

# Campaigning for Palestine Post-Jenin: A Personal View

by Francis Clark-Lowes

## Introduction

The recent invasion of West Bank towns by the Israeli army, and the wanton killing and destruction by which it was accompanied, make nonsense of any idea that the Israeli government intends eventually to hand over power in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem to an independent Palestinian administration. The intention was not merely to 'root out nests of terrorism' but to discredit and destroy the civil administration which was gradually being established by the Palestine Authority. Indeed the terrorist attacks which provided the rationale for the invasions appear to have been deliberately and cynically provoked by targeted assassinations of Palestinian leaders.

Even if one takes the view that the PA was responsible for the suicide bombings and was therefore morally culpable (positions I do not share), an alternative Palestinian administration would have needed the infrastructure which has now been destroyed. Many of us in the Palestine solidarity movement have long recognised Israel's determination that there should be no credible Palestinian administration. What has changed is the blatant evidence of the last month that such is indeed their policy. This should immeasurably strengthen our campaign for robust intervention from outside to produce a just resolution of the conflict.

Yet despite all the evidence of Israeli bad faith, Western leaders have proved spectacularly unwilling to rein in their rogue progeny. They continue to champion the two-state solution knowing perfectly well that no Israeli government is remotely willing to hand over real sovereignty. Their refusal to put all but the mildest pressure on Israel suggests at best naivety, at worst collusion. If ever there was a case of the tail wagging the dog, this is it. A review of the history of Zionism indicates that it was ever thus – Zionists have all along outwitted world leaders to get what they wanted. In the present situation that means the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They already have East Jerusalem (and a big chunk of adjoining West Bank as well).

If someone can tell me how a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel is now going to come about, I would like to hear it. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I would be *interested* to hear it. For the realisation that the two-state solution is dead has for me been like the lifting of a cloud. The one consoling thought that recurred in my mind during the Israeli actions of the last month was: 'Now at last we can start to think about a real resolution. Israel has played into our hands.' I know most disagree. They see the only course as a return to the negotiating table, perhaps on the basis of the Taba 2 talks, and the hammering out of a compromise which will allow limited Palestinian sovereignty (no one was ever talking about full sovereignty, that is with armed forces). But is it really credible (a) that the US will bring real pressure to bear on Israel and (b) that Israel will make an acceptable offer?

The mistake we have made in the Palestine solidarity movement has been to fail to meet Israeli ruthlessness with a rhetoric which is equally strident in the opposite

direction. Most people, and this is especially true of politicians, have neither the inclination nor the time and energy to think through their position on issues such as the Israel-Palestine conflict. Not wishing to appear ignorant, however, they seek the apparent middle ground between what they perceive as the credible polarities of view. In the Israel-Palestine case they see on the one hand an unapologetic democratic fascism which believes that might is right, that Arabs are scum, and that the West Bank and Gaza belong to Israel. On the other hand they see a relatively weak movement composed of liberals who assert the human rights of Palestinians while apologising for their undemocratic methods, their scruffy and devious leader, their unwillingness to love Israelis and the Israeli state, and especially their suicide bombers. Where does this leave the discourse's centre of gravity? Probably about where UK policy in this area now positions itself: Israel is our friend, but it really should improve its table manners.

I will argue in this paper that the Israel-Palestine conflict has passed a point of no return. The two-state idea, if it ever had any credibility, is now a dead duck. We therefore need a radical shift in our campaigning position. Learning from the success of the anti-apartheid movement, we need to become an anti-Zionist campaign. My thesis will be that only by destroying Zionism, which means challenging the concept of Jewish identity on which it is built, will a just resolution become possible. The question of what kind of political arrangements will follow is not my concern here, but the options which might be considered are the old PLO position of a secular democratic state, a bi-national state, that is one state with two nationalities, and some kind of regional federation.

It will certainly be said that I have no right sticking my nose into other people's business. I am not from a Jewish background and therefore have no authority to pontificate on Jewish identity. I am not a Palestinian and should not therefore presume to think out their position for them. I engage in this debate with four thoughts in mind. Firstly I am a human being who, like all others, faces the enigma of identity. Secondly as an outsider I may be able to see things that the insider misses. This has been my experience working as a counsellor. Thirdly the Israel-Palestine conflict is located along the fault-line which divides The West and what we could call The Rest and if it spirals out of control it is likely to embroil us all. And fourthly as a Westerner, and therefore as a member of the mega-culture with arguably the greatest leverage in this conflict, I believe I have something to say about changing perceptions in the West.

It may also be said that the kind of solution which I am proposing is wildly unrealistic. It *is*, in terms of *present* reality. So what I am proposing is that we change that reality, that is we change the parameters of the debate. It has been said of another wildly unrealistic project called Zionism that it was a dream which became a reality in the creation of the state of Israel.<sup>1</sup> We need to have an equally powerful, but infinitely more beautiful, vision. And like Theodor Herzl, we must have absolute confidence that it can become a reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Schoeps, J., *Theodor Herzl: A Pictorial Biography*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1995, p. 211. This book was translated from the German by Annemarie Clark-Lowes and myself.

## **Arguments for the two-state solution**

As I have said, I do not believe the two-state solution is any longer a runner. But in case I am wrong, let us now take a critical look at the pragmatic arguments advanced in its favour.

**Firstly** it is maintained that Jewish-Israelis and Palestinians will never accept integration. There is therefore a choice between separation and military conquest by one side. Separation is the more humane of these possibilities.

But is the premise true? In reality there are many instances in world history of integration between peoples who appeared to be totally irreconcilable before the resolution of a conflict. Perhaps the most relevant, though still fragile, example is South Africa. England following the Civil War is another. It should never be forgotten that a substantial part of the Jewish population (a half?) came from Arab-speaking backgrounds, where they were relatively well integrated with the Muslim and Christian societies around them. Though most of these now speak Hebrew (a close Semitic relation of Arabic), they retain strong elements of their Arabic culture and have recently begun to celebrate these openly (especially music).

It would be interesting to do a world-wide survey of conflict resolution and consider whether imposed partitions have proved effective. India-Pakistan, Ireland and Lebanon, not to mention Israel-Palestine, suggest that this solution creates more problems than it solves.

**Secondly** it is argued that although far from perfect, the two-state solution offers a way forward which could later be developed into something more just – for example a federation or an economic union. Many anti-Zionists take this position because they believe a direct confrontation with Zionism would prove ineffective. Let Zionism wither away as demographic and economic reality seeps in. This was until quite recently my own view.

For reasons which I will explore in more detail below, however, I have come to the conclusion that not attacking Zionism now simply stores up trouble for the future. The imbalance of power between Israel and a Palestinian state would ensure that ‘further developments’ would always be to Israel’s advantage and to Palestine’s disadvantage. In the context of the essentially racist nature of Zionism, I cannot conceive that a two-state resolution would be a win-win situation.

**Thirdly**, it is pointed out that Israel has the military power to do what it likes. In these circumstances the Palestinians should take what they can get and be thankful for small mercies.

Even if we wanted them to do so, the Palestinians themselves show no inclination to capitulate in this way. Despite their military weakness, they are in a much stronger moral position now than they would be after signing an unjust treaty which was essentially an endorsement of Zionism. Military power is not the only form of power. Recent developments have greatly strengthened their hand. It is often asserted that morality has nothing to do with realpolitik. The reality is, however, that moral arguments have usually played a strong part in diplomacy. Israel has been a champion

at this game. I believe its self-justifications are false, but there is no question that they are cast in moral terms. If the Palestinians could mobilise effectively in the West against the Zionist arguments their position would be transformed, but this means taking the gloves off and fighting Zionism itself. Israel's survival depends on Western approval; if it loses that, the world would be rid of a dangerous scourge.

**Fourthly** great credence is given, even among many who are on the Palestinian side, to the Zionist argument that Jewish identity needs protecting in the form of a relatively exclusive nation state.

We should stand up and expose this for the nonsense which it is. Exclusive identity is an illusion, and even if it were not, is it not paradoxical to maintain that you are protecting Jewish identity by creating a state which overrides the rights of millions of others? What this does in reality is to create a new siege identity, Israeliness, which is characterised, among other things, by chauvinism, sentimentality, toughness, rudeness, racism, paranoia, single-mindedness, efficiency and militarism.<sup>2</sup> Is this what the early Zionists had in mind?

**Fifthly** it is argued that creating a Palestinian state will divert Palestinian aggression into state building.

This is, of course, an essentially racist argument. There is no question that Palestinians are angry, but with good reason, not simply because it is in their genes or their religion. And in any case, it seems to me that the frustrations of attempting, against the odds, to create a viable state are more likely to have the opposite effect in the long run. But if others still assert the essentially aggressive nature of Palestinians, perhaps we should go looking for Donald Rumsfeld's Palestinian ancestors. After all Madeleine Albright's love of peace no doubt derived from the Jewish ancestry she was so delighted to discover.

### **Plan b, not Plan D**

If I am right that there is now no prospect of a viable Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, then we urgently need a new plan. But even if I am wrong, surely we at least need a 'plan b,' a fall-back position which will show Israel that the struggle will continue if it decides to annex the West Bank and Gaza – indeed that it will widen the conflict to the whole of mandate Palestine, including Israel's own one million Palestinian citizens.

The phrase 'plan b' recalls the infamous Plan D which was among other things the blueprint for the ethnic cleansing of 1948. Let us then be quite clear about the difference between our plan and that of the Zionists at that time. There are certainly those who wish to eliminate the Jewish population living at present in Israel-Palestine. We are NOT with them. We will take the view that the ordinary Jewish population of Israel-Palestine are in large measure as much victims, albeit more comfortable ones, as the Palestinians. They have been led into an explosive situation by means of a misguided ideology, propounded and maintained by a relatively small Zionist élite. Any attempt to return to the *status quo ante* would involve further injustice on a

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<sup>2</sup> Of course I am not maintaining that all Israelis share all of these characteristics, nor am I denying the existence of other more laudable characteristics.

massive scale. We are against this, but we are also against any arrangement which privileges Jews over non-Jews.

Once we have seriously considered ‘plan b’ I guess we will realise that we should have been following it (like a brave and consistent few) from the beginning. The following discussion will indicate why.

### **Further discussion of the defects of the two-state solution**

A two-state solution would be very unlikely to put a stop to Zionist political and economic expansionism. This is because (a) Zionists fear, with justification, those they have wronged, (b) Israel has the military strength to enforce its will, (c) Israel needs to attract attention away from the abuse of the rights of its own Palestinian citizens, and (d) the paranoid obsession to protect a pure and exclusive Jewish identity would determine a policy of extending power and control outwards from the centre.

Economic non-viability and Israeli and the US interference would ensure that Palestinian independence was negligible. Mossad and the CIA would be covertly, perhaps even overtly, involved in guaranteeing subservience to Israeli and US interests. Perhaps the EU would also be involved in ensuring economic dependency. Palestinian bargaining power in such a situation would be virtually nil unless backed up with the threat of violence. This is why any treaty to set up a Palestinian state would insist that it was demilitarised, thus denying the Palestinians the opportunity of exercising even a minimal degree of deterrence against Israeli ‘incursions.’ The emphasis of a state-making treaty would all be the other way around – of deterring Palestinian attacks against Israel. In the case of a crisis the Palestinian state would no doubt begin by appealing to the international community. If, as is likely, this proved ineffective, the threat of guerilla action would be Palestine’s only weapon and we would be back to square one.

The position of the Palestinian Israelis would become extremely insecure if the two-state solution were adopted. It would be maintained by the Israelis that their home was the Palestinian state, and the moment that they started to complain about discrimination they would be told they had a simple choice. Shut up or leave. If they then resorted to more forceful means of protest they would likely be deported, at first in ones and twos, eventually in large numbers, to the Palestinian state. Perhaps it will be maintained that the security of the non-Jewish population of Israel could be guaranteed by treaty. Anyone who knows anything about Israel’s attitude (indeed the West’s attitude) to international law would recognise the hollowness of such a guarantee.

The two-state solution would put the stamp of approval on what is essentially an apartheid solution, both internally and externally. Any intervention by the Palestinian state on behalf of non-Jews in Israel would be regarded as unwarranted interference in its internal affairs – and therefore as a potential *cassus belli*. With its huge military supremacy Israel would have little difficulty (though it would of course portray it as quite the opposite) in overrunning the Palestinian state.

In the light of the present demography of Israel-Palestine, only drastic demographic engineering, for example further mass Russian immigration, could in the longer term

ensure a continuing Jewish majority in Israel itself. This would further aggravate the position of Palestinian Israelis and would send them a very clear message (as does the refusal to allow the return of the refugees): ‘You are not wanted.’ The two-state solution would also make an equitable solution of the refugee problem impossible. Instead of returning to the part of Palestine from which they came, the refugees would be told that they had to go to the already crowded West Bank and Gaza Strip. As Salman Abu Sitta has clearly shown, there is plenty of space for the refugees in what is now Israel.<sup>3</sup>

Endorsing the exclusivism which is the essential characteristic of Zionism is an endorsement of such policies everywhere in the world. We can expect it to lead to further gains on the far right as others make the same case as Israel does. The search for an exclusive identity expressed through an exclusive national state must be recognised for the evil that it is (it was, after all, the essential characteristic of Nazism) and must be opposed with all our resources.

I do not believe that Palestinians, as a whole, will ever accept the injustice of a two-state solution. In this Israeli fears are justified. The best that could be hoped for would be that they would see it as a stepping stone to a really just solution. The two-state solution would not, therefore, end the conflict.

### **Campaigning against Zionism**

Zionism, as incorporated in Israel, cannot at present be defeated militarily. At best it can be weakened by guerilla actions and forced into a caricature of itself. Israel probably has the power to pacify the whole of Palestine to an acceptable level, that is a level where the security of the state is not threatened, but where ordinary Israelis are kept loyal by their perception of danger from without. It is, as I have argued, in the interests of Israeli governments to keep the pot gently simmering for anxiety is an essential ingredient in the Zionist broth. Palestinians should bear this in mind when considering acts of violent resistance.

The real liberation battle must be fought in people’s minds. We are involved in a struggle against a propaganda machine which is infinitely superior to that run by Goebbels and which operates world-wide. We must fight the *idea* of Zionism root and branch. This will mean deconstructing a series of interlinked narratives (listed below), at the heart of which is so-called ‘anti-Semitism.’<sup>4</sup> It is the fear of being accused of ‘anti-Semitism’ (or of Jewish self-hatred if you are Jewish) which deters even those who would otherwise have thought profoundly about the issues of the Israel-Palestine conflict. In order to overcome this obstacle we will need, as I have said, to deconstruct its narrative, and this will mean having the courage to risk alienation from friends and colleagues, perhaps even material disadvantage.

We should make it quite clear (though we need not repeat it *ad nauseam*, thereby suggesting that we have a guilty conscience) that we have no quarrel with the Jewish religion (or at any rate no more quarrel than with any other religion) or with people from a Jewish background *per se*. We will point out that there are many anti-Zionist

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<sup>3</sup> Abu Sitta, S., *Palestinian Right to Return*, London, the Palestine Return Centre, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> I am not denying the reality of anti-Jewish prejudice, but as will become apparent, I am challenging the language used to describe it.

Jews. But we will assert the right to discuss the Zionist notion of Jewish identity and to challenge the conclusions drawn from it. We will also need to review the prohibition on discussing conspiracy theories which might involve Jews. Of course the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were nonsense, but it is not irrational or anti-Jewish to talk about the way in which Zionism has mobilised world-wide to obtain its objectives. Indeed it is very necessary. In other words, we must stop allowing Zionists to set the boundaries of our discussion.

### **Deconstructing the narratives of Zionism**

Language plays an absolutely crucial part in the success of Zionism. Its interlocking narratives use words and phrases, many of which are never challenged, but which seriously distort discussion of the issues involved. We therefore need to deconstruct the language of Zionism. The phrase anti-Semitism, for example, carries with it the whole narrative about a pure 'Semitic' Jewish race (or ethnic group as we prefer to say since Hitler). It also ignores the reality that Arabs are Semites. Or take another example. It is generally accepted that the Israel-Palestine conflict is one between Jews and Arabs, or between Israelis and Palestinians. It is hardly ever pointed out that half of the Jews of Israel come from Arab backgrounds, or that one million Israelis are Palestinians. This last truth is disguised by calling the Israeli Palestinians Israeli Arabs or Arab Israelis. Indeed Israel has an altogether curious idea about who the Palestinians are, or rather about who they are not. Whereas all Jews are Jews, whatever their background, Palestinians are not Israeli Arabs, they are not Christians, they are not Druze, they are not bedouin, they are not people of non-Arab descent (e.g. Armenians) and above all they are not Jews. 'There, that's nice, we've got them down to manageable proportions. That leaves us free to demonise the ones we *really* don't like!' Israel has also been remarkably successful in getting less critical parts of the media to refer to the occupied territories as if they were part of the Jewish state.

1. **Jewish history before 1933.** The Zionist version of Jewish history goes something like this. The Jews are a gifted and peace-loving people who were thrown out of their country by the Romans and then moved all over the world. They established themselves in Jewish communities where there was little or no mixing with gentiles. Conversion of gentiles was rare. Jews, wherever they lived, experienced waves of anti-Semitism, a phenomenon which is unanalysable, that it to say it is inexplicable in terms of motivation.

All aspects of this narrative need to be unwrapped and shown up for the travesty that they are.

2. **The Holocaust and Israel's fight for survival.** Written with a capital 'h,' the Holocaust is defined as the murder of six million Jews by the Nazis. This massacre was the culmination of the gentile disease of anti-Semitism. The establishment of the state of Israel was its natural outcome and the short history of this benevolent state has been a further campaign against mindless and genocidal anti-Semitism.

While no one denies that many other civilians (countless millions of non-Jewish Russians, two-and-a-half million Roma etc.) were the victims of Nazi atrocities, the figure of six million Jews is firmly fixed in Western consciousness. Apparently the

others do not count; they certainly do not help the Zionist case. The assertion that the Israel-Palestine conflict results from anti-Jewish prejudice needs ongoing vigorous contradiction.

3. **Nationalism.** Arising out of the German romantic movement of the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, nationalism was based on the idea that the peoples of the world could be neatly divided up into nations, and that these nations required real estate for the full flowering of their own unique identities. Nationalism implied exclusion, since non-nationals clearly had no place in a nation-state which was not their own. Hence the idea of transfer – Jewish Arabs in, non-Jewish Arabs out – which dominated Zionist thinking, and which crystallised into a firm policy around 1938.

The essentially nationalist, chauvinist and xenophobic nature of Israel, and its incompatibility with the progressive notion of multiculturalism has been far too little exposed.

4. **Orientalism, Islamophobia and imperialism.** To justify its policies towards the non-Jewish population of Israel-Palestine, Israel has resorted to ever greater demonisation of Orientals and Muslims. *They* think differently from us, *they* are violent, *they* send their children to be killed, *their* religion is cruel. The West is, on the whole, well-disposed to believe this demonisation since it is itself involved on a global scale in a power struggle where it also wishes to ignore the real injustice of its policies. In other words there is, as we all know, a strong link between US imperialism and Zionism. To attack one, we will need to attack the other. They are inseparable.

### **We need to stop apologising**

As I indicated at the beginning of this paper, we weaken our position by being apologetic. I am not saying that we should stop criticising Arafat and the PA. What I am saying is that we should not allow ourselves, when engaged in debate with the other side, to be pushed onto the defensive. Indeed it should be our aim to push them on the defensive, though Zionists are much more skilled than we are at avoiding this. Our problem is our liberal conscience, their advantage is their absolute faith in Zionism. Curious though it may seem, I believe we must emulate them. Whatever doubts we may have about Arafat, it will weaken our position to make such remarks as: ‘Of course, I would prefer another leader.’ And when it comes to the burning issue of suicide bombers, we should avoid the tendency, Robert Fisklike,<sup>5</sup> to rush into condemnation. I believe we should remember the words of Bertrand Russell on the anti-apartheid movement.

It is presumptuous of those of us not faced with conditions such as those which obtain in South Africa to determine the form of the struggle. I believe our efforts in Britain should be concentrated on making known the nature of the regime and on mobilising public opinion so that the British Government can be induced to apply pressure. I do not believe anti-apartheid

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<sup>5</sup> Generally I greatly admire Robert Fisk. I just wish he did not feel the need to establish his humanitarian credentials by condemning suicide bombers out of hand. When he was beaten up in Afghanistan he said he understood the person who had done it. Does the same not apply to the suicide bombers?



organisations should dissociate themselves from nationalist movements advocating violence.<sup>6</sup>

Suicide bombings are terrible. They are understandable. Unless we are pacifists we are not in a position to make judgements about them. Doing so weakens our position.

### **An effective anti-Zionist movement needs a psychological understanding of power**

I want here to summarise very briefly ideas which I have been formulating over the past few years. I believe that they provide a firm basis for the understanding of power in general, and the abuse of power by the Zionist movement in particular. In certain respects these ideas resemble Marxism, but whereas Marx approached the question of power from a sociological-economic point of view, I do so from a philosophical-psychological angle.

The world can be divided into leaders and the led. Leaders seek the illusion of absolute power, the led seek the illusion of absolute security. Both do this in order to assuage the sense of existential anxiety which is part of the human condition. In other words, the problem arises because humans know too much about the reality of their existence for their own comfort.

Leaders are usually also part of the led, that is there is a hierarchy of power. Leaders gain power by promising to protect the led against dangers, hence the need to demonise others. They have an interest in exaggerating the 'others' villainy and extolling the virtues of the group culture, however that group is defined. Subjects are encouraged to develop a sense of group identity which overrides all other affiliations. I strongly believe that world peace depends on understanding and trying to avoid such irrational behaviour, or at least on ameliorating its effects.

In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict the degree of illusion on the Israeli-Jewish side, based as it is on a notion of Jewish identity which is far-fetched, is particularly pronounced. Palestinians may love their cultural heritage, but there is nothing like the exclusive nationalism among them which is the hallmark of Zionism. Pan-Islamism, on the other hand, is not dissimilar to Zionism, and we need to face this growing danger firmly and sensibly. The power-dynamics of today, however, make Zionism much the more pressing danger. Indeed it is Zionism and other Western form of imperialism which are stoking the fires of pan-Islamism. There is a need to try to carry the debate into Israel itself. Our Jewish supporters there often complain that they feel unsupported by those outside Israel. It is time for us to listen to their plea.

Changing perceptions is never easy, and it can appear hopeless. People seem stuck in entrenched positions. If, however, a different view of the world which offers a more hopeful future can be put on the agenda, I would be surprised if it did not eventually win a majority of converts. We need to move the boundaries of the debate which were fixed by those who wanted to maintain the *status quo*. We need to hold up a vision of a world in which people from different cultures live together in peace and harmony, a

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<sup>6</sup> Feinberg, B., & Kasrils, R., (eds), *Dear Bertrand Russell: A Selection of his Correspondence with the General Public 1950 – 1968*. London, George Allen & Unwin, 1969, p. 88. The letter in question was written on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1964 and was addressed to a Mr Hougham.

world where pure identities are no longer regarded as obtainable or desirable, a world in which the culture of the other is exciting and not a threat, a world in which we have learnt to live with, and even cherish, a degree of unavoidable anxiety, that is a world which aspires to live without illusion.

29<sup>th</sup> April 2002