

## **Palestine/Israel: The end of road for the two-state solution?**

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### **The Electronic Intifada**

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The question I would like to consider tonight, I think has become, in a sense, the fundamental question for those concerned about Palestine and Israel. Is peace in Palestine through territorial partition a doomed fantasy? And has the time come to discard it? A growing number of people believe that while it may once have worked on paper, in practice the Israeli state has succeeded, through the relentless colonization of the Occupied Territories and lately its grotesque separation barrier, in its long-standing goal of rendering any workable partition impossible. Each passing day renders this more evident. Since the Oslo Accords were signed in September 1993, Israel has more than doubled the number of settlers in the Occupied Territories, establishing facts on the ground that make any sort of reasonable partition more and more unlikely.

While Israel was conceived as a state for Jews, Edward Said explained in 1999, the “effort to separate (Israelis and Palestinians) has occurred simultaneously and paradoxically with the effort to take more and more land, which has in turn meant that Israel has acquired more and more Palestinians.” The result, as we now see, is that Israel faces a troubling reality. As the population in the territories it controls becomes less and less Jewish, what are its options for maintaining its so-called “Jewish character”? It seems the only two options under serious discussion in Israel are some form of apartheid or, ethnic cleansing.

The Israeli anthropologist and activist, Jeff Halper, has identified five distinct Israeli policies since the Oslo accords were signed in 1993 that have ruled out a viable and minimally fair two-state solution.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Halper, Jeff, “Beyond Road Maps & Walls,” *The Link*, 37(1), January-March 2004.

These include:

- i. fragmentation of territory;
- ii. closure;
- iii. settlements;
- iv. infrastructure;
- v. the separation barrier

What these elements are designed to do is permit the creation of a truncated Palestinian mini-state in no more than about ten percent of historic Palestine. Let us look at what these five policies means in a little more detail:

Firstly, Israel has confined the vast majority of the population to so-called areas A and B – 64 fragments of territory – completely controlled and surrounded by Israel. Secondly, Israel has instituted a permanent closure on the Occupied Territories, whose infrastructure consists of hundreds of “flying checkpoints.” This has affected residential, marriage and commercial patterns; it has “destroyed the fabric of Palestinian life, shredding it into tiny particles.” Third, are the settlement blocs, which as most of you know are growing apace. The settler population has doubled in the Oslo years, and the settlements are situated in such a way as to rule out any kind of Palestinian contiguity. Fourth, Israel has built a three billion dollar system of highways and “bypass roads” that integrates the settlement blocs into Tel Aviv. The result of this massive project, according to Jeff Halper, is the “reconfiguration of the country from two parallel north-south units – Israel and the West Bank, the basis of the two-state idea – into one country, integrated east-west.”

Finally, there is the “separation barrier,” which many Palestinians refer to as the “apartheid wall.” This barrier in fact defines a border between Israel and the would-be Palestinian mini-state that annexes most of the inhabitable West Bank to Israel, and leaves the majority of the Palestinian population trapped in tiny enclaves.

Armed Palestinian resistance has rendered the colonization effort extremely costly to Israel, but has been unable to stop or reverse it. This violence includes legitimate forms of resistance against Israeli occupation forces, and illegitimate forms of resistance, such as suicide bombings against Israeli civilians. Supporters of Israeli policy maintain that it is this resistance that stands in the way of peace. Such arguments, however, ignore several key facts.

First, Palestinian violence occurs within the context of much greater and more pervasive Israeli violence. The occupation and the settlements are maintained solely through the organized and systematic use of violence by Israel. There's an example I like to give of this, particularly in the United States where I'm challenged on this point all the time, where people tell me that all of Israel's violence is simply self-defence. I say, alright, let's imagine the Israeli settlement project without the use of violence. What might it look like? Probably, you'd have to go leafleting if you were an Israeli settler, go to the Palestinian village, knock on the door, and say "dear Um Muhammad, I have here this nice Jewish family and God thinks that your house and your land ought to go to them. We don't want to use violence, so we would ask you to kindly step out of the way." And see how far you get building settlements with a non-violent effort. Certainly, there would not be 400,000 settlers in the West Bank today. With this in mind, from any moment you choose to measure, the number of unarmed Palestinian civilians killed by Israel is always far greater than the number of unarmed Israeli civilians killed by Palestinians. During the first Intifada (1987-1993), the number of Palestinian civilians to Israeli civilians killed was approximately 14:1. Today it is about 3 or 4:1.

Second, there is the observation that the periods of greatest Israeli expansion in the Occupied Territories coincide with the periods of the least Palestinian counter violence. This is no surprise: when there is little resistance, Israel feels no pressure directly or internationally to curtail its colonization. When there is resistance, Israel uses that as an excuse to increase its grip on the land as well. So when there is an act of violence by Palestinians, Israelis build a new settlement there and this is what the settlers like to call the "the appropriate and Zionist response." But where there are no attacks, they also build settlements. What is indisputable is that Palestinian

resistance has increased the cost to Israel of holding the Occupied Territories, though it has been incapable of loosening Israel's hold. What is debatable is whether this resistance has come at a moral and political price that is too high for Palestinians. This is something that Palestinians disagree about amongst themselves.

Externally, the United States, is the only country with the power to decisively influence Israel. But it has failed to do so, because of its domestic politics. This doesn't seem likely to change. And there is no other international constellation of powers is ready, willing and able to do what the US refuses to do. Hence the trends I just described will only be confirmed with the passage of time, making the two-state solution more and more remote.

Edward Said was among the first prominent Palestinians to understand that in this new reality the only just solution is a one-state solution. More and more people are realizing this, and although this discussion remains more or less marginal, it is moving towards the center. Of course the one state idea is not new. In the 1930s, Jewish leaders such as Judah Magnes warned over the disaster of partition and called for a single state. Also, a single, democratic and secular state was long the central platform of the Palestinian national movement, until it was abandoned in the late 1980s. But Palestinian leaders made no serious effort to convince Israelis, or for that matter ordinary Palestinians, that they were not simply proposing to replace Israeli with Palestinian domination. This last point I will address a little later. What we need to do now is talk about how to create a genuine partnership of equals between Israelis and Palestinians. What has rendered the debate more pressing is the undisputed prediction that in historic Palestine, in other words, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza together, Palestinians will become, as they were at the genesis of the State of Israel, an absolute majority of the population.

One prominent Israeli demographer, Arnon Sofer, who has spent his career obsessing about the fertility of Palestinian women, predicts that by 2020 there will 6.3 million Jews and 8.8 million Palestinians in the country. Jews, therefore, would be just about 42 percent of the population.

Sofer complained in January that he has been preaching for years that, “the State of Israel is coming to an end,” but suddenly “in the last three years, the scales have fallen from people’s eyes.” He attributes this largely to the Intifada and the suicide bombings in Israeli cities.<sup>2</sup>

### **Israeli politics and the “demographic crisis”**

Israeli discourse about the changing population balance between Israeli Jews and Palestinians is laced with racist terminology and this, with a few exceptions, is the norm from right to left. Palestinians are routinely referred to as a “demographic threat” or “time-bomb.” One can only imagine the justified outcry if a Jewish community in any part of the world were described in similar terms. In fact, the so-called “demographic threat” has concerned Israelis, for years, but until recently it was a problem the majority felt they could ignore.

Few have been more horrified by this prospect than Israel's traditional "peace camp," represented by the Labor and Meretz parties. Shimon Peres, Israel’s elder statesman and alleged dove, eloquently summed up the fear that so many on the Israeli left have of Palestinian babies. Speaking in the Knesset in response to Ariel Sharon’s dismissal of fears about demography, Peres retorted,

“Yesterday the prime minister said he wasn’t worried about the demographic problem. I’m bursting with envy. How can you not be worried? Between the Mediterranean and the Jordan there are now 5.1 million Jews and 4.9 million non-Jews. Will they vanish in thin air? Will they disappear? Are you planning a transfer?”<sup>3</sup>

And yet, because of its liberal values, the so-called “peace camp” is unable to embrace formal apartheid or ethnic cleansing to "solve the demographic problem" as do Israel's right wing parties. The liberals, it appears, want the benefits and privileges that come from living in a “Jewish state” while at the same time being faithful to their ostensibly democratic values. It was

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<sup>2</sup> Derfner, Larry, “Sounding the alarm about Israel’s demographic crisis,” *Forward*, 9 January 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Landau, David, “To the edge and back,” *Ha’aretz*, 16 January 2004.

this conundrum that primarily drove the Israeli Labor Party in the 1980s to abandon its long-standing opposition to an independent Palestinian state.

Partly at the urging of leaders like Peres, the Palestinian leadership, and most Palestinians signed up to a two-state solution. This was gut-wrenchingly difficult, and for some impossible. It meant recognizing Israel on the seventy-eight percent of Palestine on which Israel was established in 1948, and accepting statehood in just twenty-two percent of their homeland, namely East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Most Palestinians were prepared to accept this enormous compromise. Many Palestinians in the diaspora demonstrated this by supporting the Oslo process, while those inside the West Bank and Gaza endorsed it by overwhelmingly electing Yasir Arafat as leader of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. Those opposed to the two-state solution were in the wilderness.

But in reality, even this twenty-two percent solution has never been on offer. The leaders in the mainstream Israeli left embrace Palestinian statehood warmly in theory but miss no opportunity to undermine and sabotage it in practice and to present proposals for meaningless and nominal statehood within a greater Israel. Exhibit A would be the Oslo Accords, but they have been followed by Taba, Camp David and the Clinton plan. In its latest guise, this formulation of the two-state solution has reappeared as the “Geneva Accord,” a virtual peace plan initiated by former Israeli justice minister Yossi Beilin, and former Palestinian Authority Yasir Abed Rabbo, with the tacit support of Yasir Arafat.

While its creators have tried to sell the Geneva Accord as some sort of breakthrough, the document simply recycles the unworkable arrangements that Israel and the United States tried to impose at Camp David in July 2000. Many of you are familiar with the details. A Palestinian "state" would be established in the West Bank and Gaza, but without sovereignty or control of its own borders or airspace. Israel would be permitted to keep military forces in it forever, while the Palestinian “state” would not be allowed to defend itself. The Palestinian state would be occupied by a “multinational force” that could only be withdrawn with Israeli agreement, and so on.

Israel would annex most of its West Bank settlements, including vast swathes of territory in and around Jerusalem and other major cities. Crucially, the document completely cancels the basic rights of Palestinian refugees by giving Israel an absolute veto on the return of even a single person to her home. Should anyone feel that this presentation is overly negative, just listen to how retired General Amram Mitzna, former Labor Party leader, and one of the Geneva authors presents it to Israelis. Mitzna claimed that:

"For the first time in history, the Palestinians explicitly and officially recognized the state of Israel as the state of the Jewish people forever. They gave up the right of return to the state of Israel and a solid, stable Jewish majority was guaranteed. The Western Wall, the Jewish Quarter (of Jerusalem) and David's Tower will all remain in our hands. The suffocating ring was lifted from over Jerusalem and the entire ring of settlements around it ... None of the settlers in those areas will have to leave their homes."<sup>4</sup>

Since these settlements account for the largest land expropriations in the most dense Palestinian areas, and for a majority of the Jewish settlers in the West Bank, Mitzna is simply following the Labor Party tradition of assuring Israelis that they can enjoy peace, international legitimacy and the spoils of conquest all at the same time.

The Geneva Accord, even with all its shortcomings, is the most generous offer any credible group of Israeli politicians can come up with, more generous than Camp David, more generous even than the Clinton plan. And yet, not even the mainstream Zionist left can unite around it. Shlomo Ben-Ami, a former Israeli former minister and head of Israel's delegations to the Camp David and Taba talks in 2000, derided the Geneva Initiative in a Dec. 11 interview with France's Le Figaro. He complained that the Israeli participants were "outbidding each other with concessions." Ben-Ami observed that the Labor Party, "has not swallowed the Geneva document, and in my opinion, will not swallow it." If that is the view within the Labor party, there is no chance that a majority of Israelis, let alone any significant number of Palestinians would sign up to it. You may ask why anyone would then be willing to accept a one-state solution. I will get to that.

Ben-Ami more recently made another useful admission. Reacting to Sharon's announced intention to remove Israeli settlers from Gaza, Ben-Ami wrote in a *Financial Times* commentary that, "Never before has an Israeli leader seriously contemplated dismantling settlements, nor has a prime minister in the past ever enjoyed the political conditions necessary to carry through such a divisive move."<sup>5</sup> So if Sharon is the first to seriously contemplate removing settlements, then is this not the clearest admission that those who believed that the Palestinians turned down an amazingly generous offer from Ehud Barak in July 2000 have been utterly misled? Statements like Ben-Ami's tend to confirm the suspicions of many Palestinians that the entire peace process has been about renaming the occupation, not ending it.

Now let's look at the Israeli right. The debate about the so-called "demographic threat" is not new to the Israeli right either. But the right has on the whole been more sanguine and less overtly worried about it than the left. For the right, the priority has been to irreversibly settle the West Bank. Therefore, talk of a Palestinian state was anathema. Yet because the right knew that the presence of a large non-Jewish population on the land it coveted was problematic, successive Likud-led governments declined to formally annex the West Bank.

The main focus of right-wing efforts was to bring more Jews to Israel and the West Bank. But now that immigration to Israel has virtually halted, and there is a large emigration from Israel, this path seems to offer no hope. Sharon talks about bringing one million Jews to Israel, but the hard fact is that there are simply too few Jews in the world willing to uproot themselves and move to Israel. The Israeli press and politicians pay close attention to issues like the recent economic collapse in Argentina, or reports of increased anti-Jewish attacks and harassment in France with the hope that things will become bad enough for Jews in those countries that they can be enticed to Israel. Israel has gotten so desperate for immigrants, that two years ago, it brought an Andean tribe from Peru to the West Bank, claiming that the tribe had converted to

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<sup>4</sup> Mitzna, Amram, "," *Haaretz*, 16 October 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Ben-Ami, Shlomo, "Why the world is needed in Gaza," *The Financial Times*, 11 February 2004.

Judaism.<sup>6</sup> Needless to say, immigration does not offer a solution to the so-called demographic problem.

With the decline of immigration, there has been renewed interest in changing the demographics in other ways, namely through ethnic cleansing. As Israeli historian Benny Morris has recently restated approvingly, Israel could not have been created without the ethnic cleansing of 700,000 Palestinians in 1947-48. After this initial expulsion, the notion of transfer became a taboo, but it never disappeared. For decades until his murder in 1990, Meir Kahane openly campaigned for the expulsion of all Palestinians. This was embarrassing enough to Israel that it banned Kach and Kahane Chai, groups uniting his followers. In recent years, however, “transfer” has gained renewed respectability. At the last Israeli general election, two parties, Moledet and the National Union, openly campaigned on a platform of ethnic cleansing.

On its website, Moledet explains that it is “an ideological political party in Israel that embraces the idea of population transfer as an integral part of comprehensive plan to achieve real peace between the Jews and the Arabs Living in the Land of Israel.” And the party boasts, “Moledet has successfully raised the idea of transfer in the public discourse and political arena in both Israel and abroad, within the framework of achieving comprehensive peace in this region. Moledet is also actively involved in establishing these facts on the ground, by encouraging the emigration of displaced and hostile elements from our Land.”<sup>7</sup>

Moledet today has seats in Israel’s cabinet, and the party’s leader Benny Elon is the minister of tourism. Such statements, while alarming to Palestinians, have been surprisingly well-tolerated by the international community. Do you remember back in February 2000 when Austria’s far-right Freedom Party entered the Austrian government? Not only did Israel break off relations with Austria, but even Austria’s own EU partners ostracized and isolated it. The Freedom Party,

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<sup>6</sup> In a further setback for Israel, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press reported on the results of a survey in which it found that, “[d]espite concerns about rising anti-Semitism in Europe, there are no indications that anti-Jewish sentiment has increased over the past decade. Favorable ratings of Jews are actually higher now in France, Germany and Russia than they were in 1991.” See report summary: “A Year After Iraq War Mistrust of America in Europe Ever Higher, Muslim Anger Persists,” Washington DC: Pew Center for the People and the Press, 16 March 2004. <http://people-press.org>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.moledet.org.il/english/>

despite its xenophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric never called for or boasted that it is actively involved in ethnic cleansing of so-called “hostile elements” from Austria. Not a single EU government condemned Israel’s inclusion of Moledet in its government, let alone broke off relations. Nor of course did the US. The American-Israel Public Affairs Committee and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), two of the most influential pro-Israel lobby groups in the US, pointedly refused to condemn the inclusion of Moledet in the cabinet. I know, because I asked them to do it. I actually spoke personally with Abraham Foxman, the head of the ADL.<sup>8</sup>

This response certainly contrasted sharply with the approach the Anti-Defamation League took in the Austrian case; its director and president actually flew off to Austria to meet with the Austrian president and try to influence coalition negotiations in that country and keep the Freedom Party out of the government. Although, in this context of tolerance for extremism as long as it is Israeli, Palestinian fears are perfectly understandable and we must remain vigilant about those bent on genocide who sit in the Israeli cabinet, renewed 1948-style ethnic cleansing remains highly unlikely. Such a strategy would entail enormous risks for Israel, and would meet with enormous resistance.

Forced transfer of people from a specific ethnic group fits the legal definition of genocide in the 1951 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. But it is not the only form of genocide prominent Israelis have proposed recently, and I want to share one other with you. Last December, Dr. Yitzhak Ravid, a senior researcher at the Israeli government's Armaments Development Authority, called for Israel to “implement a stringent policy of family planning in relation to its Muslim population.” In case his meaning wasn't clear, Ravid added: “the delivery rooms in Soroka Hospital in Be'ersheba have turned into a factory for the production of a backward population.”<sup>9</sup> He was speaking at an annual conference of Israel’s great and good at Herzliya, where such statements are not unusual.

Yet these ideas, as loathsome and increasingly widespread as they may be, are not what lies at

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<sup>8</sup> I interviewed Foxman for this article: Abunimah, Ali, “AIPAC, ADL refuse to condemn inclusion of ethnic cleansers in new Israel government,” *The Electronic Intifada*, 3 March 2003 [http://electronicIntifada.net/v2/article1210.shtml]

the center of the Likud government's efforts to preserve a Jewish majority in Israel without giving up the land. The Sharon government is trying to do this through what it calls "unilateral separation." Basically, this means rhetorically accepting the idea of a Palestinian state, while trying to transform it into nothing more than limited Palestinian autonomy within a greater Israel. In essence, it is a convergence between the approach of the so-called "peace camp," and the right, with disagreements over a few percent of West Bank land. Politically, the Israeli government is preparing the public for this strategy by openly acknowledging the demographic reality. That happened last December when Israeli deputy prime minister Ehud Olmert – a life long settlement builder — stunned Israelis by acknowledging the urgency of the demographic situation and calling on Israel to make a unilateral withdrawal from parts of the West Bank.

In early 2004, Ariel Sharon went even further, proclaiming his intention to pull all 7,800 Israeli settlers out of Gaza unilaterally, and suggested he might transfer several major towns with Arab populations that are currently in Israel to a Palestinian state. From what we can piece together from his actions and statements, Sharon's vision includes offloading to a Palestinian mini-state the burden of Gaza, political responsibility for Palestinians in the West Bank, and a significant number of Israeli citizens of Arab origin as well. Such an arrangement would closely resemble efforts by South Africa's apartheid rulers to maintain white rule and strip black citizens of their rights as South Africans by creating nominally independent states for them known as Bantustans.

What I have just tried to do is show you how the so-called "demographic threat" is being approached across the Israeli spectrum. What we see is that there is an utter bankruptcy of ideas for how to get Israel out of the situation it has created. The ideas range from Palestinian autonomy within a greater Israel, and apartheid at the most liberal, to outright genocide at the most extreme. Obviously, these are non-starters.

## **The One-State Debate**

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<sup>9</sup> "Herzliya conference sees verbal attacks on Israeli Arabs," *Haaretz*, 18 December 2003.

As the reality begins to dawn on Israelis that a Jewish-dominated state in Palestine is unsustainable without resort to extremist measures, there is a growing debate about a one-state solution. Although different models for a single state, or bi-national state abound, I do not want to dwell here on structures, because I think there are many possible ways to construct such a state. But most proponents see the following advantages in a one-state arrangement: Creating a single state with equal rights for Israeli Jews and Palestinians would resolve most of the key issues in the conflict. Because we cannot divide the land, a single state would give one hundred percent of the land to one hundred percent of the people. If a Jew wanted to live in Hebron, or a Palestinian in Tel Aviv or Jaffa, both would be able to, as long as each went as a normal citizen under the same law. The right of return, currently the object of so much fear among Israelis, would also become less of a problem. Since in a democracy with guaranteed rights, demographics would not be the key factor, Palestinians refugees could return. Or they could choose not to, knowing that their right to do so would be recognized at any time. A single state could also preserve Israel's "Law of Return," which allows any Jewish person to gain citizenship in the country.

For Israeli Jews, the key goals of Zionism would be realized. Jews would have a permanent, protected and vibrant national presence in Palestine, as partners and equals with the indigenous population, not as occupiers. For Palestinians, a one-state solution would gain them the equality, recognition and rights that they are currently denied. There would be major problems still, particularly related to private property and compensation for suffering. All of this would have to be dealt with, but precedents for it exist, and I believe these issues would be much easier to deal with in the context of national reconciliation. The example of South Africa, though not a precise parallel, is the closest similar experience we have to learn from in recent history. Is this all just a utopian dream?

Several well-known Israelis, such as former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, Meron Benvenisti, recently declared that they believe in some sort of binational solution.<sup>10</sup> Yet it is undeniable that the vast majority of Israelis are seeking refuge in the sorts of bankrupt ideas I described. This is

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<sup>10</sup> Shavit, Ari, "Survival of the fittest," *Haaretz*, 9 January 2004.

understandable. Giving up on the notion of a Jewish state would to most Israelis seem to be a repudiation of all that Zionism has stood for and done. This is psychologically and emotionally difficult, and in practice it would mean that Israeli Jews would have to give up their monopoly on power in a context where they already feel deeply insecure.

The strength of feeling against the one-state idea, both among Israelis and American Zionists was recently demonstrated by an exchange in *The New York Review of Books*. British Jewish historian Tony Judt published an article describing the idea of a Jewish state as an antiquated notion dating from 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism, and calling for a single democratic state.<sup>11</sup> He did so from the perspective of someone with a self-confessed deep concern for the welfare and fate of Jewish Israelis and American Jews. In a later article, Judt wrote that “much of the American response” to his article, “verged on hysteria. Readers accused me of belonging to the Nazi Left, of hating Jews, of denying Israel’s right to exist.” Other correspondents, Judt said, accused him of “pandering to genocide,” and being “party to the preparations for a final solution.” Harvard Law Professor, Alan Dershowitz, made the analogy with Adolf Hitler’s “one-state solution for all of Europe.” Many professors canceled their subscriptions to the *New York Review of Books*.<sup>12</sup>

The reaction to Judt was no friendlier in Israel. Judt’s original article prompted Yoel Esteron, editor of the left-liberal *Ha’aretz* newspaper to publish a response entitled “Who’s In Favor of Annihilating Israel?” Esteron wrote:

The most venomous and dangerous attack on the State of Israel’s right to exist hails from New York, of all places. Tony Judt, a New York University history professor, has published an article in the prestigious New York Review of Books (October 23) in which he makes a seemingly well-defended case in favor of establishing a binational state on the ruins of the State of Israel.<sup>13</sup>

Who would have thought that Israel faced its greatest threat from an article published in a New York journal read by perhaps a few thousand people? The pen, it appears, is truly mightier than the sword. Yet extraordinary as Esteron’s response is, the reality is that it is fairly typical of

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<sup>11</sup> Judt, Tony, “Israel: The Alternative,” *The New York Review of Books*, 23 October 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Judt, Tony, “Tony Judt replies,” *The New York Review of Books*, 4 December 2003.

Israeli reactions to the one-state idea. But the hysterics are the symptom of there being no convincing available arguments against the one-state solution. The influential foreign affairs columnist for the *New York Times*, Thomas Friedman, summed up the problem last September after seeing the wall Israel had built around the city of Qalqilya. Friedman wrote:

Rather than create the outlines of a two-state solution, this wall will kill that idea for Palestinians, and drive them, over time, to demand instead a one-state solution - where they and the Jews would have equal rights in one state. And since by 2010 there will be more Palestinian Arabs than Jews living in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza combined, this transformation of the Palestinian cause will be very problematic for Israel. If American Jews think it's hard to defend Israel today on college campuses, imagine what it will be like when their kids have to argue against the principle of one man, one vote.<sup>14</sup>

Friedman made it clear, while making this analysis, that he is opposed to a one-state solution. Hence the best response, if you are a Zionist dead set against it is to claim that anyone who espouses it as implacably anti-Israel or even anti-Semitic. But such arguments will only get you so far.

The main counterargument I have encountered from non-Zionists is that a one-state solution is just too remote. I recently shared a platform with Professor Norman Finkelstein of DePaul University in Chicago, who argued that as long as there was a chance of a full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, it would be “immoral” to espouse a one-state solution because it would condemn Palestinians to decades more of struggle and suffering.<sup>15</sup> Yet Finkelstein himself put the chances of such an Israeli withdrawal at just five percent. He also asked how, if the Palestinians and their supporters lack the strength to enforce a two-state solution, they would gain the much greater strength need to enforce a one-state solution? But this misses the point. The Palestinians do not have the political or material strength to stop the settlements and walls that prevent a two-state solution. But Israel’s settlements and walls are powerless in the struggle for a one-state solution. By removing territory from the equation, Israel loses its main card.

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<sup>13</sup> Esteron, Yoel, “Who’s in favor of annihilating Israel?”, *Haaretz*, 28 November 2003.

<sup>14</sup> Friedman, Thomas, “One wall, one person, one vote,” *The New York Times*, 14 September 2003.

I have also seen several ostensibly pragmatic arguments against a one-state solution, but I think they are too weak to spend much time on here.<sup>15</sup> Basically, they suggest that Palestinians would be at such a huge disadvantage economically and educationally in a single state, that it would simply transform an international conflict into one of internal strife. This might be true. But this was also true in apartheid South Africa. One would not propose preserving apartheid in order to avoid this challenge. Rather, the appropriate response is to promote policies of social justice and redistribution that compensate for decades of discrimination.

### **Moving towards a single state**

If the two-state solution is no longer viable, as I have argued, then isn't a one-state solution simply inevitable? Yes and no. The burden to persuade Israelis lies largely with Palestinians, who while demanding equal rights and an end to the Jewish Israeli monopoly on power, must hold out a future in which the two communities express their identities as equals rooted by right and history in the same land. This is undoubtedly an unfair burden, but it is a fact that oppressed groups must often show their oppressors a way out of the tunnel they have dug. This was true in South Africa, where even in the darkest days of apartheid, the African National Congress under Nelson Mandela offered white South Africans a future of reconciliation, not revenge. As in South Africa, a truth and reconciliation process can help both peoples overcome the pain of the past even as they build a just future together. I think it is beyond the ability of the current Palestinian leadership to do this.

So is it first possible to convince enough Palestinians that the future lies in a single, democratic state? I believe this will be much easier than convincing Israelis. Palestinians after all have much more to gain immediately from a one-state solution, because they will gain access to political power and resources that they are being unfairly denied. Most Palestinians understand that what

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<sup>15</sup> 12 February 2003, Panel entitled "Perspectives on the Wall," sponsored by the Middle Eastern Studies Students' Association at the University of Chicago, and held at the International House. Panelists were Ali Abunimah, Roxane Assaf, Norman Finkelstein and Derek Jinks.

<sup>16</sup> See for example: Hadar, Leon, "Two peoples, two states," *The American Conservative*, 19 January 2004; or Laor, Yitzhak, "What the settlers know" (letter), *London Review of Books*, 25(23), 4 December 2003.

lies behind the conflict and violence is injustice, and healing this injustice is the only means to end the violence and dissipate the feelings of bitterness that have accumulated. Above all, a single state would mean reunification of Palestinians on both sides of the 1967 lines, and those outside the country.

Ali Jarbawi, a professor of political science at Birzeit University has said, “Most Palestinians prefer the idea of separation, because they want their own state. But Sharon’s idea of a two-state solution is to squeeze us into cantons...Given a choice between cantonization and one-state, Palestinians will go for the latter.”<sup>17</sup> Jarbawi believes that Palestinians could be pushed by pragmatic considerations towards a one-state solution. Clearly this possibility is reflected in recent statements by the Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia, and other PA figures that this could become official strategy. Palestinian journalist Khaled Amayreh observed that as the outlines of Sharon’s cantonization plan are becoming clearer, more Palestinians are demanding the Palestinian Authority be disbanded, and all efforts thrown into a campaign for a democratic state in all Palestine. Amayreh adds:

Such views are still confined to elitist segments within Palestinian society, not so much because they are rejected, but rather because they are quite novel. However, it is very likely that in light of Israel's continuing efforts to narrow Palestinian horizons, these ideas will spread quickly and gain momentum among Palestinians as many of them are already discovering that the PA has become more of a national liability than a national asset.<sup>18</sup>

As I mentioned earlier, the idea of a single-state was long the central plank of the Palestinian national platform. But I think we have to be honest and say that what Israelis understood, was that the PLO proposed to replace Israeli domination with Palestinian domination, and the PLO did little to dispel this. If what we propose today is simply a revival of that notion, no Israeli will buy it.

But I think many Palestinians are ready to embrace a genuinely multi-ethnic future with Israelis for the following reasons: first, despite the bitterness of the conflict, the vast majority of Israelis

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<sup>17</sup> Hirschberg, Peter, “Hello, I’m Israeli-Palestinian,” *Inter Press Service*, 10 February 2004.

and Palestinians accept the permanence of the other, and on each side only a few really fantasize about the disappearance of the other.

Second, I think the whole idea of nationalism as it emerged with post-World War II decolonization has lost its luster as so many nation states in Africa and the Middle East to deliver the prosperity and freedom they promised. Millions of Palestinians, working across the region experienced that failure firsthand.

Third, and related to this, the collective experience of Palestinians in recent decades has been a transnational, rather than national existence. They have become used to being Palestinian and Canadian, Palestinian and Colombian, Palestinian and Jordanian – sometimes we hide our identity, other times we boast about it. We have become very good at judging where and how and when to do that. They are used to identifying themselves in different ways, in different contexts. I think many Palestinians, accustomed to transience and movement no longer feel the need for a unidimensional nationality embodied by a flag and a marching band. Perhaps being denied a nationality for so long, has made Palestinians want one less. What they do want though is freedom of movement, of expression, and equal access to the benefits of a democratic society. If I am right, then this makes it much easier to contemplate a multi-ethnic future in Palestine without experiencing it in any way as a loss of Palestinian-ness. If Palestinians can be convinced, then what about Israelis?

It will take enormous efforts to convince a majority of Israelis that the security and legitimacy they will never achieve through conquest and repression can be achieved by embracing the Palestinians. For most Israeli Jews, I believe, the resistance to the one-state concept will not stem from an ideological commitment to a status quo in which they are privileged and others oppressed, but will arise from simple fear of discarding today's certainties, no matter how dismal they are, for an unknown future. To get them to do so, they must be presented with a convincing alternative.

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<sup>18</sup> Amayreh, Khaled, "Controversial Move," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 15-21 January 2004.

It will be particularly hard to convince Israelis in the current context of mutual violence. But violence is the result of the absence of a viable political alternative. Therefore, at the same time as arguing for a political solution, Palestinians must revise their strategy of armed struggle. It is true that Nelson Mandela never relinquished the right to armed struggle against Apartheid, but in practice, the African National Congress focused its efforts on political struggle, civil disobedience and international coalition-building. They stuck to this strategy despite the fact that the Apartheid government killed thousands of unarmed civilians and activists and the violence was at its height in the few years before Apartheid collapsed. I am not arguing that Palestinians do not have the right to use armed force against an occupying military power, but that they have in addition to that right, a responsibility to choose how and when to exercise this right.

But even in the current context of violence, and in the absence of a campaign for a one-state solution, some Israelis have embraced the idea. This is a hopeful start, but there remains an uphill struggle, as Professor Tony Judt's experience demonstrated. Over the past six months, I have traveled to many places in the US to discuss the one-state idea with general audiences, especially at universities. The reaction I have had has been overwhelmingly positive. As Thomas Friedman feared, it will not hard to convince most Americans and I suspect Europeans of the merits of this idea. While some people said the idea is utopian and it can never be achieved, many more asked "why is no one talking about this?"

So my answer to those who say this idea is too marginal and too utopian, is to say let's talk about it. Talking brings it to the center. Talking makes it a reality. By talking about a one state future, we engage in the act of creating it. This is perhaps why die-hard Zionists are so committed to shutting down any debate on the topic. We have to say that already there is a one-state reality. Israel created it. But the struggle is to transform this state into a democracy for all the people who live in it.

At least one Israeli, Daniel Gavron, a lifelong Zionist Israeli and recent convert to the one-state idea, agrees. Gavron acknowledges that most Israelis fear a "nightmare scenario" in which "Israelis with a second passport will depart, and those who don't will be clamoring to get one,

fearful it will only be a matter of time until they come under the rule of a not-so-hospitable Arab majority.”<sup>19</sup> Gavron argues that this scenario will come to pass only if Israelis resist a multiethnic solution and have a one-state solution forced on them further down the line when they cannot influence the outcome. “If we start today,” Gavron says, “when we are in charge, it is up to us to create a society in which people want to remain. There is absolutely no reason to believe it would degenerate into something inferior. The Palestinians are often called ‘the Jews of the Arab world.’ They are far more democratic than any other Arabs, they want democracy.” Gavron continues, “If we create a society in which there are equal rights, democracy, the chance for education and creativity and self-expression, there’s absolutely no reason why a very reasonable, enlightened society won’t emerge here. I don’t see a situation in which suddenly in 20 years, the Arabs have got 61 members of the Knesset, we’ve only got 59, and then they will turn round and slaughter us in our beds.”

To me this is such a hopeful and realistic statement and one borne out by precedent. Again, South Africa offers the closest recent, though clearly not identical parallel to Israel-Palestine. The whites understood at a certain point that their monopoly on power was no longer tenable, no matter how many warplanes and nuclear weapons they had. Yet the fears of many whites who did not necessarily support apartheid were similar to those of many Israelis today. By engaging in multiparty negotiations to transform South Africa peacefully, whites ensured their own place as a permanent part of its future.

And in Europe too, we see examples of reconciliation that were once unimaginable. France and Germany fought wars for centuries and killed each other’s citizens literally by the millions. How many wars did they fight over a little patch of Alsace-Lorraine? Yet today, any French person can live and even vote anywhere in Germany and vice versa. Today, they talk about common nationality and joint government. Territory and borders have lost the power to divide. And yet everywhere we see partition has been tried as a post-colonial solution, from Ireland, to Palestine, to India and Cyprus, it has failed. I am prepared to predict – perhaps unwisely – that within five

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<sup>19</sup> Hirschberg, Peter, “One-state awakening,” *Haaretz*, 12 December 2004.

years, all but a minority of people who are concerned with the Palestine-Israel conflict will acknowledge the inevitability of a one-state solution.

I recently heard a radio interview with black South African playwright John Kani.<sup>20</sup> Kani recalled the frequent interrogations he endured from a white intelligence officer: "He used to tell us South Africa would never, ever change. This is a God-created situation. [White South Africans] were the chosen people, not the Jews, and that South Africa was their country and we didn't have the brains to become a free people, or even to think we could govern." Reflecting upon those experiences today, Kani said: "I am just laughing, because he was stupid. You can't turn the tide of freedom ... A people who fight for freedom will be free. They've got God on their side; they've got time on their side; they've got truth on their side. It doesn't matter how strong the enemy is, it's only delaying the inevitable." Palestine-Israel will, I am convinced, inevitably, become a democracy for all its people. Inevitably, because through the collective efforts of those who work for justice, we will make it so.

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<sup>20</sup> On "Fresh Air with Terry Gross," *National Public Radio*, 12 January 2004.