

Review: Interviews about the concept of a one-state solution to help resolve issues in the Middle East

November 16, 2011

REVIEW

On October 4, CBC Radio's [The Current](#) featured two interviews and audio clips [during a segment focused on the issue of a so-called "one-state solution"](#) to help resolve issues in the Middle East.

In the nearly 23-minute segment, host [Anna Maria Tremonti](#) began by describing the concept of a shared state among Israelis and Palestinians as "radical" and noting it was a view held only by a relatively small group.

Her guests were two advocates of the idea: Daniel Gavron, an Israeli writer living near Jerusalem, and Ali Abunimah, a Palestinian writer and activist living in Chicago.

Gavron told Tremonti his support of the one-state idea grew from a "negative process," in that he would vastly prefer two states but had reluctantly concluded "it isn't going to happen."

Abunimah said the [one-state situation](#) already exists "by, for, and of" the Israelis and it was a matter of transforming it into a more formal arrangement involving more democratic rights for Palestinians.

Tremonti presented an audio clip with Eytan Gilboa, a scholar at Bar Ilan University who argued that partition is the only "viable" solution because of the dispute on land and the fact the two peoples cannot live together.

Returning to the interview, Gavron said borders would be "so tortuous, so strange" and that cooperation would be necessary in any event.

Tremonti asked Abunimah why, if the two parties can live side-by-side on the same piece of land, they can't simply live side-by-side in two separate states. Abunimah said the partition is "neat in textbooks" but not in reality. A partition would not satisfy the demands of Israeli nationalists who want a Jewish state, he said, and the proposed partition leaves Israel with

indigenous Palestinians within the Jewish state. Despite disparities within Israel, the two parties get along and he wondered how much better they would live within one formalized state. Abunimah said this would be along the lines of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Tremonti played another clip featuring Gilboa discussing a trade of territory. Gavron responded that it wasn't a serious concept in the region. Abunimah added that a two-state solution would only be a stepping-stone to what Israeli nationalists seek.

The two discussed their visions of the single state, principally with what Gavron called "one person, one vote" fundamentals of democracy and complete equality. Abunimah talked about the need to avoid a sectarian state and to seek redress and restitution involving resources and the return of refugees instead of a "defensive ultra nationalism."

An audio clip featured David Goldberg, author of *The Political Dictionary of Israel*, who noted that the demography of the region would lead to the Jews being the minority. Gavron said it's wrong for Jews to fear that because initially they would be the dominant presence. He said there is "terrible suspicion and fear" that needs to be overcome.

Tremonti asked what becomes of the concept of a Jewish homeland. Gavron said it would be fulfilled and that historically there existed a multicultural nature in the region. Abunimah added: "There's plenty of space between the existing situation and the apocalypse."

A spokesman for the Palestinian National Authority was also featured in a short taped segment. She said Israelis don't want a single state and that the Palestinian National Authority wants sovereignty, too.

Abunimah said her views were not the majority Palestinian view. The discourse involves strong support for a single state and should not be confused with the political views of the political authority. Gavron agreed, though, that he is part of a very small minority of Israelis.

Gavron said borders are becoming irrelevant. He was asked: Does that not mean Zionism is dead? Gavron said it "has to live with the times," that it has changed and that will need to change.

Tremonti said Gavron, a dedicated Zionist, could be criticized for "betraying the state you helped build." Gavron agreed, but said it is necessary to "respond to what exists," not what earlier existed.

The complainant, Paul Michaels, is the director of research and media relations for the [Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs \(CIJA\)](#), the principal advocacy organization for the Canadian Jewish community.

Several emails were exchanged dating back to late September when *The Current* was planning its segment. Michaels offered suggestions on how the program could include other voices than

those advocating the one-state solution. He said the presentation of two voices with the same position did not confer balance.

“The vast majority of Israelis and their supporters abroad view the proposition that Israel should cease to be the nation-state of the Jewish people as not only misguided but hostile, intolerant and even hateful,” he wrote.

On the day of the segment, October 4, he wrote to ask if The Current planned “within the next few days” to “provide an equal and opposite perspective” on the issue. He didn’t hear back and wrote again October 11 and 12 to offer assistance to the program in identifying or contacting guests.

On October 17, the acting director of radio current affairs, Lynda Shorten, wrote Michaels. She acknowledged the one-state solution was controversial and not popular. But she argued the discussion had a place in the context of extensive Middle East coverage by the program.

“If The Current's story on a one-state solution was the only coverage the program or the network had offered of the issue, you would indeed have cause for concern about balanced presentation. It is not, of course. Far from it,” she wrote. “As you well know, The Current and our other network programs continue to provide listeners with a wide range of perspectives from and about the Middle East. Prominent in our coverage are stories about, or premised on, a two-state solution, the proposal accepted by Israel, the Palestinians, the United Nations and others.”

She said CBC has a role to present a range of views. In this instance, she noted, the one-state view was presented with audio clips of “dissenting voices.” Future programs were bound to cover the two-state concept, she said.

Michaels wrote back November 1 to question Shorten’s concept of balance.

“Do you not believe that The Current, specifically, a prominent show that has its own dedicated audience, has an obligation under CBC’s requirements for balance and fairness to provide another perspective on this highly controversial subject?” Michaels wrote.

“I shouldn’t have to remind you that the CBC is a mammoth organization with an incredible plethora of news and current affairs shows. Do you really expect that an audience that might listen with some regularity to one radio current affairs program will — perhaps, just perhaps — have the benefit of getting another perspective on the same controversial issue weeks or months down the road from, say, a TV news item or even from a disparate radio current affairs program, say Tapestry? How can you even imagine this, let alone expect it?”

Michaels added: “If producers apply CBC standards arbitrarily instead of uniformly, are they really abiding by them? Do they just insist on balance when the issue suits them, and refuse it when it doesn’t? This last point is critical because in the absence of balance — in particular, the

opportunity to address extreme allegations against Israel, if not in the same segment then surely in the immediate days ahead while the issue is still fresh in the listeners' minds — the CBC leaves itself open to the charge that it is violating its guidelines about not leading its audience to draw conclusions. The audience both deserve and demand to have sufficient, accurate information to be able to make up their own minds.”

Michaels asked for a review November 2 of the segment and of the wider concern that the principles of balance and fairness were not being applied on the program in its treatment of Israel.

[CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices](#) makes clear the news organization does not “*promote any particular point of view on matters of public debate.*”

It adds: “*On issues of controversy, we ensure that divergent views are reflected respectfully, taking into account their relevance to the debate and how widely held these views are. We also ensure that they are represented over a reasonable period of time.*”

As for balance: “*When presenting content (programs, program segments, or digital content) where a single opinion or point of view is featured, we ensure that a diversity of perspective is provided across a network or platform and in an appropriate time frame.*”

CONCLUSION

Few issues are as contentious as the proposals to resolve the territorial disputes involving Israelis and Palestinians.

The concepts within these contentions are valid grounds to explore on CBC programming. While this can be an uncomfortable discussion, I do not share the view that an examination of the one-state solution is inherently hateful or hostile. In this instance, I concluded that the segment featured a civil and nuanced presentation of the concept interspersed with, if not offset by, clear opposing views.

The CBC policy permits a range of views on controversial matters to be presented in “*an appropriate time frame*” and “*over a reasonable period of time,*” approaches that reflect policy at other public broadcasters. Thus this segment did not violate CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices.

The terms “*appropriate*” and “*reasonable*” in policy are imprecise and offer a high degree of flexibility for CBC to make its decisions as an independent news organization. While this is understandable, there is an equally understandable frustration in some quarters that CBC has no requirement to address in a timely manner any call to follow up controversial segments.

In previous findings I have noted that balance does not constitute mathematical equivalence within segments, programs or platforms but an overall fairness and equitability across CBC journalism. It would be onerous, restrictive and editorially intrusive to demand counterweight within a proscribed period. Almost certainly, the heavy-handed exercise would create a micro-managed false balance.

That being said, CBC News encourages itself through policy to sustain conversations on contentious issues with systematic journalism that accords attention to exploring controversy with depth and sophistication. It notes its ongoing obligation and commitment, albeit without reference to timing.

The public affairs experience is best served when important conversations are kept alive by responsible treatments. In this instance there are wide opportunities to follow the segment while the memory is fresh.

Kirk LaPointe
CBC Ombudsman