

**Trilateral Land Exchange between Israel,
the Palestinian Authority and Egypt:
A Solution for Promoting Peace between Israel and the PA**

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Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been broiling for a century. The last four years alone have seen over 1,000 Israelis and 3,000 Palestinians dead, and tens of thousands injured, in the second *intifada* [uprising]. This situation is insufferable for both sides. And daily the question is asked, but is it possible to resolve this conflict? And if so, how can that be achieved?

The time has come to think of and present new, innovative – daring even – ideas for local and regional peace. The present paper does just that. It offers a heretofore-untried approach to peace building: a three-way exchange of territory, between the Palestinian Authority (PA), Israel and Egypt. The plan, it is believed, could help trigger a breakthrough in the peace process and facilitate the quest for a permanent solution to the conflict.

The article first outlines the basic premises of the plan. It then discusses the basic principles underlying the plan and the pros and cons for each of the three parties. It concludes by offering a draft agreement for the land swap, to be signed by the three parties concerned as well as representatives of the international community, primarily the United States, the European Union and the United Nations. It is vital, I argue, that these entities be involved, first, to kickstart the peace process and, second, to provide incentives to the three signatories. Egypt's involvement in the plan would lend regional "muscle" and spawn other steps toward the attainment of peace in the Middle East.

In other words, I believe a land swap between the three parties concerned would mark a win-win situation in the current quagmire that is the Middle East.

The idea might sound grand. But in fact there is a precedent of a land exchange agreement in the same neighborhood: Jordan and Saudi Arabia signed such an agreement in 1965, charting anew thousands of square kilometers on both sides of their shared border. It worked then; there is good reason it can work again.

Basic Premises

The plan calls for a three-way land swap between Israel, the Palestinians and Egypt. Israel would cede an area in the Negev to Egypt, with an access route from Egypt to Jordan; Egypt would relinquish a chunk of land south of Gaza to the Palestinians; and the Palestinians would forgo at least some of their claims to land on the West Bank.

The proposed plan has five basic premises:

- A. *The land area of the West Bank and Gaza Strip will not – now or at any future time – suffice to provide adequate territory for the existence, and subsistence, of an independent and viable Palestinian state, particularly in view of the dire population conditions in the Gaza Strip today.*

In 1947, before Israel's War of Independence, the population of the present-day Gaza Strip amounted only to about 50,000 persons. Following that war, about 125,000 refugees arrived in the Strip from dozens of Arab localities all over the southern region of Palestine/Israel, which were damaged or destroyed as a result of the war. By 1967, this population had doubled to about 350,000 persons. Today, the Strip is home to some 1,250,000. Due to the extremely high rate of natural growth, about 4-5 percent, this population is likely to double about every 15 years. In 2020, it is estimated there will be about 2.5 million inhabitants. As things stand at present, this population will have no economic infrastructure in the Strip's own territory, which amounts to only 350 square kilometers. A solution must be found for this grave problem. It should be noted that neither can the West Bank sustain a potential Palestinian state and secure its economic viability. In the 21st century no country can survive solely on agriculture.

- B. *Egypt took an active part in the 1948 war. The Arab refugees arrived in the Strip as a result of that war. Egypt even controlled the Strip for 19 years, and it cannot ignore the severe Palestinian problem in this territory. It must therefore take a substantial role in solving the problem.*

The entire Arab world today presents the Israeli-Arab conflict as an integral and significant part of the problems that preoccupy it, but it appears to cast the responsibility for its solution on Israel alone. Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other Arab states have for over two years proffered solutions to the Israeli-Arab conflict, but they have not clarified what their role in facilitating the resolution of this conflict would be. Moreover, Egypt was the first country to enter into a peace agreement with Israel. Having cut out the basic lines of that road it is time now to pave it. That is the challenge that stands before this and other countries.

- C. *The international community, led by the US, Europe and the UN, view the Palestinian problem as urgent and pressing, particularly because of the occupation and the humanitarian problems that it entails. The problem has also long ceased to be an Israeli-Palestinian problem alone, and has become part of the global political and security-related tension. Nonetheless, the parties just mentioned have thus far made no substantial proposal as to how they could assist in solving this severe problem.*

Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the whole world, with the US at the helm, has enlisted to invest capital, human resources, equipment and weapons in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere in an attempt to trounce the terrible threat that was created by the burgeoning Islamic-fundamentalist organizations headed by Al-Qaeda. The Arab world, too, cannot afford a failure to overcome this global-cultural-strategic threat in the years to come. This is an added dimension to how the world now views the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and it will be prepared to contribute its resources to an extraordinary extent for this conflict's solution. It is unlikely, however, that external powers will militarily intervene in the Israeli-Palestinian strife.

It is therefore imperative for all parties involved to consider a valid idea which might provide an ultimate solution to the conflict, and which would ensure the two peoples' future survival.

- D. *Israel borders the Gaza Strip. The situation prevailing in the Strip will influence all future developments in this country.* Israel's disengagement plan, presented by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in early 2004, will not solve the domestic socioeconomic problems within the Strip. The projected withdrawal from Gaza cannot be compared to Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon. In the case of the Gaza Strip, Israel is leaving behind a demographic and economic keg of dynamite which will have a continuing impact on Israel's own existential problem and is also poised to exacerbate the conflict in the West Bank. It will have a negative effect on Egypt and Jordan as well. Israel therefore has an existential interest in seeking a suitable solution to the situation in the Gaza Strip; this solution, in turn, could preempt the resolution of the entire conflict and lead to the achievement of a final, genuine peace with the Palestinian people. It is a vital interest of other countries in the region to solve the problem and to avoid a massive population explosion in Gaza.
- E. Even if the Palestinians would one day gain the pre-1967 Green Line as their sovereign territory, this land could not safeguard the viability of this new state. Israel has no commitment whatsoever to secure a road or any other connection between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and has no obligations to import Palestinian workforce. *A solution to these problems could only be found on the basis of a trade-off.*

The plan known as the Geneva Accord, announced by Israeli politician Yossi Beilin and his Palestinian counterpart Abu Ala in early 2004, does not provide answers to the central problems of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

First, the Geneva plan lacks credibility. Today, after four years of devastating *intifada* - regardless of who is to blame and what the catalysts for its outbreak were - it is impossible to return to the course and the ideas that underlined the Oslo accord, even if at the time it was highly important and justified. It is impossible to allay the suspicion felt by the majority of

the Israeli public that the Geneva plan is little more than a trap designed to destroy the existence of the Jewish state.

Second, the minor land swap envisaged by this plan is inadequate and will not be accepted by the Israeli side, if a rift in and internal devastation of Israeli society is to be avoided.

It is now widely agreed that Israel cannot, in an ultimate peace agreement with the PA, accept a total withdrawal to the lines of 4 June 1967, due to the facts that have been created over the 37 intervening years, and that some trading of land will have to take place between Israel and the PA. Why, then, should not a more significant land swap be considered, which would offer a proper solution to the internal Israeli problem and, simultaneously, would provide much greater assistance for ameliorating the Palestinian distress stemming from the establishment of a Palestinian state in its present cramped area, and especially the demographic-economic problem affecting the Gaza Strip?

Third, and this is perhaps the most significant shortcoming of the Geneva plan, it does not offer any response to the real problem of the Gaza Strip – the economic subsistence of its inhabitants. The idea proposed by the plan, to extend the Strip eastward by 2-3 km., adding an area of about 100 sq. km., is a non-starter. Besides bringing the Gaza Strip closer to the many Jewish localities of the western Negev, thus intensifying the real danger to their existence and their inhabitants' lives, this idea solves virtually nothing from the economic perspective.

The problem is not whether or not an area of the Strip could be enlarged so as to construct housing for its exponentially growing population. Even in the Strip's present area, it is possible to construct high-rise buildings which might provide housing – albeit slum housing. The main problem is how the inhabitants are to make their living, given the rapid growth rates of the population, and what standard of living they will be able to maintain. If no valid and proper economic solution is found for these people (which is impossible within the Strip's present area) they will, even under peaceful circumstances – and certainly if there is a mere semblance of a ceasefire – “overflow” into the State of Israel and swamp it, thus progressively increasing the prospect of Israel's becoming a binational state.

Principles of the Trilateral Land Exchange

The first principle underlying the idea of this three-way land exchange holds that a genuine solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be achieved only if it guarantees to the Palestinian state the added **area which is vital to its existence**, in return for some less vital area which it will cede, without an overall reduction of the total area that would have been included in this state based on the 1967 lines.

The most suitable, and indeed almost the only, such area that might be annexed to the Palestinian state is south of the Gaza Strip, from Rafah to El-Arish and inland (see map 1). The fact that this is almost the only possibility should not be misconstrued to mean it is a "no-other-choice last resort." This area offers *enormous* potential for development (to be described below) and can answer the problem of the Gaza Strip's extremely severe population density, which cannot be solved otherwise, while radically changing the character and economic base of the future Palestinian state.

The second principle is that the primary, basic land exchange is actually between Egypt and the PA, with Israel serving as the mediator by supplying to the Palestinians an area in the southern Negev which they can swap with Egypt.

It should be noted that the idea here is based on the precedent of a land exchange agreement between Jordan and Saudi Arabia in 1965. This exchange stemmed from a desire to lengthen the Jordanian coastline near Aqaba, which was previously very short. Following the agreement, Jordanian territory was increased by about 20 km. of seafront, but the actual exchange was effected **along the entire stretch of the Jordanian-Saudi border**, for hundreds of kilometers, from the Gulf of Aqaba to the Iraqi border (see map 2). The total land exchange was 6,000 sq. km for 7,000 sq. km. The question arises whether, as the concept was successful for the purpose of enlarging the port of Aqaba, it might also be applied – even on a much smaller scale – to solve a much harsher and more complex problem: that of the huge population density in the Gaza Strip and the bitter Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The third principle is that, in return for the area in Sinai, south of Gaza, which the PA receives from Egypt and in return for other infrastructural and economic outlets, opportunities and roads that Israel

will provide to the PA, the PA should agree that Israel (which will give Egypt an area in the Negev) annexes an area in the West Bank beyond the lines of June 4, 1967.

The Israelis and Palestinians will have to reach an accord as to the extent of the area to be ceded to Israel beyond the 1967 lines, including its location and layout (this issue will be addressed in greater detail below).

The fourth and final principle is that, whereas in the Oslo accords the ultimate objective of the process agreed between the parties was not specified, out of the hope that the dynamics created between them would subsequently lead to a consensus on that matter, the present plan proposes adopting the opposite course: determining a prior consensus precisely as to the final phase of the agreement, and defining the borders first. A flaw of the Oslo accords was that it allowed each side to interpret the agreed-upon process differently and envisage divergent objectives for the final phase; indeed, it was this which doomed the accord to failure. Therefore, if this time a prior consensus is reached as to the final phase of the agreement, it will permit both sides to progress backward by steps that are adapted to the agreed final objective. Such a consensus will undoubtedly bring about an important breakthrough by creating a renewed state of mutual trust between the two parties, as well as an aspiration to achieve a joint purpose without either side having to take irreversible measures throughout the intermediary phases before the final objective is agreed upon.

The question remains: will it be possible to implement this plan? But before we explore that question in greater detail, let us discuss the components of the plan and how they may affect each of the parties involved.

Israeli, Palestinian and Egyptian Components of the Plan (see map 3)

Israel to cede an area in the Negev to Egypt, with an access route from Egypt to Jordan

An area of 200-500 sq. km. can be located in the Negev, along the Israeli-Egyptian border, which can be ceded to Egypt. The proposed area is south of Mt. Sagi, along 25-35 km. of international boundary, about as far as the Mitzpeh Sayarim region. A depth of 10-15 km. along this stretch of border,

in the expanses of the Paran and Tznifim plains, will provide the desired area. From its extremity, a route or corridor can be constructed, 200-300 meters wide, toward the Jordanian border, which at this point is only 20-30 km. away. This route will provide a **land connection** between Egypt and Jordan – which today does not exist – and thus access too to Jordan's neighbors, Saudi Arabia, Syria and even Iraq. Fences can be constructed on both sides of the route to ensure its isolation from the Israeli territory it transverses. At the crossing points with existing or future Israeli transportation routes, interchanges would be constructed to ensure a total separation between the Egyptian route and the Israeli ones (the Egyptian route can be constructed partly as a sunken highway or even a tunnel, but the necessity for this is uncertain).

The Egyptian access point of this corridor from Sinai can be connected with a **desert superhighway** to the city of Suez via the localities of Thamet and Nahal. From the Jordanian access point to the corridor, the highway can be continued to the city of Ma`an, to connect with the main Jordanian north-south highway and the Hijaz railway.

From the area that is to be transferred to the Palestinians south of the Gaza Strip, a highway can also be constructed to connect the coast of this region with the Egyptian desert superhighway. This route will also utilize the cross-Negev corridor reaching Ma`an, to connect with Jordan and its neighboring Arab states, thus granting them an outlet to the Mediterranean Sea.

The PA to cede an area in the West Bank to Israeli sovereignty

In return for the area that the PA is to receive in northern Sinai, Israel will receive sovereignty over areas in the West Bank. At the present stage, the precise demarcation and size of the areas to be annexed to Israel will not be determined, but it is important to define an order of magnitude for the land area to be exchanged. It appears that Israel will be able to request that the area be similar in size to that which the Palestinians will receive in Sinai south of Rafah, in exchange for the area ceded by Israel in the Negev. The proposed area would not, and should not, hamper in any way the viability of the future Palestinian state. Annexation of such an area to Israel would answer several of its main problems in the West Bank and would gain the support of an overwhelming majority of the Israeli population for the

signing of a final peace treaty. Determination of the area to be annexed to Israel can be based on several principles.

A. **Neighborhoods of Jerusalem** that are located outside the Green Line of June 1967, including the region of Ma`aleh Adumim and its environs, and the neighborhood of Givat Ze'ev which will become part of Jewish Jerusalem.

B. **The large blocs of Jewish settlement** beyond the June 1967 border, such as Ariel in Samaria and the Etzion Bloc in Judea, and further minor border corrections along that border.

C. **Additional limited lands** where there is no permanent Palestinian population, which would become enclaves within Palestinian territory, with access corridors and routes. These enclaves would have to be agreed upon between the two sides.

D. **Nature reserves and other areas under joint control**, either with or without an external entity. Agreement may be reached regarding lands declared National Park area, or lands under joint control. There is a chunk of land in the Judean Desert and by the Dead Sea which could be declared as such an area. There are precedents in the world where two sides to a conflict found solutions by "leaning" on nature reserves or joint control areas to solve their border issues.

Egypt to cede an area in northern Sinai, south of the Gaza Strip, to the PA

In return for the area and route that Israel will relinquish to it, Egypt will agree to cede to the PA an area south of the Gaza Strip and about twice its size. The scale of the territory is to compensate for the route that is to be granted to Egypt, which is of the greatest strategic importance, and also reflects the disparity in size between the land area of Israel and of Egypt – which is 50 times larger than Israel – or even of the Sinai peninsula alone, which is three times larger than Israel.

It is proposed that the "greater" Gaza Strip will extend along 20-30 km. of the northern Sinai coast, from Rafah toward El-Arish and 30-40 km. inland, for a total area of 500-1,000 sq. km. (Egypt would, ideally, agree to grant a relatively large area.) The Gaza Strip's present land area is 350 sq. km. (5-12 km. wide along 40 km. of coastline). The added area in Sinai will

boost the Strip between double and quadruple its size, to a land area of 850-1,350 sq. km. The small Bedouin population now inhabiting the Egyptian-assigned area, excluding the population of the Egyptian sector of Rafah which is actually a Palestinian population, will be able either to remain in place under Palestinian sovereignty or to receive compensation and relocate to another part of Sinai, particularly the environs of the city of El-Arish. The advantages of this proposal for the PA will be listed in detail below.

Pros and Cons of the Plan, and Prospects for Its Implementation

The Palestinian Authority

Pros:

A. The Demographic-Economic Perspective. The Gaza Strip's present land area, as noted above, is only 350 sq. km. and its population stands at around 1.25 million inhabitants. This makes the Strip one of the most densely populated regions in the world. Moreover, its rate of population increase is extremely high, which, as many experts have warned, means the Strip is nothing less than a ticking demographic-existential bomb. Having said that, the very sparsely populated area south of Rafah offers enormous potential for development and may be extraordinarily significant for the whole Palestinian State, to the extent of altering its entire future character.

The planning and development of this area can be undertaken by Western companies, with European-American financing, and will have to be supported by the entire world of industrial nations. This must be a global effort.

Development of this area and the absorption therein of a large part of the Gaza strip's present population can radically alter the future character of the Strip and will permit its appropriate economic development together with that of the new area. In other words, a new Greater Gaza region would be formed that could stand as the industrial and economic forefront of the Palestinian state, while the West Bank hinterland would provide the national, historical and cultural area as expressed by the cities of Bethlehem, Hebron, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarm, Qalqilya and the traditional Arab rural countryside - and, of course, East Jerusalem.

Some examples of the enterprises that may be established in the Greater Gaza region, including both the old and new parts:

1) A **deep-water port** which will serve both the Palestinian population of the present Gaza Strip and the large population of the new region to be established, which will increase steadily. Under peaceful conditions, once the proposed connecting routes are created, this port will also be able to serve the Palestinian population of the West Bank. Under such conditions Israel, too, will be able to utilize this port for its needs, particularly those of its southern portion, including the export of phosphates and potash from the Dead Sea region. This port could also serve as an *entrepôt* for Jordan and certain regions of Saudi Arabia, and even Syria and Iraq, becoming their chief export and import outlet on the Mediterranean coast, which will offer these countries numerous advantages.

2) A **petroleum terminal, refineries and associated industries**. The laying of an oil pipeline similar to the Saudi TAP line can be contemplated, which would transport petroleum directly from Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean coast. TAP line was about 1.600 km. long, transporting oil from the Persian Gulf region of Saudi Arabia via Syria and the Golan Heights to Zahrani near Sidon, in Lebanon, where refineries for the crude oil were established. Following the occupation of the Golan Heights by Israel, this pipeline was closed down, but it can definitely be rehabilitated, partly along its original route, to lead toward the greater Gaza Strip. The distance would be equivalent as to Sidon. Fuel might also be pumped there from the Basra region of Iraq, the distance being almost identical. This would save the shipping of oil by the long route through the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean, or - where supertankers are concerned - the journey around the entire African continent. From the Gaza region, fuel might be supplied by small tankers to the Mediterranean littoral countries, including their ports from which the fuel is sent inland to the countries of central Europe through pipelines, some of which already exist.

Nearly all the petroleum that is now transported from its points of origin is shipped in its crude state. Refineries are constructed in the

consuming regions, or in the transit areas from which the oil is marketed as refined products. A ramified industry develops around the refineries, utilizing their surplus materials. Such industry provides employment and abundant income to its workers.

3) **Fishing ports.** As detailed below, contemporary maritime law recognizes, in addition to territorial waters, an exclusive economic zone, which grants littoral countries fishing rights as well as gas and oil prospecting rights 200 miles from the shoreline. The coastal waters off Gaza are well stocked with fish and can be further enriched. If the Greater Gaza idea is adopted, this region will have a 70-km. shoreline (40 km. in the existing Gaza Strip plus 30 km. in the new area) with extremely rich coastal waters that will permit the construction of a sizable number of fishing ports to provide a livelihood for a considerable population.

4) A **Mediterranean Riviera.** The golden-sand coastline of the old Gaza Strip, and the new area's no less, is ideal for a Riviera-style tourism region that would be among the Mediterranean's most beautiful and suitable. Hotels and tourism centers of various standards can be constructed along this coast to attract a large market, including the future Palestinian State's population. Israeli vacationers will be as glad to go there as they are to Sinai today. With an added European clientele, tourism could become an important source of livelihood and income for the inhabitants of this region and the entire Palestinian State year-round.

5) **Power stations and desalination facilities.** Power stations can be constructed on the coast to provide electricity for the residential and industrial purposes of the entire region, including the present Gaza Strip. Desalination facilities could provide water for the industrial and residential consumption of the entire region, as it is provided today in Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf countries, and many other littoral regions. The topographical altitude throughout the new and old Gaza Strip does not exceed 100 m., which increases the economic feasibility of utilizing desalinated water as the cost of pumping it uphill is eliminated.

6) A **planned central city, additional secondary towns and a road network**. At the center of the area that is to be annexed to the Strip, in the inland region about 20-30 km. from the coast (15 minutes' drive on a suitable road,) a new, planned city can be constructed which can absorb a population of hundreds of thousands, up to 1 million and more. Throughout the new area, additional secondary towns can be established that would serve the large population, which would relocate to this area. The inhabitants of the old Gaza Strip would be able to move into all the new area voluntarily, with the distance to their previous domiciles amounting to a drive of under an hour. A new road network can be constructed, to serve both the region's internal needs and its outward connections. The possibility has been noted above of constructing a highway to connect the greater Gaza Strip to Egypt's desert superhighway, which in turn will directly connect the region with Jordan and its neighboring Arab states. A main north-south highway can transverse the entire enlarged Strip, along its eastern border, from its northern end to the new area with all that is to be constructed there, as far as its southernmost point. This highway will constitute the main artery for all the region's traffic, and it will be connected to the external highways reaching the region, such as the aforementioned eastward highway, but it will also connect to the passages that will connect (as proposed below) the two parts of the Palestinian state: the West Bank and the Greater Gaza region.

7) An **international airport**. Not far south of the central city, in the hinterland of the region, it will be possible to construct a potentially important international airport. The fact that the shortest routes for east-west aviation lines pass over this region grants local airports highly important advantages. The airports of Cairo, Amman, Beirut and other regional hubs are overloaded, with aircraft landing at excessive frequency. A new international airport, to be constructed in the greater Gaza Strip could play a most vital role as a stopover for flights crossing this region and could also serve its entire population, which would very much require this facility, as would the tourist traffic reaching this region and adjoining destinations. It could therefore provide a central source of employment and livelihood for the region's inhabitants.

All these examples, to which more can be added, indicate the high economic potential of the region.

It would be profitable if, prior to the discussion on the final agreement, an international company would be retained to assess its real economic potential and propose its own plan; this or another company can be engaged to propose appropriate regional plans for the entire region and its various subdivisions.

B. Palestinian Prestige and Honor

Another factor that can enhance PA support for the proposed plan pertains to Palestinian prestige, or honor. The Palestinians will be able to claim, rightly, that they received territory equal in size to the Palestinian territory prior to June 1967, in other words a one-for-one swap. The new lands will be even more valuable than those relinquished (a coastal area as opposed to hinterland). Moreover, the new land comes with a considerable area of territorial waters and an exclusive economic zone, with proven natural-gas reserves and extensive fishing areas of high economic value. As noted, the maritime exclusive economic zone will now extend 200 miles from the coastline, a matter of highly important geographical significance as it actually adds a large area to the Palestinian State's territory.

Con:

Palestinian unwillingness to cede to Israel West Bank areas they consider essential. This of course is a possibility, and the argument they may invoke is that the area offered to them south of the Gaza Strip is not "motherland area," unlike that which they would have to cede in the West Bank. Moreover, Palestinians view some areas that Israel would ask for annexation as vital for their future state, and they could refuse to concede such land for the purpose of the Jewish settlers. This will have to be answered by an effort to arrive at a consensus with them not only about the size of the area they receive in Sinai but also about the return they receive in terms of the size and location of the areas they will have to cede in the West Bank, along with the safe passage highways under their control between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including its new area in Sinai, thus greatly strengthening the links between the two parts of the future

Palestinian state. The problem of disconnection between these two parts, the West Bank and the Strip, is the main existential problem for the state's viability as a unitary entity. Israel controls the possibility for creating a link between the two, and if it is wise enough to assist the Palestinians in creating a real link (as will be argued below, in the section referring to Israel,) then, presumably, Israel will be able to demand appropriate compensation from the PA in the form of roads through West Bank areas, which might solve some of its own centrally important problems.

Egypt

Pros:

1) The 1965 significant land exchange between Jordan and Saudi Arabia, for the purpose of increasing the Jordanian coastline near Aqaba, provides a precedent for the current plan of exchanging territories between Arab entities. In this case, the proposed land swap is effectively between Egypt and the PA. **Israel will not receive any Egyptian territory whatsoever.** Therefore, it will be difficult for Egypt to reject this precedent, especially if such a request is addressed to it by the PA. Countries like Jordan and Saudi Arabia might press for the acceptance of such a solution, since they have carried out such an exchange with each other – provided, of course, they conclude that this solution is acceptable to the Palestinians and is capable of ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

2) The Egyptians will be able to derive great benefits from the **railway and desert superhighway** that will be constructed from the city of Suez to the area that will be offered to Egypt in the Israeli Negev, and from there will connect to Jordan, the Hijaz railway and the north-south highway connecting to Jordan's Arab neighbors, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Settlement stations can be established along the Egyptian desert highway which can serve as starting points for touring the surrounding desert and beyond. Oil, gas and water pipelines can also be laid along this route, so that this passage may assume the greatest importance for the Egyptians – indeed, it fulfils an ancient dream. This highway can even be viewed as a throwback to the historical Darb al-Haj route, which took the same course.

Receiving this passage could serve as a valuable argument for the Egyptian leadership in justifying the land exchange to its people.

3) The **threat of a continuing Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its evolution into a religious clash** can also become a domestic danger for Egypt, which it will be highly interested to avoid. Therefore, if Egypt can contribute to the solution of this problem and prevent its overflow across its own borders, it presumably will not reject the idea out of hand.

4) The present **Israeli disengagement plan** from the Gaza Strip is liable to lead Egypt into an entanglement in the Strip's affairs. The harsh economic situation that will be created in this region, the sealing of its exits toward Israel and the grave existential problems that will ensue within the Strip are liable to cause attempts by the local population to spill over onto Egyptian soil. Demands from Egypt to assist the Strip and see to its security so that its inhabitants are no longer involved in terrorist attacks on Israel may deter the Egyptians. Therefore, if Egypt can make its own contribution to an ultimate settlement of the problem, it may be prepared to consider such an idea as a trilateral land exchange much more than it was previously, especially if this is the result of a request by Israel and the PA or an agreement between them, or is the subject of an international initiative and appeal. Moreover, Egypt will not be required to give a positive reply immediately but only not to reject the idea out of hand and to stipulate that to the extent a prior agreement is reached between the other two, Israeli and Palestinian, parties, backed by the western countries and the UN, for an ultimate Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, Egypt will be prepared to consider its own contribution thereto.

5) **Financial revenue.** The creation of a passage between the greater Gaza Strip and its economic hinterland in Jordan and the adjoining countries can, on the one hand, form an important source of financial revenue for Egypt, as the passage will be through Egyptian territory and its users will pay tolls. On the other hand, such a passage may reduce Egyptian revenues that are derived today from Suez Canal tolls, since traffic through the canal may decrease somewhat as a result. Egypt may demand considerable financial compensation both for this decline in revenue and for its overall

contribution in relinquishing the area south of Rafah. Thus, for example, a commitment to dig a parallel Suez Canal alongside the existing one, which will permit replacing today's one-way traffic with uninterrupted passage in both directions, would make a great contribution to the Egyptian economy.

At present, the Egyptians are also planning extensive development projects to absorb their rapidly increasing population in the Western Desert and the Port Said-Bardawil Lagoon area. Generous financial support for these projects might definitely boost Egypt's willingness to join the trilateral land-swap plan, and presumably Cairo would agree to give the idea serious consideration.

6) **Prestige and status.** The final argument, and perhaps one of the most important, is that the trilateral land-swap idea will actually bestow on Egypt and its leader the leading role in the entire Middle East and a central status worldwide, since the possibility of implementing this solution will depend entirely on them. Egypt will have to be both a signatory of the agreement and, to a large extent, conduct its implementation, with the two parties to the conflict as well as additional Arab states, the US, Western Europe, the UN and other countries being co-opted - which will confer on Egypt and its leader an extraordinarily prestigious status in the Middle East and worldwide.

Cons:

- 1) Egypt has in the past demonstrated a resolute **aversion** to cede even an inch of its territory, as was manifested in the peace negotiations at Camp David and subsequently at Taba.
- 2) Its **unwillingness** to become involved in the Palestinian cause and its avoidance of entanglement in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship.

Israel

Pros:

- 1) The fact that the proposed area's location in the Negev is extremely **remote** from the geographical center of the Jewish State and lacks any vestige of Jewish settlement may facilitate a decision to concede it.

2) The possibility that this plan may bring about a **breakthrough toward a final peace** between Israel and the PA, as well as all the Arab countries, is worth sacrificing the area in the Negev, even if it is relatively large and even if the Egyptian route crossing it creates a certain, though not insuperable barrier.

It also appears that Israel will be required to give more than the area to be ceded in the Negev, if it wishes to achieve this breakthrough toward a durable peace with the Palestinians. A further, significant contribution to the proposed idea might be for Israel to allow the PA to maintain free passages, similar to the route that is to be offered to Egypt, through Israeli territory, connecting the West Bank and Gaza. One conceivable route might pass from the Bet Hanun region to the Hebron Hills (in the vicinity of the Arab village Bet Awa) (see map 3). In its western part, as far as the highway and railway to Beersheba, this passage might be constructed as a tunnel or sunken highway. East of the Beersheba highway and railway, a secondary road might connect the passage with the Latrun-Bet Sira region and onward toward Ramallah. These roads, which would be partly constructed as tunnels or bridges, might permit free and rapid access for the inhabitants of the West Bank to Gaza and the new area that is to be annexed thereto, and might constitute a decisive argument for the Palestinians to grant their overall support for the proposed trilateral land swap.

There should also be no cause for alarm even at the idea to offer the Palestinians an additional route from the southern Hebron Hills, passing east of Beersheba to the Nitzana region and from there to the new Palestinian area that will be added to the Gaza Strip.

Granting these free-passage routes to the Palestinians through Israeli territory should not constitute any security risk for Israel. On the contrary, it should only intensify the Palestinian desire to preserve a state of peace and quiet alongside Israel. It will also justify a demand by Israel to receive similar roads and create certain Israeli enclaves within the Palestinian state in the West Bank, and will facilitate the determination of the areas in the West Bank that are to be annexed to Israel.

Cons:

- 1) Relinquishing an area in the Negev will constitute an **erosion** of Israel's position, in that Israel will be prepared to concede original Israeli territory dating from before 1967.
- 2) The route that is to be offered to Egypt through the Negev will, in effect, form a line **cutting off Eilat** and the southern Negev from the rest of Israel, and for many Israelis this would rule out any readiness to promote the plan.

Summary

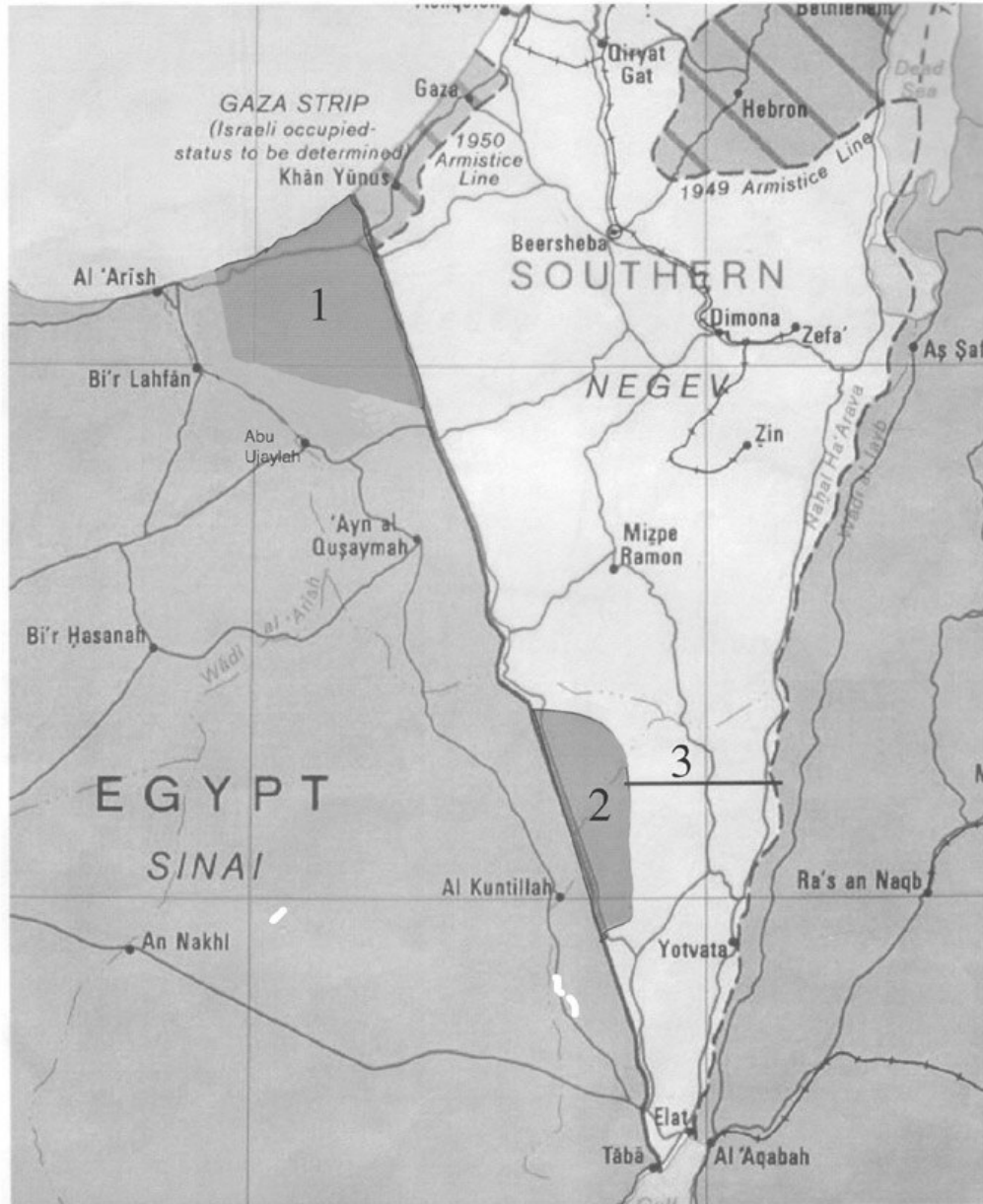
Proposing an Israeli peace plan is very important from the Israeli domestic angle, as it will open for Jewish society the vista of a possible, real peace in the event that an ally is found on the other side.

True, implementation of the proposed plan requires vision and a desire for peace on both sides. It appears that on the Jewish side, present-day society is definitely longing for peace, can appreciate the vision of the proposed plan, and will do all in its power to accomplish it. It must be hoped that on the Palestinian side, an ally can be found to strive together for achieving the coveted peace.

The idea of a trilateral land swap will constitute the first step toward an ultimate peace agreement between Israel and the PA. It will have to be expressed in a signed agreement. (Below follows a proposed draft for an agreement of principles on a trilateral land swap.)

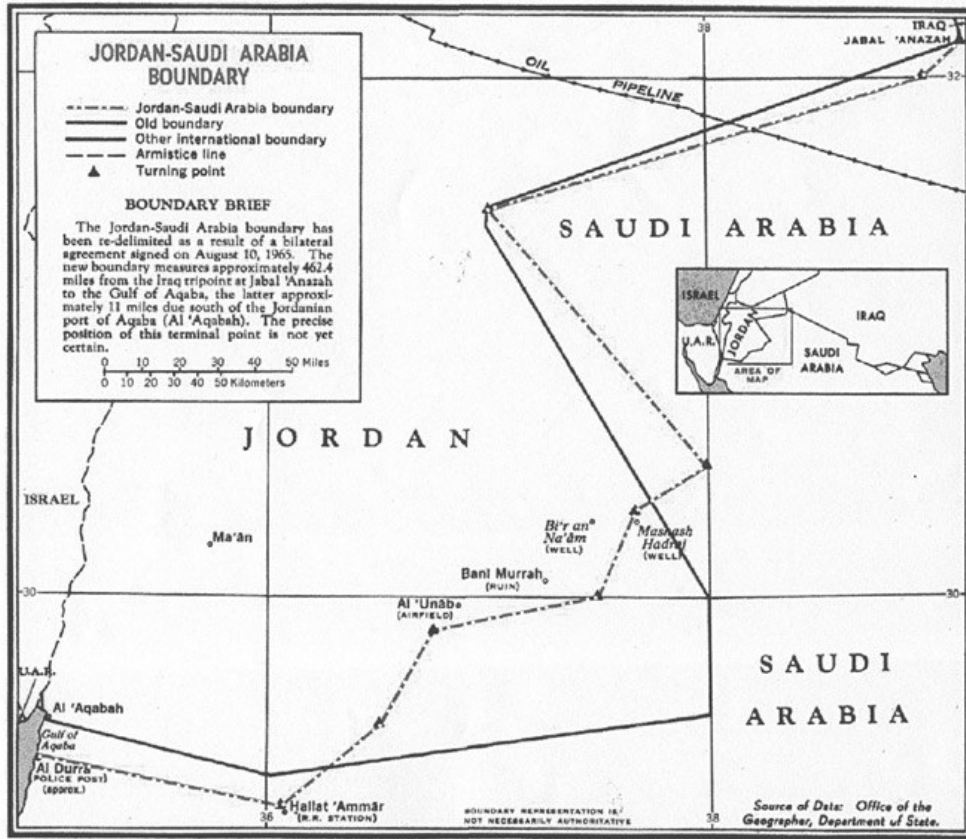
The time for proposing an original Israeli peace plan is now.

Map 1: Proposed trilateral land exchange



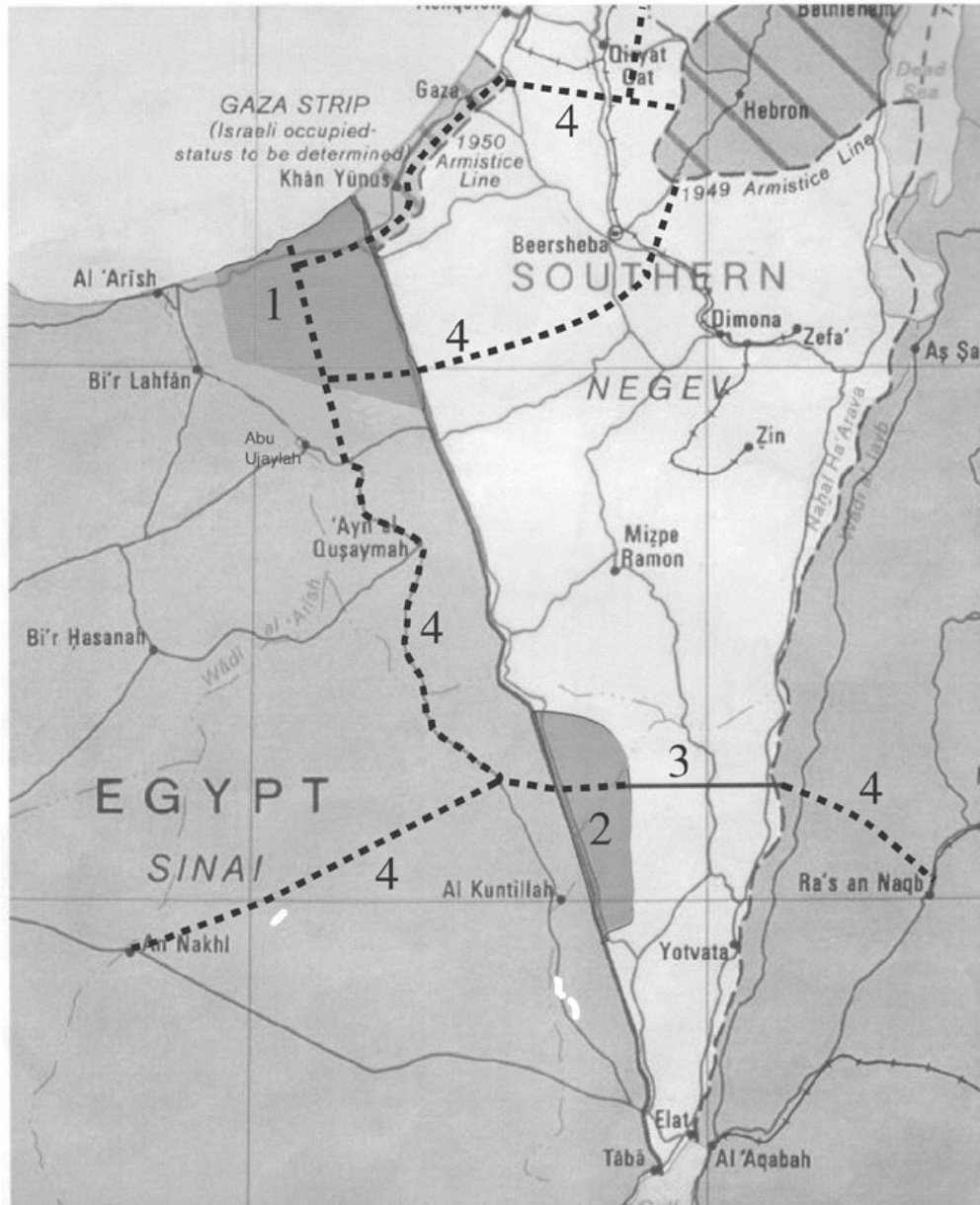
1. Egyptian land to be transferred to the Palestinians
2. Israeli land to be transferred to Egypt
3. Israeli highway/corridor to be transferred to Egypt

Map 2: Jordan-Saudi Arabia Land Exchange Agreement, 1965



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Map 3: Proposed highway connections



1. Egyptian land to be transferred to the Palestinians
2. Israeli land to be transferred to Egypt
3. Israeli highway/corridor to be transferred to Egypt
4. Proposed highways

Annex 1

**Steps toward a Final and Permanent Peace Agreement
Between Israel and the Palestinian Authority
[Proposed Draft]**

STEP 1

In anticipation of the signing of a final peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA), the signatory parties of this document agree that, as part of the peace agreement, a trilateral land exchange shall be effected among Israel, Egypt and the PA, as follows:

- A) Israel will cede to Egypt an area of 200-500 square kilometers in the southern Negev, in the Nahal Paran region bordering Sinai, approximately opposite Kuntilla, which will be annexed to Egypt and will become Egyptian territory for all intents and purposes. The security arrangements, which apply at present to the region of Sinai adjoining this area, according to the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, will also apply to this area.
- B) Israel will cede to Egypt a highway corridor from the extremity of the area that is to be annexed to Sinai toward the Kingdom of Jordan, which will permit the construction of a multi-lane automotive highway, a railway, and adequate area for laying fuel and water pipelines.
- C) In return for the area and passage that will be ceded to Egypt, the latter will agree to cede to the PA an area of at least double the size it received from Israel (500-1,000 sq. km.). This area will be south of Rafah in the Gaza Strip along about 20- 30 km. of coastline from the present Israeli-Egyptian border toward El-Arish, extending inland into Sinai.

- D) In return for the area that is to be received by the PA in Sinai from Egypt, an area of similar size will be ceded to Israel beyond the line determined by the armistice agreement which was signed between Israel and Jordan in 1949 and which was in effect until June 4, 1967.
- E) As part of the documents to be signed for this agreement, detailed maps shall be drawn up to show: 1). The size and boundaries of the Israeli area in the Negev which, according to this agreement, shall be ceded to Egypt as part of the final peace agreement that will be signed between Israel and the PA; 2). The route and breadth of the highway corridor between Egypt and Jordan, which is also to be ceded to Egypt after the signing of the final peace agreement between Israel and the PA, and as part of its implementation; 3). A delineation of size and borders of the area to be ceded by Egypt to the PA south of the Gaza Strip; and 4). The size, in square kilometers, of the area in the West Bank beyond the lines of June 4, 1967, which will, is to be finally agreed for annexation to Israel.
- F) The precise demarcation of the area to be annexed to Israel beyond the lines of June 4, 1967, and as a corollary the permanent border between Israel and the PA, as well as the determinations concerning the city of Jerusalem and its environs, will be made as part of additional steps to be agreed upon in advance of the signing of the peace agreement between Israel and the PA.

Signatories: