

how and why Israel has created disjointed Palestinian towns through checkpoints and roadblocks; how Palestinian movement is entirely dependent on Israel; how and why the IDF and Israeli police can raid and enter any area, including Area A, with impunity. But most importantly, how these “interim” agreements have (a) become the status quo, (b) turned the Palestinian Authority and its security forces into Israeli collaborators, and (c) put a nail in the coffin of any final settlement.

The Israeli rightwing was opposed to the accords. After Rabin’s assassination, Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu rose to power. Neither had any intention of following up on the interim arrangements to a final settlement. Israel continued to expand its illegal settlements, created a strong chokehold on areas under nominal PA control, and increased its military and intelligence activities in Palestinian towns.

On the Palestinian side, Hamas and the PIJ were opposed to the accords and “warned that a two-state solution would forgo the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the historic lands seized from them in 1948 when Israel was created.” Said in his LRB article called it “an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles.” Today’s Israeli cabinet comprises people who believe in expelling Palestinians from Eretz Yisrael [Greater Israel]. Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel’s current national security minister, had threatened to kill Rabin. Along with Bezalel Smotrich, the far-right current finance minister, he is also an illegal settler.

This is of course a very sketchy account. But the essential point is simple: Israel, artificially created as a Jewish state, simply cannot exist alongside a sovereign Palestinian state. This has been made clear by a number of Zionists. Their argument: “If we allow Palestinians to return, what will become of the Jewishness of the Jewish state.”

Neither one state nor two states works for Israel. As discerning observers have noted, given what happened to the Oslo Accords, the two-state solution only

lives in sham bureaucratic platitudes. There were and are many proposals on the table, but Hamas and Israel are sticking to their positions: Hamas wants a permanent ceasefire and complete Israeli withdrawal; Israel wants a temporary ceasefire, return of Israeli captives and the freedom to continue its war to “destroy” Hamas’ fighting capability, a euphemism for exterminating and expelling Gazans and occupying Gaza to make way for illegal Israeli settlements.

Some history is important

The idea of political Zionism is credited to Theodor Herzl’s 1896 pamphlet *The Jewish State*. But Herzl, a Jewish journalist and essayist who was born in Budapest in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and is considered the father of Israel, was not the first Jewish writer to have presented this idea. Zionism predated Herzl.

The idea in several forms was gestating among European Jews who were actively a part of European socio-political turmoil in the 18th and 19th centuries. As German historian Michael Brenner describes it, “Nationalism was a characteristic trait of life in 19th century Europe, and Jews were right in the middle of it.” They had “witnessed and often participated in the struggles for unity and independence of European nations, from the Polish rebellions against the Czarist Empire to the Italian Risorgimento and the struggle over German unification.”

It was “no coincidence that the most significant precursors of Zionism came from the much-contested border areas of Europe or explicitly mentioned the fight for sovereignty of European nations as an inspiration of their own (proto-) Zionist writings.”

Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai (1798–1878), born in Sarajevo, and Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874), born in West Prussian Thorn, were two contemporaries who believed that Jews could not passively await the arrival of the Messiah. Their approach was very different from many ultra-orthodox Jews (including rabbis) who were to later oppose Herzl’s political Zionism.

Alkalai, in fact, came up with a novel interpretation and pointed to “a precedent in the traditional Jewish idea of a first, temporary, Messiah from the house of Joseph, who would lead a militant struggle to open the way for the final arrival of the real Messiah from the house of David.”

This two-stage interpretation looked at Zionism, in terms of a return to the Biblical idea of Eretz Yisrael, as the form of a collective Messiah of the house of Joseph, which would then lead to the arrival of the real Messiah. As Brenner puts it, “He thus legitimised the return of the Jews and the establishment of their state in Israel by his quite original theological interpretation.”

Kalischer, while not going for a novel exegesis, however, argued in his 1862 treatise *Seeking Zion* (German: *Drishat Tzion*) that Jews could not passively wait for the Messiah. “Instead, he called for human intervention to hasten the coming of the Messiah. The colonisation of the Land of Israel was one measure he suggested.”

Speaking with me, American policy scholar Barnett Rubin, who is known here because of his work on Afghanistan and Central Asia, talked about false messiahs. That account is contained in a long article he wrote for the *Boston Review* titled, “False Messiahs: How Zionism’s dreams of liberation became entangled with colonialism.”

But a little known and often forgotten fact is that Jewish political and religious Zionism came much later. It was preceded by Christian (later, Protestant) Zionism. Jordanian-Palestinian Professor Joseph

Massad takes the idea back to Christian millenarianism during the crusades. British Reverend Dr Stephen Sizer argues this point in his book *Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon?* and says that, “Christian Zionism is the most dominant and destructive expression of Zionism today.”

Meanwhile, Donald E Wagner, author of *Anxious for Armageddon* and who teaches at North Park University in Chicago, notes that, “Christian Zionism...views the modern state of Israel as the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy, thus deserving our unconditional economic, moral, political and theological support.”

What we are witnessing today is a coming together of Jewish Zionism, which has now transformed into Religious Jewish Zionism, and modern Protestant millenarianism that is pegged on the Second Coming of Christ.

This is where theology, politics and geopolitical interests intersect. The ‘return’, essentially the stealing of Palestinian land, not only fulfilled a promise for the Jews but also provided them the support of Christian millenarians and, presumably, secular, democratic Western governments.

Why is this important?

This sketchy background of a very complex history should give the reader some idea about why, despite the Oslo Agreements, no solution to the Palestinian colonisation is in sight; why Israel continues to insist on keeping Gaza as an open prison and the OPTs as areas that are effectively controlled by Israeli military and intelligence services; why Israel can, at will, curtail freedom of movement, raid, arrest and kill Palestinian men, women and children; and why Israel continues to expand illegal settlements in the face of UN resolutions by destroying Palestinian properties and land. Most importantly, it explains why Israel will never agree to a sovereign Palestinian State.

The two-state solution, as noted above, is a red-herring. Take, for instance, the US position: first in 2011 and now several weeks ago, the US has killed Palestine’s application in the UN Security Council for a full state status. The US insists that, until a final settlement, Palestine cannot have full status.

But while mouthing the two-state bromide, it has failed to force Israel into moving towards final settlement talks or stop it from expanding its illegal settlements. Last September, when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu went to the UN with a map of Israel that showed Gaza, OPTs, Galilee and the Syrian Golan Heights as part of Israel, the US never objected to his brandishing of that map.

That map is Eretz Yisrael. Israel cannot openly show Jordan and parts of Syria and Lebanon in that map because of geopolitical sensitivities, but there’s more to Eretz Yisrael than the ‘River to the Sea’ slogan. When a reporter once asked Menachem Begin about the borders of Israel, Begin responded by saying, “But they are given in the Bible.”

As Rubin wrote in an article for the website *Mondoweiss*, titled ‘Redemption through Genocide’: “In the wake of the 1967 War, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook’s teaching that the commandment to ‘conquer and settle’ the Land of Israel was equal to all the other commandments, inspired [ultranationalist Jewish settler movement] Gush Emunim. Fulfilling that commandment is the greatest tikkun [acts of repair] and will hasten the footsteps of the Messiah. ‘The army of Israel,’ Kook taught, ‘is the army of Hashem [God].’ Expansion, repair, the promised land, the return of the Messiah, the army of God — none of this squares with a settlement with the Palestinians.”

The place of violence

This is where the Palestinian armed resistance comes in. International humanitarian law legitimises wars of national liberation. The Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 describes such resistance as a protected, univer-

sal and essential right of occupied people. This is further corroborated by UNGA’s 1974 Resolution 3314, which not only prohibits states from “any military occupation, however temporary” but also affirms the right “to self-determination, freedom and independence [...] of peoples forcibly deprived of that right, [...] particularly peoples under colonial and racist regimes or other forms of alien domination.” The resolution also recognises the right of the occupied to “struggle... and to seek and receive support” in that effort. This is further corroborated by UNGA resolution, A/RES/37/43 of December 3, 1982 which “Reaffirms the legitimacy of the struggle of peoples... all available means, including armed struggle;...”

International Law is very clear. The rest is geopolitical baloney. Hamas’ October 7 attack, despite the very high cost to Gaza and Gazans, has served to sharpen focus on Israel’s real objective: expel Palestinians from occupied territories and create Eretz Yisrael from the River to the Sea.

Ajrami, who trained hundreds of Hamas and PIJ fighters, advised them to be patient and bide their time: “Let the beast sleep until you are ready,” he said. But when the time is ripe, “Bring the beast to me, and we will slay it together.”

Hamas knew how Israel would respond: brutally and vengefully. In strategic terms, begetting the expected Israeli response was key to creating an international public relations disaster for Israel. That is precisely what has happened.

For the first time in its artificial history, Israel has lost the support of not only a number of states but people around the world. It is in the International Court of Justice dock on the charge of committing genocide and its actions have also put Germany in the dock.

The United States, its strongest ally, is in a quandary — it is stretched in geopolitical terms, from Ukraine to the South China Sea to the Middle East. The Global South, to use a loose term, no longer considers it an honest broker.

This does not mean that Israel will relent. It won’t. It also retains the capabilities to put up a fight and it will. A mix of political and religious Zionism means it cannot have a single, inclusive state in Palestine; nor can it allow a sovereign Palestine as part of a two-state solution — unless, the US and its Western allies develop some basic moral compass.

In the interim, Israel will become even more brutal. It is locked in a paradox of its own creation: such are the very conditions of the problem that the solution to the problem is rendered impossible. American author Joseph Heller called it *Catch 22*.

Equally, as the Hamas attack and subsequent horizontal escalation have shown, the rules of engagement in the Middle East have changed. To quote the IDF spokesperson Lt-Col Peter Lerner, the Axis of Resistance has created a “ring of fire” around Israel.

Resistance groups are in this war and its many battles for the long haul. They have seen how this iteration has created second- and third-order effects for Israel and the US. With the growing commodification of weapon systems, platforms and associated technologies, capabilities are becoming diffused and spreading laterally. That fact has consequences for more iterations of this war.

There are two ways of dealing with this: either the Western world leans heavily and decisively on Israel to deliver a sovereign Palestinian state or the war will continue. Its continuation will have unintended and catastrophic consequences.

As TS Eliot said in *East Coker*:
*“Our only health is the disease
 If we obey the dying nurse
 Whose constant care is not to please
 But to remind of our, and Adam’s curse,
 And that, to be restored, our sickness
 must grow worse.”*

The article first appeared on Dawn.

