

15-Feb-17 – Is the Two-State Solution Already Dead? A Political and Military History of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

Description

By Hasan Afif El-Hasan

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Born in Beit Eiba, a small village near Nablus, while Palestine was still ruled under the British Mandate, Hasan Afif El-Hasan, Ph.D, is a political analyst and journalist whose work is published in Al-Ahram, PalestineChronicle.com and other print and online media.

Dr. El-Hasan lived through the 1948 Arab–Israeli war, then the annexation of the West Bank to Jordan. He witnessed the defeat of the Arab armies, the exodus of the Palestinians, the total dissolution of their community and the ensuing chaos. The Iraqi military contingent camp was on his village's land in 1948 but as the Iraqi commanding officer said, "We have no orders to fight." This paradoxical situation inspired the author's future research and writing. After completing high school in the West Bank, Mr. El-Hasan earned his teaching credentials in Nablus and taught math and science in its secondary schools. Later he came to the United States, where he earned a B.S. degree in electronics engineering and an M.S. in electrical engineering, and enjoyed a successful career in technology. He then earned a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California at Riverside and went on to study the origins and the context of the current conflict.

The "Palestinians" or "Palestinian Arabs" in this book are the people identifying themselves as Arabs who had been living in Palestine just before the establishment of Israel, as well as their descendants. The West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem are referred to as "the occupied land." The Israelis call the indigenous Palestinians only "Arabs" to deny their linkage to Palestine and refer to the West Bank by its Biblical names "Judea and Samaria" to make the historical connection of the Jewish people with this land or the "disputed territory," to deny its status as occupied land. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) estimates that there were more than nine million Palestinians scattered throughout the world as of 2006. More than one million were living in Israel proper, three and a half million lived in the West Bank and Gaza, two and a half million lived in Jordan and the rest were dispersed through the Arab world, Europe and North and South America. The American–Israel Demographic Group disputed these findings and concluded that the PCBS total numbers are inflated by one million three-hundred thousand.

I strongly argue against the concept of using ethnic origin to define nations today because every community within a geographic area is a mixture of races that came in contact through conquest, migration and intermarriages across time. This applies especially to the self-identified Arabs and Jews in Palestine. Arabs or Jews, or any race for that matter, throughout the world, cannot support their claim of being closely related genetically, by biology. Palestine was successively conquered by Canaanites, Philistines, ancient Israelites, Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Romans and Turks, by Muslims and by Christian crusaders. The groups that lived in Palestine fought, interacted and

collaborated, but no group was obliterated in history. The Palestinians are the descendents of all the groups that inhabited the land since the ancient Canaanites and beyond. I therefore reject the myth of race and racial superiority including the ideology that fed the Fascism of the last century.

No population has struggled more than the Palestinians to hold onto their land or to return to the homes they were forced to leave — and achieved so little, if anything. Only the American Indian tribes and the indigenous peoples of New Zealand and Tasmania suffered similar injustice when they were systematically destroyed and ethnically cleansed to make room for British and European colonialists. The Palestinians used diplomacy, negotiations, protests, uprisings and wars but they have failed to save their lands and the refugees never returned to their homes. Even after the establishment of the State of Israel, the signing of peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, and the recognition of Israel by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Israel still controls all of historic Palestine and the Palestinians, dispossessed and oppressed, are either living under brutal occupation in cantons surrounded by Jewish-only settlements and roads, check-points and the Israeli wall of separation, or they are living in refugee camps across the Middle East, and a sizable minority inside Israel is treated as second if not third class citizens.

This work condemns all violence for any reason and advocates for a just peace in Palestine based on human rights and international law, a peace which all parties to the century-old conflict and the people of the region need. To that end, the Palestinians should unite and do what is necessary to strengthen the “peace camp” in Israel; the Israelis should abandon the ideology of conquest and stop electing governments that may foreclose the possibility of peace with justice; and the international community (the US and Europe) should live up to the principles of justice that they claim their civilized societies hold dear.

Supporting the right of Israel to exist and prosper should not mean supporting it in subordinating Palestinians’ claims to their historical rights and controlling their destiny. Many Israeli individuals and groups love their country and also support the Palestinians’ right to have their independent state, but they are still in the minority. They question how their Jewish people can celebrate their ancient struggle against slavery and the anti-Semitism of today, claiming moral superiority, but at the same time accept oppressing another people, occupying and colonizing their land under false narratives. The Israeli novelist David Grossman spoke for many Israeli intellectuals and peace advocates when he wrote, “I could not understand how an entire nation like mine, an enlightened nation by all accounts, is able to train itself to live as a conqueror without making its own life wretched.”[\[1\]](#)

This study will put the stories of the two parties to the Palestinian conflict, the Israelis and the Palestinians, side by side and leave it to the reader to conclude why a just peace that addresses the rights of the Palestinians serves the interests of the Israelis as well. To that end, I try to present a critical political discussion based on facts that Israel cannot be simply erased, and it will prosper and be more secure without being a colonial power. And despite their weakness, the Palestinians will refuse to continue living under oppression and in refugee camps. Chapter 1 summarizes what this study is all about. It is an effort to explain the historical and ideological background of the parties to the conflict. It covers briefly major historical events since the 19th century that led to the present sorry state. Only by understanding what has transpired in the past, the reader may grasp the Palestinian issue and why it is time the international community should act with more responsibility and a commitment to resolve the conflict according to international law and justice.

Chapter 2 is a brief review of the Arab nationalism since the 19th century. The link between Arab nationalism and the Palestinian issue today is more emotions and less substance, but under Arab nationalism, regular armies of the neighboring Arab states waged wars against Israel. Palestine was ruled by the Ottoman Turks as a part of Syria for four-hundred years before Britain and France defeated Turkey in World War I (WW I). Syria was the center of Arab nationalism when the Ottoman Empire was dismantled and Palestine was promised as a homeland for the Jews by the triumphant British. Syria was home of al-Baath Party and the Syrian Socialist National Party, organized nationalist parties that advocated the establishment of national state which included Palestine. The two political parties were strong opponents to the establishment of a homeland for the Jews in Palestine. President Nasser of Egypt championed the Palestinian cause as the self-proclaimed leader of the Pan-Arab nationalism. After the 1967 war, Arab nationalism has been replaced by local traditional and sectarian Islamic nationalism. But most Arabs today, even in the countries that made peace with Israel, continue to support the Palestinians and refuse to accept normalization with the Israelis before the Palestinian issue is resolved.

Chapter 3 is a brief history of the Palestinians since the dawn of the 20th century when Palestine was ruled by the Turks. It covers the pre-1948 period, the 1948 war, the PLO and Fatah history in Jordan and Lebanon and the rise of Hamas movement.

Chapter 4 is a review of Zionism and its early leaders and how it succeeded in the creation of modern Israel. The State of Israel has been the crowning achievement of the Zionist movement. Zionism has been the most successful international political movement in modern history. Its founder promised a homeland for the Jews in fifty years, and he was on target. The Jewish community in Palestine before the establishment of Israel is sometimes called the "*Yishuv*" in this study.

Chapter 5 is a narrative of the Hashemites' relations with Palestine since World War I. The histories of the Hashemites and Palestine are so intertwined that they can hardly be separated. Sherif Hussein Ben Ali, the patriarch of the Hashemite dynasty, lost his kingdom for refusing to accept the Balfour declaration, and when he was on his death bed, he asked to be buried in Jerusalem. King Abdullah the First of Jordan succeeded in keeping Jerusalem and the West Bank in Arab hands after the 1948 war. And until the 1967 war, the West Bank and Jerusalem were an integral part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. It was only in 1988 that King Hussein Ibn Talal disclaimed his sovereignty over the occupied West Bank and recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians.

Chapter 6 describes the relationship between Egypt and Palestine since 1914. Egypt fought four bloody wars against Israel, controlled the Gaza Strip from 1948 till 1967, and now it shares Gaza's life-line border. Jamal Abdel-Nasser championed the Palestinian cause under the banner of Arab Nationalism.

Chapter 7 reviews the development of Palestinian-Israeli relations after the 2003 Quartet "Roadmap for Peace" plan was announced. Representatives of the "Quartet," an ad hoc American-dominated committee made up of the US, the EU, Russia, and the UN, endorsed a 2003 US-proposed schedule of conditions and events dubbed the "Roadmap" for breaking the Palestinian-Israeli impasse and paving the way to a peace settlement based on a two-state solution.

Chapter 8 reviews the politics of the Palestinians after the Legislative Council Elections of 2006 and the Hamas victory. The victors in these elections were boycotted by the West, and Israel refused to

cooperate with any government headed by Hamas. The Palestinian experiment in democracy was aborted by the very countries that rightly criticize Arab states for their lack of democracy.

Chapter 9 describes the 2006 Lebanese–Israeli war and its impact on Israeli politics. The Lebanese Shiite military group Hizbullah ambushed an Israeli military patrol in a cross-border raid; Israel responded by bombarding Lebanese roads, bridges, ports and airports, as well as other targets. Hizbullah’s response was to fire hundreds of rockets on Israeli targets across the border, killing Israeli civilians including Israeli Arabs. Once it disengaged from Lebanon, the Israeli government was criticized for mismanaging the war, moved even more forcefully against the Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip which was governed by the Hamas faction and besieged by Israel.

Chapter 10 analyzes the so-called “peace process” including the 2002 Arab peace proposal and the 2007 US-sponsored Annapolis conference. The Palestinians have been clinging to the US “Roadmap” for peace and the Arab states have tried to revive the peace process, but Israel does not consider itself an occupier. Instead of withdrawing, Israel has built the separation wall and hundreds of new homes in major settlements in the West Bank.

Chapter 11, as the last chapter of the book, talks about the failure of Palestinian and Israeli negotiators to reach a final peace agreement. This study concludes that if there is any hope for establishing a sovereign Palestinian state, the Palestinians must end factionalism; the Israeli electorate political orientation must move away from the ideology of conquest; and the United States must transform its traditional Middle East policy of blind support to Israel into a genuine even-handed approach. The problem is that none of these players is ready to correct course. **Chapter 11 thus reviews nonviolent options that the Palestinians may consider if the two-state solution is declared dead.**