

Israel and the Palestinian Arabs*

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The year 1977 may well witness the beginning of a new era in the generation-old Arab-Israeli conflict. It depends greatly on Israel and on its readiness to change its attitude towards the Palestinians whether the new era brings about the diffusion of tension in the Middle East or simply represents the settling in of forces that could snowball into a major calamity.

Originally the Arab-Jewish conflict was more or less contained within the boundaries of Mandatory Palestine (1920-47) with local Arab and Jewish communities contributing almost equally in shaping its course and dictating its development. As time passed, internal issues compounded greatly by external developments, brought about the eventual internationalization of the conflict. The 1948s Middle East War, which followed the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, was fought between the Israelis and the combined regular armies of several Arab states, with the Palestinians taking passive part throughout. Moreover, the ensuing two decades (1948-70) saw the role of the Palestinians diminishing substantially. They were considered as 'Arab refugees' whose plight and misery commanded the usual humanitarian consideration, but whose political and national rights did not exist nor needed to exist. At the same time the relation (or rather the lack of it) between Israel and its neighbours dominated the political scene and constituted the core of the conflict. Thus the three Middle Eastern wars of 1956, 1967 and 1973 evolved around issues that were only marginally related to the Palestinians. However, it was the crushing military defeat of the Arab armies in the 1967 six-day war that induced the Palestinians to organize themselves into political and para-military organizations which gradually and sometimes dramatically, managed to gain local and international recognition of their political aspirations. Today, we are witnessing the coming-back of the Palestinians to claim the centrality of their cause to any meaningful and lasting political solution of the conflict. There are increasing signs to show that the Arab states are inclined to extract themselves from the Arab-Israeli impasse if they succeed to negotiate an agreement with Israel acceptable to the Palestinians. On the Israeli side, however, there is much confusion, procrastination and above all intransigence which can be attributed to past experiences associated with Israel's perception of the Palestinians and enforced by a short-sighted pragmatism which does not take into consideration the present real strength and texture of the Israeli society.

This paper concentrates on examining Israel's attitude and perception of the Palestinians during the last fifty years. In essence it sets to show that in the past, Israel's pragmatism was, on the whole, emotional, short-sighted and unreal.

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The Zionist leaders of the twenties were above all the products of an era which recognized the right of European nations to self-determination but denied it to the peoples of Asia and Africa. Those leaders accepted the physical existence of the Arabs in Palestine but were not prepared to attribute any political content to that existence. A common conviction of the period was that ensuring the civil and religious rights of the natives was all that was needed. This was the reason why the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 could totally ignore the political rights of the local Arabs but promise

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that 'nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine'. This basic British-Zionist thinking of the day was supported by the general attitude of the Palestinians themselves during and immediately after the First World War. The Arabs of Palestine then, considered themselves part of the big Arab nation and more specifically part of Syria and were willing to see their national aspirations being fulfilled in Damascus, the capital of the newly proclaimed Arab Kingdom of Syria (proclaimed by Emir Feisal on 8 March 1920). Sir Richard Allen, an experienced veteran diplomat came to the conclusion: 'A Jewish National Home, or even a Jewish-ruled State of Israel might have been eventually achieved on some basis of acceptance by the Arabs, if their claims to nationhood and independence had been met at the time when freedom was promised to them ... But the bitterness of the Arabs' resentment at being cheated of those rights in 1920 and the long struggle against Western Imperialism which followed killed all hope of this.'¹

As it happened, the liquidation of Feisal's Arab Kingdom of Syria in July 1920 gave birth to local national movements in various parts of the Arab world including Palestine. But the Zionist movement which was then in the process of building a new Jewish entity in Palestine did not pay much attention to mounting Arab opposition and looked at it as a transient phenomenon that would immediately dissipate once the indigenous population started reaping the benefits from the Jewish settlement in Palestine. When Arab opposition intensified and took on ugly forms of violence, general strife and bloody confrontations, the typical Jewish/Zionist reaction was to meet violence by more violence and whenever possible to subdue their opponents by force rather than by kindness or compromise.²

The amazing thing is that a careful analysis of Zionist policy towards the Palestinian Arabs during the twenties and the thirties revealed a total lack of any real and consistent attempt to pacify the Arabs or even to win their sympathy to the Zionist cause. On the contrary, Zionist policies and behaviour, admittedly aimed at optimizing their local and international objectives, were formulated and executed without taking into consideration the adverse effects that they might have on Arab-Jewish relations. There developed then, that persistent attitude which later became a cornerstone in Israel's foreign policy, that whatever the Arabs thought, acted or reacted was of no relevance and should carry no impact on the Zionist ultimate objective of creating and expanding the Jewish commonwealth.

A few cases are both illustrative and useful to understand the uncompromising nature of Zionism during the mandate.

1. The educational system in Mandatory Palestine: On Zionists' insistence article 15 was inserted in the terms of the mandate over Palestine. This article guaranteed '... the right of each Community to maintain its own schools for education of its own members in its own language'.³ Consequently a dual system of national education, formed on a linguistic and racial basis and having separate curriculum and organizations, was gradually developed in the country. The royal commission of 1936 (Lord Peel's commission) described the aims of the separate Hebrew systems as follows: 'Its primary pur-

1. R. Allen, *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Fertile Crescent—Sources and Prospects of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Oxford, 1974), p. 259.
2. There are some excellent works in print, analyzing the development of Arab-Jewish relations during the mandate period: A. Cohen, *Israel and the Arab World* (London, 1970); R. John and S. Hadawi, *The Palestine Diary*, vol. 1, 1914-45 (New York, 1971); A. Koestler, *Promise and Fulfilment: Palestine: 1917-1949* (London, 1949); W.Z. Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (London, 1972); *Palestine Royal Commission—Report* (H.M. Stationery Office, command 5479, 1937); L. Stein, *The Balfour Declaration* (London, 1961); C. Sykes, *Crossroads to Israel* (London, 1965).
3. For text of mandate, see Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers (PP)*, command no. 1785 of 1922; also League of Nations, documents C. 259, M. 314, 1922 VI; C.P.M. 466, C. 667, M. 396, 1922 VI.

pose is to indoctrinate the ideal of the National Home, to fasten the child's mind before all else on the tradition and achievements of the Jewish people and to foster a sense of devotion to the task of rebuilding a Jewish nation in its ancient homeland.⁴

The fatal result of this separate educational system on Arab-Jewish relations was that the new generations (on both sides) were educated in a strictly national atmosphere which prevented them from getting to know each other and excluded any common relation or understanding between them. There was no common language; the Hebrew newspapers were beyond the reach of nearly all Arabs; and the Arabic press could be read only by relatively few Jews. The young Arabs found themselves very different from the Jews (in outlook, clothes, language, aspirations etc.), whom they came to consider as strangers believing anything they heard or learned about them. In due time they themselves became ardent opponents of any Jewish-Arab rapprochement.

On the other hand, the young Jews (and some of them are today in key positions in Israel, including the prime minister Mr Rabin) were continuously imbued with nationalist ideas that tended to glorify Jewish heritage, history and achievements to the exclusion of anything else. With time a sense of superiority and arrogance crept in which meant that Jewish children had no real chance nor a need to befriend, understand or appreciate their counterpart, the Arabs. Indeed they looked down on them with contempt. Instructive in this respect is the many opprobrious words that have crept into colloquial Hebrew which vilify the Arab, his work and manners.

2. The concept of *Avoda Ivrit* (Hebrew Labour) and *Tozeret Ivrit* (Hebrew Produce): Jewish immigration to Palestine was regarded and still is regarded as one of the main cornerstones of political Zionism. The fact that there was a limit for the economy to absorb new immigrants induced the Zionist organizations to encourage the employment of Jewish labour in Jewish enterprises. During the thirties, this policy of employing Jews exclusively was advanced, encouraged and even enforced in Jewish agriculture, industry, commerce, transport and elsewhere in Palestine. Side by side with the policy of Jewish labour, another complementary policy was developed and enforced—that of 'Hebrew produce'. Paying higher wages for Jewish labour meant charging higher prices for the products. Hence the concept of 'Hebrew produce' aimed at educating-indoctrinating the Jewish population to favour Jewish products sold at higher prices than their Arab counterparts.

The policies of 'Hebrew labour' and 'Hebrew produce' accentuated the tendency to develop two parallel economies, one Jewish, the other Arab, and reduced the amount of economic interchange between them. Consequently, instead of promoting understanding and cooperation between the two rival camps by encouraging them to work together and by increasing the social and economic interrelations between them, this short-sighted policy blocked any such development and antagonised the whole Arab community especially the emerging middle class. As it so happened, this policy of favouring Jewish products was not enough to salvage the Jewish industry and render it profitable—that aim was achieved, if at all, through massive Jewish subsidies from overseas. Also, lack of jobs for new migrants did not pose any problem. Simply, jobs were created artificially to employ the newcomers. Had this racial policy in employment and commerce not been implemented and instead the labour market were left free, the cost in money terms would not have been insurmountable but the benefit for Arab-Jewish understanding and mutual interest in peaceful cooperation would have been substantial.

3. Again in 1937, the Zionists accepted in principle the idea of partitioning Palestine

4. PP, command no. 5479 of 1937, p. 335; see also Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, *Report to the U.S. Government and the United Kingdom*, Department of State, no. 2536, Near Eastern Series 2 (1946), p. 11.

as recommended by the Palestine Royal Commission (better known as the Peel's commission). By September 1937, the British managed to liquidate the Palestinian Nationalist Movement (they expelled the mufti Haj Amin Al-Hussaini, and a few of his key supporters, declared all Arab national committees unlawful and clamped down on Arab acts of terror and intimidation). This left the moderate Nashashibis in full control. The Zionists were confident then that a comparative compromise could be achieved, whereby the moderate Nashashibis would accept the partition plan. They were soon to realise however, that twenty years of negligence in public relations meant that moderate Arab public opinion had not been cultivated nor induced to understand, appreciate and thus want to live in peace, through compromise, with the Zionist entity in Palestine. For a full twenty years, not one single publication of real worth was produced to promote and propagate the Zionist cause among the Palestinian Arabs. Compared with the huge Zionist expenditure on publication (newspapers, journals, books, pamphlets, leaflets, etc.) in Hebrew and other languages for distribution outside Palestine (Europe, UK and USA), the lack of any Zionist publication in Arabic seemed extremely short-sighted and totally unjustified. Indeed, this negligence in public relations demonstrates more than anything else the depth of Zionist indifference and lethargy towards the local Arabs. Unfortunately this basic attitude persisted well into the sixties causing much misunderstanding and enmity.

It would be far from the truth to give the wrong impression that every Jew in Mandatory Palestine ignored the Arabs and paid no respect to their national aspirations. There were many Jews, both individuals such as Haim Kalvariski, Moshe Smilansky, Dr Magnes, and groups such as Brith Shalom, sections of Ha-Shomer Ha-Za'ir, the leftists in Adhot Havoda-Poali Zion, and the Communist party who advocated Arab-Jewish cooperation based on mutual respect and the peaceful coexistence of the two communities either in a partitioned Palestine or in a bi-national state. But the influence of these people and groups was very limited. They were not in a position of power and were discarded by the majority either as weird intellectuals or as leftists-deviationists. What mattered then was the thinking of key and influential people like Ben-Gurion and his supporters. As a matter of fact a close study of Ben-Gurion's works⁵ reveals, in the clearest of terms, that he wanted a regional compromise extending beyond the boundaries of Mandatory Palestine where the Palestinians could achieve their national aspiration leaving the whole of Palestine to the Jews who would then agree to become part of a loose regional federation incorporating a few Arab countries. A compromise inside Palestine was simply not on.

In summing up the experience of Arab-Jewish relations during the mandate, many authors, including this one, came to the conclusion that even the most exemplary behaviour on the part of the Zionists would not have affected the real outcome of the conflict. It would perhaps have helped to blunt its sharpness but nothing else.⁶ In recent years, however, there is more and more evidence, especially from British official documents made public recently (for the years 1945-49), to indicate that had the Zionist leaders of the day worked out a long-term policy towards the Palestinian Arabs based on the principle of partition of Palestine (which they agreed to in principle in 1937 and eventually accepted in 1947 in the form of UN Resolution on the Partition of Palestine),

5. D. Ben Gurion, *We and Our Neighbours (Hebrew)* (Tel-Aviv, 1931); idem, *The Peel Report and the Jewish State* (London, 1938); idem, *Palestine in the Post-War World* (London, 1942); idem, *Bama'racha (In the Front Line)*, 5 vols. (Tel-Aviv, 1950-51); idem, *Hazon va Derech (Vision and Fulfilment)*, 5 vols. (Tel-Aviv, 1954); idem, *My Talks with Arab Leaders* (Tel-Aviv, 1967).

6. See Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*; Sykes, *Crossroads to Israel*; R. Gabbay, *A Political Study of the Arab-Jewish Conflict* (Geneva/Paris, 1959); J.C. Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine* (New York, 1950); G. Kirk, *The Middle East 1945-1950* (London, 1954).

had they genuinely propagated the idea and put their energy and resources towards winning over to it the moderate Arabs, and above all had they convinced the British that their ultimate design was not to control the whole of Palestine, then the face of history could have been different.

It seems that in the absence of such policy of compromise, the British became increasingly worried lest Zionist intransigence backed by a superior military machine could eventually succeed with the Jews controlling the whole of Palestine and subjugating its Palestinian Arabs. This became a tangible possibility after the adoption of the Biltmore programme in May 1942, when over 500 Jewish delegates (mainly Americans) passed a resolution declaring that 'Palestine be established as a Jewish Commonwealth integrated in the structure of the new democratic world' that will follow the allied victory. The prospect of a Jewish-controlled Palestine was deemed by the British as extremely harmful to their interests and primacy in the Arab world and totally against their sense of justice and fairness. Consequently, the British, realizing how weak the Palestinians were, encouraged the neighbouring Arab countries to get involved in the dispute. With time, this involvement deepened to such an extent that by 1948, the Arab states rather than the Palestinian Arabs became the real and direct party in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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The Zionist perception of the Palestinian Arabs as being irrelevant and non-essential gained much impetus during and after the dramatic days of 1948 when the newly established State of Israel managed not only to withstand the onslaught of five regular armies converging from the north, south and east, but to launch four massive and well-conducted campaigns leading to the capture of almost 74 percent of Mandatory Palestine and crossing into Egyptian and Lebanese territories. The Palestinian Arabs took no part at all in the fighting and as pressure mounted they fled away from Palestine and deep into the neighbouring Arab territories. By April 1949, there were no less than one million Arab refugees (representing 72 percent of the total Arab population of Palestine) distributed as follows:

Transjordan	105,000
West Bank (under Transjordan's occupation)	413,000
Lebanon	142,000
Syria	86,000
The Gaza Strip (under Egypt's occupation)	260,000
TOTAL	1,011,000⁷

It was estimated then that out of the 900,000 Palestinian Arabs who lived in the territories renamed Israel, only 167,000 Arabs remained while the rest, over 730,000, fled and/or were encouraged (some would say forced) to leave. Consequently the Israelis were elated to the extreme. The Jews, then a community of 650,000 persons, stood up to the biggest challenge in their modern history, managed to defeat five regular armies, and, in the process, succeeded to expand (by 37 percent) the area allotted to them by the UN Partition Resolution of November 1947. They also gained another prize, that of getting rid of a huge Arab majority. The armistice agreements signed with the Arab countries in

7. Gabbay, *A Political Study*, pp. 54-202.

late 1948 and early 1949 made it clear that 'civilians, who hitherto had been prohibited from passing the fighting lines or entering the area between the lines were henceforth to be prohibited to the same extent from crossing the armistice demarcation line'. Translated into the political reality of the Middle East this meant that the Palestinians were barred from going back to their villages and homes. No wonder that the first president of Israel, Dr Haim Weiseman, spoke emotionally to Mr James McDonald the first American ambassador to Israel of this 'Arab Exodus' describing it as a 'miraculous simplification of Israel's tasks'.⁸

The interesting thing, however, was that Israeli leaders and strategists sincerely believed then that the problem of the Palestinians had resolved itself completely. They convinced themselves and with them Israel public opinion that the Arabs were one nation and a Palestinian Arab once moved to live in Transjordan or in Syria would become a citizen of the host country and would be absorbed there in no time. Indeed when a few Israeli intellectuals, mainly members of the leftist Mapam party advocated throughout the fifties and the early sixties that the so-called Arab refugee problem had not disappeared nor had the refugees been absorbed as anticipated, they were ridiculed and put to shame as fanatic Arabists, defectionists and the like.⁹

Instructive enough, there is evidence to show that the Israeli decision makers and political planners of the fifties were either naive in their basic assumptions or even worse, blind as to the long-term impact of some of their decisions regarding the Palestinian refugees. A study of certain decisions taken then, and of opportunities missed, reveals the amateurish and inconsistent nature of their short-sighted pragmatism. A few examples would both illustrate and confirm this point.

1. During 1948-51, Emir Abdullah of Transjordan was preparing the ground for the annexation of those Palestinian territories captured by his English-led army during the War of 1948—the so-called West Bank. In the course of his secret negotiations with the Israelis to secure their approval, he expressed his intention to rename his new kingdom 'the Hashimite Kingdom of Palestine'. It seems that the Israelis objected and managed to persuade him otherwise.¹⁰ As it so happened Abdullah backed down and when annexation was finally announced in July 1951, he called his kingdom 'the Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan'. He immediately granted the Palestinians in his enlarged kingdom (representing 52 percent of all the Palestinians), the Jordanian citizenship. But the Palestinians kept on calling themselves Palestinians partly out of solidarity with their brethren elsewhere in the Arab world and partly because to become a Jordanian implied settling for an inferior social status as the name was associated with the primitive Bedouins, who constituted the majority of the Transjordanian society.

This Israeli attitude was short-sighted to the extreme. It was based on two faulty considerations:

- (a) The fear least the name 'Palestine', if resurrected and officially used, could generate and intensify a feeling of irredentism among the Arab refugees. Indeed, this same argument is heard in Israel today whenever the demand for creating a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza is mentioned;

8. J. McDonald, *My Mission In Israel, 1948-1951* (New York, 1951), p. 176.

9. See *New Outlook* (Tel-Aviv), vols. 1-9 (1957-65), being the English mouthpiece of said Israeli intellectuals.

10. According to 'Arif al-'Arif, Abdullah's aim in wanting to use the name Palestine was twofold: to take his new kingdom out of its anonymity (Transjordan was a recent invention and thus not 'historically authentic'), and, what was even more important to him, to deal a fatal blow to the attraction of the Whole Palestine government being established in the Gaza Strip with Egyptian inspiration and support. See R. Gabbay, *My Talks with 'Arif al-'Arif* (forthcoming). For the conflict between Abdullah and Egypt during 1949-51, see Gabbay, *A Political Study*, pp. 154-57, 250-55, 317-29.

(b) The hope that by erasing the name Palestine, the Arab refugees would integrate more quickly into the society and the economy of the host countries.

For the short-run it seemed as if Israel's anticipations were coming true. The name Palestine disappeared (almost) from common usage. At international forums and meetings, UN resolutions and documents, authors, politicians and journalists all referred to the Palestinians as 'Arab refugees' and even Arab publications of the fifties called them 'the refugees'.

But when after two decades those Arab refugees continued to exist and their number increased rather than diminished (from 957,000 in May 1950 to over 1,500,000 in the mid-seventies and of which over 33 percent were still living in camps as compared with only 29 percent camp-dwellers in 1950), and when their identity and attachment to Palestine persisted despite the passage of time, a transformation in world public opinion took place. Their demand for a separate national entity became associated with Israel rather than with Jordan. In other words, had the Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan been called instead the Hashimite Kingdom of Palestine, the problem of finding an independent territory to be called Palestine would not have arisen. The problem of the Palestinians would have been conceived as an internal problem concerning the nature of the regime within an existing Palestine, alias Jordan, rather than a problem questioning the nature and essence of Israel.

2. Again, Israel's short-sightedness and preoccupation with illusionary pragmatism were manifested in its attitude towards solving the refugee problem. In December 1948 the UN General Assembly resolved that 'refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return ...'¹¹

Israel rejected the repatriation part of the resolution on practical grounds of political, social, economic and military considerations as well as on issues of fundamental nature such as the destiny of Israel, the ingathering of the exiles, the Jewish way of life, etc ... In retrospect and against the developments in other parts of the world such as Cyprus, North Ireland and even Lebanon of recent months, one may understand if not justify Israel's reluctance to accept back the Palestinian Arabs thus creating a big Arab minority (and in 1948-52 that would have been an absolute Arab majority) within a state predominantly Jewish in culture, national sentiments and aspirations. But what is incomprehensible in the Israeli attitude is their procrastination and final refusal to pay compensation for properties and belongings left behind. The total value was estimated by the UN Conciliation Commission to be £120m in 1948.¹² In the late fifties when it became clear to the Palestinian Arabs that their chances of repatriation were almost nil, they were ready to settle for compensation. There were then many indications to the effect that Arab refugees with reasonable finance either left the Middle East (to Canada, Brazil, USA and Australia—there were over 450,000 Palestinians living outside the Middle East in 1975), or established themselves outside refugee camps, especially in Jordan where the largest concentration of refugees existed. Had Israel had foresight and been generous, the payment of compensation on an individual level in the late fifties would have encouraged the trend of emigration and/or the economic integration of some 33 percent of the then refugee population. But far more important, the payment of compensation then would have placed Israel in a stronger position vis-à-vis the present-day Palestinians' claim that their national right in the old country stemmed in part from their registered properties there.

11. United Nations General Assembly, 3rd session 1948, resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

12. United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, 10th progress report, document A/1985 of 19 November 1951, pp. 13-15.

As an extension to this Israeli policy of total indifference towards a constructive solution to the refugees' problem, we find Israel exerting its influence and pressure in blocking massive Western economic aid to Arab countries including Jordan. There are at least four known cases where Arab attempts to raise private long-term loans in Western Europe during the early sixties have failed partly as a result of Israeli intervention. It seems that Israel measured any amelioration in the economic conditions of its neighbouring countries in terms of their impact on Arab military capabilities and failed to understand that accelerated economic growth could strengthen the prospects for peace and compromise for the simple reason that wars have always brought destruction and deprivation. Israel also failed to understand that the prerequisite, indeed the *sine qua non* to any constructive and permanent solution of the refugee problem could not be achieved other than by a massive economic aid, especially to Jordan where the majority of the refugees lived.

3. The final example deals with the general complacency of the Israeli political scientists who in their majority acquiesced and many even obliged in backing their government's pragmatism. An extensive study of Israeli political writings of the fifties and the early sixties revealed very little criticism of the government's deficiency in long-term political thinking. One is amazed to find how Israeli experts in Middle Eastern affairs, had failed to report on, let alone grasp, the significance of some fundamental transformation in Arab political thinking. A case at hand, which also has a direct bearing on the resurrection of Palestinian nationalism is the shift in emphasis from people (or *Qawm*) to homeland (or *Watan*) as the basic component of Arab nationalism. This shift was attributed to three major developments that took place in the Arab world in the early sixties:

(a) Algeria obtained its independence after a bitter and bloody struggle against France which lasted over seven years and took the lives of about one million Algerians (8.3 percent of the population approximately). The Algerian struggle and sacrifice became a lighthouse for the whole Arab nation and especially for the Palestinians to admire and to follow;

(b) the dissolution of the union between Egypt and Syria in September 1961 caused a significant setback to the ideal of Arab unity as propagated by Nassir; and,

(c) the complete bankruptcy of Nassirism as a political doctrine of immediate application and/or realization. The protracted war in the Yemen with massive Egyptian military intervention contributed towards that end, and focused the attention on the need for an ideological transfusion, of a harmonising nature. This was elegantly achieved by redefining the short-term objectives of Arab nationalism. Thus, whereas in the period until 1961-62, Arab political literature associated Arab nationalism with the word *Qawm* (people)—the usual meaning of which in modern Arabic is pan-Arabism and ethnic nationalism, from 1962-63 onward, nationalism was increasingly rendered by the term *Watan*, which signifies nationalism in its narrow, territorialistic sense—a sort of patriotism towards a specific country. Also, the long road towards Arab unity was then conceived as of passing through the national (i.e. *Watani*) struggle of independence for each and every Arab land and entity. Arab ideologies of the late sixties totally discarded the idea of homogeneity through unity and preached instead the need for preserving the local character even after unity has been achieved. This, it was maintained, would enrich Arab unity through variegation. Moreover, the controversy between distinctiveness and unity was also reflected in the concept of the structure of unity. The new trend towards preserving distinctiveness deemed it necessary to conserve the existing political frameworks in a loosely confederated structure as against the previously advocated course of obliterating the existing political frameworks along with their boundaries (which were considered as merely the adjunct of a colonial system).

In practical terms, this shift in ideological-cum-political thinking meant that local distinctive entities (including the Palestinians) could opt for full independence rather than being annexed or swallowed, in the name of unity, by their powerful neighbours. Indeed, it was due to this new political realism that we now have nineteen independent Arab countries some of which are midget states, population-wise (Qatar: 84,000; Bahrain: 224,000; United Arab Emirates: 203,000; Oman: 690,000, and following the same principle the right of the ex-Spanish Saharans: 60,000, for independence—a right fully supported by Algeria and others).

Unfortunately this transformation in Arab thinking went unnoticed in Israel. Israeli leaders, scholars and political strategists continued to maintain at least until 1974 (and some of them including Mrs Golda Meir, still maintain until this day) that no distinctive Palestinian people with common identity and legitimate political aspiration had ever existed.

Indeed it was this total rejection of the Palestinians' entitlement to a separate political identity that was (and probably still is) at the root of the Israel Labour party's non-written policy of holding on indefinitely to the West Bank and Gaza with their over one million Arab population.

The reality of the situation today, however, runs contrary to this simplistic and unrealistic Israeli cognition. A Palestinian people does exist. Factors such as common place of origin, shared experience and common fate and suffering in the past and at the present have contributed towards the creation of a collective Palestinian identity. Moreover, the failure of their absorption into the Arab countries, economically and, no less, socially has meant the negation by the Palestinians of their present life and their determination to create an independent political entity for themselves. The fact that the PLO has been recognized by over 120 countries and has been accorded special status by the United Nations Organization and its agencies is a further indication of the permanency of this new political reality. It depends now on the Israelis whether they can break out of their short-sighted pragmatism and achieve a political compromise with their co-partners, the Palestinians.

Bechir Ben Yahmed, the editor-in-chief of *Jéune Afrique*, expressed his belief that peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis was not only possible but also probable, provided a Palestinian state be established under the same conditions and with the same advantages as those experienced by the State of Israel. He then concluded that peace was not only the best solution for both antagonists and their supporters—Arabs and Jews—but that the Israelis and the Palestinians were doomed to achieve it.¹³ Many true friends of Israel wish they could subscribe to Mr Ben Yahmed's optimism.

13. B. Ben Yahmed, 'Doomed to Peace', *Foreign Affairs* (October 1975), pp. 127-33.