



## A Response to Peter Beinart

The liberal Jewish world has been shaken since the publication of Peter Beinart's July 7 essay "[Yavne: A Jewish Case for Equality in Israel-Palestine](#)" in which he argues that both Zionism and the political/moral imperative of equality can now be best (only?) served by the establishment of one binational state encompassing all of historic Palestine "from the River to the Sea." The furor was predictable and undoubtedly intended, not only because Beinart is probably the single best-known exponent of what some call "Liberal Zionism," but also because the sterility of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has led to despair and hopelessness on the moderate Left, which has adhered to the two-state solution with increasing desperation, seeing (and, for the most part, seeking) no alternative.

Beinart is by no means happy at abandoning the venerable 2SS, but he rightly points out that it is unattainable in the form envisioned by most of the world outside the Jewish and evangelical rightwing, i.e., an Israeli and a (arguably demilitarized) Palestinian state living in peace, with a border more or less at the June 4, 1967 Green Line, and a shared Jerusalem. With roughly 650,000 settlers already living east the largely erased Green Line, he maintains that it is nearly impossible to imagine that a path could be found to the 2SS, even if patchwork swaps allow most settlements to be incorporated in Israel.

I added "nearly" because I recently listened to a [lecture by Shaul Arieli](#), perhaps the most technically knowledgeable and eloquent exponent of two-states, who explained convincingly how it could be done. However, it was convincing only in its own terms because he did not at all address the political factor; namely, that the Israeli Right is ascendant with little indication that a majority of Israelis will in the imaginable future vote in a government that would implement the "classic" 2SS. When I asked Arieli after the lecture about the political factor, his answer stressed hope and optimism, i.e., he had no political path that would lead to two states, even though technically it could be attained.

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Thus, I see no way not to subscribe to Beinart's description of a settlement enterprise too far advanced to be able to seriously imagine reversing it in order to realize the classic 2SS. Ain't gonna happen.

However, accepting Beinart's diagnosis by no means implies accepting his prognosis. Seemingly on automatic pilot, he moves on to the popular view that there exists a one-state/two-state dichotomy, and never the twain shall meet. Although he writes "It's time to explore other ways to achieve that goal—from confederation to a democratic binational state," he does so only cursorily, leaving the strong impression that Zionism can and must be built within the confines of a binational state, which many critics regard as a contradiction in terms.

That is where I part company with him. There's no need to dismantle the existing state of Israel to preserve both democracy and a Jewish state. While I have my own strong critiques of how Israel is being governed today, it has created highly functional, though inevitably flawed state that is indeed a "Jewish national home," and absolutely serves as a refuge for those (now increasingly few) Jews in distress and in need of refuge. The question is how those accomplishments can be maintained while finding a solution to Israel's greatest problem: its continuing inability to come to terms with the Palestinian nation living next to and within it, which it controls with a heavy and seemingly unrelenting hand.

The fact is, in the modern world, there are shifting and increasingly varied models of sovereignty being asserted, with some even being implemented. The largest and most important is, of course, the European Union, now much maligned, but which has nevertheless unquestionably succeeded in its original and most important task; preventing a major European war, specifically between longtime enemies France and Germany. Not at all coincidentally, creating a lasting structure of peace would be the single most important task of any Israeli-Palestinian "arrangement." All else is commentary.

Of course there are innumerable differences between France and Germany (and Europe) in the early 1950s, and Israel and Palestine (and the Middle East) in the 21st century, beginning with the fact that the Europeans (mostly) had historically defined and separate homelands (we'll leave Alsace and Lorraine out of it). Nevertheless, in eventual tandem with most of the rest of Europe, they incrementally built a unique supra-national structure within which nationhood and national sovereignty were largely maintained. Obviously the Brexiteers took issue with that and proved that one person's generous offer is another's humiliating deception (as we had already seen at Camp David in 2000). Nevertheless, there remains a huge middle ground between two

states and one, and continuum that is the only fruitful space that seems available to explore in hopes of reaching genuine Israeli-Palestinian peace.

I should make clear at this point that I come out of what I would term the Jewish Left. Thirty years ago I set up the first Washington, D.C. office of Americans for Peace Now; I am currently President of Partners for Progressive Israel, which is loosely affiliated with Meretz. When I lived in Israel from 1996 to 2002, I coordinated Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Jordanian joint research projects at the Truman Institute for Peace of the Hebrew University. Thus, I have no doubt Israeli-Palestinian peace is possible, and have long seen the settlement movement as ideologically pernicious and dangerous to the State of Israel because settlements had the potential to block a two-state solution, which I still see as the best arrangement for settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

However, the settlement movement has now accomplished what I and many others feared. The window has closed and the train has left the station. While, as Arieli and others have shown, there exists a theoretical path to the classic 2SS as we have understood it; in practice it is gone, almost certainly for good. We on the Left must face that fact, and deal with the new possibilities, as well as the limitations, of this reality.

For me, these new possibilities are best embodied in two organizations I became aware of in 2018, namely [Roots/Shorashim/Judur](#), composed mainly of settlers in the Gush Etzion region of the West Bank and of Palestinians who work with them, and [One Land for All/Eretz l'Kulam](#) (which Beinart mentions in passing), until recently known as "Two States, One Homeland." The former comes out of the religious and settler Right; the latter from the secular Left. They work together and I support both (though I am not affiliated with either nor is Partners for Progressive Israel). There are indeed many other models, old and new, but in creating a vision for the future it seems to me essential to retain the national identities that both nations have labored to express in modern terms. It is not a post-nationalist world, and certainly not for Israelis and Palestinians. [Confederation is a form of two states](#), not one, but transcends the unnecessary dichotomy.

One Land for All is more overtly political, championing a confederation of an Israeli and a Palestinian state, with citizens from either free to live where they choose in the whole Land (presumably subject to reasonable local regulation) and, importantly, a "right of return" for both peoples (presumably qualified and regulated). Roots, by contrast, emphasizes longterm grassroots work among Israelis and Palestinians. Both are necessary, fruitful, and, frankly, somewhat

utopian, as must any plan for Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation be (excepting the cynical variety, such as Trump-Kushner).

The potential Left-Right axis of support for confederation is potentially one of the most interesting and important phenomena in the constellation of Israeli politics. Admittedly, neither organization is currently at all representative of nor is trusted by the “members” nor the leadership of their respective camps. Both are described as fringe – and worse. I submit, however, if we let go, even conceptually, of the conventional sovereign structures (namely the one-state/two state dichotomy), more opportunities will appear, and will gather political support. This is a longterm project.

In more concrete terms, the settlements are there to stay. If they, together with their adjoining space for “natural growth,” are annexed to Israel (as in Trump-Kushner), they effectively and deliberately prevent any contiguous or viable Palestinian polity from forming. However, if they are simply Jewish islands in a Palestinian sea, both subject to Palestinian law and protected by a confederation agreement, they can become positive additions to Palestine and not inimical to its sovereignty.

The most important message of Beinart’s article is that the classic two-state phase of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is now closed. Obviously, people and organizations are welcome to hang on to their hopes for the 2SS as long as they want, but they are missing the boat if they don’t engage in exploration and consultation about other possibilities and configurations.

Beinart’s greatest weakness, in my view, is in implicitly downplaying the importance of national sovereignty which, in the 21st century, implies limitations. True, binational states exist and have been functional. But confederations, where two states join, voluntarily yet contractually, in a union for specified purposes, maintaining their own languages, traditions, religions, and territory, are much more likely to endure.

Some *Haaretz* [columnists](#) have [poked fun](#) at Beinart as only being relevant to American academic discussions; pointing out, for example, that one state has no visible Israeli support, and that even Ayman Odeh and his supporters on the Joint List are absolutely committed to two states. However, there is little doubt that we are currently at an inflection point – and what we hold on to now will not necessarily be relevant in 5 or 10 years, let alone in a generation or two, which is how we need to be thinking. Those of us who lived through Oslo thought we were months or just a year or two from settlement. We have to get over that mindset; peace is not around the corner, unless a *deus ex machina* appears and surprises us all. But that’s not something to count on, even in the Holy Land.

The obvious objection to any sort of confederation plan is that it requires trust – lots of it; an ingredient that has been lacking in the Middle East since ‘time immemorial’, but in complete deficit since the Oslo balloon was punctured in 2000, and nothing since then has succeeded in restoring it. Oslo itself failed largely because of the trust issue, and certainly no new consensual arrangement is possible without it. The Trump-Kushner plan, of course, dispenses with it entirely – Palestinians had no input and reject it out of hand – which is why it could only “succeed” as a slightly rearranged occupation.

This is where the grassroots work of Roots and other civil society organizations is essential. As exponents of a conviction that the land belongs to both peoples, they are starting to break down – admittedly in a limited way – the mountains of distrust that separate the sides. There is no need to rehearse the innumerable actual events – let alone mis- and disinformation – that have cemented this distrust into place. In order to dislodge it there must be a shared concept of a solution that provides hope and a space for those who believe in consensual solutions to gather in. Confederation provides that.

Confederation is probably still too inchoate an idea to be called a “solution,” such as the 1SS or 2SS, may they rest in peace. Perhaps there won’t be a solution at all and the occupation will continue indefinitely. However, if there is an end to it, my bet is on some sort of confederation, preceded by decades, perhaps even a couple of generations, of painful trust-building, that will, *b’ezrat Hashem*, inshallah, bring us to a configuration that allows both sides to express their national feelings, but enables cooperation as well.

Meanwhile, there is no question that Palestinians have the short end of the stick in almost every way. The occupation persists, Israel controls almost everything, and settlement-building continues. The Israeli standard of living is immensely higher than that of Palestinians. For many Israelis there is no particular downside to the current situation, even if it includes “mowing the grass” every few years. Thus it’s to be expected that Beinart’s proposal is not being greeted with joy and excitement by Palestinians, nor will confederation be. There is a long slog ahead with a far-from-certain ending – and the Palestinians have every reason to be skeptical.

However, something remarkable seems to have happened in the last few weeks. There was a near-universal expectation that “annexation” of some form would take place on July 1 or immediately after. It still may, but it hasn’t yet. An ad hoc conglomeration including, among others, American Jews, members of the US Congress, European states and organizations, and, perhaps most important, Arab states including Jordan, Egypt, and the UAE, with whom Israel has developed increasingly warm,

if largely invisible, economic and political ties, sprang up in the weeks preceding July 1. Some Jewish Israelis participated, but it never became a mass movement (of course, many Israelis have been consumed by the concurrent return of the coronavirus). Nevertheless, the clear and present danger of annexation may have been avoided – and the power of joint action has been demonstrated. Perhaps the Palestinians are not as abandoned as it has seemed over the last few years? Now, the return of the coronavirus seems to have sparked a popular rebellion in the streets. Has Netanyahu's time finally come?

Why should Israelis ever agree to turning over the power they currently wield? I'm not going to even pretend to answer that one. No one can predict the history of the future. But occupation corrodes, as the Israeli Left has been saying for over half a century. New generations of Palestinians, as well as the actors above and their successors, will not acquiesce forever to being ruled a subjects. Since assimilation into the conquerors is unlikely ever to be an option, separation must be the goal. But complete separation will likely be impossible. Hence, confederation.

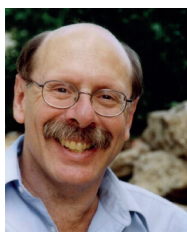
What is needed is a multi-headed movement that aims at building trust, not only between Israelis and Palestinians, but within each society as well. Thus, it is all-important that exponents of confederation come from the Israeli "tribes" that have been most at odds; i.e., secular leftists and religious settlers. A more general recognition that their longterm aims are not necessarily incompatible could lead to an upheaval in Israeli politics, a development that would be most welcome at this point.

Peter Beinart has performed a signal service by profitably utilizing his high profile to reinvigorate the public debate – and especially that within the liberal Jewish community in the US, Israel, and elsewhere – on the festering Israeli-Palestine conflict. Scholars and others are [already exploring](#) the new reality. Confederation, with its attendant flexibility and possibilities, is certain to be a major part of the coming debate. ■



Paul Scham

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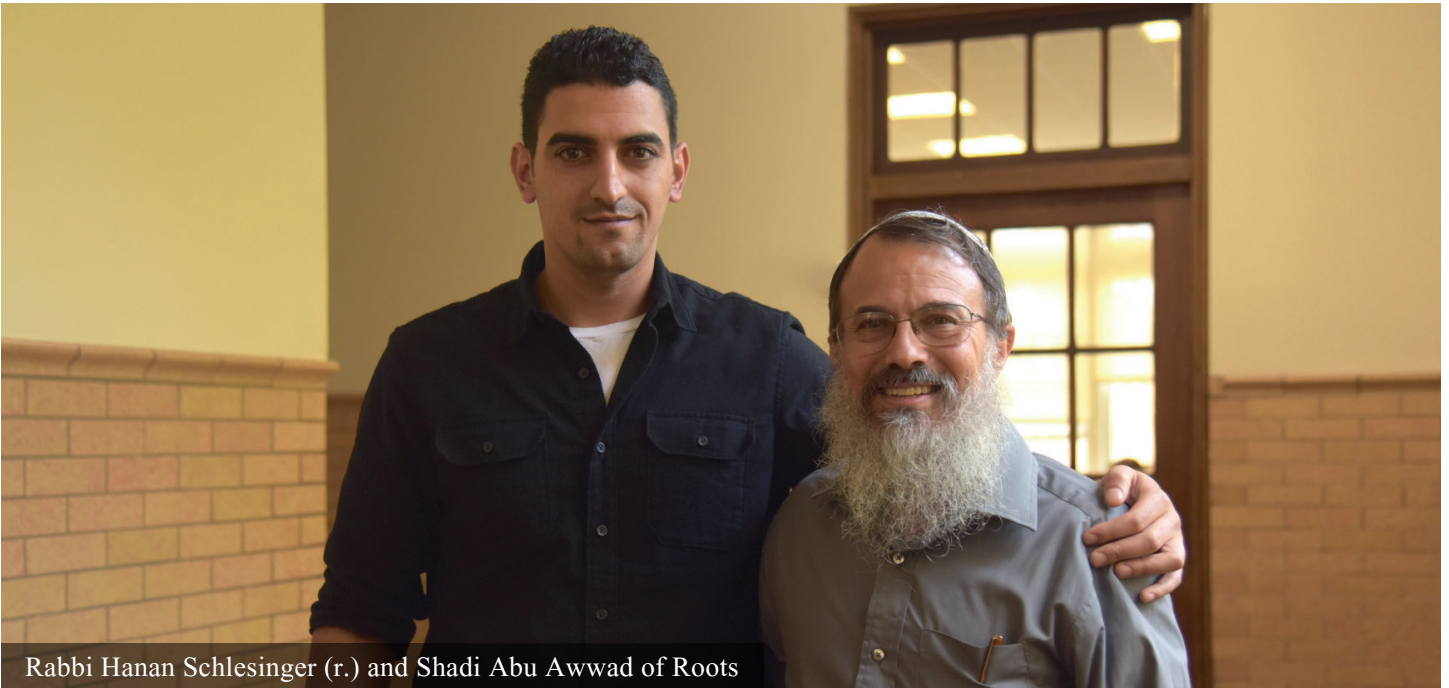
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# The Metamorphosis of an Orthodox Settler:

## How Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger Learned to Love His Palestinian Neighbors

Susan Hoechstetter interviews the cofounder of Roots



Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger (r.) and Shadi Abu Awwad of Roots

*In this second interview with Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger, he talks about his transformation from an American-born Orthodox rabbi and West Bank settler who once didn't see Palestinians as real human beings, to an activist for peace with valued Palestinian partners. Rabbi Schlesinger is a cofounder of Roots-Shorashim-Judur, an organization that brings together Palestinians and Israeli settlers, Muslims, Christians, and Jews, to build bridges through listening to one another and eventually recognizing the other's identity and humanity. He believes that Israelis and Palestinians will not be ready for peace until they get to know each other better, and that religious Jews and Muslims have to be part of that process.*

**Susan Hoechstetter:** Hanan, how did you, an Orthodox rabbi, a West Bank settler, come to work with Palestinians and Israelis for peace?

**Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger:** In January 2014, I began to go through a transformation and become a different person than before. Here's my story: In 2013, I returned to Israel after eight years in Dallas, Texas, as a rabbinic emissary from Israel to the Dallas Jewish community. I wanted to create a framework for interfaith dialogue here in Judea and Samaria [aka, the West Bank], where I live. But I knew that the American framework for interfaith dialogue wouldn't work in Israel. In America, there's a common matrix of civil society – language, culture, a public square. But here, we don't have that square or commonality between Jews, Christians, and Muslims that would allow for dialogue to take place where you already know the person across from you as a human being.

So I decided that, first, we just have to meet each other as human beings before getting to religion. And I realized how much of a bubble I lived in. I didn't know my Palestinian neighbors. In Alon Shvut [a settlement in the Gush Etzion area], where I live, we are literally within a five-minute walk of each other. But no one knows the other. No one! Our villages, towns, religions, cultures, languages, schools, stores, and calendars are different. We live in completely separate worlds.

I wanted to meet my neighbors. A Protestant pastor from Reston, Virginia, named John Moyle (Really!) has a Christian ministry and comes to the Holy Land twice a year to meet with Israelis and Palestinians, and then he introduces them to each other. In January 2014, we got to know each other and he told me about an upcoming, nearby meeting of Palestinians and Jews. A week later, I went to the front door to leave for the meeting and my wife asked me where I was going. I

said I was going to meet Palestinians. She was terrified; she screamed and begged me not to go. I, too, was frightened, but said that I had to go. I walked to the meeting place. That's how close we live to each other. I walked through the vineyards, orchards, empty land, and got to the place. And from the minute I entered the open field where we met – I'm not exaggerating – my life changed.

I saw a miracle. I saw 15 Israelis and 15 Palestinians talking to each other, informally. I didn't recognize anyone. I saw a Palestinian woman who wasn't talking to anyone. Her whole body was covered, except for her face, because she was an observant Muslim. I walked up to her and said hello in English. She said hello back, and we talked for about a minute. "I can't believe that I'm talking to you," I said. And she said, "I can't believe that I'm talking to you because we don't talk to settlers."

Just about all of the Jews there were settlers in the West Bank. We were local people meeting local people. The woman's son walked over to us. She told me that his name was Yazan. We shook hands. He said he was 17 years old. He was wearing a windbreaker with the words in English, "Seeds of Peace."

I thought to myself: "This can't be. These are Palestinians. The Palestinians don't have anything to do with peace; they are terrorists." I was pretty sure he had found the jacket on the floor and didn't know what the words meant. I asked him what Seeds of Peace was, and he told me that it's a summer camp in the U.S. that takes Palestinian and Israeli kids out of the conflict zone for recreation and reconciliation. He had just gotten back from the camp and had had a great time. He'd met Israeli kids and was now friends with them on Facebook. He said that this summer was so important to him, that he was transformed, and as a result, he would spend some of his life building bridges to peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

As I was listening to him, I had no idea if I could believe what he was saying. I was so confused and unsettled. And then his father, Jamal, walked over. We shook hands. He took out his phone to show me on Google Maps where he lives in [nearby] Beit Umar. I was staring at his phone, thinking: "Palestinian, smartphone. How could that be?" It sounds so stupid when I tell you this, but I just couldn't believe that these people were human beings.

And he told me that a friend once asked him to come along to a dialogue in Jericho between Muslims and Jews. The guy kept bugging Jamal and he finally went. He said that the Jews and the Palestinians sat in a big circle, but Jamal did not participate because he was against it. He sat in the corner and just listened.

At one point a Jewish guy got up and looked at him. Jamal said: "He came right up to me and stuck out his hand and I had to shake his hand. And when the guy left, I ran to the bathroom to wash off my hands from the filth of touching an Israeli, and I thought I'm never coming back to this place."

But, somehow, he came back. And Jamal took out his smartphone again and showed me a picture of the entrance to his house, and a plaque that says "Jamal's Family, House of Peace." And he said: "In Jericho, I met a human being and a partner, and it changed my life. And I brought my wife with me and changed her life, and I brought my children and we send our kids to Seeds of Peace."

Jamal looked at me and said: "Hanan, you know that when the children in Beit Umar see someone who looks like you, they start to cry." I asked him why, and he did not understand why I didn't understand. He said that it's the kippah, it's the beard. "Everyone who looks like you has a gun, and they kill people in Beit Umar." After what seemed to me like a very long silence, I said to Jamal that we carry guns because we are afraid of *them*. And he looked at me as if I'd said the stupidest thing. He got angry and said, "No, you're not afraid of us, because we are afraid of you."

I was so confused; I was trying to figure out what was happening to me. The conveners for the event got us in a circle. And one of the conveners, Ali Abu Awwad, the owner of the land we were meeting on, got up and spoke, in very good Hebrew. "I am Ali. I'm a Palestinian from a refugee family. We were made refugees in 1948. In 1967, Israeli forces came and conquered us and now we live under Israeli military occupation." I had no idea what he was talking about. What was occupation? I read in the newspaper that the UN criticized Israeli occupation, but I had no idea that it was something real. I walked in the fields of Judea every day and didn't see occupation. I saw the return of the Jewish people to our land after 2,000 years of exile.

And Ali, with great pathos, talked about his life and about the soldiers who came and beat up his mother in front of his eyes at 3 o'clock in the morning. And he talked about being dragged to jail and being sentenced to ten years and not being told what the charges were. He told the story without rancor. And everything he said was a direct attack on my identity. But he wasn't giving a political discourse, he was just telling the events of his life. I went home completely confused and depressed because they couldn't be lying. They were just telling their life stories. And if that's true, then I lived in a different world than what I thought I lived in. I had no choice but to go back and meet Ali again, and again, and again.

We spent hundreds of hours together, together with a small but growing group of local Israelis and Palestinians. Most of the time, we just listened. And we heard Ali tell his stories again and again. Then we started telling our stories of Jewish history, including exile and coming home after 2,000 years. We realized that we created space for sharing identity, and eventually more people gathered around us. Somehow the atmosphere was not about arguing; it was about listening and telling stories, and we saw that this was important – even transformative. From this humble beginning, Roots sprouted. And the organization continues to this day.



Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger (r.) and Shadi Abu Awwad of Roots

**SH:** What is Roots doing now and is it successful?

**RHS:** There is very little that I can say to convince my Israeli neighbors to think differently about Palestinians. And there's very little my Palestinian partners can say to their Palestinian neighbors to convince them to think differently about Jews. The one thing we can do is get people to meet the other side. It doesn't always work, but in more cases than not we have found that it creates a puncture in the hard shell of our narrative, and then there's another meeting, and people begin to get confused, and that's good, because they see that what they had thought is not the whole truth.

We built this organization on Ali's family land. It became Mercaz Karama, the Dignity Center. Mercaz in Hebrew is "center" and Karama in Arabic is "dignity." It's the only Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Israeli, Palestinian community center in the West Bank where two sides can meet with dignity and equality. Every day there's something happening there. It's not within the boundaries of any Palestinian or Israeli town, so it's accessible to both Israelis and Palestinians.

Clearly, on the macro level, we've had zero success. But on the micro level, I have evidence of hundreds of transformations.

The first, the poster boy, is me. We have at least 100 people, on each side, with Roots who at some level have gone through that transformation, and many are on their way to it.

What we are really building is a new identity, an identity that says that this land is Palestine and this land is Israel at the same time. Ali always says that we have to fit two truths into one heart. It's all Palestine and it's all Israel from the river to the sea. And you have to be able to live with two truths and two narratives that contradict each other, but are both true.

[Until now] it's been mainly secular Jews and Muslims doing peace work, and that's not bad, but it hasn't exposed the Israelis and Palestinians in these dialogues to the deep historical, religious narrative of the other side. When secular Muslims talk to secular Jews, they don't tell them the things that they, the secular Muslims, don't believe in, so they don't bring to the fore the traditional Muslim narrative that says, for example, that the Muslims to the west of the Jordan River have an identity as the keepers, the guardians of the holy places of Al-Aqsa [Mosque in Jerusalem]. But it's part of the mainstream traditional Palestinian Muslim identity.

And on the Jewish side, it's the same. My close friend, Ali, before he met me and my partners just five years ago, had been involved in peace work for 15 years with secular Jews. He said that until he met me, he had never heard about the 3,000 year-old connection of the Jewish people to this land. He said that secular Jews would speak about Zionism that began about 100 years ago; that's it. Ali said they told him we are here because of anti-Semitism, because of the Holocaust. They never told him about our connection to the land. Because they, secular Jews, don't have that connection like religious Jews do. The way that life is polarized in Israel, it's only for the right wing, only for religious people to talk about [that period of] history.

What it means is that peace, Oslo for example, was with secular Jews and Muslims, and the two sides didn't bring their peoples' deep historical identities into the equation. I think that's one of the reasons it failed.

**SH:** How successful are you at reaching out to religious people on both sides?

**RHS:** Like I said earlier, we've had zero success on the macro level, obviously. And the micro success is with one person at a time. It's a drop in the bucket. But a lot of people know about us. I just saw Roots mentioned in the mainstream settlers' newspaper, *Makor Rishon*, and it wasn't negatively. We get some pushback from our neighbors, but when our neighbors meet others, there's transformation.



So we are working with religious people on both sides and are bringing religion to the fore of the dialogue. We make sure that all our activities are friendly to people who are observant. Prayer is part of our activities. Observing holidays and Sabbath is part of our activities. And we put on the table core things, such as the bad things the Quran says about Jews and the bad things the Tanach says about non-Jews. We talk about how to overcome them, how to shape the narrative so that it's conducive to peace. Religion is part of the problem, so it has to be part of the solution. Our constituents on both sides are usually considered the enemies to peace.

The challenge is to reach people with the historical, parochial narrative to see that there's another truth. It's exciting work.

**SH:** What do you think American Jews should do?

**RHS:** I believe that Israelis and Palestinians are *not* ready for peace. I'm pretty certain of that. Before we sign the agreements, we have to prepare the people. I'm assuming at this point that people-to-people work is more important than negotiations and politics.

I've been told that one of the major factors that helped bring the conflict in Northern Ireland to a better place was the international peace movement's financial support. The work in Northern Ireland was a lot about religion, a lot about community building, faith dialogue, intercultural dialogue. I think we have to scale up that work here, and that requires money. So I want to see America, American Jews, committed to that. That means the American Congress, synagogues, and individuals giving money for peace.

The second point is one of narrative. I would like to see American Jews strongly supporting Israel without that meaning being against Palestine. I want to see them pro-Israel and pro-Palestine at the same time. There is a slogan: pro-Israel, pro-Palestine, pro-solution. I think many American Jews, well-meaning people, don't realize that being pro-Israel the way it's usually construed means being anti-Palestine. And being anti-Palestine means being pro-conflict. Because if you are against one side, you're encouraging conflict.

I'd like to see American synagogue tours come to Israel and to Palestine as well. I'd like to see American church groups also come to Palestine and Israel. I'd like Americans to see both sides. I'd like Americans to learn Hebrew and Arabic. And, of course, I'd like Americans to join the board of Friends of Roots and support us.

**SH:** Would you summarize your ideology.

**RHS:** I coined the term "Hubris of Exclusivity," which I think is a psychological illness that Palestinians and Israelis suffer from. It means that the individual can see true legitimacy only on their side. It means that each side thinks that the land is only mine, that we are right and they are wrong, that we are a nation and they aren't. Palestinians tend to say that the Jews are a religion and not a people who have a right to this land. And Israelis tend to say that Palestinians don't exist as a nation. There's never been a Palestinian state. There are only Arabs. They can go back to Jordan. Both say the other doesn't belong here and is nothing more than a fabricated nation. In Roots, we say that each side has the right to define who they are. And my job is to listen. That's against the prevailing narrative according to which everyone thinks 'I will tell you who you are.'

The Jews in Roots have learned and accepted that the other side has a very strong Palestinian national identity with longtime ties to the land. And the Palestinians in Roots have learned that while the Jews are a religion, we are also a historical people who have been connected to this same land for about 3,000 years.

So the work we're doing in Roots is revolutionary. Both sides have come to appreciate that the other side has deep historical connection to this land and has the right to live within it with self-determination. We have gotten people to cross the red line in the sand which keeps us from recognizing each other's collective identity, and that has allowed us to approach each other as human beings.

Since January, 2014, I've done no other work but this.

**SH:** Thank you for your incredible work and your time. ■

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*Susan Hoechstetter lives in Washington, DC where she writes about advocacy, social justice, Israel, and other topics.*





# Partnership, Not Divorce: The Uplifting Vision of “A Land for All”

**KOLOT**  
*Voices of Hope*

By Meron Rapoport



**E**ight years ago, a group of Israelis and Palestinians met for the first time in a hotel in Beit Jala, a town in the West Bank between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. What brought us together was our common understanding that the peace process, based on the traditional two-state model, was in deep crisis. Today, with unilateral annexation approaching, this understanding is almost a cliché. Twenty-seven years after the first Oslo agreement was signed, it's evident that the peace process as we have known it is all but dead - so there is an urgent need to look for new ideas that will get us out of the deadlock.

When we met back then in Beit Jala, it was clear to us that the basic flaw in the old two-state paradigm was that it was based on separation: We will be here and they will be there, no matter who 'we' are and who 'they' are. The members of our group understood that this approach was flawed, as it ignores some fundamental features of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The first, and perhaps most important, feature it ignored is that both peoples, the Jewish-Israeli people as well as the Arab-Palestinian people, regard the entire territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea as their homeland. Palestinians see Jaffa and Haifa, within Israel's pre-1967 borders, as part of Palestine no less than Ramallah or Jenin in the West Bank. Jews,

meanwhile, view Hebron and Bethlehem in the West Bank as part of Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel, no less than Tel Aviv or Ramat Hasharon. The unity of the land has an emotional resonance that is stronger than any political borders that may or may not divide it.

The traditional two-state paradigm also ignores the fact that Jews and Arabs are already intertwined in this land. Some 20 percent of the inhabitants within Israel's pre-1967 borders are Palestinian, with most living in the Galilee, in the so-called Triangle region, and in the Negev. Out of Jerusalem's 900,000 residents, 40 percent are Palestinians and 60 percent are Jews. Even in the West Bank, 450,000 Israeli settlers live among 2.5 million Palestinians. It's not a happy coexistence in the West Bank and Jerusalem, where Jews enjoy privileges while Palestinians are denied political rights, and even in sovereign Israel, Palestinian citizens are discriminated against. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that Arab-Jewish demography in this land is mixed.

A third feature we mustn't ignore is the intertwined geographical and economic reality. In such a small geographical area, there is simply no way to combat climate change or deal with issues such as water resources, transportation, or tourism without a high level of cooperation between the two sides. Economy, trade, and human development are also deeply interdependent.

But above all these considerations, we thought back then, and we continue to believe now, is the fact that the old model’s focus on separation is undesired - it’s not a goal to strive for. If we, Palestinians and Israelis, wish to move not only towards a peace treaty, but also towards reconciliation, we need to adopt the language of partnership and cooperation, rather the language of separation and divorce. The language we use has a power of its own.

As an alternative to the old separation model, we are offering a model for a shared homeland based on five main principles:

1. Two independent and sovereign states, Israel and Palestine, based on the June 1967 borders. Two democratic states respecting human rights, based on the rule of law.
2. Freedom of movement between the two states and, gradually, freedom of residence as well. Palestinian citizens will be free to live in Israel and vice versa.
3. The two states will establish a shared suprastructure – it matters little if we call it a “union,” an “alliance,” or a “confederation” – under which a variety of shared institutions will operate, such as a high court for human rights, a security mechanism, economic cooperation, et al.
4. Jerusalem will be an open city, the capital of both states. It will be run by a special regime agreed upon by both states that will guarantee equal rights for all its residents and for the two communities living in the city – Jewish-Israeli and Arab-Palestinian.
5. Past injustices, from 1948 onward, will be mended without creating new ones.

Ever since we drafted these ideas, we have done a great deal of work in order to develop them further, and to spread them widely. We have written an 11-point document, met with tens of thousands of Israelis and Palestinians, organized workshops and conferences, written articles, made media appearances, created a [website](#) and a Facebook page, and met with diplomats and politicians. In recent months, we drafted a 15-page booklet, summarizing our thinking and proposals. It will soon be out in Hebrew, Arabic, and English.

In our eight years of activity, we have succeeded in bringing the idea of Palestinian-Israeli partnership into the political lexicon. We have been able to mobilize supporters with varying outlooks, in Israeli as well as Palestinian society, both within political circles and beyond. We are working to expand these circles by engaging as many groups and perspectives as we can, and we are confident we can enlist various political forces, Israeli and Palestinian, on behalf of this vision, based on the principles of equality and mutual respect.

The very creation of an Israeli-Palestinian movement such as A Land for All, where Palestinians and Israelis work together under a shared vision to resolve the conflict, is an important stage toward building trust between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. The years our group has worked together are proof that Israelis and Palestinians, though they come from different backgrounds and different political approaches, can join together to formulate and promote a common vision with which they can identify.

Alongside A Land for All’s activity, we must create additional spaces for increasing trust between the two peoples. This could include direct and joint action for equality and against discrimination and the denial of rights; local initiatives in fields such as environment and culture; and joint actions to help narrow the economic gaps between the two societies and two peoples.

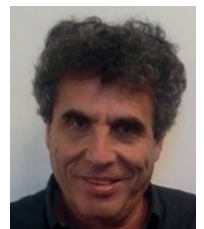
A Land for All’s political vision - an end to occupation and two independent states within a shared framework and one homeland - complements activities and initiatives that already exist on the ground, and can also encourage and support the formation of further initiatives in the future. These initiatives are important in their own right, but are also important steppingstones toward building a broad political peace movement, a movement which establishes the idea of sharing and partnership as the vision most appropriate for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The current annexation drive, even if not implemented in the end, highlights the need to treat the whole of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea as one territory. This, in turn, raises the principle of equal personal and national rights for all those living in this shared homeland as the real and perhaps sole remedy against the dangers of supremacy and apartheid. The paradigm we are promoting seems more relevant than ever.

This solution is not a fantasy. It is grounded in the historical, geographical, and emotional realities of the conflict and relies on historical precedents. It is also not a closed paradigm. Quite the contrary: Our approach invites discussion and comment, refinements and additions. But in order to work toward it, we also need to know how to dream, and especially how to turn a dream into reality. It is in our hands. ■

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*Journalist **Meron Rapoport** is a co-founder of Two States One Homeland, an Israeli-Palestinian movement now known as “A Land for All,” which calls for confederation between an independent Israeli state and an independent Palestinian state. He is also an editor and writer for Israel’s Local Call.*





# Plea to VP Biden to help STOP ANNEXATION NOW!

June 15, 2020

**Dear Vice President Biden,**

*Partners for Progressive Israel is an American Jewish organization that supports peace, justice, and equality for Israelis and Palestinians, including a Palestinian state. While we strongly support Israel as a Jewish state, we completely oppose annexation by Israel of any part of the West Bank. We should note that, as a nonpartisan 501(c)3 organization, we do not engage in electoral work nor support or oppose candidates.*

*We thank you for the strong and thoughtful statements you have made expressing your opposition to the unilateral annexation of West Bank territory currently contemplated by the Government of Israel. In particular we appreciate your having said, during a May 19th webinar with Jewish donors, “I’m going to reverse Trump administration steps which I think significantly undercut the prospects of peace.”*

*We are writing to ask you to make a public statement clarifying this expression of resolve to reverse steps of the Trump Administration that are harmful to peace. Specifically we request that you make it unequivocally clear that if elected President that you would withdraw any U.S. recognition of Israeli sovereignty over annexed areas that may have been accorded by the Trump Administration.*

*Understandably, you may believe that the statements you have already made are sufficient to have communicated that recognition will be withdrawn. However, having closely followed the debate in Israel, it is clear to us that no such message has gotten through.*

*As you know, the debate in Israel is not just between left and right, but also within the right. For a variety of reasons, many on the right question whether annexation serves Israel’s interests. In fact, support for annexation is a minority view among the Israeli public, contrary to many reports. We call your attention to a [report by the Geneva Initiative](#) detailing two recent polls, both showing that only a third of the Israeli public supports annexation. Israel’s warming relations with many Arab states will also be [thrust back into deep freeze](#) by annexation.*

*In arguing for annexation Prime Minister Netanyahu has repeatedly called it as “an historic opportunity,” a characterization also made by the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman. What they mean is the opportunity, presently at hand, to unilaterally annex West Bank territory and gain recognition from the United States, an opportunity that has never existed under any other Administration than that of President Trump.*

*A clear statement from you, that your Administration would withdraw any U.S. recognition provided by the Trump Administration will underscore that there is no “historic opportunity,” and that if you are elected, the era of U.S. recognition of annexation will have endured only for a matter of months. If this is made crystal clear, in view of the intense debate over annexation, even many of its most vigorous proponents of annexation will recognize that it would be imprudent to take such a major step in advance of the U.S. Presidential elections. And if annexation is delayed until after the elections, and if you are elected, it is extremely unlikely that annexation will go forward.*

*Thus, only you are in a position to bring this added clarity to the ongoing Israeli discourse, for the sake of both Israel and the United States. We hope you will seize this opportunity.*

*Thank you for your consideration of this request.*

Sincerely,

**Paul Scham**  
President

**Leonard Grob**  
Vice President



# Susya: Why We Must Stop Annexation

By Ayala Emmett with photos by Gili Getz

*The following includes extracts from the photo essay. To read the piece in full, [click here](#).*



The protests that flooded the US after the murder of George Floyd by the police have spread anguished cries for justice in this country and around the world. In the following account I describe my visit to Susya, a Palestinian village that is a cry for justice similar to what we have recently witnessed. The local demand for human rights in Susya or Minnesota is universal. Following the protests in America, it is easier to see that the village of Susya reveals ominous implications for Netanyahu's Trump-supported plot of annexation...

On Monday, January 16, 2017 I was on a bus heading to Susya, in the Southern Hebron Hills in area C. It was... on the second week of the Israel Symposium, a *Partners for Progressive Israel* annual trip. Harold Shapiro who had founded the symposium wanted to offer a meaningful experience for those committed to a just Israel. He designed a firsthand tour of meetings with Israelis and Palestinians, a witnessing of life on the ground.

We were on a tour organized by *Breaking the Silence* and Nadav Weiman, a soldier who served in the West Bank was our guide. Susya is among eight Palestinian villages in the South Hebron Hills that Israel refuses to recognize their right to their land. Like Susya, these villages have been under a perpetual order of expulsions... we drove... on unpaved bumpy roads and we arrived at a village in tatters, dotted with cave dwellings and patched up tents.

We were hosted by one of the cave dwelling families, chairs were brought out and coffee was offered, children ran around. Our host, one of Susya's leaders, talked about the village history of five evacuations that started in 1986...

In 2017, the people of Susya lived in caves and tents. They decided that buildings would be demolished so caves and tents would be

home. It was impossible for me to forget our Jewish history of expulsions and denial of rights, for centuries, in Europe and the Iberian Peninsula. It was hard to face that what we saw in Susya had been our doing. Remembering history meant watching the children of Susya who were born into a life of evacuations, constant threats, the absence of any of the most basic services; it all made suffering and violation of human rights so tangible, visible, and painful...

On that sunny day in January 2017, we had no idea that Netanyahu, with Trump's ill-advised support, would announce his plan to annex area C... This Netanyahu/Trump plot of annexation has disaster written all over it, particularly at this moment of American protests' cry for justice... For Susya and the rest of the area... formal annexation would destroy any shred of Palestinian hope for an end to their plight that we heard in Susya.

On Saturday, June 5 there was a protest in Tel Aviv to stop annexation that was inspired by the protests following the murder of George Floyd. The protest of annexation in Israel thus merged with the growing universal cries for justice... The Head of the Joint List Ayman Odeh drew an analogy, "...There is no such thing as democracy for Jews alone. Just like Martin Luther King and his supporters in the United States, we must realize that without justice there can be no peace. And there will be no social justice if we do not end the occupation."

The spread of the protests from Minneapolis to Tel Aviv could become a moment to turn the tide of endemic structural racism in the US and to put an end to a cruel 53 years of occupation/annexation... Susya, the story of Palestinian anguish reflects the universal call for justice in the US and in Israel... ■

[READ FULL ESSAY](#)

*Ayala Emmett is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Rochester. Born in Tel Aviv, she grew up in a religious socialist Zionist community in Israel, and served in the Israeli army.*



*Gili Getz is an Israeli-American photojournalist, actor, and activist. He served as a photographer for the Israeli military and the news editor of YnetUS. In recent years, his work has focused on Jewish-American politics and is published regularly in the Jewish and Israeli press.*





**Thank you for your support of our Stop Annexation Now Matching Grant Challenge in June. With your help, we not only reached our goal, but exceeded it! If you missed any of our activities that month, you can find a complete list [here](#). Below are some notable highlights:**

#### **PUBLISHED PIECES**

- Partners' President, Paul Scham, published a crucial article in *Ha'aretz*: [Joe Biden Can, and Should, Stop Israel's Annexation. This Is How.](#)
- Two members of the Partners' board, Ayala Emmett and Gili Getz, teamed up to publish a photo essay in the *Jewish Pluralist*: [Susya: Why We Must Stop Annexation.](#)

#### **LETTERS/STATEMENTS**

- Over 600 Jewish clergy joined major Jewish organizations and campus leaders and [signed a letter](#) opposing potential Israeli annexation.
- Ten American Jewish organizations in the Progressive Israel Network [penned the following letter](#) to Alternate Prime Minister Benny Gantz and Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi opposing annexation.

#### **CONVERSATIONS WITH ISRAEL AND PALESTINE WEBINARS**

- [The Perils of Annexation](#)
- [Annexation: Zionism & Democracy in a Post Two-State Solution World](#)
- [The Effects of Annexation on Communities and Families](#)
- [Dialogue Meeting: Stories of Bereavement and Hope](#)

#### **INSTAGRAM LIVE**

- [The Battle for Israeli Democracy on the Eve of the Annexation Decision](#)

July 1st has come and gone and the Israeli government has yet to move forward with annexation. But the threat is far from over. Partners will not stop or slow down. Thank you for your continued generosity.



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**For the past 30 years, Partners for Progressive Israel has led groups on progressive political trips to Israel.**

**This year—for the first time—we will be leading the trip virtually.**

At the birth of Israel, many Jews in America and elsewhere dreamed a dream: Israel would be a safe haven for Jews in a post-Holocaust world; Israel would be an authentic social democracy; Israel, as the prophets declared, would be a light unto the nations. Today, 72 years later, participants in this virtual excursion to Israel and Palestine will explore ways in which Israel has lived up to its prophetic calling and ways in which it has failed to do so.

***Visit*** the Knesset,  
***Go*** into the West Bank and Gaza,  
***Discuss*** Two-State? One State? Confederation?  
***Hang out*** with the NGO Leaders, the Voices of Hope,  
***Envision*** the future with Israeli and Palestinian youth,  
***Debate*** how to Preserve a Jewish and Democratic State,  
***Wrestle*** with issues of equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel.





The symposium will take place on Zoom over twelve, two-hour sessions (Session 1: 11am - 1pm ET; Session 2: 1:30pm - 3:30pm ET) on six Sundays:

August 16  
September 13

August 23  
October 18

August 30  
November 1

To allow for substantive discussion, the number of participants will be limited and each of the 12 sessions will be divided as follows:

- ❖ 45-minute presentations by the invited guest speakers
- ❖ 45-minute direct Q & A conversation with the speakers
- ❖ 30-minute discussion among Symposium participants

*Past symposiums have included meetings with Bassam Aramin, Hanan Ashrawi, Colette Avital, Sam Bahour, Gershon Baskin, Benny Begin, Yossi Beilin, Naomi Chazan, Yael Dayan, Akiva Eldar, Salam Fayyad, Zehava Galon, Galia Golan, Miki Gitzin, Nitzan Horowitz, Hagit Ofran, President Reuven Rivlin, Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh, Ahmad Tibi, and Tamar Zandberg as well as with NGOs such as Breaking the Silence, B'tselem, Eco-Peace, the Geneva Initiative, Gisha, Givat Haviva, Hagar Jewish/Arab School, Mitvim, Negev Coexistence Forum, Parents Circle/Families Forum, Peace Now, Physicians for Human Rights, Shatil, Standing Together, Together Beyond Words, Women of the Wall and Women Wage Peace.*

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We are also excited to announce our Friendship Circle sponsors:

*Claude Goldenberg  
Soryl Rosenberg  
Sam Fleischacker*

**Click here to view the program and sign up now - space is limited!**

## Supporting the Sumarin Family

*Partners recently joined a [large coalition](#) of groups supporting the Sumarin family, which is [fighting eviction from their longtime home in East Jerusalem](#). Their eviction was ordered by the Jerusalem District Court on the basis of the Absentee Property Law of 1950, which allows the state to confiscate properties owned by people living in “enemy countries.” The property was bought by the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael or KKL). Partners, through its participation in the World Zionist Organization, helps choose the governing Board of the KKL, so we, together with Ameinu, wrote a letter to the KKL Director, urgently requesting that he not enforce the judgment. The letter is here and we will report on further developments in this tragic yet potentially important case.*



July 5, 2020

Mr. Danny Atar – Chair

Keren Kayemet – Le-Israel - Jewish National Fund, International Board

*Dear Mr. Atar,*

We, the undersigned leaders of organizations comprising the core of the Hatikvah Slate of the U.S. delegation to the next World Zionist Congress, are reaching out to you about the urgent case of the Sumarin family in Silwan, East Jerusalem. The family is about to be evicted from its home, where it has lived for decades, as a result of the application of KKL-JNF. KKL-JNF should never have requested that the Custodian for Absentee Property declare the property as absentee property in 1989 and turn the property over to it, since family members were and are living in the house.

On behalf of our organizations, we urgently request that the KKL-JNF immediately stay its action, regardless of what Israeli courts have ruled and would permit the KKL-JNF to do. The KKL-JNF must absorb the loss, if there will be one. We are specifically not addressing whether or not those family members were the legal heirs or owners of the property, as it is irrelevant to the main issue. The KKL-JNF should never have cooperated with groups dedicated to “Judaizing” East Jerusalem, such as Elad, and bearing false witness in order to effectively steal a coveted home that was not empty, but lived in. If there is to be a financial loss incurred because of past unjust actions by the KKL-JNF, then so be it. The moral price of unjustly evicting a family from its home is much greater.

The regulations promulgated in 1968 for the use of the Absentee Property, as well as a basic sense of justice and decency, stipulate that the law not be used if family members were living in a home, whether or not they were the legal owners. As the [Klugman Report](#) delineates, the KKL-JNF was regularly violating these regulations by 1989 in order to acquire properties and turn them over to groups such as Elad. Two legal advisors to the Israeli government have criticized this behavior, and in 1995 the government agreed to cease these activities. However, your – that is, KKL-JNF’s – action against the Sumarin family had already begun. In 1989 KKL-JNF Director of Lands Abraham Hilleli

*Continued from previous page...*

wrote to the Custodian For Absentee Property asking that the Sumarin family home be declared as absentee property, and stating that they wished to then acquire the property. Questions as to whether or not Musa Sumarin sold the property to other family members, and the various rulings since 1989 in favor of or against the family would never have arisen had the KKL-JNF properly recognized that the Absentee Property Law should not be used when family members are living in the home. That is why these questions are not relevant to our request.

It should be noted that in 2015, the Supreme Court ruled (in the [Hussein verdict](#)), that in cases when the property owners are residents of the West Bank (who are considered “absentees” by law, yet live in territory under Israeli control), their assets may not be declared absentee property.

Early documents of Keren Kayemet Le-Israel prepared soon after the founding of the KKL-JNF lay out strict ethical guidelines for the legitimate goal of acquiring lands for the Jewish People in the Land of Israel. Not everything that is legal is just. It is time for the KKL-JNF to rededicate itself to these ideals, and to socially and environmentally conscious land custodianship, rather than exploiting the law to throw a non-Jewish family out of their home, and turn it over to a group dedicated to Judaizing a Palestinian neighborhood.

There is no “good” time to evict a family from its home and throw them into the street. But at this time, with the pandemic and economic crises threatening everyone, it amounts to a vicious and unnecessary blow to the Sumarin family. We need not remind you that at this moment the entire world’s eyes, except insofar as they may be distracted by their own crises, are fastened on Israel, due to the Government’s declared intention to annex large parts of the West Bank. This is a singularly inopportune moment to undertake an action that should have been abandoned in 1995 – and never even started in the first place.

As you know, we represent a considerable voting bloc in the WZO, and fully expect to add more signatures and organizations to this letter in the very near future. But at this moment, we urgently request that you desist from asking the court to enforce its judgment against the Sumarin family, and ask it to stay the case – and then expeditiously do what you should have done decades ago, i.e., dismiss the action. Doing so can only improve relations between Jewish and Palestinian residents in Jerusalem, and end a sorry and embarrassing episode in the long history of KKL-JNF.

Sincerely,

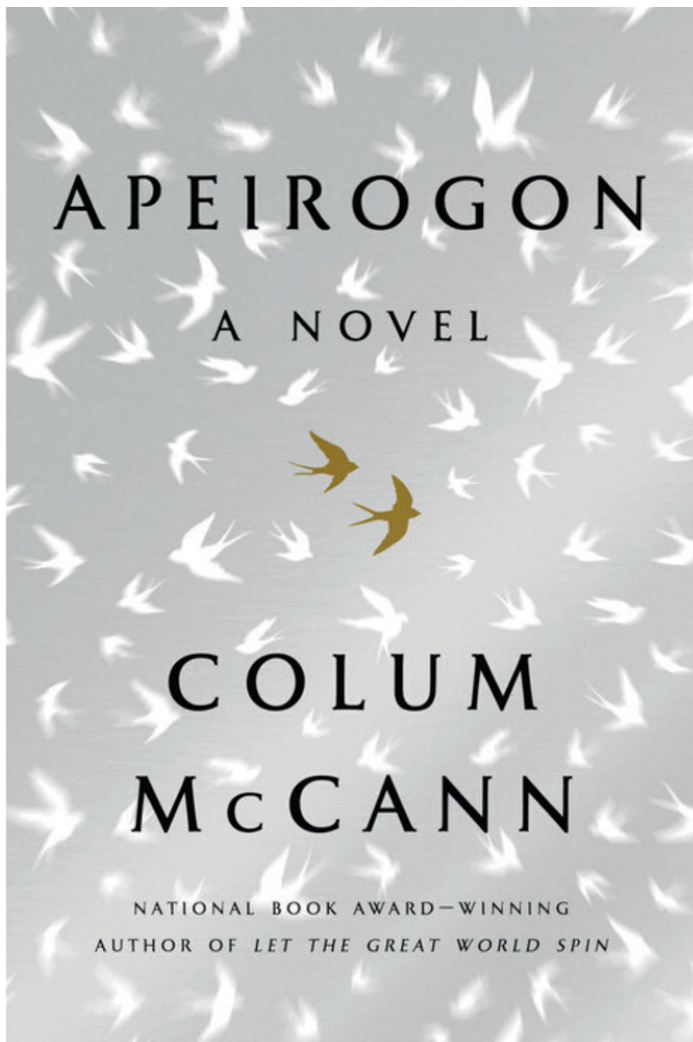
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# Apeirogon: A Novel (Colum McCann: Random House, 2020)

Reviewed by Peter Eisenstadt



*Reviewed below is Colum McCann's bestselling novel, Apeirogon, which was our gift to donors who contributed \$180 or more during our Stop Annexation Now Matching Grant Challenge.*

“Geography here is everything,” writes Colum McCann on the first page of *Apeirogon*. The phrase recurs throughout McCann’s remarkable, compulsively readable new novel. (BTW, an apeirogon is a polygon with an infinite number of countable sides.) The “here” is the Jerusalem and West Bank of the present and recent past, of the First and Second Intifadas, of Netanyahu’s unending reign of misrule, and of quagmires new and old. A sense of claustrophobia pervades McCann’s novel. It is a place of constricted and narrowed geographies and of intellectual claustrophobia as well; where

the political options impinge and jostle one another, like cars vainly trying to pass one another on one of those tight roads in Palestinian communities only one car-width wide; a world where familiarity has bred a contemptuous and sometimes murderous understanding of “the other.”

For outsiders, it is easy to reduce the situation to abstractions. We have all been reading assorted takes on Peter Beinart’s essay “Yavne” in recent weeks. I am sympathetic to Beinart’s arguments, but let me summarize the reactions. Believers in one Israeli-Palestinian state believe that two states are impossible. Believers in two Israeli and Palestinian states believe that one state is impossible. We endlessly ask “what is to be done,” but we know that for any suggestion of a way forward, it is far easier to make the case for its probable failure than its possible success. The current status quo is inherently rickety and unstable, unloved by all and detested by many, but it lingers on, well into its second-half century, impervious to any effort by the right or the left, by Jewish Israelis or Palestinians, to change it. The favorite graffito of Bassam Aramin, one of the two main characters in this book, is something he once saw on the Separation Barrier, “end the preoccupation.”

The best fiction, journalism, and works of history go beyond generalizations to explore the contradiction-fraught lives of real people and, as well as any book I’ve read in recent years, *Apeirogon* does just that, with a page-turning narrative filled with heart-breaking detail. McCann, an award-winning novelist, calls *Apeirogon* a novel, but it is an example of the non-fiction novel, a genre that has become quite popular in recent years, using a novelist’s technique to tell a real story. The book describes in great – and true – detail the intersecting trajectories of two men and their daughters. The dialogue between them is not a verbatim transcription but generally accurate. The historian in me gets a little nervous when McCann says that his is a “hybrid novel with invention at its core, which like all storytelling, weaves together elements of speculation, memory, fact, and imagination” but then again I get uneasy whenever I read a book without footnotes.

The two main subjects of the book are Bassam Aramin, a Palestinian, and Rami Elhanan, an Israeli Jew. Rami Elhanan is a seventh-generation Jerusalemite, secular; and in McCann’s telling, for many years not especially political. After some harrowing experiences in the Yom Kippur War, he started a family, and had a successful career as a graphic designer.

In 1997 his 13-year old daughter, Smadar, was murdered when three Palestinian suicide bombers blew themselves up on Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem. He became active in the Parent's Circle-Family Forum, which brings together Jewish and Palestinian families who have suffered similar losses. In 2005 he became active in the newly founded organization Combatants for Peace, which organizes teams of Jewish Israelis and Palestinians to speak of their physical and psychic battle scars, of their commitment to finding non-violent solutions to their shared problems, and of the need for peace.

One of the founders of Combatants for Peace was Bassam Aramin. He grew up near Hebron, before being forced out of his home by Israel, and then, at the age of 17, was arrested for throwing a hand grenade (an old dud he had found) in the direction of some IDF troops. He was sentenced to seven years in prison and subjected to the usual beatings, though he also befriended several guards. He left prison committed to non-violence, and had also become fascinated by the Holocaust, something he learned about in prison. (His first thought on learning about it, watching a program on Israeli television, was "only six million? The Nazis should have tried harder.") He eventually went to the University of Bradford in England to study the Holocaust and non-violence. In 2007 his ten-year old daughter, Abir, was killed by a trigger-happy soldier's rubber bullet, after crossing the street from her school to purchase a two-shekel piece of candy, hundreds of yards from a rock-throwing incident. The tragic deaths of their daughters gave Rami and Bassam, who knew each other through Combatants for Peace, a new connection. They have since toured the world, sharing their stories.

The book has a distinctive structure, arranged in 1001 sections, like the Arabian Nights, with the sections ranging in length from a few words to many pages. In the center of the book are the extended narratives by Elhanan and Aramin. The other sections provide information about the two men, the general condition in Jerusalem and the West Bank, or bits of information that do not, at first glance, seem particularly relevant, such as the Mediterranean flyway for migratory birds or the contents of François Mitterand's last meal. I learned that the word "shrapnel" immortalizes the dubious invention of a Lt. Col. Henry Shrapnel, a British officer during the Napoleonic Wars. More directly relevant to the matters at hand, though I guess it's not really funny, I laughed out loud when I read that Palestinian protestors call their throwing back tear-gas canisters in the direction of the IDF soldiers who launched them "the right of return." Taken as a whole, however, the effect is less an exercise in trivia than a cumulative sense of

the tragedy of Abir and Smadar and the deep connectedness of all things, especially our seemingly separate histories. Like Scheherazade, the narrator of the Arabian Nights, Rami and Bassam tell their stories to stay alive.

The strengths of the impressionistic narrative are also a weakness. This is a story of recent events, not a history. Those without a background in the politics of twenty-first century Israel and Palestine will not find it here. Netanyahu and the Likud, Abbas and the Palestinian Authority, are largely absent, as is almost any mention of Gaza and the Gaza Wars. The book focuses on its two main characters, and in some ways that is not enough. I wanted to hear much more about Bassam and Rami's families. Bassam's wife, Salwa, is a cipher, and little discussed. Rami Peled and Nurit Peled-Elhanan are the son-in-law and daughter of the revered peace activist, Gen. (ret.) Matti Peled. Although McCann presents Rami and Nurit as a "typical" Israeli family, they were anything but, with their proud and very left-wing lineage (Matti Peled died a year before his granddaughter was murdered). Nurit is a notable scholar, author, and professor at the Hebrew University, where she lectures to standing-room only classes. One of her books, *Palestine in Israeli School Books: Ideology and Propaganda in Education*, is available in English. She refused to allow Netanyahu to make a shiva call after Smadar's murder, and created a furor when she blamed the occupation for the death of her daughter. She was active in the Women in Black protests, and on some occasions brought Smadar with her to the vigils. (Another book recommendation: for anyone interested in this history, I urge them to read our friend and colleague Ayala Emmett's *Our Sister's Promised Land: Politics and Israeli-Palestinian Coexistence*.) I wanted to know much more about Nurit and Salwa.

Books like *Apeiogon* inevitably raise the "so what" question. Yes, we have all read heartbreaking stories similar to those of Abir and Smadar for decades, reducing us to tears. All of these sad tales of shattered and bereaved parents, of sensitive, articulate people on all sides of the conflict, trapped in what seems to be an unbreakable cycle of tragedies and counter-tragedies, trying to recognize their common humanity in the other, trying to defeat the inhumanities of daily life in Israel and Palestine while the inhumanities always win. Can we ever go beyond these recitations of sorrow? Some have argued that putting Israelis and Palestinians on the same level is to give equal moral weight to the oppressor and the oppressed. That is nonsense. The imperative for the members of Combatants for Peace, for Bassim and Rami, is the end of the occupation and discovering shared moral absolutes, not seeking refuge

in the “complexity” of the situation as an excuse for inaction or fence-sitting. An apeirogon, an infinite sided polygon, would, as McCann points out, would be indistinguishable from a perfect circle, and as he says several times in the course of the novel, “if you divide death by life, you will find a circle.” I’m not sure what that means, other than that the various complexities of our lives, properly understood, can collapse into in a single, overriding moral imperative, and the too-many sided geometry of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can fall away into a shape with no sides at all.

The Israel-Palestine situation has become a central moral touchstone of our time for writers like Colum McCann and many others, not because the solution is simple, and not because, as too many seem to think, that the world holds Israel to a higher standard than any other country. (If I had a penny for every time someone has thrown that shopworn cliché in my face I would be a rich man.) It has become a moral cynosure precisely because the situation seems intractable, something beyond politics that only politics can solve. Some have argued that focusing on individual suffering sentimentalizes the geopolitical realities of Israel and Palestine. I would argue, to the contrary, that any solution must go beyond drawing new lines on a map or creative rethinking of the meaning of sovereignty but, rather, must somehow change people on an individual level, in a way better described in a novel rather than in the bullet points of a political program.

Things are impossible until they are not. While writing this review, I have been mourning the civil rights pioneer John Lewis and thinking about his legacy. Let us remember his signal accomplishment. Around 1960 the civil rights movement was effectively stalled. The Brown decision in 1954 brought about a few victories, but formal segregation in the South, if beginning to wobble, was still very much intact. John Lewis was one of the leaders of a new generation of activists, primarily Black but with some white comrades, who thought that through sit-ins, freedom rides, boycotts, and other forms of non-violent protest, legal segregation could be vanquished, and it was. A number of factors contributed to the successes of the civil rights struggle, but without ignoring a host of political and sociological matters, I would argue that the most important of them was a contagion of moral witness, of people no longer willing to tolerate the intolerable, people willing to state the hard truths to themselves, to their friends, to their enemies, without fear and without hate, and gaining strength in numbers. As the African American

religious thinker Howard Thurman once said, “The crux of the problem is not merely that we desire the right and find it difficult to achieve it, but that it is also true that, again and again, we do not desire to desire the right.” Like Bassim and Rami, John Lewis desired the desire.

The essence of non-violence, to me, is less about the violence/non-violence question. No protest movement of the oppressed worth its salt will ever be entirely peaceful. Rather, it is the recognition that genuine social and political transformation requires a personal transformation, one that I would call “spiritual” without in being necessarily in any way “religious,” a discovery of one’s deepest moral self and one’s ultimate resources. We can debate Beinart’s essay until our tongues cleave to the roofs of our mouths, but until the people of the two unhappily conjoined nations of Israel and Palestine follow in the footsteps of the Bassim Aramins and the Rami Elhanans in sufficient numbers, it is likely to be just so much futile palaver.

There is a rather silly statement that regularly makes the rounds these days, spuriously attributed to Einstein, to the effect that the definition of insanity is to try the same thing over and over again and expect a different result. Maybe that is true for rocket science and the higher mathematics, but it is not true in politics and for the forlorn hopes of the left. We have no choice but to endlessly refight our battles, seeking a different outcome, hopefully learning from our mistakes and adjusting to new circumstances, but knowing that we have fought what is essentially the same battle many times before, and even if we succeed, we will have to fight it again. Those of us who can only cheer and argue from the sidelines need to read Colum McCann’s extraordinary new book, and hope that the acts of astonishing moral courage it depicts will not have been in vain. May the sparks of Bassim and Rami ignite a conflagration. Deep in my heart, I do believe, that we shall overcome, someday. ■

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*Peter Eisenstadt is a historian and long-time Israeli-Palestinian peace activist, currently living in Clemson, South Carolina. His latest book, *Against the Hounds of Hell: A Life of Howard Thurman*, is forthcoming from University of Virginia Press. He is a member of the Board of Partners for Progressive Israel.*





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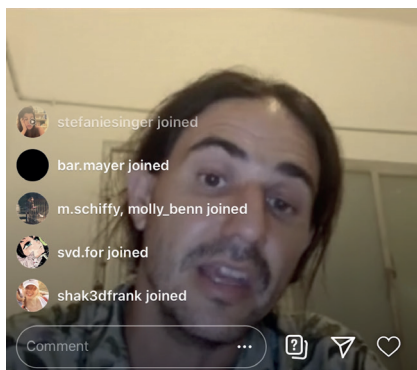
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JULY

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JUNE

### *The Battle for Israeli Democracy on the Eve of the Annexation Decision: A Conversation*

Gili Getz and Uri Zaki (Chair of the Meretz Executive) discuss the nature of democracy, the status of the West Bank annexation and the crackdown on anti-Netanyahu protests on the eve of the annexation decision.

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# The Perils of Annexation



*This webinar was conducted by Partners for Progressive Israel on June 25, 2020 as a part of Stop Annexation Now campaign. Ambassador Dr. Husam Zomlot, Head of the Palestinian Mission to the UK, and Ambassador (ret.) Ilan Baruch, chair of the pro-two-state Policy Working Group, discussed the dangers posed by unilateral Israeli annexation of West Bank territory. The conversation was moderated by Ms. Shaqued Morag, the executive director of Shalom Achshav (Peace Now in Israel) and was followed by a Q&A session. It has been edited for length and clarity. The full webinar can be accessed [here](#).*

**Leonard Grob:** Hello. Welcome to this latest installment of Conversations with Israel and Palestine hosted by Partners for Progressive Israel. Conversations with Israel and Palestine is a series of informational webinars that bring voices from Israel and Palestine to provide an important link between progressives in the US and in the Middle East.

My name is Lenny Grob and I'm a vice president of Partners for Progressive Israel. Partners is an American not-for-profit dedicated to the achievement of a durable and just peace between Israel and its neighbors and believes in the need to ensure civil rights, equality and social justice for all Israelis. Right now, Partners for Progressive Israel's main focus is preventing Israel's annexation project. We invite everyone to visit the Stop Annexation Now page on our website.

We have two co-sponsors for this session, Americans for Peace Now and Meretz UK which is a British not-for-profit organization, independent yet affiliated with the Meretz party in Israel. The organization enjoys close ties to the Jewish

Labor Movement and other progressive Jewish groups.

Let me introduce our moderator, Shaqued Morag. Shaqued has served as the executive director of Shalom Achshav, Peace Now, in Israel for the past two years.

During that time, she has presided over Peace Now's campaign against the racist nation-state law and most recently, of course, is leading the fight to prevent annexation. Before joining Shalom Achshav, she served in senior positions in the Meretz party.

**Shaqued Morag:** Thank you so much, Lenny. As Lenny said, I'll be serving as the discussion moderator over the next 60 minutes.

We have with us dear Ambassador Dr. Husam Zomlot Head of the Palestinian Mission to the United Kingdom. Prior to this appointment to the UK, Dr. Zomlot served as Ambassador to the United States as the Head of the PLO General Delegation to the United States, and Strategic Affairs

Advisor to the Palestinian President. Dr. Zomlot's previous official roles include also serving as Ambassador-at-large for the Palestinian Presidency and Director of Fatah Foreign Relations Commission.

Dr. Zomlot holds a PhD in economics from the University of London, was a professor of Strategy and Public Policy at Birzeit University, where he co-founded and chaired Birzeit's School of Government, and held a number of teaching and research positions at Harvard University and at the University of London. Zomlot has been a UN Economist and LSE Economic Researcher.

Our other panelist is Retired Ambassador Ilan Baruch, who was until recently the policy advisor to the chairperson of Meretz. In March 2011, Baruch resigned from Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on grounds of principle, after a 36-year diplomatic career that included postings in Asia, Europe, and Africa. He was a founder of the Palestinian Autonomy Department; Head of Coordination of the Multilateral Peace Process; and Head of the Middle East Division for Economic Cooperation.

Baruch was also a team member of the Israeli delegation to the Oslo Peace Interim Accords negotiations, and participated in various negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, and Egypt on economic agreements.

Ilan Baruch is currently the Chairperson of Policy Working Group, a team of activists devoted to promoting a Middle East Peace Process based on two-states. Baruch is an editorial board member of the Palestine-Israel Journal and co-founder of a new cultural center start-up, the Palestine House in Tel Aviv.

I'd like to open with the same question for the two of you: Why is annexation so dangerous. Why is it so urgent that we are gathered here discussing this? Dr. Zomlot.

**Dr. Husam Zomlot:** Annexation poses an existential threat. Let me from the very outset clarify this point. It does not pose an existential threat on the people of Palestine, the cause of Palestine. There is no such a thing as an existential threat on 13 million people. Once a journalist asked me, "What if Israel does to you what it did in 1948? What if a wholesale transfer happens, ethnic cleansing? They send you on buses off East what happens?"

I told them nothing will happen. We will just become a diaspora agency and the liberation movement from outside. Actually that's exactly what we were before 1993. The

existential part is about the two-state solution. It's a threat, an existential threat on the two-state solution not on the people of Palestine or the cause of Palestine, There will be so many other ways of manifesting justice and legality, it's not just the two-state solution.

However, the annexation is an imminent existential threat to the very notion of partition. For Netanyahu it serves three functions. Three purposes. The first is personal. It simply has allowed him to be reelected, to dodge criminal charges. He is obsessed about being the one who erected the Second Israel.

The Second Israel is a greater Israel, Israel from the river to the sea. Most likely he will not be remembered as that. He will be remembered as the one who ended the first Israel. He will be remembered as the one who has really undermined the first Israel, in one way or another a semi-democracy. There is the political function of this whole annexation.

The political function is a diversion. Because all of us are up in arms focusing on annexation and almost feeling like, should Israel pause and postpone or cancel annexation, it will be rewarded. Already Netanyahu has managed by focusing on this issue to divert the attention from the end of the occupation, the cessation of settlement expansion. Nobody is talking to Netanyahu and to the Israeli government about these real issues.

Strategically, annexation for Netanyahu would simply preempt any possibility of a two-state solution, any possibility of a Palestinian state. The map for us is very clear. The moment the Israeli government announced that it intends to annex on the 17th of May, we immediately absolved ourselves of all signed agreements. Why? Because that commitment by this wide coalition government means that Israel has abandoned any agreement based on two states and the 1967 borders.

The Oslo declaration of principles were based on Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. In Oslo, Israel reversed its decisions and its annexation of East Jerusalem because it accepted that Jerusalem is a final status issue. In Oslo, Israel also accepted the other five permanent status issues including borders, settlements, refugees and what have you. The declaration of annexation takes Israel back 180 degrees to reverse its decision to put all these issues on the table. Legally speaking, we had to absolve ourselves, It doesn't make sense that you actually stay committed to agreements that the other side has just nullified.

What they are talking about now is the entire West Bank. Go back to the ultimate deal, the Trump deal. Israel has

overall security control from the river to the sea. It doesn't matter if they annex parts of the West Bank here and there, but effectively it is the annexation of the entire West Bank. Be it the whole West Bank on one centimeter, it's about the principle.

Read my lips: that will spell for us an announcement by Israel of the end of the two-state paradigm. We will give back full responsibility of the occupied people and land to Israel, and we will go back to the pre-1993 dynamics. This is not to abandon the platform, but this is to abandon the mechanisms that Israel has been using for the last 27 years to sustain the status quo.

This is to go back to reorganize, regroup re-energize. There's much to add later on in the discussion.

**Shaqued:** Thank you so much. Mr. Baruch, can you please give us another angle of this, maybe the Israeli point of view, why is annexation so dangerous for Israel?

**Ilan Baruch:** I'm very grateful to the organizers and also to Husam for his introductory remarks. We are talking about no less than a dramatic change of the game.

Annexation by Israel of Palestinian territory of even one inch would be a paradigm change. We have been living in an uncomfortable coexistence with the Palestinians on the premise that occupation will end with a negotiated peace agreement. Annexation is actually a one-sided unilateral act of designing the future in a way that removes once and for all any option for a Palestinian opportunity for an agreement.

This is very dangerous for Israel, but it is also dangerous for any future relations between Israelis and Palestinians and Israel and the Middle East. I can see a catastrophic result, such as the fragmentation in Jordan, a threat to the Hashemite house, waves of violence in the region beyond Jordan and within Israel and Palestine.

Violence is a possibility that we need to take into account. Annexation is a very irresponsible move forward by a government that is looking at its own narrow agenda. I think Netanyahu is squarely motivated by ideology, and the ideology Netanyahu is leading is designed to defeat the Palestinians, not only on the ground but also in the narrative, the Palestinian narrative that needs to have a space alongside our narrative. It is the objective of the Netanyahu government to destroy it.

Where does it take us? Let me tell you. For 3 years I was assigned to South Africa, In apartheid South Africa, for each

white person, there were five or six black people with no future, no rights, no privilege. The whites were running a fairly liberal democracy in South Africa with a relatively speaking Free Press, with a parliament that was operating, and with everything that looked like a democratic Western society regardless of the vast population of black people that had no share in this.

If we go for annexation and Palestine is rendered a conglomerate of small spaces with no full control, we will find ourselves in an apartheid situation. As of now, on the West Bank, for each and every settler, there are five or six Palestinians with no rights, and all the settler community and politicians are very proud to say that there are 600,000 settlers in the West Bank who could not be removed. They tend to forget that there are two and a half million Palestinians. Unless they're being removed by force, they have no intention of going anywhere.

Not only that this is a horrendous future for Palestinians, it is also a bleak future for us, Israelis, because a society that exercises injustice on a scale that reminds us of apartheid South Africa has no future. It's unsustainable. Palestine actually should have been given an opportunity for independence and statehood and self-determination in the post-war period of "decolonialization."

It so happened that the case of Palestine was different. Palestine should have been already an independent state maybe 50, 60, 70 years ago. It didn't happen.

We can use the language of decolonization and say that Palestine needs to be liberated. Unfortunately, it needs to be liberated from us. I can tell you that in Israel, there is a constituency for that, one that is ready and prepared to take part in any future quest to see Palestine break the yoke of Israeli domination and begin to bloom as a separate independent state.

This is the job Husam is undertaking as ambassador of Palestine in London. This is a job I'm exercising as a player in international civil society of activists who are capable of reaching out to the international community. Few former members of Knesset wrote a letter, a petition to hundreds and hundreds of members of parliament in Europe. 1,080 parliamentarians in Europe, European Parliament and national parliaments signed this petition calling for putting a stop to any attempt at annexation.

We need to use this world crisis around annexation for regrouping and re-coordinating a universal struggle to see



Palestine finally remove the domination of Israel, and begin a new phase of partnership between two nation states, side by side. Then my last point is for our conversation, I think that we should not see a two-state solution as the objective of our work. We should see two-state solution as a callable to the main objective of peacemaking, and that is reconciliation.

But you cannot defeat someone and then request reconciliation. We need to allow a generational rehabilitation of Palestinian society into a normal nation without Israeli domination and interference, and then we can reconcile our issues. Peace is just the beginning of the hard work of reconciliation.

**Shaqued:** Since Trump's deal of the century was first declared, we've been hearing that this is actually a two-state solution because it offers a Palestinian state. How do I explain in Israel that this is not actually a peace plan, and why the Palestinians wouldn't even be willing to respond to it.

**Husam:** It isn't a plan, and definitely has nothing to do with peace. It is far from a two-state solution. The plan's first claim is that international order is irrelevant. In fact, it was the international order that created Israel. By making it irrelevant then Israel and those who really want to see "the first Israel" need to be absolutely worried. It was the international order that required us, the Palestinian people, the Palestinian leadership to accept the two-state solution.

The two-state solution was never a Palestinian demand. Prior to 1988, the PLO platform called for one secular democratic state of Palestine from the river to the sea. Under international pressure, the PLO accepted the premise of the two-state solution via the UN Security Council. The two-state solution from the Palestinian prospective marked a concession towards peace.

Then, our late President, Yasser Arafat, recognized the State of Israel on the 1967 borders. Attacking that equilibrium, the international law equilibrium, is not good for us, is not good for Israel.

The second part of the Trump deal is that Israel shall have full security control from the river to the sea. Read it. How do you have Israeli security control of the Jordan River, the eastern border of the supposed state of Palestine? How do you create a state surrounded by Israeli presence? The idea is not really a state it's very clear in that document.

Why will they then give us a bit of cash? Because they come all of them from the real estate business. In the real estate business, somebody gets the property and somebody gets the

cash. I interacted with this team many times. I must have met them 32 times in the White House accompanying my president, Abbas, when he would visit Washington and when President Trump visited Palestine as he did in Bethlehem in May 2017.

This is the way they think. The Trump thing is simply a document that tells you that Palestinians are not worthy of collective rights of national rights of the right of self-determination of independence and sovereignty, let alone the right of Palestinian refugees to be resolved fairly and justly in accordance with all the agreements between us. All that they deserve is that we may improve their livelihoods and living conditions under occupation. We will maintain the slave master relationship in the historic land of Palestine.

The Palestinian cause belongs to a nation that is very vivid, very rooted, very talented, very mobilized. The 13 million Palestinians rejected the Trump plan. We are united in our purpose, in our narrative., Our narrative is not going to be unchanged, it would only be solidified with our new generations.

Don't listen to Netanyahu on normalization. He has a couple of friends here and there, but the Arab world despises him. Even In Tunisia's discussion of its new constitution delegates introduced a section on Palestine and Israel. We have support in the region no matter what. The support is historic and has to do with religion, history, and civilization.

Netanyahu can inflate and exaggerate his claims of Sunni support for his purposes, but he's lying. We do have serious international support, and thanks to Netanyahu in the last few months particularly, this international support has been magnified. He has brought back the issue of Palestine to the fore when we have suffered in the last few years of some sort of marginalization because of other issues in the Middle East, other issues worldwide.

We are coming together. We saw the demonstration in Tel Aviv. This is very important what happened there. We have followed the letters by some members of the Knesset, by some Israeli former security personnel, we follow the Jewish community and real activism in the US. In Europe, by the way, the letter you just mentioned from 1080 European parliamentarians including 260 UK MPs was initiated by progressive Jewish organizations in Europe and in Israel. We see this as a movement together.

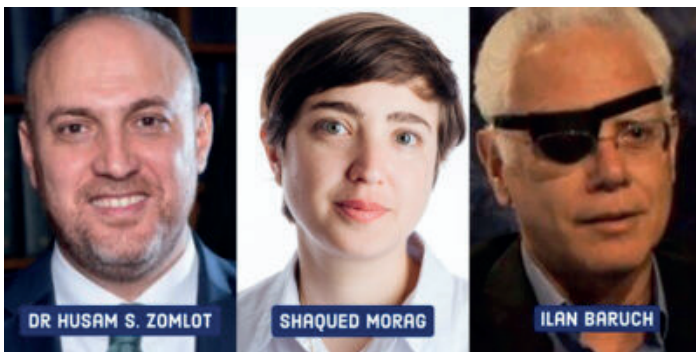
Understand that this issue is an issue of nationhood, statehood, self-determination, legitimate rights, people who really want

to achieve peace through achieving the rights. Short of that no real estate deal is going to do.

The main thing for Netanyahu is whatever keeps him in power. Now he enjoys what we call in strategic studies a “power surplus,” or excess of power. This power surplus is due to the military and economic supremacy flowing from the relationship with the US. Then there is the Palestinian authority, taking care of the entire occupied population. It’s a five-star occupation, Israel can do as it wishes without international consequences; this is exactly what I mean by power surplus.

This power surplus in the ‘90s enabled Israel to impose a solution on us, but it didn’t work. The idea in the ‘90s is that let’s impose a solution to the interest of Israel, to the benefit of Israel, advantage in Israel because of the power surplus. It didn’t work.

From 2000 to 2010 the surplus increased and it wanted to manage the conflict. Just it’s a conflict management. Lately Netanyahu has felt so much of a power surplus that he wants to liquidate the conflict. He wants to redefine the conflict from a conflict of national movements, conflict of political, and legal manifestations, and considerations, and frameworks to one of living conditions, an “economic peace.”



The Palestinian people are one of the richest in the region. We have close to the highest per capita PhD graduates worldwide. End the Occupation, and there will be a real economic takeoff.

**Shaqued:** Thank you so much, Ambassador Zomlot. Now some questions. Lawrence Joffe from Meretz UK asks both speakers: how should supporters of peace and two states respond in a post-annexation reality? Would carrots or sticks work better? Should they ask for Jews and Palestinians work together or separately?

**Ilan:** Europeans ask us, “what do you want us to do?”. We say incentives and disincentives. In the first place, everyone

was sitting outside the American Vatican waiting for the white smoke. First of all Palestine needs to be recognized as a state so that it gains at least parity of esteem to enter the negotiations room. Second, It is about delivering substance on all the issues. I think that the international community needs to offer incentives for the two parties, but at the same time, disincentives of the two parties if they do not make the necessary compromise for a deal. So far Israel suffers no disincentives, and this needs to change. Israelis are very keen to be accepted overseas, and any criticism of Israel abroad is taken very seriously in Israel.

Criticism of Israel was long restrained for reasons that have nothing to do with Palestine, but it had to do with the history of Jews in Europe, the Holocaust and so on. There’s a lot of guilt involved here and I think that we need to move forward. I don’t think that the Europeans need to give up on the sense of commitment to the Jewish people, but they need to distinguish between the Jewish people and the government of Israel. I think they need to take a far more critical stand on the policies pursued by Israel because the policies are immoral and unsustainable, and threaten the international order.

**Shaqued:** Thank you. I want Dr. Zomlot to answer this and as well address a question by Aviva Meyer, vice president of APN Board, who asks about a poll by Dr. Khalil Shikaki that was published in Israel Hayom that says that more than 60% of Palestinians are indifferent to the call of the Palestinian Authority against the annexation plan.

**Husam:** Thank You, Shaqued. First, this isn’t about people who are for Israel and people for Palestine anymore. I think there must be a movement, a global movement versus the current global fascistic movement. It’s not just against Netanyahu. Netanyahu is allying himself with the worst. He’s the ally of Trump, of Bolsonaro, of Orban and so on. He wants to ally with the far-right movement worldwide. It’s a phobic right movement, and by the way, this movement hates the Muslims and hates the Jews, and hates the Sikhs, and anybody who is “other.” We need to start thinking not in terms of ethnicities and color but in terms of principles or values.

What are the values that could bring us together? These are universal values, and they are not even to one religion. These great human values are the values of the Jewish faith, the Islamic faith, the Christian faith: equality, freedom, justice, in all religions, and in all cultures. This annexation threat is an invitation for a global movement that should come together

from all walks of life to defend our principles and our values.

The second point I want to make is how crucial the Jewish communities on the outside are. Support for Israel has been monumental. It has been a key pillar upon which Israel has relied all these years, in the strategic sense, military, economic, political, legal, what have you. We are now seeing lots of opposition here in the UK. The Jewish community is writing letters and the public is opposing the annexation, even writing a letter to ask the UK government not to accept the proposed Israeli ambassador to the UK because of her annexation advocacy.

The real alliance of Netanyahu, especially in the US, is with the evangelical movement, and I don't need to stick my neck out too much to tell you what the evangelical movement ultimately believes. If I were an Israeli I would be absolutely scared and unhappy about this alliance. In effect, there is an abandonment of the relationship with Jewish, especially progressive, voices, and an increased alignment with this right-wing worldview.

70% of the Jewish community in the US are Democrats, liberals, and progressives. They vote Democrat, regardless who's the candidate. We know that the Jewish community in America was one of the founders of the anti-war movement and supported the civil rights movement. We saw the viciousness of the extreme right wing and the white supremacists against the Jewish communities in the US and the synagogues. What is happening is not just against the Palestinians, it's against the Jewish communities in America. We find ourselves in the same trench all of a sudden, in the very same trench, and up against the same hostile ideologies. If you look in the US, who are the most adamant voices for Palestine in the US? They're all Jews supporting the Palestinian cause. This will be magnified and come to fruition.

The next question is from Aviva and about Palestinian polling. Well, clearly the majority of Palestinians want to see an end to Israel's occupation. The majority of the Palestinian people want to see an independent sovereign Palestinian state, and they need a state that defends them. They are the ones who need security. It's their sons and daughters that are being killed. It's their lands that are being stolen on a daily basis. A state would be the guarantor of their rights.

Earlier in the Corona pandemic, I was in London, the only ambassador who could not send our people back home. There were so many people stuck there because we have no airport; we have no national airline, so people want a state. The

majority of Palestinians, even within the PLO and including Hamas, now have the two-state solution as a platform. Any poll that shows you 60% will not go and fight for it should be a cause of despair for you and me. It means people have lost hope. It means that people will fight for their rights but not necessarily for some sort of a solution, which is the two-state solution. This is very worrying.

I say it every day: produce hope. Recognize the State of Palestine, level the field, impose, activate the differentiation between Israel and the settlement products. Impose sanctions not to only ostracize or punish but to say to the people on both sides you are serious about peace, and peace is possible

**Shaqued:** Is East Jerusalem a model for future annexation, including the "legal resident" status of its population?

**Ilan:** The Khalil Shikaki survey referenced earlier detected a growing impatience and speculative support for armed struggle against annexation. If we go to annexation, we might find ourselves facing a new Intifada, and this needs to be calculated into what we think of annexation. Of course, Netanyahu wants to portray everything as normal and claims that annexation leads to peace, but we know this is false – outside Israel Hayom.

East Jerusalem is a case that will have to be studied in the light of the intention of my government who create a new population in the West Bank, that is becoming people living within Israeli territory without Israeli citizenship, without the right to vote for the Knesset. Netanyahu already made it clear in a response to a question in an interview that the Palestinians living in the Jordan Valley and in the territory intended for annexation, we estimated about 60,000 to 80,000 people will have no citizenship in Israel. This will be nothing other than apartheid.

In East Jerusalem, we already have a similar situation, and the only reason why it is tolerated by many is that it is perceived as an interim situation that is to be solved through negotiations of core issues. I think that Jerusalem is a good case for us to study as to what can happen with annexation, because Israel in '67 annexed Jerusalem, and in 1980 passed a Basic Law, Jerusalem united under Israeli sovereignty and as the capital of Israel. The world reacted in a strong way. Security Council resolution 478 declared this decision to annex Jerusalem null and void and demanded action. The few countries that had embassies in Jerusalem at the time, were requested to remove their embassies to Tel Aviv, and this actually happened. We are now in a different situation. 40 years have passed, and we



need to reinvigorate our struggle against annexation, not only new annexation but also the annexation in Jerusalem.

**Shaqued:** One last question: “Is the Palestinian Authority willing to negotiate with Netanyahu? I can tell you that personally I’ve heard President Abbas saying that he’s offered a few times to negotiate with Netanyahu. As an Israeli who sees Benny Gantz or used to see Benny Gantz as the potential next prime minister in Israel, what would it take for the Palestinian Authority to negotiate with Benny Gantz, and who could mediate that?”

**Husam:** Yes, I can answer that. Let me go back to the question about apartheid. It’s a very important question. I think apartheid has existed for a long time with two different separate legal systems in one territory operated by one government. This is the UN definition of apartheid. In Israel, there are three separate legal systems that have been operating for decades.

The first is for Israeli Jews, and it is semi-democratic, it has all the needed social welfare and democratic institutions and what have you. The second is for the Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the recent Nation-State Law has specifically underscored that they are not really full citizens as they can never have collective rights or the right of self-determination. That’s a different legal system for them by law. The third system is for the Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. In this third system, there are four subsystems: one that has to do with the West Bank, a second one that has to do with Jerusalemites. Different legal systems, even, the color of IDs and the way Israel deals with the people there. Then there is the third sub-category, the people in Gaza, which is the worst category. You are besieged you are in an open-air prison. The fourth is for Palestinian exiled diaspora, refugees outside and not allowed even to visit, let alone return.

Back to your question about the who can mediate. Everybody was hoping against hope and wanted to see what will happen in the Israeli elections, and what will happen in the American elections. This syndrome lasted for 27 years. This brings me back to my first assessment. Should Netanyahu go ahead with annexation, I think the talk about apartheid will take center stage in Palestinian national politics. We chose to focus on creating a state, ending Israel’s occupation, achieving our sacred national rights. We chose to focus on this. Should an annexation happen, it’s a new chapter, new territory, new terrain, new arena. Only God will know what happens after an annexation, but for the time being our focus should be on preventing annexation.

Only the Palestine Liberation Organization has the legitimacy and the mandate by all the Palestinian factions that have been elected by their constituencies to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinian people. Even Hamas has said that it agrees with the PLO negotiating on behalf of the Palestinians under one condition: any agreement has to be offered for a national referendum. Is the PLO willing to negotiate with Netanyahu? Is the PLO willing to negotiate with Gantz? I don’t think this is about personalities, Shaqued. This is not about the person at the helm of Israeli power. It could be anybody. This is about the fundamentals.

We engaged the government of Rabin in 1993, because we saw that the fundamentals were engaged. The international framework was UN Resolutions 242 and 338. All the real issues were listed clearly which indicated Rabin’s government acceptance to reverse even the annexation of Jerusalem.

It’s about our rights. It’s about the possibilities of reaching an agreement. By the way, we have wasted 27 years. President Abbas says he is willing to meet any Israeli prime minister under the international framework. He is willing to meet any Israeli leader but not in Washington because the Trump administration cannot be a fair and trusted mediator.

We want to go in the direction of negotiations that end the conflict, but the key here is fundamentals. Remember, Netanyahu was elected in 1996 shortly after the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin on one platform plank, to derail everything. I must give him credit, he has been very successful so far.

**Shaqued:** I’d like you to address the issue of de facto annexation because as a movement in Israel Peace Now, that is tracking and monitoring the expansion of settlements, I can tell you that de facto annexation is a phenomenon that has been happening for the last decade in a speedy version, and from the moment that Trump was elected, faster still.

First, what do we have to do to stop the de facto annexation? It might seem to the international community and to Israelis and Palestinians that the threat is over. “Isn’t it even better to declare, this is what Israel really wants, the de jure annexation and not only the de facto one.”

**Ilan:** Annexation was folded into occupation since day one. Now, Netanyahu is moving it into the full daylight. We should not be satisfied with shelving the annexation because this will put it back into the embryonic stage of annexation that exists in occupation. I want to tell people it’s not the moment for desperation or a sense of defeat for the pro-peace left. It

is a moment for regrouping and putting our energies together. I'm very inspired by the presentation of Ambassador Zomlot.

**Shaqued:** Thank you so much, Ilan. Please Ambassador Zomlot, your closing remarks.

**Husam:** First, as to de facto annexation versus de jure. We've never seen the Occupation as a de facto annexation. We saw throughout the Oslo period that Israel has agreed to define its presence in the occupied. The Oslo process was a mechanism to actually roll back that temporary occupation, and create a permanent situation of two states.

Now, what Netanyahu is proposing is turning the temporary into a permanent. It's not about de jure. The announcement by this government and this pertains to Gantz, because he is a key member of this government, is an announcement that reverses Oslo. That's the heart of it.

There is some despair, lack of hope, but we've been there before, and we are capable of reproducing hope, and I assure you it will be reproduced very soon. We want to end Israel's occupation that began in 1967. You've heard it a million times, but it's good to be clear and straightforward. We want to establish a state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. We want to resolve the issue of refugees in accordance with international legitimacy, resolutions, law, and in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative. We understand we must negotiate these matters. We also know that this cannot be achieved now via Washington, and we are pushing in the direction of international mechanism.

I don't like the argument about demography being a threat. Human beings are not a threat. We are there, and we have sustained and withstood a great deal. There are 6.5 million Israeli Jews now in the same area as an equal number of Palestinians. In terms of demography we know that we are there, and that is not even to mention the 6.5 million Palestinians outside, the refugees and the Diaspora. We aren't going anywhere. So in the end, this is about Israel, how it wants to define itself, for itself, for the region, and for the international community.

This is a moment that we feel empowered, and I link back to Ilan's final remarks about hope. We almost went away in the last few years, and now we are back, and we want to do something, and I think this coming together is much bigger in numbers, is much bigger in values and principles, is much closer to international equilibrium and principles. I think in the end, Netanyahu can have his moment in the sun, but it will be brief.

We don't have the power, but it's a matter of when not if. It's a matter of time. Thank you very much for having this conversation. Allow me to say that we are partners in the path toward ending this and defeating those people who don't want to make us believe that there is a better tomorrow.

Imagine a situation when we can move freely, when we can work freely, when we can travel freely. They merge, the partnership would be huge. Israel is one of the most high-tech countries very well connected to the West. We have the most educated, the youngest, and are very well connected to the East. The partnership will produce a blast, but we have to defeat the sick, the maximalists, the ones who think they can have the cake, and eat it too.

**Shaqued:** Thank you, Husam, for your empowering statements. I think you've summarized the Israeli peace camp position as well. We believe it is not in Israel's interests to occupy, or to annex, or to oppress the Palestinian people in anyway. I truly believe that most Israelis when asked, agree. I personally see this huge crisis as a huge opportunity. It's our job to point to an alternative, and to keep the hope for an authentic peace as you've just described, instead of constant conflict and oppression.

**Leonard:** Thanks to all of you for joining us, and stay safe.

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*Thanks to David Abraham, Member of Partners' Board of Directors, for editing and condensing this discussion. The full video is available on the Partners' website [here](#).*



*David Abraham is Professor of Law Emeritus at the University of Miami and a member of PPI's Board*

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