

Written evidence from John Lynes (MEP0022)

The writer of this submission was a human rights observer in the West Bank, as a Quaker Observer (2002-3), as an Ecumenical Accompanier (2003), and with the Christian Peacemaker Team in Hebron (2004-8). This evidence is submitted in a personal capacity, not on behalf of any organisation.

Executive Summary

- Two separate provinces – Palestine and Israel – can co-exist under a single federal government.
- A ‘shelf agreement’ on boundaries is needed at an **early** stage in the peace negotiations.
- Abandoned Israeli settlements must be adapted to house returning Palestinian refugees. Design implications need to be worked out **in advance** of an end to the occupation.
- A physical link is needed between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Feasibility studies and cost implications are needed **in anticipation** of a solution to the conflict.
- The Old City of Jerusalem can become a weapon-free area. This **need not wait** for the end, or even the resumption, of the peace process.

Introduction

1. It is neither desirable nor possible to adopt a posture of neutrality with regard to the Middle East Peace Process. However the narrative of blame is generally best avoided. It must be recognised that any sustainable solution will need the assent of the broad mass of both Israelis and Palestinians. In this respect UK support for a two-state solution, rather than a single-state solution, is constructive and helpful. If in addition the British government were to back even one of the proposals below, they would light a way out of the hopelessness which today inevitably gives rise to bitterness and violence.

The Federal Option

2. It is up to Israelis and Palestinians to hammer out constitutional details, but one option which your Committee might promote is a federal solution: two separate provinces - Palestine and Israel – under one overarching federal government responsible for armed forces, for currency, and for resolving inter-provincial disputes. Other matters, including immigration, would devolve on the two provinces.
3. There would be one national flag, one national anthem, one UN seat, one Olympic team, one team for the World Cup, one entry to the Eurovision Song Contest, etc. The Federation could be known as *‘The Land of Abraham’* or *‘The Land of the Prophets’*.
4. There are several federations in existence including Canada, the United States, Australia and Switzerland. Lessons can be drawn from their history, governance, achievements and failures. The Federation would be financed by indirect taxation. The provinces could levy both direct and indirect taxes. Payment of a direct provincial poll tax would convey the right to vote in a provincial election.
5. The proposals that follow do not depend on the prospect or existence of a federation. They are intended to contribute to the Peace Process in ways which both Israelis and Palestinians could accept straightaway.

Boundaries

6. The immediate need is for a 'shelf agreement' on the boundaries between Israel and Palestine. (A 'shelf agreement' is an arrangement which does not come into effect until agreement has been reached on other contentious topics, for example, in this case, Jerusalem, refugees, security, water, etc.) The effect of a preliminary shelf agreement on boundaries would straightaway be to discourage Israelis from creating new settlements on lands which will later become part of Palestine; settlers would concentrate instead on developing the settlement blocs adjacent to the Green Line, which will later become part of Israel. Boundaries would be based on the Green Line with agreed equivalent swaps, including extra land for the overcrowded Gaza Strip. The trade-off could well include a physical link across Israeli territory between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as discussed in para 14 below.
7. Many Israelis continue half-heartedly to support the occupation on the grounds of military security. They say:

'We evacuated the Gaza Strip, and Hamas fired home-made Qassam rockets from Gaza. We left South Lebanon, and Hezbollah fired rockets from Lebanon. If Israel withdraws from the West Bank we will all be within the range of rockets!'
8. To meet their understandable anxiety, one could propose a phased Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, sector by sector, starting perhaps with the South Hebron Hills or the Jordan Valley. Ideally each stage should be planned in cooperation between both sides; this would be in everyone's best interests. But failing agreement Israel could start by withdrawing troops unilaterally from just one sector. Palestinians will be aware that a second phase is not going to follow unless the first phase passes peacefully; so it will be in their interests too to make sure that the territory released is not used as a launch-pad for Qassam rockets.
9. In the past, when settlements in Gaza and elsewhere have been evacuated, objectors have been carried off one by one past awaiting television cameras. There is no need to repeat this charade. The Israeli government should simply announce the date on which they will withdraw troops from a certain sector. Settlers who decided to stay would enjoy Palestinian citizenship. While in Palestine they would be subject to Palestinian law with precisely the same rights and duties, *mutatis mutandis*, as the non-Jewish citizens who now comprise one-fifth of the population of Israel. Those rights would include the vote in Palestinian elections (subject to payment of a poll tax), and equal access to social and health services. The peace agreement would have to formalise this reciprocal arrangement, safeguarding minorities in both areas/provinces; it would not be difficult to monitor.
10. Some hard-line settlers may choose to stay and resist. If so the Palestinian authorities could, with adequate warning, refuse to supply electricity and water for a token period to demonstrate that isolated settlements were no longer viable. No force need be used.

A future for abandoned Israeli settlements

11. The fate of abandoned Israeli settlements may prove crucial to a final resolution. Here it is important to avoid mistakes that were made during the withdrawal from Gaza, when both sides agreed that all settlement dwellings should be demolished, leading to a substantial loss of investment in housing resources. This time settlers should be compensated only if their former homes remain intact. Abandoned

settlement buildings in the West Bank must be safeguarded and earmarked for returning Palestinian refugees.

12. Deep cultural problems will arise. Typical Israeli settlements are designed for unsustainable American lifestyles, gadgetry, privacy, recreation, storage, lawns, family cars and so forth. Many Palestinian refugee families will have quite different needs and cultural expectations.
13. The necessary adaptations need to be anticipated and conceived in advance. Now is an opportune moment for the International Union of Architects (UIA) to sponsor a major competition with a prestigious international jury to reconfigure in advance, on paper, the environment of an abandoned Israeli settlement. UNESCO-UIA regulations lay down an impartial blueprint for architectural competition briefs, procedures, judging and publication of submissions. The UK could offer the UIA a generous prize for the winning design. Multi-disciplinary design teams with the best chance of winning would contain both Jewish/Israeli and Muslim/Palestinian staff; this in itself could have fruitful consequences. There will be no stable peace until the Palestinian refugee camps are closed, and every refugee family can dwell among welcoming neighbours.

A link between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip

14. A self-governing Palestine will need a dedicated transport link, across Israeli territory, between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Israel accepted this in principle as part of the Oslo Accords, but a route was never specified. Naturally Palestinians would prefer a line from Gaza City through Jerusalem, but Israelis would never countenance the intrusion of a Palestinian road or railway through built-up Jewish neighbourhoods. The shortest and cheapest route would be along the northern margin of the Negev Desert, from Gaza City to the south-west foot of the West Bank, through areas which are sparsely populated, largely by Bedouin nomads. Such a route could well be negotiated as part of the 'shelf agreement' discussed above, balancing possible Israeli provisions against equivalent concessions of Palestinian land in the West Bank.
15. What is urgently needed **in advance** is a feasibility study of alternative routes and transport modes, e.g. an overhead monorail, an underground railway (using 'cut and fill') or a road embankment. Each option has complex implications for cost and security. Serious political negotiations can scarcely go ahead in the absence of a preliminary engineering feasibility survey along these lines. Britain pioneered early railways in South America, Africa, India and the Middle East. DfID is well equipped to co-sponsor an independent study to help resolve this aspect of the Middle East conflict. Now is the time to launch the initiative.

Jerusalem

16. 2017 marks the centenary of the Balfour Declaration. Britain is being urged to commemorate this centenary, but it will be difficult to do so without trampling on susceptibilities. Some press us to apologise for the Declaration; some would expect Royal participation in the Israeli festivities. The suggestion which follows will seem peripheral to the Terms of Reference of your Committee, but may suggest an imaginative response to the conflicting demands for observing the Balfour Centenary.
17. Jerusalem is a source of conflict. Yet even today Old Jerusalem is a cosmopolitan neighbourhood. Black-coated Hasidim rub shoulders with robed Christian priests, Muslims in kaffiyas and pilgrims from all corners of the earth. Above all it is **the Holy City** – holy for Muslims, for Jews and for Christians. The Old City of Jerusalem embraces most of the holy sites – the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Al

Aqsa Mosque, the Golden Dome, the Temple Mount and the Western ('Wailing') Wall. But guns are here, there and everywhere – over the shoulders of worshippers at the Wailing Wall, in the hands of watchful Israeli conscripts at the threshold of every place of pilgrimage. The aim of this proposal is that Old Jerusalem should become a weapon-free area.

18. The Old City is bounded by an ancient stone wall, perhaps ten metres tall, and penetrated by eight 'gates'. One can envisage a couple of airport security systems outside each gate, staffed independently by Israelis and Palestinians. If our aircraft can be weapon-free, so can Old Jerusalem. Count the benefits. Pilgrims of every faith could come and go without fear of violence. Tourists would return to the old souks. Mosques, churches and synagogues would become havens of peace and prayer once again.
19. Britain could take the lead in a Week of Prayer for the Peace of Jerusalem. What better way to observe the Balfour Anniversary? It could be endorsed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pope (why not?) and the various chief rabbis, imams and ayatollahs. What faith leader could refuse to unite in supplication for the Holy City? The combined prayers, the longing for peace and the dedicated conscience of the three Abrahamic faiths could launch such a compelling bandwagon that politicians would hasten to scramble aboard. World statesmen would be pressed to declare the Old City of Jerusalem a weapon-free area for a trial period of twelve months.
20. An initial step would be to remove all private weapons. These need not be monitored or surrendered, just taken out of the Old City – no questions asked. Cars and tractors must be removed too, to stop arms smuggling. All transport would be by camel or donkey, as in centuries past. The twin airport-style security systems, staffed independently by Israeli and Palestinian officials, would be sited outside each of the eight gates. Every visitor would have to pass through both of the security filters to enter the Old City. The twelve-month experiment would be under way; people on every side would be united in promoting its success.
21. Once this is seen to work we might hope it would spread. For example new Israeli 'neighbourhoods' in Greater Jerusalem might in future be granted international recognition as part of Jerusalem on the same terms as the Old City: no weapons, and free access and movement for all unarmed civilians.

Conclusion

22. Your Committee may reject one or more of these options. Well and good if they prompt a better alternative. It should be obvious by now that hopelessness and bitterness thrive in the absence of creative initiatives, and it is that spirit that this submission is offered.