The Two-State Solution is Ultimately Doomed to Fail

There can have been few Palestinians whose hearts did not warm at least a little to the news that the British parliament voted overwhelmingly this week to recognise a Palestinian state. After all, it was a British decision to issue the Balfour Declaration – taken almost 100 years ago – that set in motion Israel's creation and the territorial conflict that has raged ever since.

The parliamentary win, as has been widely noted, was symbolic – and in more ways than one. The motion, backed by 274 votes to 12, is not binding.

Like most of the European Union, the UK government still appears unwilling to join more than 130 states worldwide that have recognised Palestinian statehood.

If, as expected, the Palestinian leadership returns to the UN next month to renew its statehood bid, British officials have indicated they will not be swayed by parliamentary sentiment.

A late amendment also tied recognition to a "negotiated two state solution". But in cleaving to the US position, which opposes unilateral Palestinian moves, British MPs continued to implicitly acknowledge the veto of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Palestinian ambitions.

The vote was symbolic, too, because the Conservatives, the dominant party in the ruling coalition, effectively opted out of the debate. More than half of all MPs either abstained or stayed away.

Research shows four out of five Conservative MPs – and a significant proportion of opposition Labour MPs too – belong to their party's Friends of Israel caucus. Each year large numbers fly to Israel at the expense of the Israeli government.

In a country that has so often betrayed the Palestinians, the other major parties' voting behaviour hardly inspired confidence. At the last minute Labour downgraded its "whip", leaving its MPs largely free to decide how they voted or whether they attended. The Lib Dems, the junior coalition partner, did the same.

Nonetheless, there was cause for celebration. The wariness of all the main parties to be seen publicly opposing Palestinian statehood undoubtedly signalled a change of political climate.

Labour leader Ed Miliband and his shadow cabinet backed the motion. The party appears to have accepted that there is a price for endlessly postponing recognition of Palestinian rights,

or conditioning them on Israel's approval. Not least, anger at western hypocrisy has spilt out in unpredictable ways: from murderous jihadis destabilising the Middle East to radicalised Muslim youth on Europe's streets.

Importantly, too, the British vote adds to the momentum initiated this month by the Swedish government's decision to break with its established EU partners by pledging to recognise Palestine. Others are likely to follow suit. On Tuesday, France's foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, indicated his country would also recognise Palestine if negotiations fail.

In short, the tide of history is turning. Israel is losing the moral argument in Europe, where the Zionist movement began. That tide will spread across Europe and ultimately lap up against the shores of Capitol Hill and the White House.

It was for that reason Israelis followed the British vote with concern. Matthew Gould, Britain's ambassador and a much sought-after guest on Israeli TV and radio, warned that the UK public's mood was shifting inexorably against Israel.

That process accelerated over the summer with Israel's assault on Gaza, which killed large numbers of civilians, followed by yet another wave of settlement building and land appropriations in the West Bank.

Mr Netanyahu, who worked with Israel's opposition Labor party unsuccessfully to defeat the House of Commons vote, shows no signs of willingness to compromise.

His officials were muted in their criticism of the UK, which is Israel's second largest export market after the US. But Sweden's ambassador was called in last week for a public scolding.

On Monday, Mr Netanyahu rebuked in person Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary-general, after he suggested the cause of the summer's hostilities in Gaza was "a restrictive occupation that has lasted almost half a century". Mr Netanyahu flatly denied Gaza was even occupied.

Similar levels of denial are exhibited in western capitals. The evolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Israel's relentless settling of Palestinian land over many decades, now fatally militates against the traditional two-state formula, as even western diplomats in Jerusalem privately concede.

This month saw the publication in English of a book by Israeli historian Shlomo Sand, whose previous works have proved unlikely bestsellers around the world. His latest provocative title – How I Stopped Being a Jew – should ensure another publishing success.

Sand has been popularising challenging ideas for some time. His latest argument is no less controversial.

He believes a Jewish tribal identity is incompatible with a democratic Israeli identity, and that one or other must give way. Is Israel to be a democratic state that abandons its tribal identity, or a Jewish tribal state that has no room for universal and democratic norms and is incapable of accommodating Palestinians as citizens or neighbours?

The implications are profound, suggesting a tribal Jewish state may, by its very constitutional make-up, be averse to peace and instead destined to endless conflict.

If Sand is correct, the traditional idea of creating a Palestinian state alongside a Jewish state

– the goal of the British vote and of every peace initiative since the UN announced its partition plan in 1947 – is ultimately doomed. A two-state solution would achieve little more than redrawing the battle lines.

– See more at: http://www.jonathan-cook.net/2014-10-15/the-two-state-solution-is-ultimately-doomed-to-fail/#sthash.ZjvF4kie.dpuf

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