



THE MIDDLE EAST

Live Long & Prosper!

Articles and reflections by Dr. Harry Hagopian

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“We are the people and this is our time, stand up, sing out for Palestine” Freedom for Palestine (compilation track)

Let me start off with a somewhat embarrassing admission: I was a childhood fan of *Star Trek* and was in fact called ‘Mr Spock’ at school. Mind you, I am still unsure to this day whether this was meant to be a supreme compliment or an even more supreme insult! But why do I bring memories of this sci-fi past into my reflections on the Palestine of tomorrow?

Well, according to the Israeli and international press, including the Ha’aretz daily newspaper, Leonard Nimoy, the Jewish-American actor who starred as the Vulcan Mr Spock in the original series of *Star Trek*, has become yet another celebrity to weigh into the debate about the Israel-Palestine conflict. In an Open Letter posted recently on the website Americans for Peace Now, Nimoy stated his firm support for a two-state solution, characterising it as “a secure democratic Israel as the Jewish State alongside an independent Palestinian state”. The octogenarian actor also argued that the two-state solution “is still critical in this region for both Israel and the Palestinian people”.

In order to illustrate his somewhat inchoate assertions that “the time for recriminations is over” and that “assigning blame over all priorities is self-defeating”, Nimoy even recalled an early *Star Trek* episode *Let That Be Your Last Battlefield* where two half black, half white men were prepared to battle to the death to defend the memory of their peoples who died from the atrocities committed by the other party to prove his own - logical - point that a myth can also become a snare.

Nimoy’s letter also tilted in favour of a division of Jerusalem, which both Israel and Palestinians claim as their capital, and pointed out that a group of fifty prominent Israelis, including the former heads of the Israeli Mossad intelligence service and its internal security agency, Shin Bet, have called for two states for two nations. It is high time, he concluded, “to pivot from the zero-sum mentality of violence to an attitude that focuses on the parties shared interests: security and prosperity”.

Ever since 17 December 2010, the MENA region has been convulsing with different - and at times adversative - spasms. Pro-democracy protestors who are challenging the Kafkaesque world they have inhabited in for long decades are being confronted by the fierce opposition of those in power or those benefiting from it. However, despite all those painful struggles erupting hither and thither, most pundits still maintain that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a central political hub in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Even those who would suggest that this conflict has simply been overtaken by others - such as those involving Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen or Bahrain - seem to miss the point that many Arabists and foreign-policy mandarins have long acknowledged as a truism, namely that Palestine remains in the political imagination of the Arab and Muslim masses even though the uprisings are not generated or conducted by the Palestinian issue alone.

Yet today, with the Palestinian Fatah and Hamas factions having been coaxed into an arrangement of reconciliation by a concatenation of factors (not least Palestinian public opinion and the 'Arab Spring'), many observers are wondering what will happen next September if Palestinians were to request the UN to recognise their independent Palestinian state within its 1967 borders. What indeed could happen with such a bid for UN statehood if Palestine were to become the 193rd member of the UN rather than have the PLO continue its Observer Status as it has done since UNGA Resolution 3237 (XXIX) was adopted on 22 November 1974? In fact, would the outcome of this possible bid translate into recognition of Palestinian full statehood or else into an admission of Palestinian membership but not necessarily as a state? Would such a step facilitate greater access to international courts and other bodies? Would it then alter the mechanics of the Fourth 1949 Geneva Convention and Israeli legal obligations as an occupying power toward the new 'Palestine' and its Palestinian 'citizens'?

Let us for the sake of argument moot that Palestinians overcame the anticipated US veto at the UN Security Council, acquired a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly and gained statehood. What will happen the following day? How does the drying ink on paper translate into fluid facts on the ground? Will the Israeli forty-four year pernicious occupation - with its myriad discriminatory tools - vanish overnight? In short, is there a robust Palestinian strategy that effectively consolidates the tactics being deployed at this time to counter the understandable Israeli hasbara (propaganda) machine that has already gone into overdrive against such putative statehood? What will be the reactions of the US Administration and Congress to such a unilateral move? What about the otiose Quartet with its envoy Tony Blair or the equally otiose 22-member Arab League? In short, what is the trajectory being drawn that renders a state that is ostensibly sovereign on paper to become truly sovereign on the ground too? Having fought the psychological battle and perhaps broken the political glass ceiling, where does this new 'Palestine' alongside Israel go next - juridically, economically, physically and politically?

Whilst Palestinians are doing their homework, I hope Israeli political leaders will also heed to those opinions articulated by Nimoy or others and appreciate that a just solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is as much in their interest as it is in that of Palestinians. Otherwise, if a Palestinian gamble for virtual statehood is met by the usual Israeli intransigence, the outcome could become more deleterious for both peoples let alone more volatile for the Arab Spring of the MENA region.

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