



PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat (R) shakes hands with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (L), as US President Bill Clinton stands between them, after the signing of the Israeli-PLO peace accord, at the White House in Washington September 13, 1993.

REUTERS

occupied territories. His cabinet undertook secret negotiations with the PLO that culminated in the Israel-PLO accords (September 1993), in which Israel recognized the PLO and agreed to gradually implement limited self-rule for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In October 1994, Rabin and King Hussein of Jordan, after a series of secret meetings, signed a full peace treaty.

In 2000, US President Bill Clinton unsuccessfully attempted to reach a deal with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat at Camp David. Months later, clashes broke out after an Israeli politician visited an Al-Quds (Jerusalem) site venerated by both Jews and Muslims. A Palestinian intifada, or uprising, gripped the region for years.

Al-Quds

Al-Quds (Jerusalem) is another major difficulty. Palestinians see East Al-Quds, which was annexed by Israel, as the capital of a future Palestinian state. The situation was further complicated by US President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Al-Quds as Israel's capital in 2017.

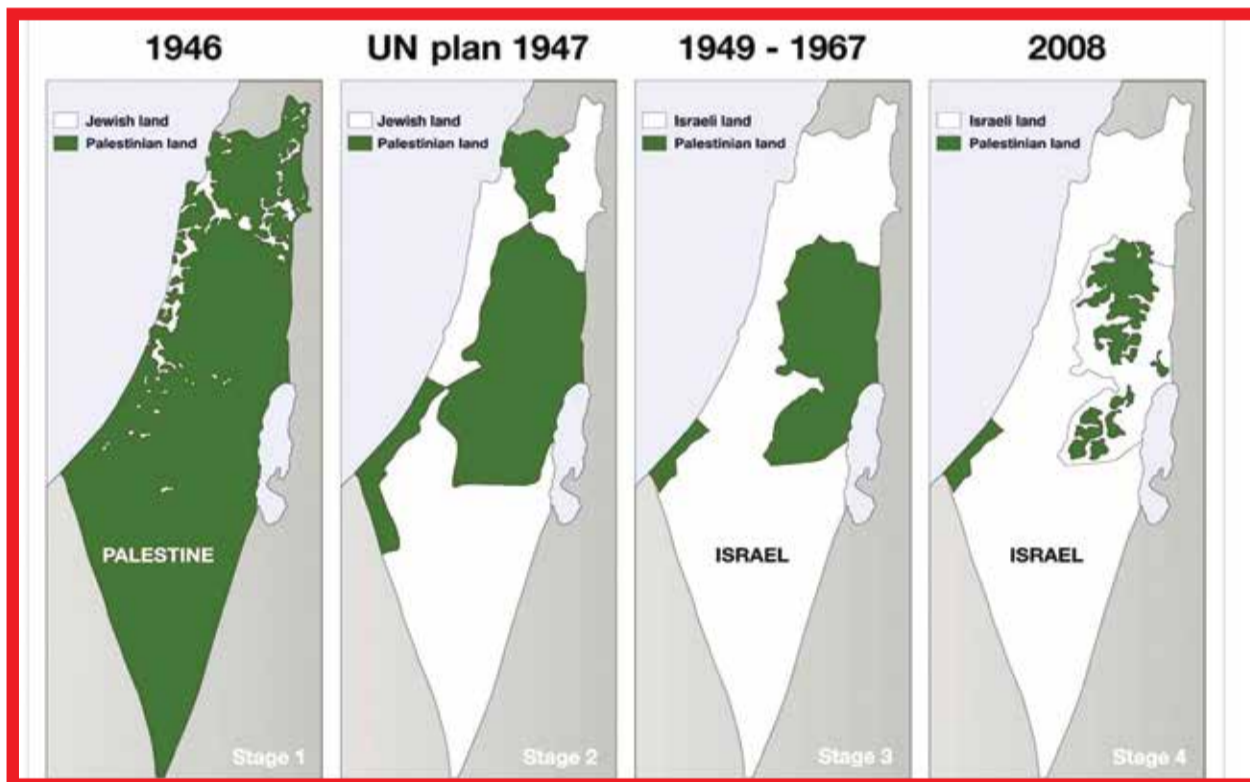
Coexistence or non-coexistence

Once all obstacles to this solution are eliminated, a pragmatic concern that remains is the prospect of coexistence – whether it is feasible for populations and states to peacefully coexist side by side. A notable instance is a survey conducted recently by the Ramallah-based Arab World for Research and Development, revealing that 98 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip harbor sentiments of not “forgiving nor forgetting” Israel's assault on the besieged coastal enclave.

In Israel, the non-coexistence view has also been reinforced by opinion polls conducted shortly before the October 7 attack. In September, a Pew Research Center survey found that only 35% of Israelis believed “a way can be found for Israel and an independent Palestinian state to coexist peacefully” – a decline of 15 percentage points since 2013.

A Gallup poll found that just 24% of Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Al-Quds supported a two-state solution, down from 59% in 2012. Young Palestinians were significantly less enthusiastic than their parents.

If it is possible for people on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to envision coexistence, a two-state solution could potentially provide a framework for shared living. Such an arrangement would require mutual recognition, respect for borders, and a commitment



to resolving the longstanding issues that have fueled the conflict. The challenge lies not only in the diplomatic negotiations but also in fostering an environment where both sides can coexist harmoniously, sharing resources, and ensuring the well-being of their respective populations. It hinges on the willingness of leaders and communities to embrace the concept of peaceful coexistence and work towards a sustainable resolution for the benefit of future generations.

To these realities, other obstacles to the two-state solution have now been added. Isafías Barreñada, an international relations professor at Madrid's Complutense University cites two. The first is that the “extreme violence with which Israel is acting in Gaza” ruins “any chance of the parties sitting down together for the next 50 years.” The second is, “the willingness of the parties to negotiate” after the war.

Palestine's gradual triumph

While the end of the current war remains still unknown, in the unfolding process of the conflict and warfare, what is happening is the gradual triumph, or, at the very least, the emergence of the Palestinian narrative against the Israeli algorithm – despite its difficulty to be seen in the political arena.

Peace needs more blood!

Many diplomats and analysts agree that lasting peace must follow the bloodiest fighting between Israelis and Palestinians for decades.

Moreover, advocates of the two-state solution believe that the violence has contradicted the ideals they strive to promote. However, it doesn't seem like an appropriate prelude for an agreement that resolves the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as Israel's assault on Gaza has killed more than 18,800 people, mostly children and women, during nearly three months.

But according to Aaron David Miller, an adviser on the Middle East to both Democratic and Republican administrations, there are numerous obstacles in the way of a two-state solution, not least that, in the immediate aftermath of the war, “we will be left with two deeply traumatized societies.”

Unlikely prospect

Now as Israel presses its bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza in the aftermath of the Hamas attack, some global leaders are also returning to the stalled diplomatic effort from decades ago to possibly shape postwar policies: the two-state solution.

In the US, traditionally a key backer of the two-state process, Joe Biden's energies will inevitably be absorbed in fighting to retain his presidency over the next

months. If he loses to Donald Trump, the chances of reviving the solution are close to nil.

Biden has recently said that the “day after” the war in Gaza may still be weeks or months away. But it will come. “When this crisis is over, there has to be a vision of what comes next.” “And in our view, it has to be a two-state solution.”

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has also discussed the “long-term goal of the two-state solution” on a call with Netanyahu. The European Council in October reaffirmed its commitment to a “lasting and sustainable peace based on the two-state solution.” Pope Francis, in an interview with Italian media, called for “that wise solution, two states.”

Despite the public endorsements, some scholars say the two-state solution is an increasingly unlikely prospect.

Is confederation an alternative?

Mark LeVine, a history professor at the University of California at Irvine, has said “We all wish that the two-state solution was possible because it would be easy to do. ‘Okay, you take this part, you take this part,’ like a divorce,” he said. However, “there's no selling the house and splitting up,” he added.

LeVine envisions a sort of hybrid model: “shared, overlapping, or what we call ‘parallel states’” that isn't defined by the

connection between territory and sovereignty. “Israel could remain a Jewish state, Palestine could be a Palestinian state, but Jews and Palestinians could live anywhere,” he said.

He's not alone in thinking beyond the traditional two-state model. Some Israelis, Palestinians, and outside scholars have supported the idea of a confederation as an alternative.

Under the confederation plan, Israelis living in settlements deeper in the West Bank would be able to choose whether to relocate to homes inside Israel or stay where they are as Israeli citizens who are permanent residents of Palestine, agreeing to abide by the new state's laws. A comparable number of Palestinian citizens would be able to move to Israel on the same terms.

However, Rand Corp. focus groups in 2018 and 2019 found significant opposition to several possible solutions, including a two-state solution and a confederation.

“On both sides, there's no leadership that believes in peace,” said Mekelberg.

Still, he said, the concept is viable. But “the two-state solution in 2023 would look very different from the two-state solution in 1993,” he said.

Iran's referendum proposal

If the only viable solution, as even Israeli allies opt for, was the two-state process, Israel would not give in to it.

As Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian recently said, the only thing that Iran and Israel have in common is that they both do not believe in a two-state solution.

At an online international forum in Doha, Qatar, on December 12, he reiterated Iran's proposal that a referendum be held to determine the fate of Palestine, with only descendants of those who lived there before 1948 being permitted to vote.

As mentioned, critics of Israeli policy also say its actions are intended to make the two-state solution impossible.

As a key player, Iran has proposed a significant solution for the issue of Palestine, and that is to hold a referendum among all indigenous Palestinians, including Jews, Christians, and Muslims. It is their right, after seventy-five years, to express their opinion on their destiny through a referendum conducted by the United Nations, and based on the results, bring an end to this matter.

A somewhat aligned perspective with this proposal would be the dream of a Palestinian child: to live in his land with equal rights without considering nationality and religion, but just humanity.