

What Now?

by Robert Wolfe (April 2016)

In recent weeks I have seen a number of articles, all of which contend that now that everyone sees that there is no chance of a two state solution at present, the time has come for a discussion of alternative ways of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. And no doubt this is true, but I find it significant that the authors of these articles do not themselves put forward any alternatives.

It seems clear to me that the reason for their reticence on this score is the same as the reason for the general disillusionment with the two state solution, namely the wave of stabbings, shootings, car rammings and stone throwings that has been unleashed against Israelis by the Palestinian leadership during the past six months. The only realistic alternative to a two state solution is a one state solution, but a one state solution implies at least some possibility of Jews and Muslims living together in peace. What has been happening during the past six months seems to rule out this possibility, hence the reluctance of critics of the two state mirage to put forward an alternative of their own.

It has long been apparent that the Palestinian leadership neither needs nor wants peace with Israel. It doesn't need it because it is sustained by the billions of dollars in foreign aid that it receives from the so-called "international community." And it doesn't want it because hostility to Israel is the entire basis of its claim to the loyalty of the Palestinian population. It has nothing to offer in the way of economic development precisely because that would entail a more cooperative relationship with Israel than it is willing to accept. What is so discouraging about the latest wave of violence is that it appears to show that the policies of the Palestinian leadership are an accurate reflection of the wishes of the Palestinian population. If they all hate us, then neither a two state nor a one state solution is a viable alternative.

The thing is, although most Palestinians may not want peace with Israel, they most definitely need it. Very little of the billions of dollars in foreign aid that sustains the Palestinian leadership trickles down to the average Palestinian. What the Palestinians need is jobs, but few investors can be found to sink their money into an environment as violent and chaotic as the

Palestinian. Only an accommodation with Israel could create the necessary conditions for Palestinian economic development, but the Palestinian leadership is dead set against even the slightest steps in this direction. And through its control of the Palestinian media and educational system, it has succeeded in convincing most Palestinians that the destruction of Israel is the solution to all their problems.

This state of affairs is unlikely to change so long as Islam remains the dominant ideology of the Arab world. Palestinian rejection of Israel's right to exist is rooted in Islam's claim to a monopoly of authority over the entire Middle East. The more Islamic the group, the more anti-Semitic. That is why Hamas rejects the very possibility of peace with Israel, while the Palestinian Authority seeks to justify the current wave of violence against Israelis on the grounds that the Islamic character of the Temple Mount is threatened by Israel. The real cause of the violence is the upsurge of Islamic religious bigotry associated with the policies of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq. So long as a more secular and democratic ideology does not take hold in the Middle East, the Islamists will continue to radiate their hatred of Israel throughout the entire world.

Under these conditions, a one state solution is almost as dangerous for Israel as a two state solution. It should be obvious by now that the term "Palestinian state" is just a code word for the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Jews from their homes and the arming of the Palestinians with better weapons than those they now possess. A one state solution would avert these dangers but expose the entire Israeli population to the random violence which now mainly affects only Israelis living beyond the 1967 borders. Also, implicit in any realistic version of a one state solution is the gradual extension of full rights of Israeli citizenship to the Arabs now living in Judea and Samaria. Under existing conditions this would create a large and hostile minority of perhaps one third of the Israeli population bent on eliminating the Jewish character of the state in any way that it could. Only the emergence of a pro-Jewish movement in the Arab world could mitigate this threat, but this is something that appears almost inconceivable at the present time.

One thing is for sure: nothing good is going to happen in terms of relations with the Palestinians so long as the "international community" remains committed to a two state solution. It is the strategy of the Palestinian Authority to

somehow induce the Great Powers to impose on Israel a withdrawal from all or most of the settlements established after 1967 in Judea, Samaria and the suburbs of Jerusalem. This is the only two state solution that the Palestinians will accept, and so long as everyone continues to think in these terms, there will exist a constant pressure to accede to the Palestinian demands. The only effective way in which Israel can neutralize this pressure is by coming up with the outlines of a one state solution. Risky as such a solution would be, and reluctant as the Great Powers might be to accept such a solution, a one state solution would still be preferable to the nightmare of a forced withdrawal from the settlements.

The great advantage of a one state solution over a two state solution is that it is in any case inherent in the situation. Even now the Palestinians get their electricity from Israel and employ a monetary system based on the Israeli shekel. A Palestinian state, even if one could somehow come into being without destroying Israel, would have little basis for an independent economy of its own. Cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians is the reasonable, natural way of developing the rocky soil and limited resources of Judea and Samaria. Such cooperation would much more easily be achieved under the aegis of a one state solution. Needless to say, the name of that state would be Israel.

Integrating the Palestinians now living in Judea and Samaria into Israel should be seen as a process, not an event. The first step in that process would be for Israel to present a comprehensive plan specifying just how this could be done. The next step would be to lobby the "international community" to accept this plan as an alternative to the Palestinian version of a two state solution. What would happen next would depend on the Palestinians. Their leadership would be sure to reject the Israeli plan as it would put them out of business. Implementation of the plan would depend on the extent to which it would be accepted by a significant portion of the Palestinian population. Even if it were entirely rejected it would put Israel in a much better position in the light of world opinion than at present. And if it were gradually implemented many of the dangers which a one state solution would pose to the Jewish character of Israel could be somewhat mitigated. The bottom line is that Israel needs to take the initiative, and a plan for a one state solution is the best way of doing this.

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