

One State

Praise for the author's previous work:

‘An intelligent, sensitive writer.’

—*Financial Times*

‘Ghada Karmi’s storytelling eloquence is celebrated.’

—John Pilger

‘Her bold vision of a single egalitarian state is the only way to break the current log jam and bring an end to apartheid Israel.’

—Nur Masalha, Palestinian historian

One State

The Only Democratic
Future for Palestine-Israel

Ghada Karmi

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Introduction

This book is based on my previous work, *Married to Another Man*, first published in 2007. It was concerned with Israel's unresolved dilemma of how to reconcile the existence of Israel as a state for Jews with the presence of a large, non-Jewish, Palestinian population in the country. The book argued that it was an irresolvable problem, and the way forward was the creation of a shared state to include Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Arabs.

That shared state, the obstacles to its realisation, and the ways of attaining it is the focus of the present book. It is underpinned by the view that a single Palestinian-Israeli state, desirable or not, will be the inevitable outcome of Israel's action and policies over seven decades; and that Israel will fiercely reject the shared state, but will be powerless to prevent it happening.

It was always an anomaly that such an artificially constructed state as Israel ever came into existence, and was then showered with unprecedented support from powerful states – support that persists until today. It is equally anomalous that, no less than Israel itself, these same powers would rush to prevent its dissolution on any grounds. Created in the mid-twentieth century to house a people who had never been a people¹ – by the collusion of a colonial power, Britain, and a European settler movement, Zionism – Israel was established against a historical trend of mass decolonisation that ran through the second half of the twentieth century. Its violations of international law and human rights abuses are manifold, and should have disqualified it from Western support. But Israel is by no means unique in its record of abuse: other

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states commit similar crimes. However, such states are not usually admired or celebrated; nor do they escape censure and sanction for their actions. The Russia–Ukraine war that started in February 2022 is a case in point. It took the West no time at all to condemn Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine, swiftly followed by the imposition of draconian economic and cultural sanctions that have crippled Russia’s freedom of action ever since. By contrast, there has never been any comparable move against Israel, which illegally occupies Arab territory, regularly attacks the Palestinians living in the land it occupies, and imposes an apartheid system of rule over them.

It is 75 years since Israel was established on the ruins of Palestine. In that process, my family was forced to flee our home in Jerusalem in April 1948. The creation of Israel, officially declared one month later, marked the start of our long exile, even as our eviction was being celebrated for installing another people in our place. In the decades that followed, we watched helplessly as the new state grew in strength and dominance to become a regional superpower. Today, Israel is a nuclear state with a powerful army. It enjoys the unstinting support of Western countries, most especially the United States, which provides Israel with advanced weaponry, intelligence sharing, and political and diplomatic support. It is regarded by the West as an integral part of the Western world, and the European Union has accorded Israel a privileged status in trade and access to EU research programmes, exactly as if it were a European state.²

In contrast, the victims of Israel’s creation, the Palestinians like me who lost out, were not honoured, commended, or given any special status. The majority of Arab states, with the notable exception of Algeria, have regarded Palestinians variously as a burden or a source of instability for their people. This attitude was explicable at one time in the historical context of the mass exodus of refugees that took place

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between 1947 and 1949. Palestinians, displaced by the creation of Israel on their land and at their expense, streamed out to the surrounding Arab countries. These gave the refugees a home and, in some cases such as Jordan or Syria, quasi-citizenship status, on the understanding their stay would be temporary while they awaited their return to the homeland.

That return never happened, and it was inevitable that the exiled Palestinians would go on to seek justice and fight for their rights. Many joined the radical Arab movements of the time, but eventually they formed their own liberation project, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Unsurprisingly, such developments came to be seen as a potential threat to Arab regimes, fearful that their own populations could be radicalised in the same way.³ The mass of ordinary Arabs throughout the region were already sympathetic to the Palestinians and supported their cause. This has remained largely the case until today. When a few Gulf States broke ranks in 2020 and signed the so-called 'Abraham Accords' with the aim of normalising relations between them and Israel, it did not negate this position. Those Israeli-Arab agreements were concluded between the governments of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Israel without the permission or consultation of their Arab populations.

This divergence between the official and popular position on Palestine is mirrored in the Western world. No Western government has ever formally supported the Palestine cause, yet there is a striking level of sympathy with the Palestinians at the popular level. This is particularly marked in the US, traditionally the devoted champion of the Israeli state.⁴ Even though the phenomenon is a modest one at the present time, a confluence of factors will help to enlarge it in future: activism amongst Palestinian exiles and their supporters, the use of social media, and the solidarity of Black and other radical groups. Repeated Israeli assaults on Gaza, earning ordinary

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people's sympathy in many places, have also played their part in shoring up pro-Palestinian support.

Israel has reacted to this positive development in public support for the Palestinian cause with alarm, perhaps the best evidence for activists' growing effectiveness. Pro-Israel supporters have come up with a number of initiatives aiming to neutralise this trend. The drive to make Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel illegal in Western countries, and the ramping up of the antisemitism campaign are two examples. Both have the aim of discrediting support for Palestine as antisemitic, and hence illegitimate. As will be discussed below, these efforts have already made inroads into policy in several European countries, and especially in the US.

We must ask where this tit-for-tat situation is heading. How will Israel's denial of Palestinian rights, and Palestinian counter-resistance to it, end? After 75 years of Israel's existence, we have arrived at a point of no return for both sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel is entrenched in the Middle East, a powerful settler state with a commanding regional position, enjoying the benefits of a complicit and supportive Western world whatever crime it commits, and a Palestinian resistance unequal to the daunting task of changing the status quo, within a weak and disunited Arab world, part of which has already been pacified with Arab-Israeli peace treaties. As a colonial state in occupation of the totality of historic Palestine, Israel exploits all the advantages of owning the land and its resources. Having attained this favourable position, it will not willingly surrender any of its privileges in a peace agreement.

Likewise, the Palestinians will not give up either, having resisted Israel's imposition on their country in various ways: the *fedayeen* (freedom fighter) movement in the 1950s; the creation of the PLO in 1964; the conciliatory acceptance of a mini-state on 22 per cent of their original land in 1988; the two Intifadas of 1987 and 2000; the rise of Islamist resistance

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movements in 1989, which have fought Israel since then; the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign launched from inside the occupied territories in 2005, and the indefatigable activism of the Palestinian Diaspora keeping Palestine's cause alive and in the public eye.

It is obvious that no solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict can be envisaged in these circumstances. The two sides have irreconcilable aims, which would have to be surrendered, at least in part, to make a peace deal possible. That hope of compromise has been the basis of the Israeli–Palestinian negotiations since 1993, which have now ended in failure. The reality, persistently ignored because it is inconvenient for the parties pushing for a negotiated settlement, is that Israel is not interested in changing a status quo which satisfies all its requirements, and hence would be unwilling to consider any settlement that entails even a minimal surrender of its gains. Since Israel is the stronger party, and no one is willing to put pressure on Israel, that inevitably leaves the Palestinians to compromise by whittling down their demands to a point which Israel might accept. But that would mean a surrender of their most basic rights, which they cannot accept either.

If ordinary Israelis were asked how they would like to see the conflict end, they would almost certainly wish for a magical disappearance of the Palestinians in their midst. And if ordinary Palestinians were asked the same question they would wish to put back the clock to a time before Israel's creation, when Palestine was their undisputed country. Neither wish can be granted, and the reality is that two communities live in the same land and need a civilised way of sharing it.

That has been the main driver of the campaigns for the 'one-state solution' which have appeared in the last two decades. But egalitarian and moral as this aim seems, we cannot ignore the fact that it is a solution neither side wants. Israelis will not accept Palestinians as equal partners in a country they

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are accustomed to regarding as exclusively their own. Palestinians, with lifelong experiences of Israelis as usurpers and aggressors, will find living with them as equal citizens hard to stomach.

In neither case can the one-state solution, however democratic, be said to solve the problem for these two peoples. The fact that small groups of peace-loving, principled individuals and their supporters from both sides are working diligently together towards a one-state solution does not alter this reality. For the mass of Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Arabs, the antipathy on both sides is real and a serious obstacle to coexistence.

Yet, a shared state is the only way this impasse will end – not because it is wanted by either side, but because it is inevitable. It is the contention of this book that the logic of the situation before us must lead to the formation of one democratic state in place of the current ethnocentric, apartheid state of Israel. It will not happen solely as a result of one-state campaigns and solidarity movements – although they will help – but rather through people's natural resistance to relentless oppression leading to the ultimate overthrow of their oppressors. Like all brutal regimes, Israel will fight ferociously to keep the status quo, and it is an irony that it was the Israelis' obdurate, short-sighted and avaricious tactics over the years that will lead inexorably to this result: an outcome Israel never sought, one that would spell the end of Zionism and bring the whole Israeli project to an end.

In what follows, we will examine this process and how it came about despite the unique support, not just for Israel, but for the *idea* of Israel. And how, at the same time, and despite their reluctance, the one-state end point is the only way Palestinians can regain their usurped rights. We will analyse the nature of Israel's state ideology, Zionism; the effect of Israel's creation on the Arab world in which it is situated; the hold

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Israel has on Jews; the attempts to make peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and conclude with an account of the one-democratic-state initiatives, past and present.

At the time of writing, none of these had become a reality, but the reader should be in no doubt that the one democratic state is the destination for both peoples. Before it happens, there will be more struggle and suffering as Palestinians fight against increasing Israeli oppression and expulsion, tacitly and overtly supported by Western inaction, and collusion amongst pro-Western Arab states. But the greater Israel's suppression of Palestinian rights, the quicker the end point will be reached.

Israel was created and maintained against the logic of history; and the same historical logic will dictate its inevitable ending.

CHAPTER ONE

The Problem of Zionism

At the outset of this book, it is important to frame the situation in Israel/Palestine within its proper context. Israel is not a natural phenomenon in the Middle East, did not arise as a normal result of circumstance, and had no historical antecedents in the region, despite the biblical mythology employed to suggest the contrary. It is a settler colonial state, set up *de novo*, aiming to provide a home for the Jews of the world, or as many of them as would come, with the aim of maintaining a permanent Jewish majority presence in that state.

When the Zionists resolved in 1897 to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, they were aware that it was already home to an indigenous non-Jewish population. How then now to create and maintain a state for another people in a land already inhabited? Squaring that circle has been the essence of Israel's dilemma ever since its establishment and the cause of the Palestinian tragedy that it led to. It could not have been otherwise, for what the Zionists envisaged was a project that was bizarre and, on the face of it, unworkable: namely to set up an ethnically -defined, Jews-only collective, existing on a land belonging to another people and to their exclusion. Moreover, this new creation was supposed to prosper in perpetuity, irrespective of native opposition.

It was inevitable that a project necessitating the appropriation of a land already inhabited by a people defined as ethnically unacceptable could only have been realised by

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a mixture of violence and coercion. To have any hope of long-term success, the new state thus created would have to maintain itself through constant military superiority and powerful backing by its sponsor, the West. The corollary to this was that the Arabs would have to remain too weak and disunited to offer much resistance, with the calculation that Israel's powerful army would swiftly despatch any resistance that arose.

This, in substance, is the Zionist project, whose main aims came to be realised in the creation of Israel in 1948, but which was never able to resolve the problem of the Palestinians. Its dilemma has nowhere been better expressed than by the Israeli historian, Benny Morris, in an interview with the Israeli daily, *Haaretz*, on 8 January 2004.¹ In a lucid exposé of classical Zionist thinking which merits quotation at length, he encapsulates all of Zionism's major elements, its inherent implausibility as a practical project, its arrogance, racism and self-righteousness, and the insurmountable obstacle to it of Palestine's original population, which refuses to go away. The conditions that must pertain for the Jewish state's creation and survival required the expulsion of much of the indigenous population and the need to maintain Israeli supremacy in the face of the inevitable Arab hostility. As Morris says:

A Jewish state would not have come into being without the uprooting of 700,000 Palestinians. Therefore it was necessary to uproot them. There was no choice but to expel that population. If the desire to establish a Jewish state here is legitimate, there was no other choice ... The need to establish this state in this place overcame the injustice that was done to the Palestinians by uprooting them.

It follows that the future survival of Israel may necessitate further Palestinian population 'transfers'. Morris maintains

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the mistake the Zionists made was to have allowed any Palestinians to remain:

If the end of the story turns out to be a gloomy one for the Jews, it will be because Ben-Gurion [Israel's first prime minister] did not complete the transfer in 1948. Because he left a large and volatile demographic reserve in the West Bank and Gaza and within Israel itself ... In other circumstances, apocalyptic ones, which are liable to be realized in five or ten years, I can see expulsions. If we find ourselves ... in a situation of warfare ... acts of expulsion will be entirely reasonable. They may even be essential ... if the threat to Israel is existential, expulsion will be justified.

Inevitably, Zionism resulted in the creation of hostility amongst its victims, since the displaced Palestinians have never been reconciled to the Zionist project and 'can't tolerate the existence of a Jewish state'. Given this, Zionism could only have succeeded by the use of superior force: 'There is not going to be peace in the present generation. There will not be a solution. We are doomed to live by the sword.' He recognises that Zionism had unrealistic expectations:

The whole Zionist project is apocalyptic. It exists within hostile surroundings and in a certain sense its existence is unreasonable. It wasn't reasonable for it to succeed in 1881 and it wasn't reasonable for it to succeed in 1948 and it's not reasonable that it will succeed now.

In the final analysis, Morris concludes the Zionist project is faced with two options: perpetual cruelty and repression of others, or the end of the dream. For Zionists, the latter is tragically unthinkable.