

## **Shattered Hopes in Palestine: Which Way Forward for Arabs and Jews?**

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I was born and raised in Israel. My parents came to (then) Palestine as young Jewish refugees from the pogroms in Eastern Europe. They were socialists and anti-Zionists, and dedicated most of their lives to the creation of a just and equal society in Palestine.

I grew up in the state of Israel, where Jews and Arabs were segregated, and Jewish children were taught in school that they could not trust Arabs because they would always stab you in the back. I was fortunate to be raised by parents who were activists, and to get involved in political actions at an early age. I continued my involvement throughout my adult life in Israel and took part in the movement for peace and justice.

This is why I am here today. The situation in the Middle East has reached new heights. The open war is taking a devastating toll of young lives, and the prospects for peace have disappeared. The testimony Nizar just gave, and the documentary film, clearly portray the Israeli violence in the occupied territories.

We are now familiar with images of Israeli combat soldiers killing unarmed Palestinian children, Israeli tanks chasing rock-throwing youth, and American-made Israeli helicopters bombing Palestinian neighborhoods. Watching the news on TV and reading the newspaper, it is difficult not to conclude that there is no reasonable solution to this upheaval.

In such demoralizing times, it is particularly important to consider ways to stop this violence and to possibly find a stable and long-term solution. This will help us see what we need to do here, in the U.S., to support a just resolution to the conflict in the Middle East.

To do this, I would like to consider the possible scenarios for the future. I think there are three:

1. Continue the current state with the possibility of peace brokered by the U.S.

2. Create two independent states. Israel in the borders before June 1967, and a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank. That means, no settlements or Israeli authority in Gaza and the West Bank.

3. Create one socialist, secular, democratic state for both people.

Let's look at each of these scenarios.

**First scenario: continue the current situation**

This scenario is not likely to lead to a peaceful resolution. The right wing in Israel, particularly those who are led by rightwing American Jews, say that this scenario is fine. They believe that all of Palestine belongs to the Jews and they are ready to continue the violence that is required to achieve this state.

Most Israelis, however, want peace. In a poll taken a couple of months ago, 80% declared that they would give up the settlements for peace. But the peace movement is somewhat slow to react to the new developments. There were a few demonstrations for peace, and some ad campaigns, but no organized condemnation of the Israeli violence in the occupied territories.

The only peace agreement in sight is the Oslo Accord and the various versions and attempts at agreements that followed (the Wye agreement, Camp David). Although the Oslo Accord was a product of the Intifada, it brought no relief to the Palestinians, and in many ways it increased their misery.

This was clear to me from the very beginning. When I visited Israel in 1996, I saw that the Oslo Accord would lead to nothing short of a civil war. If you are interested in a more detailed description of the effect of the Accord, you may want to get a copy of the paper I wrote after I came back.

Since that Accord, and the creation of the Palestinian Authority, there has been an increase in the number of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. The number of settlements doubled during these seven years. Now there are over 170 settlements with about 200,000 Israelis living in them.

Arafat's government is corrupt, and those who oppose him are brutally punished. For the Palestinians, the seven years since the Accord was signed have meant increased poverty, repression and humiliation from both Israeli occupation forces and their own self-rule authority.

What are the political highlights of the Accord? Through the various agreements, Yasser Arafat agreed to recognize Israel and to cooperate with it against what they called "terrorists." In return, the U.S. would give economic aid to the Palestinian Authority and would convince Israel to recognize the PLO. The details of the peace agreement would have to be negotiated between Israel and Arafat.

It is clear today, that the Palestinians, who fought through years of Intifada for a free and democratic state, are very much aware of the fact that the Oslo Accord has nothing to offer them. The new Intifada was ready to erupt for some time, even though the vicious provocation by Ariel Sharon sparked it on September 28th.

The media in the U.S. has us believe that these rock-throwing young men are some kind of street gangs. In fact, the mass demonstrations that we see now are led by joint efforts of various Palestinian organizations. This time, the Islamic

fundamentalists are no longer in control. Although Islamic organizations participate in the leadership of the uprising, the movement itself is democratic and secular.

The new Intifada is different from the first one. It is now taking place on a higher level. This new movement of resistance is also against Arafat. It is openly demanding a democratic and independent state. Many Palestinians call it “the War of Independence.”

It is also quite clear that Arafat has very little control over the new Intifada. Even Israeli Army officials made this observation. As a result, the Israeli government decided to escalate its violence and is now openly assassinating individuals who are leading the struggle.

The U.S. dominance and control of these peace negotiations is very open and shameless. For example, the partners to the 1998 Wye agreement decided that the CIA would be in charge of security and would coordinate between the security forces of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. In a region under war, being in charge of security is a very powerful position. And this is already happening. The CIA has already become an integral part of the oppression machine.

Why is the United State so “generous” in ushering in this peace process? Because it has one goal: it wants to increase its direct control over popular forces in the Middle East to keep it stable and safe for American capitalists, and the oil companies. The human rights of Palestinians are the least of American concerns.

What can be the results of a peace agreement that is promoted by the U.S., Israel and Arafat? The Palestinians will have some control over parts of Palestine but their territory will be scattered among Israeli settlements. Very little development could take place in the Palestinian state because of geographic dispersion and the Israeli government and military will control the economic and military infrastructure. Most important, Palestinian workers will continue to be a cheap workforce for Israel.

What does this scenario remind you of? It reminds me of apartheid in South Africa. Only this time it will be under the control of the CIA. It is clear that this first scenario, the continuation of the Oslo process, can bring only devastating results. Let’s look at the next scenario.

### **Second scenario: two independent states**

Many Israelis and Palestinians believe that the only solution at this time is for Israel to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders (to the Green Line), and for an independent Palestinian state to be created in the West Bank and Gaza. This scenario seems the most realistic now, but it has many problems.

Many issues will have to be resolved before this scenario is viable even as a temporary solution. The refugees are a central issue.

The Palestinians who have lived in refugee camps since 1948 have the right to return to their homes or to receive comparable compensation. The Israeli government made clear that this is not negotiable: no refugees will return to their land. How can a permanent solution exist when over 3 million people don't have their homes? The two-state scenario cannot be a just solution without making it possible for the refugees to build their homes.

Another important issue is the Palestinians who have lived in Israel since 1948 and are Israeli citizens. These Israeli Palestinians have been subjected to blatant discrimination, racism and police brutality for years. These attitudes have become much more evident since the new Intifada began. In several cities, Jewish mobs attacked, burned and destroyed stores owned by Palestinian Arabs, or those that employed them. This reminded me of Kristalnacht in Germany, when Nazi youth destroyed stores owned by Jews.

These mob actions were encouraged by police brutality against Palestinian civilians. One incident tells it all. One day in October, a Jewish mob from Upper Nazareth came to the city of Nazareth and attacked Palestinians in the streets, in their stores, and finally they entered into their homes.

The Israeli police was present, observed their attacks and did nothing. As the Palestinians organized and fought the attackers back, the police started shooting live bullets at the Palestinians, killing a man and a boy. In all the police killed 14 Israeli Palestinians in a two-week period of demonstrations.

In addition to the long history of racism and discrimination, the Israeli government has recently cut most of the funds for public services in the Israeli Palestinian sector even before the new Intifada began. The two-state scenario cannot be a just solution when Palestinian Israelis have no human rights.

The Israeli Jews are facing another critical problem: the rise of the religious fundamentalist right. Even though most secular Jews are horrified by this new development, very little has been done to overcome this division of the Jewish people.

The only exceptions are groups of Palestinian and Jewish women who get together for discussions and demonstrations against the oppression by the fundamentalists. For the two-state scenario to work, secular Jews have to join women and all others who are oppressed by the fundamentalists, like Israeli Palestinians and foreign workers from the Philippines and Africa. This has not happened yet.

So, the big question is: what kind of states would Israel and Palestine be?

If Israel withdraws from the occupied territories (including the settlements), and Arafat declares a Palestinian state, there will be Israel with its current government, and Palestine with Arafat at the helm. Both states will have to depend on American aid for their survival. Israel is already getting about \$5 billion a year and a Palestinian state will require a lot of economic support as well.

Can these governments be democratic? Democratic regimes in the Middle East will be a threat to the U.S. And this is a very real threat. Since the beginning of the new Intifada, anti-American demonstrations, and police violence, took place in big cities from Cairo, Egypt to Jakarta, Indonesia. Too much democracy makes the area unstable, and may reinforce revolutions in Arab countries. The U.S. will try to exert all efforts to keep in place rulers that are loyal to American capitalism.

That is, there is very little chance that the two independent states will be either democratic or independent.

Let's look at the third scenario.

### **The third scenario: one socialist, secular and democratic state**

A two-state scenario is probably the only one that is possible right now. But it is not a solution for the long term. This is because: (1) it cannot not resolve the refugee issue; (2) it cannot guarantee equality and human rights to Palestinian Israelis; (3) it will create American puppets that serve the interest of the oil companies, rather than those of their own people.

The only comprehensive solution is for both people to live together in one socialist, secular and democratic state.

Living in one state will solve the issues of the refugees, because no geographic demarcation will be needed to separate Jews from Palestinians. They will all be citizens of the same country and could live wherever they can find a place to build their home. Having a secular and democratic state will guarantee the equality and human rights of the Israeli Palestinians. They will no longer be an ethnic minority. They will be citizens of the new state like other Palestinians and like Jews. Also, all people could practice their own religion, with no one dominant religion.

Having a socialist state is necessary for all that to happen. On the global arena, a socialist state will act in the interest of its people, rather than the interest of the barons of oil companies and other capitalists.

Internally, socialism is essential to the creation of a democratic society in this new state. There is a great discrepancy between the economic status and level of education of the Jewish population and the Palestinians. Today, most Palestinians serve as cheap labor to the Israeli economy. A capitalist state would continue this division between Jews and Palestinians because it would be "good for the economy." And so the new state will have two classes of citizens: the servants and those who are served.

Therefore, only an economic system that does not rely on exploitation of cheap labor power can bring true equality between Palestinians and Jews. A socialist state will create an economy in which all people, Palestinians and Jews, are equal partners.

Some of you probably think this is an unrealistic dream. It does look like that at this time. It seems to me that the only promising solution at this point is the creation of two states, but only as a transitory solution. If this happens, Jews and Palestinians in both countries could continue the struggle for one socialist, secular and democratic state.

What can we do here to help bring about this solution?

We can demand that the American government quit supporting the Israeli state with billions in aid and military equipment. We can build a U.S. solidarity movement to expose the reality of life for Palestinians under Israeli occupation and internal apartheid. We can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our Palestinian brothers and sisters in this country to oppose what both the Israelis and the U.S. are doing. We can fan the flames of justice until the American people wake up to what is being done in their names and with their money.

**Stop the slaughter of Palestinians!**

**End U.S. aid to Israel! U.S. out of the Middle East!**

**Immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops and settlers from  
the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan Heights!**

**Right of return and reparations for all refugees!**

**End government persecution of Palestinian and Arab activists in the U.S.!**