

Chapter 3

Partition and Palestine

One can live in the shadow of an idea without grasping it.
—Elizabeth Bowen (1949)

At this late stage of threatened overripeness in the historic Arab-Zionist quarrel, partition is arguably the best and quite possibly the only realistic proposal that international relations theory and diplomatic experience have for unlocking the door to a comprehensive settlement through political compromise. Almost as if by default, territorial compromise, a re-division of land, and the redrawing of borders have emerged—indeed, reemerged—as the overall guiding principles most favored for moving on. For going beyond interim arrangements to a definitive resolution of the core Palestine problem.

After Oslo, No Turning Back

From the standpoint of repeated efforts at breaching the wall of Arab, Israeli, and Palestinian intransigence, the negotiating record since 1993 is entirely unprecedented. Looking beyond the anticipated day-to-day posturing, tactical moves, and inflammatory pronouncements as well as the sporadic outbursts of violence, surely the larger thrust—the “big picture”—is the sense of diplomatic movement. As the two directly engaged, directly concerned parties, Israelis and Palestinians are in fact moving forward (although *inching* is probably the more appropriate term) and moving inexorably toward each other. Ahead of them lies certainly their single most fateful strategic decisional crossroads: whether to continue fighting over the land, to share it conjointly, or to share in dividing it.

Without expressly saying so in declarative terms, the two claimants have already reached a notable degree of congruence by embracing the underlying postulates of (a) physical and (b) political separation, albeit with varying degrees of diluted enthusiasm, fatalism, or simple prudence.

Both in Israeli official policy circles and in public sentiment “separatism”

has become the key operative and conceptual password ever since a rash of suicidal Islamic fundamentalist terrorism in 1995 led the late prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, to endorse the idea. Palestinian politics likewise mirror the desire—equally felt—to strike out on an independent course, to be rid of the Israeli presence, and to build parallel but entirely separate and distinctive national institutions. Thus, for example, the first public opinion survey ever carried out jointly by Israeli and Palestinian research institutes revealed at the start of 1998 that both peoples held very similar views on the need for establishing a closed, clearly demarcated border between the two entities to keep them apart.¹ Sixty-three percent of the Palestinians polled, and 81 percent of the Israelis, favored such a separation.

But here the similarity and parallels end. For the two sides are poles apart in their interpretation of just what separatism means. Not as a slogan or diplomatic buzzword, but in precise and tangible terms. A straightforward land-for-peace deal or a political and political compromise involving mutual and reciprocal territorial concessions—land for land? Territorial compromise as minor rectifications or as major repartition? And if partition, which form is it going to take: hard and exclusionary, or soft, qualified partition?

The problem is that both sides have been encouraged all along to seek refuge in studied silence on these vital partitionist issues and to remain noncommittal for as long as possible. Theirs is a diplomatic waiting game premised upon intransigence, the aim being to see who will be the first to break and to concede both principles and real estate. But this kind of evasiveness on the parameters, scope, and costs in repartitioning is itself part and parcel of a larger debatable characteristic so prominent in Arab-Israeli peacemaking, which comes under the heading of “constructive ambiguity.”

An End to Constructive Ambiguity

As a rule statesmen and international lawyers are quick to underline the importance of precision, particularly when drafting any binding diplomatic instrument such as a protocol, declaration, agreement, or treaty. This exactitude is counseled in order to assure one’s own interests, to minimize the likelihood of misinterpretation, and to avoid later misunderstandings and charges of bad faith. Suffice merely to recall the 1917 Balfour Declaration. This terse, one-page open letter from the British foreign secretary of the day expressing general support for the establishment in Palestine of something termed a Jewish “national home” has generated an entire bookshelf of studies analyzing both the meaning and the intent

of each and every word. Or, more recently, the enduring controversy over the ambiguous wording and intent of UN Resolution 242, centering on the 1967 call for Israel's withdrawal from "territories" rather than "the territories," let alone "all the territories."

Logically, one might be led to assume murky language would be no less frowned upon in conflict resolution and peacemaking than it is in civil law-making or other forms of contractual dealing. Any document marked by imprecision (and how much more so if done deliberately) is readily open to extreme criticism on the grounds of being unprofessional, as false representation, possibly even collusion. The more surprising, therefore, to find ambiguity one of the pillars of conventional wisdom in Arab-Israel diplomacy and, moreover, lauded as nothing less than constructive ambiguity.

Indeed, constructive ambiguity possesses a rationale of its own. A typical defense of purposeful vagueness as an extremely serviceable tool by Middle East practitioners schooled in the intractable nature of the basic Palestine problem usually includes some of the following logic. From the standpoint of an interactive negotiating process, being vague helps paper over irreconcilable differences. By respectfully agreeing to disagree, each party is thus left free to interpret in its own way any loosely defined word, nebulous clause, or particularly controversial agenda item. Ambiguity is also helpful in that it enables conference *rapporteurs* to cite a positive atmosphere, making it possible for them to report favorably on further progress and to promote what may often in reality be the false impression of a widening consensus and of a sustainable momentum.

After all, consider those individuals directly engaged in the process who are not only ideologically and emotionally committed to it but professionally preoccupied with it as well. What matters most for them is, again, that this intentional lack of precision contributes to a perceived sense of breakthrough and of general movement in the right direction. When seen in this light, obfuscation and generalization become a fairly elegant way of sidestepping contentious issues, avoiding confrontations and removing impasses—even if only temporarily.

That constructive ambiguity also permits national leaders and negotiators preoccupied with both short-term costs and immediate gains to put off hard political choices and their personal moment of truth for as long as possible by deciding for the moment not to decide only adds to its appeal. In sum, ambiguity is dual-use: it may serve to forestall a breakdown of the peace talks while at the same time deferring a showdown in the peace talks.

Yet, this positive spin on constructive ambiguity is not entirely convincing.² It is certainly open to criticism: as evasive, as a recipe for inaction, as poisoning the atmosphere rather than building confidences, as

gaining time by encouraging false hopes while actually raising expectations on both sides. Especially telling is that unlike lawyers, Israelis and Palestinians living on a powder-keg cannot expend limitless time, and lives, dealing ad hoc with cases and peace agenda-related issues as they come up and without reference to a whole. No matter how seemingly beneficial in immediate and momentary terms, diplomatic ambiguity in the larger, longer-range sense could well be inimical to what really matters in peacemaking—ultimate peace prospects.

How much ill-will and recrimination have already been caused just in the post-Oslo interim stage because of imprecision? The issue of what constitutes Israeli settlement “expansion.” The exact formula and timetable for abrogation by the PLO of its covenant clauses calling for Israel’s destruction. The degree of direct accountability on Arafat’s Palestinian National Authority for preventing and punishing acts of terror. And, to be sure, the timing and extent of military redeployment on Israel’s part as a prelude to the final negotiations.

“Double-crossing bridges when we come to them” is a clever diplomatic play on words. Clearly, though, at some point the really thorny issues of the Palestine problem do have to be addressed. They cannot be finessed forever, least of all at the present delicate moment. As U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright came to appreciate at a fairly early stage of involvement for her, but terribly late in the peacemaking process itself. “If the parties have a clear mutual and favorable sense of the ultimate direction of negotiation,” she commented, “it will be easier for them to overcome setbacks and avoid distractions along the way.”³ One of the deeper reasons for what has been ailing the Oslo process, above and beyond personality clashes, is the simple fact that even now this sense of direction is still lacking.

Less predictable is what will happen when push does finally come to shove. When pretenses are dropped, and when core issues are finally confronted head-on, but only at a very advanced, late, and presumably final stage in the peace talks.

For negotiating theory the preferred outcome, of course, would be a happy ending: a mighty diplomatic effort capped by a valedictory demonstration of flexibility and compromise by both sides. However, there are, to be sure, also two distinctly dysfunctional outcomes. Unilateral concessions extracted under duress from one side backed into a corner and negotiating from weakness are equivalent to capitulation, thereby guaranteeing at least one disgruntled, revisionist party in the postsettlement phase.

Stonewalling is an even worse scenario. Here, intransigence by both parties and a refusal by either side to make last-minute concessions on matters each regards as vital runs the danger not only of setting back prospects for

conflict termination but of putting all previously registered gains in serious jeopardy. In such an eventuality a peace momentum sustained by ambiguity could come grinding to a halt and then reverse itself, with the attendant risks of a breakdown in talks, diplomacy's abject failure leading to a deterioration in relations and an ominous return to previous conflictual patterns.

Here Jerusalem comes to mind. Although its own special ambiguities and complexities are reserved for separate treatment in a later chapter, at least one point is directly relevant for the present discussion. Conventional Middle East diplomatic wisdom has it that for a number of reasons having to do with Jerusalem's being so emotionally charged an issue and representing the very worst in Arab-Jewish obduracy, we are all better off for now by enveloping it in ambiguity and would do well to leave it for last.

Yet insistence upon putting Jerusalem first instead of last might arguably have been a wiser approach in the first heady days of Oslo and certainly, since then, from Israel's standpoint. If, as expected, the acid test of Palestinian willingness to compromise is foregoing east Jerusalem as Arab Palestine's capital, there is greater prudence in facing the moment of truth earlier rather than later and before rather than after yielding further tangible assets that by then will be irretrievable.

In effect, the more earnest and the more detailed final status Israeli-Palestinian negotiations become, and the closer we approach a denouement, the greater the imperative for clarity and precision. But then, of course, the less available does constructive ambiguity become as the last refuge not of scoundrels but of bargainers with a vested interest in fudging the issues, in blurring distinctions, and in deferring unpleasant decisions.

In other words, only now is the really truly arduous work of partitioning Palestine beginning. And until such time as all the *i*'s are dotted and the *t*'s crossed, and a workable scheme of agreed separation is hammered out, it would be unwise, and certainly premature, to rush into print by declaring the Middle East conflict passé.⁴

Still a Discordant Note

In at least one sense, therefore, the picture of an Israeli-Palestinian convergence that has formed around the partition peace construct is deceptive or, at best, still slightly premature. Concern for partition's prospects and longer-term future, but also historical accuracy, require our duly noting that the two rival national movements have not arrived simultaneously at this partitionist conclusion. Nor do they quite share as yet a common understanding of what "territorial compromise" precisely means.

In responding sixty years ago to a British-inspired plan calling for

Palestine's fair division, the Zionist leadership of the day made the crucial adjustment from ideological rigidity to political flexibility and realism by reservedly accepting the notion of sovereign control over only a portion of the biblical holy lands. This support for the basic partitionist formula was again registered a decade later at the next critical junction. Once more confronted by the necessity of choice, in 1947 Jewish Agency spokesmen lobbied in favor of the United Nations partition initiative. This second time around they did so less hesitantly than in 1937, with greater enthusiasm and passion, seeing it as "Peel plus the Negev." Indeed, the General Assembly vote adopting a plan of partition is still regarded as a singular triumph in the annals of Zionist statecraft.⁵

Unfortunately for early peacemaking, starting with 1937 the partition strategy, once vented, only exposed new asymmetries—of attitude, of goal expectation, of pragmatism—between Arabs and Jews, further heightening the great communal and political divide already separating them. To the later observer Zionist pre-state affirmations of territorial and political separateness in 1937 and 1947 appear in stark contradistinction to the bedrock Arab stand bitterly opposed to partition.

Palestinian rejectionism was principled from the outset in that it went beyond pointed criticism of any particular plan or detail of partition. Objection rested in the most fundamental sense on the very notion in Arabic of *taqsim* as something distasteful, unjust, and artificial. This steadfast resistance to partition on the Palestinian side was to last for an entire half-century. It finds clear expression in Article 2 of the 1964 Palestine National Covenant, which states unequivocally that "Palestine, with the boundaries it had during the British Mandate, is an indivisible territorial unit."⁶ For added emphasis the first part of Article 19 pronounces: "The partition of Palestine in 1947 and the establishment of The State of Israel are entirely illegal, regardless of the passage of time."

It required fifty long years following the 1937 Peel commission report in favor of a land split for the Palestinian national leadership to reach a comparable level of political maturity and to acknowledge limits to the politically—and geographically—attainable. From the perspective of the Palestinians there should be no minimizing the enormity of the concessions that have now been made at least on the level of official ideology and declaratory policy. For most, perhaps all Palestinians, having to acknowledge the reality of the State of Israel even if restricted to the area west of the pre-1967 armistice borders is equal to a public confession of failure. It also means relinquishing title to what still represents for them a large portion of "their" Palestine.

Little wonder, therefore, the public agonizing engaged in by the Palestinian leadership once forced to acknowledge prevailing power realities. Upon issuing its “Palestinian Declaration of Independence” in November 1988, the Palestine National Council, meeting in Algiers, made positive reference for the first time to UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (1947). It became the basis for providing “those conditions of international legitimacy that ensure the right of the Palestinian Arab people to sovereignty and national independence.”⁷ When pressed shortly thereafter to amplify upon the oblique Algiers declaration, PLO chairman Yasir Arafat in December publicly stated at Geneva that the previously condemned UN Resolution 181 vouched for the right of all parties concerned in the Middle East conflict to exist in peace and security. Including “the state of Palestine, Israel and other neighbors.”⁸ While still refraining from outright use of the distasteful word *partition*, Arafat’s statement nevertheless has been interpreted ever since as belated official Palestinian endorsement for the “two states” solution through territorial compromise.

Reconfirming how all-important timing is for peacemaking diplomacy, that the two sides appear at last to be “in sync” with each other on the level of guiding principles is what now makes possible partition’s rehabilitation, geopolitical realization . . . and historical vindication. More important than adopting the terminology of partition, what really matters is for mainstream, moderate Israelis, Palestinians, and their leaders to take up the partitionist line of reasoning. And to do so publicly and unequivocally.

Lines of Ink, Fences of Stone

To be sure, in addition to those already on record, the list of potential opponents arrayed against repartitioning Palestine in any way, shape, or form is by no means inconsequential.

Seemingly unmindful of the infelicitous Lebanese precedent, those still harboring the antiquarian dream of a single Semitic entity premised upon Arab-Jewish binational coexistence and power sharing accuse partitionism of three cardinal sins. They deride it as excessive and uncalled for; second, as contravening physical, spatial realities; and, third, to be dismissed as a cowardly submission to parochial nationalism.⁹ Over the years, however, the federalist principle has come to enjoy much wider currency in many Israeli intellectual and political circles as the preferred policy of choice. Like the single-state framework, antipartitionist—and yet more cogent and more promising than binationalism.¹⁰

Middle East futurists, former Israeli premier Shimon Peres perhaps the

most outspoken among them, take a similar view. For many years himself avowedly pro-partition so long as Jordan and King Hussein were understood to be Israel's sole and indispensable copartitionist partner, the former Labor Party leader has revised his thinking.

Eager to emulate the Europeans, and to move on with all due dispatch to a federated East Bank–West Bank nestled within a regional economic and security union, Peres now prescribes a “three-tiered program” of cooperation still consistent with his long-standing recoil before the idea of a fully independent and sovereign Palestinian state. One that works its way from binational or multinational projects to consortiums and on to the third stage of “regional community.”¹¹ Leaving no room for doubt, he explicitly advocates “a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation for political matters, and a Jordanian-Palestinian-Israeli ‘Benelux’ arrangement for economic affairs.”¹²

In the eyes of such visionaries a separatist partition is objectionable for being at one and the same time unnecessary, insufficient, painful, and reactionary. Also because for some Labor Party diehards, with a residual distaste for adding a third state—a sovereign Palestine—to Israel and Jordan, confederation and moving directly to a larger supranational construct is the sole mechanism left for finessing the Palestinian drive to statehood.

There is yet a third antipartitionist camp made up of extremists on the ideological right and in the Israeli settler movement but also, concurrently, among the ranks of Islamic and Arab radicals whose entire way of thinking is rooted in territorial exclusivity. For these defenders of the faith the very notion of dividing, respectively, *Eretz Yisrael* and *Filastin* is ideologically unthinkable and politically intolerable—indeed, tantamount to a heinous religious transgression and the highest act of political treason.

Middle East experts like Fouad Ajami sensitize us to the fact that the entire “defective tale of Western betrayal that lies at the heart of Arab nationalist historiography” is encapsulated in the single theme of the post–World War I partition of the Arab patrimony.¹³ Bordering on the fanatical, this determination to fight partition at each and every stage of the wrenching process—and by all available means—should not be minimized.

Right-wing holdouts of the nationalist Likud ruling party headed by Binyamin Netanyahu represent still a fourth position averse to repartition. Drawing on the teachings of the pre-state Revisionist leader Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky and the personal example of former premiers Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, their opposition is two-fold. Opposition to forfeiting the historic claims of the Jewish people by unilaterally turning over any parts of biblical Judea and Samaria to alien non-Jewish hands. And opposition to scarring the landscape west of the Jordan River with artificial lines in order to copartition the area into an independent

Palestine state alongside a constricted State of Israel.¹⁴ One of the more outstanding examples is the late Moshe Dayan. His deep distaste for territorial compromise led him in 1977 to formally break with the Labor Party, which made finding common cause with Begin possible. Dayan served in the latter's first Likud government as foreign minister during the late 1970s, a time when, not incidentally, the idea of autonomy enjoyed brief popularity as a counter to Labor's platform of partition.

Until quite recently the most that people identifying with the hard-core Likud position might have been prepared to concede to Palestinians in their quest for political self-determination was some form of local, individual, or functional autonomy. Today, however, few spokesmen can be found for this restricted formula of limited self-rule.¹⁵ Perhaps the last vestiges of the short-of-statehood autonomy construct are official government references heard with less and less conviction in Jerusalem that Israel is prepared to accept no more than a Palestinian "entity" at the end of the final status negotiations. Which is in itself remarkable for the evolution in thinking about the price of peace it reveals, especially in the nationalist camp. As presently amended, the revised Likud stance implies Israeli-Palestinian partition yes, Palestinian sovereignty no.

Any rearguard political and ideological objections to a formal repartition and redrawing of the present lines are reinforced by the security argument. Over the years any number of defense experts in and out of military uniform have warned that repartition risks putting Israel in mortal danger once again by increasing its exposure to Palestinian irredentism along an extended and permeable eastern border. On the other hand, the May 1999 national elections, which swept Netanyahu and the Likud out of power and Labor's Ehud Barak into office, can be seen as still another reaffirmation of Israeli mainstream preparedness to deal with these and related issues through a two-state solution.

If opinion surveys can be trusted as a fairly reliable indicator of mainstream thinking, then a significant majority of Israelis and Palestinians nonetheless increasingly express far more endorsement for separatism—albeit, in broad and general terms—than for binationalism, autonomy, federalism. Or, for that matter, continuing to live by the sword. For these "intimate enemies" territorial compromise alone offers any real prospect for reclaiming some sense of normalcy. But only by cutting the Gordian knot that has kept the two peoples hopelessly intruding upon each other's physical as well as psychic space at every conceivable level, from the individual and communal to the national.

What Arabs and Jews obviously seek is to disengage from each other to the greatest extent possible—and to do so as quickly and as painlessly

as the complex, indeed, abnormal situation will allow. Which means that virtually the only shared ground still uniting the two communities resident in historic Palestine is this mutual desire—not to share the land but to share in dividing the land. Save perhaps for mutual vows to fight to the death for undivided, unshared possession of Palestine, could there be a more depressing summary statement of the futility behind Arab-Jewish intercultural, interethnic, and intercommunal relations after more than a hundred years of the closest proximity?

Translated into stark political terms, embracing separatism means favoring some form of territorial compromise. To advocate a parting of the ways is in effect to endorse partition.

Back to Peel

At one point in their important 1991 study of collective insights from earlier Arab-Israeli negotiations, Lewis and Stein observe how “yesterday’s rejected or ignored proposal, document, or procedure may become tomorrow’s accepted agreement, newly adopted position, or process.”¹⁶ Partition serves as the example par excellence for the political phenomenon whereby an idea previously disqualified is at some later point resurrected and recycled under altered circumstances.

The seemingly primordial and endless political struggle over Palestine has left a long paper trail. The partition theme thus serves as an analytical prism for refracting a great deal of the argumentation, legal and otherwise, as well as for surveying the history and evolution of the Arab-Israel conflict through its successive phases. It is in this historical context of turning points, strategic crossroads, and missed opportunities that we find an observation made some years ago singularly poignant and therefore worthy of quotation. In a 1983 essay on the conflict Larry Fabian depicted “the taboo word ‘partition’ “ as “three syllables that trigger all the primal emotions and irreconcilable arguments about what has been happening in Palestine since the beginning of this century.”¹⁷ The Middle East diplomatic record readily confirms this description.

As early as July 1937 a special British royal commission drew three landmark conclusions about the two resident Arab and Zionist communities in Palestine: they were each capable of self-government and deserving of self-determination yet unwilling to live under one roof. Which two findings inspired the Peel commission to boldly propose resolving this enigma through strong advocacy of what was then regarded as a highly original, eminently rational and appealing scheme for judiciously dividing the British-mandated country into two states.



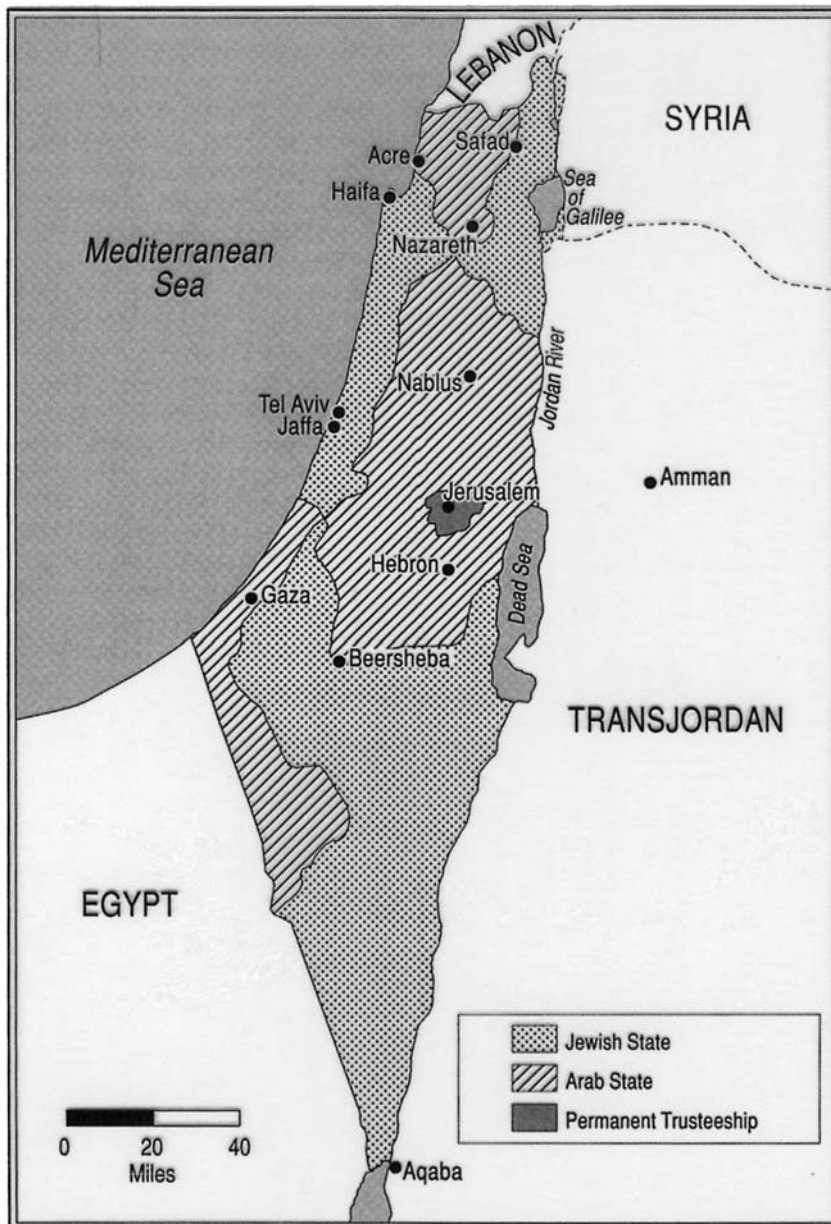
2. The 1937 Peel Commission Partition Plan

Though never acted upon, the 1937 partition plan and rationale are one of the true “defining moments” in the struggle for Palestine. Thereafter, this single ordering concept of partition encompasses more of the history of the dispute than any other. It highlights the central territorial component. It underscores the many practical, literally down-to-earth aspects involved in physically dividing the land. It classifies proponents as well as opponents of partition at each successive stage. And it sorts out by categories the argumentation and lines of reasoning, both pro and con.

Major markers in the extensive chronology of partition are as follows:

- the 1937–38 heated controversy following publication of the Peel partition plan and its nonimplementation by Great Britain, which not only stands out as the earliest and the greatest single missed opportunity for avoiding the terrible Palestine tragedy the further removed we become but is the base point for all subsequent analysis and plans for partition;¹⁸
- the historic 1947 United Nations partition resolution endorsing a peaceful separation with economic union and an internationalized Jerusalem, rejected out of hand by Palestinian and Arab leaders, one of whom, Jamal Husseini, vowed, “The line of partition will be a line of blood and fire”;
- the subsequent 1948 fighting and 1949 armistice, which did in fact leave former Palestine divided, but by military force; with the Palestinians left out and the new state of Israel and neighboring Transjordan instead as the two de facto copartitionists;
- the 1967 war that seemingly erased the so-called 1949 green line by placing the entire west bank up to the Jordan River under Israeli control;
- the post-1967 debate within Israel over the Labor Party’s peace platform of territorial compromise through the “Jordanian option”;
- such near breakthroughs as the 1982 Reagan plan and the secret 1987 London agreement with King Hussein, either of which, if enforced, would have reapportioned the contested West Bank territories once again between Israel and the Hashemites;
- the PLO’s implicit confession of past error in 1988 upon accepting the “two-state” formula of partition previously anathema to them for the better part of fifty years;
- increased speculation over territorial compromise as the centerpiece for a promised final status arrangement ever since the September 1993 Oslo declaration of principles.

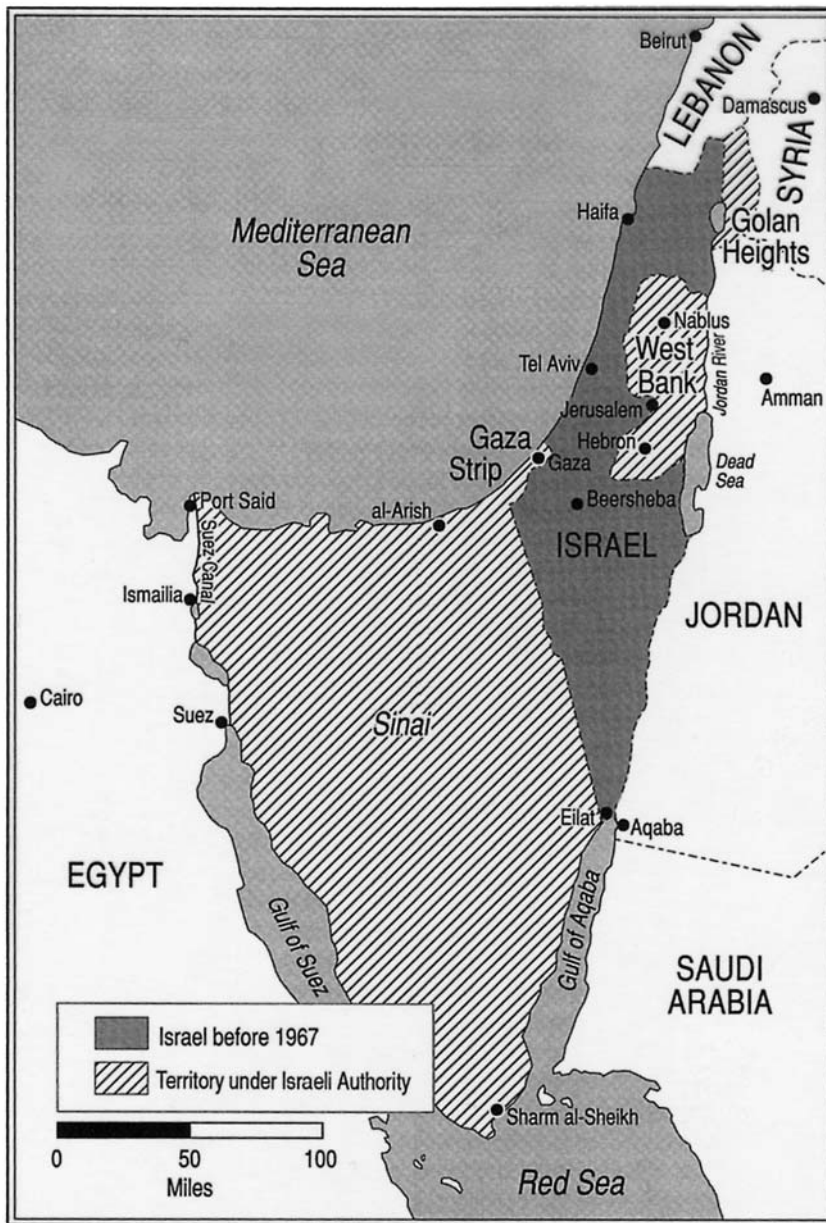
Looking back over our shoulders in seeking insights if not inspiration for negotiating the future, we observe that unanswered calls for an equitable division of geographic, historic contested “Palestine” are by now a hall-



3. The 1947 United Nations Plan of Partition



4. The 1949 Armistice ("Green") Line



5. The 1967 Cease-Fire Lines

mark. Surely no less a permanent feature of the enduring Arab-Israel conflict than the violent and arbitrary de facto scarring of this land under the force of arms.

Spanning six decades, the partition construct, in short, has the dubious distinction of being the most enduring, and unconsummated, of any peace scheme yet devised.¹⁹ In 1987 former Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban could write, “Today the partition principle is still alive, largely because the alternatives are bizarre or iniquitous.”²⁰ This still rings true more than a full eventful decade later.

Shifting perspectives from past to present tense, and from the negative to the positive, we cite George Bush’s important 1991 statement. In convening the Madrid Conference the former U.S. president expressed the belief that “territorial compromise is essential for peace.”²¹ Two years later the 1993 Oslo understandings opened an entirely new chapter in the partitioning of Palestine.

The Repartition Agenda

By now it seems clear that for all its shortcomings, and no matter how shopworn the idea—including the record of past failure—territorial compromise in Israel/Palestine still carries with it the potential for putting an end to intercommunal violence as well as for promoting Israeli Jewish no less than Palestinian Arab ethnic and cultural distinctiveness. And, in addition, prospects for Palestinian majority status in a state of their own.

Still, beyond Arab and Israeli endorsement of the abstract principle lies the less prosaic follow-up question of exactly how—in political and geographic terms—to fulfill this mutual desire as part of a permanent sequel to interim Palestinian administrative self-rule.

It is here at the practical level of political bargaining that theoretical paradigms and peaceful intentions come up, as they always must, against psychological and cultural divides, but also against the calculus of tangible interests and real-world impediments arising from human, physical, and political geography. Included under the latter rubric of “second-order” problems are questions like territorial expanse, water resources, and raw materials, the issue of security and natural versus defensible borders, and matters of demography, population clusters, and dispersal.²² Here the diplomat’s task is compounded sevenfold by the set of immutable, disadvantageous facts quite particular to the land of *Filastin/Eretz Yisrael*.

Having witnessed the 1996–97 drawdown toward a permanent status settlement mandated for 1999 by the 1993 Oslo pledge and timetable, we

are also seeing an end to an entire era of so-called constructive ambiguity in Middle East peacemaking. This in itself is noteworthy, especially as part of partition's transformation from an abstraction to a concrete, detailed plan and a joint Israeli-Palestinian specific blueprint.

On the surface this last unfinished business of partition might appear deceptively simple and straightforward. Given the expressed desire—previously missing—of both Israelis and Palestinians to separate, the motivation for partition is certainly there. Reinforcement also might be derived from the inspiring precedent of a smooth “velvet partition” carried out by the Czechs and the Slovaks in late 1992 that is part of our recent diplomatic frame of reference. Seemingly all that remains is to trace the contours and dividing lines for an elegant two-state solution: a secure Jewish state of Israel next to a sovereign Arab state of Palestine.

But as the documented experience of pro-partitionists from yesterday's Peel commissioners through Ben-Gurion and Abba Eban, the Amir Abdullah and King Hussein, down to today's Israeli peace movement can readily attest, only upon sitting down to flesh out the specific details of a territorial compromise do Palestine's harsh realities and contradictions then assert themselves with a vengeance. Moreover, as for the Czechoslovak precedent, it owed in truth to an exceptional set of unreplicable circumstances; nor is it in any way really comparable to Palestine's ethnic and other complexities.

For purposes of analysis these complexities divide into two sets of governing (macro) and implementation (micro) principles applied to six broader clusters or “baskets” of issues. First and foremost: (1) the designated partition zone and questions relating directly to the land, its parcellation, border demarcations, water and other resource allocation, and, of course, Jerusalem and its future status as a united or divided city; (2) the degree and extent of separateness and (3) its phasing or implementation. The three other remaining issue-areas encompass (4) future economic relations, (5) political and security arrangements within the framework of a territorial compromise, (6) the Palestinian refugees, minority rights, mixed cities, and other demographic questions.

More Questions Than Answers

Broad-gauged questions and first-order problems governing preliminary discussion and the signing of a Declaration of Partition Principles (DPP), as well as guiding the more detailed follow-up negotiations, begin with, To which theaters of conflict is partition applicable?

By advocating the repartitioning of “Palestine” do we mean a two-state or a three-state solution? Are we talking about a narrow or expansive territorial adjustment? All of historic Palestine? Extending to “Transjordan” and encompassing the East Bank as well? Or limited to the west of the Jordan and aimed at redividing the West Bank? Or, in the narrowest Palestinian interpretation, taking territorial compromise to mean acknowledging the Jewish state’s *de facto* existence inside the old, constricted 1948–1967 armistice borders?

Indications are that, for the foreseeable future, neither supporters of Ariel Sharon nor old-time PLO stalwarts any longer seriously or immediately promote the slogans, respectively, of “Jordan is Palestine” or “Jordan is an integral part of Filastin.” Which effectively reduces the partitionable area to “cis-Jordania”—the constricted strip of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. This said, however, it must be emphasized that the political future of Jordan and the direction Jordanian-Palestinian relations take in the next several years have the greatest bearing upon the concurrent Israeli-Palestinian equation and future political peace map.²³

Second, how far ought the separation principle to be taken? Not in measuring acreage or square miles but rather in the degree of exclusivity and insularity. Can either state honestly expect to be hermetically sealed and ethnically cleansed from each other? Ideally, fences might make for good neighbors. Realistically, however, what are the prospects and what provision is there for ensuring each political unit’s economic viability in an era of interdependence between states, regional integration, and international mergers?

Another question of a broad nature and at the same level of importance is whether partition holds the prospect for enhancing Israeli and Palestinian security. Or whether, on the contrary, it risks being counterproductive, deepening rather than alleviating the present felt individual and collective anxieties of one or both peoples, merely converting them into state insecurity.

A further step removed: Is partitioning likely to bring greater or less regional stability? What does an independent Palestinian state portend for the Middle East military balance? For Middle East common security frameworks? And not only for the two partitioners but for each of their immediate neighbors—Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria? Arguably, for no country is the emerging security dilemma quite as acute as for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, more than half of whose population is

ethnically Palestinian, and for its ordering of relations with a newly created Palestine. By the same token, does the partition formula have any relevance for Israeli-Syrian bargaining over the Golan Heights as part of a regionwide, comprehensive Arab-Israel settlement?

Still within the first category of larger governing principles heading the partition agenda is the suggested best course of action for handling the act of Israeli-Palestinian disengagement—really an unbelievably complicated process of disentanglement. Does exercising extreme caution make the most sense? Step-by-step partition, according to an agreed calendar of interim phases not to exceed 2–3 years from the time the DPP is signed, keeps to the Oslo model of gradualism (“Gaza-Jericho first”). It would also allow time for making all the necessary technical arrangements, as well as for the patients themselves to adjust individually and as societies to the traumatic and dislocating experience.

Or, alternatively, in hoping to carry out the difficult surgery without prolonging the agony, is proceeding directly to the final cut perhaps advisable? In either case a fierce procedural argument is all but certain over the preferred timetable for partitioning, with important substantive implications.

The second category of derivative or micropartition agenda items features more specific, detailed, and technical issues. Land redistribution, water rights, and resource allocation head the list, closely followed by procedures for coping with Palestinian laborers working daily in Israel, compensation and resettlement of refugees, Israel’s eastern political and security borders, limitations on Palestinian sovereignty, protecting the rights of minorities, demilitarization, security guarantees, the cultural autonomy of Israeli Arabs, the legal status and safety of Jewish settlements and settlers under Palestinian control, transit rights to and from Gaza, Jerusalem’s political and municipal status, shared control over religious sites and holy places.

These are merely some of the more salient building blocks from which a partition-based peace structure must emerge. Each second-order problem is worthy of a commission of technical experts, civilian and military, assigned to draft detailed position papers and to recommend satisfactory answers. This unilateral phase then must be followed by Israeli-Palestinian working groups with the unenviable task of pulling together the individual components, identifying points of convergence, and integrating them into a coherent, workable, and ultimately comprehensive partition package. It is thus impossible to address these many questions inclusively in any single monograph.

What we can volunteer, however, are the foundations around which to build a pro-partition consensus and coalition. Guiding principles for a fair share territorial compromise should set store upon:

- minimum suffering and dislocation,
- an honest, concerted attempt at resolving the plight of the Palestinian refugees,
- maximum separation, also implying national homogeneity and the smallest number of ethnic minorities and enclaves,
- maximum independence and self-government, mindful that the trappings of sovereignty, irrespective of their actual instrumentality, symbolize for Israelis and Palestinians alike a source of national pride and evidence of historical vindication,
- cultural autonomy,
- economic viability, with room for development, growth, and wide trade relationships,
- soft borders, allowing for the free movement of people and goods,
- but which nevertheless do not compromise the right of all parties to maximum and mutually assured security, including secure and recognized borders,
- endorsement and ratification by the largest majority possible in each of the two respective communities and constituencies, so as to neutralize the recalcitrant holdouts and in order to improve
- the prospect for lasting peace.

With these guidelines in mind, we now turn to examine in closer detail some six selected issues at the very top of the partition agenda. The demographic spread, borders and security, the economics of separatism, Jerusalem, transit rights between the Israeli and Palestinian entities, peace plans and peace maps. These best illustrate the immensity of redividing Palestine. For if practical, workable, and, needless to add, mutually acceptable answers can be devised for each of the six, then partition and territorial compromise gain in stature and deserve our respect.

No New Ground

In targeting these particular six individual micro-issues and, equally, the larger partition construct, perhaps two last-minute caveats. The first: forget the “perfect peace.” There is no prospect (if there ever was) for an elegant, scarless clean cut in Palestine. And the second final word of counsel: don’t expect any conceptual breakthrough, since there is truly “nothing

new under the sun” when it comes to basic constructs for ordering Israeli-Palestinian relations. In the short-term the most that we dare hope for is greater flexibility, albeit grudgingly, in the two respective bargaining positions and possibly a deeper change of heart over the longer term.

Because, truth be told, it is only by default—signs of mutual Israeli-Palestinian fatigue mixed with sobriety and because of a bankruptcy of competitive ideas—that the theoretical search for a safe exit from the Arab-Israel labyrinth leads back to reconsidering yet again prospects for a definitive repartitioning of Palestine.²⁴ And, most emphatically, not because it offers an attractive or particularly original and creative solution. Far from it.

To recapitulate: Arab-Jewish binationalism comes too late, and Palestinian autonomy offers too little. An Israeli-Palestinian federation, on the other hand, is asking too much, too soon. So it is territorial compromise alone which offers any hope for peace soon. Which leaves still subject to clarification partition’s main geographical and political facets: the precise territorial lines of division and the exact political status of the copartitionists—one state and one nonstate “entity” or, as I suspect, two independent states side by side.

Admittedly, there is no longer anything pristine about the formula of partition. As an answer it is more ugly than elegant. Therefore, as of now it is hard to find anyone, Arab or Jew, who is prepared to champion territorial compromise. Rather, both peoples are being pushed and dragged into accepting the formula. Parenthetically, in common with just about every other Middle East peace proposal ever floated, there is nothing quite so easy as to expose and belittle partition’s many flaws.

Truth be told, a Solomon-like surgical cut, totally distancing Arab from Jew and Jew from Arab, is an impossibility in the context of Palestine because of what political geographers like to refer to as “man-milieu relationships.” No line of demarcation, however drawn or wherever drawn, can negate the overpowering realities. Of shared water resources, of interspersed populations in such mixed cities as Haifa, Hebron, Jaffa-Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, and Nazareth as well as close proximity in rural areas, of the problem of access routes, overlapping attachments to Jerusalem and other religious sites, etc. These many practical, temporal complexities are what have always frustrated enthusiasts for partition, not merely ideological aversion or political resistance to the very idea of a territorial division in the abstract.

And yet, would-be peacemakers time and again have found themselves thrust back upon partition as a political compass for defining the elusive peace settlement and future peace map. Probably because it represents the

“least bad.” Also because its merit lies in at least satisfying minimum felt needs for separate Palestinian and Jewish self-determination in at least a part of the Holy Land.

Equally important, once agreed to in principle by the respective sides, territorial partition opens the way for creative statecraft. By addressing subsidiary agenda items, such as the subtle distinction between political and security borders, extraterritoriality with regard to settlements, settlers, and land corridors, economic cooperation through separate economies, and, of course, not least, the special status of Jerusalem. All of these to be addressed through the give and take of diplomatic bargaining and under the partition rubric. In a word, Jamal Husseini’s line of “blood and fire” can only be stanching and the flames extinguished if territorial compromise is converted into a line of reasoning . . . and reason.

Which leaves one final note of caution. Although it might well be the last peaceful resort, territorial compromise may not see full realization simply because partition makes little geographic sense in modern Palestine; it only makes sense politically. Once again, therefore, as in the past three-score years, it could be arrested anywhere short of full implementation, defeated by the impossible geopolitical and geophysical facts on the ground, but even more by extremism, by mean-spiritedness and a shortage of the commodity most needed to make partition work—goodwill.

The basic equation is as simple as it is despairing. Palestine is where theoretical weakness confronts harsh reality. Falling back upon partition confirms that there really is no new theoretical ground waiting to be discovered or explored. So is the task of persuading Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs to accept some form of territorial compromise for the sake of a higher goal—peace, statehood, security—made singularly unpromising. This is due, among other things, to there not being expansive new, fertile, or uncontested ground to offer by way of “enlarging the pie” or in making the notion of splitting the land a more attractive, palatable proposition.

Physically, there is little room for a dichotomous territorial compromise solution. Politically, on the other hand, if there is no room for a territorial compromise solution, then there may be no solution at all for the Palestine problem and thus none for the wider Arab-Israel conflict. That’s how stark the choices really are, how precarious the peace enterprise and how imperative that repartitioning Palestine be given due consideration. Above all, compromising Palestine in the near and foreseeable future must give closest consideration to the fundamental condition of Arab-Israeli mutual dependency. What I refer to throughout this study as partition plus or soft partition.