

Tablet

Sorry, but There Is No Two-State Solution

Pretending there is a deal to be done with the Palestinian leadership only opens the door to another October 7. Israelis won't be fooled.

BY **GADI TAUB** FEBRUARY 12, 2024

Herzl's Children

Gadi Taub reports on the two ongoing wars that will shape Israel's future: The military and diplomatic conflict between Israel and her enemies, and the struggle between Israel's Western-oriented elites and her democratic institutions.



Israeli soldiers operate next to the UNRWA headquarters, where the IDF uncovered a Hamas command tunnel running underneath the U.N. compound in the Gaza Strip, Feb. 8, 2024. REUTERS/DILAN MARTINEZ

I don't fault any Zionist or ally of Israel for having embraced the two-state solution, as I did for many years. No other peace plan could reconcile self-

interest and lofty principles so seamlessly. No other plan could offer a better way to transcend the contradictions that reality imposed on Israelis, by making a Zionist argument, no less, for Palestinian statehood. Far more powerful than a mere solution to a problem, the idea of two states was, for many of us, an irresistible form of seduction—a promise that partition could make Israel whole.

The seduction came from our core Zionist beliefs. Our own Declaration of Independence says that “It is the natural right of the Jewish people to be, like all peoples, masters of their own fate, in their own sovereign state.” Partition would make that stance internally coherent, validating our own right by fighting for theirs. It would also reconcile liberalism with nationalism. After all, the occupation threatens both, because it not only violates the human rights of Palestinians, it also endangers the Jewish majority. Partition would solve both problems in one fell swoop.

The two-state solution was also naturally appealing to Israel’s friends in the West, especially liberal Jews: Faced with attempts to paint Zionism as colonialism, Judaism as fundamentalist messianism, the IDF as an army of occupation, or Israel as an apartheid state, the two-state solution would dissolve such smears with a single flourish.

But compelling as it is as a debating strategy, or a form of self-therapy, the two-state solution is, sadly, no solution at all. Rather, it is a big step down the road to another Lebanon. It would doom the Zionist project, not save it, while producing much greater misery and more bloodshed for Israelis and Palestinians alike. By now most of us in Israel understand this dreadful math. If there was still a substantial minority among us who clung to the two-state promise against the evidence of the Second Intifada and everything that followed, that minority has shrunk considerably since Oct. 7.

We now know exactly what our would-be neighbors have in mind for us. We see that a majority of Palestinians support Hamas and are well pleased by its massacres. Most of us therefore believe that turning Judea and Samaria into another Hamastan to satisfy those who see the massacre as an inspiration and its perpetrators as role models would be suicidal. Who in their right mind would inflict the ensuing bloodshed on their partners, children, friends, and parents? If one is determined to feel overwhelming sympathy for one of the many stateless peoples of the world, why not start with the Kurds, or the Catalans, or the Basques, or the Rohingya, or the Baluchis, or any of one of

dozens of subnational groups—none of whom seem likely to attain their longed-for goals of statehood anytime soon. After all, it took nearly 2,000 years for the Jews to succeed in refounding their state. If the Palestinians are determined to kill us on the road to replacing us, then presumably they can wait, too.

Those Israelis who do still yearn for a Palestinian state are now a very small, yet well-positioned minority: far left politicians, academics, progressive journalists, and some members of the IDF brass. Not surprisingly, many of these were educated in American universities. But they no longer carry any real electoral weight.

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They know it, too. Which is why even they, the men and women of Oct. 6, rarely dare to tell their Israeli audiences that they still support a two-state solution. They mostly allude to it with vague insinuations that

often [invoke](#), or even parrot, Washington talking points, such as [exhortations](#) about an as-of-yet unspecified “[political horizon](#),” as National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan [put it](#), for “[the day after](#).” Get any more specific and you’re bound to lose much of your audience. And, it goes without saying, any attempt to translate “revitalized Palestinian Authority” into Hebrew would make you a laughingstock.

To be sure, the two-state solution was a noble dream. But it turns out it always was just that—a dream. What enabled those who clung to it long enough to continue sleepwalking through the wrecks of exploding buses, the bodies of slain civilians, the constant wild calls for violence against us, the massive efforts to build terror infrastructures under our noses and on our borders, was our own tendency to imagine Palestinians in our own image. For all the fashionable talk of diversity, we too find it hard to imagine a people that is not like ourselves. Knowing our own striving for self-determination, we assumed that the Palestinians, too, want above all to be masters of their own fate in their own sovereign state.

But that is not what they want. The huge amount of international aid Palestinians have received since 1948 was never used for nation-building. It wasn't used for building houses and roads or for planting orange groves. It was harnessed to one overarching cause: the destruction of the Jewish state. This is what the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) does: subsidize and shield Palestinian terror infrastructure. This is what the PA does with its pay-for-slay salaries—underwritten by the U.S.—to the families of terrorists. And this is what Hamas was able to do as a result of the billions invested in Gaza: It bought weapons, trained terrorists, and built a sprawling network of terror tunnels—and not one bomb shelter for civilians.

As Einat Wilf and Adi Schwarz demonstrate in their bestselling book *The War of Return*, the Palestinian national movement has built its ethos and identity around the so-called “right of return” of the Palestinian “refugees”—by which they mean the destruction of Israel through the resettlement of the Palestinian diaspora, the so-called refugees that UNRWA numbers at 5.9 million, within Israel's borders. But there's no such thing as the right of return: First, it is not an internationally recognized right; second, if implemented it would not be a return, since almost all of those who demand it have never been to Israel themselves. And finally, of those who fled or were expelled from the land of Israel in 1948, only an [estimated](#) 30,000 are still alive today.

No other group of people on Earth is considered to be refugees decades after so many of its members have resettled as passport-holding citizens of other countries. No other group has its refugee status conferred automatically on its offspring. And no group of actual refugees is excluded from the purview of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), entrusted instead to the care of a special agency, UNRWA, whose mandate is to perpetuate the problem rather than solve it. UNRWA cultivates Palestinian hopes for a “free” Palestine “from the river to the sea,” allows for weapons to be [stored](#) inside its [facilities](#) and schools, and for a Hamas intelligence and communications center to be [built under](#) its headquarters, indoctrinates children to glorify [terrorists](#)—whom it also [employs](#)—and [disseminates](#) wild [antisemitism](#), while still steering clear of what it should have been doing all along: resettling those who were, or still are, actual refugees.

What the centrality of the “right of return” to the Palestinian ethos means, of course, is that Palestinian identity itself is structured as a rejection of the two-state solution, and denies the legitimacy of any form of Jewish sovereignty anywhere in the land of Israel. The two-state solution presupposes mutual recognition between both peoples. Each would affirm the right of the other to national self-determination. If you demand partition but also insist on the right of return then what you are really asking for is a two-Palestinian-states solution: one state in the West Bank and Gaza, ethnically cleansed of Jewish settlers, and one in Israel, where the Jews would eventually become a minority, and would consequently suffer the fate of the Jewish communities in every other Arab state. There has never been a Palestinian leadership ready to give up the right of return, which means that they have always manipulated their Israeli counterparts, as well as all mediators (including, of course, American mediators) with fake negotiations intended to extract temporary benefits, and to buy time, in preparation for the larger goal of eradicating all traces of Jewish sovereignty between the river and the sea. Fortunately, they have failed each time. But failure hardly keeps them from trying.

There never was a Palestinian leadership ready to recognize the legitimacy of a Jewish nation-state. That is a constant fact of life in the conflict. The Arab side has rejected any and all partition plans starting with the Peel Commission in 1937, the United Nations partition resolution of 1947, and all the way through the various American mediation plans and Israeli offers, and those offered by Israeli leaders, including the Camp David 2000 offer, in which Prime Minister Ehud Barak agreed to the partition of Jerusalem, and the further concessions offered later by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. All have crashed on the nonnegotiable demand for the right of return. Even Salam Fayyad, the technocrat former Palestinian prime minister, a figurehead with no popular support at home but beloved by Western peace processors—and who’s receiving renewed attention in administration-friendly media—insisted on the right of return in an [article](#) he wrote mere days after the Oct. 7 pogrom.

Luckily, the Palestinians were never patient enough to even temporarily put a stop to terrorism or defer their demand for return until they could muster better-organized forces. It seems that the cult of death and the worship of martyrs make for an addiction to terror, and a need for violent venting. If you bring your children from kindergarten to stage plays where they pretend to kill Jews, you cannot also tell them to hold back forever on acting them out once they’ve grown up. The tree of Palestinian identity, it seems, must be

constantly watered with the blood of Jews to sustain it through the many sacrifices required for a nonproductive life of permanent victimhood.

Had our neighbors been able to restrain themselves for a time, our seduction by the two-state illusion, the game we played with ourselves to relieve our moral pangs from the imperative to rule over another people, could easily have been fatal. Had the Palestinians launched a mega Oct. 7, not only from tiny Gaza, but also from Judea and Samaria, a territory 15 times larger, perched above Israel's major metropolitan centers and international airport, Israel would have been in a far more precarious place right now. With no buffer between the West Bank and the Arab states to Israel's east there would be a land bridge from Tehran all the way to the outskirts of Tel Aviv. This is not a risk Israel can ever afford to take, and Oct. 7 only served to make the real-world dangers we face more vivid.

The Biden administration, as well as the mainstream American media, may be seduced by Israel's Bibi-hating press into believing that it's Netanyahu who stands in the way of an agreement establishing a Palestinian state. But it is not Netanyahu who is the obstacle on the Israeli side. It is the vast [majority](#) of Israelis, who may or may not vote for Netanyahu but will certainly never again vote for anyone who admits to favoring a two-state solution. The allegedly moderate Benny Gantz retains his high polling numbers only because he avoids any talk of two states. He knows that if he mentioned the two-state solution, he'd sink in the polls faster than he can say "Palestinian state."

But if the Biden team can be forgiven for misunderstanding the Israeli mood, it cannot be forgiven for imagining it can make Palestinian recalcitrance and violent intentions disappear by papering over their national ethos with fake Western jargon. There is no such thing as a "revitalized" Palestinian Authority, because there is no one who wants to "revitalize" it in such a way as to make it conform to Secretary of State Antony Blinken's sales pitch. Even for a group of progressive wishful-thinkers, this silly coinage is a new low in the language of political narcissism.

Israel is a strong country, but it is also a small country surrounded by enemies. It is important for Israel to mark the difference between embracing folly and being polite. It is time that Israel and her leaders be more vocal about the folly of America's misguided Middle East policy. We can afford to continue limping along with the burdens of the occupation for another generation or two, by which point many unforeseen things will have come to

pass that may make a solution either more or less obvious. But we will not live that long if we are once again seduced by the two-state siren song.

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