

# IS THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION STILL ALIVE?

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

*The [11-day fighting between Hamas and Israel](#), coupled with protests across the Palestinian territories and Israeli cities, has turned the spotlight once again on the Palestine question. The internationally accepted solution to this crisis is the so-called [two-state solution](#). This would mean that an independent, sovereign Palestine state and an independent, sovereign Israeli state would coexist in peace. But on the ground, since the Oslo Accords were signed, there has been little progress on the two-state solution and Israel has only tightened its occupation of Palestine over the years. In a conversation moderated by **Stanly Johny**, **Nathan Thrall** and **A.K. Ramakrishnan** discuss the past, present and future of the Palestine question. Edited excerpts:*

**Nathan Thrall:** This [escalation] was rather different from the escalations that we saw in Gaza in 2014, 2012, 2009 and 2008. The Palestinian citizens of Israel protested in large numbers and they're being arrested in large numbers today. That is something that occurred during the First Intifada. At the beginning of the Second Intifada, when what Israel calls "the October events" took place, 13 Palestinian citizens of Israel were killed in protests. So, there is a precedent for this. But it did feel different from the escalations of the last decade or so. It sent a clear message to the world and much of the Israeli public that after over 70 years of Israeli policy to fragment the Palestinian people, treat them differently, and subject them to different rules and restrictions, the Palestinian citizens of Israel and the Palestinian people at large are one.

Is the two-state solution for the Palestine question still alive? | The Hindu Parley podcast

This is an enormous challenge to the existing paradigm of the international community, the two-state solution. Most of the world has treated the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as though it's more or less a dispute over the occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza. The paradigm has been more or less that of a border dispute. We have, okay, the Palestinians don't have a state, but they have this Palestinian Authority, and it's going to be a state, and they're more or less fighting over exactly where we're going to draw the line of separation. And we just have to draw a suitable line on border adjustments, and we're done. But when the Palestinian people come together and show that the Palestinians of the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza are just one part of the Palestinian people and this is a national struggle of all the Palestinian people who are still united as one, that paradigm starts to make a lot less sense.

Because, in essence, if this is a conflict between Israeli Jews and the Palestinian people who are being dominated in various ways by the state of Israel, then it doesn't make much sense to propose a solution in which you say the dominating party, the Israeli Jews, get to stay united in a single state and the dominated party is going to be split to continue the fragmentation as part of the solution. And we'll put part of them under minority status in the state of Israel, and the others will be put in a quasi state, something that will be somewhere between autonomy and "less than a state" as [former Israeli] Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin referred to as his preferred outcome.

That solution, first of all, should be rejected, just on the simple grounds of fairness and justice. When the two parties under Israeli control today are both roughly equal in size (about 7 million Palestinians and about 7 million Israeli Jews), why should one of them be split up in this way, and not even really get a sovereign state, because the two-state solution would not truly create a Palestinian sovereign state, and the other get to stay united? And then if you look at the division of the territory in a two-state solution, it would give 78% to Israeli Jews and 22%, a

discontiguous 22%, to Palestinians. So, on all of these grounds, the two-state solution really makes no sense, if you conceive of the two parties to the conflict, as you should, being the Palestinian people, not the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza, but the Palestinian people, and the other party being the Israeli Jews.

One-state solution, the way forward in Palestine

**A.K. Ramakrishnan:** I agree with most of the points Nathan Thrall has raised. What is significant is to recognise that from 1967 onwards, Palestinian territories have been under Israeli control. And that is where the narrative has to change from two entities fighting against each other for a particular piece of land to the very conception of a colonial order. If the reality of the coloniser-colonised equation is recognised, one can think about what solution is possible.

And in addressing that aspect of resolving the conflict, this recognition of the complete control of Israel is the first step. But that's precisely what is being resisted by the Israeli government. Most of the peace processes that we have seen, from the Camp David Accords to the Oslo Accords to the non-deal of the century by [former U.S. President] Donald Trump, are mechanisms for postponing any kind of permanent settlement of the issue. So, that's why there is a dead end to the peace process, because it's not driving us anywhere towards any acceptable solution.

Palestine | The land lost between the river and the sea

The two-state solution has been the internationally accepted solution to the problem. But there have been practical impediments such as increasing illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. And the very question of contiguous territory for the Palestinians to establish an independent state of their own is not available in a practical sense, because under Israeli occupation, there has been change in the geography of the Palestinian territories over decades. So, practical problems regarding the two-state solution exist, particularly the status of Jerusalem and the future of Palestinian refugees outside the occupied territories and outside historical Palestine.

And within Israel, in 2018, under Benjamin Netanyahu's leadership, you have seen an apartheid Basic Law coming up — the nation state of the Jewish people — thereby legally undermining the citizenship of the Palestinian population within Israel. And therefore, throughout historical Palestine, there is this apartheid regime existing today. Therefore, addressing a solution should look at all these kinds of contours of the Palestine question.

The whole idea of the Israeli Jewish people and the Palestinian people living together in a democratic state is still treated as a utopia. But what is important is to recognise that the events in the current phase of the conflict are leading to newer thinking and therefore, when one thinks about a solution, one has to take into account the new narratives that are emerging out of newer types of struggles.

News Analysis | Did Israel misjudge Hamas's response?

**Nathan Thrall:** It's correct that the main political parties among the Palestinians have supported a two-state solution — de facto in Hamas's case, but this is the consensus position among Palestinians. Now, it's important to note that the Palestinian support for a two-state solution does not derive from a vision of what would be most just or most desirable. At the start of the Zionist movement, at the end of the 19th century, the Jews in Palestine made up about 3% of the population in 1882 and Palestinians were the remaining 97%. Over time, we have seen the slow takeover of Palestine and the transformation of it into the land of Israel. Palestinians wouldn't come up with a solution that would give them a disconnected state without true sovereignty and

a mere 22% of their homeland. The two-state solution is based on Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 War, but the PLO was founded before the 1967 War, the conflict factor was founded before the 1967 War, the project of Palestinian liberation and return of the refugees all precede the 1967 War. So, the roots of the Palestinian national movement are much deeper. Any adherence to a two-state solution came about very grudgingly. The international community twisted the arms of the Palestinian leadership for a very long time, which had refused to accept a two-state solution, and finally did purely out of pragmatism.

Now, it's clear that a two-state solution isn't happening. Even the two-state solution, the more realistic version of it, where the Palestinian state is demilitarised, where Palestinians have tunnels that they can use to go under sub-sovereign Israeli territory in order to reach Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, where most of the settlements [in the West Bank and East Jerusalem] will be annexed to Israel, where Gaza and the West Bank are disconnected from one another — even that proposal of the Geneva initiative, described as the most progressive and far-reaching, made during the Second Intifada, isn't happening. There's no two-state solution happening. Everyone recognises that this is the case.

'My country is at war': Gal Gadot criticised following statement on Israel-Palestine conflict

So, the very difficult position that the Palestinian leadership finds itself in is that they have undergone this slow and painful conversion. They've been rhetorically justifying their concession to reality, their acceptance of this solution for decades now. And now, they're suddenly in a position where the entire public is saying it's not happening; that even this terrible compromise isn't realistic. So, you began by asking me about what's utopia and what's realistic. And I think that the place that we're in today is that no solution is realistic, a two-state solution isn't realistic, and a one-state solution isn't realistic. What's realistic, given the balance of power, the huge disparity in power between Israel and the Palestinians, is continued domination without any Palestinian sovereignty. And we can imagine that eruptions of violence will lead to different kinds of adjustments. And when things get really bad, Israel starts putting forward plans to make tactical adjustments and withdraw from certain areas or encircle other areas by walls or readjust the route of the separation barrier in the West Bank. But these are tactical adjustments. It would take power that the Palestinians currently do not have in order to really bring about any solution. So, the situation we're looking at now is a continuation of what the human rights organisations have all deemed meets the definition of crime against humanity of apartheid — that situation is going to continue for the indefinite future. And really, any alternative to that is a utopia.

**A.K. Ramakrishnan:** The Israeli government wants not only the status quo of its occupation and its colonial policies to continue, but also expand its control and annex more territories that it occupies. What is preventing it from totally decimating Palestinian life and their resistance is the voices coming not only from the Palestinians within the occupied territories, but also the Palestinians from within the state of Israel; and from across the world. Therefore, the pressure that the Israeli population, both Jews and Arabs, can have on their government to change its policies; the popular pressure on the American government to change its continued strong support for the state of Israel; and international pressure [to restrain Israel] from doing what it is doing against the Palestinians all matter. There are questions on whether states in the international community are ready to accept this reality of day-to-day oppression of a set of people. But within Israel and within the U.S., pressure is much more significant.

**Nathan Thrall:** From the White House, I do not see any possibility of real pressure that would result in a true change to the status quo. From the liberal or progressive wing of the Democratic Party, I see a long-term possibility of change. If we're talking about the present Congress, look at the very simple Bill that doesn't change U.S. aid to Israel, but simply calls for the U.S. to examine its role in a policy like the detention of Palestinian children. Even something as simple

as that, which still isn't touching aid, which is the really big thing for Democrats, is not realistic in the present Congress and probably not in the next one either. So, it's a very long road. But the trends in the U.S. do seem to suggest that that constituency is going to grow. And some of the people who are behind it are among the most popular politicians in America, like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. So, it is possible that we will reach a point in the distant future at which the U.S. can put significant pressure on Israel in the way that it had before. But that won't happen under this Biden administration. And even if there's a second term for the Biden administration, it seems very unlikely that it would happen. It's also very important to remember the critical role of the Palestinians in bringing about the pressure — the pressure can't just come from growing sympathy for Palestinians in Congress or among progressives or internationally. If you look at other places, for example, apartheid South Africa, the thing that drove the sanctions, the divestment, was the situation on the ground. The overreach of the South African government in killing innocent people put the story in the headlines and brought it to the attention of the world which was outraged and wanted to do something about it. And also, what was more or less an uprising in South Africa in the 1980s made the place look ungovernable, it made it look like a bad place to be investing in as a business person.

So, the role of the people on the ground in helping to sustain and accelerate international pressure is critical. The escalation over the last month with the small war in Gaza and the protests over Jerusalem and the protests in pre-1967 Israel... all of that brought about a very rapid change in public opinion internationally. And we saw it again in 2014 — a huge change came about as a result of that war. So, these things come in bursts, and they're driven more than anything by the actions of Palestinians on the ground.

So, what I'm trying to say is that it's a very, very long road. But we do see that the trend is clear of growing support for using U.S. leverage against Israel in order to bring about some kind of change and reduced oppression of the Palestinians.

**A.K. Ramakrishnan:** If the Palestinian voices have to be heard, we have to recognise the diversity of voices amongst the Palestinians. In the initial days [of the Palestinian resistance], several Palestinian organisations, including Fatah and PFLP [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine], took the armed struggle as their way of placing the Palestine issue before the international community and to resist Israeli occupation. But then under [PLO Chairman Yasser] Arafat's leadership, the PLO came to the negotiating table, took the diplomatic path. The First Intifada was more or less non-violent. It is in that context that Hamas emerged, in 1987. And Hamas became part of the armed resistance.

The whole point of talking about Hamas as something which is really distinct from other Palestinian entities would not be a good thing to do. Because there is already an attempt to separate the West Bank Palestinians and the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip. Some people even talked about three states. This time, the Palestinian identity is being asserted in a big manner. Therefore, I would view the kind of ideological division between Fatah and Hamas, between various Palestinian organisations, as something that comes up as part of what to do in a very dire condition of occupation. What kind of strategy they have to adopt, or what kind of ideology the Palestinians have to follow is up to them. But this whole narrative of seeing the Palestinians as being divided... they may have differences, but I think on the basic question of liberating Palestine, the question of an independent Palestinian state, the Palestinians are united, and that is the core of the Palestine question.

*A.K. Ramakrishnan is a professor of international relations at the Centre for West Asian Studies, JNU, New Delhi; Nathan Thrall is the author of The Only Language They Understand and a contributor to The New York Times Magazine and the London Review of Books*

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To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

**END**

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