

ONE-STATE SOLUTION, THE WAY FORWARD IN PALESTINE

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

For more than 50 years, well-intentioned and more cynical, local and external actors involved in the attempts to bring peace and reconciliation to historical [Palestine](#) have religiously adhered to the two-state solution as the only way forward.

The idea of partitioning Palestine between the settler movement of Zionism, and later the state of Israel and the indigenous population of Palestine is not new. It was first offered by the British in 1937 and rejected by the Palestinians already then. The Zionist movement was hardly 50 years old and was already offered by the new British occupiers of Palestine, a chunk of the Palestinian homeland as a future state. This in the 1930s and 1940s would have been akin to an offer to decolonise India by partitioning it between a British India and local India or to propose the decolonisation of Algeria by dividing it between a French Algeria and a local Algeria. Neither the Indian anti-colonial movement nor the Algerian one would have ever consented to such a post-colonial arrangement; nor did the British and French dare to offer it when they reconciled with the fact that they will have to leave their colonial empires and go back to Europe.

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But even when decolonisation was achieved in India in 1947, not only the British but also the so-called civilised world through the United Nations insisted that the Palestinians should give half of their homeland to the settler movement of Zionism. The Palestinians attempted to convince the international community that the problem was not only about dispensing with half of their homeland but that the settler movement of Zionism would not be content with just half of the country and intended to take as much of it as possible and leave in it as few Palestinians as possible. This ominous prediction turned out to be chillingly accurate and true in less than a year after the UN insisted that partition was the only solution for Palestine. Under the guise of UN support, the new Jewish state took over nearly 80% of historical Palestine and ethnically cleansed almost a million Palestinians (more than half of Palestine's population), and in the way demolished half of Palestine's villages and most of its towns in nine months in 1948; an event known by the Palestinians as the Nakba, the catastrophe.

In 1967, Israel occupied the rest of historical Palestine, and in the process expelled another 300,000 Palestinians. Like all settler colonial projects, it had to navigate between a wish to take over indigenous territory while downsizing the number of native people living on it. It was impossible after 1948 to repeat a massive ethnic cleansing, so it was substituted by incremental ethnic cleansing (the last stage in this process was one of the root causes that ignited the cycle of violence last week — the proposed eviction of Palestinians from Shaykh [Sheikh] Jarrah, an East Jerusalem neighbourhood, as part of an overall attempt to Judaise East Jerusalem).

Incremental ethnic cleansing is not the only way of achieving the old Zionist goal to turning historical Palestine into a Jewish state. Imposing military rule in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip after they were occupied was another means which enclaved the people there without basic human and civil rights. Imposing a version of an Apartheid regime on the Palestinian minority in Israel is another method and the constant refusal to allow the 1948 refugees to return completes the matrix of power that allows Israel to retain the land and disregard a demographic reality by which the Jews are not the majority in historical Palestine.

The two-state solution, offered for the first time by liberal Zionists and the United States in the 1980s, is seen by some Palestinians as the best way of ending of the occupation of the West Bank and at least the partial fulfilment of the Palestinian right for self-determination and independence. This is why the Palestine Liberation Organization was willing to give it a go in 1993, by signing the Oslo Accords. But the Palestinian position has no impact in the current balance of power. What mattered is how Israel interprets the idea and the fact that there is no one in the world that could challenge its interpretation.

The Israeli interpretation, until the rise of Benjamin Netanyahu to power in 2009, was that the two-state solution is another means of having the territories, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, without incorporating most of the people living there. In order to ensure it, Israel partitioned the West Bank (which is 20% of historical Palestine) into a Jewish and an Arab part. This was in the second phase of the Oslo Accords, known as the Oslo II agreement of 1995. The Palestinians were forced to accept it under American and Egyptian pressure. One area, called area C, which consists of 60% of the West Bank) was directly ruled from 1995 until today by Israel. Under Mr. Netanyahu, Israel is in the process of officially annexing this area while at the same time ethnically cleansing the Palestinians living in it. The remaining 40% of the West Bank, areas A and B under Oslo II, were put under the Palestinian Authority, which optimistically calls itself the state of Palestine, but in essence has no power whatsoever, unless the one given to it, and withdrawn from it, by Israel.

The Gaza Strip was divided too. But the Jewish part was small and could not be defended from the local national movement's wrath. So, the settlers were taken out in 2005 and Israel hoped that another Bantustan, like the one in areas A and B, would be established there under the Palestinian Authority's rule and under the same conditions. But the people of Gaza opted to support a new player, Hamas, and its ally, the Islamic Jihad, which resisted this offer. They supported them not only because there was a return to religion in the face of the ongoing predicaments but also because there was big disappointment from the compliance of the PLO with the Oslo arrangements. Israel responded by imposing a callous siege and blockade on the Gaza Strip that, according to the UN, made it unliveable.

To complete its strategy that included the partition of the West Bank, its Bantustanisation, and the siege of Gaza, Israel passed in 2018 a citizenship law, known as the nationality law, which made sure that the Palestinian citizens who live in Israel proper (which is Israel prior to the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) and who are supposedly equal citizens of the Jewish state, will in essence become the "Africans" of a new Israeli Jewish apartheid state: living in a permanent regime that discriminates against them in all aspects of life on the basis of their nationality.

The endless negotiation on the two-state solution was based on the formula that once the two states become a reality, Israel will stop these severe violations of the Palestinian civil and human rights, wherever they are. But while the wait continued, more Palestinians were expelled and the Jewish settler community in the West Bank doubled and tripled and took over the fertile land, leaving no space for Palestinian expansion. The presence of more than 600,000 Jewish settlers, with a very high rate of natural growth, means that Israel will never consider moving them out; and without that, even a soft version of a two-state solution is impossible.

The whole premise of the two-state solution is wrong and that is why it did not materialise. It is based on the assumption of parity and of framing the conflict as one fought between two national movements. But this is not a "conflict" as such. This is a settler colonial reality which began in the late 19th century and continues until today. The late scholar, Patrick Wolfe, described settler colonial movements as motivated by a logic he called "the elimination of the native". Sometimes it led to genocide, as it happened in North America, sometimes it translated

to an ongoing ethnic cleansing operation, which is what has unfolded in Palestine. The two-state solution is not going to stop the ethnic cleansing; instead, talking about it provides Israel international immunity to continue it.

The Arab World and the elusive two-state solution

The only alternative is to decolonise historical Palestine. Which means that we should aspire to a state for all its citizens all over the country, based on the dismantlement of colonialist institutions, fair redistribution of the country's natural resources, compensation of the victims of the ethnic cleansing and allowing their repatriation. All this will be so that settlers and natives should together build a new state that is democratic, part of the Arab world and not against it, and an inspiration for the rest of the region which desperately needs such models to push it forward towards a better future.

Professor Ilan Pappé is the Director of the European Centre for Palestine Studies and Senior Fellow of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, U.K. He is the author of 20 books

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