In an attempt to think “outside the box,” a group of Palestinians and Israelis recently arrived at a new vision, which we titled, “two states, one homeland.” We propose that Palestine and Israel function as a union or confederation: two sovereign entities that agree to cooperate on certain matters, with open borders to all citizens of the member states. This path to peace will better address most core issues of the conflict and bypass many of the huge obstacles and dislocations deriving from either a two-state or a one-state solution.

We believe that the whole land, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, is the national homeland for both Jews and Palestinians. This strong attachment is central to mutual recognition and progress toward reconciliation. Such recognition will allay many Israeli fears and allow the establishment of a fully sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. In the union that we envision, Jewish settlements willing to keep the peace and pay for their land will be allowed to remain under Palestinian sovereignty. Jerusalem will become a genuinely united and equal city and the capital of both states under a special regime, resembling the Brussels model. The city will be jointly governed by Israelis and Palestinians with strong international and interreligious involvement.

The Palestinian right of return will be recognized, but implemented only within Palestine. Yet when refugees receive Palestinian citizenship, the principle of freedom of movement will enable their reconnection to places from which they have been evicted. The Palestinians in Israel will receive national minority status, with appropriate collective rights. Israel and Palestine will establish a series of joint institutions to manage joint concerns such as environmental threats, natural resources, economic development, labor movements, and human rights.

Such a vision allows for Israeli and Palestinian self-determination while creating a more stable and decolonized binational setting, as well as a geographical and legal platform for prosperity. These can be achieved in the union without compromising the rights of either Israelis or Palestinians.

The new movement has gathered support from grassroots action and organization, and now has several hundred members. It aims to work from below and capture the minds and hearts of Palestinians, Israelis, and international communities. It offers fresh and original answers to many of the profound problems ignored by the solutions “on the table.” It also draws on successful confederational agreements in past areas of conflict, such as Canada, Bosnia, and most famously, the European Union.

We believe that this vision can instill hope for reformulating a significant joint movement of Israelis and Palestinians working politically to end Israeli colonization and finally move seriously toward a reachable, just, and stable peace.

International pressure and support are critical to the possible success of an Israeli-Palestinian union. We hence reach out to diaspora Jews and Palestinians to join the movement or promote the initiative’s just, realistic, and progressive ideas. To learn more, visit tikkun.org/yiftachel.

State-Building Can Pave the Way to Statehood
Lessons from Kurdistan

BY REUVEN KIMELMAN

How did the Palestinians’ odds for statehood and those of the Kurds get reversed in twenty years? The Kurds have spent several decades, especially the last, constructing the educational, economic, military, and political institutions for statehood. Most telling is the growth in women’s rights and the decline in family honor killings. Turning from killing women and Turks to building Kurdish autonomy, the Kurds are achieving growing international support for their bid for statehood.

Similarly, the case for Palestinian statehood will not be made by bashing Israel, by arguing for the moral superiority of one’s narrative and one’s victimhood, or by asking what is good for Israel alone. The real question is what is good for the Palestinians. A people slaughtered by Arab Jordanians and Lebanese Christians in the 1970s, expelled by Kuwaitis in the 1990s, and massacred by Syrian Muslims in our day deserve better. They deserve a modern, democratic state.

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What would it take to create a modern, democratic Palestine? First, periodic free elections (why tolerate a reality where once elected there are no elections again?). However, for elections to foster a democratic society, there must be a supporting political culture and civil society. Otherwise, it will remain one-man-one-vote-one-time. This entails public education (especially for women), freedom of the press and speech, the right to strike and to bargain collectively, opposition political parties, an independent judiciary, and transparency in government budgets and outside funding. It entails demanding an answer to why, after twenty years of billion-dollar handouts, there is still a need for 100 million dollars from Qatar to bankroll the payroll of the Palestinian government. In addition, to win widespread international support for Palestinian statehood there needs to be a reduction in the rate of domestic violence, especially family honor killings; of government corruption; and of the persecution and decline of Christians. The Palestinian entities are not only Judenrein (“cleansed” of Jews) but threaten to be Christianrein, as well. Why should Israel be the sole Middle Eastern country that is safe for Christians and where the Christian population is actually growing?

Since the absence of minority rights paves the way for the absence of majority rights, namely the rights of individuals comprising the majority, a contingent of Jews must remain to guarantee the collective and individual rights of Christians and others. One thing is clear: blaming Israel is not the path to statehood. Were the Kurds to continue to blame their woes, legitimately or otherwise, exclusively on Iraq or Syria, they would be wallowing in the same no-win situation. The last thing the Middle East needs is another failed state that blames others for its flaws.

The number of Israelis who advocate holding all of Judea and Samaria for security reasons far exceeds the number of those who want to do so for cultural, historical, and ideological reasons. Progress on Palestinian state-building would ease their fears, creating more flexibility on the political front. What greater boon for Israelis and Palestinians than a viable, peaceful, democratic state along their longest border?

International support will play a major role in determining whether Palestinians win their bid for statehood, just as it did for Israel. Top: David Ben-Gurion signs the Israeli Declaration of Independence in 1948. Bottom: Mahmoud Abbas celebrates after the UN General Assembly votes to grant Palestine observer state status in 2012.