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QI Panel:

Jordan and the Annexation of the West Bank

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Steven Simon 0:34

Hello, welcome to Quincy Institute's webinar on Jordan. We have a fantastic panel for this discussion, a rather timely discussion, given events that are playing out in the West Bank, among other places right now that affect, given the Jordanian Israeli relationship, our three panelists are to take it from the top alphabetically. Marwan Muasher, who is, I believe, a VP at Carnegie now a vice president at Carnegie. He was Jordanian ambassador to the US and Jordanian ambassador to Israel, not at the same time Syria, and knows knows his country's politics intimately, but also knows the United States and Israel quite well. So he's ideally positioned to to discuss these issues, which are centered around the 1994 treaty between Israel and Jordan. Secondly, we have Bruce Riedel. He has had significant experience in the United States government, in very senior positions, as the Russians would say, you know, he knows where the dog is buried. He not only served at the White House and at and at CIA, but he was also a deputy assistant secretary of defense. So he understands the military side of these issues as well. And of course, there's a substantial military side to the US Jordanian relationship and to the and to the Jordanian Israeli relationship as well. Lastly, but with pride of place because she's QI's own is Annette Sheline, a fellow, a research fellow, or just a fellow at at QI. She has her PhD in Middle Eastern Studies from George Washington University, and we're very happy to have her on a panel today, because she has recently been in Jordan and written a very informative paper, which can be downloaded from the QI website called Jordan on the edge, which sums up her visit to Jordan, which was fairly lengthy, during which she interviewed a wide range of individuals From the Islamic action front on the one side to members of government and the intelligentsia on the other. So she's really got her finger on the pulse, as of course, does, does Marwan, so that that's our cast of characters.

I'd like to start out get the discussion going by asking our panelists about the world of 1994 as against the world of today. What would somebody you know from today who did not know a lot of history and who was dropped into the world of 1994 that produced the treaty between Israel and and Jordan. Would that person recognize the world into which they'd been dropped? I'd like to start here with with Marwan.

Marwan Muasher 4:18

Thank you, Steve. They would hardly recognize that word. Let me give you some numbers. When we signed the peace treaty in 94 and I became Jordan's first ambassador to Israel. Labor the Labor Party in Israel had 40 members out of 100 members of the Knesset merits, the leftist party had 12 members, and the Arabs had about 10. Just these three parties between them had

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a, you know, majority for peace. When we signed the peace treaty today, labor has four members. Merits has zero members, and the Arab. Parties are split. That gives you an idea of the constituency for peace that has vanished in Israel. In July of this year, the Knesset passed a law against the establishment of a two state solution that got the approval of every single Jewish political party in Israel, Netanyahu has called a two state solution, a reward for terrorism and annexation in the West Bank is actually taking place as we speak, with settlers attacking Palestinians in Area C, with Smotrich announcing that 2025 is going to be the year of the annexation of the West Bank and with President Trump now calling for, you know, mass transfer of Palestinians into Jordan and Egypt. When Jordan signed the peace treaty, it did that primarily to guard against the, you know, evolution of such a scenario. That is the evolution of a scenario that would solve the Palestinian question at Jordan's expense. Today, not just public Jordan, but official Jordan is also asking, why did we sign a peace treaty if Israel wants to annex the West Bank, if Israel doesn't believe in a two state solution, and if the US administration now calls for mass transfer into Jordan and into Egypt, what was the peace treaty for?

Steven Simon 6:40

Well, that's a question under the circumstances, Marwan. Let's, let's turn to Bruce.

Bruce Riedel 7:03

In addition to what Marwan has noted 30 years ago, the expectation was that peace was coming to the Middle East, that a deal was in hand. We'd had the Madrid Conference, we had the Oslo process moving. There were serious negotiations underway between Israel and Syria. And the irony of all this is, of all the hopes that we had in 1994 only one materialized, the Jordan Israeli peace treaty. And if that is now in question, then that entire hopeful era that we were on the edge of transforming the Middle East, I hate to use the phrase new Middle East, because everybody who's ever used the phrase new Middle East has discovered that the old Middle East won't go away. But there, there was an atmosphere or mood in the Clinton administration, you had a president who was willing to devote an enormous amount of personal time, which is the most important thing the presidency has to this, to these issues. Ironically, and for good reason, the United States was not really involved directly in a serious way in the negotiations that produced the peace treaty. We can come back to that later on, but it was a time of great opportunity, great hopefulness. All that, of course, has gone away with the Second Intifada, with the destruction of the Israeli peace party. It's very hard to be optimistic these days about the future of the Middle East.

Steven Simon 8:56

Thanks, Bruce. Now just a spin on this question we've heard, how Israel is is different to what it was then and and really the United States and its policy priorities were then compared to now? What? How does Jordan differ now from the Jordan of 1994?

Annelle Sheline 9:26

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I certainly want to hear marwan's perspective on this, but I think it's also just useful to keep in mind that so much of how Jordan has been transformed in the intervening 30 years has had to do, first of all with the development of the US Jordanian relationship, such that after Jordan signed the peace treaty with Israel, Jordan then received significantly more assistance from the United States, economic assistance, but also military assistance, such that then later, in the context of. Of the global war on terror, Jordan emerged as a key partner for the United States, especially for the Iraq war. For example, at the same time, as a result of violence in the region, Jordan has had to absorb millions more refugees. So as a result of the US invasion of Iraq, for example, Jordan took in over a million Iraqi refugees. Subsequently violence in Syria as a result of the Arab Spring, Jordan again took in hundreds of 1000s of Syrian refugees, many of whom still remain in Jordan. Obviously, there's some hope now, with the fall of the Assad government, that there may be an opportunity for more Syrian refugees to return to Syria, but that's still very up in the air, and obviously right now, the main concern, and what we're hearing from the US administration, is this idea that Jordan would perhaps again be viewed as the so called alternative homeland for Palestinians, which is something that Jordan and Jordan's leadership had made very clear that Palestine is for Palestinians and Jordan is for Jordanians. So to get back to this question that marijuana sort of opened with, well, why did we sign a peace treaty in the first place? Because a key provision of the treaty was to agree that Israel would not displace Palestinians into Jordan, and that Jordan gave up its previous claim to the West Bank in exchange for sort of solidifying the the status of Jordan as a sovereign country, as separate from Palestine. And that Israel would would no longer consider that Jordan sort of this alternative homeland.

But again, now, in this current context where you have a US government, considering this, it's very important to keep in mind that not only does Jordan continue to maintain a massive refugee burden, again, often as a result of US military action in the region, but also that Jordan simply does not have enough resources for its own population. Jordan is one of the most water scarce countries in the world, the the water scarcity threshold is usually accepted or is held at 500 cubic meters per person per year. And in with Jordan, is at less than 100 cubic meters available per person per year for their existing population. And so the thought of hundreds of 1000s, a million. There are 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank. So a question of if Israel were, in fact, to annex the West Bank, how many of those Palestinians would would Israel try to force across the border into Jordan? This is an absolutely existential threat for Jordan, on top of the fact that Jordan's economy already is not strong enough to provide adequate employment for their existing population. And this in a well, I'll pause there and let Marwan way in, who can speak much more to sort of how Jordan looks different now than it did when the peace treaty was signed.

Marwan Muasher 12:58

I want to make some additional points, official Jordan justified the peace treaty to its own citizens by saying that this treaty is going to prevent the establishment of an alternative homeland in Jordan. Later on, with the policies of the Netanyahu coalition, official Jordan once

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again justified to its own population that once Netanyahu goes things would become better and the conditions would be more ripe to resume negotiations that would end with two states. Both these assumptions are being proved wrong. The first assumption that the treaty is preventing the establishment of an alternative homeland is seriously questioned today, not just by public order, but by official Jordan, and the reasoning it gave its citizens is proving to be weak. The other reasoning that you know, departure of Netanyahu might bring in a more reasonable Israeli coalition is also proven to be weak after the finance had passed the law against the two state solution in July. So official Jordan today is also questioning the relationship with Israel.

The other point I want to make is this to Jordan, this is not a question of bringing in more refugees like, you know, Syrians and Iraqis, who are, for sure, an economic problem and a security problem, but for Palestinians, they are also an identity problem. Most of these Palestinians in the West Bank were once Jordan citizens. Have relatives in the country, and you know, bringing in of even few 100,000 Palestinians, if not more, from the Bank, which has a population of 3 million, is going to change, potentially, the identity of the Jordanian state. So official, Jordan is worried about that. It is an identity question. In addition to it being an economic and a security question, it is also a different kind of question. Is Jordan going to be accused, together with Egypt, as having collaborated to facilitate the establishment of a Jewish state in all of Historic Palestine and the emptying of Palestinian lands from its own citizens? Jordan cannot withstand that kind of pressure. Which brings me to the point that the Trump administration and President Trump's statement today sure statements that Jordan is going, in the end, to accept that I strongly question that logic, because for Jordan, it is not an economic issue, it is not a security issue, it's an identity issue, and Jordan, in my view, will not under any circumstances, accept the coming in of more Palestinian refugees for the reasons that I outlined above.

Steven Simon 16:20

Thank you. We're going to come back to these, to these points in a couple of minutes. I wanted, before we did that, though, to explore a little bit of a pre history of the 1994 treaty, just to get more of a context I know Bruce offered a couple of minutes ago to return to that era there. But in addition to the irrational exuberance of the Clinton years on, on Middle East peace there was, there were previous steps on the way, I'd say stations on the way. The one was King Hussein's 1988 speech in which he declared that the Hashemite Kingdom was severing its ties, severing its claims to the West Bank. Seems to me that that would have been a fundamental precursor to a treaty whenever one was going to come up on the menu of options for the concerned states. And the second was the first Gulf War, which in which Jordan played a kind of ambivalent role, or maybe ambiguous role. It's I'm searching for the right word, but, and you all can, you know, can discuss what that what that role was, but to what extent was there already a kind of momentum from the late 80s in the direction of diplomatic ties between Israel and Jordan and and to what extent returning to Bruce's Bruce's point was the exuberance in that period, irrational mean, certainly ex post facto, it seems, it seems that way, because we take for granted the role of the spoilers in in bringing that that process to an end, the peace process of the Clinton years to an end. But did was there a sense in 1994 that the Jordan Israel treaty was kind of the building block of a new future that was presaged, in a larger sense, by the good feeling, I

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suppose, and diplomatic progress of the early Clinton years. Let's, let's turn to Bruce first and then, and then Marwan and Annelle.

Bruce Riedel 19:07

There was very much a sense that coming out of the first Gulf War, the United States was not only the only superpower left, but had the power to remake the region. Now this was delusional, clearly, but it was a very powerful feeling. And it wasn't just Bill Clinton who felt that way. It was the, I would say, the political process in America felt that this way. And yes, the Jordan agreement would be, if you like, the first stepping stone, and we would get the rest and how it's frequently forgotten that we actually did come very close to a second step, which was an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement. We had that literally within 10 yards. If we had been able to come up with an agreement on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, we would have had a deal. And with that deal, you would have also gotten a deal with Lebanon. I remember at Shepherdstown mentioning to Foreign Minister Shara, what are we going to do about Hezbollah? And he said, Oh, don't you worry about that. We know how to deal with these people. And it was, it sounded as ominous as it still does.

In the end, we got none of it. What we ended up with was the Second Intifada, and really the destruction of the peace camp in Israel, of great weakening of it, in the Palestinian movement, the emergence of Hamas, and, I would say for now, as I look at it from a Jordanian standpoint, the most important part of this peace treaty today is the relationship it has developed between the United States and Jordan, which is infinitely stronger now and more nuanced than it has been in the past, including great deal of military cooperation and the deployment of American aircraft in Jordan. That's relationship is what is at risk if Jordan should, for some reason or another, sever the peace treaty, not going back to war. Correct me, if I'm wrong, marijuana and NL, but I don't think anybody in Jordan wants to go back to a state of war with Israel, but they may not want to be in a state of a peace treaty with Israel.

Steven Simon 22:03

I mean, can I probe just a little bit you know about that era? From your you had your your you had your footed in two camps, really professionally. You know? The one was, you were a White House official and deeply involved in these in diplomacy that we've been discussing. On the other you came from a career in the intelligence community with which you kept close tabs. So I guess my question is, was the analytical view in that period as optimistic as the political view during that era.

Bruce Riedel 22:46

I don't think it was. It was not, there's no chance, but there was much more recognition of here are the obstacles, and that these obstacles are quite significant. I think there was also much less confidence that the Palestinian leadership, meaning Yasser Arafat, was prepared to make bold steps. Yasser Arafat was the most frequent foreign visitor to the Clinton White House in the

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eight years that he was in office. More than any other foreign visitor was ya Rafa was there the I in my view, President Clinton assumed that Arafat was more interested in a final deal than in fact that he was. That is not to say that Arafat is the is the evil person in this story, but it is to say that Arafat understood that from a Palestinian standpoint, the issue was not just the question of the status of the West Bank and Gaza. Yes, that's very important. So is Jerusalem, but so was the fate of the Palestinian diaspora and those who wanted to go home. And that issue, there was no prospect of any breakthrough whatsoever. And it's important to understand that Yassir Arafat's base of support in the Palestinian movement in the 1990s was not the West Bank and Gaza. It was the Palestinian population in Lebanon and Syria, those and Kuwait, or formerly in Kuwait, that's where his constituency was, and Camp David in. Uh, the Clinton camp David didn't address those issues, and he was also promised, right up until the moment the helicopter flew out of Camp David, that no one would blame anyone for the failure. By the time the helicopter landed, everyone was blaming Arafat.

Steven Simon 25:21

Yeah, Annelle over to you.

Annelle Sheline 25:30

Oh, I just wanted to comment on something Bruce said. I don't think the concern is so much that Jordan is eager to violate the treaty. I think it's more the concern, and this is what I heard from Jordanians, was that they don't feel that they have a partner in Israel any longer, that this current Israeli government no longer sees it as particularly valuable to maintain a peace treaty with Jordan, and that they consider it more in their interest to push Palestinians across the border into Jordan. And then the question is, how would the Jordanian government respond? And I think given that we know that the amount of support that Jordan receives from the United States is fairly significant, although at the moment, Trump has frozen all US aid to Jordan, which accounts for about 10% of their national budget. So it seems clear that Trump is trying to demonstrate to the Jordanian government just the extent of their reliance on the United States, but that Abdullah is very unlikely to respond belligerently to Israel, knowing that he would then forfeit us support and also would then be facing the the the US backed Israeli military, but more that Abdullah would not be able to survive politically if he, if his, you know, as Marwan was saying, if Jordan faced the existential threat of hundreds of 1000s, a million, however, many Palestinians being forced across the border into Jordan, Who would then insist that their government do something, and that they that Jordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin, neither of whom would be willing to simply accept this. And so the question is, could, could Abdullah and could the Hashemite government survive something like that?

And I think the concern as, as we were saying, kind of at the opening is that the United States may not be fully comprehending the level of the existential threat this would pose for Jordan and the kind of instability that would result, in particular thinking about the broader region. Lebanon, obviously still reeling for still experiencing recent violence, current violence, Syria, obviously in a very unstable position. Jordan has long been seen as this bastion of stability that the United

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States had invested significantly in maintaining. And so the question is, is the Trump administration willing to risk that, and are they? Are they fully comprehensive of what that would mean?

Steven Simon 28:02

You let me pick up on your on your observations here, Annette and ask Bruce and Marwan whether they think that the Trump administration is serious about this and whether they think, given the state of say, politics in Jordan and politics in Israel, would, with the Israelis, at the end of the day, choose the option of an Alternative homeland, and pressing for that over maintaining a 1994 peace treaty that I think at this point has yielded something like four armored brigades on the Jordanian side of the river, basically closing the envelope, you know, of the West Bank, which favors both Israeli and Jordanian current security interests, kind of a strange choice that people are looking to make. So maybe I can turn to Marwan first and then Bruce on that.

Marwan Muasher 29:16

I don't think Steve that the Trump administration has thought through the consequences of what they are, at least, you know, trying to aim at transfer of Palestinians into job, I don't think they have thought it through in The end, \$1.5 billion of assistance hardly will come against the existential threat that Jordan feels. And if Jordan is given a choice, whether to accept Palestinians or to forego \$1.5 billion away, I think the answer is very clear for Jordan. You know, no amount of. Eight is going to, is going to stand up against what might be as, and then said, you know, an internal stability problem that Jordan has no intention of facing. And so, in my view, the king is meeting with President Trump on February 30, February 11. Now, and I think high, if not the highest, on the king's priority list, is to explain to President Trump the consequences of his actions, not on the Palestinians only, but also on Jordan. And let's remember, I mean, I was ambassador to the United States when Bruce was at the White House, and we both can attest to this very strong security cooperation the Jordan and the US today have today. The US has 15 US bases in Jordan, which is not, you know, not not publicly known, but everybody knows that we have a very strong security arrangement, and the relationship is so strong, not just with the White House, but with both sides of the aisle in Congress and with different components of US society. It is not that easy for President Trump to say, to come and say, I'm going to cut off assistance to Jordan. That's not going to be, you know, easily accepted even by many Republicans in the House and the Senate.

So, so I want to, you know, I don't want to belittle the problem, but I also don't want us to think that just because President Trump made these statements, that Jordan is going to so easily accept them, that's, in my view, not going to happen. I want to go back, if I, if you, if I may, Steve, to your earlier question. You know I was spokesman of the Jordanian delegation to the Madrid peace talks. So I've been, I've been with the peace process since its inception. Ken actually was very hopeful the Madrid peace process. He felt allowed to try this issue of arriving at a two state solution that would, you know, protect Jordan. He felt that he wasn't alone in going

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to the to Madrid. I mean, he was joined by the Syrians, by the Lebanese and by the Palestinians. He developed a very strong relationship with Prime Minister Rabin. We tend to forget that and together, even though Rabin never ever talked about the Palestinian state, but the king felt that negotiations and the relationship was going in such a direction that you know that it might very well end with a two state solution. That, of course, after Rabin was assassinated, that that that vanished, and King Hussein never had a good relationship with Netanyahu. And the same applies to, you know, King Abdullah cried at first, but today the relationship is very is very bad to the question of whether the Israelis care about the treaty or actually want a Palestinian an alternative homeland? I think they made the choice. They have publicly said it. Netanyahu said publicly, a two state solution is not a reward for terrorism. What does that mean? What does that mean? Does that mean, if there is no two state solution, does that mean he's going to make Palestinian citizens of Israel? I mean Palestinian Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Is he going to make them citizens of Israel? Absolutely not.

So what is the alternative there? If there is no two state solution, the alternative is clear, and that's why you know, on one hand, Jordan is not going to sever the relationship. The peace treaty is not going to abrogate. I'm pretty sure of that. That's an international commitment Jordan will not withdraw back from but on the other hand, I cannot imagine any kind of public cooperation other than the security cooperation that is going on. I cannot imagine any kind of public cooperation from now on with Israel, simply because official Jordan today does not trust what Israel intends to do.

Steven Simon 34:41

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. So you know on that, on this question of Jordanian attitudes towards the treaty, I mean, I'd have thought that regardless, it would be in Jordan's interest to. Keep this treaty alive, even if it's on life support, because it's really the the only institutional barrier to Israeli or American initiatives for population transfers, using Jordan for say, the Gazan Palestinian population, or part of it, or what have you. If I were Jordanian, I would, I would hang on to that treaty as long as I as long as I could.

Marwan Muasher 35:36

And that's what will happen, in my view.

Steven Simon 35:41

Bruce, what's your impression, Bruce, I assume you still track these things. And just you know, out of, out of general interest of the competence, effectiveness and and reliability of Jordan's security forces, because things are going to get more fraught, you know, clearly. So I was just wondering what your thinking was on that

Bruce Riedel 36:09

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The Jordanian security forces, or let's be very explicit, the GID, is the gold standard of international intelligence services, it is extremely good at penetrating terrorist plots aimed against the kingdom, aimed against the United States. Now that doesn't diminish questions about its role in the internal affairs of Jordan. Certainly, there's lots of concerns there, but from the standpoint of partnership between the United States and Jordan on security issues, the intelligence part has always been at the forefront. Now it doesn't get as much publicity for obvious reasons, but that is where it all begins. What's remarkable in the last decade or so is the development of conventional US military force structure in Jordan, which Marwan talked about, that's, that's, that's a really new phenomenon. Let me also just briefly address the question of the Trump administration's attitudes towards Jordan. We know from the first Trump administration that Jordan was not a high priority. President made very clear from the beginning of his term in office that his priorities in the Middle East were number one, Saudi Arabia and number two, Israel.

And I suspect that will remain his priorities, and Jordan is not it just doesn't carry the weight that tracks the Trumpers to support it. Now, Marwan, very rightly pointed out that there's a lot of the rest of the American bureaucracy and political process that understands the importance of Jordan, certainly the intelligence community, the Pentagon, CENTCOM, they all understand that. I would hope that our new Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, understands that as well, but I don't think that the President has that kind of commitment to Jordan that we've seen, For example, in the Biden administration, in the Obama administration, and certainly in the Clinton administration, and even in the in the George W Bush administration, it was the George W Bush administration, if I remember correctly, that got the Jordan Free Trade Agreement put forward, which was as was a significant milestone in the development of this relationship. I would love to know more about the king's forthcoming visit to the White House. Who's who? Who was pushing for this. My feeling is almost certainly the king was pushing for this. I'm doubtful that this was a high priority for the Trump White House.

Marwan Muasher 39:56

I mean, I don't know the details, Bruce, all I can tell you is that during. In President Trump's first term, he only met with the king during his first year, and in his last three years he did not meet with the king. And as you you know, as we all said, relationship was not exactly what Jordan wanted to be. I know that the king is keen to meet President Trump, I don't know who instigated you could very well be right that we pushed for it. But what is significant is that this time, he agreed to meet when he when he did not before, and that at least gives Jordan an opportunity to make its case about the consequences of, you know such such policies on the kingdom, not just on the Palestinians. Whether we are going to succeed at this or not, I don't know. I would. I tend to agree that in this administration, the maybe only two people that we can have a listing here from are the Secretary of State and the National Security Advisor, Mike Hans. He is married to a Jordanian that doesn't necessarily mean much, but, but he is married to a Jordanian American, which suggests that, you know, he will at least listen to what Jordan's concerns are.

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Steven Simon 41:21

Yes. Yeah, we know that, as President Clinton would have said, because it's a relative certainty, I had to think about that too the first time he said that. So when it just said, let's stay on this topic of a summit meeting as some kind of encounter between King Abdullah and President Trump. Typically when, when diplomats think about these kinds of meetings, and as they prepare for them, they think in terms of deliverables. So what's actually going to come out of this meeting? And what she What? What is each principle going to come away with that he can point to, and he in this case, that he can point to what, what are they for Jordan and the United States, if such a meeting came to pass? Over to you Marwan.

Marwan Muasher 42:14

Well, I think the king is going to deploy a policy that is not confrontational. At one point, he has no, you know, intent to have a confrontational attitude with the President, just as the President think we did in during his first term. And at the same time, he does not want to acquiesce to what Trump is suggesting about mass transfer, ideally, if Jordan, ideally, Jordan needs to come out with two things, a statement by President Trump, asserting Jordanian sovereignty and asserting the US commitment to such sovereignty and that they will not basically accept a violation of the treaty and a continuation of USAID. That is the ideal situation if both objectives cannot be met. I think at least an assertion of Jordanian sovereignty is something that the king is going to be very keen on.

Steven Simon 43:23

Bruce. What would, what would these deliverables be for, for the Trump White House?

Bruce Riedel 43:28

Well, I think in a delusional way, the President thinks he's going to convince the king to take a billion Gazans into Jordan. I think we all agree that that's absolutely not going to happen in an ideal world. What should come from this summit is, first of all, the resumption of US assistance to Jordan, and maybe even a modest increase, it should also come up with some thoughts on what is going to be the Future of Gaza. The right now the future of Gaza is an unknown. The Israelis insist that they won't let Hamas run Gaza again, but they haven't come forward with any alternative for who should the Jordanians obviously are not going to run Gaza, but they can be helpful in moving Palestinian Authority to be stronger and to go be able to take place. They could also be willing to participate in an international peacekeeping force that goes into Gaza, which, to my mind, is the. Essential next step in this whole process. And we actually have Arab states saying that they are prepared to participate, including the UAE. And we have the largest Muslim state in the world, Indonesia, saying it's willing to participate. That would make a lot of sense. The last deliverable that I think would be very helpful to come out of this is some agreement on how we're going to deal with the new government in Syria. This is a real opportunity in an otherwise pretty bleak picture. What's happened in Damascus in the last

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month or so is astounding. I certainly didn't expect that it would happen. I don't think very many people did the you know, we it's easy to be pessimistic about the future of Syria, and God knows, there's good reasons to be pessimistic, but the United States and the the Arab world should seize this opportunity to move Syria, if not to democracy, but at least out of The relationship it has had with Iran for the last 2030, years. This is a real chance to let's see if we can develop a Syria that wants to be part of resolving conflict in the Middle East rather than supporting Hezbollah and instability in Lebanon.

Steven Simon 46:54

I could say you haven't lost the hang of doing decision memos for the president. That was great, Bruce. We're going to turn to some questions from from viewers. There's one that's for Annelle that I wanted to get to from someone who spent significant time in Jordan in 2024 including covering the protest around the kludie Mosque. The crowd frequently chanted specifically about their disapproval of the wadi araba treaty. That's the treaty we've been talking about. Can you speak to the difference between the official line on normalization in Jordan as compared to the widespread sentiments in the street? I think you can do that pretty crisply, but avoid, but avoid expletives, okay, there are children watching.

Annelle Sheline 47:49

The Israel, the treaty with Israel has never been popular with Jordanians, although I do think at this point, at least, when I was there there, was some recognition of the concern of what an alternative might look like. And I do there was another question that came up of someone expressed surprise that we haven't talked about the plan advance to push the Hashemites out and make Jordan the Palestinian state. This is what we're talking about. I think this is the concern. And in particular, although Bruce outlined very reasonable and I think productive deliverables, deliverables that the White House should be pushing for. I think the concern is that Trump and his administration are pushing for what they see as an alternative solution, this idea of Jordan as the alternative homeland. And what more one has stated emphatically several times is that this is existential for Jordan, and so I do think that we're likely to see these two leaders at a loggerheads, that Trump will insist that we're going to cut off aid. They already did cut off aid. And Barbara Slavin mentioned in the chat, what if the US imposes high tariffs on Jordanian goods.

But as Marwan has said, no amount of aid or no amount of sort of economic pressure can overcome the existential threat that this would pose to Jordan. So I think another thing we haven't even brought up here is the Saudi factor, and the fact that we know that the so called deal of the century that was put forward in the first Trump administration, which was sort of articulated in partnership with the Saudis, but not in partnership with the Jordanians, potentially involved the Saudis taking over custodianship of the Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, which is something that the Saudis have long desired as a means of consolidating their control over the major you know, obviously Mecca Medina, and then Jerusalem as well, and and fully finally marginalizing the Hashemites, which, although are far reduced from their

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previous statuses of as the Sharifs of Mecca, remains sort of this alternative source of religious authority that the Saudis have never felt particularly comfortable with, even again, the fact that they rule a fairly small and impoverished country. So from the Saudi perspective, I think. And I think Jordan will be saying, Look, Mohammed bin Salman has promised me \$600 billion and I'm going to try and get it to a trillion, despite the fact that the Saudi public investment fund is only \$930 billion in the first place. So there's, there's really not that much money that MBS can throw around. Um, but I think Trump would be asking the Saudis have promised me this much investment? What are you Jordan going to promise me? And unfortunately, there's really not very much that Jordan can do for Trump, from his perspective, other than except Palestinians, and I don't know what, what sort of agreement or compromise could come out of a meeting between those two leaders.

Steven Simon 50:42

You have I'm sorry, I just want to get to one other, one or two other questions here, but one of them is actually relates to something that you were just saying and now that you were addressing yourself to, and that's Barbara Slavin's question about, well, what so what happens? You know, if the Trump administration says, hey, you know, we've got the hammer and, and we've got the cupcake. You know which, which do you want? And you know if, if the Saudis are footing the bill for, for, for this in some administration conception, you know of a deal, then you know this. This number could be very high. It could be much higher than the 1.4 billion, than than the Jordan gets from the United States. That that number would be dwarfed and and at that point, would you have a public constituency in Jordan, especially on the Palestinian side of the body politic in Jordan, that says, Well, you know, maybe, maybe this is a good idea, because we don't really have much else. And on the penalty side, I mean, the administration might regard there to be, say, no opportunity cost to punishing Jordan, because, for example, Bruce mentioned that, well, we've got a lot of military installations, small military installations, in Jordan that are a heritage of the war on terror. Well, you know, President Trump has said that he's eager to pull the 2000 troops that are now in Jordan for the defeat ISIS mission that are now in Syria for the defeat ISIS mission out of that country and redeploy them, or bring them back home, or something like that. I mean, he's very relaxed about the kinds of threats that have led to the, you know, broad deployment of of US forces in Jordan. So, you know, there may be, there may be bureaucrats who really see an importance to this, but the White House might not.

Marwan Muasher 52:52

Last week, King Abdullah was in Brussels, and he got a commitment for \$3 billion in EU, aid for Jordan next year. Okay, \$3 billion so it is not that Jordan does not have any alternatives. It does and it has a lot of respect in the international community. Again, I don't want to belittle USA, but if anybody thinks that they can put us aid against the existential threat for Jordan, they are mistaken. No amount of aid is going to convince the king to say yes to President Trump, and the meeting does not need to end positive. It might not end positive. It's an opportunity for both sides to state their case. But in the end, if they don't agree, it does not mean that it is Jordan that has to pay the price. Jordan cannot pay the price. Is what I'm saying.

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Steven Simon 53:56

That makes a lot of sense. I know. Did you want to? Did I cut you off before? I'm not sure.

Annelle Sheline 54:01

I think just one other thing to keep in mind here, and perhaps this is, again, you know, personal one, and you Steve, can speak to this a lot more authority. But essentially what it seems like Trump is proposing, with ethnically cleansing Palestinians from Gaza, from the West Bank, to Egypt, as he says to Jordan, as he says, I mean, we're essentially just re running a similar situation to what had happened after the creation of the State of Israel, where you had displaced Palestinians in other countries around the region. And not only those populations of Palestinians themselves trying to engage in acts of resistance, acts of violence, but also those countries being, you know, the leadership facing popular resistance and outrage from their own populations, as well as this sense, you know, obviously the Arab nationalism was stronger at the time, and there was the sense that their countries needed to unite for the cause of Palestine. I mean, it seems that this is Trump's what Trump is setting up to do is to sort of re establish that dynamic. And in many. Ways. You know, for those who consider the Abraham accords to have been a step forward, achieving normalization countries being willing to sort of side, sidestep the Palestinian issue and normalize with Israel, it just, it seems to me that Trump is not, hasn't read the history, and doesn't seem to understand that, that if he were to displace millions of Palestinians from Historic Palestine. This would not result in some sort of peaceful resolution of this conflict. This would result in extreme instability and likely additional violence being directed against Israel. And maybe the assumption is that Israel can handle it, or would simply react with so much of its own violence, as we've observed, that this is seen as sort of a problem that they could manage. But again, Trump's whole thing is, as Steve mentioned, you know, he doesn't want to devote additional US troops to the region. He doesn't want to devote a lot of additional attention to the region. He definitely doesn't want to get back into another war in the region. And it seems like what he's setting up for maybe just that if he engages in this sort of a policy.

Steven Simon 56:05

Well, that was an eloquent last word. Or maybe, maybe it's not a last word. We have, actually have three minutes, and we have three panelists, so perhaps we could get a one minute summing up of each panelists, bottom line, starting with Marwan, then Bruce and then back to Annelle.

Marwan Muasher 56:30

Nobody has asked whether the Palestinians want to come from Gaza to Jordan. Okay, it's we just assume they are pawns that we can move around anytime we want to. It is very clear, you know, they are not standing at the border with Egypt today. They are going back to their homes in North Gaza, even though, knowing that their homes are not there, Palestinians have learned

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the lesson. They are not going to move. And so while we, you know, engage in all these discussions, let's have that in mind as well.

Steven Simon 57:03

Thank you, Bruce?

Bruce Riedel 57:05

I think this summit between the President and the king is going to be a very interesting one, and I think there's a good chance, as Marwan has stated, that there's not going to be a meeting of the mines, and the question then becomes, where we go next? If there is a fundamental disagreement about this issue of clearing out Gaza, it's clear now that's the Trump plan for the future of Gaza, empty it people and turn it into a luxury beach complex that's not going to that's not the solution, that's not going to solve the problem. And as Marwan just pointed out, Gazans are not interested in leaving.

Steven Simon 57:57

Thank you, Annelle, over to you.

Annelle Sheline 58:00

I would echo that that as well. I think the concern, and part of what has motivated this is that, unfortunately, we have seen the complete breakdown in international law that has allowed Israel to engage in the genocide of Palestinians, such that it what Palestinians want has been so beside the point, as far as Israeli decision making, as far as American decision making, and I think the concern is clearly under the Biden White House, but also under the Trump White House, is that, I think, from the American and Israeli perspective, is sort of the Palestinians will will be forced to move, or they will be killed. And I hope, and what, I think, what will mean to be seen is how the other countries in the region react to this and either respond to what their own populations demand, which would be standing up for the cause of Palestinian sovereignty. But again, I think that the concern is given the amount of of military power that the US has used and that Israel has used, these countries will be faced with this existential question of try to stand up for Palestinians, or face this extreme violence being turned against them.

Steven Simon 59:16

Annelle, that was a fine summing up. Thank you very much, and thank you to Bruce and Marwan as well for their thoughtful their thoughtful comments, their candor and wisdom. So hope we can do it again. Thanks all.

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