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THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION: GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE

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http://www.fpri.org/multimedia/2012/20120913.susser_ibish.twostatesolution.html

For Israelis and for Palestinians, the two-state issue is always relevant no matter what is happening in the Middle East. Those of us who wish to see Israel remain as the nation-state of the Jewish people – which after all is the historical objective of the whole Zionist enterprise – must not give up on the two-state solution. There is no future for Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people outside the framework of a two-state solution. Recalling the history of Palestine, it is the Jews who wanted partition all the time, not the Arabs. The Arabs didn't need partition and today probably need partition less than the Jews do. But over the years both sides have concluded that they must support the two-state solution; yet, despite the fact that both sides support a two-state solution and have conducted negotiations for twenty years, we have failed to get there. I would venture to guess that we are probably not going to get there any time soon through the vehicle of negotiation.

I would like to explain why we haven't got there, why the one-state solution is not a solution, and what we should and can do to get there.

WHY WE HAVE FAILED TO ACHIEVE A TWO-STATE SOLUTION

First, why have we failed? The negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, like the negotiations between Israel and the Arab states, have been based on U.N. Resolution 242. I would argue that's the problem. 242 is a resolution that came into being in the aftermath of the 1967 six-day war. It was a resolution designed to solve the problems created by the six-day war through the equation of land for peace. Israel would return the land it occupied in 1967 in exchange for peace with the Arab states from which this land was taken. The Palestinians were not part of that resolution. They're not even mentioned in the resolution; nor does the word "Palestine" appear there. The thought was that Israel would return Sinai to Egypt, the Golan to the Syrians and the West Bank to the Jordanians. Where exactly Gaza would go wasn't quite clear, perhaps with the West Bank to the Jordanians. 242 is a resolution which works very well between Israel and the Arab states, and two of the three Arab states, in fact, have made peace with Israel on the base of that resolution. Jordan without the West Bank and Egypt have made peace with Israel, and we were not very far from a peace treaty with Syria as well in the 1990s.

But 242 has inherent deficiencies when it comes to the Palestinians. The Palestinians have two major grievances with Israel. One is the product of the 1967 war, the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, but the main grievance is a result of Israel's creation in 1948 and the Palestinian refugee question that results from 1948. There are no Palestinians who think that the problem with Israel began in 1967. If you talk to the Palestinians about "end of conflict," which is what the Israelis did, you are forcing the 1948 questions to the surface. There are two sets of issues that we have with the Palestinians. The West Bank and Gaza and the settlements and the borders and Jerusalem are only a part of the problem; they are the "1967 file," as I call

it. 242 does not relate at all to the 1948 file, which is the Palestinians' real problem. With the Arab states we don't have a 1948 file; there is only a 1967 problem.

The dynamic created by the Oslo Accords seemed to narrow down the whole issue of Palestine to the 1967 questions. The Palestinian authority had elected institutions, the Presidency and Parliament, both of which were elected only by the people in the West Bank and Gaza, and the Palestinian authority represented only the West Bank and Gaza, as opposed to the PLO, which represented all Palestinians everywhere. The Israelis saw this Oslo dynamic as reducing the issue of Palestine to the 1967 questions and we saw that as a very positive development. This was going to create the basis for a two-state solution, and it was on that basis that the Israelis went to Camp David in 2000. The Israelis had in their mind a tradeoff. Israel would concede on the bulk of the 1967 issues including Jerusalem, and the Palestinians would close the file of 1948 in exchange and that would end the conflict. But the Palestinians never agreed to such a tradeoff and would not agree to close the file of 1948, which is the refugee question.

On territory where the Israelis were looking for a compromise on the West Bank, the Palestinians found the idea of compromise very difficult to accept. The Israelis understood that the Palestinians as wanting all or nothing – 100 percent of the West Bank. But what the Israelis didn't understand was that, from the Palestinian point of view, to retrieve all of the West Bank was to retrieve only 22 percent of historical Palestine. Israelis already had 78 percent. So the argument the Palestinians made on territory was in effect to say we want all of the West Bank back and how can you quibble with us on the 22 percent that is left? So both on the 1967 territorial issues and particularly on refugees, Camp David failed.

The Israeli response to this recognition of the centrality of the 1948 questions was to demand of the Palestinians since Camp David to recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. That is Israel's counterweight to continuing Palestinian demands on 1948. Israelis believe that if they can get the Palestinians to recognize that Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, there will be no refugee return to the state of Israel. This makes sense from the Israeli point of view. But the Palestinians will not recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, for to do so would be asking the Palestinians to recognize that Palestine is Jewish, and they won't. So when it comes to these 1948 questions, there has been no progress between Israel and Palestine.

When Ehud Olmert and Abu Mazen conducted their negotiations in 2008 the differences were narrowed down very significantly on the 1967 issues on territory, even on Jerusalem, but not on refugees. Olmert offered Abu Mazen the return of 5,000 refugees in five years, that is 1,000 a year for five years. The Palestinians in their private conversations with the Israelis spoke about the return of 100,000 or 150,000, which was 20 or 30 times more than what the Israelis were offering. And when these numbers were leaked – 100,000-150,000 were leaked by WikiLeaks – the Palestinians denied them and Palestinian public was unwilling to accept even the 100,000-150,000 limitation. There is no possibility in the foreseeable future that the Israelis and the Palestinians will come to an agreement that will include the 1948 issues.

WHY NOT ONE STATE?

So if it is so difficult to arrive at a solution of end of conflict, why not have one state? Because the one-state cure is the proverbial cure that kills the patient. I cannot think of any place on earth where two nations locked in conflict for over 100 years are offered a solution to be thrust together in a boiling pot of coexistence that would end no doubt in mutual destruction. Communities with less historical hostility have fallen apart in recent years – Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Belgium is on and off, Sudan, the Soviet Union, even devolution in the United Kingdom.

Some illustrations may be helpful: When Andy Murray won the U.S. Open, I saw an interview on the BBC with someone saying, "This is not an English victory, it's Scottish." Some years ago, I was in Norway and was asked how long I thought it would take until Israel and Palestine merged into one state. I replied "I bet I can give you a precise answer. It will be 24 hours after Norway and Sweden merge together in one state." They didn't laugh. It is amazing how people expect us to do things that they would never imagine doing themselves!

Mainly I would say the reason why this is a bad idea is because most Jews in Israel and most Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza don't want it. There are people in the Diaspora who may wish for such a solution, but they won't face the music and probably couldn't care less about it. A one-state solution, if there were to be such a thing, would with time transform the Jews in this future Palestinian state into a minority. Looking around the Middle East today, the most unhealthy position one could wish to be in is that of a minority in any one of the Middle Eastern states. It is not a privileged position to be in. The Jews as a minority in Palestine? I hate to think of their ultimate fate without their own state being there to protect them.

THE CASE FOR "COORDINATED UNILATERALISM"

If a two-state solution is unattainable by negotiation and a one-state solution is not a solution, what do we do? We have to

begin by recognizing the limitations of the negotiating process and the limitations of Resolution 242. We, the Israelis, have to come to terms with the fact that we may have to withdraw for less than peace, that land for peace may be desirable, but not necessarily fully attainable. Why should we withdraw in the absence of full peace? If we don't, we are allowing those who resist the idea of peace with Israel, like Hamas and company, to dictate to Israel what kind of country we will live in in 10, 20 or 30 years' time.

If the prime objective is to preserve Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, we have to cut our suit according to the amount of cloth we have. There are nearly 6 million Jews in Israel and an Arab population in British Mandatory Palestine which is now more or less equal. There are arguments about the numbers and there is one particular source that keeps on promoting the idea that there are fewer Palestinians in the West Bank than everybody else seems to claim, but I know of no Israeli demographers, government or otherwise, who accept the figures of the minimizers.

By maintaining the status quo, Israel is undermining its long-term capability to remain the nation-state of the Jews, and if we are not the nation-state to the Jewish people, what's the point of the exercise? What have we been fighting for the last 120 years? To become a minority in Palestine? We can be a minority in California. That would be preferable to being a minority stuck out there in the Mediterranean. It's about being in that one place on earth where we are the majority, and if this cannot be obtained by a negotiation, then we have to think of unilateralism again. Now I know people will say, "Well, have you lost your marbles? Don't you know what happened in Gaza after Israel withdrew?" I know what happened in Gaza. Life is about alternatives, not about the ideal.

What we have to improve is the manner in which we conduct the unilateral approach; we can't just walk out of the territories without any coordination with the Palestinians. We should have what I call "coordinated unilateralism." It sounds like an oxymoron, but it isn't. Coordinated unilateralism presumes the United States is the coordinator, and that the Palestinians have their unilateral process as well. Regarding the Palestinian approach to the international community to recognize Palestinian statehood, I don't think Israel should object, so long as the prospective UN resolution indicates that the precise borders and the status of Jerusalem and the refugee question are subject to eventual negotiation between Israel and Palestine. And as the Palestinians proceed to build the institutions of their state, we should withdraw from considerable territories in the West Bank, gradually – withdraw settlements, particularly – leave the military in many places where we still need them. Thereby we will create the possibility of what I call a "two-state dynamic" – instead of what we are presently creating ourselves, which is a one-state dynamic, which is working against our own long-term interests.

This unilateral dynamic will create a two-state reality, not peace in our time. It will look a lot more like an armistice than a peace treaty, but if you look around our relations with the other Arab states today, we are going in that direction with them too. Our relations with Egypt are beginning to look much more like an armistice than a peace treaty. The relations with Syria never were more than armistice, and in Jordan, as in Egypt, the peace treaty never resulted in full, warm relations. This two-state reality would not require a written agreement between the parties, just understandings. No written agreements would mean that neither side would have to give up their historical narratives and we would have a two-state reality on the basis of which or from which eventually negotiations will be held between the state of Palestine and the state of Israel on the outstanding issues like borders and Jerusalem and, eventually, refugees. This is the only realistic alternative to sliding down the slippery slope of an irreversible one-state reality.

Yes, the Middle East around us is falling apart, but even though that is the case, we must not allow ourselves to lose sight of what our historical objective always was. I fear for the moment where we, the Israeli Jews, will wake up in 10 or 15 years' time and say, "The reality is irreversible, and we have lost it." That we cannot allow to happen. It's not in our self-interest.

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