Insight

Not an 'Alternative Homeland': New Models for Integrating Jordan into an Israeli-Palestinian Arrangement

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As part of the campaign for the 26th Knesset elections, Yisrael Beiteinu chairman Avigdor Lieberman put forward a plan to establish an Israeli-Jordanian confederation. Its main provisions include the ending of the Oslo Accords, the dissolution of the Palestinian Authority, and the transfer of Areas A and B to Jordanian responsibility (both security and civil), while Area C would remain under full Israeli sovereignty. The feasibility of this proposal is very low, given resolute Jordanian and Palestinian opposition. Jordan rejects these proposals out of concern that they are intended to turn it into an "alternative homeland" for the Palestinians at the expense of its stability and identity, and conditions any discussion of a confederation on the prior establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

In response to the impasse, two more practical alternatives emerge for Jordan's involvement in an arrangement, should Amman wish to consider them: the first is a return to a model in the spirit of King Hussein's 1972 Federation Plan, backed by the international community and Arab states and with Israeli and Palestinian consent; the second is the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian Entity with Limited Sovereignty (PELS), as a potential transitional phase toward a Palestinian statehood and subsequent establishment of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation. To enable practical discussion of these ideas, it is recommended that the softened term "an arrangement with Jordanian participation" be adopted, that the proposals be advanced through discreet discussions with expert teams, and that a package of regional and international aid and guarantees be developed.

In early October 2026, during the Knesset election campaign, Avigdor Lieberman, chairman of Yisrael Beiteinu, unveiled his plan to establish an Israeli-Jordanian confederation in Judea and Samaria, without the inclusion of the Palestinian Authority. In a statement he published, he brought the discussion of the "Jordanian option" for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict back onto the political agenda. Lieberman dubbed his plan an "upgraded London Agreement" (referring to the 1987 Peres–Hussein Memorandum) and presented it as a practical solution for preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state and thwarting a Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad takeover of the Palestinian territories.

The plan's main provisions are the ending of the Oslo Accords, the dissolution of the Palestinian Authority, and the return of Areas A and B to Jordanian responsibility, while Area C (60 percent of the West Bank) would remain under full Israeli sovereignty. According to Lieberman's proposal, Jordan

would be responsible for maintaining public order and managing the daily lives of the Palestinian population through Jordanian police forces or Palestinian battalions under Jordanian command. He said the proposed framework was not merely “wishful thinking,” but was “based on many years of familiarity with the region and the relevant parties” and was therefore “implementable.”

This article reviews various historical models falling under the "Jordanian option" and analyzes King Abdullah II's position on the confederation, as well as reactions to Lieberman's plan in the pro-establishment Jordanian press. While the gaps between Lieberman's framework and Jordan's position currently appear unbridgeable, the possibility of alternative forms of cooperation with Jordan, should Amman wish to explore them, merits consideration in the context of future efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The "Jordanian Option": Different Models of Confederation

Ideas for a federation or confederation involving Jordan have been discussed since the early 1970s as a pathway to resolving the Palestinian issue. Even today, some point to the relative advantages such a framework could offer Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians, and to its potential to serve diverse political, security, and economic strategic interests. Among other things, a confederation would address Israel's pressing need to prevent a slide toward a one-state reality under current circumstances, when a two-state solution that resolves all core issues – territorial, national, religious, security and civil – is currently unrealistic for the foreseeable future; it would reduce Israeli control over the Palestinian population and prevent unnecessary friction between Palestinians and Israel; and it would draw on Jordan's historical ties to the West Bank and its "special role" at the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, as enshrined in Article 9.2 of the Israel–Jordan Peace Treaty.

Over the years, various confederation models have been proposed. They differ in the status they accord the Palestinians, the scope of Jordanian responsibility and involvement, and the burden they place on the kingdom. The main models are as follows:

A. **Functional Involvement** – Jordan assumes defined roles without gaining sovereignty over the West Bank. Under this model, areas for consideration could include security coordination, assistance in training Palestinian institutions, administration of border crossings, development of water and energy infrastructure, trade, and management of the holy sites in Jerusalem. Each area would require a separate agreement on authority, funding, and responsibility. This is the most limited and straightforward model, requiring minimal consensus among the parties. It could take shape as one component of a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian arrangement, but it cannot stand alone.

B. **A Jordanian-Palestinian Confederation** – A shared framework for two political entities that retain their independence while delegating certain powers to joint institutions. This model could include economic, movement, and security arrangements, but it would not resolve the need for a decision regarding the status of an independent Palestinian state. As discussed below, it is unclear whether the parties would be willing to discuss such a confederation before a Palestinian state is established, or only afterward. One cannot assume there is binding Jordanian consent to this course.

C. **A Jordanian-Palestinian Federation** – A single state framework in which powers are divided between a central government and its constituent units or districts. Under this model, the West Bank would become an autonomous district under a central Jordanian government. It would require decisions on a constitution, representation, citizenship, the military, the budget, and the judicial system. It would fundamentally alter Jordan's political structure and the realization of Palestinian self-determination, and would therefore require a much broader basis of legitimacy than cooperation in defined areas.

D. **The "Alternative Homeland"** – This concept encompasses two models: (1) returning territory and population in the West Bank to Jordanian sovereignty; and (2) "Jordan is Palestine"—a model that views the East Bank of the Jordan River as the answer to Palestinian national aspirations. Both models have implications for questions of sovereignty and rights, but the "alternative homeland" idea directly undermines the identity and very existence of the kingdom in its current form.

Lieberman's plan does not fully correspond to any of the models discussed above, whose relevance to present-day political realities is itself open to question. His plan seeks to establish an Israeli-Jordanian confederation (rather than a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation or federation, as in models B and C), and to combine functional Jordanian involvement (as in model A) with the return of limited areas of the West Bank to Jordanian sovereignty (as in model D1).

The Confederation and the "Alternative Homeland" Threat From Jordan's Perspective

Jordan's position on the confederation question stems from its dualistic and suspicious attitude toward Israel. On the one hand, in court circles, Israel is seen as a strategic asset and an essential—even if quiet—partner on security, water, and energy. On the other hand, Israel is viewed as a potential existential threat. Since the political shift of 1977, Amman has feared that Israeli right-wing actors aspire to resolve the Palestinian issue in Jordan, upsetting the kingdom's delicate demographic balance and its national Jordanian identity, distinct from Palestinian identity. A central purpose of the peace treaty Jordan signed with Israel in 1994 was to fortify the kingdom's borders and enshrine the principle that "Jordan is Jordan and Palestine is Palestine." To this end, the treaty included an explicit clause (Article 2.6) prohibiting the forced transfer of population from one side of the border to the other.

Yet from Jordan's perspective, the "alternative homeland" threat has not gone away, even after 32 years of peace. Trends that have gained traction in Israel in recent years—chief among them the expansion of settlements, the establishment of outposts and agricultural farms, the de facto annexation of parts of the West Bank, the weakening of the Palestinian Authority, and Jewish terrorism accompanied by calls to encourage the voluntary emigration of Palestinians from the territories—are interpreted in Jordan as preliminary Israeli measures designed to bring about demographic change on the ground. In Jordan, the assessment has gained ground that, if Israel is determined to prevent the possibility of establishing a Palestinian state in the territories captured in 1967, then it intends to resolve the Palestinian issue within the kingdom's territory. King Abdullah gave forceful expression to this concern in his speech at the UN General Assembly in New York last September, accusing Israel of pursuing "a single policy to compel an entire population to leave their land."

Jordan's position on confederation also reflects its fear that the plan conceals an Israeli scheme to roll the demographic and security responsibility for the Palestinians onto Jordan's doorstep and turn it into

an "alternative homeland." Jordan's consistent position is that a confederation would not serve as a substitute for a Palestinian state, but could be a product of one. In Jordan's view, confederative relations between Jordan and the Palestinians would be considered only after an independent and sovereign Palestinian state had been established, and only if they were based on the free and sovereign choice of both sides, the Jordanian and the Palestinian, and on Jordanian-Palestinian agreements across a range of sensitive political issues.

Indeed, the king has flatly rejected initiatives to establish a confederation before the establishment of a Palestinian state several times in the past. For example, in January 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump proposed what he described as a "great deal": Jordan would assume responsibility for Palestinian territories in the West Bank. According to press leaks, Abdullah later said he felt as though he had had "a heart attack" when Trump made the proposal to him. He was forced to reject it despite his country's economic dependence on Washington, because he saw it as a threat to the future of his kingdom. In September 2018, Jordan's government spokesperson at the time, Jumana Ghunaimat, also publicly addressed the U.S. proposal for a confederation, stating that it was not on Jordan's agenda, as the country remained committed to the two-state solution.

The idea of confederation surfaces from time to time also in Jordanian domestic discourse, but is quickly rejected by the establishment mainstream. One example was the sharp reaction to a 2021 article published by Hasan Ismaik, chairman of the board of trustees of the Strategiecs Think Tank and a Jordanian businessman of Palestinian origin, who called for unification between Jordan and Palestine as a creative way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In his article in *Foreign Policy*, Ismaik emphasized the common ground between Jordan and Palestine on many levels—demographics, family ties, customs, traditions, and support for the Jordanian king. He proposed calling the confederative entity "The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Palestine," stressing that it would remain under the exclusive rule of the Hashemite dynasty and protect the distinct identities and interests of both Jordanians and Palestinians. According to Ismaik, such an entity would receive international aid, encourage mutual Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian trade, and bring economic prosperity and growth from which all the countries of the region would benefit.

In response, a stream of articles appeared in the pro-establishment Jordanian press rejecting Ismaik's proposal on the following grounds: first, establishing a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation before Israel's withdrawal from the territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders would erode the legitimacy of the State of Palestine, turn it into a kind of "district" within Jordan, and provoke opposition from Palestinian groups that would view it as a "Jordanian occupation" and an infringement on the Palestinian right to self-determination; second, a Jordanian-Palestinian union would serve the schemes of the Israeli right to absolve Israel of responsibility for the occupation, transfer the Palestinian issue to Jordanian territory, and destabilize the kingdom's delicate demographic balance; and third, the costs of administering the Palestinian territories and meeting the needs of the "new Jordanians" would far exceed any economic benefits the kingdom might receive, given the inheritance of the Palestinian Authority's "bloated bureaucracy" and the expected increase in security expenditures.

Jordanian Reactions to Lieberman's Confederation Plan

Lieberman's confederation plan has not yet received an official response from Jordanian government officials. This may be because it was presented as part of his party's election campaign and does not represent, at least at this stage, the position of the Israeli government. At the same time, a range of Jordanian commentators identified with the government's line have addressed the plan and presented a united front against it, pointing to three main flaws.

First, the Israeli territorial withdrawal proposed by Lieberman is insufficient. The plan calls for a confederation in Areas A and B alone, which make up less than 40 percent of the territory and have no direct access to Jordan, while leaving Israel in control of Area C, which comprises most of the territory. In this context, Sameh al-Mahariq, a columnist for the regime's daily *Al-Rai*, wrote that Jordan would be better off continuing to spar with Israel over the implementation of a two-state solution than legitimizing such a flawed solution.

Second, there is a deep gap between Jordan and Lieberman in how they view the Palestinian issue. According to Rana al-Zagha, a research assistant and project coordinator at the Jordanian Politics and Society Institute, Jordan views the Palestinian issue as a national struggle by a people demanding to realize its sovereign right to self-determination, whereas Lieberman sees it as an administrative matter concerning the management of territory and population. Similarly, political commentator Nabil Ibrahim Haddad wrote on the *Jo-24* website that Lieberman seeks to shift the discussion of the Palestinian issue from "When will the Palestinians receive the right to govern an independent state of their own?" to "Which state is best suited to manage the Palestinian population?" Jordan and the Palestinians, he argued, should oppose the plan, because "whoever succeeds in defining the nature of the problem is halfway to imposing the solution they want."

Third, the plan seeks to harness Jordan as an instrument in Israel's service, without granting sovereignty to the Palestinians. According to Haddad, Lieberman's proposal does not seek to restore the situation that prevailed in the West Bank prior to 1967, but rather to place the burden of managing the civilian population on the kingdom's shoulders while Israel retains territorial and security control. Former president of the Jordan Press Association, Rakan Saaideh, also expressed opposition to Lieberman's plot to "entangle Jordan in security and civilian roles" in the West Bank.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

As the Jordanian reactions to Lieberman's plan have demonstrated, the current discussion between Jerusalem and Amman on the confederation question has so far been a "dialogue of the deaf." It is trapped between Israel's unrealistic expectation that Jordan will take responsibility for the management of the Palestinian population in parts of the West Bank, and the Jordanian demand for the establishment of a Palestinian state as a precondition for any confederation. All this against the backdrop of the kingdom's ongoing fear of an Israeli plot to turn it into the "alternative homeland" or to make the Jordanian army an alternate occupying force to the IDF.

Accordingly, adoption by a future Israeli government of a Lieberman-style confederation plan (which applies to only 40 percent of the West Bank and excludes Jerusalem) is unlikely to lead to an understanding with Jordan. Instead, it is likely to create friction between the two states. Moreover, any Israeli attempt to advance the plan in its current format is expected to reinforce the view among

Jordanian ruling circles that there is no real difference between Israel's political camps, since all of them seek to turn Jordan into the Palestinians' "alternative homeland" and endanger the kingdom's future. This would make it harder to restore relations with Amman, which have been at a low point since the outbreak of the war on October 7, 2023, and would encourage Jordan to continue its diplomatic efforts to isolate Israel regionally and internationally.

Nevertheless, two possible avenues for further discussion regarding Jordan's potential role in future Israeli-Palestinian arrangements merit consideration, should Amman wish to explore them:

First, an initiative by Arab states and the international community inviting King Abdullah to consider whether a confederative framework might offer a possible way out of the diplomatic impasse, providing a middle ground between the Palestinian aspiration for independent statehood and the strong political opposition in Israel to establishing a Palestinian state at this stage. If such a proposal emerged as a broad initiative with Palestinian consent, Jordan would be seen as stepping forward on behalf of the Palestinians, rather than as acting in Israel’s service. One possible model for advancing this approach is the federation plan proposed by King Hussein in 1972. Its main provisions called for a united kingdom comprising two districts, Jordanian and Palestinian, headed by the king of Jordan, who would also serve as supreme commander of the armed forces. Under the original plan, which would need updating, Amman would be the capital of the Transjordanian district and East Jerusalem the capital of the Palestinian district. Each district would have its own government and parliament, holding most governing powers, with foreign affairs and defense left to the central government in Amman.

Despite Israel’s rejection of Hussein’s plan in 1972, 32 years of Israeli-Jordanian peace place the two sides in a different starting position. Israel shares its longest border with Jordan, which has remained relatively quiet. Jordan is a reliable security buffer between Israel and threats from the east, and has proved a dependable partner in confronting Iran. The security establishments of the two countries maintain close and ongoing cooperation. The peace treaty reinforces the expectation that Jordan can be relied upon to coordinate with Israel in maintaining security and implementing security arrangements in the area west of the Jordan River, extending to a border to be agreed upon by the parties and excluding the Jerusalem area. Therefore, if such a proposal is acceptable to the Palestinians and regional and international support for its implementation can be mobilized, Jordan and Israel should consider it.

A second possible framework, also based on a confederative vision, is the establishment of a separate and distinct Palestinian political entity with limited security sovereignty (Palestinian Entity with Limited Sovereignty – PELS). This framework could provide a gradual and balanced response to the parties' interests, based on defining a demilitarized Palestinian entity as a transitional stage on the way to Palestinian statehood and a confederation with Jordan can be a possible long-term vision, one that could eventually be realized through the free choice of Jordanians and Palestinians to establish shared mechanisms.

The reasonable assumption is that Jordan would be reluctant to resume administrative or military responsibility in the West Bank. Accordingly, any discussion of a potential Jordanian role during the transitional stage should begin by examining whether, and under what conditions, such involvement could serve Jordan's own national and strategic interests, while safeguarding its sovereignty and avoiding additional burdens or responsibilities. For such an arrangement to remain acceptable to all

parties over time and stand the test of reality, six critical foundational issues would need to be adequately addressed:

A. **Sovereignty and Borders.** It must be determined who holds authority in each area, what status Israeli settlements in the West Bank would have, and what arrangements would govern access and territorial contiguity between the West Bank and Jordan.

B. **Security.** The parties must clarify who would bear primary security responsibility, who would oversee border crossings and control the airspace, and what powers would apply in an emergency. Jordanian involvement could range from professional assistance to broad responsibility. Any expansion of its role should be conditional on capacity, consent, and a close coordination mechanism.

C. **Jerusalem and the Holy Sites.** Sovereignty, security, religious administration, free access to the holy sites, and municipal governance should be treated separately. A joint mechanism could be considered in certain areas, such as freedom of worship and access, alongside clear rules for joint decision-making, addressing violations, respecting the other side, and preventing escalation.

D. **Citizenship and Law.** The arrangement must define civil status, voting rights, obligations, jurisdiction, and access to the courts. It is especially important to prevent a situation in which a person is subject to one authority, votes under another, and has no influence over the key decisions affecting their life.

E. **The Gaza Strip.** Any arrangement focused on the West Bank will need to explain how it relates to Gaza. Gaza could become a sub-district under the umbrella of the Palestinian entity, once that entity is able to assume control of the Strip and establish a monopoly on the use of force: "one entity, one law, one weapon." Egypt should be included in discussions of its role in Gaza. Leaving it outside the first stage could be a practical choice, at least while Trump's 20-point plan remains relevant to implementation in the Strip.

F. **Refugees and Economy.** A relationship with Jordan does not in itself resolve refugee claims. Their status, an international mechanism for compensation and resettlement, and agreed housing arrangements will need to be determined. On the economic front, the parties must define the budget, revenues, customs arrangements, infrastructure, and cost-sharing. A plan based on external aid must specify who will commit to funding it, how to ensure that aid goes toward building state infrastructure rather than supporting terrorist groups, how long it will last, and what will happen if aid is reduced or ends.

We recommend exploring the possible relationship between the PELS framework and the idea of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation as a vision. PELS could serve as a transitional framework for advancing political, territorial, and demographic separation between Israel and the Palestinians, while strengthening the Palestinian Authority's capacity to govern as an entity. Over the longer term, and only if the parties concerned consider it desirable and mutually beneficial, a Jordanian-Palestinian confederative arrangement could be explored as part of a broader regional framework that also addresses Israel's security concerns.

The terms used will also matter in building public support for the proposed frameworks. We recommend adopting the term “an arrangement with Jordanian participation” instead of historically charged terms such as “federation,” “confederation,” or “the Jordanian option.” The recommended sequence of actions for advancing these frameworks is as follows: conduct discreet, unofficial consultations by a team of experts with Jordanian and Palestinian entities to assess feasibility; develop clearly defined alternatives for the planned legal and security structures on the ground and compare them with the current situation; assemble a regional and international package of guarantees and aid; and define performance benchmarks and measurable success metrics, such as improvements in trade and at border crossings, thwarting terrorist infrastructure, and maintaining a monopoly on law enforcement.

In conclusion, a gradual shift from conflict management to an integrated separation framework (PELS) could pave the way for Palestinian statehood and subsequently lay the groundwork for a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation**.** This approach could offer several significant advantages**:** First, an extended transition period would allow reforms within the Palestinian Authority to advance and help establish it as a separate and distinct, functioning political entity. Second, it would provide a gradual response to Palestinian national aspirations through a demilitarized entity free of Hamas involvement, with extensive civil and governing powers. Over time, these developments could create opportunities for closer Jordanian-Palestinian cooperation, potentially including a stable confederative political framework. Any such arrangement would need to reflect the interests and consent of all parties involved, while fully safeguarding Jordan's sovereignty, national identity, and security.

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