

“A Lease Could Break the Palestine-Israel Deadlock.”
Boston Globe, July 7, 2000;

“Suppose Israel Leased the Jordan Valley From the Palestinians.”
International Herald Tribune, July 8, 2000;

“Land Lease for Peace.”
Baltimore Sun, July 9, 2000.

By JAMES RON AND ALEXANDER COOLEY

BALTIMORE - During the last Israeli cabinet crisis, one unhappy minister alleged that Israeli and Palestinian negotiators had secretly agreed to split control over the Jordan Valley. Israel would recognize Palestinian sovereignty over the area, while Palestine would lease it back to Israel for military purposes.

Leasing is an innovative way of resolving protracted conflict and should be studied more closely by global diplomats. If leasing had been on the Kosovo agenda in early 1999, war and ethnic cleansing could have been averted. If the Jordan Valley lease is extended to extremist Jewish settlements in the West Bank, a comprehensive Arab-Israeli deal is possible.

Leasing has a proved track record in unstable regions. Between 1994 and 1997, Russia drew up leasing agreements with Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Latvia and Ukraine. The Russians ceded formal control over radar facilities, missile test sites and ports, but then leased them back from its former imperial subjects.

Leasing afforded hardliners on all sides a way out. In Russia, the military was furious over the loss of irreplaceable assets, while nationalists in the post-Soviet states were determined to safeguard their territorial integrity. Leasing gave everyone a way of claiming victory, diffusing potential clashes.

The Ukrainian deal was particularly vital, as conflict over the Sevastopol port and the Black Sea Fleet threatened to destabilize the entire region. Sevastopol was a key naval base and a symbol of Russian historical achievement, and the Black Sea Fleet was a major military asset. To add fuel to the fire, the city was populated largely by ethnic Russians.

Throughout the early 1990s, Russian officers, Communists and nationalists bitterly protested Ukrainian sovereignty over Sevastopol. Ukrainian politicians refused to back down, however, arguing that the city was rightfully theirs. In 1997 a historic accord divided the fleet in two and granted Russia a 20-year, \$100-million lease over Sevastopol's port facilities.

The zero-sum nature of modern sovereignty inspired many of the 20th century's wars. Nation states enjoyed a monopoly over chunks of land to the exclusion of all others, and what one state owned, no other could have. This arrangement invariably created winners and angry losers, since many regions were claimed by multiple groups. Mutually beneficial deals were rare.

But in a lease sovereignty is shared according to clear, prearranged guidelines. One side retains formal control, and the other gains use rights for a specified period of time. Conditions are worked out in detail in advance, including payment and limits to land use. Third-party arbitration is arranged for future disputes, and money is put in escrow to guarantee compliance.

An Israeli lease over disputed West Bank areas can break the current deadlock. Palestinians have lost much land to Israel and are unwilling to compromise over what little remains. But West Bank settlers dismiss the idea of Palestinian rights, regarding the area as Jewish patrimony. Palestinians want Israel to withdraw the settlers, but the Israeli government is stymied by strong domestic opposition. Neither side can back down without being attacked for treason.

A 10-year lease in which Israel recognized Palestinian sovereignty over Jewish settlements, paid substantial rent and ended further construction would work. A decade of peace would change Israel's political configuration, diffusing the radicals' claims and injecting moderation. Palestinian territorial integrity would be recognized and secure, allowing a Palestinian state to develop under stable conditions.

Leasing would have helped Serbs and ethnic Albanians out of the Kosovo imbroglio. Both sides demanded exclusive control over the province, and Western negotiators could convince neither to back down. In a world in which sovereignty granted a total monopoly, compromise seemed

foolish. Partition, another oft-discussed solution, would only have provoked more ethnic cleansing and bloodshed. A leasing arrangement, on the other hand, would have been a viable alternative.

Mutually exclusive sovereignty has generated strife ever since it was introduced to the world by Western powers. Leasing, by contrast, is a non-violent form of territorial sharing. Let's give it a chance.

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