

Contributaion to the debate on the Socialist Solution in Palestine

Thinking the Thinkable:¹
The Future Palestinian Society I aspire to

Preliminary Deliberations on Proposed Solutions to Restore Genuine
Palestinian Rights

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<http://www.kanaanonline.org/articles/01633.pdf>

An Opening Word

My decision to initiate this discussion was stimulated by a number of articles that appeared in *Kanaanonline e-Bulletin* over the last ten months, on the issue of the “one-state solution”, and by the encouragement of the editors of *Kanaanonline*.²

Before delving in the deliberations on the proposed “one-state” ideas, I want to make two comments:

- (1) What I present below is a personal position, which is a result of long years of reflection, thought and searching. I hope that these deliberations will provoke equally deep thought and reflection among all those concerned about our future.
- (2) Although I am not necessarily wedded, in advance, to any of the currently proposed “labels” for possible solutions (i.e. a Democratic State, a “Bi-National State”, a “Secular Democratic State”, a “Socialist State”, etc), I believe that the solution should emanate from clear “strategic objectives” to our struggle, to which we ought to be committed, and with which any proposed solution should be coherent. I am, however, committed to struggling, with all who share these views, for a Society that is democratic, just, non-exploitative, self-generating, self-reliant, free and independent from external domination, in historical Palestine. In other words, I am

committed to struggling for the antithesis of apartheid, and all forms of racist political, spatial, economic, and psychological separation on the historical land of Palestine.

Strategic Objectives

The overall objectives of our collective national struggle, to which I am committed, seek to achieve the legitimate historical Palestinian rights, which, as used here, are the right of **all** Palestinians to live free and independent in their **historical land**, understood to be an integral part of the whole Arab Homeland (*Watan*), without the hegemony of any force, be it political, economic, or military.

This is premised on a number of prerequisites:

- **All** activities resulting from the illegal and criminal Zionist-Western colonization of Palestine, since Palestine was targeted at the turn of the twentieth century, including land and water theft for exclusive Jewish-Zionist settlements, political and legal structures, displacement and replacement of indigenous populations, privileged access and exploitation of natural resources, etc, are null and void, and should be dismantled;
- The **unhindered return** of all Palestinian individuals and groups who were forced by the Zionist colonial enterprise, with the active support of the Western imperialist centers, to abandon their homes and properties; and to exercise their inalienable natural right to **acquire these properties back**;
- The unobstructed productive use of their lands and other natural resources for the indigenous development of the society;
- The total freedom of all the people of historical Palestine to chose the type of their governance system, without any coercion or prejudice;
- The safeguarding of the seminal principle of separating religious beliefs from the political system, and the use of religion as the basis of government;
- The legal guarantee of equal rights of individuals and groups for all minorities living in the new Palestinian Society;
- The insistence on the basic principle that majority-minority relations must be based on equality and non-exploitation.

Conceptual clarification

The essence of this discussion is about the type of Future Society I (and, hopefully, we) aspire to see developed in the land of Palestine. My focus is not, necessarily, on the type of the “nation-state” for which we should be longing. Basically, I believe that “nation-states” are anachronistic, and will eventually disappear as organizing structures of human groups. Thus, for us to be exerting all our efforts to achieve yet another (and, certainly, not unique) “nation-state”, after 2 -3 generations, is untenable, futile, and a waste of human energy. Hence, I am focusing on the type of “Society” for which we aspire. This, therefore, is a discussion at the level of concepts; it is not meant to be a discussion about a “political plan” that may be implementable over the next decade or so. It is my belief that unless basic concepts, and our understanding of them, are clarified and internalized, no “political plan”, whatever it is, can be sustained. Moreover, and to be crystal clear from the outset, this discussion does not, nor should it, undermine or minimize the urgent need for heightening the serious ongoing popular struggle against the Zionist-American occupation and domination of our lands (and against all their local and international agents and brokers), and all its symbols and structures (for example, the illegal Wall of separation, the illegal Jewish-Zionist colonies, etc.).³

From this perspective, a number of essential components require **deconstructing and careful reconstructing**, in order for us to proceed, comprehensively and without ambiguity. I focus, primarily, on three main components:

1. The nature of the **Territory** of Palestine (in the spatial-historical sense);
2. The composition of the **People** existing on the Territory of Palestine;
3. The type of **Entity**, i.e. the Political-Economic-Social Structural configuration organizing people’s existence.

Preliminary elaborations

The Territory

1. Since the Arab region was atomized into non-coherent and unviable units of “nation-states” by the Sykes-Picot arrangements of 1916, and since the historical land of Palestine was targeted for take-over by the Zionist, Western colonial enterprise, all proposed solutions for the “Palestine Question”, since the Peel Commission recommendations in 1937, through the UN Partition Plan in 1947, and culminating in the Oslo Accords in 1993 (and following), that

were premised on dividing the land of Palestine, were unjust, and did not satisfy the basic human, social, cultural and economic rights of the Palestinian people. Their objective was to arrive at an arrangement acceptable to the Western capitalist centers and dominating powers, which will help create a beachhead in Palestine, by supporting the establishment of a Zionist-Ashkenazi regime that required the “dismantling of Palestinian communal life and the pauperization of the bulk of its people”⁴, by the imposition of a ruthless and incessant military and economic domination over Palestine, through which Western imperial hegemony would be extended to the entire Arab and Muslim region.

2. I am using the **Territory of Historical Palestine** to refer to the areas of “Southern Syria”, which were labeled as “Palestine” by the end of WWI, and which, by design, fell under British occupation, and became labeled as “Occupied Enemy Territory”⁵. Regardless of the changing administrative structures over time, this territory included the entire area west of the Jordan River, along a line extending from the Lebanese border in the north to al-Naqab in the South, and extending westwards to the Mediterranean coast, along a line including al-Naqab to South of Rafah, and North to the Lebanese border, including the entire Galilee. Thus, Historical Palestine, as used here, encompasses the entire area which the British, under pressure from the Zionist movement then, insisted to have placed under its mandate, or what is referred to currently as the West Bank, Israel, and the Gaza Strip.
3. This Territory was an organic and inseparable part of the Arab Homeland (*Al-watan al-Arabi*) for the Arab nation, including the Arab Palestinian people. Currently existing Arab “nation-states”, or “mini-nation-states” in the region are artificial configurations created by, and reflecting the power balance of, competing dominant Western imperial forces of the time. Thus, the future solidity of these “state configurations” is dubious.

The People

The Future Society in Palestine will be composed of:

- All Palestinians and Jews who lived in the land of Palestine before 1948, and who continue to live in it;
- All Palestinians who were expelled, or were forced to flee, as a result of the ethnic cleansing process and dismemberment of indigenous Palestinian society, in preparation for the creation of the Zionist-Ashkenazi State in 1947-1948;

- All other population groups, regardless of their religious or sectarian affiliation, who accept, and are committed to, the essence of the “Strategic Objectives”, delineated above.

This is premised on the following principles:

1. The indigenous Palestinian Arab population of Palestine is willing to make a historical concession, stating that in spite of the criminal and unjust suffering they were subjected to by the creation and maintenance of the Zionist-Ashkenazi State, they are willing to live with the non-Zionist Jews in Palestine as equals.
2. The just “Right of Return” of all willing Palestinians is implemented and enforced, and the racist “Law of Return” for Jews is annulled and dismantled.
3. The “Jewish people”⁶ is a historical myth, created and perpetuated by the racist Zionist settler colonial movement, to justify the colonization and theft of the land of the indigenous people of historical Palestine, as a beachhead for the extension of Western imperialist hegemony.
4. The non-Zionist Jews in the Future Society in Palestine constitute an ordinary group of people, distinguished only by adherence to a religious belief. Accordingly, they do not constitute an “ethnic” or “national” group, just like the Christian minority in Palestine, or the Muslim population in France, the US, the UK, Germany, etc. If they chose to live with us, they will have the guaranteed right to exercise their cultural and religious values and customs, with freedom and respect, like any other minority with different religious beliefs and values. But they are not eligible to claim a “right of self-determination”, as if they constitute a “national” group.⁷
5. Populations of Jewish faith existing in other parts of the world are an integral part of the countries in which they exist; they have no historical or religious claim over the land of Palestine, as if they were part of a “disbursed people”. The “historical disbursal” of the “Jews” from the land of Palestine is equally mythical; their “coerced” claim, so far, has been putative and fabricated.

The Entity

Proposed “solutions”

During the last hundred years, or since the onslaught of the Zionist project, a number of proposals about the nature of the entity (primarily political) to organize the life of the population in the land of Palestine were advanced.⁸ I present my elaborations on what has been proposed, in terms of its coherence with the “strategic objectives”, delineated earlier.

I shall start with those “proposals” that can be eliminated readily because of their obvious incoherence with the basic principles of the stated “strategic objectives” above.

1. The “Two-State” Idea

This proposal, which has been advanced by the PLO since 1988, is premised basically on the following: the physical partitioning of the historical land of Palestine; the actual dividing of the Palestinian people into disconnected and isolated political-spatial categories; the acquiescence to the non-applicability of the Right of Return; the continuation, maintenance and reward of the racist Zionist-Ashkenazi state on our stolen land; the continued exploitation of the marginalized and poor classes, and the increasing gap between the rich who dominate available resources through corruption and cooperation with Zionist capitalists, and the poor, who are steadily becoming poorer; and the submission to the hegemony of the US and other major Western imperial powers over Palestine and the entire Arab and Muslim region.

This proposal is blatantly and unambiguously incoherent with our “strategic objectives”, and therefore, it should be eliminated readily from our deliberations.

2. The “Islamic State” Idea

Although this proposal has not received much elaboration and currency, there are rough sketches of its basic premises, which can be summarized in the following:⁹ The land of Palestine is an Islamic *waqf* (trust) under occupation, and giving away the smallest piece of it constitutes a serious violation of God’s law; it is the responsibility of the Muslim nation to liberate it and to establish an Islamic state in it. An Islamic state in Palestine will be governed by the application of religious laws through its religious leaders. It is a religious state where Jews and Christians (the *Dhimma* people) will have the freedom to practice their religion, but not to share in the power. The citizens of the state will be divided on the basis of religion (and treated accordingly).

Even though this proposal possesses the potential of protecting the holistic land of Palestine, it raises serious basic questions about freedom of choice, the separation between religion and the political system, the nature of citizenry, political diversity,

etc. It is, too, incoherent with the “strategic objectives”, and it should be eliminated from our deliberations.

3. The “Bi-national State” Idea

This is perhaps the most talked about idea since the early twenties, by Zionist and non-Zionist Jews, by Palestinian Arabs on the left, and by other leftists and activists. At the same time, these discussions, writings, declarations, etc, were characterized by a complete lack of clarity.¹⁰ However, because there is much literature and discussion about this idea, one can easily glean its essential premises. The basic and major premise is that there are two competing “nationalities” in Palestine/Israel, a “Jewish nationality” and a “Palestinian nationality”, and each should be recognized as having a right for political and cultural autonomy that would lead to self-determination. This premise assumes parity between the two “nationalities”, and no domination of one group over the other. This raises a number of un-clarified issues, and serious and problematic ambiguities.

- It starts by accepting the existing current Zionist structure of control, discrimination and domination, and it does not challenge the Zionist-Ashkenazi State that was created by force, and through ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Palestinian population, but it rewards it by accepting it.
- The “bi-national” idea is based on the same Zionist mythical premise that the Jews of the world constitute a “people”, or a “nationality”, and that they have a historical and religious claim to the historical land of Palestine.
- There is no clarity about in which territory this “bi-national” idea will be applied: within the “borderless” existing Zionist-Ashkenazi State, or within the territory of historical Palestine. Each has implications to the “potential” of realizing genuine Palestinian rights.
- The dismantling of the existing Zionist structure of apartheid and its illegal, unequal, and unjust control over natural and material resources, and the means of production, is not assumed to be a precondition for it.
- The Palestinian right of return is not emphasized as a precondition.
- “Bi-nationalism”, according to these premises, could very well be a form of continued apartheid, and not necessarily democratic.

Based on our analysis of these premises, the proposed “bi-national” idea, as a means of restoring genuine Palestinian rights, is not coherent with our “strategic objectives”, listed above.

4. The “Democratic ‘Secular’ State” Idea

This idea surfaced early in the heart of the Palestinian revolution, following the military defeat of Arab states in 1967 and the Israeli military occupation of the rest of Palestine, the Egyptian Sinai and the Syrian Golan. Premises of this idea generated a “lively debate” over four years, until 1971.¹¹ However, the debate ended around then, by and large; it was replaced a few years later by the active discussion of the “two-state” proposal; and it was never resurrected again in force until the last 10-15 years, and without much elaboration. The earlier attempts to infuse more clarity in its premises were not sustained, and thus it remained a slogan. The basic premises of this idea, and the problems they generate, are the following:

- The establishment of a modern “democratic” (and non-sectarian) state in historical Palestine, where the emphasis is on “democratic” and not much on “secular”.
- Palestinian acceptance that “Israeli Jews” had a place in the “future Palestine”, just like the “Christians” and the “Muslims”. The conceptual problem lies not with the “Christians” or “Muslims”, who are the indigenous subjugated constituents of historical Palestine, but with the “Israeli Jews”. Thus, the earlier attempts focused on distinguishing between “Jews”, as a religious group, and “Zionists”, as the enforcers of an oppressive, colonizing, ideology. Hence, there was an earlier emphasis on “secular” or “non-sectarian”. Without further clarifications of this premise, however, the problem remains in dividing the population into sects and in terms of religious identities.
- In the absence of clarity, the implication of accepting “Israeli Jews” was left to be interpreted as accepting them either as “a religious” group, or a “national” group, with the potential right of “self-determination”, which, at this level, would not be distinguishable from the “bi-national” idea.
- Since this was perceived from the outset as a “liberating” idea, it was made amply clear that a pre-requisite for this idea is the dismantlement of the existing Zionist structure in Palestine, and all its illegal results; but again it was left without elaboration.
- The Palestinian right of return is not emphasized as a precondition; it is assumed, by implication.

There is some degree of coherence between the premises of this idea and the “strategic objectives”. But that is not enough to adopt it.

I believe that a **Democratic and Socialist Society** in historical Palestine (and without contradiction) is the only idea that has the potential of being coherent with our “strategic objectives”. Such an idea will release current Palestine from the grip of Zionist-Ashkenazi-Western political and economic domination, and

where natural resources of land and water, and the means of production are returned to the legitimate control of the people.

And finally, why do I support the idea of One Democratic Socialist Society in historical Palestine?

Because I support a just, moral and sustained solution that embodies the potential of restoring genuine Palestinian rights in their historical patrimony. Such a solution:

1. **Rectifies** the historical and continuous evil and injustice done to the Palestinian people;
2. **Preserves** the geographical and territorial integrity of Palestine as part of the Arab Homeland;
3. **Insists** on the right of return of all Palestinians to their lands and properties from which they were forcefully and criminally evicted;
4. **Dismantles** all Zionist and Jewish-Israeli structures and laws that were built on inequality and on the exclusion of Palestinian Arabs, with the purpose of imposing and maintaining a hegemonic control of the Zionist-Ashkenazi state over the entire region;
5. **Allows** and encourages mutual living and existence between the Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews in the historical land of Palestine, within a democratic, non-sectarian, equal, non-repressive, non-exploitative, just and open society;
6. **Promises** genuine and sustainable development of the territory of Palestine, for the benefit of all its inhabitants, especially the poor and the marginalized, by focusing on the effective, productive and purposeful use of land and water, for the full employment potential of its workers;
7. **Sets** an important human example of how antagonists may live together harmoniously in a delineated physical space, once racist and exclusionary ideology and practices are expunged.

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Endnotes

¹ I took the liberty of reversing Walid Khalidi's title of his article "Thinking the Unthinkable: A Sovereign Palestinian State", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 4, July 1978, New York.

² See <http://www.kanaanonline.org>, starting with Adel Samara and Mas'ad Arbid's three-part article on a "critique of the 'Democratic Secular State' solution" (numbers 1307, 1309, 1310), and Hisham Bustani's response, on 21 October 2007 (no. 1311), and the follow-up articles by Adel Samara: on "the one-state project", June 18, 2008 (no. 1568), "Why the Socialist Solution in Palestine", July 11, 2008 (no. 1592), and Samara and Arbid's "Two states or one state?" (no. 1597), and the three-part response by Mahmoud Jalbout on the "Project of the one Palestinian state" (numbers 1603, 1605 and 1607). Also, I was encouraged by Adel and Mas'ad to develop my comments further in order to enhance the discussion forum on *Kanaan*, for which I am grateful.

³ See, for example, my latest article on 15 July 2008 in <http://www.palestinechronicle.com>.

⁴ Khalidi, 1978, p. 697.

⁵ *Palestinian Encyclopedia*, vol 3, Edition 1, 1984, pp. 474-475, and Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, *Biladuna Filastine* (our Land Palestine), vol 2, part 2, pp. 9-14. Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1970.

⁶ See, for example, the article by Tom Segev "An invention called 'the Jewish People'" in www.haaretz.com (1.3.2008), which is a commentary on the new book by Tel Aviv University historian Shlomo Zand under the title *When and How Was the Jewish People Invented?*, and the interview with the author in *Haaretz* (13.7.2008).

⁷ On this and related issues, the reader is directed to see the illuminating lengthy study by Professor of Law, W. T. Mallison, titled "The Zionist-Israeli juridical claims to constitute 'the Jewish people' nationality entity and to confer membership in it: Appraisal in public international law", *32 George Washington Law Review*, 1964, pp. 983-1075. "The 'Jewish people' membership claim is invalid, consequently, under the existing criteria of public international law. In the same way, supposed nationality concepts such as 'the Christian people' would be equally invalid." (p. 1060).

⁸ For a summary of the evolution of the "bi-national" idea in Palestine, see Irene Gendzier, "Palestine and Israel: The Binational Idea", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. IV, No. 2, Winter 1975, pp. 12-35. For a summary of the evolution and debate of the "Non-sectarian, Democratic State", see Alain Gresh, *The PLO: the Struggle Within*. London: Zed Books, 1985, esp. Part I, pp. 9-57; and the position paper titled *Towards a Democratic State in Palestine for Moslems, Christians and Jews*, which was contributed by Fateh to the Second World Conference on Palestine, held in Amman, 2-6 September, 1970. For an elaboration of the "Socialist Solution in Palestine", see the series of articles in *Kanaanonline*, as referenced in endnote 2.

⁹ For a brief discussion, see Ahmad Qatamesh, *The One Democratic State: Towards Two Separate and Interacting Societies*. Ramallah: Munif Barghouthi Cultural Center, 2007 (Arabic). See also Iyad Barghouti, *Religion and State in Palestine*. Ramallah: Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies, 2007.

¹⁰ See, for example, Mahdi Adul Hadi, ed., *Palestinian-Israeli Impasse: Exploring Alternative Solutions to the Palestine- Israel conflict*. Jerusalem: PASSIA, 2005; Virginia Tilley, *The One-State Solution*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005,

¹¹ See Alain Gresh (quoted earlier), p. 50, for the most comprehensive discussion of that period.

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