

The world will support a campaign for Palestinian citizenship in Israel

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The Palestinian liberation movement finds itself in an impossible situation. Their goal of the past 20 years for an economically viable and sovereign Palestinian state appears to have no chance of becoming a reality. To transcend their present stalemate, they must embark on a path toward Palestinian citizenship in Israel.

Present Situation

Despite the current efforts by Secretary of State John Kerry to restart the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the possibility of an economically viable and sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel is nil. This is because the ever growing settlement movement has “captured” all of Area C that makes up almost 60% of the West Bank. The remaining Areas A & B exclude East Jerusalem; they are broken into more than 100 disconnected islands surrounded by Israeli controlled Area C. The result is an area too small and isolated to form an economically viable state. This situation exists because of a deliberate Israeli policy, stated and unstated since 1958, to block a Palestinian state. The Oslo peace process has led to failure, frustration and anger with renewed violence and diminished prospects for a Palestinian state.

Some Palestinians, especially in the Diaspora, call for a single, democratic or bi-national state between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. While it is unlikely that a Palestinian state alongside Israel will emerge, it is also unlikely Israel, an internationally recognized state, would reconstitute itself as a bi-national state that includes all Palestinians as citizens. The majority of Israelis would oppose this because it would fly in the face of the oft-stated “need” of Israeli Jews to maintain Israel as a Jewish state.

The official position of many Western governments is to support Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians. This is true of the United States government, its people and the mainstream media. They deplore Palestinian violent resistance which includes airplane hijackings in the 1970s, suicide bombings that emerged after repudiation of the Oslo Accords in 2001-2003, and rockets being fired into southern Israel from Gaza.

Palestinians are not unified in portraying themselves as non-violent. Palestinian unification is absent because of a split between the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Hamas in Gaza, and the Palestinian Diaspora. They all claim to speak for the Palestinians.

The Oslo Accords recognized the PLO as the international representative of the Palestinian people. But the PLO lost its independence when it morphed into the PA that is under the iron fist and control of Israel. Palestinians themselves are still bleeding from the Second Intifada which only brought them disaster. They lack a fighting spirit and have no real leadership. The suffering of the Palestinians no longer grabs world headlines. The Israeli occupation is entrenched with the Israeli army in complete control. We are left with Palestinians with no unity and no coherent Palestinian message.

Disband the Palestinian Authority

The PA justifies its feeble existence by providing jobs from tax money and international donations, and perpetuating the illusion of an eventual Palestinian state. But a significant fraction of PA resources is lost to corruption and never reaches the people. This adds to Palestinian suffering. Palestinians must face that dual reality that the PA is corrupt and that its goal of a Palestinian state is an illusion.

Because the PA is corrupt and advocates something untenable, it must be dissolved. While this sounds outrageous, it is quite realistic. The PA was formed by the 1993 Oslo Accords and was designed to exist for five years. But the PA has existed for twenty years, and has not helped the Palestinian people to attain their freedom. Once the PA is gone, the tasks it now performs will fall on the shoulders of Israel, the Occupier. Israel already controls Palestinian lives working through the PA. Let Israel assume direct control and not hide behind the fig leaf of the PA. Most important, with the PA gone, the Palestinian people will be free to seek a new path to freedom.

Israeli Citizenship, A Path to Freedom

Taking into consideration the above analysis, we must agree that Palestinians need to replace the goal of a Palestinian state or a democratic bi-national state to achieve freedom. Palestinians have unsuccessfully worked toward those goals for at least 75 years, from long before the UN partition resolution of 1947. Perhaps it is time to abandon that quest. Perhaps it is time to accept that Israel controls all the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.

Realistically, the Palestinians have only two alternatives: either remain stateless or join Israel. Clearly, joining Israel is the better option, even though it means that the Palestinians will have to swallow the defeat of the one- and two-state options. This means transforming the struggle for Palestinian national identity to a struggle for Israeli citizenship with the accompanying civil, human, and economic rights that will come with citizenship.

Palestinians should demand admission into the state of Israel as full citizens. Israel already controls Palestinian lives, but denies them human and civil rights. As citizens, Palestinians will be in a position to demand full human and civil rights. Those rights will take some time to emerge – in the beginning the new Palestinian citizens of Israel will be more or less equivalent to present-day Palestinian citizens of Israel who we know suffer some discrimination. But with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ended, and Palestinians assimilating into Israeli society, difference in privilege based on religion can fade away.

Not A New Idea

Palestinian citizenship in Israel is not a new idea. It was considered by Israeli leaders in the first year after the June 1967 war. And it was considered by some Palestinian leaders in the same time frame. More recently it was suggested by Sari Nusseibeh, the renowned Palestinian philosopher and activist and president of Al-Quds University in a book published in 2011 (<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674048737>), and analyzed in a symposium of the same name (http://www.reasonpapers.com/pdf/342/rp_342_1r.pdf).

Annexation Will Be A Struggle

Before Palestinians can demand citizenship in Israel, they must be residents of Israel. That is already the case for East Jerusalem Palestinians who were offered Israeli citizenship just after the 1967 war. They rejected Israeli citizenship then because they hoped that Israeli control of what they referred to as “Arab” Jerusalem was temporary. But 25 years later it is obvious that there is no force that will remove Israel from East Jerusalem. Recognizing that, East Jerusalem Palestinians can and should demand Israeli citizenship now.

The situation is quite different for West Bank Palestinians. Even though Israel controls their lives, Israel has not annexed the West Bank which means West Bank Palestinians are not Israeli residents. They are “citizens” of the PA. This is worthless because the PA has not achieved Palestinian freedom, cannot guarantee and protect Palestinian civic and human rights. The PA is corrupt, and should be dissolved.

Before West Bank Palestinians can achieve Israeli citizenship, Israel must annex all of the West Bank and make them Israeli residents; not just Area C with 4% of the Palestinians, over 60% of the land, and most of the water and other resources. Israel must also annex Areas A & B where 96% of the Palestinians live and not leave them in limbo. Palestinians in all areas of the West Bank, Areas A, B & C, must demand with a single voice that all areas be annexed and Palestinians must come together to demand that all areas be annexed, and receive a path to Israeli citizenship.

Israelis fear that taking on direct responsibility for the 2.6 million Palestinians who live in the West Bank (CIA 2012 population estimate) will threaten a Jewish majority in Israel. But such fears are being challenged. Naftali Bennet, the Minister of Industry and Trade has joined other Israeli conservatives who have long urged the Israeli government to annex Area C. Just last month, Tzipi Hotovely, Deputy Transportation Minister, suggested that Israel annex all of the West Bank (<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/169233>). She acknowledges the demographic threat but says it will be worth it to end the international criticism of Israel for its continuing occupation of the West Bank. She wants to see the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict end. Minister Hotovely's suggestion seems to emanate from a fear of continuing boycotts of the settlements and of Israel itself.

Ultimately, the Palestinians must lead the way. They can do this by uniting under the idea of a non-violent campaign to demand that Israel annex the West Bank and offers the Palestinians a direct path to Israeli citizenship.

Conclusion

If, or when the Palestinians launch a campaign for citizenship in Israel, they will be win support of the international community, including the United States and Europe. How can the developed democracies not support a campaign for civil rights? If they are to remain true to their values, they must favor and support Palestinian citizenship.

Thus we see that a campaign for Palestinian citizenship in Israel is the best way for the Palestinians to overcome their present stalemate.

Once Israel provides a route to citizenship for its Palestinian residents, it will mean the end of Israel as an exclusively Jewish state. Israel must allow itself to evolve into full apartheid similar to the "Jim Crow" American South. Israel must become an inclusive democratic state where Palestinians and Jews eventually have equal rights, in order that they finally achieve the peace they so desperately need.

Once Israel provides a route to citizenship for its Palestinian residents, it will mean the end of Israel as an exclusively Jewish state. Israel must not allow itself to evolve into a full apartheid state similar to the "Jim Crow" American South. Israel must become an inclusive democratic state where Palestinians eventually have equal rights because this is the right thing to do and it will provide Israel the peace it so desperately needs.