

Determining our Fates by Eating Off Gold Plates: A Neo-Luxemburgist Case Against Nation-States

Rosa Luxemburg was a Polish, German, and Jewish revolutionary who was murdered by (proto-Nazi) German nationalists about a hundred years ago after a failed revolution she helped to lead. Before moving to Germany, she was born and raised in a Jewish family in Poland, then under the rule of the Russian Tsar. If Luxemburg's contemporary comrade Vladimir Lenin was correct in describing Imperial Russia as the "prisonhouse of nations", then the Poles and the Jews must have occupied two of the most unpleasant cells in this prison. Luxemburg belonged to both these nationalities, and not only was she perfectly aware of the national oppression these groups faced, she actively fought and organized against it. Yet despite this, she remained a staunch opponent of Polish nationalism, Zionism, and many (though not all) other ethnic movements for statehood, both in the Russian Empire and outside it, often coming to rhetorical blows with fellow socialists (including Lenin) on the issue of "national self-determination". Her most developed statement of her views on this question appeared in a series of articles, titled "The National Question and Autonomy,"¹ in the *Social Democratic Review*, the theoretical journal of her political party, The Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania.²

Luxemburg was a Marxist, and in keeping with a certain Marxist rhetorical tradition, she is haughtily contemptuous of "metaphysical" claims to abstract, universal claims to "human rights":

A "right of nations" which is valid for all countries and all times is nothing more than a metaphysical cliché of the type of "rights of man" and "rights of the citizen." Dialectic materialism, which is the basis of scientific socialism, has broken once and for all with this type of "eternal" formula. For the historical dialectic has shown that there are no "eternal" truths and that there are no "rights." ... In the words of [Friedrich] Engels, "What is good in the here and now, is an evil somewhere else, and vice versa" – or,

¹ <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1909/national-question/index.htm>. I recommend these essays to anyone who has the patience to wade through various early 20th century intra-socialist polemical disputes and ethnic conflicts inside the Russian Empire.

² A point of terminological clarification: "Social democracy" in this period does not mean what it does today: a kind of regulated capitalism with a generous, universal welfare state and strong labor unions. At this time, the phrase was basically a synonym for "Marxism", as an homage to the largest and most successful Marxist political party in the world at the time, the (still existing, though now much less radical) Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD, in its German initials). "Social Democracy" encompassed every Marxist tendency, from the "revisionist" reformism of the German Eduard Bernstein (the closest forerunner of today's "social democracy") to the revolutionary communism of Luxemburg and Lenin, to the intermediate "centrist" position of the Czech-Austrian-German Karl Kautsky. It is only after the October Revolution of 1917 that the phrase begins to take on its contemporary connotations, after those who supported the Bolsheviks' revolution begin calling themselves "Communists", and those who opposed it continued calling themselves "Social Democrats". Even then, these "Social Democrats" continued for several decades to pay at least lip-service to an eventual goal of socialist revolution, in many cases only abandoning this rhetoric after the Second World War. Even today, one finds in the SPD's latest fundamental party program of 2007 a reference to "Marxist analysis of society" as one of the ideological pillars of the party, alongside "Judaism and Christianity, Humanism and Enlightenment,... the experience of the labor movement,... the women's movement and new social movements."

(https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Beschluesse/Grundsatzprogramme/hamburger_programm_englisch.pdf, p. 7). How serious this rhetorical homage to the party's roots remains is a debatable question, of course.

what is right and reasonable under some circumstances becomes nonsense and absurdity under others. Historical materialism has taught us that the real content of these “eternal” truths, rights, and formulae is determined only by the *material* social conditions of the environment in a given historical epoch.

According to this Marxist story, the 18th century bourgeoisie dressed up its own class interests as universal demands on behalf of humanity. Phrases left over from this period, like “the rights of man” and “the right of all nations to self-determination” are but mystified expressions for bourgeois class interests, which, at the time, in the era of bourgeois revolutions against feudalism, indeed coincided with the development of productive forces and therefore with the ultimate interests of humanity. But this coincidence was just the product of particular historical circumstances.

To fully evaluate these claims would take us too far afield into issues of metaethics. I think it is plausible that “rights” claims, at the very least, often attempt to express general moral principles that do indeed possess some transhistorical validity. But rights-claims are more than general moral principles. They are assertions of entitlements to the exercise of *powers*. Thus, rights-claims depend for their truth on whether the powers they to which they assert entitlement exist or can be exercised.

Democratic Party presidential candidate (and democratic socialist) Bernie Sanders repeatedly asserts that “health care is a human right”, and usually pairs this assertion with observations about how wealthy the United States is, or that “The United States is the only major country on Earth not to guarantee health care to all people...”³ (by “major” I am assuming he means “wealthy” or “developed”). What is the point of linking a country’s wealth to its system of health care provision in this way? Does Sanders not think health care is a human right in Afghanistan or Burundi? Does he believe Afghans and Burundians are inferior or perhaps not fully human, lacking “human rights” that we in the West have?

This latter possibility is, I think, not worth taking seriously. A much more charitable interpretation of Sanders is that he believes in a general moral principle, such as “Governments have the responsibility to do what they can to provide for the material well-being of those over whom they are responsible,” and that, at a certain level of wealth, this principle implies an entitlement to health care. The moral principle applies to Burundi and Afghanistan no less than it does to any other society, but these societies currently lack the wealth and state capacity to establish functioning systems of universal health coverage. The United States does, however, which is why the U.S. government should “guarantee health care as a right”.

Our generous host Liberal Zionist (hereafter “LZ”) claims for every nation “the right to determine its own fate by means of a state that is part of the international system of nation-states.” But before we begin debating the moral and metaphysical truth of this claim, we must determine its practical possibility under present and future economic and social conditions. Are contemporary nations more or less able to “determine their own fates” by means of their own nation-states than they were in the past? Are nation-states likely to get better or worse at determining their peoples’ fates in the future? If they are likely to get worse at doing this, is this a contingent or necessary trend? How reversible is it? Do nations have “fates” or “wills”, and what does it mean to determine them? Without answering these questions, there is no more point in talking about a “right to self-

³ <https://www.facebook.com/berniesanders/posts/1645419848846346/>

determination” than there is a point to talking about (quoting Luxemburg) “the ‘right’ of each man to eat off gold plates, which, as [Russian revolutionary author Nikolay Chernyshevsky] wrote, he would be willing to sell at any moment for a ruble.”⁴

The “Easy Cases”

In support of the **Statism** thesis, LZ contends that “the generally most effective way for a people to determine its own fate is to have its own state.” In support of this claim, he points to the, at best, spotty record of international organizations (e.g., the UN and NGOs), which, he says, “have proven generally much less effective than nation-states at preventing genocides and other abuses of the human rights of those they represent, as well as at setting up administrative structures and fostering economic growth.”

Of course, if we take the phrase “international organization” literally (as meaning “between-nation organization”), then the UN and NGOs are not the only international organizations. One of the most common kinds of international organizations are multinational states. That is, a large number of contemporary states contain within them more than one group qualifying as a “nation” under reasonable definitions of the word. Examples include Afghanistan, Belgium, Bolivia, Canada, France, India, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Russia, Spain, South Africa, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Some of these states have been more successful than others at “preventing genocides, . . . setting up administrative structures and fostering economic growth,” but some on this list have done quite well in accomplishing these things, at least in recent history. In fact, some of the states on the above list (though sadly not all) have

⁴ I can’t resist an aside here on the history of political theory. This Marxist (or Marx-inspired) critique of liberal rights-claims bears striking resemblance to *conservative* critiques of universal rights. Compare Edmund Burke: “What is the use of discussing a man’s abstract right to food or medicine? The question is upon the method of procuring and administering them. In that deliberation I shall always advise to call in the aid of the farmer and the physician, rather than the professor of metaphysics.” (*Reflections on the Revolution in France*; <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15679/15679-h/15679-h.htm#REFLECTIONS>; p. 311). For Burke, “[t]he rights of men in governments are their advantages” (p. 313), i.e., what they can secure for themselves and for their descendants through the mechanisms of constitutional government. The purpose of statecraft is to secure advantages for the citizens or subjects of a state, and men have a right and a duty to preserve the advantages their ancestors have secured for them, and to pass them down to their descendants. Human beings living under lawful governments “have a right to the fruits of their industry, and to the means of making their industry fruitful. They have a right to the acquisitions of their parents, to the nourishment and improvement of their offspring, to instruction in life and to consolation in death” (p. 309). Of course, not everyone has a right to the same *share* of the advantages created by society: “In this partnership all men have equal rights; but not to equal things. He that has but five shillings in the partnership has as good a right to it as he that has five hundred pounds has to his larger proportion; but he has not a right to an equal dividend in the product of the joint stock” (ibid.).

The Marxist reply to the conservative is to add that some “advantages” cherished by the conservative are no more realizable under certain economic and technological conditions than the abstract rights of the liberal. For example, the advantages enjoyed by a feudal lord in an agricultural society in the 13th century are simply not possible to enjoy in a post-industrial society in the 21st (or in an emerging industrial society like France in the 18th, for that matter). For the Marxist, feudalism may or may not violate “the rights of man”, but before we decide that question we must decide whether or not it violates the laws of history at a given stage.

done so well at preventing genocide that it is simply not a serious concern, now or for the foreseeable future (knock on wood!). No one seriously expects the German cantons of Switzerland to massacre the French cantons, or vice versa, or for the Scots, English and Welsh to exterminate one another. (LZ worries about civil war, but there has not been a civil war in Switzerland since 1847, nor has there been war between the English and Welsh since 1415, or between the English and Scots since 1745. Northern Ireland has seen more recent conflict, sadly).

Even if it is true that (single) nation-states do better in general at preventing genocide, there are many multinational states that have done as well as any state (national or multinational) at this task. As for administrative structures and economic growth, it is again arguable that true nation-states tend to accomplish these tasks more easily than multinational ones. But, again, it is not universally true; there are plenty of states on the above list that have done a fine job at setting up functional political and economic institutions.

It should be mentioned here that LZ's point about "international organizations" like the UN and NGOs being more ineffectual than nation-states cuts both ways: The UN and NGOs are generally *also* less effectual than *multinational* states. Switzerland, the US, the UK etc., do a much better job of e.g., genocide prevention than the UN does. Thus, it is plausible that at least one of the reasons why nation-states are more effectual than the "international organizations" that LZ mentions is because the former are *states*, and the latter are not, and states, having much greater coercive means at their disposal, are better at, e.g., providing security than non-states are.⁵ Of course, multinational states are also states, so they are also generally better at security provision and other basic tasks than are non-state international organizations.

Finally, and most importantly, even if in those cases where multinational states are failing at performing these basic tasks (as is clearly the case for some of them), it is not at all obvious that breaking up these states into their constituent national parts would allow the new nation-states to perform them more satisfactorily. That is, for almost every contemporary case of a nation N seeking to split off from an existing state S, it is not all obvious that, were N to successfully split off from S and establish its own state S', this would lead to more security, less human rights abuses, more material well-being, etc., for N, *and* for the people(s) "left behind" in what is left of S, *and* for any other, non-N, people(s) included in N's new state S'. This is important, because **Statism** grants to every people the (defeasible) right, not only to preserve its own state where such already exists, but to create a new state of its own where it does not.

To fully defend this contention would take too long, but I can motivate it by examining what LZ has called "easy cases"⁶, where it is allegedly obvious that a nation *should* be allowed to construct its own state: "the Armenians before they had a state of their own, the Jews before 1948, the Kurds, the Yazidis, and the Palestinians."⁷ At the

⁵ The United Nations is of course not a state, and can perhaps more accurately be called an "inter-state" organization than an "international" one, since among its members are many multinational states. NGO are obviously not states, the acronym literally standing for "Non-Governmental Organization".

⁶ <https://liberalzionist.weebly.com/posts/one-state-vs-two-states>; comment at 7/3/2019 08:22:35 am.

⁷ <https://liberalzionist.weebly.com/posts/one-state-vs-two-states>

time I read this, I was inclined to agree in each of these cases, but on reflection I am, for each of them, now much less inclined to agree. This does not mean that I am *against* statehood for all of these peoples, only that the question is much more complex than either LZ or I initially thought it to be. And if these are the “easy cases”, the cases most favorable to **Statism**, then the overall case for **Statism** is much weaker than it might appear.

A. Kurds

In 2017, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq held a referendum on independence for Iraqi Kurdistan. An overwhelming majority of those voting voted for independence. The KRG then claimed that this referendum was legally binding and attempted to break away from the Republic of Iraq. The Iraqi state responded by mobilizing its armed and paramilitary forces and, in less than two weeks, decisively crushed the would-be Kurdish state.

But what if the Iraqi Kurds had succeeded in establishing their own state? Would the Iraqi Kurds have been better off? On the surface, “yes” is a plausible answer to this question. After all, Iraqi Kurds have suffered genocide at the hands of the Iraqi government when it was ruled by Saddam Hussein, and a scenario in which the KRG successfully breaks off from Iraq presupposes that the KRG is strong enough to resist, or simply deter in the first place, armed assault by Iraq. So, it would appear that the Iraqi Kurds would at least no longer have to worry about another genocide at the hands of an Iraqi government if they had their own state.

But, granting this for the moment, would every group in what is called “Iraqi Kurdistan” be better off? Not everyone in this region is Kurdish, after all. There are Arabs living there, some of them settled there by Saddam Hussein, some of already living there, most of them strongly preferring to remain under Baghdad’s sovereignty. And for understandable reasons: the KRG has been credibly accused of discrimination and human rights abuses against Arabs,⁸ and would presumably have more power to carry these out if it obtained independence. There are also Turkmen, Assyrians, Armenians, Shabaks, Yazidis, and other groups, often with internally diverse, fraught opinions on Kurdish independence, with many feeling caught between the KRG and the Baghdad government, without much love for either.⁹ For example, some of the Turkmen and Assyrian political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan supported the independence referendum and accepted its results, and others opposed even holding it in the first place, and rejected the results.¹⁰ (I will have more to say on Yazidis in the next section.)

But, to return, would an independent Kurdistan be good, at least, for the *Kurds*? Again, it might appear so, but appearances can be deceiving, and there is a good chance that an independent Kurdistan would be *significantly worse even for the Kurds*. The reason, in a word, is Turkey. If Kurds in Iraq, Syria, or Iran declared independence and

⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/02/25/iraqi-kurdistan-arabs-displaced-cordoned-detained>

⁹ Here is an interesting article laying out some of the concerns many members of these groups have: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/kurdistan-referendum-iraq-isis-turkey-saddam-hussein/540939/>

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Iraqi_Kurdistan_independence_referendum#Party_stance

successfully fought off one or more of the regimes of these countries, Turkey would invade the new Kurdish state, seeking to destroy it, because Turkey, even more than these other states, is adamantly opposed to Kurdish independence.¹¹ Turkey, which controls the Bosphorus Straits and has the second-largest army in NATO, would not be seriously opposed in doing this by the West (which supplied Turkey with arms all throughout its brutal war with the Kurdistan Workers' Party [PKK] in the 1990s). Nor would Russia, China, or any great power calculate that the Kurds are worth angering a strategically located, moderately powerful state with a large army like Turkey. Ironically, at this point, the only states with both the incentive and something approaching the power to resist the Turkish invasion would be the states that the new Kurdish state just broke away from: Iraq, Syria, and/or Iran!¹² But, these states would only assist the Kurds if they felt that in doing so, they were defending their own, sovereign national territory. These states will not fight Turkey for the sake of a free Kurdistan, and will most likely insist on reincorporating Kurdish territory into their own states. That is to say, the Kurds would have to accept being reswallowed by Iraq, Syria, and/or Iran in order to prevent being swallowed by Turkey. Moreover, if these states were successful in resisting Turkey, they would then, having just rescued the Kurds, be in a better bargaining position with respect to them, and could then revoke autonomy rights that the Kurds may have previously enjoyed before independence. It would appear that the best that the Kurds can hope for, for the foreseeable future, is greater autonomy within Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran. (This is presumably one of the reasons why the PKK and its sister parties in Syria and Iran have moved away from advocating outright independence toward a position of "democratic confederalism".¹³)

B. Yazidis

The Yazidis are an ethnoreligious group in Iraq and neighboring countries, who speak one of the Kurdish languages. Some Yazidis identify as ethnic Kurds, while others do not. Beginning in 2014, the Salafist-jihadist group Islamic State (IS) overran a large chunk of Iraq, including the traditional Yazidi homeland of Mount Sinjar, and subjected Yazidis to a genocide, including massacre and sexual enslavement.

Would an independent Yazidi state have prevented this crime? This idea appears attractive, but it should be noted that (as far as I am aware) there is no significant movement for Yazidi independence. Many Yazidis, though fewer since 2014 (on which more below), have supported and been active in the Kurdish nationalist movement, while others prefer to remain under Iraqi rule. But a Yazidi state does not appear to have widespread support, and it is not difficult to see why. Within Iraq, there are two main

¹¹ Turkey credibly threatened the KRG with military action following the referendum: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/kurdistan-referendum-kurdish-turkey-military-recep-tayyip-erdogan-iraq-kurds-krq-independence-a7967566.html>

¹² The PKK's sister organization in Syria, the YPG, has had major differences with the Assad regime in Syria. But when Turkey invaded YPG-held Afrin in 2018, the YPG requested and received assistance from Damascus (though not enough to stop the Turkish invasion): <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-syria-afirin-hezbollah/pro-syrian-government-fighters-start-to-enter-afirin-hezbollah-media-unit-idUKKCN1G41TN?il=0>

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdullah_%C3%96calan#Democratic_confederalism

population centers for Yazidis: Sinjar District in Nineveh Governorate, and Shekhan District in Dohuk Governorate. However, these two districts are noncontiguous, and neither are homogeneously Yazidi, containing Arabs, Assyrians, non-Yazidi Kurds, and others. It is difficult to see how an independent Yazidi state would be viable. To add to the complications, any hypothetical independent Kurdish state would almost certainly insist upon annexing Yazidi territory, so Kurdish and Yazidi independence aspirations are in tension with one another, making it difficult (though perhaps not impossible) to support both. A hypothetical Assyrian state would also likely want these territories for itself.¹⁴

The Yazidis also pose a problem for Kurdish nationalism, since, as journalist Rania Khalek explains,¹⁵ a growing number of them are opposed to Kurdish independence. This is because the KRG's Peshmerga forces apparently abandoned Yazidis and others to IS by retreating in 2014.¹⁶ As Khalek notes, many Yazidis believe this was a deliberate ploy to exploit the IS conquest in order to expand Kurdish territory, on the grounds that IS (along with many Yazidi, Arab, and Assyrian civilians) would eventually be pushed out of its territories, first by IS, then by the Iraqi government and the U.S. Air Force, allowing the KRG to swoop in and populate these areas with Kurds (Yazidis have still not returned to Sinjar¹⁷). Whether or not these views are accurate, many Yazidis felt betrayed by the Peshmerga retreat, and joined the PKK (which fought IS from the beginning) and later the Shia Arab-dominated Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), supported by Iran and linked to the Iraqi government. Of course, many Yazidis also still distrust the Baghdad government, some still identifying with Kurdish nationalism and others adopting a "plague on both your houses" attitude.

C. Armenians

Ottoman Turkish authorities and those acting on their behalf systematically slaughtered around 1 million Armenians beginning in 1915. This is in addition to earlier massacres of Armenians in the 1890s, 1905 (during which some Armenians also perpetrated massacres), 1909, and later in the aftermath of World War I and the October Revolution, up to 1920 (during which, again, Armenians were sometimes perpetrators as well as victims). It seems reasonable to think that an independent Armenian state would have been helpful in preventing these atrocities.

Yet again, things are more complicated than they appear. The first thing to note is that massacres of Armenians did *not* end because Armenians got their own state, because they did not get their own state until 1991, unless one counts the brief Armenian First

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian_homeland

¹⁵ <https://www.alternet.org/2017/09/field-yazidi-fighters-ales-genocide-isiss-hands-and-more-conflict-come/>; see also her other articles: <https://www.alternet.org/2017/09/field-yazidi-fighters-ales-genocide-isiss-hands-and-more-conflict-come/>; and <https://www.alternet.org/2017/09/field-yazidi-fighters-ales-genocide-isiss-hands-and-more-conflict-come/>; as well as this one by Tom Westcott: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/59c1233e4.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/isil-capitalises-peshmerga-retreat-northern-iraq-171017105453523.html>

¹⁷ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/my-people-were-massacred-five-years-ago-the-genocide-continues/2019/07/31/b4ee1352-b24f-11e9-8f6c-7828e68cb15f_story.html

Republic of 1918-1920, and the even briefer Republic of Mountainous Armenia in 1921. The First Republic (arising out of the ashes the month-long experiment of the multinational Transcaucasian Federation) was embroiled in wars with both of its neighbors, Georgia and Azerbaijan, for which Armenia was partly (along with everyone else) responsible in both cases. These wars, especially the latter, followed the general chaotic pattern of the aftermath of the October Revolution in former Imperial Russia, with Armenians, Georgians (as well as Ossetians and Abkhazians), Azerbaijanis (with different political persuasions among all these groups), Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries, White Russians, Germans, Turks, and British all fighting one another, including multiple instances of allegiance-switching, backstabbing, opportunistic land-grabbing, and bloody massacres by all sides. Armenians suffered greatly, but also inflicted suffering on others.¹⁸ What ended this conflict was not the independent but fragile First Republic of Armenia, but a cynical *modus vivendi* in 1920 between Kemal Ataturk and Vladimir Lenin, agreeing to split Armenia between their two nascent states. Western Armenia was conquered by Turkey and remains part of it today, while eastern Armenia was Sovietized along with Azerbaijan (Menshevik Georgia was absorbed the following year). One can object to the *realpolitik* of Ataturk and Lenin, but it seems at least plausible that the other likely counterfactual alternatives were either absorption of the entire Caucasus by Soviet Russia or Turkey exclusively, or many more years of brutal interethnic war.¹⁹ Ironically, with the independence of both Armenia and Azerbaijan after the breakup of the USSR, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh have *lost* quite a bit of their “ability to determine their own fate”, as they are periodically under siege by Azerbaijan, on whose internationally-recognized territory they live. (The same can be said for South Ossetians and Abkhazians in Georgia.)

D. Jews

Contemporary Zionism arose in 19th century Europe in reaction to a surge in anti-Semitic incidents in Europe, such as the Dreyfus Affair in France and, even more severely, pogroms in the Pale of Settlement in Tsarist Russia. Jews began settling Ottoman, and then British Mandatory, Palestine from the 1880s to 1948. Zionism was initially a minority viewpoint among Jews worldwide, and not all Zionists were Statists in the sense used here (that is, some Zionists wanted only a Jewish “national homeland” and cultural center in the Holy Land without a state). But the systematic extermination of around 6 million Jews by Nazi Germany and its proxies in the 1940s led to Statist Zionism being enthusiastically or passively accepted, both among a majority of Zionists and a majority of Jews generally, for clearly understandable reasons.

Of course, the establishment of the State of Israel led to a significant diminishment of Palestinians’ power “to determine their own fate”. Between 1947 and 1949, during the Arab-Jewish civil war and subsequent Arab invasion of former Mandatory Palestine,

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_Days

¹⁹ See Luxemburg’s prescient comments on the difficulty of establishing even national autonomy (short of independence) in the Caucasus: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1909/national-question/ch05.htm> (Section III).

around 700,000 Palestinians fled their homeland, some being forced out at gunpoint by Haganah and IDF forces, others fleeing massacres like Deir Yassin, others simply wishing to avoid the war. None of them, however, were permitted to return to their homes by the new Israeli state. The remaining territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip were conquered, first by Jordan and Egypt, then by Israel, which possesses them to this day. I think it can fairly be said that if an independent Jewish state has increased the power of Jews to determine their own fate, it has diminished this power for Palestinians.

E. Palestinians

So why not establish an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza as a solution to this problem? On balance, I tend to agree with our host that this is the best available solution. But, as LZ has explained elsewhere,²⁰ the issue is complicated. There are over 700,000 Jewish Israeli citizens living in territory claimed by Palestinians for their would-be state (the West Bank and East Jerusalem). Either (1) the areas on which these settlers predominantly live would have to be annexed to the State of Israel, or (2) these settlers would have to be uprooted and sent back to Israel-proper by the Israeli state, or slowly pushed out through coercive policies undertaken by Israel, or (3) they would have to become citizens of a new Palestinian state. (1) would mean that the new Palestinian state would not only have to surrender claim to some of the most valuable land in the area, but may have to put up with being carved up into noncontiguous or effectively noncontiguous chunks (even within the West Bank), with ordinary travel between close-by major population centers like Ramallah, Bethlehem, and East Jerusalem very difficult. (2) would be extremely unpopular and politically difficult in Israel, and would also involve uprooting Jews from places they have lived in for some time now, and which are often historically important to the Jewish people (like the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron). (3) presents security concerns and the possibility of future conflict inside the new Palestinian state, and, even in the best case scenario, a diminishment of national self-determination for Jews who chose to become citizens of Palestine. Likewise, Palestinian citizens of Israel would have to choose between continuing to live in the Jewish nation-state that does not and cannot fully represent them, or leaving the places their families have lived in for many generations to live in the new Palestinian nation-state next door. None of this means that a “one state” binational solution is more feasible, at least at this point in time. It seems to me that any move towards binational integration would have to be preceded by a long “cooling off” period for both peoples in separate states. Some combination of (1), (2) and (3) seems inevitable for the near-to-midterm future. But it does mean, once again, that things are more complicated than they appear.

I think we can draw at least two general theses from these cases.

I. Statehood for one people often comes at the expense of self-determination rights for other peoples.

When a nation seeks its own state, it is by definition seeking to split off from a multinational state. But the longer a people has lived in a multinational state, the more likely it is to be intermixed with other peoples, often in the same territory or even the

²⁰ <https://liberalzionist.weebly.com/posts/one-state-vs-two-states>

same neighborhoods. Statehood for the people seeking it can force the other peoples to make unpleasant choices, such as leaving the territories in which they live or choosing to live under the rule of another people (with the possibility that they might get a “worse deal” than the previous multinational state or empire gave them). Thus, neighboring peoples will tend to oppose the independence movement, often for very good reasons, from their perspective. At the risk of overgeneralizing, I will go so far as to say that this tendency is the rule rather than the exception.

II. Statehood for a people sometimes leads to less self-determination even for that people.

This is especially the case for peoples that inhabit “tough neighborhoods” that are the site of conflict between great or regional powers. In this situation, independence may well not be a viable option, and the people in question may have to choose between being absorbed by one or another multinational state, on better or worse terms. In the example above, the Armenians in 1918-1920, and the Kurds and Yazidis today, are three plausible examples of this tendency.

It might be objected that the complications arising from these cases are the result of various peoples refusing to respect one another’s self-determination rights. This no more refutes the existence of self-determination or statehood rights, this objection goes, than a widespread refusal to respect bodily autonomy rights shows the non-existence of rights to bodily autonomy. The problem is that LZ has based her/his case for statehood-rights in claims about the *unfeasibility* (at least at this time) of further international political integration. The record of international organizations like the UN is supposed to show that international political integration will not produce better results than national independence. But as Dani²¹ points out, the failures of these international organizations are due to insufficient commitment to international cooperation. If it is objected that it is naïve to expect existing nation-states to sufficiently commit to cooperating, then why is not equally naïve to expect emerging nation-states, great and regional powers, and nationalist movements to respect the self-determination rights of other peoples?

²¹ <https://liberalzionist.weebly.com/posts/statism-vs-internationalism#comments>; at 8/3/2019 05:14:15 pm