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Ilan Peleg and Dov Waxman  
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## Israel's Palestinians

Arguing that a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict depends on a resolution of the Jewish-Palestinian conflict within Israel as much as it does on resolving the conflict between Israel and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, this timely book explores the causes and consequences of the growing conflict between Israel's Jewish majority and its Palestinian-Arab minority. It warns that if Jewish-Arab relations in Israel continue to deteriorate, this will pose a serious threat to the stability of Israel, to the quality of Israeli democracy, and to the potential for peace in the Middle East. The book examines the views and attitudes of both the Palestinian minority and the Jewish majority, as well as the Israeli state's historic approach to its Arab citizens. Drawing on the experience of other states with national minorities, the authors put forward specific proposals for safeguarding and enhancing the rights of the Palestinian minority while maintaining the country's Jewish identity.

Ilan Peleg is the Charles A. Dana Professor of Government and Law at Lafayette College and serves as a scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington, DC. He is the author or editor of eight previous books, including *Democratizing the Hegemonic State* (Cambridge, 2007) and *Human Rights in the West Bank & Gaza* (1995), which was a winner of the Choice Award for Scholarly Excellence. Professor Peleg previously served as president of the Association for Israel Studies from 1995 to 1997 and was a founding editor of its scholarly journal, *Israel Studies Forum*.

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# Israel's Palestinians

## *The Conflict Within*

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## Preface and Acknowledgments

Our goal in writing this book is not only to provide a thorough scholarly analysis of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel but also to issue an urgent call for a major change in these relations. The book is intended to sound an alarm, to warn that, unless immediate and dramatic action is taken, the relationship between Israel's Jewish majority and its Palestinian-Arab minority will continue to deteriorate. This will put Arab-Jewish coexistence in Israel, the country's political stability, and the quality of its democracy seriously at risk. It will also undermine the prospects for a truly comprehensive and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Some may think that we are being overly alarmist and that majority-minority relations in Israel are not nearly as bad, or as unstable, as we suggest. It might even be argued that whatever the complaints and frustrations of Israel's Palestinian minority, they have never really posed a threat to the state and have always remained firmly under its control. According to this view, the predicament of the Palestinian minority in Israel today and the relationship between it and the Jewish majority – though far from ideal – is not a pressing issue or major concern, certainly not for a country that faces a host of internal challenges and external threats. We strongly disagree with this perspective. For us, the divide between Jewish and Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel is the deepest and most dangerous social and political divide within the country, and Israel's unequal treatment of its Palestinian minority is as problematic for the country's future as its continued occupation of Palestinian territories. Ignoring or minimizing this problem is to court disaster – possibly, the complete collapse of the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and major civil unrest and large-scale violence inside Israel.

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In recent years, we have observed with increasing dismay a series of events and developments in Israel that are straining Jewish-Arab relations in the country to the breaking point – most notably, the massive Arab protests and riots that occurred in October 2000, the publication in 2006–2007 of four “Vision documents” by members of the Arab intellectual elite, the rise in the number of Arab voters boycotting or abstaining from Israeli elections, the violent clashes between Arabs and Jews in “mixed cities,” the growing public discussion of transferring densely populated Arab regions in Israel to a future Palestinian state (a proposal vehemently rejected by the Arab residents of those regions), the 2009 electoral success of Yisrael Beiteinu led by Avigdor Lieberman that campaigned on an explicitly anti-Arab political platform and Lieberman’s elevation to the post of foreign minister in the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and the introduction of a number of discriminatory and anti-Arab bills in the Israeli parliament. All of this indicates to us a real crisis in majority-minority relations in Israel. The fragile coexistence that has prevailed between Jews and Arabs for decades is now in jeopardy as the two groups are becoming more politically polarized, with extremists on both sides gaining ground, and socially more alienated as heightened fear and suspicion keeps them apart.

In tandem with this crisis in majority-minority relations, the state itself suffers from a legitimacy crisis vis-à-vis its Palestinian citizens. After years of suffering from government neglect and systematic discrimination (a fact recognized by official Israeli government bodies), growing numbers of Palestinians in Israel have concluded that the state is inherently biased against them. Most believe that they will never be treated fairly and gain equality with Jewish citizens as long as Israel defines itself as a Jewish state. Consequently, the redefinition of the state has become the central demand of the Palestinian minority; but it is a demand that the Jewish majority adamantly and almost universally opposes. As the state’s Jewish identity has become a major point of contention domestically, it has also been inserted into the Israeli-Palestinian peace process by Prime Minister Netanyahu’s insistence that the Palestinian Authority officially recognize Israel as a Jewish state in a final peace agreement. Such recognition, however, is unlikely to be granted against the objections of the Palestinian minority in Israel – underlining the connection that we emphasize in this book between Israel’s external and internal Palestinian problems.

In addition to offering a thorough analysis of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel and warning of the dangers that the country faces if it fails to solve its internal Palestinian problem, we also present in this book our own



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proposals for improving majority-minority relations in Israel. Drawing on the examples of other countries that have successfully managed ethno-national conflicts within their borders, we make specific recommendations for improving the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority in Israel. We also suggest a redefinition of the state in a way that can satisfy both Jewish and Palestinian needs. Although we do not expect readers to accept all of our proposals, we hope that our proposals will at least stimulate new thinking and encourage creative and bold action to address an issue that has all-too-often been ignored.

Our thinking is fundamentally guided by the conviction we share that Israeli Jews and Palestinians (both citizens and non-citizens of Israel) do not have to be enemies. The conflict between them – inside and outside Israel's pre-1967 borders – is not metaphysically preordained or historically determined. Although it is certainly long-running and deeply rooted, it is not completely intractable and beyond repair. The establishment of a Palestinian state and a domestic transformation of Israel can greatly alleviate, if not entirely eliminate, this conflict. We also firmly believe that the State of Israel can become a place in which Jews and Palestinians can live together as equal citizens; and that it can be, indeed *should* be, a homeland for the Jewish people, a pluralistic democracy, and a state for all its citizens. This book essentially makes the case for why this is so necessary and how this could be achieved.

In the course of researching and writing the book, we were helped by many people. We are very grateful to all the people in Israel who shared their perspectives with us. They are, in alphabetical order, Ibrahim Abu-Shindi, Bashir Bashir, Adella Biadi-Shlon, Morad Elsana, Khaled Furani, Ali Haider, Hassan Jabareen, Yousef Jabareen, Amal Jamal, Ilana Kaufman, Dov Khanin, Mordechai Kremnitzer, Rania Laham-Grayeb, Anat Maor, Mike Prashker, Elie Rekhess, Ilan Saban, Sammy Smooha, and Oren Yiftachel. We are especially thankful to Alan Dowty for his comments on the manuscript and to the anonymous reviewers of the manuscript for Cambridge University Press. We would like to thank our research assistants, Matthew Goldstein, Michael Handzo, Muhammad Kabir, and Andrew Schroeder, as well as our supportive editor at Cambridge University Press, Eric Crahan. The research and writing of this book was made possible by the institutional support received from Baruch College of the City University of New York and from Lafayette College.

Finally, we would like to note that this book is truly the result of a joint and equal effort, and the order in which our names appear on the book's cover was determined alphabetically.

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We dedicate the book to all the individuals and groups in Israel and beyond who are tirelessly working to promote Jewish-Arab coexistence, cooperation, and equality. They give us hope for a better future for a country we care about deeply.

Ilan Peleg & Dov Waxman  
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