

Demography and transfer: Israel's road to nowhere

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ABSTRACT *The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, which dates back to the latter part of the nineteenth century, has always been a conflict over land and population balance. At the start of the twenty-first century, with no end in sight to the conflict, the issue of demography stares both sides in the face. Israel's ability to maintain military and economic superiority over neighbouring Arab countries in general and the Palestinians in particular is matched by its inability to maintain long-term numerical superiority in the areas it holds west of the Jordan River. It is expected that within 10 to 15 years there will be parity between the Arabs and the 5.5 million Jews who currently live in historical Palestine. While discussion of Arab population transfer has been relegated to internal debates among Zionist leaders, the idea itself has always remained a key element in Zionist thinking of ways to solve the demography problem and ensure Jewish population dominance. A recent decline in Jewish immigration to Israel, the rise of the religious-political right, continuing Jewish settlement in the West Bank and Gaza and the recent Palestinian uprising have moved this debate to the public arena. Fractions among Israel's intellectuals, political figures and Sharon government ministers have raised the demography issue publicly, calling openly for the transfer of the Palestinian population to Jordan.*

It was Theodore Herzl, the father and ideologue of modern Zionism, who more than a century ago lobbied the Ottoman government and the potentates of Europe on behalf of the Zionist movement for a foothold in Palestine. He advocated the transfer of Palestinian peasants across the border in order to realise the Zionist project of colonisation. Benny Morris, a revisionist historian who recently added his voice to those advocating the transfer of Palestinians across the border, quoted the following from Herzl's diary: 'we shall try to spirit the penniless [Arab] population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our country ... The removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly'.¹ Not to be outdone, Israel Zangwill, a politically active British Zionist, popularised in imperial circles at the turn of last century the slogan 'a land without a people for a people without a land'. The concept of transfer has been an enduring theme in Zionist discourse.² Benny Morris, for one, resurrected statements made by Zionist and British officials favouring transfer.³ These officials included, on the Israeli side, Chaim

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Weizman, David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett, Israel's first president, prime minister and foreign minister, respectively. On the British side were foreign secretary Ernest Bevin and Hugh Dalton, the chancellor of the exchequer in 1944. With these endorsements behind him, Morris now justifies ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians as a necessary, if belated, solution to the conflict between Israel and the Arab world.

Had not the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 and the prevention of their return taken place, there would have been no Jewish state now with an overwhelming Jewish majority. Nearly 50% of the population in the area allotted to Israel by the United Nations partition resolution of 1947 would have been Arab.⁴ Yet here we are at the start of the twenty-first century, hearing the talk of transfer loud and clear, this time from members of the academy, media and Ariel Sharon's own government.

The Israeli public and leadership remain committed to the principle of demographic politics even though, as we will show below, these have produced neither a pure Jewish state nor a Jewish and democratic state of which the Zionist leadership, past and present, continues to dream. Yet the debate over the transfer of Palestinians from their homeland continues unabated, and is increasingly normalised as part of legitimate political discourse in Israel.

Demography debate

The drive to maintain Jewish dominance in historical Palestine has shaped both the domestic and foreign policies of Israel. The ratio that is usually cited to ensure a continued Jewish demographic majority is for the population to be 80% Jewish and 20% Arab—a ratio which has been maintained since 1948. When the population balance is altered, even in minute degree, signalling a slight reduction in the four-fifths Jewish majority, Darwinian language about national survival surfaces. It is to safeguard against a perceptible drop in the Jewish–Arab population balance that Israeli policy makers are always on the lookout to recruit new immigrants, even at the cost of importing large numbers of non-Jews, as was the case with Soviet immigrants to Israel in the 1990s. Only around one-third of world Jewry lives in Israel, thus the task of ‘in-gathering the exiles’ remains an unfinished business. Outwardly, Israel's leaders have constantly reminded world Jewry of the danger intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews poses for the continued existence of Jewish identity outside Israel. Indeed, it is a pastime of Israeli demographers and media pundits to publish forecasts on Jewish demography world-wide. They use these forecasts to demonstrate the continued decline in the numbers of Jews and to urge further Jewish immigration to Israel. The perpetual quest for land and the displacement of the indigenous Palestinian population may have been slowed down, and even derailed at times, but they remain the main items on the Zionist national agenda. Israeli politicians remain preoccupied by Herzl's dream to this day, and have been so ever since the state came into being more than half a century ago. The legendary cartoons depicting Golda Meir's nightmares and sleepless nights over the number of newborn Palestinian babies have now become the stuff of population counting and demographic debates.

Israel's policies toward the Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line remain tied to demographic considerations. For example, of the various reasons (such as security, absorptive capacity, religion and the endangering of its culture) Israel gives for flouting international conventions and opposing the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes, none is as important as demography. As Barak remarked in the aftermath of the Camp David summit failure in July 2000, demography is an 'existential' question. Opposition to the return of Palestinian refugees, and indeed to the continued substantial Palestinian presence in the ancestral homeland, is linked to the 'Jewishness' of the state. Several think-tanks, research centres and national policy-making bodies have recently turned their attention to the issue of demography. For example, Itzhak Ravid, at one time the director of Operations Research in the Israeli air force and later head of the National Security Team in the prime minister's office (1992–93), prepared a study on Arab–Jewish demography for a high profile conference held in April 2001 under the auspices of the prestigious Herzliya Interdisciplinary Centre.⁵ The overall concern of the conference was to suggest ways for Israel to remain a Jewish state in the face of the low birth rate among the Jewish population, declining Jewish immigration and a high Palestinian birth rate—both in Israel and the occupied territories. Among the core recommendations of the conference, to which Ravid was a main contributor, was a call for the government to adopt a more proactive policy of Arab population 'containment', to encourage a decline in the birth rate among the Arabs in Israel, prevent the refugees from returning to their homes and increase Jewish immigration. In the event of revived negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis, a far-reaching proposal that was included in the proceedings and adopted by the Herzliya conference involved so-called population and land exchange.⁶ According to one variant of this proposal, which was publicly endorsed by transportation minister Ephraim Sneh, Arab towns and villages which fall close to the 1967 Green Line, such as Um El-Fahm, should be handed over through a 'silent transfer' to a new Palestinian state. In return, Israel would annex the Jewish settlements close to the Green Line—thus further diminishing the number of Arabs in Israel.⁷ Although the Arab minority, particularly those who will be directly affected by such a transfer, has not been consulted during the ongoing demographic debate, its reaction to the idea of a land and population swap has been to reject it outright.⁸

The idea of transfer resonates with the Israeli public as well. In a national opinion survey released in March 2002, 46% and 31% of the Israeli Jewish public favoured, respectively, direct transfer of Palestinians from the territories and of Arab citizens from Israel. A larger proportion of 60% said they were in favour of indirect transfer through encouraging the Arabs in Israel to accept monetary incentives to leave the country.⁹ These results are not solely the by-product of the second *intifada*. They have deep roots in the consciousness of Israelis. A national survey carried out in 1997 showed that 52% of Israel's Jews would approve the transfer of their Arab co-citizens to a Palestinian state if one were established, 56% would deny Arabs the right to vote in electing a prime minister and 55% would prohibit Arabs from participating in political referenda.¹⁰ A Gallup survey in October 2000 in Israel showed that 60% of Israeli Jews would support the transfer of Arab citizens outside Israel's borders.¹¹

The demography debate is by no means confined to the extreme fringes of right-wing politicians. Mainstream elements in academe and the Israeli intelligentsia are active participants in it as well. Arnon Sofer, a geographer from Haifa University who is nicknamed the 'Arab counter' and known for his right-wing views,¹² has made a career out of regularly tracking population figures and issuing alarm calls concerning the Arab–Jewish population balance. Sofer calculates that by 2020, of a total population of 15.1 million people living west of the Jordan River, the Jewish population will be a minority of 6.5 million. Even within 1967 Israel, in 20 years the Jewish population will shrink from its current 80% to a projected 65% majority. Demographer Sergio della Pergola's own work at the Hebrew University concurs with the general demographic picture portrayed by Ravid and Sofer.¹³ In responding to criticisms that such population and land exchanges constitute undemocratic practice, Shlomo Gazit, a retired general in the Israeli army who also participated in the Herzliya conference, replied that these are times in which 'democracy has to be subordinated to demography'.¹⁴ Although Israeli opinion makers may differ on how to deal with the demographic issue, whether through direct or indirect expulsion of the Palestinians or total separation along the Green Line, they all concur, regardless of their political proclivity, on the demographic danger that threatens Israel as a Jewish state.

A similar picture emerges from the calculations of Lebanese demographer Youssef Courbage, who works with estimates of a population base for 1997 that are higher than those published in Israel.¹⁵ He concludes by noting that the population of the West Bank and Gaza doubles every 25 years, averaging about 2.5% annual growth, and this is after fertility rates stabilise and decline to approximate those prevalent in neighbouring Arab countries. In this scenario the Palestinians in historical Palestine will become a majority (50.3%) in 2010 and, if fertility rates do not decline as expected, they will be even more numerous, at 51.1%, by 2010. Under the same fertility assumptions, by the year 2020 the Palestinians will comprise 53.9% or 55.6% of the population west of the Jordan River.

Arguably more than any other Western researcher, French demographer Phillippe Fargues highlights the interplay between demography and national conflict between Palestinians and Israeli Jews.¹⁶ In a recent study, he outlines in detail and under various political and demographic scenarios (ie, whether Israel relinquishes or continues its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza) the future Palestinian–Israeli population balance. He concludes that the only way to reduce high Palestinian fertility rates is through peaceful coexistence and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Peace and a viable state, he argues, resolve the Palestinian demographic anomaly in which high birth rates coexist with rising educational levels. The transition to peace may help uncouple the connection between large families and the national–political struggle in which the Palestinians have been embroiled for more than a half century.

Finally, in its annual *World Factbook* for 2002, the CIA estimates a much narrower gap between Arabs and Jews west of the Jordan River. With 4.8 million Jews, compared with 4.6 million Palestinians living in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, the difference is merely 200 000. However, because of the stark contrast in

the rates of natural increase for the Palestinian population in the West Bank (3.95%) and Gaza (3.39%), compared with 1.48% for the Jewish population,¹⁷ Palestinians could constitute the majority in historical Palestine in a matter of less than five years. It is important to keep in mind that these and other similar calculations do not take into account the return of any Palestinian refugees to Israel, nor a future Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

There is a near taboo in Palestinian circles on raising the issue of unchecked population growth. It is outright unpatriotic to counsel adopting rational policies that would reduce large family size (the highest in the world in the case of Gaza) and to devise means of coping with poverty and pressing development needs. As shown by Rhoda Kana'aneh, the converse seems to be taking place in Palestinian society.¹⁸ The adage 'power in numbers' is being translated into large family size, and used as a weapon of the weak against Israel.

The Sharon government's vision

To understand the current Likud position with regard to the Palestinians, it is instructive to reiterate Ariel Sharon's long-standing stance on the subject of peace with the Arabs. Sharon opposed the Madrid peace conference in 1991, voted against Israel's peace treaty with Egypt in 1979, the Hebron agreement with the Palestinians in 1997, withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, and in 1994 abstained from voting on Israel's peace treaty with Jordan. Most recently, Sharon's government reacted with indifference to the Saudi peace plan, announced in March 2002, which offered Israel total Arab recognition in return for the creation of a Palestinian state and Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, including the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem. If Netanyahu's 1996 position in the previous Likud government rested on a political platform that was based on four 'no's (no to an official Palestinian presence in Jerusalem, no to a Palestinian state, no to withdrawal from the territories, and no to a refugee right of return), Sharon's will at a minimum continue to reaffirm this position, backed by a more aggressive attitude towards the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

Ominous signs regarding the transfer of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza are being made publicly by several of Sharon's ministers on the far right—if not with his public approval, then certainly without his objection. Representatives of the far right who currently hold ministerial positions and advocate the transfer of Palestinians include Uzi Landau, a previous public security minister who remains in the new government as minister without portfolio, Limor Livnat, who remains in charge of the education ministry, internal security minister Tzachi Hanegbi, construction and housing minister Efraim Eitam, and Avigdor Lieberman, an avowed advocate of transfer, who is now minister of transportation. Debates over the transfer of Palestinians led more than 100 Israeli academics, writers and intellectuals to publish a petition in *Ha-Aretz* under the heading 'Urgent warning: the Israeli government may be contemplating crimes against humanity'. The petitioners went on to say, 'We are deeply worried by indications that the "fog of war [in Iraq]" could be exploited by the Israeli government to commit further crimes against the Palestinian people, up to full-

fledged ethnic cleansing'.¹⁹ More recently, *Le Monde Diplomatique* carried a substantial report by the Israeli journalist Amira Hass, who documented significant support among Jewish settlers, religious Jews and politicians in Sharon's government for Palestinian expulsion in the event of war in Iraq.²⁰

The talk of transfer is no longer a theoretical or hypothetical position since, as we have seen above, these statements are beginning to assume currency in the Israeli political discourse on demography. If it is not direct transfer of the Palestinian population, which would be difficult to carry out en masse in the face of international criticism, then it is silent transfer through indirect methods. Rather than continue to live under curfews and closures, with poverty affecting close to 50% of residents in the territories, even higher among the refugees, some Palestinians have stepped up their emigration efforts to Western countries,²¹ and others have begun to cross the border to Jordan in substantial numbers. The latter prompted the Jordanian government to impose a quota and, in order to ensure the return of visitors from the West Bank, to require their relatives to post a US\$5000 bond to guarantee the return of the West Bankers.²²

It is estimated that around 150 000 Palestinians crossed over to Jordan between October 2000 and June 2001 through what is euphemistically called 'voluntary transfer'.²³ The fear is that this is another Nakba (disaster) in the making—gradual and not so visible though it may be. This much comes through if one listens to a seasoned statesman such as Haider Abdul Shafi from Gaza, who led the Palestinian delegation to the Madrid peace conference in 1991. He told Joseph Algazy, a journalist for *Ha-Aretz*:

The desire to transfer us has roots in the past, and in the history and ideology of Zionist circles, which have never given up hope of attaining this goal. This danger still exists at the start of the third millennium. I will tell you frankly, in the present situation I would not rule out the danger of a [population—in original] transfer. We the Palestinians must regard the danger of a transfer as a potential option ... This is how the tragedy of the refugees was created—a tragedy that has persisted for the past 54 years.²⁴

Although a mass transfer of Palestinians during the attack on Iraq by the USA and UK did not materialise, Israeli commentators shared the concerns of their Palestinian counterparts. Meron Benvenisti foresaw a mass transfer of 'hundreds of thousands of Palestinians' from the territories to Jordan, should the USA attack Iraq.²⁵ In the words of the former chief of Shin Bet, Ami Ayalon, 'If the US attacks Iraq and during that attack there is a mega-terrorist incident in Israel, then Ariel Sharon could exploit the outbreak of rage in the Israeli public to conduct mass transfer of Palestinians'. As seen by Palestinians, Israeli military activities in the territories are intended 'to embitter Palestinian lives that they will leave of their own accord', as Danny Rubinstein put it. Rubinstein concluded that the Israeli government's argument that its military activities are intended to pressure Arafat to clamp down on Palestinian violence 'rings hollow' in the face of the total destruction of the Palestinian Authority by Israel.²⁶ What did occur during the attack on Iraq was that Israel embarked on a large-scale destruction of Palestinian homes and on targeted assassinations of wanted Palestinians.²⁷

The 'Jordan is Palestine' scenario received special attention at an Israeli

simulated war game in which the USA attacked Iraq. The simulation, carried out at Tel-Aviv University in June 2002, included the participating Israeli reserve officers, media experts, academics and politicians. According to the simulation exercise, the USA remains committed to Jordan, even if a Palestinian uprising against the Jordanian regime does erupt, something the planners of the simulation game predicted. As the simulation game had it, the Americans succeed in killing Saddam Hussein with a single smart bomb, while the Israelis took advantage of the war and assassinated the entire leadership of the Palestinian Authority, which had opposed the establishment of a Palestinian regime in Jordan all along.²⁸ It is interesting to note that Sharon forbade his ministers and anyone connected with his government to participate in the simulated exercise.

Containment of Israel's Arab citizens

The target of transfer and expulsion is not confined to Palestinians in the occupied territories, but extends to Palestinian citizens of Israel. Various government ministers now pursue this publicly under the guise of state security and old-fashioned Zionist principles. The most recent discussion of the transfer idea owes its modern incarnation to Rehavam Ze'evi, a right-wing member of the Knesset and founder of the extremist Moledet party; he was minister of tourism when assassinated in October 2001. Drawing up a profile of him, Nadav Shragai quotes Ze'evi's words as follows:

Zionism is in essence the Zionism of transfer. The transfer of the Jewish nation from the Diaspora to Zion and the transfer of the Arabs from the lands neighboring Palestine to Palestine, who came here [sic] to enjoy the fruits of the prosperity that the Jews brought to this land. But now the time has come for the third transfer, the separation of peoples, so that they will stop murdering each other.²⁹

For those who say that transfer is 'immoral', Ze'evi would argue, in Shragai's words, that 'Zionism itself is immoral'. This transfer is not confined to the Palestinians in the occupied territories but, as Aviv Lavie points out, it includes Palestinian citizens of Israel.³⁰ For example, member of Knesset Michael Kleiner of the Herut party proposed making available 'emigration packages' which would include financial incentives to entice Palestinian residents or citizens of Israel to go to Arab countries and relinquish their Israeli citizenship. The Knesset legal advisor, who recommended that the discriminatory bill be disqualified, foresaw a situation whereby if the bill became law it would appear that 'the state encourages the Jewish population with financial incentives to come to Israel and settle here whereas Arabs, who are citizens of the country, are encouraged by the state to leave'.³¹

Shlomo Benizri, a member of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party and minister of labour and social affairs, convened the Israel Council on Demography in early September 2002. Commentator Gideon Levy questioned the purpose of the Council, which included obstetricians, gynecologists and other medical specialists. This is how Levy put it:

And how will the gynecologists contribute to this endeavour? Will they make do with proposing methods to increase Jewish fertility rate and prevent abortions, or

will they also suggest techniques to encourage abortions and reduce the birthrate among Arab women? And what about non-Jewish women from the former Soviet Union?³²

Even the National Security Council veered from confining its discussion to defence and military strategy, and included in its report recommendations about 'demographic and security considerations'.³³

Several attempts are being made to find ways to strip some Israeli Arabs of their citizenship. In 1999 the Israeli Supreme Court President Aharon Barak reprimanded the interior minister at the time for revoking the citizenship of Israeli Arab women who marry Palestinians from the territories. He called the practice 'scandalous'. By 1999, 1000 Arab women from Israel had lost their citizenship when they moved to the territories. The Justice asked rhetorically, 'would anyone ask an Israeli Jew to give up his citizenship if he moved to the territories?'³⁴ The current minister of the interior, Eli Yishai, with the support of Sharon, is prepared to strip Arab citizens of their citizenship if they engage in hostile acts against the state.³⁵ In interpreting the rationale behind the move, an editorial in *Ha-Aretz* queried why it is that when Jews commit such hostile acts (and it cited five such cases), the state does not choose to apply the controversial Article 11c in the citizenship law, which empowers the minister of the interior to strip Israeli citizens of their citizenship.³⁶ The editorial concluded by saying that 'it is difficult to shake the impression that the use of Article 11c is made easier simply because the current subjects are Arabs'. In following the same debate Na'aman Carmi and Yoram Shahar, of the Association of Civil Rights in Israel, concluded likewise by deploring the 'conditional' citizenship status of Arabs in Israel.³⁷

Government activities in general, and those of the Council for Demography in particular, have their critics in the Arab and Jewish sectors. Arab non-governmental organisations working in the area of human rights in Israel have accused the government-sponsored body of willingly adopting divisive policies that favour the Jewish sector and marginalise the Arab one. On the Jewish side, feminist members of the Knesset have accused the Council, in the words of Yael Dayan of the Labor party and chair of the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women, of encouraging women to 'donate their wombs' to the service of the state. Zahava Gal-On, another member of the Knesset, sounded more poignant criticism concerning the political motives of the Council, when she said:

Some people think the Arab population will evaporate if we only encourage Jewish women to have more children. I don't. We have recently seen problematic legislation on the part of government bodies aimed at hobbling the Arab population. So I will hardly be surprised if the Knesset passes another discriminatory law. There is a deliberate policy being conducted that is harmful to Israel's Arab citizens. Are we now about to get a correction that will benefit them? Don't make me laugh.³⁸

Right-wing politicians charge Palestinians with exercising their right of return through 'the backdoor', and in the past year have frozen all Palestinian applications for family reunification. The interior ministry estimates that over 23 000 Palestinians from the territories have acquired residency status in Israel through their marriage to Palestinians from Israel.³⁹ Since 1993 the interior

ministry estimates that 100 000 Palestinians have ‘immigrated’ to Israel under family reunification. To counter these developments, the ministry established a special unit to track down and toughen citizenship requests by Arabs. Its methods include the use of private detectives and the raising of application fees sixfold, from NIS 500 to NIS 3000.⁴⁰ More worrisome, from the Israeli position, is the fact that some Arab families who had moved to Jordan after the establishment of Israel have recently requested under Israel’s law to return and reclaim their Israeli citizenship.⁴¹

The most consistent attempts at population containment and transfer of Palestinians have been unfolding for some time in Jerusalem.⁴² As one headline put it, the ‘quiet transfer gets quieter’.⁴³ Here, the concerted efforts of the interior ministry and the municipality of Jerusalem, under right-wing extremist Likud Mayor Ehud Olmert, to depopulate East Jerusalem of its Arab inhabitants are notorious. It is in the context of such a political climate that posters and graffiti on East Jerusalem’s walls, which declare that ‘250 000 Palestinians have already left. Jordan is Palestine. Transfer’, are tolerated.

Interior minister Yishai is prepared to go further and suggest amending the Law of Return so as to prevent non-Jewish spouses who are married to Jews from emigrating to Israel under the Law of Return. This is particularly the case with Soviet immigrants. The interior ministry estimates that since 1981, of the 246 037 non-Jews who received Israeli citizenship, 221 428 have been from the former Soviet Union.⁴⁴

The debate surrounding Israeli citizenship law has taken a new twist thanks to changes introduced in 2002 to abolish the nationality designation in personal identity cards. The designations did not include ‘Israeli’ and, until recently, were based on one of the following religious categories: Jew, Moslem, Christian and Druze. The secular designation ‘Israeli’ still does not appear in the new identity card. In order to comply with the law that was approved in the Knesset in March 2002, the interior ministry developed no less than 132 national designations for its internal use. However, the following do appear in the new identity card: Jew, Arab, Druze and Other. In other words, in place of Christian and Moslem, the new identity card lists Arab.⁴⁵ The ethnic, if not outright religious, division in citizenship status remains a salient feature of Israeli practice.

Conclusion

If Israel and Zionist leaders continue to pursue what one newspaper called ‘demogography’, the recent comments of Boaz Evron describe better than most Israeli commentators the outcome of such policies:

There is no way to win the race against the Arab birth rate in general and the Palestinian birth rate in particular—even at the cost of turning the country into an ecological, urban, military hell. Those who can only see the future through artillery sights will arrive at the day when the cannon on the other side will outnumber the cannon on this side.⁴⁶

The various solutions proposed by the right and left in Israel are based on the notion of people separation buttressed by demographic considerations.⁴⁷ The

position of the Labor party was clearly stated by Ehud Barak during his short term in office. In effect, this view was an extension of the philosophy of Barak's mentor, the late Itzhak Rabin. Its expression can now be seen in the highly fortified electric fence that is being built on Arab land in order to separate the West Bank population from Israel. For most of the right, separation means eventual expulsion of the Palestinians from the territories and, if need be, implementing transfer policies in Israel proper by adopting measures which encourage Arab citizens to leave. The left believes in separating the two peoples by means of the two-state solution, without paying sufficient attention to the viability of such a state. Here is how Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin of Ben-Gurion University expressed it: 'It is frightening when Jews talk about demography ... There were those who believed that the ethnic cleansing of 1948 solved the problem. Now they are discovering to their dismay a reality in which the Jews will always be a minority in the Middle East.'⁴⁸

Sharon, for one, is aiming at a hybrid solution: to grant the Palestinians a Bantustan-like state in non-contiguous areas of the West Bank and Gaza, accompanied by gradual transfer of a substantial number of Palestinians from Israel to the proposed Bantustan state through so-called population exchange, and from the West Bank to neighbouring Arab countries under the cloak of security. Akiva Eldar argues that Sharon will not banish the entire Palestinian people, although he has no qualms about banishing and assassinating their leaders and implementing apartheid policies.⁴⁹ Avi Primor, former Director of the Foreign Ministry and currently vice president of Tel-Aviv University, is more explicit about Sharon's Bantustan-like plan for the Palestinians, a plan that his advisors describe as 'painful concessions'. White South Africans of the former apartheid regime thought they had solved the demographic problem (and with it the problem of one man, one vote) when they created internal fictitious states in South Africa whose residents were able to vote as if they were citizens of an independent 'foreign' country. This symbolic independence lacks any substance in terms of state viability and sovereignty, since these fictitious states remain wholly dependent on their creators. According to Primor, such a 'Palestinian state' will be

limited to the Palestinian cities, a 'state' comprised of a number of separate, sovereign-less enclaves, with no resources for self-sustenance. The territories of the West Bank and Gaza remain in Israeli hands, and its Palestinian residents are being turned into 'citizens' of that 'other country'.⁵⁰

Such an experiment is doomed to failure, in the same manner that the South African experiment failed after a long and bloody war.

It is in this context that the Palestinians presented the US administration on 25 October 2002 with a memorandum (including detailed maps) that outlined continuing Israeli settlement activities and argued that developments on the ground in terms of settlement expansion have vitiated the prospects for a meaningful Palestinian state. The implication of this, they argued, is to abandon the two-state solution and adopt instead the bi-national state solution—something that, I dare say, will be rejected by Israel, the USA and other countries.⁵¹

Notes

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- ²⁶ Danny Rubinstein, 'The tangible fear of transfer', *Ha-Aretz*, 28 September 2002.
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