

BEYOND THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION

A NEW CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East
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Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) is calling for a major reorientation of Canadian policy towards the Middle East. CJPME urges Canadian politicians and officials to focus on immediate policy tools that can facilitate equality and human rights for both Palestinians and Israelis, rather than emphasizing a theoretical two-state solution as a potential political outcome.

Palestinians and Israelis are themselves divided on the question of a political resolution to the current situation, and CJPME is not advocating for a specific “solution” at this time. Palestinian and Israeli representatives may still decide that a two-state solution is their preferred outcome.

For now, however, it is evident that the current emphasis on a two-state solution has become an obstacle to progress towards a just resolution. By holding on to a two-state solution as the only acceptable outcome for Palestinians and Israelis, Canada is closing the door to possible alternatives that are more plausible and just, that advance full political rights and equality, and which are likely to address urgent humanitarian needs for Palestinians in Gaza, East Jerusalem, and elsewhere.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CANADIAN MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS:

1

Prioritize urgent action in support of human rights and freedom.

2

Stop privileging the two-state solution as the only acceptable outcome, and support whatever option is most likely to secure equal freedoms and rights for all, irrespective of religion or ethnicity.

3

Be clear that Israeli proposals for a Palestinian “**entity**” or “**state minus**” are completely unacceptable.

4

Advance the possibility of Palestinian self-determination by putting **pressure** on the Israeli government, including economic and diplomatic sanctions.

5

Acknowledge the role of **power relations** in any future negotiations.

6

Continue to push for **recognition** of the State of Palestine.



CJPME argues that Members of Parliament (MPs) and other Canadian officials should no longer prioritize the goal of a two-state solution, for the following reasons:

A. MANY OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT A TWO-STATE SOLUTION IS SIMPLY NO LONGER POSSIBLE

Decades of Israeli settlement expansion and the ongoing colonization of occupied Palestinian territory have created a situation in which it is not possible to carve out a viable, contiguous, sovereign Palestinian state. Israeli roads and settlements carve up the West Bank and leave Palestinians trapped inside small pockets of land, surrounded by militarized Israeli infrastructure. Palestinian, Israeli, and international human rights organizations often describe this situation as a “one state reality” or a regime of apartheid, in which Israel upholds the domination of one group over another throughout the territory it controls.¹

This may be irreversible. Creating the necessary land base for a Palestinian state would require a major evacuation of Israeli settlements, including the settlement blocs, the Jordan Valley, and East Jerusalem. However, Israel’s trajectory has been the opposite; instead of disengagement, Israel continues to expand illegal settlements and has been considering measures to formally annex significant portions of the West Bank. There is no question that Israeli authorities intend to maintain permanent control over these territories. As argued by Yousef Munayyer in the New York Times, “the two-state solution is dead. Israel has killed it.”²



B. THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT DOES NOT, AND HAS NEVER, SUPPORTED A TWO-STATE SOLUTION

There is virtually no support for an actual two-state solution among Israel's political class. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett vowed in 2013 to "do everything in my power, forever, to fight against a Palestinian state being founded in the Land of Israel"³; while his predecessor and Israel's longest serving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in 2015 that a Palestinian state would never be established on his watch.⁴ Even former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who signed the Oslo Accords (which were ostensibly about transitioning into two-states), never supported full sovereignty for Palestinians, but promoted a Palestinian "entity which is less than a state."⁵

While some Israeli political parties might claim to support a two-state solution, what this almost always means in practice is that they support the principle of "separation," or the creation of a semi-autonomous Palestinian entity under permanent Israeli subjugation.⁶

C. A BANTUSTAN IS NOT A STATE

As mentioned above, the most common vision for a two-state solution as offered by Israeli politicians is one of an Israeli state surrounding a Palestinian "entity," elsewhere referred to as a "state-minus," or possibly a "demilitarized state." Such an entity would hold a degree of self-autonomy, but without exercising control over many of the core functions of sovereignty. In this vision, whether of the right-wing Netanyahu or the centrist Yair Lapid, Israel would retain ultimate sovereign control and have the right to militarily invade the Palestinian entity at will.⁷

It should be clear that any "solution" which would deny a potential Palestinian state full sovereignty over its security, borders, or airspace, is not a state. Instead, such an entity has more in common with the nominally independent "Bantustans" which Apartheid South Africa attempted to establish in the 1970s and 80s. Just as the international community refused to recognize Bantustans in South Africa, any similar arrangement for the Palestinians should be categorically rejected as offensive and unacceptable.





D. HUMAN RIGHTS CANNOT BE DELAYED PENDING THE OUTCOME OF POSSIBLE FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS

Waiting for negotiations that may or may not result in a two-state solution has trapped Palestinians in an unacceptable status quo characterized by violence and dispossession. The “Peace Process” has not succeeded in protecting the rights and safety of Palestinians under occupation, nor has it slowed Israel’s ability to consolidate control over territory and change the facts on the ground; since the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993, Israel has quadrupled the number of settlers in the West Bank alone.⁸ At a more fundamental level, it is not acceptable to expect Palestinians to wait for future negotiations to have their human rights respected. Freedom is urgent and non-negotiable.

The emphasis on negotiations is itself problematic in the context of an occupation. The existing framework adopted by Canada approaches the issue as a conflict with two equal and aggrieved parties. This is completely divorced from the reality, as Israel holds deeply asymmetrical power over the Palestinians – not only is Israel an occupying power, but it has one of the world’s most advanced military forces, and it is continually seizing and settling Palestinian territory with the intent of maintaining permanent control. In the absence of an impartial third-party resolution mechanism, or sanctions which can hold a party accountable for violations of international law, a process of negotiations will fundamentally favour and embolden the side with the most power.



E. A ONE-STATE SOLUTION MAY BE PREFERABLE TO TWO-STATES, AS A FAIRER AND MORE JUST OPTION FOR ALL PEOPLES

In the alternative to a two-state solution, a single democratic state with equal rights which respects the individual and collective rights of Israelis and Palestinians may be a preferred solution. Such an arrangement has the potential to enhance the freedoms and aims of all parties: families would be united, movement across the territory would be free, holy sites would be shared. Rather than fragmentation, segregation, and exclusion, a greater Israeli-Palestinian society could be characterized by inclusion and partnership.⁹

A one-state solution would also address the problems of discrimination and injustice beyond the occupied territories, extending greater rights to Palestinians who have Israeli citizenship, and facilitate the right of return for refugees (without reference to demographic majorities), a key final status issue for peace in the region.

The primary objection that critics make against proposals for a single democratic state is that the state would lose its exclusively Jewish character. In making this argument, the alleged need to maintain a Jewish demographic majority – itself a deeply discriminatory priority – is used as a justification to prolong the denial of basic human rights to Palestinians. This line of thought perpetuates the notion that it would be undesirable, or even impossible, for Israelis and Palestinians to live together in peace and security as equals. It also suggests that one group's rights are inherently more important than the others. Democracy, not demographics, should be the goal of our foreign policy.



SIX RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CANADIAN MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS:

1

Prioritize urgent action in support of human rights and freedom. The focus of the international community cannot be on endless negotiations, but on Israel's responsibilities as an occupying power, and the urgent need to protect the rights and freedoms of the Palestinian people.

2

Stop privileging the two-state solution as the only acceptable outcome, and support whatever option is most likely to secure equal freedoms and rights for all, irrespective of religion or ethnicity. It is fine if an MP's personal preference is for two-states. However, it should not be their first priority. Given the dire prospect that a two-state solution can ever be achieved, it is dangerous to give priority to this outcome above all else, especially when the alternative of a single democratic state may be more likely to advance human rights and self-determination.

3

Be clear that Israeli proposals for a Palestinian "entity" or "state minus" are completely unacceptable. Proposals which offer Palestinians anything less than a fully sovereign state – or, in the alternative, full equal rights within a single democratic state – must be recognized as the continuation of Israeli domination, and a denial of self-determination.





4

Advance the possibility of Palestinian self-determination by putting pressure on the Israeli government, including economic and diplomatic sanctions. Israel is the occupying power and for decades has demonstrated its complete unwillingness to cede its control over territory. MPs must recognize that only sanctions can force Israel to abandon its control over Palestinian lives and territory. This is true whether your preference is for a two-state or a one-state solution. This pressure is the only way that Canada can play a constructive role to secure the self-determination of all peoples.

5

Acknowledge the role of power relations in any future negotiations. If negotiations were to take place under contemporary circumstances, they would be between Israel as an occupying power, and Palestinians as an occupied population. This is not a formula which offers Palestinians a prospect for success, as a just and lasting peace can only be negotiated from a position of equality of freedoms and rights. Any push for negotiations by Canadian officials must be accompanied by introducing pressure on Israel to counteract the inherent imbalance of power.

6

Continue to push for recognition of the State of Palestine. Regardless of one's position on a two-state or one-state solution, it is important for Canada to finally recognize the State of Palestine. Palestine has non-member observer state status at the United Nations, and it is recognized by at least 138 UN member states. This status is symbolic, as Palestine remains occupied by Israel, but it allows Palestinians to seek representation and justice in international forums including the International Criminal Court (ICC). Recognizing statehood is one way that Canada can enhance the ability of Palestinians to advance their rights internationally. However, as this status is not related to the viability of statehood on the ground, this action should not be understood to lock in Canadian support for a two-state solution at the expense of alternatives, for the reasons explained above.



NOTES

[1] Al Haq, "Palestinian, regional, and international groups submit report on Israeli apartheid to UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination," November 12, 2019; BTselem, "A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid," January 12, 2021; Human Rights Watch, "A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution," April 27, 2021.

[2] Yousef Munayyer, "This Moment is Different," *New York Times*, May 19, 2021.

[3] David Remnick, "The Party Faithful," *The New Yorker*, January 13, 2013.

[4] Elliott C. McLaughlin, "Israel's PM Netanyahu: No Palestinian state on my watch," *CNN*, March 16, 2015.

[5] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin: Ratification of the Israel-Palestinian Interim Agreement," *The Knesset*, October 5, 1995.

[6] See Ben White, "Separation and a Two-State Solution Aren't the Same," *Foreign Policy*, April 17, 2019.

[7] Ben Sales, "Netanyahu says he supports a Palestinian 'state-minus' controlled by Israeli security," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, October 24, 2018; Sophia Jessen, "Yair Lapid Outlines Four Demands for Peace With Palestinians," *Haaretz*, March 7, 2019.

[8] Mohammed Haddad, "Palestine and Israel: Mapping an annexation," *Al Jazeera*, June 26, 2020.

[9] For further discussion in support of a one-state solution, see: Noura Erakat, "Singular Legal Regime Necessitates One-State Solution," *Jadaliyya*, March 2, 2020; Yousef Munayyer, "Let's Talk About a One-State Solution Where Israelis and Palestinians Are Equal," *Time*, February 17 2017; Peter Beinart, "Yavne: A Jewish Case for Equality in Israel-Palestine," *Jewish Currents*, July 7 2020; Awad Abdelfattah and Jeff Halper, "It is time for the one state solution to go mainstream," *The Electronic Intifada*, December 17, 2020; Ali Abunimah, *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse*, Picador: 2006; Nadia Hijab, "To Achieve One State, Palestinians Must Also Work for Two," *Al-Shabaka*, February 7, 2018.

