



مركز الجزيرة للدراسات  
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## Report

# The Palestinian State: Between the Possible, the Probable and the Desired



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Political analyses often collide with problematic political concepts, especially around the meaning of these concepts. The Palestinian-Zionist conflict involves concepts that seem to share common agreement between the parties to the conflict, but when one excavates the meanings behind these concepts the reality reveals deep differences around the understandings of these meanings. The concept of a Palestinian state is one of these. It is a concept that appears in the discourse and literature of the Palestinians, Israelis, the Quartet's statements and some of the texts of UN resolutions alike. But even if the language used is the same, the interpretation and meaning differs between the various role-players.

Another problem in the political analysis of issues surrounding international disputes, such as the Palestinian-Zionist conflict, is the framework within which we conduct our analysis. Do we focus on the legal dimension of the conflict, rendering our writing a type of legal argument in which the practical results will be won by the side that is better able to prove its legal rights? Or, do we look to the political dimension?

Legal argumentation is based on UN resolutions and provisions of international legal treaties, texts and decisions of international courts. The analysis of the political dimension depends on the balance of power between the parties to the conflict, so long as the balance of power is examined from its three component dimensions: material power, moral power, and the art of managing the variables of power.

The history of the Palestinian-Zionist conflict over the past century reveals that the political dimension - that being the balance of power - is the dominant and decisive factor in determining the future of the conflict. This means that the future Palestinian state will be no more than a reflection of the possible, feasible and desired balance of power.

### **The Palestinian state in the projects for a political settlement**

The projects for a political settlement of the Palestinian-Zionist conflict have differed in their characterisation of the geographical space of a Palestinian state. These political-geographical conceptualisations have included:

- A)** Palestine as one state for two peoples, Palestinian and Jewish: this is the position adopted, for the most part, by leftist forces. It is the weakest in terms of the balance of power;
- B)** Two states, one of which is Palestinian that includes territory as existed before the 1967 war, and the other a Jewish state in the remainder of the territory. This is what has been called for by the Arab initiative as well as some Palestinian forces;
- C)** Two states: one Palestinian on the borders of 1967 with the acceptance of changes agreed upon between the parties through land swaps between the Palestinians and the Israelis. This is the position agreed upon by the Quartet (while maintaining land swaps as a subject for negotiation between the parties);
- D)** Two states in areas 'A' and 'B' as set forth in the Oslo Accords, this excludes the territories of area 'C' which would be annexed to the Israel state;
- E)** Palestine as a state beyond the borders of the Palestinian homeland. This would be at the expense of neighbouring countries - Jordan in particular. This is the option promoted by sectors of the Jewish radical right.

To analyse and understand the possibilities of a Palestinian state that emerges from one of these five different conceptions of the Palestinian state, the existing variables on the ground need to be engaged with. These variables include:

## The dismemberment of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip

The Oslo agreement divided the West Bank into three zones:

1. Area 'A': This includes eighteen percent of the land, and its inhabitants account for fifty-five percent of the Palestinian population in the West Bank. These areas are subject to both the security and civil control of the Palestinian Authority. Israel constantly violates, militarily, the Palestinian Authority's control over this area.
2. Area 'B': This comprises twenty percent of the land, and its inhabitants account for 44.2 percent of the Palestinian population in the West Bank. These areas are subject to joint Palestinian and Israeli authority rule in both civil and security arenas. In practice, however, it is almost entirely under full Israeli security control.
3. Area 'C': This includes sixty-two percent of the land, and its inhabitants account for 0.8 percent of the Palestinian population in the West Bank. It is under full Israeli security and civilian control.

A comparison between the three areas indicates that area 'C' is richest in natural resources (for example, ninety percent of the Jordan Valley lies within area 'C', and it is the most fertile and water rich area in the West Bank. This is not to mention the area's – and that of Jerusalem - tourist attractions). These are also considered the most viable areas for Jewish demographic expansion and economic growth.

Given Israel's full control over these areas, the systematic economic and security pressures imposed by Israel have led to a sharp decrease in the number of Palestinians in the area of the Jordan Valley. This has seen the numbers drop from 320 000 Palestinian inhabitants in 1967, to 56 000 in 2011 (this is out of a total of 150 000 Palestinians currently living in the entirety of area 'C'. Meanwhile, the number of Jewish settlers in area 'C' exploded from 1200 in 1972 to 110 000 in 1993, then to 310 000 in 2010. These settlers live in over 124 settlements and 100 settler outposts (settlements built without the authorization of the Israeli government).

In order for Israel to achieve a demographic advantage, it should be noted that the rate of population increase in Israel (within the Green Line) is 1.6 percent, while the annual population increase of Jewish settlers in the West Bank reaches 7.4 percent. This while the growth rate among Palestinians in the West Bank is currently at 2.9 percent. If Israel's displacement of, and economic pressure on, Palestinians continues, the Palestinian growth rate is expected to drop to 1.8 percent. This would have innumerable consequences, including:

**A)** A gradual disruption of the demographic balance in Israel's favour. If we take the Palestinian population of the West Bank to currently be at 2.51 million people (including Jerusalem), and the number of Jewish settlers (including Jerusalem) to be 510 000, that means that 20.31 percent of the current population of the West Bank are Jewish settlers. Additionally, if we factor in the rate of the settler population's increase over the next twenty years (7.4 percent), and we calculated the fall of the Palestinian birth rate at 0.9 percent (according to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics) we will see that the number of Palestinians in the West Bank in 2030 will be 3.413 million, compared to 989 400 settlers. This represents an increase of the Jewish Israeli population proportionate to the population in the West Bank population as 28.98 percent. When we consider that twenty-three percent of the territory of the West Bank is zoned as closed military areas or nature reserves, and forty-four percent of the West Bank, within area 'C', is land on which Palestinians are prohibited from building on, we begin to see how bleak the scenario is.

**B)** Despite the World Bank's praise of the West Bank development plan that Salam Fayyad's government has pursued since 2009, the occupation authorities have

prevented the Palestinian government from delivering services to area 'C' despite efforts by the Quartet and EU Commission. This explains the absence of the territories from area 'C' in the Palestinian Development Plan of 2008-2010. Furthermore, the 2011-2013 Palestinian Development Plan has not provided a clear project or programme for the development of these areas.

Although the Oslo Accords provided for the gradual transfer of some of Israel's civil authority over to the Palestinian Authority within five years of the signing of the agreement, which was signed in 1993, this never took place. The changes that have been clearly evident on the security side has been the expansion of the activity of the Israeli Civil Administration at the expense of the Palestinian Authority. The Israeli Civil Administration is a branch of Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, and includes only Israeli military and civilian personnel, and does not have any Palestinian employees. Indeed, since the abolition of the local planning committees in 1971 through Military Order No. 418, all aspects of daily life of Palestinians has been controlled by the Israeli administration.

**C)** The Israeli political position: without delving into the intricacies of Israeli politics, and despite the announcement by Ehud Barak in 2000 of his acceptance of a Palestinian state, and a similar acceptance by Ehud Olmert in 2008, reiterated by the current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, there are seven common and unambiguous political positions that have been repeated by Israeli officials on several occasions, namely:

1. No permanent freeze of settlement activities;
2. No return to the 1967 borders;
3. The Israeli army will remain on the River Jordan;
4. No compromise on Jerusalem;
5. No return of the Palestinian refugees;
6. The desired Palestinian state must—according to the Netanyahu plan of 2009—be disarmed and have no control over its airspace. Its borders will be subject to Israeli control, and it will be prohibited from forming any alliance with any foreign political entity;
7. Israeli public opinion: The trends in Israeli public opinion indicate continued opposition to a Palestinian state, although the percentage of the Israel's population who hold this position has dropped from seventy-nine percent in 1987 to fifty-two percent in 1996, and then to twenty-nine percent in 2010. Meanwhile, in 2012, sixty-eight percent of Israelis oppose a halt to settlement activity in the West Bank and the majority of Israelis reject the definition of a Palestinian state as a return to the 1967 borders.

**D)** The complete failure of internal Palestinian reconciliation, and the insistence of one of the Palestinian sides to continue with the negotiations despite its virtual nullity, while the other Palestinian side is lost amidst the currents of the Arab Spring and its traditional connections with the Arab 'hold out' forces;

It also does not seem that Palestinian factions have a clear vision for the process of connecting the Gaza Strip and the West Bank through Israeli territory. This makes the contiguity and coherence of this state an extremely complex matter, one that reminds us of the situation of Bangladesh and Pakistan before their separation in the 1970s.

## **The regional context: Internal conflicts**

There is no doubt that the political changes that began sweeping across the Arab region in 2011 have cast a dark shadow on the Palestinian issue. Arab states are immersed in their own internal conflicts; Iran is using all of its efforts to avoid a foreign (U.S. or Israeli) military strike against it; Turkish anger towards Israeli policies has changed direction; and religious movements in the Arab world have entered a new phase of external concerns.

In a previous article ('The Arab political scene in 2012: A turbulent region'), I noted that the return of stability to most Arab countries hit by the recent political earthquake will necessitate at least seven years. This is an adequate period for Israel to deepen the existing imbalance in its favour.

When we look to the meaning of a Palestinian state in the official Arab political discourse, we find several meanings:

- A state exactly on the 1967 borders;
- A state on 1967 borders with some 'improvement' of the borders;
- A state on the 1967 borders that accepts the principle of land swaps;
- A state agreed upon by the parties during negotiations.

If we add to this that Arab financial support to the Palestinian Authority is almost negligible, it is clear that the Palestinians' ability to resist the economic conditions within the West Bank and Gaza Strip will only worsen.

### **The international position: Israel's advantage**

Statements on the settlement of the Palestinian issue emerging from the Quartet can be seen as the clearest and most pronounced indicator of the international position on the issue of a Palestinian state. Since its inception in 2002, the Quartet has issued a total of thirty-nine statements. Although this was the body entrusted with the settlement of the conflict, its statements have included a phrase that we can almost say is the common denominator in all of the Quartet's literature: '[the]final status issues will be left for negotiations between the parties to the conflict.'

Since the outcomes of negotiation are completely determined by the balance of political, economic, military and demographic power, this means that the Quartet, and the international community by extension, have given Israel the full opportunity to employ all the variables of power at its disposal. This compared to the Palestinian negotiator who has been stripped of almost all instruments of pressure. Even if the Palestinian negotiator did possess some of these instruments, he has stripped himself of them in the belief that the system of international political values will be sufficient for his purposes.

If we stop to examine the concept of a Palestinian state in the political literature of the Quartet we find that it is a state determined by the balance of the negotiations between the parties, rather than a state determined by the rules of international law and decisions of international courts or UN Security Council resolutions.

In the context of this international position, it must be pointed out that the only indicator that offers any positive trend in favour of a Palestinian state is the gradual and increasing change in the position of international public opinion, especially in the major countries. The latest results of public opinion polls show that forty-nine percent support the establishment of a Palestinian state versus twenty-one percent who oppose it. The position of thirty percent of those polled was indeterminate.

When reviewing the results of public opinion polls in the most relevant countries, we find the following results:

**Country Proportion supporting a Palestinian State Proportion opposing a Palestinian State**

United States	45	36
United Kingdom	54	20
Germany	53	28
China	56	9
Russia	37	13
India	32	25
Canada	45	25
Egypt	90	9
Turkey	60	19
Pakistan	52	12
Philippines	56	36
Mexico	45	15
Brazil	41	26
Chile	39	9
Peru	38	18
Ghana	41	33
Australia	50	17

## International public opinion poll results for support for a Palestinian state

The table above allows us to make a number of observations:

- Two of the Quartet members, Russia and the United States, account for the lowest rates of public support for a Palestinian state. This means that political decision-makers in these two countries will face less pressure from their public on this issue;
- Public support in Europe (France, Germany and Britain) ranges from between fifty-three percent and fifty-four percent in favour of a state. Despite the significance of this ratio, it falls short of one that would have a rapid and strong effect on the decision-makers;
- Chinese public opinion is very similar to that of Europe, indicating the failure of an Arab policy in this regard.

It should be noted that these results are subject to change if the meaning of the concept of a 'Palestinian state' is better defined, since the question used in the poll centred on the notion of a Palestinian state in principle and not on a specific 'geographically defined' state. If the latter were to be used, this may lead to a change in the results.

## To Israel the land, and the Palestinians to the neighbouring countries

To assess future possibilities, we have to determine the megatrends of the phenomenon in question. The study shows that the megatrends of this subject are as follows:

- The first trend: a new political demographic map of the West Bank involving Israel's annexation of approximately seventy percent of the land whilst restricting Palestinians to about thirty percent of the land in non-contiguous and disconnected areas on which to declare a state.
- The second trend: Israeli capitalisation on present and future Arab political turmoil, while drawing Arab attention to other internal or regional issues.
- The third trend: maintaining the international community's orientation as one of leaving the fate of the Palestinian state to the results of negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian parties, as partly evidenced by the obstacles faced by Palestinians in their bid for full membership at the United Nations.

This means that the balance of power does not allow for a Palestinian state to actually come into being. Instead, Israel will work to solve the problem at the expense of the neighbouring countries through manoeuvres for incremental changes and the absorption of Palestinian refugees in Arab host countries. The possibilities of foiling this Zionist strategy will depend on the extent of the changes in Arab political attitudes and orientations and the extent to which Arab states will work to prevent these strategies from bearing fruit. The existing Arab political structure is not encouraging in this regard.

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