



THE BLOGS Moritz Haegi



# A land for all? A glimpse into a shared future

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A Land for All's Executive Director Meron Rappoport with the 2020/21 Luxembourg Peace Prize.

Envisioning genuine partnership between Israelis and Palestinians in all of the land, a fast-growing grassroots movement vows to overcome the two-state vs. one-state deadlock.

On May 28th, peacebuilders from around the world gathered for the 9th annual Luxembourg Peace Prize. As part of the ceremony, the 2020/2021 prize for Outstanding Peace Support was awarded to the joint Israeli-Palestinian movement A Land for All – Two States, One Homeland (ארץ)

which had been nominated by the Geneva-based Israeli-Palestinian NGO-umbrella-organization BS of Hope. Co-founded in 2012 by Israeli and Palestinian thinkers, geographers, lawyers, and agents of change, A Land for All proposes an Israeli-Palestinian confederation and works towards building an alternative reality to the seemingly forlorn cycle of mistrust, hate and violence between the river and the sea. Instead of proliferating the evermore hollow notion that only full separation along the lines of the traditional two-state paradigm can bring about peace in Israel/Palestine, A Land for All envisages a shared homeland, premised on partnership and reconciliation, in all of EretzYisrael/Palestine.

The idea for confederation follows neither a one-state nor a traditional two-state approach but seeks to reconcile the strong connection that both Jews and Palestinians feel towards all of the holy land with the vindication of the right to self-determination of both national movements. In essence, a confederation is a union or partnership of sovereign states united for the purposes of common action, sharing – or at least coordinating –sovereignty on mutually agreed-upon matters. The most prominent example of a confederation is the European Union. As such, A Land for All envisions two independent, sovereign states – Israel and Palestine – with full control over their territory and a border according to the June 4, 1967 lines. Preserving this element of the two-state approach acknowledges the importance of the two national identities in Israel/Palestine and allows for them to be reified in culture and polity within the context of two independent states. Contrary to the conventional two-state model, however, A Land for All insists that this separation be only political – not geographic nor demographic.

By prioritizing partnership over divorce, A Land for All's confederation proposal seeks to overcome the main obstacles that have paralyzed the peace process in the past: The Right of Return for Palestinian refugees, Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Jerusalem, Security, Palestinian Citizens of Israel (PCIs) and Gaza. A Land for All proposes an Open Border vision and full mobility for Israelis and Palestinians as a means to resolve the plethora of problems associated with rigid geographic and demographic separation that have debilitated the "Land for Peace"-doctrine since the mid-90s. In the aftermath of the Oslo Accords, it became clear that large Israeli settlement blocs in the occupied West Bank, in exchange for land within the Green Line, would become part of Israel in any final status deal. This notion of adjourned territorial exchange effectively incentivized Israeli settlement expansion, tripling the number of settlers from 1995 to 2020, and created what Israeli architect Eyal Weizman calls an "irresolvable geography." The stalling of the peace process in the interim stage – delaying any final border settlement into the indefinite future – further motivated and facilitated the creation of "facts on the ground", which in turn made a final border settlement without significant population transfer all the more difficult. Today, even if the large settlement blocks like Ariel, Ma'ale Adumim and Gush Etzion were to remain with Israel, 100'000 settlers would still have to be moved, in order for a Palestinian state to be contiguous.

The Two States, One Homeland model seeks to resolve this "irresolvable" reality by rejecting demographic and geographic segregation between Israelis and Palestinians, meaning that Jewish settlers could remain as residents in a Palestinian state, in accordance with the Open Border vision. They would keep their Israeli citizenship and exercise their political rights in Israel. This approach would stymie the incentive for accelerated settlement construction because the expansion of one settlement or another would not factor into the location of the permanent borders between Israel and Palestine. Likewise, the sovereign Palestinian state could grant citizenship to Palestinian refugees in the diaspora, thereby making them citizens of the confederation and awarding them the right to live, work and travel in all of Israel and Palestine. Further arrangements would be put in place for the restoration of lost or expropriated refugee property, or compensation for it, without creating new injustices. Confederation would not only help solve the issues of settlements and the right of return but also acknowledge Palestinian ties to Jaffa, Haifa or Lod, as well as Jewish ties to Hebron, Nablus or Bethlehem.

Indeed, open borders would require and constitute a radical shift away from the prevailing narratives dominating relations between Israelis and Palestinians. Thus, A for All views the implementation of the Open Land vision as a gradual process so to avoid inundation and aggravated antagonization. As a first step, Israel and a Palestinian state would agree on a significant number of Palestinian refugees eligible for residency in the State of Israel and vice-versa a number of Israeli settlers-turned-residents in Palestine. The goal at the end of this process would be that any Palestinian and any Israeli could work, live and travel in all of the land. As such, the passports issued by Israel and Palestine would work in a national (political rights) as well as a transnational or confederal (mobility, work, residence) way, similar to those of the European Union.

It must be noted that A Land for All condemns the Israeli settlement enterprise in its current state as an embodiment of Jewish-Israeli supremacy in all of historic Palestine and emphasizes the importance of equal partnership instead of one-sided domination. Admittedly, equal partnership between settlers and Palestinians seems distant amid the segregated realities in the West Bank, as evidenced by regular settler violence against Palestinians (so-called price tag attacks), which most recently culminated in the murder of a young Palestinian in the South Hebron Hills. Therefore, it is important to understand that the Two States, One Homeland vision is not a quick fix but rather a long-term goal to aspire to. Confederation, as a political model for conflict resolution, must be accompanied by sustained and scalable conflict transformation that changes the hegemonic narratives to the point where genuine partnership – and thus two states in one shared homeland – becomes a viable option.

Conflict transformation is not only urgently needed in the West Bank, but also with regard to similarly antagonized issues like Jerusalem, security/safety and Gaza. These issues are considered an impasse to peace, precisely because they are perceived as irresolvable and/or bear significant symbolic and emotional value. While this circumstance gives any of these issue areas the power to single-handedly jeopardize any peace process, it also bestows them with the potential to become a beacon of hope for genuine conflict transformation between Israelis and Palestinians. For instance, a shared Jerusalem as the capital of both Israel and Palestine could serve as a paragon for the benefits of genuine partnership, bringing about peaceful co-existence in a city long-plagued by inter-community discrimination and violence. Equally, Palestinian willingness to contain a Jewish-Israeli minority as residents within its borders – and vice-versa – could, on its own, be a catalyst for reconciliation between the two nations. Although seemingly unimaginable now, conflict transformation in ostensibly irreconcilable situations is not unprecedented with Bosnia, Northern Ireland and the history of the European Union serving as successful examples.

Conflict transformation must initially come from the grassroots level, in order to sustainably change the attitudes of Israelis and Palestinians from the bottom-up. If it is to be effective, however, it must also be scaled to an extent to which it can actually induce real political change through democratic participation and lobbying. Once momentum for such change occurs, the shift towards Israeli-Palestinian cooperation must be embodied and safeguarded by a political framework that allows for genuine partnership. Therefore, A Land for All's confederation envisions the creation of an institutional framework "in which differences between the two parties can be worked out through debate and discussion, and settled through mutual decision making rather than violence." While it is nearly impossible to devise the institutional details and technicalities of such a framework within the scope of a small-but-growing grassroots movement, the Two States, One Homeland vision would certainly require an inter-state human rights court. This court would ensure that both countries respect an array of mutually agreed-upon basic citizen rights anywhere in either state.

In a confederation marked by genuine partnership, shared institutions would ideally deal with any issue area the countries determine would be better served if managed jointly. These areas of joint interest could include socio-economic rights and development, tourism, customs and financial institutions, as well as environmental protection and natural resource exploitation. It is near-impossible to negate the high level of economic and environmental interdependence between Israelis and Palestinians, considering that over 12 million people (6.5mio Israelis, 6.41 Palestinians) live between the river and the sea – a geographic space smaller than Catalunya, Belgium or Switzerland. If a river in the West Bank gets contaminated, the groundwater in the coastal plain is affected and if air quality is poor on the coastal plain, it will be felt in the West Bank. Economic interdependence also already exists with hundred-thousands of Palestinians coming to work in Israel and the settlements every day, and the Israeli Shekel serving as the de-facto currency in all of the land. Under confederation, these interdependencies would no longer be subject to a lopsided power dynamic that gives one side a virtual monopoly over them but instead dealt with through genuine partnership and shared institutions that serve the joint interests of both nations.

In light of the overarching significance of security within the discourse on Israel/Palestine, any proposal for its peaceful resolution must address security concerns with the utmost seriousness. Many, especially on the Israeli side, believe that only full separation will ensure security. Proponents of this approach sometimes tend to support various unilateral solutions as part of which Israel, the stronger side in the conflict, decides what its borders are and takes care of its own security without relying on the Palestinian side (e.g.: Gaza disengagement, separation barrier). A Land for All contends that any arrangement seeking to provide sustainable security and personal safety must be based on mutual trust and agreements. This was true for Israel's peace treaties with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1995), and "it should certainly be the same for whatever security arrangement is made between Israel and Palestine, which have no natural geographic divide and whose populations and histories are intertwined." Therefore, any agreement must provide security in the broad sense of the term: both security for each of the states from external attacks by a foreign army or armed militia, as well as personal safety for all citizens against harm related to national, ethnic or religious background.

The Two States, One Homeland vision proposes to combine full security responsibility by each country within its sovereign territory with security partnership between the countries. Under this plan, Palestine and Israel would have independent security forces operating exclusively within their respective territory. However, the two countries would cooperate through a system of close collaboration and shared institutions dealing with security, intelligence and policing, thereby guaranteeing the personal and collective safety of citizens in both countries. Having free movement between Israel and Palestine would not preclude either state from denying entry to hostile individuals or having border checks where necessary – "the borders will be open, not lawless." Security cooperation would also extend to the countries' external borders where joint Israeli-Palestinian forces would be deployed, alongside an agreed-upon international presence. The countries would sign a mutual defense treaty, as well as demilitarization and extradition agreements, ensuring that neither country becomes a "sanctuary state" for individuals who commit crimes in the other. The Israeli disengagement from Gaza proved that unilateral power moves do not lead to less violence. Only strong cooperation that brings about trust between Israel and Palestine can provide true and lasting security for the citizens of both countries.

The path to peace premised on genuine partnership appears long. After a century of conflict, trust between Israelis and Palestinians is at an all-time low. Cooperation, partnership and trust are, however, much more conducive to lasting peace than domination, violence and revenge could ever be. Although international attention tends to only shift towards Israel/Palestine when Israel and Hamas exchange military blows, trust between Israelis and Palestinians is not extinct. It exists and manifests itself in hundreds of joint peacebuilding organizations with thousands of members. The A Land for All movement is one of them. While many peacebuilding movements focus on more immediate aspects of co-resistance and reconciliation, Two States, One Homeland's confederation offers a long-term vision and an ideal to aspire to. In fact, the path to confederation might not be as long as it seems. In a 2018 poll, jointly conducted by Tel Aviv University and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), roughly one-third of Israeli-Jews (30%) and Palestinians (31%) expressed support for a confederation of two states in which: 1) citizens of each country could live as permanent residents in the other; 2) Israel and Palestine cooperate on security and the economy; and 3) Jerusalem remains the undivided capital of both states. Among Palestinian Citizens of Israel (PCIs) support even reached 68%. Along with other surveys by Dahlia Scheindlin and Khalil Shikaki, these numbers indicate that the traditional two-state paradigm under Oslo has run its course and alternative approaches like confederation are gaining traction. Trump's "Deal of the Century" and Bibi's push towards annexation in 2020 show that unilateral strategies (not solutions) have already firmly entered the public discourse. It is high time that conflict resolution approaches based on partnership, equal rights and a shared future do so too. A Land for All offers a vision for such a future, which might appear illusory in June 2021, but – to quote a famous visionary – if you wish it, it is not a fairytale.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Moritz Haegi is a young professional and researcher, currently located in Tel Aviv. He is a graduate of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID) in Geneva, where his research pertained to alternative approaches to conflict resolution in Israel/Palestine, specifically the idea of an Israel-Palestinian confederation. Moritz regularly conducts research for the Israeli-Palestinian NGO alliance BS of Hope and the volunteer network Embodying Peace. His research explores the dynamics of segregation between the river and the sea, as well as conflict transformation, human rights and the role of NGOs.