

Palestine- from Imposed Partition to Incomplete Separation

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The two most critical historical phases in the evolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been the War of 1948 and the War of 1967 and their respective consequences. Since the Palestinian Nakba 52 years ago and the imposed partition of Palestine with the establishment of the State of Israel, the Palestinians and Israelis have been in continuous confrontation: Israel entered six wars without achieving recognition or security, while Palestinians continued to victimize themselves with many sacrifices without achieving freedom or statehood.

In the aftermath of the 1948 war, the Israeli leaders had no consensus for dealing with the indigenous Palestinian inhabitants who remained in their homes. Were they the enemy, which then is forced to leave, were they temporary residents with no rights, or would they become second-class citizens in the Jewish State? The Palestinians did not have the choice of accepting affiliation with the new state established on their homeland or the possibility for demanding dual citizenship (Palestinians/Israelis), but instead gradually became 'Israeli citizens' with fewer rights and freedoms than the Jewish citizens of the state. As for the Palestinians who were forced to flee their country and become refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and neighboring Arab countries, Israel ignored its moral and political responsibility for creating the refugee problem and transferred the burden for 'accommodating' their human needs to the UN and the Arab host countries. This situation has continued up to the present.

Palestinian refugees in the neighboring Arab states as well as in the Diaspora. They were forced since their Nakba in the 50s to be treated as stateless persons living under miserable conditions without enjoying any rights, with the exception of those whom found refuge in Jordan. All parties concerned, including the Palestinian leadership, made use of their misery to keep the refugee question alive. Today, none of the political scenarios presented meet the needs of these refugees for either practicing the right of return, becoming citizens of the new state of Palestine comprising the West Bank and Gaza Strip, or facilitating their return to their original cities, towns and villages through the Israeli programs of 'family re-unification' in the State of Israel. Instead, media expectations of establishing an international fund for financial compensation or offers of re-settlement in Canada, Australia and some neighboring Arab states predominate the refugee discourse.

Israelis have to admit that Israel has failed to become a state of all its citizens for whom equal rights apply with no discrimination towards religions, color or race. The political Zionist thesis holds that 'Israel' is meant to be the state of the Jews, and any minority communities are second-class citizens at best. The question is, after the political Zionist mission accomplishes the establishment of a Jewish state, how does Israel envision its future relations, not only with regard to these growing (!) minorities but also to the future of the new Palestine-in-the-making next door?

Today Israel is a divided country, struggling to develop an Israeli identity in a melting pot of religious Jews, secular Jews, Russians immigrants and Palestinians.

In the course of the June War of 1967, Israeli troops succeeded in conquering the rest of Palestine, comprising the territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and approximately one third of the Palestinian people. Since then the Palestinians have been subjugated to Israeli control and discriminatory policies and practices. Over the years, numerous Palestinian national attempts to end the military occupation and to establish an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital have met with little success.

The Israeli establishment since 1967 conducted its policies towards Palestinians and the Occupied Territories through the evolution of three different plans. The first was to consider the Palestinians to be Jordanian citizens with Amman as their capital. The Moshe Dayan thesis envisioned open bridges over the Jordan River, maintaining the linkage between the West Bank and Jordan, at the same time creating facts on the ground by confiscating land and building Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories. This plan was formulated in the Yigal Allon proposal of 1970, which called for a territorial compromise with Jordan. The first plan governed the Labor Party platform for more than two decades. It was known as the 'Jordanian Option', and lasted up till the 1980s. In the second plan, the Likud leaders attempted to 'Palestinize' Jordan as a substitute state for the Palestinians in what became known as the 'New Jordan Option', emphasizing the demographic components of Palestinians in the two banks of the River Jordan. This second plan was enhanced in Ariel Sharon contact with the PLO during Israel's unjust, unethical and unnecessary invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the subsequent exodus of Palestinians from the area. The third Israeli plan was the Labor-Likud agreed combination, bringing the two previous plans together in a formula known as the "Jordanian-Israeli shared functions in economic development and governing the West Bank and Gaza Strip". In all three cases, Palestinians resisted and overcame all attempts.

It was only the Palestinian uprising in 1987, the Intifada, that awakened both the Israeli people and their establishment, confronting them on a nearly daily basis with the reality in the territories. It did not take long for many to begin questioning the Israeli occupation on two fronts; the impossibility of indefinitely controlling and containing the Palestinians, as well as its future relations and the effects of the occupation on Israel: state, society and politics. Israelis gradually began to recognize that the thesis of irreversible occupation and Jewish settlements, which was leading to a de facto annexation, was not sustainable. They could not coerce three to four million Palestinians to live under Israeli rule indefinitely, nor could they govern them by military force, contain their national aspirations and refuse to recognize and face their leadership while at the same time undertaking feasible development of Israel as a stable, recognized and secure Jewish State in the region.

At the same time, the Palestinians realized that the Intifada could be transformed into a real political gain if they would negotiate with Israel. The Palestinian historic compromise was formulated in the Intifada thesis of 'if we cannot undo Israel, we will try

to accommodate our national agenda in a scenario of 'coexistence' based on a two-state solution'.

In 1993, the whole world witnessed the mutual recognition between the state of Israel and the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and the embodiment of their national aspirations in what, ever since, has been termed the Oslo 'breakthrough.' The importance of that event and those to follow was the willingness of both peoples' leadership to negotiate a political settlement based on the 'Land-for-Peace' formula and UNSC resolutions 242 and 338.

From the many scenarios addressed by professional negotiators or dedicated academics as well as mediators, the 'coexistence' formula between the two peoples has been constructed in terms of:

- A) A Democratic-Secular State comprising of all the Palestinian territories and Israel proper.
- B) A Bi-national State in all mandatory Palestine with an agreed political system to govern their relations.
- C) Full withdrawal from the OPT, complete separation leading to an independent and sovereign state of New Palestine along the 1967 lines.

Israeli has ruled out the first two scenarios, due to their fears of the demographic threat, among other reasons. The current Palestinian population of over three million in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is expected to reach the seven million mark within the next 10-15 years. The one million strong Palestinians minority in the State of Israel is growing faster than the Israeli Jewish Population, which will have a negative growth rate, once Jewish immigration has ceased.

Israel's current policy towards the territories is an attempt to balance the demographic and territorial components of the Palestine Question with its security obsession, but this is very shortsighted. Israelis must realize that what some consider concessions to the Palestinians in terms of withdrawal from the Occupied Territories are important for Israel's long-term existence. Only by thinking in terms of the future can the respective leaders reach an understanding to accommodate their peoples in a formula of 'coexistence' on the same land, based on relative justice! And what would be the alternative to 'coexistence'?

If a sovereign independent new Palestine comes into existence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with the East Jerusalem as its capital, would the formula of separation take the shape of a gradual Israeli withdrawal from areas A to B to C and finally out completely? Or will it result in a loose open-ended agreement to share the Occupied Territories based on percentages such as 85% for the Palestinians and 15 % for the Israelis? Or will it leave pending major issues such as Jerusalem, the refugees and settlements? Or will it lay out rules for sharing the OPT between Palestinians and settlers under a system of apartheid? How it will embrace the political, social and economic spheres, or some parts of them?

I don't have answers to the question of where both people are heading, particularly with

regard to the issue of Israeli settlements. Will the Palestinians have the power or authority to evacuate the settlements, or to pressure Israel to do so? Or are some of the settlements and settlers to remain where they are, or centralized in a bloc or two? If so, how should the Jewish settlers in the State of Palestine be treated? As enemies that must eventually leave, as foreign residences, or as future citizens, and in all cases subject to Palestinian law? And, for the sake of ensuring equitable arrangements, what if Palestinians should demand to move to and live in Israel?

Some Israelis are talking about the separation scenario as based on the formula of divorce; 'living in separate bedrooms, sharing the kitchen (economy) and the same roof (security)'. Palestinians, however, remind the world that 'we have never been married! Separation requires that the Israelis leave the house, for their activities of the past three decades have been rape'. Israelis have raped the Palestinian land; its indigenous people and their rights – leaving behind innumerable wounds, many of which will need a long time to heal.

Does Israel want to continue to construct its future based on Palestinian labor and the complete subjugation of the Palestinian economy to the Israeli one? Israel should have an interest - if not a moral responsibility - in the development of the Palestinian economy, having hampered its growth for the past three decades. The separation of the West Bank and Gaza into two isolated entities and Israel's refusal to operate the needed safe passages between the two areas or to end the closure policy has crippled internal and external trade and other relations most severely. The Palestinian State is a reality today. It is still being denied sovereignty, control over its economy, security and the ability to truly practice democracy, but the necessary institutions and state mechanisms are in place, and most Israelis will agree to this. In the meantime, however, it is critical to the interests of both sides that Palestinian migrant labor in Israel not be cut off as long as the Palestinian economy cannot yet stand on its own feet. The narrowing of the economic gap between Palestine and Israel will also be a precondition for improving all aspects of relations, especially the security situation for both sides.

It is up to the Israeli establishment to shape the future 'coexistence' formula with the new state of Palestine next door, and to promote a real culture of peace and acceptance of the 'other' based on equality and justice, rather than maintaining the old culture of fear and hatred. I am not awfully optimistic about the prospects for true historical reconciliation between the two peoples to be realized in this generation, but it is in the hands of today's leaders to make the first step and prove the political will to lay the cornerstones for living together but separately.

In the green fields of Northern Ireland, flocks of sheep bearing green and orange marks graze together by day, sharing one pasture. The sheep do not know that they are marked, for only their owners recognize the distinction as one between Catholic and Protestant, and by night separate their flocks accordingly. The Israeli-Palestinian case, however, represents the opposite situation. The people are well aware of their marks and the inequality of the divide, yet no such accepted and fair system allows for dual marks or easy separation. Though some may delude themselves with hopes for an expedient and

painless resolution, the complexity of the entanglement denies such a prospect. In reality, both peoples must reconcile themselves to the fact that the task of separation will be drawn-out, painful, and perhaps even endless.