

BEWARE THE TRAP

The politics of partition of historic Palestine

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At some point, Mr Abbas must admit to his people that most of the refugees will never return to Israel: that is the price of partition." This statement appeared on page 14 of the issue of the Economist dated September 24 to 30, 2011. The logic of partition is that it is two sides of the some coin. If there is going to be a Palestinian state, this means that there is going to be a Jewish state. The partition of the land means the separation of the people who live on it. For Palestinians to have a separate state and also having their people return to Israel is seen as having one's cake and eating it at the same time. It is true that Palestinians have the legal and moral right to return to their original homes, but one gives up one thing to get another. Palestinians would be giving up their right of return in exchange for getting a state. To think otherwise would be eccentric logic and self-deception.

The politics of position does not end there: it affects Palestinians in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Israel. Upon formation of such a state, Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria will become citizens of the new state. This means that in Jordan they will lose what little political rights they currently have, something that is being openly discussed by influential groups such as the retired military organization. Surplus people and the malcontent will be pressured to move to their state. In Lebanon and probably also in Syria, refugees will be moved from their temporary camps to permanent ones in the West Bank or Gaza.

How would partition affect Palestinians in Israel? First, the land exchange between Israel and the Palestinian state that has already been discussed by the two teams of negotiators. Pieces of land in Israel with majority Arab population bordering the west Bank will be exchanged for Jewish settlements contiguous with Israel. Second, administrative exchange; population centers with a Palestinian majority in Israel will be structured as communes to be politically administered by the Palestinian state; settlements in the West Bank will become communes administrated by Israel. Such arrangement exists in Belgium between the French speaking province (Wallonia) and the Dutch-speaking province (Flanders). The small fraction remaining will be pressured to, as Tzipi Levni put it: "fulfill their national ambitions in their Palestinian state". They will join about four hundred thousand that were internally displaced within Israel after 1948.

This is the meaning of partition for which we need to be prepared and not be surprised as happened repeatedly before.

Mr Mahmoud Abbas admitted in a recent interview with an Israeli television station that Palestinians will not return to their homes in Israel, but it is dubious that he will have the moral courage to say that directly to his people. Many leaders of the Ramallah authority have made similar statements but received little attention. After the failed Camp David negotiations in 2000, Madeline Albright, then American secretary of state,

revealed that the Palestinian negotiators privately promised to divert most refugees away from Israel and that they will be satisfied with the return of a nominal number of one hundred thousand. There were also famous statements such as by the late Yasser Arafat: "who is going to return, the millionaires of Brazil?" or the one by chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat: "we cannot expect Israel to commit suicide by taking back the refugees; and the statement by prime minister of the Ramallah authority, Salam Fayyad, "the refugees will be welcome to the Palestinian state". The leaked Palestine papers left no doubt that the authority gave up the right of return.



While the Ramallah authority has been consistent, with its behavior and pronouncements clearly showing its surrender, the goals of the Gaza authority have not been consistent with its rhetoric. It supports the partition of historic Palestine and proposes a truce with Israel lasting twenty to fifty years. However, it continues to talk of the destruction of Israel and the "liberation" of all Palestine. The Hamas leadership wants us to believe that the purpose of the truce is the preparation for the liberation. This is magical thinking that children usually outgrow by the time they are seven years old. They have set up a quasi one party state that they see as indefinite and will not easily abandon. Consider this scene: shortly after the 2008-2009 Israeli assault on Gaza, the deputy minister of tourism of Gaza was interviewed on Aljazeera Television, after inspecting a resort called Crazy Waters, to say that his government has tourism plans for the next ten years.

What can explain the drive of the two authorities to have an entity no matter how insignificant, and with no consideration for the rights of their people or what they actually want? In January 2004, Mr. Ahmed Qurai, then prime minister, threatened to call for the one-state solution in historic Palestine. Mr Tayseer Khaled, a leader of the Democratic Front and its representative on the PLO executive committee was asked for his opinion. He replied that he is against the one state solution because the "elites" of Palestinians are not up to the level of Israeli elites. These elites are the managerial class and their business allies. It is this managerial impulse, the will to power, *animus domeniadi*, that is

they have survived the harsh conditions of exile and oppression. They are not afraid as are the likes of Mr. Khaled to share a society and political entity with the Israelis.

Let the Palestinian people decide

The Palestinian people never had the opportunity to decide their political future. In 1949, what become known as the "West Bank" was annexed to Trans Jordan following negotiations between David Ben Gurion and King Abdullah and with the blessing of the British (see *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the partition of Palestine by Avi Shlaim*). This was followed by the divestment of the West Bank from Jordan in 1985. Then there was the secretive Oslo accords in 1993, which was conducted by a few individuals. As though dealing with Israel and the two authorities is not enough, prince Hassan of Jordan is talking about reclaiming the West Bank, hoping to resume the mission of his grandfather.

The partition of Palestine directly affects the lives of all Palestinians: in Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and many other countries. Even if we manage to elect a national council that represents all Palestinians, the leadership of the factions and the managerial class cannot be entrusted with making a decision regarding the partition of historic Palestine. They are so desperate to have an entity to manage no matter how insignificant that may be. They very well realize that such an entity will be a collection of reservations, a human warehouse. The leaders of the factions are bickering about who will be the administrator of the prison, and they have brought with them over eighty thousand prison guards. With an equivalent population to the West Bank and Gaza, the cities of Chicago and Los Angeles, with much higher crime rates, each has less than nine thousand police. The factions are leading their people into a trap, using the flag as bait.

The Palestinian people should make this fateful decision through direct democracy by a referendum. This requires a census and registration to be conducted by a neutral organisation. The mass media has the ethical responsibility to open its entire means to a debate on this issue. The referendum will be a means to mobilise the Palestinian people, especially the refugees, to think and prepare for their return to their homeland rather than be satisfied to talk about the theoretical "right of return". In lieu of a referendum, a poll can be conducted by a reputable organisation.

Let the Palestinian people decide whether they want to pay the price for a state that, in the words of Mahmoud Darwish: "has no room for intimacy between a male and a female pigeon, a state that you will despise the day it is announced".

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The geopolitics of immigration

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The United States came into being through mass movements of populations. The movements came in waves from all over the world and, depending upon the historical moment, they served differing purposes, but there were two constants. First, each wave served an indispensable economic, political, military or social function. The United States -- as a nation and regime -- would not have evolved as it did without them. Second, each wave of immigrants was viewed ambiguously by those who were already in-country. Depending upon the time or place, some saw the new immigrants as an indispensable boon; others saw them as a catastrophe. The debate currently under way in the United States is probably the oldest in the United States: Are new immigrants a blessing or catastrophe? So much for the obvious.

What is interesting about the discussion of immigration is the extent to which it is dominated by confusion, particularly about the nature of immigrants. When the term "immigrant" is used, it is frequently intended to mean one of two things: Sometimes it means non-US citizens who have come to reside in the United States legally. Alternatively, it can mean a socially or linguistically distinct group that lives in the United States regardless of legal status. When you put these together in their various permutations, the discourse on immigration can become chaotic. It is necessary to simplify and clarify the concept of "immigrant."

Initial US immigration took two basic forms. There were the voluntary migrants, ranging from the Europeans in the 17th century to Asians today. There were the involuntary migrants -- primarily Africans -- who were forced to come to the continent against their will. This is one of the critical fault lines running through US history. An immigrant who came from China in 1995 has much more in common with the Puritans who arrived in New England more than 300

years ago than either has with the Africans. The former came by choice, seeking solutions to their personal or political problems. The latter came by force, brought here to solve the personal or political problems of others. This is one fault line.

The second fault line is between those who came to the United States and those to whom the United States came. The Native American tribes, for example, were conquered and subjugated by the immigrants who came to the United States before and after its founding. It should be noted that this is a process that has taken place many times in human history. Indeed, many Native American tribes that occupied the United States prior to the foreign invasion had supplanted other tribes -- many of which were obliterated in the process. Nevertheless, in a strictly social sense, Native American tribes were militarily defeated and subjugated, their legal status in the United States was sometimes ambiguous and their social status was frequently that of outsiders. They became immigrants because the occupants of the new United States moved and dislocated them.

There was a second group of people in this class: Mexicans. A substantial portion of the United States, running from California to Texas, was conquered territory, taken from Mexico in the first half of the 19th century. Mexico existed on terrain that Spain had seized from the Aztecs, who conquered it from prior inhabitants. Again, this should not be framed in moral terms. It should be framed in geopolitical terms.

When the United States conquered the southwest, the Mexican population that continued to inhabit the region was not an immigrant population, but a conquered one. As with the Native Americans, this was less a case of them moving to the United States than the United States moving to them.

The response of the Mexicans varied, as is always the case, and they developed a complex identity. Over time, they accepted the political dominance of the United States and became, for a host of reasons, US citizens. Many assimilated into the dominant

culture. Others accepted the legal status of US citizens while maintaining a distinct cultural identity. Still others accepted legal status while maintaining intense cultural and economic relations across the border with Mexico. Others continued to regard themselves primarily as Mexican.

The US-Mexican border is in some fundamental ways arbitrary. The line of demarcation defines political and military relationships, but does not define economic or cultural relationships. The borderlands -- and they run hundreds of miles deep into the United States at some points -- have extremely close cultural and economic links with Mexico. Where there are economic links, there always are movements of population. It is inherent.

The persistence of cross-border relations is inevitable in borderlands that have been politically and militarily subjugated, but in which the prior population has been neither annihilated nor expelled. Where the group on the conquered side of the border is sufficiently large, self-contained and self-aware, this condition can exist for generations. A glance at the Balkans offers an extreme example. In the case of the United States and its Mexican population, it also has continued to exist.

This never has developed into a secessionist movement, for a number of reasons. First, the preponderance of US power when compared to Mexico made this a meaningless goal. Second, the strength of the US economy compared to the Mexican economy did not make rejoining Mexico attractive. Finally, the culture in the occupied territories evolved over the past 150 years, yielding a complex culture that ranged from wholly assimilated to complex hybrids to predominantly Mexican. Secessionism has not been a viable consideration since the end of the US Civil War. Nor will it become an issue unless a remarkable change in the balance between the United States and Mexico takes place.

It would be a mistake, however, to think of the cross-border movements along the Mexican-US border in the same way we

think of the migration of people to the United States from other places such as India or China, which are an entirely different phenomenon -- part of the long process of migrations to the United States that has taken place since before its founding. In these, individuals made decisions -- even if they were part of a mass movement from their countries -- to move to the United States and, in moving to the United States, to adopt the dominant American culture to facilitate assimilation. The Mexican migrations are the result of movements in a borderland that has been created through military conquest and the resulting political process.

The movement from Mexico is, from a legal standpoint, a cross-border migration. In reality, it is simply an internal migration within a territory whose boundaries were superimposed by history. Put differently, if the United States had lost the Mexican-American war, these migrations would be no more noteworthy than the mass migration to California from the rest of the United States in the middle of the 20th century. But the United States did not lose the war -- and the migration is across international borders.

It should be noted that this also distinguishes Mexican population movements from immigration from other Hispanic countries. The closest you can come to an equivalent is in Puerto Rico, whose inhabitants are US citizens due to prior conquest. They neither pose the legal problems of Mexicans nor can they simply slip across the border.

The Mexican case is one-of-a-kind, and the difficulty of sealing the border is indicative of the real issue. There are those who call for sealing the border and, technically, it could be done although the cost would be formidable. More important, turning the politico-military frontier into an effective barrier to movement would generate social havoc. It would be a barrier running down the middle of an integrated social and economic reality. The costs for the region would be enormous, piled on top of the cost of walling off the frontier from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific.

If the US goal is to create an orderly migration process from Mexico, which fits into a broader immigration policy that includes the rest of the world, that probably cannot be done. Controlling immigration in general is difficult, but controlling the movement of an indigenous population in a borderland whose frontiers do not cohere to social or economic reality is impossible.

This is not intended to be a guide to social policy. Our general view is that social policies dealing with complex issues usually have such wildly unexpected consequences that it is more like rolling the dice than crafting strategy. We nevertheless understand that there will be a social policy, hotly debated by all sides that will wind up not doing what anyone expects, but actually will do something very different.

The point we are trying to make is simpler. First, the question of Mexican population movements has to be treated completely separately from other immigrations. These are apples and oranges. Second, placing controls along the US-Mexican frontier is probably impossible. Unless we are prepared to hermetically seal the frontier, populations will flow endlessly around barriers, driven by economic and social factors. Mexico simply does not end at the Mexican border, and it hasn't since the United States defeated Mexico. Neither the United States nor Mexico can do anything about the situation.

The issue, from our point of view, cuts to the heart of geopolitics as a theory. Geopolitics argues that geographic reality creates political, social, economic and military realities. These can be shaped by policies and perhaps even controlled to some extent, but the driving realities of geopolitics can never simply be obliterated, except by overwhelming effort and difficulty. The United States is not prepared to do any of these things and, therefore, the things the United States is prepared to do are doomed to ineffectiveness.

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