



## AN ISRAELI VIEW

### **Egypt and Jordan hold the solution**

by Efraim Inbar

Conventional wisdom partitions the Land of Israel into two states, Israel and Palestine, as the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The rationale of partition was generally accepted by the majority of the Zionists after 1937, but was rejected by the Palestinians. For many years, the Arab world concurred in opposing partition and the existence of a Jewish state. Egypt and Jordan, which occupied Gaza and the West Bank respectively in the 1948-67 period, bringing about a de facto partition, did not establish an independent Palestinian entity.

Israel's problem of finding a partner for partition became relevant after the 1967 war, when it conquered Gaza and the West Bank from Egypt and Jordan. Gradually, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) acquired the status of representing the Palestinians. The PLO did not accept the two-state formula, even within the 1947 partition borders, until the 1988 Algiers conference.

For years, Israel was reluctant to deal with the PLO until the Yitzhak Rabin government signed the Oslo accords in September 1993. The agreement led to a repartition of Palestine and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority over parts of Gaza and the West Bank, leaving its borders to be negotiated at a later stage.

At that time, the two-state solution was heralded as a recipe for peace and stability in the area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Many suggested that the Palestinian national movement would be able to reach a historic compromise with the Zionist movement and subsequently establish a viable state that could exist peacefully next to Israel. Unfortunately, both assumptions have proven to be false.

The establishment of the embryonic Palestinian state led to increased bloodshed and instability. Terrorist organizations are more lethal when they have a territorial base. The discredited Oslo process allowed the PLO to gain such a foothold in the Holy Land.

In the post-1993 period, the number of Israeli (and Palestinian) casualties has increased tenfold. Similarly, the emergence of the PA led to the militarization of a fragmented Palestinian society, beleaguered by internecine struggles among a myriad of militias. Next to Israel lies a sick society, led by a pathological national movement, mesmerized by the use of force. It is a society that produces suicide bombers who have become role models in kindergartens and schools.

Yasser Arafat's unwillingness and/or inability to acquire a monopoly over the use of force further eroded the governing capacity of the PA. The escalation of the violent conflict with Israel since 2000 led to a collapse of law and order and pervasive corruption. The ascendance to power of the radical group Hamas in 2006 did not improve the PA's governance, despite hopes that the Islamists would be honest and effective administrators. Moreover, the Hamas government's



refusal to recognize Israel further eroded the belief that the Palestinians are able to reach a historic compromise with the Jewish national movement. Such a notion was undermined by Arafat's refusal to sign a deal with Israel at Camp David in July 2000.

Unfortunately, the Palestinians usually shy away from introspection and blame outsiders, particularly Israelis, for all their misfortunes. Furthermore, they hope that the world will continue to subsidize their failed enterprise. Yet, the skepticism about the ability of the Palestinians to maintain a functioning state has become widespread in the world. Israel should capitalize on that awareness to help the international community reach the conclusion that the Palestinian experiment started at Oslo has basically failed and there is no effective Palestinian option.

Little can be done by outsiders to fix the Palestinian mess. Generally, foreigners are limited in their abilities to influence the domestic socio-political dynamics of Middle Eastern societies. Western political pressure and/or financial aid can hardly change entrenched ways of conducting political affairs. Foreign support to the Palestinians and the preservation of the UNWRA relief system only sustain the unsuccessful status quo, allowing for increased militarization of Palestinian society and prolonging its inclination to refrain from facing the grim reality navigated by its leaders. Nurturing the national hopes of the dysfunctional Palestinian national movement will only bring further suffering to the Palestinians and their neighbors.

The only chance to alleviate the Palestinian situation is foreign rule. Indeed their best friends, realizing that the Palestinians are not politically mature for self-rule, advocate an international mandate. Yet it is not at all clear why an international mandate enforced by an international force should be any more successful than the US in Iraq. Recalling the colonial record of the UK and France in the Middle East, the conclusion is inescapable that only Arabs can rule over Arabs by Arab methods.

The potential candidates for ruling over the Palestinians are Jordan and Egypt, as was done with relative success before 1967. The international community should encourage Egypt and Jordan's increased involvement in Palestinian affairs. These states have signed peace treaties with Jerusalem and behave more responsibly than the PA leadership. The peace initiative of the Arab League might become the mechanism for a transition from a two-state formula to a more realistic regional approach.- *Published 11/6/2007 © bitterlemons.org*

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