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## **One State Foundation**

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Full Text:

Summary: A new initiative based on an old idea has emerged, aiming to give a full and complete voice to the one-state solution to the Palestinian/Arab-Israeli conflict, writes Abdel-Moneim Said

On 1 March, the One State Foundation was launched. A Palestinian-Israeli initiative "with an agenda to broaden debate and ultimately support for a one state solution", the foundation voices an idea and a movement whose ideas I have frequently advanced in this column. It holds, firstly, that the current situation in Palestine and Israel is untenable; secondly, that the negotiating process that emanated from the Madrid Conference and Oslo Accords on the basis of a "two-state solution" to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has reached a dead end; thirdly, that this obstructs the realisation of the hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples; fourthly, that the time has come to rethink the question in its entirety; and, fifthly, that the new thinking has to reflect the realities on the ground and, above all, the reality that after more than 70 years since the UN resolution to partition Palestine and more than 50 years since the Israeli occupation of the whole of Palestine, a form of political, economic and security unity already exists. The one state solution is far from new, although previous versions of it have been rejected out of hand. The Israelis dismissed the concept of a single, unified secular democratic state, which the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) began to advocate in the 1960s. The Palestinians have long resisted the Israeli concept of the single state, which is the current de facto version: occupation with apartheid discrimination between Israelis and Palestinians. In spite of the mutual rejection of extreme forms of the single state, there is a growing awareness of a reality of mutual dependency in economic, security affairs and a single economic market. This realisation has led to the growth of a movement among both Palestinians and Israelis who feel that the one state solution is better than the moribund political process, or that it is time to deal with reality constructively and to translate it politically. The One State Foundation, founded by a small group of Palestinians and Israelis, believes that the one-state project stands a chance. The press release announcing the foundation notes, for example, that recent opinion polls have indicated that there is already significant support for such a solution in both communities, varying between 30 to 40 per cent. This is, indeed, significant, even if the approval comes with conditions. There is also considerable literature, by both Israelis and Palestinians, that includes calls for a one-state solution. Here are a few titles: Ali Abunimah, *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse*; Ofra Yeshua-Lyth, *Politically Incorrect: Why a Jewish State Is a Bad Idea*; Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir, *The One-State Condition: Occupation and Democracy in Israel/Palestine* (The term "one-state condition" refers to the realities generated by the wars and occupations in 1948 and 1967); Cherine Hussein, *The Re-Emergence of the Single State Solution in Palestine/Israel: Countering an Illusion* (the author refers to Edward Said's beliefs on the subject in the course of examining why the Oslo process failed so miserably); and Joel Koven, *Overcoming Zionism: Creating a Single Democratic State in Israel/Palestine* (which approaches the subject from an Israeli perspective that holds that the ongoing occupation in Palestine strips Zionism of its ideological "exceptionalism"). The One State Foundation's inaugural statement reaffirms much of the substance in the abovementioned literature. However, it inclines towards the political side of the subject in that it seeks to transform the idea into a growing conviction in the Palestinian and Israeli environments by promoting the essential liberal beliefs in full equality in constitutional rights and economic opportunities and the need to end occupation, oppression, discrimination and apartheid. Accordingly, it calls for the recognition and repair of past and present injustice and wrongdoings, including the acknowledgement of the Palestinian Nakba and the implementation of UN Resolution 194 on the right of return or reparation for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, which, by extension, would end the resistance. If the new organisation does not signify that the idea has taken root and gained prominence, it does indicate that the idea has gone beyond the phase of opinion polls or uncommitted acknowledgement on the part of politicians such as Saeb Erekat, or political writers and analysts such as Yossi Alpher, Hussein Agha and Ahmad Khalidi. The new phase involves bringing the idea into the public space in a systematic way and taking it beyond its primary environment among liberal Jewish communities abroad (in the US and The Netherlands) and Palestinian communities inside Israel and abroad. "Israeli Arabs" are an important component of this phenomenon. They are the ones who held out against the odds inside Israel, who actively engaged in Israeli political processes and who reject and refuse to be part of a two-state solution in which they could become victims of territorial and/or population exchanges. The idea is still in its organisational infancy and the obstacles ahead are enormous. The majority of opinion on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides opposes it and fears a move towards a single state that would not occur on a basis of a reasonable level of military or political parity. The Palestinians would always suspect that the one state idea is a camouflage for an attempt to legitimise the status quo. The majority of Israeli opinion, which has drifted to the extreme right, sees no reason to grant equality to a people they regard as unequal to them. Majority and minority opinions aside, a vast industry has emerged around politicians, writers, analysts and opinion makers whose livelihoods have derived from the two-state solution and its complexities for the past quarter of a century. This group extends beyond Palestine and Israel to the international community and its venerable organisations, committees and experts. To them it makes no difference how often the two-state solution receives a death certificate. No sooner do negotiations start again than they return to the same formula that had just been proclaimed

dead. However, the problem goes deeper than those who live off the two-state solution. In spite of the growth of mutual dependency, up to now it is utilitarian in nature, teeming with mistrust and hatred, and infused with the belief that time and power balances will eventually work towards this or that side's favour. The Palestinians, who have grown even more attached to their land because circumstances abroad are forbidding, or immigration is impossible, believe that demographics are in their favour. In spite of the many obstacles, they also feel that they are part of a vast Arab sphere that will eventually awaken and grow strong. The Israelis, for their part, are proud of what they have achieved since the establishment of the Israeli state and its success in taking in diaspora Jews. They see their advantages in their technological advancement, their numerous Western links and an influence that makes US presidents and presidential candidates strive to outdo one another to prove their loyalty and love for Israel. The feeling that another day of conflict will bring ultimate victory continues to prevail among both sides. Attitudes such as the foregoing remain part and parcel of the Palestinian/Arab-Israeli conflict. Not only do they resist the realities that have given rise to need for mutual coexistence, they resist the aspirations of the younger generations who aspire to a different type of future than that which is offered by the present, a present that was once the future for their parents and grandparents. Most likely, these younger generations will form the space in which the One State Foundation will weave the first threads of a network that will struggle to address a long list of difficult problems at a time when the conflict is ongoing and, frequently, bloody.

The writer is chairman of the board, CEO, and director of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies.

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