

Whitewashing Palestine to Eliminate Israel: The Case of the One-State Advocates

Abstract

An increasingly fashionable position among self-styled “progressives” is to advocate the “one-state solution” to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This “solution” envisions a single “secular, liberal, democratic state” encompassing the entire former mandate of Palestine, with a “right of return” for millions Palestinian “refugees.” There is, however, a serious blind-spot in the argumentation of the one-state proponents having to do with their treatment of Palestinian political culture, both past and present. The one-state proponents systematically whitewash Palestinian political culture by denying, ignoring, or obscuring its Islamic, Islamist, and antisemitic aspects. Their goal is to distract their readers from the illiberal, undemocratic aspects of Palestinian society so as to keep the focus relentlessly on the real or imagined sins of Israel. They use propaganda as a tool of war to strip Israel of legitimacy and international support and to blind the well-meaning but uninformed readers to the very real risks that Jews would face as a minority living under an Arab and Muslim majority in a re-unified Palestine.

Introduction¹

The struggle to thwart the Zionist project has taken many forms over the past century, including terrorism, conventional warfare, propaganda, diplomatic pressure, commercial boycotts, and religious mobilization. Over the past decade, a new tactic among anti-Israel activists based mostly in the West has been

to contrast the imperfect reality of Israel with the perfect utopia of a single, liberal, secular, democratic state in the whole former British Mandate of Palestine in which Jews and non-Jews would enjoy perfect equality. While advocating the idea of the single, secular democratic state had been part of the propaganda of the Palestine Liberation Organization since the mid-1960s and seventies, the proponents of the one-state solution have revived it with renewed vigor. Since any real society looks bad compared to a hypothetical utopia, this tactic allows anti-Israel activists to portray Israeli society in harshly negative terms. It also allows them to reject the "two-state" solution on the grounds that it does not achieve the perfect justice of their imagined utopia. In rejecting the two-state solution, they aim to keep the struggle against Israel alive indefinitely.

There is a Zionist version of the "one-state solution,"² but the focus of this article is on the anti-Zionist version. This proposed solution would include the "right of return" for all Palestinian refugees of 1948 and their descendants, with compensation for losses they suffered in 1948, as well as the abolition of any alleged discrimination in favor of Jews or against non-Jews, within a single state encompassing all the territory of the former British mandate of Palestine. If implemented, the "one-state solution" would quickly turn Jews into a minority in a majority Arab Palestinian state.³

One-state advocates are enthusiastic purveyors of what Martin Kramer has called "the myth of Palestinian exceptionalism."⁴ According to this myth, the Palestinians have a political culture marked by equality, democracy, tolerance, non-violence, free debate and respect for diverse viewpoints. If it were true, this would make the Palestinian national movement exceptional in the Arab world. For in no other Arab country can one find such a political culture. In fact, when the Palestinians finally had the opportunity to create a state

in the making in the West Bank and Gaza after 1993, i.e., the Palestinian Authority, they created a corrupt, repressive tyranny that failed those who were condemned to live under it.⁵ In other words, the regime established by Yasser Arafat “did not deviate significantly from the prevailing Arab norm.”⁶ The Hamas regime in Gaza is even worse. However, the failure of the Palestinians to create a “secular, liberal, democratic state” of their own in the territory they control has not led one-state advocates to have any doubts about what sort of state an Arab and Muslim majority would create in a future united Palestine. Instead, they simply attack as “racist” anyone who would dare to raise doubts about such a state. In his critique of the one-state agenda, the Palestinian-American scholar Hussein Ibish has the honesty to acknowledge that “existential fears” among Israeli Jews are exacerbated by the poor state of ethnic and sectarian coexistence in the Middle East generally. He adds:

*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.*⁷

Since Ibish penned these words in 2009, the ethnic and sectarian conflicts of the Middle East have worsened. Ibish’s point seems obvious to anyone who follows the news, but one-state advocates cannot muster enough honesty or common sense to admit the obvious. In this respect they are remarkably like the clueless professors of Middle Eastern Studies whom Martin Kramer sharply criticizes.⁸

From a broader historical perspective, the one-state movement is only the most recent expression of the long-standing effort

by Palestinians to replace Israel with an Arab-majority state. In this respect it has much in common with the “two-state solution.” In 1970, a PLO delegation visiting North Vietnam got the idea of imitating the strategy of the North Vietnamese Communists, who in 1954 had “agreed to the division of their country into two states while awaiting a balance of power more favorable to them.”⁹ In the words of Abu Iyad (Salah Khalaf, 1933-1991), one of the leaders of Fatah and the PLO, if the Palestinians were offered a toehold in some portion of the former British Mandate of Palestine, “we should know how to take what was offered to us without renouncing our strategic objective of a democratic state in all Palestine in which Arabs and Jews would live as equal citizens.”¹⁰ To that end, the Palestinians decided in 1974 “to set up a national government on any part of Palestine to be liberated.”¹¹ Thus, from the Palestinian point of view, the Oslo Accords were merely a single phase of their plan to eliminate Israel.¹² The PLO’s alleged acceptance of Israel’s right to exist in 1988 actually was an insincere tactical ploy.¹³ Arafat’s post-Oslo terrorism constituted another aspect of the plan to continue the war against Israel from a territorial base within Palestine. However, since Israel stubbornly refuses to disappear, many Palestinian activists are now pursuing other tactics to dissolve the world’s only Jewish state. The one-state and BDS movements are examples of such tactics.