

The [Obvious] New State Solution

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The collapse of the Palestinian Authority, the result of Israel's 42-year refusal to implement a two-state solution, leaves the Palestinians no option but to unilaterally declare an independent state. Israel acted unilaterally when it announced independence in 1948. It is the Palestinians' turn. It worked in Kosovo. It worked in Georgia. And it will work in Palestine. There are 192 member states in the United Nations and as many as 150 would recognize the state of Palestine, creating a diplomatic nightmare for Israel and its lonely ally the United States. Israel will face worldwide censure if it attempts to crush the independent state by force and very likely be subjected to the kind of divestment campaigns and boycotts that brought down the apartheid government of South Africa.

The two-state solution, long held up as the way out of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, flickered and died with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. No Israeli leader since, including Ehud Barack, has shown any interest in its implementation. Israeli governments have instead cynically used the promise of negotiations as a cover to steadily expand settlements, evict Palestinians from their homes, carry out egregious acts of violence and repression against Palestinians and steal huge swathes of the West Bank, including most of the aquifers.

The death of the two-state solution is not news to those of us who have spent years in the Middle East. What is news is the public acknowledgement by the Palestinian leadership. Mahmoud Abbas, the compliant and discredited president of the Palestinian Authority, who has announced he will not run for another term, has uncharacteristically blasted Israel for deceiving the Palestinians. The chief Palestinian negotiator, [Saeb Erekat](#), who says that the effort to negotiate a solution to the conflict with Israel is dead, has called on Palestinians to declare statehood.

The disarray within the Palestinian Authority has led to the cancellation of the Palestinian elections in January, although the elections were already in jeopardy. The militant group Hamas, which took over Gaza in 2007 after thwarting a coup attempt led by Abbas' Fatah party, said it would not allow the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza to vote.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is counting on the Obama administration to thwart a declaration of Palestinian independence, will have difficulty finding a Palestinian stooge as compliant as Abbas. Abbas' time in office has been marked by repeated and humiliating concessions to Israel, including deferring, at Israel's request, the vote at the United Nations on the [Goldstone report](#), which documented human rights abuses during Israel's offensive in Gaza last December and January. Israel has shown its appreciation by ignoring Abbas' protests for a halt on settlements and dismissing his calls for negotiations. It is hard to imagine any Palestinian leader, at least one with a shred of credibility, agreeing to take Abbas' place. The only alternative left to most Palestinians, unless an independent state is declared, will be endless war and an embrace of Islamic extremism.

A declaration of independence, based on the 1967 demarcation lines between Israel and Palestinian territory, should cover East Jerusalem among other areas and the several hundred thousand Jewish settlers living in settlements in the West Bank. These Israeli settlers would instantly become citizens in the new country, replicating the experience of many Palestinians who suddenly found themselves counted as Israelis in 1948.

"When he declares independence, Abbas should call upon the Jews living in the state of Palestine to preserve the peace and to do their part in building up the new country as full and equal citizens, enjoying fair representation in all of its institutions," [Yossi Sarid](#), who supports the independence movement, wrote in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz. "David Ben-Gurion would not have been upset by such a pretty act of plagiarism from his Declaration of

Independence.”

The Israelis have orchestrated acute misery and poverty in the Palestinian territories over the past two decades in an effort to subdue and ethnically cleanse the captive population. They have reduced Palestinians, many of whom now live on less than \$2 a day, to a subsistence level. They have created squalid, lawless and impoverished ghettos in the West Bank and Gaza. Israeli soldiers, who ring these ghettos, have the ability to instantly shut off food, medicine and goods to perpetuate the misery. Israel, when the Palestinians grow restive, drops 1,000-pound iron fragmentation bombs and artillery shells—as they did a year ago in Gaza—on the concrete hovels that pack neighborhoods. The Israeli objective is to turn the Palestinian territories into a hell on earth. This policy has, however, swollen the ranks of radical Islamists in the occupied territories and throughout the Middle East.

The refusal by the Obama administration and nearly every member of the U.S. Congress to defend the rule of law and basic human rights for the Palestinians exposes our hypocrisy. It also perpetuates the absurd pretence that it is Israel, not the Palestinians, whose security and dignity are being threatened. The F-16 jet fighters, the Apache attack helicopters, the 250-pound “smart” GBU-39 bombs used on Palestinian civilians are part of the annual \$2.4 billion in military aid the United States gives to Israel. Palestinians are slaughtered with American-made weapons provided to Israel with taxpayer dollars. Israel, an international pariah, would be unable to carry out these atrocities without our financial and moral support. Mix this toxic brew with the illegal wars we wage in Iraq and Afghanistan and the United States becomes a satanic force in the eyes of many Muslims.

Abbas, [in a speech](#) delivered a few days ago on the fifth anniversary of Yasser Arafat’s death, announced that the Palestinians would not return to negotiations with Israel without a full halt to settlement building, “including the natural growth”—a term Israel uses to justify construction on the basis of natural population growth in settlements.

“They are putting obstacles in its way,” he said of promised negotiation. “They are trying to remove this concept. What do they want?”

The anniversary of Arafat’s death is a bitter reminder to many Palestinians that Israel can never be trusted. It is widely believed among Palestinians, as well as Israeli peace activists such as [Uri Avnery](#), that Arafat was poisoned by the Israelis, something Israeli officials deny. Arafat became gravely ill in 2004 as Israeli forces besieged his Ramallah headquarters. He was eventually flown to France for treatment and died at Percy military hospital outside of Paris on Nov. 11, 2004. The French, abiding by an agreement with the Israelis, did not release Arafat’s medical records.

“Each expert we consulted explained that even a simple poison produced by an average scientist would be difficult to identify by the most experienced scientists,” said Arafat’s nephew Nasser al-Kidwa. “I can’t tell for sure that he was murdered by the Israelis. I can’t refute that hypothesis because doctors couldn’t refute it.”

The suspicions around the death of Arafat replicate the feelings of most Palestinians around the death of the two-state solution. Each, in the eyes of Palestinians, was deliberately murdered. The Israelis have ensured that from now on the Palestinians will fall or rise on their own.

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