

## Two State Solution Remains the Only Option to End the Conflict

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By Corinne Whitlatch, Executive Director

There are a good many reasons to doubt that the international meeting that President Bush is planning for November will make progress in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The President has not yet been willing to match his words of support, in principle, for a viable and contiguous Palestinian state with tangible policies to help realize that goal. But the Administration seems to have finally grasped that progress toward a Palestinian state is essential. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said recently that the summit will not be merely a photo-op.

An agreement that would end Israel's occupation and the conflict itself with a Palestinian state alongside Israel will require actions and compromises on the part of both Israelis and Palestinians, and much stronger U.S. mediation. But, even to talk about the substance of specific compromises is considered risky by the politicians – Israelis, Palestinians, Arabs and Americans alike. The Clinton parameters, Taba negotiations, the Geneva Accord and the Arab League Initiative lay out what is widely understood to be the shape of an agreement that would bring lasting peace – two states living side-by-side in peace and security, recognized by their neighbors as legitimate. It is only in the context of a comprehensive package that the compromises – on Jerusalem, the future of settlements and refugees, final borders and water resources - will be negotiated and hard decisions made.

The weakness of Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, and President Bush's unwillingness to offer a detailed U.S. vision of peace, raises the level of doubt in the meeting's success. But, some analysts actually see the political weakness of these leaders, and of President Bush, as providing an incentive to demonstrate renewed leadership with a

bold peace initiative. In any case, these leaders are in a position to lay the groundwork for an agreement by opening bilateral discussions on those final status issues along with a broad endorsement of the land-for-peace principle and fleshing out of the two-state goal, setting the stage for negotiation of a peace agreement.

Opposition to a two-state solution is growing. Joining the "Greater Israel" stalwarts/settlement movement and Palestinian Hamas rejectionists in opposing two-states is America's own Pastor John Hagee, the founder of Christians United for Israel, who prays that Israel will not cede one inch of land.

Even among members of CMEPE churches who are committed to peace, despair and frustration has driven some to the conclusion that a two-state solution is not possible and that a single democratic state for Israelis and Palestinians is the only option, and ideally, the best option. The religious significance of the Holy Land fosters utopian visions, but a practical political solution in this era of nation states must be the immediate goal.

### Whose One State?

Most of the Israeli and Palestinian supporters of a single state want that state to be theirs, and theirs alone, with "the other" acquiescing if not departing. Defeat, by means of violence, has proven impossible for the mighty Israeli army and for the militant martyrs of Palestine. The nationalist movements at the core of both Israeli and Palestinian self-identities have a global symbolism of mythical proportions. It is fanciful to believe that either Israelis or Palestinians will give up the dream of a national homeland.

Some Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs call for a single, democratic and secular state. They are distressed by the systemic discrimination against Israel's Arab citizens and the growing power of the ultra-Orthodox and religious-nationalist parties within Israel. Yet, beyond a few anti-Zionist activists, there are few Jewish Israelis who would abandon the notion of the "Jewish state" that was prescribed in the UN's partition of Mandate Palestine in 1948 with General Assembly Resolution 181.

The goal of a single, binational state was the goal of the Palestine Liberation Organization until November 1988 when the Palestinian National Council, meeting in Algiers, declared an independent Palestinian state on the basis on UNGA Res. 181, and accepted UN Resolutions 242 and 338, thus effectively recognizing Israeli statehood.

Hamas, a Palestinian Islamist movement grounded in the Muslim Brotherhood that refuses to acknowledge Israel's existence, brings a new challenge to the Palestinian national movement and a two-state solution. The role of Islamist parties in government is a region-wide dilemma. It is generally agreed that Hamas's electoral success was based more on its record of social services delivery void of corruption as well as popular anger with the failures of the Fatah-led government rather than a rejection of the quest for an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

While the majority of Palestinians living under occupation want a sovereign independent state, the relentless encroachment of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land has led to a strategic backlash among some Palestinians. Their message: if Israel continues to work against a viable Palestinian state, we'll shock them by insisting on equal rights in their democratic state of Israel. A tactic, perhaps, intended to compel Israel to end the stalling, before it's too late. Such a tactic, however, could have the opposite effect of redoubling Israeli efforts to defeat, rather than compromise with, the Palestinians. Nevertheless,

the PLO and Palestinian Authority remain committed to the two state solution and focus on maximizing the potential of the future state of Palestine.

**"The only basis on which peace can be achieved is that set forth in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and in the principle of 'land for peace'."**

--Iraq Study Group Report

## International Legitimacy

Those actions by the United Nations in 1948 and 1967 laid out the international basis for two states which holds today. UNGA Resolution 188 ended Britain's mandate authority with a plan to partition Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. UNSC Resolution 242, following the June 1967 war, calls upon Israel to withdraw from lands occupied during the hostilities and for the right of every State in the area to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries. This formula of "land for peace" has remained the guiding principle of subsequent efforts to end the occupation and resolve the conflict.

This two state solution has been ratified by United Nations resolutions again and again, and most recently endorsed by the Arab League Initiative. The end of the binational state goal was codified in the Oslo agreement of 1993 with statements of mutual recognition by Israel and the PLO. There is no basis in international law for a one-state solution.

The policies of the U.S. churches when CMEP was founded in 1986 were based on support for national self-determination by the Jewish people in the state of Israel and the Palestinian people in a Palestinian homeland. Many of the CMEP member churches now have policy that explicitly calls for two states with reference to a sovereign state of Palestine as the outcome of negotiations that ends Israel's occupation in accordance with United Nations resolutions.

CMEP encourages your tax-deductable contribution by check to Churches for Middle East Peace or on [www.cmepe.org](http://www.cmepe.org) by secure, online credit card service. Contributions from individuals and from congregations help fund CMEP's advocacy work in Washington DC. Congregations interested in supporting CMEP's work are asked to contact Anna Rhee at [anna@cmepe.org](mailto:anna@cmepe.org).

## Facts on the Ground

The reality of massive growth of settlements, walls, closures, and other institutions of Israeli rule have persuaded some that there is already, de facto, a single Israeli-controlled state and that ending the occupation is no longer realistic. But, the settlements and their web of infrastructure can be dismantled or adjusted by agreement as outlined in the Geneva Accord and the unofficial negotiations in Taba in January 2001.

It is not sufficient that a token Palestinian state be established, it must be viable. A phony state composed of disconnected, economically non-viable chunks of the West Bank and Gaza would not only fail, it would be a continuing threat to Israel itself – even behind massive walls. The requirements of viability include the contiguity of the West Bank with east Jerusalem -- long the hub of Palestinian commercial and religious life -- as well as transport connections between the West Bank and Gaza. Of course, in this interdependent world, many nations are not independently viable and look to ties and assistance from outside. Palestine, like Israel, will continue to need the help of governments and diaspora Palestinians abroad to realize the full potential of its population.

## If Not Two States?

Rafi Dajani, of the American Task Force on Palestine, and Ori Nir, of Americans for Peace Now, wrote for an oped in the Boston Globe that “one alternative is perpetual conflict.” They ask, would Israeli Jews ever accept the dismantling of the state of Israel? Would Palestinians – or anyone else – be able to impose it? How would the two communities share in government and administration?

Another alternative is that Jordan would take over, or be given, the Palestinian enclaves of the West Bank and that Egypt will again rule over Gaza. This option ignores the power of Palestinian nationalism, and would likely produce further conflict. Palestinian resistance would spread, not subside, destabilizing both Jordan and Egypt while leaving the refugees’ future in Lebanon and Syria unresolved. Israel would

be even less secure as anti-Israel, as well as anti-American sentiment, would swell.

Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, a well-known Christian Palestinian who is an advocate of peace and elected member of the Palestinian Legislative Council from Jerusalem, told a group of Christian leaders meeting in Washington DC in April that “two states is the only viable solution. One state would condemn Palestinians to perpetual occupation.” If there is not a political settlement that meets minimal Palestinian national aspirations and that promises security and recognition for Israel, one-state will result by default. But, this will not be a Holy Land peace based on justice with equal rights for all. The failure to address the national aspirations of both peoples and to provide justice for both Palestinians and Israelis would likely transform the nationalist contest into a religious conflict, with global implications.

## A Real Opportunity?

The two-state solution is a real, feasible opportunity to settle the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians; it is also a prerequisite for Arab-Israeli peace. This goal has the necessary global backing, majority support among the people, and makes a sharing of Jerusalem as the capital of both Israel and Palestine possible. This is an opportunity not to be missed. Advocacy by Americans in support of more effective U.S. leadership toward a genuine two state peace must be accomplished, ultimately, by political mobilization and support among Israelis and Palestinians. But without more resolute and creative leadership from Washington, the conflict is likely to continue.

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# *Advocacy Action*

This November summit/meeting/conference will be the last chance for President Bush to realize the vision he set forth five years ago for a viable, contiguous Palestinian state and a resolution of this tragic conflict. That goal cannot be completed by the end of 2008, but significant progress can be, and must be, made at this time.

CMEP knows from meetings with congressional staff that many members appreciate advocacy that expresses good will for both Israelis and Palestinians. There is a growing recognition that, as the Iraq Study Group stated, "The United States does its ally Israel no favors in avoiding direct involvement to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict." Nevertheless, the President will meet opposition within the Congress when Israel is pressed to make changes. Both the Administration and Congress will benefit from constituents' assurances of their backing for bold and determined leadership toward ending the occupation and the conflict with a negotiated two-state agreement.

**Contact the White House, the State Department and your members of Congress with this message:**

White House Comments Line: 202-456-1111  
State Dept. Comments Line: 202-647-6575  
Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121

- I call/write to encourage the President/Secretary Rice/Senator or Representative X with an appeal for bold and sustained support for peacemaking between Israel and the Palestinians through determined U.S. leadership and mediation that would lead to comprehensive regional peace agreement.
- For the November international meeting to be successful, real progress toward a viable Palestinian state is essential. The agenda should go beyond Palestinian institution building and lead concretely toward negotiations of a comprehensive peace agreement. Hope must be restored for Israelis and Palestinians that they might be allowed to live in peace as neighbors.
- This conflict is so important to people around the world. A negotiated agreement that ends the conflict and that makes Jerusalem a city shared by the two peoples and three faiths would make possible a reconciliation of the Abrahamic family of faiths as well as restore good will toward the United States.

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