

With Help from Their Jewish Israeli Friends: A Palestinian Political Initiative (In the Making)

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
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Featured image: First large meeting of One Democratic State Campaign (ODSC) with Israeli Jews in Jaffa: Awad Abdel Fattah, Jeff Halpern, Ilan Pappé and Yoav Haifawi [[Jeff Halpern](#)]

A Trump political initiative for peace is looming on the horizon, but no one expects that “Ultimate Deal” to be, in any sense, a “Palestinian political initiative”.

It is difficult to formulate a Palestinian “political initiative”, period. Palestinians are not free political agents.

A Palestinian citizen of Israel (example, [Haneen Zoabi](#)) is not a free agent politically, even as a member of the Israeli parliament (Knesset). And neither, of course, are Palestinian leaders jailed by Israel (example, [Marwan Barghouti](#) or [Ahmad Sa’adat](#) or [Khalida Jarrar](#)) or Palestinian leaders in exile (example, [Ali Abunimah](#), author of ‘One Country’ or [Ramzy Baroud](#) or [Salman Abu Sitta](#)) or, for that matter, [Mahmoud Abbas](#) himself, whose own people are now no longer willing to listen to him, and who is certainly not a free agent politically speaking.

But if such a Palestinian political initiative were to be put forward (with a little help from friends of Palestine such as the Israeli Jews of [One Democratic State Campaign](#)), the receptivity to such an initiative by the Jewish Israeli public is going to be minimal, at least initially, whether those advancing such an initiative are Palestinians or Israeli Jews or both.

The Israeli Jewish public is thoroughly brainwashed, not least through Israel’s [education system](#). An honest discussion of Zionism and Jewish identity in the context of the Nakba is being slowly and painfully conducted in Israel by [Zochrot](#).

As Ilan Binyamin (Pappé) notes on Facebook (in the comments section of this post [link](#)):

It is not easy to bring a Palestinian initiative to the Jewish society... But this is new — never done before- and is the only way forward (together with the resistance on the ground and B D S) [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement]

But that’s exactly what Pappé and co-founders of the ‘[One Democratic State Campaign](#)’ are doing, as Jeff Halpern [explains](#):

Our initiative to create a movement for one democratic state in

Palestine/Israel, the only political settlement that is substantially just and workable, continues. After a number of meetings with Palestinians, we held our first meeting with Israeli Jews, about 20 in number, in Jaffa.

...Activism on the issue of Palestine/Israel, as over any issue, cannot succeed in resolving the situation without a political program. As the PA continues its decline towards complete collapse and Trump's "Ultimate Deal" of permanent apartheid looms, articulating a just political program and getting activists and their organizations world-wide behind it become the most urgent task.

How difficult can formulating and advancing a Palestinian political initiative by this Campaign in a Jaffa headquarters be?

Well, the initiative is barely off the ground and the reaction, as gleaned on Facebook in the comments to Jeff Halper's [post](#) are heartfelt and also lighthearted, referring to what the participants at the meeting (in the photo below) are wearing:

[Rafael Balulu](#):

בגישה הזו זה בחיים לא יצליח. רוב המוחלט של הישראלים והפלסטינים שחיים פה קונים בגדים בביג פאשן והגישה שלכם נעה בין מחסן הקיבוץ ליד שנייה של ויץ"ו. זו לא צורה רצינית לגשת לשלום. This attitude will never work. The absolute majority of the Israelis and Israelis who live here buy clothes in big fashion and your attitude moves between the kibbutz warehouse next to a second of Wichita. It's not a serious way to come in peace.

And pointing out the difficulty of the endeavor:

[Mark Klein](#): Finding 20 Israeli Jews (of any gender) who agree with this was probably hard enough.

Formulating a political plan on how to reunite the three territories of partitioned Palestine—The Jewish state of Israel on the one hand and the Palestinian territories it has been "[occupying](#)" militarily for the past fifty-one years—is no easy undertaking, no matter who initiates it.

It is easier for Israeli Jews than for Palestinians to reach the Jewish Israeli public, logistically, in terms of access to documents and media, as well as psychologically and linguistically.

Nevertheless, reaching the Jewish Israeli public with a pro-Palestinian initiative, and especially that embraces one democratic state, is far from an easy task, because it means an end to the [Apartheid](#) Jewish state.

Another Israeli Jew who takes a pro-Palestine position is Miko Peled, author of 'The General's Son' (himself—he is the son of a prominent major general in the Israeli army), who, unlike his father, [does not believe](#) that a two-state political solution is either "viable or just".

He [speaks](#) about his "journey" of understanding (or rather of "conversion" away from Zionism) in the following terms:

The longer the journey continues—and it still continues—the more I discover,

the more I learn, the more I...gain understanding and appreciation for the Palestinian experience, for the Palestinian reality, for Palestine itself as a country, as a nation, as a culture.

Needless to say, Peled's political position [resonates](#) with Palestinians much more than it does with his fellow Jews in Israel, who are largely among those who see it as "[quixotic](#)":

Now he [Peled] is fighting for what he calls "Jewish values." His aim: an Israel that embraces Palestinians as full, equal political partners. Nothing less than a Republic of Palestine-Israel. It is ambitious. Some would say quixotic.

Judaism as a religion and Jewish identity or "Jewishness" are not the same, but they are linked, hence the too-frequent conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.

Activists, whether Jewish or not, who want to discuss or point out that link as the core problem of Zionist ideology and the Jewish state of Israel often find themselves in trouble. They are often viewed as having obsessions and identity issues (if they are Jews) or outright bigots and racists or as "skirting" bigotry.

Zionism is and has been a Jewish enterprise, so much so that Judeo-centrism still frames Western political approach to the problem of Israel, rendering Palestinians powerless and invisible politically.

Pervading this mindset is an understandable sensitivity to Jewish suffering in history.

What's not understandable is when that sensitivity turns into a blind spot that makes even Israeli Zionist Jews (like [Ari Shavitz](#), for example) who admit the Nakba, only to draw the line at one democratic state—i.e., balk at Palestinian return to their homeland, thus dehumanizing Palestinian suffering in the process, and elevating Jewish suffering as unique.

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