

Sarah Leah Whitson & Michael Schaeffer Omer-Man
*From Apartheid To Democracy:
A Blueprint For Peace In Israel-Palestine*

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Only die-hard optimists would write a book proposing a peace plan for the Israel-Palestine conflict. To wade into these waters shows courage where others would show fatigue and cynicism. By suggesting a concrete blueprint for change and peace, the authors of *From Apartheid to Democracy* have shown just such courage

The timing of the publication of this book affects one's expectations and enhances its relevance. By coincidence, the book was released shortly after the Trump 20-Point Gaza Peace Plan was unveiled at a White House press conference on 29 September 2025, during one of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visits. The book, therefore, does not deal with this peace plan. However, the Trump Gaza Plan is not the only show in town – a point the authors recognise by writing this book, suggesting a blueprint. The 20-Point Peace Plan is deeply imperfect and received widespread criticism from the get-go. Therefore, it is clear that the search for acceptable alternatives should continue.

In essence, *From Apartheid to Democracy* focuses on the ending of apartheid and occupation – the essential condition without which no other transitional justice issue can be addressed. The book suggests that an interim Caretaker Government be established within the current one-state reality to oversee the transition until democratic elections are held. The book challenges the idea that a perfect leadership, or a nonviolent movement, have to emerge before a peace plan can kick into action.

From Apartheid to Democracy is anything but a dry, academic book. The authors are both seasoned experts in the field and speak from the heart and from experience. Sara Leah Whitson headed the New York-based organisation Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN) for six years. Her co-author, Michael Schaeffer OmerMan, is the Palestine director at Dawn and a previous editor of *972 Magazine*. It is evident that this publication is the product of passion and dedication. In writing the book, the authors conducted multiple interviews with stakeholders, including political experts and activists, lending credibility and legitimacy to the authors' Blueprint.

The suggested Blueprint set out in the book is a three-year plan aimed at sufficiently democratising the entire territory of Israel-Palestine. This will require the suspension of Israel and Palestine as independent states. Fundamental to the Blueprint is the idea that all

citizens must be able to participate equitably in permanent decision-making in the territory.

The book is non-dogmatic and does not prescribe the form of the future state. It is not hung up on a one-state or two-state solution. It leaves it to the people of Palestine and Israel themselves to decide, in a democratic manner, what form of state they want to live in. The authors also state that they are not covering topics such as refugee rights or reparations (including property restitution and damages). The authors are precise in their ambition: they are not attempting to address the entirety of a comprehensive transitional justice plan, but rather propose a plan for institutional reforms. Issues such as reparations should be addressed after the transition as part of a truly democratic process. The Blueprint, however, suggests preparatory steps towards restorative justice, which are discussed in section 8 of the book.

The book is divided into 9 sections, which detail the legislative, institutional and policy changes necessary to achieve transformation, as well as the proposed timetable for achieving such changes:

1. Establishing a Caretaker Government to implement the Blueprint, incorporating the authorities of the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, bound by a set of Guiding Principles that enshrine democracy and equality.
2. Ending military rule and revoking all emergency regulations.
3. Restoring full freedom of movement, temporarily leaving internal checkpoints in place but codifying the right of everyone to pass through them, subject to physical security screening.
4. Replacing Israel's High Court of Justice with a High Court for the Transition, with Palestinian, Israeli, and international judges to shepherd the democratic transition.
5. Implementing a comprehensive process for revoking racist and discriminatory laws, including 'Basic Laws' and replacing or reforming them in accordance with the Guiding Principles.
6. Extending citizenship and rights to all people living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.
7. Integrating Israeli and Palestinian civilian police, forbidding military forces from domestic operations, and instituting a comprehensive plan for disarming and demobilising remaining militant groups and security services.
8. Releasing all administrative detainees and political prisoners, recognising the rights of Palestinian refugees, and planning policy options for a transitional justice programme that a post-transition government can adopt.

9. At the end of three years, holding democratic elections that will result in a representative government, as well as preparing for a possible referendum in which all citizens can decide whether to remain as one state, or seek an alternative formulation, be it two states, a confederation, or something else.

Although it does not require a referendum, the Blueprint recommends that the newly elected government hold a referendum. The authors believe that political decisions of a certain magnitude should be made by the people. A well-managed referendum will, of course, enhance the legitimacy of the new state or states.

Throughout the book, comparisons are drawn with the South African transitional process, which is still widely considered a primary model for other transitioning countries' processes. The authors, for example, draw on South Africa's successful military integration. They hope for the right kind of 'productive' anger to galvanise action and change, and refer to the outrage that led to sanctions and diplomatic pressure against South Africa. However, it is still unclear what role international sanctions played in moving South Africa to the point of inclusive multiparty elections and change. The jury is still out on this question. The authors also refer to the Goldstone Commission as a relatively successful example of an institution that contributed to safe and orderly conduct during South African elections. One possible point of criticism is that the authors could have made some reference to the multiple ways in which the South African transition failed. South African observers, myself included, have become far less optimistic that the South African transitional model remain the model to imitate. Whereas some inspiration can be drawn from South Africa, the process has widely failed in terms of some key objectives, such as racial reconciliation, rights realisation, and peaceful co-existence.

A blueprint such as this should be discussed and debated, including in important policy circles. As recognised by the authors in one of the book launches in early 2026, DAWN, as an organisation, does not have the resources to disseminate the Blueprint to influential US politicians or Trump himself. It is hoped that they get the word out far and wide.

Towards the end of the book, the authors state that they presume the presence of political will to end apartheid and occupation. This presumption can, of course, not be taken for granted. Activists and academics should study how political will is created and how to foster and bolster it. I would have liked to hear the authors' ideas on this.

According to Trump, the first phase of the 20-Point Plan has already been achieved. But according to many, the plan has already failed dramatically. As is evident from Israel's daily attacks on Gaza, the conflict is far from over.

The two-year Gaza war represents what Antonio Guterres calls 'a moral crisis that challenges the global conscience'. It is also the largest international law crisis of the past decades. It is hoped that this Blueprint for peace will find its way into the minds and plans of influential policy makers, as well as those who care about the future of that region and its people. Far from being over, the struggle continues, rendering the book as relevant as ever.

Mia Swart

Visiting Professor, University of the Witwatersrand

Visiting Associate Professor, Kuwait International Law University