Partition and the Arab Palestinian Minority in Israel

ABSTRACT

In late 2006, leading Palestinian Arab intellectuals, political leaders, and activists in Israel compiled *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*. The document rejected the designation of Israel as a Jewish State, which they argued was exclusionary and denied the Arabs full equality. The document went on to de-legitimize the Zionist enterprise as “colonialist” and “imperialist”, but at the same time sought to obtain recognition of the Palestinians in Israel by the Jewish majority as a national minority. This paper argues that while recognition of the Palestinians in Israel as a national minority is an eminently reasonable demand, the Jewish majority would find it difficult to accept so long as the national rights of the Jewish majority were simultaneously denied by the Palestinian citizens of Israel. It is not what the Palestinian minority in Israel demands for itself that is the problem, but rather the rights it seeks to deny the Jewish majority, especially the right to self-determination that is, inter alia, the right of the majority to define the state as it sees fit.

INTRODUCTION

In late 2006, leading Palestinian Arab intellectuals, political leaders, and activists in Israel compiled a detailed 40 page document entitled *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*. The document, the first major collective articulation of the Arab minority’s stance toward the state, rejected the designation of Israel as a Jewish State, which they argued was exclusionary and denied the Arabs full equality. The *Future Vision* actually reverted to the past by essentially restating the historical Palestinian
and general Arab rejection of the notion of partitioning British Mandatory Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. In fact, the subtext of the Future Vision was the long-term objective of constructing one state in all of Palestine in which the Jews would become a minority in an Arab state. This was not a basis for negotiation and compromise between Arabs and Jews in Israel, but a recipe for more protracted conflict.

ZIONISM AND THE QUINTESSENTIAL ISSUE OF MAJORITY

The Zionist enterprise was founded on two flawed assumptions. The first was that following the Balfour Declaration’s support of a Jewish National Home in Palestine, in November 1917, and the conquest of Ottoman Palestine by the British in the closing phases of World War I, Eastern European Jews would choose to immigrate to Palestine in great numbers. On the eve of the Paris Peace Conference at the end of the war, Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann envisaged a land that would be made available for the settlement of “four or five million Jews”. In their “immediate post-1918 euphoria” Zionist leaders anticipated “70,000–80,000 immigrants annually”.1 They would soon become the majority in the sparsely populated land of Palestine, whose indigenous Arab population, at the time, hardly exceeded 600,000. The territorial desiderata that the Zionists initially put forward to the British were determined far more by geography, resources, and perceived natural boundaries than by demography, which concerned them a lot less, at least at first. However, in the words of David Ben-Gurion’s biographer, Zionism “utterly failed as a mass voluntary movement” of Jews to Palestine.2

The Zionists initially demanded all of what became Palestine of the British Mandate, but they had also set their sights on Southern Lebanon up to the Litani River, and eastwards across the Jordan up to the line of the Hijaz Railway, and even beyond. However, to their profound dismay, the Zionists soon found that the great majority of Eastern European Jews preferred immigration to the affluent, liberal democratic West, in Europe and especially in North America. These were more attractive than the trials and tribulations of settling in the rugged uncertain frontier of Palestine.

The second flawed assumption was that the Arabs of Palestine would eventually acquiesce in the Zionist project, which the Zionists believed would bring the Arabs the material benefits of Western style modernity, and the capital and the progressive enterprising spirit of the Zionists, which
would meaningfully raise the standards of living of the indigenous Arab population. Ben-Gurion, the chairman of the Jewish Agency and Israel’s first prime minister, was truly stunned in his first meeting with the Palestinian leader, Musa al-Alami, in March 1934, when he gave short shrift to Ben-Gurion’s exposé on the benefits of Zionism to the Arabs. Alami told him that he would rather have the country remain poor and desolate for another hundred years, until such time as the Arabs would be capable of cultivating and developing it themselves, than to have the Zionists take it over. Ben-Gurion was soon to realize that the conflict between Arab and Jew was inescapable. Whatever potential promise may have been in Zionism for the Arabs, it was not going to reduce their unremitting resistance to the Zionist project.

For the Zionists, the quintessential issue was to create a majority community in Palestine. It made no sense for the Zionists to have a so-called “National Home” in a territory where they would be a just another Jewish minority, the likes of which already existed all over the Diaspora. From the classical political Zionist point of view, the solution to the Jewish problem could only be solved if the Jews finally escaped their deplorable minority predicament through Jewish sovereignty in a state they could call their own. The Arabs, understandably, did not have the slightest intention of passively agreeing to become a minority in their own country. They had been the majority for centuries and felt no compulsion to have that change because Jews were oppressed in Eastern Europe.

Unable to muster a majority in all of Palestine, and in the face of determined and increasingly militant Arab resistance, the Zionists were forced to acquiesce to partition. The critical turning point came in the 1930s when the clouds of impending disaster about to befall the Jews of Europe began to accumulate with the rise of the Nazis to power in Hitler’s Germany and vicious anti-Semitism in Poland. Although nothing as horrific as the Holocaust could have been foreseen, Jews in ever increasing numbers sought to escape from Europe and the number of immigrants to Palestine constantly increased. The Arabs in Palestine, genuinely disturbed by the possibility of being overwhelmed by a Jewish majority, rose in rebellion.

The Arab Rebellion erupted in Palestine in April 1936. Clashes between Arabs and Jews spread rapidly throughout the country in the hitherto most sustained Arab opposition to the British Mandate and the Zionist enterprise. Palestinian educator and diarist Khalil al-Sakakini called it a “life-and-death struggle” of the Arabs of Palestine for their country. Ben-Gurion observed that the Arabs of Palestine were fighting a war against dispossession that could not be ignored.
It was not ignored. The Jews of Palestine were shocked into the realization that if it was a Jewish State that they really sought, there no choice but to fight a determined Arab nationalist movement to obtain it. The Royal Commission appointed to ascertain the causes of the rebellion and to make recommendations for a way out of the Palestinian conundrum, headed by Lord Peel, former secretary of state for India, arrived in Palestine in November 1936. After some seven months of deliberation and inquiry the Commission produced its report in July 1937. The Report remains today one of the most thorough and brilliantly insightful documents ever written on the Palestine problem.

It noted, “An irrepressible conflict has arisen between two national communities [my emphasis, A.S.] within the narrow bounds of one small country.” The British had come a long way from the formulations of the Balfour Declaration, which had recognized only the Jews as a people with national rights, while regarding the Arab population as no more than the “existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”, who had civil and religious, but not national, rights. The Arab rebellion imposed new modes of thinking about Palestine, coercing both the British and the Zionists to recognize the Arabs in Palestine as a national entity.

There were indeed two national communities in Palestine, one Arab and one Jewish, both equally deserved to exercise their right to self-determination. The report observed that the lesson of the rebellion was “. . . plain, and nobody . . . will now venture to assert that the existing system offers any real prospect of reconciliation between the Arabs and the Jews.” Britain’s obligations towards the Arabs and the Jews had proved irreconcilable. It concluded, “We cannot in Palestine as it now is both concede the Arab claim to self-government and secure the establishment of the Jewish National Home” and recommended partition of the country.

Even though the Jews were offered less than 20% of Palestine, in a mini-state consisting of a sliver of the coastal plain and the Galilee, the majority of the Zionist movement accepted partition. Partition recognized the principle of Jewish statehood, and with the extreme sense of urgency of the plight of the Jews in Europe, even a miniscule sovereign sanctuary was better than none. With the danger of imminent war in Europe and intense Arab opposition, Britain backtracked from partition and was pressed to seek Arab support. The idea of Jewish statehood was therefore abandoned, as the White Paper of May 1939 clearly indicated.

After WW II and the destruction of the Jews of Europe, the notion of partition was revived. With the miserable human wreckage of European Jewry assembled in Displaced Persons camps throughout Europe, the
international community reverted to the idea of Jewish statehood. War in Europe and its catastrophic consequences for the Jews had reconfigured the political context of the Palestine problem. The Jewish plight imposed itself on the conscience of the international community, reorganized in the newly formed UN.

More than ever, in the wake of the War and the Holocaust, the notion of Jewish statehood appeared to most fair-minded people in the West to be both timely and inherently just. The practicalities of Palestine were forced into the background and the inner logic of partition resurfaced. Jewish and Arab positions remained irreconcilable. The Jewish Agency insisted on partition, while the Palestinians would have nothing less than Arab majority rule and independence in all of Palestine.

By now British energy and interest for the intractable conflict in Palestine had been exhausted. In February 1947, unable to impose a solution of their own, His Majesty’s government decided to hand the issue of Palestine over to the UN, which established a committee to study the conundrum—the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). In September, after traveling to Palestine and Europe to meet Jewish Holocaust survivors, the majority of the Committee recommended partition. On 29 November the UN General Assembly passed resolution 181 endorsing the plan to partition Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, with Jerusalem and Bethlehem and their holy places as an international enclave, to remain under UN supervision.

For the Jews the UN resolution was an historical achievement. The international community had endorsed the principle of Jewish statehood and thus fulfilled the fundamental ambition of the Zionist enterprise. For the Arabs, however, partition was unacceptable. The Arab Higher Committee, the formal representative of the Palestinian Arab leadership, rejected partition since a consideration of fundamental importance to the Arab world was that of racial homogeneity . . . It was illogical [to introduce] an alien body into the established homogeneity [of the Arab world], a course which could only produce new Balkans . . . The Arabs . . . would lawfully defend with their life blood every inch of the soil of their beloved country.9

The Partition Resolution, cognizant of the fact that national minorities would remain in both the Jewish and the Arab states, called upon the parties not to discriminate on the grounds of race, religion, language, or sex in their respective states. The minorities were to be allowed unfettered use
of their language, and each state was required to “ensure adequate primary and secondary education for the Arab and Jewish minority, respectively, in its own language and its cultural traditions.” Israel’s record, though not unblemished, has in most respects met these requirements.

No Jews remained in the territories of Palestine that remained under Arab control after the war. All were killed or expelled and all their settlements were razed. However, the Jews did secure their quintessential majoritarian state. Partition had in the main served their cause. For the Arabs, the rejection of partition and the decision to go to war was disastrous. The Palestinian refugee problem was born out of the war launched by the Palestinians and their Arab brethren against partition. A relatively small Palestinian Arab minority remained in Israel and their grievances against the state have only increased with time.

The Future Vision document begins with an observation on the war of 1948 and its consequences that had “isolated [the Arabs in Israel] from the rest of the Palestinian people and the Arab world”, had “forced [them] to become citizens of Israel”, and “transformed [them] into a minority living in [their] historic homeland”. From the authors’ standpoint this was an unquestionably illegitimate and unacceptable reality.

THE ABBYSS BETWEEN THE NARRATIVES

An unbridgeable abyss separates the Arab Palestinian and the Zionist historical narratives. Zionism, in the widely held Jewish perspective, is a heroic project of national revival, restored dignity, and self-respect. The rise of Israel as an act of defiance against the miserable predicament of the European Jewish Diaspora is deeply imbedded in the Jewish collective memory and self-image.

This sentiment has been cultivated for decades by the scathing critique of Jewish hopelessness and helplessness that has become an integral part of the collective consciousness, as depicted for example in the poetry of the Zionist movement’s poet laureate, Chaim Nahman Bialik. In his “In the City of Slaughter”, perhaps the most tragically moving and riveting of his poems, he described the 1903 Kishinev pogrom in horrifying detail, depicting the Jewish men hiding in their filthy nooks and crannies as their womenfolk were raped and murdered. This pathetic manifestation of Jewish indignity and powerlessness was only the precursor to the culmination of all horror in the catastrophic destruction of the Jews in the Holocaust. Jewish national liberation, statehood, and sovereignty was thus the literal rising
from the ashes in self-defense to finally attain political independence and historical justice for the most oppressed of all peoples.

For the Palestinians the complete opposite was true. Zionism, in their view, had nothing to do with self-defense or justice. It was the epitome of aggression from the start. The Palestinian nakba or catastrophic defeat, loss of homeland, and refugeedom remain at the core of the Palestinian collective identity and their self-perception of victimhood. The war ended not only in their military defeat, but also in the shattering of their society and the dispersal of half of their number as refugees in other parts of Palestine and neighboring Arab states.

The “shared memories of the traumatic uprooting of their society and the experiences of being dispossessed, displaced, and stateless” were to “come to define ‘Palestinian-ness’”. The traumatic and formative series of events leading up to the outbreak of war in 1948, and its tragic consequences for the Palestinians, carried with them a powerful and pervasive sense of historical injustice to the innermost depths of the Palestinian collective soul.

The Palestinians yearn to turn back the clock of history, but to when—1967 or 1948? The resolution of the so-called “1967 file” relates to the outstanding issues of borders and settlements on the West Bank and to the final status of Jerusalem. The resolution of the so-called “1967 file” relates to the outstanding issues of borders and settlements on the West Bank and to the final status of Jerusalem. As thorny as these matters may be, they do not impinge upon Israel’s existence, nor do they conflict in any way with the principle of partition. The “1948 file”, however, relates to two existential matters: the question of refugee return to Israel proper and the issue of the national rights of the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel. Both could severely undermine Israel’s viability as presently constituted, i.e., as the State of the Jewish people, precisely because it is these issues that might irreversibly derail the inner logic of partition.

It is the intractable nature of questions such as these in the “1948 file” that have placed an “end of conflict” settlement out of reach. This was recently highlighted in the crisis between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state prior to the Annapolis meeting in late November 2007. Palestinian spokesmen Mahmud Abbas and Saib Arikat firmly and flatly rebuffed Israel’s demand that the Palestinians issue a binding statement to that effect.

An article in the semi-official Palestinian daily al-Ayyam noted:

Such demands can only push the Palestinians’ backs to the wall . . . [which] would prompt them to redouble their efforts to regain only the bare minimum
of their legitimate rights enshrined in international law and UN resolutions, all of which are totally against Olmert’s provocative and impossible conditions.\textsuperscript{14}

In the Jewish Israeli mindset, Olmert’s conditions were neither provocative nor impossible. This was simply an attempt to obtain from the Palestinians assurances that a two state solution, i.e., partition, would remain the foundation for the peace process, and that all outstanding questions, including the refugee issue, would be resolved in accordance with the two state logic. Israel was to be the homeland of the Jewish people and Palestine would be the homeland of the Palestinian people. It followed that Jews would have the right to return to Israel and not to Palestine, and Palestinians would have the right to return to the state of Palestine and not to Israel.

As opposed to the \textit{al-Ayyam} article, not all UN resolutions contradicted Olmert’s demand. The Partition Resolution referred specifically to a Jewish State. Although the Palestinians finally accepted the partition resolution at the 1988 Palestinian National Council, they have never accepted the legitimacy of Israel’s Jewishness. On the contrary, the partition resolution was accepted only insofar as it provided international legitimacy for an independent Palestinian state. The second half that endorsed the Jewish State was dismissed by the PNC as a blatant historical injustice:

Despite the historical injustice inflicted on the Palestinian Arab people resulting in their dispersion and depriving them of their right to self-determination, following upon UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (1947), which partitioned Palestine into two states, one Arab, one Jewish, it is this Resolution that still provides those conditions of international legitimacy that ensure the right of the Palestinian Arab people to sovereignty.\textsuperscript{15}

While there are Palestinians who are willing to acquiesce in Israel’s existence, as does this resolution, accepting its legitimacy is another matter altogether, as the PNC resolution also shows. This distinction similarly holds true for the leadership of the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel.
THE DE-CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE HISTORICAL DEBATE

In the *Future Vision* document, as compiled in late 2006, the Palestinian Arab leadership in Israel refers to the State of Israel as the culmination of a “colonialist process” (*amaliyyat istitan*), initiated by a “Zionist-Jewish elite in Europe and the West”, and imposed on “the indigenous population” with the assistance of “classical Imperialist countries”.

Israel, “seeing itself as an extension of the West in the Middle East”, continued to “implement internal imperialist policies (*siyasa isti’mariyya dakhiliyya*) against its Palestinian Arab citizens”. Benedict Anderson has observed that “Nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside history.” The *Future Vision* is one such attempt to “eternally contaminate” the Zionist enterprise for its “loathsome copulation” with the land of Palestine “outside history”, too.

Israel is thus set up in full colonialist regalia, in contradistinction to the inherently morally superior indigenous Palestinian population, who define themselves against the Jewish “settler” state. They are dismissive in their non-recognition of the Jewish national movement, the background to its emergence, and its sacrifice and struggle of over a century. This is the epitome of an a-historical approach, removing the debate from its two essential contexts—the European context of Jewish oppression and the Middle Eastern context of sustained conflict. In the *Future Vision* document the conflict does not exist, except for the insatiable appetite of the Jews for unprovoked aggression against hapless Arabs.

For the great majority of Jewish Israelis the establishment of the State of Israel is the fulfillment of the Jewish people’s inalienable right to self-determination and the achievement of their national rights, after many centuries of humiliation and persecution. For the Jews, this was the ultimate attainment, against all the odds, of a normal national existence, as deserved by all peoples, and the guarantee of their collective dignity, in rejection and defiance of their horrific history of suffering, intolerance, and physical annihilation.

An integral and essential facet of this attainment of sovereignty and independent statehood was the cultural revival of the Jews as a Hebrew-speaking people, not only living in their own state but also with their own language. Of all Israel’s achievements, one may argue that this Hebrew cultural revival, in the form of Israel’s world-class literature, theater, press, and
institutions of academic excellence, is by far the most impressive. The Future Vision dismisses this as a European elite colonialist enterprise, completely detached from the masses of the downtrodden European Jewish underclass, and their disenfranchised and dispossessed Middle Eastern Jewish brethren. The Zionist enterprise is thus reduced to nothing more than the equivalent of the coffee growing settlers in Kenya or their tobacco cultivating brethren in Rhodesia. This is groundless, disrespectful, and demeaning.

The UN Partition resolution was based on the essential symmetry inherent in the idea of independent statehood for two equally legitimate national causes. Not so in the Future Vision—Israel is not only a colonial construct, it is not a democracy either. Israel is an “ethnocracy” in which one dominant ethnic group imposes “extreme structural discrimination and national oppression” on another.18 For this to be corrected, according to the Future Vision, and to enjoy full equality with the Jewish majority, the Palestinians in Israel must be recognized as a national minority.

This demand is not unfair or unreasonable. The Jewish majority in Israel could and should seriously engage with the Palestinian Arab minority to work out as amicable an understanding as possible of what constitutes national minority rights, and how to make such an understanding viable—a mutually acceptable reality.

The problems begin when the fulfillment of this demand for equality is coupled with the Palestinian contention that the Jewish majority must concede its own right to self-determination. For such full equality to be achieved, the Future Vision argues, Israel cannot define itself as the State of the Jewish people and must refrain from policies that favor the majority. Israel must acknowledge its responsibility for the nakba and compensate its Arab citizens for the damages caused unto them, as it must similarly acknowledge the historical injustice it has generally inflicted on the Palestinians. It must also recognize and accept that the Palestinian Arabs in Israel are a social, religious, cultural, and national extension of the rest of the Palestinian people and of the Arab and Islamic nations (al-Ummatayn al-‘Arabiyya wal-Islamiyya) with whom they are entitled to maintain special relations “freely . . . and without exception”.19

All of these demands are made as though a situation of conflict between Israel and its neighbors never existed, and does not exist now either. Israel must apologize for not losing the wars launched against it thus far, and must allow free association between its Palestinian Arab citizens and the neighbors “without exception”. Does that mean free association and identification with anyone, including the most hostile, from Hamas to Hizballah and Iran? As far as the Future Vision document is concerned the
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Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel only have rights. There is no mention of any obligations at all that the Arab citizens have towards the State.

It is flawed logic to expect the Jews to confess their collective guilt and illegitimacy in order to be accepted. In 1948 the Palestinians and their Arab brethren rejected the UN Partition Resolution and threatened Israel’s existence in a war of genocidal intent. Not all nations, Israel included, always abide by all UN resolutions. However, the war of 1948 is the only case in history in which war has been waged against a UN resolution. Judging by the number of Jews that remained in the Arab controlled parts of Palestine (none), one can only guess what fate would have met the Jews of Israel had they lost the war of 1948. Israel is now expected to atone before the tribunal of history for having emerged victorious and to pay damages to the losers, as if there had been no war at all, and as if Jewish losses are of no consequence and of no human worth. Perhaps the Arabs should pay Israel compensation for the damages they have inflicted on its people and economy by war and boycott since 1948.

Like Israel’s colonial de-legitimization, these demands are in accord with the Palestinian national narrative as espoused by the PLO and Hamas. This narrative has not been the basis for agreement with Israel but for interminable conflict. Is that what the Palestinian Arabs in Israel want to join forces with? If so, how do they expect the Israeli Jews not to regard them as potentially hostile? That Palestinians do not accept the Zionist narrative is understandable, but it is unreasonable for them to require its repudiation by the Jewish majority in Israel as a basis for negotiation. It would be equally unacceptable for the Jewish majority to expect the Palestinian minority to relinquish their own narrative and to accept that of the Zionists.

It is therefore incumbent on the Jewish majority to recognize Palestinian rights to self-determination and independent statehood and also to recognize the rights of Israel’s Palestinian Arab citizens as a national minority. This can only be part and parcel of a reciprocal equation, wherein the minority in Israel must recognize, rather than de-legitimize, the rights of the majority. Minority rights cannot be interpreted to mean the denial of the rights of the majority. The equation cannot be that the state must recognize the national rights of the minority, while the majority has no similar national rights. Jewish Israelis cannot possibly be expected to accept the idea that since the Jewish national project is no more than a colonialist construct their state has no right to exist.

Some in Israel’s Palestinian Arab intelligentsia have argued that to accept Israel’s Jewish character would require Israel to be as Jewish as Sweden or England is Christian. This contention is either ill-informed or
disingenuous or both. Israel is Jewish as Greece is Greek or Denmark is Danish. Judaism is not only a religion but also an ethnic national identity. The denial of Jewish nationhood follows in the footsteps of the PLO and Hamas charters, which similarly deny Jewish national rights in order to dismiss the State of Israel as no more than a colonialist exploit.

The *Future Vision* document purports to speak in favor of *consociational* democracy, that is, the equitable mutual recognition within one unitary state of the national identities and rights of its constituent populations, such as in Belgium between the Flemish and Walloon communities, or the Anglophone and Francophone Canadians.

There is a lot to be said for the *consociational* model as a potential framework for Arab–Jewish relations in Israel; nevertheless the application of the model in the *Future Vision* falls seriously short.

*First*, it is not based on mutuality. The minority’s national rights are to be recognized by the majority, but the minority in this particular case refuses to recognize the national rights of the majority. *Second*, the classical model of *consociationalism* speaks of proportionality, yet the *Future Vision* accords the Arab indigenous minority superior rights, with no obligations, in comparison to those of the Jews, immigrant or indigenous. The Arab Palestinian minority in Israel is about 17% of the total population, which the *Future Vision* believes should override the rights of the majority, even though the latter comprises more than 80% of the population.

If it really were *consociational* symmetry, fairly based on reciprocity and proportionality, there would be no insurmountable difficulty to find an equitable formula for a mutual recognition of majority and minority national rights, and to accord the minority various forms of autonomy—municipal, fiscal, and cultural. One could even imagine a discussion on the minority having a flag and anthem of its own. The problem with the *Future Vision* document is not what it demands for the Palestinian Arab minority, but what it wishes to take from and deny the Jewish majority. The *Future Vision*, therefore, is not really framed in a *consociational* context of mutual recognition, but rather in a context of conflictual denial.

As Ruth Gavison notes, the nation state is in fact the state of the majority people who inhabit it. All its citizens irrespective of ethnic group or religion enjoy their civil rights. Democracy does not imply that all ethnic groups must abandon their identities, and in the Israeli case to deny the Jewish majority its right to self-determination, i.e., its right to have Israel defined as their nation state. There is no inherent contradiction between Israel’s Jewish and democratic characteristics, provided the state ensures and respects the rights of the minority, individual and collective.
Since its inception, Israel never thought of itself as an “ethnocracy”, but rather, a state of all its citizens, and never regarded the Jewish and democratic components of the state to be contradictory in any manner or form. In 1948, the newly declared state undertook to “foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants” and to “ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex”. Even though a war was raging and the State braced itself for an Arab invasion, Israel appealed “in the very midst of the onslaught” to the “Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel” to preserve peace and participate in the construction of the State on the basis of “full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions”.25

Israel has not lived up to the lofty principles enshrined in its own Declaration of Independence. None would reasonably contend that Israeli democracy is flawless. As the state of the Jewish people, it is a moral and political imperative for Israel to correct the failings and injustices in its relationship with its Palestinian Arab minority. That Israel should dismantle itself in the process is an unreasonable proposition.

CONCLUSION

The Future Vision document resorts to the rhetoric of the consociational model, whereas, in fact, it is replete with a South Africanized subtext. This is an obvious deduction from the attempt to portray Zionism as an illegitimate racist, European, colonial–settler enterprise in conflict with the indigenous people. In their attempt to South Africanize the debate, the authors of the Future Vision ignore the fact that they who represent the minority seek to deny the rights of the majority, and not the other way round. Some key observations on their position may be made.

The Palestinian Arabs in Israel, after having citizenship “forced” upon them, desire even fuller exercise of this unwelcome citizenship in a state whose fundamental legitimacy they do not accept. They seek a greater share in the State that they essentially wish to deconstruct. This position rests on the traditional Palestinian national narrative that has always de-legitimized Zionism and the State of Israel. Although not extraordinary, it is nevertheless highly problematic for such a position to be taken by the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel, citizens of the State, who are employing the narrative that has been used by Israel’s mortal enemies to justify its destruction, as the basis on which they seek to discuss their place within the State. The Jewish majority could hardly be expected to negotiate on such a foundation.
The full citizenship of the Palestinian Arab minority, according to the *Future Vision*, can only be achieved if the Jews abandon their national identity and its respective symbols. This demand is so excessive as to arouse the suspicion that it is not even addressed to the Jewish majority, but to the international community in what appears to be an effort to mobilize it against Israel. This only fuels the Jewish perception of the Arab minority as hostile, even potentially subversive, and reduces even further the chances of the vision document becoming a sound basis for Jewish–Arab coexistence.

Israel must profess its illegitimacy for its legitimacy to be acknowledged. It must also recognize the inherent right of the Palestinian Arab minority to reject Israel as a precondition for Israel’s acceptance. This is similar to the PLO’s demand that Israel must confess that it was born in sin, in order to be fully recognized.

These positions are logically flawed, politically unacceptable, and are all firmly rooted in the historical Palestinian rejection of the symmetry of partition. In essence, they do not accept the two-state formula of one Arab State and one Jewish State, but rather one Arab State and one other nondescript faceless entity, which would, no doubt, eventually merge with Palestine. If there were to be one and a half Arab states and half a Jewish State, coupled with the right of return of the Palestinian refugees to Israel proper, 1948 would be completely reversed, as would partition. Arab majority rule would be created in all of Palestine, the position the Arabs had taken from the very onset of the conflict under the British Mandate. This, as aforesaid, was not and is not a co-existential formula but a prescription for eternal strife.

When it comes to the rejection of partition, Israel’s own policies since 1967 should be censured in no uncertain terms. Israel’s post-1967 settlement policy was based for decades on the obfuscation of partition. For Israel this was a disastrous miscalculation. Historically, partition has served the Zionist cause more than it has served the Arabs, who had always opposed it. Eroding the two-state idea does Israel no favors. Indeed, it is a strategic disservice to the idea of Jewish self-determination.
Notes

2. Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs* (Tel-Aviv, 1985) 304 [Hebrew].
10. UNGA Resolution 181, Lapidot, 39.
11. The *Future Vision* document, 5 [Arabic].
16. The *Future Vision* document, 5, 9 [Arabic].
18. The *Future Vision* document, 5, 9 [Arabic].
20. Shlomo Avineri made this observation at the Brandeis Conference.
21. In the 1948 war 6,000 Jews were killed, 1% of the entire Jewish population and equivalent to 3 million Americans killed in one year of war today.
22. Not counting some 250,000 Arabs of Jerusalem who are not Israeli citizens.
23. Professor of law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
25. Israel *Declaration of Independence*.
26. There are repeated references in the document to the international community as a player in the issues at hand. One even speaks of international protection (himaya) for the Arab minority. The *Future Vision* document, 6, 11, 18 [Arabic].