**Bennett, remember the Balfour Declaration?**

**Shaul Arieli, Haaretz, 28.10.2021**

[בנט, זוכר את הצהרת בלפור? // שאול אריאלי - הארץ (haaretz.co.il)](https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/.premium-1.10334238)

There is nothing like the Balfour Declaration, which this week marks 104 years since its delivery to Lord Rothschild by the British Foreign Secretary, to highlight how much Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict deviates from the Zionist movement's historic commitment. The declarations of his spokesmen and associates that "there is no political process with the Palestinians nor will there be," which means continued occupation and creeping annexation, indicate a shift in the Zionist vision, and the preference of the greater land of Israel over democracy and the Jewish identity of the State of Israel- which are the three pillars of Zionism. This policy misleads many good people, such as Joel Singer and Manny Mautner (Haaretz, October 22), and leads them to the conclusion that a two-state solution is no longer possible, and to propose other inapplicable solutions ("Confederation is a Disaster", Haaretz, July 2, 2019).

The British government did approve of "the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel," and pledged in a statement that it would endeavor "to facilitate the achievement of this goal"; But it also explicitly stated that it was conditional "on a clear condition that nothing be done that might infringe on the civil and religious rights of non-Jewish communities in the Land of Israel". That is, it will support the establishment of a state for the Jewish people in Mandatory Palestine-Israel - while not applying the principle of self-determination over Palestine - provided it maintains full civil and religious equality. The Balfour Declaration, which is the legal basis for the Zionist claim, was included in the Mandate in 1920 and ratified by the League of Nations in 1922, which reiterated that the commitment to establish a state for the Jewish people is given "while preserving the civil and religious rights of all residents of Palestina, regardless of race or religion".

This package deal was clear and acceptable to members of the Zionist leadership. Thus, when faced with the need to decide between the three pillars of Zionism, they always preferred a democracy with a Jewish identity, based on a Jewish majority, over the entire Land of Israel. This was the response of the Zionist movement to the Peel Commission's proposal in 1937, to the partition decision in 1947, and to the armistice agreements in 1949. Even after the establishment of the state, as Menachem Begin declared in 1972: "Zionism ... These are its foundations in the land of Israel, whose right to us cannot be challenged, there will be a Jewish majority, an Arab minority, and equal rights for all". And he went on to pledge: "We did not deviate, nor did we deviate, from this Torah ... in which the justice of our matter is folded'.

Bennett's refusal to conduct a political process with the Palestinians, and his support for the continued construction and development of the settlements, are in fact an official declaration of a discriminatory regime of the State of Israel, which grants rights according to national origin, and deprives some of the land's inhabitants. Such a regime contradicts the Balfour Declaration and the commitment made by the Zionist movement (as well as by the declaration of independence). This was clearly stated four years ago by Jonathan Allen, the British Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations, in his speech marking the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration: "Let us remember that there were two parts to the declaration, the second part was not fulfilled".

Things are not new. When Bennett launched the Jewish Home's "Stability Initiative " in 2012, which included annexation of Area C in the West Bank, he argued that it was the preferred solution because the annexation of the West Bank as a whole, like the two-state solution, "is not feasible, and both jeopardize the future of Israel for security, demographic and moral reasons". In order to maintain the Zionist priority - a democratic state with a Jewish majority - in his proposal at the time, he was careful to ensure full "citizenship" to 50,000 Palestinians living in the annexed territories, because "this would completely invalidate the apartheid argument".

Unfortunately for Bennett, Ayelet Shaked, Bezalel Smutrich and their friends, and fortunately for the State of Israel, the annexation moves that relied on the assumption that the Donald Trump administration would support them did not materialize. Joe Biden's election to the presidency of the United States has ruled out the possibility of official annexation. In the absence of such an option, Bennett, who opposes the two-state solution, has again chosen to perpetuate the creeping annexation and the discriminatory regime, because he still believes, as he mentioned regarding the annexation of area C, even though "the world will not recognize our sovereignty there… it is not too bad. It will get used to it over the years". That is, the world according to Bennett will continue to accept forever the political stalemate, occupation and discriminatory regime.

In the absence of the possibility of annexing parts of the West Bank without the full annexation of all its inhabitants, Bennett's policy would lead Israel into a binational state with an Arab majority and shatter the Zionist vision. The only possible alternative is a two-state solution for the two peoples based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and the parameters set out in the negotiations between Israel and the PLO in Annapolis, in 2008.

The great challenge facing Israeli society in this regard is the ability to internalize that the policy of creeping annexation is deliberately accompanied by an effort to create a distorted picture of reality in relation to the impact of the settlements on the two-state solution. This image has been adopted by the majority of the Israeli public, including those who support the two states, and understand that it is the preferred solution to ensure that the State of Israel is democratic, secure, with a Jewish majority and a society in the family of nations.

Singer and Mautner also fell into this deception trap, which led them to recommend a Confederate solution. They, like others, are basing their claims on a series of erroneous assumptions and data. If they would have examined them using the official CBS data and a simple map, they would have prevented themselves and the readers the continuation of the deception - which serves Bennett's policy.

According to them, "the number of settlers (excluding East Jerusalem) has increased to more than 500,000". But according to an official CBS figure, at the beginning of 2021, 257,451 Israelis lived in Judea and Samaria. They claim that "after the Oslo Accords, the settlements were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, including in the vicinity of and even within the concentrations of the Arab population". Factually, since the Oslo Accords, and even earlier, since the Rabin government made a decision in 1992 banning the construction of new settlements, only one new settlement has been established: Amichai, for the evacuees from Amona, according to the Netanyahu government's decision in 2016, with 208 Israelis.

If they meant the dozens of illegal outposts that have been built, then those - half of which are close to Route 60 and half of which are within the existing settlement areas - have no effect on the demographic balance and spatial control. The significant outposts were legalized by the Netanyahu governments as neighborhoods in the settlements, with the exception of three that were recognized as localities - Rachelim, Sansana and Baruchin, and in all three of them live less than 3,000 people.

In fact, all the settlements in the West Bank were established near the concentrations of the Palestinian population, with the exception of the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea (where less than 7,000 Israelis live), but this did not happen after Oslo, but from the late 1970s, with the approval of the Ariel Sharon Plan in the Begin government in October 1977, and the Matti Drobles program from the Settlement Division in 1979. With the exception of the Jewish community in Hebron, which numbers less than a thousand people and is located among a city of a quarter of a million Palestinians, no settlement was built within the Palestinian communities. The effect of the settlements at the back of the mountain, where the demographic ratio between Israelis and Palestinians is 1:30, on Palestinian continuity is null and void.

Contrary to what Mautner and Singer claimed, 73% of Israelis living across the Green Line (including East Jerusalem) live in localities not more than five kilometers from the Green Line and most of them live adjacent to the Green Line. If they looked at the CBS data from the last year, which continues a trend of more than 20 years, they would find that there is a negative migration balance in the Judea and Samaria region; and that the annual growth rests entirely on natural increase, more than half of which is donated by the two ultra-Orthodox cities, Modi'in Illit and Beitar Illit, located on the Green Line. That is, even if Israel insists on continuing Netanyahu's policy, to build in the small and isolated settlements and pave a set of bypass roads, all costing tens of billions, the proportion of the ultra-Orthodox in the two ultra-Orthodox cities in the settler population will increase, and so will the weight of the localities adjacent to the Green Line in the entire population of Judea and Samaria.

Thirdly, Mautner and Singer confuse the Trump initiative, launched in January 2020, supported by Netanyahu and rejected by the whole world, with the border line proposed by Israel in Taba in 2001, the Geneva initiative in 2003, the Annapolis in 2008, and finally by the "Commanders for Israel Security Movement" in 2017.

According to the Trump initiative, a convoluted and impractical border of 1,800 km was created, while "creating a series of extra-territorial Israeli and Palestinian islands", as the two wrote; but according to the border line proposed by all four of the above, this is a reasonable extension, without any enclaves on the Israeli or Palestinian side, while maintaining the territorial continuity of both sides, without harming the fabric of their lives.

In three points, Mautner and Singer are right: Israel has indeed increased the number of Israelis who will have to be re-absorbed in the Green Line from 19,000 in 1993 to more than 100,000 today. However, in research conducted by various organizations (such as the "Commanders for Israel's Security" movement), it was found that it is possible to provide a high-level response to their absorption in Israel in terms of employment and housing. As they claim, in some places confederate solutions will indeed be required, such as in the historic basin in Jerusalem. But these solutions are known and have already been proposed in rounds of negotiations between the parties. They are also right in saying that "the establishment of a bi-national state will be an act of madness", as it will indeed be a state in which there is a constant civil war.

If so, the biggest challenge facing the Israeli society is to add to the physical-spatial feasibility of the two-state solution, which exists entirely in the West Bank and Gaza, as part of a 4% exchange of territories scenario, the much-needed political feasibility. Without it, it will not be possible to realize what is possible. The adoption of Bennett's policy and the mask of deception and lies means giving up the possibility of getting Israel back on track and upholding the Zionist vision - in contrast to the two-state solution. This solution will leave Israel loyal to the Balfour Declaration, the Mandate and the Partition Plan, which are the legal and moral political basis for the establishment of the State of Israel and for securing its future.