

Palestine 2011

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Struggling as I have for the past decades to grasp the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and find ways to get out of this interminable and absolutely superfluous conflict, I have been two-thirds successful. After many years of activism and analysis, I think I have put my finger on the first third of the equation: What is the problem? My answer, which has withstood the test of time and today is so evident that it elicits the response...“duh”... is that all Israeli governments are unwaveringly determined to maintain complete control of Palestine/Israel from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River, frustrating any just and workable solution based on Palestinian claims to self-determination. There will be no negotiated settlement, period.

The second part of the equation – how can the conflict be resolved? – is also easily answerable. I don't mean entering into the one state/two state conundrum and deciding which option best. Under certain circumstances both could work, and I can think of at least 3-4 other viable options as well, including my favorite, a Middle Eastern economic confederation. The Palestinian think tank Passia published a collection of twelve proposed solutions a few years ago. What I mean is, it is not difficult to identify the essential elements of *any* solution. They are, in brief,

- A just, workable and lasting peace must be inclusive of the two peoples living in Palestine/Israel;
- Any solution must provide for a national expression of each people, not merely a democratic formula based on one person-one vote;
- It must provide economic viability to all the parties;
- No solution will work that is not based on human rights, international law and UN resolutions.
- The refugee issue, based on the right of return, must be addressed squarely.
- A workable peace must be regional in scope; it cannot be confined merely to Israel/Palestine; and
- A just peace must address the security concerns of all the parties and countries in the region.

These seven elements, I would submit, must configure *any* just solution. If they are all included, a settlement of the conflict could take many different forms. If, however, even one is missing, *no* solution will work, no matter how good it looks on paper.

That leaves the third and most intractable part of the equation: how do we get there? Employing the linear analysis we have used over the years, you can't. In those terms we are at a dead-end of a dead “process.” Israel will never end its Occupation voluntarily; the best it may agree to is apartheid, but the permanent warehousing of the Palestinians is more what it has in mind. Given the massive “facts on the ground” Israel has imposed on the Occupied Territories, the international community will not exert enough pressure on Israel to realize even a two-state solution (which leaves Israel on 78% of historic Palestine, with no right of refugee return); given the veto power over any political process enjoyed by the American Congress, locked into an unshakable bi-partisan “pro-Israel” position, the international community *cannot* exert that required pressure. And the Palestinians, fragmented and with weak leadership, have no clout. Indeed, they're not even in the game. In terms of any sort of rational, linear, government-led “peace process,” we have arrived at the end of the road.

And yet I'm optimistic that 2011 will witness a game-changing “break” that will create a new set of circumstances in which a just peace is possible. That jolt which smashes the present dead-end paradigm must come from outside the present “process.” It can take one of two forms. The first possible game-changer is already being discussed: a unilateral declaration by the Palestinian Authority of a state based on the 1949 armistice lines (the 1967 “Green Line”), which then applies for membership in the UN. This, I believe, would force the hand of the international community. Most of the countries of the world would recognize a Palestinian state – including not a few in Europe – placing the US, Britain, Germany and other reluctant powers in a difficult if not impossible situation, including isolation and even irrelevancy. Indeed, a Palestinians declaration of independence within those boundaries would be a unilateral act but rather one done in agreement with the member states of the UN, who have accepted the 1949/1967 borders as the basis of a solution. It conforms as well to the Road Map initiative led by the US itself.

Such a scenario, while still possible given the deadlock in negotiations, is unlikely, if only because the leadership of the Palestinian Authority lacks the courage to undertake such a bold initiative. A second one seems more likely: in 2011, the Palestinian Authority will either resign or collapse, throwing the Occupation back on the lap of Israel. Given the deadlock in negotiations, I can't see the PA lasting even until August, when (sort-of) Prime Minister Salem Fayyad expects the international community to give the Palestinians a state. Even if the 90-day settlement freeze eventually comes into effect, Netanyahu will not negotiate borders during that period, the only issue worth discussing. Either fed up to the point of resigning – Abbas may be weak and pliable, but he is not a collaborator – or having lost so much credibility with its own people that it simply collapses, the fall of the PA would end definitively the present “process.”

The end or fall of the PA would create an intolerable and unsustainable situation. Israel would be forced to retake by force all the Occupied Territories, and unable to allow Hamas to step into the vacuum, would have to do so violently, perhaps even invading Gaza again and assuming permanent control. Having to support four million impoverished Palestinians with no economic infrastructure whatsoever would be an impossible burden (and hopefully the “donor community” would not enable the re-occupation by stepping in to prevent a “humanitarian crisis,” as it does today). Such a move on the part of Israel would also inflame the Muslim world and generate massive protests worldwide, again forcing the hand of the international community. Looked at in this way, the Palestinians have one source of enormous clout: they are the gatekeepers. Until they – the Palestinian people as a whole, not the PA – say the conflict is over, it's not over. Israel and its erstwhile allies have the ability to make life almost unbearable for the Palestinians, but they cannot impose apartheid or warehousing. We, the millions supporting the Palestinian struggle the world over, will not let it go until the Palestinians signal that they have arrived at a settlement that they can live with. Until then, the conflict will remain open and globally disruptive.

If any of these scenarios comes about and new possibilities of peace arise out of the violence and chaos that will ensue, the real question is: where will we be, the people who support a just, inclusive, workable and sustainable peace? Here in Israel/Palestine, unfortunately, there is no discussion over what may happen in the next year. Not only do we of the Palestinian and Israeli peace movements fail to give adequate direction and leadership to our civil society allies abroad, we tend to pursue “politics as normal” disconnected from the political processes around us, more reactive than pro-active. Despite its crucial importance to the Palestinian struggle, for instance, the BDS campaign moves along and accumulates strength, but is not accompa-

nied by focused, timely campaigns intended to seize a political moment. When the Gaza flotilla was attacked and Israel was reeling from international condemnation, Palestinian and Israeli activists from all over the world – including Palestine/Israel – should have kicked into action. Sympathetic parliamentarians (and members of Congress) the world over should have been induced to introduce bills saying that if the Occupation does not end in a year their governments will end all military aid to Israel and preferential treatment. They might not have carried the day, but imagine the public debate they would have generated at that point of time. Instead the political moment fizzled.

We are at the cusp of another such moment today, and we still have time – though not much time – to organize. Activist and civil society groups abroad should ask their Palestinian and Israeli counterparts for their evaluation of the political moment and suggestions on what to do should the Palestinian Authority collapse together with the “peace process.” Though should be given over how to transform the BDS campaign and the infrastructure of resistance it is creating from a blunt instrument into one capable of more focused resistance – of mobilizing churches, trade unions and universities, for example, and by priming sympathetic politicians to act when the moment arrives? In the absence of an ANC-type organization to direct us, we have a much more difficult job of communicating and of coordinating our actions. But we are in touch with one another. The political moment looming just weeks or months ahead demands our attention.

Life in the Occupied Territories is about to get even more difficult, I believe, but perhaps we are finally approaching the breaking point. If that is the case, we must be there for the Palestinians on all the fronts: to protect them, to play our role in pushing the Occupation into unsustainability, to resist re-occupation, to act as watchdogs over political “processes” that threaten to impose apartheid in the guise of a two-state solution and, ultimately, to ensure that a just and lasting peace emerges. As weak and failed attempts by governments head for collapse, we must pick up the slack. 2011 is upon us.

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The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions is based in Jerusalem and has chapters in the United Kingdom and the United States.

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