

# Prism of Peace: The Failure of the Israeli Left and the Two-State Solution

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Time and again one is told of the Israeli “left,” the many number of Israelis, ranging from members of the Knesset to shop owners, dedicated to peace. The 40 year occupation is of particular concern to putative peace activists and purported individuals of conscience. “The burden of occupation” and its ugly realities, as many so-called dovish Israeli politicians have pointed out, tear at the moral fiber of the Jewish state. Yet, even when one looks at the horrors of the occupation in the Israeli media and political circles, it is at best through the Israeli prism, which juxtaposes the pain of Israel in equal magnitude to the pain of the Palestinian people. This Israeli pain, without its counterpart’s suffering, is transferred to the papers of the US press and is ultimately exponentially magnified, giving the American people a distorted awareness of the Israeli narrative.

Nonetheless, there must be a clear understanding that only one people is living under occupation—many after being dispossessed in 1948 and again in 1967. By even phrasing today’s climate as a conflict, it lends support to the assumption that this is a dispute between two equal sides, with equal grievances. The complexities of the Palestine question is further complicated by issues beyond the 40 year occupation, including the Palestinian right of return, the Israeli settler movement in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the third class status of Palestinians living in a Jewish state.

Supposed peace activists find solace in verbally condemning the settlement movement and the harsh conditions that emanate from occupation. Yet most aren’t doing anything to actively stop it, and when moral fiber is truly urgent, as was the case during the Lebanon war or the continuing debilitating sanctions and bombardment on the Palestinian people, they remain silent. Condemnation after a war isn’t moral reflection, it’s cowardice. There is no difference between hawkish and dovish policy in Israel, only a divergence in the approach to implement it. Those on the “far left,” who are the brink of being classified as “self-hating Jews,” including self-styled humanitarians such as Meretz MK Yossi Beilin, only serve to massage their own egos and consciences by portraying an image that they are fighting for peace. In reality, these people assign themselves to the same racist and exclusivist ideology that came into form long before the creation of the state of Israel.

The discourse that frames the parameters of debate pertaining to the Palestine question is disturbing on multiple levels. Take for example, the recent fighting in the Gaza Strip. Nine Israelis have been killed in Palestinian rocket attacks over the last seven years, while last year alone, 700 Palestinians—half of them unarmed civilians—were killed throughout the occupied territories. Reading the news columns, be it in Israeli or Western newspapers, one would think it was the Israeli people who were occupied and being indiscriminately killed. The opposite remains true: when one woman is killed in Sderot, it consumes the Israeli

media and immediately becomes headline material for nearly every Western newspaper.

The cease-fire between occupied Gaza and Israel is another case in point. Hamas eventually ended its unilateral recognition of a cease-fire because of continued attacks by Israeli forces inside of Gaza and the West Bank. The demand for a Gaza/West Bank cease-fire by Hamas is seen by Israel as the same old story, where “conventional wisdom” suggests that the obstinate, overreaching Arabs insist on the fulfillment of unreasonable demands, when they are in no position to do so. Yet, calling on the Palestinians (including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade), to accept a truce localized to the Gaza Strip, giving Israel impunity to act within the West Bank, is tantamount to asking Hamas not to fire rockets at Sderot and the Negev, while remaining free to bombard Tel Aviv and Haifa. The Palestinians are a people, no less than the Israelis are a people, and a death in Ramallah is as significant as a death in Gaza City.

Every problem afflicting Palestinian society, be it the expansion of the Apartheid Wall, checkpoints, flying checkpoints, curfews, or the restriction of goods and access to education, is characterized as necessary measures for Israeli security. Nonetheless, many non-partisan organizations, including the World Bank, the United Nations, the Hague, Amnesty International and a number of other institutions have condemned Israel and its tactics on levels of morality, legality, and effectiveness. Logically, if one is looking for peace with a society, economic strangulation and imprisonment will not create an environment conducive to peace. The Wall is not being built on the internationally recognized green line and encroaches so far into the West Bank that thousands of Palestinians have been kicked out of their homes, lost their land or have been split from their towns, workplaces, and schools. Even if one were to justify the Wall, which the Israeli Shin Bet has called an ineffective means of protection, why not build the Wall on Israeli territory? “Punishing” the Palestinian people by creating a greater refugee problem and economic deprivation is hardly an incentive for Palestinians to resort to more preferred tactics of resistance. Furthermore, settlements continue to grow, far surpassing the number of settlers that were removed from Gaza, and even with the basic cessation of suicide bombings, restrictions in movement have markedly increased in the West Bank.

The issue of the 400,000 settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is particularly startling. Policy in the United States has slowly shifted from a two-state solution on the basis of the green line, with no Jewish settlers within Palestinian territory, to the vast majority of settlers staying in place, with effective Israeli control of half of the West Bank for an indefinite period of time. The prevailing truth that Israel and America want people to accept is that time creates “indisputable” facts on the ground, meaning: if a crime is committed for a long enough period of time, the international community and the victim must recognize the crime. It is to the bewilderment of the Palestinian people that they are seen as the uncompromising ones when they are asking for no more than international law provides. Sadly, it was the Labor party—the party that many purported peace activists are members—that propped up and legitimized the settler movement, leading to one of the many disputes Palestinians and Israelis find themselves in today.

Many so-called Israeli peace activists point to Camp David 2000 as the quintessential example of Arab rejectionism. One is told that Israel offered the Palestinians 95 percent of the occupied territories, including a grand compromise on East Jerusalem. Let us suppose this is true and forget the Palestinian narrative, that by engaging in Oslo, the Palestinians had effectively relinquished the right to 78 percent of historic Palestine (a “generous”

compromise in their minds). Even looking through the Israel prism, one should ask themselves, if Israel was interested in peace (added to the fact they are the occupying force with the upper hand), would it not be reasonable with peace at the forefront of one's mind, to give up all of the occupied Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as 5 percent of the Negev? While Israel has much empty land, an abundance of resources, power and capital, an Israeli could claim that on principle alone, the state could not commit to such a plan. But is principle really an option when peace could be just over the horizon or even a remote possibility? If the offer failed, the Israeli left could point out further Arab rejectionism, could it not?

The way in which one is expected to digest the so-called "facts" of the Israeli occupation and the Palestine question hinders any rationale debate and demonizes any individual calling for an end to Israel's racist and hegemonic policy, as was the case with former US president Jimmy Carter. If there were a 100 suicide bombings in Tel Aviv tomorrow, it would not diminish the Palestinian right to see an end to the occupation, nor would it minimize the urgency. Furthermore, Israel is not occupying Palestinian land as a punishment. It is not as though a suicide bombing struck Tel Aviv 40 years ago by a Palestinian group and the Israel army decided it was time to clamp down on Palestinian society. Rather after a preempted strike on neighboring states, Israel colonized a land that the international community, including the United States, insisted it had no business occupying.

A quick and just two-state resolution to Israel/Palestine may sound like an oversimplification, but if supposed steps towards peace were made and "offered" at Camp David 2000 and at the following talks at Taba, the same type of directive could be taken today. But let's be honest with ourselves, the two-state solution is dead. It is a figment of the imagination of the Israeli left and of the multitude of Palestinian leaders and diplomats who have gone enormous lengths to sell out the Palestinian people. That is the danger of looking at the two-state solution and Israel/Palestine through an Israeli prism: it draws the parameters of practicality, affecting even those who support the Palestinian plight. Israel doesn't want peace, not under a Barak government, a Sharon government, an Olmert government or a Peres government. It's been forty years, and yet Israel has become married to the settlements and to an ideology that sees a Jewish state with inherent rights over its non-Jewish citizens, but more critically it as an expansionist state that believes in the right to permanent domination of the lands it controls.

The only way to break down a racist and exclusivist structure is to chip away at its base and force an alternative reality. This would require not only ending the occupation, but looking internally at the Israeli state, a Jewish state, a state which doesn't and can't function as democracy for all its people. Many Palestinians leaders and supporters within Israel have come to realize this and have been ostracized for bringing this notion to light, namely Azmi Bishara, while many more will be undermined and attacked in the future. Yet, divestment, boycott, and sanctions coupled with a movement forward for both Israelis and Palestinians to live as equals in a shared society is the only hope for true peace. This new path must run counter to the Oslo mentality of submissiveness and acquiescence: a model much like South Africa, Northern Ireland and Belgium. It is time for an end to the occupation, but more importantly, it is time to look through a new prism, one that sees a better solution for Israel/Palestine.

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