

As a Settler who Believes in Peace, I Welcome Beinart's Call for Equality in Israel-Palestine | Opinion

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Peter Beinart, a long-time and prominent advocate of the two-state solution, has dropped a bombshell in the pages of [The New York Times](#) and in own publication, [Jewish Currents](#), last week. He called for a shift of paradigm in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: from separation into two nation-states, to a new vision of partnership and equality between Palestinians and Israelis, across the entire land. I welcome Beinart's transition. And what's more, it fits perfectly into the work we've been doing for about eight years now with a new coalition of Palestinians and Israelis from communities on all sides of the Green Line. Like Beinart's, our vision is one of equal partnership and inclusion— for all those who belong to the land.

Let me take you back to one of the first meetings of our group, eight years ago this month—summer 2012. We were about 20 men and women, Israelis and Palestinians, sitting at the Everest Hotel on top of Ras-Beit-Jala near Bethlehem. On a clear day you can step out and see the Mediterranean shining to the west, and the Judea Desert and Mountains of Moab rising beyond the Jordan River, to the east. Awni al-Mashni, a veteran activist in the PLO, rose to speak. "I know," Awni told us, "and the other Palestinian comrades here also know, that when your parents and grandparents came here, they didn't come for Tel Aviv or for Netanya. They came here because of al-Quds, and Hebron, and Bethlehem, and Nablus and Shilo and Beit-El. We know this. But just as we know and acknowledge this, you, the Israelis, have to understand that for us Palestinians, Palestine is not just al-Quds, Hebron, Bethlehem and Jenin and Tul-Karm. Palestine is also Jaffa and Haifa and Akko, which we long for and sing about at our weddings to this day. Perhaps from this place, from this shared knowledge, we can truly make a beginning..."

It's hard for me to put into words what I felt as a *tzabar*, a son of this land, a second generation settler of Judea and Samaria, when I heard Awni, a *tzabar*, a son of this land, a second generation refugee

from the village of al-Kabu near Jerusalem and a resident of the refugee camp of Daheishe, acknowledging my deep belonging, as an Israeli, to the entire land of Israel; and demanding my peers and I recognize his deep belonging, as a Palestinian, to the entire land of Palestine—the same land, the same country, the same homeland for us both. All I can say is that looking at him that day, I knew that in refutation of the [infamous statement](#) that ended the two-states peace process twelve years prior, we do have a partner, and that through this partnership, a solution to the conflict can be found.

We're here—and they're here too

And so, from profound mutual recognition, we embarked on a journey of listening, study, discussion, argument and interrogation, an inclusive, stubborn journey that continues to this day. It's a process reshaping our identities, our consciousness, even our spiritual experiences; complex and enthralling, endured by each person alone and amplified a hundredfold by sharing this journey together. This forcefulness of this process can be gleaned in Beinart's articles, but it is perhaps even greater and more transformative when it takes place on the ground, here, in Israel-Palestine, between the two communities embroiled in this century-old conflict. In such a journey you find you must shed fantasies and dogmas, reappraise conventions and prior knowledge, and open yourself up to new creative possibilities.

One of the most fundamental (and most suppressed) fantasies in Israel-Palestine, shared by many on both sides of the conflict, is to wake up one morning, throw open the window, and find out that—puff!—the other community has vanished into thin air. But even setting aside the question of whether we really want this to occur (we all know what unspeakable horrors are required to make a deeply rooted community actually vanish), it's time to recognise that even after a century of bloodshed, of land wars and of demographic contests through immigration and displacement, neither side has managed to defeat the other—much less to make the other side completely go away.

All of us—Israelis and Palestinians—are here to stay. And when you open up to the other, to his pain and his fears, to his hopes and his dreams, you might discover how similar the two of you are, and how processes in the two societies might not be identical, but they do certainly run in parallel. And then, a bit later still, developing this mutual learning further, you realize that the paradigm of separation between Israelis and Palestinians is just a sublimation of that fantasy and desire of not having to see the other side anymore. If anything, it's even more dangerous than mere fantastical yearning for the other's magical disappearance, because separation been deceptively cast, over more than 27 years, as "realistic", "pragmatic", just within reach; entrenched into the public consciousness

and narratives, from the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1992 to the unilateral construction of the separation barrier in the 2000's.

The fantasy of separation is dangerous because it doesn't stop with cold concrete walls and barbed-wire fences. It builds walls of ignorance and hatred in each heart, in every community. Separation fuels hate, racism, demonization and dehumanization, toxic weeds fertilized by religious-nationalist fundamentalism, Jewish and Muslim alike. By now, a generation of Palestinians and Israelis has grown up in the land without knowing each other, seeing each other, and, obviously, without acknowledging each other. On such a ground, even the dream of peace is alien and barren; one can't but recall the wretched words of one leader of the ostensibly pro-peace Israeli Labor party, who came very close to becoming prime minister. When asked for his vision for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, all [the man](#) could muster was "I want the Palestinians to be behind the fence, and the further back, the better." Hardly a vision of hope to inspire the masses. The "divorce vision", espoused by many leaders and thinkers of the centre-Left over the years can never be the solution; it's part and parcel of the problem.

It's part of the problem for many other reasons, too. It's part of the problem because our Palestinian partners and neighbors have said consistently over the years that such an arrangement can only be, at its best iteration, a ceasefire between wars—as indeed the history of the conflict since separation was first attempted has proved. It's part of the problem because fundamentally, it's ignoring and even actively trying to delegitimize and erase the very foundation of both nations' political consciousness and identity: a deep, keen bond to all the wide expanses of our shared land, from the river to the sea, and the attachment to all of it as our home—our homeland.

It's part of the problem because it insists on 1967 as Year Zero of the conflict, ignoring all the hard, bloody layers that built up to it, and especially what happen to us and to them in 1948: our triumphant independence, their Nakba.

And it's part of the problem because it ignores the geographic and demographic realities created in the seventy-odd years since. We are all mingled and entangled and mixed up, Jews and Palestinians, living cheek by jowl on either side of the Green Line. When you actually look at a map, it's hard not to see that partition is impossible. It's impossible in the heart of the conflict, in the Holy Basin area of Jerusalem, it's impossible in the sprawling city of Jerusalem itself, and it isn't really possible anywhere in the entire land.

So after digesting all of this, you suddenly understand the motto that Israel's serving president, Reuven Rivlin, has espoused ever since taking office: We Israelis and Palestinians weren't condemned to live together in the same land. We were meant to live together.

And yet, on the other hand, the requirement to give up national self-determination altogether for the sake of a great intermingling and unification—as Beinart's vision can be read to suggest—bodes ill for both peoples of the land. It's almost a moot point that it would terrify and antagonize Israelis, who feel only distinct national sovereignty stands between them and a relapse into centuries of persecution, culminating in the Holocaust. It also ignores the abiding need and unceasing, and as yet unrealized aspiration of most Palestinians for national self-determination and independence.

Two states sharing a single homeland

The conclusion our Palestinian partners and us have reached in our particular group—now known as '[A Land for All](#)'—is that a viable solution must stop one step short of what Beinart is envisioning. Our proposal can be summed up in four words: Two states, one homeland.

Put simply, we acknowledge Israel-Palestine as single geographic historical unit, equally comprising the homeland of both peoples. We acknowledge the need of each of those peoples for national self-determination, and so support the establishment, after 70 years' delay, of a Palestinian state, alongside Israel. The two states will be fundamentally committed to partnership in all aspects of statecraft, domestic and external alike, and the borders between them—based on the '67 borders—will be open. Furthermore, the two states will be united under the umbrella of a confederative Union of Israel-Palestine. Like in the European Union, the citizens of each member state will also be citizens of the Union, which will safeguard their rights through dedicated institutions. Jerusalem will be a shared, open city, the capital and the seat of government for both states and the capital of the Union, with a jointly run municipality.

Each state will naturally retain a significant national minority whose rights will be constitutionally enshrined, thus addressing one of the hitherto most intractable problems of the conflict: the settlers will be allowed to remain, in an agreed arrangement, in the territory of the new Palestinian state, as citizens of Israel and of the Union and permanent residents of Palestine; and Palestinian refugees and their descendants will be able to live, in an agreed arrangement, as citizens of Palestine (and of the Union), and as permanent residents of Israel, anywhere in the Israeli state.

This is the most moral and the most feasible solution to the conflict. In recent years it has begun to percolate into diplomatic conversation in both Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and has enjoyed impressive support in "Peace Index" public opinion polls among both communities. The growing interest in the model abroad, among research institutions and international organizations, also signals a new awakening to the for an inclusive, confederative model that acknowledges the deep attachment of both nations to the entirety of their homeland—and the need to amend the wrongs of the past, without creating new wrongs for future generations.

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Translated from Hebrew by Dimi Reider.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own.