



President's Message:

If Annexation Happens...

I imagine that anyone at all concerned with Israel has managed to tear themselves away from the appalling daily reality of the coronavirus and of our president and made themselves aware of another looming catastrophe; namely Israel's likely annexation of parts of the West Bank after July 1. That is the date the new coalition government has set, after which an annexation bill can be presented to the government (i.e., the cabinet), where it is virtually certain to pass, whence it will proceed to the Knesset, which will also pass it. That's that.

We are implicated in this bill both as Jews who support Israel and as Americans. As Jews we care that Israel is moving towards becoming a rogue state – as this act is fundamentally in breach of international law and opposed by virtually the entire world community outside the US (though the rightwing governments in Hungary and Austria announced recently they would block the European Union from taking any concerted action). As Americans we know that the only thing that has allowed Israel to proceed with annexation is Trump and Kushner's already infamous "Deal of the Century," recently reaffirmed by Secretary of State Pompeo. Theoretically that gives us and our Israeli allies two routes to stop annexation, but the reality is that Trump controls American foreign policy and annexation commands a majority among Israelis. It is not a done deal yet – anything could happen – but any path to stop it seems narrow. Nevertheless, we must try. Partners and its sister organizations in the Progressive Israel Network have made it their highest priority.

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נפסיק את הסיפוח עכשו

Stop Annexation Now

أوقفوا الضم الآن

We still don't know what parts of the West Bank Israel will annex. The DoC purports to grant Israel the right to annex all settlements plus the Jordan Valley, which would turn remaining Palestinian territory into a patchwork of non-contiguous pieces of land. Bibi may not choose to annex the most far-flung settlements; on the other hand he has announced that none will be evacuated.

While we must fight against annexation, we must simultaneously think about dealing with the situation if annexation goes through. While I don't claim to have the answer, I have some suggestions.

The two-state solution is preferable to all other options. It doesn't solve all problems but it provides a viable framework on which to deal with them. I have supported it for 30 years, from even before it seemed imminent and attainable during the Oslo years through the Second Intifada, which killed all hope among Israelis, through the Abbas-Olmert deal, abandoned so mysteriously, and the abortive attempts of Secretary Kerry, verging on the duplicitous, to revive it. But now may be the end, if we don't stop the annexation. The irony, though only useful for a rueful chuckle, is that annexation's greatest proponents, the settlers, are themselves against the Trump plan. Why? Because it purports to establish a convoluted and non-viable Palestinian statelet, but with so many impossible conditions to be fulfilled that it will never come to pass. They purport to see any Palestinian state whatsoever as an existential danger to Israel.

So what is the alternative if annexation goes through and in January a President Biden (Inshallah, b'ezrat Hashem) cannot or will not reverse it? We of the pro-Israel peace camp owe it both to our Israeli comrades and our Palestinian cousins not to give up, for both of their sakes.

Of course, the simple and simplistic alternative is "one democratic state." Apart from the opposition of virtually all Israeli Jews and many Palestinians, such a state would fulfill neither nation's national goals, nor would it be workable in practice. Two peoples with fierce and opposing narratives and over 100 years of vicious conflict cannot be shoved together and told to get over it. It is the mentality of a school yard monitor.

What I have become more and more interested in during the last few years is the movement that goes under the name of One Land, Two Peoples and is supported by the predominantly secular group [Two States One Homeland](#) and the religiously-oriented [Roots/Shorashim/Judur](#). They often work together, though I've had more contact with Roots.

Like many leftists, I have avoided settlers and settlements for many years, seeing them as the root of much that is wrong with Israel. However, close to 500,000 Jews live in the West Bank and 300,000 in East Jerusalem, some for three generations now. Though the majority are near the Green Line, more than enough live so far from it that it is doubtful whether a two-state map could now be drawn that any Israeli or Palestinian government could accept. Annexation would make two states impossible once and for all – in my view.

I have met the Jewish leaders of Roots and their Palestinian counterparts and was astonished that they accept each other in ways that I had previously seen only on the Left. They work together to counter settler violence, but principally to build trust between the warring communities. Most of the Roots activists live in the Gush Etzion area of the West Bank, east and south of Jerusalem, known as generally containing more moderate settlers.

Their views are similar to mine with one essential difference: they believe fervently in the indivisibility of the Land of Israel/Palestine and their right to live in any part of it, subject to reasonable laws and regulations. They say that Palestinians must have the exact same right to live in the Land of Palestine. Needless to say, the latter is *ana thema* to the vast majority of settlers who see their views as bizarre and dangerous.

They are less interested in long-term political solutions than in building trust but when pressed, they talk about a "confederation," of a Palestinian and a Jewish state with borders along the Green Line, but where members of either nation could live anywhere but would vote in their own state. A rough approximation is the arrangement in the European Union, though perhaps with somewhat less national sovereignty. But first trust must be built, a task they see as taking a generation or two.

Trust! How could they speak of relying on trust, when lack of trust is what, fundamentally, brought down the hopes of Oslo? If there were trust, the majority of Israelis would have readily agreed to a Palestinian state a generation ago. Isn't this utopian and dangerously unrealistic?

It is hard to imagine, they answer, but what is the alternative? I have no answer to that. If the two-state solution is precluded, what is left except people learning to live together under current circumstances? Most Palestinians do not want another intifada.

Obviously, this is a simplification. I was somewhat reassured

If Annexation Happens...

when I toured their rudimentary headquarters and spoke at some length with the Palestinians who are part of their organization – and face as much skepticism among their people as the Jews do.

However, I am seriously bothered by the implication that the Israeli occupation must last until trust is built, no matter how long it takes. That means Israeli control of Palestinian lives for the foreseeable – and largely unforeseeable future. I have not heard a good answer to that except for the usual show-stopper: “What is the alternative?” I have no response to that – in the absence of a viable two-state option.

Others may see a different solution as preferable if the two-state solution is buried for good. There is no ready alternative, which is why we must try to save it. But, in my view, annexation will end that possibility.

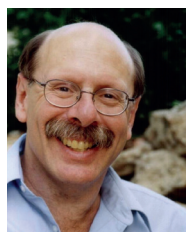
The Israeli Left doesn’t generally accept Roots as an ally, giving the same objections I raised, and many more. The worldviews seem too different. It is not simply a matter of religious vs. secular, as they are also wary of the secular Two States-One Homeland. However, their visions of peace are not really that far apart and, in my view, they must learn to accept each other, because the number of Jews and Palestinians who are ready for real compromise on either side is small and not growing.

The pro-Israel Left, here and in Israel, will likely face some difficult choices in the next few years even if annexation is stopped – but especially if it’s not. We need to face those choices with an open mind – and realistically. We are not in the world we imagined for ourselves 25 years ago – and yet we must continue. ■



Paul Scham

Paul Scham is a Professor of Israel Studies at the University of Maryland and President of Partners for Progressive Israel. The views expressed here are his own and not necessarily those of Partners or of Meretz.



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اوقفوا الضم الان

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A Farewell to Labor, the Peace and Partial-Annexation Party

By Ron Skolnik



On April 26, the Central Committee of Israel's Labor Party [voted](#) (online, of course) to endorse Binyamin Netanyahu as prime minister. In doing so, the party lent its hand to the installation of a government that is poised to unilaterally annex West Bank territory this summer and perhaps deliver the knockout punch to the two-state solution. Significantly, but with less fanfare, the Labor Central Committee simultaneously [authorized](#) party chair Amir Peretz to pursue negotiations for a full and final merger with the much larger center-right Blue and White Party. In other words, last month's vote could have been the Labor Party's final bow as an independent political entity.

If that is the case, watching Labor depart the stage while facilitating annexation would be a fitting "last hurrah," as the once-heralded party's descent over recent decades is tied, at least in part, to the wishful thinking it peddled, both to itself and the Israeli public, for decades: that Israel could make peace while maintaining possession of vast sections of the Occupied Territories. In a sense, one might say, the final-status map envisioned by the Trump plan is a twisted variant on a theme pioneered by Labor itself.

Those whose interest in Israel began during the Oslo process of the 1990s understandably perceived Labor to be Israel's peace

party. But that was never a fully accurate description. Since the war of June 1967, Labor has generally positioned itself between the full-fledged Greater Land of Israel annexationism of the right and the calls on the left to recognize the pre-war "Green Line" as the basis for a two-state solution. It has been a party of peace with partial annexation.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin indeed broke new ground in 1993 in recognizing the PLO as the Palestinian representative and Israel's interlocutor. And Ehud Barak seven years later was the first Israeli leader to put the question of Jerusalem on the negotiating table. But, even during these banner years, Labor held on to hopes for a peace deal that would allow Israel to expand territorially. Rabin would never publicly utter the term "Palestinian state," for instance, using the noncommittal "Palestinian entity" instead. The incremental Oslo process that he agreed to kept the preponderant share of occupied territory in Israel's hands and postponed the question of borders to final-status talks – which never took place.

We will never know what the slain prime minister would have agreed to had he lived long enough to engage in those talks. We do know, however that when Labor had its next (and, apparently, last) chance, between 1999 and 2001, Prime Minister Ehud

Barak's original thinking was that the Palestinians could and would create a state on about [66 percent](#) of the West Bank. While Barak became more flexible over time (his offer at Camp David in July 2000 amounted to an Israeli annexation of about 10 percent of the West Bank, without equal land swaps), recognition of the Green Line was a principle he refused to accept.

To better understand the origins of Barak's position, one should begin decades earlier than the '90s. In the wake of the June 1967 "Six-Day War," Israel's government, then dominated by the Alignment (a predecessor to Labor) decided that Israel would never return to the prewar armistice borders it had had with Jordan, due to strategic (rather than ideological) considerations. Over the next decade – until it lost power to Menachem Begin's Likud in the 1977 elections – Labor governments toyed with a variety of ideas, including one for a fully encircled Palestinian mini-state in the northern West Bank; none were ever officially adopted, but all left Israel permanently in control of some or all of the occupied territory.

The most famous of these ideas was the Alon Plan, championed by Cabinet Minister Yigal Alon. Under the plan, Israel would retain, in perpetuity, roughly [30 percent](#) of the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley, while the remainder of the territory could eventually be returned to Jordan under a peace treaty. Labor would hold on to what it called this "Jordanian Option" until King Hussein of Jordan, in 1987, relinquished any claims to the West Bank in favor of the Palestinians.

Meanwhile, not long after the 1967 war, Alignment/Labor governments would launch an Israeli [settlement drive](#) in the Jordan Valley, the key strategic West Bank zone they insisted on keeping, where the Palestinian population was relatively sparse. And while settling the whole of the Land of Israel was never an ideological goal for Labor, its governments acquiesced in the 1970s to the messianic Gush Emunim movement's creation of settlements throughout the West Bank, such as in Hebron/Kiryat Arba and Elon Moreh.

What's more, Labor figures who embraced a more dovish approach were either removed from the party, or left of their own volition. In the early 1970s, the dovish Aryeh "Lova" Eliav, for instance, committed the heresy of referring to the Palestinian people as a unique nation, and was forced out of his position as secretary-general and later out of the party altogether. Shulamit Aloni, Yossi Sarid, Yossi Beilin, Yael Dayan, Avraham Burg, and Colette Avital were among the other leftwing leaders over the years who began their political careers in Labor, but grew disappointed and joined or formed other political frameworks.

Seen in the context of Labor's history, therefore, Ehud Barak's offer to the Palestinians in the last months of his government was a relatively sharp – albeit not total – break from the party's past. But, even then, Labor never accepted the principle that peace would require Israel to forego permanent territorial gain; and after Barak suffered a major electoral defeat to Ariel Sharon in 2001 amid the escalating violence of the Second Intifada, the party sought to beat a retreat from its newly-acquired "soft" and "compromising" image.

As "peace" and "negotiations" became increasingly unpopular terms in Israeli discourse, a series of Labor Party leaders would seek to steer their party back to its centrist origins on relations with the Arab world. So Labor agreed to serve under two Likud prime ministers during the 2000s (first Sharon, and later Netanyahu), and in the 2010s chose a series of leaders who sought electoral salvation through an appeal to Oslo-skeptical voters. Shelly Yachimovich, for example, who took over as party chair in 2011 amid that year's massive social justice protests, [diverted](#) the party entirely from a discussion of the occupation, two states, and peace, focusing instead on supposedly more "electable" topics like the cost of living. Yitzhak Herzog succeeded Yachimovich and promoted a new ten-year [interim plan](#) that would have left the occupation in place until at least 2027.

Over the years, the consistent underlying message that Labor delivered to Israelis has been that, while certain areas of the West Bank might be conceded in the framework of peace, other areas would be Israel's forever – and no equivalent territorial exchanges would be required. Since the Israeli right favored no territorial concessions whatsoever, Labor's position produced a sense that there was a wall-to-wall Israeli "consensus" regarding the untouchability of the Jordan Valley as well as areas of intense settlement growth that came to be known as the "settlement blocs." If a settlement area had become large enough or urbanized enough, Labor's position held – e.g., Ma'aleh Adumim or Ariel – it was ipso facto "too big to evacuate," to remain Israel's in perpetuity, and therefore kosher for even further expansion.

One could certainly argue, therefore, that 53 years of Labor's unwillingness to commit to the internationally recognized lines of June 4, 1967 has provided a scaffolding of legitimacy within which Netanyahu has been able to market his much more extremist moves to the Israeli mainstream.

Because it was unwilling to recognize the Green Line, Labor also never recognized the principle that all settlement in Occupied Territory is illegitimate. Instead, it sought to distinguish between "security" settlements in the Jordan Valley or "consensus" settlements in the blocs (good) and "ideological" settlements

A Farewell to Labor, the Peace and Partial-Annexation Party

elsewhere (bad). The former were hailed, of course, because they were consistent with Labor's intention of ultimately expanding sovereignty to those areas.

But Labor's effort to straddle the fence – to be both pro-peace and pro-expansion – ultimately left it wanting on both counts and proved to be its electoral undoing. Because it refused to accept the June 4, 1967 borders as the legal/political term of reference (remember that, in 1988, the Palestinians had adopted their historic compromise – a small Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, representing only 22 percent of the area between the Mediterranean and the Jordan), it settled on a process that ultimately – and, one could say, logically – imploded: Labor's piecemeal territorial handovers to the new Palestinian Authority during the Oslo years weren't nearly enough to satisfy Palestinian aspirations and bring peace; and those same "redeployments" came to be seen by a terror-stricken Israeli society as altogether too generous – and dangerous.

With Israelis over the past 20 years increasingly seeing peace as unfeasible and conflict as inevitable (recall Netanyahu's 2015 [statement](#) that Israel would "forever live by the sword"), Labor's limited territorial claims took on the appearance of "Likud-lite" – a paler, less effective, and more naïve approach, compared to the rightwing's more robust and self-confident ambitions.

Labor, unwilling to stake out a truly leftist position on the territories, and unable to compete with the right, had no real message on the Palestinian issue to offer the public and it began to hemorrhage voters, first in a trickle, and then, over the past year, in a torrent, until its base of support had run dry. Polls taken since Labor broke away in early April from its parliamentary alliance with Meretz show the party of Ben-Gurion and Rabin [well below](#) the minimum vote threshold needed for election, should it decide to run independently again. Barring a major surprise, it seems that the party that created the State of Israel has reached the end of the road just as the country approaches its most fateful turning point since 1948. ■

Ron Skolnik is an American-Israeli political columnist and public speaker, whose articles have appeared in a variety of publications, including Haaretz, The Forward, Al-Monitor, Tikkun, and the Palestine-Israel Journal.



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An interactive Zoom conversation with
Peter Beinart

*Annexation: Zionism and
Democracy in a post-Two State
Solution World*

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Gili Meisler



Moira Jilani

COVID-19 Challenges Settler/ Palestinian Reconciliation Efforts

Interview with Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger, cofounder of Roots/Shorashim/Judur – Part 1

By Susan Hoechstetter



Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger describes himself as a “passionate Zionist settler” who in 2014 had a life-changing conversion after meeting Ali Abu Awwad and other Palestinians who were dialoguing with Israeli Jews. As both an Orthodox rabbi and a settler, that conversion created leadership opportunities for him, as well as the challenges involved in promoting a viewpoint which starkly differed from the views of his community members. He has taken up those challenges head-on.

The American-born Rabbi made aliya (immigrated to Israel) at the age of 20. In 2014, he cofounded Roots/Shorashim/Judur with Ali Abu Awwad, Shaul Judelman, and others, and currently works full-time as its Director of International Relations. Roots brings together Israeli settlers and Palestinians who live on the West Bank, creating a network of local Palestinian and Israeli grassroots activists working towards reconciliation through dialogue and events that build trust between the two groups.

The interview below, the first of two with Rabbi Schlesinger, was conducted on March 30, 2020. In it, he addresses how the current coronavirus pandemic is affecting Roots’ peace work, and also discusses Palestinian-Israeli cooperation in the health care system in Israel. He points out that many Palestinians are, sadly, already near starvation as a result of the current lack of work. A second interview will feature Rabbi Schlesinger’s views on how peace efforts, if they are to be successful, must involve religious Jews, Muslims, and Christians as well as the dramatic history of his conversion from viewing Palestinians as enemies to viewing them as full human beings and allies.

Susan Hoechstetter: Rabbi Schlesinger, you’ve been working with Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the West Bank through [Roots](#) to build dialogue and trust for several years. How is the coronavirus, which we are all focused upon now, impacting that work?

Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger: Now, instead of gathering person-to-person in meeting halls, we’re gathering online. In one way it’s actually more intimate because we’re getting to see each other’s houses. It’s against the law for Palestinians and Israelis to go to each other’s houses in the West Bank. But Skype and Zoom are not covered under that. Israel forbids its citizens from entering Palestinian zones and forbids Palestinians from entering Israeli cities and settlements within the Israeli zones.

Our main mission is building relationships with Palestinians and the core of that work is hosting people at our Merkaz Karama Center (Dignity Center) in the West Bank between Bethlehem and Hebron, the area called Gush Etzion by Israelis. After years of efforts, Roots has started three nascent satellite groups of local Israelis and Palestinians in other parts of the West Bank. Until the virus struck, we had face-to-face activities of some sort almost every day. And being in the same room is transforming. Now, because of isolating due to the virus, we are not able to meet face to face. We decided, though, that we could do some of our work over Zoom, and are continuing many of our meetings that way. Our youth group just met. And our Jewish-Christian and our Jewish-Muslim groups have meetings planned. Tonight we’re hoping to have 30 Palestinian and Jewish activists meet by Zoom.

One problem is that there’s not much opportunity to bring in new people. Soon it will be Ramadan (*the interview took place before the holiday began – SH*), when Muslims fast from dawn to dusk, which is an opportunity to come together, across religions, over the dinner that breaks the fast. We have done this every year almost since Roots was founded, and there have been times when we had 100 people at the meal. It was wonderful. Certain Jewish people are more willing to meet “Muslims” than they are to meet “Palestinians.” They are the same people, of course, but more palatable and less threatening to some when framed as Muslims. Not doing the break-fasts this year will be a big loss.



Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger

And, the pandemic is not having a positive effect on Palestinians' work here. The minute many Palestinians here don't work, they don't eat. I have recently heard that many are already almost starving. Some are scrounging in garbage cans looking for food. The Palestinians are basically stateless; they don't have unemployment insurance and they don't have bailouts like you have in the United States and like Israel will have.

So, we are going to ask our American Board to see if we can collect money to support meals for Palestinians during Ramadan. I'm hopeful that we can get American Jews, Christians, and Muslims to contribute. Currently, very few American Muslims contribute to Roots. Perhaps they will now. But of course Americans have their own problems at this time.

SH: You live in walking distance from your Palestinian neighbors. Has dealing with a very contagious virus brought about more Jewish-Palestinian cooperation?

RS: You see on social media and in newspaper articles that 20 percent of the Israeli healthcare system is staffed by Israeli Palestinians [*Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel – SH*] – pharmacists, doctors, and others. And we're all looking more to the healthcare system now. So there is a feeling of a shared fate of Jewish and Palestinian citizens within the State of Israel. And there's hope that the sense of a shared fate will continue. But that's with Israeli Palestinians and [Israeli] Jews. In our local world here, Palestinians are not Israeli citizens. Unlike Jerusalem and Israel proper, when it comes to the West Bank / Judea and Samaria, Palestinian and Israeli healthcare systems are 99 percent separate.

The question is – are Israelis going to look more empathetically upon Palestinians where we live? That is not happening. My Jewish neighbors know just about nothing about what is currently happening with the Palestinians within whose midst we live. They don't think about it. The few Palestinians they see, other than if they engage in Roots activities, work building houses or gardening. That work is not taking place right now, so there's less contact. I'm sure my local Jewish community is thinking just about Jews.

SH: If the pandemic lasts a long time, what do you think it might mean for your future work?

RS: I have no idea. I generally feel that Israelis who live in Judea and Samaria are blind to the existence of Palestinians. With the current pandemic, it's worse than before because Palestinians and Jews don't even see each other in the streets because everyone is in their houses. For my Jewish neighbors, their newspapers – they read the right-wing paper, *Makor Rishon* – Google groups, and updates from local rabbis don't make any mention of Palestinians. I appreciate how we in Roots are on Zoom with Palestinians now, but 99 percent of my Jewish neighbors don't have that interaction.

SH: Is there anything you'd like to add?

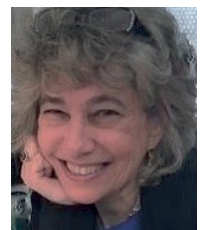
RS: Yes, I can be reached at ravhanan@gmail.com. Readers can feel free to reach out to me. And readers are invited to join our English-language Zoom events and can obtain the Zoom link by sending me an email with a one-line explanation of who they are. Questions can be submitted beforehand to me at that email address.

SH: Thank you for your time and your groundbreaking work.

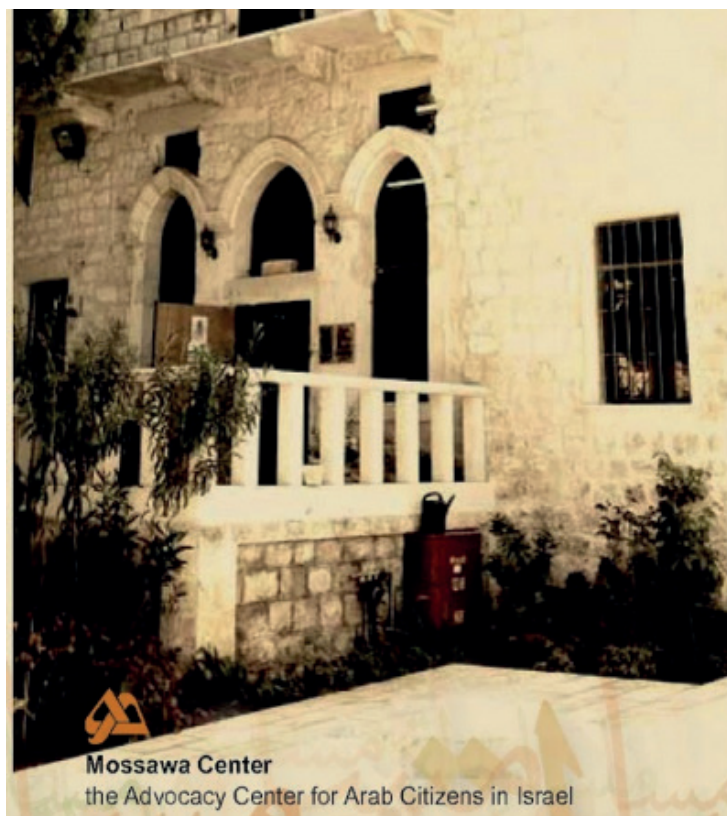


To be continued...

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



By Suha Salman Mousa



Mossawa Center

the Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel

The Mossawa Center, the Advocacy Center for Palestinian Arab citizens in Israel, was established in 1999 in order to promote the economic, social, cultural, and political rights of the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel, and the recognition of this community as a national indigenous minority with its own national, cultural, and historical distinctiveness. In addition, the Mossawa Center seeks to promote a democratic society and acts against all forms of discrimination.

The Mossawa Center engages in a variety of spheres to achieve its mission, including:

- Advocacy in Israel, on the Knesset and governmental levels
- International advocacy, amongst political decision-makers and on the grassroots level
- Economic research and state budget analysis
- Community organizing and youth engagement
- Strengthening Arab civil society through capacity- and network-building
- Outreach to the Jewish community
- Media advocacy

Palestinian Arab Citizens of Israel

The population of Palestinian Arabs in Israel is 1.8 million, representing 21 percent of the total Israeli population. (This number does not include Palestinians living in the occupied territories, who do not have citizenship.) Most live in Arab-majority towns and cities such as Nazareth, Umm al-Fahm, and Rahat, and in mixed Arab-Jewish cities such as Haifa and Acre.

The Israeli government has consistently and systematically discriminated against the Palestinian Arab community, despite their status as citizens, since the country's founding in 1948, and over the last 15 years, discrimination and racism against minority groups has increased significantly. This discrimination manifests itself in many aspects of daily life for Palestinian Arab citizens. The Arab community in Israel suffers from land confiscation and inequitable administration, home demolitions, systematic attacks on their civil rights, and racial incitement. Moreover, as a result of discrimination in state budgeting, nearly 50 percent of Palestinian Arab families live below the national poverty line and eight of the ten poorest localities in Israel are Arab towns.

On the other hand, education levels have increased significantly since 2000. As of 2018, 29 percent of Palestinian Arab women and 20 percent of Palestinian Arab men in Israel had completed 16+ years of schooling, compared to 20 percent and 15 percent, respectively, in 2000.

Despite the challenges it faces, the Palestinian Arab minority is more than a victimized community: Palestinian Arab citizens constitute an integral component of Israel's social and political fabric and, because of its unique position, the Palestinian Arab minority has unrivaled potential to foster mutual understanding and trust between Palestinians and Israelis and, ultimately, a just peace.

State Budget Advocacy and Economic Development Projects

The Mossawa Center is the only civil society organization in Israel that comprehensively analyzes the state budget and its implications for the country's Palestinian Arab citizens. The Center produces a report each year on the needs of the community in contrast to the budget allocated to it. The Mossawa Center's State Budget Analysis provides members of the Knesset, civil society organizations, local authorities, and citizens with the details needed to effectively advocate for more equitable fiscal policy. The Mossawa Center also engages in direct advocacy regarding the state budget – on the Knesset and governmental levels, as well as in the court system.

Besides discrimination in state budgeting on the national level, one of the greatest impediments to the socioeconomic wellbeing of the Palestinian Arab community is the economic health of Arab local authorities. Drawing on its state budget expertise, the Mossawa Center works with local authorities to access funds from the central government, and to build and implement budgets in an effective manner. Since 2017, the Mossawa Center has been working with the Palestinian Arab village of Jisr al-Zarqa – the poorest locality in Israel – where the majority of inhabitants live below the poverty line. The Mossawa Center, in cooperation with local authorities, the Arab Center for Alternative Planning, and the Legal Clinics at Tel Aviv University, has begun to unlock Jisr al-Zarqa's economic potential. The ongoing project has so far resulted in the allocation of millions of shekels, vast infrastructural improvements, and increased involvement of the community in the village's future.

Legal Advocacy

The Israeli legal system has been riddled for decades with institutionalized discrimination against its Palestinian Arab citizens – despite their supposedly equal status as citizens of the state. The Mossawa Center seeks to transform this reality,

advocating for equal rights through legislation and challenging discriminatory laws through litigation.

In the current political climate, with the rate and scope of legislative attacks on the Palestinian Arab community on the rise, the Mossawa Center's legal advocacy team has found itself increasingly on the defensive, monitoring and combating a raft of discriminatory legislation.

In July 2018, for example, the Israeli parliament passed the highly contentious "Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People" law. As a Basic Law, it enshrines in constitutional statute the second-class status of Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel, downgrading the standing of the Arabic language and explicitly denying non-Jews the right to national self-determination. The law also allows for segregation in housing and planning, a practice that was formerly rampant but had at least been subject to judicial recourse. The law repeatedly privileges the State's Jewish identity, without once referencing equality or democracy.

In the most recent Knesset, the Mossawa Center engaged in extensive advocacy against Culture Minister Miri Regev's "Loyalty in Culture" bill, which seeks to silence Palestinian and progressive cultural institutions that are critical of the state and its policies. Fortunately, this bill was shelved – but other discriminatory pieces of legislation have made it through the Knesset in recent years, including: The Expulsion Law (designed to make it easier to expel Palestinian Arab Knesset members); the Kaminitz Law (aimed at construction in the Arab sector); and the NGO Law (aimed at limiting the activity of anti-occupation nonprofit organizations).

The Mossawa Center also engages in strategic litigation on behalf of Palestinian Arab citizens, as well as on behalf of the greater public interest. Areas of litigation include issues of police brutality and racial incitement, as well as discrimination in social, economic, and cultural spheres.

Palestinian Arab Citizens of Israel During the COVID-19 Outbreak

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, the Palestinian Arab community in Israel has had to deal with another major problem: Deliberate failure by the Israeli government to address its public health needs. In response, the Mossawa Center has stepped in to lead an intense advocacy and awareness campaign in order to help the Palestinian Arab community in Israel cope with the COVID-19 outbreak. We were on the front line as one of the first organizations to produce and broadcast videos in the Arabic language with Palestinian Arab medical professionals, and we flooded the media on the needs of the community. Here are some

more of the other projects and initiatives we have carried out over the last few months to address the crisis.

Health Services and Testing

At the outset of the outbreak, testing facilities and healthcare services were concentrated exclusively in major Jewish localities. Thanks to intense advocacy, however, we were able to accomplish the following in the Palestinian Arab community:

- The establishment of testing sites in the major Arab localities of Nazareth, Umm al-Fahm, Taybeh, Rahat, Tira, and the Triangle area.
- The opening of coronavirus clinics and treatment facilities. Ensuring the equal deployment of respirators.
- Arranging for isolation centers for patients.
- The allocation of resources for patient tracing. The provision of priority testing, care, and training for senior-care teams and the strengthening of nursing home care.

Information Availability

One of the most dangerous problems facing the Palestinian Arab community amidst the outbreak has been the lack of information provided to it by the government. Consequently, we have worked to fill this need by:

- Pushing the Health Ministry to provide information in Arabic about the outbreak on its website.
- Launching a dedicated page in Arabic on our own website where we translate and merge all the information relevant and vital to the Palestinian Arab community on a single page.
- Working with the Joint List faction in Knesset and the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel, an extra-parliamentary group, to raise awareness about necessary precautions and actions the community must take. This included hosting a live Q&A about the virus with Dr. Mogher Khamaisi, Director of the Department of Internal Medicine at Rambam Health Care Campus.

Welfare and Food Security

Scarcity of food and welfare services has emerged as another problem that will impact the Palestinian Arab community disproportionately. In response, we are working to combat the issue by:

- Demanding that the Ministry of Social Affairs expand its aid programs and provide Palestinian Arab families in need with food packages.
- Advocating for the allocation of 450,000 hot meals for the elderly

- Pushing for the allocation of 300,000 vouchers worth 300 NIS (approx. \$85) each for families in need.
- Helping people apply for unemployment benefits.
- Securing over 400 food packages through our community solidarity initiative in Haifa.

Advocacy in Support of the Palestinian Arab Community's Public Health Needs

The Mossawa Center has also been active in the Knesset, where we reach out to Knesset members on pressing issues, forward documents containing the demands of the Palestinian Arab community and local councils, and follow up on matters being discussed by the relevant Knesset committees. On the government level, we present the demands of the Arab community, together with experts and emergency staff, in addition to facilitating connections between Palestinian Arab local councils and government ministries regarding the needs of the Palestinian Arab community in fighting the spread of coronavirus.

Coordination and Management

In cooperation with the High Follow-Up Committee and others, we have established a robust network in order to ensure that our efforts are carried out effectively and maintained successfully throughout the Palestinian Arab community. We have done so by:

- Establishing headquarters in mixed cities (such as Haifa) and major Palestinian Arab localities in order to coordinate activities between organizations and extend our reach to all members of the community.
- Establishing headquarters in the Negev in order to coordinate community activities in the unrecognized Bedouin villages.
- Communicating and coordinating with local municipalities in order to effectively allocate resources and report data to relevant government ministries and bodies.

Additional information about the Mossawa Center and all our efforts can be found on our website in English, <http://www.mossawa.org/eng/> ■

Suha Salman Mousa is the Executive Director of the Mossawa Center, the advocacy center for Palestinian citizens of Israel. She also led the initiative to establish Friends of Mossawa, a U.S.-based sister nonprofit organization of the Mossawa.



Letter to the Meretz Leadership and their Responses

Below is a letter that the Board of Partners for Progressive Israel sent to the leadership of Meretz and the responses we received. The letter expressed our view that Meretz and the Israeli Left must be more pro-active in working with Arab citizens of Israel in a political context. We would be happy to hear any comments by you to the views expressed in the letters - or your own views on the subject. To comment, click [HERE](#).

May 17, 2020

To the Meretz leadership:

These are indeed grim days for those of us who actively support progressive change in Israel. Between Covid-19, the swearing in of the new rightwing government, and the likelihood of imminent Israeli annexation of large parts of the West Bank, it is hard to retain optimism that needed change will be attainable at any time soon. With that said, we stand with you, reiterating our strong support and commitment to Meretz. The work ahead is more important than ever before.

The undersigned are the officers and members of the Board of Directors of Partners for Progressive Israel; many of us have been active for decades in the struggles for peace and social justice for Israel, working both in Israel and in the American Jewish community. Some of us are Israeli citizens as well, who grew up in or have lived for years in Israel. We understand the reality on the ground.

We are writing to express our strong support for a decisive effort to increase Jewish-Arab political partnership in Meretz that would embody the values of a shared democratic society. This is not a retreat from our ideals of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, but a necessary step towards their fulfillment; a recognition of the reality that Arab Israelis are partners with Jewish Israelis in the struggle to change Israel's current ruinous course.

We reject criticism that a political partnership between Jews and Arabs betrays Meretz's Zionist roots. We fully recognize that there are sins as well as glorious accomplishments of our forebears; decisions that must be regretted as well as those that should be celebrated. But going forward, both political reality and basic morality dictate the importance for Meretz to create a model for a viable political structure that will appeal to Jews and Arabs alike, and that will work towards a state based on democracy, peace, equality, and an end to the occupation.

Election after election we have seen the failure of parties claiming to represent the "center." Now that Meretz is set on the path of rebuilding itself and creating a true alternative to the current political direction, a new orientation is imperative if the Left is ever to regain a significant place in Israeli politics. Engaging all parts of Israeli society is essential. Strengthening and deepening the relationship with the Joint List, as well as with those Arab citizens of Israel already affiliated with Meretz, are initial steps. Both Arab and Jewish leaders need to play an integral role in the party's decision-making.

While there will be challenges in this rebuilding, we want you to know that you have our full support in fighting to restore democratic practices and for creating a viable alternative on the Left. As we have stood with you for all these years, we will continue to partner with you on this difficult journey towards a Jewish and democratic Israel as envisioned by its founders and set out in the Declaration of Independence.

We look forward to hearing from you and working together for a better future.

B'shalom

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Paul Scham, President
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Karen Shapiro, Vice President
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Gil Kulick
Rabbi Andrea London
Lilly Rivlin
Sanford Weiner

Dear Friends,

First allow me, on behalf of Meretz, to congratulate you for your most important initiative. As we invest in our mutual relations on the basis of Zionism and Israeli-diaspora ties, it is essential that we are involved in each other's challenges and share our visions and perspectives.

I strongly adhere to the desire for a Jewish-Arab coexistence and equality in Israel. As we define Israel as a Jewish and democratic nation, we should always bear in mind the fact that there are Israeli citizens who are not Jewish and must enjoy full civil equality.

Therefore it is Meretz's mission, and always was, to fight racism and discrimination, and to defend and promote civil rights. Parliamentary cooperation, political partnerships, and firstly strong actions on the grassroots level are not only welcomed but rather essential for all the political factors.

Our most urgent common challenge is preventing the annexation of settlements in the west bank and the deprivation of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. This catastrophe is enthusiastically encouraged by President Trump and his Middle eastern staff. Unfortunately the US has become the major international power advocating annexation. We need your decisive help in order to tackle this disastrous plan.

We are working here Jews and Arabs, hand in hand, to put an end to the occupation and bring about peace and prosperity for all. But since the main pressure is coming from America, we yearn for your active involvement. I do believe that together we can win this. That will be a tremendous achievement.

My dear friends I thank you for your continuous support and I wish you all a quick recovery from the Corona crisis. Let's hope that we can all meet soon in Jerusalem.



Sincerely,

MK Nitzan Horowitz
Chairperson of Meretz

Thank you Paul and all friends on PPI.

I strongly agree with your words and believe that our mission is to go along that path. Jewish-Arab partnership is not only the right and just path for Meretz, it is the right and just vision for the Israeli left and for Israel. It is the way to ensure full democratic citizenship and to fulfill our premise of equality and justice. Moreover, from political view, it is the only way to win a majority in Israeli society.

I promise to do all in my power to lead toward that inspiring vision.



*Thank you again
and all the best to you
and your families.*

Tamar Zandberg, MK

Dear Paul,

First and foremost, I wish to thank the PPI for its longstanding support and partnership, it is of the highest importance that we maintain our ties with partners abroad, in an increasingly globalized world.

I would also like to thank you for your remarks. There are many thoughts and discussions and different views on what would be the right course of action. I rest assured that whichever path we take, our dialogue and cooperation will continue.



Kind regards,

Tomer Reznik
Secretary General, Meretz

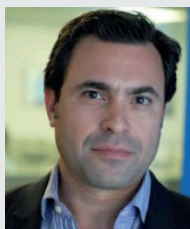
Dear Paul & friends at PPI,

First, let me use this opportunity to thank you for your endless support to Meretz. We cherish this partnership which is a huge asset for Meretz.

There is no doubt that on the background of the recent (and unfortunately not surprising) collapse of the alternative to Netanyahu, which happened because of racism within the ranks of the Blue & White faction, and even with in one of the MKs on our list, Ms. Levy Abekasis, Meretz should emphasize and hoist the flag of Jewish-Arab partnership.

Not only is it the ideological right thing to do, it is also the politically smart thing to do. The last year and three election cycles proved that much like in the US, where Democrats cannot get into power without the Black & Latino votes, there isn't any path for a change in government in Israel without the Arab vote. It is Meretz's destiny to serve as the bridge for preventing another de-legitimization of a political clear majority because of the fact that Arabs are part of it.

Part of the plan I presented to the Meretz Executive Board upon being elected as its Chair several weeks ago was a strategic process the Board will lead, to examine how to promote our vision into political action. I will very much welcome your input and ideas on what we should do. There is only one guideline: an open mind!



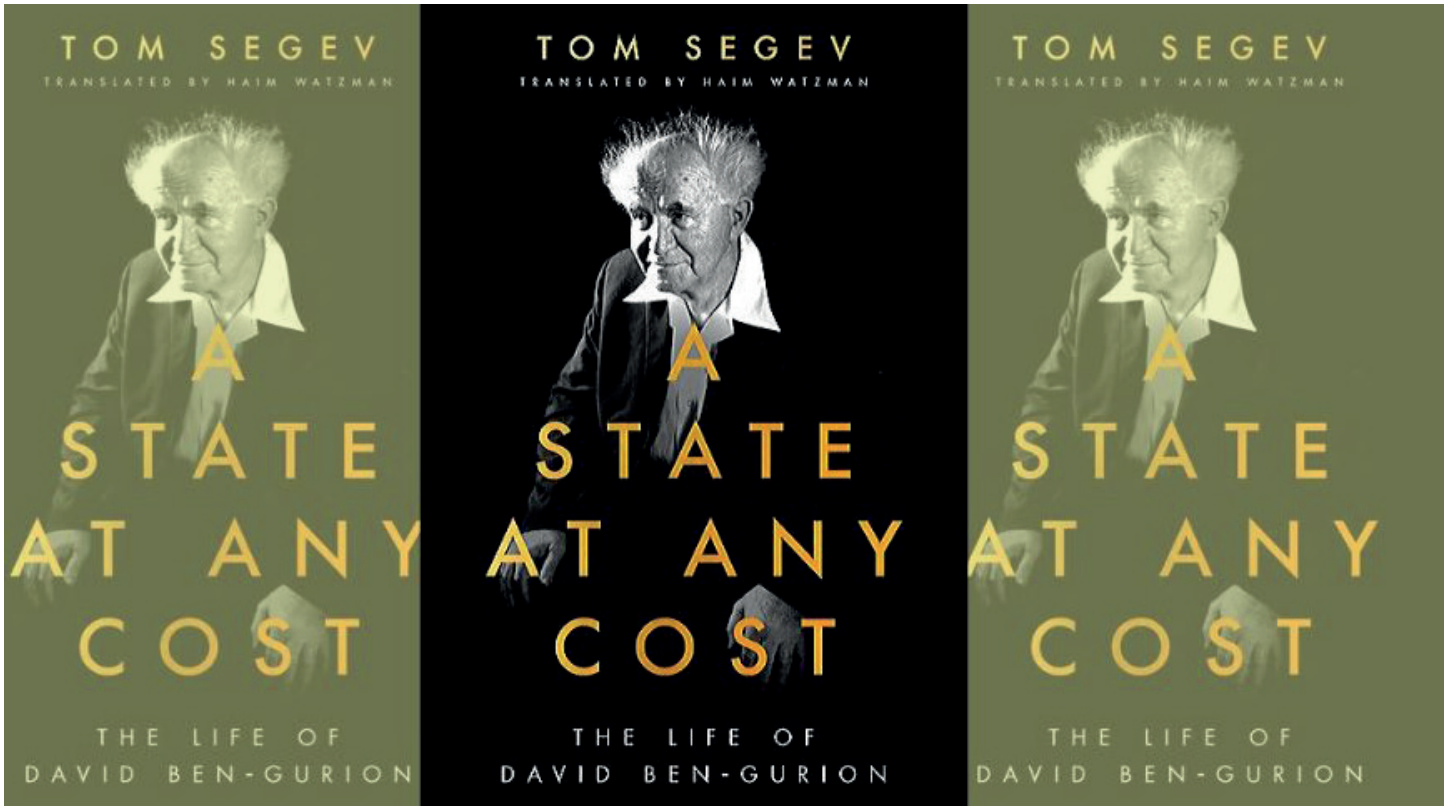
Looking forward to continue our conversation.

Best,

Uri Zaki
Chair of Meretz Executive

A State at Any Cost: The Life of David Ben-Gurion (Tom Segev: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux: 2019)

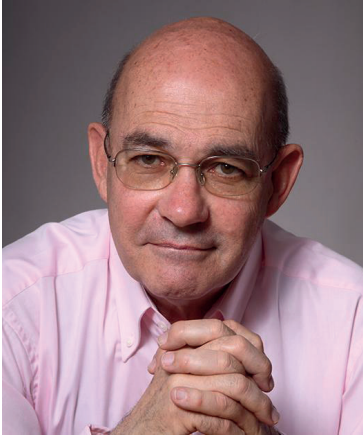
Translated by Haim Watzman / Reviewed by Peter Eisenstadt



During the years Tom Segev was writing his indispensable biography of David Ben-Gurion, *A State at Any Cost*, he records that he was confronted by a Ben-Gurion revival in Israel; new books, plays, films, documentaries about the former prime minister. Many of them looked at him nostalgically, eager to recall a time when Israel's leaders were not personally corrupt, did not see public service as an excuse for private enrichment, and when Israel and "unending moral quagmire" were not yet synonyms. (Ben-Gurion did have an unfortunate habit of making extravagant book purchases on the government's shekel, which is, I must say, for me anyway, the most forgivable of all forms of venality.) And it is certainly true that during Ben-Gurion's era, Zionism, outside of the Arab world of course, had far more lauders than detractors, and Zionism was seen as a progressive cause rather than a rallying cry for reactionaries. But the best way to inoculate oneself against Ben-Gurion nostalgia, in thinking, with Wordsworth's Milton, that Ben-Gurion "shouldst be living at this hour" is to read Segev's book. For those who hope for a new, democratic Israel, let us leave Ben-Gurion interred at Sde Boker.

Although Segev's book has affinities with Israel's "new historians," now a generation old, his main purpose is not a recounting of Israel's sorry history of relations with Palestinian Arabs. Neither is it an effort at debunking nor a catalogue of his flaws and shortcomings, though catalogue them he does, running through most of the seven deadly sins; including at least envy, pride, vanity, and concupiscence. However, one sin Segev does not, and cannot, accuse Ben-Gurion of, is sloth. Ben-Gurion was a force of nature, a machine of perpetual motion and ambition, who accomplished much and who worked tirelessly for the Jewish people at the darkest hours in their long history, his legacy too complex and too consequential for a simple thumbs up or down.

Reading Segev's biography, the books that most came to mind were Robert Caro's studies of political power, i.e., his lengthy biographies of Robert Moses and Lyndon Johnson. Like them, Segev's Ben-Gurion was not particularly likeable, not warm; a man with many associates but few close friends; a suspicious man with many enemies, real and imagined, and he apparently entirely lacked a sense of humor. But like Moses and Johnson, he was a master of the bureaucratic arts. If, as Oscar Wilde was



Tom Segev

supposed to have said, the problem with socialism was too many evenings, in this way only was Ben-Gurion's socialism not skin-deep. He loved going to meetings, writing memoranda, and explaining his position at great length. Like his fellow power brokers, he was both a great persuader and a great intimidator, able to convince or cajole

others into agreeing that his way was the highway, the only way forward, and that all other alternatives were either unworkable or unthinkable.

The way to make sense of Ben-Gurion's contradictions, as Segev suggests, is to subsume them all beneath his life's goal, to create a Jewish state in Palestine and defend that state at all costs, at all odds, against all comers. Born in Plonsk, in Russian Poland, in 1886, coming of age amid the welter of ideologies that coursed through Eastern European Jewry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he sampled many, such as socialism and anarchism – the ideology of his wife-to-be Paula Moonweis, when they met – but Zionism was always his north star. Ben-Gurion made aliyah in 1906, found that he wasn't interested or cut out for manual labor or farming, and soon became involved in labor-Zionist politics, though until World War I his main means of support seems to have been money from his father in Plonsk. (Ardent Zionist that he was, he remained quite the Plonsker, returning there numerous times through the 1930s.) Quickly moving up the political ladder, he became, shortly after its founding in 1920, the general-secretary of the Histadrut and, given the absence of other strong institutional structures in the Yishuv, he used his position to amass steadily increasing political power.

Labor for Ben-Gurion meant Jewish labor, and this meant reducing or, preferably, eliminating Arab employment from Jewish enterprises. His socialist principles led, perhaps self-servingly, to the conclusion that since some Jewish landowners were exploiting Arab labor, the socialist solution was not to employ them at all. And this would require defending Jewish settlements against Arab attacks and reprisals. Segev makes clear that at no point in his life did Ben-Gurion have any faith in Jewish-Arab cooperation, nor believed that there could be

a peaceful resolution of tensions in Palestine. As he stated in 1914, and reiterated in many ways throughout his life, "one does not receive a country, one conquers it."

Ben-Gurion saw himself as a person of destiny. Segev argues that one of the central events in Ben-Gurion's life was an extended visit to the Soviet Union in 1923 and, though he was neither a Communist nor a fellow traveler, he marveled at what the then-dying Lenin had wrought, "a man who knew how to crawl on his belly in the utter depths to reach his goal, a man of iron who will not spare human life and the blood of innocents for the sake of revolution" and so on. Segev suggests that while he wouldn't or couldn't try to realize his goals with the ruthlessness of a Lenin, he saw his ultimate responsibility not to the Jewish people, as one might suppose, but to his version of the "Zionist Idea."

By the 1930s Ben-Gurion was determined to topple Chaim Weizmann from the leadership of the World Zionist organization, which he proceeded to do, and continued to treat him with considerable pettiness. (Weizmann was in the United States when Israel's independence was declared, and Ben-Gurion deliberately did not leave space for him to sign the Israel's Declaration of Independence.) As for his other great rivals in the 1930s and 1940s, Vladimir Jabotinsky and Menachem Begin; for Segev, their disputes were much ado about not very much. Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky both wanted a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan, both of them wrote of an "Iron Wall," and both also promised to protect the civil rights of the Arab minority in a Jewish state. Although they came from very different ideological backgrounds, Segev asserts that "Jabotinsky was not a fascist any more than Ben-Gurion was a Marxist. Ben-Gurion was no less nationalist or militarist than Jabotinsky. The right-left divide in the Zionist movement was largely a matter of style and modes of operation, not of fundamental values. In the large picture it was a fight over power more than it was over ideas."

Segev's account of the Altalena affair, when under Ben-Gurion's command, the newly formed Israel Defense Forces sank, with loss of life on both sides, the Altalena, a ship carrying military supplies to the Irgun (Etzel), is more sympathetic to Begin than Ben-Gurion. Begin had already agreed to place his forces under IDF authority and a compromise could have been worked out with Begin, but Ben-Gurion did not want any challenge to his new authority as prime minister.

Segev seems most interested in Ben-Gurion before 1948 and, indeed, his role in helping to bring Israel into existence is more important than what he did afterwards. I am inclined

to give Ben-Gurion a bit more credit than does Segev for his handling of the Holocaust. True, he made a number of stupid statements to the effect that creating a Jewish state was more important than saving refugees, though it is not clear that he really meant them, and he did what he could to rescue Jewish refugees. However, in the end, Ben-Gurion was as powerless as all other Jewish leaders were in confronting the catastrophe. As for the Nakba, Segev gets it right. Through a combination of intention, winks and nods, and allowing events to take their own course if it involved the dispossession of Palestinians, Ben-Gurion got what he wanted, a Jewish state with a relatively insignificant Palestinian minority. And Segev is also correct that what Ben-Gurion wanted for Israel/Palestine was not really Jews but Zionists. Thus, he found the German Jews in the 1930s too German and bourgeois, and after the creation of the state he found Arab Jews too Arab, survivors of the Holocaust too traumatized to be of much use, while the Jews he really wanted to ingather, from the United States, didn't want to come.

As prime minister, Ben-Gurion became, in Segev's words, something of an "Israeli King Lear," given to threats of relinquishing his power without really wanting to relinquish it and, though he indeed established, at least for Israel's Jewish population, a strong democratic tradition, his tenure was erratic, highlighted by terrible misjudgments such as the Lavon affair and the Suez crisis. After '67 his statement that "if I had to choose between a small Israel with peace and a large Israel without peace, I would prefer a small Israel," has sometimes been quoted by peace activists, but Segev argues that "he had always dreamed of possessing the entire Land of Israel, and that continued to be his ultimate wish," even after the Six-Day War

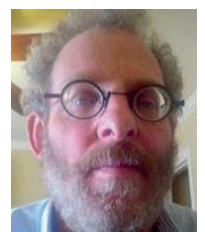
Adam Shatz, an anti-Zionist, in a sharp and biting review of Segev's biography in the *London Review of Books*, concludes that Segev shows that "how central exclusionary nationalism, war and racism were to Ben-Gurion's vision of the Jewish homeland in Palestine, and how contemptuous he was, not only of the Arabs, but of Jewish life outside Zion," and that his former admirers "may look at the state that Ben-Gurion built, and ask if the cost has been worth it."

I don't think that is really the point. Surely the question of whether the creation of Israel was worth the cost of the terrible conditions of its birth is a discussion not really worth having. Like all shaping events in history, the creation of Israel cannot be wished or counter-factualized away. But I think Segev would argue (seconded by me) that Ben-Gurion was

perhaps the key person in the shrinking of mid-20th century Zionism from a plethora of contending possibilities to its dominant minatory and reactionary form today. Begin may have lost the battle of the Altalena, but with Ben-Gurion's help, he won the war.

Let me end on a more positive note. The anecdote that most lingered for me from Segev's 800 pages has nothing to do with the Jews, Palestine, or Israel. When in 1916, Ben-Gurion, in the United States as an emissary for Po'ale Zion, stopped in Nashville, he wrote a friend about life in what he called "the Negro Pale of Settlement"—a great phrase—and how embarrassed and ashamed he was to sit in the front of a Jim Crow trolley car, or having to make use of a whites-only bathroom. When he went to a local movie theater—showing *Birth of a Nation*, perhaps?—in an act of solidarity, he went to sit in the black section, though an usher immediately came and insisted that he relocate himself to the white section. This didn't prevent him, later in life, from worrying about uncivilized blacks from Africa taking over the world, or making that ultimate stupid "trump" argument against Jewish intermarriage to a friend, that after all, you wouldn't want your daughter to marry a black man. Still, his observations from Nashville were impressive, showing that at moments Ben-Gurion's highest aspirations were universal enough to include all peoples and nations in their quest for equality. This is Ben-Gurion (and Zionism) at their best. However, as Segev shows, far too much of contemporary Israel is built on a foundation of Ben-Gurion at his worst. To start again, we must look at Israel's history without apology, and without blinking. There is no better place to start than with Segev's biography. ■

Peter Eisenstadt is an independent historian who lives in Clemson, South Carolina. He is completing a biography of the African-American religious thinker Howard Thurman, to be published by the University of Virginia Press.



“Deal of the Century”: What Now for the Israeli Left?



This webinar was conducted by Partners for Progressive Israel on March 12, 2020 and has been edited for length and clarity. The full webinar can be accessed [here](#).

Donald Trump and Binyamin Netanyahu recently announced a new plan for Israel and Palestine weighted heavily in favor of those in Israel who support annexation of the West Bank and reject the internationally accepted parameters for a viable two-state solution.

With unilateral Israeli annexation of a large portion of the West Bank on the near horizon, does the Trump plan mark the end of the road for the two-state solution? Must the Israeli left now formulate a new paradigm for the future?

Jodi: My name is Jodi Rudoren. I’m the Editor-in-Chief of “The Forward,” the leading Jewish journalism outlet in the United States. Before I started at “The Forward” about six months ago, I was a journalist for more than two decades at “The New York Times,” including a tour as a Jerusalem bureau chief, which is where I met today’s two wonderful, impressive speakers:

Aluf Benn is the Editor-in-Chief of Haaretz. He has been working there since 1989. He’s been running the place since 2011 for almost 10 years. Aluf always tells the truth as he sees it. His commentary is always based on his deep experience and is filled with sharp, fresh analysis.

Joining us also is Akiva Eldar who used to sit on the “Haaretz” editorial board and, in fact, worked at the paper for 35 years. He and Aluf know each other so well. He was the Chief Political Correspondent and US Bureau Chief among many

other jobs there. Akiva is now a columnist for “Al-Monitor.”

Aluf and Akiva are two stalwarts of the Israeli Jewish left. They’ve recently had a bit of a public back and forth over President Trump’s peace plan and specifically how Palestinians should respond to it, which is one of the things we’ll be talking about today. It seems a long time since Trump announced his Deal of the Century Peace Plan back in January/. Aluf, given how distracted we’ve all been by the coronavirus and our own political campaign news, I hope you could start us off with an update on what has happened since the March election and what’s likely to happen next.

Aluf: It’s still topsy turvy because the March election again ended without a clear winner. Then came the coronavirus, which was already in the background. The coronavirus crisis once again positioned Netanyahu as the national father figure. He’s running the daily press conferences in a similar way to how he ran them during the Gaza War six years ago. 90% of the news cycle today in Israel is dominated by the virus.

Jodi: Akiva, can you talk a little bit about what you think might happen next?

Akiva – As Aluf mentioned, everything is dominated by the coronavirus. There is a big hole in the budget, and now we will have to deal with people who are not able to pay their mortgages. Priorities in public discourse have changed

Jodi: This call was framed as being about the Israeli left. We have traditionally thought of the Israeli left as the Zionist left. Meretz and Labor ended up with seven seats in the March election. The Joint List is now the third-largest party with 15 seats. What does that mean for what we’ve traditionally understood as the Israeli left?

Akiva: First of all, it means that the Israeli Jewish left will have to review its agenda. What “left” means is going to change. I think one of the reasons that so many people moved from Meretz to the Joint List was that there was no Arab in a meaningful position on the Zionist left list.

But we’re here together now to talk about Trump’s plan. If Meretz will not be able to bring the conflict back to the center of its agenda— if Meretz cannot bring the occupation back to the center of public discourse—it has nothing to offer. The March election campaign was based on corruption or no corruption, and whether you liked Bibi or not. Once it’s not a discussion about Bibi’s personality, we will go back to key

issues, for instance, the budget and peace. Then maybe the Israeli left will have something to offer to the discourse.



Jodi: One of the ways that the Joint List has managed to grow is by not focusing on the big questions of peace and settlements, but by talking about services for Arab communities within Israel as a primary concern.

Akiva: I think that the Joint List ought to send a bunch of flowers to Lieberman and to Bibi. It started with Lieberman lifting the threshold hoping that the Arabs would drop under it; that made them unite under one flag. A second cause of the growth of the Joint List was Netanyahu’s incitement against Arabs.

Jodi: I wonder, Aluf, maybe you could jump in here about what feels like just a complete collapse of the old left.

Aluf: Well, the complete collapse of the old left began on July 25th, 2000, when we stood listening to Ehud Barack who just came out of the Camp David Conference and told us that there is no partner on the Palestinian side. Since then, time and again there have been polls where the majority of Israelis said they would support a two-state solution in principle. However, when the same sample was asked, “Will it happen?” they said, “No, it’s not practical.” If you believe in something but you don’t believe it’s going to happen, then you could say you’ve supported it because you want to differentiate yourself from the right wingers. The other issue concerns anti-religious sentiments; that was the key to the agenda of Shulamit Aloni, the founder of Meretz.

Akiva: Yes, the mother of Meretz.

Aluf: She was a staunch anti-clerical politician, but that line was appropriated first by the Lapid, the father and the son, and then by Lieberman. Now we have a secular right winger fighting Shas while the left is saying, “Well one day we’re going to need Shas, and an alliance with Shas is not as bad as one with settlers.” Since the end of the Second Intifada,

the cost of the status quo to the Israeli public – even with the occasional interruptions from Gaza – has been minimal.

Further, the right wing since 2009 has focused on fighting the Israeli Arab society, in part to prevent any resumption of a left-wing government dependent on the Arab voting bloc.

Clearly the achievements of the Joint List are phenomenal. They’re seen as a strong political entity. I think this is the unintended consequence of the most important thing that the Netanyahu government did: advancing the Nation-State Law almost two years ago. This law helped pull the Arab society into the mainstream.

It has been said that the political debate in Israel today is between the right and the far right. Are you more Jewish or more democratic? If you’re more democratic, then you support the anti-Bibi cause.

Jodi: Aluf, I’m glad you brought up that moment after Camp David because I want to get back to the question of the Trump Peace Plan. You wrote this very provocative piece saying that Palestinians should surrender unconditionally, just as Germany and Japan did at the end of WWII.

Aluf: This is what Trump is demanding; it amounts to unconditional surrender and accepting to be the poor neighbor of Israeli-controlled areas in the West Bank in return for some economic development.

Jodi: What I meant to say is that it does not feel as if it’s the end of the Palestinian movement in the way that a lot of people thought it would be after Camp David. Tell us more about what you think unconditional surrender would mean. Could it lead to a stable future going forward?

Aluf: I think that the major surprise that happened was that for many years, the Israeli peace camp, and apparently the Palestinian peace camp as well, were built on American pressure to drive Israel out of the territories. I think nobody anticipated an American government that would outflank this Israel from the right and basically issue a plan saying that the Palestinian National Movement is a fake and that it should forego its historic narrative and instead follow the dictates of Netanyahu.

You can find copy-pasted paragraphs from Netanyahu’s writings in the Trump Peace Plan. Here’s my question to the Palestinian leadership: when you rejected the Camp David offer 20 years ago – assuming that over time, you would get a better proposal – you believed the offer was insufficient. The same is true regarding offers you received in Taba seven

months later and then from Olmert in 2008. Looking back, was it smart to say no at the time, because what you have now is double or more the number of settlers and much less international support? In the meantime, other problems in the Middle East have surfaced. When you currently have millions of refugees from Syria, who cares about the refugees of seven decades ago? We can all adhere to the Geneva plan of 2003 and say, “This is the only possible peace plan.” How do you reconcile it with the existence of an armed, Hamas-led Palestinian enclave, run as a dictatorship in Gaza, a regime that is not going anywhere?

Jodi: Right. Which brings us I think, Akiva, to the question that I feel like every conversation really circles around, which is whether the two-state solution is still at all viable now or in the future. Is it really dead?

Akiva: If you look at the polls, the majority of the Israeli people support a two-state solution. They are not in love with it, but they have chosen it over the option of a one-state solution or the status quo. We lost eight years during Obama’s presidency. If we had President Carter or President Bush, we would certainly be better off. It was Bush who said to Prime Minister Shamir, “You have to choose between loan guarantees and promoting settlements.” Shamir said, “I can have it both ways,” and he lost the next election. There is a red line that the Israelis won’t cross viz a viz the U.S.

I think that the majority of Israelis, the mainstream and of course the Left, are winning. Sharon was the one who disengaged from Gaza and part of the West Bank, What we need is a kind of Sharon-type leader. Let’s say, Bibi Netanyahu would decide today to do what Olmert did, move all the way to the left and say, “Maybe the only way to fight the corona is to get out of the territories because we can’t control the borders.” I believe that the Israeli left has a good product in its hands, but their marketing is very poor. Netanyahu has learned how to market himself and to market a fake agenda. The real agenda belongs to the Israeli left.

Jodi: Given the official division of the Palestinians and the weakening strength of the PA and PLO leadership, what can you say about the Palestinian prospects currently?

Akiva: What I think is that the Palestinian made a mistake in ‘88. They accepted Resolution 242 and the Arabs gave up the PLO Charter and military action against Israel. They gave up on 1948 issues. What they got in return was opening a dialogue with the Reagan Administration. Their assumption was that they will get 22% of the mandatory Palestine, and

Israel will be happy with 78%. At that time, settlements were not a major issue. Back in ‘88, there were a few thousand, perhaps 10,000 to 20,000 settlers. Now, time has worked against the Palestinians because the majority of Israelis have been born into the occupation. How many Israelis even remember the pre-’67 lines?

Look at the Arab Peace Initiative that has been waiting for us since March 2002. No Israeli cabinet even discussed it seriously. The Initiative offers regional peace. It seems we can live with the status quo. But what happens 20 years from now? Even now there is a non-Jewish majority between the Mediterranean and the Jordan. What do we do with it?

Jodi: Aluf, how responsible is the Jewish left to include Palestinian voices?

Aluf: The question from an Israeli point of view is whether the Joint List will become a new platform for Jewish-Arab cooperation. Akiva said that Netanyahu has the unique opportunity to do whatever he can in the peace process because he enjoys this kind of overarching political authority in Israel. He achieved that authority by refusing to move an inch.

Jodi: Here is a question from listeners: “Since you think Israel would not start a fight with U.S., do you think that if Democrats win in November, there would be a chance to change the dynamic for two states?” Would you expect Palestinian attitudes to change if Biden were elected?

Aluf: Well, first of all, what we know from the past is that American governments always like to rewrite previous American administrations’ plans for the Middle East. We know that, even grudgingly, they accept unilateral Israeli acts. Regarding annexation, in my opinion, the time to watch is prior to November. Bibi will support annexation as a kind of gift from Trump to his evangelical base and to many of his Jewish supporters. He would not be giving it to Netanyahu for his own election, but rather for the sake of his own. If Trump is defeated, I don’t believe that a Biden administration—especially after the current devastating economic crisis—will take office and the first thing he’ll do is try to reawaken the dream of a two-state solution. I’m not saying that it’s dead, I’m just saying that it’s not going to be high on a new U.S. agenda.

Akiva: I think there is a consensus in the Jewish community in the United States that we need to separate from the Palestinians, that we need to get a good divorce lawyer before we get a rabbi to get married, I think that the new American

president will not have to invent a new wheel. It’s all there. There are the Clinton parameters, and there is the Madrid process. It’s a bipartisan issue, and it will be very easy to bridge the two sides of the aisle.

Jodi: Another questioner notes that in Europe the expression a “Jewish and Democratic” state is very worrying because every ethnic connotation weakens any sense of a constitutional or secular democracy. Does Israel run the risk of slipping into an ethnically pure state? I was going to add that I think the vast majority of American Jews believe that Israel should be both a Jewish and democratic state.

Aluf: Well, the position of the Joint List – especially of one of its components – is that it cannot reconcile itself to Israel being both Jewish and Democratic; a Jewish state, by its nature, privileges one part of society, even if it’s the majority. Several years ago, there was a survey of Israeli public opinion. 79% of the Jewish respondents said that in a Jewish state, Jews should have more rights than non-Jews. In practice, this is the way things have been in Israel for over 70 years, and it’s very difficult to change. Apparently, if there’s going to be a Jewish Arab Party in the future, its platform would speak to a Democratic state with a Jewish public face, but not one that declares itself a state controlled by Jews as an ethnic group.

Akiva: I think at the end of the day, Israel will have to decide whether it wants to be a state of all its citizens, or just a Jewish state. There is an inherent paradox in the Zionist idea: it says, equal rights to everyone but Jews have extra rights. Arabs don’t have the right to self-determination. First of all, I believe that once we find a solution to the Palestinian problem, it will be easier for the Israeli Arabs to decide if they are part of Israel or part of the Arab world. We are walking on a very thin line here with being both a democratic and Jewish state. In the last 10 years, we had a Prime Minister who was walking on it like an elephant in a china store. What we will need is a Prime Minister who will rewind what has been done in this regard.

I remember that when Yossi Sarid and Shulamit Aloni were ministers of education, there were Peace Studies in the schools. Now, it’s more about Jewish heritage. Students are taught there is only one narrative.

Jodi: There is a question about a confederation model.

Aluf: At the end of the day, the big question is who is calling the shots with regard to security. Who is guarding the border? We’re not short of plans and maps and ideas

of cooperation. The big question is the political will to act, and we know that the risk of civil war is not imaginary. The issue of confederation is 10 steps beyond having the ability to take this and other risks. What’s the incentive? We’ve been hearing that the occupation is not sustainable for 53 years now.

Akiva: Arafat said more than once that he is willing to consider confederation if he would get an independent state for even one day. Then negotiations would be between Israel and Palestine, two equal states.

Jodi: We forgot to say at the beginning that Americans For Peace Now is a co-sponsor of this conversation, along with Partners for Progressive Israel, and I want to thank both of them. I am going to give Akiva and Aluf one minute each to say any last licks.

Akiva: I want to thank my friends in the Jewish liberal left-wing Jewish constituency, and I hope that you will send a clear message to the next president and Congress. Keep in mind that a two-state solution has to be the basis for support of Israel. Congress will be willing to hear from you about it.

Aluf: Thank you for the invitation, it was a good chance to see my longtime mentor and friend Akiva, and I have not yet had the chance to congratulate you, Jodi, on your move to “The Forward”.

Jodi: Thank you both so much.

Thanks to Leonard Grob, Vice-President of Partners’ Board of Directors, for editing and condensing this discussion. The full video is available on the Partners’ website [here](#). ■



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