Time to Reconsider the Two-State Paradigm

written by Prof. Kobi Michael | 06.05.2024

The prevailing axiom regarding the Palestinians and their right to a state must be reexamined, at least and for the most part following the October 7 attack. It is also necessary in light of the non-functioning as a properly governing ethno-national entity since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority as part of the Oslo Accords.

The widespread political support of Hamas and its leaders among the Palestinian public signals an in-depth problem in Palestinian psychological foundations and requires rethinking as to whether the Palestinians are primed for the establishment of an independent, responsible, functioning and peace-seeking state.

An independent entity does not necessarily mean an independent state as currently presumed. There may be other creative models, certainly under the conditions of a new regional architecture that will undoubtedly generate currently uncharted new opportunities.

What distinguishes the Welsh, Basques, Catalans, Kurds, and perhaps several other groups from the Palestinians? These are all ethno-national groups with a national history and a distinct cultural heritage that do not live in their own independent states.

Without debating the different historical circumstances, and given that Palestinian civil status must be resolved, the prevailing axiom regarding the

Palestinians and their right to a state must be reexamined, at least and for the most part following the October 7 attack. It is also even more necessary in light of Palestinian non-functioning as a properly governing ethno-national entity since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority – what was supposed to be an independent governing body on the path to statehood as part of the Oslo Accords.

Three decades have passed since initial implementation of the Oslo Accords and establishment of the Palestinian Authority. During this period several failed attempts were made to reach an agreement that would lead to the establishment of an independent, responsible, and functioning Palestinian nation-state alongside the State of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish People.

From an historical perspective, Palestinian leadership has not invested efforts in building an independent Palestinian state by cultivating a civil society and developing functioning state institutions, an economy and national infrastructures. Instead, it has directed most of its energy to thwart and dismantle the Zionist project. The Palestinian leadership's historic and tragic failure has been its inability and unwillingness to undergo a process of change from a revolutionary national movement to nation-building. Instead, the Palestinian resistance ethos and the Palestinian Liberation Organization's modus operandi were copied and replicated in the Palestinian Authority's code of operation.

The way in which Israel disengaged from the Gaza Strip, followed by elections in the Palestinian Authority in which the US imposed on Israel and the Palestinian Authority the participation of Hamas in the elections, led to Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip. This engendered a deep rift in the Palestinian arena and created two competing Palestinian entities hostile to each other. The result is well known. Hamas, which built Gaza as the most fortified and armed place in the world, plunged the area into a regional war with a security-undermining and destabilizing global impact.

The war in Gaza is in no way a local Israeli-Palestinian event. It is only the tip of a much larger and broader process. Hamas and the Gaza Strip are an important component of the Iranian strategy in its drive to regional hegemony through two vectors. The first – the non-conventional, consists of building its nuclear capabilities, and the second – the conventional, is based on establishing a network of proxies throughout the Middle East in the aim of encircling Israel in a ring of fire.

The October 7 attack, which even if Iran was not a partner to its timing, was a full partner to its planning and preparation, has turned into a multi-arena regional war driven by Iranian proxies. Its intent and purpose is to systematically weaken Israel towards its full and complete destruction, whether by undermining the normalization processes and Israel's integration in the region, or through a high-intensity war of attrition aimed at debilitating Israel's society and economy, exhausting its army and sowing division and tension between Israeli society and the government and army, and between the army and the government. This in addition to systematically eroding international legitimacy for Israel's very right to self-defense in the first stage, and its very existence going forward.

The fact that this axis of resistance is also supported by Russia and China, and that the war has intensified a wave of radical protest led by the green-red coalition on US campuses and on the streets of Europe, turns this regional war into an event with global implications. In many ways this is World War III between the free world and radical Islam which is supported by the two revisionist superpowers, Russia and China.[1] Israel is perceived as an arm of the free world led by the US, with calls for its extinction or dismantling and its portrayal as illegitimate and as the root of all evil heard in organized and orchestrated demonstrations and disorderly protests throughout the free world.

Hamas is the Palestinian spearhead of the war against Israel, with its leaders spicing up their savage, barbaric and murderous actions with religious edicts and a messianic vision of the Islamic caliphate, beginning with the destruction of Israel and liberation of Al-Aqsa as a necessary step on the path to establishing the caliphate. The widespread political support of Hamas and its leaders among the Palestinian public signals an in-depth problem in the Palestinian's psychological foundations and requires rethinking as to whether the Palestinians are primed for the establishment of an independent, responsible functioning and peace-seeking state.[2] Worse still, it is important to understand that the establishment of a Palestinian state on the heels of the barbaric attack of October 7 will be viewed as no less than a prize to terror and a veritable recipe for the expansion and strengthening of the radical entities in the area. This will be the case even if Hamas does not remain the governing and military entity in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas leadership's commitment to continue to slaughter Jews and to carry out many more October 7-like attacks, coupled with Palestinian public support of the attack, demonstrate just how sick Palestinian society is. This in addition to the

fact that not even one senior or significant Palestinian Authority official saw fit to condemn the murderous attack, several senior Palestinian Authority officials even promise more October 7's to be launched from Judea and Samaria, and the widespread public and popular support of Hamas and of the murderous attack among the Palestinian general public.[3] This is a sure recipe for perpetuation of the conflict and its accompanying violence, legitimizing and even favoring unbridled ruthlessness.

Two states living in peace side by side is no longer a viable paradigm. This is the case even if there are those in the international community and in the US making every effort to revive this paradigm, born out of dedication to an idea that represents the founding values of the Western world and which in their eyes reflects the right geo-strategic interests – even if this does not demonstrate a geostrategic understanding of the reality in the Middle East.

Moreover, the international community expressly and emphatically applies this value system and ideational standard to Israel, but not to other ethno-national groups and to state actors in other conflict zones in the Middle East. This is the case for example with respect to the Kurds and Turkey. In the face of this reality, Israel will have to use its full power of persuasion to explain that the establishment of a Palestinian state is comparable to prescribing short-term pain killers to a terminally ill patient. It will be another failed state in a region rife with such entities, a bedrock of regional instability, whether security, economic or political, with not only regional but also global ramifications. Hence the consequences of failed states such as Syria, Libya and Yemen. The ripple effect of these state failures goes beyond the Middle East, permeating Europe as well as the US and Australia.

As such, with no horizon of a Palestinian state, what is the proposed alternative? First, it is important to understand that the elimination of Hamas is the cornerstone of any process and a necessary condition for effective regional action against Iran and its proxies. Eradication of Hamas begins with its destruction as a military and governing entity in the Gaza Strip and with an in-depth rigorous process of de-Hamasification in the Gaza Strip, and going forward also in Judea and Samaria. Elimination of Hamas is critical, and Israel must complete this undertaking at any price, in Rafah, in the central camps, and wherever there are residual military and governing capabilities.

If this process of dismantling the Hamas and exiling its leaders, those who remain alive, can be completed by means of a regional coalition backed by the US that will render superfluous a military operation in Rafah, it is in Israel's best interest to leverage this option as a pivotal point and an exit strategy from the war. Such an exit strategy will create the conditions for achieving the goals of the war and will provide a possible route for attaining complete victory – by dismantling the Hamas, changing the security and political reality, removing the security threat from Gaza, increasing Israel's integration in the region based on the normalization process, and building an axis that will weaken Iran and its proxies in the area, and all alongside the resettlement and flourishing of the communities along the Gaza border.

If such a process will not be possible Israel will face a moment of truth and will have to complete the operation in Gaza. This must take place even at the cost of a conflict with the US.

Dismantling Hamas's governing and military systems will not eliminate all the organization's terrorists, or the Hamas ideology ingrained in their hearts and minds. Several hundred Hamas operatives remain in northern Gaza, a fighting force capable of endangering IDF forces. Furthermore, local police are enforcing the public order as Hamas operatives in an attempt to take control of food distribution, directly or through middlemen, increasing Hamas's chances of survival and of rehabilitating itself. Hamas as a hybrid organization will continue to carry out terror attacks and guerrilla warfare, which means that fighting in Gaza will continue for many years. Hence the need for an infrastructure that will provide a stable security and civil presence in Gaza.

Thus, concurrent with eliminating the residual Hamas fighting forces in southern Gaza action needs to be taken in northern Gaza to further destroy the terror infrastructure. In addition, a governing alternative to Hamas must be built while maintaining and enhancing IDF ability to operate from the Gaza Strip border to continuously thwart any attempt to rebuild terror capabilities and to carry out operations from Gaza.

The idea of placing Palestinian Authority entities in Gaza does not stand the test of reality as to the Authority's capabilities, not to mention its willingness, mainly given Hamas's remaining capabilities in the Gaza Strip. The attempt to promote and implement this idea may prove to be both a strategic and moral failure.

What's more, such a step may be perceived as a prize to terror. After all, the Palestinian Authority has not even condemned the attack of October 7, and it continues to pursue Israel in the international arena in the aim of undermining its international legitimacy so that it is denounced and persecuted while some of its senior officials promise many more October 7's launched from areas under the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore, such a move will instantly abolish the chance for a genuine process of reforms and change that must take place in the Palestinian Authority as this is a corrupt, terror-supporting entity that lacks legitimacy and does not function in a manner that will enable it to control the entire area, even less so the Gaza Strip.

An alternative governing entity to Hamas in Gaza must be found or established as a component of the strategy to decisively defeat and dismantle the organization. In the absence of any other concrete alternative at this time, the only possible option to remove the Hamas from the centers of power in the Gaza Strip is to impose temporary Israeli military governance in the aim of creating an opportunity to find local civilian governing entities that are not Hamas. This while the IDF will have to maintain full security control of the area as it does in Judea and Samaria.

Before it will be possible to initiate the next stage, that of implementing feasible ideas or models of an independent Palestinian entity, an independent and responsible Gazan administration must be entrenched and functional, and in-depth and comprehensive change must be carried out in the Palestinian Authority. These two processes require time, commitment, and supervision. Such an independent entity does not necessarily mean an independent state in its familiar format. There may be other creative models, certainly under the conditions of a new regional architecture that will undoubtedly create currently uncharted new opportunities.

[1] Gabi Siboni and Kobi Michael, **An Historical Perspective: Iron Swords is Israeli's WW II**, Misgav Institute, 16 April 2024.

[2] Kobi Michael and Elie Klutstein, **The Psychological Foundation of Palestinian Society Remains Rigid**, Misgav Institute, 10 April 2024.

[3] See the poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR), headed by Dr. Khalil Shikaki.

https://pcpsr.org/en/node/969