



## THE ONE-STATE SOLUTION: AN ALTERNATIVE VISION FOR ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

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*This essay examines the one-state alternative to the commonly accepted two-state solution, which has been the basis of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process since 1993. It reviews the prospects for success of the two-state solution and sets out the arguments for and against such a settlement. The history and interpretation of the one-state alternative, whether binational or secular democratic, are explored, and the future chances of its success assessed. The author finds that to date no “road map” exists for how to implement the one-state solution, without which it is likely to remain an idealistic dream.*

THIS ARTICLE IS WRITTEN against the background of the latest round of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks that began in Washington on 2 September 2010. The object of the talks, as of the peace process launched in 1993, is the termination of the conflict through the creation of a Palestinian state “alongside” Israel, that is, the two-state solution.

However, changes on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories since 1993 threaten to make such a solution unlikely, if not impossible. The Israeli colonization of the West Bank and East Jerusalem has so advanced as to make questionable the logistical possibility of creating a viable Palestinian state on the territory that remains. Yet there is an extraordinary reluctance on the part of most politicians concerned with the conflict to look the facts in the face and draw the obvious conclusion: A two-state solution that complies even with minimalist Palestinian requirements cannot emerge from the existing situation. Rather like Hans Christian Andersen’s tale of the emperor’s new clothes, none of them is willing to see the naked truth.

As the feasibility of the two-state solution recedes, the debate has turned to the one-state alternative, often as an undesirable outcome of last resort failing implementation of the preferred option. Both sides have used it as a threat against those standing in the way of the two-state solution. Israel’s former prime minister Ehud Olmert, for example, told *Ha’Aretz* on 30 November 2007 that if the two-state solution collapsed, leading to a South African-style

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struggle for equal rights, Israel would be “finished.” And former Palestinian prime minister Ahmed Qurai` declared in 2004 that if the two-state solution became impossible, Palestinians would have to aim for one state.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever the motivation, the idea of a unitary state has attracted renewed interest. In fact, the idea of sharing the land between Arabs and Jews is older than that of the two-state solution, which is a recent notion in Palestinian history that emerged in response to a series of defeats for the Palestinian national movement. Though never totally absent from the debate about a solution, the unitary state has increasingly become part of mainstream political discourse. A number of one-state groups have come into being,<sup>2</sup> half a dozen conferences have been held, and a growing literature on the topic has appeared.<sup>3</sup> Given the reality on the ground in what remains of Palestine, the uncertainty of success for peace negotiations aimed at two states, and the precariousness of the political situation, it would be irresponsible not to seriously examine the one-state alternative.

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE TWO-STATE IDEA

The two-state solution has become something of a mantra for all those involved in the peace process. But the proposition that it is the ultimate solution, to the point of obviating the need to consider others, is neither true nor consonant with elementary notions of justice. Not only does it divide the Palestinians’ historic homeland into grossly unequal parts, made possible by coercion and force of arms, it also forecloses any meaningful return for the refugees driven out. The idea that it could reasonably settle a conflict whose very basis is dispossession and injustice without addressing those issues is, to say the least, unrealistic.

The two-state solution is in fact a recent position for Palestinians, who always rejected the idea of partition as a device used by Britain and later the UN and Western states for accommodating Zionist ambitions in the country. Today’s Western support for a two-state solution springs fundamentally from the same motives. The Zionists first proposed partition to the Mandate authorities as far back as 1928, when the Jewish population of the country was 20 percent.<sup>4</sup> In 1937 the Peel Commission, set up by the British Government to find a solution for the conflict between Jews and Arabs in Mandate Palestine, recommended that the country be divided into Jewish and Arab states. In 1947, the partition of Palestine was enshrined in UN General Assembly resolution 18, which was passed thanks to overwhelming U.S. pressure and against strong Arab opposition.

The Palestinians at the time saw partition as an outrageous assault on the integrity of their country and an undeserved gift to a newly arrived immigrant Jewish minority imposed on them. This remained the Palestinian position after 1948, when the aim of the newly formed PLO in 1964 was “the recovery of the usurped homeland in its entirety,” as the preamble to the 1964 Palestine National Charter phrased it.

It was the 1967 war, which spectacularly demonstrated Israel's superior military power (not to mention its staunch Western support), that forced a change in the Palestinian position. The question of partition returned implicitly to the national agenda in 1974, precipitated by the peace negotiations that followed the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, offering hope of a comprehensive settlement and a role for the PLO. At its twelfth meeting, the Palestine National Council (PNC) formally resolved to set up a "national, independent and fighting authority on every part of Palestinian land to be liberated" from Israeli occupation. Although there was no mention of a Palestinian state as such, the resolution paved the way for new thinking about the future. This was reflected in the next PNC meeting in 1977, which called for "an independent national state" on the land with no reference to its total liberation.<sup>5</sup>

By 1981, the PNC had welcomed a Russian proposal for the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the idea of a two-state solution was gaining ground. The 1982 Saudi-inspired Fez plan, which called for the creation of a Palestinian state in the occupied territories (an implicit adoption of a two-state solution), also won Palestinian endorsement. The PLO's isolation following its expulsion by Israel from Lebanon in 1982 and the outbreak of the first intifada were important factors in accelerating the trend toward the two-state solution. Increasingly, Palestinian awareness of Israel's power and the futility of military struggle persuaded the remaining doubters within the PLO to join the majority in adopting a political program that reflected this reality.

These considerations ultimately led the PLO to recognize Israel and adopt the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside it as the goal of the Palestinian struggle. The PNC's adoption in November 1988 of the previously rejected UN Partition Resolution 181—acquiescing after forty-one years in the division of Palestine—represented the PLO's acknowledgment that, under the circumstances, the issue of justice had to be separated from that of attainability. Having concluded that justice—recovery of all of Palestine and the return with compensation of the dispossessed refugees to their lands—was beyond reach, the PLO opted instead for what it believed to be possible. The Declaration of Independence passed at this meeting implied that the state would be established within the UN-demarcated 1967 borders of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital. A month later, addressing the UN General Assembly, PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat reinforced the recognition of Israel as a legitimate state by affirming the right of all parties to the conflict to live in peace and security.

After the 1993 Oslo accords, the two-state solution dominated the international political discourse. It formed a major part of President George W. Bush's vision for the future of the region, and the much-cited but unimplemented Road Map was adopted in 2003 by the international community to set out the steps for achieving it.<sup>6</sup> The international consensus had become not *whether* a Palestinian state would be created, but *when* and in exactly what territory.

The contours of the putative state were given official shape in the 2002 Arab peace plan,<sup>7</sup> adopted at the Arab League summit in Beirut, which confirmed the vision of a state in all of the 1967 territories, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and proposed a “just settlement” for the refugees in accordance with UN Resolution 194. The Palestinians later accepted minor modifications to the 1967 borders and a land swap to accommodate Israel’s desire to retain its major West Bank settlements. Significantly, Israel has yet to articulate its own vision of the contours of a Palestinian state.

Support for the two-state solution among Palestinians did not arise initially from a belief that it was in itself ideal or even desirable. Rather, the appeal came from the desire for the occupation to end—even at the expense of dividing the historic homeland into two states—and because they thought it the only way to save the last remnants of Palestine, where they could recoup Palestinian national identity and social integrity.<sup>8</sup> Many diaspora Palestinians saw the state as the first step on the journey home, envisioning, within the context of two neighboring states at peace, the possibility of an exchange that could have provided a sort of return for the refugees.

The apparent attainability of the two-state solution in the immediate aftermath of Oslo added to its appeal. Indeed, the question of whether one or two states is the preferable solution to the conflict is commonly debated in terms of feasibility, with the one-state option seen as impossible, or so the conventional argument goes, because it would be rejected by Israel and the international community and the Palestinians would be powerless to do anything about it. The two-state option, on the other hand, is seen as having better prospects because it enjoys international, even Israeli, support and has the enthusiastic backing of the Obama presidency.

Yet it has been clear for some time that implementation of a two-state solution has become logistically impossible on terms that could satisfy even the most minimal Palestinian aspirations, let alone rights. Israeli colonization and segmentation of the West Bank, unimpeded since 1967, have reduced what was supposed to form the Palestinian state to nonviability. The conclusion reached by numerous studies analyzing this problem is that a two-state outcome has been superseded.<sup>9</sup> The concept of Israel’s occupation as a triple “matrix of control” (military, territorial, and bureaucratic) advanced by Jeff Halper, the head of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, is probably the most graphic of these and the best illustration of Israel’s tenacious and irreversible hold on Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Given these Israeli-imposed territorial constraints and the international refusal to exert meaningful pressure to change them, what can a two-state solution mean? The outlines of an answer have been emerging for years through the pronouncements of various Israeli leaders. In 1967 Yigal Allon, Israel’s deputy prime minister at the time, called for annexation of a third of the West Bank to include the Jordan Valley, a greatly expanded Jerusalem, and a wide corridor linking them that would run all the way to the Jordan River.<sup>10</sup> In 2005 the Sharon/Olmert plan envisaged everything to the west of

the separation wall being built, which lobbed off significant additional West Bank land, to be annexed to Israel. Also to be annexed were the major West Bank settlement blocs (Ma'ale Adumim to the east of Jerusalem, Gush Etzion to the south, and Ariel to the north), while the Jordan Valley would remain under Israeli control. What remained of the West Bank would amount to 54 percent at most, separated into numerous enclaves. These, along with the minuscule Gaza Strip, would constitute the Palestinian state, made "contiguous" by linking its sundry parts through a combination of bridges and tunnels.<sup>11</sup> The safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza provided for in the Oslo accords was never really allowed by Israel to function properly.

In the unlikely event of a deal emerging from the negotiations, the most that could be expected would be an agreement approximating the Clinton parameters of 2000.<sup>12</sup> For Palestinians, this is where adherence to the two-state logic in such circumstances must lead: a downgrading of their demands and an abandonment of most of their rights. It could not be otherwise if the basis for the two-state solution is one of unchecked Israeli colonization of Palestinian territory assigned to the future state.

Such a two-state solution cannot be in the Palestinian interest. The fact that it is so actively promoted reflects the priorities of others, namely the United States, Europe, and the pro-Western Arab states. All of these wish to see the end of a conflict that costs them money, causes instability in an important region, acts as a spur to Islamist extremism, and threatens the security of Israel, a key Western ally in many ventures. At the same time, the Western states, which have been engaged in the plethora of state-building projects that mushroomed all over the occupied territories after 1993, bear a heavy responsibility for nurturing this Palestinian aspiration to statehood without making it happen.

### THE ONE-STATE SOLUTION AND ITS VARIANTS

The one-state proposal represents a fundamentally different approach to solving the conflict. The two-state solution has as its sole object the termination of Israel's 1967 occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the occupied land. It deals exclusively with the consequences of the 1967 war, as if the conflict with Israel began then and the territory that became Israel in 1948 had not been occupied Palestinian land whose owners had been expelled. The two-state proposal therefore leaves untouched the very nature of the Israeli state.

The one-state solution, by contrast, goes to the heart of the matter: the existence of Israel as a Zionist state. If the imposition of Zionism on the Arabs was the cause of the Palestinians' dispossession, the denial of their rights, and the constant state of conflict between Israel and its neighbors, it makes no sense for a peace agreement to preserve this status quo. For Palestinians the key date in the conflict is 1948, and the occupation of the 1967 territories is a symptom of the disease, not its cause. The problem is

that the two-state solution does not merely confine itself to dealing with the symptoms; it actively helps to maintain the cause.

The roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lie in an ongoing belligerent and expansionist Zionist project. Zionism has not adapted to its environment in more than sixty years nor accepted limits on its aspirations. On the contrary, the more Israel has been able to take from the Palestinians with impunity, the more it has wanted to take, resulting in a self-perpetuating cycle of aggression and expansionism.

The one-state solution means the creation of a single entity of Israel/Palestine in which the two peoples would live together without borders or partitions, thereby avoiding a division of resources that could neither be workable nor fair.<sup>13</sup> Only a one-state solution can address all the basic issues that perpetuate the conflict—land, resources, settlements, Jerusalem, and refugees—in an equitable framework. In the last analysis, the one-state solution is actually just a way of restoring a land deformed by half a century of division and colonization to an approximation of the whole country it once was, a rejection of disunity in favor of unity.

There is a perception that the one-state option is monolithically unitary, all or nothing. In fact, there are several models for sharing Palestine, principally, the binational model, where the two groups share the country but remain ethnically separate; and the secular, democratic, one-person, one-vote model based on individual citizenship and equal rights irrespective of race, religion, or gender. The binational model preserves the structure of two religious/ethnic communities, while the secular democratic model emphasizes the individual rather than the community, in the style of Western liberal democracies.

Thus, binationalism makes it possible for a form of Zionism to survive, while the secular democratic alternative does not. This is why most binationalists have come to their position, not because they think it desirable, but because the reality on the ground precludes both sides from exercising their right to statehood in the whole of the territory. The adherents of the secular democratic unitary state, on the other hand, tend to support the idea out of ideological commitment. Yet these important distinctions between binationalism and secular democracy are often blurred by analysts, as if the two models were interchangeable.

### ***Binationalism***

The binationalist proposal in Palestine began with a small number of early twentieth-century Zionist immigrants whose aim was to revive Jewish life in the ancient homeland, which they did not believe was incompatible with Arabs living in the same space. Opposed to the project of a Jewish state, they advocated an arrangement whereby Jews and Arabs could live side by side cooperatively and in harmony.<sup>14</sup> They were mainly active between 1925

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and 1933. Judah Magnes, the Hebrew University's first president, was the strongest advocate of this "cultural Zionism."<sup>15</sup> Other contemporary Zionist intellectuals in Palestine who supported binationalism were Martin Buber, Chaim Kalvarisky, and Arthur Ruppin. Ruppin, though a major force in the Zionist settlement enterprise, looked to a Jewish cultural rebirth in the East through cooperation among Jews, Arabs, Armenians, and other "Eastern peoples." For the Zionists, who were but a small immigrant minority at the time, "sharing" the country would itself have been a major achievement, but unsurprisingly the vast majority of Palestinians did not welcome the idea.<sup>16</sup>

With the triumph of state Zionism in 1948, binationalism became obsolete. However, after 1967, Israel's colonization of the West Bank and Gaza so entwined the two peoples as to make Israel and the occupied territories in effect one state. This situation led to a revival of the binational idea as a way for Israelis and Palestinians to share the state while preserving their separate ethnic and cultural identities.<sup>17</sup> By the late 1990s, Israelis like Haim Hanegbi and Meron Benvenisti and Palestinians like Azmi Bishara and Edward Said were actively arguing the case, partly on principle and partly in recognition of the fact that the physical reality precluded anything but a shared territory.<sup>18</sup> Under the simplest form of binational state, each community would be autonomous in terms of language, education, and cultural life, with an administrative council to run its communal affairs. Matters of common concern, such as national policy, defense, and the economy, would be handled by joint institutions and a joint parliament with equal representation.

A binational state could be configured as cantonal, federal, or—in an innovative variation latterly devised by Swedish diplomat Mathias Mossberg—as "dual states" superimposed on one another.<sup>19</sup> Instead of two states side by side, Israelis and Palestinians would live in parallel states, but have the right as citizens of each to settle anywhere between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Other models include a federation of separate Jewish and Arab administrative units linked to a central government as in the United States,<sup>20</sup> and two sovereign states in political and economic union in a kind of rejuvenated UN Partition Plan.<sup>21</sup> This latter model would involve a Palestinian state comprising areas of predominant Palestinian habitation (such as the West Bank and the Galilee), an Israeli state similarly constituted, and a separate district encompassing Jerusalem and Bethlehem that would have its own independent council with equal residency rights for Israelis and Palestinians.

Several other binational proposals (which in fact could be seen as variants of the two-state solution) are based on the concept of two federated but territorially separate states, rather like the 1947 minority report of the UN Special Committee on Palestine, which proposed federated Jewish and Arab states with Jerusalem as the common capital. Modern versions of binationalism cite Belgium, Canada, and Switzerland as models. Of these, Switzerland is probably the most successful example of how ethnic communities can live peacefully together.

A closer parallel to the Israel-Palestine situation, however, is Belgium, where Flemish and French-speaking communities, roughly equal in size but with different cultures and a long history of mutual conflict, are joined in a federal union. Belgium accommodates the two peoples in two main regions, the Flemish-speaking Flanders and Francophone Walloon. Brussels, the country's capital, comprises a third, self-governing region. Citizens can travel, live, and work anywhere in the country.

In a similarly federated Israel-Palestine, Jerusalem would be the equivalent of Brussels. The federal constitution would protect the rights of Israelis and Palestinians and guarantee religious freedom and the separation of religion and state to guard against theocratic extremism. Returning refugees could live in Israel as well as Palestine but would retain Palestinian citizenship. It must be noted, however, that the precariousness of the Belgian federation, even after more than a century in existence, demonstrates the difficulties inherent in such models, especially, perhaps, with regard to an eventual Israel-Palestine.

### ***The Secular Democratic (Unitary) State***

The idea of a unitary secular democratic state as a solution to the conflict originated with the PLO in 1969, when the PNC envisaged for the first time a “democratic state of Palestine” to encompass “all Palestinians, including Muslims, Christians, and Jews.” The PNC specified that only resident Jews who renounced Zionism would qualify, but by the eleventh PNC meeting in 1973, the qualification was diluted and the Palestinian state was described simply as “opposed to all forms of prejudice on the basis of race, color, and creed,” whose citizens would live “in equality, justice, and fraternity.”<sup>22</sup>

This imaginative vision of dealing with the reality of the Israeli Jewish presence in the homeland never became more than an outline, however. The

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unitary state was never adopted at the popular level, and for many Palestinians it remained a theoretical notion that was poorly understood—not so different, perhaps, from the situation today. Lacking a concrete plan for implementation, it was not followed up, even by its proponents, and by 1974 the goal of a democratic nonsectarian state was dropped in favor of a “National Authority” to be set up on any Palestinian land to be liberated, thus setting PLO policy on the road to the two-state solution. The secular democratic

state idea was finally buried in 1988 with the PNC's declaration of independence and de facto recognition of Israel, though a tiny minority of Palestinian and Israeli left-wing intellectuals never ceased to support it.<sup>23</sup>

The secular, democratic one-state solution did not return to the political debate until the early 1990s, roughly in tandem with the renewed interest in binationalism. Unlike the PLO's democratic state proponents of the late 1960s and early 1970s, today's many one-state supporters are motivated not



by the principle of an inclusive society and equal rights, but rather by more pragmatic considerations, such as the apparent unfeasibility of the two-state solution and awareness of the Palestinians' ultimate advantage in a one-state arrangement, as Gary Sussman has pointed out.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the more Israel colonizes and fragments the Palestinian territories, the more Palestinians are driven to consider a unitary solution.

Support for the secular unitary state idea comes mainly from diaspora Palestinians, anti-Zionist Israelis, and left-wing intellectuals opposed on principle to ethnic or religious states.<sup>25</sup> Many of these, however, have devoted their energies to promoting the principle, leaving for a later stage the design of what a unitary state would look like. Exceptionally, Jeff Halper, a one-state proponent, has been advocating practical steps for attaining this goal through a South African-style anti-apartheid struggle against Zionism.<sup>26</sup> Others endorse the same strategy in the struggle to end the occupation, without explicitly calling for a unitary state.<sup>27</sup> In some cases the reason for this reticence is tactical, as for example with the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign that has been gaining strength on a global scale since 2002, and which has refrained—as a movement—from specifically endorsing a one-state solution.

The issue of equal rights has prompted another approach to the one-state goal: the demand for annexation to Israel of the occupied territories, as a way of transforming the struggle into one for equal civil rights within an expanded Israeli state. A call to this effect came from the popular imprisoned Fatah leader, Marwan Barghouti, in 2004,<sup>28</sup> and is in line with similar calls for the dissolution of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and a direct struggle for equal rights with Israelis.<sup>29</sup>

Palestinian calls for the annexation of the occupied territories should not be confused with those of right-wing Israelis (e.g., Knesset member Tzipi Hotovely, Knesset speaker Reuben Rivlin, and former Israeli defense minister Moshe Arens) who have been calling for the incorporation of “Judea and Samaria” (the official Israeli administrative term for the West Bank) into a greater Israel. Though such proposals envisage citizenship for the Palestinian inhabitants, the goal is not to create an egalitarian unity state. Rather, they stem from an assertion of Jewish ownership of the whole of the West Bank, no part of which should be “given away,”<sup>30</sup> and though the expanded Israeli state thus envisioned would have a larger Arab minority, it would be preserved as Jewish and democratic; unusually in the current Israeli context, the advocates of these ideas believe that the Arab demographic threat can be contained. Despite the very different intentions of these right-wing proposals, it is possible that their discussion in Zionist circles may help open doors to the concept of sharing the land.

With much of the focus on the concept, little has been said about how a unitary state would be constituted. An intriguing exception has been offered by Yoram Avnak, a self-described Zionist who sets out a relatively detailed vision of the structure of the “secular state of Israel-Palestine” in what seems to be a serious attempt to put some flesh on a hitherto skeletal concept.<sup>31</sup>

According to Avnuk, the new Israel-Palestine, to be established by the international community in his view, would entail total separation of “church and state,” with a ban on religious parties. Education would be strictly secular, and any religious teaching would be funded by parents. In order to maintain the desired demographic balance between Jews and Palestinians (45 percent each), the Israeli law of return would be cancelled, and the Palestinian right of return would be restricted to that level. Hebrew, Arabic, and English would be the official languages. The state parliament would be made up of 45 percent representation for each side, with 10 percent for others. The Old City of Jerusalem would become a separate body like the Vatican, administered by non-citizen Jews, Muslims, and Christians appointed by the UN. Though Avnuk believes his plan represents the last chance to build a healthy society, he provides no strategy to get there.<sup>32</sup>

### THE DEBATE

As Israel’s unwillingness to give up Palestinian land or comply with international law has become increasingly evident over the last decade, interest in the unitary state idea as a way out of the impasse has grown. As early as November 2003, the U.S.-based *Jewish Week* was warning that the “alarming idea” of one state had taken hold among Palestinians, American left-wing circles, and students on university campuses and that it risked garnering global support. About the same time, Jewish intellectuals living in the United States, including Daniel Lazare and the late Tony Judt, came out in support of a binational state and rejection of Zionist ideology, with Judt in particular being roundly condemned as a “self-hating Jew.”<sup>33</sup>

In the last few years especially, a surge in the debate on the one-state solution has become apparent.<sup>34</sup> Meron Benvenisti’s major 5,000-word essay in *Ha’Aretz*’s 22 January 2010 supplement is a striking indication of this surge. Mainstream Western publications now carry articles on the one-state solution with fair regularity: a recent far-from-comprehensive sampling includes opinion pieces or articles in the *Los Angeles Times* (Saree Makdisi, “Forget the Two-state Solution,” 11 May 2008), *Newsweek* (Sari Nusseibeh, “The One-State Solution,” 29 August 2008), the *Irish Times* (“Nudge Towards Alternatives in the Middle East,” 13 March 2010), *Foreign Policy* (Dmitry Reider, “Who’s Afraid of the One-State Solution?” 31 March 2010), and the *Washington Post* (George Bisharat, “Israel and Palestine: A True One-State Solution,” 3 September 2010).

It would seem that the barriers to thinking the unthinkable have been breached. But it is important to remember that, with a few modest exceptions, no major institution or mass movement has adopted any variant of the one-state solution to date. Indeed, endorsements at any official level have stemmed only from oppositional groups or states outside the “Western club”: adoption of the one-state solution by the U.S. Green Party at its national convention in 2004; a call the same year by former Iranian president Hashemi

Rafsanjani for unification between Israel and the Palestinian territories under one government and “harmony” between its Jewish, Christian, and Muslim citizens;<sup>35</sup> and a proposal by the notoriously erratic Libyan president Mu`ammar Qaddafi for the creation of a unitary Israel/Palestine (which he dubbed “Isratine”) in his 2003 *White Book*. Though he presented the idea to the 2004 Arab League summit in Tunis (emphasizing its potential to resolve the Palestinian refugee problem), no Arab leaders took up the proposal—hardly surprising given Qaddafi’s record.

The reality is that opponents of the one-state solution far outnumber supporters. Much of the resistance—from both Palestinians and Israelis—relates to the formidable obstacles to the idea’s implementation, starting with the lack of constituency on either side.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, a 2009 Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre opinion poll found that only 20 percent of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians, and just 9 percent of Jewish Israelis favored a binational solution. A 2003 Peace Index poll of Israelis found that 73 percent feared the emergence of a binational state, with only 6 percent in favor of one, and in 2007, 70 percent still backed a two-state solution.<sup>37</sup>

Certainly, there are objective reasons for reluctance over the one-state option. Both sides identify themselves as national communities with a right to self-determination, and the Palestinians especially would not willingly abandon their struggle for independence in order to struggle anew for equality in a joint state where Israel would inevitably have the upper hand; given the greater development of Israelis, Palestinian fears of being kept in a permanent underclass should not be dismissed. As for the Israelis, though they fear Palestinians in their midst, they have become accustomed to unfettered exploitation of Palestinian land and resources and would fight to keep their free hand. More generally, the level of distrust, grievance, and ill will between the parties is such that the very idea of sharing the land would be anathema to both.

The obstacle that dwarfs all others, however, is the mortal threat posed by the one-state solution to Israel’s identity and indeed existence as a Jewish state. Zionism has become an integral part of the Jewish *weltanschauung*, if only as a bulwark against Jewish insecurity, real or imagined. Keeping Israel secure has become an immutable international obligation not open to question or challenge.

There is no doubt that as an idea, the one-state solution challenges the received wisdom, now taken as self-evident, that Israel’s security is inextricably linked to its Jewishness. And given that the two-state solution is seen as a guarantor of Israel’s Jewishness, the one-state solution threatens the West’s vested interests not only in the two-state solution, but in Israel itself. The Western states, which created Israel in the wake of World War II as a repository for Jewish refugees unwanted in Europe, a sop to the European conscience for centuries of Jewish persecution, and as a local agent for Western interests, are committed to Israel, which thanks to the above factors and

the familiar biblical association of Jews with the Holy Land, has become an integral part of the West. In this context, the two-state solution is the only option it accepts.

As for the Palestinians, many see Western support for the two-state solution, however unpalatable and truncated and unjust, as their main protection and hope. For many, abandoning their struggle for an independent state with strong international backing for the chimera of a one-state option would be pure folly. As veteran Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery has argued, the struggle for a two-state solution has already gained the Palestinian movement a territorial base, so why abandon these gains now? For those who hope for a South African type solution in Israel-Palestine through an anti-apartheid struggle against Israel, Avnery reminds us that the South African regime had few international supporters, whereas Israel commands the unstinting support of Jewish communities worldwide and the near unconditional support of the world's only superpower, the United States. Finally, it is the Arabs, not the Jews, who are seen as "the world's bogeymen."<sup>38</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Despite these compelling arguments and seemingly insurmountable obstacles, a small but growing number of dedicated advocates of the one-state solution remain undaunted, and the burgeoning interest in the idea continues to gather momentum. Clearly, a very long road lies ahead, with formidable barriers to building a Palestinian consensus on the idea much less an agreed position on the issue. And yet, taking a long view of the history of the conflict and observing the current situation on the ground, some form of a one-state solution seems inevitable. If this had been a scientific experiment repeated using the same formula for over sixty years without results, the formula would have been changed by now. The failed formula here stipulates an inequitable division of land and resources and precludes the return of Palestine's indigenous people to their homeland despite international law and precedents enforced elsewhere.

For Palestinians, the refugees' right to return is not a minor issue despite Israel's ceaseless and relentless efforts since 1948 to make it so. Indeed, if there were only one justification for the one-state solution, it would be this. In 2007, the number of forcibly expelled Palestinians and their descendants was estimated by the Bethlehem-based BADIL Resource Center for Residency and Refugee Rights at 7.6 million, 4.6 million of whom are UN-registered refugees. Especially in light of the international role in their plight, these people have an unequivocal right to a settlement of their claims in accordance with justice and the law. Instead, a raft of proposals—collective or individual compensation, settlement in host societies, transfer abroad—put forward by Israel and Western countries aims precisely at preventing the right of Palestinian return to Israel.<sup>39</sup> Such attempts are of course inevitable in the context of a two-state solution.

It should be obvious that Israel's continued confiscation of Palestinian land, its denial of Palestinian rights, and increasingly open racism toward them, as well as its supremacist policies toward its Arab neighbors, must all be addressed using a different formula. A new paradigm is needed whose starting point must be based on the principle of equal rights for Jews and Palestinians in one land.

The one-state solution is as yet a political idea, which like others (including Zionism at one time), has to be accepted in principle before it can be implemented. The fact that it may be impracticable at various historical junctures does not invalidate the idea itself. This essay has focused principally on that idea with the aim of making it better understood and therefore more widely accepted. An implementation strategy that at least identifies the relevant forces to support the idea must now follow, and one-state supporters need urgently to elaborate an implementation plan. Not doing so would earn them dismissal as utopian or hopeless dreamers.

## ENDNOTES

1. Michael Tarazi, "Two Peoples, One State," *New York Times*, 5 October 2004.
2. Most of these groups are email networks, but a few have been more substantial. Examples include the Association for One Democratic State in Palestine/Israel (Switzerland), Movement of One Democratic Secular State in Israel/Palestine (USA), and most recently, The Movement for One Democratic State in Palestine (USA).
3. See for example Mazin Qumsiyeh, *Sharing the Land of Canaan: Human Rights and the Israeli-Palestinian Struggle* (London: Pluto Press, 2004); Virginia Tilley, *The One-State Solution: A Breakthrough for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Deadlock* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Ali Abunimah, *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Ghada Karmi, *Married to Another Man: Israel's Dilemma in Palestine* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), pp. 245-48.
4. Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 86-87.
5. Muhammad Muslih, "Towards Coexistence: An Analysis of the Resolutions of the Palestine National Council," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 16, no. 4 (Summer 1990), pp. 3-29. This article contains a detailed analysis of the formal Palestinian position on the two-state solution.
6. "The Roadmap: Full Text," BBC News, 30 April 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/2989783.stm>; "The Road Map," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 32, no. 4 (Summer 2003), pp. 83-99.
7. "Arab Peace Initiative: Full Text," *Guardian*, 28 March 2002, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/mar/28/israel7>.
8. Mohammad Baraka, "Between the One-State and Two-State Solution: Independence is Not a Luxury, it is a Necessity," *Al Majdal*, no. 28 (Winter 2005), pp. 20-24.
9. United Nations, *Report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, John Dugard, on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied by Israel Since 1967*, United Nations Commission on Human Rights, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2006/29, 17 January 2006. An excellent summary of these logistical problems was provided in 2002 by the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department study, *Israel's Pre-emption of a Viable Two-State Solution* (Ramallah, 2002); Jeff Halper, *Obstacles to Peace: A Reframing of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Jerusalem: Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, 2009).
10. Michael Palumbo, *Imperial Israel: The History of the Occupation*



of the West Bank and Gaza (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), pp. 60–62.

11. Karby Leggett, “Olmert to Call for Global Support of Israel’s West Bank Pullout Plan,” *Wall Street Journal*, 12 April 2006, p. A6.

12. Giora Eiland, an Israeli security expert, sets out the U.S. position with clarity. Giora Eiland, “Clinton’s Plan is Back,” *Yediot Aharanot*, 4 April 2010, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3871538,00.html>.

13. Eyal Weizman makes exactly this point in *Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 15–16.

14. As’ad Ghanem, “The Binational Idea in Palestine and Israel: Historical Roots and Contemporary Debate,” *Holy Land Studies* 1, no. 1 (2002), pp. 59–82.

15. William Brinner and Moses Rischin, eds., *The Life and Times of Judah L. Magnes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987). Arthur Goren, *Dissenter in Zion: From the Writings of Judah L. Magnes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 307–67.

16. Among the handful of Palestinians who responded positively to the binational idea on the grounds that the Jewish presence in Palestine might attract foreign capital to develop the country and that the arrangement was preferable to Jewish statehood was Fawzi Husseini, the head of the Filastin al-Jadida [The New Palestine] organization that supported binationalism. In 1946 he signed an agreement with the League for Jewish-Arab Rapprochement and Cooperation to build a binational state in Palestine. He was assassinated by fellow Palestinians shortly afterwards. See Susan Lee-Hattis, *The Bi-national Idea in Palestine During Mandatory Times* (Haifa: Shikmona, 1970).

17. Tamar Hermann, “The Binational State in Israel-Palestine: Past and Present,” *Nation and Nationalism* 11, no. 3 (2005), pp. 381–401.

18. Ari Shavit, “Cry the Beloved Two-state Solution,” *Ha’Aretz*, 6 August 2003; Meron Benvenisti, “The Binational Option,” *Ha’Aretz*, 7 November 2002; Meron Benvenisti, *Intimate Enemies: Jews and Arabs in a Shared Land* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 31; Edward Said, “The One-State

Solution,” *New York Times Magazine*, 10 January 1999; Azmi Bishara, *New Realities, Old Problems* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 212–26.

19. Mathias Mossberg, “Superimposing a Solution,” *Foreign Policy*, 27 June 2006; Deb Reich, “Beyond the Onion of Blame,” *Counterpunch*, 30 October 2002; Mathias Mossberg, “One Land, Two States? Parallel States as an Example of ‘Out of the Box’ Thinking on Israel/Palestine,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 39, no. 2 (Winter 2010), pp. 39–45.

20. See for example Lama Abu-Odeh, “The Case for Binationalism,” *Boston Review*, December 2001/January 2002; and Tarif Abboushi, “New Road Map: One State, Modeled after U.S.,” *Houston Chronicle*, 11 June 2003.

21. Nasser Abufarha, “Alternative Palestinian Agenda—Proposal for an Alternative Configuration in Palestine-Israel,” in Mahdi Abdul Hadi, ed., *Palestinian-Israeli Impasse: Exploring Alternative Solutions to the Palestine-Israel Conflict* (Jerusalem: PASSIA, 2005), pp. 145–87.

22. Muhammad Muslih, “Towards Coexistence,” pp. 13–14.

23. Fouzi el-Asmar, Uri Davis and Naim Khader, *Towards a Socialist Republic of Palestine* (London: Ithaca Press, 1978).

24. Gary Sussman, “The Challenge to the Two-State Solution,” *Middle East Research and Information Project*, no. 231 (Summer 2004).

25. See Tikva Honig-Parnass, “Binationalism Versus the Secular Democratic State,” *News from Within*, 13 March 2002; and Tikva Honig-Parnass, “A Secular Democratic State,” Interview with Eli Aminov, *News from Within*, July 2002; Ghada Karmi, “One Land Two Peoples,” *Ha’Aretz*, 9 July 2002; “A Secular Democratic State in Historic Palestine: An Idea Whose Time Has Come” [in Arabic], *Al-Adab* (July 2002); “The Right of Return and the Unitary State in Israel/Palestine,” *Race Traitor*, no. 16 (Winter 2005).

26. Jeff Halper, “One State: Preparing for a Post Road Map Struggle Against Apartheid,” a 2003 paper given at the UN International Conference on Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People, New York, 5 September 2003, <http://www.fromoccupiedpalestine.org/node/772>.



27. One such example is John Mearsheimer, a distinguished American political scientist and co-author of *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, who calls for the adoption of a South African-style anti-apartheid strategy in a “war of ideas” with Israel, but stops short of advocating the one-state solution, although he does see this outcome as inevitable if no two-state solution emerges. See Mearsheimer’s lecture at the Palestine Center, Washington, D.C., 29 April 2010, <http://www.thejerusalem-fund.org/ht/d/ContentDetails/i/10418>.

28. “Palestinians Ready to Push for One State,” *Associated Press*, 9 January 2004.

29. A number of those calling for the dissolution of the PA have done so for tactical reasons rather than in support of a one-state solution. Ali Jarbawi, a PA minister in Salam Fayyad’s government and former Birzeit university academic, was the first to call for the dissolution of the PA in 1999; see his “Remaining Palestinian Options,” *The Arab World Geographer* 8, no. 3 (2005), <http://arabworldgeographer.socsci.uva.nl/content.htm#awg8182>. Also see Rami Khoury, “Dissolve the Palestinian Authority,” *Daily Star*, 20 February 2008.

30. Moshe Arens, “Is There Another Option?” *Ha’Aretz*, 2 June 2010; Moshe Arens, “Give Palestinians Israeli Citizenship,” *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 March 2010.

31. Yoram Avnak, “Thus We Will Build It,” *Ha’Aretz*, 7 February 2010.

32. Practical strategies for attaining the one-state goal are also in short supply. Daniel Gavron, an ardent Zionist-turned-unitary-state-supporter after the second intifada erupted, is one of the few who has proposed a rudimentary outline of a schedule: Annexation of the Palestinian territories to Israel, imposition of universal franchise, and finally the creation of a multi-ethnic state. See Daniel Gavron, *The Other Side of Despair: Jews and Arabs in the Promised Land* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

33. Daniel Lazare, “The One-State Solution,” *Nation*, 11 October 2004; Tony Judt, “Israel: The Alternative,” *New York Review of Books* 50, no. 16 (23 October 2003).

34. Separate from the one-state discussion but indicative of the ferment in

Israeli society, Abraham Burg, a former speaker of the Knesset, told *Ha’Aretz* on 7 June 2007 that defining Israel as a Jewish state was “the key to its end.” Recently, Burg formed a new political party of Jewish and Arab Israelis aimed at transforming Israel (within its 1948 boundaries) into a “state for all its citizens”—adopting the goal first adopted by former Israeli Arab Knesset member Azmi Bishara. See Ari Shavit, “Burg: Defining Israel as a Jewish State is the Key to Its End,” *Ha’Aretz*, 23 July 2010.

35. “Rafsanjani Proposes Uniting Israel, Palestine Under One Government,” *Jordan Times*, 14 November 2004.

36. Salim Tamari, “The Dubious Lure of Binationalism,” in Mahdi Abdul Hadi, ed., *Palestinian-Israeli Impasse: Exploring Alternative Solutions to the Palestine-Israel Conflict* (Jerusalem: PASSIA, 2005), pp. 67–73; Jeff Halper, “A Middle Eastern Confederation: A Regional ‘Two-stage’ Approach to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Arab Media Internet Network*, 15 December 2002; “Abed Rabbo Rules out Binational State,” Palestine Media Centre official Web site, January 2004; Alexander Yacobson, “A Bi-national State Here?” *Ha’Aretz*, 29 January 2010.

37. The Peace Index, October 2003, published by the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, Tel Aviv University, [http://spirit.tau.ac.il/peace index/2003](http://spirit.tau.ac.il/peace%20index/2003); “Peace Index—Demographic Fears Favor Unilateral Separation,” *Ha’Aretz*, 7 December 2003. The 2007 poll is reported in *Ha’Aretz*, 3 July 2007.

38. Uri Avnery and Azmi Bishara “A Binational State? God Forbid!” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 4 (Summer 1999), pp. 55–60.

39. Since the late 1990s, Israel and its Western allies have put forward various plans for ensuring that the refugees do not return to Israel. See U.S. proposal on compensation in *al-Sbarq al-Awsat*, 13 January 2005, and Israeli plans for development zones in Arab states, *Ha’Aretz*, 1 January 2005. A U.S. proposal for settling some refugees in special areas on the Libyan-Egyptian border and in Iraq and integrating the rest into the societies of Arab host-countries enjoys Arab approval and will be Arab-funded, as reported in *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 16 April 2010.