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## THE SECULAR SOLUTION

### *Debating Israel–Palestine*

I APPRECIATE YOAV PELED'S undertaking this review of my book, *The One-State Solution*.<sup>1</sup> Some of his criticisms help to move the debate on the Israeli–Palestinian question forward, and since this was a central goal of the book, those moments are very welcome. Still, his approach reflects a common weakness of the one state/two state debate, in evading the real implications of the evidence I cite. He takes some early summary statements regarding a one-state solution to charge that my argument is over-simplified: 'real political life is a little more complicated than that', he concludes. He also dismisses my extended discussion of Zionist doctrine as 'ethereal', over-absorbed with 'texts', and divorced from useful reality. He agrees that the two-state solution is 'dead' yet interprets this simply as Palestinian 'defeat'—failing to recognize its implications for Zionism. His response seems to suggest that all views are set in stone and, effectively, that no solution is imaginable. Need we be so fatalistic? Can we afford to be? The search for an equitable solution is as urgent and legitimate as ever.

Two central aspects of the book's agenda, as well as its theoretical framework, seem to have eluded Peled. Its first goal, as he acknowledges, is to lay out the empirical evidence that a viable two-state solution is now dead. Hence the opening chapters offer a dense overview of relevant 'facts on the ground': the geographic realities of the settlement grid—that huge and deliberately sprawling network of stone and concrete cities, suburbs, industrial zones and highways that has already dissected the West Bank into cantons—as well as the social, political and economic grids that underpin them. A further chapter explores at length the backing, tacit and otherwise, which Israel's annexation strategies have received

from the United States, and how that backing is secured politically by a matrix of high-profile pro-Israeli ‘research’ and lobbying organizations, coordinated with a nationwide array of small but active grassroots constituencies which are regularly mobilized to pressure Congress and the media. Peled ignores this material entirely.

The goal of stimulating debate also informed a second aspect of the book’s agenda: to free up discussion of a one-state solution for Israel/Palestine by addressing head-on what is, in my experience, its principal political obstacle—the canon of intimidating and confounding claims deployed by mainstream Zionist propaganda tanks (such as local Zionist federations or ‘Israel Media Teams’). As many of us know to our great frustration, that canon now cripples pragmatic rethinking and frank discussion about the fiction—or lie, or swindle—represented by the ‘road map’. Above all, it is almost impossible to discuss a one-state solution without incurring orchestrated Zionist accusations of anti-Semitism.<sup>2</sup> The second half of my book takes on this Zionist edifice in its substantive as well as divisive dimensions, in the hope that exposing ambiguities will help to liberate the social and political analysis which, as Peled correctly asserts, is essential to a one-state solution.

Some solid political science theory also underlay this approach, which seems to have run foul of Peled’s own preferred theoretical framework. The ineffable realm of values and emotion, wrapped up in ethnic identities and nationalist myths, is crucial to ethnic-conflict resolution. That realm may strike some as ‘ethereal’—particularly those who consider class struggle to be the only ‘real’ conflict in society—but it packs a strong political punch, nonetheless. Discourse analysis should be understood to complement rather than compete with socio-economic approaches; to pursue one is hardly to dismiss the importance of the other. Since Zionism and the two-state solution both exist as discourses, their analysis seemed to take priority as an opening step. If he did not grasp these agendas and the theory driving them, it is less surprising that Peled challenges me for what I did not attempt to do.

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<sup>1</sup> *The One-State Solution: A Breakthrough for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Deadlock*, Ann Arbor and Manchester 2005. Henceforth *oss*.

<sup>2</sup> A storm of Zionist vitriol in the South African press last November, which spun from a review of my book, was only one of many fresh demonstrations.

One of the most puzzling of Peled's criticisms is his assertion that I write particularly for an American readership.<sup>3</sup> This is mistaken. As noted above, he overlooks entirely my lengthy discussion of the reasons why us policy in the Middle East is deadlocked; nor does he address my argument that neither Europe nor the Arab states have sufficient will or leverage to alter us policy. Facing these political realities reveals that the driving force for change must be sought elsewhere. The transnational human-rights community may now comprise the only agent capable of creating the political space in which the diplomatic community might be brought to consider a one-state solution—for example, through the international boycott and disinvestment campaign now springing up within European, us and South–South human-rights networks.

### *Levels of support*

This international orientation also reflects the expanding global character of the debate. The academic world may be aggravating the common misapprehension, shared by Peled, that arguments for a one-state solution are largely confined to 'Palestinian intellectuals' (or to academics generally). My own recent experience in Washington, London, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Budapest, Berlin and Pretoria, not to mention extensive internet activism, has confirmed that the death of the two-state solution has become the elephant in the room for diplomats, human-rights activists and the 'Arab street' alike. Judging by confidential reports, belief that a one-state solution has become inevitable is circulating within the Palestinian Authority itself. (In December 2005, Saeb Erekat told me that he is the primary voice in the PA still arguing against a one-state solution, indirectly confirming this internal turmoil.)

Nor is this analysis confined to Palestinians: broad layers of diplomats and other staff from European states and the United Nations are privately discussing the one-state solution. Moreover, some of the most eloquent endorsements for such a solution are from prominent Jewish professionals in Israel and abroad: Tony Judt, Rabbi David Goldberg, Haim Hanegbi and Tony Lehman come immediately to mind. The scope of this widening concern can be measured also by the angry denunciations of one-state ideas now regularly emanating from official

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<sup>3</sup> The only reason I can glean for Peled's view is Tony Judt's endorsement on the dust jacket.

Israeli bodies and local Zionist organizations, which would not be moved by the writings of a few 'Palestinian intellectuals'.

Opinion surveys also complicate Peled's view that a one-state solution utterly lacks popular Palestinian or Jewish support. Oddly for a scholar of his experience, Peled cites opinion polls as though they deliver a frozen and absolute judgement on political prospects for a one-state solution, while implying that I fail to appreciate such data. Of course it is essential to consider surveys of Jewish-Israeli polarization over withdrawal from the settlements, Jewish-Israeli antipathy to Arabs, and how Jewish-Israeli concerns about a binational state are feeding Jewish support for a two-state solution.<sup>4</sup> And certainly the data indicating strong Jewish support for 'transfer', such as the opinion poll by Asher Arian from 2003, is both alarming and disheartening.<sup>5</sup> The 2005 survey by Sammy Smootha cited by Peled was completed after I wrote the book, but its findings are consistent with earlier data that I provide on Jewish-Israeli views and Jewish views in the us.<sup>6</sup>

But in offering his 'little thought experiment' to support the assertion that the 'vast majority of Jews would opt for a Jewish, non-democratic state over a democratic non-Jewish state', Peled ignores my discussion of precisely this issue.<sup>7</sup> I draw on another poll by Smootha, conducted in 1995, in which Israeli Jews responded to the question: 'What would you prefer in the event that the democratic-egalitarian character of the state comes into contradiction with its Jewish-Zionist character, and you are forced to choose between them?' Nearly 22 per cent replied that they would 'certainly' support its democratic-egalitarian character, while almost 24 per cent thought they would but 'could not be certain'. Another 30 per cent thought they would support a Jewish state but could not be certain—suggesting that only one fifth of Israeli Jews were certain that the Jewish-Zionist character of the state was their first priority. Unsurprisingly, these views have changed dramatically over the past decade. But that very fluidity suggests that Jewish xenophobia is sensitive to the political context and that, in more favourable conditions, it might respond to a movement attempting to craft a new space for debate about a one-state solution. In running his 'thought experiment', Peled might have considered this data. At least, any historian of nationalism

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<sup>4</sup> oss, pp. 58, 65 and 167.

<sup>5</sup> oss, p. 257.

<sup>6</sup> oss, pp. 244, 249.

<sup>7</sup> oss, p. 232.

would concur with my concluding comment that ‘Whole nations have been imagined and created from a smaller social base than this’.

### *Palestinian viewpoints*

The apparent sensitivity of Jewish public opinion to the political environment should prompt us to treat survey information from both sides with some care. Peled alludes to data in my Appendix B which shows that, through 2003, about a quarter of Palestinians consistently supported a ‘binational’ state, while an additional tenth supported a unitary state of some kind. These figures support Peled’s assertion that the great majority of Palestinians presently favour a two-state solution. But he does not seem to register my observation about the difficulties of interpreting such poll data. Public discussion of a one-state solution is heavily suppressed in the Occupied Territories, and even in the Palestinian diaspora, because it is (rightly) considered subversive of the PA’s diplomacy and even its existence (as it was established by the Oslo Accords as the Palestinian agency charged with implementing a two-state solution). Absent such public discussion among Palestinians, the very meaning of the term ‘binational state’ remains opaque and lacks public consensus. What Palestinian respondents understand by it in their answers to survey questions is therefore also entirely cloudy. More or fewer might select it, if it were defined for them in any detail—although no single definition presently enjoys a consensus among scholars, either.

Moreover, it is an obvious political reality that Palestinians in the Territories are living in an environment still dominated by the urgent collective norm—common in any revolutionary movement—to maintain political unity behind the leadership. Hence it is at least reasonable to suspect that they might indicate support for a two-state solution to a pollster because it is the party line, or otherwise ‘politically correct’. This is not to say that the poll data is wrong, or that Palestinian views have not grown so bitter since the Oslo debacle that co-existence with ‘the Jews’ has become unimaginable, or even an anathema, for most. But it does suggest that 25 per cent support among Palestinians for a one-state solution under these very negative conditions is actually formidable, and could signal much broader sentiment favouring a unified state. Similarly, given that Israeli Jews face serious social sanctions against even discussing a one-state solution, and that the Israeli government retains a monopoly over popular knowledge (for instance, by instilling

the hegemonic myth of Arafat's rejectionism at Camp David), relatively low Jewish-Israeli support for a one-state solution does not define what might emerge under different political circumstances. At least, the evidence warrants greater caution than Peled shows when he argues that Jewish or Palestinian rejection of a one-state solution should be taken as an unyielding edifice. Popular views may change dramatically as recognition of the death of the two-state solution becomes more widespread.

### *Immovable obstacles*

Peled's focus on popular support, however, avoids the central argument offered in my book. It might well be concluded, as he suggests, that a one-state solution would be nice in some dreamy fiction but remains unfeasible in reality. I attempt to demonstrate the opposite case: that it is the two-state solution that has become an unworkable fiction. The moral arguments for a one-state solution must therefore be plumbed with new courage: not only because we might like to see them prevail, but because we should feel compelled to avert a destabilizing and dangerous bantustan or apartheid future. Reducing several hundred pages of this argument to two dimensions—that the settlements are immovable and the water problem intractable—Peled finds both weak.

In dismissing my case that the settlements are immovable, Peled focuses on diplomatic options, briefly citing several withdrawal 'plans' which (he claims) offer 'best-case scenarios'. To do so, however, he must ignore the dense body of empirical evidence in the book that casts these plans as logistically unworkable or as outright frauds. As I demonstrate, a strategic constellation of factors anchors the West Bank settlement grid and its half-million population of Jewish settlers. These factors include its economic value (hundreds of billions of dollars of private and public investment); its bureaucratic embeddedness in the Israeli state (I detail state funding and other forms of government complicity); its demographic weight (hundreds of thousands of settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, only a small percentage of whom are religious zealots); its political importance (polarizing the Israeli electorate in ways that would bring down any government attempting withdrawal); its ideological sway (being integral to ideas of Jewish 'return' to the biblical homeland, both in secular-nationalist and religious-nationalist discourse); and a feckless international community debilitated by the us diplomatic monopoly.

On the political will required to remove the settlements, I discuss how the interplay of all of these factors blocks all mainstream options for withdrawal by comprising a political behemoth that even the best-intentioned Israeli government could not tackle. Yet none of this background seems to enter into Peled's sweeping assertion that the Sharon government overturned my conclusion: that the withdrawal of Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip showed sufficient political will. It is clear, as my book details, that the West Bank and the Gaza Strip figure very differently within Israel's politics and economy—not to mention in Zionist discourses of the historical (biblical) Jewish homeland and hegemonic notions of Israeli national security. Moreover, withdrawing some 7,500 people from a few bedroom communities with portable greenhouses is hardly comparable to shifting the complex of sizeable cities, their industrial zones and the half-million residents now entrenched in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It is therefore not adequate for Peled simply to assert that Sharon's orchestrated withdrawal from 0.2 per cent of historic Palestine in Gaza demonstrates that the 'pre-condition has been met' for a comparable withdrawal from the West Bank. If he rejects my analysis of this disparity, in reviewing my book he should at least address it.

Instead, Peled says that I offer only a 'worst-case scenario' for the two-state solution in holding that nearly half a million settlers are involved. He argues that the Clinton, Taba and Geneva 'plans' each proposed a viable two-state solution that 'would have involved the removal of only 80,000 settlers'. But plans that are politically and economically unworkable cannot be said to be 'best-case scenarios'. None of these 'plans' had a breath of real life. Authoritative post-mortems like Clayton Swisher's *The Truth About Camp David* have demonstrated that the Oslo and Camp David negotiations amounted to little more than diplomatic tap-dancing to distract from Israel's ongoing settlement construction.<sup>8</sup> But even if we credit these plans with political viability, none would have prevented the West Bank from being divided into unsustainable bantustans. The micro-managing rhetoric of Madeleine Albright and others—'92 per cent' or '96 per cent'—failed to recognize that narrow shafts of Israeli sovereignty plunging deep into West Bank territory will cantonize it just as effectively as wider shafts would do. Peled does not acknowledge this geographic problem despite my explicit attention to it, illustrated by maps of all these plans.

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<sup>8</sup> Clayton Swisher, *The Truth About Camp David: The Untold Story About the Collapse of the Middle East Peace Process*, New York 2004.

The Geneva Accord, which Peled also cites as a ‘plan’, was never even on Israel’s table: it was a maverick initiative denounced by the Israeli and us governments, and conducted entirely outside the orbit of state diplomacy. Still, some people believe it offered a viable plan that a future Israeli government could adopt in a burst of enlightened self-interest. A critique of the Geneva Accord is beyond the scope of this article, but I can reiterate my reason for treating it so briefly in the book: that it shunted off to a never-written ‘Annexe X’ precisely those stumbling blocks to ‘final status’ talks that Israel has erected for every plan. It even unilaterally dismissed what is still a non-negotiable Palestinian demand, the right of Palestinian return. If any such plan were sufficient, we would have had peace decades ago. I find it surprising that so many smart and responsible people have considered Geneva a major step forward when its lack of substance casts it as no more than a well-intended chimera. Its only significant contribution was seriously to dent Israel’s claim that the Palestinians offer ‘no partner for peace’—a good gain, but circumscribed by a lack of broader support for the Accord that is unsurprising, given its fundamental flaws.

All ‘plans’ hefted in the hands of actual Israeli government diplomats during the Oslo and Camp David processes were revealed as empty gestures—or complete frauds—by the simultaneous growth of the large West Bank settlements, which doubled their population during that period. Public statements by the Sharon and Olmert governments have confirmed what their internal planning documents have indicated for decades: government intentions to anchor the large settlements permanently in the West Bank landscape. The route of the Wall has, with new precision, demonstrated Israel’s intention to annexe some 45 per cent of the West Bank. Indeed, Peled must dismiss the material evidence now gleaming from West Bank hilltops—massive apartment complexes and shopping malls, topped with construction cranes, spreading daily across the landscape—to suggest that any of these ‘plans’ were ever more than diplomatic stage shows.

### *Desalination plans*

The question of water—to which Peled applies more weight than its importance for my argument could justify—is more technical, although here analysts reasonably disagree. I’m therefore sorry that Peled has chosen simply to dismiss sober warnings emanating from a myriad of





A future Palestinian 'state' as suggested by the route of Israel's Separation Wall and the settlement grid. © Palestine Mapping Center, 2003.

independent analysts—from the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to the Applied Research Institute in Jerusalem—as a ‘red herring used by the Israeli right’.<sup>9</sup> Instead, he cites only Jan Selby’s interesting but marginal study, which minimizes the water problem beyond the opinion of most analysts. Selby is accurate in two senses: Israel will not go to war primarily over water (although that is never argued) and desalination is one way to offset the mounting shortfall. It is indeed on the agenda. In 2000, the Israeli government approved a desalination ‘Master Plan’ that will establish four plants along the Mediterranean which, when completed, will hopefully produce close to half a billion cubic metres annually. By comparison to Israel’s GDP, the costs might appear manageable, although they are certainly more than Saul Arlosoroff estimated: around a billion dollars, judging by the costs of the new plant in Ashkelon.<sup>10</sup> Still, the master plan remains a ‘best-case scenario’: Israel’s economy is currently on the mend, but a billion dollars for such plants is hardly ‘cheap’ and may not be easy to find.

Israel’s desalination plan itself reflects another reality: that the shortfall is more than the 100 million cubic metres argued by Arlosoroff. With the coastal aquifer seriously contaminated and the level of Lake Tiberius falling to dangerous new lows, desalination plants will go toward replacing failing freshwater resources for Israel’s growing population rather than topping off existing supplies. Moreover, relying more on desalination will raise water costs, straining the budgets of industry. The West Bank aquifers will therefore remain indispensable to Israel’s permanent supply for the foreseeable future. Handing over to Palestinians the cheap water from the West Bank—half a billion cubic metres annually of the best-quality water in the territory, a third of Israel’s present supply—is certainly not on the agenda.

Determination to fund desalination plants is also likely to wobble due to another ‘fact on the ground’: the geographic spread of the large West Bank settlements is strategically congruent with the grid of Israeli

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Steven Plaut, ‘Water Policy in Israel’, *Policy Studies*, no. 47, July 2000, Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies; for related discussion and sources, see *oss*, pp. 62–4.

<sup>10</sup> The Ashkelon plant, which ultimately cost \$250 million to build, is designed to produce about 100 mcm annually: a fifth of the West Bank aquifer recharge and just 5 to 6 per cent of Israel’s present annual consumption.

pumping stations that tap the West Bank aquifers. (Juxtaposing a map of the present settlement blocks with a map of Israeli wells and pumping stations makes this relationship immediately clear.) Hence, if ‘Israeli policy makers no longer consider water a core issue for negotiations’, as Peled argues (citing Selby), it is because the question has already been pre-empted. Palestinian negotiators, viewing water as epiphenomenal to control of West Bank land, may well have treated it as a secondary issue at Camp David. But their technical staff have not been placated by talk of a desalination plant on the Mediterranean that would provide fresh water to the West Bank via a pipeline. For one thing, that plan promises to replace only the 10 per cent of West Bank water which Israeli occupation policy has left to Palestinians, a fraction of what Palestinians need. For another, such dependency is frightening. Relying for fresh water on the plant, expertise and good graces of a historically hostile neighbour is not a welcome prospect for any state, particularly when that neighbour has unilaterally appropriated the supply from the local aquifer. In light of Israel’s stated strategy to keep the Palestinian cantons geographically isolated and therefore dependent on Israeli fiat, water looms as one more mechanism securing that vulnerability.

### *Ethnic blocs*

In his absorption with this technical question, Peled touches on one of greater political substance. In his view, Palestinians *qua* Palestinians would ‘gain sovereignty over the entire country’, a prospect that—regarding water and everything else—Zionists would naturally reject. In this assessment, Peled reproduces classic Zionist assumptions that identities like ‘Palestinian’ would be permanent features of a one-state solution, securing enduring patterns of mutually hostile ethnic voting. Although he has championed the salience of class divisions, Peled does not consider that democracy might allow class and other interests to cross-cut and erode the boundaries of established Jewish and Palestinian ethno-nationalist blocs—let alone that new social unities might also emerge. To offer a different ‘thought experiment’: it is not unimaginable that, in a secular democracy, some Muslims and Jews might find common cause in containing religious extremism in the government. Upwardly mobile middle-class Mizrahi Jews might form coalitions with middle-class Arabs to confront anti-Arab racial biases in Israeli national life. Israeli Arabs in Galilee might work with neighbouring Jewish communities to mitigate the economic impact of Palestinian returnees

arriving from camps in Lebanon. The very category ‘Palestinian’ might crumble into its old sectarian and class subdivisions, and link up with Israeli-Arab interests similarly divided. All these possibilities are, again, open for study and possibly even activism.

Paradoxically, the same assumption—that ethno-nationalist identities would remain polarized—seems also to inform Peled’s argument that secular democracy would *ipso facto* eradicate the Jewish ‘national home’. Here his neglect of my argument is more culpable, for probing that assumption was my central project in the closing section of the book—which Peled disparages as over-absorbed with ‘texts’. Yet that discussion reflected a task basic to any study of ethnic conflict: to assess how democratization will affect ethnic interests, we must first establish what those interests are. To understand how unification would affect a ‘Jewish national home’, we must ask what the nature, mission and needs of that ‘home’ truly are, and interrogate more closely why and how people understand Jewish statehood to provide the necessary conditions for them.

This effort is hardly some rarefied project to ‘transform’ Israeli society ‘through the correct interpretation of texts’. In practice, popular Jewish rejection of a one-state solution derives its logics and passions from a net of Zionist aphorisms and polemics about Jewish-national welfare and survival. Especially important is the classic Zionist narrative, which proposes that a peace-loving Jewish-national movement settled and modernized the arid and empty deserts of the Jewish biblical homeland, sought peaceful co-existence that backward and anti-Semitic Arabs irrationally rejected, and so was forced to defend itself against attack by ‘five Arab armies’. Today (the narrative continues), democratic Israel is still surrounded by Arab neighbours whose burning hostility is driven only by anti-Semitism, and remains a vital sanctuary for Jews who everywhere face brooding anti-Semitic threats. All these beliefs rest on historical myths and tautologies, but they comprise a worldview—and generate real fears—that we must treat seriously in order to facilitate a willingness in their adherents to engage in revising them.

Cultivating such willingness is indeed very difficult, not least because Israeli-Jewish society does famously sustain many normative bans on serious discussion of Zionism itself. But it is both condescending and unhelpful of Peled to assert that the reading public ‘does not have the

patience for a real analysis of Israeli society and its problems'. For one thing, willingness to confront unpleasant or dreaded subjects is typically cultivated, in all societies, by crisis conditions. If Israelis are brought to recognize that they face precisely such a crisis—indicated by empirical evidence from which they are now sheltered—the required 'patience' may appear. Secondly, popular reluctance to confront the disastrous outcome of a cherished nationalist ideology is hardly a legitimate cause for international reticence on the subject. Even if domestic Israeli debate is stalled, a broader public must nevertheless consider frankly whether the Jewish national home actually requires a Jewish *state*, in order to clarify its own moral and political obligations to Zionist arguments.

### *National home or state?*

Interviews and scrutiny of Zionist tracts make it clear that Zionist concerns to preserve a Jewish state largely reduce to one core belief: only Jewish control over the state can preserve the ethnic majority deemed essential to securing the Jewish national home. The central concern is indeed a 'national home', understood as the crucible for Jewish-national culture, vital in providing a diaspora-Jewish sanctuary, and sometimes seen as essential to reconstituting religious (or spiritual) Jewish practice. But Zionist arguments for a Jewish state evince unclear conflation of nationhood and statehood. (Many people confuse 'state' and 'nation' at the best of times.) They are also often unfamiliar with ways in which norms of the 'nation-state' concept have been profoundly transformed over the last half-century, moving from ethnic to civil-territorial premises. As a consequence, Zionists today show little understanding that Israel has become an atavistic outlier in this regard—an 'anachronism', in Judt's description. They assume that an ethnic state provides essential conditions for ethnic life, although such conditions are being met elsewhere, and with less risk of conflagration, by neutral democratic states. Hence arguments for a Jewish state are internally quite complicated, building from circular and sometimes contradictory beliefs about the international system and a collective, mythic memory of Jewish and Zionist experience.

Peled himself, however, asserts that only two irreducible tenets are fundamental to the 'Jewish national home': Jewish immigration to Palestine and Jewish control over land. He demands the 'courage' among proponents of a one-state solution to accept that, without Jewish

statehood, these ethnic privileges would evaporate, and the Jewish 'national home' along with them. Yet it is exactly this kind of opaque and reductionist proposition that prompted the deeper exploration I attempt in *The One-State Solution*. Why should we grant force to this argument when even its proponents leave its internal logic unclear? Why, precisely, would changes in the Law of Return eradicate the Jewish national home? Peled does not say. Would elimination of this law or its reform, *in itself*, dissolve Jewish-national life for a Jewish-Israeli population that is already over five million strong, and that sustains a sophisticated national literature and media, vigorous arts and a sturdy political culture? It is hard to defend such a claim. Indeed, partly out of *sabra* fatigue with us-born, extremist settler thugs, Israeli Jews themselves have already conducted public debates about halting *aliyah* (at least, as a deliberate recruitment programme), modifying the Law of Return, or extricating Israel more substantively from its interdependence with the Jewish diaspora. Even Hannah Arendt, whom Peled and I both quote, qualified her understanding of Jewish immigration as rightly 'limited in numbers and in time'.

Hence we can peer more closely at issues like 'Jewish immigration' to see what the core concerns are and whether they might be addressed by a constitution securing non-discriminatory governance. One of Peled's more startling claims is that Israel's juridical status as a 'Jewish and democratic state' is confirmed by its constitution. Israel famously has no constitution; its ethnic character is confirmed by several Basic Laws. Could a true constitution, crafted through a collective, consultative process, satisfy the core elements of the formula 'Jewish and democratic' in a secular democratic state? A central concern is that Israel provide the sanctuary of last resort for Jews, in the event of some dire resurgence of anti-Semitism. But in the sense of asylum, the Law of Return need not be eliminated but only amended. Peled is also wrong in stating that the Law of Return conveys citizenship to Jewish immigrants upon arrival. Citizenship is actually conveyed by the Citizenship Law, which among other provisions for naturalization grants citizenship to anyone arriving in Israel under the Law of Return. In a one-state solution, consistent with the principle of non-discrimination, naturalization could be divorced from the Law of Return. Or the Law of Return itself could be made ethnically neutral yet continue to serve concerns for Jewish sanctuary by revising it as a Law of Asylum, listing racism as one qualifying cause for granting asylum, and (if the redundancy is deemed necessary) specifying that anti-Semitism is a form of racism.

As a corollary measure, however, deliberate programmes by state agencies to encourage the immigration of anyone on the basis of ethnicity would have to be proscribed. For instance, Peled is right in observing that Palestinians would doubtless want to ‘balance [the Law of Return] with a law of return of their own’. But this need not equate with new ethnic rivalry. Return of Palestinian refugees—a necessary and difficult early stage in the normalization process—could be handled either through temporary legislation or a constitutional provision for naturalization based not on ethnicity but on indigeneity (documented family origins in the land). Similarly, land ownership must be detached from any ethnic privilege, to preclude the rival Palestinian ambitions that Peled predicts.

### *Demographic threat?*

But of course, democracy would not threaten the Jewish national home through any such law in isolation. As Peled points out, the real fear is of the supposed ‘demographic threat’: that Muslim and Christian Arabs will become a majority and seize control of the government as a whole, to the point of damaging Jewish interests or persecuting Jews. On a popular level, this fear is entirely understandable—if arguable, as I explore at length in the book. But its reproduction here by scholars like Peled is less defensible, for it rests on several shaky premises. First, it assumes that ‘Palestinian’ would remain an electoral bloc. Second, it fails to consider that neither Jews nor Palestinians would accept a single state that failed to provide robust constitutional protections against ethnic discrimination. Generating a true constitution that enjoys broad popular legitimacy (as was done in South Africa) would be essential to a stable one-state solution.

Third, Peled assumes that Palestinians themselves would not support such a constitution, even though its survival would clearly be essential to the economic and political success of the country. The racism inherent in that assumption is obvious: that Arabs are incapable of long-term vision and instead, like the fabled scorpion on the frog, will drown themselves because it is their ‘nature’. That view hovers uncomfortably in Peled’s affirmation that, ‘if the Palestinians had their way’, they would seize the water, the land, the legal system and everything else dear to Jews, and destroy the Jewish national home immediately or by stages.

While objecting to Peled’s simplistic assumptions about permanent bloc Palestinian hostility, I would certainly agree that Palestinian identity

will remain salient. Especially in the short term, the Palestinians' historical grievances would remain politically central and require difficult compromises. Yet both sides are equally capable of compromise, not least because both will be motivated by rational self-interest. For instance, regarding challenges like managing mass Palestinian return, all parties would have a keen interest in mitigating the inevitable socio-economic and political strains. Here we confront the problem that launching negotiations toward such solutions requires some preliminary work to make their success imaginable. For instance, Jewish fears of mass Palestinian return reflect apprehension of being swamped by millions of returnees, but it is unclear how 'mass' that return would be. Many Palestinians in the refugee camps of the frontline states would certainly wish to return as soon as they could, but millions of others have built decent lives elsewhere, with family and business ties they would wish to sustain.

Indulging in such speculation here does not equate with serious consideration of Palestinian politics, of course, and perhaps my decision to minimize review of Palestinian opinions in *The One-State Solution* was inadequate, on several grounds. First, it may insult Palestinians by seeming tacitly to demote or remove their politics and interests from the equation. Second, Palestinian politics play out as a dialectic with Jewish-Israeli political thought, such that one cannot really be analysed without the other. But, third, Zionists commonly excuse Israeli policies by reducing intricately textured Palestinian politics to brute ciphers like terrorism. Increasingly, Zionist rhetoric points to Hamas in order to legitimate Israeli government rejectionism. Yet Hamas itself is a complicated and internally factionalized movement, whose intellectuals are grappling seriously with internal ideological and political flux associated with their unexpected gain of a parliamentary majority. Peled's alarmist allusion to Hamas traduces this complexity, particularly in his *non sequitur* equating its participation in the January elections with some fundamental falsity in Palestinian democratic values. Contrary to Peled's elision, I therefore did not call Hamas itself a "frightening Islamic totalitarian" *movement* when I expressed my concern about the 'frightening rise of Islamic totalitarian *doctrines*'.<sup>11</sup>

### *Bi-nationalism?*

As to my neglecting to mention a Palestinian 'national home'—a concern Peled himself confines to a footnote—the reasons are twofold.

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<sup>11</sup> *oss*, p. 203.



First, Palestinians do not fear that a one-state solution in the territory of Mandate Palestine would eradicate that home. Their cities and villages are located there, their political economy and social networks are based there, and their collective identity and nationalist ideology are centred there. Moreover, worry that ethnic coexistence would endanger that home does not plague Palestinian nationalism as it does Zionist thought. ‘Palestinian’ has always been a multi-sectarian and multi-ethnic identity, as it is based on indigeneity to a territory whose population has always included Christians, Jews, Druze and others. It has always been Zionism’s logic of ethnic cleansing that threatens Palestinians. This threat would evaporate in a stable one-state solution.

Second, for my own part, I find the notion of a binational state inadequate and do not feel compelled to affirm symmetrical ethno-national rights on the question. Here I diverge from many others who, writing about a one-state solution, believe it would be right and necessary for Jewish and Palestinian nationalisms to enjoy explicit constitutional privileges or protections. I fear that inscribing these nationalities into constitutional law would set up incentives for exploiting them. While a secular, democratic one-state solution must provide all groups with the conditions for a rich and satisfying ethnic life, a degree of fluidity—intermarriage and multi-ethnic identities—will also be vital to precluding the kind of retrenchment that has plagued countries like Lebanon. Securing equal rights and normative standing for citizens who pertain to neither nationality is also important for a durable democracy. Hence, in my view, a stable one-state solution in Israel-Palestine should allow the free pursuit of ethnic life but also guard against any penalty—formal or informal—for individuals and groups seeking to form new identities, according to their tastes and interests.

The language of binationality reifies now-rival identities and so might impede such fluidity, fostering tendencies to guard and gatekeep rather than soften present national boundaries. Indeed, as Azmi Bishara asserts, Palestinians themselves have never sought a binational solution—which is one apparent reason why they never endorsed the Ichud programme in the 1930s. Peled chides me, in another footnote, for ignoring Palestinian ‘indifference’ to the binational proposals of people like Martin Buber, but he simply missed my (admittedly brief) reference to this issue.<sup>12</sup> More importantly, he also missed my subsequent description of United

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<sup>12</sup> *oss*, p. 200.

Nations debates in 1947, when the Arab and Muslim states' delegations to a UN subcommittee unanimously endorsed a one-state solution in Palestine. It could be very interesting for scholars to bring that resolution, and its arguments and proposals for a unitary state, back onto the table for fresh review.<sup>13</sup>

### *Lessons of South Africa*

As the previous discussion has illustrated, the South African comparison frequently arises in analysis of the one-state solution, as a useful font of experience and ideas. I am baffled as to how Peled can describe *The One-State Solution* as inconsistent on this question, 'dismissing it at one point as irrelevant but repeatedly referring to it nonetheless' in what he calls 'rhetorical platitudes'. The book has a separate section on this comparison where I thought my argument was entirely transparent:

In sum, looking to the South African experience for guidance or inspiration will avail little unless policymakers also adopt the principles, standards, and values that guided that struggle: that is, that ethnic supremacy is illegitimate and cannot generate a just political system and that formal civil democracy, for all its flaws and lingering injustices, is essential to permitting a more egalitarian and peaceful political competition for resources . . . But the very idea of ethnic equality or multiethnic democracy is explicitly rejected by dominant Israeli doctrine. If that rejection is actually *accepted* by the international community, the South African experience in eliminating apartheid must be considered irrelevant.<sup>14</sup>

That is, the comparison fails if one assumes that peace in Palestine must be made through ethnic separation rather than a one-state solution, such as the one South Africa pursued. But if we argue that Israel-Palestine must pursue a one-state solution, as I do, then the comparison becomes very useful indeed.

Pending completion of my follow-up study on it, I find the comparison most useful heuristically, especially when people assert that the Jews 'will never accept a one-state solution'. For instance, Jewish fears of annihilation at the hands of native (Arab) hordes strongly recall Afrikaner fears and prejudices about Africans. Afrikaners also believed blacks incapable

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<sup>13</sup> See the full text in Walid Khalidi, ed., *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem until 1948* [1971], Washington 1987.

<sup>14</sup> *oss*, p. 142.

of democracy, and intransigently vengeful and hostile toward whites, echoing Zionist claims that Arabs are capable only of dictatorship. South Africa's transition may therefore offer invaluable insights toward softening Jewish fears and beliefs. Again, such willingness clearly also requires external pressure: the international boycott and sanctions campaign against South Africa combined with internal strikes, selective sabotage and moral opprobrium to bring the South African white community to face the necessity of abandoning apartheid. But a range of conciliatory gestures also allowed whites to imagine that apartheid could be dismantled without ruin and mayhem to themselves: for example, formal ANC statements toward a 'rainbow nation', secret negotiations in Europe and international guarantees.

It is therefore surprising that Peled himself treats the comparison so simplistically, rejecting its relevance solely on the basis of union leverage. Here he turns at some length to Mona Younis's analysis of the ANC and PLO, which stressed the important role of labour unions in negotiating the end of apartheid.<sup>15</sup> I do not disagree with this (often cited) position, and Younis's study is well argued: white realization that blacks and whites are inextricably interdependent in South African society was certainly key to their final acceptance of full suffrage. But the labour angle hardly casts the South African experience as irrelevant to the Palestinian one. First, South Africa's transition resulted from the hard work of many actors, at multiple levels and in many social sectors, and not only the unions (especially COSATU). Scholars of the comparison between the two should explore this complexity, and activists need to identify modes of action that might compensate Palestinians for their lack of corollary union leverage.

Second, it is insupportable for Peled to affirm, in such blanket fashion, that the Palestinian movement has been 'doomed to failure' by its 'middle-class leadership' (who is that, precisely? and how is 'middle-class' defined here?) and that its 'cadres' were drawn 'mostly from the refugee population'. The latter assertion would astonish the millions of Palestinians in the Territories, who have understood themselves to be heavily engaged in resistance for the past half-century. True, PLO policies and factionalism have fostered the collective weakness of Palestinian workers, seriously

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<sup>15</sup> Mona Younis, *Liberation and Democratization: The South African and Palestinian National Movements*, Minneapolis 2000.

damaging Palestinian collective leverage with the Israeli government. But many other problems have also contributed to the movement's 'failure': not least, its dramatically different geopolitical context, including the crucial role of us patronage and subsidies to Israel—which, again, remain conspicuously missing from Peled's analysis.

### *Addressing the evidence*

Finally, even a rigorously Marxist approach to the conflict should not confine itself to examining Palestinian labour on the South African model. Israelis have never successfully 'excluded Palestinians from their economy'. Palestinian labour was integral to the Zionist project from its beginnings and it remains so, even though Palestinian employment in Israel has been greatly curtailed since the Oslo process. (New Israeli industrial zones are currently being established close to the Wall, in order to exploit this long-standing pool of cheap labour.) The Israeli economy also remains bound up in Palestinian labour, production and consumption through the conditions imposed by the Occupation: the captive market Israel has made of the Territories and the dirt-cheap products it imports in return. It is unclear whether Israel could sustain its accustomed living standards without continuing to reap these benefits from the Palestinian sector. Can these hidden profits be measured? Can this intrinsic interdependency translate into new incentives for Israelis to consider more efficient integration? Could incremental 'stages' of economic integration offer the best way to pursue a stable one-state solution? These questions remain, ripe for research and perhaps activism.

I welcome anyone's contribution in identifying the apparent holes and new research directions suggested by my analysis. Such questions abound in my own notes. But Peled seems more concerned to dress me down for exposing these pressing gaps and questions. He rightly takes me to task for neglecting the IDF and its own interests in the Territories, which I should have acknowledged. But his own summary, stressing the Occupation's benefits to the IDF, is uni-dimensional, and demands deeper analysis of how the IDF's controversial role in the Occupation is also corroding its own internal consensus on those benefits. (Can the IDF's demoralizing experience in Lebanon offer any insights?) I also neglect questions of gender, semi-proletarian modes of production, the enduring importance of kin ties in Palestinian politics—such as *hamula*/clan affiliations—Palestinian diaspora politics, Mizrahi politics,

the Middle Eastern market and other important issues and categories of analysis. At this writing, major reconfigurations of Israeli and Palestinian politics—signalled by the exit of Ariel Sharon and the election of Hamas—raise new questions. All these and many other areas cry out for exploration.

But to launch those studies, we must face the incontrovertible evidence that a stable two-state solution in Israel-Palestine is now on the trash heap of history. Offering only unsupported claims about obsolete peace ‘plans’ and a startlingly depoliticized analysis of the water problem, little in Peled’s contribution addresses that evidence. The demise of the two-state solution—which even Peled admits is moribund—compels our frank attention. We must stop bickering about desalination plants or cherry-picking opinion polls, and begin seriously trying to sort out the implications.