



ARMISTICE NOW

New Bottle, Old Wine

By
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Briefing Paper
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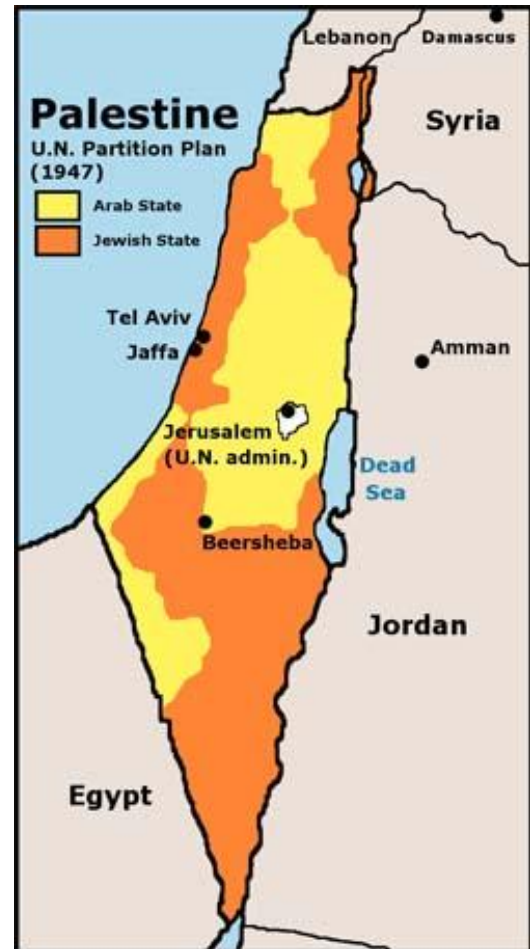
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The March/April 2010 addition of *Foreign Affairs*¹ features an article entitled 'Armistice Now' written by the Lafer International Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and Middle East Commentator for Channel 2 News in Israel, Ehud Yari. The article's central paradigm asserts that Israel needs to urgently reach a provisional agreement with the Palestinian Authority and establish a Palestinian state within temporary armistice boundaries if it is to salvage the prospect of an increasingly less viable two-state solution. It further argues that the best solution for both parties would be to put aside discussions of final-status or comprehensive peace deals and seek a less ambitious agreement rather than pursue the 'daring shortcuts' and 'giant steps' that have been attempted to date.

Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Palestinians did not exert military control over their territory and as such were not party to an armistice agreement with Israel. However, as Palestinians now have a semblance of control over certain portions of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, it is proposed that they now enter into such an arrangement along the lines of other Arab-Israeli armistice agreements of 1949. These agreements, proceeding from a UN Security Council resolution, included the drawing of armistice lines as borders and included further provisions such as prisoner exchanges and in some instances, territorial swaps. They also included the stipulation that "no provision of the agreement shall in any way prejudice the rights, claims and position of either party in the ultimate peaceful settlement." Not only did they fail to achieve a lasting peace, but a formal peace treaty with Syria is yet to be secured some 60 years later.

This new proposal draws obvious parallels with the Oslo Accords of 1993, officially called the *Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements* and intended to be the framework for future negotiations within which all outstanding "final-status issues" would be addressed and resolved. The arrangement was intended to last for no more than five years. The PLO acknowledged the state of Israel and renounced



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violence while Israel recognized the PLO ‘as the representatives of the Palestinian people.’ Consequently, a Palestinian Authority was given administrative control over the territory and final-status issues were deliberately left to be decided at a later stage.

It is then no wonder that President Obama has quite literally thrown his hands up in despair at having misunderstood and underestimated the intricacies and perils of the Middle East bottleneck when the obfuscating ‘new’ theories published by *‘the leading forum for serious discussion of American Foreign Policy and International affairs’* are a simply re-hash and re-packaging of dismal failures in past policy. Not only does an interim proposal take us back a decade and a half, but it underscores a pre-occupation with the pursuit of half baked solutions and a refusal to honestly address the core issues that prolong this conflict. Jonathan Freedland writing in the Guardian [the Guardian](#) in August 2009 rightly pointed out, “Peace has not remained out of reach because the peacemakers did not try hard enough or because the moment was not ripe. Peace may have stayed out of reach because for too long we refused to confront the true causes of this war.”

The Elusive End Game

The Netanyahu government is of the opinion that it cannot be expected to adopt peace deals with the Palestinians agreed by previous governments - in particular, Olmert’s peace offer of 2008. It also believes that final-status negotiations cannot succeed ‘at this stage’ as the PA is too weak to deal with Hamas. Rather, interim arrangements for a Palestinian state are being advocated by key figures within the coalition, including the Prime Minister himself and the Minister of Defense.

Solutions based on the two-state model remain current as they are supported by the majority of the Israeli public and would thus be approved by the Knesset. However, many Israelis have been lulled into a general apathy over the need for a peace settlement based on delusions about Israel’s military successes in both Gaza and the West Bank. In addition, the apartheid wall has provided many with a sense of insulation from the existential issues as well as a false sense of security. Nevertheless, should Israelis pretend that certain problems do not exist or delay dealing with them, does not mean they will suddenly disappear. To the contrary, there is an increasing demand, even from elements within Fatah, for control over East Jerusalem and stronger emphasis being placed on the right of return for Palestinian refugees and their descendants. The official position within the PA has always been that it will not consider a state with interim borders.

An Armistice proposal likewise ignores or refuses to address several core issues. By focusing only on the refugees created in 1967 and ignoring the 805,000 Palestinians driven from their homes in 1948, would be tantamount to an endorsement of what Ilan Pappé calls, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Such a proposal also refuses to acknowledge and condemn the core racism underpinning the state of Israel – its insistence upon geographic and demographic homogeneity. This, above all else would presently necessitate the speedy establishment of an interim Palestinian state. Similarly, suggestions that demands for a freeze to illegal settlement expansion be dropped, do not acknowledge that their continuation reflects a maximalist vision of the state of Israel by the current extreme right coalition government. It is needless to mention that their growth is the key stumbling block to the resumption of either direct or proximity peace talks with the PA, and yet they continue.



By definition, an armistice agreement cannot be reached without negotiation with Hamas as it they who maintain control over Gaza Strip and are the democratically elected government throughout the territories. The proposal that the PA should enter into an armistice agreement on their behalf, which they would later be required to ratify is simply illogical and puerile.

Statehood Now

Securing the acquiescence of an armistice arrangement from Palestinians would presumably stem their retreat away from an increasingly less viable two-state solution and negate the need to consider alternative formulas, such as the bi-national model, currently gaining currency among Palestinians but deemed unacceptable by Israel. Indeed, skepticism of this belabored model is held by both the populace and the leadership on both sides of the Palestinian political divide. As Yari himself points out, the prominent Palestinian academic Ahmad Khalidi argues that “Today, the Palestinian state is largely a punitive construct devised by the Palestinians’ worst historical enemies” intended “to limit and constrain Palestinian aspirations territorially, to force them to give up their moral rights.” Khalidi also illustrates that Palestinians instinctively distinguish between “independence” (the end of occupation) and “sovereignty” (statehood) and while desperately wishing to rid themselves of Israeli control, they do not necessarily want to see their land divided.

Opposition to alternatives to the two-state solution is rooted in the ideological principles of Zionism and its immutable commitment to the Jewish character of the state. These racist supremacist notions provide the intellectual and moral justification for its occupation, colonization and apartheid like regime at the heart of which lies the desire to maintain demographic and political hegemony over the territory. The death of the two-state solution would leave no alternative but for Jews to coexist alongside an Arab majority in the whole land of Palestine and would effectively herald the end of Israel as a theocracy that racially privileges Jews above its other citizens. According to Yari, this would be “in effect accomplishing by stealth the sort of Arab demographic dominance that Israeli leaders have for decades sought to avoid by occupying rather than annexing, the Palestinian territories.”

Officially, the Palestinian Authority has always rejected the concept of a state within provisional boundaries and continues to insist upon a final status agreement. Yet, an armistice proposal contends that this position can be changed through “intense diplomatic efforts” on the part of the US and the EU as well as providing them with “incentives”. No doubt, such diplomatic efforts would resemble the recent fiasco in which the US pressured Abbas into delaying the Goldstone report causing uproar. In effect, what is being proposed is that an armistice agreement to be imposed on the Palestinian people against their will through inducement and pressure tactics exerted by Western powers on an unelected entity.

Divided but Not Conquered

The prognosis of certain failure with regards to reconciliation between the PA and Hamas and hence the formation of a national unity government betrays a fear of a unified Palestinian resistance. Recent strategy reviews call for the PA to move away from negotiation toward resistance and there have been calls by



influential figures for popular resistance in alliance with Hamas. There is growing realization that the current split plays into the hands of the Israeli government which is following a policy of divide and conquer. The present situation fuels the assertion that a PA too weak to exact concessions from Hamas cannot practically negotiate final-status issues. As such, it is argued that any further efforts to reach a final settlement will further undermine the PA and may lead to an uprising. Moreover, should they attempt to negotiate with Israel without a settlement freeze or attempt to establish an interim state on behalf of the people of Gaza, the result may well be the same.

The Final Hurdle – Peace by Peace

An armistice proposal adds nothing new to the Road Map. Instead of establishing a Palestinian state in the territories occupied in 1967, it would only serve as a delay tactic that, while relieving Israel of its responsibilities as an occupier, would allow it to continue to geographically and demographically consolidate control over the territory. It would effectively mean the imposition of an unjust and undemocratic situation on the Palestinian people; settlements would continue to expand unchecked and there would be no incentive for Israel to pursue a final-status agreement leaving Palestinians in an indefinite limbo. Rather than ignoring or postponing the core issues, Israel should be made to adhere to a settlement freeze, as set out by the Road Map, in order for negotiations to resume. Israel needs to begin making concessions and to prove its commitment to the diplomatic process as the current impasse is becoming increasingly dangerous.

Proposals for armistice near enough mirror current thought and the objectives of the present Israeli coalition government while nevertheless endeavoring to evoke ‘serious discussion’ on a viable alternative solution to the conflict. Unless of course one considers, as ‘Armistice Now’ would suggest, that there is no discernable difference between presumed Israeli interest and US Foreign policy in the Middle East, this would go a long way in explaining continued US failure as an ‘impartial’ broker toward an ever more slippery peace deal.

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