

The Quartet which comprises the USA, EU, Russia and the UN have failed to bring about the two-state solution within three years when they launched the much vaunted Road Map in 2002. Earlier this month Daniel Seidemann, an Israeli legal expert on Israeli Palestinian relations delivered a grim message to President Obama; the two-state solution is dead and the US administration is to blame.

By Nehad Ismail

Mr. Seidemann spent the last two decades trying to broker the two-state solution to end the conflict. Seidemann blamed the surge in settlements for subverting the two-state solution. Seidemann had some harsh words for both Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Obama, the former for defying Obama and the latter for keeping quiet about the settlement issue. If a two-state solution is not workable or achievable, the logical conclusion would inevitably lead to a one-state solution. The general view in the Middle East is that the relentless proliferation of settlements throughout the territories occupied by Israel in 1967 has made the very concept of creating a viable Palestinian state, let alone one with East Jerusalem as its capital, unrealistic if not impossible.

Declaration from Beit Sahour:

A group of pro-peace activists based in the Bethlehem area of the West Bank in conjunction with a number of international activists the most prominent of whom is Roger Higginson, a London based international negotiator and a member of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition (ICHD) are promoting the concept of a one-state for two nations. Their collaborations resulted in a "Declaration from Beit Sahour" which calls for a one-state solution. Beit Sahour is a Palestinian Christian town close to Bethlehem. George Rishmawi a human rights activist in the Bethlehem area supports the one-state solution.

Higginson and Rishmawi are firm believers in a single state for all the inhabitants of historical Palestine. Both believe a single state should not represent a threat to the Jewish citizens of Israel. Both communities lived in peace in the past, and there is no inherent reason why they cannot do so again today. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948 and particularly since the six day war of 1967, the Palestinian struggle has been focused on reclaiming land from Israeli control. Today in 2012 nineteen years after the now-defunct Oslo accords and ten years after the Road Map which was launched by the Quartet (USA, EU, UN and Russia) the two-state solution remains a mirage. It is a known fact that neither Oslo nor the Road Map had delivered the two-state solution. There is no prospect of a viable, contiguous Palestinian State. Facts on the ground and the Israeli political right have seen to that.

Roger Higginson argues that there is a growing consensus now that the two-state solution is a dead duck and the only practical solution is a one state for all the people. Jewish and Arabs and the Palestinians must focus on claiming equal rights, civil, human and political. One simple fact

is that the Palestinians are denied the same rights as those enjoyed by the Jewish communities amongst whom Palestinians live. This is despite the fact that the Palestinians have been here for generations before the arrival of the Jewish immigrants who are now citizens of Israel and the Palestinians pay the same taxes and have the same obligations to the state of Israel.

The Palestinians happen to be on the wrong side of the ethnic divide. Whilst Israeli citizens even those arriving from Russia and elsewhere become citizens and enjoy all the rights which are taken for granted in any Western democracy, Palestinians by contrast can have citizenship residency revoked, suffer restrictions on movements and access and are denied rights to adequate housing and suffer discrimination in all aspects of life.

The quest is now for Palestinians to be treated as equals with their Jewish citizens of Israel. Since Oslo twenty two years ago, the Middle East Process has remained a process without peace, but in the meantime settlements expanded and life became more and more difficult for Palestinians. As regards the future of the Palestinian Authority (PA) the Beit Sahour Declaration states that "as a nation within the state of Israel, the Palestinians have a right to a high degree of autonomy in such fields as culture, education, language, media, and sport. The PA is well placed to both lead the campaign in these sectors and to administer them in the territories designated as areas A and B in the Oslo accord".

It is worth noting that The Palestinian Authority had renounced violence as a means to achieve political ends. As regards Jerusalem, the declaration states "if Jews and non-Jews both have the same rights within the state of Israel, there will be no need to divide Jerusalem. Access to the Holy City by all must be guaranteed".

As for the tricky question of refugees, Israel has always demanded that Jordan, Syria and Lebanon absorb the refugees living in these countries. Then Israel itself must be expected to do the same with the refugees under its control in the West Bank and that means a process of integration leading eventually to citizenship.

And of Gaza, like any people in the world, they have right to decide on their own future. Becoming part of Israel is not politically realistic today. But there is nothing stopping them having an open relationship with Egypt or trading with the countries of the Mediterranean. What the Israelis think? Many distinguished Israeli writers and academics argue that the two-state solution is in Israel's long term interest and survival. A one-state solution if adopted will drastically dilute the Jewish nature of the state. Such fears were expressed recently by Clive Wolman in the London Jewish Chronicle. Wolman stresses that the demographic realities would ultimately lead to a bi-national Jewish-Arab state. To avoid becoming a one-state for two peoples, Israel must agree to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

This is the conclusion not only of the Israeli Left, but also of the Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and even of the centrist Yair Lapid the celebrated journalist who is working towards what he calls "an efficient divorce" between Jew and Arab". The link for Wolman's article is at the end of this article. Israel has three choices; a two-state solution, a one-state solution or an apartheid state keeping the Palestinians under perpetual occupation. You don't have to be a genius to pick the right choice.

Here is the link for Wolman's full article.<http://www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/comment/63837/a-demographic-time-bomb-jewish-state-cannot-afford-ignore>

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(Editor's note : apologies to the author and readers for the lack of proper formatting for some time after publication. He hopes it has not deterred comment.)