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Ten Questions + One for the One-Staters

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The supporters of the two-state solution are often told that this vision is unrealistic and has become unachievable. Young, idealistic seekers of justice and equality are increasingly offering what they claim is a more "realistic" solution: a single state for all Israelis and Palestinians, including refugees.

Because I am deeply aware of the difficulties of achieving a lasting solution through two states living side-by-side in peace, I am always eager to examine other options. In sincerely evaluating the one state idea, I first reviewed how the two-state concept emerged, assessed the fundamental realities of the status quo, and posited the series of questions about how a single state could be achieved.

Beginning with its inception in 1965, the Palestine Liberation Organization pursued a single state solution. It only accepted Israel and the two-state solution in 1988 after armed resistance not only failed to achieve a state, but precipitated a series of calamities for Palestinians.

The two-state solution also became the official policy of the United States -- and the world as represented by the Middle East Quartet -- under the George W. Bush administration in 2002. It was buttressed by the Arab Peace Initiative and, in 2009, was even accepted by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It is the consensus of international policy, but is also stymied and forestalled by international politics, and is losing support and confidence because of the failure of the negotiating process and expanding settlement construction.

Whether pursuing two states or a single state, everyone needs to begin by honestly assessing the status quo as defined by the following salient facts:

- Israel occupies the Palestinians and their land conquered in 1967.
- Soon the number of Jews and Arabs in territories of mandatory Palestine, between the sea and the river, will be equal.
- The de facto state of Israel already constitutes a one-state reality, but the conflict is not ended.

- Jordan is already another unified, single state that is organically tied to the conflict.
- Both negotiations and "armed resistance" have failed to produce a solution.
- Demographics, and land occupancy, are inexorably changing, according to their own logic and pace.

Among Palestinians, the one-state idea is embraced mainly by those most opposed to Israel, Zionism, normalization, negotiations, cultural exchange and trade, and who support boycott, divestiture and sanctions.

To take the one-state option seriously, due diligence regarding its feasibility is required. This simply means asking how it can be achieved through the following questions:

- 1) What is the mechanism for negotiating, implementing or imposing such a solution? A UN Security Council or General Assembly resolution dissolving the State of Israel? The voluntary dissolution of the State of Israel? Negotiations without negotiators? A military solution imposed by the international community or by the armed forces of Palestine and neighboring Arab countries?
- 2) Remembering that it is advocated by those Palestinians most opposed to Israel, what are the realistic prospects of gaining significant support for this idea among Jewish Israelis?
- 3) Would the Palestinian Authority disappear altogether? Would it be replaced by the Israeli bureaucracy? Would they somehow merge, or be forced together by outside powers, and if so, how and by whom?
- 4) Would all citizens of this state become instantly equal before the law, with all rights and responsibilities of the citizen, without discrimination? Who will define these terms and implement them, and who will oversee the process?
- 5) Would the current educational systems be merged after the establishment of the single state? Would there be an official, hybrid, historical narrative? Or would the two narratives be taught simultaneously?
- 6) Would the armed forces of this state result from a merger of the existing forces? Would all citizens be eligible to join? Would the leaderships of the existing armed forces continue to be the same, or would they be replaced by some other leadership, and if so, whom?
- 7) Would there be an affirmative action program to integrate the disadvantaged into various systems, public and private? Would it be phased in over years, decades or centuries?
- 8) Would land ownership revert to the status quo in 1948 and 1967? How would competing property claims be managed and by whom?
- 9) Who would head and form the government? Or who would at least lead a transitional government until a unified one is formed, and how long would the transition last?
- 10) What would happen regarding the occupation and settlements while these questions remain unaddressed?

Finally, would it not be fair to ask one-state advocates if their talents, energies and time have

been diverted from the fight to achieve freedom for Palestine, only to fashion yet another tool that that will preserve the status quo and prolong the occupation?

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