

Another Pipe Dream

Uri Avnery

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WHAT'S WRONG ABOUT the demand that the Palestinian leadership recognize Israel as the "Nation State of the Jewish People"? Well, practically everything.

States recognize each other. They don't have to recognize each other's ideological character.

A state is a reality. Ideologies belong to the abstract realm.

When the United States recognized the Soviet Union in 1933, it recognized the state. It did not recognize its communist nature.

When the PLO recognized the State of Israel in the Oslo agreement, and in the exchange of letters preceding it, it was not asked to recognize its Zionist ideology. When Israel in return recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, it did not recognize any particular Palestinian ideology, secular or religious.

Some Israelis (including myself) would like to change the self-definition of Israel as a "Jewish and democratic state", omitting the word "Jewish". Some other Israelis would like to omit or demote the word "democratic". Neither of us believe that we need the confirmation of the Palestinians for this.

It's just none of their business.

I DON'T know what the real intention of Netanyahu is when he presents this demand as an ultimatum.

The most flattering explanation for his ego is that it is just another trick to sabotage the "peace process" before it reaches the demand to evacuate the Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories. The less flattering explanation is that he really believes in it, that he is driven by some deeply rooted national inferiority complex that needs outside assurance of "legitimacy". Recognizing the "National State of the Jewish People" means accepting the entire Zionist narrative, lock, stock and barrel, starting from the divine promise to Abraham to this very day.

When John Kerry considers whether to include this demand in his Framework Agreement, he should think about this twice.

Where would this leave his special emissary, Martin Indyk?

Mr. Indyk is a Jew, bearing a Yiddish Name (Indyk means turkey). If Israel is the state of the entire Jewish nation and/or people, he is included willy-nilly. The state of Israel represents him, too. So how can he function as an honest broker between the two warring sides?

And where does this leave the millions of American Jews, now that the conflict between the governments of the US and Israel is deepening? On what side are they? Are they all Jonathan Pollards?

THE NEWLY found independent American voice vis-à-vis Israel drives Israeli rightists to devise more and more weird solutions.

The latest example is Binyamin Netanyahu's brilliant idea: why not leave the Israeli settlers where they are as Palestinian citizens?

This looks to many sensible people as eminently fair, in the best Anglo-Saxon tradition.

The state of Israel now has some 1.6 million Arab Palestinian citizens. Why should the State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, not include some 0.6 million Jewish Israeli citizens?

The Arabs in Israel enjoy, at least in theory, full legal rights. They vote for the Knesset. They are subject to the law. Why should these Israelis not enjoy full legal rights in Palestine, vote for the Majlis and be subject to the law?

People love symmetry. Symmetry makes life easier. It removes complexities.¹

THIS SYMMETRY is false, too.

Israel's Arab citizens live on their land. Their forefathers have been living there for at least 1400 years, and perhaps for 5000 years. Sa'eb Erekat exclaimed this week that his family has been living in Jericho for 10,000 years, while his Israeli counterpart, Tzipi Livni, is the daughter of an immigrant.

The settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories are mostly new immigrants, too. They do not sit on the land of their forefathers, but on Palestinian land expropriated by force—either "private" land or "government land". This so-called "government land" was the communal land reserves of the villages that in Ottoman times was registered in the name of the Sultan, and later in the name of the

¹When I was a recruit in the army I was taught to mistrust symmetry. Symmetry is rare in nature. When you see evenly spaced trees, I was told, it is not a forest, but camouflaged enemy soldiers.

British and Jordanian authorities. When Israel conquered the area, it took over these lands as if it owned them.

BUT THE main point is something different. It concerns the character of the settlers themselves.

The core of the settlers, precisely those who live in the “isolated” small settlements in the areas that will in any case become part of the Palestinian state, are religious and nationalist fanatics.

The very purpose of their leaving comfortable homes in Israel and going to the desolate stony hills of “Judea and Samaria” was idealistic. It was to claim this area for Israel, fulfill their interpretation of God’s commandment and make a Palestinian state forever impossible.

The idea that these people would become law-abiding citizens of the very same Palestinian state is preposterous. Most of them hate everything Arab, including the workers who work for them without the benefit of minimum wages or social rights, and say so openly at every opportunity. They support the “Price Tag” thugs who terrorize their Arab neighbors, or at least don’t speak out against them. They obey their fanatical rabbis, who discuss among themselves whether it is right to kill non-Jewish children, who, when grown up, may kill Jews. They plan the building of the Third Temple, after blowing up the Muslim shrines.

To think about them as Palestinian citizens is ludicrous.

OF COURSE, not all the settlers are like that. Some of them are quite different.

This week, an Israeli TV station aired a series about the economic situation of the settlers. It was an eye-opener.

Those ideological pioneers, living in tents and wooden huts, are long gone. Many settlements now consist of palatial buildings, each with its swimming pool, horses and orchards—something the Israeli 99% cannot even dream of. Since almost all of them came to the “territories” without a shekel in their pocket, it is clear that all these palaces were built with our tax money—the huge sums transferred every year to this enterprise.

The clusters of urban settlements near the Green Line called “settlement blocs” are another matter. They are likely to be joined to Israel in the context of an “exchange of territories”. But at least two of them raise severe questions: Ariel, which lies some 25 km inside the putative Palestinian state, and Maaleh Adumim, which practically cuts the West Bank into two.

Incorporating these two large towns with their inhabitants into the sovereign State of Palestine is a pipe-dream

WHEN NETANYAHU promised this week that he will not remove one single settler nor evacuate one single settlement, he may have been thinking of Charles de Gaulle, who also did not remove settlers or uproot settlements. He just fixed the date when the French army would leave Algeria.

That was enough.