

# The Israeli Perspective on the Two-State Solution

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**Menachem Klein**

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**Sustaining its regime over the area** between Jordan and the Mediterranean is Israel's key strategic goal. Israel uses various tactics to maintain the current regime, including settlement activities, security operations and creating divisions among the Palestinians. In the last decade, this policy has paid off for Israel. When Israel does make mistakes, however, it makes tactical concessions aimed at enabling it to continue its general strategy. Following the Turkish flotilla affair, for example, Israel eased its blockade of the Gaza Strip.

**Continued settlement expansion** with increasingly higher levels of financial investment involves more individuals, families, communities, state agencies, political activists and civil society members in the settlement project. This is accompanied by Jewish religious radicalism and increasing problems related to the loyalties of religious army soldiers. When Israel decided to evacuate some settlements, many soldiers were forced to choose between obeying the state and obeying their own religious authorities. The cost of turning the wheel back to enable a withdrawal to Israel's 1967 borders is rising dramatically.



The achievements of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's de facto state-building programme have been modest. Here the PM attends a march in the West Bank village of Bilin.

Photo: REUTERS/ Mohamad Torokman.

**In their efforts to manage their daily lives,** Palestinians are completely dependent on Israeli permission and external funding. They are fragmented both politically and geographically and increasingly wonder how they might bring about a change in the status quo. President Mahmoud Abbas was dragged reluctantly into direct talks with Israel and feels betrayed by the international community, which refuses to help him to change the status quo through the political track.

**The achievements of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's** de facto state-building programme have been modest. Palestinians are no closer to running their own state. Indeed, Fayyad's strategy has even helped Israel to sustain the status quo through its establishment of Palestinian institutions for good governance

and security cooperation. Israel favours a stronger autonomous Palestinian Authority that has control over Areas A and B (which comprise about 40% of the West Bank), but is unwilling to allow a de facto Palestinian state to operate in Area C, to say nothing of Jerusalem. In order to expand Areas A and B to 60% of the West Bank, Israel will have to evacuate about 50,000 settlers residing in the most ideological settlements. Even such a limited step seems almost impossible under the current circumstances.

**The current Democratic administration in the USA** is implementing the same conflict-management strategy as its Republican predecessor. Nor has it made any effort to reduce the asymmetries that operate in Israel's favour. Thus, the USA is

helping to maintain the status quo by limiting its involvement to process rather than pushing for an end to the current situation.

## Policy Recommendations

- It is vital to acknowledge the shift that has occurred within the Israeli–Palestinian conflict since 2000 and to adjust policies to the new circumstances. It is clear that more of the failed policy of the Oslo period will not help to resolve the conflict. Current policies may serve short-term interests, but they also work in Israel’s favour and will lead to the political demise of President Abbas. The international community must ask itself whether it wishes to continue to assist Israel to maintain its current ethno-security regime over the Palestinians. In addition, efforts must be made to prepare for the post-Abbas era that can already be discerned on the horizon.

- If the international community is interested in conflict resolution – rather than conflict management and maintenance of the status quo – it will need to make structural change its strategic goal. Having identified this as the goal, the next step is to identify the best tactics to serve this goal. The international community should be ready to confront Israel, particularly when its actions and policies give rise to criticism at the international level, both within policy circles and among the general public. Attention should be drawn to the ethnically discriminative nature of the current Israeli regime and its dimin-



The international community should suggest the deployment of international troops in the West Bank, rather than Israeli troops and settlers.

Photo: Nicholas Marsh, PRIO

ishing democratic credentials. For example, the recent Israeli policy regarding the provision of support to Israeli human rights organizations should be questioned. The international community should not be afraid of the charge of anti-Semitism, which it should counter by reaffirming its commitment to Israel’s right to exist within its 1967 borders and the right of the Jewish people to self-determination. The 1947 United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine that created Israel represents a valuable document in this context. Build support for adopting a firm line towards Israel by creating links between local civil society members and Israeli liberals. The international community and Israel’s liberals share the same value system. Though the Israeli liberal-left

is currently very weak, with external support it can confront Israel’s ethno-centrists. The international community should bear in mind that the current Israeli ethno-security regime can only survive as long as it does not meet with international incrimination. If Israel is condemned as an *apartheid* state, as a state that utilizes ethnic cleansing or as a state that discriminates to an unacceptable degree against its citizens on ethnic grounds, the way is open for the international community to consider sanctions and in the worst case to even send troops to protect the Palestinians. The Israeli ethno-security regime is aware of these options and seeks to prevent them.

● Attempts should be made to create space for an independent Palestinian state to emerge. No structural change will be achievable unless the regime under which Israel currently controls land outside its 1967 borders is abolished. To create space for the development of an independent Palestinian state, essential preconditions include a total Israeli withdrawal from the occupied areas and a relinquishing of all forms of Israeli authority over Palestinians. Before any agreement is reached between the sides, the international community should suggest the deployment of international troops in the West Bank, rather than Israeli troops and settlers. This could be carried out in stages – starting with the deployment of international forces and Palestinian security units in the Jordan Valley and in the horizontal roads connecting this area to Palestinian Authority areas A and B (the Palestinian-populated areas of the West Bank) and East Jerusalem. Creating a space conducive for the emergence of an independent Palestinian state will also ensure that better use is made of international financial aid to the Palestinian state-building project.

● Efforts to assist the building of a viable Palestinian state are doomed to failure as long as the international community continues to support the existing political division between Hamas and Fatah. True independence, effective state-building and the making of peace concessions to Israel will prove impossible as long as Hamas is excluded and continues to exercise its veto power. External actors that continue to support the ongoing political division will end up been seen as maintaining the position of an elite group within Fatah. Nor is supporting Hamas over Fatah a viable option. Rather, the international community should encourage Palestinian national unity at the lowest common denominator and oppose Israel's policy of prolonging the status quo by making demands of Hamas that it knows the organization cannot agree to.

● There is little point in trying to convince Israel of the benefits offered by peace. Israelis are fully aware that making peace will create domestic division, including a possible split in the army and armed resistance by extremists. Israel's current status quo policy serves to keep such a domestic confrontation at bay. Moreover, Israel benefits from the status quo. It does not need peace dividends to benefit economically. The Israeli occupation will end only when the external forces that help to maintain it, even if unintentionally, cease to cooperate. The moment the economic, diplomatic and military costs of the present regime become higher than the cost of a peace agreement, Israel will inevitably agree to decolonize. The international community should be preparing for the arrival of a time when it will need to assist Israel's liberal and democratic forces to rebuild the Republic of Israel. ■

For a more in-depth look at the background behind these recommendations, see *PRIO Paper 'The Israeli Perspective on the Two-State Solution'* (Klein, 2011, PRIO), available from [www.prio.no](http://www.prio.no).

## THE AUTHOR

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## THE PROJECT

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## PRIO

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit peace research institute (established in 1959) whose overarching purpose is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, international and interdisciplinary, and explores issues related to all facets of peace and conflict.