

## **“Blood and Religion”**

A Review of Jonathan Cook's book

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Theme: [Religion](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Jonathan Cook is a British-born independent journalist based (since September 2001) in the predominantly Arab city of Nazareth, Israel and is the “first foreign correspondent (living) in the Israeli Arab city....” He’s a former reporter and editor of regional newspapers, a freelance sub-editor with national newspapers, and a staff journalist for the London-based Guardian and Observer newspapers. He’s also written for The Times, Le Monde diplomatique, the International Herald Tribune, Al-Ahram Weekly and Aljazeera.net. He is also a frequent contributor to Global Research. In February 2004, he founded the Nazareth Press Agency.

Cook states why he’s in Nazareth as follows: to give himself “greater freedom to reflect on the true nature of the (Israeli-Palestinian) conflict and (gain) fresh insight into its root causes.” He “choose(s) the issues (he) wish(es) to cover (and so is) not constrained by the ‘treadmill’ of the mainstream media....which gives disproportionate coverage to the concerns of the powerful (so it) makes much of their Israel/Palestine reporting implausible.”

Living among Arabs, “things look very different” to Cook. “There are striking, and disturbing, similarities between” the Palestinian experience inside Israel and within the Occupied Territories. “All have faced Zionism’s appetite for territory and domination, as well as repeated (and unabated) attempts at ethnic cleaning.”

Cook authored two important books and contributed to others. His newest one, just published was reviewed by this writer. It’s called “Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East.” Advance praise accompanied it, and noted author John Pilger calls it “One of the most cogent understandings of the modern Middle East I have read. It is superb, because the author himself is a unique witness” to events and powerfully documents them.

Cook’s earlier book was published in 2006. It’s titled “Blood and Religion: The Unmasking of the Jewish and Democratic State” and is the subject of this review. It’s the rarely told story of the plight of Israel’s 1.4 million Arab citizens, the discrimination against them, the reasons why, and the likely future consequences from it. Israel’s “demographic problem” is the issue Cook addresses. It’s the time when a faster-growing Palestinian population (excluding the diaspora) becomes a majority, and the very character of a “Jewish State” is threatened. Israel’s response – state-sponsored repression and violent ethnic cleansing, in the Territories and inside Israel.

Arab-Israeli citizens are referred to as “Israeli Arabs.” It’s how many of them refer to themselves as do Israelis. They’re the sole remnants of the Palestinian population Israel expelled in its 1948 War of Independence. Palestinians call it the Nakba that [alnakba.org](#)

describes as follows: ...."the Nakba (cataclysm)....saw the mass deportation of a million Palestinians from their cities and villages, massacres of civilians, and the razing to the ground of hundreds of Palestinian villages." Noted Israeli historian, Ilan Pappé, believes 800,000 were affected. Cook uses 750,000. Whatever the true figure, it was huge and changed everything for Palestinians henceforth.

Authorities have worked ever since to hide the past and "de-Palestinize" those remaining inside Israel – to erase their "national and cultural memories and turn them into identity-starved 'Arabs.' " So far, it's failed. There's been a resurgence of "Palestinian-ness" for at least two reasons. Palestinians believe that Israel won't ever grant them a viable independent state and will always regard them as a "fifth column." They're also denied a national or civic identity. Nonetheless, they prefer Israeli citizenship to life in the Territories where people have no rights under occupation. They live with a hope Israelis are obsessed to deny them – that one day Israel will change from a Jewish State to a democratic one for all its people.

So far, it's nowhere in sight, Cook documents it in his book, and he states his premise upfront: "Israel is beginning a long, slow process of ethnic cleansing" Israeli Arabs from Israel as well as Palestinians from the parts of the Occupied Territories it wants for a Greater Israel.

#### Introduction – The Glass Wall

Israel has a penchant for walls, fences and barriers as exemplified by its best known one being erected in the West Bank. It's mammoth in size and when completed will encircle most of the Territory's inhabitants and measure nearly 700 km. It's ghettoizing Palestinian communities, cutting them off from each other, and isolating them all from the outside world. It devours the landscape, uproots ancient olive groves, destroys pastures and greenhouses, and expropriates around 10% of occupied Palestine by an inexorable land-grab masquerading as security.

In 1994, a similar barrier went up in Gaza – an electronic fence around the Territory, and again security was cited. Both walls reflect early Zionist thinking – that Palestinians won't ever be dispossessed so "unremitting force" has to subdue them. It affects Palestinians under occupation and "rarely mentioned" Israeli Arabs who comprise one-fifth of the population or a slightly greater percentage than when Cook wrote his book. At year-end 2007, Israeli society broke down as follows: 7.24 million total of which 75.6% (5.47 million) are Jews, 20% (1.45 million) Arabs and 4.4% (320,000) Christians and others.

Walls and fences keep those in the Territories constrained. An invisible "glass wall" inside Israel is just as "unyielding and solid as the walls around the West Bank and Gaza." Its aim is the same – to imprison the people, force them into submission, hide what's happening from view, and do it for a reason.

Israel's problem is demographic and its danger is twofold:

- a far higher Palestinian birth rate threatens the Jewishness of the state; and
- right of return UN Resolution 194 guarantees compound the problem.

Walls and fences are meant to solve it – physical and glass, and Cook suggests the latter is

the greater obstacle to Middle East peace.

They exist for a purpose – to intimidate and silence captive people in different ways. In the Territories, brute force is used, but inside Israel efforts are more subtle to preserve an image of a democratic state. In other words, “the glass wall is essentially a deception.” It creates the impression of normality that “bears no relation to reality” that, in fact, is harsh, unyielding and has been unrelenting for decades. In a nominal democratic state, Israeli Arab rights are denied, they’re considered hostile non-citizens, and when they demand equal treatment to Jews, it causes “howls of outrage.”

No matter what they do or how they try, they’re Arabs first, and in Israel that’s the “enemy.” In a Jewish State, they’ll “never be equal to a Jew.” The state, in Jewish eyes, belongs to Jewish people, not its non-Jewish citizens, and Israeli courts affirm a Jewish State. It’s a legal concept found nowhere else in the world, most countries could never get away with it, yet the world community ignores what Israel does.

Cook notes the racist implications. Nearly all Israeli land is in trust for Jewish people living anywhere. Arab Israelis have no right to it and legally can be excluded from parts of their own country. This notion was embodied in Israel’s Law of Return. It was passed in 1950, and its purpose is still relevant – to erase the demographic threat of a Palestinian homeland in a Jewish State. It grants every Jew in the world the right to automatic Israeli citizenship if they choose to live in Israel, and the reason is simple – to ensure a continued Jewish majority in perpetuity. So far it’s worked, but it’s threatened. More on that below.

Israel’s Declaration of Independence enshrined a Jewish State identity. It only recognizes Jewish people, their history and culture as well as Zionist movements. They include the Jewish Agency and Jewish National Fund that legally may discriminate against non-Jews.

Israel is rare in another respect as well. Like the UK, it has no formal constitution although its Declaration of Independence pledged one would be produced in six months. It never was because embodying Jewish values can’t avoid discriminatory language. So Israel instead has 11 Basic Laws, none of which guarantee free speech, religion or equality. Israel’s 1992 Law on Human Dignity and Liberty is the closest it comes, but it, too, excludes equality as a guaranteed right.

Other anomalies also exist. For example, each religious community regulates issues relating to births, deaths and marriages. No civil institutions or courts have authority. As a result, the state has no power over marriages, divorces or to intervene in these matters. In addition, Judaism is privileged, only the Hebrew calendar and Jewish holidays are recognized, and conversions to Judaism are rare and allowed only after rigorous vetting.

On the other hand, suffrage is universal, but two factors dilute it. Arab parties are excluded from government coalitions and decision-making bodies so it makes voting for them largely symbolic. In addition, all political parties must pledge allegiance to Israel as a “Jewish and democratic” state. If Arab Israeli politicians demand a democratic one for everyone, they risk violating the law. Jews profoundly reject the notion of one state for all because it challenges rigid customs:

- a “Jewish and democratic” state favoring Jews;
- Zionism’s founding presumption that Israel was exclusively for persecuted

Jews; and most threatening

— democratization in its truest sense could empower a “demographic monster that could devour the Jewish state almost overnight.” An eventual Palestinian majority in Greater Israel would end the Jewish State.

The idea of true democratization emerged in the late 1990s, it became a frightening vision, and state authorities feared it could become a national insurrection once the second Intifada began. It was thus confronted with lethal force inside Israel and the Territories. Palestinians have been harassed ever since, most severely in Gaza, marginally less in the West Bank, but also inside Israel – unreported and out of sight.

Cook’s book mostly addresses Israeli Arabs and contends the following – that their treatment is key to understanding why reaching a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is so elusive. At its root is Israel’s refusal to end discrimination because that would force it to do what it can’t and won’t – atone for its War of Independence crimes that have been carefully suppressed for 60 years. Further, Zionism conceptually sanctifies Israel as the “Promised Land” for Jews alone. That, in turn, legitimizes expropriating resources from non-Jews. It also condones violence and advocates ethnic cleansing to maintain a majority Jewish population as a natural right of the Jewish people.

That’s been the strategy since the second Intifada’s onset in September 2000, and Cook examines it through “two prisms” – security and demography. Israeli Arabs are considered “security threats” because of their perceived dual loyalties. In addition, the demographic problem of a higher Arab birth rate threatens a Jewish majority. These problems require drastic action from which a visible trend is emerging:

— blurring the distinction between Palestinians in the Territories and inside Israel; and

— a determined effort to separate Arabs from Jews.

Cook contends the following – Israel wants a “phantom state” in the Territories and intends to unilaterally transfer Israeli Arabs’ citizenship rights to the new entity. It’s a grave breach of international law and a risky strategy, so why do it. Most likely to create an illusion of a Palestinian state, remove Israel’s glass wall and transfer it to the Territories. With no Palestinians inside Israel, Jewish democracy will be affirmed and the Jewish State preserved.

For their part, Palestinians will be marginalized, and enclosed behind walls and barricades in “little more than open-air prisons, guarded by the Israeli army.” It’s been the scheme since the early 1990s, and the idea is similar to South Africa’s Bantustan solution under apartheid. Israel wants the same type homelands for Palestinians, and policy has been moving that way for years. Cook is dubious and states: “It is futile to believe such an arrangement – rigid ethnic separation on Israel’s terms – will bring peace to the region.” It’s hard to disagree as Palestinians continue to resist.

#### Israel’s Fifth Column

Israel used the second Intifada politically – presenting it as a well-planned assault on the Jewish State and blaming it on Arafat. He was unfairly scapegoated for rejecting Camp David in 2000 even though Israel designed talks to fail. Ehud Barak insisted Arafat sign a “final

agreement,” declare an “end of conflict,” and give up any legal basis for additional land in the Territories. Nothing was in writing, and no documents or maps were presented. The deal was so duplicitous that had Arafat accepted it any hope for peace would have been dashed. He didn’t, was unfairly blamed, and “government spin-doctors” went further.

They claimed Arafat wanted Camp David as a demographic weapon against Israel:

- to demand the right of return for millions of Palestinian refugees; and
- use his demographic advantage to destroy Israel’s Jewishness and make the entire area “Greater Palestine.”

Israeli officials jumped on him with wild accusations – that he unleashed the Intifada in retaliation. Initially the notion was accepted, but years later it was “finally and irreversibly discredited” as a politically-concocted lie. Israel’s own intelligence exposed it when a senior army officer broke the silence. He revealed no evidence existed and available intelligence suggested that Arafat wanted compromise, not conflict, but not on one-way terms. Israel’s duplicity spawned the Intifada, and it sprang from the grassroots. People felt betrayed and reacted after Ariel Sharon’s provocative al-Aqsa Mosque visit in September 2000.

Thereafter, violence erupted and a police-led onslaught ensued. In the first week of October, 12 unarmed Palestinian civilians and a Gaza laborer were killed and hundreds more seriously injured. Arab Israelis began demonstrating and were also targeted. Their citizenship offered no protection.

Israeli police react like the army as both security forces are connected. How so? National military service is compulsory for non-Orthodox Jews. They’re conscripted after leaving school at age 18 and required to serve for three years. Police have completed the requirement, are familiar with military weapons, and have absorbed the security-conscious culture, including a profound distrust of Arabs. The result – their mindset is hard line and racist, and it shows on Arab streets.

Months after demonstrations subsided, Arabs were still targeted, and hundreds continued to be arrested. Deaths occurred, cover-ups followed, and when Israeli unrest reacted to Arab protests, police responded much differently, avoided violence, no Jews were killed and few, if any, were injured.

Arabs, in contrast, were accused of orchestrating large-scale violence. Some called it a second front or a fifth column, Arafat was blamed, and it was claimed he schemed to overthrow Israel “through a mix of demographic war and armed Intifada.” It was ludicrous, yet the idea took hold. It spread through the media and became permanently fixed in the public mind even after later evidence disproved it. It suggested no armed insurrection occurred, Arab protesters were unarmed, and no Jewish community was threatened or invaded. The very notion stretches credulity and proves the truth about Goebbels’ maxim: “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually....believe it.” Or the Churchill one about “a lie get(ting) halfway around the world before the truth (gets) its pants on.”

It makes Arabs easy targets when leaders are profoundly racist, and it shows in Ehud Barak’s comments. In a summer 2002 interview, he called Palestinians “products of a

culture in which to tell a lie....creates no dissonance. They don't suffer from the problem of telling lies that exists in Judeo-Christian culture. Truth (for them) is seen as an irrelevant category."

In the same interview, Barak repeated the second front accusation many other Jews believe – that Israeli Arabs want to transform Israel from a Jewish state to one for all its citizens. "This is their vision," and Barak and Sharon were convinced (or said they were) that Arafat was behind it since the early post-Oslo days. He was offered an illusion of a future Palestinian state but "wanted to keep a strategic foot in Israel," promote the right of return, and demographically destroy Israel. It led to Arafat's downfall. He was imprisoned in his Ramallah compound in 2001, became ill and died suspiciously in November 2004 in a Paris hospital. His personal physician claimed he was poisoned and evidence seemed to confirm it.

### A False Reckoning

Defending accused Arabs in Israel and the Territories is risky, thankless, and not a way to win legal victories. Nonetheless, courageous lawyers try, and one Cook cites is Hassan Jabareen of the Adalah Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel. The name means "justice" in Arabic.

Since its founding in 1996, Adalah has been chipping at Israel's glass wall, advocating in the Territories, and its 1999 annual report showed what it's up against: racism, relentless discrimination, futile battles for justice without end, bucking stone walls in court, and violations against Arabs of everything imaginable – rights relating to language, religion, education, land, housing, women, prisoners, political and social issues, and economic and employment ones. In all these matters and more, Israel grossly discriminates against Arabs and gets away with it.

Still, Adalah persists, and Cook cites examples of its struggles for justice. Most often, they're hopeless, small victories are relished, but even then they turn out hollow after court rulings favor Arabs, state authorities ignore them, things get worse, and courts won't intervene.

On its web site, Adalah states its advocacy mission as follows: Its "legal actions include filing petitions to the Supreme Court of Israel; filing appeals and lawsuits to the District, Magistrate and Labor Courts; submitting pre-petitions to the Attorney General's Office; filing complaints with Mahash (the Ministry of Justice Police Investigation Unit) about police brutality; and sending letters to government ministries and agencies, detail legal claims, and demanding compliance with the law." Adalah is also involved in "providing legal commentary on proposed and pending Knesset bills to NGO advocacy coalitions and staff of Arab MKs." In addition, it "provides legal consultation to numerous Arab public institutions, NGOs, student committees and individuals."

Adalah and Jabareen drew public attention in February 2001. At the time, the Or Commission began investigating 13 unarmed Arab demonstrators Israeli security force killings at the start of the second Intifada. They were wanton acts demanding justice, but try getting it for Palestinians, and that was evident early on under Supreme Court Justice Orr.

He denied an Adalah lawyer official standing before the Commission so he could prepare a proper defense. As a result, he couldn't issue subpoenas, cross-examine witnesses, see most state evidence, or get advance word of issues to be raised. At the same time, the



Israeli public got a steady commentary diet about Arafat-led fifth column Arabs.

Israeli police prepared in advance of the Intifada, and Adalah got details of their tactics. They included preparatory exercises as part of operation “Magic Tune” – a code name for a full-scale military operation involving special anti-riot training and more. It established protocols for snipers and excessive force to disperse protesters, even those doing it peacefully. It assumed trouble was coming, security forces would exacerbate it, harsh responses would follow, so civilians would be targeted with live ammunition to subdue it.

In September 2003, the Commission report was issued, and hopes for justice were dashed. It was a “sore disappointment to the families (of victims) and Adalah.” In session for two and a half years, it called 350 witnesses, yet its conclusions were “tepid and lack(ed) teeth.” The report criticized police for “substantial professional failures,” several officers got minor punishment, other senior ones were reprimanded, but no prosecutions followed because no policemen responsible for the killings were identified. For petitioners, it was a crushing defeat.

In addition, the report said nothing about the Justice Ministry’s failure to investigate killings, its conspiracy of silence about using live ammunition and snipers, and a final comment added insult to injury. The Commission unjustly described street protests as “unprecedented riots” and accused three leading Arab figures of incitement. In all, it was a painful conclusion to lengthy hearings and a lesson for Arab petitioners – expecting justice in Israel is futile because the state denies it to them no matter what the circumstances.

### The Battle of Numbers

In 2003, the Knesset passed a temporary amendment to the landmark 1952 Nationality Law – the Nationality and Entry into Israel Law. It denies Israeli Arabs a residency permit for a Palestinian spouse living outside Israel or the right to bring that spouse into Israel.

International and human rights groups were outraged, and B’Tselem called the legislation a violation Israel’s Basic Law on Human Rights and Liberty. Still, it’s the law, it supercedes previous ones, and Shin Bet’s (Israel’s internal security service) Avi Dichter claimed it was “vital for Israel’s security.” Others were more forthright about its true purpose – to prevent Palestinian applications for citizenship through marriage from eroding the country’s Jewish majority. That was Ariel Sharon’s view in these public comments: “The Jews have one small country, Israel, and must do everything so that this state remains a Jewish state in the future....”

Haaretz later reported that there was “broad agreement in the government and academia (for a strict policy to) make it hard for non-Jews to obtain citizenship in Israel” or even residency. Moreover, children of an Israeli and a non-Jew would henceforth be ineligible for citizenship rights.

These measures reflect Israel’s growing concern about its demographic problem, and it led to Sharon’s “sudden conversion to the cause of ‘unilateral separation.’ ” It became his “Gaza Disengagement Plan,” first announced in February 2004, then implemented in August and September 2005. It was a small price to pay for a big benefit. It let Israel dispose of an unwanted population, now around 1.5 million, and tried to defuse world opinion (if unconvincingly) that Israel governed like apartheid South Africa. It also squarely aimed at the threat of two populations approaching parity with Israeli Jews about to be overtaken by a

higher Palestinian birth rate.

Removing Gaza bought time for a more permanent solution to the core issue – Israel’s growing Arab minority that’s more pressing than Palestinians in the Territories. The small 150,000 Israeli Arab population in 1948 now numbers 1.5 million, and historian Benny Morris calls it a “time bomb” needing decisive action to defuse. His solution is mass expulsion. Israelis call it “transfer.” World ethicists call it “ethnic cleansing.” International law experts call it illegal.

Israel’s founders foresaw the problem and planned accordingly. When Israel became a state in May 1948, the leadership attacked demography three ways:

- mass expulsion under cover of war;
- encouraged massive Jewish immigration and blocked right of return; key was passage of the 1950 Law of Return that gives anyone of Jewish ancestry the right to Israeli citizenship; three million Jews took advantage, including one million after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990;
- incentivizing Jewish birth rates by financial and other means while denying similar benefits to Israeli Arabs.

At the time, Gen-Gurion set an upper Arab population limit of 15%. Despite a birth rate twice that of Israel, the level wasn’t exceeded thereafter and is barely above it now. It was 13.6% in 1949, 12.5% in 1970, about 16% today, and a key topic at the first Institute of Policy and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Centre conference in Herzliya in 2000. It shaped Sharon’s thinking, helped him formulate disengagement ideas, and spotlighted Israel’s “demographic threat.”

The conference report stated: “The increase in the demographic share of the Arab minority in Israel tests directly Israel’s future as a Jewish-Zionist-democratic state.” A range of solutions were proposed to maintain a Jewish majority, including:

- policies to encourage a higher Jewish birth rate;
- “encourag(ing) Israeli Arabs to transfer their citizenship to a Palestinian state;” and
- moving the densely populated “Little Triangle” Arab heartland to Palestinian Authority (PA) control as part of a land swap deal; the idea was to transfer small West Bank settlements to Israel in return and have a similar arrangement for Arab East Jerusalem.

Post-2000, “transfer” caught on as a euphemism for ethnic cleansing and was popularized in the mainstream, the media, academia, and in the Israeli Knesset. It was no longer taboo in public to express former Military Intelligence chief Shlomo Gaziti’s view that “Democracy has to be subordinated to demography.”

More extreme notions were also heard from extremists like former general, Sharon Tourism Minister, and outspoken racist, Rehava’am Ze’evi. He advocated “transfer(ing)” Palestinians to other Arab states and remove them by state-imposed policies of economic hardship, unemployment and restrictions of land, water and other essential services. Two other times



he was more extreme. In a 2001 radio interview, he referred to Palestinians as a “cancer (and) We should get rid of the ones who are not Israeli citizens the same way you get rid of lice, but he topped that one in 1990 after Saddam invaded Kuwait. Then he advocated expulsion to Jordan where they could be human shields if Iraq attacked Israel.

He wasn't alone in his views, and earlier, closely related ones were around and a policy called “Judaisation.” Under it, state-sponsored Jewish settlements populated Arab heartlands in the Galilee and Negev, expropriated Palestinian land, and displaced its inhabitants incrementally. Polls during the second Intifada showed most Israelis approve, and that helped legitimize the development of “uncompromising policies to tackle the ‘demographic threat.’ “

An early scheme was to discriminate in child allowances by cutting them 20% for parents who hadn't served in the army. It targeted Arab families because few among them perform military service. Other benefits were also cut: tax credits, employment opportunities, mortgage relief, housing grants and more with a simple idea in mind – economic warfare to reduce the Arab birth rate. At the same time, the defunct Demography Council was reestablished to devise ways to raise it for Jews and discourage abortions.

More went on as well. In May 2002, the Interior Ministry imposed an administrative freeze to effectively ban newly married mixed-couples from living together inside Israel. In July 2003, the Knesset made this part of the Nationality Law. It placed established couples in legal limbo and prevented Palestinian spouses from upgrading their temporary residency status. It got worse in mid-2005 when the Knesset prohibited Israeli citizens from bringing Palestinian spouses into Israel, except under rarely granted circumstances.

The move had a clear purpose – to harden “ethnic consolidation” and treat Arabs the way the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) described it: an intolerantly “endemic, systematic and pervasive bias against non-Jews....trampling on their legal rights.”

Israel's Population Registry of the Interior Ministry was empowered to do it through the Nationality Law to “put a legal gloss on existing racist practices” against Arabs. In addition, a definitive immigration policy was devised to impose strict conditions on naturalizing non-Jews to ensure a “solid Jewish majority....”

Amnon Rubinstein got the task as a well-credentialed law professor, Israel's foremost constitutional expert, and a cheerleader for the hawkish right. He publicly supported the amended Nationality Law and believed in the guiding principle that “the key for entering the Israeli home (should be) held by the Jews.”

Israeli professor Yoav Peled called the new law a watershed, viewed it with alarm, and believed it's “a very dangerous turning point” in the country. Previously, Israeli laws disguised discrimination. No longer. Henceforth, according to Peled: “Palestinian citizens who are (moved) will not be transferred to another state – a Palestinian state where they can realise their rights – because there will be no other state. Their citizenship will not be transferred; it will be revoked.”

Citizens would, by law, become non-citizens. They'd be moved against their will to a “pseudo-state” under Israeli rule and stripped of their voice entirely. “Palestinian citizens will move from being Israelis with rights to residents of the occupied territories – and residents of the occupied territories have no rights at all.”

## Redrawing the Green Line

Professor Arnon Sofer heads up geopolitics at Haifa University. He also counts Jews and Arabs and expresses concern for what he finds. In his opinion, “in the next 15 years either we will see Israel surviving or we will see the end of the Zionist dream....We are counting down to the end of Israel.” Only one viable option remains – partitioning the land. “We can no longer think about Greater Israel; we have to think about divisions.” Why? Because Palestinians, especially in Gaza, reproduce faster than Jews.

For Sofer, the same problem exists inside Israel, and swift action, in his judgment, is needed to address it. “We have the Israeli Arabs in the Triangle and the Galilee. What to do about them?” Referring to the Triangle and its quarter million Palestinians, he’s “ready to get rid of Wadi Ara and Taibe – no problem. We can change our borders and lose the Triangle but we cannot give up the Galilee....Muslims must be isolated....we must use a carrot and stick. There is no right or left at the moment. It’s Jews versus Arabs,” and that includes Israeli Arab citizens.

Since the 1967 war, Israel forestalled territorial division, built Israeli settlements in the Territories, and continue expanding them in the West Bank after the Gaza disengagement. Today, Palestinians and Jews are so intertwined in neighboring communities that separating them can only happen in one of three ways:

- evacuating settlers that’s politically impossible (except for isolated settlements);
- expelling the Palestinians that’s highly probable; or
- dramatically redrawing the Green Line as another likely choice.

More than ever today, Israel covets occupied Palestine’s choicest parts, including East Jerusalem, and it’s no secret why – to complete its dream of “Eretz Israel,” and since the 1967 war, to use settlers as pawns to expropriate Palestinian land for a Greater Israel. The process has gone on ever since but was stepped up post-Oslo.

The historic agreement ostensibly was for peace in the spirit of compromise. In fact, it was a Trojan horse. It established a vaguely-defined negotiating process, specified no outcome, and left major unresolved issues for indefinite later final status talks. It granted Palestinians nothing in return for renouncing armed struggle, recognizing Israel’s right to exist and being its enforcer. In contrast, Israel got what it wanted – the right to continue land seizures, colonize the Territories and move inexorably toward territorial separation of an enlarged Israeli state from a smaller adjacent Palestinian one in name only.

Post-1993, settlements grew dramatically and now exceed 200. According to various sources like B’Tselem, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and others, their population tops 400,000. UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine John Dugard estimates 460,000, and included is over 220,000 in occupied East Jerusalem (Dugard’s figure is 253,000) where Palestinians are being squeezed out entirely.

Disengagement, separation barriers, and a fragmented Palestinian state are parts of the scheme – in three disconnected cantons: around Nablus and Jenin in the north, Salfit and Ramallah in the center, and Bethlehem and Hebron in the south. Wedged between them are

Israeli settlements around Ariel in the north and the Ma'ale Adumim "envelope" to the East of Jerusalem. On the West Bank's east side, Israel would control the Jordan Valley. East Jerusalem would then be severed from the rest of the West Bank. In the end, Palestinians would have an illusory state under Israeli control that few analysts believe can be "viable."

Israel is shaping it, the West Bank's choicest parts are being taken, ethnic cleansing continues, borders are being redrawn, the Green Line is a fiction, Palestinians are impotent, and Washington is on board. Where will it lead? Three possible outcomes are suggested:

- Palestinians will be confined to urban ghettos; they'll grow poorer and more desperate; lacking a future, middle-class and ambitious ones will emigrate to neighboring Arab states;

- Palestinians will settle for a cantonized "prison state," according to Jeff Halper, director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions; Israel will relax its military harshness and replace it with colonial exploitation masquerading as economic development; the process is well-advanced, Palestinian cities are ghettos, agricultural land is disappearing, Israel plunders the land, intends to exploit an expendable cheap labor pool, and the Territories are being "asphyxiated;" and/or

- Israel will create two unconnected Palestinian mini-states: an "Eastern Palestine" in the West Bank identified with Jordan and a "Western Palestine" tied to Egypt.

The scenarios aren't mutually exclusive. They also ignore what senior political and military officials may have in mind – a far more radical reshaping of the region to Israel's advantage. At its core is ethnic separation and transferring Arab Israelis to a future Palestinian state. They're concentrated in the "Little Triangle" along the Green Line, the Galilee in the north, and Negev in the south.

For decades in the Galilee and Negev, Israel pursued "fierce state-sponsored programmes of 'Judaisation,' " much like settlement expansions in the Territories. It tipped the population to Israel's favor in the Negev by a three to one margin. So far in the Galilee, it 50 – 50, but the long-term trend in both regions disadvantages Israel. A higher Palestinian birth rate is the threat, but efforts are being made to counter it.

In 2003, settling Jews in the two regions became a priority, establishing new towns were ordered, and International Zionist organizations were recruited to help populate them. In addition in late 2002, the Jewish Agency announced a planned 350,000 Galilee and Negev expansion by 2010 to ensure a "Zionist majority" in both areas.

At the same time, the government confronted its greatest Judaisation threat – small "unrecognized" Bedouin Negev farming communities. Their population numbers around 70,000, as many or more live in the Galilee, and Israel so far failed to cluster them in "planned township" reservations.

Today, no new communities are allowed, and existing ones are denied essential municipal services like clean water, electricity, roads, transport, sanitation, education, healthcare, postal and telephone service, refuse removal and more because under the Planning and Construction Law they're illegal.

In 2003, the Sharon government took further measures:

- it allocated millions of dollars over five years for forceable relocation;
- reclassified Bedouins as “trespassers” on state land;
- encouraged settlers (through extra compensation) to colonize the Galilee and Negev;
- after 2002, the Interior Ministry destroyed village crops by herbicide spraying until courts halted the practice in mid-2004; and
- after the 2005 Gaza disengagement, announced “Negev 2015” - to clear the area of “scattered” Bedouin communities by house demolitions and replace them with new Jewish settlements.

Cook believes these policies suggest a dramatic shift in Israeli priorities - concentrating on “Judaisation inside Israel over settlements in those parts of the occupied territories that will one day have to be abandoned (for) a new ‘Palestinian state.’ It reflects a decisive scaling back of Israel’s territorial ambitions.” Israel instead is focusing on protecting the Jewish state from a growing Arab population, yet it can’t put off the inevitable - confronting its demographic problem by “separat(ing) absolutely from its Palestinian citizens.”

How at this time isn’t known but under consideration is redrawing the Green Line to exclude dense Arab areas like the “Little Triangle.” Remaining Israeli Arabs will then be pressured to “identify with the new Palestinian state,” carrot and stick approaches will be used, and the latter kind will include denying non-Jews essential benefits to encourage them to leave.

Holdouts will be forced to sign loyalty oaths pledging allegiance to Israel as a “Jewish and democratic state.” Added pressure will be made to get them to:

- transfer their citizenship to the Palestinian state;
- downgrade them to permanent residents or guest workers;
- deny them their former rights (meager as they were); and
- henceforth subject them to the whims of Israeli authority that may in the end expel them.

The process is underway, legislation to complete it exists, and all that remains is a “pretext” to enforce it “ruthlessly.” What better one than the illusion of a “Palestinian state” next door. It’s being constructed inside enclosed West Bank walls that include fences and barriers to incarcerate a quarter million Palestinians in walled-off ghettos on the “Israeli side.” The argument then goes: if Jews can be uprooted from Gaza and isolated West Bank homes, why not Israeli Arabs as well.

### Zionism and the Glass Wall

In 1937, David Ben-Gurion was blunt about his vision: “A partial Jewish State is not the end, but only the beginning.” Today it means “an Arab Israeli is not a real Israeli” because they’re as much part of the regional conflict as Palestinians in the Territories. An influential

minority of hardcore Zionists believe Israel is the Promised Land, Jews are God's Chosen People, and they have a "divine obligation to settle the whole of Greater Israel." According to them, Jews have as much right to Gaza, Hebron and East Jerusalem as they do to Tel Aviv and Haifa.

Until the second Intifada's outbreak, Israel's main fault line was political. Labor wanted a maximum of land with a minimum of Arabs. "Likud (in contrast) wanted a maximum of land, period," and it allied them naturally with religious Zionists. The tie was threatened, however, when Sharon opted for territorial separation, abandoned Likud's traditional position, and adopted Labor's vision.

As political fault lines closed, a secular and religious one widened. It threatens severe West Bank clashes if Israel plans significant settler withdrawals to solve its demographic problem. Cook believes settlers, in the end, will seek compromise, not a showdown, but whatever happens, disengagement will be traumatic enough to "have profound effects on the future of religious Zionism." Analysts speculate what's next, and Hebrew University professor Moshe Halbertal suggests a possibility – that religious Zionists won't "break the(ir) bond with mainstream Israel." A critical mass of them will place Jewish unity above other considerations.

It's another matter, however, when it comes to Jewish versus democratic. When Jews are united, Arabs lose. The challenge for future leaders is how to forge an ethnic consensus, ideologically consolidate a Jewish state, and do it successfully by addressing issues important to secular and religious Jews alike. Ensuring a "family-type feeling" may be the way "to carry out the required surgery of partitioning the country without civil war," according to Hebrew University Professor Alexander Jacobson.

Arabs are the "Other," and if secular and religious Jews unite, they become "the enemy." They're "unwelcome, intruder(s), saboteur(s) (and) terrorist(s)." Solution – leave or be forced out. Religious symbolism becomes crucial, and nowhere more than on most sacred land for Arabs and Jews – the Noble Sanctuary or Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City. Fundamentalist Jews covet it with clear aims in mind – to destroy its mosques, erect a Third Temple, and await the Messiah's arrival. Palestinians resist and demand Jerusalem's Old City for their capital.

Battle lines are drawn; Palestinians are weak, divided, unaided and without allies; and who dares predict what's next in their struggle for justice long denied. At its epicenter is Islam's third most sacred site, the holiest one for Jews, and what Ehud Barak calls "the Holy of Holies." It's fundamentally symbolic for both sides, each is united and firm, and here's where things stand. Israelis claim sovereignty over what all Islam won't relinquish.

Try imagining what's ahead. Opinions differ but one thing is sure – more turmoil, oppression, killings and unimaginable human suffering with Palestinians, by far, paying the greatest price for what they hope in the end will be worth it.

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