

Blueprint for a One-State Movement

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An excerpt from *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War Against the Palestinians*, by Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé, edited by Frank Barat

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GAZA IN CRISIS
REFLECTIONS ON ISRAEL'S WAR AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS



The demise of the Oslo Accord at the very beginning of the twenty-first century gave special impetus to the old/new idea of a one-state solution. It seems to be with us again and the interest in it grows by the day. And yet it does not appear as an item on the agenda of any actor of significance on the Palestine chessboard. Neither major powers nor small political factions endorse it as a vision or strategy, let alone as a tactic for the future. Its attractiveness, however, is undeniable given the failure of the alternative solutions.

A Troubled History

The one-state solution has a troubled history. It began as a soft Zionist concept of Jewish settlers, some of whom were leading intellectuals in their community, who wished to reconcile colonialism and humanism. They were looking for a way that would not require the settlers either to return to their homelands or to give up the idea of a new Jewish life in the "redeemed" ancient homeland. They were also moved by more practical considerations, such as the relatively small number of Jewish settlers within a solid Palestinian majority. They offered binationalism within one modern state. They found some Palestinian partners when the settlers arrived in the 1920s, but were soon manipulated by the Zionist leadership to serve that movement's strategy and then disappeared into the margins of history. In the 1930s, notable members among them, such as Yehuda Magnes, were appointed as emissaries by the Zionist leadership for talks with the Arab Higher Committee. Magnes and his colleagues genuinely believed, then and in retrospect, that they served as harbingers of peace, but, in fact, they were sent to gauge the impulses and aspirations on the other side, so as to defeat it in due course. They existed in one form or another until the end of the Mandate. Their only potential ally, the Palestine Communist Party, for a while endorsed their idea of binationalism, but in the crucial final years of the Mandate, adopted the principle of partition as the only solution (admittedly due to orders from Moscow, rather than out of a natural growth of its ideology). So by 1947, there was no significant support for the idea on either the Zionist or Palestinian side. Moreover, it seems that there was no genuine desire locally or regionally to look for a local solution and it was left to the international community to propose one.

The appearance in 1947 of the one-state solution as an international option is a chapter of history very few know about or bother to revisit. It is worth remembering that at one given point during the discussions and deliberations of UNSCOP (the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, February to November 1947), those members of the UN who were not under the influence of either the United States or the USSR—and they were not many—regarded the idea of one state in Palestine as the best solution for the conflict. They defined it as a democratic unitary state, where citizenship would be equal and not determined on the basis of ethnicity or nationality. The indigenous population was defined as those who were in Palestine at that time, nearly two million people who were mostly Palestinians. When their idea was put in a minority report of UNSCOP (the majority report was the basis for the famous [or infamous] Resolution 181 of November 29, 1947), half of the then-members of the UN General Assembly supported it, before succumbing to pressure by the superpowers to vote in favor of the partition resolution. It is not surprising in hindsight that people around the world, who did not feel, like the Western powers did, that the creation

of a Jewish state at the expense of the Palestinians was the best compensation for the horrors of the Holocaust, would support the unitary state. After all, the Jewish community in Palestine was made of newcomers and settlers, and were only one-third of the overall population. But common decency and sense were not allowed to play a role where Palestine was concerned.

So Palestine was partitioned between Israel, Jordan, and Egypt. But the idea was kept alive when the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) came into being. Its version of one state was a secular and democratic one (although unsympathetic toward the possible presence of Jewish settlers who arrived after 1948) and was attractive enough even to inspire a small anti-Zionist group in Israel—Matzpen—to accept it for a while. The Arab world, in words and through the Arab League, seemed to stand behind the idea. This was the vision of the liberation movement until the 1970s, when lack of success, pragmatism, and a growing realization of how powerful Israel had become due to unconditional American support—which was not equaled by the limited aid the USSR gave the PLO—led to new ideas about the future. Thus came to the world Fatah's Stages Program. This was a willingness to consider a two-state solution. Initially, the plan was presented as a temporary means for bringing peace and justice to Palestine, but later on it was portrayed as a strategy, and perhaps even a vision.

The idea of a two-state solution, however, did not germinate on the Palestinian side. It was always the preferred solution of pragmatic Zionism. Pragmatic Zionism, or mainstream Zionism, led the Jewish community in Palestine since the late nineteenth century, and its basic ideas still guide the Israeli political system today. The power of the two-state solution depends largely on the power of pragmatic Zionism. Those who are presently regarded as pragmatic Zionists are defined as such due to their support for the two-state solution. Since the support only has to be verbal and noncommittal, even right-wing parties in Israel, despite their declared ideology of a Greater Israel (a one-state solution with exclusive Jewish presence and rights), can endorse it. This was recently demonstrated by Binyamin Netanyahu's pledge to such a solution, made only in order to allow the continued strategic alliance between an allegedly more critical American administration and a more hawkish Israeli government.

But because the two-state solution is so closely connected to the fortunes of pragmatic Zionism, it is important to recap the historical record of this mainstream Zionist force. The leaders and movements who represented pragmatic Zionism were responsible for the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine, the military rule imposed on the Palestinians inside Israel for almost twenty years, the colonization of the West Bank in the last forty years, and the repertoire of oppressive and brutal policies against the people of Gaza in the last eight years. And the list, of course, is longer and new chapters of oppression and dispossession are added to it by the day. And yet the total identification of pragmatic Zionism with the two-state solution, and before it with territorial compromise with Jordan (the Jordanian option), equated it in the eyes of the world with "peace" and "reconciliation." As transpired clearly during the days of the Oslo Accord, the discourse of two states and peace provided a shield that enabled the pragmatic Zionist governments to expand the settlement project in the West Bank and escalate the oppressive policies against the Gaza Strip.

Looked at from a different angle, pragmatic Zionism was the only actor on the ground that gave substance to the idea of two states; whereas the PLO, even when it endorsed the idea, had to accept the Zionist interpretation of it. The relevant international actors, and the United States in particular, followed this Zionist interpretation as they still do today. This interpretation meant that the two-state solution is based on total Israeli control of the whole of what used to be Mandatory Palestine: its airspace, territorial waters, and external borders. It includes a limited measure of Palestinian sovereignty within those parts of Palestine that Israel is not interested in (the Gaza Strip and less than half of the West Bank). This sovereignty would also be limited in essence: a demilitarized government would have little say in defense, foreign, and financial policies.

But the potency of this Zionist interpretation of the two-state solution, which remains to this very moment the only interpretation, is waning. This is the main reason for the reemergence of the one-state solution. The latter was kept alive by those who always believed in it as the only moral, not just political, settlement

that contains, and answers, all the outstanding problems involved in the ongoing conflict. Issues such as the refugees' right of return, the colonialist nature of Zionism, and the need to accommodate the multireligious and multicultural fabric of society seem to have no room in the two-state solution. The first group of one-state supporters were joined by the "desperadoes," those who reluctantly endorse the one-state solution since they despair of any hope of implementing a two-state solution. They regard the new geopolitical realities Israel created on the ground as irreversible and they recognize there is no will on the Israeli side to accept a truly independent and sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Thus, despite its troubled history, the one-state idea is still with us today. And yet it remains on the margins and attributed to naive daydreamers. From this very brief, and admittedly somewhat esoteric description, it is clear that only a significant erosion of the validity of the two-state solution can revert attention to the concept of a one-state solution, in whatever form. However, it is important to stress early on that the idea was kept alive, not by those who despaired of the possibilities of a two-state solution, but rather by those who did not lose faith in the moral validity of the concept and its political feasibility. These very few feel vindicated in the last decade by the many that joined them as "new converts," as the demise of the two-state solution becomes clearer by the day.

As these words are being written, it is mainly a large number of individuals, and not even NGOs, who stand firmly behind the idea. They are visible and have advanced the case of the one-state solution significantly in recent years by structuring the discussion and airing the outstanding issues beyond slogans and ideals. The final boost to this intellectual and public activity was the appearance of several coherent books, whose authors, along with other writers, joined efforts to disseminate the concept and root it deeply in the public discourse and mind. But, as mentioned, there are no political parties upholding this idea, and, although an intuitive survey of the scores of NGOs working on the ground in Israel, Palestine, and the exilic communities indicates wide support in Palestinian civil society for this idea, none of the present governmental and nongovernmental actors have officially taken a stance of support.

Reselling the Past

The struggle over memory in the case of Palestine seems to be the most important task in this century for anyone committed to the Palestine cause. The convergence of industrious Palestinian historiography with the new revelations made by revisionist historians in Israel transformed not only the research agenda of academia, but also the public discourse among activists. It was, in many ways, the exposure to the full picture of what occurred in 1948 that expanded the spectrum of peace activists, and members of Palestinian solidarity committees, so that it included the 1948 Nakbah. Even President Obama, in his June 2009 Cairo speech, acknowledged a Palestinian suffering that spans over sixty years.

The struggle over historic memory is highly relevant to the debate about a one-state solution. Only the historical perspective reveals the reductionist nature of the two-state solution: the fact that "Palestine" refers to only one-fifth of the land and about one-third of the Palestinians.

A deeper historical recognition exposes the colonialist nature of the Zionist movement. It does not only show that Palestinians were ethnically cleansed in 1948 and were never allowed to return, but also that the ideology that produced that policy is still operative today.

The unified Palestinian experience from the late nineteenth century up to 1948 has been replaced by discrete experiences due to the fragmentation of the people and the bisection of the land. But these new disjointed experiences, all without exception, relate to what happened in 1948: in other words, whether you live in Ramallah, London, Yarmouk, or Nazareth, your present predicament is a direct result of what occurred in 1948.

Moreover, the ideology that produced the 1948 ethnic cleansing is the one that keeps refugees in their camps today, discriminates against Palestinians inside Israel, and oppresses those under occupation in the West Bank and imprisonment in the Gaza Strip.

At the academic and civil society level, this realization is solid and has created fertile ground for the discussion about a one-state solution. However, this is unfortunately not the case with the mainstream media and political arena in the West or in the Arab world. There is a better chance to debate the historical narrative than to propagate the one-state solution at this stage in the struggle. Mainstream media and politicians reject out of hand the one-state solution, but may be willing to accept that their historical narrative so far was distorted and wrong and that they should view the conflict as a process that began in 1948, even in 1882, and not in 1967.

In other words, what should be hammered in is that what the "desperadoes" call the facts on the ground that gradually made the desired two-state solution impossible were not an accident. They are the outcome of a strategy aiming at granting the State of Israel control over all of Mandatory Palestine. This strategy was and is the cornerstone of pragmatic Zionism and it divided the land into two territories: the one that Israel rules directly and in it wishes to implement what Shimon Peres coined "maximum territory and minimum Arabs." And the other territory is the one that Israel controls indirectly or through proxies such as a collaborationist Palestinian Authority. What was and still is presented by Western journalists and politicians as a fundamental debate inside Israel about peace and war, of retaining the territories or withdrawing from them, is, in effect, a debate about what "maximum territory" is and what are the means of achieving it, as well as how one attains the target of minimum Arabs.

Deconstructing the Peace Process

The biggest contemporary obstacle for putting forward the one-state solution as a viable option is that the *raison d'être* of the "peace process" of the last forty years is firmly based on the vision of two states. It is so powerful that even some of the bravest and most committed colleagues in the struggle for Palestine endorse it in the name of *realpolitik*.

The peace process began immediately after the June 1967 war ended, and while the early initiators were French, British, and Russians, it soon became an attempt to impose a *Pax Americana*. The basic American assumption underlying the "peace" effort was an absolute reliance on the balance of power as the principal prism through which the possibility of solutions should be examined. As Israeli superiority was unquestioned after the war, it meant that whatever Israeli politicians and generals devised as a peace plan soon became the basis for the process as a whole.

Thus, the Israeli political elite constantly produced the common wisdom of the peace process and formulated its guidelines according to its own concerns. These American-Israeli guidelines were drafted in the first years after the 1967 occupation and crystallized as a vision for a new geopolitical map for historical Palestine. Pragmatic Zionism dictated that the country would roughly be divided into two spheres: one that Israel controls directly as a sovereign state and the other that Israel rules indirectly while giving Palestinians limited autonomy.

The principal American role was to present to the world these dictates in a positive manner as "Israeli concessions," "reasonable behavior," and "flexible positions." To this day, either out of ignorance or interest, successive American administrations adopted a perception of the conflict that caters solely to the internal Israeli scene and one that disregards totally the Palestinian perspective of whatever nature or inclination.

This hegemonic American-Israeli presence produced five guidelines that so far have not been challenged politically and diplomatically by the Quartet and whoever manages the peace process.

The first guideline relates directly to the struggle over historic memory mentioned above. It states that the "conflict" began in 1967 and, hence, the essence of its solution is an agreement that would determine only the future status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Such a perspective confines a settlement to 78 percent of Palestine.

The second guideline is that everything visible in those areas is divisible and that such divisibility is the key for peace. So even the remaining 22 percent of Palestine has to be divided for the sake of peace. Moreover, the peace agenda meant that not only the 1967 occupied areas should be divided, but also its people and natural resources.

The third guideline is that anything that happened until 1967, including the consequences of the Nakbah and its ethnic cleansing, are not negotiable. This pushed the refugee issue off the agenda, where it remains to this very day.

The fourth guideline is an equation between the end of the Israeli occupation and the end of the conflict. Namely, once some kind of eviction or control were agreed upon, the conflict would be resolved for all intents and purposes.

The last guideline is that Israel is not committed to any concession until the Palestinian armed struggle ends.

In 1993, these five guidelines were translated into the Oslo Accord, when a Palestinian partner seemed to accept them in principle. They were repackaged again in Camp David 2000 and in both cases after trials and tribulations rejected by the PLO and the Palestinian Authority (PA). But these are still the agreed upon principles for the peace process.

The task here is twofold. The first is to associate in the public mind the present reality, which is accepted by international observers as representing a human catastrophe of unimaginable dimensions, as the inevitable outcome of this peace process and its principles. Thus, exposing it as a political act that provides international immunity for a policy of colonization and dispossession. It is true that this policy has escalated dramatically since 2000, but it is not true that the escalation is the result of the collapse of the peace process—it is the result of the process's *raison d'être*.

The one-state movement has the academics, journalists, and activists who possess the means of disseminating this knowledge through books, journals, and public meetings whenever the current affairs of Palestine and Israel are discussed. A media monitor of sorts is already working, but not in a professional or systematic way. Although one has to admit that it is much more timidity than ignorance that prevents intelligent and knowledgeable journalists and politicians from exposing the "peace process," shielding a well-structured Israeli plan, devised already in 1967, to enclave the Palestinians in bantustans. Pragmatic Zionism did not wish to directly control the populated Palestinian areas in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, did not dare to expel them, and did not wish to give them more than limited autonomy.

The second task is to bring to the fore the Palestinian voices that were directly victimized by this Israeli policy in the last forty years within a paradigm of analysis that highlights the connection between their sufferings and the charade of peace. In other words, the debate is not only about the question whether the road taken so far was right, but an accusation of those who led us on that road as contributing directly to the continued oppression of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. This would mean challenging the very agenda of the Palestinian Authority that claims that peace with Israel under the old premises will bring an end to the suffering of the occupied people, while the counterargument should be that it is having precisely the opposite effect: deepening the occupation and perpetuating the oppression.

Preparing for the Future

In its present form, the one-state movement is made of individuals from all walks of life who can bring to the fore their activism and professionalism before the vision is taken up more systematically by NGOs and political parties. It is time to expand the activity beyond the big conferences that have so far successfully heralded the idea and exposed the fallacies of the two-state solution model. There are more areas of investigation that the one-state movement can focus on.

The first is a survey of attitudes toward the one-state idea. So far, no one has attempted such a survey and, despite the obvious weakness of such an instrument, this is a precondition for any future campaign of disseminating the idea and recruiting others for it.

The second is the formation of working teams, very much on the basis of the Tawaqim (professional teams) that were preparing, in earnest but in vain, for the creation of an independent state in the Orient House during the Madrid conference days. These teams should prepare the practical products emanating from a future political outfit for Palestine and Israel in whatever form it will appear: a constitution, an educational system, curricula and textbooks, basic guidelines for an economic system, the practical implications within a state of a multicultural and multireligious society, and so on. For some of these aspects of statehood there is no need to reinvent the wheel, as the Tawaqim were quite good in covering them; for others, inspiration should be found elsewhere in history, other geographies, and human thought.

Constructing, in the most practical way, these end products—such as a prototype constitution, an educational curriculum, laws of citizenships for all (indigenous, returnees, and new immigrants), land and property ownership regulations (including compensations and absentee properties), and similar projects - can give substance to the idea of one state beyond slogans and the deconstruction of the two-state solution.

The last project for the one-state movement before it hopefully becomes a potent, popular, and political movement is to focus on small teams, and, later, in front of larger audiences—on how to disseminate the idea and educate people about it. Palestinian NGOs, domestic and abroad, the few NGOs in Israel that are still engaged in the struggle against the occupation, the Palestine solidarity campaigns and committees, and all the other NGOs in Western societies and around the Arab and Muslim worlds can be all recruited to take a firmer stand on the issue.

The struggle for one state cannot be had without close cooperation with official PLO, Hamas, and PA representatives, nor without adoption of the discourse or dictionary of these groups on the ground. This would allow the one-state movement to envision peace and reconciliation in a less limited, more inclusive way. One doubts whether Arab regimes would help, apart from heads of state who are already openly in support of the idea. On the other hand, the South African government and NGOs have already shown greater enthusiasm for the idea than any other state actor on the international scene. With these limitations in mind, and with these potential partners, the voice of the one-state movement should be heard at all times.

This can be accomplished, despite the profound knowledge that popular support for the idea depends crucially on a total disintegration of the two-state solution, and this scenario, in turn, is beyond the influence of the one-state movement. While waiting for developments beyond our control and influence, we should prepare as if this moment is around the corner and assume that millions of desperate Palestinians, Israelis, and whoever cares about them in the world would quickly seek an alternative to the paradigm that so disastrously informed the peace process in Palestine and Israel. Activism, scholarship, dissemination of information, persuasion, protest, and solidarity are the most powerful weapons powerless people have. Let us use them wisely.

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