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The Israel-Jordan Peace Negotiations (1949-51): King Abdallah's Lonely Effort

The story of the negotiations between King Abdallah of Jordan and the new State of Israel has not yet been told in full, although the previously classified diplomatic documents, Israeli, British and American, have been available to the public for several years now. Even those well-versed in the history of the region will find much that is new to them. It emerges clearly that King Abdallah conducted the talks throughout with complete sincerity but with a singular lack of sober appraisal as to the possible outcome of all the changes that took place in Jordan as a result of the 1948 Arab–Israeli war. Abdallah's prolonged exertions in pursuit of peace with Israel make an intricate story that deserves a full-blown monograph, in which the interactions between the participants — the Jordanians, Palestinians, Israelis, British and Americans — would be treated *in extenso*, supported by a full armoury of documentary references. This brief account will focus only on the salient points of the story.

Abdallah was assassinated on 20 July 1951; on 27 June, just three weeks earlier, he had shown how very far he was from any accurate evaluation of the prospects for a settlement with Israel, when he unburdened himself to a US member of the UN Palestine Conciliation Commission then visiting Amman, who recorded the talk in vivid detail. 'I am an old man', said Abdallah. [He was sixty-nine years old.] 'I know that my power is limited. I know that I am hated by my own son [Tallal]. I also know that my own people distrust me because of my peace efforts. I know I could get a peace settlement if only I had some encouragement.' A year earlier, the Arab League had passed two Resolutions (on 1 and 13 April 1950) to expel any member that made a separate peace with Israel. Abdallah was quite ready to defy this decision of the Arab League but not his own people, who, he was sure, would support him if only Israel were to offer Jordan what he termed 'reasonable concessions'. He concluded the conversation with

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the UN Palestine Conciliation Commission representative by appealing in what the diplomat described as 'an almost imploring tone' — 'Please help me. I can do it if I get some help and encouragement. But I am an old man', he said for the second time. 'I have not much time left and I do not want to die of a broken heart.'[1] The King's interlocutor, who had not seen him for some time, was struck by the fact that he had aged greatly.

On 28 June 1951, just one day after this conversation in Amman, Sir Alec Kirkbride, the British Minister in Jordan, who was then in London, met the founder and director of the Dead Sea Potash Company, Moshe Novomeyski. Kirkbride's thirty years in Jordan had given him an unsurpassed knowledge of the country and familiarity with Abdallah himself. He said to Novomeyski that people outside Jordan altogether failed to grasp that the country had undergone a peaceful revolution in the previous six months, caused by the arrival in Amman of the Palestinian refugees, and that Palestinian Arabs were now in control there. The country was still called 'Jordan' but in reality it had become Palestine, and the King had lost most of his authority. Kirkbride did not add, as he might have done, that the King himself was either insufficiently aware of what had happened or else refused to admit even to himself how far-reaching the change in his position was.

It has generally been assumed that the decline of the King's authority in this period was the direct, inevitable result of the Palestinians' increased representation in the parliamentary elections and of the proclamation on 24 April 1950 of the Union between the two banks of the Jordan and their amalgamation in one single state. This assumption is correct, but the process of erosion of the King's authority was revealed earlier than that. The King had already suffered a severe setback in March of that year, a full month before the elections, when he failed to find a Prime Minister prepared to co-operate with him in seeking a settlement with Israel. Prime Minister Tewfik Abu el-Huda (a Palestinian, born in Acre) had resigned at the beginning of March 1950 because he did not care to be identified with the King's policy of negotiation. Abdallah had then asked one of his closest associates, Samir el-Rifai (also a Palestinian, born in Safed, father of Zaid Rifai, Prime Minister of Jordan in 1988); to form a new Council of Ministers. It took only two days for Samir to have to confess to failure, leaving Abdallah no choice but to reinstate el-Huda. The King had to pay a price for Huda's agreeing to serve — he was forced to suspend the negotiations with Israel until after the

elections on 17 April 1950.[2] This suspension spelt the end of all serious negotiations.

The meetings with Israel that took place intermittently in the following year were marked by the dichotomy of the regime in Amman, with the King and his Council of Ministers moving further and further away from each other. The bitter cup that Abdallah was forced to take from the hands of Abu el-Huda would not be his last. The King was extremely disappointed by both of Huda's successors, Said el-Mufti (Prime Minister from 14 April to 3 December 1950) and Samir el Rifai (from 4 December 1950 to 25 July 1951).

The diplomatic documents show clearly that Said el-Mufti and his Ministers were not prepared to undertake direct negotiations with Israel, although Abdallah doggedly went on trying to get them to change their attitude. This evidence is of the highest importance, because it completely clears Abdallah of the charge of duplicity, of having pretended still to be seeking a settlement when he was in fact coming round to his government's line. The documents show that the King put pressure on el-Mufti to negotiate a settlement, but that el-Mufti resisted the pressure and was ready to offer his resignation rather than enter into negotiations for a separate agreement with Israel. He threatened to resign whenever he felt he was being asked to change course.[3] In this he was sure of overwhelming support from both Houses of Parliament.

Kirkbride tried in vain to use his influence as British Minister in Jordan to further agreement between Jordan and Israel. At the end of September 1950 he informed London that the struggle between Abdallah and his Ministers had come to a head. Abdallah had asked them to agree to direct contacts with Israel; they had refused and Prime Minister el-Mufti had tendered his resignation. The ensuing government crisis with el-Mufti in October 1950 resembled that with Abu el-Huda the previous March in every detail. Again the question was whether the King would be able to find a government ready to enter into any kind of agreement with Israel, even if only a working arrangement. After ten days of efforts to find a new Prime Minister, King Abdallah had to admit defeat and ask Said el-Mufti again to form a new Council of Ministers.[4] The new Council held office less than two months, giving the King little satisfaction. He was obliged to inform Israel that he could not find a Cabinet ready to negotiate peace. In December he dismissed the Cabinet and called again on his old associate Samir el-Rifai to form another. This time, Samir was successful. A week after the formation of the new government,

Abdallah showed optimism at a meeting with Reuven Shiloah, the Israeli representative — an optimism caused by the new Prime Minister's appointment. He explained to Shiloah that in the past Samir had been a mere bystander without executive authority, but this was no longer the case. The King's optimism was, however, misplaced. By now a separate settlement between Jordan and Israel was becoming more and more remote, certainly as far as Samir was concerned. He regarded the stalemate with equanimity, while Abdallah refused to accept it. When, shortly after his appointment, Samir was attacked in the Jordan parliament on the issue of negotiations with Israel, he made it plain that he would only make peace with Israel if this step were accepted by all the Arab countries. Told by the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) Chief of Staff that the Israelis were delighted with his appointment, he reaffirmed that he had no intention of making a separate peace. He told Reuven Shiloah so too, and made it clear to him that he could do only one thing, namely, discuss problems connected with the smooth working of the Israel–Jordan Armistice Agreement. Shiloah soon discovered that Samir meant very little by this.[5]

Abdallah also realized eventually that he could not count on Samir any more than on his two predecessors. Sufficient evidence of this can be found in the Israeli diplomatic documents, and in at least one US document, which reports that the King was much upset by a stiff reply that Samir sent to Israel.[6] The Israeli documents provide fuller insight into the relations between the King and his Ministers. Abdul Ghanem Karmi — the ever-ready faithful go-between between Abdallah and Israel — related how Abdallah convoked his Ministers in mid-February 1951, telling them that if they were still not ready to conclude a peace treaty with Israel, they ought at least to enter into a non-aggression agreement such as he had proposed in February 1950. He reminded them that they had been appointed specifically in order to promote relations with Israel, adding that Ministers who disagreed with this policy were free to go their own way. Moshe Sasson of the Middle East Department in the Israeli Ministry for Foreign Affairs wrote at the time: 'The attitude of the present Prime Minister has come as a severe blow to Abdallah. For some time now, the King has had his doubts of Samir's courage and readiness to do as he [the King] wishes. . . . [Samir] had formed a moderate enough Council of Ministers that would allow him broad and flexible political manoeuvring, and this gave rise to new hopes [on the part of the

King]. . . . The King did not stop pressing him to reach an agreement with Israel, but Samir cherished his political and personal record as a veteran leader too highly to endanger it through any arrangement that could make him look a traitor in the eyes of the Arab world.'[7]

Abdallah's determination to achieve peace with Israel is borne out by documents numerous enough to convince the most confirmed sceptic. A striking illustration is provided by a step he took very soon after the parliamentary elections on 17 April 1950. The day after the Jordanian parliament proclaimed the Union between the two banks, Abdallah met Reuven Shiloah, keeping it secret from his new Prime Minister, Said el-Mufti. A few days later, he finally divulged the fact of the meeting to the British Minister, asking him to inform el-Mufti about it and plead with him to renew contacts with Israel. Kirkbride put it to the King that it was preferable for el-Mufti to hear the news from him directly. Abdallah took his point and told his Prime Minister of the meeting. It was now el-Mufti's turn to ask Kirkbride to talk to the King and get him to restrain his excessive enthusiasm for talks with Israel. Kirkbride decided to ignore the request. In his report to London, he stated his reasons: if he acceded to el-Mufti's request and advised Abdallah not to press his government on contacts with Israel, the King was likely to tell the Israelis that the British were holding him back in his peace efforts; but if he, Kirkbride, were to do as the King wished and encourage the Prime Minister to negotiate, it could result in the latter's resignation. He preferred to escape from the dilemma by not doing anything at all. One of the Foreign Office officials who read this report approved of Kirkbride's masterly inaction, but nevertheless commented: 'Whatever happens, Abdallah [may] tell the Israelis that it is the British who are holding him back.' This comment proved prophetic. A few days later, the Israeli Foreign Minister, Moshe Sharett, indeed informed Sir Knox Helm, the British Minister in Israel, that Abdallah had told the Israeli envoy, 'Kirkbride was advising him to go slow, but he [Abdallah] was determined to go ahead.'[8]

The general picture delineated here is confirmed in a report to Washington from the US Minister in Jordan, Gerald A. Drew, dated 3 May 1950. Drew had learned from Kirkbride that Prime Minister el-Mufti had told him that no more than five or six of the fifty members of the Jordan parliament would be prepared to support negotiations with Israel, and that all the members of the Cabinet were against. Referring to Abdallah's meeting with Shiloah, Drew added that this was the first time that the King had concealed a meeting with

the Israelis from him and from Kirkbride. Drew thought he had done so not only because he wanted to keep his Council of Ministers in the dark, but also because he knew in his heart that he had been acting hastily.

An incident that sharply illuminated the difficult relations prevailing at the top occurred in July 1950. Abdallah was again persistently pressing his government to negotiate with Israel, now using the argument that whenever he spoke to Palestinians living on the West Bank, he got the impression from them that they were seemingly in favour of a peace settlement with Israel. His government, however, contended that he was mistaken and that its impression was exactly the opposite. To clear the matter up, the Council of Ministers sent a 'fact-finding' Ministerial Commission to the West Bank (22–26 July 1950). By pure coincidence, Kirkbride was in the West Bank at the time, having assigned himself the thankless task of explaining to the Palestinians there that they would do well to agree to a settlement with Israel. Little did he realize that his chances of success were negligible; the Palestinian nationalists saw him as a British agent with unlimited influence over Abdallah. The unexpected arrival of the Commission, though something of an embarrassment to Kirkbride, enabled him to observe its *modus operandi*: in effect it set out to prove that its reading of West Bank sentiment was the correct one. The persons interviewed were carefully coached beforehand to say what the Commission wanted to hear — opposition to a separate peace with Israel and only grudging consent to contacts between the Jordanian government and the Palestine Conciliation Commission of the UN. The Palestinians presented the Ministerial Commission with petitions, among whose signatories were many people who had taken a completely different line in talking to the King. Abdallah soon got to know of this 'put-up job' from his own sources and was infuriated beyond measure. He would have proceeded to dismiss his Council of Ministers forthwith had it not been for the realization that he could not find anyone to replace them.[9]

The Israeli leaders and Israeli representatives at the negotiations are seen in the documents as being on the whole realistic about the prospects of a settlement with Abdallah. They were fully appreciative of Abdallah's traditional friendship and his desire to live peacefully side by side with the Jewish community in the early days, and thereafter with the State of Israel. Abdallah's attitude had made it

possible to reach military agreements between Israel and Jordan many months before the first Armistice Agreement was signed between Israel and Egypt in February 1949. The Mount Scopus Agreement with Jordan was signed as early as July 1948, followed in November by the 'Sincere Cease-Fire Agreement' in Jerusalem. Meetings with the King himself were again possible from January 1949. The Israelis remained sceptical all the same, being well aware of the constraints that were likely to prevent the King from making peace as he wished to do. The fact that Abdallah had surrendered to the Arab 'front' and joined the general military offensive of the Arab States against Israel on 15 May 1948 was sufficient warning not to be carried away, even when agreement with Jordan seemed within easy reach.

The note of scepticism is omnipresent in the Israeli documents. Sharett, then still Shertok, gave a very reserved welcome to the renewed contacts with Abdallah and the good news they seemed to herald. 'We tend to regard these contacts as nothing more than public relations,' he wrote. '[Abdallah] is not master of the situation either in relation to the British or his own government.'[10] This comment of Sharett's was made many months before the intensive negotiations for a settlement actually started. When these negotiations began seriously, they lasted for three months, from the end of November 1949 to the end of February 1950, by which time it had become clear that the two sides could not bridge the gap between them.

The negotiations went through three stages. The first, which lasted for two months (from 27 November 1949 to 23 January 1950) focused on attaining a comprehensive peace settlement. This proved to be out of reach, because Jordan demanded territorial concessions from Israel. One demand was probably made for bargaining purposes only — that Israel surrender part of the Negev — but the other was meant perfectly seriously. Jordan insisted that Israel give Jordan an outlet to the Mediterranean in the form of a coastal belt linked by a corridor to the Jordan-held part of the West Bank. The coastal belt would have to run from the border of the Gaza Strip to Ashkelon (Majdal), and the corridor cutting across Israel should be at least two kilometres wide, under Jordan sovereignty.[11] These demands Israel rejected. It recognized Jordan's need for a coastal outlet and was prepared to grant special transit rights along an access route, two to three hundred metres wide, connecting the outlet with Jordan territory; but a corridor under Jordan sovereignty was out of the question. Jordan turned this proposal down. In vain the Israelis tried

to make their offer more attractive by expressing readiness to grant Jordan transit and special port rights in Haifa as well.

To save the talks from deadlock, Israel proposed tackling the problem of Jerusalem. The Jerusalem issue was indeed urgent. It was still on the agenda of the UN Trusteeship Council, and the danger of internationalization was still a real one. The Israeli and Jordanian delegations at the UN had in fact co-operated in foiling UN plans for internationalizing the city. The Israelis explained to the Jordanians that they saw negotiations about Jerusalem as part of the talks on a general settlement, a hint that Israel had not given up hope of a comprehensive settlement. Under pressure from his confidant, Samir, the King agreed to ask his Council of Ministers to take part in negotiations over Jerusalem. This marked the second stage of the negotiations, which lasted less than a month. The Jordanians demanded the return of the Arab quarters of Jerusalem occupied by Israel (Talbieh, Katamon, the Greek Colony, Baka'a, etc.) and Israel demanded the Jewish Quarter of the Old City and Mount Scopus with the Hebrew University and the Hadassah Hospital. On 13 February, the Jordan Council of Ministers rejected the Israeli demands. A further meeting between the Israelis and the Jordanians on 12 February was about to end in failure, when King Abdallah joined the delegates to declare that he would not accept defeat. He said he was certain that one day the two peoples would live in peace and friendship; it was therefore vital to move towards this goal through temporary arrangements, if full formal peace was still unattainable. The Israel–Jordan Armistice Agreement (signed in April 1949) would not do. Special arrangements would be bound to bring the parties closer together and create a more propitious atmosphere. Concretely, he proposed a Non-Aggression Pact for five years. He asked Samir el-Rifai to draft the terms, and when the latter jibbed at the task, the King himself dictated the text then and there in Arabic to the Israeli representative, Reuven Shiloah. The main points were that the agreement would remain in force for five years and would cover the territories of the two States without any changes in the then-existing armistice demarcation lines. The two parties would give the UN firm pledges on the safety of the Holy Places. There would be discussions on special compensation to residents of Jerusalem for their abandoned property. Property-owners would be granted permits to cross the lines or to empower legal representatives to settle their claims. Negotiations would take place to renew trade relations and provide a free zone for Jordan in Haifa. Joint

committees would be set up to prepare solutions to the problems that would still have to be solved, solutions that would eventually be embodied in the final peace treaty.

No representative of the Jordan Council of Ministers was present at the meeting in which Abdallah made this proposal; this explains why he said he would submit the matter to his government for discussion only when the Israeli government informed him of its favourable reaction to his plan.[12] This was the start of the third and last stage of these contacts. Within a matter of days, Israel conveyed a message to Samir expressing readiness to negotiate on the basis of the King's proposal. Samir's reply was puzzling: if Israel was not prepared to make new concessions, there was no need for any further meetings. The Israelis suspected that this message had not been authorized by the King, and so they addressed themselves to him directly, informing him of their consent. The result was an invitation to a meeting which took place the next day, this time with a representative of the Jordanian government present in the person of the Defence Minister, Fawzi Mulki. The King again dictated his proposed agreement in detail. The new text was somewhat longer than the first one but remained substantially unchanged.[13] When the King had completed the drafting, he asked those present to initial the agreement. Samir and Mulki did so with patent reluctance. (Shiloah and Dayan initialled for Israel.) It was then decided that each of the parties should prepare a formal draft of its own to serve as a basis for the final text. At the next meeting, which took place on 18 February, both parties, however, met with bitter disappointment. Jordan presented a diluted text that had only the vaguest resemblance to the initialled document: it was not called a non-aggression pact but described as a modification of and annex to the Armistice Agreement. It did not limit the agreement to five years, and the provision on trade between the two countries had disappeared. The Israeli draft was marked by excessive legalism. Entitled 'A Pact of Non-Aggression and Amity', it was decked out in all the nice distinctions of international law, including a provision on conciliation and arbitration in case of disagreement. All the same, the Israeli draft did refer to all the provisions that had been agreed on in the first draft, with the exception of the outlet to the sea under Jordan sovereignty, reference to which was omitted. The earlier draft had stated that this issue would be discussed in a joint committee, as one of the provisions to be included in the eventual comprehensive peace treaty.[14] Abdallah had not been shown his own government's draft and flew into a rage when

he saw it, criticizing it openly. According to the American report on the incident, he said that he could influence the Israelis but he could not control his own government.[15] The Israelis noted in their report that they actually felt embarrassed by the King's criticism of his Ministers. Abdallah went to the length of saying that, if necessary, he would get himself a new Council of Ministers.[16] Kirkbride nonetheless remained optimistic. In reporting to London, he said that he was hopeful that the efforts would continue despite all the difficulties. He considered that the fact that the Council of Ministers had decided in principle in favour of a non-aggression agreement was 'the most important step taken so far' by Jordan towards a settlement. He pointed out that this decision gave the lie to all the previous declarations of the Prime Minister and his Council to the effect that they would 'never negotiate with Israel'. For all that, Kirkbride was mistaken. Prime Minister Tewfik Abu el-Huda reacted furiously to the Israeli draft. He found it completely unacceptable, declaring he saw no point in attempting to reach agreement with the Jews, who were 'tricksters'. The British Minister tried unsuccessfully to calm him down by saying that it would hardly be expected that agreement would be reached at the first meeting, when matters of such import were at issue.[17] Abu el-Huda resigned, retracting only when the King promised to halt the meetings with Israel until after the elections.

The King, in his embarrassment, conveyed a proud message to Israel: 'Abdallah son of Hussein does not break his word.' At a further meeting, the Jordanian representatives had a *Note Verbale* read out: 'The Jordanian government accepts the King's plan as a basis for settlement. Owing to rumours and lies circulating in Jordan, it is decided not to press negotiations but to ask for an adjournment.' Hope was expressed that negotiations would be resumed at the earliest possible moment, 'animated by the same spirit and objectives as in the conferences to date'. The King explained that he would have preferred to go ahead, but since his government had accepted his plan — implying that it had bowed to his wishes — he had agreed to the delay.[18]

The idea of a non-aggression pact was certainly the most realistic proposal put forward. Abdallah's agreeing to hold up the negotiations indicated a serious weakening of his authority. This immediately raised the question in Israel of how to proceed. Moshe Sharett did not doubt the King's sincerity. When urged by his advisers to mobilize US and British diplomacy to persuade the King to continue negotiating, Sharett asked rhetorically, 'Mobilize against whom?' 'The King needs

no persuasion,' he affirmed, 'but [rather] Ministers ready to sign and damn the consequences. US [is] unable to supply them [i.e. Ministers] . . . On the contrary [US] intervention at this stage interpretable as Jewish pressure, hence inimical.'[19] Sharett may not have realized that his view was very similar to those held in London and Washington. There were, however, nuances: London was rather more inclined than Washington to consider whether the time had not come to help the negotiations along, but doubted whether anything could in fact be accomplished by increased diplomatic urging.[20] While London and Washington were still weighing their tactics, the problem partly resolved itself, since Kirkbride continued to play a constructive role in Amman in line with his general instructions. London soon realized, however, that the King might end up alone without a Council of Ministers, if he persisted on his course. It became apprehensive of making things still worse between the King and his Ministers by giving unwanted advice to the Ministers and unneeded encouragement to the King. Washington, for its part, feared that to prod Jordan in the pre-election weeks would be seen as interference in the country's domestic affairs. According to the US Minister in Jordan, the real argument against diplomatic *démarches* was, however, their complete futility. The opponents to an agreement — the Arab League, the Palestinians and the Jordan parliament — had become so much stronger that the diplomat felt bound to advise his superiors not to be affected by Abdallah's enthusiasm.

Notwithstanding this setback in March 1950, the King went on believing that an agreement with Israel was possible, even if it turned out rather less than a fully-fledged peace treaty. At the very least, such an agreement could be something in the nature of an extension of the Armistice Agreement.[21]

As months went by without the contacts' producing any results, Israel was inclined at times to blame the deadlock on the western powers and on Britain in particular. In May 1950, there was an awkward contretemps between Israel and Britain.[22] Sir Knox Helm responded to the repeated requests of the Israeli Foreign Ministry and asked London to urge Abdallah to continue negotiating. The Foreign Office, however, preferred to heed Kirkbride's counsel not to do anything that might complicate the King's relations with his Council of Ministers. One matter of much concern to the British, as they wondered whether or not to use their influence in Amman, was the economic problem. The Arab League was threatening to impose sanctions on Jordan in the event of a Jordanian agreement with

Israel. The Head of the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, Geoffrey Furlonge, pointed to the problems that would be liable to arise for Britain. Having repeatedly declared in favour of a settlement between the Arab States and Israel, Britain could hardly refrain from helping Jordan, if that country were to sign an agreement with Israel and become the object of an economic blockade. Furlonge noted, 'In [Jordan's] already weakened economic position, which a settlement with Israel will apparently not much improve, this [economic blockade] will make it difficult for her to survive without direct help from ourselves. On the other hand, we can hardly discourage King Abdallah from settling with Israel if he can.'[23]

How Britain should act was becoming a matter of controversy inside the Foreign Office itself. Sir Thomas Rapp, Head of the then still influential British Middle East Office (BMEO) in Cairo, visited Israel and Jordan towards the end of 1950. He was very favourably impressed by Israel and worried by what he saw in Jordan. He concluded that time was not working on the side of an agreement and strongly suggested that the Foreign Office adopt a firmer stand in favour of reaching an agreement — the King was old and weak, and this was one more reason to act quickly while he was still there.[24] It appears that Rapp went so far as to suggest the use of bribes to promote agreement. The Head of the Eastern Department, embarrassed by Rapp's exhortations, was forced to defend himself again and explain that during the spring and summer of that year (1950), he and his superiors had regularly gone into the question of using British influence in Jordan (and perhaps in Israel too) in favour of an agreement, only to conclude time and again, on the basis of both Kirkbride's reports and their own knowledge of Middle Eastern affairs, that such pressure would be of no avail. The Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir William Strang, also felt impelled to send Rapp explanations on similar lines. He pointed out that the Jordanian Prime Minister, Samir el-Rifai, had said shortly before that he could not make peace with Israel because of the Arab League. 'After all,' as Strang noted, 'Samir's statement cannot be ignored — he is one of the King's most trusted aides.'[25]

The basic British attitude towards a settlement between Jordan and Israel can be put quite briefly. The British documents will surprise anyone expecting to find an exclusively pro-Arab or pro-Arab League line. As early as September 1948, the Head of the Eastern

Department of the Foreign Office, Bernard A. Burrows, wrote that if the price for settling the Palestine question was to disrupt the Arab League, 'I'm not sure we should be so very distressed.' A year later, a Foreign Office memorandum prepared for the Cabinet stated 'It is not up to HMG to take any steps to bring it [the Arab League] to an end but we shall not regret its demise.'[26]

The British favoured a settlement for two main reasons. They were apprehensive of being subjected to Jordanian pressures to come to that country's assistance in case of a serious border incident with Israel. The Anglo-Jordan Treaty gave Jordan cause to ask for help in such circumstances. As hopes rose in February 1950 that King Abdallah would make headway with his Non-Aggression Pact proposal, Kirkbride wrote approvingly: 'My own reaction is that the present move seems to offer better hopes of an early settlement, which will remove the danger of hostilities between the two countries and consequent embarrassing appeals by Jordan under the Treaty.'[27] The second reason was that Britain had reached the conclusion that in order to play a strategic role in the Middle East, she would need Israel in time of war. It would obviously be far easier to include Israel in Middle East defence plans after a peace settlement between Israel and Jordan.

In the last few months before Abdallah's assassination, Israel no longer had any real hope that the contacts with Jordan would bear fruit. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was of the opinion that King Abdallah meant well but was in the hands of the Palestinian Arabs and powerless. Reuven Shiloah held similar views but also believed that the King had become 'a wishful thinker'.[28] It was Eliahu (Elias) Sasson, a man particularly esteemed by Abdallah, the veteran expert on Arab affairs of the Jewish Agency's Political Department and later Director of the Middle East Department of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, who was the first to draw attention to several matters that escaped other observers, misled by their zeal for an agreement. In 1951, when Sasson was already serving as Israeli Minister in Ankara, he wrote home that Jordan was indeed the Arab country most inclined to make peace with Israel, but it was also the country that had the biggest claims on Israel — claims that Israel could not admit. Secondly, Jordan depended on one old man, 'old and strange . . . courageous and well-meaning but not independent and not free to direct and control affairs'.[29] Sasson was also the first to warn that

negotiations would take a turn for the worse when Samir el-Rifai was made Prime Minister.

One question remains — what made Abdallah persist in his efforts against tremendous odds? It was Kirkbride who tried to give an answer. In a letter to the Foreign Office that made something of a stir and that was still being quoted months later by his colleagues, Kirkbride wrote that Abdallah's desire for a settlement with Israel was not in fact due to far-sighted statesmanship. Abdallah was obsessed with the idea of recovering the land of his fathers, the Hejaz, whence his father, the Sharif Hussein of Mecca, was expelled by Ibn Saud in 1924. Abdallah saw a settlement with Israel as the first step towards his objective. The second step was to be the creation of 'Greater Syria' and only then the final confrontation with the Saudis. Kirkbride noted that there was no chance whatsoever of the dream's being realized but, he added, this did not affect Abdallah's determination or his actions. According to Kirkbride, it was because of the dream of reconquering the Hejaz that Abdallah was indifferent to the precise terms of a settlement with Israel and was ready to be accommodating.[30] Abdallah's Ministers were aware of the King's motives and maintained their reserve. There is certainly a great deal of truth in this analysis by the veteran British envoy in Amman, yet Abdallah was also beyond question impelled by a sincere desire to settle the problems between Jordan and Israel peacefully.

Shortly after Abdallah was assassinated, the Jordan Prime Minister — it was Tewfik Abu el-Huda again — told the US Chargé d'Affaires that his government would not continue with Abdallah's policy on 'Greater Syria'. Moreover, Jordan would abandon Abdallah's policy of a separate peace with Israel and would from then on follow the lead of Egypt and the Arab League in this matter.[31] Thus hope of an Israeli–Jordanian peace agreement disappeared for many long years to come.

Notes

1. Foreign Relations of the United States (hereinafter FRUS) 1951, vol. 5, 735.
2. FRUS, 1950, vol. 5, 804.
3. British diplomatic documents, Public Record Office, Foreign Office (hereinafter FO) 371/EE82179/100, 1 October 1950.
4. FO 371/82179/103, 13 October 1950.

5. FO 371/91364/371, 12 January 1951.
6. FRUS, 1951, vol. 5, 660.
7. Israeli documents (hereinafter Isdoc) 2408/13, 19 February 1951. See, too, summary of M. Sasson's impressions in memorandum entitled, 'The policy lines of Samir Pasha Rifai regarding Israel'.
8. FO 371/82178/EE1015/55, 4 May 1950 and FO 371/82178/EE1015/56, 10 May 1950.
9. FRUS, 1950, vol. 5, 978 ff; FO 371/92179/EE1015/82, 19 July 1950.
10. Isdoc 2451/3, telegram from Sharett to Eban, 2 February 1949.
11. Isdoc 2408/13, 17 February 1950, report on meeting of 9 February.
12. Isdoc 2408/13, 17 February 1950.
13. In Abdallah's first draft there was no mention of an outlet to the sea for Jordan with full Jordanian sovereignty, but it was referred to in the second draft, although as a subject for discussion at the final peace settlement and not in connection with the non-aggression pact.
14. As against this, the possibility was mentioned of a Free Port in Haifa as demanded in the previous draft.
15. FRUS, 1950, vol. 5, 774.
16. Ibid., 775.
17. FO 371/82178/EE1015/36, 2 March 1950.
18. FRUS, 1950, vol. 5, 797.
19. Isdoc 2453/3, telegram from Sharett to Geneva, 5 March 1950; 2453/3, meeting of Sharett and newspaper editors, 9 March 1950, 12.
20. FO 371/82177/EE1015/2, 371/82177/EE1015/19, 31 December 1949, 6 and 12 February 1950.
21. FRUS, 1950, vol. 5, 836.
22. Isdoc 2412/6, 3 May and 2412/6, 16 May 1950.
23. FO 371/82178/EE1015/62, 31 May 1950.
24. FO 371/82178/EE1015/119, 15 December 1950.
25. FO 371/82178/EE1023/156, 15 January 1951.
26. FO 371/68587/EE12196, September 1948; CAB 129(36), 25 August 1949; CAB 129(37), 19 October 1949. These last two Cabinet Papers are memoranda by Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin.
27. FO 371/82177/EE1015/28, 20 February 1950.
28. FRUS, 1951, vol. 5, 711, 657.
29. Isdoc 2408/13, letter from Eliahu Sasson to Reuven Shiloah and his son Moshe Sasson, 12 January 1951.
30. FO 371/82179/EE1015/77, 14 July 1951.
31. FRUS, 1951, vol. 5, 990.

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