

## ONE STATE PUSH FOR ISRAEL AND PALESTINE?

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

The recognition of the U.S. State Department of the illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank is yet another indication that the two-state solution is dead. There are 600,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank and they will soon be one third of the overall population. When the Zionist settlers in the 1930s became one third of the population, Palestine was doomed. This is when the Zionist leadership began to contemplate the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

The West Bank is under a similar danger. Vast areas have already been ethnically cleansed, and the rest are enclaved in spaces that at any given moment Israel can turn into inhabitable areas, as it did in the Gaza Strip. This policy has so far been immune from any significant international rebuke.

The “Green Line” — the 1949 armistice line that separates Israel from the West Bank — is a figment of the imagination of those who support the two-state solution. It was replaced by a greater Israel, ruled by the Israeli nationality law passed in 2018 that states that only the Jews have the right of self-determination all over historical Palestine, sanctions the continued colonisation of the country and upholds its apartheid system.

This new reality requires a different approach by anyone caring for the future of the Palestinians and respects their basic rights. This is now a struggle for a regime change. A regime that allows half of the population living between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean to have all the privileges and continue to rob the other half of its living space, lands, rights, dignity and life. Such an oppressive reality is not solved by a “peace process” but only by decolonisation that would reformulate the relationship between the third generation of Jewish settlers who arrived in the late 19th century and the indigenous population of Palestine on the basis of equality.

Decolonisation is rightly associated with processes that took place in the first half of the last century (such as the one leading to the liberation of India), but that does not mean colonisation disappeared from the rest of the globe. Even more importantly, the process of decolonisation, apart from two places, Algeria and South Africa, has not affected settler colonial projects which ended in the creation of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Israel, to mention but few of those cases.

In some cases, the settler community acted upon the logic, defined by the late Australian scholar, Patrick Wolfe, as “the logic of the elimination of the native”. This led to the genocide of native Americans and aboriginals. But even there the struggle continues for recognition, restitution and equality. In Palestine, that logic was translated to an incremental process of ethnic cleansing, which the Palestinians call “the ongoing Nakba” (Nakba in Arabic is catastrophe and is used in the Palestinian narrative to describe the ethnic cleansing of 1948).

The Zionist movement succeeded in expelling half the Palestinian population in 1948 and since 1967 led to departure of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from all over historical Palestine (the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Israel). Today, the Israeli government continues to dispossess land and take away resources from Palestinians, thus creating conditions that become and more unsustainable for many Palestinians.

In the 1960s and 1970s the Palestinians resisted this policy of colonisation and dispossession with an armed struggle in their quest for freedom and liberation. In many ways, the Hamas in

Gaza seems still to believe that this can be an effective tool in the struggle. But quite a few Palestinians seem to prefer a different kind of popular resistance, given the imbalance of power between the strongest military force in West Asia and the weakest one.

The “march of return” — the weekly peaceful demonstrations by thousands of Palestinians on the fence between the Gaza Strip and Israel is one example of a different kind of a popular resistance, which demands not only the end of the inhuman siege on Gaza and its two million people that has led to a human catastrophe there, but also the right of return of the refugees to their homes; 80% of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are refugees who live near their lands, villages and towns from which they were expelled in 1948.

Popular or armed resistance on the way to liberation would have not been needed had international diplomacy bravely examined the origins of the conflict in Palestine and on its basis support a just and lasting solution. But the international community, and mainly western political elites, fully support Israel and remain silent in the face of continued dispossession of Palestinians. It adopted the two-state solution as its mantra for what should be done and was supported by the Palestinian leadership which hoped to salvage at least part of Palestine (22%). This approach has failed miserably. Israel has established that any sovereign Palestinian state is impossible. And now we have an American administration that fully endorses Israel’s wish to de-politicise the Palestinian question and allow Israel to fully extend its sovereignty all over historical Palestine (and by that also rejecting categorically the right of any Palestinian refugee to return — a right recognised by the UN in its Resolution 194 from December 11, 1948).

We wasted 50 years in trying to push towards this solution and the end result of this effort was more Jewish settlements in the West Bank and a total separation between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank; and now we see another fruit of this approach — an American recognition of the Judaisation of the West Bank.

The civil society in Palestine and around the globe believes in a different way forward. Unlike its political elites it frames the situation in Palestine not as a conflict but a struggle against settler colonialism; not unlike the struggle against Apartheid South Africa. And hence the first step forward suggested by Palestinian civil society was to call upon the international community to divest from, boycott and sanction Israel in order to stop the “ongoing catastrophe”. This BDS, or Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions, campaign will continue until the people of the West Bank would be liberated from a military rule, the people of Gaza from the siege, the refugees return from their exile, and the Palestinians in Israel would be recognised as equal citizens.

The next step is now beginning to unfold. A clear alternative Palestinian call for the establishment of a one democratic state all over historical Palestine. At this moment in time it is a vision, soon it will become a clear Palestinian political programme. One that rectifies past evils by compensating and restituting lost land and property, enables the repatriation of the refugees, and offers democracy for all who live in historical Palestine, without any discrimination. This vision has now a growing support in the international community, among young Palestinians and progressive Jews inside and outside Israel. For many people it still looks like an insurmountable task — privileged people like the Jews of Israel would not willingly give up their position. But pressure from the outside, a continued popular struggle from the inside and a clear Palestinian vision for the future can turn this vision into reality. At least we will not waste another 50 years in looking for a lost key where there is light instead of searching for it where we lost it.

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