

Coercive Diplomacy: Israel, Transjordan and the UN – A Triangular Drama Revisited

Abstract:

The Arab states suffered humiliating defeats at the hands of Israel during the first Arab–Israeli war. Immediately following the war, Israel made brilliant and shrewd use of diplomacy to achieve its goals at the negotiating table, much as it had previously used armed force. Israel refused to negotiate with a united Arab negotiation team, preferring to isolate the states, picking them off one after the other. The Israeli–Transjordanian talks differed radically from the other armistice negotiations. Here, two parallel tracks were followed. At Rhodes, the two countries negotiated openly under UN auspices, while in Jerusalem and at King Abdullah’s palace in Transjordan, representatives of the two countries held secret bilateral talks. Israel masterfully used the context of these talks to maximize its gains – using military operations to create ‘facts on the ground’, combined with direct coercion in the shape of blackmail, while taking full advantage of international power structures and abusing the trust that King Abdullah had placed in personal relations. The UN Acting Mediator, Ralph Bunche, was aware of the secret back channel, where the clearest cases of coercion took place. Physically and mentally exhausted by the protracted negotiations, he allowed the secret talks to progress despite his dislike of the outcome. The British government, at the time the protector of Transjordan, was unable to assist its client for fear of falling out with the USA, while the US government, in many ways the protector of Israel, maintained an equally ‘hands off’ stance because the talks concerned only an armistice, not a peace treaty. Already at this early stage in their relations, the power asymmetry between Israel and the Arab states was the main reason why the parties could not arrive at a peaceful, sustainable solution. This article is able to reinvestigate this diplomacy by using a combination of US, Israeli, British and UN archives, as well as the almost untouched Ralph Bunche diary.

Transjordan, born with a stroke of Winston Churchill's famous pen, was one of the two most artificial of all the Middle Eastern states created by the victorious Great Powers, Great Britain and France, after the First World War.¹ The other was Israel. The birth of the Jewish state in 1948, along with its prelude, was clearly a strange element in the modern Middle East, established out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. A third state-to-be, however, was to vanish from the map of states emerging in the turbulent region at this time: Palestine. The UN-decreed state for the Palestinian people died before it saw the light of day. As a result of the 1948 war between Israel and the surrounding Arab states, the majority of the Palestinian people living in mandatory Palestine entered a permanent refugee status. The neighbouring Arab states faced a humiliating defeat. Only two states, the 'best of enemies',² achieved major territorial expansions as a consequence of the war and the subsequent negotiated armistice agreements: Transjordan, which annexed the West Bank, the core area of the planned – but from then on entirely dead – Palestinian state, and Israel, which expanded its borders by incorporating 22 per cent more of Palestine than had been allocated to the proposed Jewish state in the UN Partition Plan of 1947.³

On the island of Rhodes, Ralph Bunche, the former US State Department official with a doctorate in political science, collected together the winners and losers of the 1948 war at the Hotel des Roses in order to negotiate. A permanent peace was not within reach, so the task facing Bunche – who had been appointed by the new international apparatus, the United Nations – was to concentrate his efforts in order to reach an armistice, as laid down in a United Nations Security Council Resolution of 16 November 1948.⁴ The task was clearly difficult. The winner of the war, Israel, would launch new military operations and announce border revisions during the armistice negotiations. In addition, the Jewish state – and not least its Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion – would not negotiate with the Arab states *en masse*, but preferred to deal with one Arab state at a time, meaning that Israel's room for manoeuvre was continuously strengthened as the talks progressed.⁵ Meanwhile, the severely weakened Arab

¹ Avi Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), pp. 11–18.

² The term is borrowed from Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies: Israel and Transjordan in the War of 1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1987).

³ Baylis Thomas, *How Israel Was Won: A Concise History of the Arab–Israeli Conflict* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999), p. 89.

⁴ Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

⁵ Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan*; Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*; Jørgen Jensehaugen, *Friendship Reanimated: The Israeli–Transjordanian Armistice Negotiations 1948–1949* (unpublished MA thesis, University of Oslo & PRIO, 2008).

states gave in one after another. On 24 February 1949, Israel and Egypt signed an agreement, followed by Lebanon on 23 March. On 3 April 1949, Israel and Jordan signed their armistice, and finally, on 20 July, Syria caved in.⁶

The armistice agreement between Jordan and Israel differed from the three others in almost every respect. First and foremost, the negotiations that led up to this agreement took place in two places simultaneously. At Rhodes, a dummy team negotiated under the scrutiny of the UN Acting Mediator Ralph Bunche. Meanwhile, a second set of negotiations – the ‘real’ ones – took place at King Abdullah’s palace in Shuneh and in the no man’s land that had split Jerusalem in two. These negotiations were secret, bilateral and presumably unknown to the UN, with the exception of Ralph Bunche himself.⁷

In relation to these negotiations, a number of questions seem to require an answer: Why did Israel and Transjordan choose to hold negotiations primarily on a bilateral basis rather than through the third-party apparatus made available by the UN? It was through negotiations via the UN, after all, that Israel negotiated with its other Arab neighbours, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. Also, how did this dual setting influence the outcome? And, why did King Abdullah of Transjordan expose himself to the rage of the Arab world by engaging in direct talks with Israel? What were the roles of the Great Powers – in particular Great Britain, with whom Transjordan had a Treaty of Alliance, and the United States? Last, but not least, what room for manoeuvre did the UN’s Acting Mediator Ralph Bunche have within this somewhat peculiar setting?

The armistices agreements ended the 1948 war and were intended to provide the basis for subsequent peace negotiations, which were expected to commence within a year.⁸ With Jordan, peace talks were initiated but never concluded. Indeed, peace between Israel and Jordan would remain elusive for another 45 years, while the aspirations of the Palestinian people remain unfulfilled to this day. Officially, Israel and Jordan remained at war until King Abdullah’s grandson King Hussein signed a peace treaty with Israel on 26 October 1994.⁹ On 10 December 1950, however, UN Acting Mediator Ralph Bunche received the Nobel Peace

⁶ Avi Shlaim, *The Politics of Partition: King Abdullah, the Zionists and Palestine 1921–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 273.

⁷ Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan*; Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*; Jensehaugen, *Friendship Reanimated*; UN Oral History interview with Shabtai Rosenne by Jean Krasno, Charlottesville VA, 12 June 1990, p. 55.

⁸ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co, 2001), pp. 41, 47.

⁹ Philip Robins, *A History of Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 187.

Prize for his efforts to negotiate the armistice agreements that were to end the conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbour states.¹⁰

There has been a widely held misunderstanding that the appearance of the armistices was due, almost singlehandedly, to the genius of the Ralph Bunche.¹¹ According to such a view, despite the bitter enmity between the parties, Bunche managed, by virtue of his diplomatic talent, to bridge the gap and settle, albeit not solve, the conflict in the Middle East. In the case of the Israeli–Jordanian armistice, however, Bunche received credit for the settlement even though he did not attend the most important negotiations – the secret bilateral talks that took place at King Abdullah’s winter palace in Shuneh, and in Jerusalem. In fact, Bunche’s role in the Transjordanian–Israeli context seems to have been to grant international legitimacy to a treaty mainly negotiated elsewhere, while the connection between Bunche and the Shuneh talks have received insufficient attention.¹²

Why might it be important to revisit these events today? Arab–Israeli peacemaking in the late 1940s represents the crucial beginnings, the formative years that would later influence subsequent attempts to deal with or solve the intractable conflict in the Middle East. An appreciation of the approaches, processes and outcomes of peace initiatives during this period is arguably of the utmost importance for understanding the entire post-war era. Closer examination of the triangular drama between Transjordan, Israel and the UN can offer us insight into what mediation can and cannot achieve in the resolution of protracted regional conflicts, such as that in the Middle East. Furthermore, a considerable amount of source material exists within Israeli, American and British archives, much of it shedding new light on the very first Arab–Israeli negotiations of 1949. The Ralph Bunche diaries and notes, in particular, have so far been poorly utilized in relation to these negotiations.¹³

¹⁰ Brian Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche: An American Life* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1993), pp. 230–231.

¹¹ See, for example, Noah Lucas, *The Modern History of Israel* (London: Praeger, 1975), p. 267.

¹² A key reason for this is that Ralph Bunche’s diaries have generally been unavailable, and it has until now been impossible to ascertain whether Bunche was aware of the Shuneh talks. Only Brian Urquhart has had access to Bunche’s diaries, but his analysis of the armistice negotiations are brief and far from complete; see Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*.

¹³ Ralph Bunche’s diaries, along with some of his correspondence, have been unavailable for the public. Brian Urquhart was in possession of much of this material and, upon the publication of his biography of Bunche, this material was made available as a private collection, housed within the library of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). In Urquhart’s collection, copies of both Bunche’s diaries and a huge number of other important documents may be found, withdrawn from the public in the Bunche collection. Brian Urquhart’s private collection is located within the Department of Special Collections at UCLA.

The theoretical framework of this article is mainly based on an understanding of power relations and power asymmetry developed during research on the Oslo peace process in the 1990s. This research showed the critical influence of power relations on peace settlements – not only the negative effects of power asymmetry between adversaries, but also the advantages and disadvantages for the mediator of his own power vis-à-vis the parties of the conflict.¹⁴

This article fills essential empirical gaps regarding capabilities, goals, legitimacy, knowledge and coordination of mediators who were working on two parallel tracks, open and secret, leading to the 1949 armistice between Israel and Jordan. The article will especially try to tease out the actual power relations among the parties, along with each party's awareness of and response to those power relations.

The Result of the 1948 War

On 14 May 1948, the creation of the State of Israel was proclaimed. The next day, Israel's Declaration of Independence was followed by a declaration of war, as the armies of the surrounding Arab countries invaded the newborn state.¹⁵ Though the Arab League had drawn up detailed plans for this invasion, when push came to shove Arab unity was replaced by national self-interest, with the various Arab armies acting in ways that deviated from their original war plans. Transjordan changed its stated war plan into one that fitted well with its former 'promise' to Israel – a takeover of what is now known as the West Bank. For its part, Egypt saw this move as a Transjordanian land grab and responded by changing its war plan into one involving a two-pronged attack, with one force moving up through Beersheba and the other north towards Jerusalem. By taking parts of the West Bank, Egypt hoped to limit Transjordan's gains.¹⁶

¹⁴ Hilde Henriksen Waage, 'Explaining the Oslo Backchannel: Norway's Political Past in the Middle East', *The Middle East Journal*, 56, 4 (2002), pp. 597–615; Hilde Henriksen Waage, *Peacemaking Is a Risky Business: Norway's Role in the Peace Process in the Middle East, 1993–96* (Oslo: PRIO, 2004); Hilde Henriksen Waage, 'Norway's Role in the Middle East Peace Talks: Between a Small State and a Weak Belligerent', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 34, 4 (2005), pp. 6–24; Hilde Henriksen Waage, 'The "Minnow" and the "Whale": Norway and the United States in the Peace Process in the Middle East', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 34, 2 (2007), pp. 157–176; Hilde Henriksen Waage, 'Postscript to Oslo: The Mystery of Norway's Missing Files', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 38, 1 (2008), pp. 54–65.

¹⁵ The best short-hand accounts of the 1948 war are found in Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–2001* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001) and Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*. The account that follows here is based on those works.

¹⁶ Morris, *Righteous Victims*, pp. 220–221; Thomas, *How Israel Was Won*, pp. 80–82.

The Arab Legion, the Transjordanian army, entered Palestine and quickly moved forward into the West Bank, with the aim of taking control of and holding the Arab areas. On 28 May 1948, the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem fell to the Legion following the forcing of the latter's hand by the entrance of Israeli troops into the Old City.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the Egyptian army moved northward and occupied the Gaza Strip, before continuing as far north as some twenty miles south of Tel Aviv and north-eastward to Beersheba, through Hebron and Bethlehem. By 23 May 1948, the Egyptian army had reached just south of Jerusalem, and the Egyptians dug in on all fronts.¹⁸ The Iraqi army, numerically the largest Arab force in Palestine, comprising a total of 18,000 troops, managed to hold the 'triangle' – Nablus–Tulkarem–Jenin – the northern section of what is now the West Bank.¹⁹

The Syrian offensive came a day later than planned, with the Syrian army initially only occupying a former British fort as well as some abandoned settlements. However, the small areas in which the Syrian army achieved success were just enough to give the Syrians a tiny foothold in Palestine, thus providing them with a bargaining chip, however modest. The Lebanese army barely entered the war at all.²⁰ The previously much-touted Arab unity had proven to be a farce, as had the stated plan to wipe out the infant Jewish state with a strike 'which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades.'²¹

By December 1948, the Arab forces in Palestine had been all but decimated. The Egyptians controlled pockets of resistance, as well as a small belt on the border between Egypt and Palestine. The West Bank was divided between the Arab Legion and the Iraqi army. Both were undermanned and lacked ammunition. Supply lines were overstretched, and neither of these two forces could afford another round of fighting. The Syrian contingents, as well as the Arab Liberation Army, had been routed. It had become clear that sooner or later the involved parties would have to negotiate. Furthermore, the Iraqi forces that occupied the northern section of the West Bank, both for Iraq and for Transjordan, had created a complicated situation. Iraq was in a much weaker position than Transjordan, but had a less pragmatic outlook. The result was that the Iraqi army would neither fight nor negotiate nor withdraw.

¹⁷ Eugene L. Rogan, 'Jordan and 1948: The Persistence of an Official History', in Eugene L. Rogan & Avi Shlaim (eds.), *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 112–113.

¹⁸ Morris, *Righteous Victims*, pp. 227–230.

¹⁹ Morris, *Righteous Victims*, pp. 230–232; Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 123.

²⁰ Morris, *Righteous Victims*, pp. 232–234.

²¹ Statement by Arab League Secretary Azzam Pasha prior to the invasion; quoted in Morris, *Righteous Victims*, pp. 218–219.

This Iraqi intransigence developed into one of the biggest problems for Transjordan in the subsequent negotiations, as it fell on Transjordan to negotiate on behalf of Iraq.

As a result of its success in the war, Israel became a much more demanding negotiating partner: ‘Our public is drunk with victory – out of ignorance, just as a year ago it was frightened of the Arab armies, out of ignorance’, as Israel’s Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion aptly described the Israeli attitude.²² In the armistice negotiations that followed, Israel’s chosen method was to pick off one enemy at a time, as it had done militarily during the war. It was clearly advantageous for Israel to face several weak opponents rather than one unified Arab alliance. Israel, therefore, skilfully used inter-Arab discontent to its advantage.²³

The Historical Setting and the Room for Manoeuvre

After the First World War, Great Britain and France were the sole Great Powers, controlling individual spheres of interest in the Middle East. Basically, Transjordan, Palestine, Iraq and Egypt belonged to the British sphere, while Syria and Lebanon belonged to France. Following the Second World War, however, the two European countries were only bleak shadows of their former grandeur, though they still retained a degree of influence. The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 granted Britain huge military facilities in Egypt, along with the possibility of protecting the Suez Canal, a vital line of communication. In exchange, Britain had to come to Egypt’s rescue ‘in the event of an emergency’.²⁴ Similarly, with Transjordan, the British government was bound by the 1948 Anglo-Transjordanian Treaty of Alliance, a treaty that had replaced the previous agreement from 1946. However, this treaty only applied if Transjordan’s official borders were breached. There were no British guarantees against Israeli aggression towards the West Bank.²⁵

Ever since its creation in 1922, Transjordan had been extremely dependent on Britain. In 1948, this was still the case. The kingdom had officially become independent in 1946, but its

²² Quoted in Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, p. 122.

²³ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 39; Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*, p. 212; Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, pp. 181, 189; FO 12 Feb. 1949, FO371/75347, Amman to FO, Cypher 83.

²⁴ Wm. Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East 1945–1951: Arab Nationalism, The United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 229.

²⁵ A copy of the Treaty of Alliance is to be found in FO371/75287. This folder also contains some legal discussions on whether the treaty might apply to the West Bank, the conclusion being that it would apply to that region only if the West Bank was annexed by Jordan and the annexation recognized by the British government.; Israeli State Archives (ISA), 2431/1, Eytan to Shiloah, 18 March 1949; David Tal, *War in Palestine 1948* (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 458.

independence was largely illusory. Economically, Transjordan was heavily dependent on British subsidies. Politically, Britain had a major influence on the kingdom – both through the British government in London and, not least, through high-ranking British officials and advisors in Amman, particularly the British Minister to Amman, Sir Alec Kirkbride, who was close both to the British throne and to King Abdullah, who considered him his confidant. Militarily, the Transjordanian army – the Arab Legion – was the best-trained army in the region, commanded by Britain’s Sir John Glubb (Glubb Pasha) and led by British officers.²⁶

By 1948, however, the formerly so great British Empire in the Middle East had been reduced to a *fata morgana*. Britain had just left the uncontrollable Palestine. Once bitten, twice shy: the British had no intention of being boiled in the witches’ cauldron again. Thus, Britain would not participate or in any other way be seriously involved in any acts of war or negotiations over the outcome of the Arab–Israeli showdown. The consequence of Britain’s willing retreat from the Middle East further tilted the balance of power in Israel’s favour. Although Britain still had an interest in the region, and it was seen as vital that Transjordan – and, of course, Egypt – came out of the war and the negotiations that followed in as good a position as possible, the British were neither willing nor in any position to participate actively on the side of their Arab allies. Thus, not only had the Arab states suffered a humiliating defeat in the war against Israel, they were also left orphaned in the negotiations that followed.²⁷

There was, however, one exception from this picture of British passivity. Both Britain and the new superpower, the United States, had been monitoring the 1948 war from a distance. By no means did they intend to get involved. However, when Israel crossed the Egyptian border during ‘Operation Horev’ at the end of December 1948, the situation in the Middle East began to appear threatening even for the Great Powers. When Israel, in addition, shot down five aircraft from the British Royal Air Force, Britain had had enough. A military confrontation between Great Britain and Israel suddenly seemed possible.²⁸

Using the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian agreement as a pretext, Britain threatened to intervene unless Israel immediately withdrew its forces from Egypt.²⁹ Border crossings were a red line, and

²⁶ Robins, *A History of Jordan*, pp. 27–68.

²⁷ Jensehaugen, *Friendship Reanimated*, pp. 84–103.

²⁸ Peter L. Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 60–61; Louis, *The British Empire*, pp. 564–571; Benny Morris, *1948: The First Arab–Israeli War* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 370–372.

²⁹ Louis, *The British Empire*, p. 565.

this also caused a strong US reaction. US President Harry S. Truman conveyed a clear-cut message to the Israeli government, suggesting that the United States was even considering withdrawing its support for the newborn state. The pressure from the Western powers had an immediate effect. Prime Minister Ben-Gurion ordered a halt to the operations, and Israel withdrew from the Sinai. Israel, however, had already achieved its most important war aim: it had nearly obliterated the Egyptian army.³⁰

The British government, however, understood that one more failed standoff would lead to a complete loss of its political credibility in the region. If the defensive treaties with Britain could not be trusted, then was it worth being an ally? True, Egypt had not invoked its defensive treaty, but it had asked for arms, and the British government had been unable to comply due to the UN-imposed embargo on arms imports to the warring countries.³¹ Admittedly, Transjordan was much more willing to ask for direct aid by British troops. The furthest the Foreign Office was willing to go was to move arms and ammunition to the British bases in Transjordan and prepare for a movement of troops to Aqaba. The ammunition was only to be released to the Arab Legion if the international border was crossed by Israeli forces and the Anglo-Transjordanian Treaty was invoked. The troops arrived on 8 January. Britain, at least, had shown some muscle by sending defensive troops to Aqaba.³²

For its part, the position in which Israel now found itself was far better than the devastating situation facing the Palestinians and the Arab states alike. Israel had won the war. In addition, it had several active and strong international protectors. Since the end of the Second World War, the United States had been the Zionists' and Israel's most faithful supporter. The UN Partition Plan of November 1947, which advocated the creation of a Jewish state, had been adopted following strong US pressure on states that were in some way dependent on the United States. The United States had recognized Israel eleven minutes after its establishment. Its Congress, president and White House strongly supported the establishment of Israel and its right to exist. President Harry S. Truman had been under enormous pressure to support and recognize the newborn Jewish state. In the autumn of 1948, he was confronted with his first presidential election. In this context, not only did Truman face strong pressure from the Israel lobby. In addition, his advisers believed that the Jewish vote was essential if the Democratic

³⁰ Louis, *The British Empire*, pp. 564–565; Morris, *1948*, pp. 350–374.

³¹ FO 29 Dec. 1948, FO141/1321, Cairo to FO, Cypher 158; FO 31 Dec. 1948, FO141/1246, BMEO to FO, Cypher no. 534; FO 4 Jan. 1949, FO371/75381, FO to Canada, Cypher No. 1; FO 11 Jan. 1949, FO141/1329, FO to Cairo, Cypher No. 98; Tal, *War in Palestine 1948*, p. 451.

³² FO 6 Dec. 1948, FO816/134, Amman to FO, Cypher 931; FO 30 Dec. 1948, FO816/142, FO to Amman, Cypher no. 1187; FO 6 Jan. 1949, FO371/75293, MoD to Burrows (FO), E458.

Party was to achieve electoral success – not only in the presidential election, but also in congressional and state elections. The president, under conflicting pressures, stumbled and staggered, but in the end he fell down in most cases on a pro-Zionist, Israel-supportive policy. Over and over again, President Truman changed US policies in ways that were certainly at odds with the preferences of the State Department.³³ Diplomats within the British Foreign Office noted that Jewish influence on President Truman was considerable and resulted in several shifts in US policy. US Acting Secretary of State James E. Webb went so far as to state that no one should ‘overestimate the US influence with Israel. Past record suggests that Israel has had more influence with US than has US with Israel.’³⁴

However, though political support was almost free of cost, involvement in war was something very different. Differences of opinion between the United States and Great Britain over Palestine – and not least the question of Jewish immigration – had led to severe problems in the two countries’ ‘special relationship’, with the Anglo-American powers being the principal adversaries in every discussion over the question since 1945. However, the two states had one thing in common: both had a hands-off approach to the war, and to Israel’s repeated breaking of the truce during the autumn of 1948

This was the situation confronting Transjordan, one of the war’s losers, along with the United Nations and its Acting Mediator Ralph Bunche when negotiations started in January 1949. Who was to implement UN resolutions demanding that Israel hand back the excess territories it had occupied during the war? The United States was not willing to take on such a role. Nor was Britain. The only actor left on the scene was the UN. But, the UN had no military forces at its disposal. There existed no UN peacekeeping force that could be sent to the Middle East. There was no chance of getting the Great Powers to agree on any kind of military involvement – or any other sanctions, for that matter. It was up to the so-called involved parties to comply with UN decisions or simply ignore them. Ever since the UN had taken on the responsibility for solving the conflict in Palestine, every decision in the UN had shown how futile it had been to adopt resolutions with which the parties to the conflict refused to comply. Consequently, such decisions remained mere words on paper. Every attempt to solve the dispute over Palestine had involved grand solutions made over the heads of the involved parties. Votes had been cast and counted. Few, if any, bridges or compromises had been

³³ Michael Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers, 1945–1948* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1982), pp. 292–300; Neff, *Fallen Pillars*, pp. 28–29, 50–54, 96; Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, pp. 20–63.

³⁴ Neff, *Fallen Pillars*, p. 96.

made.³⁵ None of the neighbouring countries, or a single Muslim country had voted in favour of the partition plan. Also Britain abstained from voting. With the exception of the mainstream Zionist movement, this meant that the decision was made contrary to the views of the interested parties.³⁶

UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie regarded the infant state as his ‘own baby’ and protected it as best as he could.³⁷ The UN mandate – Security Council Resolution 62 of 16 November 1948 – was vague in defining the framework for the armistices.³⁸ Bunche, the UN Acting Mediator, had to relate to this reality: it provided the setting and the framework within which he was left to negotiate an armistice agreement. As a result, Bunche only had the power to make recommendations. He was in no position to make final decisions. Moreover, he could not force solutions on unwilling parties. If pressure was deemed necessary, he was totally dependent on external actors. Bunche might have liked to put pressure on the stubborn adversaries, but without strong support from the USA, with Britain losing its colonial hold, and with Transjordan and Israel participating in secret bilateral negotiations – with Bunche’s knowledge, but without his involvement – no such support was to be found. Therefore, the UN Acting Mediator lowered his ambitions: ‘[W]e had to try to make the best out of a bad situation’, he wrote in a private letter in October 1949. ‘That sort of approach rarely leads to a *good* result, but only to something *less* bad [...] When *I* come out there again it will be as a tourist.’³⁹ Bunche’s other option might have been to leave the conflicting parties and return to the UN, with no deal secured at all.

Mediators are often thought to be more effective if they are unbiased, impartial and have no preferences of their own as to how a disputed issue should be resolved. Mediators may be divided into several categories. The *weak but unbiased mediator* – the United Nations, for example – represents the classic conception of a mediator, someone unable to influence the bargaining directly by offering carrots and sticks, but who facilitates agreements in other ways. Yet, the importance of a third party’s impartiality seems to have been overemphasized as a mediatory virtue. Many successful mediators have been strong, have had policy interests

³⁵ Evan Luard, *A History of the United Nations: The Years of Western Domination, 1945–55* (New York: MacMillan, 1982), pp. 184–189.

³⁶ Victor Kattan, *From Coexistence to Conquest: International Law and the Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1891–1949* (London: Pluto Press, 2009), pp.152–153.

³⁷ Israeli State Archives, 2404/3, Rafael to Shertok, 4 Sept. 1948.

³⁸ UN Security Council Resolution 62, 16 November 1948; available at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/047/87/IMG/NR004787.pdf?OpenElement> (last accessed 15 April 2009)

³⁹ UCLA, Ralph Bunche’s private archive, collection 2051, box 127, Bunche to Sam Souki, 5 October 1949.

of their own, and have therefore been, in some sense, biased. Indeed, on many occasions, mediation with muscle has proven to be superior to that of less weighty third parties.⁴⁰

Mediation theory points to the fact that process symmetry rarely serves to redress existing power asymmetry between negotiating parties. It also identifies Ralph Bunche as a weak mediator, with little muscle to force solutions on unwilling parties. At Rhodes, a powerless mediation process was set up to carry the entire burden of conflict resolution. The immediate context in 1949 was not only a resounding Israeli military victory on the ground, but also the very real and substantial support offered to the newborn state from both the world's leading superpower, the USA, and the United Nations – and not least the latter's secretary-general, Trygve Lie.⁴¹ This situation effectively set the limits for the UN mediator's room for manoeuvre.

However, the impartiality and the role of a mediator is only one part of the problem to be addressed. Just as important with regard to Rhodes is the mediation approach. A secret approach by a weak mediator or facilitator is unlikely to be able to adequately address problems related to power asymmetry between two conflicting parties. In practice, UN mediator Ralph Bunche could do little about the asymmetry of power that existed on the ground in the Middle East. Such a third-party role could only be reserved a strong mediator, basically a superpower like the United States. However, making matters worse, in the case of Transjordan and Israel, the UN Acting Mediator was only marginally involved when the temporary solutions for the most important issues were being decided. Bunche was kept in the dark. Furthermore, he allowed this to happen, thus leaving the two asymmetrical parties to sort out their problems themselves.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Saadia Touval, 'Biased Intermediaries: Theoretical and Historical Considerations', *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, 1, 1 (1975), pp. 51-69; Saadia Touval, *The Peace Brokers: Mediators in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1979* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982); Saadia Touval & I. William Zartman (eds), *International Mediation in Theory and Practice* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1985); Saadia Touval & I. William Zartman, 'Mediation in International Conflicts', in Kenneth Kressel & Dean C. Pruitt, *Mediation Research* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1989), pp. 115-137; Saadia Touval, *Mediation in the Arab-Israeli Conflict During and After the Cold War* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1999); I. William Zartman & Saadia Touval, 'International Mediation After the Cold War', in Chester Crocker & Fen Hampson (eds), *Managing Global Chaos* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, 1996); Jacob Bercovitch & Allison Houston, 'Influence of Mediator Characteristics and Behavior on the Success of Mediation in International Relations', *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 4, 4 (1993), pp. 297-321; Andrew Kydd, *Mediation, Preferences and Credibility* (unpublished manuscript, Department of Political Science, University of California, 2000). This theoretical approach to mediation has been used in several of Hilde Henriksen Waage's recent publications; see footnote 14.

⁴¹ Donald Neff, *Fallen Pillars: U.S. Policy Towards Palestine and Israel since 1945* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2002); Hilde Henriksen Waage: *Da Staten Israel ble til: Et Stridsspørsmål i norsk politikk 1945-49* [When the State of Israel was Born. A Controversy in Norwegian Politics, 1945-49] (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1989).

Dual Negotiations, Secret and Open

On 12 January 1949, Egyptian and Israeli delegates commenced their negotiations on Rhodes. For Transjordan, the removal of Egypt from the fold was a double-edged sword. Transjordan was given the ‘moral high ground’ over Egypt, the Arab ringleader, and was thus free to engage in talks with Israel.⁴² But, Transjordan was also left more isolated than ever, less politically threatened by the other Arab states, but more prone to Israeli aggression. The power balance between Israel and Transjordan was radically upset in Israel’s favour. As the Foreign Office in London saw it: ‘Jews have now agreed to negotiations with Egypt for an armistice; and we have every reason to fear that, if and when this is achieved, they will attack Jerusalem or Transjordan or both’.⁴³

Already in early January, while Israel was dealing its deathblow to the Egyptian forces in Palestine through Operation Horev, the diplomatic contact between Israel and Transjordan increased. This was a continuation of a process that had been going on since November 1948, when Israel and Transjordan, represented mainly by the two high ranking military commanders Moshe Dayan and Abdullah al-Tel respectively, on a largely bilateral and secret basis, had negotiated a truce over Jerusalem.⁴⁴ When the Israeli team of diplomats met with King Abdullah in January, a strengthened Israeli self-confidence was revealed. Gone was the amicable atmosphere that had existed between the two in November. Israel was now increasingly both more demanding and more ambitious. King Abdullah, for his part, preferred a more careful, step-by-step approach. As in November, the Israeli team talking to the Transjordanians consisted of prominent figures. The most prominent roles were filled by the leading Israeli Arabist, Elias Sasson, and Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion’s man, Moshe Dayan, described as ‘the most prominent military man amongst the politicians, and the most prominent politician amongst the military’, along with Reuven Shiloah of the Foreign Ministry.⁴⁵

Israel refused to talk with Transjordan’s representatives if UN observers were present. An unequivocal message was conveyed from the Israelis to the king: ‘Transjordan’s game was to

⁴² Rogan, ‘Jordan and 1948: The Persistence of an Official History’, p. 118.

⁴³ FO 12 Jan. 1949, FO371/75381, Commonwealth Relations Office to High Commissioners in Commonwealth Countries, Cypher No. 15.

⁴⁴ The November meetings also had precedence in covert meetings between King Abdullah and Golda Meir in the period preceding the 1948 war. The Shuneh talks were thus part of a ‘long’ tradition; see Jensehaugen, *Friendship Reanimated*.

⁴⁵ Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, pp. 150–165.

gain time', but Israel was 'not prepared to play any longer. Transjordan would have to realize that it was not on the winning side in this particular war and must now choose between peace or war.'⁴⁶ Israel also practically demanded of Transjordan that Britain be kept uninvolved in and uninformed of the talks. As Israel saw it, Britain stood in the way of an armistice with Transjordan: Britain had political influence in Transjordan, and it could, in theory, give Transjordan military aid that would have made Transjordan less willing to give in to Israeli pressure. Not least, Ben-Gurion intensely distrusted and feared Britain, his primary ghost from the time of the British Mandate.⁴⁷ Transjordan, however, had no intention of keeping Britain uninformed.⁴⁸

Israel clearly set the agenda. The armistice talks would be based on neither the UN Partition Plan nor the Bernadotte Plan, but rather on the existing military position: 'Their attitude [...] was that they intended to keep what they had conquered', Kirkbride reported to London.⁴⁹ Israeli forces had occupied large areas that went far beyond the territory given to Israel by any of the UN plans. Negotiations based on any such plans would therefore imply large Israeli concessions. The Israeli delegates also made it clear that negotiations with Transjordan could only deal with the areas held by the Arab Legion, which at that point were the central and southern section of the West Bank as well as the southern corner of the Negev. The areas held by the Iraqi army in the northern West Bank were thus not to be under discussion.⁵⁰ On the question of Jerusalem, the two parties seemed to agree, albeit on a purely pragmatic basis. Both realized that the cost of attempting to capture the whole city would be insurmountable. The UN still supported internationalization of Jerusalem, as did the US government.

⁴⁶ FO 29 Dec. 1948, FO816/142, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 982. Two weeks later, according to his own account, Moshe Dayan repeated almost the exact same words to Arab Legion field commander Abdullah al-Tel on the direct phone line that had been established between the two commanders: 'if there were no change in Jordan's approach, they would bring about war, not peace'; see Moshe Dayan: *Moshe Dayan: Story of My Life* (New York: Warner Books, 1976), p. 166.

⁴⁷ Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East*; Benny Morris: *The Road to Jerusalem: Glubb Pasha, Palestine and the Jews* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003).

⁴⁸ FO 29 Dec. 1948, FO816/142, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 982; FO 2 Jan. 1949, FO371/75330, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 3; FO 10 Jan. 1949, FO371/75376, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 19; Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, pp. 171–193.

⁴⁹ FO 2 Jan. 1949, FO371/75330, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 3.

⁵⁰ FO 2 Jan. 1949, FO371/75330, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 3.

Transjordan and Israel agreed on partition and on keeping Jerusalem at great distance from the UN.⁵¹

Transjordan continued to lose ground, however. King Abdullah was clearly far too optimistic as to what might be obtained from such personal talks. His distrust of the UN, combined with his trust in negotiations based on personal relations, had to a certain extent blinded him towards the harsh realities on the ground. He sought to use this personal relationship with Israeli diplomats to his advantage. The king begged Israel to stay away from Aqaba to allow Anglo-Israeli tensions to quiet down. He also asked Israel to completely drive Egypt from Palestine, and not least from Gaza: ‘Take it yourselves, give it to the devil, but don’t let Egypt have it!’⁵² Of course, the king himself wanted very much an outlet to the Mediterranean. The only real development in the secret talks, however, was on the subject of prisoner-of-war (POW) exchanges. Transjordan held several Israeli POWs, while Israel held none from Transjordan. The prisoner swap therefore included a release of Egyptian POWs held by Israel.⁵³

On 24 February 1949, Egypt signed an armistice with Israel. The length of time it had taken to conclude the negotiations between these two countries surprised UN Acting Mediator Ralph Bunche. His initial estimate had been that Egyptian–Israeli negotiations would be completed ‘within a matter of days.’⁵⁴ The talks were after all only supposed to solve military issues and postpone the political issues, but it had become evident that this was not possible. The talks had inevitably become political, resulting in much prolonged negotiations.⁵⁵ The talks had sapped Bunche’s energy. His initial optimism was therefore lacking when he went to the Israeli–Transjordanian talks.

⁵¹ FO 29 Jan. 1949, FO371/75347, Jerusalem to FO, Cypher No. 65; FO 4 Feb. 1949, FO371/75347, Jerusalem to FO, Cypher No. 85; FO 6 Feb. 1949, FO371/75347, Jerusalem to FO, Cypher No. 91; FO 12 Feb. 1949, FO371/75347, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 83; FO 1 March 1949, FO371/75348, Washington to FO, Cypher No. 1198; Israeli State Archives (ISA), 2431/1, Sasson to Eytan, 21 March 1949; Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, p. 166.

⁵² Dayan, *Moshe Dayan*, p. 168; Sharett to Elath, 18 Jan. 1949, doc. 185 in Yemima Rosenthal (ed.), *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel: Volume 3: Armistice Negotiations with the Arab States December 1948-1949* (Jerusalem: Israeli State Archives 1983), p. 343. The same view, bar the ‘take it yourselves’, was echoed later in Egypt. See FO 16 Feb. 1949, Cairo to FO, Confidential Bag No. 37; FO 20 Feb. 1949, FO371/75347, Cairo to FO, Cypher No. 280.

⁵³ FO 10 Jan. 1949, FO371/75376, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 19; Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, p. 180.

⁵⁴ FO 18 Jan. 1949, FO371/75346, New York to FO, En Clair No. 131.

⁵⁵ Shabtai Rosenne, *Israel’s Armistice Agreements with the Arab States* (Tel Aviv: Blumstein’s Bookstores, Ltd, 1951); Hilde Henriksen Waage, ‘The Winner Takes All: The 1949 Island of Rhodes Armistice Negotiations Revisited’, *The Middle East Journal*, 65, 2 (2011), pp. 279-304.

The Transjordanian delegation arrived at Rhodes four days later, led by Colonel al-Jundi and composed of four Arab Legion officers, as well as a secretary and two representatives from the Transjordanian Foreign Office.⁵⁶ The Israeli delegation, led by Reuven Shiloah, with Moshe Dayan as his deputy, arrived the next day.⁵⁷ It was clear that the two countries viewed the Rhodes negotiations differently. Israel sent senior diplomats who had taken part both in prior negotiations with Transjordan and in the armistice negotiations with Egypt. Transjordan, on the other hand, sent representatives who had no prior experience in negotiating with Israel.⁵⁸

The Rhodes talks started off in an almost farcical manner. Ralph Bunche described the Transjordanian delegation as ‘unimpressive, timid, and not very bright [...] obviously on a string with rigid written instructions.’⁵⁹ The Transjordanian delegation’s combined lack of seniority and political manoeuvrability delayed the negotiations continuously. Every move had to be confirmed with Amman.⁶⁰ It was clear that King Abdullah wanted to control the talks himself. Parallel to the Rhodes talks several secret meetings were held. The most important of these took place towards the end of March 1949 – on 18 and 22 March 1949 in Jerusalem, and on 19, 23 and 30 March at Shuneh. The participants were all high-profile, including Moshe Dayan, Reuven Shiloah and Walter Eytan from Israel, and acting Prime Minister Said al-Mufti and Prime Minister Abul Huda, as well as Abdullah al-Tel from Transjordan. At times King Abdullah even intervened personally.⁶¹ The implications of these secret talks will be discussed later.

When Bunche finally managed to call a joint meeting on Rhodes on 4 March, the Transjordanian delegates refused to shake hands with the Israeli delegates. It turned out that the whole thing was based on a misunderstanding. The ‘handshake incident’, however, gave the Rhodes negotiations an almost childish tint.⁶² After a week of negotiations, Bunche

⁵⁶ Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, p. 192.

⁵⁷ Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, p. 197.

⁵⁸ Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, pp. 197–198; Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan*, pp. 400–401.

⁵⁹ Brian Urquhart’s private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 28 Feb. 1949, UCLA 364/8-7.

⁶⁰ Brian Urquhart’s private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 1, 2, 5, 6 March 1949, UCLA 364/8-7.

⁶¹ FO 21 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 177; Israeli State Archives (ISA), RG 93.3/1 64/1, Eytan to Sharett, 23 March 1949; Israeli State Archives (ISA), RG 93.3/1 64/1, Eytan to Sharett, 3 April 1949; Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, pp. 215–233; Jensehaugen, *Friendship Reanimated*, pp. 94–103.

⁶² Brian Urquhart’s private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 4 March 1949, UCLA 364/8-7.

managed to get the Israelis and the Transjordanians to agree on starting armistice talks based on the existing battle lines.⁶³ The joint meeting was to be held 9 March.

Around 8 March, however, Israel launched a military move towards Aqaba – Operation Uvda (*fait accompli*) – occupying the remaining section of the Negev. An Israeli column marched down the Negev, gambling that the Arab Legion would offer no resistance and retreat. The operation was a complete walkover. Israel Defence Forces troops reached the Gulf of Aqaba on the morning of 10 March.⁶⁴ The operation illustrated how Israel completely dominated the military, political and diplomatic situation. Israel mastered the situation on the ground and could feel free from outside pressure as long as international borders were not crossed. As a result, it was also able to negotiate rather aggressively. The southern Negev had been transformed from a Transjordanian asset into an Israeli ‘fact on the ground’. Israeli access to the Red Sea had been one of the most formidable demands made by Israel towards Transjordan. With the successful completion of Operation Uvda, however, there was nothing left to negotiate in terms of Israeli access to the Red Sea. Israel had obtained a major goal, and Transjordan had lost a bartering position of great magnitude. Neither the US or Britain reacted to Operation Uvda in any way that could pressure Israel back to the situation prior to the operation. The US made a statement to the effect that the consequences could be grave if there had been an Israeli incursion into Transjordan.⁶⁵ Britain bolstered its forces in Aqaba as a warning to Israel, but due to international constraints the British had to make it clear that they would only engage with Israeli troops if these fired on the British troops or if the international border was crossed. As with the US statement above, since the Negev was not within

⁶³ Brian Urquhart’s private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 7 March 1949, UCLA 364/8-7.

⁶⁴ Israeli State Archives (ISA), 2431/1, Yadin to Shiloah, 8 March 1949; Israeli State Archives (ISA), 2431/1, Sharett to Nebo, 9 March 1949; Israeli State Archives (ISA), 2431/1, Shiloah to Sharett/Yadin, 9 March 1949; Israeli State Archives (ISA), 2431/1, Yadin to Shiloah, 10 March 1949; FO 9 March 1949, FO371/75381, FO to Haifa, Cypher No. 239; FO 9 March 1949, FO371/75294, Burrows to Secretary of State, E3246; FO 10 March 1949, FO371/75382, Haifa to FO, Cypher No. 416; FO 10 March 1949, FO371/75381, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 142; FO 10 March 1949, FO371/75381, FO to Cairo, Cypher No. 474; FO 15 March 1949, FO371/75381, New York to FO, En Clair No. 584; FO 24 March 1949, FO371/75382, New York to FO, En Clair No. 656; Brian Urquhart’s private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 11–16 March 1949, UCLA 364/8-7.

⁶⁵ Sec. of State to President, 10 March 1949 in *Foreign Relations of the United States 1949: The Near East, South Asia and Africa* (hereinafter *FRUS*), Vol. VI (Washington: Government Printing Office 1977), pp. 810-812.

Transjordan's borders, the 'threat' was empty as it implicitly accepted the capture of the Negev.⁶⁶

Since neither the USA nor the British government reacted, and since there had been no battles, the operation had been cost-free for Israel. Ralph Bunche reacted to Operation Uvda with sarcastic disgust: '[S]mack in the midst of armistice negotiations with Transjordan. Good faith!' and, later, 'nice work while armistice negotiations are in progress. [...] am thinking of resigning'.⁶⁷ Bunche informed the Israeli delegates that he might have to resign in reaction to Uvda;⁶⁸ yet, when push came to shove, he did not do so. Transjordan made some complaints, but did not push the issue.⁶⁹ Bunche was nothing less than astounded by this moderation.⁷⁰ After all, Transjordan had, in one day, lost what was perhaps its best bargaining chip in the talks.⁷¹ King Abdullah, however, was much more worried about the situation on the Iraqi front on the northern West Bank.⁷² He feared that complaints made through the UN would provoke Israel into attacking the Arab Legion on the West Bank. As he saw it, the best way of avoiding an Israeli offensive was by approaching Israel directly.⁷³ On 11 March, the day after Operation Uvda, a ceasefire was signed and the armistice negotiations continued.⁷⁴ The British Minister in Amman, Alec Kirkbride, was furious at both Israel's behaviour and the British lack of (re)action: '[T]he Israeli forces can go where they want, pretty well when they want to and unless some greater degree of diplomatic support is given to the Arabs the use of the term 'negotiations' in connexion with a settlement is a mistake.'⁷⁵ It was clear that the British representatives on the ground had a very different approach than the British Foreign

⁶⁶ FO 4 March 1949, FO371/75294, CoS Committee Instructions to British Commander at Aqaba, C.O.S. (49)82; FO 9 March 1949, FO371/75381, FO to Haifa, Cypher No. 239; FO 9 March 1949, FO371/75381, FO to Washington, Cypher No. 2740; Brian Urquhart's private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, Cordier to Bunche, 9 March 1949, HQMed. 367, UCLA 364/8-8; Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between the Secretary and the British Ambassador, 10 March 1949, in *FRUS* 1949, Vol. VI, pp. 813–814; FO 11 March 1949, FO371/75381, FO to Amman, Cypher 209; FO 11 March 1949, FO371/75294, MEDME to Air Ministry, London, ACCX. 984; FO 22 March 1949, FO371/75386, Jerusalem to FO, Cypher 224; Jensehaugen, *Friendship Reanimated*, pp. 87–94.

⁶⁷ Brian Urquhart's private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 11–12 March 1949, UCLA 364/8-7.

⁶⁸ Israeli State Archives (ISA), 2431/1, Dayan to Yadin, 13 March 1949.

⁶⁹ Israeli State Archives (ISA), 2431/1, Shiloah to Sharett/Yadin, 9 March 1949; Israeli State Archives (ISA), 2431/1, Shiloah to MFA, 10 March 1949.

⁷⁰ Brian Urquhart's private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 14 March 1949, UCLA 364/8-7.

⁷¹ Stabler to Sec. of State, 9 March 1949, in *FRUS* 1949, Vol. VI, p. 808.

⁷² Brian Urquhart's private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 16 March 1949, UCLA 364/8-7; Brian Urquhart's private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, Bunche to Secretary-General, 18 March 1949, Med. 214, UCLA 364/8-8.

⁷³ Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*, p. 216.

⁷⁴ Transcript of ceasefire found in Acting Mediator to Sec. Gen., 11 March 1949, in *FRUS* 1949, Vol. VI, pp. 816–817.

⁷⁵ FO 11 March 1949, FO371/75381, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 146.

Office. The Foreign Office was too constrained by the international situation, particularly with relation to the US, and was thus unwilling to implement what the British representative(s) in Amman thought necessary.⁷⁶

The Iraqi forces occupied the northern West Bank, an area that Transjordan was planning to annex after the war. By mid-January 1949, the Iraqi position had increasingly become a problem for King Abdullah, despite the fact that Iraq was Transjordan's closest ally in the Middle East. The Iraqi government refused to recognize that, as a warring party, it also had to be a negotiating partner. This meant that Transjordan would have to negotiate on behalf of Iraq in order to legitimize the occupation of the northern West Bank.⁷⁷

Iraq had long been in political turmoil, and its political leadership was pressed from a number of sides. In Baghdad, the government had been faced with strong pan-Arab opposition and massive anti-British popular protests. In addition, Hashemite family affairs were not always dominated by trust. It was King Abdullah's younger cousin, Abd al-Ilah, who sat on the throne in Iraq. The Iraqi leadership had invested large amounts of political capital in the war effort, contributing the largest single Arab contingent. In addition, the propaganda that had been fed to the Iraqi masses was one of military victories. As a result, when the ceasefires were signed in June and July 1948, many Iraqis were shocked and angered. The defeats in Palestine brought down the Iraqi government in January 1949, and there was an increasing suspicion that the Iraqi army was being used as a tool for King Abdullah so that he could enlarge his territory by annexing Palestine.⁷⁸ These things considered, it is no wonder the Iraqi leadership hesitated to withdraw from Palestine.

In early March, the involved parties were still unable to come to an understanding as to how Iraq was to be represented at the talks, or how Iraqi troops were to withdraw from the northern section of the West Bank. On 11 March, a ceasefire was signed between Transjordan and Israel, covering all fronts. In the end, Israel had accepted a declaration that Bunche had added to the ceasefire, which stated that once Transjordan had taken over the front from the Iraqi troops, the parties would extend the ceasefire to include the strip of land previously held by the Iraqi forces.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ FO 10 March 1949, FO371/75294, FO to Amman, Cypher No. 202.

⁷⁷ Jensehaugen, *Friendship Reanimated*, pp. 94–103.

⁷⁸ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, pp. 118–126.

⁷⁹ Israeli State Archives, 2442-9, Second Joint Formal Meeting of the Israeli–Transjordan Armistice Negotiations, 11 March 1949.

However, as the Iraqis were about to withdraw, Israel broke with the common understanding, declaring on 18 March 1949 that the upcoming withdrawal of Iraqi troops and their replacement by Transjordanian forces represented a breach of the truce.⁸⁰ Legalistically, Israel had a point, since troop movement on the front could be considered a breach of the truce. The Iraqi withdrawal, however, was beneficial for Israel, as it enabled a hostile army to be replaced by a force that was interested in negotiating. Nevertheless, Israel was attempting to secure further benefits from the situation: In a secret meeting between Abdullah al-Tel, the Arab Legion field commander, and Moshe Dayan in Jerusalem on 18 March, Dayan informed al-Tel that Israel might be willing to ignore Transjordan's breach of the truce if, in return, Transjordan were willing to concede territory to Israel.⁸¹ Previously, Elias Sasson, whom King Abdullah considered to be a friend, had given the regent the same message in a milder form: 'The present lines in the Triangle should be rectified [...] in accordance with an agreement arrived at peacefully'.⁸² The time had come for those rectifications. 'Another meeting is arranged for this evening when the exact amount of this particular instance of blackmail is to be named,' Pirie-Gordon, a British representative in Amman, reported to London.⁸³

When King Abdullah later met Dayan at Shuneh, the barter was not much more specific. Dayan made clear only that Transjordan would have to concede 'certain unspecified 'high points,'⁸⁴ later defined as 'a general withdrawal of the Arab Legion for 15 kilometres along the front opposite the coastal plain.'⁸⁵ Transjordan was given 24 hours in which to agree – 'or Israel would withdraw its agreement to Arab Legion taking over from Iraqis.' Dayan was reported to have said 'that if rectification not made by agreement, Israel would make them anyway.'⁸⁶ Either Transjordan would concede territory voluntarily or Israel would launch an attack and seize the land. The British Foreign Office was shocked by the threat, but was incapable of doing anything other than to urge the US State Department to exert pressure on

⁸⁰ FO 18 March 1949, FO816/144, Message from King Abdullah to British Chargé d'Affaires Amman, S.1/49.

⁸¹ FO 19 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 172; FO 22 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 179; FO 23 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 182; FO 23 March 1949, FO371/75386, FO to Washington, Cypher No. 3847; Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, pp. 215–217.

⁸² Israeli State Archives (ISA), RG 93.3/1 87/24, Sasson to Eytan, 18 March 1949.

⁸³ FO 19 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 172. The Foreign Office was not alone in calling it blackmail; see, for example, Stabler to Sec. of State, 23 March. 1949, in *FRUS* 1949, Vol. VI, pp. 861–862.

⁸⁴ FO 21 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 177.

⁸⁵ FO 23 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 180.

⁸⁶ Stabler to the Sec. of State, 23 March. 1949, in *FRUS* 1949, Vol. VI, pp. 859–861.

Israel. The State Department urged Israel to stop issuing such demands, but little real pressure was applied.⁸⁷

On 23 March 1949, during a long and hard round of negotiations at Shuneh, the size of the demanded area was slightly reduced.⁸⁸ It was to be a 'belt about 5 kilometres deep stretching from just east of Lydda to the north of Jenin along a front of 60 kilometres'. Glubb Pasha estimated that this area included 'about 15 [Palestinian] villages and approximately 12,000 inhabitants.'⁸⁹ The land in question was also described as 'some of the best agricultural land now remaining in Arab hands'.⁹⁰ The Israeli negotiators, Walter Eytan and Yigal Yadin, 'demanded acceptance by 1900 hours this evening [...] in the event of refusal Transjordan 'would soon see' what would happen.'⁹¹

King Abdullah was convinced that a refusal would result in an all-out Israeli attack.⁹² Glubb Pasha, however, argued that it might be possible to slightly delay the agreement in an attempt to obtain some form of help from the United States.⁹³ Convinced by Glubb Pasha, King Abdullah managed to postpone the signing of the Shuneh agreement by a week, on the pretext that it would have to be signed personally by Prime Minister Tawfiq Abul Huda, who was visiting Lebanon at the time. Israel gave the prime minister a week in which to return and sign the agreement.⁹⁴

In the meantime, King Abdullah made a last-ditch attempt to enlist the help of the USA against Israel. He personally sent a letter to President Truman urging him to apply pressure on Israel so that an armistice could successfully be signed without loss of further land, and hence with reduced risk of renewed fighting.⁹⁵ Israel, however, had nothing to fear. As far as the US State

⁸⁷ FO 23 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 180; FO 23 March 1949, FO371/75386, FO to Washington, Cypher No. 3847; FO 23 March 1949, FO371/75386, Washington to FO, Cypher No. 1673.

⁸⁸ FO 23 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 182.

⁸⁹ FO 23 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 182.

⁹⁰ FO 25 March 1949, FO371/75387, Strang to Prime Minister, P.M./W.S./49/42.

⁹¹ FO 23 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 182.

⁹² FO 23 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 182. There are several indications of an Israeli takeover in the Hebron area in the same time period as the issuing of the Iraqi blackmail. From the various sources, however, it is hard to accurately evaluate the size and nature of this takeover; see Brian Urquhart's private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 23–24 March 1949, UCLA 364/8-7; FO 26 March 1949, FO371/75387, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 187; FO 4 April 1949, FO371/75273, Monthly Situation Report on Transjordan March 1949; Israeli State Archives (ISA), 2431/1, Shiloah to Eytan, 17 March 1949.

⁹³ FO 23 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 182; FO 23 March 1949, FO371/75386, FO to Washington, Cypher No. 3847;

⁹⁴ FO 24 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 185.

⁹⁵ FO 25 March 1949 (letter states '48, but this is clearly an error), FO816/145, Abdullah Ibn El-Husseini to Truman.

Department was concerned, the concessions demanded of Transjordan were small (5 x 60km) and not permanent. After all, as the USA saw it, it was only an armistice that was being negotiated, not a peace agreement.⁹⁶ Truman responded personally to King Abdullah's letter, stating in a 'very non-committal' manner that 'the Jews should eventually give compensation for all territory they get in excess of the 1947 partition'.⁹⁷ 'Eventually' was understood as referring to 'an ultimate political settlement between the Parties', meaning a final peace treaty.⁹⁸

King Abdullah was left with no other option than to accept Israel's demands. The British Foreign Office was shocked: '[This] seems to augur very ill for prospects of effective co-operation between us and the United States in Europe, where we shall be faced with opposition far more powerful and determined than the Israeli Government can put up.'⁹⁹ The Foreign Office realized that no American pressure was going to materialize and found itself forced to advise King Abdullah to sign while there was still time.¹⁰⁰ King Abdullah understood perfectly well that there was 'now no other course of action left open but to accept Israel's demands'.¹⁰¹ Transjordan was practically unarmed and isolated. The British government was unable to provide any help, and the United States was both unwilling and uninterested.¹⁰²

The armistice text – which was finalized, but not signed, at Shuneh on 23 March – included a clause stating that 'Israel [...] has made similar changes for the benefit of the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom in other areas.' This clause did not match well with reality, as there were no 'similar changes'. It was inserted purely for the sake of helping Transjordan save face if the concessions leaked.¹⁰³ Other than a minute, purely symbolic modification, Israel had no intentions of bartering land. The minuscule change was finally made in the Hebron area and in the northeast.¹⁰⁴ The strip of land handed over to Israel in this agreement was

⁹⁶ FO 25 March 1949, FO371/75387, Washington to FO, Cypher No. 1711.

⁹⁷ FO 30 March 1949, FO371/75387, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 199.

⁹⁸ FO 4 April 1949, FO371/75387, Amman to Ernest Bevin (FO), Despatch No. 23.

⁹⁹ FO 28 March 1949, FO371/75387, Jerusalem to FO, Cypher No. 247.

¹⁰⁰ FO 29 March 1949, FO371/75383, FO to Amman, Cypher No. 263.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, p. 231.

¹⁰² Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, pp. 228–230.

¹⁰³ FO 27 March 1949, FO371/75387, Amman to Eastern Department FO, S.1/49; Stabler to Sec. of State, 24 March. 1949, in *FRUS* 1949, Vol. VI, p. 867; Israeli State Archives (ISA), RG 93.3/1 64/1, Eytan to Sharett, 23 March 1949.

¹⁰⁴ FO 24 March 1949, FO371/75386, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 186; FO 24 March 1949, FO371/75387, Washington to FO, Cypher No. 1680; FO 25 March 1949, FO371/75387, Washington to FO, Cypher No. 1712; 'Agreement between the Hashemite Jordan Kingdom and the State of Israel' (concerning amendment to 'the taking over by the Arab Legion of the Iraqi front') signed 30 March, found in FO 371/75387; FO 31 March 1949, FO371/75387, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 202; Walter Eytan: 'Three Nights at Shuneh', *Midstream*, Nov. 1980, p. 54; Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*, p. 217.

geographically small, but in relative terms it represented around 1 per cent of historical Palestine and was roughly the same size as the Gaza Strip.¹⁰⁵ The result thrilled Israeli negotiator Walter Eytan: '[T]his agreement is too good to be true [...] It gives us in respect of territory – nearly all of it highly strategic – far more than we should ever have contemplated taking by military action.'¹⁰⁶

On 3 April 1949, Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (the new name given to Transjordan, as its borders now encompassed land on both sides of the Jordan River) signed their armistice agreement on Rhodes. In it, the issues of the temporary division of Jerusalem, the temporary armistice lines and the release of POWs were all adequately addressed. The main issues, however, were postponed: the Palestinian refugees, the final borders and the final status for Jerusalem. The postponed issues were all those that really mattered to the Palestinians. The real victims of the war were therefore, in a sense, negated from the armistice negotiations. With the armistice treaty finalized, Jordan could start the annexation of the West Bank, which was formally carried out in April 1950, a full year after the armistice was signed.¹⁰⁷ 'Another deal and as usual the Palestine Arabs lose,' summed up Ralph Bunche dryly as he left exhausted for home.¹⁰⁸ The result was in many ways so beneficial for Israel that it became a hindrance for peace, rather than the bridge it was intended to be. Peace had a price, something Israel was not willing to pay. The armistice was simply a prize good enough for Israel.

Coercive Diplomacy

Was Israel a 'gangster state headed by an utterly unscrupulous set of leaders'? This was what Sir John Troutbeck, head of the British Middle East Office, located in Cairo, felt when describing recent events in the 1948 war to Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin on 2 June 1948.¹⁰⁹ What Israel clearly had was a shrewd team of political leaders, unwilling to let go of an inch of what they had managed to take and control during the war. During the armistice negotiations, the Israeli leaders even sought to expand the Israeli-held area beyond what they

¹⁰⁵ The strip on the West Bank is 300 km², while the Gaza strip is 360 km².

¹⁰⁶ Israeli State Archives (ISA), RG 93.3/1 64/1, Eytan to Sharett, 23 March 1949.

¹⁰⁷ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 66.

¹⁰⁸ Brian Urquhart's private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 1 April 1949, UCLA 364/8-7.

¹⁰⁹ Avi Shlaim, 'How Israel Brought Gaza to the Brink of Humanitarian Catastrophe', *The Guardian*, 7 January 2009.

already had secured. The US diplomat Mark Ethridge¹¹⁰ was probably closer to the mark when he summed up the armistice negotiations in a cable to US Secretary of State Dean Acheson: 'Israel has stiffened rather than modified her position. The [a]rmistice talks emphasized Arab weakness because, as Bunche told me, Israel gave at no point where concession was necessary. Israel intends to exploit that weakness to the maximum'.¹¹¹

It was exactly this asymmetry of power that Israel shrewdly and brilliantly exploited in order to protect what it defined as Israel's best interests. In this triangular drama, Israel held all the good cards. Regardless of whether its stance was morally right or wrong, Israel's position and actions during the negotiations were to take more, to achieve more, to secure everything, to control all, to risk as much as possible and to concede nothing – these were Israel's guiding principles for the settlement that followed the war. As regards Transjordan, Israel was in a position to make harsher demands in direct secret talks than in official UN-monitored talks. Israeli demands relating to the southern Negev and the northern section of the West Bank met with little resistance. Israel's tactic had long been that of isolating the Arab states, taking them on one by one. In a sense, the Shuneh talks were the culmination of such a policy. Not only was Israel able to completely isolate Transjordan from the rest of the Arab world, but by negotiating through a secret bilateral channel it also managed to isolate Transjordan from almost all other forms of outside interference. In its policy of divide and rule Israel was immensely aided by the inter-Arab bickering which had made it so much easier to play them against each other.

The two other actors in this drama, Transjordan and the UN representative Ralph Bunche, both had extremely weak and seriously difficult points of departure. Their actions are also seemingly more difficult to explain. However, for them too, the asymmetry of power, their own weak positions and their limited room for manoeuvre offer the best path for us to follow if we are to explain their chosen courses of action.

The most natural choice for Transjordan would have been to negotiate at Rhodes through Acting Mediator Bunche. At Rhodes, it would presumably have been harder for Israel to make the harsh demands and outright threats that were made at Shuneh. Under the scrutiny of the UN, such coercive diplomacy would have been more difficult. It would also have been easier for Britain to put its weight behind Transjordan if talks were official. The US position on the

¹¹⁰ Mark Ethridge was the US head of the Palestine Conciliation Commission.

¹¹¹ Ethridge to Sec. of State, 13 April 1949, in *FRUS* 1949, Vol. VI, p. 916.

Partition Plan might possibly also have been made more visible – namely, that the Israelis should provide compensation for all the areas they held beyond the Partition Plan.¹¹² Talks under the UN, moreover, would have made the Arab world's position towards Transjordan less hostile. These arguments, however, rest on the luxury of hindsight. The question is not whether King Abdullah made the right choice, but rather why he made the choice he did.

King Abdullah was deeply distrustful of the UN. He was vehemently anti-communist and feared Soviet involvement if the UN apparatus was used. Further, he disliked the slow bureaucratic nature of the organization. He also disagreed with the UN position on Jerusalem, which was that of internationalization. The Old City had been Transjordan's greatest gain in the 1948 war, and this had been the result of a hard-fought battle. Israel and Transjordan had a shared view on Jerusalem (division), and this was contrary to the UN stance.¹¹³ Last, but not least, Transjordan was not officially recognized as an independent country by the UN, another element adding to the king's profound dislike of the world organization.¹¹⁴

In addition, King Abdullah had had good experiences with personal diplomacy in the past. These experiences had borne merits. He had established a close relationship with Israeli Arabist Elias Sasson and had secured a controversial pre-war agreement between himself and the Zionists. Beyond that, the Jerusalem truce that had been negotiated on a personal basis in November 1948, without UN interference, was perceived as a great success. The establishment of a direct phone line between Moshe Dayan and Abdullah al-Tel, which had been made in connection with the Jerusalem talks, had served both parties well.¹¹⁵ The successful exchange of POWs had also been completed through personal negotiations that had excluded the UN.

From King Abdullah's standpoint, the argument that negotiating under the UN's auspices might prove advantageous because of the availability of outside pressure was invalid. It had become clear that such outside pressure would not be forthcoming. Britain could not even supply the Arab Legion with ammunition, and the USA was simply uninvolved. Such outside pressure, it was clear, would only manifest itself if international borders were crossed. Even then, as became evident when Egypt proper was attacked in December 1948, the US and

¹¹² FO 30 March 1949, FO371/75387, Amman to FO, Cypher No. 199.

¹¹³ Despite the fact that the parties disagreed with the UN on Jerusalem, the question of division was basically handed over to Bunche who drew up the lines of division that were meant to be temporary. These lines were based on the fighting lines. Both parties agreed to this temporary solution – the Israelis slightly more begrudgingly than Transjordan. Brian Urquhart's private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 13 March – 16 March 1949, UCLA 364/8-7.

¹¹⁴ Jensehaugen, *Friendship Reanimated*, pp. 37, 47, 50, 61-62, 69, 74, 87, 105.

¹¹⁵ Jensehaugen, *Friendship Reanimated*.

British reaction was limited and slow. Elias Sasson, towards the end of March 1949, seemed to be close on target when he commented that ‘the King is anxious to conclude an armistice with us at any cost and [...] the British are not giving him much backing.’¹¹⁶ One might almost suspect that the Israeli negotiators were already familiar with the later so famous American economist Thomas Schelling and his arguments regarding the diplomacy of force, written two decades later. Indeed, how Israel achieved its territorial objectives – by threatening to conquer all of the West Bank but without actually resorting to the use of force – seems almost to have had Schelling’s thesis as guidance: ‘Violence is most purposive and most successful when it is threatened and not used. Successful threats are those that do not have to be carried out’.¹¹⁷

Beyond that, the other Arab states that had functioned as a limiting force on King Abdullah were all but outmanoeuvred. Most of them had already made concessions to Israel, and their ability to exert pressure on the Hashemite regent was depleted. King Abdullah was no longer under any pressure to negotiate under UN scrutiny. In addition, unlike the other Arab leaders, he was authentically interested in negotiating peace with Israel.¹¹⁸ If his long term goal was to further his diplomatic relationship with Israel, then fostering his personal relationship with its leaders was perhaps of equal importance as minimizing the concessions made in the armistice.

UN Acting Mediator Ralph Bunche had already spent a month and a half at Rhodes, negotiating the armistice between Israel and Egypt. Bunche, who initially believed that this first negotiation round would be over in a couple of days, had experienced something very different from his expectations: the talks had been long and hard; he had received hardly any help from the outside; and the negotiations and the agreement had been reached on Israel’s premises and according to Israel’s rules of the game.¹¹⁹ A weak mediator, lacking the strong muscles required to enforce anything and with an extremely limited room for manoeuvre, had faced the tremendous challenge of shouldering the burden of a conflict-resolution project designed to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. The armistice agreement between Israel and Egypt could not, and would not, create the basis for future peace. With this round out of sight, Bunche had to initiate a new round of negotiations, which were wracked by political bickering, lack of professionalism within the Transjordanian delegation, late nights, early

¹¹⁶ Sasson to Eytan, 22 March 1949, doc. 246, in Rosenthal (ed.), *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel: Volume 3*, p. 465.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies*, p. 197. For a full presentation of the theory, see Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 1–34.

¹¹⁸ Shlaim: *The Politics of Partition*, pp. 355–389.

¹¹⁹ Waage, ‘The Winner Takes All’.

mornings and bouts of disease.¹²⁰ Outside pressure on the negotiating parties was essentially lacking and Ralph Bunche was left to handle the situation on his own. Most of the essential issues in the talks took place parallel to Rhodes, and the talks were heavily affected by coercive diplomacy such as the *fait accompli* in the Negev and the blackmail on the Iraqi front. All of this was outside of Ralph Bunche's control. Bunche wanted to finish the whole affair and go home. He was mentally and physically exhausted – or, as he put it himself, 'sick of this business'.¹²¹ He knew about the Shuneh talks and – as series of comments from his diaries seem to bear out¹²² – perceived them as a forum where problems that arose at Rhodes could be straightened out in direct consultation with King Abdullah. These 'consultations' had the simple function of lifting a burden off his back, and he allowed this undermining of his mandate to continue because he had reached a breaking point, where the only thing that mattered was expediting his mission. Perhaps the clearest indication of Ralph Bunche's state of mind is found in a letter he sent to his wife, Ruth:

You can't imagine what it takes to hold these monkeys together long enough to squeeze agreement out of them. And such trickery, deceit and downright dishonesty you have never seen. I swear by all that's Holy, I will never come anywhere near the Palestine problem once I liberate myself from this trap.¹²³

The Shuneh talks allowed him to get out of that trap with greater haste and less work than would have been possible if the talks had only taken place at Rhodes. Bunche may not have agreed with the outcome, but at least an agreement had been reached. With some exception, however, it was not Bunche's skill as a mediator that squeezed an agreement out of "these monkeys". When push came to shove the most difficult issues were "solved" behind the scenes as Israel coerced Transjordan into accepting their demands. These "agreements" were then handed to Bunche at Rhodes where they were formalized.

Power-diplomacy

Knowledge about what went on in the very first negotiations between Israel and the surrounding Arab states helps sharpen our understanding of the historical role that third-party

¹²⁰ Brian Urquhart's private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 28 February–4 April 1949, UCLA 364/8-7.

¹²¹ Brian Urquhart's private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 1 April 1949, UCLA 364/8-7.

¹²² Brian Urquhart's private collection in the UCLA Library, Department of Special Collections, excerpts from Bunche Diary 24, 25, 28 March and 1 April 1949, UCLA 364/8-7.

¹²³ Quoted in Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*, p. 217.

intervention and mediation has played, as well as pointing to the limitations of third-party mediation in the future. Already at this very early stage in their relations, it would seem that the power asymmetry between Israel, on the one hand, and the Arab states, on the other, was the main reason why the parties could not arrive at a peaceful, sustainable solution.¹²⁴ By no standards could the Israelis and the Arabs be claimed to be on an equal footing. Israel was – and is – the stronger party, and the Arabs the weaker. Any solution that reflected these asymmetrical power relations, however, would undoubtedly have been unacceptable to the surrounding Arab states. This means that the only way a viable solution could have been achieved would have been for a strong third party to rectify the basic asymmetry of power by forcing Israel to accept a compromise solution that the Arabs would never have sufficient force to obtain through armed struggle – or through negotiations, for that matter. Since little has changed regarding the power-relations in the region since 1949, this means that a viable solution in the Middle East today is only possible if a strong third party – basically meaning the United States, probably in cooperation with the UN, the EU and Russia – decides to lean heavily on its Israeli ally. The really powerful third party, the United States, with its strong muscles, has generally lacked the will to exert any pressure to counterbalance the asymmetry of power. Neither in 1949 nor in 2010 has real pressure been applied on the stronger party in the Middle East – Israel. Increasing pressure, however, has been put on the weaker part, the surrounding Arab states and the Palestinians, making the weaker party even weaker. In 60 years, no real progress has been made, and no new approaches have been seen. There is, in other words, little that is new under the sun in the Middle East.

¹²⁴ Waage, 'The Winner Takes All'.