**Taub and Yemini's house of cards**

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In November 1988, the PLO recognized the partition resolution (181), which means recognition of a Jewish state in Israel. A month later, it recognized Resolution 242, which means recognition of the State of Israel on the 1967 lines, leaving the Palestinian state 22% of Palestine, as Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) told Channel 2 in 2012: "The West Bank and Gaza are Palestine, the rest is Israel". These decisions led to the mutual recognition of the PLO and Israel in 1993 and the signing of the Oslo Accords.

The dramatic change that took place with the recognition of UN resolutions did not result from the adoption of the Israeli narrative or the relinquishment of the Palestinian narrative, but occurred despite the firmness of this narrative in the Palestinian consciousness and position. In the run-up to its declaration of a Palestinian state in 1988, the Palestinian National Council announced its agreement to the division of the land into two states "despite the historical injustice imposed on the Palestinian Arab people". Four years later, senior PLO official Faisal Husseini wrote: "When the PLO outlined its plan, we were fully aware that such a plan would not do our people any real and absolute justice. Because pure justice means ... historical rights, meaning a return to Palestinian land". In other words, the PLO understood that the geo-strategic reality that had emerged - the collapse of the USSR, the "exile" of the Palestinian leadership to Tunisia, the growth of Hamas, the growth of alternative leadership in the West Bank and more - necessitated a change in attitudes. (Similar to the change expressed in Ariel Sharon's speech to justify the disengagement from Gaza). The change necessitated a move from a perception of "all or nothing" to a perception of "half the glass full".

The PLO understood that the denial of international decisions by the Palestinians since the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate, excluded them from the international community and deprived them of the opportunity to obtain their rights, which according to the organization were robbed of them. Recognition of the decisions meant entry into the international community, assuming that it would assist in the realization of the rights of the Palestinians within the framework of its decisions, chief among them Resolution 242. The PLO responded to the Oslo process not with a letter of unconditional surrender, but with international decisions and interpretations, which sees all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as occupied territories that Israel must withdraw from, as part of a permanent agreement to be negotiated and include a just solution to the refugee issue.

Israel, for its part, entered the Oslo process for reasons of demography, the price of the first intifada, the rise of the Iranian threat and more. Similar to the political process with Egypt and Jordan, with the Palestinians Israel also felt that it could not return to the 1967 lines due to three interests and constraints it had beyond these lines: security, the holy places in Jerusalem, and the settlers.

The big challenge for the parties and mediators was to find creative solutions, which on the one hand would be included in the interpretation of international decisions and would meet the Palestinian basic position, and on the other hand would fit Israel's interests and constraints - without demanding any side to give up its narrative and accept the other.

Gadi Taub (Haaretz, 9.4), and Ben Dror Yemini (Yedioth Ahronoth, 2.4), serve as mouthpieces for Benjamin Netanyahu's position and right-wing governments, and are unwilling to accept the "half glass full" approach. Even if I ignore the collection of third-and-fourth hand journalistic sources that the two presented as opposed to the detailed argument I presented in my article, at the heart of their position is the demand for Palestinians to renounce their national narrative - the one that creates the Palestinian consciousness and connects the Palestinian people, scattered in Israel, in the territories and in Arab countries (imagine that the Jewish people in the Diaspora will be required to exclude from the Siddur the prayer "for next year in Jerusalem").

Taub and Yemini are demanding that the Palestinians surrender unconditionally even before Israel agreed to accept the Palestinian concession of 78% of Mandatory Palestine territory. They seek to conduct the negotiations from the perspective of a “zero-sum game,” which characterizes wars rather than attempts at compromise and agreements. As PLO senior Abu Ala described it at the final of the 2000 Camp David Conference: "For us, this means that we have only 22% of historic Palestine left, the rest is yours. We recognized Israel, within safe borders, with security arrangements. You did not see this as a Palestinian concession. For you, everything is yours. As if we had never been here. You put this huge historical concession in your pocket and you continued to make demands".

Taub, Yemini and others deliberately cling to the refugee issue to justify their belief that the Palestinians want the destruction of Israel. Even they are forced to agree that during the negotiations over the years the parties have agreed on principles for resolving tensions between the Palestinian position and Israel's interests in the context of the other core issues: Exchange of territories to resolve the border issue (as was done with Jordan) that will leave most of the settlers under Israeli sovereignty, demilitarization to meet security needs (as was done with Egypt), and division of neighborhoods in East Jerusalem according to the demographic line.

I will therefore expand on the issue of refugees, on which Taub and Yemini build their house of cards, to illustrate the differences between the two approaches: the one that seeks compromise, and the one that requires unconditional surrender.

In order to resolve the refugee issue, it must be understood that there are two levels in this field: one is, in principle, the recognition of the "right of return"; And the second is practical, the realization of the "right of return" - and the two levels must be distinguished in the context of the Israeli interest and acted accordingly.

At the principle level, the Palestinian leadership demands recognition by Israel of the "right of return" of refugees, as emphasized at the end of the 2000 Camp David Conference by senior PLO senior Nabil Shaath: "We are in the process of returning every right that was stolen from us in 1967 and every right that was stolen from us in 1948 - at least when it comes to refugee rights". This is the Palestinian narrative. According to the Palestinians, the refugee issue is part of the historical injustice done to them by the international community when they denied their right to self-determination at the end of the First World War.

But what is the real threat in the context of refugees in terms of Israel's essential interest? The fear that the mass return of refugees will make the Jews a minority in the country and undermine the economy and society in Israel.

Here we must turn to the practical level, which can bridge the gap between the Palestinian demand and the Israeli interest, as Israel understood even before the Camp David summit. The Research Division of the Israel Defense Forces clarified to the Israeli government in 2000 that "the issue of territory is a fundamental issue in the eyes of the Palestinians, while the right of return is (only, SA) an important bargaining chip against Israel".

One can point to a turning point in the Palestinian position as expressed by the PLO regarding the exercise of the "right of return" during the exchange of letters between Abu Iyad, Arafat's deputy, and the US State Department in 1988, in which Abu Iyad wrote: "The right of return cannot be realized while harming Israel's interests, but must take into account the situation created since 1948 ... We understand that a complete return is no longer possible ... We are not completely unrealistic when we consider how to exercise this right. It must not be an unbridgeable obstacle". This position was maintained throughout the rounds of negotiations. In Annapolis 2008, Mahmoud Abbas said: "It would be unreasonable to ask Israel to take in five million refugees or even a million refugees ... this would mean the end of the State of Israel".

And most important of all: this position is reflected in the numbers that the Palestinians mentioned in the negotiations, when they demanded a symbolic return of refugees to Israel. Brigadier General Udi Dekel, head of the Administration of Negotiations with the Palestinians in Annapolis, recently published: "The lowest number which Erekat mentioned was 80,000 refugees. Mahmoud Abbas agreed to the principle that Israel, as a sovereign state, will have the right to determine who enters its territory and who is recognized as a citizen of the state. It was also agreed between the parties that most refugees would be settled by agreement in Palestine, in the 'host' countries in which they currently reside, or in other countries expressing a desire to settle refugees in their territory" (The Institute for National Security Studies, February 2021).

Thus, according to first-hand testimony, the Palestinians demanded the return of between 80,000 and 100,000 refugees (a number that Israel agreed to absorb as early as 1949, at the reconciliation conference in Lausanne); That is, no more than 1.5% of all registered refugees. In contrast, Israel offered the return of between 5,000 (in Annapolis) and 40,000 (in Taba) refugees. Both of these numbers are completely negligible for Israel demographically, economically and socially. Those who believe otherwise can be "reassured" that a permanent agreement will include the revocation of the Israeli residency of 350,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, in exchange for receiving Palestinian citizenship, which in the final balance of a permanent settlement will increase the Jewish population in Israel by 2% -2.5%.

Some will insist that Israeli recognition of the right of return will open the door to future Palestinian claims (Israel has so far refused to recognize it and has offered softened formulations regarding its involvement in the refugee issue) - but it will not. The implementation of the agreement, as worded in the various drafts, will be considered by the Palestinians as the implementation of Resolution 194, and will be considered the end of the conflict and the end of the claims. This is repeated in the Arab League's peace initiative from 2002 and in the PLO's position papers. And in the words of Palestinian national poet Mahmoud Darwish: ""(The) trace of the Nakba must be eliminated through a permanent solution based on the principle of two states for two peoples. The establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel will lead to a historic reconciliation between the two peoples"(April, 1998).

The orientalist Mati Steinberg presents in the introduction to his book, "Standing for Their Fate" (Yedioth Books), the threat inherent in the perception of Taub and Yemini, as well as Netanyahu and a friend his likes: "The simplistic view that reduces diversity to one piece (such as: 'The goal of all Palestinians is to destroy the State of Israel no matter what'), creates, perhaps, a sense of meaning and clarity in such a complex reality, but it is inconsistent with the diverse reality ... (it) plays into the hands of those on the Palestinian side who strive to abolish diversity and return to the original absolute goals".

Whoever seeks to reach a compromise-based peace agreement must find ways that will allow the parties to descend from the high ideals of their narratives to the ground of reality. Anyone who clings to the conflicting narratives of the parties and paints the world in black and white, and seeks to reach a solution to the conflict from a concept of zero-sum game - cannot be a partner, and perpetuates the conflict according to the perception of extremists on both sides. Those who espouse such a view, which absolves any responsibility from one side, actually justify the continuation of the conflict, and ignore the moral, social, security and political deterioration of the State of Israel as a result of the continued occupation.