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OPINION

Time for a two-state illusion has passed. Now we look toward a one-state solution



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The two-state solution involves the formation of an independent Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. [See all 5 stories.](#)

In 2007, I arranged a sabbatical at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Ahead of the course I was planning to teach at the University of Sydney, my stay allowed me to study the situation there firsthand.

In addition to meeting Israeli and Palestinian colleagues, I was introduced to the United Nations officials who had monitored the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967. Examining [their detailed maps of illegal Israeli settlements](#), roadblocks and checkpoints made it clear, even then, that the two-state solution – a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza – was no longer viable. There were simply too many settlers, settlements and an all-pervasive Israeli military presence.



In the West Bank, the Israeli government is trying to drive out as many Palestinians as possible. PHOTO: KATE GERAGHTY; ARTWORK: MARIJA ERCEGOVAC

The following year, I returned as part of a delegation of foreign academics for a study tour of the country. Part of the itinerary included a memorable helicopter ride over Jerusalem's Old City and central Israel. The aim, the pilot explained, was to demonstrate the precariously small size of the country and thus elicit our sympathy. When looking down on the windy route of the relatively new separation wall, I couldn't miss how it intruded into Palestinian territory and snaked around the Palestinian town of Qalqilya, effectively cutting off its inhabitants from their agricultural lands and the rest of the West Bank.

Matters have escalated since then. According to the UN, between 2012 and 2022, the number of Israeli settlers living in the 279 illegal settlements increased from 520,000 to 700,000 people. Of these settlers, 229,000 reside in 14 settlements in occupied East Jerusalem. As a map of the West Bank reveals, the settlements are spaced to shatter Palestinian territory into disconnected parcels, making land swaps all but impossible – an outcome that is no accident.

Killing off the two-state solution became the political consensus among all major Israeli political parties after the Second Intifada (2000-2005). Since 2009, the Israeli public has continued to elect a leader – Benjamin Netanyahu – who had campaigned against the Oslo Accords with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation.

Since the two-state solution is an illusion, the only option is granting political equality for everyone living in the region, and thereby creating a one-state solution.

Across his three terms as prime minister, Netanyahu has tried to prevent the realisation of a two-state solution by entrenching the West Bank occupation to the extent that some Israeli human rights organisations have joined Palestinian and international bodies in categorising the system of institutionalised inequality as “apartheid”. To weaken the Palestinian Authority’s potential as a government of a future state, he bolstered Hamas in Gaza by allowing Qatari money to flow to the group, as extensive reporting from *The New York Times* revealed. Most recently, he advocated for the Nation-State Law that restricts self-determination solely to Jewish people, and that legalises systematic discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel.

In other words, Israeli policy has produced a one-state reality from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: Israeli power determines the lives of all people, whether Jewish, Muslim or Christian, in the West Bank and Gaza in grossly unequal legal arrangements. If Hamas governs Gaza internally, Israel retains control of its borders, airspace and sea access, thereby remaining the occupying power under international law.

This reality is unstable for two reasons. First, Hamas resolved to place the Palestinian question back on the geopolitical agenda with its terror attack on southern Israel on October 7, which killed an estimated 1200 Israelis and guest workers. In response, Israel has killed more than 25,000 Palestinians in Gaza and laid waste to much of the strip.

In the West Bank, the Israeli government is implementing what the French government has called a “policy of terror” to drive out as many Palestinians as possible. The UN estimates that, acting in concert, the Israeli military and settler militias have killed over 300 West Bank Palestinians since October 7, arrested thousands more, burned agricultural land, destroyed property, and driven out shepherds and villagers.

Observing the looming destabilisation, Western leaders are now dredging up the two-state solution, by which they mean merely the granting of local autonomy to Palestinian enclaves, not meaningful sovereignty. In other words, this “solution” is the continuation of inequality and discrimination by other means.

In those circumstances, Palestinian resistance will continue because Palestinians say they want what Zionists want: to return to their independent homeland from which they were expelled.

If Western leaders want to address Palestinian resistance, they need to confront this historical injustice and the current Israeli “policy of terror”. Since the two-state solution is an illusion, the only option is granting political equality for everyone living in the region.

This is not a new idea. It has been conceptualised in different ways. Resisting the partition of their country, Palestinians have advocated for a democratic non-sectarian state for Muslims, Christians and Jews since the 1930s. Also with long histories are binational confederal proposals that reconcile the existence of autonomy for Jewish and Palestinian nations in a single state with security and political equality. It is often forgotten today that Zionist thinkers toyed with similar ideas in the 1930s.

The minority report of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine also advanced such a plan in 1947. But the Committee’s majority report, which was ultimately adopted, recommended partitioning the British Mandate against the wishes of the Arab population and allotted most of the land to the minority Jewish population. One year later, the latter expelled about 700,000 Palestinians during the Nakba.

By December 1948, the UN General Assembly passed a motion declaring that Palestinian refugees “wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours” should be able to do so. But Israel has always refused because reversing the long-sought demographic advantage is interpreted as national suicide.

To ensure Jewish security, Israel expelled and rules over Palestinians, resulting in their insecurity. To this end, Netanyahu is now declaring permanent occupation of all territory west of the Jordan River, where Israeli and Palestinian populations are roughly equal in number. Meanwhile, religious zealots in his coalition are urging “voluntary” emigration of Palestinians – an echo of the Nakba.

Understanding that this stance cannot guarantee security in the long-run, a growing number of Israelis are having second thoughts, especially as their government prioritises destroying Gaza over negotiating the release of hostages.

A new poll indicates that a small majority of Israelis support a two-state solution if Palestine is “demilitarised”. It is unclear where Palestinians stand on the subject, but they are not going to tolerate Israeli control, however “lite” or indirect.

Meanwhile, Hamas sends mixed signals, by turns seeking the expulsion of Israelis as “settlers” or provisionally accepting Gaza and the West Bank as the site of a Palestinian state. It is likely to oppose any arrangements in which Palestinians cannot protect themselves, meaning it will likely oppose demilitarised “solutions”.

This lack of basic trust on all sides is the outcome of the Israeli state’s violent foundation, and the catastrophic horrors that led to it. It is naive, then, to expect that confederal or binational arrangements will be met with majority support from Israelis.

But as the European Union’s foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell said this week, if the world wants to see peace achieved, “the solution has to be imposed from outside because the two parties will never be able to reach an agreement.”

Recognising Palestinian equality is the way forward. While there are those who believe this solution equates to the destruction of Israel, that is not true. But it would mean substantial change, and a different Israel to the one we know today.

Yet, it is hard to see how that solution can be achieved. The dream of self-determination, meaning separation and control, is intrinsic to Israeli nationality. And yet, forcing a fake two-state solution on Palestine will only ensure everyone’s continuing insecurity. As Borrell noted, “If this tragedy doesn’t end soon, the entire Middle East might end up in flames.”

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