

# The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Is the Two State Solution Dead?

Speaking notes for Peter Larson, Chair, Ottawa Forum on Israel Palestine  
Debate/discussion with Jon Allen, former Canadian Ambassador to Israel  
Organized under the auspices of the Middle East Study Group of the Canadian  
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Thank you Mr. Moderator for that kind introduction.

Jon Allen has laid out his vision of a reasonable path to a solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict.

I agree with a number of his basic premises –

- that it is possible for Arabs and Israelis to **overcome past hurts** and find a way to eventually live peacefully together and share this troubled land.
- That any solution will require some **painful compromises** on both sides.
- That this will require **visionary leaders** on both sides, the likes of which we have not seen so far.

And based on that, Jon suggests a specific compromise. It includes a retrenchment of most of the Israeli settlements, some reciprocal jiggling of borders, a very limited return of refugees, and an unspecified compromise on Jerusalem. This can lead, he argues, to reciprocal recognition, of the States of Palestine and Israel. Two states for two peoples.

Here is where I start to part company with Jon.

I think he is right that it might **be possible to negotiate a DEAL** along the lines he proposes. If the right combination of pressure and financial incentives were offered to the Israeli government and the PLO, I think a DEAL is imaginable. Abbas, or his successor MIGHT sign it. Bibi or his successor might sign it.

**But a deal is not the same as a solution.**

To be a solution, one that will stick, the deal would have to satisfy most of the demands of most of the people on both sides.

If too many people are profoundly unhappy, or feel betrayed, the DEAL will not turn out to be a solution but a recipe for more anger and violence.

I don't know whether a 2 state deal, along the lines Jon is referring to could be accepted by most Israelis. Jon is certainly a much better judge of Israel and its contradictions, than I am.

But I am quite sure that it will not come anywhere close to the most basic demands of most Palestinians.

I am not a Palestinian and don't pretend to speak for them. I am a Canadian. **I am more interested in justice and equality than I am in whether there is, or is not a Jewish State, or whether there is or is not a Palestinian state.**

But if a DEAL along the lines Jon suggests were to be signed by the Palestinian leadership, I predict that in short order, the

likely result would be anger, unhappiness and of course, unrest and even violence from the Palestinian side.

The late Israeli author Amos Oz in described the Israel/Palestine situation. “the Jews jumped out of a burning building and landed on the Palestinians”.

European antisemitism caused that burning building Oz is referring to. Not to put too fine a point on it – European Christian antisemitism.

Theodore Hertzl proposed to save European Jews by creating a new Jewish homeland in the middle east – in Palestine, a majority Muslim area where Jews had been a tiny minority for centuries.

And in 1947, the Western world decided that 1.5 million Palestinian Arabs, who had nothing to do with the Holocaust, would be forced to pay the price for the Holocaust, giving up over half of their country to European Jewish refugees.

Not surprisingly, the Palestinians objected. While the Western nations called it a “partition”, the Palestinians saw it differently. It was “appropriation” or even “theft” by Western powers of half of their country for the exclusive use of European Jews.

Creating a Jewish state, where the existing population was overwhelmingly Muslim and Christian, required expelling hundreds of thousands of non-Jews.

The Palestinians call this the “disaster” or “Nakba”.

Coincidentally, our event today takes place almost 75 years to

the day of the event that is called “Independence day” by the Israelis and “Nakba Day” by the Palestinians.

The result has been and continues to be a disaster for the Palestinian people.

Today there are about 10 million Palestinians spread around the area that was their homeland, most of them still within 100 kilometres of Jerusalem.

- 3 million live in the West Bank
- About 1.6 million still live inside Israel
- About 300,000 live in Jerusalem
- Nearly 2 million live in Gaza
- And 5 million more live within 200 km of Jerusalem in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon

The essence of the proposed two-state “solution” that Jon proposes is a deal which allows the Palestinians to keep 22% of their homeland in a fragmented and unarmed “state” totally dependent on Israel for water, electricity, transportation. Little of it is suitable for agriculture. Some have observed that it would be more like a large Indian reserve or Bantustan.

In return, the Palestinians would be asked to:

- accept as irreversible the takeover of most of their land and resources (78% approx.) in 1947/48.
- Tell almost all of the millions of Palestinian refugees they must accept as permanent their expulsion, and give up any

hope of regaining either their properties or assets that were confiscated by Israel

- convince the Palestinian Citizens of Israel that they must accept permanent and legal second-class status inside a state which declares itself to be officially and legally “Jewish’.

With respect, I think this is closer to a “**capitulation**” than to a “compromise”. And I think the hype and euphoria that will surround the declaration of a Palestinian “State” following any agreement would quickly evaporate when the consequences for the majority of Palestinians become clear.

I think the Palestinian leadership – even the corrupt, weak leadership of the Palestinian Authority - understands that this bargain would not be acceptable to most Palestinians. That is why no amount of US/Israeli/international pressure or enticement has convinced any Palestinian leader to accept it in 55 years.

I think I can demonstrate this by asking you to imagine the situation of various Palestinians in the wake of the kind of 2 state deal that Jon is proposing.

Let me give 4 you imaginary examples to illustrate what I mean.

- Yousef, is one of the 3 million Palestinians living in the West Bank. In a 2-state solution, his life definitely will be better. The Palestinians in the West Bank gain the most under a 2 state deal. He will no longer have Israeli soldiers

or settlers tormenting him. He no longer faces humiliating checkpoints to move around in his own country. But instead of living in a poor landlocked territory, he now lives in a poor landlocked state almost completely dependent on Israel for water, electricity, export and imports. Yousef will only have to look over the new border to see that his economic prospects pale in comparison to those of Israelis. Who will he blame? Israel? Or his own leadership? Either way he won't be happy.

- Now turn to Mohammed, one of the nearly 2 million Palestinian Citizens of Israel, whom Israel calls "Israeli Arabs". In the wake of a 2 state solution, as a non-Jewish citizen in Israel, Mohammed finds himself still a second class citizen. He sees that in Israel preferment is still given to Jews in all areas from education to housing to jobs. If he complains, he will face increasing pressure from racist Israelis to move "over there". Mohammed's kids will soon be joining demonstrations and marches demanding equality. Israel will be forced to deal with growing internal unrest. There will be no peace.
- How about Fadi, one of the 2 million Palestinians who live in a refugee camp in Gaza. His grandparents were expelled from Jaffa in 1948. Under a 2-state solution, Fadi now lives in an "independent" Palestine. He no longer fears Israeli bombs. But Israel still exerts much control over him. He may or may not be allowed to enter Israel to find work.

Israel controls the electricity and power generation and import/export. Fadi still lives in a refugee camp. He believes he has the right to return to Israel, a right which the UN supports. Fadi will be angry. He will support any political party that promises to win him his rights, even if it proposes using military means to do so.

- And finally, think about Rania - one of a half million Palestinian refugees living in a cramped, unsanitary refugee camp in Lebanon. Rania and her brothers have been waiting to return to the Galilee in northern Israel where their parents came from. They are seething at having been “sold out” by Palestinian leaders, who they think have traded their rights to return away. Rania is hoping for the day that Hezbollah and the Israeli army will come to blows.

In short, I think that none of these four imaginary people will find the 2 state deal is anywhere near fair.

In conclusion

I am not saying I oppose a 2-state solution. I am saying that I don't think this kind of solution based on simple territorial division will address most of the issues. It can't work. It's a recipe for ongoing anger and violence.

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