

A Radical Approach to Resolving the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Arguments for the 2-state solution and counter-arguments (marked A)

1. 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.
 - (A) There are many instances in world history of integration between peoples who appeared to be totally irreconcilable before the resolution of the conflict. It should never be forgotten that a substantial part of the Jewish population (a half?) comes from Arab backgrounds, where they spoke Arabic and were relatively well integrated with the Muslim and Christian societies around them. Though most of these now speak Hebrew (a language very close to Arabic), they retain strong elements of their Arabic culture and have recently begun to celebrate these openly (especially music).
2. Although unust, the 2-state solution offers a way forward which could later be developed into something more just – a federation, economic union etc. etc.
 - (A) Israel could be expected to insist that any state-founding treaty is so written to forstall further developments. It is the knowledge that this is the Israeli attitude which makes Palestinian negotiators so cautious. Institutionalising injustice in international treaties simply stores up trouble for the future.
3. Israel has the military power to do what it likes, and so the Palestinians should take what they can get and be thankful for small mercies.
 - (A) Despite their weakness, the Palestinians are in a stronger moral position at present 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. Israel needs Western approval, and if the Palestinians could mobilise effectively against this their position would be much improved. Recent developments are, in this context, promising. Strangely, in what appears to be a completely amoral world, moral arguments have always played a very strong part in diplomacy; the problem is one of point-scoring.
4. Jewish identity needs protecting in the form of an exclusive nation state.
 - (A) Exclusive identity is an illusion, and even if it weren't, it is paradoxical to maintain that you are protecting Jewish identity by overriding the rights of millions of other people in the land where you create that nation state.
5. A Palestinian state will divert Palestinian aggression into state building.
 - (A) It might divert some this way, but the frustrations of attempting, against the odds, to create a viable state are more likely to have the opposite effect in the long run. In any case, this is an essentially racist argument, based on the idea that Palestinians are naturally more aggressive than Jews or Westerners. I strongly suspect this would be impossible to substantiate. (Unless, of course, it turns out that Donald Rumsfeld is really a Palestinian. But then again Madeleine Albright turned out to be Jewish.)

The present situation

While the 2-state solution continues to be described as the only game in town, its realisation becomes increasingly hard to credit. Israel clearly has no intention of

pulling out of the West Bank and Gaza sufficiently to enable even the figleaf of Palestinian independence. The United States shows no sign whatsoever of putting the kind of pressure on Israel which would effect a change of policy in this direction, and Europe is not prepared to put serious pressure on the US either. In these circumstances it is natural to think that we need a 'plan b.' Actually I'm inclined to think that once we have seriously considered it we will realise that it is the plan we should have been following from the beginning.

Further discussion of the defects of the 2-state solution

1. Israel and the US would ensure that Palestinian independence was negligible. Mossad and the CIA would be covertly, perhaps even overtly, involved in guaranteeing subservience to their interests. Palestinian bargaining power in such a situation would be virtually nil unless backed up with the threat or violence. This is why any treaty to set up a Palestinian state will insist that it is 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.
2. The position of the Palestinian Israelis would become extremely insecure if the 2-state solution were adopted. It would be maintained 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. Couldn't the security of the non-Jewish population of Israel be guaranteed by treaty? Anyone who knows anything about Israel's attitude to international law would recognise the hollowness of such guarantees.
3. The 2-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*.
4. International guarantees of a Palestinian state, which would no doubt be woven into any treaty, would, judging by previous experience, prove ineffective against unscrupulous Israeli regimes. When it came to the crunch we could expect that the international community would back off, especially if, as is likely, the US supported Israel.
5. A 2-state solution is very unlikely to put a stop to Zionist political and economic expansionism. This is because (a) Zionists fear those they have wronged, (b) Israel has the power 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 will determine a policy of extending power and control outwards from the centre, and Israel has at present the military supremacy to do this. (Hence the worry about Iraq.)
6. In the light of the present demography of Israel-Palestine, only drastic demographic engineering, for example further mass Russian immigration, can ensure a continuing Jewish majority. This is clearly a major infringement of the

rights of Palestinians living there and sends them a very clear message (as does the refusal to allow the return of the refugees) that they are not wanted. The 2-state solution would encourage this. It would also make an equitable solution of the refugee problem impossible. Instead of returning to the part of Palestine from which they came, they would be told that they had to go to the already crowded West Bank and Gaza. There is plenty of space for them in what is now Israel.

7. 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.
8. Palestinians, as a whole, will never accept the justice of a 2-state solution. The best that could be hoped would be that they would see it as a stepping stone to a really just solution. The 2-state solution would not, therefore, end the conflict.
9. A Palestinian state is very unlikely to be economically viable, and this will mean that its independence will be enormously restricted in this sense as well.

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. It may have the power to pacify the whole of Palestine to an acceptable level, that is a level where ordinary Israelis are kept loyal by their need to be constantly vigilant. It is, as I have argued, in the interests of Israeli governments to keep the pot gently boiling.

The real liberation battle must, therefore, be fought in people's minds. 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.'¹ It is the fear of being accused of 'anti-Semitism' (or of Jewish self-hatred if you are Jewish) which deters most intelligent people from engaging in a profound discussion of the Israel-Palestine conflict. In order to overcome this obstacle we will need, as I have said, to deconstruct its narrative, but we will also need to have the courage to risk alienation from friends and colleagues, and perhaps even material disadvantage.

We should make it quite clear (though we need not repeat it *ad nauseam*, thereby indicating 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 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 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 act with impunity.

¹ I am not denying the reality of anti-Jewish prejudice, but as will become apparent, I am challenging the language used to describe it.

The narratives of Zionism which are in urgent need of deconstruction are as follows:

1. **Jewish history.** 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 and there was little or no sexual interaction with 'gentiles'. Conversion of 'gentiles' was rare. Jews, wherever they lived, experienced waves of 'anti-Semitism' and this was always inexplicable in terms of motivation. The 'Holocaust,' defined as the murder of six million Jews, was the culmination of this 'gentile' disease, and the establishment of the state of Israel was its natural outcome. The short history of this benevolent state has been a further campaign against 'anti-Semitism.' (I will not go into all the distortions which that history is subject to, since we all know it and anyway the new Israeli historians have done our work for us.)

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

2. **Nationalism.** Arising out of the German romantic movement of the 18th & 19th 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 have no place in a nation-state which is 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.

3. **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.

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

Very briefly 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 (i.e. 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. 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 usually 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. 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 that we proved them wrong.

Changing perceptions is never easy, and it can appear hopeless. People appear to be 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 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.