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After the Trump “Peace Plan”: One-State Solution is the Only Way Forward

→ Diana Buttu



A Palestinian boy attends a protest against US President Trump's so-called "Deal of the Century" aimed at solving the conflict between Palestinians and Israel, Gaza Strip, February 2020. © EPA-EFE/MOHAMMED SABER



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Last month, a Palestinian think tank, the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research, revealed its survey results following the release of the Trump/Netanyahu plan. In announcing the results, Dr Khalil Shikaki, the head of the polling centre, noted that 94 percent of Palestinian respondents opposed the plan: “I don't think we've ever seen such a level of consensus among the Palestinian public,” he said. These results are unsurprising, of course, as the Trump/Netanyahu plan effectively seeks Palestinian approval for Israeli land theft, ethnic cleansing and continued subjugation.

But alongside the results of the question pertaining to the Trump/Netanyahu plan was a more important question: “Do you support the two-state solution?” A mere 39 percent of surveyed respondents answered affirmatively, while 37 percent indicated that they support a one-state solution. These results should be placed in their proper light: for more than two decades, as the Palestinian leadership and the international community have repeatedly called for the implementation of the two-state solution, increasing numbers of Palestinians have moved away from this view and increasingly supported one state, even though there is not a single Palestinian party – whether inside ‘48 borders or in the occupied territories – advocating for it. In fact, Palestinian leaders and the international community both espouse the common view of decrying the concept of one state and adamantly holding that “There is no Plan B.”

The reason for this steadily increasing Palestinian support for one state has both everything and nothing to do with the Trump/Netanyahu plan. This plan makes clear that it aims to ensure that Palestinians will never have a state and instead remain forever under Israel's boot. But it isn't just the Trump plan. Over time, Palestinians increasingly have seen that the version of “two states” that the international community will support – and indeed press for – is not the version of two states that Palestinians demand. To the contrary, while the world spoke of a two-state settlement, Palestinians witnessed a tripling of the number of Israeli settlers living on their land. The international community appears content with allowing Israel to build and expand settlements, while at the same time allowing it to demolish Palestinian homes and schools and imprison Palestinians into cantons.

This approach condones Israel holding our economy hostage and mercilessly



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besieging the Gaza Strip, with only the mildest, mealy-mouthed international condemnations. The world community has blocked attempts to press for a condemnation of Israeli settlements in the International Criminal Court and has, in some cases, criminalized support for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS). Even the European Union has been loath to uphold its trade agreement with Israel, under which Israeli settlement products should be labelled separately and should not benefit from free trade status. It has become clear that while the international community speaks of *wanting* a two-state settlement, it has shown itself wholly unwilling to do anything to make that happen. As someone who participated in the peace negotiations, I observed that a state for Palestinians was the furthest thing from the Israeli public and political leadership's thinking. Instead, they were concerned with how to forever contain and control Palestinians, and how to maintain longstanding international community support in this endeavour. In short, the concept of two states has become devoid of all meaning, with the focus instead on form – whether labelled as a “state” and however dysfunctional and lacking any of the powers that actually define a state.

This increasing realization has led many Palestinians to abandon the statehood project. This may sound like a defeatist position or the expression of frustration. Indeed, over the years, we have heard PLO leaders threaten to abandon the two-state project and, separately, threaten to dissolve the Palestinian Authority. Some support for one state is undoubtedly borne of that feeling. But not all.

To be clear, my support for one state grew not from the futility of negotiations – even though they were indeed futile – but from a sense that the approach was incorrect. The attempt to divide land simply modelled the power structures I was attempting to fight – economic and political structures that aim to maintain Israeli power and control over Palestinians lives. Therefore, rather than focus on land – where Israel always has an advantage –, the focus should be on people and how we, as people, should live. The time has come to look to a model that focuses on equal rights for all, irrespective of religion; a model which seeks reconciliation and not separation and where people are protected and not viewed as subjects of control or, in the case of refugees, of wholesale and heartless exclusion.

Today Israel and the occupied territories function as one territory, with rights and privileges granted to some and not to others. There are no separate border



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crossings for “Palestine” and no separate Palestinian currency. Yet Palestinians, including Palestinian citizens of Israel, are denied the same rights and privileges as Israeli Jews.

I am under no illusion that achieving this equality will be easy. Power is never voluntarily given up by those who wield it but taken through pressing for rights. Palestinians will be better able to break down the system of ethnic-religious privilege that plagues Palestinians (a similar system ruled apartheid South Africa) by getting to the root cause – that of Zionism, a nationalist project that favours one group over another –, by pushing for BDS and for accountability internationally and by challenging racist Israeli laws. In short, we can and must create a just system for all, irrespective of whether we demand one or two states.

History demonstrates that ethnic privilege ultimately fails in a multi-ethnic world. And given that Palestinians and Israelis are fated to live together, the real question is whether we will continue to allow this system of ethno-religious privilege to prevail or whether we will press for equality, irrespective of religion. Borders, flags, and currencies can wait.



About the author



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- We empower individuals and institutions to develop their own concept of policy solutions
- We mobilize stakeholders to build coalitions for positive change

Our aim is to see vibrant democratic societies emerge and grow in the region.

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