



PERSPECTIVES

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The Two-State Solution: A Greater Threat to Palestinians than to Israel

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Most observers, when debating the pros and cons of a two-state solution, focus exclusively on its potential impact on Israel and its Jewish citizens. Much less attention is paid to the solution's potential impact on the Palestinians. Leftists, right-wingers, conservatives and liberals all tend to assume that two states would naturally be in the Palestinians' interest. Think again.

As was apparent at the recent Paris conference, the world refuses to acknowledge that the two-state solution has already failed the Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority (PA), established in 1994, came to rule over all of Gaza in the summer of 2005 after the complete Israeli withdrawal and destruction of Israeli settlements. The PA also had exclusive control over the major cities in Judea and Samaria/the West Bank and their environs, comprising some 95 percent of these territories' population.

However, that unified Palestinian entity, which was supposed to be the Palestinian side of the two-state equation, proved extremely short-lived. Within two years of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, Hamas took over Gaza completely. In the summer of 2007, after several rounds of fighting that began soon after Hamas's electoral victory in 2006, the Islamist group established its own exclusive government in Gaza.

Thus, the Palestinians partitioned themselves into two bodies: an autocratic entity headed by Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank, and a Hamas theocracy in Gaza. Almost unnoticed, the two-state solution had given way to a three-state solution.

European states – like France, for example, which convened the Paris conference – will no doubt clam that that was all in the past, and the past can always be corrected.

It is certainly true that the Palestinians are always allowed by the international community to have yet another chance. But a two-state solution is simply no longer feasible.

A relatively bloodless civil war has been raging between the two entities day in and day out since their bloody 2007 confrontation, offering a constant illustration of why there cannot be a single Palestinian state. If the two sides were to attempt to reunite, that war would become very bloody indeed. The Palestinians themselves realize this, which explains the succession of failed attempts to bring the sides together.

As separate entities, the two sides make do by utterly subduing the opposing group. The cost of this suppression has been relatively low so far: several deaths of tortured political prisoners in Hamas and PA prisons, a few extrajudicial killings, and the occasional closing down of professional or charitable organizations linked to the opponent. The PA, the economic clout of which is financed by the international community, has blocked projects like the creation of a new Israeli electric grid line into Gaza and the creation of a modern port that would considerably improve Gazans' standard of living.

Ironically, Hamas supports the new Israeli grid line, even it means greater dependence on the Israeli enemy it has vowed to destroy. For Hamas, waging civil war with the PA over electricity (in addition to many other areas) is more important than increasing its own dependence on the enemy.

For Abbas's PA, the three-state solution, or, more precisely, the current status quo, is even more essential for its security. The Hamas network of sympathizers, activists, and terrorists in the PA is huge – far greater than the threat Abbas's Fatah organization poses to the Hamas government in Gaza. The presence of Hamas in the PA is so substantial that the PA is able to contain it only with significant help from the IDF. For the PA, civil war might lead to the same outcome in Ramallah that it experienced in Gaza in 2007.

Even worse, Hamas as an organization has proven adept at maintaining unity. This is not true of Abbas's PA and Fatah, its ruling party and militia, which have excelled in their divisiveness. This problem is made only graver by Abbas's refusal to appoint a deputy and potential successor. In this state of

affairs, civil war could give way to several more unresolved and bloody Palestinian partitions.

There is an Israeli angle to Palestinian partition and civil war. Israel's clear historical right to settle the Land of Israel has been flagrantly challenged, partially on the basis that it would undermine the two-state solution. The argument goes that it would turn the future Palestinian state into a discontinuous state geographically – a Swiss-cheese configuration that is assumed to be inherently dysfunctional. The international community forgets that it was the Palestinians themselves who initiated the process of discontinuity, and they are likely to make it worse as the fight over Abbas's successor intensifies.

At the end of the day, there are only two available options: 1) A Swiss cheese configuration that remains bloodless due to Israeli state expansion through settlement, which keeps the Palestinian opposing sides at bay; or 2) a prolonged and bloody Palestinian civil war between two or more Palestinian entities.

The Zionist movement, and later the State of Israel, have been waiting a hundred years for the Palestinians to be both sufficiently flexible to live side by side with the Jewish state and sufficiently unified to remain intact as a state. In the face of Palestinian failure to do either, Israel has every right to pursue its legitimate rights in settling Judea and Samaria. This should include annexation of area C, the blocs around Jerusalem and in Samaria where almost no Palestinians live, or anywhere else Israel sees fit.

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