

Who's afraid of a binational state?

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"Who's afraid of a binational state?"

By Gideon Levy

Jews and Arabs have lived together in one state since 1948; Israelis and Palestinians have lived together in one state since 1967. This country is Jewish and Zionist, but not democratic for everyone. Its Arab citizens are deprived, while the Palestinians in the territories are disinherited and lacking rights. Yet the one state solution is here - and has been for quite a long time. It has been a solution for its Jewish citizens and a disaster for its Palestinian subjects. The ones who are frightened by it - nearly all Israelis - ignore the reality that the one state arrangement already exists. They only are terrified by a change in its character - from a state of apartheid and occupation to an egalitarian state; from a binational state in practice that is disguised as a nation state (of the ruler), to a binational state in principle. Either way, Jews and Palestinians have lived in this one state for at least two generations, albeit apart. It's impossible to ignore. Relations between the two peoples in this one country have known changes: from a military regime over the Arab-Isrealis until its abolishment (in 1966), from a calmer and freer period in the territories through stormy periods of murderous terror and violent occupation. In Jerusalem, Acre, Jaffa, Ramle, Lod, the Galilee and Wadi Ara live Arabs and Jews, and the relations between them are not impossible. Relations with the Palestinians in the territories have also changed - but over the years we lived in one country, even if by the sword. For 47 years, the possibility of withdrawing from the territories and contributing as such to the longed-for Jewish and democratic character of the state has stood before the Israelis who fear a change in its character. They chose not to. It is perhaps their right - most doubtfully - but it is their duty to offer another solution. Under this banner, they established the settlement enterprise, whose goal was to thwart partition. This enterprise succeeded to the point that it became irreversible. And there's no arguing with success: no one speaks anymore of evacuating over half a million settlers - and therefore no one speaks anymore of a just solution of two

states. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's proposals, which also deter a large number of Israelis, do not guarantee a just solution, so they do not promise a solution. "Settlement blocs" will remain in place. Ariel has long been inside, and leasing Ofra and Beit El are possibilities. "Security arrangements" will be made for the Jordan Valley, perhaps its settlements will also be allowed to remain. The proposal says no to return or a solution to the refugee problem. Meanwhile, the prime minister makes a commitment not to "evacuate one Jew" and proposes keeping settlers under Palestinian sovereignty - as unabashed spin. With all that, it may be possible to go to the corner grocer, to formulate and even sign another document (without any intention of implementing it) that resembles remarkably to all its predecessors since the 1969 Rogers plan, through the Clinton parameters to the Road Map. All of them are kicking up dust, deep in some filing cabinet. But it's impossible to solve the conflict with such a plan. The refugees, the settlers and the Gaza Strip; the lack of good intentions; and the lack of justice will all remain as they are. Anyone who supports the two-state solution - apparently most Israelis - must offer a real solution. Kerry's proposals do not bode well. Israel might just accede to them, but only to maintain its relations with the United States and the world and to push the Palestinians to the wall, certainly not to establish peace or impose justice. From this general "no" rises the "yes:" yes, to one state. If Israelis truly want to maintain the settlements they established, and to remain in the Jordan Valley and on the mountain ridge, in Gush Etzion and in Maale Adumim, in East Jerusalem and leading in Beit El - let them do so, but then there won't be two states. If there are no two states, there is only one state. If there is one state, then the discourse must change: equal rights for everyone. The problems are many and complicated, and like them so are the solutions: division into districts, federation, joint or separate governance. But there will be no demographic change here - because the state has long been binational - but rather just a democratic and conscious change. And then the question will arise in full force: Why is it so scary to live in an egalitarian state? Indeed, all other possibilities are much scarier.