Mobilizing Palestinians in support of one state

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This article examines the challenges to mobilizing Palestinians in support of a single democratic state in Palestine/Israel. The current fragmentation and diversity of outlooks among Palestinians demands a segmented approach, particularly toward Palestinian citizens of Israel, refugees living outside of historic Palestine, and those suffering under Israeli military occupation. Appeals to the Palestinian political class, nationalists, and Islamists, are also considered.

Keywords: Palestine-Israel one-state solution; mobilization for one-state solution and obstacles; Gaza, West Bank; Palestinians in exile; Palestinian Islamists; Israeli settlements

Introduction

The challenges of mobilizing Palestinians in support of the one-state solution have rarely been systematically explored by supporters of this solution. Proponents of the single state have, instead, focused primarily on how to overcome anticipated resistance from Israeli Jews. Considering the extent of Israeli Jewish opposition to the one-state idea, this focus is understandable (Sussman 2004). Advocates of a one-state solution (‘One-staters’) may also have tacitly assumed that, as the advantages to Palestinians of their cherished goal are so obvious, Palestinian support for it need not be cultivated, but rather that it would grow naturally (Bisharat 2008). It is, however, a mistake to assume Palestinian support for the single-state concept, or to underestimate the breadth, and in some cases, the intensity of Palestinian opposition to it. My goal, therefore, is to identify both the appeal of the one-state ideal to Palestinians, and the questions and concerns they may have over it, and to sketch how the appeals may be strengthened, and how the questions and concerns may be most effectively addressed.

This is a complex task. In fact, the roughly 10.6 million Palestinians today are geographically dispersed, deeply fragmented, and facing extremely diverse experiences and challenges that are, at least potentially, generative of different interests and outlooks (BADIL and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2009). Unfortunately, we know little about the current level of Palestinian support for the one-state solution; public opinion is difficult to track when the ‘public’ in question is strewn across state boundaries, and in some cases, lives in highly vulnerable political circumstances, where frank expression is not always prudent. There is some polling evidence from the Occupied Territories suggesting that support there for one state fluctuates between 25% and 33% (Abunimah 2006, p. 165). Evidence is more
elusive regarding the perspectives of Palestinian citizens of Israel\textsuperscript{6} and is virtually non-existent regarding the views of Palestinian refugees living outside of the borders of Mandate Palestine.\textsuperscript{7}

It seems probable, however, that no single message or appeal will be effective for all categories of Palestinians and that – on the contrary – a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach is likely to fail. Of course, a completely systematic approach to the challenge of mobilization would address Palestinians in all their diverse conditions and perspectives and detail what appeals and organizing approaches would likely be most effective for each sub-group. Such an effort is beyond the scope of this brief study, and thus there is a need to establish some priorities.

First, if mobilization might be conceptualized as entailing phases of both persuasion\textsuperscript{8} – that is, convincing a group of the need to act in a particular direction – and organization\textsuperscript{8} – that is, providing them with a concrete framework and instrumental means of moving forward – then my emphasis here will be on the phase of persuasion.\textsuperscript{8} Second, I will focus more on the content of persuasive messages than on the means of communicating with Palestinians in their various distinct living situations.\textsuperscript{9} Third, while there are many categories and sub-groups of Palestinians – defined by class, gender, religion or sect, occupation, political affiliation, and others – and, as I have said, ideally one would systematically study all of them, and consider potentially distinct appeals for each one – I will sample, albeit somewhat inconsistently, only from a few key categories. After addressing one reservation concerning the single state that may obtain to some extent among all groups of Palestinians – namely, the perception that it is ‘utopian’ and ‘idealistic,’ but unattainable – I will discuss how the one-state model may be presented most effectively to the three major segments of the Palestinian people (citizens of the State of Israel, residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Palestinians living in exile outside of historical Palestine). The Palestinian political class is pivotal so I will examine how to make headway on the one state ideal with that group. Palestinian nationalists, loosely defined, are another important category that can reasonably be expected to have reservations about one state. Finally, Islamists, a powerful and ascendant force in Palestinian politics, may not resist the notion of a single state as such, but their vision of the character of that state may be considerably different than that promoted by most supporters of a single state. Thus, how to engage their support for a democratic and egalitarian one-state solution seems a necessary part of this discussion. I will further justify my selection of these particular categories as I discuss each one.

Persuasion entails identifying and building on support among Palestinians for a single state, but it also, and perhaps even more importantly, involves understanding and effectively addressing Palestinians’ possible reservations concerning this goal. The discussion over the one-state solution, moreover, is not taking place in a vacuum. Rather, it is occurring in the context of alternatives, and unquestionably the other main alternative disposition is the two-state solution (Halper 2005, pp. 55–69).\textsuperscript{10} Therefore, the challenge, in some respects, is simultaneously one of persuasion in favour of the one-state model and dissuasion against the two-state model.

One final note is necessary before embarking on the substance of this discussion, and that concerns the tone in which proponents of one-state attempt to persuade other Palestinians to support this goal. That tone, it seems to me, must be respectful, judicious, and tolerant of differences if proponents seriously hope to gain substantial support. We must be able to acknowledge that there are bona fide concerns about the one-state solution – particularly regarding its attainability – and reasons to support a
two-state solution that could lead Palestinians of good faith to conclusions different from our own. It would be completely counterproductive to impugn the motives or ridicule the logic of other dedicated and committed Palestinians when the realities are so complex, the prospects so speculative, and the future ahead so unclear. One-state supporters situated outside of historical Palestine and possibly ensonced comfortably in the West are particularly vulnerable to de-legitimation on the ground that we would not live the indefinite, but likely lengthy, suffering to which we would seem to be condemning other Palestinians as the inevitably long struggle for the single state unfolds. A healthy dose of humility and a collegial debate, on the other hand, affords better prospects of convincing sceptical minds.

Escaping the ‘utopian’ tag

Perhaps the single greatest challenge that proponents of a one-state confront in persuading Palestinians of its validity is the perception that, despite its clear moral or political advantages, the single state is ‘utopian’ or ‘unrealistic,’ while the two-state solution, although imperfect and requiring compromises of principles, is ‘realistic’ and attainable. This is a perception likely held by many Palestinians, wherever they are situated, and thus we will address it first. If, indeed, this perception were correct, proponents of one state would arguably be leading Palestinians (and Israelis, although the preoccupation of this study is Palestinians) into a dangerous diversion, that would sap strength from the effort to achieve two states and consign Palestinians to years, if not decades, of continued acute suffering (Tamari 2000). Confronted with a choice between the tangible and relatively immediate relief that a two-state solution would seemingly provide the Palestinians, especially those suffering acutely under occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the distant and speculative goal of one state, many Palestinians – even those whose rights and interests might not be vindicated by the establishment of a Palestinian state – would seize the opportunity to alleviate the suffering of fellow Palestinians. This would be an entirely reasonable and compassionate response – and we bear the burden of showing why it is, nonetheless, mistaken.

There is no ready or definitive answer to this challenge. But perhaps two general, and perhaps slightly contradictory, responses seem due. The first involves accepting the propriety of subjecting political goals to a test of realism and working quickly and assiduously to meet that test. It is, perhaps, understandable for the time being that supporters of one state are still negotiating first principles, but very soon we must begin to propound a credible political programme for the future. This programme must be as definitive as possible with respect both to the end goal, and even more importantly, the path to achieve it. At the same time, supporters of one state must insist that the same standard of realism to which they have been subject also apply to the two-state solution.

The second response would involve re-framing the discourse surrounding solutions away from the language of ‘possibility’ and ‘impossibility’ altogether – language that some of us have been accustomed to using. We (and I include myself) have argued, for example, that the two-state solution is ‘no longer possible’ or that the ‘window of opportunity’ for its realization has now closed (Tilley 2005, p. 1). My current sense is that this approach is simply not persuasive, and may, indeed, be self-defeating. For whatever the obstacles to the two-state solution – at least one that a majority of Palestinians might be willing to accept – the obstacles to the one-state
solution might seem to many Palestinians to be considerably greater, and little is accomplished by proving them both to be impossible.\footnote{14}

It seems more forthright to acknowledge that nothing – strictly speaking – is impossible, and the question, instead, is one of probabilities: what are the odds that a conjuncture of political forces could arise in the reasonably foreseeable future that would produce either a one- or two-state outcome? And how, by our own agency, can we ‘make’ or tip these odds in the direction we desire? Viewed in this way, the answer seems relatively clear: considering the vast military, diplomatic, and economic power imbalance between Israel and the Palestinians at this time, any agreement between them will reflect this inherent underlying imbalance, and thus will be unjust to the Palestinian people. Imbalances, of course, can be offset by external actors. Yet, at this point, it seems unlikely that the rhetorical shifts by the United States under President Obama presage a sufficiently significant re-alignment of real American power to offset the imbalance between Israel and the Palestinians in any serious way. The bitter truth, therefore, is that no solution that is likely to be accepted by a majority of Palestinians is at all imminent.

This does not mean, however, that no agreement is currently possible, but simply that its terms would indubitably involve surrender of substantial Palestinian rights. Current Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu, in his June 2009 address, gave some inkling as to what sacrifices might be involved: demilitarization, Israeli control of Palestinian airspace, recognition of Israel as the ‘state of the Jewish people,’ abandonment of Palestinian refugees’ right of return, Israeli annexation of all of Jerusalem, and more. To be sure, this Israeli list of demands may not be met in full, but certain of its elements would surely be incorporated into any agreement negotiated in the near term.

Hence, what really seems at stake here is not which solution can be realized in the near future – because none is likely – but rather, what will be the platform for the next stage of the struggle for justice and peace in Israel/Palestine? Does a ‘state,’ no matter how diminished, provide a haven for Palestinians, a place to affirm their national identity and enable them to consolidate gains while preparing for new forms of struggle? Or, will the price tag, in terms of the formal and permanent surrender of core Palestinian rights, be too great? Given the current constellation of power, the latter seems the more likely outcome.

Despite this bleak outlook, we do have recourse, and that is to rely on the moral power of the one-state idea. We must be candid, however, that the struggle for justice and equal rights for all of the residents of Israel/Palestine in one state is still distant – perhaps even decades in the making. A single state offers the most promising framework for maximizing the rights of the greatest number of Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews as will become evident, at least with respect to Palestinians, in the next section.

One state and the three major segments of the Palestinian people

With the ethnic cleansing of 85\% of the Arab population of Palestine by Zionist forces in 1948, the Palestinian people were cleaved into two broad segments: those who managed to escape expulsion and remain in their homes and homeland, eventually to become citizens of the State of Israel, and those who were less fortunate and driven by force or by fear into exile into the surrounding Arab countries or into the remnants of Palestine which fell either under the control of Egypt (the Gaza Strip) or Jordan (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem).\footnote{15} In 1967 when Israel seized the West Bank...
and the Gaza Strip, yet a third category of Palestinians was created: those who still resided within the borders of former Mandate Palestine, but as residents of territories militarily occupied and ruled by Israel and lacking any political rights. Thus, it is possible to speak today – very generally – of the three major segments of the Palestinian people: citizens of the state of Israel, who today number approximately 1.2 million (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics 2008); those 3.88 million or so who live under Israeli military occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Scobbie 2005) and the other 5.2 million who live in exile outside of the borders of former Mandate Palestine. Needless to say, this is a somewhat crude breakdown, and there are substantial differences in the circumstances faced by Palestinians within each of these segments. One implication of the widely varying circumstances of these three major segments of the Palestinian people is that the one- and two-state solutions have differential impacts on Palestinians depending on where they live and what challenges they face in life. Of course, not all Palestinians will simply support the solution that most immediately supports their narrow interests or which does the most to ameliorate the condition of the segment of which they are part. Such factors as political affiliation or ideology, or even basic sympathy for the plight of Palestinians facing more dire circumstances, might well trump self-interest in the judgement of many Palestinians considering the relative advantages of the one- and two-state solutions. Nonetheless, it is likely that where Palestinians are situated will have much impact on how they view the future, and thus we must examine how these different groups stand to gain or lose through the two alternative solutions for which purpose we examine the implications for Palestinian citizens of Israel, refugees, and residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

One state and the Palestinian citizens of Israel

It should be clear that among the three segments of the Palestinian people, those 1.2 million who live under a regime of formal and informal discrimination as citizens of Israel have the least to gain by the two-state solution and the most to gain by the one-state solution (Adalah 2001, Human Rights Watch 2001, Sultany 2003, Nathan 2005). Whether or not Israel’s status as the state of the Jewish people is enshrined in an official agreement, the very purpose of the two-state solution would be to preserve Israel as a majority Jewish state (while also providing space for national expression for Palestinians elsewhere). The relaxation of tensions that would presumably follow such an agreement might permit marginal improvement of the position of Palestinian citizens of Israel, but this is by no means certain. As Israeli law professor Ruth Gavison, speaking on the future of Palestinian–Jewish relations stated in 2004:

One of the fraudulent things about the Israeli-Jewish Left is the statement that yes, there will be equality. There will not be equality. There will be dispute. It will be better than [elsewhere] in the region; it will be better than in many other places; there will be a process; but there will not be equality …. (Haaretz 2004)

There are other worrying indications that the status of the Palestinian citizens of Israel could actually deteriorate in the aftermath of a two-state solution, particularly if accompanied by a substantial re-concentration of Israeli settlers from the West Bank into Israel. A glimpse of what could be in store was had, perhaps, in the October 2008 ‘pogroms’ (a term employed at the time by the Israeli press and some political leaders) against Palestinian residents of Akka, apparently in which former residents of Israeli
settlements in the Gaza Strip – evacuated in 2005 – played a leading role (Haaretz
2008).23

Yet, it is not only the prospect of increased informal racism at the hands of indi-
vidual Israeli Jewish citizens that is of concern. The last two Israeli foreign ministers,
Tzipi Livni and Avigdor Lieberman, have either hinted at or openly advocated alter-
native means of disenfranchising Palestinian citizens of Israel in connection with a
peace agreement. Livni, while campaigning for the office of Prime Minister in
December 2008, offered that she would say to Palestinian citizens of the state: ‘Your
national solution is somewhere else.’ At the very least, the statement seemed to imply
that Palestinian citizens who did not accept the Jewish character of the state should
leave for the Palestinian state, or, perhaps, suffer the attenuation of voting rights
within Israel in favour of a status akin to permanent residency. Current Israeli Foreign
Minister Avigdor Lieberman has been much more frank, advocating land swaps with
the Palestinian state that would put large Palestinian communities adjacent to the
Green Line, such as Um al-Fahm, under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian state,
effectively de-nationalizing their residents (Teeple 2006).

In sum, then, the two-state solution would permanently segregate the Palestinian
citizens of Israel from their fellow Palestinians and render their struggle for equality
a purely internal Israeli matter, with uncertain, but troubling prospects. In contrast, a
single state founded on the fundamental principle of equal rights would end formal,
institutionalized discrimination against Palestinian citizens. These Palestinians would
no longer be a politically marginalized minority, but rather members of a Palestinian
population that would equal or exceed the number of Jewish citizens of the state, and
thus be able to defend itself against other forms of discriminatory governmental
practices. They would enjoy the opportunity to commingle, intermarry and engage
economically without restriction with Palestinian residents of the West Bank and the
Gaza Strip. Furthermore, because the single state would permit for the genuine
realization of the right of Palestinian refugees to return, Palestinian citizens of Israel
could also look forward to the reconstitution of their families, torn asunder and
separated for more than 60 years.

In terms of interests, therefore, the appeal of the one-state solution to Palestinian
citizens should be very strong. Yet, headway may nonetheless be difficult. Perhaps the
greatest problem in establishing and broadening support for one state among Palestin-
ian citizens of Israel may be overcoming the combination of despair and fear that they
might logically be expected to feel. The despair would reflect Palestinian citizens’
acute and intimate awareness of the solidity of the Israeli state, replete with its Zionist
features, and their understanding of the strong commitment of Jewish Israelis to keep-
ing their advantages in the current system intact. The fear would be a predictable
response to Israeli repression, exemplified in the minds of many in the prosecutions
and eventual harassment into exile of Palestinian Member of the Knesset Azmi
Bishara – repression that may intensify if Palestinians begin to take effective actions
in support of one state and to accrue momentum towards that goal.24 If so, more than
any ‘message’ as such, what may be needed to spark greater open support of one state
among Palestinian citizens of Israel would be an organizational effort and campaign
to provide protection for those daring enough to speak out. To reiterate, however: not
all Palestinian citizens of Israel can be expected to support one state simply because
it promotes their interests more so than two states – ideology, political affiliation, and
other factors may militate otherwise (Alternative Information Center 2009).25 We are
speaking of tendencies and amenability to the one-state message only.
One state and Palestinians in exile

Refugees living outside the borders of former Mandate Palestine constitute another segment of the Palestinian people who, logically speaking, should be sympathetic to the call for one state. The reason is straightforward: the two-state solution is self-evidently unable to accommodate the Palestinian right of return. Even in the most generous versions of the two-state solution, such as the Geneva Initiative (an informal plan that Israel has never accepted), refugee return to their actual homes and villages within Israel would be token. While return to the Palestinian state would be permitted, presumably without restriction, in practice – even assuming complete Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank – the land base and economy of the state would be insufficient to absorb large numbers of Palestinian refugees from exile. The Gaza Strip, in particular, is, at 4,010 persons per square kilometre, one of the most densely populated areas in the world today, and is, itself, in acute need of population relief (BADIL and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2009). The West Bank, less densely populated, nonetheless has limited arable land, and even fewer water resources, and thus, it, too, could accept only limited numbers of refugees. As a matter of practice, then, relatively few Palestinians would be likely to immigrate to the new Palestinian state, in view of limited economic and life opportunities, and their ‘right’ to return would effectively have been nullified.

In any case, while ‘return’ to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would redress one dimension of the refugees’ plight – namely, their statelessness – in legal and moral terms, this fails to address the real core of refugee rights which involve the right to return to their actual homes and receive compensation for their losses, or where that is not possible, to nearby alternative housing (Quigley 2005). The single-state solution, in contrast, would open up much greater space for the actual realization of the right of return, as refugees would be able to settle anywhere within the new state.

One state and the residents of the Occupied Territories

There is little question that proponents of a single-state solution face their toughest challenge in winning support among residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These Palestinians have faced more than 42 years of Israeli military occupation that has only grown more violent, brutal, and repressive over time. The litany of abuses is quite familiar: thousands of Palestinians have been killed, and many more wounded, in Israel’s periodic eruptions of violence; approximately 10,000 Palestinian political prisoners, including some minors, languish in Israeli jails, many held without trial; countless Palestinian detainees have been subjected to torture; thousands of homes have been demolished or sealed; Israel’s siege of the Gaza Strip (now in its third year) and its policy of closures and restriction of movement in the West Bank have disrupted economic and social life, stunted Palestinian children, and reduced many Palestinians to penury.

Manifestly, these Palestinians acutely need and deserve relief from such dire circumstances, and were a credible opportunity to achieve it honestly presented, it would be very hard to deny it to them. Moreover, if residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip wished never to lay eyes on Israelis, their persecutors, that would be an understandable human reaction to their suffering. And indeed, the two-state solution, even in a diminished (and diminutive version) is likely to afford them at least some measure of relief, although precisely how much would depend greatly on the actual terms of such a settlement.
Given the circumstances, it is striking that support for one state – as previously noted to range from 25% to 33% according to evidence from polls – is as high as it apparently is in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Several responses by advocates of one state can bolster this support, in my view. First, an appeal to national unity and solidarity with other Palestinians must be made. The point must be stressed that any relief for residents of the Occupied Territories will, as we have seen, come at the expense of the permanent surrender of rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinian refugees. At the same time, proponents of one state must devise a strategy that encompasses short-term relief for the residents of the Occupied Territories – strongly implying a moratorium on the exercise of the right to violently resist occupation, and a disciplined resort to pure non-violence. The strategy must be capable of inspiring hope in West Bank and Gaza Palestinians that their sacrifices are not in vain, and instead, are for the ultimate good of their people. They should be honoured and celebrated for their courage and ṣumūd – or ‘steadfastness’ – for today they bear the brunt of Israeli repression for the Palestinian people as a whole.

The Palestinian political class

The Palestinian political class – by which I mean officials of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), or of the Palestinian Authority (PA), and their close administrative and other associates, political party officers, union and professional association leaders, and the like mostly located today in the Occupied Territories – constitute a pivotal audience for proponents of a single-state solution. It is almost certain that some members of this group already support the single-state solution (Abunimah 2006, pp. 161–162). However, beyond the occasional threat issued by high PA officials that Palestinians would begin to demand one state if a two-state solution were not in the offing, this group has offered no public support for the one-state ideal (Jerusalem Post 2008).

The substantive points to be raised in attempting to win greater support for one state among Palestinian professional politicians may not be different than they would be for attempting to win the support of any other Palestinians. The reason for singling them out here, however, is because of their commanding role vis-à-vis vital Palestinian resources, tangible and intangible. These include the PLO embassies throughout the world, the permanent mission to the United Nations, and the legally recognized right to speak on behalf of the Palestinian people before the international community. Such are key institutions, especially in the way they set standards for what constitutes acceptable support for Palestinians world wide. More than once the phrase ‘we cannot be more Palestinian than the Palestinians’ has been voiced to justify a state’s refusal to take a bold position on Palestinian rights. Were Palestinian officialdom’s as yet unbending commitment to the two-state solution shifted, it might well release a significant reserve of international solidarity for the one-state solution that has been impeded from expression up to this point.

Speaking to Palestinian nationalists

As we have noted repeatedly, the way Palestinians are likely to respond to appeals for one state is a function of multiple factors. One of them, surely, is political outlook or ideology – the set of ideas, values, ethics, and beliefs that individuals employ in
thinking about public life. As in most populations of similar scale, Palestinians hold highly diverse political perspectives and world views. Prudence would suggest that supporters of one-state not seek to overturn these world views in favour of a unitary ethical justification for the one-state solution, but rather that they probe the various outlooks and traditions of thought held by Palestinians for elements that are compatible with or complementary to the one-state ideal.

Many Palestinians, wherever they are situated, and whether or not affiliated with a specific political party, are ‘nationalists’ in the sense they wish their people to have a flag, their own passports, public holidays, national museums, and an educational system that teaches their national narrative – in short, to have their identity as a people affirmed and expressed within the framework of an independent nation state. Others may further believe that after sixty years of fragmentation, dispersal, and repression, Palestinians need the protection of an independent state to reconstitute themselves as a people – to rebuild their economy, educational system, infrastructure, and so forth, so as to be able to participate in the global community from a position of greater strength.

Many Palestinian nationalists, loosely defined, might fear that in a single state their people would be denied the opportunity for national self-expression, or at least, would be forced to share the ‘public square’ with Israeli Jews. Meanwhile, they might also be apprehensive that Palestinians from the Occupied Territories and from exile would be assimilated into a single state society at approximately the level of Israel’s current Palestinian citizens – in short, as the new state’s permanent underclass. These are estimable concerns, and supporters of a single state must, in some way, have a response (Tamari 2000, pp. 83–87, Avnery 1999, p. 55).31

There is no escaping the fact that in a single state, Palestinians would not enjoy exclusive control of the public domain, and instead, would be obliged share it in some way with Israeli Jews. On the other hand, this sacrifice would be made reciprocally by Israeli Jews. Moreover, for both peoples, lack of exclusive control of the public domain is not tantamount to the negation of their respective national identities. After all, constitutional arrangements are possible which could enshrine and concretize the identities and interests of both peoples. In short, ‘half a loaf’, while less preferable than a whole, is not the same as nothing.

Perhaps a new and more inspiring vision of Palestinian nationalism can be engendered here as well. There was a time, in the not too distant past, when to say that one was ‘Palestinian’ implied nothing about one’s ethnic or religious identity. Cannot pride be fostered in a re-emergence of that older, more ecumenical notion of ‘Palestinian-ness?’ Is not the newer ethnically based understanding of what it means to be ‘Palestinian’ a distortion, or deviation from tradition, that has been forced on Palestinians by their confrontation with Zionism? And have we not been diminished as Palestinians by being forced to assert just one facet of ourselves as our exclusive identity, and one that is, in some senses, the mirror image of Zionism itself? Would it not venerate our deepest traditions of tolerance and hospitality to return to that broader understanding of who we are?

As to concerns that Palestinians would be submerged in the new unitary state as a permanent underclass, these are not totally unjustified, but may be somewhat exaggerated. In the first place, the current position of Palestinian citizens in Israel is not an accurate predictor of the future of other Palestinians in a single state. Their condition, on the contrary, is in significant part the consequence of official Israeli discrimination and political vulnerability as a minority of 20% – factors that would be negated in a
single state. In addition, Palestinians, particularly in the diaspora, have invested heavily in education, and would enter the economy and bureaucracy of the unitary state with considerable entrepreneurial and other skills and experience (Schultz 2003, p. 132, Hammer 2005). With their linguistic, cultural, familial, social, and economic ties to surrounding Arab countries, Palestinians returning to the new state would bring substantial assets and economic opportunities. This is not to say that the single state would immediately be a paradise of social and economic justice and equality. But Palestinians may not be as severely disadvantaged as imagined, and some would no doubt prosper.

**Speaking to Palestinian Islamists**

Palestinian Islamists have won their current prominent position in Palestinian politics by steadfast opposition to Zionism. Whatever one may think of their ideology – some aspects of which are clearly adverse to progressive values – and occasionally their military tactics – some of which almost surely violate international laws of war – Palestinian Islamists have demonstrated tremendous courage and willingness to sacrifice to defend Palestinian interests and advance their cause. They will not be disappearing from the political scene any time soon, and thus supporters of one state must attempt to engage them.

Some Palestinian Islamists appear to support the idea of one state in Palestine in principle – but their vision of such a state differs from either the bi-national or secular democratic models supported by most proponents of the single-state ideal. The reference in the charter of Ḥamās to the land of Palestine as a ‘waqf’ that is, inalienable, and to be held in trust for Muslims in perpetuity, seems irreconcilable with any notion of sharing the land equitably between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews. And the notion in the same document that non-Muslim religious communities can only be safe and prosper in Palestine ‘in the shadow of Islam’ on the face of it seems to be a prescription for Muslim political supremacy (Abu Lafi 2005, p. 298).

But these ideas, articulated in 1988, are perhaps not as fixed as they might first appear. Ḥamās has, over time, demonstrated strong pragmatic tendencies, evidenced in the organization’s support for a long-term hudnah or ‘truce’ in return for an end to Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This stance, which is tantamount to an acceptance of two-states, has been repeatedly articulated by Ḥamās political leaders. It is hard to believe that Islamists would be less open to a one-state solution that, while imperfect from a doctrinaire perspective, responds far more comprehensively to Palestinian rights and interests than a mere end of Israeli occupation. It seems far more likely that Ḥamās would respond as Ḥizb Allah has done in Lebanon – that is, to enter the political mainstream as a rule-abiding party. When the will exists, moreover, there is ample scope within the Islamic legal tradition (fiqh) to justify the shifts that Hamas and other Palestinian Islamists might deem helpful and necessary on political grounds. For example, some contemporary scholars of the Islamic fiqh have argued that classical doctrines mandating exclusion of non-Muslims from positions of rule were, in fact, historically contingent – making room for the argument that the conditions justifying the doctrines have now expired, and there is no contemporary justification for them (Jackson 2004, pp. 77–108). These positions cannot be foisted on Palestinian Islamists by outsiders, but respectful dialogue might help them locate the sources they need when the time is deemed appropriate by Islamists themselves.
Conclusion

The task of mobilizing Palestinians in support of one state is substantial. While attention to this point has been properly focused on the greater challenge of persuading Israeli Jews to accept the one-state ideal, it would be a grave mistake to neglect the need to cultivate support among Palestinians. I have, hopefully, identified some of the ways in which Palestinians can be approached and their support won. In the end, one should not underestimate the power of a moral idea to inspire and transform both peoples. As previously noted, there was a day when to say that one was ‘Palestinian’ implied nothing as to one’s faith or ethnicity. We need to return to that day.

Notes

1. For example, two leading and otherwise excellent monographs on the issue, Abunimah (2006) and Tilley (2005), devote relatively little discussion to the question of Palestinian support for a single state, and still less to possible Palestinian objections to it. Abunimah treats Palestinian views on one state in ten pages of a chapter titled ‘Israelis and Palestinians thinking the unthinkable’. Tilley includes an appendix on Palestinian public opinion on one state, but her discussion of Palestinian perspectives is sprinkled sporadically throughout the text, and nowhere deals systematically with Palestinian qualms. Similarly, Kovel (2007), which also advocates the one-state solution, has virtually no discussion of Palestinian reservations. Karmi (2007), while supporting a single state, includes a brief but forthright discussion of Palestinian objections to the single-state solution, including vehement opposition from some prominent Palestinian intellectuals, including the late Ibrahim Abu-Lughod.

2. According to a poll reported in Haaretz (2003), 78% of Israeli Jews oppose a single binational state. See http://www.merip.org/mer/mer231/sussman.html/.

3. The present author has argued elsewhere that a single state provides the most promising framework for vindicating the fullest range of rights for the broadest numbers of both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews.

4. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the worldwide population of Palestinians at 10.6 million as of the end of 2008 in a special report issued on the 61st Anniversary of the ‘Nakbah’ (‘Calamity’) of 1948. The breakdown of this population will be reviewed below (BADIL and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

5. Polls have been conducted regularly in the Occupied Territories by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center, and can be viewed at the group’s website.

6. Haifa University sociologist Sammy Smooha has conducted polling among both Israeli Jews and Palestinian citizens of Israel over many years, the results of which indicate strong support among Palestinian citizens for the two-state solution. For example, in 2007, 83.8% of ‘Arabs’ favoured ‘two states for two peoples’ (Smooha n.d.). Four ‘vision documents’ issued by leaders of the Palestinian community in Israel in 2007 also at least nominally accepted the two-state framework. On the other hand, these same documents called unequivocally for implementation of the right of return and full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel – demands that are inconsistent with the concept of ‘two states for two peoples’, or with the maintenance of Israel as a Jewish-majority and Jewish-dominated state. Polling research conducted by the Haifa-based Palestinian research institute Mada al-Carmel in 2005 affirmed the strong support for the right of return among Palestinian citizens of Israel; 70.3% of those surveyed supported either granting Palestinian refugees the right of return to Israel proper or offering them the choice between return and compensation (Rouhana and Sabbagh-Khoury n.d.). In short, Palestinian citizens of Israel appear to support the two-state solution and yet also take positions that seem at odds with that end.

7. The only systematic recent effort to elicit the viewpoints of Palestinian refugees was the Civitas project, yet its focus was on issues of governance and representation, not final disposition options (see http://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/Projects/Civitas/index_english.aspx). There is, of course, demonstrable interest in the one-state idea among Palestinian intellectuals and activists in the diaspora evidenced in articles, conferences, groups and declarations.
8. This is not because organization is any less important than persuasion, but simply due to
the fact that other contributors to this volume write on organization. My choice to
emphasize persuasion is intended to avoid overlap and promote complementarity.

9. In fact, the problem of how to communicate with Palestinians is substantial – again, due to
their geographical dispersion, and the absence of any effective deliberative body within
which matters of national interest may be raised and debated. The Palestine National
Council, which once served this function (albeit never perfectly), has not met since 1997.

10. Israeli anthropologist and founder of the Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions Jeff
Halper has suggested a ‘two-phase’ solution ultimately leading to a Middle Eastern
regional confederation joining Israel and the surrounding Arab states, but this is one of very
few alternatives to either the one- or two-state solutions that has been publicly propounded.

11. For a good example of this, see Avnery (2003).

12. One of the best articulations of this concern is Salim Tamari.

13. This is a fairly common formulation among supporters of one state. For example, Tilley
(2005) begins by saying: ‘The Jewish settlements, always recognized by the international
community as an “obstacle to peace,” have accomplished their purpose: the territorial basis
for a viable Palestinian state no longer exists. The premise for all present diplomacy – the
two-state solution – has therefore become impossible.’

14. As veteran Israeli journalist and political commentator Uri Avnery cleverly noted in
a recent writing, those who support a single state after the demise of the two-state solution
are like a middleweight boxer who, having lost the championship match, now wants to take
on the heavyweight champion.

15. Originally these groups were about 154,000 and more than 800,000, respectively (BADIL
and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009). There is by now a voluminous literature
on the expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948 (for example, Masalha 1992, and Morris 2004).
On the specific characterization of the expulsion as an example of deliberate ‘ethnic cleans-
ing’, see Pappe (2006).

16. The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics counted the Arab population of Israel as 1.45
million at the end of 2007; this figure, however, included 200,000–250,000 Arab residents
of East Jerusalem, who are permanent residents, but not citizens of Israel.

17. The Gaza Strip remains ‘occupied territory’ within the meaning of international law, notwith-
standing Israel’s withdrawal of its settlers and ground troops in August–September 2005.
Israel continues to exercise ‘effective control’ over the region by patrolling its coastal waters,
land borders, airspace, and by entering it at will to arrest and kill Palestinians. Israel also
supplies the Gaza Strip with electrical power and fuels, and retains its population registry.

18. These population figures are derived from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.
Needless to say, these are extremely broad and in some cases messy categories (for
example, 27.2% of West Bank residents and 67.9% of Gaza Strip residents are refugees,
meaning that even while living under Israeli military occupation, they share certain
interests and experiences with Palestinians in the more distant diaspora).

19. For example, Palestinians living in Lebanon without citizenship, and legally barred from
over 70 professions and occupations, face vastly more daunting challenges than Palestinians
in Jordan, who have been awarded citizenship and are able to enter occupations free of
formal legal discrimination.

20. Adalah, the Legal Center for Minority Rights in Israel, has counted some twenty Israeli
laws that explicitly favour Jews over non-Jews or otherwise discriminate against Palestin-
ians.: Apart from this de jure discrimination, Palestinian citizens also face de facto policy
discrimination in the form of unequal access to benefits, employment, education, and other
services.

21. It is intriguing, for example, that the Israeli High Court’s decision overturning discrimina-
tory housing practices in Katzir was reached in the year preceding the outbreak of the al-
Aqṣā Intifada, and in a relatively hopeful atmosphere concerning the prospects for a peace
agreement.

22. Quoted in Segev (2004). Gavison, a former head of the Israel Civil Rights Association, and
sometimes mentioned as a candidate for the Israeli High Court, had joined in a two-year
project sponsored by the Israel Democracy Institute to develop a charter for Jewish–Pales-
tinian relations. The project ended without conclusion as the group, composed of twelve
Jews and eight Palestinians, was unable to reach agreement over whether Israel would
remain a ‘Jewish state’ or a ‘state of all its citizens’.
23. Yoav Stern and Yuval Azoulay; Livni tells Acre residents, ‘don’t take the law into your own hands’.

24. Avi Dichter, head of Israel’s General Security Services, recently suggested the possibility of employing covert means against Palestinian citizens of Israel who mobilized against maintaining Israel’s status as a Jewish state, even where that mobilization used purely democratic and legal means.

25. For example, Hadash, the socialist Israeli political party that draws substantial support from Palestinians, has consistently supported the two-state solution – while also calling for equal rights within Israel.


27. On the legal foundations of the Palestinian right of return.

28. Anecdotally, I can report at least this sentiment is quite strong among many Palestinians in the West Bank.

29. As former Negotiations Support Unit lawyer Michael Tarazi reported to Ali Abunimah, following the publication of his opinion-editorial piece in the New York Times (Tarazi 2004) supporting one piece in October 2004, he was approached by a number of Palestinian Authority officials who agreed with his perspective, but declined to say so publicly.

30. For example, top Palestinian peace negotiator Ahmad Qurei stated in August 2008: ‘If Israel continues to reject our propositions regarding the borders [of a future Palestinian state], we might demand Israeli citizenship.’

31. These concerns are expressed in different ways by Tamari and Avnery.

32. As one observer noted: ‘Education has been of mighty importance in Palestinian perception as well as in real-life strategies. Education has been seen as both a form of and a preparation for the struggle. It has been the sole source of social mobility and an opportunity to save refugees from current degrading circumstances.’ Diaspora Palestinians have been extremely successful entrepreneurs in private enterprise and have made major contributions to state-building in Arab countries, particularly in the Gulf.

33. See Hamas Charter, Article 11.

34. See Hamas Charter, Article 6. Indeed, Ahmad Abu Lafi concludes that ‘support for the idea of a binational state is unlawful from the perspective of the Shari’a’.

35. Most recently, for example, Khaled Meshaal; Ismail Haniyeh, too.

References


