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## ***Mirror Image***

**By Leonard Fein**

The argument has long-since been familiar: If a two-state solution fails, dies from sheer exhaustion, then we're looking either at a continuation of the status quo or at some form of one-state solution. The status quo is inherently noxious; it is also inherently unstable. It is folly to suppose that it can endure indefinitely, that it will not periodically be interrupted by ever more lethal confrontations. As to a one-state solution — that is, a single state from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River, all of what is now Israel and all of Gaza and the West Bank — one catastrophe or another would surely follow.

Fertility rates are notoriously difficult to predict. In the area in question, there are approximately 5.3 million Arabs and 5.8 million Jews. Though the birth rate among Palestinians is declining, the annual growth rate in Gaza is 3.3% and in the West Bank it is 2.13%. The Jewish population's rate of growth, by comparison, is only 1.7%. For those who oppose a two-state solution yet seek to preserve a Jewish state, these figures are ominous. One option: Withhold from millions of Palestinians the right to vote, thereby officially opting for apartheid, thereby decisively offending the international community and, for that matter, everything worthy in the Jewish religious and historical traditions. Or Israel might seek to “encourage” large numbers of the Palestinians to leave their homes, move to... to where? There's a name for that, too: It is called ethnic cleansing.

The only remaining option would be some form of binational state, a doctrine that had serious Jewish advocates in the 1930s and that has now been resurrected by some people on both sides of the conflict. But: In a binational state, Arabs would soon be the majority. Farewell, then, to a Jewish state. No matter what the assurances of civil and religious rights that might be written into the constitution of such a state — including perhaps even a substantial degree of autonomy

for its Arab majority and its Jewish minority — Israel's Jews are deeply skeptical that they would in practice enjoy those rights, that the guarantees would hold.

That skepticism is easily explained. Old hatreds do not readily vanish. Genuine peace and mutual respect are not switches that know only off-on settings. There are continuing grievances, scores to be settled even as new scores accumulate. There's a mottled history of the fate of Jews when they lived in Arab countries such as Morocco and Iraq. There's the powerful sense that the Palestinians do not have a deeply rooted commitment to civil rights and liberties.

There's also one more explanation, more powerful than all the others: Israeli Jews need only look at their own track record with their own national minority, the 20% of Israel's population that is Palestinian. Nearly 63 years after Israel's founding, a thousand-and-one broken promises later, Israel's Arabs remain second-class citizens. Yes, they have the vote, and yes, Arabic is an official language of the country, but no, and again no, to anything approaching government services equal to those granted Jewish citizens and Jewish communities. (Apologists for Israel are fond of pointing out that the standard of living of Palestinian Israelis is higher than that of Arabs in neighboring countries, but that is obviously not the relevant comparison. Israel's Arabs, citizens promised full equality in Israel's Declaration of Independence, do not compare their condition with the condition of citizens, say, of Egypt but with their own compatriots — to wit, the Jews.)

And the Israelis do not even have to look as far as actual discrimination against their Arab neighbors to comprehend the animus they fear in a binational state; they can look inside themselves. They can see (in a recent survey by the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University) that 44% of Israeli Jews agree with the notorious rabbis' letter forbidding Jews to rent or sell property to Palestinians. They may themselves have been among those recently surveyed by the Israel Democracy Institute, which reports that a majority of Israeli Jews (55%) think greater resources should be allocated to Jewish communities than to Arab ones, and another 70% oppose having Arab parties join the government and the appointment of Arab citizens as government ministers.

The country may or may not be slipping and sliding into a more overtly racist time, but based on Jewish behavior toward Israel's Arab minority, skepticism regarding Jewish prospects in a binational state with an Arab majority seems amply warranted.

A cozy binational state? Look in the mirror.