

NewStatesman

Israel and Palestine

Is the two-state solution dead?



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MEDICAL AID FOR PALESTINIANS

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Paradigm shift

In April, the nine-month deadline of US-sponsored peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority passed, without progress being made. Whether this diplomatic failing indicates the end of a viable two-state solution to the conflict was the subject of a *New Statesman* round-table discussion, in partnership with Medical Aid for Palestinians. (It took place shortly

after the deadline passed.)

Many of the participants argued that the debate had grown stale. Others declared that the two-state solution was indeed dead. It was suggested that attention should shift away from hard politics to issues of equality and human rights. Israeli settlement building continues in the West Bank and conditions inside Gaza are deteriorating.

Yet some of the contributors still believe in a two-state solution, for which there remains strong support inside Israel as well as among Israeli lobbyists and UK and US decision-makers.

What is certain is that, after the failure of the Kerry plan, there will be no solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict without bold and courageous new thinking on both sides. |

This supplement, and other policy reports, can be downloaded from the NS website at newstatesman.com/page/supplements

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First published as a supplement to the *New Statesman* of 13-19 June 2014.
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COVER: SHUTTERSTOCK/DESIGN BY LEON PARKS

An untenable situation

By Tony Laurance

It is not possible to provide an effective, functioning health system in conditions of occupation

For the past few months, we have watched with dismay, but little surprise, as the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, brokered by the US secretary of state, John Kerry, have spluttered and died. Maybe, just possibly, they will be rekindled. But how many of us hold out any hope, after so many previous failures, that this time there will be a breakthrough?

So what now? Do we give up on the two-state solution – or is it still the only game in town? Everyone has been saying that these negotiations are the last chance – and anyone who knows anything about the situation on the ground would surely endorse that. But what alternative is there for a just and fair solution?

Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) has a stake in this because we have been providing medical aid and support to the Palestinians living under occupation for more than 30 years. I do not suppose the founders of our charity ever imagined that we would be around for this long. We would love to shut up shop because our help was no longer needed – and I am sure that our loyal and generous supporters, ordinary British taxpayers, feel the same way. But there is not much sign of that happening any time soon.

The conflict has dragged on for 60 years. For the past 47 years, since the Six-Day war, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have been living under occupation and siege. There are now more than five million Palestinian refugees in occupied Palestine and neighbouring countries.

Until recently, about 540,000 were living as refugees in Syria, where they enjoyed better conditions and rights than most. Now more than half of them have been displaced by the conflict in Syria and almost all of them are in need of assistance.



Conditions in the refugee camps are appalling

More than 50,000 Palestinians have fled to Lebanon. The conditions in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon are appalling. The camps are overcrowded, the sanitation is terrible and there is massive poverty and unemployment. The refugees are also deprived of basic political and civil rights – to own property, to social and

In 2012, a UN report concluded Gaza may be uninhabitable by 2020

medical insurance, to work in most professions. If you walk through the narrow alleyways of the Palestinian camps, you see posters depicting their yearning to return to their homeland – their dream for more than 60 years, the only possible future for themselves and their children.

Meanwhile, in Gaza the situation is worse than at any stage since the siege began. The reason is simple: the siege has been going on for seven years and the tunnels are now closed. The tunnels to Egypt were not just a lifeline – they were

a major artery for supplies, including fuel, and an important source of revenue for the de facto authorities. The impact is palpable: higher prices for food and fuel; more poverty and unemployment; power cuts for between 12 and 18 hours every day; even more people dependent on aid.

The situation is untenable. In 2012, the United Nations produced a report on Gaza which concluded that it may be uninhabitable there by 2020. That date must have been brought forward by recent events.

In the West Bank, while the peace negotiations have continued, so has settler building. There are more than 500,000 settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, posing a huge obstacle to the creation of an independent Palestinian state. We have seen more violations of international law, more demolitions, more deaths and injuries and continuing restrictions on access and movement.

Working in this context, as MAP does, focusing on our responsibilities for health and health services, we simply note that it is not possible to provide an effective, functioning health system in conditions of occupation. There has to be a political solution.

That is why we wanted to bring together experts and MPs from across the political spectrum to discuss the current situation and what can be done about it. It was fascinating to join the lively debate.

There were those, the politicians mainly, who clung to the two-state option, seeing no alternative. Others viewed it as a lost cause, long dead, and argued for reframing the analysis against the turmoil in the region and focusing on an agenda demanding equal political and civil rights for all. Read for yourself what they had to say. |

Tony Laurance is the chief executive of Medical Aid for Palestinians

The end of the two-state paradigm?

By *Becky Slack*

As yet another round of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority fails, we ask, in partnership with Medical Aid for Palestinians, whether it is time to refocus efforts on a new and different solution to the conflict

In the summer of 2013, the American secretary of state, John Kerry, began the difficult process of brokering a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians. It was reported that negotiations were to be based on the 1967 borders and would tackle all the final status issues including Jerusalem, borders and refugees. Importantly, there was a deadline – the end of April 2014 – by which decisions were to be taken.

Progress was slow with each side accusing the other of obstruction and bad faith. Then as the deadline approached, Israel requested an extension to talks before it would release the fourth and final group of Palestinian prisoners that it had agreed to set free in exchange for the Palestinian Authority suspending moves to join international bodies and treaties. Israel's refusal to hand over the prisoners and its continued violations of international law prompted the PA to sign 15 instruments of accession to multilateral treaties.

At the same time, Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, initiated reconciliation talks between Fatah and Hamas, aimed at achieving a unity government. This culminated in Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, suspending the peace talks.

Throughout the negotiations, amid the meetings and the rhetoric, there was little change in routine for the people of Palestine and Israel. Indeed, they could be forgiven for wondering if the peace talks were taking place at all. During the nine-month process, according to UN reports,

some 3,021 military searches took place in the West Bank, resulting in the detention of 3,573 Palestinians.

There have been 45 conflict-related Palestinians casualties, 19 in Gaza and 26 in the West Bank - 35 of which were civilian deaths. A further 2,055 civilian and non-civilian Palestinians were injured across both territories. Meanwhile, 522 demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures took place, displacing 917 people, while nearly 14,000 settlement units were advanced.

In Gaza, the ongoing blockade continued to confine 1.7 million Palestinians within an area of 365 square kilometres, leaving them vulnerable to poverty, interrupted food supplies and disease. The sole power plant functioned at partial capacity because of the on-going fuel shortages, with power outages averaging 12 hours a day. Hospitals remained at the mercy of restrictions on medical supplies and equipment; in November, the UN reported 30 per cent of essential drugs and 52 per cent of medical disposables were at zero stock.

There were Israeli casualties, too. Three Israelis were killed in conflict across Israel, Gaza and the West Bank and 73 were injured, 38 of whom were civilians.

It came as no surprise to most when the peace talks failed – not least to the participants of our round-table talk, supported by Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), which took place shortly after the end of April deadline had passed.

“What was said by many at the time, including me, was: ‘We’ve heard all of

this before’,” said Richard Burden, Labour MP for Birmingham Northfield and chair of the Britain-Palestine All-Party Parliamentary Group, during his introductory comments. “How would this peace process be different to the one before and the ones before that?” he asked. “We were told what would be different was a clear end point – a time limit with milestones to achieve. And yet here we are. We have a situation where settlement-building is still going on and the prospect for a viable Palestinian state is disappearing.”

For others, there was scepticism about whether either side had really wanted to engage in the first place. “What struck me when talking to both sides was that neither believed the other side was serious,” commented Nick Herbert MP, Conservative MP for Arundel and South Downs, in relation to his recent visits to both Palestine and Israel.

For Lord Phillips of Sudbury, using the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation as an excuse to pull out of talks was “rather a tragic joke”, as he commented that Israel's fears of Hamas would surely be allayed if the two parties formed an alliance.

Does the collapse of this latest set of talks mean the end of the two-state paradigm? This was the main focus for the conversation and saw a mixed response from around the table.

Some participants were less than positive. Phillip Lee, Conservative MP for Bracknell and vice-chair of the Conservative Middle East Council, said he felt the two-state solution was “sadly, dead in the



New solutions: round-table participants agreed any workable two-state model had lost its potency in recent years

water”. “The idea that you’re going to have two pieces of land connected by a tunnel and a growing population in a small space of land that isn’t entirely fertile – this isn’t going to work,” he said.

Yet for others there was still hope.

“Palestinians both in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank continue to believe that two states is the only viable solution. And within Israel, within the Knesset, there is a large body who believe in a two-state solution,” said Edward Channer, Middle East programme manager of Forward Thinking, an organisation which works to promote inclusive peace in the Middle East.

Jack Straw, Labour MP for Blackburn and a former foreign secretary, felt that achieving a two-state solution was a moral imperative, as it “embraces the idea of a separate, independent state of Palestine. Should we abandon that as an aspiration? No, no more than in the darkest days of apartheid in the mid-1960s would it have been right to abandon the idea of a free and equal state of South Africa,” he said.

However, he acknowledged that the

two-state solution was in a weaker position than it had been previously, the reasons for which were “complicated”. While many Israelis are supportive of the idea of an independent Palestine, their political system makes it difficult for government ministers to reach agreement, he explained. At the same time, there is unwillingness within the United States to take action that is perceived to be against the interests of the Israeli government – much of which is the result of a powerful pro-Israel lobby.

“How money is used in American politics defies our imagination and that of most of Western Europe. There are no limits on spending. No restriction on the use of television advertising,” Straw said; he felt this lobbying undermined the political process.

The UK does not escape the influence of the lobby, either. Far from it, according to Straw, who explained how ministers – in particular the PM and foreign secretary – are put under “immense pressure”. “The degree to which the Israeli government thinks it has the right to complain and to

pressure British governments when they do not approve of what a British politician is doing is extraordinary,” he said.

However, pressure can work both ways and as Tony Laurance, MAP’s chief executive, pointed out, Israel – albeit economically and militarily successful – is still very much tied in with Europe, historically, politically, culturally and scientifically, the importance of which should not be underestimated. He drew on the example of the 2012 report, *Trading Away Peace: How Europe Helps Sustain Illegal Israeli Settlements*, which highlighted the extent to which, despite having declared settlements illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace, the EU continues to provide a primary export market for settlement products. The reaction to such reports, the recent business guidelines, settlement statements and scientific negotiations were, he said, “very painful and sharp in Israel”, demonstrating how seemingly small actions can have a big impact.

He added: “We should also be thinking about who is paying for this occupa-



Israeli justice minister Tzipi Livni, John Kerry and Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat

tion. Europe is the biggest contributor to the Palestinian Authority budget. Is it not reasonable that the occupier should bear a growing share of the burden of the cost? Not least, so it is more obviously felt among the silent majority of Israelis, who want peace but are too insulated from the implications of the crisis.”

Sanctions were discussed and, while there was a belief that getting a consensus in the EU on blanket sanctions would be extremely difficult, further restrictions were viewed as a potential response – particularly if they were linked with international trade, such as the UK business guidelines, which warn of the reputational, legal and economic risks to companies that do business with Israel’s illegal settlements.

“I call them ‘love sanctions’, because they are born of a wish to see Israel survive forever. And the only way it can survive is by accepting the borders they were given at its creation,” Phillips said.

“The only time I’ve ever offered to lay down my life for anybody was for Israel during the Yom Kippur War,” he added. “I offered to enlist. I feel that strongly about the survival of Israel for all the reasons we know. At the same time, what drives me now is the shamefulness of what Israel is doing to the Palestinians, because there are so many reflections of what was done

to them. I am not pretending the situation is the same but there is an element of complete negation of their own sympathies and experiences.”

Understanding the Israeli psyche was deemed paramount to any discussion on this topic. And central to this is the issue of security, Herbert suggested. “What matters to them is the knowledge that they can go about their daily lives without risk

“The two-state solution is a medical miracle: it’s been dead for five years”

of attack,” he said, and questioned what would happen if Israel withdrew from the territory it occupies. “There is a real risk it will be attacked”, he said.

Herbert agreed that the occupation was in itself provocative and destabilising, but suggested that from the Israeli point of view, the current situation offered reasonable safety and, as a result, Israelis were unwilling to change the status quo. After all, why should they enter into arrangements they do not trust or which don’t offer assurances of future security?

These were all familiar arguments. Yet for Ghada Karmi, a Palestinian author and research fellow at the University of Exeter,

and the Israeli professor, Ilan Pappé, director of the European Centre for Palestine Studies, also at the University of Exeter, the conversation needed to be turned on its head if any real alternatives were to be found.

“The problem for Palestinians is that we have been divided into various communities with different circumstances; some are living as second class citizens in Israel, some are in refugee camps, some are in exile like me,” Karmi said. “All of us need a solution. The two-state solution does not solve the problem of all of these people, and most certainly not the refugees.

“If we said our starting point is: ‘How do we attend to the consequences of Israel’s creation?’ then the question becomes a real question. If the question is: ‘How do we keep Israel happy and give something to the Palestinians?’, then we might be pursuing this two state idea.”

Pappé expressed a similar sentiment: “We are demanding from the political elite something which it cannot do. It cannot think outside of the box about this process as long as the process shows even the most feeble signs of life.

“The two-state solution is a medical miracle – it has been dead for five years now. Already we have a reality where Palestine and Israel are intertwined under one political regime. And the world is still talking about partitioning as the best solution. The only way the reality will become the main focus of the negotiation is when the reality kicks. When it becomes painful . . . when it becomes bloody,” he said, adding that he believed the third intifada was already “in the making”.

Both Karmi and Pappé focused on the need to shift attention dramatically in one direction and one direction alone – towards equal rights for all.

“The quickest way forward is to promote a policy of equal rights for people in the one state,” Karmi said. “At the moment the Palestinians, the non-Jewish citizens, are not being ruled equally. So we must demand they are granted equal rights. If the Israelis don’t like that, then get out of their territories. You can’t have it both ways.”

For Pappé, this required regime change – which would involve a concerted effort to grant Palestinian citizens the same basic

rights as Israelis. “Regime change is not a dirty word. When a certain legal regime is not respecting people’s rights, asking for that regime to change to respect those rights does not mean that immediately you use military force. No. Regime change can be a reasonable, gradual process,” he explained.

Persuading Israel that this was the best course of action was, of course, not going to be easy.

“On the left you have many people who are very pro-peace but disagree with the one-state because it is the death of the Zionist dream, the watering down of Jewish identity. On the right you have the idea of a single-state solution, which is completely detached from any kind of justice or equality,” Channer said.

He suggested that instead, Israel needed to be sold the idea that the two-state solution is the lesser of two evils: “Take, for example, the injustices of the siege and the blockade, of growing unemployment. All of these things are turning this into an ideology-driven conflict, particularly with the rise of Sufi jihadism in the Gaza Strip.

“Gaza in the past ten years has changed dramatically. What needs to be stressed to the Israeli government is that if this process continues, there will be no solution. Hamas will be brought further and further to the extreme. The only way to counter that is to support a prosperous Palestinian state.”

At this point, the conversation around the table became more animated, with a heated discussion about what democracy means in Israel. Could the Jews ever accept a state in which the Palestinians had a majority? How, as Straw put it, do we persuade Israelis by whatever means to change their minds – from where we are now, which is a comfortable place for the Jewish community, to where we think they ought to be?

“There is no clear political plan how tomorrow you transform the whole of Israel into one democratic state,” responded Pappé. “But there is recognition of the end of a two-state solution and a recognition of including everyone who lives between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean in the conversation about the future, including those who were expelled in 1948.”

Pappé pointed to the civil society idea – a sector that has begun to take its own steps towards instigating change, including via



Could a divided society unite for human rights?

the Boycotts, Divestment and Sanction movement, in the belief that strong pressure from the outside will convince Israel to change its discriminatory constitutional and legal structures.

However, he didn’t feel this was good enough: “I think there has to be a very guarded and gradual, even modular process of transformation from within, that is first of all based on the understanding that this is one political state,” he said.

Instead, by applying the same human rights and civil rights framework that the West wants to apply to the whole of the Middle East, people in the Arab world would accept it as a viable alternative.

“I think you are missing a historic opportunity here,” he emphasised. “Go to young people in Iraq, in Egypt and

Taking Israel and Palestine in isolation is missing the point

tell them: ‘Look here, we have a national agenda of human and civil rights and we want to apply it in Cairo, in Tel Aviv and in Beirut’ – you will find a completely different response from the Arab world towards Britain. You don’t have to talk about the one state – just say whoever is Palestinian is entitled to equal rights.”

Throughout the entire conversation, there was a sense that a time had perhaps come in which others were better able to pick up where the “political elite” had failed.

“I don’t actually think there is a political solution,” Lee said. “The solution will come from the street. I think we should

focus our efforts on persuading younger people that the future is best served by living together.”

Indeed, young people are already beginning to make their voices heard, be it through activism camps staged at iconic Palestinian sites, or through the use of social media channels such as Facebook.

And let us not forget the potential impact of changes taking place elsewhere in the Middle East. As Lee pointed out: “Taking Israel and Palestine in isolation in a region that is so complex is missing the point. What’s happening in Syria, for example, is essentially a division of the country created by us and the French. And it will divide, I am convinced of that. How do these borders impact upon Israel and Palestine? Where do we draw the country of Palestine?”

That is the perennial question, of course. And one that the round-table participants could have discussed for many hours. Unfortunately time was running out and it was left to Straw and Laurance to bring the conversation to a close.

“The Palestinians have an equal right to a state – that is extremely important and should not be abandoned,” Straw said. “Of course the practical reality that you see on the ground is that the Israelis, through colonisation, are building against a viable Palestinian state. How do you square this circle? In any effect, whether you end up with a viable two-state or a single political space, the process of change has to be a pressure on the Israelis and on the Israeli backers in the United States and Europe. That remains the same.”

For Laurance, the issue of equal rights was absolutely central to any future discussion. “The only future for all these people – and it’s a glowing future – is if they can move towards equal rights, reconciliation and the end of ethnic divisions. It’s almost impossible to conceive of it at the moment but that can be the only way forward,” he said.

“Meanwhile, we all have a responsibility to push for an agenda that focuses on human rights under international law and which does not overlook the ongoing humanitarian needs,” he concluded. Because as the extreme poverty, lack of clean water and poor access to healthcare in Palestine demonstrates – these needs are not going to go away quickly. |

Becky Slack chaired the round-table discussion for the New Statesman

REMEMBER THE CHILDREN OF PALESTINE

Medical Aid for Palestinians works for the health and dignity of Palestinians living under occupation and as refugees

For over 30 years MAP has been providing emergency aid in times of crisis, as well as working to build a sustainable healthcare system.

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