

ARCHITECTURE FOR THE PLANET

PALESTINE PIECE PLAN

By PETER FEND

Negotiations for a Palestinian homeland never got started. Who would participate, and whom they would represent could not even be decided. There were questions of tying the Palestinian homeland to Jordan, or Israel, or to the PLO itself. Meantime, the Israelis stayed in southern Lebanon and began doubling their settlements in the West Bank. And the U.S. went along.

It may be easier to begin by defining what, physically, is on hand. Who will run the Palestinian homeland, and what ties it will have with its neighbors can be decided after that homeland comes into being. When the U.S. declared independence from England, it had not already answered questions of whether to be a monarchy, or confederation, or federal republic, or even whether to speak English or German. The Americans took certain defined colonies and made them their own: pieces of the planet acquired a political existence. Everybody who knew what the 13 colonies looked like, no one yet knows what the Palestinian homeland will look like. Here's a plan.

The Jordan Rift Valley, or Jordan Valley, is a famous place. It has long been a tourist attraction. It has the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, and — on the western ridge — such famous cities as Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. It also has probably the longest growing season in the Middle East — agriculture, if there's water, does well. The Jordan Valley has a west bank, half of which has come to be known as the West Bank, and an east bank, which includes the capital of Jordan, Amman. All the water of the west and east banks, and all the soil and pollutants running down those banks, goes to one place: the Jordan River and Dead Sea. None of the water goes to the ocean. Physically, as a geological and hydrological system, the Jordan Valley is on its own. It's a natural

If this autonomy becomes a Palestinian homeland, what happens? Israel keeps half of the West Bank, the part that slopes into the Mediterranean and not into the west bank of the Jordan River. Jordan saves face from the losses of the 1967 war and effects Arab control of holy sites in East Jerusalem and more than what was lost in 1967. The Palestinians get more land than they hoped for after initially getting bumped out by Israel in 1947.

Since Amman is within the basin, Jordan (mostly Palestinian anyway) remains linked with the Palestinians. This satisfies Israel, but simultaneously gives both Jordan and the Palestinians respective regional identities. With the basin entirely under one Arab administration, the Palestinians can plan their own agricultural and industrial development. They can develop an autonomous resource policy, and given the inward drainage, a comprehensive wastes and pollution policy. All this can be overseen by resource observation satellites, and every day on TV, the state of the Basin can be displayed. The Israelis — they'd be over the hill, on the other side, the side that faces west, the side with sunsets over the Mediterranean. In the new Palestine, a single piece of earth and water, the Palestinians (tied with Jordanians) get not just some land, but a microcosm of the world.

Questions remain: Would Israel give up its access to the Dead Sea, and its grip on the Golan Heights, in return for a clear-cut identity? Would Jordan, a 20th century artifice, allow its borders to the east, on the high plateaus of the Arabian peninsula, to gradually fade away, among desert sands? Would both the Israelis and Palestinians, seeing themselves in separate natural regions, get enough security from each other with that knowledge? Satellite imagery, in color on TV, can make the natural separation, and respective opportunities evident.

Soon after preparing this article and map, the author met with an official of the United Nations International Conference on the Question of Palestine. A thorough report and proposal has been requested for the 1983 session in Paris.

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