

Unilateral Peace

It's time for Israel to move toward a two-state solution, alone if necessary.

BY AMOS YADLIN, GILEAD SHER | MARCH 18, 2013



The White House has made **clear**, as recently as last Thursday's press **briefing** by Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes, that President Barack Obama's visit to Israel this week "is not about trying to lay down a new initiative" for Arab-Israeli peace. Yet over the last 13 years, there have been only two rounds of substantive negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians and two realistic peace proposals: former U.S. President Bill Clinton's 2000 "Clinton Parameters" and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's 2008 proposal, neither of which was accepted by the Palestinian leadership.

The Palestinians have opted for a unilateral strategy, bypassing negotiations with Israel to seek unconditional U.N. recognition of the "State of Palestine." They hope that the international community will deliver Israeli concessions without forcing them to make the reciprocal ones that a negotiated agreement with Israel would inevitably require. It is not at all clear that even a negotiated peace agreement would win the support of the Palestinian people, let alone be implemented in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, where Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), cannot even visit. Moreover, the PA continues its efforts towards reconciliation with Hamas, a terrorist group armed by Iran, which has sworn to destroy Israel.

We Israelis cannot continue to wait for the Palestinians. Israel must take charge of its future as a Jewish, democratic, secure, and legitimate state. A **poll** conducted in **December 2012** indicated that some 80 percent of Israelis still support a credible peace agreement with the Palestinians. We therefore propose that Israel lay down an initiative -- one that will breathe new life into the peace process.

Israel should begin by once again presenting the Palestinians with a generous and realistic proposal along the lines of the Clinton Parameters and Olmert's comprehensive 2008 offer. If, yet again, the Palestinian leadership is unwilling to resume credible negotiations, Israel should pro-actively take constructive, unilateral, internationally coordinated steps

towards a two-state reality, meaning the *de facto* -- if not yet *de jure* -- existence of two nation-states for two peoples. This process could lead to the resumption of negotiations. Israel should attempt to coordinate with, or at least inform, the PA of such steps, but proceed independently even in the absence of approval.

Unilateral Israeli action would create tangible progress toward a two-state solution and generate momentum towards re-establishing negotiations. As such, Obama should support it. Such a plan contradicts neither U.S. commitment to a bilaterally negotiated solution nor U.S. opposition to unconstructive, unilateral actions that could impede negotiations, such as terrorism and international legal actions against Israel.

Unilateralism has a bad reputation in Israel, primarily because Israel's 2000 unilateral redeployment behind the "blue line" demarcation with Lebanon led to Hezbollah's entrenchment and rocket fire against northern Israeli towns, just as its 2005 unilateral withdrawal from Gaza led to Hamas' rise to power and unprecedented daily shelling of civilian centers in Israel's south. At the same time, however, few Israelis -- if any -- wish to return to the occupation of southern Lebanon or Gaza. The decision to withdraw from both territories was correct. In the first case, unilateral action legitimized Israel's border in the north; in the second case, it mitigated Gaza's growing demographic threat and the challenge that the Israel Defense Force's presence posed to Israeli legitimacy. What was flawed about these past moves was how they were carried out.

The government of Israel made four main errors during the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza: not preceding the move with a generous peace offer to the Palestinians; leaving a corridor open to weapons smuggling into Gaza; completing the total evacuation of the territory without leaving bargaining chips for future negotiations; and failing to secure recognition of its significant and constructive concessions by not coordinating the move with the international community or the Palestinians. As a result, Gaza became a launching pad for rockets and missiles targeting Israel.

But past mistakes hold lessons for the future. We suggest a new series of unilateral steps towards disengagement that have a better chance of succeeding. First, Israel should renounce its sovereignty claims over areas east of the security fence that separates Israel from the West Bank. Second, it should end all settlement construction east of the fence. And third, Israel should enact a voluntary settlement evacuation and compensation law. These measures would pave the way for Israeli disengagement from roughly 85 percent of the West Bank. They would also undermine the Palestinian argument that Israeli settlements are skewering a two-state solution and encourage them to return to negotiations over the remaining 15 percent of the West Bank.

Israel should coordinate these moves -- particularly those related to security -- with the United States, the international community, and the PA, thereby lending legitimacy to the process. The Jordan Valley and possibly other strategic locations should provisionally remain in Israeli hands to prevent the smuggling of weapons to the West Bank and assure Israel's security.

These steps are not necessarily contingent on a renewal of negotiations. Instead, they are designed to proceed in tandem with efforts to revive talks and reach a negotiated settlement, based on U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

By supporting this approach, Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry would simply be encouraging actions aimed at creating a two-state reality and laying the groundwork for a two-state solution. If the United States believes that the window is closing on a two-state solution, it should opt for new thinking over old, progress over the status quo, and coordinated unilateralism over stalled negotiations.

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TutAnkhAmon

The MB military arm (Hamas) will not be interested in peace now that they have the MB in Egypt and soon Syria in power to support them



jvillain

Is this the alternate universe where Spock has a beard?

Most of the new members of the government were elected on a platform of expropriating the bulk of the West bank and forcing the Palestinians out. Obama will be told on this trip how this is going to happen. In the mean time the Israelis are back to their old tricks just as Kerry arrives.



AaronJA

I thought PM Olmert's peace plan failed because he was forced to resign because of a corruption scandal and the new Israeli government decided to scrap



FehmidaAbdulSattar

the article is quite funny as it contains some jokes that world can laugh at them only. first Israel is taking all steps unilaterally for progressing peace efforts and on the other hand Palestinians have epitomized the policy of rejection-ism towards peace process. without mentioning that Israel on the one hand asking



AfineWhiskey

FehmidaAbdulSattar was there a palestinian state somewhere in history we should all be aware of?

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