

The demographic balance sheet bursts the bubble of annexation

Shaul Arieli Haaretz, March 28, 2018

The report of the Civil Administration on the demographic issue, which was presented to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee this week, bursts the bubble of the imagined reality build by the opponents of the two-state solution. Proponents of annexation have been spreading false facts for years to conceal the demographic balance, which maintains the basic tension that has accompanied the Zionist movement from the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the necessary decision that results from it. The demographic balance between Jews and Arabs that was presented, requires the Israeli leadership to re-determine the choice of two of the three fundamental goals of the Zionist movement and of Israel: to be a democratic state, to be a Jewish state in its national sense and to be in the entire territory of the Land of Israel.

The existence of a non-Jewish majority in the Land of Israel during most of the 100 years of conflict is not a product of an Arab demographic transformation but a product of the fact that when the Balfour Declaration was issued in 1917 and the Mandate was approved in 1922, And since then, the Zionist movement has failed to achieve a significant Jewish majority between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.

It was a tremendous and unprecedented challenge for the Zionist movement and the British to implement the two components of the declaration: the first, a Jewish national home, and the second that it would be established "on the clear condition that nothing would be done that might harm the civil and religious rights of non-Jewish communities in the Land of Israel." In other words, a democratic state for the Jewish people. Ze'ev Jabotinsky addressed this challenge in his address to the Eretz Israel Council in 1919: "In other countries, where all the people live in their land, all the citizens are sitting on their land, this building is simple and easy to establish. But it is not in our country, which is subject to special conditions, which is an 'abnormal' country, because most of its citizens are outside the borders of the country. "

Max Nordau spoke of the importance of achieving a Jewish majority, at the Zionist Conference in London in 1920 and stated that "it is imperative that at least 500,000 Jews be found in Palestine when England receives the Mandate for Palestine. If not, Zionism is doomed to fail". But despite the fact that at the time of the Mandate the number of Jews was only 83,000, it did not happen. In order to implement the Mandate, which states that Britain must "create in Palestine the political, administrative and economic conditions that will ensure the establishment of the Jewish national home," the British refrained from establishing an indigenous government that was naturally composed of the Arab majority. As was the case in all the other Mandatory states. The Mandate defined clauses (7,6,4) that gave clear priority to Jewish immigration, naturalization and Jewish settlement in order to generate the demographic and spatial transformation and to establish a democratic state with a Jewish majority.

In 1937, the Peel Commission laid down its proposal to divide the country between Jews and Arabs. Despite the small area allotted to the Jewish state (17% of the land), the Zionist Congress authorized Ben-Gurion, Chairman of the Jewish Agency, and Weizmann to negotiate with the British on the establishment of a Jewish state in part of Eretz Israel. It was a clear decision to favor a Jewish majority and a democratic state over the entire Land of Israel, because the Jews constituted only 30% of the land's population. This is what Ben-Gurion says to his son Amos: "What we want is not that the land be unified and whole, but that the unified and whole Land be Jewish. I do not have any satisfaction with the entire Land of Israel - when it is Arab". Mordechai Nemir, at the Mapai Conference in 1937, further explains the need for territorial concessions: "A reduction in the area is the price we must pay for the fatal delay of the Jewish people in building the land and for the rapid growth of Arab Movement. "

The two men did not see the establishment of a small Jewish state as the end of the story, and developed the "theory of stages." Ben-Gurion continues to write to his son: "A partial Jewish state is not an end, but a beginning ... The

establishment of a state - even partial - is the maximum of our strength in this period, and it will serve as a powerful lever in our historical efforts to redeem the entire land." Namir sums up and says: "Future generations - whether before or after the socialist revolution - will find a way to correct the distortion."

The Holocaust, the great tragedy of the Jewish people, drives Ben-Gurion to demand that the British government partition the land, of which only a third of its inhabitants are Jewish. In February 1947, he wrote to Foreign Minister Bevin: "The only possible immediate arrangement with a basis of finiteness is the establishment of two states, one Jewish and one Arab."

The partition resolution, in November 1947, places the projected demographic balance in the Jewish state at 55 percent. Ben-Gurion is aware of the difficulty that this creates, and in his words at the Mapai Center in December 1947, he states that even those who are currently seeking the annexation of the West Bank alone should internalize the following: "In this composition there is not even absolute certainty that the government will be governed by a Jewish majority. There is no stable and functioning Jewish state as long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60 percent. "

The War of Independence and the issue of the Palestinian refugees have revolutionized the demographic balance and placed the proportion of Jews in the State of Israel (inside the Green Line) at more than 80 percent. Ben-Gurion again decided to end the war in favor of a democratic state of the Jewish people at the expense of Greater Israel. To the criticism that he did not complete the conquest of the land he answers in the Knesset in April 1949: "A Jewish state throughout the country without using the methods of action taken in Deir Yassin can only be a dictatorship of the minority ... A Jewish state, in the present reality ... is impossible, if it will be Democratic, because the number of Arabs in the western part of the Land of Israel is larger than the number of Jews".

The Six-Day War and the conquest of Gaza and the West Bank reawakened the territorial objective of the Greater Land of Israel, but over one million Arabs who lived there blocked the Israeli government from all annexation except for East Jerusalem, as Levi Eshkol put it: "How will we live with so many Arabs?"

Later, the Likud governments made do with annexing the Golan Heights only, where only Druze live in four small villages.

Israel's strategic choice to give up territory in return for preserving Jewish identity and democracy rose again in the 1990s, when Yitzhak Rabin declared that he "views the separation issue as a central issue" and chose the diplomatic path of the Oslo Accords. Later on it was Ehud Barak who defined the separation as "a supreme national need for Israeli demography, identity and democracy." Even Ariel Sharon, who did not believe in permanent agreements, said in a similar way: "The demographic consideration played an important role in determining the route of the separation fence because of the fear of annexing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who will connect with Israeli Arabs." Ehud Olmert concluded: "Either two states or Israel is finished."

The current demographic balance is a fact. It is sad to discover that after 100 years of conflict and decades of negotiations for an agreed political separation, the discourse in Israel still exists only inwards. There is no history, no international resolutions, no Palestinian people with national aspirations, and no agreements and declarations signed by the governments of Israel. Even sadder is the fact that many in the Israeli government are trying to hide the demographic truth because of aspirations for annexation and messianic visions.

This government, unlike all its predecessors, chose another strategic decision regarding the goals of Zionism: the Land of Israel in exchange for a democratic regime and a Jewish majority. This decision will remove international commitment, because Israel will not meet the democratic conditions, and will push it to the position of the leper, in which South Africa has spent many years. This irresponsible decision will trigger a process that could lead to civil war, Israel's internal collapse, the birth of an Arab state, and the disappearance of the Zionist vision.