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## Twenty Years after Oslo: Tactics and Strategy towards New-Zionism

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On September 13, 1993, exactly twenty years ago, the Oslo Accords were signed on the southern lawn of the White House. The extraordinary and clandestine endeavor that led to this historic event and to the symbolic handshake between Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat had actually begun nine months earlier at a preliminary secret meeting in Norway that launched the process. Before we set out, on the morning after the Knesset decision to rescind the law prohibiting meetings between Israeli citizens and PLO representatives, Dr. Yair Hirschfeld and I humbly hoped that we would be able to return to Israel and provide decision makers here with information that could help them advance the official negotiations, which were stalled in Washington at the time. Even in our wildest dreams, we did not imagine that this meeting might lead to a process that would eventually culminate in the signing of a Declaration of Principles.

During the very first meeting, however, it became apparent to us that we were engaged in what might become a historic turning point. The messages conveyed to us by Abu 'Ala (Ahmed Qurei) on behalf of Arafat and Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) were revolutionary: they want peace; they will settle for a state within the 1967 border; they understand that neither side has time to waste; they oppose terror; they approach the Right of Return pragmatically; they are interested in close economic cooperation; they support the regional approach to resolution of the conflict; they advocate meetings between individuals and communities across the Green Line; and they understand that there is no alternative to a solution that shares and divides Jerusalem between the two parties.

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The author's views expressed in this analysis do not necessarily reflect the views of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

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I cannot speak on behalf of those Israeli leaders who, in the course of the process, adopted the Oslo concept. In my point of view, however, from the very first moment the political process, as well as peace itself, were only intermediate objectives. The ultimate goal was and still is to conclude the process of establishing the Israeli state that had begun on November 29, 1947, with the UN resolution that called for partition of the Land of Israel/Palestine – a process that as of today has not yet come to fruition. The Oslo Accords entailed two major achievements. The first was the historic mutual recognition between two national movements – the Zionist movement in the form of the State of Israel and the Palestinian national movement in the form of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) – two movements which until then had played a zero-sum game, where one side's gain would be the other's loss. The second major achievement was the agreement that resolution of the conflict be based on implementation of Security Council Resolution 242, that is, land for peace – the territorial division of Israel/Palestine into two political entities, an Israeli and a Palestinian.

Many factors contributed to the breakdown of the Oslo process, but the root of its collapse and the seeds of the calamity that followed were planted by its three leaders: Arafat, Rabin, and Peres. All three sought peace, but from the very start of the process each one also played a part in the failure of the Accords to achieve their intended aim. Arafat did not make the transition, in terms of mentality and leadership, from an era of military and terrorist struggle to the era of diplomacy and statesmanship. The most salient example of this was his arrival at the White House signing ceremony wearing a military uniform. This was precisely the moment at which he should have changed into the uniform of statesmen, namely, a business suit.

He proceeded from there to make a variety of comments – immediately quoted by Israelis – that maintained his practice of doublespeak, typically using different formulations in Arabic and English and citing the Quran as well as Islamic traditions in a manner that served as “proof” for opponents of the process in Israel that the Palestinians were not a reliable partner and had not relinquished their aim to annihilate Israel. Arafat's attitude also helped legitimize verbal incitements against Israel, which persisted not only among opponents of the process but also within circles closely tied to the Palestinian leadership, which in turn often approved or at a minimum kept silent in the face of these incitements.

All this was compounded by Arafat's approach of turning a blind eye to some of the terrorist activities of Oslo's opponents, primarily cells of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad that soon began carrying out attacks against Israel. Although Arafat did issue orders to fight the opposition, these were often vague and half-hearted, thus facilitating a soft policy against Islamic terror. Rather than fighting the terrorists in an unconditional and unequivocal manner, as Abu Mazen did upon his appointment to the position of President in January 2005, when he announced that under his rule there would be only one law and one weapon, Arafat created a reality in which terrorists against Israel had the maneuverability to perpetrate an increasing number of attacks. These attacks were then attributed by most Israelis to “all Palestinians,” regardless of whether they supported or opposed the peace process, thereby catalyzing the growing mistrust as well as Israel's hard-line security policy of indiscriminately attacking both the suspect population and the innocent, peace-seeking Palestinians. The policy of

the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) comprised curfews, closures, checkpoints, and collective punishment, which compounded the vicious cycle of action-reaction.

On the Israeli side, Peres and Rabin made a big mistake in not communicating to the Israeli and Palestinian publics, immediately upon signing the Oslo Agreement, the fact that this new stage manifested a dramatic transformation of Israeli policy, aiming eventually at bringing about the unequivocal solution of two states for two peoples on the basis of the 1967 borders, conditional of course on successful implementation of the interim agreement and satisfactory future security arrangements.

Moreover, the Israeli official apparatuses were not directed to adjust the new approach towards the Palestinians in any real sense, and therefore the various relevant actors within the IDF, police, and government ministries did not transform their psychological attitude and practical approach to the new realities on the ground. In practice Rabin and Peres, intentionally left the vision and the intended course of negotiations vague, while simultaneously issuing clarifications that totally excluded a two-state solution. In so doing they generated a roaring dissonance as well as serious practical problems.

The lack of an Israeli clear strategy and vision regarding the end-game constituted a severe obstacle from the outset, a problem that soon became even more acute with the 1995 Interim Agreement. When the Israeli negotiating team sought instructions regarding the ultimate objective, it became clear that no such objective existed. Accordingly, their instructions were to reach an agreement that would leave all options open: perhaps there will be a Palestinian state, or perhaps not; perhaps Israel will withdraw, or perhaps not; perhaps the Palestinians would only be granted autonomy, or perhaps not. The absence of any strategy resulted in an inferior agreement, compared with what might otherwise have been achieved, and in superfluous Israeli "achievements" that were imposed on the Palestinians with the overall aim of denying them the attributes of an emergent state. This situation was a salient and substantive contributing factor in the breakdown and failure of the implementation of the Oslo Accords.

Difficult as it is to admit, Rabin and Peres were the ones responsible for not correctly reading the political map and thus failing to formulate a solid Israeli vision and an End-Game strategy already at an early stage. However, Rabin did in fact seem capable of accepting and successfully promoting a two-state solution, whereas Peres strenuously opposed the concept of an independent Palestinian state with control over both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Peres aspired to generate conditions under which a Palestinian state could be established only in Gaza while the West Bank would become an Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian condominium. Until 1998, five years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, he still believed that an agreement implementing some version of the Jordanian option could be achieved, even though this option had been laid to rest ten years earlier with the Jordanian decision to disengage completely from the West Bank. Simultaneously, Israel also continued building and expanding the settlement "enterprise" and permitting the humiliating treatment of all Palestinians as potential and suspected enemies. Mistreatment of Palestinians at checkpoints persisted, although most did not constitute a threat to Israel. A ten-year-old boy or a fifteen-year-old youth who sees his father

humiliated by an eighteen-year-old Israeli soldier will never forget the experience.

The situation on the ground and the relations between Israel and the Palestinians deteriorated at an ever faster pace under the first Netanyahu administration, during 1996 through 1999. As prime minister, Netanyahu explicitly opposed the Oslo Accords, and although he did the minimum necessary so that Israel would not appear to be violating the agreement, he also did the maximum possible to prevent any political progress that could lead to an agreement aimed at ending the occupation and establishing peace. The Barak administration of 1999-2001 also contributed substantively to the deteriorating situation. Suffice it to say that the failure of the Camp David Summit – which, in my opinion, is largely attributable to Barak’s misguided and amateurish approach to negotiations – sparked the intifada that in turn led to mutual violence and loss of confidence in the possibility of achieving peace.

The Oslo process was originally intended to bring about the end of the Israeli-Arab conflict - at the heart of which is the conflict between Zionism and Palestinian nationalism - to lead to the establishment of a permanent and internationally recognized border between Israel and its Palestinian neighbor, to enable global acceptance of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel (in contrast to the current situation), and to foster normalized relations between Israel and the Arab and Islamic world. These achievements would have brought us closer to the strategic goal of a stable state in which one may comfortably carry on with one’s life without asking when the state will cease to exist, without standing in line for a foreign passport because of the fear of another Holocaust, without leaders who terrify their citizens by invoking every potential imagined or exaggerated threat.

We have been standing at this historic crossroad for twenty years now. The question before the Israeli public is whether to turn right or turn left. Leftward does not mean leftism in the provocative sense of the word but, rather, everything that is encompassed in the concepts of liberalism, openness, willingness to cooperate and coexist within the state, compassion for the disenfranchised, equality, social justice, ending the rule over another people, equitable distribution of social responsibility, and termination of the illogical preference given to a settler population that resides beyond the future borders of the state.

Oslo marked the beginning of a journey that should lead to the end of occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and to peace between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine. The alternative is a course that will permanently entrench the occupation and relegate us to an ever-increasingly violent struggle that could expand beyond the Israeli-Arab sphere and even threaten Israel’s national existence. The route of Oslo represents the option of an Israel that is enlightened rather than immersed in its own dark ages, inclusive rather than exclusive, modern rather than reactionary, progressive rather than fundamentalist, and egalitarian rather than inclined towards those sectors of society that receive without reciprocating.

## **Judaism vs. "Israeliness"**

Oslo began as a journey towards normalization aimed at sustaining and renewing the Zionist enterprise by infusing it with social values that include full equality for the Arab minority within the State of Israel, a minority that must be part of any future and fair Israeli society. Such a society, in turn, must encompass Judaism without returning us to the days and lifestyle of the Diaspora, when Judaism was at the center of life and "Israeliness" was just a dream. Israel is situated within the dialectic between Judaism and "Israeliness", and the question facing Israeli society is how to integrate the two. The current reality, where on the one hand the political party Habayit Hayehudi and the voices of racism are growing stronger while on the other hand the political camp of Yesh Atid and Meretz is also growing stronger, encapsulates the ever-increasing dichotomy between the two camps: the former represents the extreme version of Israel's Jewish, religious, and national characteristics, whereas the latter highlights Israeli, secular, and liberal values. The former are accused of sacrificing the state for the sake of the land, while the latter are attacked and vilified as traitors to the most fundamental values of the Jewish people, rather than those of the state.

The Oslo approach had and still has the potential to guide Israeli society through a process that highlights its Israeliness, which encompasses Jewish secularism, the same phenomenon that in fact led to the founding of the State of Israel. It was primarily secular Jews from Eastern Europe who founded the state, part of the wave of nationalism that swept over Europe during the latter half of the nineteenth century and as an alternative to the orthodox, diaspora-style Judaism of Eastern Europe at the time, which remained stagnant and detached from the new developments that were overtaking Europe such as the Enlightenment, progressiveness, liberalism, egalitarianism, democracy, the emancipation of women, rationalism, universal education, independence, and freedom from religious control over the daily life of the individual and the state.

The new Israeli Judaism as publicly represented by right-wing Knesset members dovetails with and drags Israeli society towards increasing ultra nationalism, chauvinism and racism. The recent comment of former General Security Services ("Shin Bet") chief Avraham Shalom was not without basis: "The future is bleak. It is changing the character of society. We draft most of our youth into the armed forces, and they see two opposing things: on the one hand it seeks to be a people's army, but on the other hand it is a cruel occupying army". Likewise, Yuval Diskin, who served as chief of the General Security Services from 2005 until last year, stated that he "agrees with every word" of Prof. Yishayahu Leibowitz, who stated only one year after the Six Day War that "a state that rules over a hostile population of a million foreigners will inevitably be a security services state, with all its ramifications, such as the nature of its education, the freedom of speech and thought, and democratic rule. The corruption that is characteristic of every colonial regime will infuse the State of Israel as well. The administration will have to engage in suppressing Arab resistance movements, on the one hand, and in recruiting Arab traitors and collaborators, on the other hand."

## **New-Zionism**

The time has come for us to pause, review our history, and do whatever we can – even at the cost of painful compromise – in order to bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an end and embark on a journey towards a new form of Zionism that unites Right and Left, is attentive to the hardships of Arab citizens of Israel and addresses the injustices inflicted on them over the years, and creates a common denominator between the religious and secular. This approach may be termed New-Zionism.

New-Zionism is easiest to define by what it is not. It is not the anachronistic Zionism, whose authority stems from truths that were relevant over a century ago and were realized through the seizure of land, demonstrating to the entire world that Jews are not forever exiles. It is not the Zionism of settlers across the Green Line, which derives its authority from rabbis and the world of religious anti-humanism and messianism, completely disconnected from pragmatic Zionism and secular Judaism. It is not the Zionism that reinvented itself after the founding of the state on the basis of “the ends justifying the means,” thereby tolerating a variety of atrocities, beginning with the destruction of Jewish different ethnic identities and cultures that did not comply with the “Sabra [native] Israeli” model that had emerged prior to the state’s founding, and concluding with the historic discrimination perpetuated against Palestinian Arabs who remained under Israeli sovereignty and became second-class citizens in our state.

New-Zionism is Zionism in renewal, the Zionism of the 2000s, which will drive us forward rather than drag us back as standard, stagnant Zionism does. It does not entail turning our backs on the past or denying the foundation on which it was based and from which emerged the legitimate aspiration of the Jewish people to a national home in the Land of Israel. What we now need is to update, modify, and successfully implement the concept in accordance with the new reality that has emerged over the course of more than sixty years since the founding of Israel as an independent state – a state that will not only serve the traditional Zionist concept of a national home for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel but will also shift its center of gravity, first and foremost serving all its citizens and residents by ensuring “complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race, or sex” and guaranteeing “freedom of religion, conscience, language, education, and culture,” in the words of the Declaration of Independence. The state must also strive to establish normalized relations with its regional neighbors, as the Zionism of “a people dwelling alone” was never relevant.

The new Zionism must set itself new objectives as well as new subject matters and symbols. Some of the subject matters must address for example the definition of the state not only as that of the Jewish people – an appropriate formulation during the post-WWII period, when Jews were persecuted and lacked a secure national homeland where they could take refuge – but also as the state of the Jewish people and all its Israeli citizens. After all, approximately 20% of the state’s citizens are Arab, and at least another 200,000 are Christians who immigrated to Israel from former Soviet states under the Law of Return, which in itself will also have to be reviewed and revised. Not every Muslim or Christian with a Jewish grandparent has to be granted the automatic right to immigrate to

Israel, receive an identity card, and vote in Knesset elections upon arrival in Israel.

The new Zionism must be receptive to change and dynamic in defining the broad goals of Israeli society. Modifications along these lines will not substantially transform the nature of Israeli society, but they will enable Arab citizens to feel like full partners with equal rights and obligations. As it renews itself, society must formulate the broadest possible common denominator in order to facilitate the integration of all public sectors in the society, whether through full participation in civilian (non-national) projects or through military service.

New-Zionism along these lines could eventually not only unite Right and Left, but also generate a common ground between the religious and their secular "brethren," who have in practice already begun unconsciously implementing the New-Zionist chapter. The secular core of Israeli society already thinks and acts in terms of renewed Zionism, whereas the religious core requires new objectives and challenges to replace the "settlements" chapter, which must disappear from the annals of Zionism. These developments are likely to entail a transformation of religious, nationalist, and territorial values into social, and professional values that will be manifested for example through fostering weaker Israeli communities at the periphery. The Israeli homeland comprises not only the experience of the Diaspora and religious Judaism, but also and primarily Hebrew culture, social ties, and the language, art, and literature that have evolved here since the first Zionist arrived in 1882. All these elements are an essential part of a renewed Israel that looks to the future rather than to the past. They must be preserved, reinforced, and cultivated.

### **The lack of a peace strategy**

As noted, the capstone of this process is conditional on a strategy for peace. In the current reality, however, it appears that Israel has no peace strategy. Everyone wants peace, but a purely verbal declaration in support of peace and two states does not constitute a strategy. The essence of any strategy lies in its identification of clear, usually long-term, goals, from which are derived the courses of action and their manner of implementation. The only strategy that currently exists within the official discourse relates to matters of security and war. Yet essential national interests – including a clear delineation of the future borders of the State of Israel – are liable to be no less, and perhaps even more, affected than matters related to peace.

Many in Israel have become enamored with the status quo. Proponents of this approach advocate the concept of "conflict management" as an alternative to "conflict resolution," hoping that the current situation remains as is, that the borders expanded during past wars will not change, and that a state of neither peace nor war can be sustained. The concept of conflict management was the approach Netanyahu adopted from the outset: he does not want a permanent status agreement; therefore, in his view, it is necessary to curtail the current fires, to continue coordinating security measures, to create an "economic peace" that includes improved economic conditions in the West Bank, reducing Palestinian motives for an uprising, to put pressure on Hamas in Gaza, and not to proceed along any diplomatic course. The objective as he sees it is state of calm at no cost.

The Yom Kippur War – during which the State of Israel faced an existential threat that eventually led to negotiations with Egypt and the first peace agreement with an Arab state – has demonstrated that in our region, long-term status quo is not possible. Did the reality at the time necessitate reaching the hour of two p.m. on October 6, 1973, fighting for nearly twenty days, and losing thousands of soldiers, in order to agree to what might have been agreed upon even without a war? Sadat initiated the war not because he wanted to undermine Israel's legitimacy, existence, or sovereignty. His demand before the war, which was received with scorn and apathy across the board in Israel, was to reach a peace agreement based on a fair and reasonable deal – the return of all lands captured by Israel six years previously. He did not intend to undercut Israel's power or take territories Israel had captured in the War of Independence, but rather to restore the honor of his country, to initiate a political process, and to help stabilize the Middle East through a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and its neighbors.

The public and leadership in Israel did not understand this at the time, nor to my great regret do they understand this concept today in the context of relations with the Palestinians or with the Arab world. The Arab Peace Initiative (March 2002), which includes full normalization of relations between Israel and twenty-two Arab countries in exchange for the establishment of a Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 borders, still comes up against an impenetrable Israeli wall. One lesson from the Yom Kippur War is that if we do not reach peace agreements, then even strategies of war and security are likely to collapse eventually.

Having said all that, recent action on the part of Prime Minister Netanyahu suggests that the man who strove to undermine the Oslo Accords and sparked incitement against Yitzhak Rabin, and who would still prefer to manage rather than resolve the conflict, has apparently accepted that the strategy of Oslo is the right approach for Israel and for Zionism. Netanyahu has recently witnessed how the ground beneath all our feet is starting to burn. The Palestinian people, the Arab world, and most of the states of the world will not tolerate the continuation of this state of affairs, and recent European resolutions regarding Israeli control over the West Bank seem only the opening salvo of an anti-Israel campaign that could increase in scope and pose an economic threat to Israel.

The lack of political progress also weakens the moderate Palestinian camp, which has championed the approach of two states based on the 1967 borders coexisting in peace, and drives the Palestinian public into the welcoming arms of Hamas, which offers them an all-out struggle against Israel until victory is achieved. The feeling on the Palestinian street, where most people have concluded that an agreement with Israel is the preferred approach, is that Israel is pushing them into a corner and is not interested in a permanent agreement ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state. Settlements are expanding, illegal outposts are flourishing and receiving judicial or political backing, Area C lands (60% of the West Bank) are barred to Palestinian development and under threat of Israeli annexation. The sense of being under siege is intensifying, and the overall feeling is one of humiliation with no change on the horizon.



Even most of the Israeli public understands that the approach of two states for two peoples is the only way to maintain a dominant Jewish majority in the State of Israel. The alternative will most likely result in the reoccupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, a deterioration of the situation that could lead to an Apartheid regime, border disputes with all our neighbors, including those with whom Israel has a peace treaty, and the transformation of Israel into a pariah state in the eyes of the Western world as well as a significant portion of world Jewry.

The distance that Netanyahu is willing to travel in order to actualize what seems to be his new approach still falls far, far short of what is needed to reach a permanent agreement. The critical question, therefore, is how to progress from the current position of the prime minister, towards a permanent peace agreement that will save the state from the slippery slope that is already leading us towards a point of no return, a point at which full IDF control over the streets of Gaza and ancient alleyways of Nablus is imminent, with all the disastrous diplomatic, political and economic ramifications of such a process.

An Israeli leader who values the future of the state above his own immediate political popularity must initiate a process – perhaps launching it at the parliament in Ramallah alongside President Obama and President Abbas – whereby Israel publicly announces that it accepts the approach of two states based on the 1967 borders with a minimal and territorially comparable land swap, two capitals in Jerusalem, demilitarization of the territories, a freeze on construction in the settlements, and a fair solution to the refugee problem that does not include returning to Israel yet does constitute an acceptable implementation of UN General Assembly Resolution 194.

The secret to success is to define the end-game from the outset. It is always preferable that both sides have a clear picture of the final outcome. In our case the parties must begin with a strategic understanding. The Palestinians, for example, currently have a strategy regarding the border: at Oslo they gave up the dream of a greater Palestine and are prepared to settle for a state covering 22% of the territory with Israeli sovereignty over the remaining 78%. This was the historic Palestinian concession granted to Israel at the start of negotiations. In their view, a peace agreement must result in two states based on the 1967 borders. They will accept a limited land swap of a 1:1 ratio. Why does Israel not adopt this equation as a strategy as well, with the question of the border's location submitted to negotiation? As noted, however, under the current reality in Israel, the political pyramid is headed by a prime minister who is incapable of presenting such a position, even though it was already placed on the negotiating table in 2008 by then Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Accordingly, we must acknowledge that even though a permanent agreement could already be within reach, in terms of the conditions on the ground and public support, at this time the possibility of such an agreement borders on the impossible. Reality currently offers us an especially adverse combination: an Israeli government that is not prepared to pursue the agenda of land for peace, a coalition whose most vocal faction is situated to the right of the prime minister and objects even to the little that he is willing to offer, an apathetic and skeptical Israeli public, and upheavals in the Arab world that many in Israel perceive as a threat. In the background there is the political weakness of the Palestinian leadership, which suffers from a major substantive division between Fatah and

Hamas as well as between the West Bank and Gaza, further limiting Palestinian political maneuverability.

### **Towards a one state solution?**

From the Palestinian perspective, the international option pursued at the UN during the past two years is losing ground, and the future is looking increasingly bleak. As in other Arab countries, young people are the leading voices of criticism. They oppose violence, but they oppose the continuation of the status quo just as much. One of the major and more interesting campaigns to emerge recently in the West Bank included giant notice boards in the large cities that stated "One democratic state for five million Arabs and six million Jews." The new perspective there is that the option of two states has faded away, and what remains is to act through non-violent means to establish a single state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

Nonetheless, the PLO – Israel's official negotiating partner – has not altered its policy of supporting a two-state solution on the basis of the 1967 borders, although moderate Palestinian leaders are concluding that Israel's expansion of settlements and recent Israeli government action are undermining the foundation of the two-state solution, and the de facto outcome will therefore be a one-state solution. They cannot remain indifferent to the fact that their own public has ceased to believe in the two-state solution, and therefore they are seeking an alternative resolution to the conflict, even in the form of a single state.

Internal Israeli discourse indicates that a single state is also the dream of some of the Right wing in Israel, including the extreme and religious Right, which relies on a divine promise and an equation that places the land above the people and the state, as well as representatives of the presumably liberal Right, who base their stance on the perspective that the entire Land of Israel belongs to the people of Israel. More and more politicians and right-wing members of the public have recently been proposing formulas reminiscent of Alchemy, whereby Israel would annex the West Bank and continue to exist as Jewish state, even though the Palestinians would constitute a majority within a short time (there are approximately 6 million Jews in the Land of Israel today, 5.7 million Palestinians, and an additional 300,000 others, mainly Christians and other foreigners registered in Israel).

Other entities have joined the fray: Israel's extreme and anti-Zionist Left advocates a single, egalitarian state, while some within the moderate Left argue that the reality on the ground, the settlements, and the right-wing government have already brought the situation to the point of no return, and therefore the two-state solution is no longer an option.

This raises many questions, among them the following: Does a single state include the Gaza Strip, and if not, will Gaza be permitted to become an independent state with its extreme, adversarial, violent, and fundamentalist character, with its size of only slightly more than 1% of the territory of Israel/Palestine, and with one and a half million people living in one of the most densely populated places on earth? What about the millions of Palestinian refugees residing outside of historical Palestine? Will they be permitted to return to the single state planned by Israel's extreme Right in the framework of a Law

of Return comparable to that of the Jews? How can equality be established between Jewish and Arab populations that have vast gaps in their basic economic and educational levels, and where would the resources for such a dubious union come from? Would the new Arab citizens be drafted to the IDF and fight against terrorism from Gaza or Lebanon?

The significance for people like me – who still believe in the concept of an Israeli, Hebrew state that preserves Liberal Jewish values and adheres to the “contract” with world Jewry, whereby anyone persecuted for being or identifying as Jew can find refuge here – is simple: a bi-national state would constitute the end of the Zionist idea and the State of Israel.

But even at the practical, day-to-day level, a single state is a concept that seems objectively impossible to implement and sustain. Even in more enlightened states such as Belgium and Canada, where two sectors have long resided under one political roof, the rifts are vast and the aspiration to separatism and dissolution of the partnership is explicit, and ever-present. The differences and divisions between Israel and Palestine are immense: two cultures, two religions, two nationalities, two narratives, two identities. Everything is different and there is almost no common denominator to bridge the enormous gap. Neither side has reached the point where it is capable of shedding its symbols, memories, or fears. These are two nations that have not yet distinctly defined themselves.

In the future, in ten or fifty years from now, we will be able to (and in my opinion we will) find a mechanism that could already be planted today and that can lead us in the direction of an Israeli-Palestinian confederation based on an equitable partnership between two independent states. There are some topics we can already agree on as mutually dependent partners, topics that could lay the foundation for a future confederation of two neighborly states. Water, infrastructures, electricity, gas, the environment, and in the future fiscal and monetary systems – all these are fitting issues for full cooperation to be pursued as soon as possible. In the future Israelis should be allowed to reside in the Palestinian state, and Palestinians in Israel. This process will also help resolve two problems –Palestinians who will want to live in the places from which they have been uprooted and Jews who will want to live in the places from which they will be uprooted.

The territory of the two states must be separated by a clear border, so that each side knows precisely what areas come under its sovereignty while maintaining the sense that the existing space belongs jointly to both sides. This will only be possible after recognized and unequivocal borders are established, with a clear delineation of what is mine and what is yours. Only on the basis of sovereignty and equality between two independent parties, with no coercion by the occupier of the occupied, will we arrive at a fair partnership, after and by way of a process of conciliation and mutual historical acceptance.

There is a view now gaining ground in Israel and Palestine, which holds that it is no longer possible to separate physically into two states based on the 1967 borders and minimal border adjustments. This view is not actually grounded in current physical reality. Delineation of a clear, recognized, and functional border between the two states is still a viable and implementable process. As someone who knows the area, I am of the view that it is definitely possible to draw a new borderline that would be acceptable to both sides, while adhering to the principle

of minimal territorial annexation with a maximum number of settlers and minimum number of Palestinians.

The future border should follow a course between that set by the Geneva Accord and the maps Olmert presented to Abbas, namely, with annexation and land swap covering 3%-4% of the territory. It is important to bear in mind that the built-up lands belonging to settlements in the West Bank constitute only 1% of the entire West Bank itself. Even in Jerusalem, where nearly 200,000 Israelis reside, constituting about 40% of the 530,000 settlers living across the Green Line, it is possible to draw a line that would separate the two capitals and enable territorial and transportation contiguity as well as sovereignty in each city separately.

The large settlement blocs in Etzion, Ma'ale Adumim, Givat Ze'ev, Ma'arav Hashomron, Beitar Illit, and Modi'in Illit, can easily be linked to Israel through minimal territorial annexation. Within these blocs are three Jewish cities – Modi'in Illit, Beitar Illit, and Ma'ale Adumim – that have more than 40,000 residents each. Also within these blocs are an additional fifteen localities with up to 10,000 residents each, such as Efrat and Alfei Menashe.

In most of the localities situated outside of the settlement blocs there are fewer than 2,000 residents. In many the number does not exceed a few dozen families. The number of households that will have to be absorbed within Israel in the context of an agreement varies between 20,000 and 30,000. If properly prepared, Israel will be able to absorb them, with a big financial investment, yet without substantial difficulty. The problem lies not in the physical division of the land into two states but, rather, in the will and political courage to do so. This discussion should take place using the concepts of Realpolitik. Emotions will run high, and sadly there might be the possibility of Jews killing Jews and Arabs killing Arabs during the implementation process – though we hope not – but this cost will still be lower than that of any alternative.

### **Prospects of an interim agreement**

So what can be done? We must not accept deterioration and re-occupation as the inevitable future. Nor is acceptance of the end of the Zionist vision, alongside measures aimed at establishing one state for two peoples in the entire Land of Israel, an option. The current American initiative led by Secretary of State John Kerry in combination with Netanyahu's willingness to take steps towards a two-state solution, provides an opportunity to advance a process that though complex and intricate, could bring us closer to a two-state solution and move us away from the edge of the cliff where we now stand.

Our starting point is that the most Netanyahu is prepared and able to offer in negotiations does not come close to the minimal Palestinian position, which is synchronized not only with the position of Arab states but also with the Americans and Europeans. The prime minister is not a possible partner to a permanent arrangement, but he is prepared to reach an interim agreement that would include withdrawal from Area C land and the declaration of a Palestinian state within temporary borders.

The Palestinian side will object to any interim agreement that does not clearly contain the elements of a permanent agreement. In other words, President Mahmoud Abbas is willing to sign an interim agreement that leads to the declaration of a state within temporary borders, as long as the fundamental conditions of a permanent agreement are clearly announced and contain the following principles: an independent Palestinian state established on the basis of the 1967 borders with minimal border modifications and a 1:1 land swap, demilitarization of the Palestinian state from all means of warfare beyond what is needed for the maintenance of internal security and the struggle against terrorism, Arab Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state, and a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem that is just and agreed upon by both sides, to be announced as the implementation of UN Resolution 194. However, it is clear that Netanyahu is not prepared to let Israel be part of any declaration of the sort that Abbas would demand in order to enter into negotiations on an interim agreement.

Accordingly, this time the Americans must be in the room and must play a leading role, offering a clear outline and establishing a dominant presence. The complex and multifaceted US role is to create a mechanism that will bring about the conditions that allow both sides to advance without conceding their fundamental principles. On the one hand, Netanyahu would not be committing to the elements of a permanent agreement, while on the other hand, Abbas would be accepting his demands regarding the core issues as conveyed by a third party, and the two sides would be able to conduct negotiations on a time-bound interim agreement.

The way to actualize this approach is through a two-way, top-down and bottom-up process. The Americans can help achieve the vision of a permanent agreement in three ways: through a presidential decree announced as US policy, through a decision of the Quartet (the US, Russia, the European Union, and the UN), or through a UN Security Council resolution. The correct and preferred option in my eyes is the pursuit of a Security Council resolution that in practice will replace the outdated Resolution 242, which does not mention the Palestinians. The substantive advantage of a Security Council resolution is that it is a binding international resolution under international law, which would eventually serve as a new compass for the entire Israeli-Palestinian peace process, even if the current Israeli government announces that it does not accept such an international dictate. A Security Council resolution would stand alone in its own right, with no official connection to the parallel process of negotiations over an interim agreement underway between Israel and the Palestinians under US patronage, which in turn would not contradict the principles of the new UN resolution.

The interim agreement should lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state in land covering at least 51% of the West Bank (that is, expanding Areas A and B by more than 10%) as well as the entire Gaza Strip. The aim would be to create a unified, contiguous, sovereign space, but inclusion of an agreement on Gaza would be conditioned on the Palestinian Authority reasserting control over Gaza and disarming Hamas of its weapons. Regarding portions of what is today declared as Area B that would remain as enclaves within Area C, their security status and arrangements for access would have to be agreed upon.

The interim agreement would also address relations between the State of Israel and the Palestinian state (which would enjoy full international recognition), assist in laying the foundations of the new state, define what is permitted or prohibited regarding settlement construction, facilitate economic independence and the delineation of new trade relations between Israel and the Palestinian state and between the latter and the rest of the world in the framework of a free trade agreement (FTA) which will substitute the economic Paris Protocol, start planning and constructing the territorial link between West Bank and Gaza Strip, revive the process of conciliation and confidence-building between the two populations, and address other issues such as water, natural resources, the environment, and the like.

Such a process would prevent deterioration of the situation on the ground, halt the progression towards Israel's global isolation, help position Israel positively in the Arab world, assist in the renewal of bilateral relations between Israel and Arab states, weaken extreme fundamentalist voices in the Arab world that blame Israel and the US for preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state, reinforce moderate voices in the Palestinian arena, and reestablish trust between Israel and the US government as well as between Israel and the European Union.

The Palestinians would also benefit greatly from this process, including through the founding of a recognized state, increased authority and sovereignty over areas under their rule, an accelerated process of state building and social development, improved potential for economic independence, the definitive assurance of more international assistance, and international recognition of the contours of a permanent agreement acceptable to the Palestinian leadership.

This plan is not ideal. As noted earlier, preference should be given to an accelerated process leading to an unequivocal, clear permanent agreement that is accepted by both sides, with an implementation process that could take place in stages, including one stage in which a Palestinian state is established within temporary borders as described above. This was the outline formulated by Olmert and Abbas in the summer of 2008, during a process that was abandoned only because Olmert was forced to relinquish his position as prime minister in light of legal proceedings against him, regardless of the position of Abbas, who believed then and still believes today that this outline could yield a peace agreement.

The current Israeli reality must, however, be taken into account. From a pragmatic perspective, a two-stage process as described in this document is preferable to continued deterioration of the situation, which will inevitably lead to an explosion that would be detrimental to both sides. Additionally, the presentation and acceptance of a plan and vision for a permanent agreement that are recognized and accepted by the entire world will, for the first time, create a new political reality with the potential to produce an Israeli political camp united in support of the new international resolution.

The Israeli public will finally be able to confront the two dichotomous alternatives facing it: continuation of the Israeli-Arab conflict leading to a threat to the existence of the State of Israel, or a solution based on clear parameters that will complement the Arab Peace Initiative, which as noted offers Israel regional peace as well as diplomatic and economic relations with all Arab states.