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What's Wrong with the One-State Agenda? - HTML

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American Task Force on Palestine

What's Wrong with the One-State Agenda?

Why Ending the Occupation and Peace with Israel is Still the Palestinian National Goal

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Preface

The American Task Force on Palestine is proud to present this study by Senior Fellow Hussein Ibish, *What's Wrong with the One-State Agenda? Why Ending the Occupation and Peace with Israel is Still the Palestinian National Goal*. The subject matter could not be more timely or significant, particularly given the vigorous re-engagement of the United States

government under the leadership of President Barack Obama in the quest for an end-of-conflict agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

We are proud that the founding mission of the Task Force, first articulated in 2003, which holds that such an agreement is essential to the American national interest, is now front and center in the foreign policy of our government. Given this bold re-engagement led by President Obama, the United States is now poised to unite policy with politics in pursuit of a historic peace agreement. To a significant degree, the success of this Administration's foreign policy will be measured in terms of progress on this crucial issue.

The developing American and international consensus regarding the two-state solution has fundamentally transformed the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from a zero-sum equation to what can and should be a win-win dynamic. In the United States, the two-state premise has become the unifying principle around which a wide coalition with a constituency that cuts across religious, ethnic and communal lines can be organized. Jewish, Arab and other Americans from the right, left and center can now come together within a framework that enables them to cooperate as well as engage their differences constructively in the service of a common goal. It has created a virtuous dynamic within which the Administration, the Congress, the foreign policy community, and the wider public can interact to advance US national interests.

Globally, the consensus around the two-state solution has created the space for bold, constructive initiatives such as the Roadmap on the international level and the Arab Peace Initiative at the regional level. It has allowed the peace process to resume under the Bush Administration, and forms the cornerstone of the Obama Administration's new diplomatic drive. The framework of a two-state solution has made it possible to support the Palestinians' aspirations to freedom without being anti-Israeli, and to call for Israel's right to security and normality without being anti-Palestinian. This has created new openings for promoting the American national interest and countering national security threats in the Middle East. Realizing a two-state solution will allow the United States to approach threats like terrorism, extremism, and Iran's potential nuclear weapons within a new regional framework, and is the cornerstone of mending the strained relations between our country and the Muslim world.

However, to achieve success, all parties must play their parts. This requires clarity as to what goals each of us - Americans, Palestinians, Israelis and others - are pursuing and what precisely will help to achieve them as opposed to what might seem appealing but is, in fact, counterproductive. This applies to individuals, organizations, both large and small, and institutions in civil society, as well as governments, political parties and multilateral institutions. From its outset, ATFP intended to be first and foremost a goal-oriented organization. This goal-oriented character is amply reflected in this study, which is guided throughout by a consistent focus on what is achievable and preferable in the real world, as opposed to unachievable aspirations.

We believe that in this study, Dr. Ibish has made a definitive case from the perspective of the Palestinian national interest for reaffirming the commitment to seeking a negotiated agreement with Israel, an end to the occupation and a permanent end of conflict based on two states living side by side in peace and security. In particular, Dr. Ibish answers the challenge to this long-standing consensus that has emerged in recent years, mainly on college campuses, from advocates of a one-state agenda that seeks to dispense with both Israel and Palestine in favor of a single, post-nationalist state. As the first comprehensive critical treatment of the "one-state" paradigm, this study goes methodically and exhaustively through

the various arguments and demonstrates their internal contradictions, dangerous implications, and ultimate unfeasibility.

It is hard to think of anyone better suited to this task than Hussein Ibish, given his long history of engagement with Arab-American and pro-Palestinian advocacy in the United States, and considerable experience dealing with all sides in this complex conversation. I have known and worked with Hussein for over 10 years, and have witnessed his personal journey from a young activist who was invested and influential in the adversarial approach to Palestinian-Israeli issues into one of the most thoughtful, eloquent and committed supporters of a partnership for peace. His eloquence, insight, wit, and encyclopedic knowledge have allowed him to play a unique role in our collective voyage from marginal ethnic representation to the mainstream of national debate and policy, and made this arduous process both achievable and, at times, even enjoyable.

I am confident that this study will be a significant contribution to the debates about Palestinian national strategy, pro-Palestinian advocacy in the United States, and the quest for peace in the Middle East. It addresses some of the most serious problems, deepest illusions and profound yearnings with precision, insight and, above all, seriousness of purpose. It dares to answer questions that have remained woefully unaddressed, and to ask urgent questions that have been begged for far too long within Palestinian and pro-Palestinian circles. Most importantly, it has the courage of its convictions. Even those who are ultimately unpersuaded by these arguments cannot doubt the commitment and the intensity of concern that is reflected in these pages.

Dr. Ibish's analysis demands and deserves the serious and sustained attention of all those who are engaged or interested in questions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the quest for peace in the Middle East.

Ziad Asali

President, American Task Force on Palestine

Washington , DC, June, 2009

Introduction

As this study was being initially drafted in December 2008, the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas expired, violence increased, and Israel predictably launched a massive military offensive in the Gaza Strip. More than 1,400 Palestinians, most of them civilians, were killed, and over 5,000 injured, with 21,000 homes and business destroyed or badly damaged. Hamas and other Islamist groups fired about 700 rockets into Israel, killing four Israeli civilians. The quixotic search for a military solution to the political needs of Israelis and Palestinians once again demonstrated both its primacy and also its profound futility.

As the dust settled, a long-evident truth was yet again demonstrated with crystal-clarity: neither Israel nor the Palestinians can achieve their aims or advance their long-term interests

through the use of force. Decades of sustained occupation and repeated offensives and invasions have not brought security to Israel or lessened the threat of terrorism and armed attacks. The will of the Palestinians to seek their freedom and resist occupation by both legitimate and illegitimate means remains unbroken, and has even intensified. Regional acceptance and the normalization of the Israeli state in the Middle East is being delayed, complicated and thwarted by the occupation and its violent enforcement. For the Palestinians, decades of armed resistance and violence has not weakened or lessened the occupation or alleviated the suffering of the Palestinian people. Instead it has united the Israeli population, allowed supporters of the occupation to cast it as self-defensive, and damaged the reputation of the Palestinian cause internationally. It has led to ever more brutal methods of repression and reprisal, and, in the most recent instance, reduced the Gaza Strip to ruins.

Obviously, Israel has not enhanced its security in any meaningful or long-term sense through the attack on Gaza. Rocket attacks did not cease, the border area was not secured and smuggling tunnels continue to operate. But, even if those narrow war aims had been achieved, in the absence of any significant improvement in the quality of life in the West Bank and, more importantly, meaningful progress towards achieving a peace agreement that ends the occupation, Israel's action would still have the effect over the long run of strengthening Hamas and deepening the conflict. The Gaza war also seriously undermined Palestinian and other Arab public confidence that Israel has any interest in securing a reasonable peace agreement, and reconfirmed the perception of Israel as simply "the enemy." A sensible evaluation of the fallout of the Gaza war from the Israeli point of view, no matter how one gauges the military performance of the IDF, confirms that security, regional acceptance and an end of the conflict are only possible through a negotiated agreement involving the creation of a viable, sovereign Palestinian state, and not through endless, inconclusive wars and a non-viable occupation.

The Gaza war demonstrates clearly that Palestinians need statehood because the ongoing cycle of occupation and resistance only produces intensified occupation and more counterproductive forms of resistance, most damagingly manifested by the self-destructive glorification of "martyrdom." Palestinians need a state to secure their basic human rights and national interests against the fundamental negation of those rights and interests inherent in the Israeli occupation. But the recent war also demonstrates that the Palestinian national movement needs state institutions and a responsive government with a popular mandate in order to avoid the national cause being hijacked by extremist groups that seek popularity and power through outbidding all rivals in radical rhetoric and actions that court catastrophic responses and sabotage any effective political strategy for liberation. Hamas' reckless and strategically incoherent tactic of launching crude rockets in the general direction of Israeli cities – usually without doing much damage but creating mounting pressure on Israeli political leaders for ever harsher responses, culminating in the Gaza war – is not the first time that an extremist group has bypassed the mainstream national leadership and initiated a catastrophic series of violent actions. The campaign of hijackings and other violent acts by the PFLP and other far-left groups in the late 60s and 1970 led directly to the disaster of Black September, and damaged the reputation of the Palestinian cause internationally for decades. The campaign of assassinations and bombings by the Abu Nidal group led directly to the devastating Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 that sought to destroy the PLO once and for all. The militarization of the second intifada, which came to be characterized on the Palestinian side largely by suicide bomb attacks and religious rhetoric driven by Hamas, could well be seen as another such instance. The Gaza war, therefore, follows a consistent pattern in which the lack of a coherent and unifying state structure has allowed extremist or marginal

groups to drag the Palestinian national movement into highly destructive episodes.

The cycle of incessant violence from both sides has solved and will solve nothing between Israel and the Palestinians. It has become blindingly clear that Israel can only achieve its aims of living in peace and security and regional acceptance and normalization through a negotiated agreement with the Palestinians. It is equally clear that Palestinians can only achieve their goals of ending the occupation and gaining freedom and independence in a sovereign state through a negotiated agreement with Israel.

This study explains why, in spite of all of the failures, false starts and frustrations that have characterized the peace negotiations over the past 15 years, the Palestinian national goal is still ending the occupation and securing an end-of-conflict agreement with Israel. The Gaza war interrupted the composition of this study, but only reconfirmed all of its essential arguments. It reminded us, with a fury and horror that few other recent events could match, that the choice facing Israelis and Palestinians is between peace based on two states or continued conflict, increasingly in the name of God, for the foreseeable future. The idea that a single, democratic state in all of mandatory Palestine is a viable, plausible and serious political option for both peoples and for the Palestinian national movement is simply an illusion. The actual choice facing these two peoples, who are at odds in every possible sense and at every conceivable level, is between a hellish (albeit in some minds “divinely sanctioned”) future of continued conflict or a decent future of coexistence and diplomatic relations between two independent states. It is, simply, a choice between war and peace.

What is the one-state agenda and where does it come from?

Part I: What is the one-state agenda and where does it come from?

An outline of the one-state agenda

The one-state agenda discussed in this study is a relatively recent innovation, although based on much older ideas, in thinking about how to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. It is essentially the proposal that all Israelis and Palestinians, including Palestinian refugees and expatriates, should become equal citizens in a single, democratic state in the area now comprising Israel and the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. It repudiates the goal of establishing an independent Palestinian state in the occupied territories and peace with Israel, and downplays or even dismisses the imperative of ending the occupation. Its proponents differ as to the details of such an arrangement, and generally speaking have done very little to explain what this single state would look like or how it would operate in practice. Instead they have mainly focused on arguing that a Palestinian state both cannot and should not be established, and urging an uncompromising confrontation with Zionism as a racist ideology and Israel as a racist state. This study focuses mainly on the rhetoric of Palestinian and other Arab supporters of the one-state agenda, and their direct allies. It does not examine in detail the arguments or motivations of the tiny handful of Jewish Israeli intellectuals who have espoused similar visions for the future, some of whom have sharp and significant differences with their Palestinian counterparts. The point here is to evaluate how the one-state agenda affects Palestinian national interests and strategy, and pro-Palestinian activism and rhetoric. This study will examine the main arguments usually

advanced by the Palestinian and Arab proponents of the one-state agenda and serious problems with the approach, and consider the dangers of Palestinians attempting to use it as a diplomatic “threat.” Finally, it will examine reasons why, in spite of more than 15 years of disappointment and frustration, the campaign to end the occupation and establish a Palestinian state is still the only plausible path to peace, a better life for both peoples, and the realization of Palestinian national aspirations.

The one-state agenda has developed in Palestinian and pro-Palestinian discourse in the West mainly since the outbreak of the second intifada, which began in September 2000. The experience of the second uprising in the occupied territories and Israel’s violent suppression of it, which inflicted profound suffering and created deep ill-will on both sides, bolstered stridently nationalist perspectives in Israel and among the Palestinians. In the Palestinian diaspora too, it prompted a negative reevaluation of what kind of peace was possible and desirable. In Israel, this process was manifested in the collapse of the “peace camp,” a radical shift to the political right and the election of Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister. Among Palestinians, Islamists, especially Hamas, gained significant ground. In the Palestinian diaspora - where support for Hamas is both limited and in the United States, especially after September 11, 2001, politically untenable and even legally risky - this same disillusionment and radicalization has been largely expressed through the rise of the one-state agenda. The principal proponents of the one-state agenda have been professors of Palestinian and Arab origin in American and British universities and students influenced by this rhetoric, although some grassroots and other activists have also been increasingly gravitating toward it. Plainly, the one-state perspective is still a minority point of view among Palestinian and pro-Palestinian activists in the West, and, despite the undoubted passion of its supporters, has yet to fully propel itself into the mainstream of Palestinian political life anywhere.

Indeed, a principal feature of the one-state agenda as it stands today is that it is a quintessentially diasporic discourse, largely reflective of the perspectives, imperatives and ambitions of those living outside of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. This has been one of its greatest appeals for its adherents, but is also a significant weakness in that it does not seem to speak to the situation on the ground as much as to the imagination of part of the diaspora. To date, the one-state agenda commands very little support among Palestinians in the occupied territories, and virtually none at all among Jewish Israelis, with solid majorities of both populations consistently polling in favor of two independent states. There are ample reasons for this skepticism: Jewish Israelis would risk surrendering political power to a Palestinian plurality that, in time, seems destined to grow into an ever stronger majority. Palestinians too would risk subordination to a far more wealthy, educated, organized and institutionalized Jewish community. There is a distinct possibility, if not probability, that Palestinians would find themselves permanently consigned to second-class citizen status in a single state that proves in practice not to be fully democratic. The Israeli historian Avi Shlaim, who is one of the most acute readers of the history of the conflict, has warned that, “a one state solution would institutionalize apartheid. It would be worse than South Africa under apartheid.”¹ Both peoples would be abandoning cherished national projects in favor of a grand experiment in almost entirely uncharted waters that seems to pose significant risks and offer uncertain benefits.

The one-state agenda has gained momentum in the Palestinian diaspora in the context of the violence of the second intifada, but is more broadly a consequence of the failure of negotiations, diplomacy and the peace process to yield tangible results towards Palestinian independence or peace. It is essentially a symptom of deep frustration and disappointment

among Palestinians, particularly in the diaspora, and reflects the bitter conclusion that diplomacy and negotiations are a dead end and that only some radical alternative can offer any serious hope to the Palestinian cause. This study is an effort to explain why this approach is misguided, counterproductive and, ultimately, costly for Palestinian national aims and interests. Until now, few commentators in the pro-Palestinian community have bothered to respond to the claims and general approach of the one-state agenda, assuming that it is too marginal and too fanciful to have much of an impact. However, the lack of a sustained and reasoned response has probably contributed to whatever gains this rhetoric has been making on university campuses and beyond. A response at this stage is timely and warranted, and at the very least merits serious consideration even by those who find themselves in sympathy with all or much one-state rhetoric.

The origins of the one-state agenda

The contemporary one-state agenda builds on foundations that were laid during the Palestine mandate by a number of liberal Jewish thinkers. Most notably, Judah Magnes, Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber and the other founders of the Brit Shalom organization, beginning in the 1920s, argued that the Zionist movement should not seek exclusive ethnic political power or the establishment of an independent Jewish state in Palestine, but rather pursue a binational or common state with the Palestinians. However, support for this position among Jews in mandatory Palestine, and even worldwide, became extremely weak following sustained expressions of international support for the creation of a Jewish state in the wake of the Second World War and mounting tensions and armed conflict with the Palestinians. There have always been Jews and Israelis who have continued to support this position, but they have been extremely small in numbers and politically marginal. Even today, when Jewish Israeli one-state advocates can be listed by name (some well-known), they still constitute a tiny fraction of Jews in Israel and internationally, and have built no constituency or clout whatsoever in the Israeli political scene.

Some Arab and Palestinian supporters of a one-state agenda claim to be continuing or returning to a “traditional” Palestinian approach to resolving the conflict. They usually point to the 1968 PLO Charter, which calls for the creation of a single state in Israel and the occupied territories. However, the Charter was clear that this state would be Arab and Palestinian, not binational or ethnically neutral, stating that “Palestine is the homeland of the Arab Palestinian people; it is an indivisible part of the greater Arab homeland, and the Palestinian people are an integral part of the Arab nation.”² It further stated that, “claims of historical or religious ties of Jews with Palestine are incompatible with the facts of history and the conception of what constitutes statehood,” suggesting that only an Arab and Palestinian national project in Palestine was legitimate. It did allow that, “the Jews who had normally resided in Palestine until the beginning of the Zionist invasion [variously interpreted as either referring to the 1917 Balfour Declaration or the outbreak of civil war in 1947] are considered Palestinians,” which could be, and often was, understood as suggesting that Jews who had emigrated to Israel under the Law of Return might not be “considered Palestinians,” and had an uncertain future in the Palestinian state.³ Plainly, the Charter was a document of ethnic nationalism that does not correspond to the stated principles of the present day one-state agenda.

Faced with the failure of a strategy based on the 1968 Charter’s maximalist ambitions, rejection of diplomacy with Israel and emphasis on armed struggle, the PLO gradually moved away from these positions over a decade or so beginning in the mid 1970s. By the late 1980s, the PLO had repeatedly and formally adopted the position that it was prepared to recognize

Israel on condition that Israel agree to the eventual establishment of a Palestinian state in the occupied territories. In light of the Oslo Accords, the PLO amended the Charter, as explained in a letter dated September 9, 1993 sent from PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin: "In view of the promise of a new era and the signing of the Declaration of Principles and based on Palestinian acceptance of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the PLO affirms that those articles of the Palestinian Covenant which deny Israel's right to exist, and the provisions of the Covenant which are inconsistent with the commitments of this letter are now inoperative and no longer valid. Consequently, the PLO undertakes to submit to the Palestinian National Council for formal approval the necessary changes in regard to the Palestinian Covenant."⁴ The PLO subsequently and repeatedly repealed the articles in question, and in April 1996 the Palestinian National Council did the same by an overwhelming majority.

The Palestinian national strategy thereby shifted from the goal of creating an Arab Palestinian state with a Jewish minority in all of the territory of mandatory Palestine to the pursuit of an independent state in the occupied territories to live alongside Israel. This shift was based on a growing realization that the creation of Israel in 1948 could not in fact be reversed, but that the occupation that began in 1967 could be replaced by an independent Palestinian state. Palestinian and Arab activism and diplomacy was thenceforth focused on emphasizing the illegitimacy of the occupation and the need for peace based on two states. An impressive body of international law and a now virtually unanimous international consensus in support of this position has been slowly and painstakingly constructed. In recent years, this consensus has extended to its adoption as the formal policy goal of Israel's closest ally, the United States, and the subject of the first explicit calls for Palestinian statehood in a series of UN Security Council resolutions. Many Israeli national leaders increasingly acknowledge it as an important strategic goal for Israel as well.

Rather than attempting to build on these diplomatic, legal and strategic advances, the one-state agenda urges the abandonment of the entire project of independence in favor of a program to replace Israel with a completely different state. While there can be no doubting the failure of diplomacy and international law to yet produce an end to the occupation, or even a halt to settlement construction, and no questioning the difficulties still facing the quest for Palestinian independence, the one-state agenda would replace that project with one that has no significant support among either the Israelis or Palestinians, no basis in international law, no support from regional states or the international community, and no articulated program for advancement let alone realization.

The contemporary one-state agenda has been most significantly influenced by a number of thinkers who, over the course of the past decade, urged the innovation of, or a "return to," this approach to resolving the conflict. Probably the three most potent influences have been the late Professor Edward Said, Columbia University historian Tony Judt, and the Israeli writer and former Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, Meron Benvenisti. Benvenisti pioneered groundbreaking studies in the 1980s of the new political topography in the occupied territories being created by the Israeli settlement program. These analyses ultimately led him to take the plunge and declare Palestinian independence impossible and insist that a bi-national reality was already in place in Israel/Palestine.

In 1999, Edward Said made similar arguments in the New York Times, stating that, "[the] Oslo [agreements] set the stage for separation, but real peace can come only with a binational Israeli-Palestinian state."⁵ However, Said's thinking about the future of peace was always

complex and never fully resolved. In the late 1970s, Said had emerged as an early proponent among Palestinians of negotiations with Israel aimed at mutual recognition and the establishment of a Palestinian state. And, until the end of his life, while he increasingly became a proponent of a single state, Said continued, in both public and private declarations, to recognize the virtue of independence and the imperative of ending the occupation. To cite only one example, in one of his last columns, written in October, 2001, Said observed, “we are now in an intolerable impasse, requiring more than ever a genuine return to the all-but-abandoned bases of peace that were proclaimed at Madrid in 1991: UN Resolutions 242 and 338, land for peace. There can be no peace without pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, and -- as the Mitchell report affirmed -- to dismantle its settlements. This can obviously be done in a phased way, with some sort of immediate emergency protection for undefended Palestinians, but the great failing of Oslo must be remedied now, at the start: a clearly articulated end to occupation, the establishment of a viable, genuinely independent Palestinian state, and the existence of peace through mutual recognition. These goals have to be stated as the objective of negotiations, a beacon shining at the end of the tunnel.”⁶

Interestingly, Benvenisti greeted a 2000 interview with Said in the Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz with deep bitterness, and offered a spirited defense of the Israeli national narrative against Said’s critiques, complaining that, “Said allows himself to bewail his fate and I have to feel guilty for our victory, for the sacrifices made by my parents, for the fact that we stayed and fought [in 1947-48], while he and those like him fled.”⁷ This demonstrates how deep the divide still runs even between Israelis and Palestinians who have apparently reached similar conclusions, not just about two states, but about one state as well. For his part, Said responded by condemning Benvenisti as “a right-wing Israeli Zionist” who “was responsible for the destruction (and probably knew about the killing of several Palestinians) of Haret Al-Magharibah in 1967, in which several hundred Palestinians lost their homes to Israeli bulldozers.”⁸ While Benvenisti’s analyses and some elements of his prescription have been influential among Palestinian one-state advocates, his attachment to the Israeli narrative and essential commitment to many aspects of Zionism have thus far hampered the development of any meaningful cooperative political relationship. Benvenisti’s admonitions against those who “cherish the pipedream that they’ll win the battle of the womb,” for example, would appear to cut too close to home for a number of the Palestinian and Arab one-state advocates.⁹ After attending a one-state conference in Boston in April, 2009, Benvenisti noted that, “those hostile to Israel have discovered that the call for one state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, a state based on civil and collective equality, is a powerful propaganda tool, because it is based on universal norms that enable critics to denounce Israel as an apartheid state.” He rather bitterly complained that, “Israelis who seek to earnestly examine various models that could serve as the basis of a future sovereign entity at times find themselves being used as fig leaves to cover up efforts to spread anti-Israel propaganda.” “But,” he continued, “this is always the lot of those who pursue new avenues.”¹⁰

In 2003, Tony Judt added further intellectual heft and Jewish ethnic credibility to the one-state trend in a much discussed essay in the New York Review of Books called “Israel: The Alternative,” in which he reiterated that there was already a binational reality in Israel/Palestine, and that the peoples of the land should avoid ethnic nationalism in favor of mutual and reciprocal democracy, urging the formation of broader regional unions and confederations.¹¹ However, in his reply to criticisms, he did agree that, “when I wrote of binationalism as an alternative future, I meant just that. It is not a solution for tomorrow.”

Acknowledging that most people on both sides were not interested in post-nationalist unification in a single state, he added that “for the present, then, binationalism, is—as I acknowledged in my essay—utopian.”¹² These important caveats in his response to critics received far less attention than his original article, which continues to serve as a touchstone for one-state rhetoric that sees its agenda as rational, practicable and realistic rather than utopian and a distant “alternative future.”

The basic assumptions of one-state advocates

The one-state agenda discussed in this paper has built mainly on the foundations laid by these writers, and has mostly restated and elaborated on their arguments. A number of conferences, mainly in London, have been held to advance the single-state agenda, and in the fall of 2007, a “One-State Declaration” was drafted or signed by many of the individuals listed below. The two most significant documents in terms of detail and depth of argumentation produced by advocates of the one-state agenda to date are Virginia Tilley’s *The One-State Solution: A Breakthrough for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Deadlock*¹³ and *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse* by Ali Abunimah¹⁴. While the two books share much in common, they are not as interchangeable as their virtually identical sub-titles might suggest. Tilley’s book is more scholarly, serious and sustained, while Abunimah’s is better written, more engaging and probably more effective with the general public. However, neither goes very far in outlining what this new state and national identity would look like, and even less in suggesting how, from a strategic point of view, it could ever be achieved. Both are largely devoted to the two dominant themes of this discourse: the enormous barriers facing the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the salutary example that the abolition of apartheid in South Africa supposedly offers to Israelis and Palestinians. UCLA literature professor Saree Makdisi’s recent book *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*¹⁵ also includes a substantial section advocating the creation of a single state. Other vocal Palestinian and Arab proponents of the one-state agenda include geneticist Mazen Qumsiyeh, political scientists Joseph Massad, Assad AbuKhalil, Assad Ghanem and Naseer Aruri, writer Ghada Karmi, law professor George Bisharat and activist Omar Barghouti. An extremely small group of Jewish Israeli activists have expressed sympathy with this orientation as well, most notably the historian Ilan Pape, but also commentators Haim Hanegbi and Daniel Gavron, and jazz musician Gilad Atzmon. In addition to Tony Judt, several other Jewish-American observers have expressed similar sentiments, including Bard College professor Joel Kovel. Unlike Benvenisti, all of these analysts accept as their starting point a thoroughgoing condemnation of Zionism on political and ethical grounds. However, like their fellow Jewish Israeli and international counterparts, most Jewish American critics of Israeli policy and even Zionism itself – including many on the far-left such as Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein – remain proponents of ending the occupation and Palestinian independence.

One-state arguments almost invariably proceed from two assumptions: first, that it is no longer possible to establish a Palestinian state in the occupied territories, and second, that such a state is not desirable or sufficient even if it could be established. There is something of a dissonance between the two arguments when they are bundled together: if a Palestinian state is not sufficient or desirable, there is no need to insist upon the impossibility of its creation, whereas if it is impossible, then its desirability becomes moot. It sounds a bit like hedging: this is impossible, but even if it were possible, etc. One almost expects to be presented with a third corollary to the effect that even if it were desirable, some other

objection would be raised. While Virginia Tilley largely stresses the non-viability of Palestinian independence, almost all of the Palestinian and Arab advocates of the one-state agenda, and their tiny group of Jewish Israeli allies, emphasize moral objections to Zionism and the overriding need to establish a democratic state for all the people of Israel/Palestine, political exigencies and realities notwithstanding. However, what neither emphasis acknowledges is that almost all of the obstacles facing the creation of a Palestinian state also apply, but to an exponentially increased degree, to the replacement of Israel with a single, post-national state. There is a lack of logical coherence, to put it charitably, to the argument that while Israel cannot and will not be compelled or persuaded to relinquish its control of 22 percent of the territory under its rule, it can somehow be compelled or persuaded to relinquish or share its control of 100 percent of it.

The one-state agenda versus ending the occupation

What is most significant from the perspective of the Palestinian national agenda and pro-Palestinian advocacy is that the one-state agenda both implicitly and explicitly abandons the imperative of ending the occupation. Some one-state advocates are openly hostile to the focus on ending the occupation, arguing that other causes such as the right of return are equally if not more important. Some ignore the centrality of the occupation. Makdisi's valuable book, on the other hand, considers the occupation in careful, sensitive and revealing detail. No matter how they arrive at their conclusions, however, one-state advocates invariably end up shifting the focus away from ending the occupation to a broader agenda that includes not only the right of return and other refugee issues, but also the civil rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel and other concerns. In the process, the task of ending the occupation becomes subsumed into a politically implausible agenda that involves replacing Israel with a different and as yet undefined state, at some time in the not foreseeable future, by means as yet unarticulated.

In this sense, the one-state agenda, either consciously or unwittingly, sets itself against the project of ending the occupation. It is a change of subject, a different goal requiring different rhetoric, strategy, allies and attitudes. It is an altogether separate political program. Therefore, the one-state agenda, insofar as it gains any momentum, is a drain on the resources available to any serious activism for ending the occupation. By broadening the agenda in an overambitious matter, and piling unrealizable goals on top of potentially realizable ones, it dilutes the strength and energy of the campaign to end the occupation, and diverts the focus of activism and advocacy. Worse still, in practice, the one-state agenda plays perfectly into the hands of the Israeli far right and the occupation, allowing the settler movement and its supporters to claim vindication for their assertions that Palestinians are, in reality, not seeking independence at all, but wish to eliminate the State of Israel and replace it with a Palestinian-dominated entity in the entire territory. When the Palestinians were simply a rejectionist armed movement, this was no threat to the greater-Israel and settlement projects – on the contrary, it was a positive boon since the settlements could be framed as self-defense against an existential threat from all forms of Palestinian nationalism. The Palestinian agenda to end the occupation, which commands considerable support internationally and which does not challenge the existence of Israel in its internationally recognized borders, on the other hand – although it has yet to achieve its goal – is a serious threat to the continuation of the occupation and to the settler movement. The one-state agenda, like the Islamist movement (for which some leading single-state proponents betray an ideologically inconsistent sympathy), threatens to return Palestinians to a position that effectively enables and

rationalizes the settler movement.

Though they are no doubt divided on the subject, the most extreme Palestinian one-state advocates would appear to actually prefer a continuation of the occupation for the time being, pending possible future democratization in the entire territory, to Palestinian independence in the occupied territories which they view as insufficient. On his twitter feed on April 17, 2009, Abunimah summed this attitude of hostility to the goal of ending the occupation and implicit support for the Israeli right-wing and settler movements by declaring, "I am just so pleased that Netanyahu has placed impossible conditions in front of the 'two-state solution.' Go Bibi!"

While some of its supporters may be genuinely drawn to a vision of reconciliation and equality, however fanciful, some one-state advocates are plainly old-school Arab and Palestinian nationalists and rejectionists who have found a convenient new vehicle for unconditionally opposing anything and everything connected with the State of Israel and for uncompromising confrontation on all fronts. At least one noted one-state advocate, Assad AbuKhalil, actually urges a return to the "Three No's" of the Khartoum Resolution of August 1967: "no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it." Because Jewish Israeli resistance to the one-state idea is, and can safely be expected to remain, virtually unanimous, the one-state agenda returns Palestinians and Israelis to the zero sum equation that has been a cornerstone of rationalizing the occupation and the settlements from the beginning (in addition to religious claims and nationalist irredentism). It certainly makes compromise effectively impossible. All of this is a gift that no occupying power and no colonizing settler movement deserves.

Key questions for one-state advocates

As we review the arguments for and against the one-state agenda, readers should keep in mind the following questions that are not usually addressed to, or have been insufficiently answered by, one-state advocates, and in many cases not adequately considered by their sympathizers:

- If Israel will not agree to end the occupation, what makes anyone think that it will possibly agree to dissolve itself?
- What, as a practical matter, does this vision of a single, democratic state in Israel/Palestine offer to Jewish Israelis?
- What efforts have Palestinian and pro-Palestinian one-state advocates made in reaching out to mainstream Jews and Israelis and to incorporating their national narrative in this vision? Why is there such a profound contradiction between the stated goals and the actual rhetoric of most one-state advocates?
- Jewish and Israeli concerns aside, how do one-state advocates propose to supersede or transcend Palestinian national identity and ambitions? Why is it that no significant Palestinian political party or faction has adopted this goal?
- How, apart from empty slogans about largely nonexistent and highly implausible boycotts, do one-state advocates propose to realize or advance their vision? What practical steps do they imagine and what is their roadmap for success?
- Since they reject both Palestinian independence and the ongoing agenda of

infrastructural and institutional development presently defining the strategy of they call the “quisling” Palestinian Authority, what do one-state advocates, as a practical matter, offer those living under occupation other than expressions of solidarity and interminable decades of continued struggle and suffering?

The main arguments for the one-state agenda

Part II: The main arguments for the one-state agenda

The following two sections of this study examine a series of arguments taken one by one, beginning with those typically presented in support of the one-state agenda. Many of the ideas outlined and responded to in this section actually deal with the supposed insufficiencies of a two-state approach to ending the conflict. This is because most one-state advocacy remains consumed with this negative theme, rather than seriously elaborating the mechanics of a viable one-state arrangement or exploring workable strategies for its realization.

1) An independent Palestinian state is impossible given the levels of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories

Proponents of the one-state agenda invariably argue that the degree of settlement colonization in the occupied territories engaged in by Israel since the conquest in 1967 renders Palestinian statehood effectively impossible. In *The One-State Solution*, Virginia Tilley is absolutely categorical, arguing “the territorial basis for a viable Palestinian state no longer exists,” that “the two-state solution has therefore become impossible,” and “only one state can viably exist in the land of historic Palestine between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River.”¹⁶ A single state is inevitable, she claims, because “no other choice remains” since “a viable Palestinian state has become impossible,” adding for emphasis that, “the one-state solution is not an option to be argued. It is an inevitability to be faced.”¹⁷ In *One Country*, Ali Abunimah agrees, writing that “the stark reality is that partition, despite the copious lip-service it receives, has always been hard to attain; today in the face of Israel’s takeover of what is left of Palestinian land and the international refusal to confront it, partition is unachievable.”¹⁸ For her part, Ghada Karmi says flatly that, “a Palestinian state as [traditionally] envisaged is not feasible.”¹⁹ Saree Makdisi is also convinced that “there is no longer a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”²⁰ Virtually all one-state advocacy begins with this categorical dismissal of the potential to achieve a two-state agreement.

What is most striking about these assertions is the absolute certainty and finality with which they are declared. Few, if any, of these commentators identify exactly when the possibility of a Palestinian state was finally and irrevocably foreclosed, but their arguments all start with the assumption that there is no longer any possibility for a two-state solution. Some one-state advocates suggest that such a partition was never really possible because a mutually acceptable border could never have been agreed upon by the two parties, while most allow that it may have been possible at one point, but that at some unspecified time the level of Israeli settlement activity rendered Palestinian independence impossible. It would appear that

any equivocation that two states might conceivably still be possible is regarded as the gravest threat to the one-state agenda, and therefore categorical assertions that defy any sense of restraint or allow any doubt about this are required. The reality, of course, is that there is always doubt about the political future. Extraordinary things have occurred, not least of them the creation of Israel itself. And of course, this is a crucial aspect of the one-state argument: that one may dare to dream about, count on and even declare inevitable, extraordinary and highly implausible political developments. Apparently, this does not include the Israeli withdrawal from, or transfer of sovereignty over, existing settlements, even though settlement removal has already taken place in the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank.

In most one-state arguments, no allowance is made for the possibility that political will can trump entrenched interests. There can be no doubt that the settlement movement and ideology, and indeed the settlement industry and related financial interests, constitute a major political and economic force in Israel. Certainly, these interests have been a crucial factor driving the continued settlement activity that has undermined all peace efforts and negotiations since the early 1990s. But advocates of the one-state agenda take every aspect of the occupation and the settlements to be an irreversible feature of the geographical and political landscape in the occupied territories. As we have seen in the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank, when the political interests of the Israeli state as a whole trump the settlement agenda, dismantling of settlements does in fact occur. The pertinent question then is, what will it take for Israel's leadership to accept that withdrawal from or transfer of sovereignty over a sufficient number of West Bank and East Jerusalem settlements to accommodate a viable and acceptable Palestinian state is essential to the national interest and therefore necessary? One-state advocates in general simply do not allow for this scenario to emerge.

The Gaza redeployment and settlement withdrawal may well have pleased much of the Israeli military, which regarded those settlements as a burden, but it was not an inevitable or simple matter. Indeed, it made the point that Israel has national interests beyond the question of settlements and territorial expansion, and that under the right circumstances these broader national interests can and should trump settlement ambitions. Now that this Rubicon has been crossed, there is no reason why, given sufficient political conditions and pressures, the same logic should not eventually be applied to settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

This internal pressure combined with external pressures and skillfully managed diplomacy on the part of the Palestinians and the international community ought to be able to bring a majority of Israelis and the Israeli government, however reluctantly, to regard holding on to the occupation as fundamentally incompatible with their broader national interests. When and if that happens, the settlement movement and the vested political and economic interests entrenched within it would surely not be able to prevail. Some can be placated with economic incentives and compensation; others compelled to abide by the wishes of the majority and the decisions of the government. The idea that the settlement movement and its supporters are an indomitable political force in Israel is simply an assertion, not a fact, and logic suggests strongly that the will of the majority and the broader national interest can overrule these powerful factions. Overcoming political and physical resistance from settler groups and their supporters might be difficult for the Israeli state and a popular majority, but there is no serious reason to believe that it is impossible. To be categorical about these assertions, as almost all one-state arguments have been, seems almost impossible to justify, especially from those who are advocating as plausible – and even inevitable – an infinitely more far-fetched scenario.

2) An independent Palestinian state would not be economically viable

There is no question that an independent Palestinian state would require years of external support to build its economic base, and that this viability will take time, effort and skillful management to construct. But it is incorrect to suggest that there are no models through which a Palestinian state in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip could be economically self-sustaining.

Palestine's greatest resource is its human capital. There is every reason to hope that in an information-driven global economy, a well-educated and highly motivated Palestinian population might be able to generate considerable economic activity and foreign exchange. One of the more interesting features of the postcolonial world is that numerous countries rich in natural resources, such as Sudan and Uganda, among others, have struggled economically while a number of natural resource-poor states such as South Korea and Singapore have made considerable progress by emphasizing education and human resource-oriented strategy and planning. Experience suggests that human capital is at least as important as, if not more significant than, natural resources. Palestinian human capital is promising, to say the least. In addition, Gaza is potentially a major Mediterranean port. The prospects for a gigantic and highly profitable tourism industry in East Jerusalem and much of the West Bank are, under conditions of peace, very bright. The Rand Corporation was responsible for two major studies demonstrating the potential viability of a Palestinian state called *The Arc: A Formal Structure for a Palestinian State*²¹ and *Building a Successful Palestinian State*.²² Obviously, a successful economy in a viable Palestinian state would have to be thoroughly integrated in a regional economic system with all of its neighbors. Indeed, the long-term economic health and viability of all states in the region depends on developing and sustaining a workable regional economic system. Since this is in their interests, there is no rational barrier preventing its development over the long run.

None of this guarantees the immediate or even long-term prosperity of a Palestinian state, but it does mean that categorical declarations that such a state could never come to be self-sustaining are facile assertions aimed more at advancing a political argument than at explicating the actual prospects and pitfalls of independent Palestinian economic development. If it is objected that this author is not an economist, then that is equally true of almost all commentators who have scoffed at the prospect of an economically viable Palestine. On the other hand, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad who has led a serious program of institution and infrastructure development, especially during his second term in office, is an internationally noted economist with a long background in multilateral institutions including the World Bank.

The real question is: would an independent Palestinian economy not be more robust than that which has struggled under the burden of occupation? Those questioning the economic viability of a Palestinian state rarely confront the practical alternative, which is an occupation economy. Furthermore, few if any peoples seeking independence and decolonization have hesitated to pursue freedom because they are not certain about how to construct a prosperous economic future following liberation. The postcolonial world includes states that have thus far proven both economically viable and nonviable. Few if any serious observers argue that the economic difficulties of some postcolonial states in Asia and Africa suggest that decolonization and independence was a bad idea or that a return to colonial rule might therefore be preferable. The notion that Palestine should somehow prove its economic

viability on paper before it gains its independence sounds exactly like what it is: a rationalization for rejecting independent statehood for the Palestinian people.

3) An independent Palestinian state would be dominated by a powerful and abusive Israeli neighbor

This is essentially the mirror image of the Israeli argument that a Palestinian state would necessarily be a hostile or even “terrorist” state, and pose an existential threat to Israel. Arguments that assume an inherent antagonism between Israel and Palestine are derived from the historical animosity between the two peoples and the pervasive attitude on both sides of a zero-sum relationship. However, the accomplishment of a peace agreement would, by definition, change that equation. The two countries would become partners in peace, if nothing else. Palestine, created on the basis of an agreement with Israel, would have a clear stake in the maintenance of the agreement through which it was established. It would have no incentive to seek the downfall or destruction of Israel. Similarly, Israel would have a stake in the success, and not the failure, of Palestine in the context of an end-of-conflict agreement.

Palestinians would finally have a state in which they could live as first-class citizens, a refuge from intolerable conditions in other countries, and an advocate for their interests on the international stage. It would also allow Palestinians to seriously begin to rebuild their society and develop their future beyond the conflict with Israel and the occupation. This would give the Palestinians the institutions, self-government and independence to develop their national identity, society and culture outside of the context of conflict and occupation. Palestinians deserve a chance to live a normal life, both individually and collectively, and a Palestinian state would provide that opportunity.

It is true that a potential Palestinian state will not be the economic or military equal of Israel for the foreseeable future. But that has been true of all of Israel’s Arab neighbors for the past few decades. Is the statehood and independence of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon, to name a few, worthless or pointless because the Israeli state is economically or militarily more powerful than each of them individually or even all of them collectively? Since no one would seriously make such an argument, it obviously does not apply to Palestine either. A viable end-of-conflict agreement requires a Palestinian state that is not a “bantustan,” independent in name only, but a fully sovereign and independent member state of the United Nations with all the rights and responsibilities enjoyed by other members of the international community. Israelis can have no illusions that Palestinians are prepared to accept less.

There is therefore no reason, in the context of a viable agreement, to suspect that either party would have a vested interest in systematically undermining the very essence of that agreement: two fully and equally sovereign states living side-by-side in peace and security. The old zero-sum formulation of Israeli-Palestinian relations would be replaced by a normalized relationship of two sovereign national entities. The achievement of a peace agreement does not necessarily dictate, and probably will not involve, warm friendship between these two societies, but it does mean that both parties would have a strong stake in making it work.

4) The process of independence would require abandoning “sacred” Palestinian principles, such as the right of return

Some of the most influential objections hold that Palestinian independence and ending the

occupation is not a cause worth struggling for because it will not resolve all Palestinian concerns and grievances. These “sacred” principles vary depending on the advocate and context, and can include territorial imperatives (specifically the return to the status quo ante before the 1948 war and the restoration of all property seized by Israel from Palestinians in the aftermath of that conflict), the right of return of refugees, or simply opposition to anything that smacks of reconciliation with Zionism, recognition of Israel or normalization of the Israeli state. It is extremely rare to hear “sacred” principles invoked in any context compatible with an agreement to which Israel can conceivably acquiesce. The very term “sacred” itself suggests removing ideas from the table and invalidating a priori any Palestinian compromises on a range of subjects. Although this version of “sacred” is essentially a reflection of civic beliefs rather than religious ideas as such, their function as articles of a nationalist faith makes this terminology unfortunately apt.

The question of the right of return of Palestinian refugees is most frequently cited as the issue that ought to be seen as a deal-breaker by Palestinians because it will almost certainly not be fully realized by an end-of-conflict agreement based on two states. It is undoubtedly true that Israel will not agree to the wholesale return of millions of Palestinians registered as refugees by the United Nations. For some Palestinians and their supporters, this means that no achievable peace agreement would be acceptable. They demand and expect Israel to open its borders without restrictions to all registered Palestinian refugees, a condition that Israel will certainly not accept. It is an open question whether the complete and unconditional realization of the right of return is the actual reason why some commentators reject the idea of any plausible peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, or whether, conversely, this demand actually functions as a useful rationalization for rejecting an agreement that is not really desired in any form. Either way, a refusal to consider a reasonable compromise on the right of return certainly serves to make an agreement impossible.

On the other hand, the Israeli positions that the Palestinians have only themselves to blame for the refugee problem, Israel has no responsibilities towards the refugees and no return of any kind can ever take place is equally implausible. Obviously any serious agreement requires that as much as possible be done for the refugees, including an admission of at least partial responsibility on the part of Israel. It is likely that some form of limited “return,” if nothing else under the rubric of family reunification, would be an integral part of any end-of-conflict agreement. Refugees would certainly have a right to “return” to the new Palestinian state. And, of course, Palestinian refugees would be entitled to compensation for their dispossession. So the Israeli position too requires adjustment, critical reevaluation and flexibility. However, as a sovereign state, Israel is not going to open its borders to large numbers of Palestinian refugees to return to live in Israel under any conceivable circumstances, and it is unrealistic to expect it to do so.

The maximalist rhetoric about the right of return in Palestinian political life functions in an analogous manner to the absolutist rhetoric in Israeli political discourse regarding Jerusalem, “the eternal, undivided capital of the Jewish people.” It has been clear for many years, if not decades, that all Israelis who are serious about a peace agreement understand that no Palestinians will agree to a state that does not have its capital in East Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a deal-breaker for Palestinians, a sine qua non of any end-of-conflict agreement, just as the right of return is to the Israeli side. No matter how often Israeli and Palestinian leaders pass out political narcotics to their people on these two issues in order to win popularity and bolster national morale, the political realities require compromises on both refugee return and Jerusalem. Indeed, most serious observers have understood for a long time that these two

issues constitute reciprocal compromises the two parties can usefully exchange in crafting a painful but acceptable and necessary agreement.

Those on the Palestinian side who insist on a full realization of the right of return for all refugees who wish to exercise it know that they are rendering an agreement impossible. What they do not acknowledge is that, in so doing, they are consciously choosing to extend the struggle indefinitely for the sake of one aspect of a conflict with many facets. By refusing to accept the need for any serious compromise on this issue, they are sentencing all of the Palestinians, Israelis, their neighbors, and indeed the entire region and the world, to the continuation of the conflict for the foreseeable future. More significantly from a Palestinian point of view, they are consigning the millions of Palestinians who live under occupation to continue suffering under that condition, and a fourth generation of refugees to continue to languish in camps, in the pursuit of an unrealizable goal.

There can be no question that the right of return is a moral issue. But ending the occupation is at least as urgent a moral imperative, and has much more far-reaching political implications, including significant benefits to the refugees themselves. The establishment of a Palestinian state, for example, would create a home for the Palestinian refugees, such as those living in Lebanon for example, who are most exposed and vulnerable and who cannot safely or decently continue their existence in their present circumstances. An imperfect solution is far preferable to no solution at all, especially when, as with the Palestinians in refugee camps in Lebanon, the issue has been and could again become a matter of life and death. Moreover, a Palestinian state would serve as an advocate for and representative of all Palestinian refugees.

Independence does not solve all the problems of all the refugees by any means, and it would be disingenuous to claim that or downplay the ongoing problems many Palestinians would continue to face. However, there can be no doubt that it would be a very positive development even for those who do not return to Palestine after its establishment. A peace agreement would also surely entail compensation and other benefits not currently available to Palestinian refugees. Demanding, and worse still expecting, the mass return of millions of refugees into Israel proper is not only unrealistic and feeds people very dangerous false hopes, it allows the perfect (but almost certainly unachievable) to be the enemy of the better (and quite possibly achievable). The end of the occupation, Palestinian independence, and peace between two states is hardly perfection, but is it not infinitely preferable to a continuation of the occupation and warfare, conflict and suffering into the indefinite future?

5) Palestinian independence in the occupied territories would not entail the realization of “Justice”

This is absolutely correct, but it is an allegation that can be fairly leveled at any political order whatsoever. As well as being extremely subjective and resistant to mutually agreed-upon definitions in practice, “Justice” belongs to the category of absolute aspirations and abstractions that imperfect human societies can never fully achieve. One can certainly achieve more or less justice in many instances, but human societies will never be able to attain the systematic implementation of anything as perfect as Justice. Some injustices cannot be repaired. There is no justice for the murdered dead, for example, and no justice for those killed on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Even among the living, a perfect equilibrium of justice is almost always unattainable because competing claims and definitions will render criteria for realizing that status entirely subjective. This is not to say that there are

not obvious moral cases of injustice. It is to suggest that any order that corrects injustice, even if it achieves less injustice overall, will not secure a condition of categorical Justice. What seems relatively Just at one moment in a given situation may look very different as perceptions, values, imperatives and circumstances change.

The end of apartheid in South Africa plainly meant less injustice for the vast majority of South Africans, but no one familiar with conditions in South Africa could possibly claim that an overall condition of Justice applies there. Long-standing grievances continue to simmer, all kinds of ethnic and other rivalries persist, inequalities based on colonial and apartheid injustices have been codified into the new system, class distinctions of a striking, if not shocking, degree persist, and numerous other forms of injustice flourish in spite of the ending of systematic racial discrimination. Similarly, in every case of decolonization many grotesque forms of injustice were abolished or overcome, only to be supplanted by other forms of injustice or the continuation of certain elements of injustice that could not be or were not addressed by the process of decolonization and independence.

Because of the almost universal inability to specifically define political and economic Justice, or fully realize it even when there is an agreed-upon definition, societies rely on law as a substitute for the abstraction of Justice, or, to put it another way, as a guideline to get closer to something approximating Justice. In this case, international law would seem to be the most obvious and appropriate guide, and international law clearly and unequivocally dictates that there should be two states, Israel and Palestine, an end to the occupation and peace between them based on a negotiated agreement. It will be objected that not all aspects of international law would be enforced or realized in a peace agreement. The right of return will immediately be cited as an example. However, it may be impossible to reconcile the gigantic, unequivocal and current body of international law stipulating an end to the occupation and the conflict based on the creation of a Palestinian state, with those elements of international law supporting the realization of the right of return of all refugees wishing to reside in Israel. The fact that one aspect of international law cannot, as a practical matter, be realized because a powerful interest will not agree to it for what it considers to be existential reasons should not be an argument for allowing other vital elements of international law to remain unenforced.

The appeal to Justice is, at its heart, the invocation of morality and human values. And, indeed, the one-state agenda in fact corresponds to many well-established human values, but with at least one rather striking exception: peace. Because Israel and the majority of Jewish Israelis will not in the foreseeable future plausibly agree to such an arrangement, it cannot in practice be realized and insisting on it means preferring continued conflict to peace. Some elements of the “peace and justice community” sometimes end up sounding a lot more like a “war and justice community.” No one would suggest that Palestinians (or Israelis, for that matter) should accept peace at any price. However, a peace agreement that involves an end to the occupation and the creation of a viable, sovereign Palestinian state in the territories occupied in 1967, and which deals seriously with all the other outstanding issues at stake, is the only plausible, achievable means of moving beyond conflict and occupation. If realized, it would give both peoples their minimum requirements for achieving a decent future beyond bloodshed and the present ghastly relationship of dominance and subordination. This, surely, constitutes the overriding moral imperative.

6) Zionism no longer serves Jewish interests

It is entirely debatable, and has from the outset been debated, not least within Jewish communities around the world, whether Zionism has ever served Jewish interests. It depends how those interests are defined, and how Zionism is perceived as affecting them. It seems obvious, however, that the only decisive and definitive opinion on this question is that of citizens of Israel in general, and Jewish citizens of Israel in particular. Arguments made by others, even prominent Jewish thinkers outside of Israel, are interesting, but as long as a majority of Jewish Israelis remains committed to the continuation of the Israeli state, Zionism will remain a major political force. Unless and until a significant segment of Jewish Israeli public opinion comes to see Israeli nationalism as no longer useful to its interests, other parties would be extremely foolish to proceed on the assumption that they are about to abandon their national ideals.

Indeed, it would be difficult to deny that the Israeli national identity has outgrown the transnational Zionist movement, and taken on a distinct life of its own. An identity based on social and national belonging is very different than an affiliation with certain ideological principles. Therefore, even if one could somehow (although this is very difficult to imagine) persuade most Jewish Israelis to agree that Zionism no longer serves Jewish interests, one would still have to deal with social, communal and national interests that almost certainly transcend and exist independently of the specific principles of Zionist ideology. For the foreseeable future all other parties would be foolhardy to expect Jewish Israelis to abandon their nationalism or their national identity. The real question here is: does the continuation of the Israeli state as it is presently constituted inside its internationally recognized borders serve the interests of the majority of Israeli citizens? Only they can answer this question, and there is no reason to expect a negative answer anytime in the foreseeable future.

7) Ethnic nationalism is an atavistic, outmoded political model from which both Jewish Israelis and Palestinians should be freed

Ethnic nationalism without question has been the source of tremendous conflict and antagonism at least since the Renaissance in Europe. And of course, it would be nice to think of parochial nationalism as outmoded or passé, but most evidence is to the contrary. The overwhelming trend in recent history is of states and regions splitting along ethnic-national lines, rather than coming together. The examples of this political pattern are too pervasive to list, involving numerous countries and regions in Europe, Asia and Africa. The process of decolonization, which in some respects continues to this day, demonstrates both the power of ethnic nationalism as an anti-colonial organizing principle and subsequently as a threat to postcolonial states. Larger colonial administrative regions and states have tended to break apart rather than come together. But even in non-colonial situations, the tendency in the contemporary world for larger states to split along ethnic and sectarian lines has been frequent and almost pervasive.

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in the 1990s demonstrated both the dominance and currency of the trend towards national splitting along ethnic and sectarian lines: the pan-South Slavic state of Yugoslavia broke into much smaller ethno-national states at the first possible opportunity, Czechoslovakia split in two, etc. The break-up of the Soviet Union demonstrates the same pattern, as do the separatist movement in Chechnya and the two separatist movements in Georgia that led to the Russian intervention in the fall of 2008. The violent division of colonial India into the Indian and Pakistanis states was followed by the violent division of Pakistan into present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh (formerly East

Pakistan). In 1965, Malaysia even went so far as to expel Singapore, a valuable, prosperous and strategically located port city, from its federation, largely because of ethnic tensions between the Malay majority and the largely Chinese population of Singapore, in spite of the fact that Singapore wanted to remain part of Malaysia. In Africa, Eritrea has successfully gained independence from Ethiopia, and numerous other separatist and independence movements persist throughout the continent. The Middle East, too, is no stranger to this pattern. The creation of the Israeli state in 1948 is an example of it, following numerous eruptions of communal violence between Palestinians and Jewish settlers during the mandate and the outbreak of a fully-fledged ethnic civil war in Palestine in 1947. The civil wars in Lebanon, Iraq, and other Middle Eastern states reflect the same pattern, as does the Kurdish struggle in several states, most particularly Turkey. While the grievances underlying the myriad ethnic conflicts around the world have been significant, in most instances they cannot match the degree of antipathy, mistrust and history of violence between Israelis and Palestinians.

These centrifugal political trends are not absolute, of course, as some centripetal political pressures can be clearly seen at work in the world, in particular, regionalism in which conglomerations of still independent states form geographically-defined free trade, common defense and other alliances that involve the surrender of some, usually limited, sovereign prerogatives. The most obvious and fully-developed example of this is probably the European Union. But even the formation and consolidation of the EU has not led to an end to the Basque separatist movement among others, demonstrating that regionalist centripetal momentum is not a panacea for nationalist/separatist tensions. However, it might well be argued that the peace agreement in Northern Ireland was to some extent dependent on the membership of both the UK and the Republic of Ireland in the EU. In other words, it is possible that regionalism can reassure the localized fears of competing ethnic or sectarian groups by allowing them to participate in a broader entity that transcends their grievances and allows greater scope for reconciliation.

If this is true, then the one-state agenda in Palestine/Israel is missing the point: what would be needed would be not a joint Palestinian-Israeli nation-state, but the incorporation of both national communities into a regional organization in which mutual antagonisms would be muted. Aside from the fact that there is no serious momentum in the direction of forming a regional organization of Middle Eastern states, and that on the contrary the region is currently split into two rival camps, an even bigger problem is that all existing regional organizations are voluntary unions of independent states. Israelis and Palestinians could only benefit from the centripetal force of regionalism as a counter to the centrifugal force of ethno-nationalism through two states. In other words, it is very easy to imagine that the rise of a regional Middle Eastern organization could serve as an important component in developing a relationship of cooperation and trust (beyond maintaining the peace) between Israel and Palestine, but not in developing a single democratic state from the river to the sea in place of both Israel and Palestine.

Ethnic nationalism, it would appear, is here to stay for the time being, and it would be hard to locate two more nationalistic or ethnically conscious communities than Palestinians and Jewish Israelis. As other parts of the world are striving to move beyond ethnic nationalism with great difficulty, it may well be unreasonably ambitious to expect these bitter antagonists to, in one step, let bygones be bygones, forego their national identities and independence, and join the vanguard of enlightened humanity transcending the most fundamental of modern identity categories. Is it too cynical to suggest that neither of these two societies have demonstrated

much evidence of or interest in such transcendence?

There is an additional irony on the question of ethnic nationalism and the conflict. Many of the Palestinian and Arab proponents of the one-state agenda talk about overcoming ethnic nationalism and accuse supporters of a Palestinian state of indulging in retrograde ethno-nationalist thinking. However, a brief review of the writings of these advocates reveals them to be among the most strident Palestinian nationalists, as outlined in detail below. In fact, it is some proponents of peace based on ending the occupation who have moved furthest from the traditional Palestinian ethno-nationalist narrative to recognize the validity of the Israeli Jewish narrative and take Israeli national interests seriously, as a necessary precursor to developing a workable peace agreement. It is possible that one day a discourse that genuinely transcends both Palestinian and Israeli national identities and narratives may be developed. Sadly, the literature produced by most Palestinian and Arab supporters of the one-state agenda has for the most part charged headlong in the opposite direction.

8) There is no reason why Jewish Israelis and Palestinians cannot at this time live amicably in equal numbers in a democratic state

Advocates of the one-state agenda generally do not acknowledge how deep the animosity between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians really runs. The two peoples possess mutually exclusive and perhaps irreconcilable national narratives, understandings of the nature of present realities, and visions of the future. One of the greatest strengths of the two-state solution is that it does not require Israelis and Palestinians to reconcile their national narratives, but would allow both societies to develop themselves as they see fit according to their own historical understandings and visions for the future. The one-state agenda requires either one narrative (the Palestinian one) to prevail over the other narrative, or for both national narratives to be replaced by a third narrative, as yet unwritten and not seriously conceptualized. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find two competing national narratives as bitterly at odds as those of the Jewish Israelis and the Palestinians. The truth is that most Israelis and Palestinians, and their supporters around the world, view their relationship in a zero-sum framework: everything good for one party is bad for the other, and vice versa. This attitude is also highly characteristic of much one-state rhetoric.

It is difficult to overstate the bitterness between the two peoples as a consequence of decades of bloodshed, and the extraordinarily high number of civilians killed on both sides since the outset of the conflict. Both Israelis and Palestinians perceive the other as determined to achieve total and exclusive domination of the entire territory between the river and sea, and the subordination and possible physical exclusion or even extermination of the other community. Therefore, on top of the almost universal perception of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship as zero-sum, there is a powerful conviction on both sides that the other party is bent on its destruction at least as an empowered national community.

What makes matters more complicated is that these perceptions are not completely irrational, but are based on real efforts by both communities to rationalize and achieve complete political dominance at various times in the conflict and through various means. In addition, both Israelis and Palestinians project their darkest fears and most grandiose ambitions onto the other party, ensuring the deepest possible distrust.

Obviously, this distrust of the other's motivations and ambitions has been a major factor in preventing the development of a peace agreement and greatly complicates any prospects of

reconciliation in a single state based on mutual trust. Simply put, are Palestinians and Israelis ready to move directly from decades of armed conflict, uprising and occupation to an equitable, trust-based democracy in which power is shared between two populations of roughly equal size? Or rather, does anyone really believe that they are? Apparently some observers cannot bring themselves to fully acknowledge the depth of the bitterness and mistrust that characterizes the Israeli-Palestinian relationship. Abunimah, for example, in his book on the single-state agenda makes the extraordinary claim that, “Israeli Jews and Palestinians may actually be better positioned to develop truly cross-community politics” than the Dutch and French speaking communities of Belgium!²³

Existential fears, especially on the Israeli side, are greatly exacerbated by the political climate in the Middle East generally regarding ethnic and sectarian coexistence. It would be indefensible to assert that the contemporary Middle East enjoys a regional political climate favoring pluralism and equitable sectarian and ethnic power-sharing. Ethnic and sectarian conflict in Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and many other Middle Eastern states suggests that the political climate does not favor enlightened mutuality based on common interest. Lest the Jewish Israelis feel smug about living in a “bad neighborhood,” it should be pointed out that their own behavior in the occupied territories and attitude in general towards Palestinians living both under occupation and as second-class citizens of Israel is a prime example of the present inability throughout the region to treat ethnic and sectarian minorities equitably or maintain properly pluralistic societies. Jewish Israelis have also shown a good deal of intolerance for each other, especially during periods in which the Arab “threat” appeared to diminish, as it did in the second half of the 1990s when sectarian and other tensions in Jewish Israeli society reached unprecedented proportions. Palestinians too have been ripped apart by political and other differences, and their own national movement has now broken into two warring factions. It seems reasonable to point out that not only is the Middle East at present not an environment that favors the kind of delicate pluralism that approximately equal numbers of Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Arabs would have to construct in a single, democratic state, but also that Israelis and Palestinians are having a hard enough time building and maintaining pluralism within their own societies. One day Palestinians, Israelis and other national communities in the Middle East may be ready and happy to live together as equals in pluralistic societies and regional confederations. That day does not appear to be imminent.

It is argued in most one-state rhetoric that a bi-national reality already exists in the context of the occupation, and that an equitable single-state can be constructed on the basis of this reality. But if there is a bi-national reality already, and it has taken the shape of the occupation, then this is an argument against rather than for bi-nationalism in Israel/Palestine. There are, in fact, three existing models of Israeli-Palestinian “coexistence,” if it merits that term at all. The first was under the British mandate in Palestine, which was a period of continuously intensifying competition and hostilities, and which laid the groundwork for the war of 1947-48 and the creation of the conflict as we know it. This is plainly not a model for anything but disaster. The second example is the occupation, which is obviously unacceptable and which speaks for itself. It is certainly one of the most extreme examples in the world today of the suppression of one national group by another.

The third example is within Israel itself. Some one-state advocates point to peaceful coexistence between Jewish and Arab citizens within Israel as proof that a bi-national state would work. What this argument elides is that this coexistence takes place within the context of the “Jewish state” and “Jewish democracy” of Israel, and is entirely dependent on the

Palestinian population being a manageable minority of approximately 20 percent of the total citizenry. Palestinian citizens enjoy many equal rights in Israel, but are subject to significant discrimination in a number of areas, and are severely restricted in the expressions of their national aspirations which are subsumed under the dominant Jewish Israeli national project, discourse and institutions. This system of coexistence works precisely because Palestinian citizens are not in a demographic, social or political position to challenge Jewish dominance in the state.

It has very little to say about relations between equal numbers of Israelis and Palestinians in the same democratic country.

Putting aside the highly conditional accommodation of Israel's manageable minority of Palestinian citizens, the two fully-fledged experiences of Israeli-Palestinian "coexistence" in roughly equal numbers are therefore the mandate and the occupation. Both resulted in armed conflict and ever-deepening bitterness, given the extreme difficulty of reconciling two competing and contradictory national projects. Competing national projects live side by side all over the world in separate nation-states, but rarely, if ever, do they peacefully coexist within the same framework in equal numbers. The often cited examples of South Africa, Northern Ireland – which did not merge with the Republic of Ireland to achieve peace – and the rest do not address this problem in any direct way, for they point towards paths that correct discrimination and civil strife within existing states, but not unification in new states between competing and contradictory national projects by groups of relatively equal demographic size.

Many one-state advocates promote the idea that during the mandatory period Palestine was a relative haven of peaceful coexistence and tranquility between Arabs and Jews. Abunimah, for example, argues that, "a memory of peaceful coexistence between Jews and Arabs in Palestine before the creation of Israel... is the key to a new future."²⁴ Sadly, nostalgia for the multicultural, multi-ethnic past in mandatory Palestine is fraudulent if it does not acknowledge the enmity and hostility that actually characterized political relations between the two communities during the entire mandatory period, personal friendships notwithstanding. The fact that personal friendships, and more, certainly existed does not characterize the essential relationship between the communities, which plainly was one of competition and steadily mounting conflict. This was precisely the context that produced the war in 1947-48, partition, the refugee crisis, and the entire conflict as we know it. Whatever it might say about the resilience of individual human decency under difficult circumstances, it cannot possibly serve as a useful model politically, and even socially, for a better future. In political terms, the past of peaceful coexistence and harmony between Jews and Arabs in mandatory Palestine before the creation of Israel is a myth and a very misleading falsehood.

All known experience suggests that bi-national "coexistence" between Israel and the Palestinians has inevitably defaulted to either violence or systematic efforts aimed at the suppression of one national project by the other. There is no reasonable reason to think that another model of bi-nationalism or coexistence, even if it could be created, is more likely to transcend than to reenact this social and national confrontation. On the contrary, there is every reason to suspect that civil war would again become virtually inevitable. As long as both Israelis and Palestinians continue to cherish nationalist sentiments, an agreement based on two nation-states is the only practicable way to square the circle, rather than attempting in vain to make these contradictory projects and narratives coexist as if the other is not there or does not matter.

9) The South Africa-like situation in the occupied Palestinian territories calls for a South Africa-like solution in all of Israel/Palestine

There is no question that many aspects of the political and social order enforced by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories are disturbingly reminiscent of apartheid in South Africa. In its broadest sense, the relationship between Israeli settlers and Palestinians living under occupation is that of separate and extremely unequal. This order is enforced at the point of an Israeli bayonet. The analogy, while not precise, is deeply compelling and has been explored at length by many commentators, including this author. There is no need to revisit the argument in detail in this study, since it is stipulated and beyond any meaningful dispute. It would be fundamentally dishonest for anyone not to acknowledge these conspicuous parallels and echoes.

Indeed, it is also striking that some of Israel's efforts to deal with the irresolvable problem of wishing to keep control over a territory without accepting political responsibility for its population mirrors that of apartheid-era South Africa. It is clear that if Israel could convince Palestinians to accept a bantustan-like entity with nominal sovereignty and the trappings but not the substance of independence, the conflict would have been resolved a long time ago. However, while Palestinians were willing to agree to the creation of the Palestinian Authority and the division of the occupied territories into Areas A, B and C as part of a phased agreement that was supposed to result in an end to the occupation, no Palestinians have been willing to accept partial or limited statehood as a basis for an end-of-conflict agreement.

While there is no doubt that in both its conduct of, and its efforts to consolidate, the occupation Israel has acted in a manner reminiscent of apartheid-era South Africa, it does not therefore follow that a South Africa-like solution is plausible between Israel and the Palestinians. Historical analogies are useful only in explicating aspects of any given political reality, which is by definition unique. Such analogies can become mystifying and extremely dangerous when they are taken to be absolute parallels. The idea that because some elements of one conflict are reminiscent of political elements of another conflict, then the solution to both conflicts must therefore be the same, is facile and lazy, not to say illusory. However striking may be the similarity between the Israeli occupation and apartheid, the overall differences between the political problem facing Israel and the Palestinians and that facing black and white South Africans are far more significant when it comes to crafting a solution.

Fully listing, let alone interrogating, these myriad differences would require a separate study entirely devoted to that topic. However, a brief review of some of the most obvious distinctions would have to begin with the question of demographics. Obviously, Jewish Israelis, who constitute a solid majority inside Israel proper and a plurality of approximately or slightly less than 50 percent in the areas controlled by Israel (Israel and the occupied territories), are in a far different position than the 4.5 million white South Africans, who were approximately 13 percent of the total population at the time of the abolition of apartheid in 1994 and were outnumbered by at least 35 million black and other South Africans. An extremely simplistic but not inaccurate understanding of the historical compromise that ended apartheid suggests that the ruling white minority was willing to cede political power to the black majority on condition that its property was inviolable and its economic and social privileges that were not dependent on continued systematic racial discrimination by law would not be directly challenged or attacked by the new constitutional order. This was codified most obviously in the commitment

to uphold all civil service contracts established under the apartheid system that greatly favored white South Africans. In other words, there was a quid pro quo involving the transfer of political power to the hands of an overwhelming but theretofore disenfranchised majority, in return for the guaranteed protection of existing assets and many privileges that the elite minority had accumulated during the periods of colonialism and systematic discrimination.

No such quid pro quo presents itself in the case of Israel and the Palestinians. The demographic pressure of a privileged but very small minority facing a vast and disenfranchised majority is not present. The demographic “threat” in this case, to use the frankly racist terminology that has been a feature of Israeli discourse on this issue, is a factor, but of a completely different degree and character. Palestinian demographic pressure on Israel challenges the “Jewish character” of the Israeli state, whatever that may mean. And, because the Palestinians of the occupied territories are disenfranchised and are not citizens of any state, it further challenges Israel’s status as a democratic society. The fundamental contradiction is rooted in the occupation rather than the domestic political structure of Israel as such, although systematic discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel does occur, especially in the areas of housing and social services. On the one hand, Palestinian demographic pressure on Israel is not comparable to that felt by white South Africans during the apartheid era because, while these numbers threaten the ideology and self image of Israel, they do not challenge the core political power or continued existence of the state. Moreover, the very impulses that lead Israelis to regard the Palestinian plurality between the river and the sea with alarm also feed the most fundamental and implacable resistance to the idea of a single state. On the other hand, by ending the occupation, Israel would return to dealing with a “manageable” ethnic minority of Palestinian citizens whose struggle against discrimination challenges Israel’s claim to be an equitable society but does not seriously undermine Israel’s self image as a “Jewish” or even a democratic state. Demographic pressure in South Africa pushed strongly in the direction of an end to apartheid, while in the case of Israel it militates strongly in favor of ending the occupation and against the idea of joining with all of the Palestinians in a single, democratic state.

In addition, white South Africans were not being asked to dismantle their state or repudiate their narrative. They were being asked to democratize their country and to accept the quid pro quo cited above. Their only rational choice was to risk relinquishing political dominance in order to achieve internal social stability, maintain certain valuable assets and privileges, normalize their country and society in the eyes of the region and the world, and develop a South Africa of which they could be proud rather than ashamed. If there is a version of the one-state agenda in Israel/Palestine that approximates this equation, we certainly have yet to see it. The intention, if not the likely consequence, of those who advocate a single state is plainly the replacement of the State of Israel with something else, as yet woefully undefined. It is not a matter of creating a new and improved Israel. It is, as far as anyone can tell from the one-state advocacy elaborated until now, a matter of creating something entirely different in the place of Israel. When relying, as they usually do, on a South Africa analogy, proponents of the one-state agenda rarely acknowledge that not only are the two circumstances more dissimilar than analogous, but that crucially Jewish Israelis are being asked to do something (dismantle their state) that white South Africans were not being asked to do. It is vital in this context to recognize the clear distinction between a program of radical reform and restructuring of the internal social and political order within a given state as in South Africa, and the practical elimination of an existing state altogether as the one-state agenda proposes.

Another crucial distinction between the Israeli and South African circumstances involves the

attitude of the international community, particularly the West. While there was obviously some level of racial and cultural identification with the white population of South Africa in Western societies, and a belief, especially on the political right, that South Africa was a useful ally in the Cold War, the apartheid regime was increasingly seen as an embarrassment to the West and a liability. In the final analysis, there was no fundamental international or Western commitment to the existence and maintenance of a white minority government in Africa. Indeed, there was substantial and growing opposition, including in the United States where apartheid raised unpleasant memories of Jim Crow segregation. The same kind of moral objections have emerged regarding the occupation and the system of pervasive ethnic discrimination Israel enforces in the occupied territories. However, this opposition to the occupation does not equate with opposition to Israel as such. For very complex political, historical, cultural and religious reasons, Western societies in general, and the United States in particular, are committed to the continued existence of the State of Israel. There was never any such commitment to the continuation of the apartheid regime, which was opposed in theory even by Western governments like the Reagan Administration in the United States and the Thatcher cabinets in the United Kingdom that supported it in practice. Israel is a member state of the United Nations, and has diplomatic relations with the overwhelming majority of other states, including several Arab and Muslim countries. In other words, Israel can rely on a bedrock of international support, not for the continuation of the occupation, but for the continued existence of Israel as it is internationally recognized. Effective international pressure to end the occupation is plausible and achievable, but a serious campaign with major support in the West to dismantle Israel and replace it with something else is highly unlikely.

The analogy between the Israeli occupation and apartheid is compelling, but the idea that a South Africa-style solution of common political identity and democracy is available to Israel and the Palestinians does not follow. Indeed, when the differences between the two circumstances, which are greater than the similarities, are factored into the equation, the plausibility of such a grand rapprochement seems highly remote. Neither the internal nor the international conditions that would lay the groundwork for such a transformation seem to be in place. Moreover, the rhetoric and attitudes of many of the most prominent one-state advocates rather than showing the way forward to an enlightened future actually demonstrate just how difficult it will be for Palestinians and Israelis to achieve this kind of total reconciliation.

Problems with the one-state agenda

Part III: Problems with the one-state agenda

Section three of this study examines some serious problems with the practicability and desirability of the one-state agenda, and explores the contradiction between the stated aims and the rhetoric and attitudes of many of its Palestinian and Arab proponents.

1) The creation of a single Palestinian-Israeli state is not possible given existing international and regional power equations

The one state-agenda essentially argues that, since Israel will not agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the occupied territories, it must and will therefore agree to the establishment of a post-Israeli state (with a Palestinian majority) in not only the occupied territories, but Israel as well. To say that this discounts the mechanics of power would be an understatement. It seems clear to most serious observers that if Israel is having difficulty agreeing to end the occupation, it is hardly likely to agree to dismantle itself, and acquiesce in its own replacement by a radically different state. One noted one-state advocate a few years ago passionately urged to this author to adopt a one-state argument in a debate with one of the most prominent American supporters of Israel on the grounds that Israelis and their supporters have no convincing answers to demands for democracy and equality. Even if that were true, what this accomplished and intelligent professor failed to recognize is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not an academic debate, it is a political struggle based on existential anxieties and national requirements. Israel is not going to agree to dismantle itself because it has lost a moral argument or an academic debate. Policy, diplomacy and the monumental national decisions at stake for both societies are not an abstract intellectual exercise. Those who are seeking an end to the occupation cannot allow themselves to be beguiled by the narcissistic thrill of “winning” an intellectual debate while contributing nothing, or even causing harm, to the causes of Palestine and peace.

Almost all elaborations of the one-state agenda frame themselves as introductory musings designed to begin a conversation. From advocates urging an entire people to abandon their national goals and strategy, this is nowhere close to sufficient. And, of course, all of the arguments that supporters of the one-state agenda put forward to illuminate the undoubted difficulties facing an agreement to end the conflict and end the occupation apply, but with an exponentially increased degree of difficulty, to the idea of persuading Israel to dismantle itself. There is no way to seriously explain, in real-world and not alternate reality terms, how this would happen, what forces would bring it about, what could possibly compel Israel and the Jewish Israelis to agree to it, what the new state would look like and how it would work, or anything else specific and concrete. It is telling that proponents of the single state have never begun to explicate a strategy for achieving this result, beyond the slogan “boycott, divestment and sanctions.” Several observers have noted that although there has in effect been an international boycott against the Palestinians that has gone on for many decades, this has failed to break the will of the Palestinian national movement. Such pressure is hardly more likely to achieve the capitulation of Israel. The idea that a single democratic state can be achieved through boycotts and action centered around solidarity movements and grassroots organizations and activism seems to be yet another misunderstanding of the politics of the end of apartheid in South Africa and misapplication of the South African model to Israel/Palestine. The lack of any more serious strategic ideas about how to develop a single Israeli-Palestinian state is probably no accident, since the application of this idea to the real political world, including the factor of power, results in an instantaneous collapse of any notion that it can be achieved in the foreseeable future. It is therefore generous even to call one-state advocacy, at this stage at any rate, an “agenda.” It might be more accurately termed a slogan, or perhaps an idea about having an idea. It certainly is not a program or a strategy in any meaningful sense, not least because it has no answer whatsoever about how Israel and Jewish Israelis can possibly be persuaded to willingly and voluntarily agree to any such thing,

or how it could be accomplished without their agreement.

2) One-state rhetoric lets Israel off the hook on occupation and settlements

Perhaps the most significant and immediate negative consequence of the one-state agenda for the Palestinian national movement is its effect of defanging the two most significant diplomatic and political problems facing Israel's relationship with the international community: the occupation in general and the settlements in particular. The international consensus that the occupation must end is crystal clear, and Israel faces mounting international pressure to cooperate in bringing it to an end. Official Israeli explanations for why the occupation continues tend to focus on two rationalizations: first, the problem of violence and the issue of security and second, the idea that Israel has done all it could to promote a reasonable agreement. On the question of security, partly as a consequence of violence including suicide bombings and rocket attacks, many Israelis and friends of Israel around the world have been able to deceive themselves that the occupation is essentially a defensive posture. The idea is that Israel would like to end the occupation, but cannot because it would leave Israeli civilians vulnerable to murderous attacks by Palestinian extremists, and the Palestinian authorities would be either unable or unwilling to control violent radicals. This position, while appealing to hard-core supporters of the occupation as a rationalization, is increasingly met with international skepticism given the growing understanding that the occupation itself is the primary fuel for Palestinian extremism and violence. In other words, there is an increasing understanding around the world that this argument is an essential ingredient in a vicious circle in which Palestinian violence is justified by the occupation and the occupation in turn is justified by Palestinian violence. Neither explanation is particularly convincing given the interdependence of violent resistance and violent occupation in perpetuating and justifying each other.

The question of settlements brings this problem into even sharper focus. Outside of Israel, there is no official support for Israeli settlement activity, and the international community has been very clear regarding the illegality of this behavior. An increasing understanding of the negative dynamic reinforcement between violence and settlements is reflected in the Roadmap of the Quartet, which requires reciprocal Phase One responsibilities in which Palestinians would eliminate or curb violence in exchange for an Israeli settlement freeze. More to the point, Israel's protestations that it is committed to a reasonable agreement in which the occupation is ended and a Palestinian state emerges to live alongside Israel in peace and security are severely undermined by settlement activity of any kind. No Israeli official or apologist has been able to produce a remotely convincing argument about how a commitment to a reasonable peace can be reconciled with settlement activity which can only serve to make achieving an agreement more difficult. Under successive administrations, the United States, Israel's most ardent international patron, has repeatedly expressed opposition to settlement activity, and pointed out the incompatibility of the settlements with a commitment to peace. The settlements also make it very difficult for Israel to argue, even to friendly audiences, that it has done all it can to secure a peace agreement only to be met with intransigence and violence on the other side.

The one-state agenda effectively lets Israel off the hook on all of this. If the goal is reconciliation in a single state, settlement activity cannot be seen as fundamentally incompatible with the desired end result. It may be seen as immoral, even predatory, in terms of individual property rights, but since all Palestinians and Israelis are going to be equal citizens of a single state, the issue of where people live in effect becomes a matter of

domestic policy and litigation. Abusive and discriminatory practices conducted by the occupation also recede in importance in a one-state framework, to be bundled in with discrimination faced by Palestinian citizens of Israel and that faced by various Jewish minority groups in Israel as well. All of these inevitably become matters to be resolved through the political and legal processes of a single state, rather than abuses committed by an occupying power that is bound by the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention and other international instruments.

By in effect liberating Israel from its legal status as an occupying power, since the entire territory is recast as a unitary whole in which no part could be considered “foreign” and hence meaningfully under occupation, one-state rhetoric abandons a great deal of the legal restrictions that define Israel’s transgressions in the occupied territories. The entire matter can then be cast as one of civil rights within a given country. For example, if Israel can claim not to be bound by the Geneva Convention or by other aspects of international law predicated on its status as an occupying power, and all of mandatory Palestine is to be legally considered even by Palestinians as the territory of a single state in which discrimination is now the norm, then Israel could argue that it is not in violation of international law by creating and expanding its settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. It might under such circumstances be guilty of unlawfully expropriating private property, for which reasonable compensation would then be due. It could then point out that this is not anything that numerous governments operating within the territory of a single country do not routinely also do, with the exception of the scale of the population resettlement and, perhaps, the ethnic bias at work. Certainly, such an understanding, if it became widespread, would transform the settlements from a unique element in the global landscape today to a more mundane one.

Not only would Israel’s international obligations potentially be dispensed with, so too would much of the role of the international community in passing judgment on what happens in an area that is no longer considered the site of a foreign military occupation, but rather a site of discrimination against disenfranchised residents of a state that is unfair and abusive to many of its people. The present status of the occupied territories is virtually unique in today’s world, most other unlawful foreign occupations having been resolved. Claiming that there in fact is a foreign military occupation in place in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but that the proper corrective is not withdrawal from occupied territories but rather political unification between the occupier and the occupied would be a novel, and frankly incoherent, political position. Were Palestinians to move away from the idea that occupation defines the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and that what is taking place there should instead be viewed as discrimination within a single country, the scope, scale and intensity of Israeli discrimination might be considered unusual, but the reality of discrimination – even systematic legal discrimination – is neither unique nor unprecedented. This might then be seen as the worst, but it would certainly not be the only, system of institutionalized ethnic legal discrimination currently taking place within the territory of a given country. The rights and interests of the international community in cases of domestic discrimination are not equivalent to those attached to territories considered by the UN Security Council to be under foreign military occupation. In the case of South Africa, international intervention to help correct a system of gross discrimination was an important, but not decisive factor. However, South Africa remains a unique case, and Palestinians would be surrendering a clear and well-established international consensus against occupation and settlements in exchange for very optimistic hopes that the international community will react the same way to Israeli discrimination as it did to apartheid-

era South Africa, if only Palestinians request that. And, even if there is to be an analogous international response, there is no guarantee that it would be sufficient to compel Jewish Israelis to effectively dismantle their state and agree to live as a plurality and, very soon, a minority, in a different state.

3) The single-state agenda has no significant political base among either Palestinians or Israelis

A key element in the lack of any serious strategy for promoting a one-state agenda is that no significant political formation, party or organization among either the Palestinians or Israelis has adopted it as a goal. Polling data consistently and clearly shows a marked preference for two states on the part of both Palestinian and Israeli majorities. Palestinians respond more favorably to polling questions about a single state, both because this would be a vast improvement over the occupation and because Palestinians may hope to exercise political power through majority voting in a democratic single state in Israel/Palestine. Several commentators who support the one-state agenda have argued that it would not be difficult to get Palestinians to support such an agenda. This may well be true, but at present there is a clear preference for independence and ending the occupation. More significantly, until a major national Palestinian political party or mass movement dedicates itself to the advancement and realization of this agenda and begins to explicate its aims with specific political proposals, it will remain an abstraction fit for academic musings and vague polling questions, but not a really existing political program. Even if a single-state agenda were adopted by one or more significant Palestinian political formations, the absence of any interest on the Israeli side would be a deal-breaker. For this idea to begin to advance itself in the real world of political life, significant constituencies on both sides in favor of such a reconciliation would have to emerge. Someone would have to explain at length and in detail, and in a convincing and effective manner, how exactly such a radical political transformation would benefit Jewish Israelis. Moral arguments are not going to begin to be sufficient for this. Not only have we yet to see such a case being made by significant Palestinian political movements, in fact the rhetoric of many of the most ardent Palestinian supporters of a single-state agenda has been downright counterproductive to their own cause in this respect.

The Israeli political scene is split between those who wish to continue the occupation, those who wish to modify it and those who wish to find an agreement to end it and the conflict. Those who wish to transform Israel into a post-Zionist state in democratic pluralism with the Palestinians are not to be found in actual Israeli political dynamics, although they may exist in tiny numbers on the margins of academia and society. Palestinians too are engaged in a serious national debate, between the nationalist movement represented by the PLO on the one hand, and the Islamists led by Hamas on the other. The PLO and most other secular parties seek to establish an independent Palestinian state in the occupied territories. Hamas and other Islamist groups, in addition to seeking to “Islamize” Palestinian society along ultra-conservative Muslim Brotherhood lines, profess to want to establish an “Islamic state” from the river to the sea, although there is talk of a provisional state in the occupied territories based on a long-term “truce” with Israel, but not a peace agreement. The debates in both societies are between those with maximalist ambitions who seek the rule of one ethnic and/or religious group in the entire territory and those who wish to construct a compromise involving two states. In neither Palestinian nor Israeli society is the idea of a single state in all of Israel and the occupied territories a serious part of the national conversation about the future.

It is true that some politically significant Palestinians have invoked the one-state agenda as

a “threat” to pressure Israelis to come to terms on ending the occupation, as reviewed in section IV of this study. But that “threat” does not constitute a serious consideration of this agenda as part of the Palestinian national debate. The day when the one-state agenda becomes a major part of both the Israeli and the Palestinian national dialogues, and is adopted by significant political parties and factions among both, is the day when the idea has to be seriously reconsidered as a plausible option. The wishful thinking of one-state proponents aside, there is no serious indication that this is about to happen on either, let alone both, sides of this divide.

4) The single-state agenda has no basis in international law, which strongly favors two states

International law, especially as derived from UN Security Council resolutions, is unequivocal on the correct solution from a legal point of view to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: two states and an end to the occupation. This position was first articulated by UN Security Council Resolution 242, which lays out the principle of land for peace. Its preamble emphasizes the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war, and its body calls for the withdrawal of Israel from territories occupied in the 1967 conflict (land), and for all states, including Israel, to live in peace within secure and recognized borders (peace). This essential position has been reiterated in countless Security Council resolutions, which constitute an enormous corpus of international law leaving no doubt that the occupation must end but that Israel must be allowed to live in peace and security.

When Israel declared the de facto “annexation” of East Jerusalem in 1980 by extending its civil law into that part of the occupied territories, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted UNSCR 476, which reaffirmed “the overriding necessity to end the prolonged occupation of Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967, including Jerusalem.”²⁵ This resolution established with clarity that Jerusalem is included in the occupied territories from which Israel is required to withdraw, in case anyone had any doubts about that. In 2002, the Security Council added further specificity by adopting UNSCR 1397, which explicitly endorses “a vision of a region where two states, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders.”²⁶

The gigantic body of international law that establishes the illegality of the occupation, the requirement for Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories including Jerusalem, and the necessity of establishing a Palestinian state to live alongside Israel was a hard-won victory for the Palestinian national movement. In some ways, its slow and painstaking development constitutes the single greatest success of a movement that has enjoyed a very few unequivocal successes. One of the most dangerous elements of the one-state agenda as it is currently being propounded is that it practically casts aside this diplomatic and legal achievement in exchange for a rather vapid, feel-good set of platitudes and aspirations. It might be objected that this body of international law has not rescued the Palestinians from continuing to suffer under occupation. But, whatever the limitations of an admittedly difficult to enforce international legality, are contradictory empty slogans going to be more useful or effective? The fact that Israel has struggled with, and frequently attempted to deny, its legal status as a foreign military occupier, if nothing else, demonstrates the political and diplomatic value of this veritable mountain of international law.

5) One-state rhetoric harms the Palestinian national interest

The one-state agenda largely emerges from and plays exceptionally well in academia where abstract arguments – removed from power equations, feasibility and other concerns that characterize goal-oriented constituencies – are most appealing. The one-state agenda is particularly beguiling because it offers Palestinian activists and their allies on campuses the best of both worlds: an opportunity to adopt what appears to be an absolutely moral stance, urging legal and political equality without regard to religion or ethnicity, coupled with a vehicle for maximalist Palestinian nationalism, attempting to regain through the ballot box what has been lost on the battlefield and reverse the consequences of the 1948 war. For those who do not wish to compromise with Israel or Zionism in any meaningful sense, the one-state agenda provides an attractive platform for stridency that can be readily defended as simply a call for equality. One of the more vocal one-state advocates, Assad AbuKhalil, has made the slogan “no peace with Zionism” (sometimes adding, for emphasis, the word “ever”) a regular feature of his blog, and that certainly seems to sum up much of the attitude towards Israeli nationalism to be found in one-state rhetoric.

These attitudes make a great deal of one-state advocacy extremely counterproductive for Palestinian interests because they reinforce Israeli fears that Palestinian ambitions go far beyond liberation of the occupied territories and that they are, in fact, really intent on the elimination of Israel. They play into the hands of those on the Israeli right who argue that the occupation is not the issue driving the Palestinian national movement, and that Palestinians cannot and will not reconcile themselves to living in peace alongside Israel. These arguments, however disingenuous on the part of the right-wing Zionists who make them, and the real fears that many ordinary Israelis and their supporters may have regarding Palestinian intentions, are among the greatest psychological and political barriers to the realization of an agreement to end the occupation and the conflict. As long as Israelis are able to convince themselves that the occupation is self-defensive, and that ending the occupation opens the door to existential threats to the Israeli state, opposition to a viable peace agreement must remain a highly potent force on the Israeli political scene. In this sense, a great deal of one-state rhetoric does significant harm to Palestinian national interests.

Given the fact that the one-state agenda has not been adopted by any political party or movement among Israelis or Palestinians, its advocates also are liberated from the necessity of taking responsibility for any actions by really existing political actors. Operating strictly at the level of intellectual abstraction, one-state advocates move within a theoretical political space and are unencumbered by the behavior of any political party or grouping. They can, and often do, oppose all actions and positions taken by really existing political formations both in Israel and among the Palestinians. No doubt this makes such rhetoric all the more appealing in some parts of the academic world and for some activists, but it only emphasizes the extent to which the one-state agenda remains removed from the realities of Israeli and Palestinian political discourse and the relationship between the two societies. For these reasons and more, one-state rhetoric is comforting, ostensibly moral and ethical (although in many cases there is an obvious latent content that is far less lofty), and sheltered from the distasteful realities of actual political conduct.

6) The one-state agenda typically offers nothing to Jewish Israelis

Since it is characterized by deep-seated attitudes that do not fit with its professed aims, most one-state advocacy suffers from a profound and debilitating contradiction between its ostensible goals and its actual rhetoric. Given their stated aim of creating an equitable, mutual

and pluralistic democratic state that would incorporate both Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Arabs in a single state that does not favor either community, one would expect one-state advocates to spend most of their time constructing a vision of a viable, coherent and post-ethnic political identity. Almost none of them have spent any time whatsoever on this issue, reaching out to mainstream Jewish Israelis, or explicating and promoting exactly how Israelis would benefit from such a total transformation of their political order and society. Instead, almost all the activities of many leading one-state proponents seem to be devoted to criticizing Israeli policies, critiquing Israeli society, lambasting Palestinians and other Arabs who continue to work for a two-state solution and an end to occupation, and insisting that nothing useful can ever come out of negotiation, diplomacy and engagement with the international community at the state level. Even the most generous and accommodating Arab and Palestinian one-state advocates seem to be falling into the same error regarding Jewish Israelis that the Zionist movement made in its early phases in Palestine in the 1920s and 30s with regard to the Palestinians: primarily viewing the other side as essentially a collection of individuals, with individual rights, rather than a national community with national interests and rights. A number of leading one-state advocates have taken to referring to Israel only as “the usurping entity” or even “the temporary racist usurping entity.”

The attitudes of most one-state advocates regarding dialogue are exceptionally problematic. These advocates are generally opposed, usually stridently and passionately, to negotiations with Israel and many of them support blanket boycotts against dealing with Israeli officials and even Israeli academics. Yet, they have not explained at all how, if they are absolutely opposed to negotiations, they intend to realize their project. If this is going to be a campaign based entirely on coercion, they certainly have yet to outline what the necessary force could be that would compel Israel to capitulate or how that could be mobilized. There would appear to be a striking dissonance between an idea that could only conceivably be realized through dialogue and mutual understanding and an attitude that generally eschews not only negotiations but also most forms of contact and certainly anything that smacks of the “normalization” of Israel and mainstream Jewish Israelis. There is an additional wrinkle, in that an exception is made for that small group of Israelis who already agree with a one-state agenda. So the attitude is not so much that we will not talk to Israelis, but rather that we will only talk with Israelis who already agree with us. This attitude mirrors that of the Israeli ultra-right, and seems an impossible contradiction: as a practical matter it prevents any serious program of outreach to mainstream Jewish Israelis and rejects the concept of negotiations with its national institutions and leadership as unacceptable “normalization,” but does not propose any serious alternative for advancing its program.

A representative example of the striking dissonance between the professed aims and the actual rhetoric of most one-state advocacy can be found in the “One-State Declaration” adopted in London and Madrid at the end of 2007.²⁷ Written mainly by Palestinian academics living in the United States and Britain, along with a very small number of sympathetic Israelis, the document reflects the most far-reaching Palestinian nationalist concerns, but includes nothing whatever that could be seriously intended to appeal to Jewish Israeli interests, national identity, or narratives. The document begins by declaring that a two-state agreement is neither feasible nor desirable. It focuses mainly on accusations that a two-state arrangement would not resolve discrimination faced by Palestinian citizens of Israel, realize the right of return for refugees, or correct other “fundamental injustices,” and would necessarily be premised on a false equivalency between Israeli and Palestinian “moral claims.” The principles enunciated begin by describing the territory as “the historic land of

Palestine,” which is perfectly accurate, but again demonstrates a puzzling lack of interest in accommodating Jewish Israeli interests and perspectives. In several passages, it asserts that this territory “belongs” equally to everyone living in it and to all Palestinian refugees as well, regardless of everything including “current citizenship status.” It demands, “just redress for the devastating effects of decades of Zionist colonization,” and the unrestricted and unconditional implementation of the right of return for all Palestinians. It also calls for “a central role” in “decision-making” for “the Palestinian Diaspora and its refugees, and Palestinians inside Israel,” as well as emphasizing the themes of “justice and liberation.”²⁸ It does not even attempt to provide an argument as to what Jewish Israelis could hope to gain from such a single-state, let alone elaborate any safeguards beyond equality and nondiscrimination to protect the interests of that society. It is steeped in the Palestinian national narrative, and explicitly and strongly repudiates the Israeli national narrative. Even though one or two Jewish Israelis were involved in drafting the document and several more endorsed it, it is impossible not to read the “One-State Declaration” as reflecting a very hard line version of Palestinian nationalist perceptions and ambitions. For a group of people whose ultimate aim must be to convince a majority of Jewish Israelis to voluntarily enter into an arrangement based on these principles, their document is strikingly devoid of anything that might serve that purpose in any way. On the contrary, it could hardly be better designed, unless it openly proposed the expulsion or disenfranchisement of Jewish Israelis, to appeal less to that constituency.

Not only do many of the most prominent Palestinian one-state proponents make their antipathy towards the Israeli state and Jewish Israeli society crystal-clear, they seem to take particular delight in denouncing other Palestinians, especially those associated with the PLO and other secular nationalists, with the most inflammatory and dangerous pejoratives available. The frequency and ease with some of the leading, although by no means all, one-state advocates toss terms like “traitor,” “quisling,” and “collaborator” at other Palestinians and Arabs with whom they do not agree further undermines any prospect that such rhetoric could be the vanguard of a successful outreach effort that produces, or even lays the building blocks of, an innovative new ideology that would eventually result in a new national community joining Jewish Israelis and Palestinians as mutually respectful equals. This problematic element of much one-state rhetoric is compounded by the fact that many, if not all, of its most enthusiastic advocates were themselves until very recently proponents of ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state.

That they have changed their minds and adopted a new approach is not objectionable, but their evident anger against those fellow Palestinians and Arabs who continue to work towards independence and an end to the occupation is difficult to explain or justify. This may not be exactly an instance of the narcissism of minor differences, but it certainly does not reflect an attitude of tolerance and pluralism even towards compatriots and former allies. If Palestinians who persist in seeking an agreement with Israel to end the occupation are to be subjected to this kind of vitriol for simply continuing an agenda which most, if not all, of the accusers used to endorse and which is supported by a huge majority of Palestinians, what can Jewish Israelis expect from the same parties?

7) It's the occupation, stupid

Many of the leading one-state advocates downplay the centrality of the occupation and oppose placing it at the center of Palestinian and pro-Palestinian efforts around the world. Other issues, such as the right of return and the condition of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, are said to be as, if not more, important than ending the occupation. Abunimah, for example,

has argued that in Palestinian and pro-Palestinian discourse, “the exclusive focus on the occupation serves increasingly to obscure that the conflict in Palestine is at its core a colonial struggle whose boundaries do not conveniently coincide with the lines of June 4, 1967.”²⁹

Yet it is clearly the occupation that drives the conflict. It is and has been the proximate cause of an inability to find a long-term, viable peace agreement and modus vivendi between Israel and the Palestinians. The occupation has consigned millions of Palestinians to living as noncitizens in their own country and their own homes, stateless persons in a world of states. As noted above, there is no need in this study to reiterate the outrageous physical and legal-political conditions that Palestinians, both individually and as a community, endure under the occupation. But, there is clearly a need to reaffirm the centrality of the goal of ending the occupation to the Palestinian national movement and pro-Palestinian activism. Ending the occupation is an overriding imperative to advance Palestinian national and individual interests, and it is an achievable objective. All efforts on behalf of Palestine and peace should focus with a laser-like intensity on ending the occupation.

That the occupation must come to an end, and that peace between Israel and the Palestinians must be based on two states, is firmly established in international law and a rock-solid consensus of global opinion. The occupation is not the only issue between Israel and the Palestinians, but it is the only issue that, if unresolved, ensures the conflict will continue indefinitely and, if resolved, would bring it to an end at long last.

8) The real alternative is not between one state and two states, but between war and peace

The real alternative, therefore, is not a choice between one state and two states for Israelis and Palestinians, but between an agreement to end the occupation or a continuation of the conflict, suffering and bloodshed into the indefinite future. Proponents of the single-state agenda ought to be honest with themselves: they are choosing to promote an idea that, at best, could only be realized sometime in the very distant future and are therefore consigning the Palestinians living under occupation to continue suffering under those conditions, and everyone else to continued conflict.

There is an extraordinary propensity on the part of at least some of the most prominent advocates of the one-state agenda to imagine that the State of Israel is on the brink of some sort of imminent collapse. There is absolutely no evidence to support this idea. Many years ago, a leading one-state advocate confidently predicted to this author that Ariel Sharon would be the last Jewish prime minister of Israel. At the time it seemed like extremely self-indulgent wishful thinking, and in retrospect looks positively delusional. The idea that the Israeli state is exceptionally fragile and likely to implode under the weight of its own contradictions in the near or foreseeable future can be detected as an underlying assumption and consistent implication in much one-state rhetoric. In reality, the only serious threat to the future of Israel is the occupation and the conflict it drives. Israeli state institutions are, to all appearances, robust, especially by Middle Eastern standards, its economy is relatively sound and it enjoys a reasonable degree of political stability within Jewish Israeli society. That the occupation poses a profound threat to the future of Israel is beyond question. However, the idea that under present circumstances Israel cannot sustain itself as an internal matter, the occupation notwithstanding, would appear to be an extravagant fantasy.

Given that it is not in the rational self-interest of either Israelis or Palestinians to continue

the conflict, and that they will suffer more as a consequence of indefinite warfare than from the concessions required by an agreement, the likelihood is that this will eventually occur. As Avi Shlaim puts it, an Israeli-Palestinian agreement to end the occupation and the conflict is more likely than not, because “nations like individuals are capable of acting rationally after they’ve exhausted all the other alternatives.”³⁰ However, it is possible for societies to act in a manner contrary to their manifest self-interests. This could tragically prove to be such a case, but it is incumbent on all parties to do everything in their power to ensure that it does not.

9) The conflict is inherently unmanageable and is moving towards a dangerous new phase of religious warfare

One of the most damaging illusions about the conflict is that, because it cannot be readily resolved under the present political conditions, it is better managed and contained pending some anticipated positive future developments. One-state rhetoric plays into this thinking by dismissing the prospects of a diplomatic solution and pinning its hopes instead on the supposedly “inevitable” political effects of the intersection of Palestinian demographics and Israeli settlements over the long run. It is yet another version of conflict management that embraces the idea that since no answer can be easily found at the present moment, one should seek to shape the distant future based on long-term trends. But all parties, and not just one-state advocates, need to recognize that this conflict has demonstrated that it cannot be either managed or contained, and that long-run solutions are formulas for disaster. There is no conflict management between Israel and the Palestinians, only conflict metastasis. Because the Israeli settlement program has not stopped, this means that the difficulty of resolving the conflict has only intensified over time. Moreover, the longer Palestinians live under the violence and oppression of occupation, the more their bitterness intensifies and the more likely they are to turn to armed resistance of various kinds rather than negotiations. Israelis, for their part, often interpret this resistance as an existential threat and also become increasingly bitter due to the bloodshed caused by armed Palestinian groups. Therefore the conflict is not manageable since the logistical and political problems are not static but intensify during any misguided period of “conflict management.”

There have been numerous instances in which periods of such “management” or “benign neglect” have in fact had entirely malignant consequences, precisely because this conflict does not lend itself to pauses in which the status quo is simply maintained while political developments sort themselves out. The status quo is ever shifting, and thus far always for the worse.

Even more dangerously, the conflict has proven to be unstable in its very nature over the past hundred years, with the character of its participants and the terms of reference shifting over time. There have been at least four distinct phases to the conflict since the First Zionist Congress at the end of the 19th century. The first phase, which might be called a “prelude,” was essentially a negotiation between the Zionist movement and various European imperial powers over which would become the partner and patron of the Zionists. Arabs and Palestinians were hardly involved at this stage, and Jewish colonization in Palestine was extremely limited. A second phase, beginning after the First World War and the establishment of the mandate, might be thought of as a kind of “imperial triangle,” pitting the British, the Palestinians and the Jewish settlers against each other at various stages. There was always more cooperation between the British and the Zionists, but these forces turned on each other very bitterly towards the end of the mandatory period. A third phase, an extended regional confrontation which constituted the broader “Arab-Israeli conflict” as such, began with the

largely ineffective intervention in May 1948 of Arab armies into the civil war that had been raging in Palestine since late 1947. Israel was thereafter pitted against neighboring Arab states, with the Palestinians playing virtually no role at all for most of the period, until the late 1960s. This phase ended with the Egypt-Israel peace treaty in the late 1970s, which effectively removed the possibility of major armed conflict between Israel and the Arab states. Since then, the conflict has entered a fourth phase, which one might call an “ethno-national” period, or the “Israeli-Palestinian conflict” as such, pitting the Israelis and Palestinians in direct competition for political power and sovereignty in a limited but clearly defined territory.

One can readily see the potential for fifth and even more dangerous phase of the conflict to emerge in the foreseeable future, what could be a “religio-apocalyptic” phase, essentially pitting Jews against Muslims for control of holy land and places. The intensification of religious sentiment and symbolism among the Jewish settlers and in Israeli politics, the rise of Islamism and the use of Islamic symbols (“the Al-Aqsa Intifada,” etc.) among Palestinians, the adoption of the issue as an “Islamic cause” by Iran, Hezbollah and other radical states and organizations, and the adoption by much of the extreme religious right in the United States of the cause of greater Israel and the settler movement as its principal political focus, all point squarely in this direction. Efforts by Israeli army rabbis and other right wing religious forces in Israel to cast the war in Gaza as a “religious war” to “expel the gentiles who are interfering with the conquest of holy land” is yet another indication that this religious fanaticism is spreading on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian divide.³¹ Obviously, were the conflict to morph from one primarily conceptualized as an ethno-nationalist competition over land and power to one seen primarily as a religious struggle based on “the will of God,” it would become all the more difficult to contain and probably impossible to peacefully resolve. No one can be sanguine about “conflict management” or long-term trends when the conflict itself has evolved through so many distinct phases in a relatively short period of time, and when the building blocks for a new, and far more dangerous, phase, are readily apparent. Placing faith in future trends without acknowledging where these trends are actually leading is disingenuous and extremely dangerous, and the one-state agenda falls into this trap with disturbing enthusiasm.

The one-state agenda as a negotiating tactic

Part IV: The one-state agenda as a negotiating tactic

The emergence of the one-state “threat” against Israel

In addition to the diasporic discourse considered at length above, one-state rhetoric is beginning to appear at a very different register of Palestinian political life. Several significant Palestinian political figures and officials have recently invoked a one-state agenda as an implicit or explicit “threat,” in effect telling the Israelis that if negotiations do not soon begin to yield progress on ending the occupation and Palestinian independence, the Palestinian national movement will or may shift its emphasis towards demanding citizenship and equal rights within a greater Israeli state including the occupied territories. Several important instances of this were clustered around August 2008, when despair about the prospects of successful negotiations appears to have reached a high point among Palestinians.

Perhaps the most high-level such “warning” came in that month when former Palestinian Prime Minister and lead negotiator Ahmed Qurei suggested in a speech that, “if Israel continues to reject our propositions regarding the borders [of a future Palestinian state], we might demand Israeli citizenship.” He added that, “the Palestinian leadership has worked to establish an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, but if Israel continues to resist making this a reality - then the Palestinians’ demand for the sake of the Palestinian people will be a solution of one state for both nationalities.”³² He did not elaborate about when or how such a radical change would be made. Striking a similar theme earlier in 2008, Ziad Abu Zayyad, a former PA minister, told the *Atlantic Monthly*, “There are only two or three years left,” he said. “If this doesn’t work, then everyone will be arguing for a one-state solution.”³³ In another telling instance, in a December 2007 opinion article in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, Ahmad Samih Khalidi, a scholar at St Antony’s College, Oxford and former official advisor to Palestinian negotiators, wrote that because of a lack of progress in peace talks and Israeli conditions that would compromise the sovereignty of a Palestinian state, “the temptation is to say, thanks, but no thanks. Under such circumstances, Palestinians may just opt for something else. They could evoke Olmert’s worst nightmare and call for a more equitable and fair resolution that is built on a different basis; one of mutual respect, equality and mutuality, and a sense of genuine partnership in sharing the land.”³⁴

In August 2008, a 52 page report by the ad hoc Palestine Strategy Study Group entitled *Regaining the Initiative: Palestinian Strategic Options to End the Israeli Occupation* detailed the potential use of the one-state agenda as a bargaining tactic in negotiations with Israel.³⁵ The Group included numerous significant Palestinian political figures, analysts and commentators including Hani al Masri, Jibril Rajoub, Ali Jarbawi, Mazen Sinokrot, Mohammad Horani and Abedual Qader Al Huseini. The report lists the key Palestinian strategic goals, presumably in order of importance, as: “the first strategic objective is to end occupation of Palestinian lands. The second strategic objective is to establish a fully independent and sovereign Palestinian state. The third strategic objective is to honour the right of return of Palestinian refugees.” Indeed, the report is clear that the Palestinian national objective must be to end the occupation and establish an independent state, but allows that Palestinians could use the one-state agenda both as a threat to Israel and as a hedge against continued and permanent failure of peace negotiations. The document repeatedly refers to the use of the one-state agenda explicitly, in its own words, as a “threat” to be strategically deployed to bring Israel to reasonable terms, pointedly asking, “is this what Israel wants? Israel cannot prevent Palestinians from a strategic reorientation along these lines. Does Israel really want to force Palestinians to take these steps?” It attempts to give substance to this “threat” by suggesting that consideration of a potential shift to a one-state Palestinian national strategy could be both a rhetorical gesture and a budding future strategy at the same time, suggesting that, “even if only used as a strategic threat in order to force Israel to negotiate seriously, the intention must still be to implement the new strategy should negotiations fail. An empty threat is strategically no threat. A mere bluff does not work.” It warns that, “if current negotiations fail, Palestinians will be driven to replace the 1988 offer [of a two-state peace agreement] by a new strategy, not just rhetorically but in reality. The negotiated two state outcome will then be definitively cancelled.” The report explains, “the Palestine Strategy Study Group is convinced that the two state outcome is by far the best scenario from an Israeli perspective. Unfortunately Israel does not yet understand this.” As a consequence, it argues that the Palestinians’ “chief strategic aim must be to alter these Israeli perceptions and calculations. Israel must be made to understand that there are no alternative more attractive scenarios.”³⁶ The report does not make any mention of the Islamist agenda at all, but this, in fact, appears to be the main

alternative to a two-state Palestinian national strategy, at least in terms of the debate as it actually exists in Palestinian society.

Also in August 2008, Sari Nusseibeh, president of Al-Quds University and a leading Palestinian dove (much vilified for his commitment to peace with Israel by many of the diasporic Palestinian one-state advocates), told the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz, "I still favor a two-state solution and will continue to do so, but to the extent that you discover it's not practical anymore or that it's not going to happen, you start to think about what the alternatives are."³⁷ Nusseibeh then raised the prospect of Palestinians shifting their struggle from independence to equal rights in a single state, saying, "we can fight for equal rights, rights of existence, return and equality, and we could take it slowly over the years and there could be a peaceful movement - like in South Africa." However, Nusseibeh suggested that the best way to get to a single state was through the creation of a Palestinian state, observing, "the best solution, the one that causes the least pain and that can actually be instrumental to a one-state solution, is to have peace now, and acceptance of one another on the basis of two states." Making it clear that he views talk of a single-state as a threat designed to spur Israel to make progress on ending the occupation, Nusseibeh described his musings as "an ultimatum," and concluded that, "unless a major breakthrough happens by the end of this year, in my opinion we should start trying to strive for equality." The following month, in a September 2008 article for Newsweek magazine, Nusseibeh expressed a significant change of heart, beginning with an acknowledgment of the grave dangers inherent in adopting such a strategy, and even using it as a threat, noting that "serious proponents of the one-state scenario seem not to realize how much more human suffering it would take to attain. As for sounding alarm bells, this might have made sense 25 years ago," but no longer serves any useful purpose. Nusseibeh admitted that, "many Palestinians think a single state might be ideal—since it would involve the defeat of the Zionist project and its replacement by a binational country that would eventually be ruled by its Arab majority. But many ships have been wrecked on such rocks before. And the one state likely to emerge from a cataclysmic conflict would likely to be anything but ideal."³⁸

In none of these instances did the Palestinian officials or leaders actually endorse the one-state agenda or repudiate the struggle to end the occupation and establish a Palestinian state. In all cases, they raised the prospect as a potential negative consequence for Israel of the failure to reach an agreement. Enthusiasm for the one-state agenda significantly is either attributed to "some" or "most" Palestinians rather than the writer or speaker in question, or framed as a potential future response to an anticipated continued failure of the peace process. It is also extremely significant that Nusseibeh floated the trial balloon in an interview with Ha'aretz, only to effectively repudiate it in Newsweek, recognizing in the cold light of day both the amount of pain and suffering that would be required to produce a single state and the inevitable deficiencies of any state born of such additional protracted conflict. Clearly, then, when politically significant Palestinians have invoked the one-state agenda, they have done so in an effort to call Israeli attention to the dangers of not coming to terms in a reasonable agreement with the Palestinians.

Contradictions between domestic and diasporic Palestinian discourses on a single state

This flurry of discussion about the topic does not, in fact, indicate that the one-state agenda is becoming a significant part of the political conversation among Palestinians in the occupied territories, which remains almost entirely consumed by the competition and conflict between

the secular nationalists of the PLO and the Islamists led by Hamas. The invocation of the one-state agenda by these politically significant Palestinians is framed almost entirely in terms of a “threat” and a warning to Israel about the dangers and consequences to both parties of not achieving a reasonable agreement. There is a fundamental distinction between a diasporic discourse that wishes to embrace the one-state agenda whole-heartedly and angrily rejects any notion of a two-state peace agreement and the way Palestinians in the occupied territories have begun to deploy the concept as a tactic in attempting to bring the Israelis to reasonable terms.

Some diasporic one-state advocates know this perfectly well – and they do not like it. Abunimah, for example, reacted to the Palestine Strategy Study Group report quite negatively in a blog posting called, “A New Palestinian Strategy or the Same Failed One?” He complained that, “using the one-state solution as a tactical threat is unlikely to move Israel and simply discredits such a solution in the long-run by playing into Israeli claims that a democratic state where everyone is equal would be a disaster for Israeli Jews.” He adds that, because the report accepts that the essential Palestinian national aim is ending the occupation, “for some [study participants] the PSSG was a cynical exercise to maintain the peace process industry and the PA, and to conceal that the two-state solution is even less viable than realized, rather than to move in a new strategic direction.”³⁹

In this sense, the diasporic one-state advocates are correct: there is a profound contradiction between the goal of ending the occupation through a peace agreement with Israel and that of a long-term confrontation designed to replace Israel with a single state. The report by the Study Group is plainly mistaken, as Abunimah correctly observes, when it suggests that a discourse about ending the occupation is strategically compatible with rhetoric about replacing Israel with a single state for all Israelis and Palestinians. The two projects undermine each other at a core level, as most diasporic one-state advocates recognize, and send absolutely contradictory messages to the Palestinian people, the Arab world, the international community and, above all, Israel and the Jewish Israelis.

Many one-state agenda advocates and other activists strongly object to what they perceive as placing undue and unworthy emphasis on Israeli interests, Jewish Israeli perceptions and the like. This is a consistent complaint from those who emphasize confrontation and who do not support ending the occupation as the primary Palestinian national goal. However, what these complaints fail to recognize is that nothing serious in securing the broadest and most fundamental Palestinian national aims can be achieved without the agreement of Israel. The occupied territories are not going to be liberated through armed struggle, as the PLO slowly came to recognize between the 1960s and 1980s. Even the implementation of a one-state arrangement could only be accomplished through the voluntary agreement of the Israeli state and a strong Jewish Israeli majority. Indeed, those who advocate the creation of a new society based on complete reconciliation, mutuality and equality have far more distance to cover in convincing Jewish Israelis and their state about their intentions and fundamental attitudes than those seeking to end the occupation and establish a state of Palestine. Such objections coming from one-state advocates make absolutely no sense if their professed intention of total reconciliation is genuine. If, however, the one-state agenda is simply a vehicle for uncompromising rejectionism and continued confrontation at every level, then these objections become readily intelligible if not sincere.

The dangers of raising a one-state agenda as a diplomatic “threat” against Israel

Even when it is deployed as a strategic “threat” designed to encourage Israeli seriousness

in achieving a negotiated agreement, some of the gravest dangers associated with one-state rhetoric have to do with the perceptions, most importantly Israeli but also others, that it creates. Political agendas, particularly those seeking decolonization and the voluntary relinquishing of an occupation, depend on the effectiveness of their rhetorical power. As long as the colonizing or occupying power perceives its occupation as an existential necessity, the prospects of achieving independence become greatly complicated if not foreclosed. In some cases, a successful guerrilla war or campaign of destabilization and sabotage can compel a reluctant power to quit an occupation or colonization project. The greater the geographical distance and the lower the perceived social and economic costs are, the more likely the occupying power is to allow itself to be compelled to leave on terms to which it has not willingly agreed. In this case, it is clear that Palestinian armed struggle and/or nonviolent resistance, unlike the effort to expel Israel from southern Lebanon for example, are not in themselves sufficient to compel Israel to end the occupation begun in 1967.

The historical record regarding decolonization is clear: it is preferable, and often necessary, for the colonized people to convince the colonizing or occupying power that its core national interests and domestic political system will not be irreparably damaged when the occupation or colonial presence ends. Occupiers and colonizers frequently conceive of their projects in existential terms, believing that ending the occupation and withdrawing from the territory will place their own domestic survival at risk. Anti-colonial movements have as one of their principal tasks the reassurance of a substantial constituency within the domestic population of the occupying or colonial power: withdrawal from India, Indonesia, Algeria and Vietnam would not have meant the end of Britain, the Netherlands, France, or the United States. It might seem ridiculous for the subjects of an occupation to face the need to reassure the occupiers, but that is exactly what sound liberation, independence and decolonization strategy frequently dictates. Palestinians have a paramount strategic need to wisely and effectively confront, oppose and reject the occupation while at the same time taking every possible measure to convince and reassure Jewish Israelis that ending it is in their own national interests.

The one-state agenda as a negotiating tactic and “threat” has starkly diminishing returns. It induces as much, and probably more, fear of Palestinian intentions among most Israelis as it does fear of the status quo and the negative consequences of the occupation. In order to agree to end the occupation, and especially if they are to agree to the creation of a Palestinian state, most Israelis and their government will have to believe that Palestinians are reconciled to living alongside Israel into the indefinite future. The one-state argument certainly plays into traditional Israeli fears of a “plan of phases,” in which ending the occupation serves merely as a prelude to reversing not the 1967 war, but the 1948 war and eliminating Israel as a Jewish state. As such, the one-state agenda serves to undermine Palestinian diplomatic and public diplomacy efforts to assuage Israeli fears that Palestinians are looking for total victory rather than peace or reconciliation. As Israeli commentator and peace activist Uri Avnery put it, “there are also some Palestinians who delude themselves into thinking that if they talk about One State, it will frighten the Israelis so much that they will agree to the establishment of the Palestinian state next to Israel. But the result of this Machiavellian thinking is quite the opposite: it frightens the Israelis and pushes them into the arms of the Right. It arouses the fearful dog of ethnic cleansing, which is sleeping in the corner. That dog must not be forgotten for a moment.”⁴⁰ Avnery may be exaggerating somewhat with his own “strategic threat” of ethnic cleansing, but his essential point that the one-state agenda tends to induce panic in most Israeli audiences and would in all likelihood provoke a hostile and possibly even violent response under the rubric of self-defense and preservation of the state of Israel seems very well-founded. Under such circumstances, deployment of the one-state agenda as a diplomatic

tool in the form of a threat would under present circumstances be entirely counterproductive to Palestinian national interests.

These fears are often mysterious to Palestinians and their allies, especially given Israel's military might and the fact that Palestinians quite correctly see themselves as victims of a historic injustice, but they are deeply rooted in the Israeli psyche. They are a consequence of both recent Jewish history, especially in Europe culminating in the Holocaust, and the fact that Israel remains, in the minds of many Israelis, a tenuous and small Jewish and Western outpost in a sea of Arab and Muslim hostility. Because of these anxieties, the "threat" of a one-state agenda probably serves as much to push Israelis away from a reasonable end-of-conflict agreement as it does to frighten them towards it.

There can be no avoiding the need for a sustained effort to make the case that ending the occupation is not only in the Palestinian interest, but also in the manifest and obvious Israeli interest as well. One-state arguments framed as a threat about the long-term implications of the status quo undermine the prospects of most Jewish Israelis coming to this conclusion and encourage a bunker mentality in which an untenable status quo becomes preferable to an existentially threatening agreement that is perceived as a possible prelude to the eventual elimination of their nation-state.

Negative effects of one-state rhetoric on Palestinian political thinking

At least as troubling as its counterproductive impact on Israeli audiences are the potential consequences of a widespread proliferation of one-state agenda rhetoric for the Palestinian people's understanding of their national interest and national strategy. Palestinians are already split between those who seek an achievable end of conflict agreement with Israel and those who prefer, at least publicly, to pursue confrontation until an unachievable "victory." This division has greatly complicated political progress towards ending the occupation and undermined the Palestinian diplomatic position. By seeking to add a third layer to the Palestinian national division which rejects both the PLO's diplomatic efforts to reach an agreement with Israel and Hamas' quixotic pursuit of an "Islamic state," one-state advocates are seeking to make an already confused and divided situation even more difficult. For years, Israeli rejectionists pointed to a false confusion regarding authority within the Palestinian leadership as an excuse for not negotiating in good faith, questioning whether or not there was a legitimate negotiating partner on the other side. The rise of Hamas and the split in the Palestinian national movement since 2007 has, for the first time, made such objections plausibly reasonable if not convincing. The emergence of a third Palestinian political agenda alongside the secular nationalist and Islamist ones would not only confuse international opinion regarding the nature of the Palestinian national project, it would confuse and complicate Palestinian perceptions as well.

Of course, changing tactics to adapt to changing times is something that national movements have to do from time to time, as when the PLO abandoned the unachievable goal of replacing Israel with a Palestinian state in favor of seeking independence in the context of an end to the occupation. The one-state agenda's appeal lies in rejecting the difficult path facing Palestinians (and Israelis) in constructing an agreement, and instead, in effect, promising Palestinians that they can achieve what amounts to a reversal of all the political disasters, setbacks and defeats of the past 60 years simply by changing their national rhetoric. Obviously, as noted above, there is virtually no chance that Jewish Israelis will be induced to effectively dissolve their state because Palestinians demand they do so, and there is virtually no possibility of such a unified single-state being established in the foreseeable

future. Therefore, one-state rhetoric effectively urges Palestinians to abandon a difficult but plausible national strategy of ending the occupation and replacing it with one that is deeply satisfying at the emotional level but completely ineffective at the political register.

Were Palestinians to pursue this single-mindedly, it would almost certainly be yet another in a long history of dead ends for Palestinian diplomacy. As penetrating research such as *The Iron Cage: the Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* by Rashid Khalidi⁴¹ and other studies have shown, one of the keys to the inability of Palestinians to secure independence and statehood since the imposition of the British mandate in the early 1920s has been an irrational conviction that steadfastness and an unwavering assertion of Palestinian rights would be sufficient to secure the national interest, and that little in the way of more sophisticated or detailed political or diplomatic strategy would be required. One of the bedrocks of Palestinian thinking for most of the past hundred years has been a persistent belief that Palestinian demography would ultimately triumph over Israeli military and political power. This was characteristic thinking during the mandatory era, following the creation of the Israeli state, during the early years of the occupation following the 1967 war, and has never been fully debunked even after the PLO's change of strategy and national aspirations in the 1980s. The one-state agenda is, among other things, the most recent iteration of this core assumption. However, the history of the same period demonstrates the essential fallacy of this conviction. Presence on the land, demographic majorities and pluralities, and steadfastness have not yielded any specific political results for the Palestinian people other than their survival as a cause. Based, as it is, on this deeply rooted but also deeply flawed collective Palestinian conviction, the one-state agenda is no more likely to yield positive results for the Palestinian national interest than any of the earlier approaches which were similarly based on the assumption that presence on the land and steadfastness would somehow ultimately result in political victories, Israeli strategies, intentions and power notwithstanding.

Even when used as a threat, the one-state agenda would certainly promote confusion about the Palestinian national strategy not only among the Israelis and the international community, but among Palestinians themselves. "Constructive ambiguity" is always a tricky diplomatic and political tool, and runs the risk of creating self-fulfilling prophecies in the place of what are originally intended to be open options, trial balloons and empty "threats." In this case, were there to be a proliferation of one-state rhetoric among Palestinians, whether intended sincerely or as a diplomatic "threat," questions regarding Palestinian national ambitions, already complicated by the PLO-Hamas split, would become even more muddled. Palestinians themselves might find themselves torn between sympathy for maximalist projects that are emotionally satisfying but fundamentally unattainable such as the Islamist and post-national one-state agendas, and more prosaic and painful but fundamentally achievable strategies aimed at ending the occupation. The lack of clarity on national strategy and aims that would be produced even by the deployment of one-state rhetoric as a strategic and diplomatic "threat" designed to induce Israel to negotiate more seriously to end the occupation might not be containable and could make a reasonable agreement difficult to sell to Palestinian public opinion given the vast raising of expectations it would probably entail.

What Palestinians require is clarity and unity of purpose behind a sound, achievable and realistic diplomatic and political strategy. In any difficult and apparently intractable political impasse there is always an important role for creative solutions, as long as they are practicable and plausibly acceptable to the key parties. For example, while there might be a creative and useful role for countries like Egypt and Jordan in the development of a Palestinian state, no matter how fervently supporters of the Israeli ultra-right push the issue,

Palestinians in the West Bank are not interested in becoming Jordanians and those in Gaza certainly will not agree to become Egyptians. Needless to say, Jordan and Egypt would steadfastly resist any efforts to force them to resume control of parts of the West Bank and Gaza, respectively. Because it is not plausibly acceptable to Palestinians, Jordan and Egypt, the long-standing right wing Israeli ambition that Egypt can be somehow made to once again accept responsibility for Gaza and Jordan for parts of the West Bank, in place of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, is simply an empty fantasy. This same problem applies to the one-state agenda as a creative solution; it does not respond to or take into account how the overwhelming majority of Jewish Israelis define their fundamental national interests. For creative solutions to be useful in resolving the impasse between Israel and the Palestinians, they must be acceptable to the fundamental national interests of both peoples. There is little, if anything, to be gained by telling ourselves what we wish to hear. By offering a comforting and emotionally satisfying alternative to the painful political realities with which Palestinians actually have to contend, one-state rhetoric undermines unity, distorts clarity, promotes ambitions and goals that are not achievable and will only ensure that the occupation and the conflict continue indefinitely, with ordinary Palestinians paying the heaviest price.

Negative effects of one-state rhetoric on Arab diplomacy

Palestinians and Israelis will not be the only ones confounded by the rise of one-state rhetoric. The international community, most notably the Arab states and peoples, will similarly be left to wonder what to make of such an about-face regarding the Palestinian national agenda and the prospect of mutual recognition between Israeli and Palestinian states. Palestinians find themselves in a position where they are in great need of diplomatic, political and material support from the international community, above all the Arab states. Not only do Palestinians living under occupation and as refugees require this support for their essential well-being, Palestinian diplomacy cannot proceed without international and Arab backing. Simply put, the Palestinians are not in a position to go it alone.

Arab states and societies have been profoundly affected by the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the other Arabs would be major secondary beneficiaries of any peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. This is a complicated, touchy and delicate subject, but the relationship between the other Arabs and the Palestinians, and between Arab states and societies and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, has not always been a healthy one. Palestinians and their cause have both benefited and been harmed by the central role their conflict has played in modern Arab politics and culture. While some supporters of Israel have exaggerated this phenomenon, it is definitely true that many Arab governments have falsely cited the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a reason to reject internal reforms or as an excuse for various failures of leadership. Dangerous extremists of various stripes have hijacked the Palestinian issue as a rationalization for violence or radicalism. In Lebanon, the continued conflict with Israel provides the essential argument for Hezbollah to maintain an independent armed force (plainly more powerful than that of the state itself) and, in effect, an independent foreign policy, under the rubric of "the resistance." Numerous non-Palestinian governments, parties and other organizations have cynically been willing to keep fighting Israel until the last Palestinian. Al Qaeda and other transnational terrorist organizations, none of which have ever done anything significant to combat Israel or help the Palestinians, rely on the issue as a legitimating argument and recruiting tool. As long as the occupation continues, the issue of Palestine can be picked up by almost anyone in the Middle East who wishes to challenge the status quo, and is willing to make noise about the issue without having to actually do anything about it, as a shortcut to legitimacy and credibility. At a psychological level, Palestine is a

traumatic prism of pain through which Arabs generally view international relations. Resolving the conflict and ending the occupation would free not only Palestinians at the literal level, but begin the process of liberating Arab political perceptions from a constant source of anger, resentment and mistrust.

The Arab Peace Initiative, which was first adopted by the Arab League in 2002 and re-endorsed in 2007, both times unanimously, promises that if Israel withdraws from the occupied territories, agrees to the establishment of a Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem and participates in “a just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees,” the Arab states would reciprocate with a permanent and comprehensive peace and full normalized and diplomatic relations with Israel. In effect it commits the Arab states to normalizing relations with Israel in response to an Israeli-Palestinian end-of-conflict agreement, and indeed formally adds Arab diplomatic recognition to the benefits an Israeli government could reap from a successful conclusion of negotiations with the Palestinians. However, the Initiative is less important as a detailed working document than it is as a clear indication of the transformation of Arab diplomatic attitudes towards Israel, at least in theory, and the final repudiation of the “3 No’s” of the Khartoum Resolution. Whatever the details of its language and its future as a working document, the Initiative makes two points perfectly clear: first, that the Arab states recognize that it is in their interests to try to find a modus vivendi with Israel under reasonable terms, and second, that these states recognize that they have a role to play in helping to secure a workable Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. This is in addition to Israel’s peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, and its lower-level diplomatic relations with several other Arab states, as well as the repeated and emphatic statements from Syria, Lebanon and other Arab countries expressing a willingness to enter into peace treaties with Israel.

In other words, were Palestinians to adopt a one-state national strategy, they would not only be turning their back on the international consensus and the corpus of international law regarding peace in the Middle East, they would also be repudiating the consensus position of the Arab states. This is not to say that Arab governments and populations would therefore become hostile to the Palestinian cause; rather it is to point out that diplomatic cooperation requires some degree of harmony in goals, and this would be very difficult to achieve between an Arab world that is seeking peace agreements on reasonable terms with Israel and a Palestinian agenda of replacing Israel with an entirely different state.

The use of one state-rhetoric as a “threat” produces similar effects. Whatever the intentions of its proponents, it nonetheless opens an unbridgeable gap between Palestinian national goals and the consensus position of the Arab states.

One leading one-state advocate, when he was still an advocate of ending the occupation and securing Palestinian independence, was fond of pointing out that “Israel is entirely surrounded by states that have either made peace with it or have expressed their strong desire to make peace with it on reasonable terms.” Just so, and it is striking that one-state advocacy has yet to address or even recognize the serious problem the Palestinian national movement would face if it suddenly began to charge in the opposite diplomatic direction as the rest of the Arab world with regard to Israel. It is possible that some one-state advocates feel that international grassroots support is sufficient diplomatic backing to secure success, and that Palestinians are in no need of support from any governments. Such a position need not be refuted in any detail, since to ask the question of whether or not Palestinians need international and Arab state support is to answer it, resoundingly in the affirmative. It is difficult to imagine Palestinians making significant diplomatic and political progress towards any substantive national goals without strong international and especially Arab backing. The one-

state agenda does not recognize or account for this important consideration, implicitly dismissing it in a most unrealistic manner.

Israel's existential need for a peace agreement

It has been objected by some observers that because of the Initiative and other strategic and diplomatic developments, Israel no longer has any pressing incentive to seek a reasonable agreement with the Palestinians, at least in terms of its regional interests. This argument fails to recognize several key factors. First, the Initiative demonstrates the willingness of Arab states to normalize relations with Israel, but it does not normalize relations. Only Egypt and Jordan have full diplomatic relations with Israel, and what the Arab League did was to lay out its terms for a much broader swathe of normalization in the region. A stated willingness to normalize relations is not the equivalent of the normalization of relations. Second, the key Arab state responsible for promoting the Initiative in 2002 and 2007, Saudi Arabia, and others have made it clear that the Initiative is not to be seen as an open ended document. What Arab diplomats have been trying to communicate to the Israeli government and public is that the present consensus on peace with Israel is the product of a particular political moment; just as it was not reflective of past attitudes, it may also not be reflective of future attitudes. Therefore, Israel would be foolhardy, if it still seeks diplomatic normalization in the region as a foreign policy priority, to ignore the present opportunity, whether through the Initiative or some other means of securing widespread recognition in the Middle East of its legitimacy as a consequence of achieving an end-of-conflict agreement with the Palestinians. Third, by not taking the necessary measures to secure wider regional acceptance, as well as end the conflict with the Palestinians, Israel places this Arab consensus in favor of constructive engagement and normalization at risk. Nothing is more damaging to the political order in the region than the perception on the part of millions of ordinary Arab citizens that their governments are indifferent to the suffering of Palestinians under occupation and cooperating, directly or indirectly, with an Israel that is bound and determined to maintain and expand the occupation.

However, even if the Israeli government were to delude itself into thinking that the new balance of power in the Middle East eliminates Israel's need to secure regional acceptance and normalization of relations with the Arab states, rather than providing a new and possibly temporary basis for securing such relations through an agreement with the Palestinians, such an agreement would still be essential to Israel's future. The understanding within the Israeli political establishment that the status quo of occupation itself poses a long-term threat to Israeli national interests has plainly been growing over the past few years. Extremely strongly worded comments to this effect from former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in the immediate aftermath of the Annapolis meeting and throughout the remainder of his term in office were unprecedented for any Israeli national leader. It is significant that they came after his political career was essentially ruined by political failures and alleged corruption scandals, almost certainly demonstrating two key realities: first, that these views reflect widespread but privately held opinions shared by many in the Israeli establishment including numerous people such as Mr. Olmert with long careers on the nationalist right and second, that these establishment figures fear that the Israeli public would react badly to such stark comments from anyone who harbored viable future political ambitions. Like many national leaderships in the Middle East, it would appear that large segments of the Israeli establishment have not been particularly forthright with the general public and have not prepared their people to understand the stark choices facing them.

In the long run the occupation poses a mortal threat to Israel's identity as a "Jewish and democratic state." Without an end to the occupation, Israel can be neither meaningfully democratic, as it will contain within its de facto borders millions of disenfranchised noncitizens, nor properly "Jewish," as those borders will soon contain an Arab majority (if they do not already). These realities are very unlikely to produce the single state promoted by one-state advocates, but they would be sufficient to render the self-conceptualization of Israel as "Jewish" and "democratic" incoherent at best and nonsensical at worst. Israelis can either have the state to which they are so deeply committed or they can have the occupation. They cannot have both, and they have to choose. And, increasingly, many of their responsible and pragmatic national leaders are recognizing how straightforward and existential this choice in fact is. It is probably necessary for Israelis to hear from their leaders that the situation is untenable and that the need to act soon is urgent in order to preserve Israel's self-image as a Jewish and democratic state. However, the same effect cannot be achieved by Palestinian leaders and officials, or even grassroots activists, making similar comments – these only complicate an already difficult political and psychological landscape, not least by calling into question Palestinian national intentions and aspirations.

Conclusion

A rational and effective strategy for Palestinians and their supporters in the United States

One of the purposes in writing this study is to help ensure that yet another generation of Palestinian and Arab Americans does not condemn itself to political irrelevancy in the United States by adopting a politically and strategically untenable set of positions and attitudes. Historically, by adopting positions that did not proceed on the basis of the commonly understood American national interest and by adopting a skeptical attitude towards the American political system as such, generations of Palestinian and Arab Americans have volunteered to be politically ineffective in their own country. Although it may have been the case 20 years ago, it is now not at all difficult to find space within the American foreign policy establishment consensus and the commonly understood definition of the national interest for promoting the Palestinian goal of ending the occupation and peace with Israel. However, it requires willingness, determination and seriousness of purpose. Just because achieving success in ending the occupation will be difficult is not an argument for giving up or for adopting a strategy that is emotionally satisfying but has no chance of success whatsoever. Positions such as the one-state agenda, if widely adopted, would return Palestinian and Arab Americans to their traditional role of political marginalization and an inability to act effectively on the American political scene.

The issue of the strategic goal of the Palestinian national movement is not a question about which pro-Palestinian activism in the United States, if it wishes to be effective, can be agnostic or vague. A number of pro-Palestinian groups refuse to take a clear stance defining the essential goal that they are pursuing in order to maximize their potential appeal and membership and not to alienate any potential activists. Such a stance may be designed to draw as many people as possible together, but in fact it severely limits the political effectiveness of such organizations and ensures that they cannot have any effect on national policy, which is, by definition, geared to producing specific political results. Anyone representing such organizations at the political level, in meetings with congressional staff on

Capitol Hill for example, would not be able to give a clear and straightforward answer to the simplest policy question: what do you want? Their work is therefore limited strictly to public education about Israeli policies and abuses, and, crippled by their refusal to define what exactly they oppose and what precisely they propose, they cannot hope to have any effect on US national policy, even under the best possible circumstances. This is particularly unfortunate given the greatly increased sympathy in the US government and even in Congress for the established Palestinian national goal of an independent state in the occupied territories. It is simply not true that American policy towards, or establishment thinking about, Palestinian statehood is static or intransigent; to the contrary, the positive momentum on this question is striking and appears to be gaining pace. It makes no sense whatsoever for pro-Palestinian activists to walk away from the American foreign policy establishment at precisely the moment they are beginning to embrace as a consensus opinion not only the long-standing goals of the Palestinian national movement, but also the urgency for the United States of securing their realization.

Another significant obstacle to effective and clear-headed activism on behalf of a workable peace agreement is the ethnic solidarity still at work in most of the Arab-American and Jewish-American communities with regard to the conflict and the ethnically-defined double standards both groups tend to employ when judging individuals and organizations who are engaged in the issue. Both communities tend to think favorably of peace-oriented, dovish organizations on the other side, and often simultaneously take a dim view of organizations within their communities that take the same positions. For example, Jewish-American groups such as Americans for Peace Now (APN) and the Israel Policy Forum (IPF) are sympathetically regarded by many Arab Americans who dislike Palestinian organizations such as the American Task Force on Palestine (ATFP) that take analogous stances on most issues. The reverse is equally true: there would appear to be more sympathy among many Jewish Americans for peace-minded Palestinian groups like ATFP than for Jewish and Zionist organizations like IPF and APN that have a similar approach to ending the conflict. What this suggests is that in this context the ethnic identity of the speaker in question is far more important than the substance of their positions to the reception of their viewpoints by many of the most engaged audiences. Arabs and Jews expect their own people to say one thing, and the other side to say something else. When those expectations are defied, this produces either sympathy or disdain, based less on what people have to say and more on the extent to which they are perceived as deviating positively or negatively from the supposedly normative ethnic position. This phenomenon is an index of both the primacy of ethnically defined hegemonic discourses within both communities that exist independently of a coherent set of well-defined political goals, and the irrationality with which many Arab and Jewish Americans continue to approach questions regarding the conflict and its resolution.

What makes most sense for Palestinians and their supporters in the United States at this stage in their history is to move quickly and decisively to take advantage of the new opportunities and increased regional and international support for their independence and state-building efforts driven by new political realities. They should, in so far as possible, redouble their commitment to seeking an independent state in line with the manifest interests and stated goals of the overwhelming majority of the international community, especially the Arab states and the United States. They should embrace, build upon and cling tenaciously to all aspects of international law and diplomacy that support their quest for freedom, including the UN Security Council resolutions, existing Israeli agreements with the Palestinians, the Roadmap of the Quartet, and, above all, the Arab Peace Initiative. They should press, first and foremost, for an immediate and comprehensive settlement freeze. The majority of

Palestinians should do their best to help shift the position of Hamas and its supporters to one that accepts international legality with regard to the future between Israel and Palestine, and other Quartet conditions, so that the participation of that party in government in the future does not mean international isolation and diplomatic paralysis.

They should focus their practical energies not only on aggressive diplomacy to promote their position in search of a reasonable agreement with Israel, but also on institutional and economic development in the occupied territories in preparation for independence. Palestine must have the basic infrastructure of the state in order to become a state, and the order in which these are achieved is less important than the fact of their realization. Most significantly, Palestinians need a robust, professional and independent security service in order to maintain law and order in Palestinian society, meet international and Israeli expectations regarding security, and prevent the rise of militia groups, private armies and ad hoc militants. Palestinians should also be making continuous overtures towards Israel and the international community in order to emphasize the simplicity and clarity of their national goals, and cultivate an unequivocal political discourse within their own society. Their supporters and allies in the United States should be single-mindedly focused on the goal of ending the occupation, and continuously and sincerely seeking to build alliances with all parties, especially Jewish-American organizations, that are genuinely interested in a reasonable peace based on two states. In other words, Palestinians and their supporters need to do everything in their power to take advantage of the new strategic situation in the Middle East and the increased need and interest of regional and international powers in securing a two-state peace agreement between themselves and Israel. There is no guarantee that this will be successful. However, such a strategy is well within the ability of Palestinians to advance, reflects international and regional political realities and needs, and would prove very difficult for Israel to successfully rebuff over an extended period. In other words, it is the only national strategy for Palestinians that has any hope of success in the foreseeable future.

The “death of the peace process and the future of the conflict

At some point a two-state agreement could well become practically impossible, although this has not yet occurred. The moment at which a state of “impossibility” for the realization of a two-state peace agreement will emerge is, contrary to many arguments by one-state advocates, not the function of a critical mass of administrative, topographical and infrastructural changes constructed by Israel in the occupied territories. Rather, it is that moment when a critical mass of Israelis and Palestinians conclude that such a peace agreement is no longer feasible or desirable. The two questions are linked, since entrenchment of the occupation greatly complicates any belief in the plausibility of a peace agreement to end it. However, political realities are fundamentally shaped by the confluence of political will and power. Long-standing and deeply rooted realities can be transformed by political actions based on necessity and consensus. The emergence of the State of Israel itself is a prime example of this process at work. As long as there is an international consensus for the desirability of a two-state peace agreement and significant Israeli and Palestinian majorities, or even pluralities, in favor of that, it will be premature, unjustified and extremely unwise to pronounce the death of the two-state solution or the “end of the peace process.”

The day may come when Israelis and Palestinians cast their lot in together and develop a single-state, union, confederation or mutual membership in a broader regional entity of some kind. There are essentially two plausible paths to this distant eventuality. The first is through

the establishment of an independent Palestinian state that could, in time, forge closer ties and eventual forms of unification or confederation with Israel. The second would be as a result of a long and bitter struggle lasting for many more decades, if not longer, leaving both parties so exhausted, depleted and demoralized that they willingly forego their national identities and aspirations to achieve an end to violence. Nothing indicates that this day is close at hand, and it is difficult to seriously imagine as both Israelis and Palestinians seem as committed as ever to their separate national projects and identities. Let there be no doubt, such a process of mutual exhaustion would be long, and exceedingly painful and bloody. Nonviolent resistance and boycotts will surely not be the main elements of a period of continued confrontation and struggle. The historical precedents both within Israel/Palestine and internationally offer no reasonable hope of, or plausible model for, that. Violent occupation and violent resistance will continue to feed each other in continuing escalation, as they have for so long.

It is theoretically possible that at the end of many further decades of conflict, Israelis and Palestinians might be compelled by desperation and exhaustion to forgo their national ambitions, and create a new identity and a new narrative that could allow for the creation of a single state. However, such rhetoric could and would bear little or no resemblance to the one-state agenda as it is presently being advocated, since the attitudes which inform it and the discourse that it inspires bear none of the hallmarks of the profound reconciliation and mutuality that would be required under such circumstances. Given such potential future political conditions following a period of extreme bloodshed on both sides, an effective one-state agenda might become plausible, but what most one-state advocates are promoting today will most certainly not suffice for such a grand project of reconciliation. At any rate, to pin the aspirations and long-term futures, not to mention basic living conditions and immediate needs, of millions of people on possible political conditions that may or may not ever develop between Israel and the Palestinians, and which would certainly require and indeed be based upon many future decades of violence and bloodshed, is completely irresponsible.

That the actual alternative to a negotiated end-of-conflict agreement is a continuation of the conflict is beyond serious dispute. To oppose the realization of a reasonable and mutually acceptable end-of-conflict agreement, therefore, is to embrace, reluctantly or otherwise, continued warfare and confrontation. It is also, in effect, to politically abandon the people living under occupation to continue in that condition and to provide nothing to refugees but lip service. While presenting itself as “moral” and “ethical,” the practical consequences of such an attitude are distinctly immoral and unethical, as it favors a continuation of conflict and confrontation over the prospect of a workable negotiated solution that would be accepted by most people on both sides.

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