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Middle East:
is peace possible ?

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Middle East: between warm peace and cold war

**Peace making: a complex formula
which must include the weight of history
and the conflicting agenda of the region's Rulers**

Yves Gazzo

The signature of the Peace Treaty between Jordan and Israel on 26 October 1994 is perhaps one of the most major achievements of the Middle East Peace Process initiated at the Madrid Conference in 1991. It follows the agreement reached between representatives of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples in Oslo in 1993 and the Camp David Accord between Israel and Egypt some 18 years ago. It constitutes a further step in efforts developed over time by the main partners of the region, as well as those outside, to reach a long-lasting regional peace involving the actual core parties at first (Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians), and Syria and Lebanon later; this should thus provide room for a smooth political, social and economic development, and deter the negative impact of any form of extremism on Arab civil societies; it should also later provide an adequate forum for addressing issues linked to the nuclear security risk in the region to include countries such as Iran, Iraq and Libya, which border the Middle East. This could constitute an ideal path.

This logical framework and approach does not, however, include elements which encompass the weight of past and present history, the competition among rulers for leadership in the Arab world and their capacity to undermine positive steps taken by competing neighbours, ie. Egypt's attempt to maintain its role as 'broker' of the peace process within the region, etc., the relative weight of the various sponsors, and their willingness to cooperate.

These elements have substantially influenced the peace process, which evolves in a very sensitive and volatile environment, and could shape the destiny of the Middle East as prospects for a 'warm peace' are dwindling, those for a second best achievement, namely a cold war, at least seem to be diminishing, and room for a 'cold peace' is being let...unless a growing resentment from the populations, or at least from the more radical segments, jeopardises the presumably ongoing process in the Middle East. This is not unknown to one of the most active peace makers - the United States - as their involvement in the region is not recent, be it at a religious level through an unabated intervention in the Holy Land, or as a political player in the region at large.

These peace efforts take place while new countries, but old civilisations, of the Middle East are trying to establish their founded sovereignty; at a time when they see their national sovereignty diminishing as international and supranational organisations show a growing concern for issues such as human rights, ecological responsibility, democratisation, and so forth. International agreements have the tendency to limit the new-found sovereignty of these countries precisely on those issues which are most troubling to them. This is also a time when the old concept of the «one Arab nation» is revisited, though no longer among the nationalistic movements, but through a growing theocratic movement, relying mainly on Islamic fundamentalist parties. The European policy, which favours a regional approach for the future of this region, is somewhat trying to shape an intermediate

path between the two extremes. The Barcelona Conference of November 1995 is the starting point of a process of a common trans-Mediterranean future to which the southern non-European countries have expressed their commitment.

But the extent in which the implementation of this prevailing ideology - the rationalistic approach - will be able to take into account local and regional specifications, and design a tailor-made rather than a ready-to-wear agreement (including the peace process), will not only make the process a reality, but will also contribute to reinforcing the internationalisation of the very goals expressed by this ideology.

The Peace Process: The difficult combination between rationalistic and romantic approaches. The impact of «biased» actions and of «biased» reading of the other in the making.

Rationalistic versus Romantic: the weakness of the first fuels the existence of the second.

The western world has for some time been developing a rationalistic approach included in the Marxist philosophy. After the second World War, European leaders, eager to eradicate the ingredients, nationalism included, which led to war, destruction and mutual hatred, embarked on a new cooperation based on international and regional solidarity and a strong emphasis on human rights and the democratisation process. Since the end of the cold war, which could be interpreted as a victory for the democratic camp against the totalitarian regime, one can witness the surge of 'romantic' trends dominated by ethnic, religious or national values, which in most cases rely on confrontational identity. These trends also exist in Europe, where competition between East and West has stimulated our belief in a world with unlimited resources (Domenach, Castoriadis).

For some time, however, one can note a growing influence in several segments of the political and civilian populations in Europe (green, ultra conservative, etc.), a spreading belief in the notion of limited resources, of a limited world, one developed by Aristotle in his time.

In the Arab world, this new romantic challenge is even more perceptive, as the different societies which compose it have been facing several disappointments and as the nationalist wing, which has constituted for some time the common denominator of opposition to the dominant Western world without, however, rejecting the modernity carried by the west, is now more and more overwhelmed by radical Islamists who reject assimilation to the Western culture. Should these factions accept to emulate the Western world in one way or another, they reject modernisation of their society through systematic imitation, which would lead to subordination. For example, many sympathisers of the Fundamentalist movement are actually seeking degrees from the West in technical fields, which they later use to spread their ideology, but they refuse to participate in Western-style scientific research.

These elements of discontent are compounded by several other elements:

Severe economic and social problems, such as the still high rate of population growth in the Arab world while agricultural production increases are not able to follow a similar trend and, as a result, the services and industrial sectors cannot absorb the annual increase of labour supply on the employment market.

Questionable choices made by most of the leaders (cf «*industries industrialisantes*», etc.) of authoritative regimes which prevail in the Arab world have not facilitated the best use of scarce resources. Furthermore, the state of war, as well as the «cold war» prevalent until the late 80's have

	% of Military Spending-GDP		No. of Soldiers/1000 inhab	Military Spending / % Total Budget
	1960	1987	1987	1987
All Developing Countries	3,9%	5,2%	4,7	18,4%
Middle East	5,6%	16,9%	16,4	33,4%

Source: R.L. Sirard, *World Military and Social Expenditures*, World Priorities, Washington, D.C. 1989.

fueled overspending in the non-productive military sector, thus reducing the low resources available for productive investment.

The Threat of the Other: the building of mutual misunderstanding

The way that the one perceives the other is not a new issue, nor has it improved, as Gerard Khoury² states in «Le temps du regard inegal n'est pas, hélas pret de s'achever, ni non plus celui du regard mutile».

In the West itself, the presence of a substantial minority of Moslem immigrants, combined with an ailing basis of population increase, has resulted in the threat of the other and is leading to xenophobia and racism when seen in the light of the internal problems of Western societies, such as the high rate of unemployment. Reports in the Arab media of racist behaviour here and there in Europe is exploited by some politically active segments of the Arab political spectrum. The bombing in Oklahoma City, which was first attributed to Islamic radicals by some Western journalists, provoked a deeper sense of outrage in the Arab press. The 'task' of undermining Western values is facilitated by the perception that, while the West is emphasising or supporting democratisation and human rights, it has no problem in supporting

authoritarian and oppressive regimes when its economic, military and even political interests are at stake. In recent history, reference is often made to French and US support to Sudan as a 'barter' to get Carlos out of Sudan.

The Gulf crisis is a good example of the type of misunderstanding between the West and the Arab world, a misunderstanding amplified by the mass media coverage of the crisis as the European/American footage of the conflict, supposedly aimed at glorifying the 'goodies' (west) against the 'baddies' (Iraq), contributed to opposite reading, not only among the Islamists, but in the Southern shores in general.

During the Gulf war Castoriadis had the occasion to show in this respect that the images aired by the Western media were not perceived in Arab countries the way they were intended to, but rather deciphered into a display of lies and, in general, a decadent way of life as food and sex related to movies and commercials were depicted as the main cultural messages that Western television can produce and display.

Further, Y. Schemeil³ contributes to highlighting the difference of approach which prevails between the Arab and the Western worlds. Quoting General de Gaulle, who saw the «Ottoman

or the Western diplomat going to the complicated Orient with simplistic ideas», he stresses the importance of the «politique des petits pas», which produces much better results than the «politique des grands coups» (Suez, the October war, invasion of Iraq, etc.), because the classical diplomatic virtues (prudence, patience, distrust) constitute the pillar of any diplomacy in this part of the world, where clientele, family relationships and networks have the utmost importance, and lead to government practices which would be unacceptable by Western standards (Leca, Schemeil 1983). These solidarity networks allow the establishment, or the maintaining, of shared dominion of the power circles, the cultural spheres, the tribal territories and, above all, the urban towns, where strategies aiming at the refusal of a centralised power, designing of cultural identities and manipulation of various ideologies take shape (such as Ottomanism, anti-colonialism, nationalism, or the Arab socialism: Khoury 1984). It is in this context, and knowing that the regional system cannot tolerate a long-lasting hegemony, that the new peace process was engineered with substantial external sponsors, in particular the USA.

The Role of the Peace Makers: The growing importance of a rational approach «made in the USA» compared with the declining one from the former European partners.

There have been several competing 'protectors' of the Middle East including the Ottomans, the British and the French. The more recent newcomers, the USA and Russia (as the Former Soviet Union) did take advantage of the post First World War and, more particularly, of the post Second World War to extend their influence in the region to the detriment of the former European colonial powers; while Europe, still in a building process, is trying to rebuild a coherent and long-lasting influence in the region. This partly explains the ubiquity of the two sponsors of the

peace agreement signed between Israel and Jordan and the relatively modest presence of Europe on the occasion of the signature of the Treaty in October 1994. (One will note that on the occasion of the Egyptian/Israeli agreement signed at Camp David, only the US were actively involved.)

This US influence, however, is rather older than it seems. The USA have never diverted from what constitutes intangible elements determining their policy in the region, namely petroleum interests and Palestine, while in a particularly sensitive sector, water, which has fueled several serious wars in the region, the US has been involved for some time. One will remember that the USA have been connected with the region one way or another since the early days of their independence, when in 1801 they engaged in a four-year war against Tripoli in order to protect US ships and, in a more specific way, through Protestant missionaries who gained substantial influence and sympathy from local populations as they established dispensaries and schools during the 19th century, and created the influential Syrian Protestant College of Beirut (a number of Arab elite was formed in this college, and it served as a reservoir of employees for the US oil companies which launched their businesses in the 20th century).

This Protestant influence was motivated by the strong belief that the American people were the «new elected people» and that such a presence in the Holy Land was indispensable. Ultimately the Jews should be regrouped in Palestine before being converted (as should other non-Protestant Christians) to Protestantism, a final step before the end of this world⁴.

The seal of the USA portrays the crossing of the Red Sea and includes the motto: «rebellion against the tyrants and obeisance to God» in «Faith and Fulfillment, Christians and the return to the Promised Land»⁵.

While reporting on US involvement in the petroleum sector would be too long, it may be worth recalling that the USA did benefit from a substantial capital of sympathy (built on throughout the 19th century by the Protestant missionaries), as they had a stand in favour of independence of Arab countries, which was also a way to promote their open-door policy against the protected zones established mainly by France and the UK in the Middle East...even if later on they were also participants in the restricted economic area policy, when Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), established in 1929 and controlled by the US consortium Near East Development Company, got a quasi-monopoly on oil concessions inside Iraq. during the Second World War, US troops were sent only to the Arab Gulf while their main base was established at Dhahran in Saudi Arabia⁶

Concerning Palestine, the Near East Relief foundation provided substantial subsidies in favour of the Palestinian refugees before the UN takeover, while the American Jews, more open to free enterprise than the European Jews, invested heavily in the National Jewish Foundation and settled in Palestine with dual nationality.

In a specific and determined sector, water, American influence is also noteworthy, as the quest for water continues to constitute a major element of conflict in the region, and as Israel has always made sure, during each of its wars with its Arab neighbours, that it would gain additional control over water resources. One will remember the Main-Klapp plan published by the United Nations in 1953 (Main after the name of Chester Main Inc. and Cr. Klapp after the director of the Tennessee Valley Authority), which aimed at providing water to the region, including 400 million cubic metres to the State of Israel, through the construction of a

series of hydraulic networks (dams, pipes, etc.). This plan was rejected by both Israel and the Arab states and was then followed by the Johnston Plan after the name of Eric Johnston, special envoy of President Eisenhower, and by the preparation of a number of documents⁷. Even the 1967 war, seen as a «war for water», in the meantime allowed Israel to increase its pumping from the Jordan River up to 330 mcm per year, and to obtain an additional 200 mcm from the Golan Heights.

This dual impact of religious activism, Protestants first, followed later by a Jewish one, and economic activities in favour of 'open door' and later on in defending obtained economic interest, is essential for understanding the background of the influence and role of the US in the region, as they appear to be the main architect of the logical framework approach described above.

This, as it seems that no power other than the Americans - the Russians seem to have at present less potential for bringing a constructive contribution to economic and social development in the region; while the Europeans have the potential which remains, however, to be harmonised before it can produce its expected impact - has at present the capacity to 'run the show', on condition that all the regional parties concerned accept, and they have various and often conflicting agenda to be orchestrated by Washington.

Will the peace-makers have the arguments both politically and economically (but not exclusively) to counterbalance the actions of the peace-breakers, which could attract the majority of a Middle East population aiming at peace but not at any condition? This will continue to be the challenge of this undertaking.



© drawing by Nagui, weekly Al-Ahram, 23-29 April, 1997

Even though Israel is America's best allied in the Middle East, the list of American vetos for a quick resolution is endless and may put Israel in great difficulty.....

The Peace Process in Practice: A long way paved with unexpected effects

The major sponsors have been active for several decades in order to achieve what would appear to be a «fair and balanced» process for all parties concerned in the region, although their immediate interest may have been somewhere else.

The USA, for example, had for some time come across as being more concerned by the potential threat of the Soviet Union, particularly over the Gulf oil countries. It is also perceived as biased in favour of Israel, as witnessed by the long list of vetoes at the UN Security Council every time the rights of the Palestinians vis-à-vis the security of Israel are at stake. On the other hand, the Europeans have tried for some time to make sure that the rights of the Palestinian people are protected, in an attempt to lay the foundations for a future settlement of the Middle East on a regional basis.

In retrospect, the outcome of these numerous diplomatic moves in favour of the populations of the region (Israel excepted) has been rather limited, with only two peace treaties signed so far; with Egypt in 1979 and with Jordan 15 years later. Moreover, rivalry among leaders in the Arab world, perhaps more than elsewhere, does not permit the drawing of any definite conclusions and, as the gap widens between this political elite and the growing and impatient masses, it renders the problems more challenging.

US Policy: a relatively unconditional support to Israel

There is a long story of the US veto to any UN resolution attempting to put Israel, its «best ally» in the Middle East, in a difficult position,

while at the same time the various US administrations have tried to:

- engineer a peace process,
- prevent any soviet threat in the region detrimental to their interest,
- prevent any European initiatives which could overshadow its own efforts.

Concerning the use of its veto power at the UN Security Council, the list is long and has not contributed to lifting the American lack of credibility in the Arab world.

For example, in January 1976, the US vetoed resolutions aimed at recognising the Palestinians' right to establish a state of their own and calling on Israel to withdraw from the territories occupied since June 1967. In August 1983, again the US vetoed a UN Security Council Resolution which had declared the West Bank settlements illegal and condemned the violence against Palestinian civilians. On Lebanon and in January 1987, the US invoked their veto against a resolution deploring Israeli behaviour in Southern Lebanon. The year 1991, however, would witness a slight modification in the US' attitude: for the first time since the 1956 Suez crisis, the US administration made its support for a US \$10 billion loan guarantee to Israel conditional.

Although again in 1993 the US warned that it would veto a resolution (No. 794) aiming at imposing sanctions on Israel for deporting about 400 alleged Islamic activists to the Lebanese border. In addition, the US used other means to either put pressure on other Arab parties in the region or to maintain Israel's military superiority in the region.

In 1986, and following Jordanian/Palestinian talks on the terms of PLO participation in peace negotiations, the US administration notified King Hussein that it was postponing indefinitely its

request to Congress to sell advanced weapons to Jordan, which it had managed to secure in September 1985 (US \$ 1.9 billion) despite the Zionist lobby.

Even the bombing of the PLO headquarters in Tunis by Israeli warplanes in October 1985, although condemned by the US and by European leaders, was seen as a legitimate response to terrorism. Later, President Bush' stated goal of working towards disarmament in the region was contradicted by continuous arms supplies to Israel and the Gulf States, and by the American promise to guarantee Israel's military superiority in the region. Before that, the sale of 50 Phantoms to Israel by President Johnson, confirmed by his successor, President Nixon, one month later, marked an important stage in the escalation of the arms race in the Middle East. Additionally, the revelation in 1986 of secret arms deals between the US and Iran (while arms had been refused to Jordan), as well as the closing of the PLO observation mission at the UN in New York, was a serious blow to American credibility in the Arab world. Much later, a US threat to veto any decision of the UN Security Council concerning Jerusalem and going against Israel (the proposed expropriation of 53 ha of land, an issue which infuriated the Arabs) reinforced the credibility damage.

This biased attitude in favour of Israel did not prevent the USA from working on the engineering of plans for the region, starting with the 1969 Rogers plan, followed later by disengagement agreements signed in 1974 between Egypt and Israel, and between Syria and Israel under the shuttle diplomacy of Dr. Kissinger following the October 1973 war.

In 1988, the Schultz plan, partly under pressure from a US Jewish community shocked by the potential disastrous effect of the Intifada on Israel's image, did propose among other things an interim autonomy for the Occupied Territories with

an agenda attached. This plan, which did not see the light because of its lack of credibility in the Arab world, was initiated at the time of the Genscher Initiative (which it overshadowed) while the Soviet threat was fading away.

One of the major concerns of US policy in the region had been the potential threat of the Soviet Union over the Gulf oil countries and through its then allies Egypt, in the time of Nasser, and later Syria...until President Assad's move to cover the elimination of the last PLO stronghold around the Lebanese port of Sidon, and to sign with Lebanon a treaty of fraternity, cooperation and friendship in May 1991: this was interpreted as Syria, deprived of its Soviet sponsor, was looking for other support: The USA would tolerate Syrian protection over Lebanon against its support for the American administration's peace efforts.

Although originally in favour of a UN sponsored conference which would be based on the assumption of implementation of Resolutions 242 - UN Security Council Resolution 242 passed on 22 November 1962 constitutes the basis of the start of peace initiatives in the region and it remains an important element in attempts to resolve the Palestinian question, since it underscores the illegitimacy of the acquisition of territory by war - and 338 of the Security Council. Syria gradually moves to the US proposal of a Soviet/US chairing of a conference, but with the presence of EC observers. This eventually led to the October 1991 Madrid Conference, at which the European presence was called for by Arab states and by the Palestinians.

The various European initiatives seem in retrospect more balanced, even if they are lacking in glamour. Respective statements indicate over time the continuous support of Europe for a fair peace, in particular as far as the Palestinians are concerned. In November 1967, the then nine EC member states endorsed a statement calling for an Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967; they restated in London on 24 June 1997 their

view, that a peace settlement should be based on Resolutions 242 and 338. On 13 June 1980 in Venice, the EC states also issued their Middle East Statement in which, for the first time, a call for «Palestinian people must be allowed to exercise fully their right to self-determination» was made, while the PLO was called on to be associated with the negotiations...this despite the opposition of the USA, Israel and Egypt. The election of a Republican team to the White House in 1979 did not ease the bias, as Dr. Kissinger had dismissed the (European) Venice Initiative, and as Mr. Reagan had declared that the Israeli settlements were «not illegal». This rendered the differences between the Americans and the Europeans more blatant, as the former saw the European initiative as conflicting with their policy in the Middle East, particularly when their main preoccupation was not the Palestinians, but rather the potential Soviet Union threat over the Gulf oil countries.

Under the German Presidency in 1988, Europe took the initiative to push this time for an international peace conference under UN auspices, but the initiative was undermined by the Schultz plan. Later, when Palestinian representatives at the November 1988 session in Algiers unilaterally declared the independence of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital, the Europeans welcomed this decision (independence recognised by 60 states, including two permanent UN Security Council members China and the USSR). This position was confirmed at the end of the Gulf war when, in mid-September 1991, President Delors underlined to the attention of Israel that, once the Gulf crisis was over, the «legitimate rights of the Palestinians» should be addressed, and when it was later decided not to over-penalise the PLO leader Mr. Arafat for his support of Iraq. In more recent history, successive declarations by the European Union continue to reaffirm support for the peace process, recalling the essential principles enshrined in UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and underlining the key principles of self-determination for the

Palestinians and land for peace as essential for the achievement of a just, comprehensive and durable peace in the Middle East (Florence, June 1996). In the Dublin Summit of December 1996, the EU expressed grave concern over the continuing deterioration in the peace process, calling on all parties to discourage violence and reduce tension in order for negotiations to resume on all tracks. In Dublin, the EU Heads of State also declared that «the settlements issue is eroding confidence in the peace process. Settlements contravene international law and are a major obstacle to peace». In June 1997, the EU summit of Amsterdam called on all governments of the region to renew

- the spirit of mutual confidence and again stressed
- the land for peace formula, «respect for the legitimate aspiration of the Palestinian people to decide their own future»,
- and the non-acceptability of the «annexation of territory by force».

The Amsterdam Summit also urged the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to continue negotiations to further the implementation of the interim and Hebron Agreements and revive the Permanent Status talks, and abstain from «unilateral actions prejudging the Permanent Status issues».

Concerning Palestine, the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) is a priority identified by the Europeans for the newly established Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Results had been rather limited: funds for establishing the Palestinian Police Force had been provided, but other issues such as the EU political role in the MEPP remained until the appointment in October 1996 of a European Union Special Envoy (EUSE) to the Middle East Peace Process. In fact, substantial progress can be noted over the last couple of years, including in the Barcelona

Conference of November 1995 and with the appointment of the EUSE. Europe as such is a reference for the Middle East thanks to its own integration process and to its political commitment, as well as its economic strength, which has made it possible for it to become a major contributor to the Peace Process.

Because past experience indicates that expanding trade relations between neighbours or enhancing the political dialogue (Euro-Arab Dialogue of 1973) is not enough, Europe has decided to set up a comprehensive set of instruments encompassing political and security issues, economic support, and exchange between the civil societies of the two sides of the Mediterranean Sea. The main avenue of future cooperation accepted by all partners at Barcelona has since been implemented, and the economic pillar in particular will take support from the various Association Agreements to be signed bilaterally by the European Union and each southern state with the objective of establishing a Free Trade Area by the year 2010. Furthermore, substantial assistance, ECU 4.7 billion from the MEDA line, will contribute in particular to the upgrading of the economies of the southern partners.

The nomination of the EUSE is also a major step towards maintaining a traditionally weak side of Europe when it comes to expressing coherence and a unified external policy. The EUSE has been appointed in time for the Europeans to compete with the Americans, at least as long as military security remains the number one issue in the region. Nevertheless, in the long run, the European approach, based on confidence building measures, may become predominant if and when the priority given to military strength loses its weight to the addition of peaceful inter-governmental structure. This will also entail the European trans-Mediterranean initiative which will inevitably shake the political and economic leading groups in the south and will be

implemented without provoking major destabilisation of these societies nor their blocking by the ruling elite.

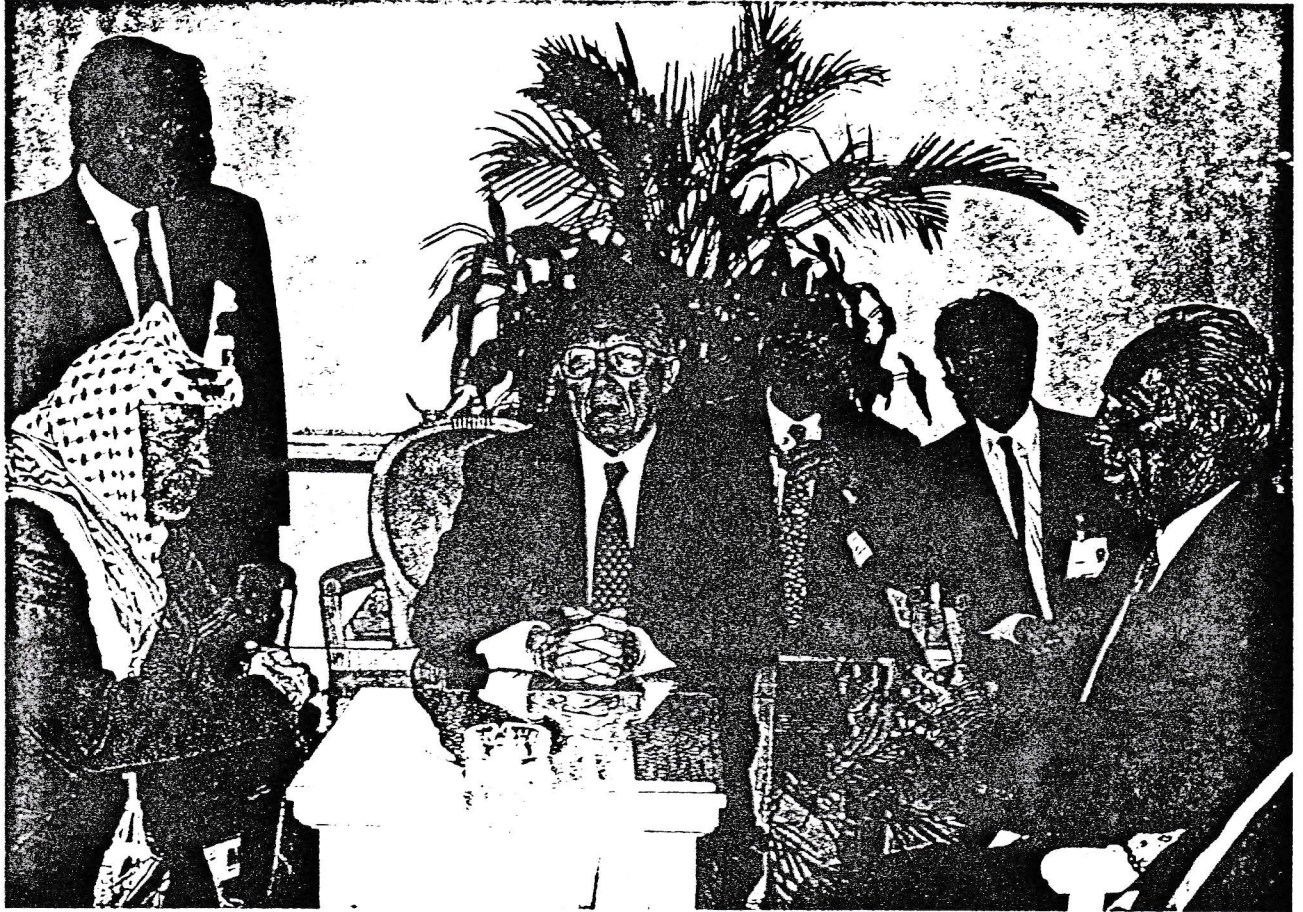
Above all, the Europeans are favouring a regional approach to the Middle East problem, one which innovates as compared with the «State by State» approach of the US, and at the same time does not correspond to the present revisited idea of an (Islamic) «Arab Nation», a concept which was mainly re-engineered by laic Arab thinkers in this century and attracted most of the parties fighting to regain their independence from their European protectors.

The Human Chemistry as opposed to «treaty» symbolism - the Arabs and the Peace Treaty

The weight put by President Carter in the balance was instrumental in seeing Egypt and Israel through the painful discussions of Camp David, which started in September 1978 and produced, among other things, a framework for peace in the Middle East, together with a detailed agenda for the future of the West Bank and Gaza to include a transitional period of 5 years maximum with autonomy at stake for the inhabitants; negotiations to determine the final status of the West Bank and Gaza would start 3 years later, at which time a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan would be concluded.

A peace agreement was finally signed in Washington on 26 March 1979, returning Sinai to Egypt, but confirming its isolation from the Arab world. This did not prevent Mr Begin from stating not long after, that no border would ever again be drawn through the land of Israel and that we «shall never withdraw from the Golan Heights».

A similar «chemistry» did facilitate the Madrid Conference which was followed by the Oslo Accord in 1993 and confirmed by



Marrakech conference 12-15 April, 1994. Yasser Arafat, Jacques Delors, Shimon Pérès.

The different stands taken by European countries demonstrate a great desire for peace in the region and more so as far as Palestinians are concerned.

© photo Ch. Desjeunes

the Israeli/PLO Declaration of Principles in Washington on 14 September 1993, and the Israel/Jordan Peace Treaty of 26 October 1994.

The victory of the Labour Party in Israel in 1992, as well as the presence of the late Prime Minister Rabin (a former Israeli Ambassador to the US during the second half of the 60's), the election of President Clinton in 1992 and the solid reputation of King Hussein and his long-standing commitment to a fair peace, have all been instrumental in the 'realisation' of these accords. It is true that economic and land compensation were put in the balance in the case of Egypt (return of the Sinai) and of Jordan (return of some land taken by the Israelis, but more importantly Mr Clinton's promise to write-off about US \$ 800 million owed to the USA, provide advanced military equipment, and to try to thaw the relations between Jordan and the more important Gulf States). This is less obvious in the case of Palestine; prominent Palestinian writer, Edward Said, scorned the Israel/Palestine agreement for transforming the PLO from a «radical liberation movement to a municipal council»⁸

Those Arab leaders who signed the respective accords are, on the other hand, becoming isolated in the Arab world. This was the case for President Sadat. It is the case now for King Hussein and Chairman Arafat. It is true that Mr Arafat is a kind of «survivor» in politics, as he is used to going through difficult times. For the record one will remember that the only State to support his PLO movement was Algeria in 1964, followed by Syria's acceptance in 1966 to host two training camps for PLO fighters. This was followed in Amman by 'Black September' in 1970, and the transfer of PLO activities to Lebanon, followed by the strained relationship between the PLO and Iraq in 1973 (Iraq did not intervene in Jordan in 1970 to support the PLO). The strained relationship with

Egypt started in 1975, with Libya in 1973, followed by a warmer relationship with Syria during the Lebanon war of 1975 which as a consequence was followed by a close relationship with Egypt, the one with Iraq being reversed to the one with Syria. With Iraq, the «war of the shadows» started in 1978 and provoked the physical depletion of several PLO leaders followed by a rupture with Libya in 1979. In 1983, Mr Arafat was expelled from Syria as a result of the support of President Assad for the more radical Fateh rebels in their clash with moderate Palestinians. In 1990, Mr Arafat and President Saddam Hussein issued a joint statement in Baghdad articulating their dual objectives of fighting Israeli occupation and US intervention in the Gulf.

The King of Jordan has faced a number of challenges, though of a different nature, as he is currently fighting to break the relative isolation of his country with powerful Arab countries (Gulf States, Syria) and also with Egypt, which would like to remain «broker» of the peace process in the region and is trying to prevent King Hussein from making the Israeli-Jordan relationship the centre of the peace process with American blessing. This explains the Egyptian irritation with issues such as the NPT, or in the forming of association on the occasion of the December 1994 Alexandria summit between Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, at one point critical of the peace process.

The signature of several PNA/Jordan agreements in 1995, knowing that King Hussein is said to have had a better relationship with Mr Rabin than with Mr Arafat, is an indication of the feeling of the various responsible leaders in the region, that, whatever their divergence may be, time is running out as the population shows growing impatience.

The Peace Process at risk: growing gap between the political circles and the expectations of the masses

The leaders of the countries participating in the peace treaty, Jordan in particular, have realised that this gap renders the entire exercise most challenging in the economic and social fields at large, as some issues such as Jerusalem and the settlements will last, and as:

the expected peace dividends will not come as anticipated from the western countries;

economic relief will no longer come from renewed employment opportunities in the Gulf countries similar to those prevailing until the Gulf war;

the Peace Treaty will not provide an immediate boost to the economy, so in fact Israel may remain the main beneficiary of the new peace era, and a widening gap will be witnessed between Arab and Israeli societies.

In economic terms the main challenges ahead in the region are the high unemployment rates, the strong imbalance between GDP and respective population growth and the mediocre level of investment.

The two fields are clearly inter-related; a proper political climate will contribute to encouraging investors to flock to the region, while establishing sound investment legislation is not sufficient to attract foreign and local investors if at the political level the future remains uncertain and unstable.

Between the various countries of the region, conflicting strategies of some leaders and the expectation of the masses are exacerbated by

prevailing living conditions (unemployment, population growth and disparities between Israel which enjoys a GDP/head ten times the one of Jordan, for example), thus growing frustration and resentment may be exploited by radical groups opposed to the peace treaty. Jordan enjoys a GNP per capita of US \$ 1,120 (1991) as compared to US \$ 1,933 in the West Bank, US \$ 1,122 in the Gaza Strip, US \$ 640 in Egypt and US \$ 9,333 in Israel. A recent study from A. Arnon and J. Weinblatt, «The Full Potential between Israel, the Palestinians and Jordan», Bank of Israel, July 1994, indicates that although there is a potential for Jordanian exports (fruits, vegetables and textile products) the impact of the peace treaty on trade between the two countries will not be extraordinary, at least not for Jordan (between 3% and 14% of Jordan's existing traditional exports).

«N'est-ce pas la paix de Versailles que les Arabes sont invités à signer? Il y est prévu que l'armée syrienne devra être réduite à cent mille soldats! La Cisjordanie et Gaza sont d'ores et déjà encerclées; les aides au développement tant attendues par l'administration palestinienne sont interdites d'entrée; les colonies israéliennes se développent en Cisjordanie et autour de Jérusalem.

Il s'agit en fait de préparatifs de guerre et non de paix.—

La région fourmille de haines après un demi-siècle de guerre et de sang. Elle vit sur un baril de poudre qui explosera à la moindre étincelle.—

Ajoutons que les intégristes guettent au bout du chemin. Ils ont hâte de gérer eux-mêmes l'opposition à la paix, l'Iran ne suffisant plus à lui seul!», warns us Abdul Hamid El-Ahdad.



Grandfather of King Hussein. H.R.H. King Abdallah was born in 1880, became emir of the Left Bank (Transjordan) in 1921, then King of Jordan from 1946 to 1951. He was assassinated in Jerusalem in July 1955 by a Palestinian refugee.

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HM. King Hussein of Jordan has himself successfully overcome a number of challenges, of a varying nature certainly, and he is now having a go at trying to become the cornerstone of a peace process that depends on the Israel-Jordan treaty with America's blessing

Elysée Palace, Paris, February 1988. Born in 1935, Hussein Bin Talal became Jordan's King in 1952.

© photo Ch. Desjeunes

In Palestine, for example, and following the start of the «Intifada» in December 1987 and the emergence in early 1988 of an underground leadership (UNLU for United National Leadership of the Uprising), the PLO leadership had been dominant and was seen as the «sole representative of the Palestinian people» (Rabat Conference of 1974). It has since faced more difficulty in preventing more radical forces such as HAMAS, which has benefited from the support of various Governments in the region in a collective attempt to destabilise the situation of Mr Arafat.

Examples of this nature are numerous and they contribute to delaying any constructive attempt for a fair peace process in the region. They are also evolving in a world which is becoming more and more remote from the man in the street's needs and expectations. In other words one would expect to shift from «the peace of the treaties» to the «peace of the people» (King Hussein).

The man in the street is primarily concerned by his daily problems, but he nevertheless keeps an eye on the management of long term issues which still remain, such as the Holy Sites and the settlements; and the way that these will or will not be handled will play a determined role in regional peace process.

On the custody of the Holy Sites, there has been some manoeuvre between several Arab countries; Jordan, for example, had been facing until the 1992 Ifran Islamic Conference summit, serious setbacks in its position as its intention to retain custody is not accepted as such by most of the Arab countries, the Palestinians included. The position of Jordan on this issue is that it has expressed its willingness to pass on the custody to the Palestinians once the latter get sovereignty of

the site, which is something which remains very uncertain given the Israeli declaration to maintain Jerusalem as its capital and as more «public» voices in America express their support for the role, including US Senator Dole's declaration in May 1995.

On the Palestinian side there was concern following a Jordanian decision in 1994 to relinquish links with the Islamic Awqaf and Sharia Courts in the West Bank, excluding Jerusalem. The Palestinians feared that this disengagement from the Jordanians was a way to let the Israelis control these institutions after the handover in areas where the Palestine National Authority had not yet extended its rule.

On settlements, which are obviously linked to the issue of refugees, it seems that this issue will not be resolved soon.

In addition, following the USSR's relaxation of restrictions on Jewish emigration in 1989, 1990 was a year of increased immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel. This sudden flow reinforced the views of those who argued in Israel for an increased colonisation of the West Bank and Gaza. As a consequence, 1991 was the most vigorous year of settlement-building in about 25 years of occupation.

Even now the Israeli official position on the settlements does not eliminate its ambiguity, as settlements financed with public money are frozen while those financed through private sources are continuing because the Government has no say in this enterprise. On the Golan issue, the Syrians are unlikely to go for a peace treaty unless, among other elements, a total phasing out of Israeli occupation there is secured; however, the relevation of Mr Shimon Peres (April 11, 1995) in

which he ruled out return to pre-1967 war border lines on the Golan, indicate that the conditions expressed by the late Mr. Rabin in 1992 are still rigid, as they are asking Syria for a «full, normal peace with Israel before the issue of withdrawal from the Golan Heights would be discussed»¹⁰; the position expressed by the late Israeli Premier in 1992 was described by the Syrian chief negotiator at the sixth round of bilateral talks in Washington as being along «exactly the same attitude and policy as Shamir».¹¹

In fact King Hussein rightly voiced his fear that the settlement policy in the West Bank would prestage the «transfer of the indigenous population to the East Bank, thus transforming the Hashemite Kingdom into a Palestinian State», while in Israel a kind of «Bantoustan» state for the remaining Palestinians would be tolerated.

Furthermore, there are several other «perverse» effects of the existing peace process which could fuel strong resentment namely:

The possibility that Israel could concentrate on the economic opportunities offered by the peace process, thus increasing economic and social disparities with its Arab neighbours, and even if the peace process will allow Israel to pull itself out of the «economic ghetto» in which it has been constrained for decades with its neighbouring Arab states, there is a risk to put itself, as a civil and political society, in another ghetto-like situation, as the settlements policy is provoking devastating effects including in Jerusalem, and until Israel becomes ever a secular state.

This will undoubtedly fuel substantial radical fundamentalist opposition when leaders of the countries who have signed peace treaties are

perceived by some segments of their populations as traitors to the Arab world; the «fundamentalist» movements which have benefited for some time from the reinforcement of disillusioned leaders from former «nationalist» movements, are getting unexpected support for their cause with the signature of the peace treaties, and this despite the fact that the majority of the people of this region want peace. Wanting peace, however, does not mean agreeing with the speed at which normal relations are being pushed when people can watch daily on their TV sets that «Israel continues to occupy, imprison, torture and kill other Arabs» (R. Khouri of the Jordan Times quoted in the Economist, March 4, 1995, p.50: «it can't be a lukewarm peace»).

In fact these issues and the way they will be sorted out will not only determine the «degree of warmth» of the peace process (a cold peace like between Israel and Egypt or not), but will also have a long term and far reaching effects on the fate of the complex societies, their way of living and the political and civilian framework in which they will evolve.

Furthermore the present peace process and the difficulties it is going through is representative of several tensions which prevail at world level.

The major set of issues concerns the Western political and economic vision, which rests on three fundamental pillars, namely capitalism and free market, human rights and secular liberal democracy and the nation-state framework of international relations (which is dominating world ideology); will this remain unchallenged or not; in other words, is the Western model obligatory and inevitable, like some years ago the Rostow¹² model seemed to be the only way for developing countries to take off economically.

The way capitalism works creates more and more identity crises in fragile states, as it creates winners but also many losers. «There is thus a strong risk to see radical elements to take advantage from deteriorating social conditions to further their own agenda»¹³ as class, regional and ethnic tensions rise in the face of competition for shrinking resources and dwindling standard of living.

Under these conditions is an intermediate path, namely a regional one, possible? It would have the advantage of combining the positive input of a larger, more prosperous regional economic force, while preserving the rich and numerous specific cultural and social elements of the Arab societies. But, only supposing Israel integrates itself in the Middle East, and this remains the major question mark.

The opinions expressed in this article are entirely those of the author.

Footnotes

1 Dr. Robert Aliboni: «Factors affecting Mediterranean Security» - workshop on «Arms Control, Confidence Building and Security Cooperation in the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East», Malta 24/26 1992.

2 in *Le démembrement de l'Empire Ottoman : question d'Orient ou d'Occident*; see also Alain le Pichon *Le regard inégal*, J.C. Lattès 1990 and Daryush Shayegan *Le regard mutilé*, Albin Michel 1989.

3 *Stratégies économiques et politiques industrielles dans le Monde arabe* - Y. Schemeil et

J. M. Chatelus, in *Maghreb-Mashrek* no. 120 April, May, June 1988. *La Documentation Française*; and J. Leca and Y. Schemeil «Clientélisme et patrimonialisme dans le monde arabe» in *International Political Science Review* 4, 1983.

4 Henry Laurens - «Les Etats-Unis et l'Orient arabe: préhistoire d'une présence», in «Les nouvelles questions d'Orient» - cahiers de l'Orient, 1991.

5 Valentine Mitchell, London, 1985 pp. 25-62.

6 A study (John Reilly: «the Public Mood at Mid-debate» in *Foreign Policy* No. 98, Spring 1995, Page 80, Washington, D.C.) about the way that the American public and leaders perceive US vital interests around the world confirms this approach, as Saudi Arabia comes second (83% of the public and 94% of US leaders see this country as vital) after Japan, but before Mexico, Russia, Kuwait and Canada.

7 Habib Ayeb «Le Bassin du Jourdain dans le Conflit Israélo-Arabe», CERMOC N°. 6 1993.(i) «Arab Plan for Development of the Water Resources in the Jordan Valley by the League of Arab States in 1954; the Cotton Plan published by Israel (after the name of the US consultant who proposed this counterplan to the Arab proposal) Jordan did proposed in 1955 a report entitled «Yarmouk-Jordan Valley project: Master Plan Report», prepared by Harza Engineering Co. Chicago» and by Michael Baker, Pennsylvania, followed by a complementary report in 1962.

8 The Arab-Israeli Confrontation 1967-94 - p.65, Paul Cossali in the Middle East and North Africa 1995, Europea Publications, 1994, London.

9 Abdul Hamid El Ahdad - La Paix de la Honte et la paix des braves in Arabies No. 100, April 1995.

10 The Arab-Israeli Confrontation 1967-94 opus cited p.62.

11 The Arab-Israeli Confrontation 1967-94 opus cited p.53

12 Y. Gazzo: les économies arabes face à la crise - les solutions libérales et leurs limites

13 Graham Fuller: «The next ideology» Foreign Policy No. 98 op. cte. p. 148

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