**Peter Beinart Doesn’t Realize That the Israeli-Palestinian Divide Is Too Wide to Bridge**

**Shaul Arieli, Haaretz, July 24, 2020**

[**https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-beinart-doesn-t-realize-that-the-israeli-palestinian-divide-is-too-wide-to-bridge-1.9016379**](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.haaretz.com%2Fopinion%2F.premium-beinart-doesn-t-realize-that-the-israeli-palestinian-divide-is-too-wide-to-bridge-1.9016379%3Ffbclid%3DIwAR2qwC9poA8sgY5LinK9BJ5yEeAjNX0g6cw_roY3RRR16qJI_B4vNPO5DLs&h=AT1nboInmt_zcrFpxO4WUHLk7JhXHJy63CfTVX7QtzeIZidnHZreAFc0TMnE4RbiksCxu5sHN0fphEaiFW6B0Pz27EdZdvI7n29XA0HFArSfK3t0pMJLPX_9UpQzcE83fAP4&__tn__=-UK-R&c%5b0%5d=AT3cLTxrJ2Ud6zPmsPW46U_YIqfjALrBBeDNWNKERv-JKZxV8YPcdW_vM7Swt9fDNzLsqSMG20GEeXhVygNcQJrTak0GM2gpOmZfhbKdS2sKeIe1IJFu3TDcEgw93oom6dhAvAP3X71HcbjYBWb4suHii6YZnCMr1HVk1pAYRE06ljnjNKb0MoTkVvgI)

Last week Gideon Levy heaped praise on Peter Beinart’s New York Times piece in which the American columnist wrote that the two-state solution was dead due to the irreversible number of settlers in the West Bank. The two pundits conclude that one state should be established since, as Beinart says, “The goal of equality is now more realistic than the goal of separation.”

The contribution of journalists of Beinart’s caliber is often expressed as a simple description of a complex reality. But in this case his statement is tantamount to an attempt to explain why people on the other side of the earth don’t fall off, using the argument that the world is flat. It’s catchy, simple, but in no way reflects reality, which should include better knowledge of the situation on the ground rather than the embracing of official data.

Beinart’s argument includes two complementary arguments. The first is that the number of settlers has made the two-state solution impossible. The second is that one state is the desirable solution. Regarding the first claim, here are some facts.

First, the Israeli settlements are not integrated with the population of the West Bank. Sixty-two percent of the settlers work in Israel, and 25 percent work in their own communities’ school system, which is disproportionately subsidized. Only a few percent are employed in agriculture and industry, where 99 percent of the labor is provided by Palestinians; the road system serving the settlers is almost separate, lacking any logic in terms of planning.

There is no common web of interactions between adjacent settlements save for a few exceptions, with no social or cultural interaction between Palestinians and Jews.

Second, there’s the demographic and spatial reality. The Gaza Strip, with a population of 2.1 million Palestinians, has not one Israeli resident. In other words, there is total separation. For 20 years, the number of Israelis in the West Bank has constituted 18 percent of the population, similar to the percentage of the Arab minority in Israel on the eve of the state’s establishment.

With a two-state solution, Israelis who wished to do so could receive the choice of staying put as Palestinian residents. In the southern West Bank, south of the Gush Etzion settlement bloc, and in the north, north of Nablus, the ratio of Arabs to Jews is 40 to 1. In other words, they are segregated in those areas.

Ninety-nine percent of private land in the West Bank is owned by Palestinians. The built-up area of all the settlements doesn’t reach 2 percent of the West Bank. Half the settlers live in three large cities that hug the 1967 border, the Green Line, or Jerusalem. With a land swap of less than 4 percent of the total area, one could leave 80 percent of Israelis now living beyond the Green Line under Israeli sovereignty, excluding the city of Ariel.

Thus, there already is separation. Israel certainly has the ability to absorb the rest in terms of housing and employment.

Regarding the argument that a one-state solution is desirable, I’d like to pose several questions. How can a country with a per capita GDP of $40,000 absorb a population less than one-tenth as rich? Would the Jewish population accept the intolerable drop that would occur in health, welfare and education services with the absorption of a population equal in number where 98 percent occupy the lowest socioeconomic strata? Or would we witness a brain drain and an emigration of young people?

Would Palestinians serve in the army of “Israstine”? What would happen with Palestinian refugees – would they return to “Israstine,” giving the cfaountry a substantial Arab majority? Who would shoulder the financial burden of absorbing and rehabilitating them?

Has Beinart seen the results of a survey by the Institute for National Security Studies showing that 78 percent of Israelis are unwilling to grant residential or civil rights to Palestinians living in areas Israel might annex? These people support apartheid and oppose any relinquishing of control by Jews.

More than 70 years since a UN committee’s 1947 report on partition determined that Palestine contained Jews and Arabs different in their lifestyle and political interests, this statement is still valid. These differences fuel the struggle between two national movements, both of which have valid claims that are irreconcilable other than by partition, as stated in 1937 by the Peel Commission.

Yes, the feasibility of a two-state solution is currently very low, but not because of the number of settlers. The settlement enterprise in the last two decades has seen a dramatic drop in the number of Israelis moving to the West Bank; the increase in settler numbers stems largely from natural growth in the ultra-Orthodox community in two cities along the Green Line. Meanwhile, the socioeconomic ranking of the West Bank Jewish community has gradually declined. All this shows that this enterprise isn’t powerful enough to stifle the two-state solution.

As I’ve shown repeatedly in the past, there is a physical-spatial feasibility for such a solution in terms of the four core issues plaguing this conflict: borders, Jerusalem, security and refugees.

The low feasibility of a two-state solution stems from the lack of political feasibility, mainly on the Israeli side. It’s enough to note the declaration signed last year by more than 40 ministers and lawmakers on the right; they committed to block a two-state solution and establish one state for one people in the Land of Israel.

Beinart’s lack of familiarity with the spatial-demographic-social reality and Levy’s sincere yearning for equality have led them to conclude that a single state is possible without examining the diplomatic, cultural, security and economic aspects.

Levy must know that it’s impossible to impose communal life on peoples that don’t desire it and don’t respect each other. Beinart, as a political scientist, should focus on explaining the absence of political feasibility, since that’s where his strength lies. Let him propose moves that would effect change.