

The Two-State Solution and the Ruin in Gaza

By [Virginia Tilley](#)

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For several years, those of us warning that we already face a one-state solution in Israel-Palestine have been regularly dismissed as nay-sayers, ivory-tower intellectuals, and/or utopian crackpots. So it's noticeable when these dismissive comments begin to falter and flicker out.

True, over the same period we've heard rounds of worried agreement that if 'something' is not done, the two-state solution would be dead and one-state solution upon us within three months, or six months, or simply 'soon'. Most of those 'six-month' warnings were issued years ago but never seem to expire. The problem was that most people weren't sure what precise signal would tell them, beyond doubt, that the two-state option is truly defunct. All the diplomatic theatre—the Oslo Accords, the Road Map, Annapolis and the Paris Protocol—gave people such an impression of seriousness that they interpreted every new contradiction, like a doubling of the settlement population in the West Bank, as a mere 'impediment' or 'setback' to the supposed diplomatic process rather than evidence that it was all a sham. Bearing the burden of this increasing unreality show, the two-state project became less a real programme than a tenet of faith: however elusive it appears in reality, the two-state solution must be defended or 'saved', resuscitated as the 'only way'. Lofty rhetoric about 'sacrifice' on both sides added gravitas to this masquerade. No one knew what to do if the two-state notion finally collapsed, so no one wanted to say that it had.

The result has been dithering and delay. And Palestinian deaths. Always more deaths. But now it seems the tide has shifted, for Gaza and the Israeli elections have stripped away these last illusions. For what could failure look like, if not the rubble of Gaza? It is not just the shocking scale of the brutality, which belies any notion of a 'moderate' Israeli government or any good faith whatever on Israel's part. The whole attack was the direct result, a necessary component, and the final proof of the two-state fraud. How else could Israel have attacked Gaza so horribly, so cruelly, if security for Jewish settlements in the West Bank were not ensured through deals with Mr Abbas's Palestinian Authority? Yet how else could the Palestinian Authority enforce that security—that is, play the increasingly strained part of an 'interim governing authority'—without the two-state fig leaf? Only by ensuring that the PA was in position to suppress any mass uprising by outraged Palestinians in West Bank cities now suffocated by Jewish settlements could Israel dare to strike Gaza the way it did. So the two-state solution/illusion had to be kept alive in order to prop up the PA in order to attack Gaza.

But of course, the basic equation was also holding: Gaza had to be crushed in order to prop up the PA — for again, the last drive of settlement construction that will create Israel's new permanent borders requires security for West Bank settlements that only the PA can deliver, and Hamas threatened that filthy pact by exposing it for what it was. Now that Hamas has survived and the Abbas circle looks even more like tools and fools, we see 'unity' talks in

Cairo. But we may be sure that these talks are allowed by Israel only to prop up the Abbas people up a little longer, just as the money is meant to do (e.g., of the US\$900 million, not one dollar is for Gaza's reconstruction and all is channelled through PA or Fatah or other non-Hamas hands). Any deal struck in Cairo will fall apart as soon as Hamas again confronts the betrayals certain to follow—which will be quite soon, because Israel will not tolerate any mis-step by the Abbas circle, which for Israel always had only one *raison d'être*: to serve Israel's annexation of West Bank land.

So the two-state solution has had life only in Israeli government rhetoric and people read into that rhetoric what they wanted to believe. As one still-believing colleague protested to me last year, confronting the absence of any evidence for it, the two-state goal was "understood". After Gaza, such the scales are falling away from people's eyes.

Still, it's worrisome that people are pronouncing the final death of the two-state solution partly because of the imminent ascendance in Israeli politics of Netanyahu and Lieberman. We must be clear about this, too: regarding Palestinians, no shred of difference exists between their policies and those of Livni and Barak. In any case, Netanyahu is an opportunist and says whatever will sell. When the Obama administration pressures him, and the diplomatic climate changes, he will go for whatever new version of Annapolis is cooked up and fill our media with earnest phrases about Israel's eternal innocence and laboured quest for peace. But nothing will change, whether he comes or goes, because Israel's policy goes deeper than Israeli electoral politics. The only change we can anticipate is one of style. The 'yes-but' chicanery of the Peres/Livni/Barak camp will morph into the 'no way' rhetoric of the Netanyahu/Lieberman camp, both presenting their rejectionism as Israel's tragic burden arising from Palestinian failures or betrayals. Whatever Palestinians do, neither camp has the slightest intention to do anything different in the West Bank except build settlements as fast as possible, take the land, shut the Palestinians behind the Wall, and finish the consolidation of Eretz Israel.

In fact, the idea that Livni and Barak ever meant to do anything different about the West Bank only falls for that famous old government ploy—Israel's plausible-deniability myth—that fanatical religious settlers actually drive the settlement's growth. The Israeli government has run the entire settlement operation—mapped, planned, funded, overseen, subsidised, and defended it — from the beginning. So let us not try to recreate that tinsel fiction for ourselves once again: that if only we had 'moderates' in the Israeli government we could 'keep the diplomatic process alive'. The 'moderates' brought us the carnage of Gaza and their intentions remain entirely clear, so let us have no more clinging to their lies and lip service and war crimes.

And let us have no more foolishness about Israel's security. Israel is overwhelmingly secure. It is as secure as the U.S. Army fighting Apaches on the western U.S. plains and crying foul at any white settler death. Where whites/Jews want the indigenous people's land, have overwhelming military power and capacity to take it, and see no reason to stop, what is needed to stop the government from cramming the people into Bantustans/reservations is not 'mediation' so the two sides can gain 'trust' and see each other as human beings, or indigenous collaboration to make whites 'secure', or indigenous recognition that the dominant state has a 'right to exist'. The only solution to such a power imbalance is to eradicate the state's claimed moral authority to destroy and rob and brutalise the outsider by changing the very relationship between state and outsider into something else. Native Americans did this too late, after too much was destroyed and stolen. The Palestinians can

do it in time.

But this means getting serious and it means acting now.

The one-state solution is not a 'dream'. It is the only hope for real peace but it is also the grim reality we already face. The Israeli government knows this full well and also knows that the two-state façade is cracking. We see the bloody consequences of that knowledge in Gaza, where Israel deliberately created mayhem partly to derail Hamas and distract the world from the increasing transparency of the two-state lie. So there is nothing 'utopian' about this one-state reality. In South Africa, the one-state solution cost thousands of lives, particularly toward the end when the apartheid regime became desperate. As in South Africa, conditions in the one-state solution in Israel-Palestine are likely to get worse before they get better but also we have no guarantee that the struggle will come out well. It could go to ethnic cleansing and wars. It will come out well only if people shed their myths and get seriously busy.

The Myths That Must Go

Zionists' myths are infamous, if increasingly tired and tattered: the Palestinians were not in Palestine when the Zionists arrived; Arab states told the Palestinians to flee in 1948; the Six-Day War was forced on Israel and so Israel has no obligation to withdraw from 'territories seized'; Israel is a nation-state like any nation-state; the occupation is not an occupation. Possibly the most dangerous myth still entertained by Zionists is that Israel can act on its own myths and somehow things will work out: that because the Palestinians have no just grievance in opposing Israel and so must be only backward fanatical (or gullible foolish) savages, Israel can bomb them into giving up their irrational anti-Jewish agendas. Zionists do not yet grasp that this tactic will never work—indeed, the myth is actually reinforced by Palestinian refusal to capitulate—because they must cling to all the other 'founding myths' to make moral sense of their ethnically cleansed state. The dogged public work of discrediting those myths in order to derail that self-deception must and will continue.

But Zionists aren't the only ones with myths. Let us lay ours out now, so that they can finally be identified for what they are and set aside like outgrown games.

The first myth is that Israel ever signed onto a two-state solution. Taking a magnifying glass to the texts of the Oslo Accords, Road Map, Annapolis and Paris Protocol, we find that Israel has not once – never, not in any deal, treaty, accord, or document of any kind – committed itself to a two-state solution. The only moment when it seemed to do so, in signing onto the Road Map, Israel put so many obviously impossible preconditions on the PA that Israel could rest easy that it would never be held to anything. So Israel isn't contradicting any formal commitment it has made by eradicating the basis for it. (Nor did Israel ever promise to abide by United Nations Resolutions 181, 194, 242, and 338, and that magnifying glass reveals that its admission to the UN was not conditioned on its allowing Palestinian refugees to return, either, but those are other issues.)

The second myth is that the US will ever make Israel withdraw from the West Bank. This is partly due to lack of political will and the Zionist lobby, but let's imagine for a moment that the Obama Administration gets serious enough, or desperate enough, to use some real leverage to force, say, a settlement freeze. It won't be enough, and not only because, at this point, a freeze is not enough. A major withdrawal is needed. But any Israeli governmental that attempted seriously to *withdraw* the big settlements (and mind, no Israeli government

has ever agreed even to consider this) would betray whole sets of Zionist constituencies, cast the fragile Zionist pact about Jewish statehood into crisis, and split the Zionist national body down the middle. No external power can make any state willingly destroy its own national cohesion, for that is political suicide, and suicide is precisely what the Zionist dragon tail is now flailing around to avoid. In any case, there's not enough money to pull it off and Israel needs West Bank water desperately.

The third myth is that the Jewish national society that has been created in Israel will ever vanish. It will no more vanish than did Afrikaner society in South Africa (which, by the way, is flourishing today as never before). It is vital that the Palestinian national movement and solidarity movement accept this fact ideologically as well as pragmatically, for otherwise the one-state solution is ethnocidal in its premise and will never work. This might seem obvious but it strikes a deep bell of warning for Palestinian nationalist discourse: just as the 'Jewish state' cannot persist, the 'Arab state' of the Charter and Palestinian rhetoric can never form in Israel-Palestine. What forms must be something else and, as in South Africa, it must liberate all groups from the vicious grip of racism.

The fourth myth is that a one-state solution can march to secular triumph without the great Abrahamic faiths pitching in fully on the project. Religion here will not be shoved off into the private sphere. It must help lead this effort, not float in the background. But a linked myth is that people of those faiths do not have to deal seriously with the internal challenge of sorting out how to live a virtuous religious life in a multi-sectarian society. Christianity, Judaism and Islam can never 'win' in Palestine, or indeed find their greatest spiritual calling, without reaching for their noblest and most universal principles and putting them forward with all the certainty that faith enables, in this land that has suffered so bitterly from their past failures to do so.

The fifth myth is that the world will ever get behind Palestinian self-determination enough to give the Palestinians a viable separate state. This may seem counter-intuitive, especially for those recalling decolonisation in the 1960s or sensing the growth of the boycott campaign. But think: no major global movement has ever pitched in effectively behind someone else's self-determination struggle. (How much sleep have you lost over the Tamils lately?) If the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa had centred on 'Zulu self-determination' or 'Xhosa self-determination' instead of equal rights and anti-racism, apartheid would be operating here today. Apartheid was defeated by making claims on the world's conscience, and this was done by insisting on values shared by all—the fundamental equality of human beings in dignity and rights and the cruelty and illegitimacy of racist rule. We see that kind of real pressure emerging in Palestine at last, as the world views in horror the agony of Gaza. When Palestinians finally invoke those universal values directly, and demand equal rights in their homeland as citizens of a single unified non-ethnic state, they will find themselves tapping into that global force to degrees unprecedented in their political history, gaining not merely world sympathy but world passion.

Ironically, the voice that most forcefully argues this point is Ehud Olmert, who has cautioned that if Palestinians adopt a one-state anti-apartheid strategy, Israel is doomed. In April 2004, he warned that, "More and more Palestinians are uninterested in a negotiated, two-state solution, because they want to change the essence of the conflict from an Algerian paradigm to a South African one. From a struggle against 'occupation,' in their parlance, to a struggle for one-man-one-vote. That is, of course, a much cleaner struggle, a much more popular struggle – and ultimately a much more powerful one. For us, *it would mean the end of the Jewish state.*" In November 2007, he said again: "If the day comes when the two-state

solution collapses, and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights (also for the Palestinians in the territories), then, *as soon as that happens, the State of Israel is finished.*"

No wonder that Olmert and Livni and the whole machinery of Hasbara Zionist solidarity are pounding the table so hard about a two-state solution: it is their only defence against the collapse of ethnic statehood and real democracy. When one's opponent indicates the path to its certain defeat, one should pay attention.

Finally, we must set aside all those myths about the one-state solution itself: that it is easy, utopian, inevitable, impossible, will evolve naturally if we just wait, or – the most common myth — that 'the Jews' will never accept it. The truth is that the one-state solution is difficult, dangerous, the only workable solution, the necessary solution, will take huge work to prevent it going wrong, and 'the Jews' *will* accept it. But for that to happen, the Palestinian nationalist vision and mission will have to embrace a new vision of a shared society and the international community must stop fiddling while Palestine burns. Either Israel or the Palestinians will seize and steer the one-state solution. What happened in Gaza tells us what Israel intends to do with that power. It must be taken back.

This new struggle will convey tremendous political strength to the liberation movement. In Palestine we see indeed a real chance to create one of those rare shining moments when humanity briefly transcends itself, such as when Nelson Mandela stood before the Union Buildings in Pretoria and took the oath as president of a new South Africa. But let us not waste more time and energy longing for some 'great man' to come act the part of Mandela in Palestine and lead everyone to national reconciliation. We all carry little Mandelas inside us – that is why we wept when watching that historic moment in South Africa, because it resonated inside us with something universal. Let us all find within ourselves those deeper resources of moral courage to pitch in and help steer Israel-Palestine to a second global triumph against apartheid and lay a foundation for real democracy and justice in the Middle East. God knows the world must to defeat this old ogre of the last century, racial nationalism, in order to confront collectively the great challenges facing us in the next one.

Virginia Tilley is head of the Middle East Project and a chief research specialist in the Democracy and Governance Programme of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, writing in her private capacity. She is author of The One-State Solution (Michigan University Press and Manchester University Press, 2005) and many essays on Israel-Palestine, as well as another book and academic articles on racial nationalism in Latin America and elsewhere. She can be reached at vtilley@mweb.co.za.

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