



CHATHAM HOUSE

---

Life with the Enemy: The One-State Solution

Author(s): Ghada Karmi

Source: *The World Today*, Vol. 53, No. 8/9 (Aug. - Sep., 1997), pp. 200-202

Published by: [Royal Institute of International Affairs](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40475966>

Accessed: 03/03/2014 11:23

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Royal Institute of International Affairs is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The World Today*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# LIFE WITH THE ENEMY: the one-state solution

## Ghada Karmi.

*The policy of the present Israeli government has made the option of a Palestinian state less workable and less likely. As an alternative, a single democratic state including Israelis and Palestinians might seem utopian, but it is a route to a stable region.*

AS THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS LUMBERS TOWARDS WHAT should be its final phase, with the permanent status talks between the two sides supposedly next on the agenda, one idea for the future seems to have taken firm hold. A two-state solution for the Palestinian/Israeli conflict has become accepted dogma.

This is not a new concept, but it has never before enjoyed such credence. It was first raised in 1974, when the Palestine National Council (PNC) voted at its 12th meeting to establish a Palestinian 'authority' on any liberated part of the Palestinian homeland. Since then, the Palestinian leadership has consistently aimed for an independent state, to be set up in the West Bank and Gaza, most of which is currently under Israeli occupation, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

After the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993, this position crystallised and found support, both tacit and overt, from the Arab world and the international community – with the exception of Israel and the United States. The Arab League had in any case embraced 'Palestine' as a member state in 1976.

Although the exact boundaries of the proposed state have not been defined, even by the Palestinians, and international support has not expressed itself in terms of square metres of land which might constitute the new state, the idea of such an entity 'alongside Israel' has been accepted. Today, it so dominates discussion about the final outcome of the peace process as to exclude all other possibilities.

### POCK-MARKED BY SETTLEMENTS

Yet, it is by no means certain that the two-state solution for this intractable conflict is either feasible or desirable. If we take first the

question of feasibility, we see at once that there are considerable logistical obstacles in the way of a Palestinian state. A glance at the latest map of the occupied territories explains the position. This shows a West Bank pock-marked by Jewish settlements encircling Palestinian towns and separating them from each other, criss-crossed by so-called bypass roads built for the exclusive use of Israelis and breaking up Palestinian territory even more.

Sharing the West Bank and Gaza with the Palestinians are 140,000 Jews, living in over 14 urban and 82 rural settlements. In addition there are eleven residential areas in and around East Jerusalem, giving this part of the city a Jewish population of 200,000.

When the latest development at Jabal Abu Ghoneim (Har Homa) is built to the south of Jerusalem, the separation between Jerusalem and the West Bank will be complete. The map thus shows no territorial continuity between the Palestinian areas in the West Bank, which are cut off from each other, from Gaza and from Jerusalem.

If the settlements remain, then any projected Palestinian state would have no meaningful territory on which to become established. The problem is further complicated by the lack of natural resources in the Palestinian areas. One of the effects of thirty years of Israeli occupation has been a transfer of those resources from Palestinian inhabitants to the settlers. Thus, Meron Benvenisti, the former deputy mayor of Jerusalem and an expert on the West Bank, calculated in 1989 that 90 per cent of its cultivable land and 75 per cent of its water had been switched to the settlers and beyond them to Israel.<sup>1</sup>

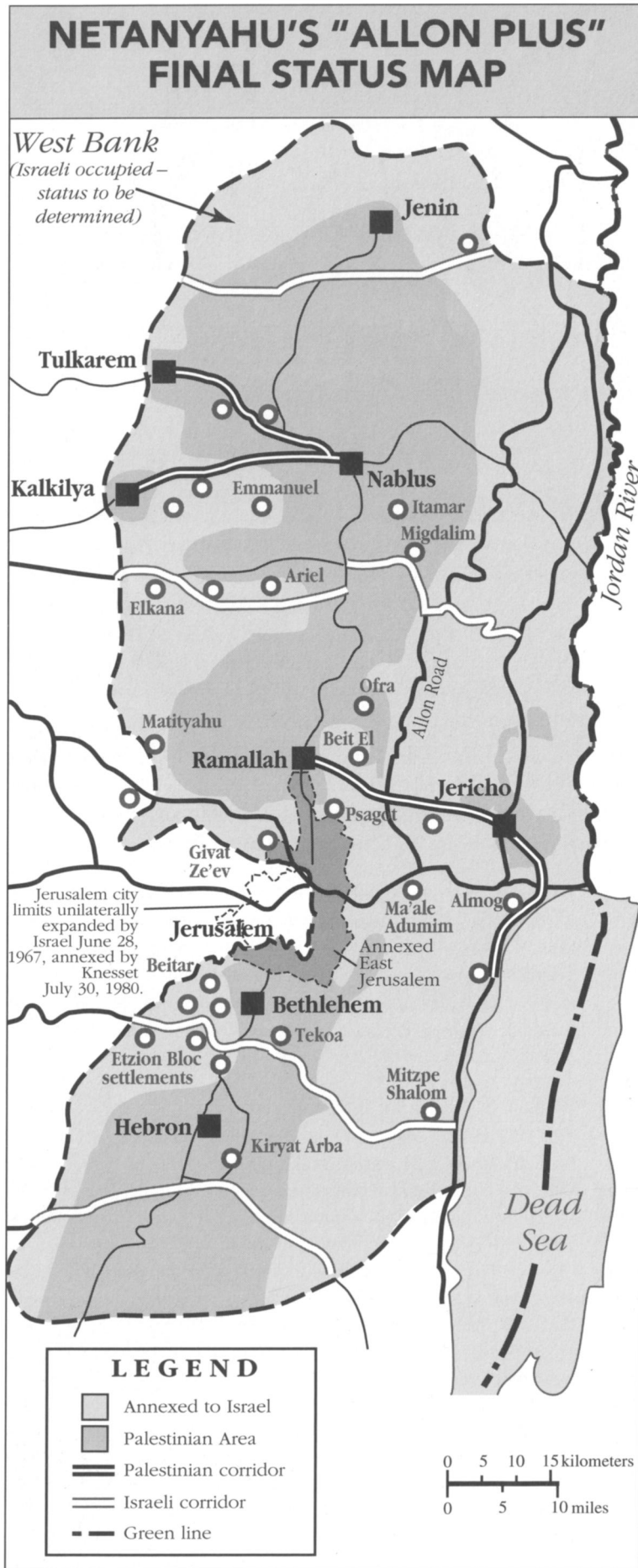
Since the Palestinian economy is heavily dependent on agriculture – in 1991 it accounted for 35 per cent of the West Bank and Gaza's GDP, compared with 2 per cent for Israel – this depletion of land and water is extremely serious. To make matters worse, there was a significant lack of investment in the infrastructure of the West Bank and Gaza throughout the years of Israeli occupation.

Unskilled labouring in Israel consequently became a major economic activity for Palestinians from the Occupied Territories. In 1990, nearly 35 per cent of the Palestinian labour force was working in Israel. These factors made the already weakened Palestinian economy heavily dependent on Israel.

### DETERIORATED FURTHER

Since 1993, the economic situation in the Palestinian territories has deteriorated further as a result of the Israeli closures of Gaza and the West Bank and the importation into Israel of foreign labour. The Palestinian areas are thus disadvantaged by high unemployment, trade restrictions, an undeveloped industrial base and poor natural

GHADA KARMI is a Research Associate at the Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. Her book *Jerusalem Today: What Future for the Peace Process?* (London: Ithaca Press) was published last year.



resources. Any Palestinian state set up on this basis is obviously not viable and could only survive with a massive infusion of billions of dollars' worth of aid.

A different approach would be needed to change the situation, for example the lifting of closures and a willingness to share resources equitably. But recent events in Israel are not encouraging.

The Israeli government has instituted a vigorous programme of settlement expansion with a target to settle 500,000 Jews in the Palestinian territories by the turn of the century. It has declared East Jerusalem non-negotiable. The closures are still in place and no Israeli withdrawal under the Oslo Agreement has taken place since that from Hebron in February. On 5 June, Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, set out his vision for the final settlement with the Palestinians (see map).

According to this, Israel would keep most of the land and control all the resources. East Jerusalem would remain part of Israel's 'united capital' for ever. All Israeli settlements and their connecting roads would stay, leaving about 40 per cent of the West Bank and 60 per cent of Gaza for the Palestinians. In the West Bank, there would be three Palestinian cantons around Nablus, Hebron and Jericho, not connected with each other or with Gaza.

This plan is not new, a similar version having been put forward in 1968 by the then Labour party leader, Yigal Allon, but its significance is that it makes a nonsense of the idea of a Palestinian state. Without the removal of the settlements and a withdrawal from East Jerusalem, the formula put forward for a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital simply cannot work. To realise the aim of the two states, one would have to postulate either an Israeli renunciation of the settlements and East Jerusalem, or an external force willing to pressure Israel into this. Neither is on offer.

For these reasons, a Palestinian state as envisaged is not feasible, and the situation on the ground makes even a physical separation of the two peoples hard to achieve. Abandoning the two-state solution in favour of one state to include both peoples would seem the obvious alternative. Currently, such an idea will provoke strong opposition, but there are several good reasons why it should not be dismissed out of hand.

#### DEMOCRATIC PALESTINE

The history of the single-state solution goes back nearly thirty years. The proposal to create what was then called a secular democratic state in Palestine was first put forward in 1969 by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and formally adopted in the modified version of a 'democratic state of Palestine' by the 6th PNC meeting the same year.<sup>2</sup> This was described as a state in all of historic Palestine wherein Muslims, Christians and Jews would enjoy the same rights, free from religious and sectarian discrimination. Hebrew and Arabic would be the official languages. The intention was to offer liberation not only for the Palestinians but for the Jews as well, whom the PLO saw as condemned by Zionism to live in the perpetual insecurity of a Jewish state.<sup>3</sup>

With a few exceptions, this proposal met with rejection. ▶

Map from the Foundation for Middle East Peace/Andy Henstreet



tion on both sides. The Israelis considered it quite simply a recipe for their destruction, and the Palestinians thought it an unacceptable concession to the enemy and worried that in such a state the more advanced Jews would dominate. In reality, it should be seen as a remarkable psychological breakthrough on the part of the Palestinian, who were offering to embrace in equality the very people who had dispossessed them – an offer, incidentally, which has never been reciprocated even remotely by any Israeli leader. However, it was never followed through by either side and the idea was quietly dropped after 1974, as the option of a West Bank state began to unfold.

In recent times, and faced with the current political impasse, the idea of one state for the two peoples has begun to resurface among left-wing Israelis and diaspora Palestinians, albeit from varying perspectives and for different motives.<sup>4</sup> The debate centres on what form this state should take, whether binational or secular and democratic.

In a binational state, Jews and Palestinians would coexist as separate communities guaranteed the legal right to use their own language, religion and traditions. Both would participate in government – not necessarily on an equal basis. Such a state would be the homeland of both communities and could be modelled on the cantonal structure of Switzerland or the Belgian arrangement between Flemings and Walloons.<sup>5</sup>

The democratic secular state, on the other hand – an idea this author supports – envisages a one-man, one-vote polity without reference to ethnicity or creed. It would aim to create an equitable pluralist society on the Western democratic model. It is opposed to an arrangement of separate communities.

The details of these proposals cannot be entered into here, but irrespective of which system is chosen, the one-state solution is unlikely to find acceptance amongst the mass of Palestinians or Israelis. For the former, it means the end of the dream of a sovereign Palestinian state which had become familiar and seemed until recently so attainable. For the latter, the secular democratic state would spell the end of Zionism and force them to share with non-Jews the land they view as exclusively Jewish. For both, the prospect of life with the enemy, after decades of hatred, would seem highly unpalatable.

And yet, there is no other way forward now. Ironically enough, it is the Israeli government's annexationist policies in the Occupied Territories which have destroyed the two-state option. In fragmenting the West Bank so effectively, it has ensured that no separate state can exist there and thus opened the door to the one-state alternative.

The late Yitzhak Rabin, aware that such a danger would ensue if the Palestinians were not given their own state, tried to safeguard the Zionist ideal by entering into the Oslo agreement with the PLO. Many observers believe that the previous Israeli Labour government would ultimately have ceded enough land to make a Palestinian entity possible. Thanks to the present government's policies, however, that is no longer feasible. Nor, from a Palestinian viewpoint, is it even desirable. A two-state solution, had it ever happened, would have been unstable and ultimately unacceptable to the Palestinians for a number of reasons.

It would have given them at best a truncated entity, almost certainly demilitarised and economically dependent, on a fifth of their



'Truly, I am facing trouble not only from the students. I am facing trouble from our Legislative Council... they are furious. Because everyone is asking me: is this the peace which you signed – confiscation of land, new settlements, no implementing of what has been agreed upon, closure, siege, killing, opening fire against our people everywhere. They are asking me truly. The situation is very delicate, very, very delicate, and I hope we will be able to control it because the other alternative is confusion.'

**Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Palestinian National Authority, speaking at Chatham House in July**

original homeland. Even if they were offered the whole of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, these would form only 23 per cent of Mandate Palestine. It would be unable to absorb the four million displaced Palestinians, and would end any hope of their right to return to their homes. Most seriously, it would have set the seal of approval on the Zionist claim to Palestine as the exclusive land of the Jews, which no Palestinian has ever accepted.

## RESOLVING INJUSTICE

The Palestinians' sense of injustice, which fundamentally derives from the loss of their homeland and the denial of their right to return to it, will not be redressed by an unequal arrangement of two states. And if the injustice is left unresolved, it will remain a source of instability and a cause of 'terrorism' in the region. The past cannot be reversed, but a solution even at this late stage which permits the equitable sharing of the whole land between the two peoples and repatriates the refugees will help lay the foundations for a stable future.

A secular democratic state will not be easy to achieve and may indeed seem utopian now – but surely no less so than the Zionist dream of establishing a Jewish state in someone else's country must have seemed at the first Zionist Congress in Basle exactly one hundred years ago. ☪

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the *New York Times*, 22 October 1989, p. A18.

<sup>2</sup> Aryeh Yodafat, Yuval Arnon-Ohanna, *PLO Strategy and Tactics* (London, 1981) pp. 55–7.

<sup>3</sup> David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch*. (London, 1977), p. 292.

<sup>4</sup> Yair Sheleg, *Kol Ha'ir*, 31 January 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Jenab Tutunji, Kamal Khalidi, 'A binational state in Palestine: the rational and moral choice', *International Affairs*, Vol. 73, January 1997, pp. 31–59.