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## ***Any Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Will Lead to Civil War - Israel has invested a lot in the occupation, and some won't let it go without a fight***

The ongoing debate between supporters of a two-state solution and those who advocate for one state is an argument about the goal: Is one of them an ideal solution, or only a pragmatic one, and what would the solution look like?

In the 1980s and '90s, the answer to those questions was clear. The two-state solution received international backing, and support for it among the majority of both Israelis and Palestinians was growing. The road to achieving it was direct negotiations based on the June 4, 1967 lines with mutual border adjustments. Today, U.S. President Donald Trump's "deal of the century," disregarding the international consensus, is meant to force upon the Palestinians different terms, tailor-made for the Israeli right.

The failure of the negotiations based on the Oslo Accords and the settlement expansion that went on during the talks and continues have increased support for a one-state solution among both Israelis and Palestinians. Meanwhile, the Israeli government appears to have abandoned the search for a solution, settling instead for management of the conflict. While discussion about the goal is important, it ignores the question of how to achieve it. I do not refer to whether the only means is a "diplomatic process" or the imposition of a solution by the international community. I also do not refer to the question of whether the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement is an effective means of advancing a solution. Discussion about those matters assumes that if the sides are not capable of

bridging the gap between their negotiating positions, the international community will force them to do so.

Yet we still have to ask if the two communities will accept whatever solution their leaders achieve, either on their own or as a result of heavy international pressure. Even if an agreement via international pressure does not appear to be on the horizon, it's worthwhile to devote some thought to this question. One day it will be timely.

I would like to present the following thesis: Any solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is likely to lead to an armed revolt against the legitimate government, or even a civil war in some form. I am not a believer in historical determinism. It's possible that a serious rebellion will not break out because each side will find a way to cope with its extremists and put down a revolt before it turns into a civil war. But for that to happen, it's necessary to pose the question and address it in order to reduce the potential damage if one of these possibilities is realized.

I will focus on the Israeli side, because the circumstances that might lead to a revolt or civil war in Israel are different from those that might develop on the Palestinian side. Palestinian opposition to a permanent agreement according to the Arab Peace Initiative will be based on religious arguments and national symbolism: the renouncement of a complete return of the 1948 refugees to Israel; the providing legitimization to Zionism and to Israel, and total abandonment of the area of Palestine on which Israel exists. However, opposition in Israel would not be only for symbolic reasons but also because of material interests. In addition, an end to the Israeli occupation and the achievement of full independence would constitute a historic Palestinian achievement that would lessen the pain of the concessions made. On the Israeli side, however, it would constitute a colossal failure.

### **Hardening of positions**

The possibility that a revolt or civil war will break out is not hypothetical: It is in the air and exists in the consciousness of the decision-makers. This elephant in the room leads to a hardening of positions. For various reasons, including the desire to avoid an internal confrontation, the Israeli side prefers to declare that there is no partner, or to present negotiating positions that are nonstarters. At the same time, in both societies there is great pessimism about the other side's readiness to agree to an arrangement. More and more voices are siding with the one-state solution based on the argument that there is no possibility of evacuating the settlers.

Why is the evacuation of the settlers such a serious obstacle? First, because Israel's territorial expansion project and control over the Palestinian population is the largest state/national project the country has ever carried out. Its scope in time and territory and the cost of the project is unprecedented in Israel's history. I estimate that the establishment of the state cost less than its expansion after 1967.

Almost the entire state is invested in this project. This does not refer only to the ideological investment and the transfer of settlers into the Palestinian territories. It's also about jobs for hundreds of thousands or millions of Israelis, as well as profits from exporting technological know-how and security products that maintain Israel's control over the Palestinian population and territory. The existence of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would require far more than a political decision or the evacuation of about 100,000 settlers: It would require a total change in direction by the State of Israel.

Israeli investment in controlling the Palestinian population has increased as Israeli expansion has increased. In 2002, Israel reconquered the West Bank and converted the Palestinian Authority into its subcontractor via security cooperation. Since then, a reality of one regime between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea has been created. Under this regime, the Jewish ethnic group maintains control over the Palestinian group. Despite the deep gaps between the two rival ethnic groups in the balance of power, human rights and access to resources, there is demographic parity.

The demographic balance is being undermined to the detriment of the Jews, however, and this requires them to deepen their control over the Palestinians. The settlements do not only create de facto annexation of the territory, they also constitute a tool of control over the Palestinians. As investments grow, it becomes harder for the Israeli-Jewish group to liberate itself from them and to give up the privileges provided by the status of being in control.

The Jewish majority mobilizes a series of arguments to justify its march of folly. At the head of this list is security. The Jewish side feels that its superiority and ability to control the situation are being threatened. While this threat has a basis in reality, many on the Jewish side interpret it, mistakenly, as an existential threat. This only increases the difficulty involved in changing direction.

**Who is a settler?**

It is a mistake to think that the problem I'm raising stems mainly from the number of settlers. It's true that there is a growing settler population, more than half a million. And not all of them are extremists like the murderers of the Dawabsheh family in the West Bank village of Duma in 2015. Some among them genuinely believe in coexistence with their Palestinian neighbors or in the need to accept the decision of the democratic majority. But we should remember that the settlers as a political-religious-social group are not limited to the area of the West Bank. In other words, it's not the place where they reside that determines who is a "settler." In this respect, there are "settlers" also within the State of Israel, meaning those whose religious-political security and national worldview is identical to that of the radical settlers. Some of them might bear arms to try to overturn a democratic decision enabling full Palestinian sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including East Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, and the return to Israel of an agreed-on number of refugees in exchange for the "illusion of peace." Israeli democracy would then face a confrontation with its very legitimacy.

This would be a confrontation not with an external enemy but with some of Israel's own citizens and soldiers. In the name of the sanctity of the Land of Israel and a deep mistrust of the Palestinians' intentions, this group is liable to turn the weapons at its disposal and its military know-how against the army and the security services, which would be implementing the decision of the majority of the country's citizens. That would follow a bitter internal debate and a legitimate democratic struggle by opponents of the agreement. France in the mid-1960s had to cope with the revolt of settlers and military units when it decided, in a referendum, to evacuate Algeria. Algeria had been annexed to France and had 1 million settlers and half a million French soldiers. It's worthwhile recalling that France decided on the evacuation of Algeria in the context of global de-colonization – a context that does not exist today. That would only increase the difficulty of carrying out an Israeli evacuation.

The deep symbiosis between the settlers and the military and security establishment that protects them in the West Bank could create a situation in Israel similar to that which existed in France. Settlers of the type I have described here can be found not only in settlements but also in Israeli combat units (some of them homogeneous), the Civil Administration and the security services. I imagine that many would find it difficult to take action against the army and the state apparatuses, but it's not far-fetched to think that

some would assist the rebels behind the scenes either by commission or omission, and that a smaller number would take part in a rebellion.

The Jewish underground in the 1980s numbered around 20 members. However, it showed that a group of activists with military expertise and the ability to organize an underground could act with the support of ideological authorities to create a strategic change. Since then, the likelihood that such a situation will be repeated has only increased. Since the evacuation of the settlements in the Gaza Strip in 2005, the group that supports violent settlers has not contracted, but expanded. Contrary to the impression created by reports about settler violence against the Palestinians, the major threat to a permanent-status agreement doesn't come from a small, violent band of teenage outlaws, but rather from an organized underground that has a broad support in the social and political establishment. To get the Jewish group that is so deeply invested in the expansion and control project to give up its privileges, there must be a severe crisis or heavy external pressure. No colonial power ever gave up a colony for reasons of morality and recognition of human rights. If the crisis and pressure worsen, whether from the Palestinian side, the international community or both – it will become equally harder for Israel to give in. Members of the Israeli peace camp would be labeled traitors and collaborators and be symbolically removed from the collective. As was demonstrated in the events that preceded the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, it could be a prologue to the actual removal from the collective. In 1994-95, the attack was aimed at one individual. In the future, arms may be aimed at an entire segment of the population.

### **Taboo discussion**

The one-state solution doesn't remove the possibility of the outbreak of civil war. Instead of a struggle between the State of Israel and a rebel Jewish group, within one state the struggle would be between two ethnic-religious-linguistic collectives. For all the reasons I have mentioned, the Jewish ethnic group would not agree to give up its privileges for the creation of an egalitarian regime between Jews and Palestinian Arabs. Per capita GDP in Israel for 2017 was \$36,250, compared with \$3,000 in the Palestinian territories. Even if this huge gap is reduced, much of it will divide the rich and powerful Jews from the Palestinian Arabs not because the latter are less qualified, but because of the Jews' interest in maintaining the upper hand.

Given Jewish superiority in every area except demography, there is no chance the Jews would not gain superior positions in a one-state situation and would not exploit their greater resources to preserve their status. In a reality of almost demographic equality between the two ethnic groups, there is no chance that the Palestinians would agree to be in an inferior position. In brief, one state is a guaranteed prescription for an ongoing civil war, similar to what happened in the Balkans with the breakup of Yugoslavia, or in Lebanon.

The discussion about a civil war is taboo in Israeli society. The dominant slogan is “a Jew doesn’t evacuate a Jew.” There is no doubt that the events that would accompany the liberation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the achievement of full Palestinian sovereignty over them and East Jerusalem, together with the return of refugees, would be traumatic for Israeli society. To make a comparison, when the Altalena was sunk in 1948, 16 Irgun members and three Israeli soldiers were killed, and the event is still a painful memory that arouses deep division in Israeli society.

The history of other nations and events that accompanied the ending of a discriminatory and repressive regime teaches us that these nations had to cope with a revolt or a civil war when they were undergoing a fundamental transformation. There is a basis for concern that the fate of Israeli society will not be different

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