

A Cold Peace

Even the greatest of all optimists would have to concede that this may be one of the most awkward times to talk about peace in the Middle East. For all the promise of a so-called peace dividend, the political reality on the ground is graver than ever. Violence has never been so rampant and, with few notable exceptions, efforts to animate the economies of Israel, Jordan and Palestine via a tripartite alliance have failed miserably.

One of the great illusions of the Israeli and American political camps throughout the early and mid-1990s was the belief that the conflicting parties could do good business without the presence of real peace. The assumption was that a mutually rewarding economic relationship could eventually make peace a foregone conclusion – after all, countries that trade with each other are less likely to go to war against each another. The reality, however, is that while token commercial deals may help to break the ice between protagonists and lead to a more optimistic atmosphere, to expect anything beyond is, as history has demonstrated, simply naive if not spitefully hypocritical.

From this bleak point, how can the Arabs and Israelis start clawing their way back to a situation in which peace would again seem hopeful? Much will depend on a durable and long-lasting settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as envisioned in Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Only then could the so-called peace dividend prove considerable, and not just in terms of ending the bloodshed. On the other hand, perhaps peace itself is a dream that has been clothed in too many layers of optimism, when in truth it is merely a prerequisite to changing an unfavorable status quo.

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In This Section:

38 Behind The Curtains

Abdel Salam Al Majali offers a brief, behind the scenes look at the Israeli-Jordanian peace negotiations

46 A Wavering Peace

Munther J. Haddadin, senior negotiator, looks at the hectic events that culminated in the Wadi Araba peace treaty

41 Peace Immobilized

Shimon Shamir, Israel's first ever ambassador to Jordan, reflects on the ups and downs of the Israeli-Jordanian peace process

51 A Sullen Peace

Mustafa Hamarneh on how public opinion has shaped the jagged history of the Wadi Araba peace treaty

44 Yields Of The Peace Dividend

Riad al Khouri looks at the economics of the 15-year peace effort

