

The One-State Reality

Given Israel's current position on the conflict defining its borders—with or without Trump's 'deal of the century'—what future awaits it?

By [Sari Nusseibeh](#) | March 8, 2020 9:30 PM

A time-worn philosophical speculation probes whether our identities essentially remain the same or change through time and circumstance. Clearly, the relevance of this extends to us as individuals as it does to states and peoples. Answering it one way or the other affects how we decide to relate the past with the present and the future. For example, in Israel's case we can ask whether Israel was constituted at its birth in such a way that in its 20th year of existence it was ready to begin digesting the lands it conquered, and by the time it was 40 to maneuver behind Palestinian and Arab peace initiatives such that, by the time it became 70 it could finally receive full American blessing for its growth designs. In retrospect at least, its trajectory has clearly been one of a growing Leviathan, a pattern that allows us a better insight into what it will become in its centennial.

We can likewise ask a parallel question about the Palestinian people—their physical/political fragmentation in 1947-48 when Israel was born, their political reemergence in the '60s as Israel entered its second phase after conquering the rest of Palestine, and their refragmentation both politically and physically by the turn of the century, as this Leviathan embarked on its 70th year of existence. Extrapolating from these lifelines, and in particular from their present states, we can then speculate about Trump's appropriately called "deal of the century"... or what we expect will happen now and for the next 30 years. All things being equal (which they may turn out not to be), and on the assumption that Israel's "growth pattern" into an empire is inbuilt in its constitution, the following may be a realistic assessment of what to expect will happen within this empire, ignoring for our purposes Palestinian and wider international pressures on this empire from without.

Regardless of the results of the political elections in Israel this week, and whether negotiations on the basis of Trump's vision will take place or not, the likely short-term outcome of the historic process envisioned in Trump's conception map and whose physical/political infrastructure on the ground is already set in stone will be a Jewish state that is effectively sovereign throughout the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. Life-support systems for Palestinians living in the territory will be ensured through different mechanisms, while "Palestinian identity needs" will be provided through symbolic arrangements. Both mechanisms and arrangements will be envisioned to secure a manageable level of control by the state over its non-Jewish inhabitants.

Palestinians will be the party paying the price for the Empire's projected trajectory. Besides taking their major concerns off the table—Jerusalem, refugees, borders, natural resources, land—their proposed future in the Trump conception map, whether in a sandwiched and truncated "state" or not, will leave them deprived of those intangible human values they care most about: dignity, self-worth and respect, freedom, and independence. At most, theirs will be the lot of a patient in a hospital living off a life-support system provided at the discretion of their masters. The door to the patient's room will have a sign on it with the word *Palestinian*. Signing to this arrangement is a capitulation to these terms—precisely what proponents of the [Israel Victory Project](#) seeks them to do, as expressed in the two large posters (one of them, at right) in Tel Aviv recently depicting Mahmoud Abbas and Ismail Haniyeh on their knees, pleading for "peace." Simply, this will not happen. Even if Abbas is lured to the negotiating table by well-meaning European intercession promising better terms or even recognition of the '67-lined Palestinian state, only insignificant dents on the ground may be caused in the overall Trump conception plan, and the unfolding political reality will likely continue to remain the same for a durable period of time. In effect, as with the Madrid/Washington talks, and the Oslo arrangements that followed, the same scenario will unfold—the empire's expanding hegemony on the land and its people.

In the absence of formal negotiations on Trump's basic plan, the aforesaid reality will be brought about partly unilaterally through a series of annexation steps, and partly through an oscillating relationship with the Palestinians, much along the same pattern we have witnessed in the past—dramatic periods of unrest interspersed with longer periods of relative quiet and adjustment. Popular unrest now brewing against the Trump plan and the PA, alongside an expected power struggle upon Abbas' passing, will likely lead to further fragmentation, with or without possible elections. Indeed, it is not far-fetched to assume the eventual dissolution of the overarching political authority of the PA in the West Bank and the assumption of control in the accompanying disorder by one or more already-existing security organization and power center. With Hamas' Gaza being successfully kept under control by the stick and carrot policy, life in the West Bank can soon be brought back once again under control, this time being held in place through security/administrative coordinations with several Palestinian venues in place of a single authority. Interruptions in this order will continue to erupt from time to time, alongside a continued process of colonization in the area.

Realistically, however persistently “inside Palestinians” will try to confront the Leviathan's expansion, they will not be able to prevent it from fulfilling its projected growth. Most of the areas slated for annexation by the conception plan are anyway not within their reach or control. Under whatever leadership or leaderships they will end up having as the confrontation process unfolds, they will in all likelihood find themselves having to adjust to a long-term survival mode of existence within this Leviathan. A vacillating 50 years of occupation experience has already shown us how insidiously the daily needs of so-called normal life manage to prevail over ideology. But the downside of such “adjustment” from Israel's point of view will be a steadily growing Palestinian population in its bowels. Long run, demographics may not be able to sustain this political incongruity. This will likely remain a thorn whether or not more drastic action down the road—such as cross-border population transfers, or the acquisition of further territory—is taken.

There are, however, limits to this one-sided trajectory. Even in their pre-20th-century “international world order” heyday, sovereigns did not last. This one is not likely to either. More often than not, empires crumbled from within. Cracks in the very constitution of the sovereign begin to show, and these eventually contribute to its breakdown. In the Israel of tomorrow, several such cracks will take their toll. The most fundamental is that of the notion of peoplehood—whether the Jewish sovereign will continue to be seen as an embodiment of their peoplehood by world Jewry, demanding their continued and unconditional respect and support. Somewhere along the trajectory of the sovereign's future development, values informing self-identity in the Jewish world will part ways, causing a radical rupture: No longer would it make sense for a J Street to differentiate between two faces of Israel. The Jewish sovereign will only have one ugly supremacist face, and simple “Jewishness” will no longer be able to sustain it. This crack will reach down within the sovereign's body to the different ethnic groups and classes that constitute it, where ethnic and economic inequalities in what will essentially be a capitalist “Jewish regime” cannot as in other pluralistic societies be accepted or tolerated under the guise of a secular “citizenship,” but will be challenged by Jewish groups refusing to be benefiting less from a Jewish state than other Jewish groups. Signs of these economic and ethnic cracks are already visible today.

Another major crack in the body-politic of the sovereign that is also already visible is the one delineating its Arab minority. This is a minority that is hewn around two fundamental principles: equality as Israeli co-citizens, and self-determination for their Palestinian co-nationals. To the extent that the sovereign will be bent on flouting these principles, this minority will continue to agitate and gather power and support both at home and abroad. At some point, this minority may well end up joining forces with other discontented Jewish groups, thereby beginning to cause a malfunction in the workings of a supremacist body-politic.

It is not far-fetched, then, to foresee a deconstruction of this body-politic at least beginning to make itself felt within the next 30 years. As already said, the country's



'Peace is only made with defeated enemies' (Photo: Jack Guez/AFP via Getty Images)

borders will have been set. But they will have been set in such a way as to define a homeland for all as much as to mark a foreign territory. Within these borders, two intertwined peoples will already have begun to pave new political ways for themselves. The deconstruction of the empire will not be sudden, nor will one people eventually come out on top. Indeed, an altogether new citizen might be born, attached to the country as a homeland, and to a new version of political identity, perhaps configured constitutionally in any number of different ways, but which in the end reflects a just distribution of rights. *Ceteris paribus*, such would be the rise and fall of the Jewish empire.

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