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Palestinians Taking the Initiative:
Dissolve the PA and Embrace a One-State Solution Strategy... Now

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This brief is the fifth in PSR series of Critical Policy Briefs for 2019. These briefs address important domestic and foreign policy-oriented issues confronting Palestinian society today.

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This paper is grounded on three assumptions. First, it takes for granted the death or the impossibility of achieving the two-state solution due to the non-stop Israeli settlement expansion across the territories of the long-yearned for Palestinian state. Moreover, the Palestinian cause is off the agenda of the various Israeli parties and there is no genuine international willingness or ability to bring pressure to bear on Israel to have the withering solution off the hook. Many Palestinians and Israelis believe that by failing to provide a just solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees, the two-state option, even if achieved, would not bring the conflict to an end.

Second, the collapse of the Palestinian Authority (PA), either due to economic causes or to internal conflict over power, is a mere matter of time. Falling short of the Palestinian people's expectations, the PA has lost the grounds of its *raison d'être* and has failed to prove itself as a midwife for a corruption-free democratic state that respects citizenship rights and adheres to the separation of powers. For example, while 57 per cent of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip deem Israel's democracy good or very good, only 23 per cent do the same for the PA regime.¹

Third, it is impossible to perpetuate the *status quo* that prevails today between the sea and the river. The *status quo* depicts a picture of a one-state reality in which Israel imposes every day more facts on the ground in its favor, with a growing discrimination against Palestinians. This discrimination renders the one-state reality as an advanced form of racism. Still, the Palestinians do have a chance, which may not last for long, to change the *status quo* by exposing the racism of this developing *de facto* reality and forcing the establishment of a democratic one-state solution in historic Palestine, one that can serve the interests of the Palestinians and compensate for the losses inflicted by the Oslo Accords.

The continued determined adoption and promotion of a two-state solution by Palestinians or other parties contributes to the perpetuation of the suffering of the Palestinian people. What is more, marketing the two-state solution as a viable option might cost the Palestinians a second *Nakba* (catastrophe). Bottom line, the two-state solution is dead and gone. It is, furthermore, nonsensical and incorrect to hold President Trump responsible for this eventuality, and thus rely on the day after the Trump Administration. Indeed, Trump, quite unwittingly, might be an opportunity to be seized on before it is too late. What he has done, and is doing, puts a stop to the Palestinian false hope dealers, railroading the Palestinian leadership to admit its mistake and adopt a new strategy.

Israel is the one and only ruling power in historic Palestine since 1967, and this rule continued even after the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the PA. Israel weaved its way through the "peace process" by circumventing the first *intifada* by establishing the PA to get out of the racism stigma hook. Zionism was recognized as a form of racism and racial discrimination by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution [3379](#).² It did not take but forty-five days after the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 for that resolution to be nullified by Resolution [46/86](#) of 1991.³ However, after only a few years of the Oslo Accords, Israel's intentions started to unfold. Israel won the very best 25 years in its history. On all levels, Israel distracted and deluded Palestinians with a never-ending peace process; meanwhile it enforced its control and power over all aspects Palestinian daily life. Buying time, Israel went on extending its control over more land and resources and imposing a new *fait accompli*. From the perspectives of many Israelis, some international actors, and even few Palestinians, whoever calls for changing the new *status quo* is disconnected from reality.

¹ <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/723>

² <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/761C1063530766A7052566A2005B74D1>

³ <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/9a798adbf322aff38525617b006d88d7/0aca0b9fe5c99b0885256a9b0061300c?OpenDocument>

Israel succeeded in exploiting the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) weakness and its leadership's eagerness to remain relevant - not to mention the collapse of its allies and the exhaustion of its financial resources. Israel used this state of affairs to impose on the PLO a poor agreement through the Oslo Accords. Striking two birds with one stone, Israel got rid of the racism stigma, which the first intifada revealed, while creating the PA to manage the affairs of the Palestinians on its behalf. From day one, the PA leadership began to act toward its people and allies as if it were an independent state, promoting itself as the nucleus of the desired Palestinian state. This made it difficult for it to consider going back to the pre "state" status. After the Camp David summit in 2000, the Palestinian leadership realized that it could not sell false hope to its people. Instead of turning the tables on the occupation, by taking a step back and returning the situation to what it was before Oslo, by dissolving the PA, the PA leadership showed an unwillingness to give up its formal and individual gains.

Ironically, two decades after the end of the transition period (1999) and the failure of the Camp David summit and as the strategy of internationalization and isolation of Israel fails, the dissolution of the PA remains the only option to try to save what can be saved. The proof for this can be clearly seen in the constant threats and warnings by the PA leadership, repeated many times during the past decade, to dissolve the PA and 'hand over the keys' to the occupation. This also applies to the Palestinian leadership's decision to terminate the agreements signed with Israel last July in response to the demolition of Palestinian homes, some of which were located in *area 'A'* such as Wadi al-Hums in the town of Sur Baher, in Jerusalem. Like other decisions, the new one lacks credibility and remains unimplemented.

Dissolve the PA; do not wait for its collapse

What is sad and hard to believe today is that Israel's bet is still valid to the point that the Palestinian leadership is ready to risk holding on to authority until it collapses instead of dissolving it. The collapse is imminent and can happen at any moment either due to economic reasons, the failure of the PA to carry out the tasks assigned to it, or due to internal conflict over power. The risks of this conflict are exacerbated by the dissolution of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). The Basic Law indicates that if the office of the President of the PA becomes vacant, the Speaker of the PLC shall temporarily assume the powers and duties of the Presidency and prepare for free presidential elections within two months, just as happened after the death of President Yasser Arafat.

The difference between waiting for the PA collapse and initiating its dissolution is strategic and fateful. In the PA's dissolution scenario, the leadership and the people will unite under the umbrella of the PLO. It would be highly recommended if parallel to the dissolution, changes and reforms in the PLO decision-making were made allowing for an inclusive representation. Such reforms would help to stop the massive drain on the PLO's role as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians. Today, only 54%⁴ of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, compared to 69% 13 years ago, believe that the PLO is that kind of a representative. In parallel, the leadership should give wide powers to municipalities and local councils and form popular committees in the neighborhoods and villages to support municipalities and local councils in maintaining internal security and lead the popular resistance. It should also take the initiative to collect the arms of the security services and hand them over to a third party, such as the United Nations, in order to achieve three goals: (1) avoid Israel's attempt to drag the Palestinians into a situation similar to that of the second Intifada; (2) serve the strategy of a one-state solution which is based on peaceful popular resistance; and (3) attract more Israeli Jews to join the Palestinians in their struggle to end the racist *de facto* reality.

In the scenario of PA collapse, and its potential consequences, from anarchy, security chaos, and armed conflict, Israel would be in control to the point where it might exploit this situation by committing a second *Nakba* against the Palestinian people in the West Bank. Israel, as a state, may not even be a major participant in the new *Nakba*. Instead, it might leave the matter to settlers whose attacks have increased in recent years and their numbers reached more than 600,000⁵ in the West Bank. Settlers do not lack the weapons to commit a new *Nakba* under the pretext of self-defense in an atmosphere of chaos and insecurity that is likely to arise after the collapse of the PA.

⁴ <http://www.pcpsr.org/ar/node/753>

⁵ <https://www.btselem.org/settlements/statistics>

Therefore, dissolving the PA should be adopted as a policy that aims to avoid the unprecedented risks to the Palestinian cause. We can add to such risks the "Deal of the Century," a plan currently being imposed and implemented. The PLO leadership, without any hesitation or delay, should immediately dissolve the PA, an institution that has lost the justification for its existence. Another reason to dissolve the PA is that fact that its existence is the most crucial reason for the internal division. Furthermore, PA existence exempts Israel from shouldering the responsibility of the occupier. Indeed, the Israeli economy profits from more than 70%⁶ of the total international aid for Palestinians. Also, by dissolving the PA, it is certain that the Palestinian leadership would regain a significant part of the people's trust (regaining trust is a central element for the adoption and the success of the post-dissolution strategy and action plan), which is now virtually non-existent. Approximately half of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip considers the PA a burden and supports its dissolution⁷ although it is the largest employer, the main service provider for the public, and despite the fear of the unknown in the absence of a post-dissolution strategy. If, after embarking on a new and realistic post-dissolution strategy, we ask the Palestinians what they think of PA dissolution, the support will undoubtedly be much higher. Indeed, only those with vested interests -- interests that are incompatible with the collective national interest -- would remain opposed to its dissolution.

It is difficult to assess the likely reaction of Hamas (which controls the Gaza Strip) to the decision of dissolving the PA, but it will be difficult for it to stand against a popular consensus on a new and realistic national strategy that ensures the rights of the Palestinians.

A post-dissolution strategy: a one-state solution

The policy of wait-and-see, currently pursued by the Palestinian leadership, awaiting the results of the American or Israeli elections, or anticipating a change in the policy from the European Union and its member states, one that would exert pressure on Israel, has failed miserably. Palestinians paid and are paying a heavy price for it. The "Deal of the Century" certainly cannot be countered and foiled by waiting or simply saying "no" while it is being implemented on the ground. It is time to rely solely on ourselves to impose what we want within a national plan, and to invest in Arab and international positions as much as possible, but as enablers rather than essentials or doers.

A national, realistic, ethical, and popularly supported Palestinian plan is the only way to thwart "the Deal of the Century" and similar designs. This Palestinian plan must embrace a one democratic state solution in historic Palestine that guarantees:

- (1) full equality for all its citizens;
- (2) the right of return for refugees;
- (3) no group dominates the other;
- (4) the development of short and medium-term programs that seek to bridge the gap among the citizens in all spheres, especially the economic, on the basis of equal opportunity and positive discrimination towards the poor; the security sector must seek to integrate all, at all ranks and levels; and,
- (5) that the one democratic state should pursue a foreign policy based on neutrality, i.e., that it will not engage in any international or regional alignment out of respect for the religious and historical significance of this land to a huge portion of humanity and in order to benefit from its promising tourism and commercial future.

The two-state solution is the official program for the PLO. Yet, despite the mobilizational efforts sought by the organization to promote this solution, the percentage of those supporting a two-state settlement between Palestinians and Israelis today is the lowest in more than two decades and does not constitute a majority on either side. On the other hand, although there is not a single Palestinian political party that embraces and promotes the

⁶ <http://www.shirhever.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/InternationalAidToPalestiniansFeedsTheIsraeliEconomy.pdf>

⁷ See PSR poll of September 2015: <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/621>. The most recent PSR poll, conducted in June 2019 shows that 48% of the Palestinians continue to view the PA as a burden, but support for its dissolution has dropped to 38%: <http://pcpsr.org/en/node/761>

option of a one-state solution, and despite Palestinian public perception of weakness and the inability of their leadership to compel the Israelis to accept a one-state solution, [31 %](#)⁸ of the Palestinians support the abandonment of the two-state solution and the embrace a one-state solution. Indeed, the support for a one-state solution rises to 39% among those who reach the conclusion that the two-state solution is no longer feasible.⁹

The tools for achieving this strategy should be based on broad, peaceful, popular resistance. Most Palestinians support this form of resistance ([63%](#))¹⁰, but when asked why citizens are scarcely involved in the popular resistance, the largest percentage ([39%](#))¹¹ say that it is due to the lack of public confidence in the leadership. As mentioned earlier, public confidence can only be restored by a bold decision, such as the decision to dissolve the PA. This will make the public an active participant in the non-violent resistance. We already have two clear examples of this. First, in the summer of 2017, Palestinians protested against the Israeli attempt to install electronic gates at the entrances to Al Aqsa Mosque in the Old City thereby providing an example of a broad and successful popular resistance in a place that lacked PA presence.

The second example is the massive public participation in the Great March of Return that has been ongoing since March 2018 on the Gaza Strip borders with Israel. Here too there is no PA presence. Imagine similar marches in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Or imagine the participation of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, from the 1948 areas, who are thirsty for an inclusive leadership for all Palestinians. These Palestinian citizens of Israel still suffer from the perception of abandonment resulting from the signing of the Oslo agreement by the PLO. This is particularly relevant today as the perception of being an oppressed minority has intensified since the recent Israeli adoption of the Nation State law. A great march in all parts of historic Palestine, exposing Israel's discriminatory policies and demanding the restoration of the United Nations General Assembly resolution 3379 of 1975, which equated Zionism with racism, would also provide a momentum to the BDS movement (the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement targeting Israel). It will be difficult for those governments that seek to crack down on the movement to continue to do so for the fear of being accused of defending a one-state reality characterized by open discrimination, one that has been exposed to all.

Israel, as a small state, has a limited ability to confront and withstand the emerging new situation characterized by mass popular demonstrations, accusations of fostering a racist one-state reality, and calls for its boycott. This will force it to respond to the demands of the Palestinians in a record time, in order to avoid immediate repercussions on its image and on its economy, a modern and fast-growing economy that is unable to withstand major tremors and disruptions. This development would also have immediate repercussions on its tourism sector, which breaks consecutive records, most recently in 2018, where the number of tourists reached more than [4 million](#) with revenues reaching 24 billion NIS (\$6.3 billion)¹².

Position of the Israelis

Although [54%](#)¹³ of Israeli Jews describe the situation in Israel as good or very good, 30% as average, and only 16% as bad or very bad, more than [20%](#)¹⁴ of them said in 2018 that they support the one-state option in which the rights of all citizens are equal. The claim that it is impossible for Israeli Jews to accept a one-state option cannot be credibly tested without putting Israel in a position where it is obliged, according to the aforementioned strategy, to choose between the two-state solution and the one-state solution. In addition, there are about two million Palestinians who are Israeli citizens or residents, forming 20% of the total population of Israel and more than [two-thirds](#)¹⁵ of them support the one-state solution. The above-mentioned figures are positive indicators of the willingness of some Israelis to accept the Palestinian demands, if presented within the aforementioned

⁸http://www.pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/Table%20of%20Findings_English%20Joint%20Poll%203%20June%202017_1.pdf

⁹ <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/731>

¹⁰ <http://pcpsr.org/en/node/725>

¹¹ <http://pcpsr.org/en/node/725>

¹² <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-saw-record-breaking-4-million-tourists-in-2018-says-tourism-ministry/>

¹³ <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/731>

¹⁴ <http://pcpsr.org/en/node/725>

¹⁵ http://www.pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/Table%20of%20Findings_English%20Joint%20Poll%203%20June%202017_1.pdf

strategy. It should be pointed out that these Israelis are probably confident that a one democratic state will guarantee their rights in the future regardless of their numbers. The attempts by some to intimidate them by raising the demographic factor are obviously ineffective. It should also be pointed out that there are some Israeli Jews who actually vote for Arab parties and that more than [30%](#)¹⁶ of the Palestinian citizens of Israel have in fact voted in April 2019 for Jewish parties.

Moreover, there are several initiatives that have been put forward by Israelis that fit within the framework of the one-state solution, such as the confederal initiatives: “[Two States-One Homeland](#)” and the “[Confederation](#)” initiative. However, these are initiatives that do not live up to the rights and aspirations of all the Palestinians, but they are certainly better than the *status quo* and the two-state solution at its best. In addition, about a year ago, a group of Palestinian citizens of Israel, jointly with Israeli Jews, established an initiative called “[One Democratic State Campaign](#)” that calls for establishing “One Democratic State in historic Palestine that guarantees equality between all its citizens, the right of return, and the dismantling of the existing Zionist colonial regime.” This group aims to hold a conference to announce itself and its political agenda this year.

The position of the international community

As mentioned earlier, it is time to rely on ourselves, to impose what we want. Other factors such as the Arab and Islamic role, and that of the international community, provide an enabling environment and nothing more. The national community, led by the European Union, the biggest supporter of the two-state solution, has, especially in the last ten years, become interested in managing the conflict and prolonging the *status quo* for as long as possible. This can be seen in the fact that it has refrained from putting any pressure on Israel. At the same time, it has provided support for the authoritarian PA; all at the expense of the suffering of the Palestinian people. Yet, in its speech in front of the European Parliament on 16 April 2019, Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the primary supporter of the two-state solution, said: “In fact, the two-state solution is not only fading, it is actually being dismantled piece by piece.”

Many European politicians and diplomats recognize the demise of the two-state solution. But they find it hard to say so publicly given that fact that the Palestinian side continues to hold on to it and because of their multi-billion dollar investment in this solution from the pockets of European taxpayers. Therefore, they prefer that the declaration of its demise comes directly from the parties concerned. The Trump Administration, the main sponsor of the peace process, has at the first joint press conference between the US president and Netanyahu at the White House, indicated that it would support any solution that the two sides prefer, whether the two-state solution or the one-state solution. This means that the international community, which has done nothing to save the two-state solution, might not oppose a one-state solution. Indeed, the dissolution of the PA and the exposure of the one-state reality as nothing short of a system of discrimination, might put them in an unescapable position in which they have no choice but to support a democratic state that is equal to all its citizens.

¹⁶ [Arab town elections results: 29.7% of votes for Zionist parties](#)

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