

# Separation or Unity

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The first and second Intifadas in the West Bank and Gaza steered the Palestinian liberation project away from unity with the rest of Palestine. In his second instalment on Israel's historic options, **Azmi Bishara** argues that there is no reason now why that unity cannot be recaptured

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Negotiations on the "two-state solution" have been voided of all substance. The Palestinian national liberation movement has lost all its sources of strength as a liberation movement, including its ability to rely on the Arab community instead of the "international community". It lost and forfeited its sources of strength before ever becoming a state and securing national sovereignty. It became the Palestinian Authority, an entity totally dependent upon negotiations, America's and Israel's good intentions, Israeli public opinion and other such factors. Negotiations over the Palestinian state have been reduced to a process of blackmail in which concessions are demanded and offered and fundamental rights are bartered away.

From the attitude that negotiations are an alternative to resistance, as opposed to the culmination of resistance, a new Palestinian leadership was born, a leadership so bound to the negotiating process that it is existentially dependent upon it. Israel knows that; we know that. Moreover, in this process, what is most essential to the concept of negotiation has been drained and replaced by Israeli handouts and the tokens of good intention that this leadership needs in exchange for laying siege to, hunting down and killing those Palestinian forces that have chosen and adhered to the path of resistance.

As a result, things that were taken as givens under occupation, such as electricity, water, freedom of movement, jobs, food and medicine have become aspects of the negotiation process. They have become prizes flaunted in the face of those forces that "provoke" or "upset" Israel by "exposing themselves and their society to a blockade" for their refusal to give up on resistance, thereby depriving their society of those "great achievements" that, in fact, had been the legal responsibility of the occupation to provide.

In the national liberation struggle phase, Palestinians who offered themselves as intermediaries with the occupation, for the issuing of travel and work permits, or distribution of electricity and fuel supplies, would be regarded as agents. They were seen as lending themselves to an Israeli strategy for creating an alternative Palestinian leadership to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), which at the time was viewed as a national resistance leadership because it refused to accept services as a solution, instead insisting on the end of the occupation itself. In the current phase of negotiating over the creation of a state, the provision of fundamental services has become an Israeli-Palestinian instrument for rewarding a moderate leadership that deserves to be supported by such services and punishing an extremist leadership by withholding these services from Palestinians in order to force them to turn against this leadership because it adhered to the path of resistance.

However, while the Palestinian state component of the "two-state solution" is being voided of all substance, the Palestinian resistance front, which currently consists, for the most part, of forces -- such as Hamas and the Palestinian Jihad -- that espouse an Islamist ideology, does

not appear inclined to a democratic alternative that would offer a choice to Israelis, such as the "one-state solution". The idea of a single democratic state for all its citizens, Arabs and Jews alike, has never been taken up in a serious, practical way in the history of the struggle. The Arabs, rightfully, regarded Zionism as a colonialist movement and they saw Zionists, who were not indigenous inhabitants in Palestine, as colonisers bent on the goal to found a state on a land belonging to another people. The Balfour Declaration was no secret and the Zionist project to create a Jewish state in Palestine had been declared for all to hear.

There would also have been some practical conceptual problems. Zionism in practice meant, as it still does, drawing as many "pioneers" as possible to settle in Palestine; the boundaries of who would qualify for citizenship in a single state were never clear. Equal citizenship is the basis and essence of the idea of co-existence in a single state not dominated by Zionist ideology. It is also the message the Arabs should send out in order to offer Jewish society an alternative to the concept of a Jewish state, this alternative being the prospect of legitimising that society's presence in Palestine on the grounds of the principles of citizenship.

This is the message of co-existence; it is the antithesis of genocide, expulsion, or "throwing the Jews into the sea" (that famous quotation that is harped on by -- and to a large extent the invention of -- Zionist propaganda when, in fact, it is Israel that threw the Palestinians into the sea and the desert). But for the Arabs to try to pinpoint a specific cut-off date after which immigrants should not be considered legitimate residents is not only unrealistic, it is an unacceptable, and indeed absurd, way to define the boundaries of citizenship.

On the other hand, and more importantly, the Zionist movement has always insisted upon the framework of a Jewish state in Palestine as a solution to the Jewish question. This is how Zionism has historically defined its existence. The creation of a Jewish state was its banner and its ultimate aim throughout its campaigns, among Jewish opinion in the Diaspora, let alone to win the support of the Great Powers, to obtain the Balfour Declaration, and to push the settler drive. This state project was intended to rise from the ruins of Palestinian Arab society and never envisioned life together with the Arabs in a single political entity.

But there was one notable short-lived exception: the call by Hashomer Hatzair (The Youth Guard) for a bi-national state. Nevertheless, this stance must be seen against the backdrop of this movement's settler activities in the 1930s and the way these conflicted with the rights and interests of the indigenous population.

It is foolish to think that Zionism of any stripe, or Israel and any of its political parties or even major social components, would now accept the idea of a single democratic state as the framework of a solution. It is simply not a subject for negotiation in the context of current balances of power and in the sense the word "solution" is understood these days. When the idea was suggested for a brief period by Fatah, for example, in the 1970s, it was interpreted in Israel as synonymous with "the destruction of Israel". The PLO had also proposed the one-state solution, couched in the formula of a "secular democratic state in which full equality of rights would be guaranteed for all its inhabitants: Muslims, Christians and Jews". The PLO thus addressed the question of religious affiliations in the state without addressing national identity. However, it did not suggest any mechanisms for transforming the idea into a political programme carried out through joint Jewish-Arab efforts, for example -- indeed, through the liberation of Arab Palestine. In all events, the idea did not stay in circulation long.

The single democratic state is different from the bi-national state solution currently being aired by some Arab and Jewish intellectuals and, as noted above, first proposed by the socialist Hashomer Hatzair movement in the 1930s. The difference is that this idea acknowledges the existence of two national groups in Palestine, each of which would form a distinct entity within a single state. It thereby fulfils each group's demand for national expression, but within the boundaries of a single state that recognises them both. Historically, Hashomer Hatzair dropped this idea quickly and never picked up on it again. It was rejected both by Palestinians and by Zionists, even if it echoed faintly here or there in Hebrew University corridor and among some prominent, albeit very few, Jewish intellectuals before 1948 within the framework of the Brit Shalom movement.

The bi-national model, which acknowledges the existence of two national identities, one indigenous, the other exogenous, is closer to the Palestinian reality than the South African model. In new South Africa, as reconstructed after the collapse of apartheid, the concept of nationalities was ignored in favour of the concept of cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic plurality within the framework of a single citizen state. Otherwise put, the process of reconstructing national identity in South Africa (as opposed to the French model, for example) overtly recognises diverse ethnic, tribal, linguistic and cultural affiliations, but it is not a multinational framework.

But even if the bi-national solution is closer to the reality in Palestine because it addresses the indigenous/ exogenous dichotomy (in contrast to the immigrant models of the US, Australia and New Zealand, in which nationality is defined by citizenship with no reference to ethnicity and diverse national expressions), it has no more chance of being entertained diplomatically than does the single-democratic-state solution. Not only does the current balance of power in Palestine work against it, the current direction of the Palestinian national movement does too. In South Africa, the national liberation movement, as embodied by the African National Congress, actively espoused the course of national liberation through the pursuit of a single multi-cultural state founded upon the concept of equal citizenship. The Palestinian national liberation movement, by the end of the 1970s, had set its sights on the creation of a separate Palestinian state.

Because of this, the first and second Intifadas in the West Bank and Gaza were steered away from, rather than towards, unity with the rest of Palestine. Because of this, too, the Palestinian political map today may be divided over many issues but it is still pushing towards the creation of a separate Palestinian state. That this should be the case, however, does not mean that the fact that some democratically minded Palestinian intellectuals have recently begun to advocate the single-democratic-state option should not be taken seriously; indeed, there is every reason that this concept should be discussed seriously. I do not believe that there are great ideological or structural obstacles to this solution from the Palestinian standpoint. It is also in the interest of the Palestinian people to espouse a democratic programme that includes the right of return, insists on certain inalienable rights, and gives Jews in Israel reasonable cause to espouse this solution, too. If the Palestinians adopt it, then there can be no serious Arab obstacle to it.

Clearly it is pointless to wait for large segments of Israeli society to come around to this stance. No people willingly gives up its privileges, and for the Jews this is what the one-state solution would mean, to a greater extent in the secular citizen state formula than in the bi-national federal formula. There is, thus, very little prospect of the rise of a socio-political movement in Israel advocating a solution that conflicts with the concept of the Jewish state.

The most one hears from the Zionist left is a call to make a separate Palestinian state out of the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian right of return continues to be rejected out of hand.

The problem is that those who have recently begun to espouse the "one-state solution" have done so out of conviction that there is no hope for the "two-state solution" (based on pre-June 1967 borders and the principle of the right of return), rather than by way of perceiving an opportunity for a one-state solution to succeed. But the failure of the two-state solution does not, in itself, furnish the conditions necessary for the success of the one-state solution.

As much as I believe that the one-state solution is the worthiest in that it best meets the conditions for the fulfilment of Palestinian rights and extends a democratic message to Israeli society, in the currently prevailing language and mindset of negotiated solutions it doesn't stand a chance. This is primarily because Israel refuses so much as to even contemplate the idea and because there is not a single Israeli political force capable of elevating it as a serious item on the public agenda, unless of course the objective is to frighten public opinion away from retaining total hegemony over the Palestinians. Indeed, this is how the one-state idea has been wielded so far in Israel: negatively, as a means for intimidating public opinion into agreeing to let go of densely populated Palestinian areas, such as Gaza. Moreover, it is in this spirit, by way of a fear that realities may develop in a way that would propel towards the "one-state solution", Israel has begun to come around to the "two-state solution".

Unfortunately, the formula that Israel is currently proposing in this regard, as couched in the Bush and Sharon "visions", has so little to do with the actual creation of two sovereign states living side-by-side that it effectively proves the futility of the two-state solution. Worse yet, the Palestinian elite born from the "peace process" along with Arab regimes that are itching to put this burden behind them are helping Israel to market the rhetoric and stage the scene so as to make it appear as though the creation of a Palestinian state within the framework of a two-state solution is really on the cards. So for the time being we will be hearing a lot more about "land swaps" (without Jerusalem), "recognition of the right to return" without the exercise of this right, the creation of an entity without full sovereignty but called a state, and other such devices and euphemisms of which there seems to be an endless supply.

Would such a settlement bring peace, even if not a just peace? An answer to this question will be offered in the third episode.