

The New World Order

Towards An Israel-Palestine Two-State Solution

With the ceasefire in Gaza and a projected unity government in Palestine, the spectre of a two state solution has again risen to haunt Netanyahu. He has responded by announcing the annexation of nearly 1000 more acres of Palestinian territory for settlements. Meanwhile, a new [post-war poll](#) by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) shows that 79% of Palestinians think Israel lost the war and 72% favor an armed intifada in the West Bank. That is a big change from a [poll taken in Gaza June 15-17](#), when 73% said they favored non-violent resistance, though, as PSR points out, Palestinian poll numbers always swing widely after a war: these changes might be temporary.

The Gaza war has thus made it more urgent than ever to get serious about Palestinian nation-building. As Israeli elder statesman [Uri Avnery](#) has pointed out many times, a secure, well-run, democratic state in Palestine is the key to progress and economic development for the region; it is also the *only* possible way either side can be secure.

Recently, however, prominent Jewish liberals like [Anthony Lerman](#) and [Jonathan Freedland](#) have begun to say that a two state solution has become impossible because the growth of Israeli settlements have created an irreversible situation. To Avnery, this idea is nonsense: "I can think of a dozen different ways to solve the settlement problem, from forcible removal to exchange of territories to Palestinian citizenship (meaning the settlers will become Palestinian citizens)... All the Herculean problems of the conflict can be resolved—if there is a will. It's the will that is the real problem."

The [majority of people in both Israel and Palestine](#) are still convinced that two states are needed. 75% of Palestinians in the new PSR poll reject a one state approach. Within the region, right wing Israeli politicians are the main ones talking about one state—and they certainly don't mean a state in which all citizens would be

equal. But the problem of political will is real. Israeli society has succumbed to the despairing worldview of the Likud, which sees any talk of peace as either fantasy or treachery. As [David Grossman](#) says, "the right has not only vanquished the left: It has vanquished Israel.... In the area most critical to its survival, today's Israel is practically immobile, one might even say incompetent....(There is) a void of actions, a void of consciousness, a void in which an efficient suspension of moral judgment prevails, a failure to notice the injustice at the root of the entire situation."

At this crux, people who still believe in a two state solution have got to get smarter and tougher, particularly in the US, where groups that support this goal have tended to be timid and overly focused on Beltway politics, hoping that, if they play nice, they will be accepted by conservative Jewish institutions. This approach hasn't worked.

In fact, the only dynamic anti-occupation groups in the US are those that support Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) - but they do not have a two state perspective. The [goals of the BDS movement](#) are to end the occupation and dismantle the separation wall; give full equality to the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel; and promote the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes as guaranteed by UN Resolution 194. The last demand, for the right of return, is usually understood to mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state. As [Noam Chomsky](#) and [Norman Finkelstein](#) have both observed, this demand will limit the base of BDS support to college campuses and the left, making impossible the kind of broad-based movement needed to change US policy.

The US is Israel's chief enabler. Congress, more focused on donors than on votes, is totally one-sided on this issue. The Republicans, led by their [Christian Zionist](#) wing, can be relied on to push for war in the Middle East, hoping it will lead to the rapture, while [even the most progressive Democrats](#), like Bernie Sanders, stand up for Israel right or wrong—[Hillary Clinton](#) now seems poised to make doing so central to her campaign strategy. The Obama administration has been more reserved in its support than Congress, even [holding up a shipment of Hellfire missiles](#) in August because of the Gaza war. But all are basically responding to a strong public identification with Israel.

On Aug. 28, 2014, after seven weeks of a war in which Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilians received much more coverage than usual, 66% of those [polled by the Pew Research Center](#) sympathized with Israel. A broad coalition against the occupation needs to be able to reach the many Democrats who are "[liberal on everything but Israel](#);" this requires much more energetic organizing for a two state solution.

Two main obstacles stand in the way of this solution.

The first is the religious-nationalist right on both sides— Hamas and the Likud coalition. They have a symbiotic

relationship: Israel's destruction of Gaza has enormously increased the popularity of Hamas, while the rockets of Hamas have strengthened the Israeli right. And both have historically opposed a two-state solution, though on Sept. 5, according to the Lebanese weekly [Al-Akhbar](#), Khaled Meshal, head of the political wing of Hamas, agreed to accept two states within the 1967 borders. Netanyahu, on the other hand, is more intransigent than ever, as he said [in a speech last month](#): "there cannot be a situation, under any agreement, in which we relinquish security control of the territory west of the River Jordan."

But Palestinian support for Hamas is not written in stone. Hamas is an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and, if it ever actually becomes part of the government of a Palestinian state, is likely to have the same problems reconciling its ideology with the need to govern as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Tunisia. [The youth of Gaza in particular](#) have found Hamas politically incapable and far too repressive; they want peace, freedom and development, not a theocracy. Nor does Islamism mesh well with the secular ideals of the [Palestinian National Charter](#), written in 1963 and amended in 1968, which calls for setting up a nation founded on "freedom of worship and of visit (to Jerusalem) to all, without discrimination of race, color, language, or religion."

Like Hamas, the Israeli right is an obstacle to a two state solution, as shown by its practice for the last twenty years. It includes the religious fundamentalists of the [National Religious Right](#), who think God gave them the right to all the land "from the river to the sea," and the ethnic nationalists of the Likud coalition. Some, like Netanyahu, are traditional maximalist militarists; others are open racists and advocates of ethnic cleansing, like Foreign Minister [Avigdor Lieberman](#) and Deputy Speaker of the Knesset Moshe Feiglin. Of the five parties in the current governing coalition, all except Tzipi Livni's Hatnuah are relentlessly opposed to giving up land occupied by settlements, sharing Jerusalem, or doing anything else that could bring about an independent Palestinian state. They do not conceal their views; Feiglin wrote a recent [op ed](#) proposing total war on the civilian population of Gaza, to be followed by ethnic cleansing:

"After the IDF completes the 'softening' of the targets with its fire-power, the IDF will conquer the entire Gaza, using all the means necessary to minimize any harm to our soldiers, with no other considerations....The enemy population that is innocent of wrong-doing and separated itself from the armed terrorists will be treated in accordance with international law and will be allowed to leave.... Subsequent to the elimination of terror from Gaza, it will become part of sovereign Israel and will be populated by Jews."

The second obstacle to a two state solution is a lack of concrete progress towards a Palestinian state. Unless nation-building begins soon, the whole idea will seem like a hopeless fantasy.

While the new coalition between Fatah and Hamas is a step in the right direction, it is a far cry from a democratically elected government based on the rule of law. Palestine needs a functioning economy, an

updated secular constitution, political parties, transparent elections, and a strong civil society. It also needs better leadership than it has at present— which is why freeing [Marwan Barghouti](#) must be a key international demand. Nation-building will require capable honest leaders who are younger and less compromised than Mahmoud Abbas and are not militaristic theocrats like the leaders of Hamas.

The parameters of a two state solution have been clear for many years: a return to the 1967 borders with just and mutually agreed upon solutions to the refugee problem and the question of Jerusalem. The details can only be settled by real peace negotiations leading to a settlement, not just by temporary breaks in a permanent state of war. The urgent task of the anti-occupation movement is to build enough international pressure to force such a settlement.

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"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Romans 10:13

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