Do not evacuate settlements before you know whether the border is realistic

Shaul Arieli, Haaretz, August 20, 2018

Uri Mark and Gideon Levy discuss in their articles, the same subject, but each on a different level from the other. While the former is trying to get to the bottom of the feasibility of the two-state solution on a practical level, the latter goes on in an attempt to refute the other's claim on the level of consciousness and justice, and ultimately both are marching in good faith far from the target.

I would be the last to challenge Mark's factual assertion that the settlement enterprise failed to achieve its political goal: to create the physical and spatial conditions that would allow Israel to annex all the territories (Gush Emunim, the Likud) or some of them, (Alon Plan, Labor) without harm to the Zionist vision of a democratic state with a Jewish majority.

After the evacuation of the Gaza Strip, the question of separation of the Jewish population from the Arab in the West Bank, relates to the ability to implement it at a reasonable national price. The more the population manages a journal routine in the form of "two eggs" rather than an "omelet", it is easier to implement; Populations living in a common fabric of life (settlements, roads, labor, commerce, etc.) require complex, difficult and expensive solutions to the point they become impossible.

Due to concern over international criticism, the government blocks annexation attempts, but promotes the application of laws on settlements. An in-depth examination of the demographic and spatial data of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank reveals the following: The Palestinians enjoy a solid majority of 82% of the population, as well as in each of the "security zones" established in the Alon Plan (1967-8) and the Sharon Plan (1977); 109 out of 126 Jewish localities belong to regional councils, and are small in size and population. In half of them there are fewer than 200 families, and in the second half less than 1,000 families; 75% of the Israelis live on the Green Line, half of them in Modi'in Illit and Beitar Illit;

Israelis do not use two-thirds of the West Bank roads; 60% of the Israeli workforce in the Judea and Samaria District work within the Green Line, the Israelis process less than 100,000 Dunams, the vast majority of them in the Jordan Valley and with two exceptions, there are no significant Israeli industrial zones and in all of them, the workers are Palestinians; Israel's control of the area relies mostly on military closure orders in more than 50% of Area C, and on a permanent and mobile military presence, whereas in the Israeli "blocs" there is Jewish dominance in demography and space, but these amount to only 4%-5% of the West Bank, while Palestinians enjoy demographic and spatial dominance in the rest of the territory.

Mark is wrong about two essential things. First, he repeats the common mistake among the Israeli leaders who conducted negotiations with the PLO on a permanent border: he and they seek to outline the border on the basis of Israeli interests and constraints. Most of them relate to the challenge of evacuating some of the settlers.

The Palestinians, on the other hand, sought to avoid harming the fabric of life of a large number of Palestinian communities and Palestinian territorial contiguity. The border lines proposed by Israel, as well as by the Palestinians, have never been examined in depth, methodically and scientifically, and there has been no reference to all the implications of the new border.

A professional examination must focus on a border line that will enable stability and not contain the seeds of the next calamity. The guiding principle for determining the border is to deal with the question of the price of a final status agreement. Under the parameter that guided the Annapolis negotiations in 2008 - the "1967 lines" as a basis and the exchange of territories in a 1: 1 ratio - there are three central costs for territorial exchanges, which are interdependent: 1. Evacuation of Jewish settlements from the West Bank and the absorption of their residents in Israel. 2. Damage to the Palestinian fabric of life and Palestinian continuity as a result of Israeli annexation of "blocs" and "fingers" of Jewish communities entering the heart of the Palestinian territory. 3. Damage to Israeli communities residing close to the border, inside the State of Israel due to the transfer of the land they use to Palestine. Any attempt to reduce the cost of the first component increases the costs of the other components: in annexing more Jewish communities, their agreed and forced evacuation is spared, and the cost of harming the Palestinian fabric of life and Israeli settlements close to the border rise; On the other hand, reducing the harm to Palestinians and Israeli residents means a wider evacuation of settlements.

The various costs must be recognized, understood and evaluated in depth, and optimal solutions should be proposed, in which the cost-benefit components will enable a reasonable coexistence of two states on the basis of a border that enjoys structural stability.

From a close perspective of the costs of the three components against the background of the spatial-physical situation, it can be determined that a separation based on territorial exchange of 4 percent is possible at a reasonable national price. This is not a matter of the evacuation of 46,000 Israelis, but rather of a number double in size, which from a practical point of view, Israel knows how to deal with their absorption in the aspects of decent housing and employment.

Mark is aware of this and states that "the evacuation of the 33 isolated settlements will not be sufficient to achieve a Palestinian agreement to end the conflict ... However, this is enough to draw a border between Israel and Palestine, unilaterally or by agreement for a limited period of time". Here lies his second mistake. All the political and social costs that will be required for a limited evacuation of the settlers without a permanent agreement and without any return on the part of the Palestinians are almost identical to the costs that will be required for a final status agreement. Therefore, there is no point in trying to "cross the abyss in two jumps". Moreover, the chances that the Palestinians will agree to another interim stage without the knowledge of the final map, 25 years after the Oslo Accords, are negligible.

At the same time, it is fair to note that this plan is binding, should Israel agree to negotiate with the Palestinians on the basis of the parameters of Annapolis, and sould the Palestinians change their position and refuse it.

I will not seek to also undermine Levy's statement that, contrary to the practical feasibility of a two-state solution, the political feasibility of implementing this agreement today is very low. This is mainly due to Netanyahu's withdrawal from the parameters of the negotiations set at Annapolis, and because his government is now led by the nationalist-messianic faction that aspires to annexation, and the political reality on the Palestinian side must be remembered for all its disputes, Gaza-West Bank, Hamas-Fatah And more. These do not contribute to presenting a unified Palestinian address to Israel and to the international community, which will be able to reach an agreement and primarily to implement it.

To this I would add that today, Israel's "awareness feasibility" of the two-state solution is also low. Public discourse in Israel is rooted in intimidation, incitement, lies and an ethos of the conflict. Without a drastic change in this discourse, the appropriate conditions can not be created to enable the leaders to make the painful moves and compromises that are at the basis of a compromise based solution, or of relative or historical justice.

Levy's mistake stems from his attempt to reach a solution based on justice, and worse, only on justice in accordance with the Palestinian narrative. Each side believes that it is right, and that its claim to the Land of Israel or all of Palestine enjoys political, legal, historical and moral strengths. One common narrative can not be created, based on sincere recognition by one side of the other's right to self-determination or reconciliation. Resolving the conflict is based on compromise, territorial division, in which each side remains with part of what it wanted but can still preserve its national narrative and territorial dreams.

The justification for a compromise on both sides rests on what I call "the consciousness of no choice". In other words, each side understands that it can not achieve or maintain its most important national interests without compromise with the other. For the Jews, the interest is to maintain a democratic state for the Jewish people, and for the Palestinians - to establish an independent Palestinian state. This was stated in the partition resolution of 1947: "The basic assumption behind the partition proposal is that the claims on Palestine, both of the Arabs and of the Jews, are both valid and can not be reconciled with each other. Of all the proposals that have been proposed, the division is the most practical ... and it will allow to satisfy some of the national demands and aspirations of both sides".

The Zionist movement agreed to partition (even if it had planned not to adhere to it) for the first time in 1937. The Palestinians refused all along, and therefore we can not accept Levy's claim that "the land of the Palestinian people was stolen from them mostly in 1948". It is sufficient from the declaration of Mahmoud Abbas (2008): "The opportunity for the partition of 1947 was lost, and before that the opportunity for the partition of the Peel Commission was lost", in order to recognize the historical truth regarding the Palestinian refusal to establish an independent state on part of the land.

Therefore, a permanent agreement between Israel and the PLO must be based on the accepted interpretation of UN Security Council Resolution 242, which includes the formula "land for peace", meaning, Palestine the size of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, no more than that (6,205 square kilometers). Levy should not presume be more Palestinian than the Palestinians, as a sober Abbas continued: "We do not want to lose another chance; hence we accepted the division of 1948 and 1967, which do not include more than 22% of historic Palestine".

Mark and Levy must internalize that those who seek to find a solution to the conflict can not only ask for their interests or justice, but only a compromise based on the reality on the ground, on international decisions, on the existence of a stable border and on the political capabilities of the parties.