

Palestine: Beyond the Two-State Solution

By [David Swanson](#)

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Fast forward to 2048. The world is greatly changed, and in this year China invades France, occupying Paris and a good portion of the nation. The French are massacred, evicted, raped, chased, and terrorized. Towns are destroyed. Every town and village has its name changed to a Chinese name, and its prior existence erased from any history books produced from then forward.

Portions of France not yet under Chinese control shelter refugees by the millions. French citizens captured in their homes are held as “prisoners of war” and freed to become refugees in distant parts of France. China changes the name of its occupied areas from France to Chance. The remaining parts of the country are just referred to by their local (Chinese) names, as if they were part of no nation at all and yet somehow Chinese in the end.

For years, the Chancian government continues to expand and to assault the French people. With more and more immigrants from China, Chance becomes an apartheid nation with lesser rights for any French within it. In 2067, Chance launches a major assault, seizing control of much of what’s left of France. The newly seized areas come to be called “the occupied territories,” in contrast to the already occupied territories, which are called simply Chance.

As the years pass, Chancian children are born and raised in Chance who had nothing to do with the original invasion. In fact, they are never even told about it. At most they are taught that Chance was founded in 2048 when the French voluntarily left and the true border of the Chancian nation was drawn on a map with a purple line. That purple line is also called “the line of 2067,” even though it was drawn in 2048. Outside of that purple line are the occupied territories and the few towns and villages left to the French.

Liberals in Chance propose giving “the occupied territories” back to the French and restoring the Purple Line, while conservatives propose eliminating the last French descendant from Europe. Those are the extremes of the political debate in Chance. Everything within the Purple Line is universally agreed upon as properly Chancian. The agreement runs so deep that the question is never raised at all. The original sin in Chancian history is dated to 2067 when the Chancian democracy strayed outside its natural borders and violated the rights of others for the first time.

But, of course, Chancian families are raised through the years outside as well as inside the Purple Line, a line that had never been agreed to in any way by the French, a line that would deny many of them the right to return to their homes.

The French want reparations and restoration. They date the catastrophe of their nation to

2048. The Chancians are willing to talk about undoing anything they've done since 2067, including through the creation of a French nation. The French nation would include several geographically separated bits of territory in northern and southern parts of the former France. It would remain subject to the rule of Chance on major questions. And the new France would have to agree to the rightful existence of Chance inside the Purple Line — or the Purple Line plus a little.

So, a lengthy and seemingly endless process is created called the Peace Process. The French show up wanting to talk about 2048. The Chancians show up willing to talk only about 2067. The two sides never hear each other. There is never any peace. The Chancians announce at the end of each failed meeting that they “have no partner” with which to negotiate peace. Hostilities and a permanent state of emergency prevail, with French people within Chance and Chance’s “occupied territories” deprived of basic rights, imprisoned, tortured, and assaulted. The other nations of Europe join with the French in resenting the behavior of Chance. The nations of Asia, however, celebrate Chance as “the only democracy in Europe.”

Chance versus Palestine

There are several differences between this story and the story of Israel and Palestine. Some of the differences are trivial: The dates are 1948 and 1967, not 2048 and 2067. The line is green rather than purple. Some of the differences are significant: The Jewish culture always had ties to Israel. The religious element allows for an intermediary class of citizens consisting of Arab Jews. Et cetera.

But morally, the differences seem only to obscure what matters. The state of Israel was created through ethnic cleansing. It was created as a state to privilege one religious group, something that states should not do. But two wrongs cannot make a right. Evicting Israelis from their homes, inside or outside the Green Line, is not a solution.

Yehouda Shenhav’s new book, “Beyond the Two State Solution: A Jewish Political Essay” tells the story above, but straightforwardly, without the analogy. The language of the Green Line, Shenhav writes, is “a language through which Israel is described as a liberal democracy, while the Arabs (and Mizrachi and religious Jews to boot) are described as inferior and undemocratic. This is the language of someone who came to the Middle East for a short while, not to integrate but to exist here as a guest. The position it expresses is not only immoral with regard to the Palestinians, but also potentially disastrous for the Jews. It commits them to life in a ghetto with a limited idea of democracy based on racial laws and a perpetual state of emergency.”

Shenhav wants to restore awareness of 1948, but not to try to reconstruct the world of 1948. He does not propose eliminating Israel. He does not propose uniting the people of Israel and Palestine into a single nation.

He does propose allowing Palestinians to return to their homes in a manner least disturbing to Israelis already living in those villages or buildings, including with compensation paid to residents evicted by an agreement with returning refugees. He proposes a bilingual society, with a fragmented political federation. He expects this to be very difficult, while preferable to any other approach. And he rightly sees the first step as recovering honesty with regards to not-so-distant history.

David Swanson's books include "[War Is A Lie.](#)" He blogs at <http://davidswanson.org> and <http://warisacrime.org> and works as Campaign Coordinator for the online activist organization <http://rootsaction.org>. He hosts [Talk Nation Radio](#). Follow him on Twitter: [@davidcswanson](#) and [FaceBook](#).

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