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## A NATIONAL SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM

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### **The Palestinian Question Returns**

The Madrid and Washington peace talks have elevated the question of the Palestinians to new heights of international interest. The reason for this is directly tied to the results of the Second Gulf War (the First Gulf War was the Iran-Iraq War). The Americans had promised Israel that as a result of the war many things would change in the Middle East, but many things did not change. The feudal systems in the Arabian Peninsula are still in place. They promised some reforms just before the war, and after the war started they even promised to come to an accommodation with Israel, but as soon as the war was over they reverted to their previous stand. The same sheiks are still there, collaborating among themselves to preserve their feudal systems.

The same can be said of Iraq. Saddam Hussein is still in place and the Iraqi army's whole system is still pretty much intact, especially as far as the elite troops are concerned. The Kurds are still oppressed and there are new discoveries of terrible

weapons nearly every week.

Syria has been sending mixed signals. Many commentators even said that the Syrians had switched to the American side because they sent troops to help the American coalition. But that is quite misleading because, in return for sending troops to Saudi Arabia, the Syrians received a free hand in Lebanon, \$3 billion in cash, and international legitimacy. If Syria had really wanted to help the American coalition, the easiest way would have been to concentrate their troops on the Syrian-Iraqi border. Instead, their 14,000-man division took some six weeks to arrive in a clumsy operation via the Suez Canal, and when they landed they announced they were not going to fight.

The Syrians came to Saudi Arabia for totally different reasons, the main reason being that they knew very well that when the war was over they would be able, along with the Egyptians, to dictate the disposition of those riches of Arabia because

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the Americans would leave and the Saudis were not strong enough to defend themselves.

If so little has really changed since the Gulf War, what, then, does President Bush have to show his people and world public opinion? Of course, the only party who can deliver something in order to save the whole operation is Israel. Therefore, the United States encourages, pressures, even threatens Israel to deliver something or else, because American prestige in this affair depends on what Israel does or does not deliver. This is the reason why, in view of the results of the Gulf War, Bush and Baker felt compelled to push the Palestinian question to the forefront of international politics.

This all sounds almost grotesque when we remember that the Jordanians and the Palestinians, who openly supported Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War, were the first ones to be visited by Baker and coaxed, with money and legitimation, to come into the peace process, because unless they came, nothing could be settled, and then Israel could not be pushed to deliver.

#### **All Current Options Unfeasible**

The problem for Israel is the nature of the solution. There are two options on the table. One, put forward by the Israeli government in May 1989, is called the autonomy plan, a rehash or renewal of the old autonomy plan that was put forward by Menachem Begin in the 1970s. The other option on the table, one that has worldwide support, is the Palestinian solution, the realization in practice of the state that was declared by the Palestinians on November 15, 1988, in Algiers.

However, both of these options are unfeasible, as are all of the other popular options for solving the Arab-Israeli conflict that have been part of the world agenda. Some 8 or 9 options have been discussed in the last 24 years since the June 1967 War. Those 8 or 9 options may be grouped in pairs, with each pair reflecting a certain point of view and its reverse or mirror image. Because every one of those solutions is not feasible, its reverse is not feasible either, although for the reverse reasons.

#### **Jordanization of the West Bank Versus the Palestinization of Jordan**

The first pair may be called Jordanization versus Palestinization. Jordanization means the position taken by some in Israel which wants to go back to the pre-1967 situation and return the West Bank to the Jordanians. According to this position, King Hussein is more apt than the Israelis to suppress the intifada or

any Palestinian tendency toward freedom or autonomy and therefore Israel should let Jordan do that. They say that King Hussein is a very moderate king, he is pro-Western, we have nothing to fear from him, and therefore, from the Israeli point of view, that is the ideal solution.

In fact, however, King Hussein is not and has never been a moderate king. Many seem to have forgotten that King Hussein is the one who attacked Israel with American tanks in 1967. When in the 1970s he did not get American Hawk missiles, he did not hesitate to turn to the Soviets and got Soviet anti-aircraft missiles. He was the same moderate king who joined Saddam Hussein during the war. He is not a moderate, he is simply an opportunist and will join anybody who seems victorious. Not only can Israel not count on King Hussein's moderation, but even if he were moderate, returning the West Bank to him would not resolve the Palestinian problem. And without a national solution to the Palestinian problem there will be no peace and tranquility in this part of the world.

The reverse of Jordanization is the Palestinization of Jordan. This is the view championed by Ariel Sharon which says that, in fact, Jordan is Palestine. But Jordan is only part of Palestine. Historically, Mandatory Palestine included Western Palestine as well as Eastern Palestine. To say Jordan is Palestine is to imply that its western part is not Palestine, which is not accurate. Palestine and Eretz Israel are two names for the same territory. To say that only the western part of Palestine is Eretz Israel is to abdicate one's rights over Eastern Palestine. Historically, geographically, and demographically, both parts have to be included in Palestine/Eretz Israel.

How do we define the nature of a country? Inter alia, by the composition of its population. If two-thirds of the population of Jordan in 1990 were Palestinian, and now it is three-quarters because of the reinforcement of 350,000 Palestinians who came from Kuwait, then that country should be called Palestine. In that sense even King Hussein is a Palestinian, because he was born there. But even if Israel agrees to the Palestinization of Jordan, it will still rule over 2.5 million Palestinians — 1.7 million in the territories and 800,000 so-called Israeli Arabs who are, for all intents and purposes, no different from other Palestinians, with some exceptions, of course. Therefore, what should Israel do with them? Even if we accept the proposition that Jordan is Palestine, Israel is left with half the Palestinian people — 2.5 million. Therefore, this is no solution either.

### **Federation with Jordan Versus Autonomy Within Israel**

The next pair of options is federation versus autonomy. Federation is a plan evolved by King Hussein back in 1972 that offered the same kind of autonomy to the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza under the Hashemite crown that was offered later by the Israelis. Now no autonomy in the world stands on its own; every autonomy must have some sovereign body as its source of legitimacy. When King Hussein spoke of autonomy under the Jordanian crown, the Palestinians rejected the plan in 1972 and they continue to reject it today.

Begin's idea of autonomy, which is being discussed again today, is the mirror image of King Hussein's autonomy, but under Israeli sovereignty. But this is precisely what the Palestinians did not want to accept from Jordan and I believe they will never accept. Therefore, both of these options involving autonomy or federation are no solutions either.

### **Israeli Annexation Versus Palestinian Statehood**

The next pair of options is annexation of the territories by Israel versus a full-fledged Palestinian state. There are some quarters in Israel who want to annex Judea, Samaria and Gaza for strategic, historical, mystical, and/or religious reasons because they are part of Eretz Israel. But annexation does not provide an answer to the very sore issue of demography. What does Israel do with 2.5 million Palestinians?

There are those who say the massive Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union makes the demographic problem irrelevant, but the Soviet Jewish immigration may well be the last large aliya for Israel. They will number some 1 or 2 million, but the potential growth of the Palestinians may be greater. It is likely that all that the Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union will do, even at its utmost, will be to delay the demographic time-bomb of widely differing birthrates between Arabs and Jews, but it will not stop it. So annexation, even with the Soviet Jewish immigration, is not the solution either.

The other part of this pair is a Palestinian state, namely, giving up the territory to the Palestinians to implement their dream. But if there is to be a Palestinian state as declared by the PLO in Algiers, then we should look carefully at the documents of Algiers, both the declaration of independence and the political communique published as a result of that meeting, where one sees very clearly that the Palestinians did not accept

any of the three American conditions put to them.

The Palestinians went in a roundabout way to say that they recognized the State of Israel, but they immediately delegitimized it by their accusations; they declared their willingness to "base" a settlement on U.N. Resolutions 242 and 338 instead of accepting those resolutions; and they vowed to renounce terrorism, but Israel's, not their own.

Secondly, and even more important, the Palestinians, while speaking about minimal aspirations for a mini-state in the West Bank and Gaza, are still harboring the maximalist solution of seeing the entire area under Palestinian rule, not only in their hearts but in their writings and in their thoughts. They attached two conditions to their so-called recognition of the State of Israel which actually annul that recognition. First, they link recognition to acceptance of the Partition Plan of 1947, that is to say, an Israel cut in half. Secondly, they link recognition of Israel to the right of return of all the Palestinians. Their objective is not only an Israel cut in half but also a diluted Israel which the Palestinians will turn into another Arab state, either immediately or in the long range. Therefore, all these formulae that were used by the Palestinians are really not conducive to a solution that could possibly be acceptable to Israel, if this were to be the nature of that mini-state in the West Bank and Gaza.

However, another reason that this option is unacceptable is that it would only resolve one-third of the problem. In the West Bank and Gaza there are 1.7 million Palestinians. In the world there are about 5.5 million. Resolving only one-third of the problem is a recipe for instability because of the remaining two-thirds who will still lack a Palestinian national identity.

The Palestinians have an answer to that. They say they will be like the Jewish people, a minority in their independent state and a majority in the diaspora. But that is a false analogy because most of the Jews, unfortunately, do not want to come to Israel. Many Palestinians, however, have been rotting in refugee camps for three generations and therefore they cannot wait to come to an independent Palestine when there is one. The people in Ein Hilwe in Lebanon or the refugee camps near Damascus will not sit quietly and accept that their mini-state cannot absorb them. They will push for a solution. They will say that since they now have a mini-state, it is time to resolve the refugee problem. Where can it be solved? Only in Israel. And then Israel will face increasing pressure. Therefore this option is also no solution.

### Territorial Compromise Versus Exchange of Populations

The next pair is territorial compromise versus exchange of populations, including transfer. Territorial compromise is simply absurd because there must be somebody to compromise with, and that means Jordan. In all the 16 meetings that took place since 1967 with Israeli leaders, including the London conference with Shimon Peres in 1987, King Hussein insisted that he is prepared to make peace with Israel but only if Israel withdraws from all the territory including east Jerusalem. The Labor party has always said that east Jerusalem is out of the question, not to mention the majority of Israelis who do not want to return to the pre-1967 borders. So there has never been a partner for territorial compromise. In fact, the option of territorial compromise existed for only three weeks, between June 8, 1967, the day Israeli forces entered east Jerusalem, and June 28, when the Israeli Knesset adopted the law annexing east Jerusalem. The moment Israel adopted that law it foreclosed the so-called Jordanian option, and repeating it today is simply an exercise in futility.

The other half of this pair of options addresses the idea of the exchange of populations and transfer. It is necessary to say "exchange of populations" because there are 800,000 Jews who came to Israel from Arab countries (this writer is one of them), who came as refugees. Any solution must be on a reciprocal basis, nothing less. Since the Palestinians claim that they are part of the Arab nation, and since Jews evacuated from Arab countries left behind property assessed to be worth \$20 billion, a quid pro quo trade-off of refugees and property would settle the refugee problem.

The whole idea of transfer has become anathema in Israeli politics, but let us look at it from a historical point of view. At the end of World War II, President Truman appointed Joseph Schechtman, an American Jew, to deal with the refugee problem in Europe. At the time some 13 million Germans from Hungary, Russia, and all over central Europe were relocated, most of them against their will. Based on his experiences, Mr. Schechtman wrote what became the classic book dealing with refugee problems, and in which he lists twelve criteria by which to judge when transfer of populations is moral, from his point of view. Those twelve criteria all apply to the case in the territories. The bottom line, he says, is when we have a situation where a minority population is living within a majority with whom it cannot reconcile, where there will be eternal frictions and both sides will be miserable from now until the end of the world. If the choice is be-

tween continuing that status quo or causing the terrible injustice of uprooting one generation of refugees but by doing that one assures that at least in future generations both groups can live peacefully and happily because they will not have that friction anymore, he would choose the second. Therefore, the problem of transfer is not necessarily a moral one.

It is more an issue of practicality. In the first place, there is no recipient country, least of all Jordan, that is prepared to absorb them. Without a recipient country they cannot go anywhere.

Secondly, the people are not so willing to go. Since 1968 the Palestinians have been cultivating the idea of *sumud*, which means resistance, resilience. (See JL:70, "Sumud Versus Settlements: Communal Conflict in the Holy Land," by Hillel Frisch.) Hang on to the territories, they say, because our war with the Jews is the war of the womb. Demographically we will become much more numerous than them and we will win. Therefore, the idea of *sumud*, combined with the lack of a recipient country, makes the whole issue simply unfeasible.

### The Status Quo

There is a last option, maintaining the status quo. Many say that what Israel has lived with for the past 24 years could continue another 100 years. It is just one of many problems facing the country. It is not even so costly, though every casualty is terrible. But to my mind this situation has become unbearable. Perhaps that kind of argument was valid before the intifada, but the continuing impact of the intifada on Israel, and on world public opinion, makes that proposition invalid. Most worrisome in this respect are the divisions within Israel, which weaken its powers of resistance in any future conflict.

### The Palestinian Triangle

Each of these nine options are not feasible for one reason or another and cannot work, and none of them address the very critical issue of the Israeli Arabs. Although no Israeli government from Ben-Gurion to this day has ever suggested a solution to this issue, everyone knows that although the Israeli Arabs are proclaimed equal citizens, in fact they cannot be equal under the present circumstances where the Arab-Israeli conflict is unresolved and the Arabs of Israel do not share in the security burdens of the country. Today there are 800,000 Israeli Arabs. By the end of the century they will number 1 million people who, for the most part, consider themselves part and parcel of the Palestinian people. Ask them and they answer that they

are Palestinian. Any solution must take into consideration this group who comprise one-sixth of the Palestinian people.

We need to understand the Palestinian problem as a triangle. The triangle includes the Palestinians in Israel, the Palestinians in the territories, and the Palestinians in Jordan. Somehow we have to develop a solution which will include all of them. That solution should include not only a people as a whole — the Palestinians — but also a territory as a whole, that is to say, historical Palestine or Eretz Israel — it is the same territory.

### **A Solution Based on Reciprocity and Parity**

Instead of appearing before the world as always saying "no," let Israel say "yes" to anything that is reasonable, but under conditions that are based on parity and reciprocity that will sound fair to European and American public opinion. The notion of "a people" has two derivatives: one, a people has the right of self-determination; two, a people has the right of nationhood or statehood. Israel could say it accepts the idea of a Palestinian people, but expects the Palestinians to reciprocally agree that the Jewish people are a nation too. What the Palestinians negate in their national charter is precisely this point. They say the Jews are not a nation and therefore they do not deserve a state. Who is a nation? The Palestinians, of course — only the Palestinians. True reciprocity requires that the Palestinians recognize the right of the Jewish people, not the right of Israel, to exist and to enjoy self-determination.

The Palestinians say they have a movement of national liberation called the PLO. Israel does not want to talk to the PLO not because it is a dirty word but because it has a certain identity card, its infamous charter describing its ideology, which calls for Israel's destruction. If they alter that charter, or make it invalid in some way, then the PLO becomes a neutral term. Furthermore, the Jewish people has a movement of national liberation called Zionism. The Arabs continue to claim that Zionism is racism, repeating it every day. But they cannot take the Jewish movement of national liberation and say that it is racist and at the same time expect Israel to accept the PLO. Israel has to insist on this point because some 15 of the 33 articles of the Palestinian National Charter speak about the elimination of Zionism.

The Palestinians say that they have a right over Palestine, or at least part of it. As noted earlier, Palestine and Eretz Israel are two terms for the exact

same territory. To the Palestinians, Palestine includes Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and what is now called Jordan, all of which is identical with Eretz Israel. It is unfortunate that some Israeli parties have renounced any claims over Eastern Palestine because this is the great paradox: Only if one is maximalistic in one's demands does one have something to give up. If Israel starts from a small territory, then it must be uncompromising because, as Shamir said, it is because we have a little country and there is nothing to give up. In this case, Israel has a right over the big country, but so do the Palestinians.

Again, this is the paradox. Only if one acknowledges the rights of others over the same thing can one claim the same right and thus offer any compromise. Let Israel say to the Palestinians, yes, you have the right over Palestine, Eretz Israel for us, from Tel Aviv to the Iraqi Desert. All of it is yours because you are Palestinian. But we Jews also have the same right exactly, no more and no less. Then let the two parties take this big land in which Israeli Jews and Arab Palestinians are the predominant population and divide it up. If that occurs, the argument will descend from being a qualitative one, as it is today, about whether or not a Palestinian state, whether or not an Israel, and will go down one notch to become a quantitative issue. How much to each side? A quantitative argument over territory is much more given to compromise because negotiation is a give and take process where quantities can be settled by a process of negotiation and compromise. Therefore, if Israel puts on the table the whole of Palestine and discusses it with the Palestinians, then everything can be settled. Furthermore, we cannot hope to solve the full problem if we do not put on the table all the pieces of this puzzle called Palestine. If the Palestinians want Palestine, they must start to discuss all of it. They cannot take 80 percent of the territory and say, this is Jordan, now let us discuss Palestine. No, if that is Jordan, the rest is Israel, and therefore there is no Palestine.

What happens to King Hussein? Nothing. King Hussein is a Palestinian. He rules a country now three-quarters Palestinian. If they want to keep him at the head, then perhaps he will have to call it the Hashemite Kingdom of Palestine, which is what it is today. Perhaps they will have a constitutional monarchy, but it would be their choice, the choice of the majority of the people. Already the prime minister of Jordan, Tahar el-Masri, is a Palestinian. How many prime ministers from Palestine do they need? Whether the Palestinians keep King Hussein or send him to the

French Riviera is not Israel's business. King Hussein is not a country, King Hussein is not a people, King Hussein is a regime and the regime should be devised and decided upon by the majority of the people. Why do the 2.2 million Palestinians in Jordan deserve less self-determination than the 1.7 million who live under Israel rule? It is the same people, living in the same territory.

Everything should be negotiable. Israel should not say, as the Israeli government or even the Labor party do today, that Jerusalem is out of the question. I say Jerusalem is negotiable and so is Tel Aviv, but so is Amman and Irbid, everything. Israel should put everything on the table. There are demographic realities, of course. Since Western Palestine is predominantly Jewish and Eastern Palestine is all Arab, then of course we are not going to bring the people of Amman to Tel Aviv and vice versa. They know that and we know that. Therefore, the general outline of a solution will remain much as it is today. Israel should keep the heights of Judea and Samaria because without them the army cannot defend the country.

Any solution will have to distinguish between sovereignty over territory and the personal status of the inhabitants. Once a certain border is agreed on, wherever it is, then all the Arabs who will remain under Israeli rule, no matter how many, including the Israeli Arabs in the same package, should be able — mentally, practically, whatever — to choose to identify with the Jewish Zionist state, to swear allegiance to its flag, and to send their children to an Israeli school system in which Arab and Jewish children learn exactly the same things in the same language and share the same values. All those who are prepared to do this should be welcomed, and then Israel should really open the doors and make them citizens with equal opportunities, something that they are not today. Once they choose to identify, and there are some Arabs who are prepared, indeed eager to do that, we should give that option to those who want it because today we do not even give them the chance.

All the others who are not prepared to identify with Israel, the overwhelming majority, 80-90 percent, can remain where they are, but they will not be citizens of Israel. They will be citizens of the Palestinian state, provided there is a Palestinian state, east of Israel. They will not be expected to be loyal to Israel. They will live in Israel and be politically and emotionally loyal to the Palestinian state. They will hold Palestinian passports and vote for their parliament, if there is one. They will teach their children whatever they want at their own schools, at their own expense, and not be part of the Israeli school system. As long as they respect Israeli law they can work in Israel, live in Israel, and enjoy life in Israel freely. But if they throw molotov cocktails at Israeli cars driving in Wadi Ara, they will not be expelled, they will be repatriated. They will be returned to their country of citizenship, exactly as the Americans would do to me if I threw a molotov cocktail in New York. So to make this clear distinction between sovereignty over territory and the personal status of the inhabitants may provide the beginning of a solution.

The overall goal of any peace talks should be to try to reach a solution that will include most of the Palestinian people, 90 percent of them, in that big territory of Palestine/Eretz Israel where there is room for them. Any partial solution will not and cannot bring about a final settlement of the Palestinian problem.

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