

A New Border Proposal for a Palestinian State

The Future State of Palestine in Bible Prophecy

The heinous terrorist attacks against the U.S. on September 11, 2001, plus the subsequent "War on Terrorism," is causing many Americans to reconsider the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Why? The suspected terrorists responsible for these acts, and countless other Islamic militants, have vented much rage against the U.S. for various reasons. A very important one is the U.S. government's longstanding role as the peace broker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Frankly, the U.S. has had a conflict of interest in this role; as Israel's number one ally, the U.S. has armed and aided Israel with \$3 billion per year for decades yet not given hardly anything to the Palestinians. Neither has it pressured Israel to settle this dispute nor proposed any resolution but simply left it to the two parties to negotiate a settlement.

In the past, most Americans either did not understand or care about why the Arab world was so angry with the U.S. and Israel. Arabs were very sympathetic toward their suffering Palestinian brethren, especially the destitute families in the refugee camps. The founding of the modern State of Israel had resulted in "the Palestinian problem," which refers to the displacement and dispossession of the Palestinian people, their consequent loss of dignity and the denial of their aspirations, primarily the right to form an independent sovereign state. The Arabs' mounting anger against the U.S. and Israel therefore concerns their intransigence in solving this prolonged humanitarian problem. So, let us briefly look into this Palestinian problem to see why it has thus far not been resolved and how it might be.

Jews fought the Arabs and founded the State of Israel in 1948. In 1967 Israel fought the Arabs again in the Six-Day War and took the "occupied territories," which included the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The concept of Israel returning this territory to the Palestinians, with a necessary corridor connecting these two separated parcels, has prevailed ever since. But this proposed solution has always been flawed because it is based on demographics rather than geography. Indeed, UN Resolution 242 demands that Israel return to pre-1967 borders; but it also guarantees "secure and recognized boundaries" for the states involved, which Israel and many analysts rightly conclude is a contradiction. Thus, Israel has always insisted that returning all of the West Bank to the Palestinians would seriously jeopardize its own security. Moreover, this solution leaves the Palestinians with even less security because they would be more vulnerable in two separate territories against the strongest nation militarily in the Middle East. Much worse is a West Bank-Gaza entity in which the 136 Jewish settlements remain. This results in 40-90% of the West Bank, in the form of much non-contiguous land that looks like Swiss cheese, being under Palestinian sovereignty. The current intifadeh is showing that this arrangement could prove to be a much worse security predicament for both parties. These security concerns have certainly been a prime reason for Israel's intransigence in settling this dispute, and Israel deserves some sympathy for this dilemma. So, continuing to focus on a West Bank-Gaza solution will likely prolong the stalemate.

The West Bank-Gaza solution is based on demographics because that is primarily where the Palestinians have lived. However, geography largely predetermines security or the lack thereof. You can change the demographics, but you can't change the geography. A new geographical arrangement needs to be considered, one that provides a more plausible security for not only Israel but the Palestinians as well.

Israel's "Proclamation of Independence" has been the basis for its formation and continuing existence. However, an important element in this document does not coincide with Israel's existence. It proclaims that the Jewish people have a right to "the Land of Israel," which it implicitly defines as "the land of their fathers" and "their ancestral land." These terms do not refer to the so-called "Promised Land," a larger territory variously described in the Jewish Bible, but solely to the land possessed and lived in by the Jews' forefathers in antiquity.

When modern Israel became a state, the international community quickly recognized the Jews' claim to a "National Home" in their ancestral land as a legitimate and therefore just solution to their Diaspora, which resulted in "the Jewish problem." However, modern Israel has never been located precisely in the Jews' ancestral land. Historical research reveals that all of the coastal plain, beginning at least at the Nahal Sorek (located about ten miles south of the center of Tel Aviv) and extending southward to include the Gaza Strip, cannot be regarded as the Jews' ancestral land. Nevertheless, all of this land, except for the Gaza Strip, has always been a part of modern Israel. In fact, this territory, along with the Gaza Strip, represents the heart of "the land of the Philistines," a people in antiquity who were Israel's archrival and from whom the modern Palestinians derive their name. On the other hand, the West Bank represents the heart of the land of Israel. Thus, modern Israel has never included the most significant portion of its ancestral land, but it has always included a portion of

territory that is not its ancestral land.

It seems that this issue has never been discussed publicly, and perhaps it should be. Since modern Israel has always existed on the claim of historical precedent, and the international community has always accepted this claim, why not settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on this basis? That is, let the Jewish people have all of their ancestral land, as their Proclamation of Independence insists, which includes all of the West Bank and extends to the Shephelah foothills, and let the Palestinian people have the remaining land, which represents "the land of the Philistines." This territory consists approximately of the coastal plain beginning in the north, at perhaps the Nahal Sorek, and extending south-southwesterly to not only Rafah, at the south end of the Gaza Strip, but another twenty-five miles beyond it to the Wadi el Arish, then following this wadi southeasterly to the environs of Kadesh Barnea and extending northerly past the western environs of Beersheba and along the Shephelah foothills to the Nahal Sorek. (See attached map.) In sum, the entire proposed territory for the Palestinians would result in a very expanded Gaza Strip, with its most prominent city-Gaza-being strategically located.

For many years Egypt has stated its desire to help solve the Palestinian problem. In antiquity, the Wadi el Arish was well recognized as Egypt's northeastern border. Perhaps Egypt would agree to return to this ancient border by acceding the remote territory between the Wadi el Arish and the Gaza Strip to the proposed Palestinian state. This territory is useless to Egypt because it is arid, in need of imported water, and most of it is in the very wide International Peacekeeping Zone. One possible source of water is to extend Israel's Kinneret-Negev Conduit that transports water from Lake Kinneret (=Sea of Galilee) throughout Israel to just outside the south end of the Gaza Strip. Indeed, Israel did that when it started to develop this land prior to returning it, as part of the Sinai Peninsula, back to Egypt. But the Dead Sea is already drying up due to excessive removal of water from Lake Kinneret. Better yet, Egypt might agree to a canal system that would allow some of the Nile water that empties into the Mediterranean Sea to be sent over.

This proposal provides both peoples with the most security conceivable. It has no non-contiguous lands and at least two-thirds less border than that of the entire West Bank-Gaza entity. Thus, it is the most minimal and manageable border possible and the only one that geographically fits the land, with the Shephelah serving as a strategic buffer. The Jews get the hill country and the Palestinians get the coastal plain, resulting in two completely separate states lying side-by-side. In fact, there is a growing movement among Israeli Jews called "separation," which means that the two peoples ought to be completely separated territorially. (Indeed, that is exactly what Britain's blue-ribbon Peel Commission recommended in 1937. But a naiveté has often dogged this conflict, exemplified by the British mandate, in which it was thought that the two peoples should be able to live together peacefully in a single or bi-national state.)

Israeli Jews would probably favor this proposal. Undoubtedly, they would be reluctant to compromise by relinquishing their industrially developed Ashkelon-Ashdod area. Of interest to religious Jews, this proposal would meet the halakic requirement to retain all of Eretz Yisrael, that is, if this term is defined according to Israel's Proclamation of Independence.

The Palestinians, on the other hand, may need convincing. First, the Palestinians would not be forfeiting any acreage in this exchange because the size of territory being proposed for them would approximate the combined total of the entire West Bank-Gaza. Second, the Palestinians would gain the Ashkelon-Ashdod area, which includes the modern Port Ashdod. Third, nearly all of the proposed territory for the Palestinians is arable and very conducive to development, and at less cost, than the hilly West Bank. In contrast, the Judean wilderness in the eastern West Bank is unusable. Fourth, with water and capital, this entire proposed Palestinian region could be made very appealing. Nevertheless, like the Jews in Ashkelon-Ashdod, many of the nearly 2 million Palestinians living in the West Bank would at first resist giving up their homes and transferring to the coastal plain. But what about the 3.5 million Palestinians living in UN refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria? They comprise about half of the 7-8 million Palestinians worldwide. Israel can never concede to the Palestinians' demand for the refugees' "right of return" to Israel because it would pose a future dire population threat of an eventual Arab majority due to the disparity in birth rates between the two peoples. Many of these refugees might prefer a well-developed coastal plain. In conclusion, the two primary keys for making this proposal most attractive to the Palestinians are (1) Egypt's territorial and water concession and (2) wealthy nations making a substantial financial commitment to develop the Palestinian state. Palestinian donor nations would likely be more enthusiastic to support a territorially more secure solution.

This proposal may be more costly, especially due to the necessary population transfers. However, the gain in security and saved lives, plus reduction of future, armed conflict, will far outweigh these extra costs. Also, the additional manpower and infrastructure (roads, physical barriers, checkpoints, etc.) required for security for both states in a checkerboard West Bank-Gaza solution will be far more costly than this proposal necessitates. Moreover, the disagreement over whether to allow the Palestinian state to have a national defense would likely

be alleviated. Regarding the feasibility of transferring peoples, two population transfers were conducted during the 20th century on a far grander scale than this proposal stipulates: (1) the transfer of 11.5 million Germans from throughout Europe to Germany following WWII and, (2) at approximately the same time, an exchange of about 18 million Hindus and Muslims between India and Pakistan.

What about East Jerusalem? The Palestinians demand it in which to locate their capital. The Old City is such an emotional issue for Jews, Palestinians, and many Muslims. Yet, it too is the Jews' ancestral land. Moreover, for two peoples having a history of marked conflict between them, it would be unprecedented in world history for their nations to be located side-by-side with the capital of one existing not only within the borders of the other but in its capital city no less! As for East Jerusalem's holy shrines, perhaps an international district that includes them should be established to insure free access to them for all peoples. Admittedly, the Palestinians not getting East Jerusalem fails to meet all of their aspirations. However, the political feasibility of a Palestinian capital located in East Jerusalem is most questionable. And if the two states were ever to engage in armed conflict, Israel could easily strangle the Palestinian state by cutting off the necessary corridor and easily taking its capital. Besides, economists allege that a Palestinian state in two separated territories, with its capital in East Jerusalem, is not very economically feasible. So, if the Palestinians can see that this proposal represents a better deal for them than the entire West Bank-Gaza-East Jerusalem entity, and much better than a checkerboard West Bank component will provide, perhaps they can bring themselves to abandon their demand for East Jerusalem.

Militant Palestinian organizations, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, demand all of "Palestine" and thus the annihilation of the State of Israel. Of course, the international community, under the auspices of the UN, disagrees. There is an interesting semantical argument regarding the term "Palestine." The words "Palestine" and "Palestinian" derive from the words "Philistia" and "Philistine." Through the centuries, Greeks, Romans, and Europeans used the word "Palaestina/Palestine" to include the former "land of Israel," and this practice was continued in the 20th century. If "Palestine" were applied as originally, only to "the land of the Philistines," this proposal would meet the demand for all of Palestine. Moreover, historical research suggests that the Palestinians probably have a stronger genetic link to the ancient Philistines than any other people group. (What if future genetics studies proved this true?)

Most of the world is now demanding that the Palestinian problem be solved and be solved soon. And it will not be solved until the Palestinians get their own independent and autonomous state. In late 2001, President Bush announced that he and his administration favored the establishment of a Palestinian state. No U.S. president had ever made this affirmation. And the UN Security Council soon endorsed the idea. President Bush has been reluctant to become involved in this most intractable dispute because he acknowledges that (1) the previous administration expended much effort to solve it and failed, and (2) his administration has nothing new to offer. Then why not try to break the stalemate by proposing this new (yet old) border arrangement and see if the two parties will agree to it?

(This proposal is further elucidated in my book, entitled *Palestine is Coming: The Revival of Ancient Philistia*. For the existence of Israel, the establishment of the State of Palestine, and peace between both peoples, I remain.)