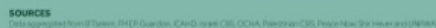
Mr Lieberman, known in his early days in the Knesset for his virulent hostility to the Palestinians, especially those who are Israeli citizens, arguing that they should swear an oath of loyalty to the Jewish state or lose their voting rights, has come round to the two-state idea, with "transfers" of land: the Arab-populated areas of Israel should be placed within a Palestinian

A horizontal timeline from 1993 to 2013. The timeline is divided into two sections by a vertical line at 2000. The left section is titled 'NEGOTIATIONS FAIL TO END OCCUPATION' and the right section is titled 'ATTEMPTS TO RESTART NEGOTIATION PROCESS'. The timeline shows the following events: 1993 (OSLO), 1995 (OSLO II), 2000 (CAMP DAVID), 2001 (TABA), 2007 (ANNAPOLIS), 2010 (WASHINGTON), and 2013 (NEW TALKS). Each event is represented by a speech bubble containing the name of the negotiation, with a silhouette of the participants shaking hands below it.

Year	Event
1993	OSLO
1995	OSLO II
2000	CAMP DAVID
2001	TABA
2007	ANNAPOLIS
2010	WASHINGTON
2013	NEW TALKS

ISRAELI SETTLER POPULATION
DOUBLED
TO OVER 500K SINCE 1993

11 K
PALESTINIANS FORCED
OUT OF JERUSALEM
SINCE 1993



Talks timeline: <http://bit.ly/talks-timeline> Settlement units: <http://bit.ly/settlements-map> <http://bit.ly/settlements-photos>
<http://bit.ly/settlements> Settler population: <http://bit.ly/settlers-pop> Settlement subsidy: <http://bit.ly/settlement-subsidy>
 Home destruction: <http://bit.ly/home-destruction> <http://bit.ly/home-destruction-photos> <http://bit.ly/home-destruction-videos>
 Displacement orders: 1000: <http://bit.ly/1000-orders> 1500: <http://bit.ly/1500-orders> <http://bit.ly/1500-orders-photos>
 IDF Palestinian population: <http://bit.ly/idf-population> Registered refugees: <http://bit.ly/registered-refugees>
 Settlements 100 West Bank: <http://bit.ly/settlements-100-wb> Checkpoints: <http://bit.ly/checkpoints-wb>
 Wall length: <http://bit.ly/wall-length> Gaza blockade: <http://bit.ly/gaza-blockade> <http://bit.ly/gaza-blockade-photos>

The 'peace process' and the Jordan Valley

One of the central issues in the negotiations has been the status of the Jordan Valley and the demand pursued vigorously by the Israeli side that the valley should remain under Israeli military control. In December Benjamin Netanyahu appointed former Israeli ambassador to the UN, Dore Gold, as his foreign policy adviser. In July 2013 Gold published an article in *Israel Hayom* arguing that the Jordan Valley is "the frontline of Israel's defence" and recapping the history of this Israeli viewpoint.

In July 1967, just one month after the Six Day War, Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon, the former commander of the Palmach in 1948, submitted to the cabinet his famous proposal for Israel retaining territories of strategic importance for its defense, thereby giving Israel what Allon called "defensible borders" that would replace the vulnerable 1967 lines. Legally, Allon based himself on U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, which according to its drafters, envisioned the creation of a new secure border that would replace the old armistice lines, from which Israel was forced to defend itself at the start of the Six Day War.

The Allon Plan, which was largely based on Israel retaining the Jordan Valley, remained a critical component of Israeli military thinking years later, even after conditions in the Middle East changed. Thus on October 5, 1995, almost two years after Israel signed the Oslo Agreements, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin declared before the Knesset that "The borders of the State of Israel, during the permanent solution, will be beyond the lines which existed before the Six Day War. We will not return to the 4 June 1967 lines." In the spirit of Allon, who had been his mentor when they served together in the Palmah, Rabin added: "The security border of the State of Israel will be located in the Jordan Valley, in the broadest meaning of that term".

During his first term in office, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used the language of "Allon-Plus" to give the public a sense of his thinking. Finally, even after he announced his disengagement plan, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told Haaretz on April 14, 2005, that Israel must continue to control the Jordan Valley from the hill ridge above the Allon Road, which had been regarded until then as the western boundary of the Allon Plan area.

A similar argument was set out in an editorial in the Jerusalem Post on the 30th December 2013:

Beginning with the 1967 Allon Plan, Israeli control over the Jordan Valley has been a centerpiece of the security establishment's conception of the Jewish state's essential defense needs. In October 1995, almost two years after signing the Oslo Accords, then-prime minister Yitzhak Rabin declared that "the security border of the State of Israel will be located in the Jordan Valley, in the broadest meaning of that term."

The "broadest meaning of that term" probably was a decidedly inclusive definition of what is meant by the Jordan Valley, a definition that might even include the mountain ridges that overlook the valley to the west. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has adopted Allon's and Rabin's decades-old defense perspective. In November, he said that security arrangements with the Palestinians "will no doubt include many things, but first among them will be that the State of Israel's security border remains along the Jordan [River]."

This perspective on the Jordan Valley's centrality to Israel's security is shared by a majority of Israelis as well. Sixty-three percent of Israelis said they opposed an Israeli pullout from the valley in a survey commissioned by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. The poll, conducted by pollster Midgam and published in October, also found that 74% were opposed to having international forces in the Jordan Valley instead of IDF troops. Retired Marine Corps Gen. John Allen, the former commander of US troops in Afghanistan, was tasked by US Secretary of State John Kerry with formulating a solution in the Jordan Valley that could conceivably answer Israel's security needs without compromising Palestinian sovereignty too much.

Allen has reportedly accepted the idea that Israeli, not American forces, must remain on the ground along the Jordan Valley, at least in the short-term after the signing of a peace agreement. The challenge remains to convince the Palestinians.

On Sunday 29.12.2013, The Ministerial Committee for Legislation voted in favour of a bill that would annex the Jordan Valley and place it under full Israeli sovereignty. Although the bill is unlikely to be enacted into law, the bill's sponsor, Miri Regev, said the committee's approval was "a clear statement by the government that the towns in the Jordan Valley are a strategic and security asset of the state of Israel that must stay in our hands".

This Israeli insistence on the security implications of its control over the Jordan Valley obscures the vital role the valley plays in Israel's economy asset and, in particular, as a major source of water. The water sourcing of Syria, Israel and Jordan have reduced the amount of water flowing into the river by 98% compared to the river's flow in the 1940s. Water levels in the Dead Sea, have dropped by 82 feet in the past 50 years i.e. since the occupation began in 1967.

The Jordan Valley is seventy five miles long and nine miles wide, stretching from the Dead Sea in the south to the village of Bisan in the north, and forming the entire border between the West Bank and Jordan. It constitutes almost 30% of the West Bank or about 2,400 square kilometers. The Jordan Valley makes up the largest single segment of what is known as Area C, as defined under the 1993 Oslo accords.

When Israel occupied the Jordan Valley in 1967, there were 320,000 people living in the area. The area is now permanent home to no more than 56,000 Palestinians, most of whom live in the oasis city of Jericho. However, many Palestinians live in the Valley on a seasonal basis, moving down to it to cultivate their lands and graze herds.

In 1968 Israel began building 'settlements' in the Jordan Valley. There are now some 9,000 settlers living in more than 30 'settlements', most of them administered by the Jordan Valley Regional Council, with its Likud mayor, David Elhiani. The 'settlements' occupy 1,200 square kilometers, or 50 percent of the Jordan Valley. Israel also controls 1,065 square kilometers (44 percent) of so-called closed zones like the border line, military bases and natural reserves. About 50 square kilometers of the Jordan Valley (two percent) are under combined Palestinian civil control and Israeli security control. The remaining 85 square kilometers in the area of Jericho and al-Uja, only 3.5 percent of Jordan Valley, fall under Palestinian control.

The Jordan Valley is situated over the Eastern Water Basin. However, Palestinians in the area suffer from lack of access to water due to Israeli restrictions and copious usage by Israeli settlements. Palestinians are only permitted to use 40% of the water in this basin or approximately 58 mcm of water per year. Since its occupation in 1967, Israel has monopolized, destroyed and exhausted the area's water resources. Over the last four decades, Israel has isolated 162 agricultural wells in the Jordan Valley, prohibiting Palestinians from using them.

Israel controls all crossing points between the Jordan Valley and the rest of the West Bank, making it by-and-large not economically viable for Palestinians to directly export their produce. Many sell their produce to Israeli companies, or rely on just trading within the West Bank itself. On the other hand, fruit and vegetable exporter Agrexco, which is fifty-percent owned by the Israeli state and is responsible for the export of 60-70 percent of all settlement produce, including that from the Jordan Valley, .

The attached report from the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, originally published in December 2011, sets out the facts in clear terms.

The Jordan Valley: A Microcosm of the Israeli Occupation

Factsheet

December 2011

Introduction

The Jordan Valley, the area west of the Jordan River, extends from the Green Line in the north to the southern part of the Dead Sea covers 1,611,723 dunums, and makes up approximately 28.8 percent of the West Bank. There are approximately 70,000¹ Palestinians residing in the Jordan Valley, the majority of whom (71.5 percent), live in Jericho. Following the Oslo Accords, the Jordan Valley, except for the enclave around Jericho, was classified as Area C (89%), over which Israel maintains complete security and administrative control.

A recent UN study on parts of the occupied Palestinian territory (“OPT”) designated as “Area C” concludes that Israel’s illegal settlement policies, home demolitions, and other measures are examples of “*clear patterns of displacement*”² and that Palestinian residents have to leave their homes and communities “*to meet their basic needs.*”³

The Jordan Valley is strategically important for the Palestinian people, given its political, cultural, economic and geographic value. The Jordan Valley is important not only for tourism, but also for its fertile land, natural resources and a warm climate appropriate for a wide range of agriculture-related industries.

Since the occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip in 1967, Israel has sought to annex the Jordan Valley through a series of policies and actions. In fact, over the past 44 years of occupation, Israeli policies, including home demolition and confiscation of land, have reduced the Palestinian population in the Jordan Valley and shrunk the area accessible to Palestinians to a mere 6% of the Valley. The area’s abundant water and other resources are denied to Palestinians while Israeli settlers reap tens of millions of dollars annually from industries that illegally use Jordan Valley resources. Israel has also designated large areas of the Valley as firing range and military zones and nature reserves, banning Palestinians from much of the area. In fact, the majority of Israeli-declared closed military areas located in the Jordan Valley.

¹ http://www.pch.gov.ps/Portals/_pch/populati/jerich.htm

² http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_area_c_report_august_2011_english.pdf

³ http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_area_c_report_august_2011_english.pdf