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Voices from the conflict: Israeli and Palestinian op-eds in The Guardian

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Introduction

In January 2011, The Guardian played a pivotal role in the release of the 'Palestine papers', a huge cache of documents that allegedly revealed the intimate details of a decade's worth of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Its editorial line on the purported revelations was unequivocal; the Palestinian negotiators had been 'weak'¹ and 'craven'² and their concessions amounted to 'the longest suicide note in history'.³

The nature of its criticisms, however, went beyond simply supporting a strong negotiating stance intended to create an independent Palestinian state under the best possible conditions. The Guardian's framing of the story suggested an underlying ambivalence to any two state solution that left Israel intact. Significantly, the broadsheet scandalised two alleged 'concessions': the acceptance of Israel as a Jewish state and the acknowledgement that Palestinian refugees and their millions of descendants would not be allowed into said state.

The Guardian's discomfort at these points suggested that while it supported Palestinian independence, it had no such commitment to Jewish independence and would have few qualms about Israel becoming an Arab-majority state. This was entirely in keeping with an editorial published a few months prior to the Palestine papers. 'Discriminatory by design'⁴ slammed a proposed loyalty oath on the grounds that it described Israel as a 'Jewish and democratic state', not least because it would 'pre-empt' negotiation about 'the right of return of Palestinian refugees to sovereign Israeli territory'.

Most recently, The Guardian's foreign leader editor David Hearst used a comment piece⁵ to openly posit the end of Israel as a Jewish-majority state. Citing the Palestinian claim that Israel could not be a democracy as long as it had a 'supremacist' (i.e. Jewish) character, Hearst eulogised a unitary state as a substitute for any two state solution to the conflict. That a single state would by necessity result in 'the end of Zionism, no less' was acknowledged, but the proposed negation of Jewish self-determination merited no further discussion.

But it is not just in these specific references that evidence for The Guardian's anti-Zionism emerges. Hostility to Israel's national character also informs much of the commentary that the broadsheet publishes from external contributors. While the publication of any single author does not imply that the paper endorses any or all of their views, comment pieces in general will reflect the editorial line of the paper. The publication of an author also inevitably grants them a degree of legitimacy, suggesting that their viewpoint is a valid contribution to the discussion at hand.

1 'Pleading for a fig leaf', The Guardian, (Editorial), 24 January 2011

2 'Pleading for a fig leaf', The Guardian, (Editorial), 24 January 2011

3 'Pleading for a fig leaf', The Guardian, (Editorial), 24 January 2011

4 'Discriminatory by design', The Guardian, (Editorial), 11 October 2010

5 David Hearst, 'Could Arab staying power ultimately defeat Zionism?', (Comment), The Guardian, 5 August 2011

‘Voices from the conflict: Israeli and Palestinian op-eds in The Guardian’ is a quantitative and qualitative analysis of this issue. It examines the outlook and arguments of the Israelis and Palestinians that were published in the print edition of the paper over the six month period between January and June 2011.

The report breaks the contributors down in four categories. **‘ Hamas supporters ’** includes the Palestinian authors with strong ties to the radical Islamist group, all of whom endorse violent attacks against civilians as part of an ideological campaign to destroy Israel.

‘ Arab nationalists ’ details the Palestinian authors who strongly advocated policies such as the right of return and the one state solution that reflected antipathy towards Israel’s role as the Jewish homeland.

‘ Palestinian negotiators ’ examines the two contributors who wrote exclusively about their relationship with the Palestine papers.

‘ Israeli contributors ’ discusses the Jewish Israeli authors who provided comment pieces, mainly on the regional implications of the Arab Spring.

For a detailed explanation of the report’s methodology, please refer to the Methodology section.

Executive Summary

- The Guardian published more op-eds by Palestinians than by Israelis during the first half of 2011, with eleven comment pieces by nine Palestinian contributors in comparison with six by four Israelis
- Three of the Palestinians who contributed op-eds during this period were either members of Hamas or strongly affiliated with it, and have endorsed terrorist attacks
- Four further Palestinians were secular nationalists who also reject Israel's legitimacy and endorse policies that would turn it into an Arab majority state
- All of the Israelis given op-eds are associated with the left-wing of Israeli politics that supports the concessions needed to create a Palestinian state in order to facilitate two states for two peoples
- The majority of comment pieces by Israeli contributors dealt with the repercussions of the Arab Spring, rather than directly with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself.

Contributors

1. Hamas supporters

During the first six months of the year, The Guardian published three opinion pieces by contributors affiliated with the Palestinian Islamist party Hamas. This meant that a third of all the Palestinian contributors represented an organisation that fundamentally rejects the possibility of any peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Hamas' long history of violence, including its preference for deliberately targeting civilians, is well-documented. Indeed, its ideological commitment to the destruction of Israel is set out at the start of its founding charter:

"Israel will exist, and will continue to exist, until Islam abolishes it, as it abolished that which was before it." [From the words of] The martyr, Imam Hasan al-Banna', Allah's mercy be upon him.⁶

Given that the charter has never been repudiated and that senior leaders continue to espouse irredentist policies and belligerent rhetoric, it is noteworthy that The Guardian repeatedly provided Hamas with a platform. It is also telling that none of the op-eds appear to have been commissioned with the understanding that their inclusion might be in any way contentious, or that the extremist nature of the organisation should be acknowledged. Instead of being resigned to the periphery, The Guardian chose to seek Hamas' perspective on several major developments, suggesting that it sees the group as just as legitimate as any other party involved in the conflict. The publication of these op-eds came despite all three authors having endorsed exactly the kinds of violent attacks against civilians that have made Hamas notorious.

Osama Hamdan

The first of these op-eds came in January, during the week that The Guardian published the 'Palestine papers', a huge batch of leaked documents that purported to reveal the inner workings of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations between 1999 and 2010. Much of the content suggested that there was broad consensus around the positions that had been outlined by the 2001 'Clinton parameters', arguably the clearest formula for a viable two-state solution. Specifically, the Palestinian negotiators appeared ready to compromise on issues such as settlements, refugees and holy sites in Jerusalem.

On the third day of its coverage The Guardian offered Osama Hamdan, the head of Hamas' international relations department, the opportunity to give his verdict on the Palestine papers. Hamdan has justified the exact tactics and aims that have resulted in Hamas being labelled a terrorist organisation, arguing that suicide attacks on civilian buses are acceptable since 'anyone who comes to live in a war zone is a

⁶ 'The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement – Hamas', MEMRI - <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1609.htm>

combatant, regardless of whether he wears a uniform'⁷, and explaining the 'final goal of the resistance':

'We are making the preparations for a confrontation. This is not because we need to be prepared for an Israeli act of aggression – after all, aggression is intrinsic to this entity – but because the final goal of the resistance is to wipe this entity off the face of the Earth. This goal necessitates the development of the capabilities of the resistance, until this entity is wiped out.'⁸

Predictably, Hamdan was vociferous in his criticism of the concessions that appeared in the leaked documents. **'The Palestinian cause has been betrayed. But no more'**⁹ accused the PLO of 'collaborating with the occupiers', and branded them 'stooges and tools for the repression of the Palestinian people.' Hamdan went as far as stating that if a peace deal had been signed on the basis of the concession the Palestinians were apparently willing to make, it would have represented 'the biggest act of treason in the region's history'. Not content with merely condemning the Palestinian Authority, Hamdan stated that Hamas would also be taking 'practical measures' against their rivals, a worrying notion given the group's tendency to execute those deemed to be 'collaborators'¹⁰.



Osama Hamdan, head of Hamas' international relations department.

Azzam Tamimi

In May, The Guardian published an opinion piece by Dr Azzam Tamimi on the implications of the Arab Spring for the Palestinians. Tamimi, a British based academic

7 'Hamas representative in Lebanon Osama Hamdan Justifies Suicide Bombings in Buses: Israeli Soldiers Ride Those Buses', MEMRI - <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1527.htm>

8 'Hamas representative in Lebanon Osama Hamdan Justifies Suicide Bombings in Buses: Israeli Soldiers Ride Those Buses', MEMRI - <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1527.htm>

9 Osama Hamdan, 'The Palestinian cause has been betrayed. But no more', (Comment), The Guardian, 26 January 2011

10 'Under Cover of War: Hamas Political Violence in Gaza', (Report), Human Rights Watch – 20 April 2009

of Palestinian origin, has been previously described by The Guardian as an ‘advisor’¹¹ to Hamas. He regularly defends their policies and has lionised them as the ‘legitimate representative of the Palestinian people’¹² and ‘the most loyal to the [Palestinian] cause’.¹³

Tamimi is suitably forthright in his views about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, his opinions entirely in line with those of Hamas. He rejects Israel’s right to exist and has described the Jewish state as a ‘cancer’¹⁴ and a ‘black chapter in the history of humanity’.¹⁵ Tamimi is perhaps most famous for a 2004 appearance on the BBC’s ‘HARDtalk’ programme¹⁶, in which he repeatedly refused to describe the deliberate killing of civilians as ‘murder’, defended suicide bombings as a ‘noble cause’ and even expressed his own desire to conduct such an act.

In ‘**Our freedom is now closer**’,¹⁷ Tamimi argued that ‘the Arab revolutions are the best news the Palestinians have had for decades’. The reasoning behind this was that the new democracies would invariably be ‘anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian.’ Notably, Tamimi didn’t countenance a situation whereby Arab democracies took a pro-active role in enabling a two state solution, instead preferring to portray the conflict as a zero-sum game. He also cited favourably the opinion of his ‘old friend’ Khaled Meshal – head of Hamas – that ‘it would not be too long before Palestine was free.’ While Tamimi did not specify what form the freedom of Palestine would take, the guiding ideology of both Tamimi and Meshal suggests that neither would consider it complete until Israel was destroyed as well.

Musa Abumarzuq

The third op-ed from a Hamas contributor came later that month. May saw the formal rapprochement between Hamas and their secular rivals Fatah, with both parties unexpectedly declaring their intention to form a unity government. The prospect of the Palestinians no longer being politically divided meant that Israel could now negotiate with one representative body; however, it also raised the question of what such a body’s stance on negotiations would be.

The Guardian’s response to this event was to once again provide a senior member of Hamas the opportunity to state the party line. Musa Abumarzuq, deputy head of the organisation’s political bureau, used the opportunity to rail against those who condemned the unity declaration. Abumarzuq’s previous statements showcase the exact attitudes that triggered those condemnations.

11 Anshel Pfeffer, ‘Israeli envoy in Guardian row’, The Jewish Chronicle, 11 December 2011

12 ‘HARDtalk’, BBC, 22 January 2008

13 ‘HARDtalk’, BBC, 22 January 2008

14 ‘“Dr” Azzam Tamimi Declares Support For Terrorism’ - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zh6q02J6dJk>

15 ‘“Dr” Azzam Tamimi Declares Support For Terrorism’ - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zh6q02J6dJk>

16 ‘HARDtalk’, BBC, 2 November 2004

17 Azzam Tamimi, ‘Our freedom is now closer’, (Comment), The Guardian, 2 May 2011

In an illuminating interview¹⁸ with islamonline in 2008, Abumarzuq's gave detailed responses to a variety of questions. He explained that even if Israel were to withdraw from the West Bank Hamas would not recognise it as this would mean 'giving up our right to the rest of Palestine.' Abumarzuq further clarified that this was not a matter of failing to recognise that Israel actually physically existed; 'the problem is that it doesn't have the right to'.

On the issue of violence, he stated that Hamas 'was and still is a resistance movement and it will remain to be so'. Abumarzuq, who expressed his belief that 'the Zionist movement owns the biggest share' of Western media organisations and that the two biggest such organisations 'are owned by Jews', also sounded a note of dissatisfaction as to how Hamas' 'resistance' is portrayed by media outlets such as Reuters:

'When you check the political terminology that Reuters uses in dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict, you find that [for example] they use the term "suicide bombing" instead of "martyr operation."'

The conviction that Hamas was treated unfairly by 'the West' was readily apparent in '**Welcome Hamas's conciliation with Fatah**'¹⁹. Abumarzuq directed most of his ire at President Obama, who had described the unity declaration as an 'obstacle to peace'. Criticisms of Obama included the precondition that Hamas recognise Israel, but without also including a corresponding precondition on Israel to accept 'the right of return'. Abumarzuq stated that the 'core issue of our cause is the right of every refugee to return to their home', signifying that the organisation is not willing to even enter talks with Israel until it agrees to absorb millions of Palestinians – ending its existence as a Jewish state. Abumarzuq declined to give the real reason for the Islamist organisation's rejection of Obama's precondition; namely that it is ideologically opposed to the very concept of any Jewish sovereignty in the region. Similarly, when he chastised Obama for denying Palestinians 'the right to resist the Israeli occupation', he did not mention that Hamas regards all of Israel as occupied Palestinian territory, to be liberated by force.

2. Arab nationalists

Not all Palestinians clamour for the destruction of Israel in the fiery theological language of Hamas. However, even amongst secular nationalists, there is a strong tendency to deny the legitimacy of a Jewish state in the Middle East. Under the mantle of equality and human rights, these rejectionists support one or both of two related projects; the one state solution and the right of return. Either one of these would mean the end of Israel as a distinct entity with a Jewish majority and annul the Zionist goal of national sovereignty for the Jewish people.

¹⁸ 'Interview on Hamas', islamonline.net, 25 August 2008

¹⁹ Musa Abumarzuq, 'Welcome Hamas's conciliation with Fatah', (Comment), The Guardian, 24 May 2011

The one state solution envisions a single state containing the territory and inhabitants of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, as opposed to a two state solution that would formalise the division between Jewish and Arab majority areas. A one state solution is often touted as a bi-national state or a state for all of its citizens; however, the reality is that demographically it would rapidly, if not immediately, become an Arab-majority country with a Jewish minority. Accordingly, it is viewed as a transparent attempt to quash Jewish self-determination.

Similarly, the right of return is also regarded by Israelis as little more than a demographic weapon. The arrival of millions of Palestinians, refugees from 1948 and several generations worth of their descendents would tip the scales in favour of Arab inhabitants in Israel, once again paving the way for it to become an Arab-majority state. The cynical exploitation by successive Arab regimes of their Palestinian refugee populations, who have been deliberately denied citizenship and kept in political limbo in their host countries for decades, is testament to the belief that the creation of Israel in 1948 was a temporary aberration to be rectified at a later date.

The vast majority of the Palestinians who contributed op-eds during this period openly call for the enforcement of the right of the return, the dissolution of Israel into a larger Arab state, or both. Many of them did so in the op-eds themselves. The regularity with which The Guardian published these individuals suggests that it believes that it is not only acceptable but also preferable that Palestinians maintain such demands.

Karma Nabulsi

During the week of the Palestine papers, The Guardian published three op-eds by secular nationalists who reject the legitimacy of Israel. The first of these was by Dr Karma Nabulsi, an Oxford academic and former representative of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Despite her previous membership of the group, she readily joined The Guardian's chorus of condemnation for the PLO's negotiations with Israel.

Nabulsi's contradictory attitudes towards Palestinian and Jewish nationalism were evident in an open letter to Mahmoud Abbas that she co-signed in 2010²⁰. While the letter stated that the authors were committed to the 'inalienable right to self-determination' of the Palestinians, they saw no contradiction between this and also demanding 'the right of return for Palestinian refugees and their descendants [to Israel].'

Stating that '[n]o Palestinian institution or leader has ever accepted an exclusive Jewish claim to Palestine, which is irreconcilable with the internationally recognized rights of the Palestinian people', the letter contained a withering response to any hint that the Jewish people might have an equal right to self-determination:

'During a 9 June meeting with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, you

²⁰ 'Don't deny our rights: open letter to Mahmoud Abbas', The Electronic Intifada, 29 July 2010 - <http://electronicintifada.net/content/dont-deny-our-rights-open-letter-mahmoud-abbas/1075>

reportedly said: “I would never deny [the] Jewish right to the land of Israel,” a statement that you have yet to retract. We regard this announcement, which adopts a central tenet of Zionism, as a grave betrayal of the collective rights of the Palestinian people. It is tantamount to a surrender of the right of Palestinian citizens of Israel to live in equality in their own homeland, in which they have steadfastly remained despite the apartheid regime imposed on them for decades. It also concedes the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes.’

Such high regard for the collective rights of Palestinians, at the expense of any consideration for Jewish collective rights, was apparent in **‘This seemingly endless and ugly game of the peace process is now finally over’**.²¹ The Palestinian negotiators were depicted as ‘villains’ who had ‘polluted the Palestinian public sphere’, men responsible for the ‘secretly negotiated surrender’ of every core right of the Palestinians – chief amongst which was the ‘return for millions of Palestinian refugees’. While Nabulsi framed her critique in terms of the Palestinian ‘national cause’ – the effort to ‘obtain long denied freedom’ – having been betrayed, it was clear she also regarded the demand that millions of her co-nationalists be absorbed into Israel as paramount.



Palestinians attempt to breach Israel’s borders, Nakba day 2011

In a second op-ed for The Guardian, Nabulsi acknowledged that these were two separate goals. **‘Nakba day: we waited 63 years for this’**²² was written after hundreds of Palestinian protesters in Syria and Lebanon had attempted to breach Israel’s borders on Nakba day, the annual ‘day of catastrophe’ marking the anniversary of Israel’s creation. Since 1948, according to Nabulsi, the Palestinians had been struggling for ‘two things: liberation and return’. She continued to argue that the fate of the ‘7 million stateless Palestinian refugees’ – kept stateless by the Arab nations that host them - was separate to the ‘search for a state or the establishment of two’. For Karma Nabulsi, the end of the occupation and the

21 Karma Nabulsi, ‘This seemingly endless and ugly game of the peace process is now finally over’ (Comment), The Guardian, 24 January 2011

22 Karma Nabulsi, ‘Nakba day: We waited 63 years for this’ (Comment), The Guardian, 19 May 2011

creation of a Palestinian state would not be sufficient unless it also entailed Israel becoming a second Palestinian-majority state as well.

Ghada Karmi

The second op-ed published during the week of the Palestine Papers by a secular nationalist was by Ghada Karmi. Karmi, an academic at the University of Exeter, focused on the specific charge that Palestinian negotiators had surrendered the right of return, continuing the trend of demonising any possible compromise on behalf of the Palestinians.

Ghada Karmi's demand for the right of return fits in to her characterisation of Israel as an unacceptable intrusion into the Arab world²³. She has been unwavering in her rejection of a two state solution, which she has described as the 'selfish idea that each must own the land exclusively to the detriment of the other'²⁴, and helped draft a UN resolution in favour of a single state²⁵. Part of her reasoning for this is that a Palestinian state would not be able to accommodate all of the returning refugees, and so a unified state would be required to absorb them all²⁶. Notably, Karmi has acknowledged that the right of return to Israel would negate Jewish self-determination, but dismissed any possibility that this self-determination should supersede, in her eyes, 'the rights of the people at whose expense it was promulgated'²⁷.

'Only Palestinian refugees can give up their right of return'²⁸ expanded on this theme. Karmi identified that Israel had rejected the right of return as 'an unjustified threat to its existence' that would 'destroy its Jewish character', and noted that for many there was a 'quiet assumption that the return of refugees to Israel is impossible, and other plans must be devised.' However, she described the possibility to integrate the refugees into the Arab-host countries that the majority of them have actually been born in as 'impractical', and instead concluded that any decision to revoke the right of return would not only be illegal but also 'perpetuate the conflict for decades to come.' Karmi did not consider that sending millions of Palestinians to a state most had never visited to live amongst a people they had been in conflict with for well over half a century might be impractical; nor did she question whether continuing to demand the right of return might also perpetuate the conflict indefinitely.

Haneen Zoabi

The third op-ed by a secular nationalist during The Guardian's coverage of the

23 Ghada Kharmi, 'A voice from exile', (Interview), Middle East Policy, March 2010

24 Ghada Kharmi, 'The map must show a way home' (Comment), guardian.co.uk, 6 June 2003

25 Ghada Karmi, 'The future is one nation' (Comment), The Guardian, 25 September 2008

26 Ghada Kharmi, 'The map must show a way home' (Comment), guardian.co.uk, 6 June 2003

27 Ghada Karmi, 'By any means necessary' (Comment), guardian.co.uk, 18 March 2004

28 Ghada Karmi, 'Only Palestinian refugees can give up their right of return', (Comment), The Guardian, 25 January 2011

Palestine Papers was by Haneen Zoabi. Unlike Nabulsi and Karmi, Zoabi lives in the region, being an Arab citizen of Israel. In keeping with the other two writers, however, she also aligns herself with the wider Palestinian constituency that regards Israel's Jewish character as illegitimate²⁹.

Haneen Zoabi is an elected member of the Israeli parliament (Knesset), representing the Arab party Balad. Balad's official platform reflects a certain hypocrisy towards the twin nationalisms in Israel. On one hand, it calls for greater cultural and political autonomy for Palestinians, who should be recognised as a national minority. On the other, it rejects Israel's Zionist identity, despite it being the sole instance of Jewish cultural and political autonomy in a region populated with Arab and Muslim regimes. Zoabi has explicitly stated that she opposes Israel as a Jewish state, which she regards as racist³⁰, and has criticised it for not recognising Palestinians as 'the owners of this homeland'³¹.

'Palestinian negotiators must not take key decisions on our behalf'³² therefore devoted considerable space to this issue. Zoabi noted that, '[i]n practice, Israel has acted as a Jewish state since its founding', implicitly acknowledging that it had been created as a national home for the Jewish people. However, any recognition of Israel as a Jewish state was regarded as wholly unacceptable. Recognition of Israel's Jewish character would 'delegitimise the citizenship of Palestinians in Israel', give a 'legal and ethical justification' to discrimination against them, and 'effectively block the right of return of the Palestinian refugees'. Despite the fact that she is a member of the Israeli parliament and is able to make such accusations in a public forum without fear of censure or retribution, Zoabi concluded that it was impossible for Israel to be both Jewish and a democracy: 'Israel should be a democratic state, not an ethnic state.'

Zoabi appeared a second time in The Guardian in the wake of the Raed Salah affair. Salah, the head of the Northern branch of the Islamic movement in Israel, was detained while on a speaking tour of the UK in June. This was due to the serious allegations that he shared some of the more deplorable views³³ of Hamas, an organisation that he has previously been convicted of fund-raising for³⁴. Nonetheless, Zoabi whitewashed his reactionary Islamism and virulent anti-Semitism, instead presenting him as a much maligned champion of Palestinian rights.

29 Samira Shackle, 'The NS Interview: Haneen Zoabi', New Statesman, 6 August 2010

30 Samira Shackle, 'The NS Interview: Haneen Zoabi', New Statesman, 6 August 2010

31 Samira Shackle, 'The NS Interview: Haneen Zoabi', New Statesman, 6 August 2010

32 Haneen Zoabi, 'Palestinian negotiators must not take key decisions on our behalf' (Comment), The Guardian, 31 January 2011

33 Yoav Stern, 'Islamic Movement head charged with incitement to racism, violence', Haaretz, 29 January 2008

34 'Islamic Movement leader Salah freed on bail in UK', The Jerusalem Post, 17 July 2011



Raed Salah, head of the Northern branch of the Islamic movement in Israel.

'An Israeli trap for Britain'³⁵ once again railed against the apparently inherent racism of Israel's Jewish nature. Ignoring the specific charges against Salah, Zoabi instead argued that allegations of anti-Semitism were being used to suppress his criticism, rhetorically asking '[s]ince when has the struggle for equality become a form of racism?'. Palestinians in Israel had been 'struggling for [their] political rights', and 'confronting Zionist racism'; all the while Israel's 'persecution' of Salah had increased, as had 'its attacks on leaders of Palestinian citizens of Israel more generally.' This one-sided account came to the same conclusion as her earlier comment piece: that the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state was incompatible with the Palestinian 'struggle' for 'real democracy'.

Ahmad Samih Khalidi

Like Ghada Karmi and Karma Nabulis, Ahmad Samih Khalidi is an academic based in the UK. A former Palestinian negotiator, he is now senior associate member of St Antony's College, Oxford. After the announcement by the Palestinian Authority that it would seek recognition of statehood by the UN, Khalidi argued in *The Guardian* that such a move was not in the best interests of the Palestinians, on the grounds that it would leave Israel intact.

Khalidi's hostility towards the UN independence bid stems from a long-standing ambivalence towards the concept of two states for two peoples. He has repeatedly written in favour of a single state³⁶ and justified not accepting Israel as the Jewish homeland on the grounds that it would hazard the right of return. According to Khalidi, the problem with Salam Fayyad's institution-building programme was not just that it could 'devalue the already unconvincing currency of a two-state solution'³⁷ but also that security cooperation with Israel undermined 'those who seek to take up arms against the occupation.'³⁸ In 2007, he explicitly came out

35 Haneen Zoabi, 'An Israeli trap for Britain' (Comment), *The Guardian*, 30 June 2011

36 Ahmad Samih Khalidi, 'A one-state solution' (Comment), *guardian.co.uk*, 29 September 2003

37 Ahmad Samih Khalidi, 'The Palestinian Authority's state-first mistake' (Comment), *The Guardian*, 28 October 2009

38 Ahmad Samih Khalidi, 'The Palestinian Authority's state-first mistake' (Comment), *The Guardian*, 28 October 2009

against a separate Palestinian state³⁹, describing it as a ‘punitive construct devised by the Palestinians’ ‘worst historical enemies’, designed in part to ‘constrain Palestinian aspirations territorially’ and to ‘force them to give up on their moral rights’.

‘**A West Bank Anachronism**’⁴⁰ hinted at many of these issues, openly deriding the UN bid while alluding to mass appeal for a pan-Palestinian state instead. The bid, according to Khalidi, seemed to be ‘out of tune with prevailing Palestinian sentiment’ where ‘the goal of statehood has lost most if not all its glitter and resonance.’ This ‘inevitably constrained and incomplete form of statehood that would come at the expense of equally fundamental rights’ could only hope to address ‘part of the Palestinian condition on part of the land.’ In contrast to this, Palestinians were ‘forging a new common identity and common national goal’ that ‘aimed at the entirety of Palestine before 1948.’ This reference to Palestinian territory prior to Israel’s creation, and his support for expanding the confrontation with the ‘Zionist enterprise’, suggested that while Khalidi applauded this ‘much broader interpretation of [Palestinian] self-determination’, no interpretation of Jewish self-determination would be acceptable to him.

3. Palestinian negotiators

Of the nine Palestinian contributors during the six month time frame, only two were not long-term advocates of policies that run counter to the ‘two states for two peoples’ formula. Unlike the majority of the Palestinians who had comment pieces in The Guardian, they were neither linked to parties that call for the destruction of Israel, nor were they well-known for opposing its continued existence as a Jewish-majority state as part of any final settlement peace deal.

Both were negotiators intimately involved in the leaked documents that comprised the Palestine papers. It is noteworthy that while others were invited to provide an opinion on the documents, the only two Palestinians who did not fit the standard profile for contributors were those who actually had some insider knowledge of the negotiations. This suggests that their inclusion in The Guardian was the exception that proves the rule; unless the broadsheet was able to receive commentary from those at the heart of any given story, it resorted to a selection of suitably anti-Zionist individuals who could be relied on to condemn any and all Israeli policies.

This is not to say that the opinions expressed by the two Palestinians in this section differed significantly from those of the other contributors. On the contrary, they held Israel primarily responsible for the failure of peace talks and placed considerable emphasis on the refugee issue. However, given their positions, it is unsurprising that they would seek to place the blame for the continuation of the conflict on Israel and to defend their respective actions as being in the best interests of the Palestinian

³⁹ Ahmad Samih Khalidi, ‘Thanks, but no thanks’ (Comment), The Guardian, 13 December 2007

⁴⁰ Ahmad Samih Khalidi, ‘A West Bank anachronism’ (Comment), The Guardian, 19 April 2011

people.

Saeb Erekat

At the time of the publication of the Palestine papers, Saeb Erekat was the chief negotiator of the PLO and featured prominently in the leaked documents. Given the sheer scale of opprobrium being levelled at the Palestinian negotiators during this period, the main thrust of his comment piece was to defend the actions of the negotiators, arguing that the documents revealed that his team had been serious about achieving a final settlement to the conflict.

As one of the public faces of the Palestinian Authority, Erekat's pronouncements reflect their official stance on the peace process. In a 2002 op-ed entitled 'Saving the two-state solution'⁴¹, he declared that 'Palestinians are committed to two equal states for two equal peoples.' The Palestinian state is to be based on the 1967 borders, with east Jerusalem as its capital; discussions in negotiations suggested a high level of flexibility towards Israel keeping West Bank settlements as part of territorial swaps.⁴² Even when arguing that the right of return 'has been considered absolutely necessary for the stability of peace'⁴³, his language is ambiguous enough to appeal to the Palestinian diaspora while still offering Israel a certain degree of future leeway.

'**The Palestine papers are a distraction from the real issue**'⁴⁴, differed from every other comment piece by a Palestinian contributor during this period in that it sought to justify the actions of those named in the documents. Erekat wrote that the PLO had been involved in 'hard-fought but meaningful negotiations' to secure two states, which would include a 'just solution to the refugee issue'. Of note is that Erekat did not denounce any of the alleged concessions his team were accused of making, instead arguing that 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed', and that any such agreement would have to have been accepted by a referendum. While Erekat concluded that it was the Palestinians who had lacked 'a serious partner for peace', he did not argue, as others did, that Israel would have to be dismantled for peace to be achieved.

Ziyad Clot

The second contributor in this section was, like Erekat, a Palestinian negotiator. However, Ziyad Clot differed in that he did not see any value whatsoever to the peace talks conducted between Israel and the Palestinians. Indeed, he claimed responsibility for the leaking of the Palestine papers on the grounds that they

41 Saeb Erekat, 'Saving the Two-State Solution', (Comment), The New York Times, 20 December 2002

42 Ian Black and Seumas Milne, 'Israel spurned Palestinian offer of 'biggest Yerushalayim in history'', The Guardian, 23 January 2011

43 Saeb Erekat, 'The returning issue of Palestine's refugees', (Comment), The Guardian, 10 December 2010

44 Saeb Erekat, 'The Palestine papers are a distraction from the real issue', (Comment), The Guardian, 27 January 2011

exposed the 'deceptive farce' that the peace talks had become.

Clot's involvement in negotiations also led him to author 'Il n'y aura pas d'État palestinien' ('There will be no Palestinian state'), a book detailing his experience as part of the negotiation support unit (NSU) for the PLO. Clot argues that Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank have rendered the creation of an independent Palestine as part of a two state solution impossible.⁴⁵ Therefore his endorsement of a single unitary state appears to be the result of a deeply-rooted pessimism, rather than any ideological rejection of Israel's legitimacy.

In '**Why I blew the whistle about Palestine**'⁴⁶, Clot discussed his motivation for passing the documents that comprised the Palestine papers on to Al Jazeera. Throughout the article, he frequently disparaged the peace talks, describing them as an 'inequitable and destructive political process' during which 'biased terms were unilaterally imposed by Israel'. Instead of reaching a 'fair end' to the conflict, Clot stated that the peace process had 'deepened Israeli segregationist policies', justified the 'geographical fragmentation' of the Palestinian population, and allowed the 'intensification of the colonisation of the Palestinian territory.' He also felt that the documents revealed that the Palestinians had a 'strong commitment' to peace, but that they had made compromises which would be 'unacceptable in any other region of the globe.' Clot concluded by stating that the 'path to Palestinian self-determination' would require all Palestinians to reconcile in order to achieve their 'common future' of 'national liberation'. The argument that a two state solution was no longer viable meant that this common future would have to come at Israel's expense.

4. Israeli contributors

When contrasting the Israeli contributors with their Palestinian counterparts during this period, there are three noticeable differences. Firstly, there were fewer op-eds written by Israelis than by Palestinians and from a much smaller group of authors. Specifically, there were six comment pieces by only four Israeli contributors, as opposed to 11 by nine different Palestinian contributors.

Secondly, all of the Israelis shared a similar profile, being broadly associated with a secular political left that believes Israel should make concessions in order to help facilitate the creation of a Palestinian state. This conciliatory outlook contrasted with the general antagonism of the Palestinian authors towards the Jewish state. Characteristic of the outlook of the Israeli authors was the inclusion of two journalists from Haaretz, Israel's leading liberal broadsheet. Haaretz is well known for its anti-occupation stance; it advocates the formal division of land⁴⁷ (including

45 Silvia Cattori, 'Shimon Peres n'est pas un homme de paix', (Interview), Info-Palestine.net, 29 March 2011

46 Ziyad Clot, 'Why I blew the whistle about Palestine', (Comment), The Guardian, 14 May 2011

47 'Israel should learn the lessons of Sudan', (Editorial), Haaretz, 10 July 2010

Jerusalem⁴⁸) and the evacuation of the settlements⁴⁹ as a precursor to peace.

The third difference was that, by and large, the Israelis who authored op-eds were not actually commenting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself. While Palestinian authors offered their perspectives on a variety of major events, Israeli authors were on the whole confined to discussing the Arab Spring. This meant in effect that for any given development in the peace process, The Guardian consistently opted for a Palestinian perspective over an Israeli one, amplifying the already considerable disparity in the numbers of op-eds published by each side.

Aluf Benn

The most frequent of the Israeli contributors – in fact, of all of the contributors in this report - was Aluf Benn, whose three op-eds constituted exactly half of all of the comment pieces by Israelis during this period. At the time, Benn was diplomatic editor for Haaretz; he has since become editor-at-large. Haaretz is well known for strongly supporting the evacuation of West Bank settlements to secure two states and Benn's op-eds conform to his paper's editorial line.

The first of his comment pieces, **'The Palestine papers help Abbas in the diplomatic jujitsu'**⁵⁰, addressed the leaked negotiating papers, portraying them as proof that Israel 'has – or had – a partner for a negotiated two-state solution.' According to Benn, the papers indicated that the Annapolis peace conference 'was the most serious attempt so far at reaching an Israeli-Palestinian deal', with both sides agreeing on the principle of an independent Palestinian state, with West Bank settlements annexed alongside territorial swaps from Israel. Benn showed considerable sympathy towards the Palestinian negotiators, writing that they 'never bought...suggestions that they should accept less than their aspirations.' He also stated that the papers undermined Israeli claims that it had no partner for peace, the first of several accusations he would make in The Guardian that his country was less-than-honest in its commitment to peace with the Palestinians.

In the second op-ed, Benn discussed Israel's reaction to the Arab Spring. However, unlike the other Israelis who also wrote about this subject for The Guardian, he dismissed any concerns about Islamic extremists coming to power, instead deriding Israelis for their 'arrogance' and disinterest in Arab culture.

'Israel is blind to the Arab revolution'⁵¹ opened by describing the antipathy of Israeli leaders towards the Arab Spring, which had yet to 'resonate positively' in the Jewish state. Benn briefly touched upon Israel's security concerns, stating that the country's foreign policy is 'focused on survival in an unfriendly neighbourhood'. Nonetheless, he quickly moved on to explaining the 'deeper motive underlying the Israeli attitude': a misplaced 'western self perception.' Israeli Jews were 'arrogant

48 'Netanyahu is dooming Israel to live eternally by the sword', (Editorial), Haaretz, 17 June 2010

49 'Netanyahu is dooming Israel to live eternally by the sword', (Editorial), Haaretz, 17 June 2010

50 Aluf Benn, 'The Palestine papers help Abbas in the diplomatic jujitsu', (Comment) The Guardian, 25 January 2011

51 Aluf Benn, 'Israel is blind to the Arab revolution', (Comment) The Guardian, 23 March 2011

and ignorant about their vicinity' and had 'shunned' the 'wider Middle Eastern culture'. Benn even went as far as accusing Israel of negotiating with Palestinians in bad faith; rather than seeking peace, they merely saw it as 'a means of pleasing the west'.



Egyptian protesters in Tahrir Square.

Having alluded to Israel's apparent disingenuousness in its relation with the Palestinians twice, Aluf's third op-ed focused exclusively on this charge by placing the blame for the impasse in the peace process solely on the Israeli Prime Minister.

'Netanyahu and Obama: is this the final showdown?'⁵² was extremely sceptical of Netanyahu's commitment to negotiations, while justifying Mahmoud Abbas' rejection of peace talks. Any positive gestures that the Israeli prime minister made – referencing a Palestinian state, halting settlement expansions - were evidence of his belief that, 'at most', Israel should 'throw a bone to the Palestinians to satisfy its western supporters'. Netanyahu 'reject[ed] pleas to announce an Israeli peace plan', and then 'announced the peace process over' in the wake of the Hamas-Fatah unity deal. Benn ignored the possibility that the Israeli government might have genuine reservations about Hamas being brought into the political sphere; instead, the unity deal was a cynical 'PR boon'. In contrast to his evaluation of Netanyahu, Benn found no fault in Abbas' actions and defended the Palestinian president's decision to seek unilateral statehood rather than 'pointlessly engaging Netanyahu'. Therefore, even on one of the rare occasions where an Israeli was providing comment on the peace process, blame was still attributed overwhelmingly to the Israeli side.

Benny Morris

The second Israeli to have an op-ed was the historian Benny Morris. Morris first made his name as a leading member of the 'new historians', a group of dissident

⁵² Aluf Benn, 'Netanyahu and Obama: is this the final showdown?', (Comment), The Guardian, 17 May 2011

academics who sought to dispel the founding narratives of Zionism, especially in terms of Israeli claims of national innocence during the 1948 war. While Morris does not believe that the creation of two states will resolve the conflict, due to the widespread expansionist claims on the Palestinian side, he still argues that Israel should partition the land in accordance with the Clinton parameters.⁵³

Morris' comment piece, however, was not on Israeli politics or the peace process, but on the Arab Spring, in keeping with the majority of op-eds by Israelis. **'The west must be wary of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood'**⁵⁴ concentrated on the veteran Islamist group and the prospect of them gaining significant political influence after the ousting of Hosni Mubarak. Their goal, according to Morris, was to 'take power'. Discussing their support for the presidential claim of the 'western-educated' Mohamed ElBaradei, the Israeli historian hypothesised that he would be 'shunted aside' by the 'religious fanatics' of the Brotherhood as soon as possible. Once in control, they were likely to emulate other extreme Islamists and crush dissent and it was entirely possible, according to Morris, that one of their first acts would be to 'annul Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel.'

Amos Harel

Israel's concern that its oldest peace treaty with an Arab state might be abrogated was the subject of a comment piece published a week later by Amos Harel. Like Aluf Benn, Harel is a journalist for Haaretz, where he has been military correspondent and defence analyst for over a decade.

'What will become of Israel if Mubarak falls?'⁵⁵, opened by immediately explaining the differences in perspective between Israel and the rest of the Western community surrounding the Arab Spring. While other states understandably supported freedom in countries like Egypt, Harel argued that Israel's immediate concerns were the security threat posed by radical Islamist regimes. He cited the precedent of the 2006 Palestinian elections, which culminated in Hamas gaining power in Gaza. Harel predicted two main consequences if the Muslim Brotherhood were to fill the political vacuum. Firstly, that Israel would once again have to seriously prepare for the eventuality of war with Egypt. And secondly, that peace with the Palestinians would become less likely, since the ousting of Mubarak would be 'interpreted as an ideological victory for those warning against territorial concessions'.

53 Esma Basbaydar, 'Morris: Two states best solution to Israeli-Palestinian conflict' (Interview), Today's Zaman, 19 June 2011

54 Benny Morris, 'The west must be wary of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood' (Comment), The Guardian 4 February 2011

55 Amos Harel, 'What will become of Israel if Mubarak falls?' (Comment), The Guardian, 9 February 2011



Egyptian placard denounces Mubarak's ties to Israel.

Shimon Peres

The final op-ed by an Israeli during this period was by Shimon Peres, the current president of Israel. Peres' political career spans the length of Israel's history and as one of the architects of the Oslo Accords he is strongly associated with articulating the case for two states for two peoples. In 2009, he wrote that the two state solution remained the 'only realistic and moral formula to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict'⁵⁶.

'We in Israel welcome the Arab spring'⁵⁷ sought to provide a more positive interpretation of how popular revolutions might affect the dynamic between Israel and the Arab states. Peres described how the 'wind of change' provided a 'window of opportunity' for Israel, since '[d]emocratic and science-based economies by nature desire peace.' As an example of this, according to Peres, is the high degree of co-operation between Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank, where there is now an unprecedented level of economic growth. Similarly, Israel was 'more than willing' to help fledgling Arab democracies, in exchange for 'acceptance...and the opportunity to play a full role in the life of the region.' Sounding a note of caution about 'reactionary forces' that might seek power, Peres concluded by stating that Israel hoped that its neighbours would 'choose to join the family of democratic nations.'

⁵⁶ Shimon Peres, 'Two is better than one' (Comment), The Washington Post, 10 February 2009

⁵⁷ Shimon Peres, 'We in Israel welcome the Arab spring' (Comment), The Guardian, 1 April 2011

Conclusions

The key finding of this report is that on any given development in the conflict, The Guardian gave a platform to those Palestinians most likely to espouse intransigence as a matter of course. Not only were there noticeably fewer Israelis published during this period but they predominantly addressed the Arab Spring, leaving discussion of the peace process to those whose entire perception of the situation casts Israel in the role of permanent villain.

This selection of contributors goes beyond merely promoting Palestinian narratives at the expense of Israeli ones. After all, there are a plethora of opinions on both sides on any given policy, government or event and as a liberal paper, it is hardly surprising that The Guardian would champion the voices of those who oppose the occupation. Its choice of Israeli authors reflects this, emphasising a left-wing perspective that sees the partition of territory as crucial to peace.

The real issue is that there was no similar desire for compromise amongst the Palestinians featured and no reciprocal belief in the national rights of the other party. Irrespective of whether or not Israel ceded control of the West Bank, these authors would not regard the conflict as resolved until, at the very least, it also absorbed millions of Arab refugees.

It is in this respect that the publication of three different Hamas authors is particularly telling. Considering it is legally classified in the UK as a terrorist organisation, it might not be immediately clear why 'the world's leading liberal voice' would provide them with such a regular platform. The Guardian presumably disagrees with many of their core tenets such as anti-Semitism, homophobia and the religious value of suicide attacks against civilians.

The one topic where Hamas does not differ from the majority of contributors is in its rejection of Israel's right to exist, and it is in this regard that it simply articulates more explicitly the underlying conviction of the other authors. Whatever other differences in strategy or ideology they might have, both secular nationalists and Islamist annihilationists fundamentally agreed that the Jewish right to self-determination in Israel was at best irrelevant, at worst unacceptable.

Such a clear preference for seeking commentary from the least conciliatory of voices is problematic for a number of reasons. It legitimises policies based on maintaining the status quo rather than giving up unattainable shibboleths. It crowds out moderate Palestinians who are then portrayed as less genuine in their commitment to their national cause. And it promotes the negative impression that all advocates of ending the occupation are ultimately motivated by a desire to see the end of Israel itself.

In a January editorial on the implications of the Palestine papers, The Guardian argued that the two state solution 'remains the only show in town.'⁵⁸ However, this report found that it overwhelmingly promoted those who disagree with the very principle of two states for two peoples. The Guardian should consider whether

⁵⁸ 'Despair. But we still need a deal', The Guardian, (Editorial), 25 January 2011

this contradicts its editorial line, or if it too endorses the annulment of Jewish self-determination as a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Methodology

The comment pieces ('op-eds') included for analysis in the report are all those published in The Guardian's print edition between 1 January and 30 June 2011 and which were written by Israeli or Palestinian contributors.

These were gathered using The Guardian's website, which categorises its comment pieces in a specified 'Comment' section. In the 'Middle East' subsection of comment, the 'Israel' tag redirects to a column of relevant op-eds; the tag for 'Palestinian territories' redirects to a news page instead. For each op-ed, the 'Article history' function states whether it only appeared on The Guardian's website, or if it was published in print. Only the latter were included in this report.

The categorisation of each individual was based on The Guardian's profile for each writer, as well as their own statements.

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