

Robbie (Sholem) Skeist for the Collective (1975)

The Way to Peace: Two Peoples, Two States

We believe that the only hope for peace in the Mid-East lies in 1) guarantees for a secure existence for the state of Israel as a Jewish homeland, and 2) the creation of an independent state as a Palestinian Arab homeland.

Right now this proposal is unacceptable to both the Israeli government and the P.L.O. But minority voices within Israel, and to a lesser extent within the P.L.O., are considering this "two state" approach.

Arya Eliav is one prominent Israeli who calls for a Palestinian Arab state. Eliav came to Palestine in 1934, was active in the Haganah (underground Jewish army), and was elected secretary of the powerful Labour Party in 1970. He has said:

"The path Israel must take is to declare in principle its willingness to restore (to restore and not to retreat—there is an enormous difference between those notions) to the Palestinian Arabs most of the territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, so that there and *in the territories on the East Bank of the Jordan River they may found an independent and sovereign state of their own.*" (We have added the emphasis: most people who call for a Palestinian state demand only that Israel relinquish the West Bank, thus ignoring the Palestinians living under oppressive Jordanian rule in the East Bank. A demand that the Jordanians also give up territory for the Palestinian state might convince the Israelis—and us—that those making such a demand were truly pro-Palestinian, rather than simply anti-Israel.)

Dr. Mattityahu Peled, head of the Arabic Department of Tel Aviv University and formerly a major general and chief of logistics in the Israeli Defense Forces, is another widely respected Israeli peace activist. He is a leading figure in the Israel-Palestine Peace Council, which argues that the best step Israel can take to guarantee its security is to negotiate with the Palestinian Arabs on the basis of two peoples each needing a homeland.

Another group, the Israeli Committee for a Just Peace between Israel and the Arab Countries, was formed by a coalition of groups that hold positions

from slightly to far left of Israel's present government. It includes members from Mapam, Moked, Meri, Rakah, Siach, and Black Panthers (Sephardic Jews). The Committee urges that "Israel should pave the way for a direct dialogue between itself and the Palestinian people, in which each side will be represented by its own recognized leadership."

"The state of Israel," continues the Committee, "should express its readiness to negotiate with the PLO on the basis of mutual recognition, cessation of violent operations and a search for a peaceful settlement between a sovereign state of Israel and a sovereign state of Palestine."

These views are expressed daily in the Israeli press, debated on the floor of the Knesset, and dramatized in public demonstrations. Hopeful responses from the P.L.O. and support from friends of Israel in this country would help Eliav, Yozma and the Committee grow from a struggling minority to the dominant force in Israel.

Signs from the P.L.O.

No faction within the P.L.O. clearly recognizes Jewish peoplehood and the right of Jews to Israel as a national homeland. This should be remembered by those who place all of the blame for continued Israeli-Palestinian fighting on the Israelis. However, we can point to two important signs that give us some hope for P.L.O. flexibility.

Said Hammami, the London representative of the P.L.O., caused a stir in 1975 when he urged Israeli-Palestinian peaceful coexistence, calling for the creation of a Palestinian state "on a part of the Palestinian homeland."

Hammami accepted one of the most basic demands Israel would make of such a state: a pledge that the new Palestine would not attack Israel, backed by "the most stringent and effective international safeguards."

Hammami defined three major goals of the new state of Palestine. First, it would need "a massive injection of external aid" for "industrial, technological, and educational progress." The second task, so

reminiscent of Zionism, would be "to promote the ingathering of the Palestinian exiles now living in diaspora and their rehabilitation on their own soil."

"Thirdly," Hammami declared, "we would aim to open and maintain a continuous and developing dialogue with any elements within Israel who were prepared to meet and talk with Palestinians regarding the form of a mutually acceptable co-existence which might in time be developed between the two peoples." The P.L.O. spokesman expressed hope that Israel and the Palestinian state would encourage "a mutual penetration of commerce, industry, and cultural activities."

Hammami's remarks were repudiated by the official news agency of the P.L.O. Yet he remained the P.L.O. representative in London. Some Israelis who urge a "two state solution" say that Hammami represents a small but growing trend within the P.L.O. to accept a peaceful settlement.

Former presidential candidate George McGovern reports that in conversations with P.L.O. leader Yassar Arafat, Arafat claimed he would accept a separate Palestinian state, pledged to live in peace with Israel. We must emphasize however, that at this writing the public positions of Arafat and Hammami are still that their ultimate goal is the creation of a single state to replace Israel.

McGovern publicly urged Arafat to declare to the press and to Israel what he told McGovern in private but this has not happened. While we listen carefully to these various reports of privately stated moderation, they are no substitute for a public statement of willingness to negotiate—a statement that we have also asked of Israel.

We are encouraged by the formation of the "Israel Council for Israel-Palestine Peace." It has called for direct meetings *now* between Israelis and members of the P.L.O., to share ideas on how to work toward "the co-existence of two sovereign states, each of which will be the national home of its people." Members of the Council have met with P.L.O. representatives, and feel that peace may be possible. But with continued P.L.O. bombings, such as the explosions in Jerusalem following the U.N. resolution condemning Zionism as "a form of racism," it is hard to be optimistic about P.L.O. intentions. And the Israeli government, while it is fully justified in planning for its military defense, is blocking the most likely path to peace by not declaring its willingness to accept the creation of an independent Palestinian state formed on land including the West Bank,

providing that state would live in peace with Israel.

We challenge Israel and the P.L.O. and their supporters: what other path is there to peace, besides two independent states? Support for Palestinian Arab guerrilla groups will remain strong until there is a Palestinian Arab homeland. And the Jews of Israel—natives, refugees from Arab lands, and survivors of the Holocaust—will never give up their state. There *must* be both a secure Israel and a Palestinian national homeland.

Israel and the new Palestine, we hope, would develop economic ties, aiding each other with natural and scientific resources. Cultural and educational resources would be shared. Rights of the Arab minority in Israel and the Jewish minority in the new Palestine would have to be protected.

Join us in urging this plan for peace!