

Challenging the Boundaries: A Single State in Palestine/Israel

This Conference, held on the 17/18th November 2007, in SOAS, was of historic importance. Such is the strength of the Israeli/Zionist lobby, and the position of the US Govt. that the debate around the future of Palestine is almost invariably confined to the 2 State “solution”.

Attempts are made to ban books in the US, such as Joel Kovel's, on the one state solution. So it was as a breath of fresh air that the newly formed ‘London One State Group’ called this Conference. It was also a sign of the times; the tide is going this way. Many more books are now published, as well as the fact that the organisers could produce such a high-powered Conference, as a continuation of the July Madrid Conference.

250 people attended, from all over the World, particularly Europe, a conference that charged £30. Being at a time when many political organisations in the UK had rallies, the left in the UK was hardly represented.

The Conference was organised as 6 Panel sessions. The strength of these can be shown for example by the first Panel on “Why One State”. It was chaired by author Ghada Karmi, long time one state campaigner. Ilan Pappé, now of Exeter University gave a description of the history of Palestine. From the first steps of the Ottoman Empire responding to proto-nationalist ideas, in which he made it clear that without the Zionist immigration there would have been a one state Palestine, through to the people ‘on the ground’ in the British Mandate who also saw only one coherent state. This only changed because out of the Balfour Declaration there were huge numbers of Zionist immigrants. The first immigrants, from 1882, were accepted by the Arab population, with hospitality. They fitted in as tailors, carpenters, shopkeepers etc., they lived together in one state. It was only as mass migration took place that the two state issue arose. So when the UN divided the country it was Zionist policy. The two state solution then existed from 1948-1967, and this was its only period. Prior to that, and since there has only been one state in Palestine. We need 1 person 1 vote in a democratic secular Palestine. International Academia presents it as the only democracy, in reality it should be lumped in with Burma, by the media. The World talks about peace whilst Israel continues with its plans.

Ilan was followed by Joseph Massad, of Columbia University, USA. He spoke about the origins of the two state idea from amongst the Palestinians. He quoted the Palestinians within Israel as arguing for a “State of all its Citizens.” He then explained that the West Bank and Gaza leadership was giving away the rights of the Diaspora, and now further rights. The first arguments for two state had first come from some on the West Bank in 1974, and then after the 1982 defeat in the Lebanon the PLO leadership which up to that point, had argued for “One Democratic Secular State”, began the moves towards a deal that turned those in Israel in to 2nd class citizens, and gave up the majority of the Diaspora. He said the well of concessions was not yet dried up. The Israeli Palestinians, and the Diaspora, had not given up West Bank rights, and therefore those on the West Bank had no right to give up theirs. This was a common theme of the conference, in that all Palestinians should be seen together. The Israelis have succeeded in splitting them. Massad said that the Palestinian Authority should be thrown in the dustbin.

The third speaker in this session was Ali Abunimah, Co-Founder of the Electronic Intifada. He quoted both Cameron, and Condoleezza Rice as saying that Annapolis was the last chance for the two state solution. The media, and leaders want to present the 2 state solution as the only pragmatic, peaceful, reasonable solution. He also said the arguments against the Palestinians were racist. He is in favour equality for all privileged for no-one. This has to be centre of one state, in other instances the exact forms emerged very late on in their negotiations.

In the next Panel on the Geopolitical landscape Ghazi Falah, from University of Akron, Ohio, dealt with the borders. He said that Israel had cleared all the borders, as in Rafah, Gaza, so that they would have complete control even if an independent state emerged.

As'Ad Ghanem, from the University of Haifa, argued that the majority of Palestinians in Israel, and the West Bank accepted two state. So he was part of the document that challenged ethnic domination in Israel. Israeli Palestinians have been excluded by Arafat, and Abu Mazen. It is time to bring this to an end. We cannot accept the collapsed movement to negotiate for us.

Ghada Karimi from the University of Exeter, said that people saw one state as utopian, they never ask the first question, is it desirable? Israel will not allow negation of Zionism. The Palestinians first concern is the occupation, plus the Western states support two state position. So we are presented with what seems to be politically obtainable.

Then Leila Farsakh from the University of Massachusetts, Boston said that Israel was doing well economically whereas the Palestinians had 40% unemployment. But it is one single economy Israel requires integration in to the world economy. What came out of Oslo was the EU financing the occupation, to the tune of £1 Billion a year.

Panel 3 was on Land, Citizenship, and Identity, in which there was a conflict between a bi-national or one democratic secular state.

Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin from Ben Gurion University Palestinian question as one question. He argued for bi-nationalism, he argued it is wrong to ignore the rights of Jews.

Nadim Rouhana from George Mason University said Israeli Jews gained illegally, but they now exist. We need to present a policy for the 'other'. The One State project is for a generation we must have meetings in Ramallah and Gaza.

Tikva Honig-Parnass, political activist said he conflict was between imperialism, and the Arab world. The demand of the Palestinians challenges the state, and against US imperialism. She said in Algeria would a movement have called for equal rights for the settlers.

Omar Barghouti, political activist said: To hear the call for the national rights of Jewish Israelis is demoralising. We call for the legitimate rights of Palestinians, and the rights of Jews, after they have given up rights such as right of return. The Israelis only recognise as a Jewish Nation, not Jews as a Nation. The talk of bi-national is premised on equal moral claims, or equal rights of self determination. But self determination is for colonial people from their oppressors. You cannot ethnically

cleanse, and then call for right of self-determination. The first question is the right of return, with collective and cultural rights. As with the reparations after the war we will deal with Palestinian right of return. He also said colonialists never give up power without resistance.t

Day 2

Panel 4, looking at the past:

Louise Bethlehem from the Hebrew University. She spoke about S. Africa. Apartheid was racialised capitalism, the Freedom Charter called for a country of all its citizens, it called for shared resources, and against material inequality. Some quote Mandela as peaceful compared to the Palestinians, but he did not denounce the armed struggle. Between 1990-1994 'black on black violence left 14,000 dead, the truth and reconciliation never dealt with this. In post apartheid society they concentrated on individuals, they did not deal with structural problems, only human rights. We need to deal with structures. This is why you have problem over Aids debate, and wealth differential.

Kathleen O'Connell from Ireland PSC. The protestants had been in Ireland for 100s of years. They couldn't defeat the IRA, and Vice Versa. Sinn Fein had some support from USA. Still a problem the Unionists have just blocked an Irish Language Act. The nationalists see the situation is transitional, the Unionists that they have established a separate state.

Sumantra Bose from LSE. The partition of Pakistan and India took place August 1947, Palestine November. He dealt with whether it would have been better to stay one state, which he replied yes. Was it inevitable, no. Who was to blame. Jinnah only started to go for 2 states in 1940, and he was not a fanatic. The Indian National Congress had no mass support amongst Muslims, who made up 1 third of the population. The British had operated a divide and rule policy, with the Muslims at the bottom. From 1930 onward they registered people by their religion. Once violence on the ground started people tried to stay united, as in Bengal, but they were not strong enough.

Panel 5, social movements to one state:

Eitan Bronstein from Zochorot in Tel Aviv, an organisation that shows the old Palestinian villages in the Tel Aviv area, and wants to show what the right of return would mean. In May they are having a conference on the right of return. They go round putting the names of old Palestinian villages on road signs, and they have been to refugees, in Israel, and Lebanon, taken their photos and put them, life size, on the walls of their old houses, or in one instance of an old man who died, in a grave yard. We have to transform state in to a democratic state. At present it is a 'non-Arab' state.

Rajaa Omari from Natrinkum, Haifa. We need unity of all Palestinians. The 1948 Palestinians are sacrificed; they curse in their own homes, even have problems speaking Arabic on the streets. Meanwhile children in Gaza live on tea and bread.

Eyal Sivan from the University of East London, described his project of making the film Route 181, which followed the green line. He said 18 families, (16 Ashkenazy),

own 83% of the wealth in Israel. He said we need social dimension to our struggle. He said also that the Communist Party was slowly moving from 2 state position.

6th and Final Panel:

This was of a group of the speakers giving their final impressions.

Ghada Karmi introduced a model UN resolution.

Ilan Pappé said we were a community of activists with few successes. We don't know how to stop the genocide in Gaza. The problem is the fragmentation of the Palestinians, we should have shared institutions in exile.

Ghazi Faleh said he had been hired by Arafat to produce a feasibility study on 2 states, and it had been rejected, but he had now moved to one state solution. Omar Barghouti said we are not in a fight with 2 state solution people, we must convince them. The main place for this is with the refugees.

Ghada Kharmi: The first question was to campaign for one state. Repeated the need to incorporate all three elements of the Palestinians together. The question of the Jewish population's rights.