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4 MAY 1999 AND PALESTINIAN STATEHOOD: TO DECLARE OR NOT TO DECLARE?

AZMI BISHARA

After examining the legacy of Oslo, particularly the structure of the peace process and the pattern of negotiations that has emerged since the advent of the Likud coalition, the author analyzes the Palestinian option of unilaterally declaring a Palestinian state on 4 May 1999 and the various scenarios that might ensue. Concluding that the declaration would benefit the Israelis, not the Palestinians, he then sketches out possible alternatives that remain for the Palestinians with the ending of the transitional period.

ACCORDING TO THE OSLO ACCORDS, the “interim phase” ends on 4 May 1999. Given the virtual impossibility of reaching a “permanent settlement” to the Palestine question by then, the option of declaring an independent Palestinian state on the Palestinian lands under the rule of the Palestinian Authority (PA) on that date is being raised. Aside from signalling Palestinian rejection of the self-rule formula and attempting to create a productive crisis aimed at changing the course of the process in favor of the Palestinians, what are the advantages and disadvantages of facing Israel and the world with such a fait accompli? Contrary to the PLO’s 1988 declaration of the Palestinian state in Algiers, which was a moral and a psychological declaration, a declaration of statehood on 4 May would be intended to recognize the sovereignty of an authority that already exists on the ground in a specific territory. This is precisely what makes the declaration dangerous, for it transforms what remains of the Palestine question—Jerusalem, the refugees, the remaining land under Israeli occupation, the settlements—into marginal issues in a conflict over recognition of sovereignty and borders between two states, one with full sovereignty and the other claiming to have sovereignty but in reality not possessing it. This is the hypothesis I shall attempt to prove below.

THE OSLO LEGACY

The Palestinians accepted peace with Israel before reaching an agreement—they sat down to negotiate *after*, not *before*, peace. As this paper proceeds from the Oslo process and the structures it produced on the ground,

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there is no need to revisit here the reasons the PLO submitted to Oslo's terms after the Gulf War and after the intifada had reached an impasse. As the declaration of the state is a step internal to this political process, we cannot evaluate the prospective declaration except through dealing critically with these existing conditions, including the current unbalanced political process.

The repeated delays and stalemates that have characterized the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations—notwithstanding the recent accord at Wye River—stem from the very structure of these negotiations and notably from the fact that they are not governed by a single principle or projected outcome which the parties would seek to translate into reality or that would serve as the basis for the negotiations. Instead, the entire Oslo process is based on procedural matters. That these procedural matters have become essential negotiating points does not alter this reality. In the absence of a guiding principle emanating from the quest for justice and fairness—albeit relative justice and fairness—for the Palestinian people, what actually structures the peace process is the balance of power between the two parties, i.e., Israel's power to dictate and desperate Palestinian attempts to limit that power (through getting the United States to support the Palestinian position in purely procedural matters, prodding Europe to play a bigger political role, or mobilizing official Arab anger against Netanyahu's government).

If we take the negotiating deadlock over the American initiative—which was “resolved” at Wye River after eighteen months and only after the marathon personal involvement of the president, the secretary of state, the national security adviser, and the head of the CIA—one can see in it a perfect example of the crisis-ridden negotiation structure over the past few years. The pattern that has emerged is as follows:

1. an agreement is reached over one of the points regarding the interim phase;
2. a disagreement arises over how this point is to be interpreted: Israel attempts to dictate its terms, and a new compromise solution which decreases Israeli concessions is reached;
3. a new disagreement arises over implementation: Israel refuses to implement because the Palestinians are not living up to their commitments;
4. renegotiation takes place to find a new agreement formula over implementation;
5. disagreement arises over the interpretation of the new agreement;
6. negotiations begin over its interpretation;
7. finally, the United States intervenes and presents a compromise solution which takes the new Israeli concerns into consideration (for example, allowing Israel to build bypass roads, allowing it to expand settlement);
8. Israel in essence refuses to accept the U.S. initiative;

9. more negotiations take place to blackmail the Palestinians into making new concessions in order to begin to put the new U.S. initiative into practice.

Now that the Wye agreement has been concluded, we can expect the haggling over interpretation and implementation to begin forthwith. One can anticipate Israel stopping implementation after withdrawing from, say, 2 percent of the West Bank while demanding that the Palestinians fulfill their obligations. A new crisis would then begin, with Arab and international escalation, confrontations at checkpoints, new negotiations, and so on and so forth until we reach 4 May 1999. This is exactly what Netanyahu is planning; and his plans are based on a certain logic and a certain approach. And it is this approach that constitutes the crucial difference between him and the Labor party. With Labor, an impasse would have been expected to take place with the onset of the “final status” talks, whereas the right-wing Israeli government accelerated this “impasse phase” to include the interim phase.

Netanyahu believes that the basic defect in the Oslo path is Israel’s agreeing to give back land to the PA before reaching a permanent settlement; for him, any redeployment means decreasing the number of Israeli negotiating cards. This is why the current Israeli government will use all means to postpone the redeployments stipulated in the various agreements, including the ones signed by Netanyahu himself (first the Hebron agreement, and now, inevitably, the Wye agreement), and to impose early final status talks instead. A second acceptable possibility for Netanyahu’s government would be redeployment in exchange for Palestinian concessions in final status matters, which effectively means beginning final status negotiations and abrogating the current Oslo formula distinguishing between the interim phase with its attendant obligations and the final status phase—a distinction which the current Israeli government rejects and which it will do its utmost to negate.

Arab politicians often blame everything on such vintage Netanyahu tactics, thus reducing the situation to a question of personality and what they see as his propensity to lie and evade. Lying and evasion may be the methods used by the current Israeli government in communicating with the Arabs and the Europeans in order to manage the crisis. (Indeed, Netanyahu is treating the entire process as if it were crisis management, making use of the quarrels that explode on his right-wing extremist fringes in order to gain time by making false promises to those Arab states with diplomatic relations with Israel, or by blackmailing the United States into echoing Israel’s positions on the final status phase in exchange for Israel’s acceptance of the U.S. position on Israel’s redeployment obligations.) But the real issue is not Netanyahu’s lying but his *honesty*—his systematic rejection of Palestinian demands and unwavering belief that he can impose Israeli conditions on the Arabs. Even if Israel is unsuccessful in imposing its conditions, he is convinced that there will be no crisis that Israel cannot absorb through the power of deterrence available to it.

Netanyahu is brutally honest when it comes to the big picture. His lying exists only in the details.

Netanyahu, then, is brutally honest when it comes to the big picture. His lying exists only in the details. But Israel and the United States have succeeded, precisely, in transforming the dispute into one over details. The Madrid process (deadlocked because of Palestinian insistence on core issues) was abandoned and replaced by the Oslo formula—whose starting point was postponing core issues and beginning with details and whose entire logic consists of proceeding from one detail to the next; in theory, these details will eventually culminate in a series of “accomplishments” that in turn will lead into final status.

But postponing core issues in favor of immersion in details does not translate into amassing accomplishments leading to the core issues that have somehow remained constant and intact. In negotiating over the details, the obstacles and delays introduced by one side end up by transforming the details into the real issues themselves. This is not because their actual importance increases with the local and international energies invested in resolving them, but because the core issues, which had been postponed to the final status based on the illusory assumption that they would remain constant until then, are themselves transformed through this very process.

Indeed, the Palestinian “constants”—Jerusalem, the dismantlement of settlements, refugee return, complete sovereignty—have changed in the eyes of some members of the Palestinian political elite who have elevated them to the level of an ideology far removed from the realm of political possibility; they have become questions of dogma whose very rigidity serves as a guarantee that they will not disrupt the negotiation process. This is precisely what Netanyahu means when he speaks of “the lowering of the ceiling of Palestinian expectations.”

In the logic of the ongoing negotiations, the final settlement is inseparable from those very negotiations. Thus, while the Israeli negotiating party existed before the negotiating process and is external to it, on the Palestinian side the final status will be negotiated by structures created on the ground (including the PA itself) by the negotiations themselves.

In this regard, one should not judge—as a critic might—the repeated Palestinian concessions as treason or collaboration. For what determines the behavior even of a Palestinian nationalist in this situation is the structure of the Palestinian-Israeli relationship. As already noted, the negotiating relationship is based on progress in reaching agreement over details in a process where one party, the Palestinians, demands that promises of earlier agreements be implemented while the other party, Israel, refuses to do so without conditions. These conditions are not really about such issues as “fighting terrorism” or “changing the PLO Charter” but involve creating structures designed to implement the Israeli conditions and which, resulting as they do from the negotiating process, have a vested interest in perpetuating the process. It is thus that security coordination committees, for example, empty the

PLO of any content and transform the PA into a local authority bound to Israeli terms. Such bodies establish dependent economic relations wherein the Israelis grant “concessions” here and there in matters of import and export, the sea port, the airport, and so on that are ultimately not costly to Israel; what is important to Israel is that the economic framework depend on such “concessions” in order to continue.

Of crucial importance is the relationship between the political elites emerging from these continually forming economic and security structures and Israel, as well as the attitudes of these elites concerning their dependency on Israel. Their personal desire for independence is beside the point; what matters is whether or not they have the ability and power to take an actual position on the ground in terms of a conflict or political confrontation with Israel (which the Arab press sometimes counts on when negotiations reach an impasse). But in fact, the confrontation never seems to materialize, and the crisis always ends in compromise. This is so because life must go on, and life in its intricate details is linked to this existing relationship of dependency. As such, confrontation—the staging of demonstrations at checkpoints, besieging an Israeli settlement in Gaza, raising tensions in Hebron—remains within the dependent relationship. PA escalation generally represents an attempt to improve its margin of maneuver within that context and thus inevitably stops short of total confrontation.

This does not mean that an all-out crisis—one that would force Israel to make difficult choices and the international community to take decisive action—could not be ignited. But it could not happen without a Palestinian political elite that is ready for confrontation and not preoccupied with customs duties on cars, forging personal ties with this or that Israeli official, or disputes as to which group will control this or that local agency representing Israeli or foreign companies. The obstacle preventing the emergence of Palestinian political and security elites largely free of this type of dependency is the same as that blocking democratic transformation: the ease with which the political elites can exploit their positions to transform themselves into economic elites (via Israeli concessions of local agencies, licenses, permits and passes permitting freedom of movement, and so on) and hence become dependent on Israeli terms. Indeed, segments of the political and economic elites overlap and coincide to an unimaginable degree, and this structure has become deeply rooted. This is the structure we are likely to find when we reach the final status talks, or, in the event that a permanent settlement is not in sight, when the Palestinians would contemplate a unilateral declaration of independence.

DECLARING A STATE

Since the PLO already declared a Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, in Algiers in 1988, the question arises: How many times must a national liberation movement declare a state during its lifetime? Some might

argue that the declaration is justified by the existence of the PA, the fact that it is bound to a real exercise of authority over Palestinian society on a part—albeit a small part—of the land that had been declared a state in Algiers. Certainly, as was the case in Algiers, the state would be declared on the entire area of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem as the capital. But that aspect of the declaration would be of a moral nature and thus not unlike the one made in Algiers.

Aside from the fact that the declaration would be effected on the ground, the main difference with the Algiers declaration is political. The PLO's 1988 declaration was a national liberation movement's declaration of intent at the height of an uprising directed *against* Israel, whereas the PA's present declaration would be that of an authority whose very existence is the outcome of international agreements signed with Israel itself. These agreements were signed under the patronage of the international community, which therefore would have to respond. Indeed, the declaration would remain meaningless unless followed by a series of diplomatic steps, including raising the level of representation, changing the manner of dealing with the Authority, demarcating of borders with Egypt and Jordan (keeping in mind the presence of the Israeli army barricaded at the borders), and so on.

But the crux of the debate is the fact that the declaration of statehood would not be merely a psychological declaration, but one that would entail a number of retreats, changing the battle being waged by the Palestinian people and their recognized leaders. Indeed, the entire history of the Palestine national movement can be read as a succession of retreats, a progressive transformation of the core issues of the Palestine question into side issues. When the battle was for liberation and return, the West Bank and Gaza were not singled out. When the battle was for a national existence, all efforts were directed to strengthen the PLO and to obtain international recognition for it. When efforts became concentrated on the two-state solution, the refugee question was shunted to the background. It is true that slogans about the right to return (along with that of self-determination) continue to be repeated, but many of those repeating them know well that it is impossible to speak of a Palestinian state and a Jewish state (i.e., the two-state solution) and the return of the refugees all in the same breath. One can expect such slogans to be repeated with increasing stridency as they become increasingly unattainable.

If the PA goes ahead and declares a Palestinian state, the principal issue will immediately shift to securing recognition of that state. Talk of the settlements, the liberation of all territories occupied in 1967, the refugees, and the liberation of Jerusalem may well continue, but the real emphasis will be on recognition. This will be the case because even if there is no outright confrontation following the declaration, Israel will act in such a way that the Palestinians will have to deplete all their energies securing the recognition and indeed the survival of the "state." There are many ways Israel could do this, either diplomatically (pronouncing the Palestinian move as a violation

of the peace process and using it as a pretext to end further negotiations and renege on its commitments) or otherwise. For the Palestinian “state” could not possibly survive without minimally peaceful relations with Israel. It is not merely that there can be no movement across the various parts of the “state” in the West Bank, no passage between the West Bank and Gaza, no possibility of crossing into Jordan or Egypt without Israeli consent. Quite simply, in the present structure, there is not a single aspect of Palestinian life that does not require regulation through Palestinian-Israeli agreement. This being the case, the Palestinians will have to pay a high price for getting the Israelis to reverse whatever punitive measures Israel may have instituted—cutting off communications, ending negotiations—or to secure some achievement compared to the present state of affairs.

Indeed, if the current Israeli leadership were wise, it would actually provoke the Palestinians to issue a declaration of statehood, for even if the nascent entity—confined to areas A and B—would be called a state it would differ very little from the entity that now exists. Israel should be more than ready to make such agreements and even to recognize the Palestinian “state” within the latter’s declared borders if such a deal could serve as the permanent settlement to the Palestine question, closing the door to further negotiations on the final status issues. It would even be wise for Israel to recognize the state *de facto* and grant it some additional territory that it would have given back anyway within the context of the final settlement in order to secure the settlements and lebensraum in area C. In this situation, the declaration of a state would accelerate the conclusion of a permanent settlement on Israeli terms, which is what Netanyahu has always wanted ever since he came to power.

The Israeli opposition, at least, has realized the advantages of a declaration: why else would it seem so enthusiastic about the move, to the point of trying to persuade the Palestinians to go ahead? From the opposition’s standpoint, finally there would be a “realistic” goal that could be imposed on the Israeli government without triggering a bloody conflict, while at the same time liberating Israel from the issues that had been postponed to the final status talks—Jerusalem, the settlements, and the refugees. Moreover, as is known from numerous opinion polls, the majority of the Israeli people consider the establishment of a Palestinian state inevitable anyway. Concentration on the slogan of the state has reached such a level that any discussion of its constitution, borders, its authority, all become issues of details. What is important is that it be established!

As for the Western states, they could be expected immediately to embrace this new opportunity to specify a realizable goal such as a Palestinian state, despite the fact that it would not have been established via the negotiating process they sponsored. And once the Western states recognize this Palestinian state, they would balance the action by ignoring the continuation of set-

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tlement-building around Jerusalem and even by ignoring a possible Israeli decision to annex all Israeli settlement areas near the Green Line, including Gush Etzion, Beit El, and Ofra (which Ehud Barak, the new Labor leader, had declared were built to make sure the land remained part of Israel).

Declaring a Palestinian state within the present borders of the PA would not alter the existing balance of forces but would take place within it. This is precisely why international and Israeli opinion would see it as a major achievement and a master stroke, while the Palestinians on the contrary would become prisoners of their very achievement.

Certainly, it is possible to imagine an alternate, confrontational scenario. There is no question that some of the Palestinians in favor of the declaration of statehood would like to force the Palestinian security elite into a confrontation with Israel, which in turn would mobilize international actors. But why would we expect the existing structures (which were created by the Oslo process and which are therefore committed to a continuation of that process to ensure their very existence) to change by the simple act of the declaration? And why would these existing structures behave differently after the declaration just because they are functioning under new names, or not try to take advantage of the crisis in order to achieve new gains in the realm of details within the negotiation process itself?

Still, counting on the patriotism of some of the leaders of the security apparatuses and their cadres and considering that most of them were raised to view Israel as the enemy and to see themselves lined up on the other side of the barricade, let us consider a confrontation scenario. Let us imagine that the Palestinian security forces deploy throughout area B and even parts of area C a few hours before the declaration—assuming that the Israelis would not have anticipated the move and readied their forces. What would happen in this situation? There could be a bloody conflict, followed by meetings of the coordination committees and intervention by the United States, Egypt, and Jordan. (Some like to fancy that Egypt and Jordan would join the confrontation, but this seems out of the question; most likely the farthest they would go would be to withdraw their ambassadors from Israel.) Another possibility would be for Israel to allow the Palestinian security forces to remain as a kind of unnegotiated redeployment in areas that Israel would eventually return to the Palestinians anyway. In so doing, Israel would have demarcated the borders of the Palestinian state, just as in the non-“confrontation” scenario sketched out above.

As for confrontation for the sake of confrontation, that is, confrontation undertaken with the intention of unleashing widespread armed conflict, this is unrealistic. The current Palestinian leadership and the Arab leaders would both oppose such an option, the Palestinians because Israel would exploit it to reshuffle the cards, and the Arab leaders because their refusal to join in would cause them great domestic embarrassment. In any case, such a choice would not require declaring a state, as the redeployment of Palestinian security forces in area B as a confrontational step could take place in the pres-

ent phase, and the argument for it already exists—that Israel is not living up to its commitments at Wye River.

Finally, the Israel that would be faced with the declaration of the Palestinian state is the same Israel we always knew, and there need not be much imagination efforts expended to invent another Israel. The Israeli Right would immediately demand the annexation to Israel of area C—the some 60 percent of the West Bank where the PA has no jurisdiction. The deranged Right would surely go farther and demand the reoccupation of Nablus and Gaza and other towns. The Israeli opposition would demand recognition of the Palestinian state and/or entering into negotiations with the PA for the purpose of reaching a permanent settlement based on recognition of Palestinian statehood. The Israeli government would maneuver between the two currents and would call for the establishment of a government of national unity after it had amassed its forces around the territories controlled by the PA and around the settlements, especially the ones located in the heart of the PA areas: Hebron, Netzarim, and others. The opposition would then demand the evacuation of these settlements in order to protect lives and avoid friction, while the Israeli government would at first insist on their continued existence and on negotiating over them within the context of the “permanent settlement” that I sketched above.

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

If the declaration of independence on 4 May 1999 does not constitute a real alternative to the current strategy, what is the alternative?

The idea of declaring the state is essentially a political, not a legal, idea, and a legal vacuum would not affect the legitimacy of existing structures. Even if on 4 May 1999 the existing Palestinian administration declared itself no longer bound by its commitments under the interim agreements and if Israel did the same, the PA would not be affected. Under international law, the continuity of the structures created under Oslo is ensured, even if the interim agreements on which they were based expire before a final status agreement is reached.

The Palestinians could also initiate legal moves that would mobilize local and international opinion while not precipitating an uncontrollable collapse: for example, they could demand new elections for the Legislative Council, whose tenure expires at the end of the interim phase. Since the new council would be established on the basis of the Palestinian national will, not on the basis of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, the Palestinian opposition groups would participate. The council would also be established on a Palestinian legal basis (or even, if possible, a Palestinian constitutional basis) to be legislated by the present council. While Israeli approval would be needed for elections to be held, refusing such permission would be politically costly and ultimately a losing battle. This is one way the legal vacuum could be exploited, though the success of such a course is contingent upon far-reach-

ing efforts to make Palestinian institutions democratic and on exposing Israel's utter hostility to this process. Another possible way of marking 4 May 1999 would be to halt security coordination with Israel, though this would certainly entail Israeli reprisals.

But in order to come up with a coherent Palestinian national project and an appropriate Palestinian national strategy, we need to move beyond the legal vacuum situation and to think politically. Political thinking should proceed from the conviction that there is no just (and hence permanent) solution to the Palestine problem in the foreseeable future. This conviction must become the dominant political mood among Palestinian, even Arab, decision makers. Once this occurs, a less confused strategic planning can proceed.

The struggle for a just and permanent solution to the Palestinian question will continue until such a solution is reached. In the meantime, the Palestinian strategy should focus on a number of points.

First, efforts must be made to solidify and consolidate a unified Palestinian national existence in the diaspora and the inside. This means rebuilding PLO institutions and relationships with the refugee areas, especially in Lebanon and Syria.

Second, PA institutions must be built in a democratic fashion and under the rule of law. This would include:

- strengthening the Palestinian Legislative Council and abiding by its decisions and legislation;
- assuring the independence of the judiciary, including the office of the prosecutor general so that it would be solely under the rule of law;
- subjecting all Palestinian administrative appointments to a purely administrative bureaucratic process under the rule of law and instituting a system of checks and balances;
- strengthening the relationship between the Palestinian institutions of the presidency and the Legislative Council;
- rebuilding Palestinian party politics by delinking the political parties from the security apparatuses;
- subordinating the Palestinian security apparatuses to the existing legal institutions (the presidency, the Legislative Council, the judiciary) so that the leadership of these forces would be in the hands of the president, subject to a system of checks and balances and answerable to the judiciary's decisions when necessary;
- subjecting the existing Palestinian-Israeli relationship to the checks and balances of the Legislative Council and its economic, political, and legal committees;
- halting the process of self-enrichment and corruption in some institutions of the Executive Authority through the imposition of harsh legal penalties that do not end merely with dismissal; and

- devising a comprehensive socioeconomic development plan, with a timetable for implementation, which would be used in allocating resources and attracting investment capital.

While many details could be added to these items of institution building and “putting the Palestinian house in order,” the sequence of these points was based on a number of studies dealing with obstacles preventing the establishment of the rule of law and an institutional system in the PA areas.

Third, the battle for Jerusalem must be waged not only on the symbolic level but on the level of everyday life. To this end, a national movement in Jerusalem needs to be established under a strong leadership with a unified agenda. It has recently been noted that the readiness of Jerusalem’s residents for self-sacrifice or for participation in the political struggle in defense of their city has been declining; instead, individual solutions for problems with residence permits and other issues are being sought through personal contacts. In the absence of an institutionalized national address capable of linking the various issues into a comprehensive strategy, daily struggle in Jerusalem is gradually taking the form of civil demands. The Jerusalem issue should be a source of strength for the Palestinian cause, but because of the way it is being marginalized it is becoming a source of weakness.

Fourth, efforts must be made to revive campaigns of solidarity with the Palestinian people, especially in Western Europe, the United States, and Israel. The political and media discourse that is necessary to address public opinion in the United States and Israel must be developed, as should its institutionalized tools. This is to be done through consultation with intellectuals of the Palestinian community in the United States and Arab intellectuals in Israel. The Palestinian national liberation movement has not yet learned how to address public opinion in the United States and Israel, a situation that cannot be allowed to continue at a time when winning over public opinion is crucial. This should have been a principal axis even during the phase of armed struggle, but it was neglected and marginalized.

THE INTERIM PHASE AS “PERMANENT SETTLEMENT”

According to the logic of the negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel, negotiations are taking place in the shadow of an actually existing Palestinian-Israeli peace before the “peace process” ends. They are also taking place in the shadow of the interlocking ties and interests of those party to the negotiations. This is done through holding progress in small bits and pieces hostage to a series of crises that have begun to develop their own mechanisms and common management institutions and which ultimately lead to mutual concessions affecting the permanent settlement. Given the prevailing balance of power, this situation can be expected to continue. The concessions from both parties have already included issues of land, settlement, and the refugees, leaving the state as the remaining issue. But this took

place after these four issues have been stripped of their original substance. This was accomplished by Israel's conceding part of the land and its expectation that it would get in exchange a Palestinian resignation on resolving the questions of settlement, refugees, and Jerusalem and that there would be a habituation of the Palestinian-Israeli peace without them. Consequently, whatever state may materialize will differ little from the present PA, except in terms of land area and the PA's powers. It is hardly a coincidence then that the existing difference between Labor and Likud pertains only to these two matters, with Labor being the more generous of the two from a Palestinian perspective. Bargaining over increasing the land area and the PA's powers can be expected to continue indefinitely.

Given the prevailing balance of power that determines the Palestinian-Israeli relationship, there can be no sharp distinction between the interim phase and the permanent settlement phase, even in the unlikely event that a final status agreement is signed. And given that nothing capable of transforming the balance of power or the Palestinians' situation appears on the horizon, it is actually better for the Palestinians that the final status be left unresolved, that the issue of justice not be foreclosed at this juncture through a permanent agreement.

What remains in the meantime is for Palestinian institutions on the ground to be improved and consolidated and for Israel to be compelled to deliver on its commitments under Oslo. In this way, small incremental gains can be realized by the Palestinian people, provided that the PA civilian and security apparatuses be reformed and that the rule of law be established on every part of the land under Palestinian control. Only then could such parts be characterized as "liberated."

The horizons of the future remain open. It is Israel that should worry about the future, for it will not be possible for it to preserve its apartheid system far into the twenty-first century. If Israel blocks the Palestinian nationalist choice of a genuine statehood, then so long as justice remains the measure, the alternative cannot be apartheid but a binational solution. In pursuit of that ultimate goal, Palestinian action must concentrate on consolidating and solidifying the relationship between Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line and supporting the demand of the Palestinians in Israel that Israel be transformed into "a state for all its citizens." This is the only viable program at present, and it is the one that comes closest in its principal concept to a binational state.