

Rethinking Palestine: The Humanitarian Approach

By Dr. Martin Sherman

If Israel is to continue to exist as the permanent democratic nation-state of the Jewish people, it must adequately address two imperatives:

(a) **The Geographic Imperative:** It cannot make the territorial concessions in Judea/Samaria necessary for a viable Palestinian state without critically compromising its minimum security requirements and rendering itself geographically untenable; and

(b) **The Demographic Imperative:** It cannot incorporate the Palestinian Arabs resident in these areas into its society as enfranchised citizens, without rendering itself demographically untenable.

2. Israel must therefore maintain control over the territory while inducing the relocation and rehabilitation of the Palestinian Arab population elsewhere. The only non-coercive way to achieve this is with positive inducements – chiefly generous economic incentives.

3. However, there is strong international support for the establishment of a Palestinian state in Judea/Samaria. What fuels this support is the perceived legitimacy of the Palestinian narrative, according to which the Palestinian Arabs are a distinct people, comprising a cohesive national entity that strives to exercise national sovereignty in a defined homeland. As long as the perceived validity of this narrative persists, the international pressure for Palestinian statehood will also persist.

4. Clearly then, if the intellectual fuel that drives international pressure for a Palestinian state is the perceived validity of the Palestine narrative, forestalling this pressure requires the deconstruction of this narrative. Such deconstruction should – and can – be based principally on the deeds, declarations and documents of the Palestinians themselves.

5. This narrative-deconstruction must be attained by an assertive public diplomacy offensive, adequately funded and appropriately energized. Without achievement of this objective, there will be no conceptual space in the discourse to advance Zionist-compliant alternatives to the TSS (two state solution).

6. Deconstruction of the Palestinian narrative will obviate the need to deal with the Palestinian Arabs as a cohesive national entity, and instead facilitate addressing them as an amalgam of fate-stricken individuals who, for decades, have been disastrously misled into their current unenviable position by cruel, cunning and corrupt cliques.

7. Approaching the Palestinians Arabs on the individual, rather than on the collective, level makes way for policy paradigms that call for:

(a) The **de-politicization** of the context of the predicament, and the nature of its resolution; and (b) The **“atomization”** (individualization) of the implementation of that resolution.

8. This enables the formulation of crucial elements of actionable policy that do not require reaching agreement with any Arab collective or political entity –something increasingly implausible in the post-“Arab Spring” climate – but rather the accumulated acquiescence of individuals seeking to enhance their well-being.

Humanitarian instead of political

Depoliticizing the context of the Palestinian Arabs’ predicament will not, in itself, dissipate that predicament, or render the need to do so any less pressing. But what it will do is provide a totally new dimension along which to pursue policies to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian impasse, and new methodologies by which to do so.

Thus, rather than strive for an unattainable political solution, energies should be channeled along humanitarian lines.

This will lead --almost inexorably--to the formulation of a policy prescription based on the eminently liberal (as opposed to “illiberal” rather than “conservative”) principles of:

1. Eliminating ethnic discrimination toward the Palestinian Arabs as (a) refugees and as (b) residents in the Arab world.
2. Providing individual Palestinian Arabs the freedom of choice to determine their future and that of their families.

These principles translate into a comprehensive tripartite proposal, whose constituent components should be seen as a mutually interactive, integrative whole:

1. Dissolution or radical restructuring of UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency) to bring the treatment of Palestinian refugees into line with universal international norms.
2. Resolute insistence on the cessation of ethnic discrimination against Palestinian Arabs in the Arab world and of the prohibition on their acquiring citizenship of countries in which they have resided for decades.
3. Generous relocation grants provided directly to individual Palestinian Arab breadwinners/family heads, resident in Judea/Samaria (and subsequently, in Gaza) to allow them to build better futures for themselves, and their dependents, in third-party countries of their choice.

Evidence of feasibility

Strong anecdotal and statistical evidence exists indicating that **there is widespread desire among the Palestinians to emigrate if given the opportunity. This opportunity could be afforded them by providing relocation finance.**

Withholding financial "artificial respiration" for the dysfunctional Palestinian authority –thereby letting it collapse –will also provide a powerful disincentive to remain and suffer the economic consequences of such a collapse.

Who will accept them?

Since the Palestinians will not be arriving as penniless refugees but relatively wealthy émigrés, in terms of average global GDP per capita, there will be considerable economic benefits for the host countries, whose economies will receive large influxes (potentially billions) of capital. Absorption can be made more palatable by offering host countries additional benefits (for example the funds currently funneled to UNRWA).

How much will it cost?

I estimate the total cost –spread over about a decade and a half –at about US\$ 200 billion. This might appear an excessively high sum, but several things need to be kept in mind:

First, the absolute cost is largely irrelevant and must be compared to the cost of other alternatives – such as the establishment of a Palestinian state – which also carry a multi-billion price tag.

Secondly, it will entail a fraction (around a quarter) of the cost that the US incurred in its largely unsuccessful wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Thirdly spread over a decade and half Israel could shoulder most the cost itself, with the burden being around what the defense budget was in the 1980s. If other OECD countries were included, the entire program could be executed at an imperceptible cost in terms of their GDP.

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