

FPC Briefing: Two-state solution still indispensable and achievable

Dr Toby Greene

Despair at the lack of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has led to increasing voices of doubt about the viability of the two-state solution. Though intensive US diplomacy may succeed in reviving final status negotiations in 2013, distrust between Israeli and Palestinian leaderships and clear gaps between the sides on core issues relating to borders, security, Jerusalem and refugees mean hopes for a comprehensive agreement are low. Both Foreign Secretary William Hague and US Secretary of State John Kerry have asserted that time is running out for the two state solution, as at times have members of the Israeli peace camp.

Polling consistently shows that the two-state solution has majority support among both Israelis and Palestinians and is far more popular than a one-state alternative for both sides.¹ Despite this, there is an increasing tendency in some quarters, particularly among some Palestinian officials and intellectuals and their international supporters, to talk up the possibilities of a single state encompassing Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile opponents of the two-state solution on the Israeli right, like to claim that the two-state solution has already been rendered inoperable by the 'success' of their settlement building programme, or by the intransigence of the Palestinians, and offer their own alternatives which allow Israel to keep most of the West Bank.

This briefing will suggest that in reality the idea of one-state solution is a fallacy, and that the idea of a window closing on a two-state solution is a misleading and unhelpful way to characterise the current situation. However problematic the two-state solution is, it remains the only conceivable arrangement that can reconcile the core demands and interests of Palestinian and Jewish national movements. That is, in each case, a sovereign state that provides national self-determination and a national home, including for each side's diaspora. It offers an arrangement with which neither would be fully satisfied, but which majorities on both sides could conceivably live with, and it offers a realistic opportunity for both peoples to build a future which is more peaceful and more prosperous than the present or the past. The one-state 'solution', on the other hand, is a chimera. A single state cannot bring peace, since it would ultimately undermine the national goals of one or other of the two competing national movements. The alternative to two states is not one state, it is an on-going situation of conflict and turmoil which harms both sides.

One State?

There is no such thing as a one state 'solution' to the Israeli Palestinian conflict. If a solution means ending bloodshed, affording dignity, universal human and political rights, and economic and social opportunities to all peoples involved, then the phrase 'one state solution' is simply an oxymoron. There is an honourable tradition, including on the margins of the Zionist movement, of utopian one-statism, rooted in universalistic principles, which accepts both Jewish and Arab attachment to the land and advocates a single state which is the home for both nations.² But as long ago as 1937, the Peel Commission realised that Jewish and Arab aspirations for national self-determination, as understood by the overwhelming majorities on both sides, were irreconcilable within a single state. For this reason it proposed that for both sides, "Half a loaf is better than no bread."³ The only way

¹ Yehuda Ben Meir and Olena Bagnio-Moldavsky, *Memorandum 126: The Voice of the People: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2012*, (Institute for National Security Studies, 2013); 'Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No (47)', *Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research*, 28-30 March 2013.

² High profile advocates in the pre-state era included Martin Buber and Yehuda Magnes, and in contemporary Israeli discourse Meron Benvenisti.

³ *Palestine Royal Commission Report (1937)* p. 394.

each side could enjoy national self-determination was through partition into two states. For a host of reasons, utopian one-statism is at least as removed from reality today as it was then.⁴

Most of those advocating some form of one state approach today, whether from Jewish-Zionist or Palestinian perspectives, are coming from a position that negates the national narrative and interests of the other side. Unlike the two-state formula, their visions do not reconcile the positions of the two peoples. Whether it is a Palestinian or Israeli vision of a single state, the winner takes all, the loser loses completely.

Palestinian one-statism

Most of those in the West who promote a one-state alternative today are Palestinians or their supporters who reject entirely the Jewish-Zionist narrative and the Jewish claim to national rights or self-determination.⁵ Blurring the distinction between Israel within the 1967 lines, where Arabs enjoy full legal equality, and the situation in the Occupied Territories, they argue that the State of Israel as a whole is inherently illegitimate and racist. In making this claim they draw a false analogy to apartheid South Africa.⁶

They consider a two-state solution impracticable and in any case undesirable since it would not address all Palestinian demands, in particular for the 'right of return' for Palestinian refugees and their descendants from the 1947-48 war. They propose instead a single state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, to which Palestinians would enjoy the 'right of return'. The unavoidable corollary of this vision is the dismantlement of the State of Israel as it exists today as the nation state of the Jewish people, and its replacement with an Arab majority state. Given the overwhelming priority Israeli Jews place on maintaining Israel's character as a Jewish majority state, this is not something that the State of Israel is ever likely to agree to.⁷

At times the idea of a single state alternative has been raised by Palestinian leaders in negotiations with their Israeli counterparts over the terms for a two-state solution. They well understand that Israel cannot accept a one-state outcome, and they propose it not as an alternative model to resolve the conflict, but as a threat.

"We will leave it for our future generations to demand our rights", said Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qurei to then Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, when he did not like her border proposal during a closed negotiation session in April 2008. "The solution is a bi-national state from the sea to the river," he added.⁸ He was implying: if we do not get terms we like, we have an alternative which will give us total victory in the end, we will ultimately outnumber you, we will demand the right to be citizens of your state, and international pressure will force you to accept.

This strategy was spelled out explicitly in an unofficial document by the 'Palestine Strategy Group', a group of leading Palestinian intellectuals and advisors in August 2008.⁹ They proposed the threat of demanding equal rights for West Bank Palestinians in the State of Israel, backed by international

⁴ For practical objections to the idea of a bi-national state see Asher Susser, *Israel Jordan and Palestine: The Two State Imperative* (Brandeis University Press, 2011), 124ff; Gershon Gorenberg, *The Unmaking of Israel*, (Harper, 2011), 224-227.

⁵ See for example *The London, Madrid One State Declaration* (2007) <http://onedemocracy.co.uk/documents/london-madrid-one-state-declaration/>; also Alan Johnson, 'What a One State Solution Really Means', *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 October 2012.

⁶ Asher Susser calls this the 'South Africanization of the discourse on Israel-Palestine' and sets out clearly why the analogy does not hold, See *Israel, Jordan and Palestine*, 119.

⁷ Surveys show a decisive majority of the Jewish Israeli public regards a Jewish majority in the State of Israel as more important than having the State of Israel include all parts of the Land of Israel West of the Jordan. See for example Prof. Ephraim Yaar and Prof. Tamar Hermann, 'Peace Index - December 2012', <http://www.peaceindex.org/>.

⁸ *Minutes of meeting of 8 April 2008 on Borders including Ahmed Qurei, Saeb Erekat and Tzipi Livni*; [Palestine Papers – Al Jazeera Transparency Unit](#) (2011).

⁹ Hussein Ibish, *What's Wrong with the One State Agenda*, (American Task Force on Palestine, 2009).

support, was an existential threat to which Israel had no response; a trump card that would force Israel to end the occupation on Palestinian terms. The approach of advancing Palestinian positions by isolating Israel internationally, rather than through negotiations, has been encouraged by the success of Palestinian campaigns to secure recognition of their statehood in Gaza and the West Bank in international forums, and by the increasing criticism and even demonization of Israel in parts of European civil society.

Many Israelis take seriously the threat that if a two state solution is not realised, Israel will face a political campaign for Palestinian rights similar to that which isolated apartheid South Africa. Former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and former defence minister Ehud Barak have articulated this as part of the case made within Israel for making progress towards a two-state solution. However whilst the threat to Israel's legitimacy of the status quo may be real, the idea that the conflict can actually be *solved* through a one-state solution – as in the case of South Africa - remains an illusion. Jews currently make up 75% of Israel's population within pre-1967 lines. After centuries of persecution and war, and in particular after the Holocaust, Israeli Jews are unlikely to voluntarily give up this majority overseeing the sovereign institutions of their state, in particular the Knesset, government and military. The ability of the Jewish nation to defend itself on its own initiative, is one of the immutable values of Zionism and supported by the majority of the Israeli population. This is inconsistent with any conceivable bi-national or even federal state model in which a single army would have to represent both nations.

Israeli one-statism

Surveys consistently show that around 60% of Jewish Israelis favour a two-state solution, including a narrow majority among voters of Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party.¹⁰ Nonetheless, some Israelis claim they also have a route to a one state solution on Zionist terms. They try to do this in various ways, none of them credible.

Some on the extreme margins of the Israeli right advocate transferring the Arabs somewhere else, enabling the Jews to keep all the land and maintain a Jewish majority. Moshe Feiglin, a Knesset Member on the far right of the Likud, proposed paying Arab families \$500,000 each to leave the West Bank during the last election. Most Israelis, however, including mainstream settler leaders, have no regard whatsoever for proposals to transfer Palestinians out of the West Bank.¹¹

Some, like Likud MK Tzipi Hottobely, or former diplomat Yair Ettinger, claim that Israel can annex the whole of the West Bank, giving its 2.5 million Palestinians Israeli citizenship, and still have a single state with a solid Jewish majority.¹² Those taking this position often try to bolster it with various demographic claims playing down Palestinian population growth, or they propose some gerrymandering of the electoral system to prevent Arabs getting too many seats in the Knesset. They also conveniently ignore the Gaza Strip, and its 1.5 million Palestinians. Most Israeli Jews recognise this approach as wholly unrealistic. Israel as it is today, with a ratio of Jewish to non-Jewish citizens is 3:1 or 4:1, can legitimately be both the nation state of the Jewish people, and a democracy which

¹⁰ See for example Yehuda Ben Meir and Olena Bagno-Moldavsky, Memorandum 126: The Voice of the People: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2012, (Institute for National Security Studies, 2013) and Prof. Ephraim Yaar and Prof. Tamar Hermann, 'Peace Index - December 2012', <http://www.peaceindex.org/>.

¹¹ Less than 16% of Jewish Israelis think Israel's aspirations include expelling Palestinians from the West Bank. See 'Joint Israeli Palestinian Poll, June 2013', *The Harry S. Truman Research Institute For the Advancement of Peace and Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research*. See also Danny Dayan interviewed by Mehdi Hassan, *Al Jazeera*, 7 July 2013.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/headtohead/2013/06/201361310127499186.html>

¹² Yoram Ettinger, *The One State Solution*, 2 July 2011. <http://www.onestateisrael.com/solutions/israeli-proposals/yoram-ettinger-the-one-state-solution/>.

gives equal rights to non-Jewish minorities.¹³ But if the ratio is 3:2 the sustainability of the arrangement looks less certain.

Then there are those like Naftali Bennett¹⁴, who do not advocate transfer, but also are also not willing give West Bank Palestinians the vote. Bennett proposes that in order to ‘manage’ and ‘stabilise’ the situation Israel annex the settlement blocks and the open areas of the West Bank, leaving the areas currently controlled by the PA as autonomous, but with full freedom of movement in the West Bank.¹⁵ The objections to this incoherent proposal are too many to detail here. Suffice it to say that a solution is not a solution unless the majority of the people subject to it are willing to accept it. The Palestinians are not going to accept living as second class citizens in someone else’s country, without the right to elect the government that runs their lives, any more than Jews would be.

There are also those, mainly on the Israeli right, who hold to an old dream of Jordan becoming the homeland for the Palestinian people. Space does not permit exploring this issue here, but as far as the Hashemite monarchy is concerned this proposal is an existential threat, and no Israeli government is likely to propose a policy which would unseat its only trusted ally in the region.¹⁶

The Two-State Problem

Given there is no one-state model that can reconcile the two sides’ desire for national self-determination, it is not surprising that a majority of Israelis, and a majority of Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, favour the principle of a two-state solution.¹⁷ The fact that majorities on both sides agree on a broad approach to ending the conflict ought to be a source of hope that the conflict is indeed resolvable.

However, whilst the absence of a one-state option may make the two-state solution desirable for both publics, it does not make it attainable, and after years of disappointments in the peace process, majorities on both sides fear it is not. Observers in the West also frequently point to several trends which they claim are making the two-state solution harder if not impossible to implement. Whilst these trends are each to some degree problematic, I would argue that none should cause either the conflicting parties or international third parties to despair of the two-state goal.

Settlements

The most frequently cited reason why the window is said to be closing on the two-state solution is that the growth of Jewish settlements is rendering the establishment of a contiguous Palestinian state including most of the West Bank and East Jerusalem practically unfeasible. Furthermore, the settlement population, which has indeed grown rapidly in recent years, is said to be reaching the point where Israel can no longer conceivably remove it at will, as was done with 2500 settlers in the Sinai in 1982, and 9000 in the Gaza Strip in 2005.

It is undeniable that the greater the number of Israeli settlers in areas that will be designated for a future Palestinian state, the harder it will be to remove them. No one should understate the

¹³ Tal Becker, interviewed by Toby Greene, ‘BICOM Expert View: The Idea of a Jewish State is itself Democratic’, *BICOM*, (March 2012).

¹⁴ Bennett is Minister of Industry, Trade, and Labor, Minister of Religious Services and Minister of Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs as well as leading the governing coalition’s third largest party The Jewish Home.

¹⁵ Naftali Bennett, *The Israel Stability Initiative*. <http://www.onestateisrael.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/The-Israel-Stability-Initiative-Naftali-Bennett.pdf>.

¹⁶ *Israel, Jordan and Palestine*.

¹⁷ Yehuda Ben Meir and Olena Bagno-Moldavsky, *Memorandum 126: The Voice of the People: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2012*, (Institute for National Security Studies, 2013); ‘*Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No (47)*’, *Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research*, 28-30 March 2013.

challenge for Israel of forcing Jews from their homes in the historic Jewish heartlands of Judea and Samaria. However, it remains the case that to create a border which connects the major Israeli settlement blocks, where most of the settlers live, to Israel requires annexing only around 6% of the West Bank, which can be compensated with 1:1 land swaps.¹⁸

The 2008 offer by then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas would have left less than 65,000 Jewish settlers on the Palestinian side of the proposed border. Whilst the challenge of moving this population would be daunting, it is worth recalling that the entire settlement population of the Gaza Strip, including 9000 residents, was forcibly depopulated in a single week in August 2005, with the 2500 homes they had built over nearly four decades bulldozed the following week. Four smaller settlements in the northern West Bank were also removed at the same time.

As for whether Israel can reabsorb those settlers, the country has demonstrated extraordinary capacity to take in large population influxes. Whilst the settlement population has grown considerably from a few thousand in 1980 to 330,000 today (excluding East Jerusalem), the overall population of Israel has doubled from around 4 million to around 8 million. The country absorbed nearly one million immigrants from the former Soviet Union in a single decade following the end of the Cold War.

At the same time, we should not discount another possibility, which is that those settlers who refuse to leave could be allowed to stay under Palestinian sovereignty.¹⁹ The physical footprint of isolated settlements beyond the major blocks is just 0.4% of the territory of the West Bank, hardly representing a physical barrier to the development of a contiguous Palestinian state, as frequently claimed by one-state advocates.²⁰

Increasing radicalism in the region

A second concern is that the situation in the region is removing the regional political support for the two-state solution. The empowerment of Arab publics with very hostile views towards Israel, and the rise of Islamist political forces, appeared to weaken the Palestinian Authority under Mahmoud Abbas whilst strengthening their radical Islamist rivals Hamas.

A particular concern until now has been Egypt, the most populous and militarily powerful Arab state, and the first to make peace with Israel. However, Egypt's policies since the revolution suggest that whoever rules in Cairo, Egypt's internal crises make its economic dependency on the West and its interest in political stability in the Sinai and the Gaza Strip greater than ever.

This explains the fact that even whilst the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Morsi – who was a natural ally for Hamas and unwilling to even say the word 'Israel' – resided in the Presidential palace, the critical military and intelligence relationship between Egypt and Israel remained intact. In May 2013, prior to Morsi's ousting, Egypt's foreign minister Mohamed Kamel Amr even lined up alongside Qatari, Palestinian, Jordanian and Saudi leaders in Washington and endorsed the principle of land swaps in the context of the Arab Peace Initiative. So whilst instability among Israel's Arab neighbours does not make advancing the two-state solution any easier, and certainly underscores the importance of security arrangements for Israel in any future agreement²¹, it has not fatally undermined regional support for the two state solution.

¹⁸ Shaul Arieli, 'Why Settlements have not Killed the Two-State Solution', *BICOM Expert View*, January 2013.

¹⁹ Palestinian negotiator Ahmed Qureia offered this solution during the Annapolis process. Akiva Eldar, 'PA: Settlers can become Palestinian citizens', *Haaretz*, 26 May 2009.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Michael Herzog, 'BICOM Expert View: Making Peace After the Arab Spring', *BICOM*, (August 2011).

A parallel argument has it that Israel is also becoming more radical, and in particular that the ranks of the IDF officers have been swelled with national religious soldiers who might refuse to participate in forced withdrawal of settlements if their rabbis forbade it. No one can say what will happen if and when the IDF is ordered to evacuate more West Bank settlements, but it is premature to claim that the IDF is incapable of carrying out an evacuation order given to it by the government; something it proved capable of doing in 2005.²²

Indeed, what is remarkable about Israeli support for a two-state solution is how constant it has remained in the last 10-15 years, and the extent to which it has become the mainstream political consensus, despite the scepticism engendered by the failure to reach a conflict ending agreement. In this context, the more radically hard-line settlers behave, particularly when they place themselves in opposition to the government or the IDF, the more they are likely to isolate themselves from the Israeli mainstream.

The problem of leadership

Another concern which fuels the 'window closing' thesis is that President Abbas – a leader willing to negotiate a deal - is aging and weakening and will sooner or later be replaced by a more intransigent Fatah leadership, or Hamas. Whilst reasonable questions are raised about the leaderships of both sides, the fate of President Abbas, who has no clear successor, raises particular concerns.

Abbas's relative moderation and consistent opposition to violence have been important to the relative calm and stability in the West Bank since his election in 2005. Furthermore, with increasing numbers of Palestinian leaders and younger educated Palestinians talking about a one-state outcome, Abbas is an important anchor for the pro two-state position within Palestinian society. As hard as it seems to be for Israel to cut a deal with Abbas, it seems harder still to imagine cutting a deal without him. Abbas himself has on numerous occasions used the 'Après moi, le déluge' threat of resignation as leverage against both Israel and the West.

However, Abbas has appeared for most of the last four years unwilling or unable make progress with the current Israeli leadership. It is a mistake therefore to rest all hopes for long term peace two-state solution on his shoulders, or indeed on the shoulders of any individual leader on either side. It is impossible to predict what might happen when Abbas exits the scene, but even if he is replaced with someone less interested in compromise, it will not change the fundamental reality that there is no alternative to the two-state solution. It may make the imminent possibility of a signed agreement even less likely, but if that is the case, it calls for new ways of thinking about progress towards a two-state reality, rather than abandoning the two-state model altogether.

New ways of thinking

The ideal remains a comprehensive agreement signed between the parties, which is then implemented as far as political realities (i.e. the continuing Hamas rule in Gaza) allow. Greater flexibility by leaders on both sides would improve the chances of achieving this. However, if a final status agreement proves unattainable at present, rather than allowing the adverse trends to close off the hope for peace, those who want to advance a two-state outcome need to adopt new approaches that circumvent existing barriers to progress.

Pragmatic and moderately inclined Israelis and Palestinians have many overlapping interests, even if they prove incapable of achieving a final status agreement. They share an interest in ending Israeli control of Palestinians in the West Bank, allowing a sovereign Palestinian state to be created, and for that state to develop economically to the benefit of its inhabitants. Much of this can be achieved

²² Amos Harel interviewed by Alan Johnson, 'The IDF 2.0', *Fathom*, 14 September 2012.

without a full and final agreement, either through interim agreements or by unilateral steps by both sides.

Unilateralism good and bad

Not all unilateral steps are conducive to a peaceful future, and third party support for unilateral measures should be determined according to their consistency with ultimately achieving an agreed two-state solution.

On the Palestinian side, the bottom up state building programme spearheaded until recently by Salam Fayyad is entirely consistent with the two-state vision and third party states, as well as Israel, should do everything they can to help it continue.

By contrast, recent Palestinian attempts to have their status as a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to the pre-1967 lines, recognised at the UN, have risked undermining the prospects for a future peace agreement. Rather than establishing a new basis for talks with Israel, seeking recognition at the UN looks more like a Palestinian strategy to impose its position through international pressure as an alternative to compromising through bilateral negotiations.

An international declaration of the right of the Palestinians to statehood in Gaza and the West Bank could be consistent with a two-state solution, but only if certain conditions are met. A declaration that is not balanced, and does not address core Israeli concerns, particularly with regard to the Palestinian 'right of return', could also be consistent with a Palestinian 'phased approach': seeking sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza today, whilst leaving their claims to pre-1967 Israel open for the future. The UN General Assembly in November 2012 affirmed the Palestinian demand for sovereignty in the occupied territories without addressing concessions they will have to make for a two-state solution to be realised. It also increased the scope for the Palestinians to use legal forums like the ICC to prosecute Israel, a development which is likely to escalate hostility between the sides and reduce the chances of successful negotiations in the future.

Israel has also taken unilateral steps to shape the future situation between Israel and the Palestinians. The most significant was the evacuation of all settlements in the Gaza Strip and a small number in the northern West Bank in 2005. Since then however there has been a continuation of settlement construction in the West Bank. Whilst much of the construction is in areas Israel can reasonably expect to keep as part of a future land swap arrangement, some is in areas that Israel has no chance of keeping, and some is in sensitive areas which are hotly disputed, including around Jerusalem. To the extent that settlement activity occurs in areas beyond Israel's anticipated future borders, i.e. beyond the major settlement blocks, it is clearly inconsistent with a future two-state solution, increasing the challenges of future implementation, and undermining faith on the Palestinian side.

However, an increasing number of Israeli politicians and policy experts are proposing a return to Israeli unilateralism in the opposite direction, i.e. that in the absence of diplomatic progress Israel take measures to withdraw from isolated settlements in the West Bank, allowing for the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state in interim boundaries.²³ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not yet shown any interest in such a move, and the Israeli public is sceptical since the rise of Hamas followed the disengagement from Gaza. There are also risks to Israel proposing it, not least that

²³ See e.g. "The Palestinian Issue: Toward a Reality of Two States", *Institute for National Security Studies*, 23 April 2011; Shlomo Cesana, Yoav Limor and The Associated Press, "Barak floats unilateral withdrawal from Judea and Samaria," *Israel Hayom*, 24 September 2012; Ehud Yaari, "Armistice Now", *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2010; "The Mofaz Plan", *Israel Policy Forum*, 16 November 2009; "Reassessment of Israeli-Palestinian Political Process: Build a Palestinian State in the West Bank", *Reut Institute*, 5 May 2009; Shlomo Avineri, "No realistic chance of permanent Middle East peace", *Haaretz*, 5 October 2011.

offering to give up land for nothing in return may further reduce Palestinian incentives to negotiate an agreement. However, if the Palestinians appear in any case unwilling or unable to make an agreement, an Israeli move that allows for the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, with sufficient security safeguards for Israel, could create the conditions for a comprehensive peace in the future.

Conclusion

The preferred option for advancing a two-state solution should be through a bilateral agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and every effort should be made give the current US led diplomatic process the best chance of success.²⁴

However, even if current diplomatic efforts fail, there is no alternative one-state model which can bring peace. Furthermore, the two-state outcome is still a realisable goal, and majorities on both sides still share a strong preference for a two-state model over any alternative – a fact whose significance should not be underestimated.

Therefore, if attempts to make progress in negotiations are not successful in 2013, Britain and other third parties should consider supporting only those unilateral acts which are consistent with the promotion of two-state reality on the ground or with a future negotiated agreement. These would include continuing bottom-up Palestinian state building, and Israeli proposals which might facilitate that, including through reducing its presence in the West Bank.

There may be increasing political momentum behind Palestinian unilateral efforts to secure recognition of their statehood in international bodies and isolate Israel. In 2012 Britain abstained from the vote on Palestine achieving non-member state status at the UN on the basis that this would potentially make it harder to return to negotiations in future. Britain should continue to assess Palestinian moves in international forums according to their impact on the prospects for future negotiations, or the implementation of a two-state solution on the ground. In that respect they should keep in mind that rewarding Palestinian unilateralism which imposes one-sided formulas or isolates Israel risks further incentivising Palestinians to stay away from negotiations.

Moving towards a two state reality on the ground without a peace agreement does not resolve the conflict. But unlike maintaining the status quo, introducing one-sided international resolutions, or calling for a supposed 'one state' alternative, it does offer the prospect of a better future for all concerned, and maintains a situation in which a peace agreement might be achievable in the future.

Key points

- Even whilst the US engages in intensive efforts to revive final status negotiations, lack of progress in recent years and apparent gaps between Israel and the Palestinians are causing some to claim that the window is closing on a two state solution.
- However, there is no alternative one state 'solution' to the Israeli Palestinian conflict. If a solution means ending bloodshed, affording dignity, universal human and political rights, and economic and social opportunities to all peoples involved, then the phrase 'one state solution' seems an oxymoron.
- Whilst adverse trends are making a two-state agreement harder to achieve - including growth of settlements, increasing radicalisation and the threat to the current Palestinian leadership - none of these are fatal to the two-state solution.
- Though scepticism abounds, majorities on both sides still favour in principle a two-state solution.

²⁴ For suggestions on what Britain and Europe can do to support this process see Michael Herzog, 'A moment to seize in the Israeli-Palestinian arena' [Fathom](#) Issue 3, May 2013.

- Given that the two-state model is the only viable option which reconciles the interests of the two sides, rather than the third parties despairing of the two-state solution, they should seek ways to advance it even in the absence of a full agreement.

Dr Toby Greene is Research Director at [BICOM](#) and author of 'Blair, Labour and Palestine: Conflicting Views on Middle East Peace After 9/11' (Bloomsbury, 2013).

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