

The Two-State Solution: A Future Doomed to Failure

By

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Biographical note:

Tariq Kenney-Shawa received his BA in Political Science and Middle East Studies from Rutgers University in 2017. His research interests include U.S. foreign policy and international relations, with a focus on conflict resolution in the Middle East and North Africa. During his time as an undergraduate student, Tariq spent a term in the Palestinian Territories and Israel, conducting interviews with youth organizations, academics, and policy experts, in preparation for his honors thesis discussing the failure of the two-state solution and the role of Palestinian youth in ongoing peace process. Tariq currently works as an Intelligence Analyst at MSA Security in New York City and plans to pursue a MA in International Relations, with a focus on Security Studies and Conflict Resolution.

Abstract:

For decades, the Palestinian-Israeli peace process has been centered on the theory of separation, with all official parties dedicated to some form of a two-state solution. However, with the various physical and political obstacles that have accumulated to obstruct the realization of a viable, genuinely independent Palestinian state, does the two-state option still represent a feasible and just solution to the conflict? This paper argues that the two-state route never presented a just solution and was actually established on a fallacious conflict paradigm that ignores both the one-state reality that has engulfed Israel and the Palestinian Territories and the central rights of the majority of Palestinians. More importantly, the current drive for Palestinian independence ignores the interests and aspirations of Palestinian youth, who represent the backbone of any future solution. Recognizing the failure of the two-state solution and the incipient one-state reality will be vital in laying the groundwork for a restructured peace process.

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Introduction:

For decades, discourse surrounding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been centered on the theory of separation as the principal means of achieving sustainable peace. The deeply engrained vision of Palestinian independence has taken root not only among nationalistic Palestinians, but across the global Palestinian diaspora, the Arab world, and among sympathizers with the Palestinian struggle. Consequentially, it has established itself as a central priority of mediating efforts of the international community, with the United States at the helm. However, despite the exhaustive effort dedicated to achieving a two-state solution, the prospect of establishing a viable, independent state that adequately addresses the future generation's right to self-determination has been receding before our eyes.

On December 28, 2016, in one of his final public remarks as Secretary of State, John Kerry assumed a tone of genuine urgency, emphasizing that “the two-state solution is the only way to achieve a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.”ⁱ He went on to observe that the persistent political impasse and the expanding Israeli settlements were “cementing an irreversible one-state reality.”ⁱⁱ It was only a couple months later, amidst the peculiarity of the Trump Presidency that this reality has truly manifested itself, as for the first time, the United States disavowed the two-state solution. First, following a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Trump clumsily proclaimed, “I’m looking at two-state and one-state, and I like the one that both parties like, I can live with either one” (2017). Then, in a move that reversed decades of U.S. policy, elicited almost universal international condemnation, and sparked widespread protest across the Muslim world, Trump declared Jerusalem as the undisputed capital of Israel and set in motion the process of relocating the U.S. embassy. With that, our preconceived, yet deeply entrenched understanding of the path to resolution was flipped on its head, and that was only the beginning.

In the face of the innumerable obstacles caused by the physical situation on the ground, the political impasse triggered by a growth in radical ideology and nationalism, and growing doubt that an independent Palestinian state based on the current discourse would adequately address the interests of young Palestinians, perhaps separation does not represent a solution after all. With a growing number of Israeli settlers, supported by a complex, exclusive facilitating structure, “facts on the ground” have successfully created the most visible obstacle to the establishment of a viable Palestinian state: a future of fragmentation. Additionally, Israel has

proven time and again that it does not have the desire, let alone the political will to make what an increasing number of Israelis view as critical concessions. Finally, it is clear upon further analysis that the two-state formula, established through the asymmetrical Israeli-Palestinian relationship, does not recognize the realities of the conflict, nor, more importantly, the interests of Palestinian youth.

The Failure of the Two-State Paradigm:

If a Palestinian state based on any of the proposed parameters were established today, defying all logic of the current political reality, it would fail to achieve the central demands of Palestinian self-determination and their struggle to gain basic human rights, would not represent a functional state, and would merely alter the boundaries of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, not end it. However, before delving into the specific failures of the two-state solution, it is vital to first identify the critical requirements that a Palestinian state must adequately address in order to represent a viable solution to Palestinian struggles for self-determination and human rights. These conditions would be based on the overarching theme of achieving a complete end to the Israeli occupation and the establishment of genuine sovereignty. The requirements for viability include, but are not limited to: physical contiguity, territorial sovereignty and security, environmental and economic autonomy, and a stable governing structure, along with a viable solution addressing the demands of Palestinian refugees and citizens of Israel. Without these, the Palestinian state project will fail to represent a solution at all.

The Fragmentation:

Perhaps the most visible obstacle to the two-state solution is the daunting physical reality that emerged out of the Oslo process regarding the construction and expansion of a complex settlement infrastructure. Coupled with the Israeli strategy of fragmentation, it renders a contiguous, viable Palestinian state impossible. The territorial fragmentation that emerged out of the occupation that began in 1967 and its formalization in the 1993 Oslo Accords has come to be tacitly accepted by the international community, as if it were a natural physical reality, rather than the constructed entity that it is. With this deeply flawed interpretation of the conflict parameters themselves, it is no wonder that all negotiation attempts based on these constraints have repeatedly failed in achieving a lasting solution to the conflict.

To begin with, the separation of the West Bank and Gaza remains one of the most vital components to Israel's overall "divide and conquer" strategy. As Israeli journalist Amira Hass stated, "The total separation of the Gaza Strip from the West Bank is one of the greatest achievements of Israeli politics, whose overarching objective is to prevent a solution based on international decisions and understandings and instead dictate an arrangement based on Israel's military superiority."ⁱⁱⁱ If a Palestinian state were established along the 1967 borders, the Palestinian Authority would be forced to cooperate with Israel to create a functional connection between the two separated territorial units of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In addition, the tumultuous relationship that persists between Fatah and Hamas will continue to serve as an obstacle to the functioning of a Palestinian state, as multiple unity attempts have broken down. The failure to establish a unified Palestinian government is not only caused by internal divisions, but has been repeatedly exacerbated by Israel, which has actively opposed any unification attempts due to its classification of Hamas as a terrorist organization. Consequently, it is difficult to argue that a Palestinian state will be able to create a fully functioning connection between the West Bank and Gaza Strip with an entirely independent and antagonistic Israel sprawled in between them, not to mention internal political divide and the potential security concerns for citizens on both sides.

The fragmentation of Palestinian territory continues most discernibly in the West Bank, which is considered the heart of a future state. Ever since the War of 1967, Israel has embraced an accelerating settlement construction policy, building a vast network of settlements and supportive infrastructure that is deemed illegal under international law. Today, the number of Israeli settlers in the West Bank has surpassed 370,000. This population lives in about 140 settlements scattered throughout the territory, with almost 100,000 located in settlements that are closer to Jordan than they are to Israel.^{iv} Additionally, over 250,000 Israeli settlers live in settlements around occupied East Jerusalem, physically cutting the city off from the rest of the West Bank in order to prevent a Palestinian claim to East Jerusalem as its future capital.^v Between 2009 and 2014 alone, the West Bank settler population has doubled, bringing the total number of Israeli settlers in the territories dedicated to a future Palestinian state to over 600,000.^{vi}

The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics found that in 2015, the West Bank saw a 4.1% growth of its Jewish population, representing a growth rate that is double that of the Israeli

national average, which stands at around 2%.^{vii} Area C, comprising about 60% of the entire West Bank and the strategic portions of the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea region, has become the central object of Israel's annexationist ambitions. Currently, over 300,000 Israeli settlers are rooted in Area C alone, compared to only around 150,000 Palestinians, who face high levels of continued displacement and an 80% population decline in the area since 1967.^{viii} These settlements have come to form large Israeli population centers within occupied Palestinian territory, creating the blueprint of a future Palestinian state that will inevitably be dotted with Israeli settlements housing overwhelmingly hostile inhabitants.

While these settlements alone form a daunting Israeli presence in the West Bank, their impact is further accentuated by the complex grid of settler-only outposts and roads that are considered illegal even under Israeli law. Over 100 settlement outposts have been constructed in Area C without formal Israeli government approval. According to Israeli law, these illegal outposts most either be formally authorized or dismantled. Over the past decade, more than 19 outposts have been legalized, with another 13 currently undergoing the same authorization process, leaving the remaining outposts pending government action.^{ix} Recently, in an extremely controversial move, Israel's parliament gave approval to a bill that would legalize settlement homes built on private Palestinian land in the West Bank, gaining expected criticism from the international community and pointing to the increasingly permanent nature of Israel's settlement project.^x

Connecting the growing array of settlements and outposts are over 1,660 km of roads dedicated for Israeli use only.^{xi} With a 50-75 meter buffer zone required on each side of these settler-only roads, over 41,500 acres of Palestinian land have subsequently been confiscated.^{xii} The Israeli government is even planning to construct over 475 km of rail lines that would represent not only a new mode of transportation for Israeli settler use only, but an important signal of the permanence of the settlement infrastructure, along with further visions of expansion.

The impact of the settlements is further exacerbated by the ongoing construction of the separation wall that lines the Green Line, with the stated goal of achieving security by preventing Palestinian attacks in Israel. However, as Lev Grinberg states, the separation barrier has proven to not be a tool to merely separate Jews from Arabs, but a method of expanding the regime of limited Palestinian movement.^{xiii} In other words, the wall is more successful at further

fragmenting the Palestinian people and complicating their mobility in the already heavily controlled West Bank. With 80% of the its route lying within occupied Palestinian territory, it is clear that the wall exemplifies Israel's expansionist aspirations, appropriating more Palestinian land in the hopes of potentially permanently annexing vast swathes of Palestinian territory that include major Israeli settlements.

The Permanence of “Facts on the Ground”:

It is clear that the conditions that have led to the unviability of a Palestinian state are a product of a well-planned and articulated strategy. Shortly following the War of 1967, the Allon Plan was introduced, proposing the annexation of 25-40% of the West Bank, the entirety of Jerusalem, and the surrounding territorial blocs with the aim of isolating the Palestinian-dominated East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and preserving Israeli dominion over the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea.^{xiv} This was later buttressed by the Drobles Plan, which further institutionalized the process of settlement development in the West Bank with the stated goal of “reducing the danger of an additional Arab state being established in these territories.”^{xv} In 1977, Ariel Sharon, agriculture minister at the time, initiated a plan that hoped to settle two million Jews in the occupied territories by the end of the twentieth century. In 1979, Mattisyahu Drobles, co-chairman of the Jewish Agency's Settlement Department furthered this proposal by explaining: “The state of Israel must, for political and other reasons, develop the entire region of Judea and Samaria (the West Bank); and if in five years time, 100,000 Jews will not live in this region, I doubt that we will have a right to this region.”^{xvi} Drobles believed that the settlements must be strategically situated surrounding Palestinian population centers in order to “reduce the danger of an additional Arab state being established in these territories,” outlining the Israeli determination to control all of historic Palestine.^{xvii} By establishing these permanent “facts on the ground,” Israel benefits in future negotiations regarding a Palestinian state by allowing themselves the ability to point to the Israeli footholds as an intransigent physical reality and claim to the land, which can only be undone by the contentious task of evicting thousands of Israeli settlers.

This raises the question of whether Israel will be able, or more importantly, willing to extricate itself from the West Bank. Given the continued pace of settlement growth and the nation-wide rightward political shift, it is increasingly clear that the existing settlement structure would be impossible to completely dismantle, mainly due to the historic and religious

significance that the West Bank holds in the eyes of many Israelis. Indeed, the debate over the future of Israeli settlements in the West Bank has shown the potential of creating a deeply divisive rift in Israel. If it came down to a forced withdrawal of settlers from the West Bank in a fashion similar to that which occurred in the Gaza Strip, many Israeli officials, including former head of the army's central command, Yitzhak Eitan, have even warned of the serious potential of civil war.^{xviii}

However, many continue to downplay the potentially devastating impact of dismantling the settlements in the West Bank. Some attempt to draw parallels between the Israeli settler experience in the Gaza Strip, pointing to their withdrawal as an example that could be similarly applied to the West Bank. In late 2005, the Israeli military evicted around 8,000 Israeli settlers from the Gaza Strip, providing each settler with around \$200,000 in compensation.^{xix} Despite the widespread uproar that the withdrawal from Gaza caused within Israel, some believe a similar approach could be used to dismantle the settlement structure in the West Bank. In a defense of the latent potential of a two-state solution and the practical possibility of demolishing the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Assaf Sharon, Professor at Tel Aviv University, stated "it is wrong to conclude that they are irreversible... Israel removed the settlements in the Gaza Strip. Despite mass protest, the eviction of thousands of settlers from Gaza took less than a week. No one died and no one killed anyone..."^{xx} However, this comparison grossly underestimates the deeply-engrained religious significance that many Jewish-Israelis attribute to the West Bank, along with the significantly larger settlement population and level of growth and development that the West Bank settlement infrastructure has reached.

While this argument is erroneous enough in the fact that it equates the significance of the Jewish connection to the Gaza Strip to that of the West Bank, it is further impaired by the fact that dismantling the settlements in the West Bank would impact hundreds of thousands of more ideologically motivated settlers, rather than a mere several thousand who could have been more easily swayed with generous stipends. To this argument, Sharon asserts that 85% of settlers in the West Bank live within what is referred to as "settlement blocs" which are areas that are potentially transferrable in the "mutually agreed-upon land-swaps" left to final status negotiations, meaning that this would merely call for the evacuation of an overwhelming 90,000 to 100,000 settlers in isolated settlements.^{xxi} However, if this number were not daunting enough, this prediction is taking for granted the territories that would be further appropriated from the

already minimal 22% of historic Palestine that would be allocated to a Palestinian state. Additionally, if one sees full access to Area C as vital for the viability of a Palestinian state, this brings at least 300,000 settlers into the equation.^{xxii}

Sharon goes on to make the important point that the settlements are not in fact the results of an “unruly avante garde” segment of the Israeli population, but a deeply state-supported project.^{xxiii} In other words, the settlement expansion would not have been possible without massive support from state institutions, legal sanction, international aid, and deep ties with the military for protracted protection. Without this widespread support, the Israeli settlements represent an extremely costly “geopolitical absurdity” that may not be sustainable in the long run.^{xxiv} This argument follows that if the Israeli government, military, and various international backers decided to withdraw their support, the collapse of the settlements would only be a matter of time.

While Sharon correctly claims that this reality ensures that settlements are inherently reversible due to their unsustainable nature and dependence on external support, it raises the more important question of whether Israel can muster the political will to withdraw support and face the inevitable backlash from right-wing and religious communities that would follow. Due to the rightward shift of the Israeli political balance of power, along with the growing number of ultra-orthodox Israelis due to their substantially higher birth-rate, Israeli society will become increasingly opposed to dismantling the settlements and will be unable to muster the already colossal level of political will that is necessary to achieve the contentious mission.^{xxv} As Virginia Tilley stated, “Only the political will of iron ... could reverse the present trajectory.”^{xxvi}

It is the deeply-rooted spiritual and religious connection that many Israeli Jews feel toward the West Bank that makes the most effective argument for the irreversibility of the Israeli settlements. The importance that “Judea and Samaria” holds in Jewish scripture represents some of the core tenets of the Zionist movement. In October of 2016, Naftali Bennett, Education Minister and leader of the HaBayit HaYehudi party professed that the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, or as he stated, “settlement in the land of Israel,” represents the realization of the will of the Israeli people. Similarly, just over 45% of Jewish Israelis strongly or moderately support the annexation of the territories that were seized following the War of 1967, with just over 44% opposing annexation.^{xxvii} With this deep split, it can be reasonably expected that there will be significant Israeli opposition to not only dismantling settlements, but the

abandonment of the West Bank in general. Another recent survey found that over 40% of religious respondents believed that the IDF should refuse to evacuate settlers and dismantle settlements even if given the official order to do so.^{xxviii} A tragic reminder of the potential for escalation of the deeply-rooted hostility that many Israelis have towards making “concessions” to the establishment of a Palestinian state will always be found in the 1995 assassination of former Prime Minister Yizhak Rabin. While this has formerly been considered to represent the views of a radical minority of the Israeli population, the overall rightward shift in Israeli society shows that these views are no longer marginal.

Israeli Opposition to Palestinian Statehood:

In the face of the increasingly popular expansionist pillars of Zionism, it is clear that withdrawal from the West Bank is inconceivable and a Palestinian state is simply not on Israel’s agenda. Since its inception, Zionism has faced the difficult dilemma of balancing its expansionist ideals with its desire to establish a nation with a Jewish majority. With Israel’s establishment in 1948, Zionism focused its efforts on the Judaization of historic Palestine, initially represented by the push to increase Jewish immigration and culminating with the settlement expansion initiatives that we see today. Especially now, with the population of Jews and Palestinians roughly equal within the area of historic Palestine, the common theme of discourse regarding the future of Israel focuses on preventing the “demographic danger” of a non-Jewish majority in Israel.

It is clear that the ultimate goal of the Zionist movement does not allow for partition. Before the establishment of Israel, Zionist support for partition was tactical at best, resulting from the demographic weakness of their position at the time. This became clear with the words of David Ben Gurion who stated, in reference to the 1937 Peel Report that recommended partition, that “the proposed Jewish State ... is not the Zionist aim,” summarizing the view that receiving a portion of their Holy Land may be acceptable for now, but will not achieve the ultimate Zionist objective of full control of historic Palestine.^{xxix} Later, explaining the calculated purpose of the temporary acquiescence to partition, Ben Gurion announced “after we become a strong force as the result of the creation of a state, we shall abolish partition and expand into the whole of Palestine.”^{xxx} In 1969, Moshe Dayan proclaimed “Our fathers had reached the frontiers which were recognized in the UN partition plan of 1947 ... now the Six Day Generation has managed to reach Suez, Jordan, and the Golan Heights. This is not the end.”^{xxxi} With these

sentiments in mind, it is vital to recognize that the expansionist, ethnocentric nature of the ongoing Zionist project repeatedly voiced by Israeli leaders and embodied in settlement expansion policies, directly obstructs the creation of a separate Palestinian state.

Accordingly, it is clear that the ongoing rightward shift of Israeli politics should not be viewed as an unexpected, fringe phenomenon, but as realization of the political mindset that has constituted a fundamental building-block of Israel's society since its inception. In fact, Israel's decision makers are simply not interested contributing to the establishment of any viable two-state solution. In January 2016, Israelis elected the most far-right government in Israeli history, with 78 of the 107 members of the Knesset openly opposing the two-state solution. Prime Minister Netanyahu himself has openly stated his objection to establishing a Palestinian state and continues to bend further to pressure from Israel's far-right, going as far as appointing ultra-nationalist Avigdor Lieberman, known for his extreme comments and policies as defense minister.

Two-state initiatives have also been hindered by Israel's conflict management policies. In an attempt to reconcile Zionism's expansionist ideals with the desire to maintain a Jewish majority in Israel, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon initiated his plan to place conflict management, rather than the peace process at the center of the Israeli agenda. This tactic has guided Israel away from a path to a solution, but rather toward the continuation of the status quo. While allowing a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders represented too large of a concession for the Zionist ideals, extensive ethnic cleansing would not be possible. Instead, by dividing the Palestinian West Bank into isolated, manageable enclaves of limited self-rule and initiating a policy of disengagement from the Palestinian issue in general, Israel was able to simultaneously assure relative calm for its people, along with gradual expansion. The logical result of this policy would be Israel's eventual acceptance of a Palestinian 'state' permitting it consisted of these weak, isolated enclaves that could be easily controlled by Israel, and would allow the Jewish state to retain as much of the West Bank as possible with the potential of future expansion.

The policy of conflict management continues today under Prime Minister Netanyahu, allowing Israeli complacency with the ongoing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. According to Seeds of Peace member Netanel Boleg, Israelis have largely lost interest in the conflict. In a recent survey, only 8% of Israelis reported the conflict as a top priority, citing domestic socio-economic issues as more important.^{xxxiii} The goal of achieving a sense of calm for

the Israeli people has been quite successful, as Israelis have reached a point where their lives are not directly affected by the suffering of the Palestinian people. Thus, they see no reason to act to change the status quo that ultimately benefits them.

An Unviable Palestinian State:

With the fragmentation caused by an immovable settler infrastructure fueled by the Zionism's innate expansionist nature, a Palestinian state will fall far short of the aforementioned requirements of physical contiguity, territorial sovereignty and security, environmental and economic autonomy, and a stable governing structure. Consequently, the Palestinian state would not represent a viable political project – quite the opposite of the almost utopian reality that is shallowly imagined by theories of Palestinian independence. Instead, a two-state solution will merely resituate the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a border dispute between two asymmetrically balanced nation-states.

While the mere existence of the complex settlement grid and its supporting infrastructure alone causes the debilitating fracturing of a future Palestinian state, it is also highly unlikely that the Palestinian authorities would retain total sovereignty over their territory. Even if the Oslo parameters were realized, the Palestinian state would consist of over 120 isolated territories, creating an administrative nightmare in an already delicate political climate.^{xxxiii} If the settlement structure remains, it is doubtful that the Israeli settlers would accept abiding by Palestinian law and would continue to develop in isolated, enclosed territories within the West Bank. With the extremely hostile relationship between settlers and Palestinians, continued Israeli military protection would likely be required, which indicates the permanent stationing of a foreign military presence throughout Palestinian territory. To Palestinians, this would doubtless be interpreted as a continuation of military occupation and could result in further violent escalation.

The matter of security represents the most flagrant obstacle in the path of producing a fully sovereign Palestinian state. Despite its substantial military superiority, security has been Israel's primary excuse for the heavy-handed occupation measures in the West Bank and the effective imprisonment of Palestinians in Gaza. With the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, Israel's fixation on security would continue, and likely result in some level of sustained control over borders, airspace, maritime activity, and perhaps provide an excuse to continue conducting military activities within the Palestinian territories. In a recent statement, one of the preconditions set forth by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was that a

Palestinian state would be completely demilitarized, signaling Israel's determination to "do what it must" to ensure Israeli security, despite the impact this has on Palestinians.^{xxxiv} An example of this possible precedent can be seen in Israel's relationship with the Gaza Strip – claiming to formally withdraw from the territory, only to exact a suffocating grip on all aspects of daily life for Gazans. In other words, as long as Israel continues to prevent Palestinian autonomy, the incessant cycle of violence will continue, regardless of the official status of the Palestinian state.

A future Palestinian state would additionally be unable to benefit from full environmental autonomy and the effective control over natural resources due to the likely continuation of the one-sided relationship that Israeli settlers currently maintain with the Palestinians. A prime example of this unfeasible relationship can be seen in the Israeli control of water resources and the difference in use between Palestinian and Israeli communities. Water resources in the West Bank are not as scarce as they may seem, as they include the Jordan River, the Mountain Aquifer underlying the West Bank and Israel, and a surprisingly significant amount of rainfall that covers the area.^{xxxv} However, with full control over means of distribution, Israel diverts over 87% of aquifer water to Israelis and has only approved 56% of Palestinian water treatment projects compared to the 100% approval rate for Israeli projects, ensuring weak Palestinian water infrastructure.^{xxxvi} Further, Israeli settlements are privileged over Palestinian areas in the West Bank in order to sustain the lifestyles of Israeli settlers who each consume over 300 liters of water a day, compared to the 73 liters of average daily consumption of West Bank Palestinians. To make matters worse, Israeli settlements are known to flood waste into Palestinian areas, leading to widespread water contamination, along with a future of health issues for Palestinians.^{xxxvii} On the other hand, the Gaza Strip receives most of its water from the Israeli-controlled coastal aquifer, allowing Gazans far less access to natural sources. Even with the establishment of a Palestinian state, it is unlikely that Israel would relinquish its hold on West Bank water resources, ensuring that Palestinians would find it impossible to develop without at least equal access to their territory's resources.

The lack of full territorial and environment autonomy would also limit the potential for sustainable development, both in terms of urban growth and agricultural development. The overarching issue of space is most acutely felt in the Gaza Strip, which is already known to be one of the most densely populated territories on earth. If a Palestinian state is established, rapid population growth and urbanization would have to be taken into account, especially with the

expected influx of refugees. With over 50% of West Bank territory closed or confiscated by Israel to allow for infrastructure ranging from settlements and their connective systems to industrial and military zones, there simply would not be enough space for urban expansion.

Without territorial contiguity, control over natural resources, or genuine sovereignty and access to land and sea access points, the Palestinian economy will be unable to fully develop. As previously mentioned, the isolation of the Gaza Strip creates the unique problem of establishing transport lines between the two separated Palestinian territories. Even if this complex task is achieved and a connection between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is accomplished, it would unremittably be at risk of collapse in the case of security flare ups and could even become a bargaining tool for the Israelis, who could threaten to prevent its continuation at their discretion. Further, the free movement of goods and trade would not be possible if Israel is to maintain control over the airspace, border crossings, and seaports. With this in mind, it is likely that the Palestinian economy would likely remain highly dependent on foreign aid and Israel, which currently supplies a majority of goods and services to the Occupied Territories. This leaves the future of a Palestinian economy in Israel's hands.

Given these considerations, one could argue that the physical situation on the ground has already created a one-state reality. This is not only caused by the impossibility of demarcating and defending permanent borders and the mutual population penetrations that include over 1.6 million Palestinian citizens of Israel and over 600,000 Israeli settlers dispersed throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem, but because of the interwoven and territorially dispersed issues such as the holy sites of Jerusalem, access to the Dead Sea, control of resources, and sovereignty over land, roads, seaports, and shores. These issues are exacerbated by the intrinsic indivisibility of social, cultural, and economic resources. In reality, Israel currently controls the Occupied Palestinian Territories in a manner that is consistent with full sovereignty, albeit without the political will of the Palestinian population. To put it simply, the two-state solution may fail, not because of a concerted effort to undermine it, but because separation is inherently impossible.

An Inherently Unjust Solution:

It is clear that the conflict paradigm that emerged out of the War of 1967 and solidified in the Oslo process has established an inherently unjust scenario for Palestinians, and most importantly, will not provide a secure future for the coming generations. Taking full advantage of their strategic and territorial superiority, Israel, supported closely by the United States, has

produced five central standards that have come to represent the undisputed principles of today's negotiation parameters.^{xxxviii} The first reframed the conflict as rooted in the disputes that emerged out of the results of the 1967 debacle, ensuring that a "resolution" to the conflict would only determine the future status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This served to confine any settlement to covering a mere 22% of historic Palestine. The second ensured that anything within those residual areas would be divisible based on "mutually agreed-upon land swaps." The third demanded that anything that occurred prior to 1967, including the consequences that transpired as a result of the mass Palestinian displacement, would not be considered for further negotiation, effectively discarding the entire refugee question to the outer peripheral of conflict discourse. The fourth equated the end of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict with the end of the occupation, rebuking all other outstanding Palestinian trepidations. The fifth stated that Israel would not commit to any concession without assurances of the conclusive termination of all forms of Palestinian armed struggle. With the international community's absolute acceptance of Israel's position of multi-faceted superiority, based on these guidelines, any peace resolution would be validated entirely on Israeli demands and concerns.

The principle effect of these strict parameters for future negotiations was that it established the false perception that Israeli participation in any form of negotiations would represent their apparently inherent flexibility, cooperation, and interest in making substantial concessions; an assumption that couldn't be further from reality. In fact, Israel effectively masked its expansionist goals, enabling their argument that the entirety of the territory they now held was fundamental to the survival of the Jewish state. The current conflict paradigm has established a discourse that seeks to sustain the status quo of asymmetrical power relations between Israelis and Palestinians, doesn't address the core roots of the conflict, and promotes "amnesiac" politics, in which the core issues have been forgone.^{xxxix} With the vast military, economic, and diplomatic superiority that Israel holds over the Palestinians, any agreement that is made between the two parties will only reflect the underlying power imbalance, resulting in an inevitably unjust outcome for the Palestinians.

To begin with, the parameters of the best-case scenario Palestinian state frames negotiations on a mere 22% of what Palestinians see as their historic homeland, ensuring that they would view any proposal that emerges out of these boundaries as an agonizing concession in itself. When Israel lays claim to their remaining territorial interests in the West Bank, this

would ensure that a further 40-50% of the territory would not be fully accessible by the Palestinians, reducing the Palestinian state to around 11% of historic Palestine, all broken up into the isolated, fragmented, and ultimately unviable Palestinian state that was discussed earlier.^{x1} It is inevitable that Palestinian anger would boil over and potentially be aimed at their own leadership for accepting the “crumbs” of their historic homeland.

Following the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, the focus of the Peace Process fixated conclusively on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This cut Palestinian refugees and Palestinian citizens of Israel out of the equation, effectively excluding over 50% of the Palestinian population from having any input in their own future and intensifying the political fragmentation of the Palestinian people. The central feature of the Oslo Accords was the agreement that “hard issues” like the refugee crisis would be shelved in order to allow for the traditional “trust building” conflict resolution methods. This fact alone means that any negotiations that stem out of these inherently unjust parameters would not be tailored to address the needs of a majority of the Palestinian people, and thus should not be considered seriously.

The placement of the refugee issue on the backburner of the negotiation process effectively de-historicized the conflict, uprooting recognition of the origin of a sizeable segment of Palestinian suffering and disabling the means of representation required to solve it. In other words, even ending the Israeli occupation that emerged in 1967 would not constitute an end of the conflict for the Palestinians who see the roots of their suffering dating back to before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. For millions of Palestinian refugees, return means return to their homes that currently reside within Israeli territory. However, the international acceptance of Israel’s constructed reality has allowed Israel to staunchly object to any significant facilitation of the right of return, restitution, or compensation for refugees that has repeatedly been outlined under international law. With little promise of the realization of the right of return to Israel, millions of refugees would have to contend with settling in the newly formed Palestinian state which, as outlined earlier, would not be able provide for that significant of a population spike. The blame for this neglect must also be aimed at the actions of the PLO in their recognition of UN Resolution 181 calling for partition and their acknowledgment that the quest for justice would have to be separated from that of feasibility. As a consequence, the Palestinian refugee community does not have any form of official representation in deciding the outcome of their fate.

Palestinian independence may also threaten the ongoing rights battle being pioneered by Palestinian citizens of Israel, who would likely become exposed to a further deterioration of their status as second-class citizens and may face the threat of expulsion. Today, Palestinian citizens of Israel represent over 20% of the Israeli population. However, despite their relatively large demographic, they have historically had little or no influence in policy-making. Often considered by Jewish Israelis as a “fifth column” or Israel’s “Achilles Heel” and seen as obstacle to the Jewish nature of the state, Palestinian-Israelis have struggled to achieve equality in issues ranging from unfair property laws to state protection and freedom of speech and expression. Yet, despite their socio-political position, many Palestinian-Israelis have signaled that they would choose to remain in Israel, rather than move to a Palestinian state if the choice was presented to them. However, the establishment of a Palestinian state would likely put these citizens at risk of a renewed bout of ethnic cleansing, as many Israelis may see no reason for the Palestinian-Israelis to remain in their Jewish state. Already, Jewish supremacists have engaged in the same intimidation tactics that have been used by settlers in the West Bank to evict Palestinian citizens of Israel from their communities in places like Acre and Jaffa.^{xli} In other words, the existence of a bordering Palestinian state would provide an excuse for Israel to take drastic measures to reinforce the Jewish nature of Israel.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a two-state solution does not provide a future for Palestinian youth. It is vital for young Palestinians to be presented with a realistic outlook of what an independent Palestinian state would look like based on the aforementioned obstacles that obstruct its path to success. Emerging out of the failed Peace Process, young Palestinians have largely lost hope in their government’s ability to achieve a negotiated settlement with Israel and, according to recent studies, youth confidence in the Palestinian leadership and support for the two-state solution has been continually declining.^{xlii} With this decline in confidence, young Palestinians have mostly turned inward or to radicalism, viewing violence as the only way to achieve political change. More important however, is examining the desire of Palestinian youth for their own individual development, which has contributed to the weakened “drive” for statehood and a more substantial desire for individual rights regardless of the political solution. In other words, young Palestinians have become increasingly disinterested in fighting what they see as a long-lost, bureaucratic battle for statehood, and would rather divert their attention to

tangible initiatives that can further their immediate interests, such as education, economic opportunity, and social engagement.

While it is important to recognize the unique political positioning of Palestinian youth, the appreciation of their similarities to youth around the world is vital in distinguishing their strategic potential. In truth, mirroring the desires of counterparts across the globe, young Palestinians simply yearn for a reality in which they can grow and thrive without the daily obstacles of occupation and political suppression. They desire a life that is not interrupted and limited by an ineffective government that cannot protect them or maintain genuine sovereignty. They demand the rights to move freely, make their voices and opinions heard, sufficiently access land and natural resources, gain an education, build professional careers, and perhaps eventually start families. Obviously, these aspirations are considered common expectations of youth elsewhere, but as demonstrated earlier, it becomes increasingly unlikely that they can be achieved in a Palestinian state built around a future doomed to failure. It is this truth that has come to dissuade so many young Palestinians from the struggle for statehood and turned either to silence, or violence.

According to Khalil Shikaki, Director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, surveys show that youth support for a one-state solution is significantly higher than that of older generations, citing their political exasperation as the core explanation for the abandonment of the two-state preference. In Shikaki's words, "youth look at the domestic political process and they conclude what they see is so hopeless, it is so detrimental to their interests and long term success because the system is so dysfunctional that if a Palestinian state is created, it will be corrupt, authoritarian, inefficient, just another failing state waiting to collapse." Similarly, according to Murad, a 23-year-old resident of the Aida refugee camp located just two miles north of Bethlehem, "we just want to live our lives, pursue our education, get jobs, and build a family. We can't do this with the occupation. To us, our rights are what is important. A Palestinian state is not able to achieve this." This represents one of the main driving factors for the rising number of Palestinian youth who have attempted to leave in hopes of continuing their education and securing stable employment elsewhere.^{xliii} With this in mind, the establishment of a volatile Palestinian state that does not address the core concerns of Palestinian youth would only lay the groundwork for prolonged social and political upheaval, just as it has across the region.

Conclusion:

As long as visions of achieving Palestinian self-determination and ultimately a resolution to the conflict are premised on the conflict parameters enforced by the asymmetrical relationship between the Israelis and the Palestinians, two-state ambitions will inevitably collapse. In its current form, the two-state solution has proven not only unviable, but inherently unjust. While continued Palestinian suffering may not disturb the Israeli public and its leadership, with growing numbers and an increasingly dissatisfied youth base that shifts progressively towards radicalism, chaos will persist. If these factors are permitted to develop, the conflict could enter a stage of intractability that has not yet been experienced. In truth, the answer to sustainable peace is not bludgeoning through today's flawed peace process, but reevaluating the approach to peace altogether. For the sake of all parties involved it is time to reframe understanding of the conflict among Palestinians, Israelis, and the international community, and in doing so, reevaluate the parameters in which we approach resolution.

In reality, John Kerry's seemingly eloquent assessment of the importance of the two-state solution could not be further from the truth. It is abundantly clear that separation does not represent the "only way to achieve a just and lasting peace" and the "only way to ensure a future of freedom and dignity for the Palestinian people." In fact, today's conflict paradigm has come to represent a fallacy that will not only fail in achieving a lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but undermine the rights of Palestinians, propelling them down a path that will undoubtedly lead to a future of eternal, taciturn suffering, all too reminiscent of the fates of indigenous peoples around the world.

Despite the obstacles that delay this discourse shift, it is clear that based on the interlocked physical reality, the mutual population penetrations, shared natural resources, the vital right of return of refugees, the inherently unjust nature of separation, and the deep spiritual and historical ties to the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, sustainable peace can only be achieved through integration. Even if a two-state solution were to be established, unprecedented levels of political and community-based cooperation would have to be achieved in order to come to agreement on issues ranging from natural resource management and distribution to shared access to the principal holy sites. Whether it be based on a secular

democratic structure, a bi-national framework, or a creative parallel state apparatus, the only path to genuine, lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis clearly lies in extensive levels of cooperation, a reality of coexistence, and an extensive process of establishing mutual recognition. Those that continue to blindly call for a two-state solution merely propel Palestinians and Israelis further from coming to terms with the shared future that is inevitable. But now we must ask, what will define the upcoming phase of the Palestinian struggle for peace and justice as they embark on what may be an impossible battle against entrenched separation?

Endnotes

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