**Annexing the Jordan Valley Doesn’t Make Security Sense
Shaul Arieli, Haaretz, October 4, 2019**

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The 1994 peace treaty between Israel and Jordan included two clauses whose security importance is as great and perhaps greater than the demilitarization of the Sinai Peninsula in the peace treaty with Egypt. These clauses turn Kahol Lavan chairman MK Benny Gantz’s intention and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s demand to annex the Jordan Valley to Israel into a tasteless joke showing a lack of national responsibility.

The first, Clause 4 of the fourth article, prohibits Jordan and Israel from signing military agreements with states or organizations hostile to the other party, or “allowing the entry, stationing and operating on their territory, or through it, of military forces … in circumstances which may adversely prejudice the security of the other Party.” In other words, based on the working assumption that the Jordanian army intends to or can threaten Israel, Israel’s real security boundary is not the Jordan River, but Jordan’s border with Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia, which are hundreds of kilometers away from Israel’s population centers. This clause gives Israel greater strategic depth than what the Zionist Movement ever sought in any demand since the 1919 Versailles peace conference.

The security buffer on the eastern slopes of Samaria and the Jordan Valley was born out of Israeli fear after the Six-Day War of a ground invasion along the “potential eastern front” by the armies of Jordan, Syria and Iraq. This front eventually faded, beginning with the destruction of the surface-to-air missiles in Lebanon’s Beka’a Valley and the downing of 86 Syrian aircraft in the First Lebanon War, through the cessation of free weapons shipments from Russia to Syria due to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1988, the peace treaty with Jordan in 1994 and the conquest of Iraq in 2003, and ending with the civil war in Syria since 2011.

Any rookie intelligence officer knows that Iran cannot and does not intend to send armored forces toward Israel, which would require crossing 1,500 kilometers of the Arabian Desert, exposed to the Israel Air Force, in an entirely Sunni area. And yet it turns out that in Israel, where half its teachers do not know what countries it shares borders with (according to a 2015 Gal Institute survey) and around a third of its students do not know what the capital of Syria is (based on a 2003 survey of junior high schools in Jerusalem), propaganda films can be successfully released portraying the Jordan Valley as a natural barrier to tanks from the east.

The threat against Israel is indeed framed currently as infiltration and a trickling of terror from Jordan through the Jordan Valley to the future Palestinian state and from there on to Israel. This threat, too, has been met with very worthy responses, as elucidated in the second significant clause of the peace treaty with Jordan. To wit, Clause 5 of the peace treaty’s article on security states: “Both Parties will take necessary and effective measures, and will co-operate in combating terrorism of all kinds. The Parties undertake: 1. to take necessary and effective measures to prevent acts of terrorism, subversion or violence from being carried out from their territory or through it and to take necessary and effective measures to combat such activities and all their perpetrators.”

Brigade commanders in the Jordan Valley and chiefs of the Central Command will attest that the Jordanian army, deployed east of the Jordan River, is doing its work more than faithfully. This success has allowed and continues to allow Israel to enjoy a stable and calm border and to significantly limit the numbers of its troops along the border. Second, in the framework of negotiations between Israel and the PLO, the latter agreed that Israel could leave a military presence in the Jordan Valley for a few years, to allow, among other things, Palestinian security forces to organize throughout the West Bank after the IDF withdrawal and the evacuation of settlers as part of a permanent agreement. Thereafter, the Palestinians agreed that there be permanent third-party forces. Mahmoud Abbas proposed that armed American forces, acceptable to Israel, ensure the demilitarization of the Palestinian state and supervise its entry points.

The claim that the Hashemite Kingdom’s days are numbered has been heard for decades. Yigal Alon, who proposed immediately after the Six-Day War to establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank, ruled out talks with King Hussein because “Hussein shouldn’t be seen as eternal…today it’s Hussein, tomorrow [Jordanian leftist and former Prime Minister Suleiman] Nabulsi and the day after tomorrow some Syrian who will take them over.” The lack of stability, as we see it in Syria, or we saw in the rapid regime changes in Egypt in 2012 with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, is a very reasonable risk that is preferable to canceling the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan – if Netanyahu makes good on his pledge to annex the Jordan Valley unilaterally.

Gantz should also know that the Palestinians don’t want to and cannot give up the border with Jordan; they can’t give up 30 percent of the West Bank for nothing in return, and they intend to settle in the Jordan Valley the few refugees who will return to the Palestinian state as part of a permanent agreement. He must work to reduce the pressure expected to be placed on the king, the public and Jordanian parliament against the continued normalization and security cooperation Jordan maintains with Israel in the face of the lack of progress on the Palestinian track. He must work to stop calls in the Knesset and the government to see Jordan as the “Palestinian homeland,” to give Jordanian citizenship to residents of the West Bank and even to expel masses of Palestinians in the heat of the next war – calls that are perceived in Jordan as a blow against the peace treaty and a threat to its future, because it will undermine the stability of the kingdom and its fragile economy.

And a word on the clause in the treaty relating to Moshav Tzofar in the Arava. Israel’s conduct with regard to Jordanian land that Israel stole from Jordan, and yet has been allowed to farm without payment for 25 more years, shows lack of respect for the generosity toward it at the time demonstrated by King Hussein. How can a country as rich and powerful as Israel not have found an alternative to the 2,000 dunams (494 acres) cultivated by the members of Moshav Tzofar? It should suffice itself with adopting the method by which, in the 1960s, it moved 60 tons of soil from Jordan to Israel illegally in trucks, and move land from northern Israel to the moshav, which lies within Israel’s international borders. How are the Palestinians supposed to approach ideas of temporarily leasing land that Israel proposed as part of a permanent agreement if Israel assumes that such leases are meant to last forever?

Without renewing negotiations with the Palestinians based on the parameters set by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Abbas in 2008 in the Annapolis talks, canceling the peace treaty with Jordan, which is good for Israel (and on some issues good for Jordan, too), could turn into the worst step in the parade of stupidity of Netanyahu and his successors with regard to Israel’s security and integration into the region.