

Israel's other Palestinian problem: the Future Vision Documents and the demands of the Palestinian minority in Israel

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This article examines the challenge Israel faces from its Palestinian minority in light of the publication of the 'Future Vision Documents', a series of seminal documents written by leaders of the Palestinian community in Israel in which they demand that Israel abandon its Jewish identity and recognize its Palestinian citizens as an indigenous national minority with collective rights. The article also assesses the implications of this challenge for the two-state solution to the Palestinian problem.

Keywords: Future Vision Documents; Palestinian minority; Arab leadership; Arab citizens of Israel; collective rights

The forgotten Palestinians

'The Palestinian problem', as it has become known, is widely understood to refer to the dire predicament of Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, seized by Israel in the 1967 Arab–Israeli war. The essence of the problem, according to this common view, is Israel's occupation of the territories; accordingly, many believe that the solution to it lies in ending this occupation and allowing the Palestinian population in the territories to establish their own independent state therein. The 'two-state solution' to the Palestinian problem has long been advocated by the international community ever since the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 181 partitioning Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, on 29 November 1947, and in recent years has been accepted by a solid majority of Israelis and Palestinians.

The two-state solution, however, essential though it is, only addresses the needs of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and possibly Palestinian refugees elsewhere if they are granted permission to 'return' to a new Palestinian state or receive compensation (there is little, if any, chance that they will be able to return to Israel). But Palestinians in the territories and Palestinians in the Diaspora are not the only Palestinians. There are also Palestinians living inside Israel as Israeli citizens, numbering approximately 1.3 million – about 20% of Israel's total population.¹ All too often, this Palestinian population is overlooked

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by international observers as well as by their fellow Israeli citizens. Indeed, Israeli Jews have traditionally sought to avoid recognizing their Palestinian national identity, preferring instead to call them 'Israeli Arabs'.² When Israeli Jews discuss and debate Israel's so-called Palestinian problem, they generally have in mind Palestinians in the territories, not some of their fellow citizens. But Israel's 'Palestinian problem' is not limited to the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian minority in Israel poses a challenge to the future of the Jewish state that is as significant and urgent as that posed to it by Palestinians in the territories. The full nature of this challenge is only just becoming apparent.

This article examines the challenge posed to Israel by its Palestinian minority. In particular, it discusses a number of documents published in 2006–07 by leading members of Israel's Palestinian minority in which they call upon their state to abandon its exclusively Jewish identity and recognize its Palestinian citizens as an indigenous national minority with collective rights. These documents express the common view of much of the political and intellectual leadership of the Palestinian community. Hence, they provide the most authoritative expression of the sentiments, criticisms, demands, and aspirations of the Palestinian minority in Israel. For the first time, the leadership of the Palestinian community has put forward its own vision of Israel's future. It is a vision that differs sharply from that imagined by the vast majority of Israeli Jews, and consequently has elicited a great deal of criticism and consternation in Israel. Yet despite the controversy generated by these documents, there has been little attempt to analyse their contents in depth. This article seeks to fill this lacuna.

The Arab awakening

From the time of Israel's establishment until the present day, the state's Palestinian minority has been marginalized within Israeli society and discriminated against by the state (both *de jure* and *de facto*).³ To be sure, Palestinians in Israel have experienced material advancement and improving standards of living, but there has always been and continues to be a large inequality between Palestinians and Jews in most aspects of life in Israel. This inequality is clearly apparent in a variety of areas such as access to land, governmental services, educational levels, and economic, legal, and political conditions.⁴ More than six decades after Israel's founding, Palestinian citizens of Israel continue to live as a 'separate and unequal' minority subordinate to a significantly more powerful Jewish majority. Although the Palestinian community is no longer the completely ghettoized minority it was during Israel's formative era (1948(67)), it remains a distinctive, largely unassimilated, self-conscious minority on the margins of Israeli society and politics. Jews and Palestinians reside in segregated neighbourhoods, attend different schools, and meet only in university and the workplace.⁵ Moreover, Palestinians in Israel are still subject to deep suspicion and at times outright hostility from members of the Jewish majority. They are widely perceived as a security threat, a potential 'fifth column' in Israel's ongoing conflict with the Palestinians in the territories.⁶

Given this state of affairs, it is hardly surprising that the Palestinian minority has become frustrated and resentful. They feel highly deprived compared to Jewish citizens, rejected by Israeli-Jewish society, and alienated from the state. In response, Palestinians have become increasingly mobilized and politicized. In stark contrast to their political quiescence during Israel's formative years, Palestinians in Israel are now active and vocal in expressing their dissatisfaction with the status quo. The politicization of the Palestinian minority has occurred gradually over many years, reaching a zenith in recent years.⁷ More than ever before, members of the Palestinian minority (especially its younger members) protest against their 'second-class' status within Israel.⁸ In addition to demanding equality (in government budget allocations, bureaucratic appointments, etc.), Palestinian opposition to the status quo has increasingly taken the form of denouncing Zionism, rejecting Israel's claim to be a democracy, and demanding that Israel cease to define itself as a Jewish state.⁹

The political assertiveness of the Palestinian minority in Israel has reached new heights with the publication of four documents in 2006–07: 'The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel',¹⁰ 'An Equal Constitution for All: On the Constitution and the Collective Rights of Arabs Citizens in Israel',¹¹ 'The Democratic Constitution',¹² and 'The Haifa Declaration'.¹³ Produced by different Palestinian organizations in Israel and written by prominent Palestinian academics, intellectuals, and activists; these four documents are the most public, direct, sweeping, and substantive challenge ever posed by Palestinian citizens to their status within the Jewish state. In the words of Elie Rekhess, a leading Israeli expert on the Palestinian community in Israel: 'These documents . . . constitute a watershed in the history of Jewish–Arab relations in Israel'.¹⁴ For the first time, leaders of the Palestinian minority openly expressed not only their opposition to the status quo, but also their vision of Israel's future and the place of Palestinians within it. Hence, these documents have collectively become known in Israel as the 'Future Vision Documents'.

Since these 'Future Vision Documents' are of historic importance, it is essential to understand what brought them about. While a full account of the origins of these documents is beyond the scope of this article, a few key events and developments that led to their publication must be noted here. First, the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were signed in September 1993.¹⁵ This landmark agreement in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the ensuing peace process involving Israel and a newly established PLO-led Palestinian Authority (PA) completely ignored the issue of Palestinians within Israel. The Oslo peace process was not about the Palestinians in Israel, but about the Palestinians residing in the occupied territories. The prospect it raised of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, while fervently supported by Palestinians in Israel, would do nothing to improve their status in Israel or close the socioeconomic gap between them and Israeli Jews. As a result, the intellectual and political elite of the Palestinian community in Israel realized that they had to advance the interests of their community themselves. This

realization refocused the political agenda of the Palestinian community away from the broader Palestinian struggle for statehood and against the Israeli occupation toward improving their own status and fulfilling their own aspirations.¹⁶ It therefore accelerated the evolution of an independent political stance on the part of Palestinians in Israel.

Second, violence occurred in October 2000 following the outbreak of 'the second Intifada'. For more than a week, Palestinians in Israel staged massive protests, some of which turned violent as some demonstrators (mostly youths) hurled stones and firebombs at the police, set fire to buildings such as post offices, banks and fuel stations, and blocked main highways and junctions around the country. One Israeli Jewish civilian was killed after being hit by a stone while driving along a highway. In their effort to quell the violence, the police fired tear gas, rubber-coated bullets, and live ammunition at the demonstrators, killing 13 and wounding hundreds.¹⁷ The 'events of October 2000' as they became known were a turning point in the relations between Jewish and Palestinian citizens in Israel, significantly widening the rift and increasing the animosity between the two communities.¹⁸ The sense of alienation from the state and Israeli-Jewish society long felt by Palestinians in Israel increased markedly.¹⁹ In particular, the fact that the police fired live ammunition killing 13 protesters brutally demonstrated to Palestinians their second-class status in Israeli society. In the words of Ahmed Tibi, a Palestinian Knesset member: 'We were regarded not as demonstrators but as enemies and treated as such. Before seeing us as citizens, they saw us as Arabs. Jewish citizens demonstrate, but none of them [are] killed'.²⁰

The October 2000 events catapulted the issue of the Palestinian minority in Israel higher up the national agenda. As a result, the government appointed an official commission of inquiry to investigate the protests and the police's response to them. In its final report issued in September 2003, the Or commission (named after its head, Supreme Court judge Theodor Or) strongly criticized the discrimination endured by Arabs in Israel and called for the state to immediately rectify this.²¹ But in the years since the report's publication little concrete government action has been taken to implement the commission's recommendations.²² The state's failure in this respect has only further intensified the dissatisfaction and frustration of Palestinians in Israel. Above all, therefore, the 'Future Vision Documents' are a response by the leadership of the Palestinian community to the violence of October 2000 and the deeply damaging repercussions it had on the relations between the Palestinian minority and the state and the Jewish majority.

The 'Future Vision Documents' are also a direct response to efforts among the Israeli-Jewish political and intellectual elite to arrive at and articulate a new political consensus, which was deemed necessary in order to overcome growing social and political polarization in Israel (demonstrated most dramatically in the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin). One example of such an effort was the 'Kineret Declaration' formulated in July 2001 by a group of left- and right-wing, secular and religious Israeli-Jewish writers, scholars, journalists,

and public officials. Invoking the spirit of Israel's original Declaration of Independence, the Kineret Declaration affirmed Israel's status as both a Jewish and democratic state, stating: 'There is no contradiction between Israel's character as a Jewish state and its character as a democracy'.²³ The Kineret Declaration was subsequently endorsed by hundreds of well-known Israeli personalities from across the ideological spectrum, among them many leading politicians, intellectuals, and cultural icons. It was praised as 'a symbol of Jewish unity', an expression of the 'collective Jewish voice'.²⁴

Another example was the attempt by the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI), a prominent non-governmental organization, to write a 'constitution by consensus' that would be accepted by all segments of Israeli society and adopted by the Knesset. Although some Palestinian citizens initially participated in this (unlike in the drafting of the Kineret Declaration), they eventually withdrew from the project since they could not agree with their Jewish counterparts on the basic definition of the state, as they refused to accept it being defined as a Jewish and democratic state.²⁵

These Israeli-Jewish efforts to achieve and express a consensus on core political issues were viewed negatively by members of the Palestinian elite in Israel. As the Palestinian Israeli scholar Amal Jamal writes:

Both projects ignored the elected Palestinian leadership, denying the basic needs of the Palestinian minority. Both projects aspired to maintain the status quo concerning the relationship between the Jewish majority and the State on the one hand and the Palestinian minority on the other hand. Both projects viewed the definition of a Jewish, Zionist, democratic State as the only worthy possible formula to be imposed on the Palestinian minority.²⁶

The 'Future Vision Documents' were produced, therefore, partly in reaction to these projects. They seek to add a Palestinian voice to the ongoing Jewish-dominated discussions over what Israel's identity should be and how it should be governed. Feeling excluded from this discussion, they represent an attempt by the Palestinian intellectual and political elite to join it and present the hitherto absent Palestinian perspective.

Finally, the 'Future Vision Documents' are a response to the rise of right-wing, anti-Arab attitudes, and the growth in popular support for radical 'solutions' to the perceived 'demographic threat' posed by Israel's Arab citizens to the future of the Jewish state. One such 'solution' increasingly advocated involves redrawing Israel's borders so that Arab towns and villages along the Green Line (inside Israel's pre-1967 borders) would be included in a future Palestinian state, while Israel would annex the large Jewish settlement blocs on the other side of the Green Line in the West Bank. Another 'solution' with growing support among Israeli Jews was 'voluntary transfer', involving the government enacting measures that encouraged Palestinian citizens to emigrate. In one survey in 2003, for example, 57% expressed support for promoting the emigration of Arabs from Israel, and 33% favoured their expulsion.²⁷ The idea of 'transfer' – an Israeli euphemism for ethnic cleansing – had long been deemed

morally reprehensible and calls for it were traditionally confined to the margins of Israeli public discourse. Such calls, however, have become more frequent and more publicly acceptable in Israel in recent years.²⁸

Thus, the 'Future Vision Documents' are in this respect a reply from leading Palestinians in Israel to this dangerous domestic political trend. Collectively, they affirm the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel and the determination of the Palestinian community to claim those rights. Even more importantly, they signal the desire of the Palestinian minority to remain citizens of Israel, rather than move to a future Palestinian state. In essence, they declare: 'We are Palestinians, and we are rights-bearing citizens of Israel, and we are here to stay!' The 'Future Vision Documents', however, are much more than just declarations of Palestinian political will. They also provide a Palestinian narrative of Israeli history, present a harsh critique of Israel's treatment of its Palestinian minority, and put forward numerous demands, including proposing some far-reaching changes to the Israeli state and political system. The next section of this article discusses the contents of these seminal documents in more detail.

The 'Future Vision Documents'

'We are the Palestinian Arabs in Israel, the indigenous peoples, the residents of the State of Israel, and an integral part of the Palestinian People and the Arab and Muslim and human Nation.'²⁹ Thus begins the 'Future Vision' document, clearly defining the collective identity of the Palestinian minority in Israel. The 'Haifa Declaration' goes further, stating that:

Despite the setback to our national project and our relative isolation from the rest of our Palestinian people and our Arab nation since the *Nakba*; despite all the attempts made to keep us in ignorance of our Palestinian and Arab history; despite attempts to splinter us into sectarian groups and to truncate our identity into a misshapen 'Israeli Arab' one, we have spared no effort to preserve our Palestinian identity and national dignity and to fortify it. In this regard, we reaffirm our attachment to our Palestinian homeland and people, to our Arab nation, with its language, history, and culture, as we reaffirm also our right to remain in our homeland and to safeguard it.³⁰

These statements of identity are significant because they are assertions of Palestinian national identity in defiance of the longstanding tendency of the state and Israeli-Jewish society to avoid recognizing the Palestinian national identity of Arab citizens of Israel. In rejecting an 'Israeli Arab' identity and declaring the attachment of Arabs in Israel to their Palestinian national identity, the documents underscore the 'Palestinization' of the Arab community in Israel. The proud and defiant assertions of Palestinian identity in these documents are not only aimed externally at an Israeli-Jewish audience long accustomed to ignoring or denying this identity, but also internally at their own Arab constituency. They remind Arabs in Israel of their Palestinian identity and they reinforce this identity. In this respect, the documents provide a clear and unequivocal answer to the vexing question of identity that Arabs in Israel have long grappled with – 'who are we?'

Furthermore, the documents actually help construct this Palestinian identity by providing a collective historical narrative for Arabs in Israel. Such a narrative provides the heterogeneous Arab community in Israel with a common, single biography, and hence bolsters a collective sense of Palestinian identity. The historical narrative presented in the documents is essentially a Palestinian nationalist one, according to which Zionism is a European colonialist enterprise. In the first chapter of the 'Future Vision' document Israel is described as 'the outcome of a settlement process initiated by the Zionist–Jewish elite in Europe and the west and realized by colonial countries contributing to it'.³¹ This description is far removed from the dominant Israeli–Jewish perception of Israel as the product of the return of the Jewish people from exile to their ancient homeland. Indeed, the historical connection of the Jewish people to the land of Israel is completely ignored in the document, as is the partition vote by the United Nations General Assembly calling for a Jewish state to be established alongside an Arab one. By omitting these facts, which provide crucial legitimacy to the existence of a Jewish state, this chapter of the 'Future Vision' document basically portrays Israel as an illegitimate creation. Likewise, the 'Haifa Declaration' depicts Israel as the product of a 'colonial-settler project' which was carried out 'in concert with world imperialism and with the collusion of the Arab reactionary powers'.³²

The historical narrative presented in the 'Future Vision Documents' is starkly at odds with the traditional Zionist version of Israeli history in which Israel appears the innocent, virtuous party, constantly victimized and attacked by anti-Semitic Arab enemies. All the documents refer to the *Nakba* of 1948 as a formative event for the Palestinian minority. They pointedly note that it is precisely because of the *Nakba* that they are a minority, 'against their will' in the words of the 'Democratic Constitution'.³³ In the 'Future Vision', 'Haifa Declaration', and the 'Democratic Constitution',³⁴ Israel is solely blamed for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem.³⁵ The 'Haifa Declaration', for example, states that in 1948, 'the Zionist movement committed massacres against our people, turned most of us into refugees, totally erased our villages, and drove out most inhabitants out of our cities'.³⁶ The subsequent history presented in the documents is equally damning of Israel's actions as Israel is accused of uprooting, repressing, abusing, and even killing its Palestinian citizens.³⁷ The 'Future Vision' document sums up this history in the following manner:

Since the al-Nakba of 1948 (the Palestinian tragedy), we have been suffering from extreme structural discrimination policies, national oppression, military rule that lasted till 1966, land confiscation policy, unequal budget and resources allocation, rights discrimination and threats of transfer. The State has also abused and killed its own Arab citizens, as in the Kufir Qassem massacre, the land day in 1976 and Al-Aqsa Intifada back in 2000.³⁸

Unlike the other documents, the 'Haifa Declaration' also describes Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories following the 1967 war. Here, too, the description of Israel's behaviour in the territories is highly negative:

Israel carried out policies of subjugation and oppression in excess of those of the apartheid regime in South Africa. . . . Israel has perpetrated war crimes against Palestinians, killed and expelled thousands, assassinated leaders, jailed tens of thousands . . . inflicted physical and psychological torture, and bulldozed thousands of houses.³⁹

The 'Future Vision Documents' are also scathing in their portrayals of the state's discriminatory treatment of its Palestinian citizens. In the words of the 'Haifa Declaration':

The State of Israel enacted racist land, immigration, and citizenship laws, and other laws that have allowed for the confiscation of our land and the property of the refugees and internally displaced persons... It has spread an atmosphere of fear through the Arab educational system, which is supervised by the security services. The state has exercised against us institutional discrimination in various fields of life such as housing, employment, education, development, and allocation of resources. pp. 2–13.

Similarly, in the section of the 'Future Vision' document entitled 'The legal status of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel' the author states that: 'Since the establishment of the State back in 1948, Israel has taken a discriminating policy towards the Palestinian Arab citizens, through implementing discriminatory laws and legislations (canonized discrimination)'.⁴⁰ The author of this section goes on to write that: 'official discrimination on a national basis is the core of all forms of discrimination against the Palestinian Arabs in Israel. It is the root cause from which Palestinians in Israel suffer, individually and collectively'.⁴¹ Israel, therefore, is accused of systematically discriminating against its Palestinian citizens. All of the 'Future Vision Documents' squarely place the blame for this discrimination upon Israel's identity as a Jewish state. As the 'Future Vision' document puts it: 'the official definition of Israel as a Jewish State created a fortified ideological barrier in the face of the possibility of obtaining full equality for the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel'.⁴² In other words, discrimination against Palestinians in Israel is not an aberration; rather it is an inevitable by-product of Israel's definition as a Jewish state. Hence, as long as Israel identifies itself as a Jewish state, its Palestinian citizens will suffer unequal treatment.

Not only do the documents attribute the discrimination against Palestinian citizens to Israel's official identity as a Jewish state, but also they claim that this means that Israel is not fully democratic. 'Israel cannot be defined as a democratic State. It can be defined as an ethnocratic state', writes Haifa University Professor As'ad Ghanem in the 'Future Vision' document.⁴³ Indeed, according to the 'Future Vision Documents', it is precisely the fact that the Israeli state is undemocratic that constitutes the primary rationale for why it should be fundamentally transformed, and many of the documents' proposals are explicitly justified on the grounds that they are necessary in order for Israel to be fully democratic. Although the documents describe this desired transformation of the Israeli state in slightly different ways – the 'Future Vision' document talks of establishing a 'consensual democracy',⁴⁴ the 'Haifa Declaration' espouses a

bi-national state,⁴⁵ and the 'Democratic Constitution' proposes a 'democratic, bilingual, multicultural state'⁴⁶ – they all essentially involve the abolition of the Jewish state.

At the heart of all the 'Future Vision Documents' is an extensive set of demands and proposals for changing the relationship between the Palestinian minority and the state and addressing the basic needs of Palestinians in Israel. The main demands issued in the 'Future Vision Documents' can be grouped into three broad categories: (1) historical redress, (2) equity, and (3) political governance.

First, all documents demand that Israel take measures to redress the historic injustices it is accused of. Above all, the documents call upon Israel to acknowledge its responsibility for the *Nakba*. According to the 'Haifa Declaration', Israeli recognition of the Palestinian narrative is essential for reconciliation between the 'Jewish Israeli people' and the 'Arab Palestinian people'.⁴⁷ In addition, the 'Haifa Declaration' and the 'Democratic Constitution' demand that Israel recognize the right of return of Palestinian refugees (in accordance with UN Resolution 194); while the 'Future Vision' document only suggests that Israel pay compensation to its Palestinian citizens and allow the 'present absentees' to return to their villages in Israel.⁴⁸ Israel is also called upon to redress other wrongs it has committed in the past against its Palestinian citizens. In particular, Israel must return Palestinian land and property it has appropriated over the years.⁴⁹ Moreover, the 'Future Vision' document recommends that Israel 'adopt policies of corrective justice in all aspects of life in order to compensate for the damage inflicted on the Palestinian Arabs due to the ethnic favouritism policies of the Jews'.⁵⁰ Likewise, the 'Democratic Constitution' calls for 'affirmative action based on the principles of distributive justice in the allocation of land and water and in planning'.⁵¹

Second, equality is also high on the list of demands in the 'Future Vision Documents'. Since all the documents condemn the lack of equality between Jews and Palestinians in Israel and the discrimination that Palestinians endure, they are unanimous in demanding equal treatment for Palestinians and Jews and equal distribution of resources (e.g. budgets, land, and housing). Thus, the 'Future Vision' states that: 'Israel should refrain from adopting policies and schemes in favour of the majority. Israel must remove all forms of ethnic superiority, be that executive, structural, legal or symbolic'.⁵² In line with this, therefore, the 'Law of Return' which gives Jews the automatic right of citizenship in Israel would be annulled and Israel's national symbols, such as the flag and anthem, would be changed. In a similar vein, the 'Haifa Declaration' declares:

Our vision for the future relations between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews in this country is to create a democratic state founded on equality between the two national groups... In practice, this means annulling all laws that discriminate directly or indirectly on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, or religion – first and foremost the laws of immigration and citizenship – and enacting laws rooted in the principles of justice and equality.⁵³

In other words, according to the 'Future Vision Documents', in order to ensure Jewish–Palestinian equality in Israel, all the laws and symbols associated with Israel's Jewish identity must be abolished.

Third, the 'Future Vision Documents' propose various changes in the political structure of the state to allow for power-sharing in the central government between Jews and Palestinians and greater self-governance by the Palestinian community. The 'consensual democracy' that the 'Future Vision' document advocates involves implementing what is essentially a consociational system of government. Such a system would guarantee the Palestinian community formal representation in governmental decision-making and a veto on certain issues of direct concern to them. It would be a major departure from Israel's existing system of government in which Arab parties have always been excluded from government coalitions and have little or no ability to prevent the passage of legislation that affects the Palestinian community. Although the 'Future Vision' document is vague on how consociationalism would actually function in Israel, the 'Democratic Constitution' provides two different models for how this could work. The first model involves the creation of a 'Parliamentary Committee for Bilingual and Multicultural Affairs' with half of its members drawn from Arab or Arab–Jewish parties. All government legislation and statutes would have to be approved by this committee (unless two-thirds of the Knesset voted to override the committee's decision).⁵⁴ The second model would give Arab or Arab–Jewish parties in the Knesset veto power over proposed legislation if 75% of their members voted against the legislation on the grounds that it violated the fundamental rights of the Palestinian minority.

The other major demand in the area of political governance made by the 'Future Vision Documents' concerns granting the Palestinian community non-territorial autonomy in education, culture, and religious affairs. Self-rule in these areas would give the Palestinian minority a measure of self-determination within Israel, which these documents claim they are entitled to as an indigenous national minority. Indeed, it is the Palestinian community's status as an indigenous national minority that underpins the 'Future Vision Documents' demands for restructuring the Israeli political system. Unlike other minority groups in Israel, Palestinians are, according to the documents, entitled to power-sharing and greater autonomy because they are members of a distinct nation living in their homeland (as opposed to immigrant minority groups, for example).

Conclusion

Taken together, the 'Future Vision Documents' present a bold challenge to Israel's Jewish character and to the Zionist narrative of the country's history held by its Jewish majority. They demonstrate that the issue Israel now faces with regard to its Palestinian minority is not only a material issue which can be remedied through increased government spending and providing Palestinians with equal opportunities, but also an issue of identity which goes to the heart of

Israel's self-definition. Ending discrimination against Palestinians and providing them with full equality as individual citizens is no longer enough (if it ever was). The Palestinian minority also wants collective rights. They want both individual equality and national equality with Jews.⁵⁵

Furthermore, they are not prepared to wait until the Israeli–Arab conflict is over for these demands to be met. If in the past the Palestinian minority in Israel hoped that their predicament would improve with the coming of Israeli–Palestinian peace – that is, when their state would no longer be at war with their nation – today, this hope has faded along with the hope for Israeli–Palestinian peace. Instead, increasingly impatient for an end to their second-class status in Israel, there is a greater sense of urgency to the demands made by the Palestinian minority. ‘Equality now’ is the unequivocal message of the ‘Future Vision Documents’, and this equality can only be achieved by transforming Israel and abolishing its Jewish character.

For Israeli Jews, the vast majority of whom are committed to maintaining Israel's Jewish identity (notwithstanding their own disagreements over what this means in practice), the message of the ‘Future Vision Documents’ is alarming and deeply disconcerting. Indeed, the initial Israeli–Jewish reactions to them in the media were overwhelmingly negative and hostile.⁵⁶ This is not because Israeli Jews by and large are opposed to equality for all Israeli citizens. In fact, there is a growing acceptance among Israeli Jews of the need to end overt discrimination against Palestinian citizens and provide them with full civic equality. Rather, many Jewish critics of the ‘Future Vision Documents’ were dismayed by the documents’ refusal to accept the legitimacy of Zionism and the Jewish state, and they strongly objected to their demand for Israel to cease being a Jewish state.

What is most disturbing about this from the perspective of Israeli Jews is that it fundamentally calls into question the two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. As far as Israeli Jews are concerned, since it was first broached in the 1930s (by the British government's Peel Commission) through to the present day the two-state solution means the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside a Jewish one. Popular support for the two-state solution among Israeli Jews has always been predicated upon this understanding. To challenge Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state and call for a bi-national state in its place – as the ‘Future Vision Documents’ do – is therefore contrary to the two-state solution. Instead, it essentially proposes a ‘one and a half state solution’ (a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, and a Jewish–Palestinian state in Israel), which, as far as Israeli Jews are concerned, is no solution at all.

At a time when the prospects for achieving a two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict appears to be getting slimmer by the day, whatever possibility remains for it rests upon the persistent support it receives from a majority of Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza (although there are already signs of declining support for it among Palestinians in the territories). That is, as long as most Israelis and Palestinians favour a two-state solution it has some

chance to succeed. But if a two-state solution does not involve the acceptance of a Jewish state by Palestinians in the territories as well as those in Israel, Israeli-Jewish support for it could well evaporate. What point is there, Israeli Jews may wonder, in allowing for the establishment of a Palestinian state (and the security risks this could entail) if it does not help secure the existence of a Jewish one? Simply put, unless Palestinians inside and outside Israel are willing to accept Israel as a Jewish state, Israeli Jews are unlikely to support the idea of a Palestinian state.

The problem is that a majority of Palestinians in Israel are opposed to Israel's very existence as a Jewish state, as the 'Future Vision Documents' clearly indicate. So too are Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and their political leadership is unlikely to agree to explicitly recognize Israel as a Jewish state in the framework of an Israeli-Palestinian final status agreement (as called for by Israel's Netanyahu government and the Olmert government before it) in opposition to the wishes of Palestinians, including those inside Israel (the so-called '1948 Arabs'). Hence, if the Israeli government continues to insist that a peace agreement establishing a Palestinian state also recognizes Israel as a Jewish state, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to reach such an agreement.

While the current Israeli demand to recognize Israel as a Jewish state makes an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement much harder to achieve, a future Israeli demand that many Palestinian citizens of Israel instead become citizens of a Palestinian state will almost certainly be a deal-breaker. This demand, already being voiced by Israel's Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman (head of the *Yisrael Beiteinu* party) and others,⁵⁷ calls for an exchange of territory in which heavily populated Palestinian areas inside Israel would come under the sovereignty of a future Palestinian state while Israel would annex some areas of West Bank territory heavily populated by Jewish settlers. This would mean that a large number of Palestinians who are currently citizens of Israel (the approximately 115,000–140,000 Palestinian residents of the region known as the 'Triangle') would become citizens of the new state of Palestine and would no longer be Israeli citizens. Although this has not yet become an official Israeli demand in the context of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations,⁵⁸ it could well become one in the future as it is popular with the Israeli-Jewish public.⁵⁹ If it does, there is almost no chance that the Palestinian leadership will ever agree to it, given the strong opposition it faces from Palestinians in Israel, including from the vast majority of those living in the areas concerned.⁶⁰

The issue of Palestinian citizens inside Israel, therefore, cannot be neatly separated from the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The issue could undermine Israeli-Jewish support for a two-state solution to the conflict, complicate Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, and even prevent a peace agreement from ever being reached. At the same time, while the issue of Palestinian citizens inside Israel makes solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict harder, resolving the issue of Palestinian citizens inside Israel depends, at least in part, on an end to that conflict. That is, as long as Israel is locked in a bitter and protracted conflict with

the Palestinians, there is little chance of a dramatic improvement in relations between Jews and Palestinians inside Israel. The former will continue to regard the latter with suspicion and see them as a potential security threat, and as long as this mentality prevails among the Jewish majority there will be little inclination to make major concessions to the Palestinian minority (such as granting them collective rights). While there may be some progress in reducing inequalities between the two communities, the Jewish majority will not willingly relinquish its position of dominance over the Palestinian minority while simultaneously engaged in a conflict with the Palestinian nation at large. Thus, the 'Catch 22' seems to be that a solution must be found to the issue of Palestinian citizens inside Israel in order to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, while the Israeli–Palestinian conflict must be resolved in order to find a solution to the issue of Palestinian citizens inside Israel.

In conclusion, after enduring decades of neglect, Israel's Palestinian citizens can no longer be ignored. Their recent 'Future Vision Documents' testify to their growing political assertiveness and their adamant rejection of the status quo in Israel. The expressions of Palestinian national identity in these documents and their demands for collective rights as a national minority represent a serious challenge to Israel. Hence, more than ever before, Israel's 'Palestinian problem' goes beyond the demand for statehood by Palestinians in the territories, and it cannot simply be solved by establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.⁶¹ Much now depends upon how Israeli Jews come to terms with this – both the future of Israel and the possibility of a future Palestinian state.

Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. This figure excludes Arab permanent residents of Israel who do not hold Israeli citizenship; specifically, Palestinians living in East Jerusalem and Israeli Druze living in the Golan Heights.
2. In numerous surveys of the Palestinian minority in Israel conducted over many years, the majority consistently define themselves as Palestinians, rather than as 'Israeli Arabs' or even 'Palestinian Israelis'. Although the state and Israeli-Jewish society continues to use the label 'Arabs' in reference to Palestinian citizens of Israel, this article generally uses the term 'Palestinian' since this more accurately represents the self-identity of the Palestinian minority in Israel.
3. See for instance Ian Lustick, *Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980).
4. See the annual reports on Arab–Jewish equality produced by the Israeli non-governmental organization *Sikkuy: The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel*, <http://www.sikkuy.org.il/english/home.html>.
5. Joel S. Migdal, *Through the Lens of Israel: Explorations in State and Society* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 179.

6. For instance, nearly two-thirds of Israeli Jews saw Palestinian Israelis as a security threat in 2001, and over 70% did so in 2002. Nadim Rouhana and Nimer Sultany, "Redrawing the Boundaries of Citizenship: Israel's New Hegemony," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33, no. 1 (2003): 15. Most recently, in the September 2010 Peace Index poll conducted by Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann, a majority (64.5%) of Israeli Jews thought that Arab citizens have a negative attitude toward the state and only a quarter of the Israeli Jewish public believed that the Arabs felt themselves to be Israelis. Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann, "Peace Index – September, 2010," Israel Democracy Institute, http://www.idi.org.il/ResearchAndPrograms/peace_index/Documents/%202010/Peace%20Index-September-trans.pdf (accessed December 24, 2010).
7. Eli Rekhess, "The Evolvement of an Arab-Palestinian National Minority in Israel," *Israel Studies* 12, no. 3 (2007): 1–28.
8. Dan Rabinowitz and Khawla Abu Baker, *The Stand Tall Generation: The Palestinian Citizens of Israel Today* [In Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002).
9. Amal Jamal, "Strategies of Minority Struggle for Equality in Ethnic States: Arab Politics in Israel," *Citizenship Studies* 11, no. 3 (2007): 263–82. For instance, Azmi Bishara, leader of the Palestinian nationalist political party Balad, ran for prime minister in the 1999 election, the first ever Palestinian candidate to do so (he withdrew his candidacy just before the election). The centrepiece of his election campaign was his demand that Israel become a 'state for all its citizens', rather than a Jewish state.
10. The National Committee for the Heads of Arab Local Authorities in Israel, *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel* (Nazareth: Al Woroud, 2006).
11. Yousef Jabareen, *An Equal Constitution for All? On a Constitution and Collective Rights for Arab Citizens in Israel* (Haifa: Mossawa Center: The Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, 2007), <http://www.mossawacenter.org/files/files/File/An%20Equal%20Constitution%20For%20All.pdf> (accessed December 24, 2010).
12. Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, *The Democratic Constitution* (Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, 2007), http://www.adalah.org/eng/democratic_constitution-e.pdf (accessed December 24, 2010).
13. Mada al-Carmel: The Center for Applied Social Research, *The Haifa Declaration* (Mada al-Carmel: The Center for Applied Social Research, 2007), <http://www.mada-research.org/archive/haifaenglish.pdf> (accessed December 24, 2010).
14. Elie Rekhess, "No Balm in Galilee," *Jerusalem Post*, November 27, 2007.
15. The Oslo Accords are officially called the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements.
16. Eli Rekhess, "The Arabs of Israel After Oslo: Localization of the National Struggle," *Israel Studies* 7, no. 3 (2002): 175–98.
17. Twelve of the protesters killed by the police were Palestinian citizens of Israel; one was a Palestinian from Gaza.
18. In a public opinion survey of Israeli Jews carried out in their aftermath, 74% said that Palestinian Israeli behaviour during the first week of the 'second Intifada' amounted to treason. Rouhana and Sultany, "Redrawing the Boundaries," 9.
19. The extent of this alienation and the impact of the events of October 2000 upon it were revealed in a survey conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute, which showed that in February 2001 only 21% of Palestinian Israelis felt proud to be an Israeli, whereas the year before (in April 2000) this number was 55%. Asher Arian, Shlomit Barnea and Parzit Ben-Nun, *The 2004 Israeli Democracy Index* (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2004), 30.

20. Quoted in International Crisis Group, *Identity Crisis: Israel and its Arab Citizens*, International Crisis Group, ICG Middle East Report no. 25 (March 4 2004): 9.
21. "The Official Summation of the Or Commission Report," *Ha'aretz*, September 2, 2003; James Bennet, "Police Used Excessive Force on Israeli Arabs, Panel Says," *New York Times*, 2 September 2003.
22. Elie Rekhess, "Israel and its Arab Citizens – Taking Stock," Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, October 16, 2007, <http://tau.ac.il/dayancenter/Israel%20and%20its%20Arab%20Citizens.pdf> (accessed December 24, 2010).
23. "Appendix: The Kineret Declaration," *Azure* (Summer 2002). vol. 13, pp. 20–26.
24. David Hazony, "Miracle on the Sea of Galilee," *Azure*, vol. 13 (Summer 2002), pp. 13–19.
25. For the details of this see, Uzi Benziman, *Who Does This Country Belong To?* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2006).
26. Amal Jamal, "The Political Ethos of Palestinian Citizens of Israel: Critical Reading in the Future Vision Documents," *Israel Studies Forum* 23, no. 2 (2008): 3–28.
27. In 2002, these figures were 53% and 31%, respectively. Asher Arian, *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2004), 30.
28. In January 2002, for example, huge posters declaring 'Only transfer will bring peace' appeared around the country. Sari Makover, "Danger: No Border Ahead," *Ma'ariv*, February 21, 2002.
29. *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*, 5.
30. Mada al-Carmel: The Center for Applied Social Research, *The Haifa Declaration*.
31. As'ad Ghanem, "The Palestinian Arabs in Israel and their Relation to the State of Israel," in *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*, 9.
32. *The Haifa Declaration*, 11–12.
33. *The Democratic Constitution*, 4.
34. *The Democratic Constitution* refers to the 'injustice' of the *Nakba* perpetrated by Israel (p. 4).
35. No mention is made anywhere of the attack against the fledgling Jewish state by five Arab armies (Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon, and Iraq).
36. *The Haifa Declaration*, 12.
37. *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*, 5; *The Haifa Declaration*, 12; *The Democratic Constitution*, 5, 7.
38. *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*, 5.
39. *The Haifa Declaration*, 13.
40. Yousef Jabbarin, "The Legal Status of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel," in *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*, 12.
41. *Ibid.*, 13.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Ghanem, "The Palestinian Arabs in Israel," 9.
44. *Ibid.*, 10.
45. *The Haifa Declaration*, 16.
46. *The Democratic Constitution*, 3.
47. *The Haifa Declaration*, 14.
48. *The Democratic Constitution* also calls for allowing the return of the 'present absentees' to their villages and for them to receive compensation from the state (p. 14).
49. See, for instance, *The Democratic Constitution*, 5, 14.
50. Ghanem, "The Palestinian Arabs in Israel," 11.
51. *The Democratic Constitution*, 14.
52. Ghanem, "The Palestinian Arabs in Israel," 11.

53. *The Haifa Declaration*, 16.
54. *The Democratic Constitution*, 9–10.
55. According to a public opinion poll conducted among the Arab public in December 2006–January 2007 by the Yafa Institute (commissioned by the Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish–Arab Cooperation), a majority of the Arab public agreed with the demands of the ‘Future Vision’ document, although only 16% of respondents had actually heard of it. Only 14% of respondents said they thought Israel should remain a Jewish and democratic state in its current format; 25% wanted a Jewish and democratic state that guarantees full equality to its Arab citizens; while 57% said they wanted a change in the character and definition of the state. Elie Rekhess, ed., *The Arabs in Israel Update Series*, The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish–Arab Cooperation (February 7, 2007), 7–9. Similarly, in the 2004 *Index of Arab–Jewish Relations* conducted by Professor Sammy Smooha, nearly all the Arabs who were questioned thought that: ‘The state should grant Arab citizens the authority of self-rule over their religious, educational and cultural institutions’ and that ‘the state should recognize a top body that Arab citizens will choose to represent them’. S. Smooha, *Index of Arab–Jewish Relations in Israel 2004* (Haifa: The Jewish–Arab Center, University of Haifa; Jerusalem: The Citizens’ Accord Forum between Jews and Arabs in Israel; Tel Aviv: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2005), 52.
56. See, for example, Yossef Lapid, “A State within a State,” *Ma’ariv*, December 6 2006; Avraham Tal, “This Means War,” *Ha’aretz*, December 9, 2006; Amnon Rubinstein, “And the Left is Silent,” *Ma’ariv*, January 5, 2007; Ze’ev Schiff, ‘Self-Inflicted Injury’, *Ha’aretz*, January 26, 26, 2007; Uzi Benziman, “Azmi Bishara as an Example,” *Ha’aretz*, April 11, 2007; Evelyn Gordon, “‘Kassaming’ Coexistence,” *Jerusalem Post*, May 23, 2007.
57. Eetta Prince-Gibson, “Land (Swap) for Peace?,” *Jerusalem Post*, November 8, 2007; Ilene Prusher, “Israelis Ponder a Land Swap,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 April, 2006.
58. The idea has, however, been privately raised by Israeli officials on numerous occasions during the final status negotiations conducted by the Olmert government and the Palestinian Authority following the American-sponsored Annapolis summit in November 2007 (according to a Palestinian participant in these negotiations in an off-the-record conversation with the author).
59. In one opinion poll, three in four Israeli Jews supported the idea. “Israeli Jews favour ‘Palestine’ for Arabs,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency News*, April 1, 2008. In a more detailed survey of Israeli-Jewish public opinion carried out in 2007, 30% of Israeli Jews were in favour of the transfer of as many Arab communities as possible, another 17% were in favour of transferring a small number of communities, and 27% were in favour on condition that it would be undertaken with the consent of the Arab residents of those communities. Only a quarter of Israeli Jews were opposed to any kind of transfer. Yehuda Ben Meir and Dafna Shaked, *The People Speak: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2005–2007*, The Institute for National Security Studies Memorandum No. 90 (May 2007): 81.
60. Numerous surveys have indicated a strong reluctance on the part of Palestinian citizens of Israel to join a future Palestinian state, even if they did not need to leave their homes and land.
61. This point was made by some Palestinian public figures in Israel at a conference marking the one-year anniversary of the publication of the ‘Future Vision’ document. See Yoav Stern, “Israeli Arab leaders: A Palestinian State is Not the Solution for Us,” *Ha’aretz*, December 4, 2007.