

What Is Left of Palestine's Eighty-Year-Old Partition Plan?

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In July 1937, Lord Peel's Palestine Royal Commission report was given to the British government. This report concluded that the only solution for Palestine was the prototype principle of "two state for two nations" solution - a Jewish state and an Arab state. This was the first proposal for a partition plan in Palestine. Since then, throughout the 90 years, there have been over 20 recommendations for the solution of the struggle based on the two-state solution. The last, most recent, recommendations were The Camp David Accords drafted by Clinton in 2000, the Geneva Initiative in 2003, and Ehud Olmert's Annapolis Plan in 2008. It appears that the differences between the sides are many, too many to enable reaching an agreement regarding two states. What has happened over the last 80 years since then? Is a two state solution, after over 100 years of Arab-Jews conflict in the Holy Land, still possible? This article shows the long road the partition plan has taken in Palestine and suggests a new look about the partition that already exist.

Keywords: Israel, Palestine, partition plan, Peel Commission

"No other problem of our time is rooted so deeply in the past" (Peel, Martin, Rumbold, Hammond, Carter, Morris, & Coupland, 1937, p. 2).

For years, diplomats and scholars have believed that a partition, a Jewish State, and an Arab State, in the land of Israel/Palestine would end the long-lasting conflict between the Jews and the Arabs in historic Palestine. From the time that the Balfour Declaration was issued on November 2, 1917, there have been over 20 attempts to arrange a compromise agreement between the two sides—the Arab side (which usually includes the other Arab states on the side of the Palestinian Arabs) and the Jewish side.

The Beginning: The Peel Commission

In July 1937, the members of the British Royal Commission under the leadership of William Robert Wellesley Peel (two months after Lord Peel submitted his report he passed away), presented a detailed, revolutionary, 400-page report analyzing the Palestine Mandate and then went on to present its recommendations—all of which were accepted by the British parliament. These recommendations included one which stated that Palestine should be a "national homeland" for the Jews and that a Jewish State should be established on part of the mandate area which would become "as Jewish as England is English".

On April 19, 1936, the Arab Revolt broke out. As a result of the widespread riots and strikes which were announced by the Arab Higher Committee (AHC), under the leadership of the Mufti Hajj Muhammad Amin al-Husayni (1974), the British government decided to establish a royal investigatory commission with the following mission:

To ascertain the underlying causes of the disturbances which broke out in Palestine in the middle of April; to inquire into the manner in which the Mandate for Palestine is being implemented in relation to the obligations of the Mandatory towards the Arabs and the Jews respectively; and to ascertain whether, upon a proper construction of the terms of the Mandate, either the Arabs or the Jews have any legitimate grievances upon account of the way in which the Mandate has been or is being implemented; and if the Commission is satisfied that any such grievances are well founded, to make recommendations for their removal and for the prevention of their recurrence. (Peel et al., 1937, p. ix).

In order to enable the Commission to gather information, the Mufti, agreed to halt the strike. Thus, on his request alone, but “officially” due to the intervention of the Arab kings, all hostile activities were suspended during the commission’s investigation. Field Marshal Sir John Greer Dill, the British military commander, viewed this as evidence of the Mufti’s total control over the rioters (Barr, 2011, p. 172).

In the detailed 400-page report released by the commission, one can find the guiding principles and prototype of every subject and attempt to reach a compromise solution to the Palestinian problem including dividing the area into two states, one Jewish and one Arab.

In August 1936, W. F. Boustany submitted his report to his Majesty’s Government. Boustany was the representative of the Arab cultivators in the Mudawra Lands Agreement with the Palestine Mandatory Government and a member of the Third Palestine Arab Delegation to London in 1923 (Gavish, 2005, p. 105).¹ In his book he argues the illegal aspects of the British Mandate on Palestine. The Arab attitude, as presented by W. F. Boustany, was that after an 18-year trial, the Balfour Declaration policy itself should be abolished in the interest of all concerned (Boustany, 1936, pp. 136-138).

He believed that the Palestine Arabs felt that if the Royal Commission chose to speak freely there would be every reason for them to endorse the recommendation made by Sir Louis Bols in 1920. In 1936 he forcefully recommended the abolishment of the Jewish Agency and the whole Balfour Declaration policy (Boustany, 1936, p. 137).

The case of the Jews differs from the case presented by Boustany, as admitted by Churchill in his 1922 White Paper (Churchill, 2010, p. 55). According to Churchill and other British Policy makers, the Jews are the indigenous people of Palestine. This is the reason why the first chapter of the report fully detailed the Commission’s findings in regard to the historical connection between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. The Jewish nation was presented as the only nation linked to the land by a historical presence and religious connections. The Commission argued that the Jewish people could only achieve political freedom in Palestine. The report noted that the Jewish people are indigenous to the Land of Israel/Palestine because they lived there for hundreds of years. The Commission detailed how, for example in the 16th century, a flowering Jewish community lived in Safed and from there influenced world Jewry (Peel et al., 1937, pp. 11-15; Leumi, 1947, pp. 56-60; Lewis, 1954, pp. 469-501).

Due to this valid historical tie and international political considerations (including concern regarding a German declaration similar to the Balfour Declaration which would win approval by the Turkish Sultan), the Balfour Declaration was issued on November 2, 1917. It included a statement recognizing the rights of the Jewish nation to establish a national homeland in Palestine. Before it was published, its wording was approved by President, Thomas Woodrow Wilson. Its content was approved by the French government on February 14, 1918 and the Italian government on May 9, 1918 (Peel et al., 1937, p. 22).

¹ *Mudawara* means “transferred” or “turned around”. On November 19, 1921, the British mandate government signed an agreement with the representatives of the population in Beisan (now the Bet She’an and the Jordan Valley area) that the government recognized their ownership over the Miri lands that were under their control from the period of the Turkish sultan.

The members of the Peel Commission also recognized that a Jewish state on part of the land would be a solution and sanctuary for the indigenous Jewish communities in the Middle East who were suffering from persecution and who had begun, little by little, to sneak into Mandatory Palestine. In April 1936, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, president of the Jewish Agency, wrote a memorandum to the British High Commissioner, Sir Arthur Grenfell Wauchope, on the necessity of resolving the standing of the Jewish political refugees from Eastern and Central Europe and the Middle East countries (Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and North Africa) who were living among the Arabs in a state of great distress.²

In 1946 the Jewish Agency expressed its opinion to the Anglo-American investigative committee in a special memorandum which stated: "The waves of immigration needed to be taken into account and also the situation of the Eastern Jewish [communities] and the lack of security that is growing in the countries that are outside of Europe" (1946, p. 36).³

In 1948, at the time that the State of Israel was established, there were approximately a million Jews indigenous to the Middle East. The majority of these Jews chose to escape from Muslims countries to the Jewish state immediately after its establishment in order to save their lives (Gilbert, 2010, pp. 208-236, 310-324). Mandatory Palestine was transformed into a haven for Middle Eastern Jewish refugees who had lived for generations in the various Arab Middle-Eastern countries.

A census, taken in 1922 at the beginning of the British Mandate, reported that there were approximately 83,000 Jews, 71,000 Christian, and 589,000 Muslims (Peel et al., 1937, p. 43). On July 24, 1922, the League of Nations approved the British Mandate over Palestine which explicitly included the British obligation to establish a National Jewish Homeland in Palestine. In this version, Britain's commitment also included Eastern Palestine which was later called Jordan. On September 22nd, Winston Churchill's (the British Colonial Minister at that time) letter to the League of Nations was approved as Paragraph 25 of the Mandate. The letter called for the separation of Eastern Palestine from the area on which there was a commitment to a Jewish homeland: "In the territories lying between the Jordan [River] and the eastern boundary of Palestine" (Peel et al., 1937, p. 37).

Historical Palestine also includes the area of the Jordanian state as was specifically approved in the 1922 Palestinian Mandate. The establishment of Jordan and the national homeland of the Jews on two parts of Palestine was part of the design of the new Middle East in the years after World War I and the agreements between the powers in regard to the division of their influence in the area. It was "part of a large clarification of matters which greatly influenced the Arabs and gave them independence in a wide area of the former Ottoman Empire as a result of the British victory" (p. 23).⁴

In 1937, when the Peel Report was written, it included the fact that 400,000 Jews already lived in the National Homeland and an appropriate infrastructure already existed for a small country on part of Palestine. "Half a loaf is better than no bread", is what the members of the Commission originally said, indicating that self-determination through two new states was the best solution possible for two so vastly different communities. A Jewish Agency memo dated April 30th indicated that as of that date there were 450,000 Jews in Palestine making up 29.8% of all of the residents of the country.⁵

² Chaim Weizmann, memorandum presented by the Jewish Agency for Palestine to the General Secretary of the League of Nations for the Diligent Study by the Committee on the Mandate. Apr. 30, 1936, p. 2.

³ A Memorandum of the Jewish Agency for Palestine to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, Jerusalem, 1946, p. 36.

⁴ Memorandum of the Jewish Agency for Palestine to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, p. 23.

⁵ Chaim Weizmann, memorandum presented to the Jewish Agency for Palestine, pp. 3-4.

This memo presented the amazing developments taking place in the Jewish Settlement in manufacturing and agriculture and in regard to settlement, the purchase of lands and political institutions. Already in 1936, one could see characteristics that could easily be turned into a state at any time. But, according to Boustani, industrial development didn't solve the problem: "The capital is Jewish. The laborers are Jews. The net result for the Arabs is an abnormal rise in the tariff prohibiting the import of cheaper articles and ultimate subordination in numbers to the components of the Jewish national home" (Boustany, 1936, p. 103).

The Peel Commission never recommended the establishment of a third state for the Arabs of Palestine because it did not see a need for this. The Arabs of Western and Eastern Palestine were already considered a part of southern Syria who had been subjects of the Ottoman sultans for 400 years. There were existing ties—familial, language, and cultural—between the Arabs of Palestine and the Arabs of the Arab world around them (Sharon, 1975).

The Peel Commission also determined that the Arab areas of Western Palestine be appended to the Trans-Jordan emirate—about a million Palestinian residents. The Jewish State would be established on a small area, about 17% of the area of Western Palestine, or on about 4% of the entire area of historic Palestine. The two states would sign contract treaties with the British government and would later on join the League of Nations as sovereign states. The religious places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem would be connected by a narrow corridor to the Jaffa coast which would include Lod and Ramle. There would also be a special Mandate contract for this area and the treatment of the two populations would be equal. The area of the Jewish State would include the whole Galilee, Haifa, and the Carmel and the majority of the coast from Ashdod to Rosh Hanikrah (Peel et al., 1937, pp. 380-393).⁶

In order for the agreement to become final and for the riots and disturbance to cease, the Peel Commission argued that only a transfer of populations—the Arabs from the area of the Jewish State and the Jews in the opposite direction—could solve the problems of Palestine in a conclusive manner. Approximately 225,000 Arabs and about 1,250 Jews would have had to be moved. Thinking about a Palestinian Arab transfer from the Jewish State was pervasive among Zionist leadership circles long before 1937 when Lord Peel recommended this (Morris, 2007). But this time it seems that to have practical viability. According to David Ben Gurion, the Yishuv's leader, "The implementation of this transfer is a great blessing for the Arab State and for us it is a question of life, existence, protection of culture...freedom and independence" (Peel et al., 1937, p. 42).

The members of the Commission were aware that there would be difficulties and perhaps the use of force would also be needed. But, according to their words, a precedent already existed on this matter—one between Turkey and Greece (1922-1923). At that time, 1,300,000 Greeks were removed from the Turkish area and 400,000 Turks were expelled to the Turkish area. This proved that this type of solution made ethnic disputes difficult. According to the Commission, creating two states for the Arab and the Jewish nations with a land switch would reduce friction and disturbances between the sides, bringing stability to the area (Peel et al., 1937, pp. 374-376).

The recommendations of the Commission were revolutionary. This was the first time that an official British factor presented a detailed and reasoned report that described the Jewish Homeland as a "Jewish State on the Way". The report was sent to the League of Nations and approved. The Peel Commission thus established the principle that whatever portions of the land were settled by Jews would become a part of the

⁶ See also the partition map in the Report Appendix.

Jewish State and whatever portions were settled by Arabs would become part of an Arab state. This principle became a cornerstone for all partition suggestions from that day forward up until our time. An additional principle was that the Arabs of the Jewish State could sell their land or receive compensation for it and move to other Arab states. This principle was adopted after the 1948 war when the Arab portions captured by the Jordanian Arab Legion were officially annexed to the Kingdom of Jordan by King Abdullah I. The Palestinians in the West Bank and in Jordan became Jordanian citizens. Thus, the Peel Commission recommendations for two nations in historical Palestine were carried out (Caroz, 1975).

The Arabs in Palestine seriously opposed the establishment of a Jewish State on even the smallest part of Palestine. In the fighting in 1938 there were 68 British citizens, 292 Jews, and at least 1,600 Arabs, rebels and others killed (Bethell, 1979, p. 36). The Arabs in Palestine were appreciative that the British understood that the struggle between the Arabs and the Jews was about rights and self-determination and that there was no hope of there ever being proper relations between the Jews and the many Arabs living on the same small piece of land. Arab representatives, such as Musa Alami,⁷ argued that it was not a struggle between two sides with equal rights of ownership of the land. The Arabs demanded the cessation of Jewish immigration to Palestine, a halt in the sale of land to the Jews and the establishment of an independent Arab state similar to the Arab states taking their first steps toward independence at that time. Even the White Paper of Malcolm MacDonald (1939) was unable to reduce Arab opposition to recognizing a Jewish minority with equal rights although they made up one third of the population at that time (Alami, 1970, pp. 46-49).

Another Royal Commission, headed by Sir John Woodhead, issued a report advising limiting a Jewish State to a small portion of the coastal plain. Plan C, which the commission recommended, included a Jewish State from the coast of Zichron Yaakov and the slopes of Mt. Carmel until Tel Aviv combined with an additional enclave in the Rishon LeZion-Rehovot area (Woodhead, Russell, Waterfield, Reid, & Luke, 1938, pp. 99-110). Such a small country, with a Jewish population of 226,000 and a small minority of Arabs (54,400), could surely live in peace with its neighbors without the need for transferring any Arabs (Woodhead et al., 1938, pp. 232-246). Thomas Reid, one of the commission members, was against any partition plan: "None of the witnesses...suggested that the Arabs would consent to partition or accept quietly the *fait accompli*, if partition were implemented...they all tend to indicate that partition would not produce peace" (Woodhead et al., 1938, p. 266).

Later studies have shown that Mufti Hajj Muhammad Amin al-Husayni succeeded in convincing the French to support the Arab objections to the Peel Commission's partition plan. That is why the French allowed armed groups from Syria to infiltrate into Palestine and carry out terrorist acts on British soil (Barr, 2013, pp. 172-190). An historical review, published by Hamas in 2013, explains the Muslim rejection of the partition plan. Although the Peel Commission recommended that only 4% of Mandatory Palestine (including Jordan) be granted for a Jewish state, Hamas described this recommendation as a non-successful attempt by the British to diffuse the Great Arab Rebellion led by Sheikh Farhan al-Sa'adi to drive out the foreign occupation from Palestine's borders. All of the British suggestions for partition were rejected by the Arabs (2013, pp. 9-11).⁸

Lacking any other option, the Colonial Minister publicized an additional declaration in November 1938. In this declaration, he stated that

⁷ A prominent Palestinian nationalist and politician headed the Arab office in London in the 1940s.

⁸ Hamas' booklet, *Waraqa al-Ziqra* (n.p., al-Lajna al-Thaqafiya al-'Ama. Al-Haya al-Qiyadiya al-'Aliya, 2013), pp. 9-11.

His Majesty's Government, after careful study of the Partition Commission's report, hasv reached the conclusion...that the political, administrative and financial difficulties involved in the proposal to create independent Arab and Jewish States inside Palestine are so great that this solution of the problem is impracticable. (MacDonald, 1938).

Weizmann was convinced that once partition became a fact on the ground, Arab opposition would disappear. However, MacDonald's assumption, backed by reports from several experts, was that the Arabs would not accept the partition plan in any time (Bethell, 1979, p. 39).

UN Partition Plan and After

The United Nations accepted Resolution 181, the United Nations' Partition Plan for Palestine on November 29, 1947. This resolution recommended the division of Western Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, that would be connected economically. The Jewish State was meant to be established on 55% of the area of Western Palestine while the Arab State would be on the rest of the area. Jerusalem was supposed to become an international city. The Arabs who were supposed to live in the Jewish State, according to the UN Resolution, could move and live in an area under Arab rule—if they wanted to do so (Mahler & Mahler, 2010, pp. 99-105). The Arabs and the Palestinian leadership rejected the Partition Plan and saw it as exceedingly favorable to the Jews (Khalidi, 2004, pp. 121, 200).⁹ This led to a war where over 15,000 Palestinian Arabs and about 6,000 Jews lost their lives. Over 600,000-700,000 Arabs left or were exiled from Israel to live under Arab rule in the surrounding countries (Bartal, 2011, pp. 1-16). After the war, in the cessation agreements, the Jewish State held 78% of the land of Western Palestine (about 18% from all the original Mandatory Palestine which had included Jordan). King Abdullah, a supporter of the Peel Commission's partition plan achieved territorial expansion by acquiring Transjordan. A Palestinian Arab state headed by the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, was aborted (Rogan, 2001, p. 109).

On September 16, 1948, Folke Bernadotte, the U.N. mediator, recommended that the Arab area of Western Palestine (without the Gaza Strip) become a part of Jordan due to its historical connection and its common interests with Transjordan (PRO, 1948; Ben-Dror, 2015, pp. 61-95). His plan was very similar to the Peel Partition Plan.

Already in 1948, the Palestinians began to divide themselves into two different entities, one in Gaza which yearned for political independence and the other in the West Bank with its many ties—political, economic and through its clans (*hamula*)—to the Jordanian East Bank which yearned to be a part of the Jordanian Kingdom. On October 1, 1948, the Palestinians Arabs in Gaza announced that they were an independent state with their own parliament. The newly declared state based its legitimacy on resolution 181 (PASSIA, 2008, pp. 20-21; Shemesh, 2012, pp. 88-114). Its announcement read as follows:

Acting on the basis of the natural and historic right of the Arab people of Palestine to freedom and independence—a right for which they have shed the noblest blood and or which they have fought against the imperialistic forces which, together with Zionism, have engaged our people to prevent them from enjoying that right—we, members of the Palestinian National Council, meeting in the city of Gaza, proclaim on this day...October 1, 1948, the full independence of the whole of Palestine as bounded by Syria and Lebanon to the north, by Syria and Transjordan to the east, by the Mediterranean to the west, and by Egypt to the south, as well as the establishment of a free and democratic sovereign State. (PASSIA, 2008, p. 21)

⁹ The Jewish population was only 31 percent of the total and received 55 percent of the land according to U.N. partition plan.

The new government of Gaza, headed by Ahmed Hilmi Abd al-Baqi, lasted until 1952. The declaration above reflected the opinion of the Mufti, as president of the new Palestine state. This government was intentionally called the "All-Palestine Government". It denied any idea that a Jewish State could be established in Palestine, even if it will be only on a small area. This declaration was aborted because of the Egyptian restrictions over it. Palestinian researchers today see this willingness to declare an independent state on only part of Palestine (the Gaza Strip, which was under Egyptian military control) as Palestinian pragmatism to the principle of partition between the two states (Salem, 2002, pp. 7-11).

The Jordanian West Bank, on the other hand, developed a different reality as its residents pushed the Jordanian leadership to annex the West Bank. They took upon themselves the rule of Abdullah I as king of both sides of the Jordan. This nationalistic support for the annexation by Jordan of the West Bank was expressed at the Jericho Conference on December 1, 1948 and in other small conferences in the West Bank. Maan Abu Nawar, who served as the Minister of Information in the Jordanian government and the deputy head of the Jordanian government during the 1990s (Nawar, 2002, pp. 335, 379), in a speech in the Jordanian parliament on April 24, 1950, expressed the wide Palestinian nationalistic support for this move. At the unification ceremony of the two Banks, King Abdullah I, gave an emotional speech where he emphasized the unity of the two Banks:

It is my pleasure to open for the first time the constitutional life of Jordan. The National Assembly which combined the two Banks of the Jordan, emanating from the will of *one people, one country and one hope*....The unity of the two banks is a national and practical fact...proven by the strong ties of unity between the two Banks since 1922, ties of currency, of mutual defence, of ports, of frontier security of ease of customs and travel, cultural legislative exchange, which made each Bank important to the other. (Author emphasis) (Nawar, 2002, p. 347)

Two States Solutions After the 1967 War

Since 1967, Israel has tried number of times to forge a peace agreement on the basis of returning areas of the West Bank to Jordan but all these peace initiatives failed. Yigal Alon's plan in the 1970s was the most prominent two-state solution. Jordan would control the Palestinian areas including three populous Palestinian enclaves and Israel would control Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, and other strategic West Bank areas (Shapira, 2015, pp. 317-320).

After the first *intifada* (1987-1993) broke out, King Hussein announced (on July 31, 1988) that he was breaking off administrative ties between the East Bank and the West Bank as Jordan had no more political claims on the area of the West Bank. In other words, if Jordan as a state had certain rights over the areas captured by Israel in 1967, these rights were officially cancelled by the Jordanian decision of disengagement (Shliam, 2007, pp. 340, 456-470). Israel was therefore permitted (according to Resolution 242 which demanded a withdrawal from part of the areas captured in 1967) to set aside an area or part of an area in its possession or, alternatively, enable the residents of this area an independent political stand under autonomy or another political stand (O'Malley, 2015, pp. 31-32).¹⁰ This was understood by the Palestinians who, from then on, began demanding their political rights in the West Bank under international law (Abbas, 1995, pp. 26-27).

The Palestine Mini-state Solution

After the 1967 War, new ideas for new peace initiatives were developed. One idea was to establish an

¹⁰ Resolution 242 was accepted on Nov. 22, 1967. It demanded withdrawal from the areas captured in 1967. According to the decisive British version, it did not apply to withdrawal from all of the captured territory but only from parts of it.

independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. This mini-state would be established on the territory of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Already at the Camp David Conference in 1978, President Jimmy Carter, tried to convince the Palestinian representatives to participate in the peace negotiations on the basis of accepting the principle of the two states. The PLO refused (Carter, 2006, pp. 42-43, 52). It also negated the idea of the establishment of a mini-state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as it was against their principles of a “stages struggle” which had been decided at the 12th Conference of the Palestinian Nationalist Council (held on June 8, 1974). The PLO’s “stages” plan enabled the establishment of a state alongside Israel but without the abandonment of the continuation of the struggle against Israel until its destruction (Steinberg, 2008, pp. 64-70, 97-101). In Palestinian eyes, partition is not a final solution.

The 1974 Palestinian political plan did not deny the special ties with Jordan, as one can see from Paragraph 5 of their ten-point plan: “Struggle along with the Jordanian National Forces to establish a Jordanian National Front whose aim will be to set up in Jordan a democratic national authority in close contact with the Palestinian entity that is established through the struggle” (Mahler & Mahler, 2010, p. 142).

It was only on November 15, 1988, at the 19th conference of the Palestinian National Council, that the Palestinians realized that the principle of two states also required the recognition of Israel (Mahler & Mahler, 2010, pp. 185-188). The Palestinian initiative was eventually adopted by the Yitzhaq Rabin government which, for the first time, gave the Palestinians a position of political independence on certain areas of Palestine. The agreements signed with the Palestinians were temporary and left many points of major disagreements—refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, and security issues—as topics to be discussed in the final negotiations. Israel did not commit itself to the eventual creation of an independent Palestinian state. Israel’s commitment was to autonomy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the intermediate period until a permanent agreement deciding the future of the area would be reached (Abbas, 1995, pp. 26-27).¹¹ For two and a half decades unsuccessful rounds of discussions were held with the goal of reaching a final permanent solution. During the 10 years from 2000-2010, there were as many as 17 unsuccessful peace initiatives! (Fishman & Lavie, 2010). But the differences between the sides and their various narratives were too deep to bridge. The most famous peace initiative negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians were the Camp David Summit in the year 2000 and the Annapolis negotiations that took place in 2008.

In July 2000, Ehud Barak, Israel’s Prime Minister and Yasser Arafat, the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority (PA), met at Camp David, under the mediation of President Bill Clinton, to try to reach a final peace agreement. For the first time, an Israeli proposal included major concessions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip including Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, plus an agreement giving Palestinian refugees “the right of return” to the Palestinian State. Barak’s proposal was revolutionary in Israeli terms and included concessions that no Israeli government before it ever suggested.

Despite Israel’s willingness to compromise, the offer was rejected (Morris, 2009, pp. 133-150). The Israeli government, which included Yossi Beilin and Yossi Sarid, long-time supporters of a line of reconciliation toward a peace agreement based on the two-state solution, failed to reach an agreement with the PLO, which they defined as a “Partner for Peace”. Dennis Ross, the special Middle East mediator at that time wrote in his memoirs how Clinton broke out in anger at Arafat and said to him, “[We have] been here fourteen days and [you] say ‘no’ to everything” (Ross, 2004, p. 775). As a consequence of their failure, the second *intifada* broke

¹¹ “Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements,” Mahmoud Abbas, *Through Secret Channels*, pp. 225-229.

out. It continued for four years until the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004. The Palestinians argued that Barak's offer did not match Palestinian expectations, particularly in regard to the right of return of Palestinian refugees to inside the borders of Israel and the issue of Jerusalem. This excuse was put forward in order to counteract the growing criticism aimed at them, even from Arab factors, for refusing to agree to a peace agreement (PLO, Negotiations Affairs Department, n.d., pp. 39-41). According to Benny Morris, if in Camp David the Palestinians had signed a peace agreement and ended the struggle against Israel, the Israeli public would have supported Ehud Barak and would have voted for him in the 2001 election (Morris, 2009, pp. 134-135).

A similar process took place in 2008 when the Palestinian delegation refused to agree to a peace agreement during the Annapolis process. The Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert proposed a peace agreement ("the package") that answered the majority of Palestinian demands, including the annexation of six percent of the West Bank to Israel, Israeli renunciation of four percent of the land in return, plus a demilitarized Palestinian State on 98 percent of the area of the West Bank and Gaza. A security understanding was reached that included an Israeli withdrawal from the Jordan Valley and the introduction of a military presence, such as NATO, to ensure the peace despite security problems (Zanany, 2015, pp. 102-103). In a crucial meeting between Olmert and Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) on September 16, 2008, Olmert presented Israel's absolute limit on concessions. Abbas announced that he would return the next day with an answer but his answer never came. The unacceptable Israeli demand in these two attempts was for the Palestinians to sign a final peace agreement (Zanany, 2015, pp. 35-40, 133-134).

In Palestinian eyes, a final peace agreement would be an abandonment of the 1974 stages plan and would lead to a final and absolute acceptance of a division of Palestine. Rashid Khalidi described the Palestinian viewpoint:

The Israeli offer will divide the West Bank into three disconnected segments and give Israel complete control over the borders of a state that would thereby have been much less than a sovereign state (Khalidi, 2004, pp. 140-142). There is no way to bridge the differences in outlook in regard to the central issues of the Palestine-Israel conflict. Arthur Ruppin, one of founders of the Brith Shalom peace movement which supported a binational state during the Mandate period, explained the situation in his book, "What we can get from the Arabs at this moment is of no use to us and what we need we cannot get from them" (Bein, 1971, p. 276).

According to Padraig O'malley and Benny Morris, who, over the years, have researched the two state-solutions believe that today a solution of two states no longer appears viable. There is a need to find a different solution (O'Malley, 2016, pp. 302-317; Morris, 2009, pp. 195-201). They are not the only ones who think so.

What Is Left From the Idea of Two States?

The Israelis and the Palestinians have been unable to successfully reach a permanent peaceful two-state partition solution. But that doesn't mean that the idea is not viable. The partition plan does not have to be only between Israel and the areas west of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip. There are many different variations of a partition plan. A partition plan could also be inside Israel and include the Palestinian Arabs like the proposal of Avigdor Lieberman, head of *Israel Beitenu* party. His plan, which can be described as a "Populated-Area Exchange Plan" includes changing the 1948 borders (Galili, 2004). A regional partition plan that would include Jordan is still an option. Mahmoud Abbas does not reject a kind of confederation or federation with Jordan with a possibility of Israel joining as well (Abbas, 1995, pp. 4-5, 40-41, 57, 64, 69, 112).

In a lasting partition solution that both sides could agree to there is a way to solve the settlements issue without expelling over 500,000 settlers, most of them living in settlement blocks. President George Bush, in an April 2004 letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, expressed the idea of aspiring for a realistic solution in the spirit of reality and not one based on wishful thinking:

In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities.¹²

It seems that President Donald Trump has also adopted a similar attitude.

Conclusions

The major obstacle to an agreement is that in both narratives—the Palestinians and the Israelis—all the areas between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea are their homeland. Mahmoud Abbas believes that the only purpose of the negotiations regarding the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is to obtain an agreement that concurs that the whole area in question belongs to the Palestinians. The direct object of the negotiations is to discuss the ways and the stages whereby Israel will withdraw and pass on full authority to the Palestinian side (Abbas, 1995, pp. 94-95). The Israeli side, on the other hand, sees the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) as one where Israel has legal claims. Israel is, however, willing to compromise and enable the Palestinians to receive a part of it because of demographic reasons. This difference in outlook creates an expectation gap.

Implementation of a two-state solution in Western Palestine—a Jewish state on 78 percent of the land and an Arab state on 22 percent of the land with the exchange of a few areas between them—cannot be carried out today. There is a need for another arrangement, one which deals with reality and not illusion.

For over 20 years, the two sides have attempted to reach an agreement in regard to the establishment of a Palestinian State in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. Many alternatives were offered by the Israelis, including those which would have enabled the Palestinians to have an independent state (with Jerusalem as its capital on a large part of the area) and thus conclude the 100-year struggle. But the Palestinians refused. In the last 20 years, the Palestinian lack of flexibility resulted in their refusal to sign Ehud Barak's proposal (supported by President Bill Clinton) and the one by Ehud Olmert (supported by President George Bush, Jr.). The Palestinian thus missed two opportunities for the establishment of a lasting Palestinian state on part of the area of Palestine.

What is left 80 years after the first partition plan?

A partition plan could be an internal plan and include an Israeli, Palestinian, or regional partition which includes Egypt and Jordan in the process. A Palestinian national identity is a new one, one that only appeared in the last 100 years. Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinians only developed a national identity after the First World I and during the British Mandate period. This is the reason why the Peel Commission Report, the U.N. mediator Folke Bernadotte and others tried over the years to set a regional partition solution with boundary changes to resolve the Palestinian problem.

¹² The site of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/mfadocuments/pages/exchange%20of%20letters%20sharon-bush%2014-apr-2004.aspx/>.

This solution will be hard to achieve. It is possible that the status of war between Israel and the Palestinian State will continue for more years. It is possible that in the areas of the Palestinian Autonomy there will be significant changes that we cannot predict. For 80 years, a solution has been sought for an agreement of two states for the two ethnic nations living in Palestine and Jordan. Eighty years after Lord Peel's and Sir John Woodhead's partition plans, the possibility of such a plan succeeding still exists but in a different manner.

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