

ISRAEL, PALESTINE AND A TWO-STATE SOLUTION: A GUIDE TO THE CONFLICT

LFI POLICY BRIEFING

LABOUR
FRIENDS
OF ISRAEL



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WORKING TOWARDS A TWO STATE SOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION

The horrific atrocities committed in southern Israel by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent conflict in Gaza have highlighted the tragic conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

In the wake of the massive bloodshed, suffering and pain on both sides, it's hard to see how this seven-decade-old conflict might come to a close. Nonetheless, the need to find a resolution – which brings peace and security, and recognises the legitimate right to self-determination of both the Jewish and Palestinian peoples – could not be more urgent.

This guide is designed to briefly outline the history of the conflict; detail the thorny issues which have hampered the quest for a settlement; and tackle some of the myths which surround much-debated topics, for instance, Zionism.

It also seeks to offer ideas around how the peace process might be restarted and touches on the part Britain's new government might play.

I hope that you find this guide useful and informative. If you'd like to know more about these issues, continuing developments in the region, and LFI's work, please join our mailing list at www.lfi.org.uk. You'll receive our weekly bulletin, Key Issues, and information about LFI's activities, policy briefings and publications.

Michael Rubin
Director
Labour Friends of Israel

1. WHAT IS ZIONISM?



Haifa, Mandatory Palestine. Buchenwald concentration camp survivors arrive in Haifa on the immigrant ship RMS Mataroa, 1945

The national liberation movement of the Jewish people, Zionism is a belief in the right of the Jewish people to self-determination in their ancestral homeland. It developed in the 19th century as part of the wider rise of the nation state and was intensified by the persecution suffered by many European Jews, culminating in the Nazis' attempt to annihilate European Jewry in the Holocaust.

Today, support for Zionism is widespread among Jews worldwide. At the same time, many non-Jews identify themselves as Zionists.

Support for Zionism does not equate to support for the policies or political stance of individual Israeli governments. Nor does support for Zionism in any way preclude support for a Palestinian state.

“The Labour party has long supported and been allied to socialist Zionists. Labour’s sister parties in Israel are Israeli Labor and the left-wing Meretz party”

Zionism has never been homogenous. There are many strands of Zionism – stretching from the socialist Zionism pioneered by the Israeli Labor party and its left-wing allies – to the more strident “revisionist” Zionism encapsulated by the Israeli right and the Likud party. The Labour party has long been allied to

socialist Zionists. Labour’s sister parties in Israel are Israeli Labor and the left-wing Meretz party. The Jewish Labour Movement is part of an international network of socialist Zionist organisations.

The case for the left to support Zionism has been put by historian Jack Omer-Jackaman:

“To be on the left means ... to be on the side of the underdog. I am thus a Zionist because I am a leftist, not in spite of it. In its affirmation of a viable Jewish peoplehood, and its sober and rational recipe for Jewish survival, Zionism demands leftist support for European civilisation’s ultimate underdog.”



A meeting of the fifth Zionist Congress in 1901. Theodore Herzl can be seen in the centre

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT



The prime minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, and the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, shake hands in front of US president Bill Clinton for the first time after the signing of the Oslo Accords' Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-government Arrangements

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is long, tragic and complex. But, as LFI has consistently argued, any resolution to it rests on the application of a simple principle: that both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples are equally deserving of the right to self-determination. This principle has long been recognised by Britain and by the international community. The British government's famous Balfour Declaration of 1917 recognised the case for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people".

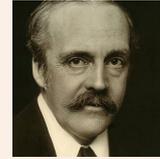
It was right to do so: the land of Israel is the historic, religious and cultural homeland of the Jewish people. Despite the Romans' destruction of the Jewish state in AD70, there has been a continuous Jewish presence in the Holy Land for several millennia. But the Balfour Declaration also stipulated:

"Nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine."

TIMELINE OF THE CONFLICT

1917

The Balfour Declaration was the British government's pledge to help the Jewish community build a national home in their historic homeland, the Land of Israel. It took the form of a letter penned on 2 November 1917 by the British foreign secretary, Lord Balfour, to Lord Rothschild, who was then then serving as the honorary president of the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. The Zionist movement was growing rapidly in Europe as a result of rising and increasingly violent antisemitism.



1948

The UN General Assembly voted in favour of establishing an independent Arab state and an independent Jewish state with Jerusalem under "an International Trusteeship System". The Jewish leadership accepted partition and in 1948 declared statehood. But Palestinian leaders opposed the UN proposal and Israel's Arab neighbours promptly invaded the fledgling Jewish state, sparking a brutal conflict which came to an end with a 1949 ceasefire.



1967

Israel launches a pre-emptive attack against the neighbouring Arab states which were threatening and preparing war. Israel defeated Egypt, Jordan, and Syria and took a buffer zone including the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. Israel hoped its Arab neighbours would sue for peace; but, in August 1967, the Arab League responded with its infamous "three no's": no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel.



1973

An Arab coalition surprised Israel by invading on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar - an intelligence failure unsurpassed until 7 October 2023. The war lasted from 6 to 25 October. The majority of combat between the two sides took place in the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. After three days of heavy fighting, Israel halted the Egyptian offensive, resulting in a military stalemate on that front, and pushed the Syrians back to the pre-war ceasefire lines.



1978

As a result of the 1973 war, Israel negotiated its first peace treaty with a neighbouring state. Under the Camp David Accords, Israel agreed to withdraw all its civilians, soldiers and army bases from the Sinai Peninsula and return it to Egypt. Egypt's Anwar Sadat later paid a heavy price for his willingness to make peace with Israel - which saw the two countries establish diplomatic relations - when he was assassinated in October 1981.



1993

The Oslo peace process in the 1990s led to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, which assumed control of Gaza and much of the West Bank territory. Addressing the Palestinian people at the White House signing ceremony alongside the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin declared: "We wish to open a new chapter in the sad book of our lives together, a chapter of mutual recognition, of good neighbourliness, of mutual respect, of understanding."



2000

Following the Israel-Lebanon war of the early 1980s, which began in response to attacks carried out from Lebanese territory by Palestinian militants, Israel pulled out of its southern Lebanon "security zone" in May 2000. But Iran's proxy army, Hezbollah, swiftly took control of southern Lebanon, using it as a base to attack northern Israel. This led to the 2006 second Lebanon war. Hezbollah has rebuilt its arsenal, launches regular cross-border attacks on Israel and routinely violates the UN security council resolution which brought the 2006 war to an end.



2005

In 2005, Israel uprooted 21 settlements and 9,000 residents from the Gaza strip. The withdrawal left the Gaza Strip under control of the Palestinian Authority. In June 2007, Hamas launched a coup and seized power from the PA. Many thousands of rockets and mortar shells have been fired from the Gaza Strip onto southern Israeli towns and villages, terrorising and destabilising the lives of hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens. Gaza was also used as a launchpad for the deadly 7 October attacks.



A two-state solution was first proposed by the UK government's Peel Commission in 1937 during the Mandate when Britain administered Palestine. It recommended the land be partitioned between its Arab and Jewish inhabitants. Partition reflected the fact that, as the commission said, "it is fundamentally a conflict of right with right". While the Arab Palestinian leaders rejected any notion of a Jewish state, the Zionist leadership accepted the principle of partition.

"Both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples are equally deserving of the right to self-determination"

This pattern was repeated in 1947 when the United Nations passed a resolution endorsing a partition and the establishment of an "independent Arab and a Jewish state". The Jewish leadership in Palestine accepted partition and in 1948 declared the State of Israel in the territory awarded to it by the UN. But Palestinian leaders opposed the UN proposal and Israel's Arab neighbours promptly

invaded the fledgling Jewish state, sparking a brutal conflict which came to an end with a 1949 ceasefire. Instead of establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel, Jordan then assumed control of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, while Egypt took charge of Gaza.

In June 1967, with the Arab states once again preparing and threatening war against the Jewish state, Israel launched a pre-emptive defensive strike, taking a buffer zone of territory: the Golan Heights from Syria; East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan; and Gaza and Sinai from Egypt. Israel hoped its Arab neighbours would sue for peace; but, in August 1967, the Arab League meeting in Khartoum responded with its infamous "three no's": no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel. Israeli governments have nonetheless subsequently pursued a policy of "land for peace" – one which underlines the importance of strong and courageous political leadership in pursuit of peace.

In 1978, for instance, the first peace treaty between Israel and one of its neighbours was negotiated at Camp David between the Israeli prime minister, Menachem Begin, and Egypt's Anwar Sadat. Sadat later paid a heavy price for his willingness to make peace with Israel – which saw Israel withdraw from Sinai and the two countries establish diplomatic relations – when he was assassinated in 1981 by extremist army officers.

The Oslo peace process in the 1990s saw an effort to bring about peace between Israel and the Palestinians. It led to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, which assumed control of Gaza and much of the West Bank territory inhabited by Palestinians (see below). Addressing the Palestinian people at the White House signing ceremony alongside the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, the Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, declared: "We wish to open a new chapter in the sad book of our lives together, a chapter of mutual recognition, of good neighbourliness, of mutual respect, of understanding"

Those hopes were sadly dashed. Hamas suicide bombers began a campaign to disrupt the peace process with terror attacks which saw the murder of hundreds of Israelis, while a far-right Jewish radical assassinated Rabin after a peace rally in 1995.

Subsequent efforts by Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak in 2000 – which would have seen the establishment of a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank, with its capital in East Jerusalem – were rejected by Arafat, sparking the bloody Second Intifada. Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert offered similar proposals in 2009 but the current Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, failed to take them up. This intransigence has allowed some on the Israeli right, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, to claim that Israel has no partner for peace. Today, following the Hamas atrocities of 7 October and the terrible war in Gaza, it is clear that the impasse of the past two decades must end. Both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples need new leadership to bring this tragic conflict to a long-overdue close.

3. WHY SHOULD WE SUPPORT A TWO-STATE SOLUTION?

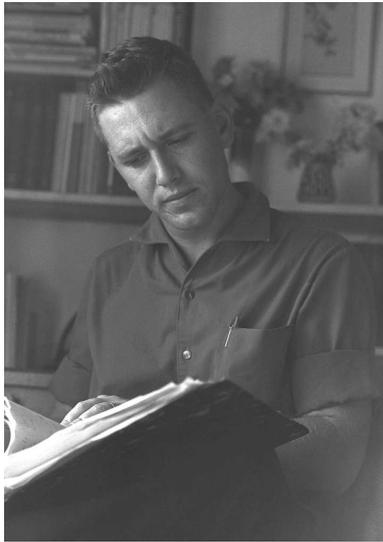


An Israeli and Palestinian flag flying over Jerusalem

A two-state solution is the only means by which to guarantee Israel's security and to preserve its identity as both a Jewish and democratic state, as well as to satisfy the legitimate demand of the Palestinian people for self-determination and national sovereignty.

It is also the only solution which commands popular support among both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, as well as having the backing of the international community, including Israel's allies and key regional players in the Arab League.

The case for a two-state solution is best encapsulated by the Israeli author Amos Oz (pictured):



Amos Oz at Kibbutz Hulda

“The land has to be a two family dwelling.

We, Israeli Jews are not going anywhere.

We have no place to go. The Palestinians are not going anywhere, either.

They too have nowhere to go.

In its essence, the fight between the Palestinians and us is not a Hollywood western and a fight of good against evil, but a tragedy of justice versus justice.”

While it is true that polls have registered a decline in support for a two-state solution in Israel, this is less the result of an ideological aversion to a Palestinian state among the Israeli public than practical concerns stemming from the collapse of the Oslo process and the experience of Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 and Gaza in 2005.

In both instances, the result was not peace and stability but war and conflict. In the case of the former, Hezbollah exploited the weakness of the Lebanese authorities to use the south as a base from which to repeatedly attack Israel. In Gaza, Hamas overthrew the PA in a bloody coup in 2007, instituted an authoritarian Islamist regime, and provoked five conflicts with Israel in 15 years, culminating in the attacks of 7 October.

But, for all the difficulties, it is also clear that the alternatives to a two-state solution are unworkable and unpalatable.

A binational “one-state solution”, encompassing Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, would likely be riven by conflict and violence. As The Guardian columnist Jonathan Freedland has written: “It is the lose-lose scenario, in which two peoples who have long yearned for self-determination are both

denied. It gives no one, neither Palestinians nor Jews, what they want, namely the chance to be master of their destiny. It suggests that two nations that could not negotiate a divorce should get married instead. It demands that two peoples that have fought bloodily for nearly a century should now live in harmony.”

Equally, permanent Israeli rule over the Palestinian territories would not simply deprive the Palestinians of their right to self-determination, it would also fundamentally alter Israel's character as a democratic state – indeed, the only democratic state in the region.

Crucially, a two-state solution remains viable (see the question on settlements below) and continues to command widespread international support. It also rests at the heart of any regional agreement to normalise relations between Israel and its neighbours.

“For all the difficulties, it is also clear that the alternatives to a two-state solution are unworkable and unpalatable”

The principle underpinning the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative – which offers Arab world recognition of Israel in return for the establishment of a Palestinian state – could offer a way forward, building on the progress made by the Abraham Accords which saw Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco and Sudan recognise Israel in 2020. Indeed, there is much cross-over with the Biden administration's current thinking. Its goal, the US secretary of state, Anthony Blinken, has suggested, is: “An Israel that's fully integrated into the region, with normal relations with key countries, including Saudi Arabia, with firm guarantees for its security, alongside a concrete, time-bound, irreversible path to a Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel, with the necessary security assurances.”

4. SETTLEMENTS: DO THEY MAKE A TWO- STATE SOLUTION IMPOSSIBLE ?

Continued settlement expansion undermines trust, weakens the viability of a future Palestinian state and does nothing to enhance Israel's security. Over the past decade, it has been used by Benjamin Netanyahu to appease the most right-wing elements of his electoral coalition, despite their being utterly unrepresentative of the views of most Israelis.

Particularly since the current Netanyahu cabinet took office in January 2023, extremist settlers have also too often engaged in sporadic, violent attacks on innocent Palestinian residents of the West Bank. As President Isaac Herzog has repeatedly suggested, these attacks are “illegal and immoral” and should be punished severely.

Crucially, however, settlements are a remediable issue. Other issues, such as security questions, Jerusalem and refugees, are challenges with much more complex solutions.

Including Israeli Jews residing in East Jerusalem, some 85 percent of Israelis who have “settled” beyond the 1967 “Green Line” live in “settlement blocs”, such as Maale Adumim and Modiin Ilit, within the security barrier. At the same time, 90 percent of Palestinians live outside the security barrier. The security barrier was built by Israel following a wave of Palestinian terrorism – some of the worst incidents were perpetrated by Hamas – inside Israel during the Second Intifada, which began in September 2000 and ended in February 2005.

“85% of Israeli Jews living in the West Bank live in settlement blocs close to the 1967 Green Line”



The Israeli settlement of Har Homa in the West Bank

All peace negotiations since 2000 have proceeded under the assumption that most of the settlement blocs will become part of Israel in any future agreement. Given that the vast majority of settlers live in these blocs near the Green Line, this would not obstruct the contiguity or viability of a Palestinian state. In return, land that is currently part of Israel near the 1967 border would become part of a Palestinian state.

In 2008, for instance, the Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert, proposed an agreement at Annapolis involving five percent of the territory of the West Bank joining Israel with compensating territory from within the 1967 lines becoming part of the new Palestinian state. The Palestinians have agreed to this principle of “land swaps”.

Detailed proposals have been drawn up by the Geneva Initiative, a joint Israeli-Palestinian project, to address the issue of settlements as part of ending the conflict.

Settlers are not an homogenous group. Nearly 40 percent identify as ultra-orthodox (Haredim), with 28 percent identifying as secular. Most of these settlers move to the West Bank in search of cheaper homes and a better quality of life. The

number of “national-religious” settlers, who are ideologically committed to settling in the West Bank, is around one-third.

Settlements that are not near the Green Line and obstruct the viability and contiguity of a Palestinian state would have to be evacuated. Importantly, there are precedents for this. In 1982, Israel evacuated 12 settlements in Egypt’s Sinai peninsula, which it had occupied since 1967. And in 2005, Israel evacuated 21 settlements in Gaza as part of its unilateral withdrawal, and evacuated a further four settlements in the northern West Bank.

Given the reason outlined above why most settlers move to the West Bank, a package of strong economic incentives could smooth any evacuation process. LFI has consistently called for an end to both the construction of new settlements and the expansion of existing ones.

But while they are a barrier to peace, due to agreement on the principle of land swaps, settlements are by no means an insurmountable obstacle to a two-state solution.



Annapolis 2008 map based on negotiations between Ehud Olmert and Mahmoud Abbas (Shaul Arieli)



2020 map for Commanders for Israel’s Security outlining potential land swaps (Shaul Arieli)

5. DOES ISRAEL HAVE A PALESTINIAN “PARTNER FOR PEACE”?



President Mahmoud Abbas at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, 2007

A viable, democratic Palestinian state rests on the strength, transparency and accountability of the institutions of Palestinian governance. This is vital for the Palestinian people. And it is vital if Israel is to be convinced that a partner for peace exists that can both speak for the Palestinian people and, by negotiating on their behalf, come to an agreement which will be upheld and honoured.

The Palestinian Authority, which was established as part of the Oslo Accords, recognises Israel's right to exist and supports a two-state solution. Oslo established three zones – Areas A, B and C – in the West Bank.

In Area A, the PA exercises both political and military authority. Although comprising only 18 percent of the landmass of the West Bank, it includes all of its major towns – including Ramallah, Jenin and Bethlehem – and the land in their immediate vicinity.

In Area B, which covers roughly 22 percent of the West Bank, Israel and the PA share jurisdiction, with Israel retaining, in coordination with the PA, security control and the PA in charge of Palestinian public order and civil affairs.

**“Many Palestinians view the PA as weak and corrupt.
It is crucial that the PA is simultaneously
strengthened and radically reformed”**

In Area C, which covers the remaining territory, Israel has full control over civil affairs, security and public order, although the PA is responsible for civil affairs relating to Palestinian residents. Although sparsely populated, Area C includes all Israeli settlers in the West Bank, as well as IDF military installations.

In summary, approximately three million Palestinians live in the West Bank (Areas A, B and C combined), more than 90 percent of whom live in Areas A and B, with some 180,000-250,000 Palestinians living in Area C.

LFI supports the expansion of Area A, as well as the restoration of the PA's authority in Gaza, as a vital step towards the establishment of a Palestinian state. At the same time, we recognise that many Palestinians view the PA as weak and corrupt. It is crucial that the PA is simultaneously strengthened and radically reformed (see below).

There have been no parliamentary or presidential elections in the Palestinian territories since 2006 and President Mahmoud Abbas, elected in 2005 to a four-year term, is increasingly autocratic. Reforms must strengthen civic society, enhance the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law, and address the behaviour of the security forces.

Finally, the PA's policy of inciting violence, antisemitism and terrorism must end. The PA's payment of “salaries” to those convicted of terrorist offences – offering financial rewards to “martyrs” – incentivises terror, breaches the terms of the Oslo Accords, and sows distrust, violence and fear which weakens support in Israel for a two-state solution.

6. WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES TO A PEACE DEAL?



PERMANENT BORDERS

UN Security Council Resolution 242, which calls for Israel to negotiate secure borders with its neighbours, provides room for flexibility with regards to the eventual borders.

In direct negotiations, Israel and Palestine can determine borders that facilitate both a secure Israel and a viable Palestinian state.



ISRAEL'S SECURITY

Given Israel's existence is constantly called into question and is continually attacked. Israel has a right to expect its security to be guaranteed in any final status agreement.

Hamas and Hezbollah cannot exploit and utilise a Palestinian state to continue their war against Israel.



STATUS OF JERUSALEM

Both Israelis and Palestinians lay claim to this holy city.

A widely agreed solution is dividing the city between an Israeli-controlled West and a Palestinian-controlled East, with potentially some international control over the holy basin in the Old City.



PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

The "right of return" is central to Palestinian national identity and international campaigns but Israel says it presents a fundamental threat to its existence as a Jewish state.

Israel believes that, for the most part, Palestinian refugees and their descendants should "return" to a future Palestinian state.

The core obstacles to a peace deal, which have been addressed at the negotiating table on a number of occasions since the early 1990s, are an agreement on the permanent borders of the State of Israel (including the issue of the settlements); Israel's security; the status of Jerusalem; and the question of the Palestinian refugees from 1948.

1

Israel wishes to see its permanent borders decided in direct final-status negotiations with the Palestinians. UN Security Council Resolution 242, which calls for Israel to negotiate secure borders with its neighbours, provides room for flexibility with regards to the eventual borders; indeed, the 1949-67 Green Line was merely the armistice line decided in 1949, and was never intended to be a permanent border. In direct negotiations, Israel and Palestine can determine borders that facilitate both a secure Israel and a viable Palestinian state.

2

Given the conflicts of 1948, 1967 and 1973, and the continuing terror threat which culminated in the attacks of 7 October, Israel has a right to expect its security and the safety of its people to be guaranteed in any final-status agreement. The growth of Hamas and Hezbollah, supported by their patron Iran, has strengthened Palestinian rejectionism and “anti-normalisation” (the belief that Palestinians should avoid negotiation, reconciliation or contact with Israelis). In 1987, a year before the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) agreed to endorse a two-state solution in principle, Hamas, an offshoot of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, was established as a rival to Fatah. Fatah is the PLO’s dominant and nationalist faction. Hamas’ founding charter dismisses all “so-called peaceful solutions” and says its struggle is against the Jewish people. Hamas’ rise is an element of Tehran’s desire to expand its regional influence. The spread of the conflict across the Middle East has been directed by Iran through its “axis of resistance” – which also includes Lebanon-based Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, and Shiia militia in Iraq – and bolstered by millions in funding as well as political and military assistance. Israel will require that a final-status agreement ensures that Iran and its allies in Hamas and Hezbollah cannot exploit and utilise a Palestinian state to continue their war against Israel.

“Borders, Jerusalem, security and refugees would top the negotiators’ agenda”

3

The final status of Jerusalem, and particularly the Old City of Jerusalem, remains highly contentious. Both Israelis and Palestinians lay claim to this holy city. A widely agreed solution is dividing the city between an Israeli-controlled West and a Palestinian-controlled East, with potentially some international control over the holy basin in the Old City. Many Israelis wish to see their country retain a united Jerusalem as Israel’s capital city. However, as Israeli prime ministers Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert showed, this position has shifted in previous negotiations. At the same time, the Palestinians want all of East Jerusalem (east of the Green Line) as their capital, which would include Jerusalem’s Old City. The Old City contains sites holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims, but Palestinian leaders, including President Abbas, have continually rejected the city’s Jewish history and deny the existence of any historic Jewish sites there.

4

The “right of return” refers to the collective belief in a legal and moral right for Palestinian refugees – and, crucially, their descendants – to return to their ancestral homes. These homes were once part of Mandatory Palestine but are now in Israel. The right of return has become central to Palestinian national identity and international campaigning and presents a fundamental threat to Israel’s existence as a Jewish state. Israel believes that, for the most part, Palestinian refugees and their descendants should “return” to a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. It has also offered that a small number of Palestinians will be able to settle in Israel as part of a symbolic gesture: in 2008, Ehud Olmert, proposed allowing the relocation of 5,000 Palestinians within Israeli borders, while offering compensation and resettlement to a Palestinian state for the rest.

7. HOW CAN BRITAIN HELP CREATE A PALESTINIAN STATE ?

The Labour party and LFI are committed to a negotiated two-state solution, with two states for two peoples: Israel safe, secure and recognised within its borders; living alongside a viable, democratic and independent Palestinian state.

The Oslo Accords state that any dispute must be resolved through direct negotiations, which history demonstrates is the only successful path to progress. In order to reach a two-state solution, it is therefore vital to support direct negotiations and mutual agreement between the two sides.

“LFI believes strongly in the right to self-determination of the Jewish and Palestinian people”

LFI believes strongly in the right to self-determination of the Jewish and Palestinian people. This requires the establishment of a Palestinian state. Alongside international partners, Britain should recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel, as part of efforts to contribute to securing a negotiated two-state solution. In the meantime, and as a crucial aspect of actually creating a Palestinian state, Britain should support the process of Palestinian state-building, including a radically reformed and strengthened Palestinian Authority and measures to bolster the Palestinian economy and increase Palestinian economic independence (see below).

Whatever its undoubted appeal, recognising a Palestinian state unilaterally and outside of a wider process has a number of drawbacks and, instead of being used to bolster the prospects of peace, might prove an empty gesture. It would undermine the concept of a negotiated solution by bypassing the need for both sides to negotiate.

In this context, extremists who reject negotiation altogether would be empowered. Absent from final-status negotiations, recognition would also change little on the ground. Finally, under international law, statehood depends on certain criteria, including the existence of an effective and independent government which exercises control over a defined territory. The Palestinian Territories currently meet almost none of these criteria.



What can a Labour-led Foreign Office do to help bring about a Palestinian state?

Crucially, unilateral moves also have a track record of damaging the prospects of peace. For example, Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 ultimately failed. It led to greater conflict, allowing Hamas to seize power and use Gaza as a base for attacks like those which occurred on 7 October. By contrast, negotiated bilateral agreements, like Israel’s peace treaties with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) and the normalisation deals with the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan (2020), provide an example of more successful and sustainable outcomes.

The only path to the recognition of the rights of both Israelis and Palestinians and to a lasting peace is through negotiations. Britain must support and encourage that process but it cannot supplant it.

8. FIVE STEPS WE CAN TAKE NOW TO FURTHER A TWO-STATE SOLUTION



Palestinian flags at Rawabi - the first planned city built for and by Palestinians in the West Bank. It is hailed as a "flagship" Palestinian enterprise

Even in the absence of a formal political process, steps can be taken which begin to restore trust and confidence between Israel and the Palestinians, maintain the viability of a two-state solution, and shrink the boundaries of the conflict. Crucially, however, these steps would also have a concrete impact on the ground. They would both ease the plight of the Palestinian people and expand their rights and freedoms while also recognising the legitimate security fears of the Israeli people – fears which the events of 7 October have heightened and exacerbated.

Overleaf, we outline what such an agenda might look like.

1

Tackle the plight of Gaza: Beyond critical life-saving humanitarian efforts, an alternative governing authority – led by Palestinians with international support – must replace Hamas with the capacity to ensure security and manage reconstruction. Infrastructure priorities will be water, sanitation, power, healthcare, and shelter. A key component will be an international mechanism to ensure no remilitarisation, including tight controls inside the Gaza Strip to prevent the diversion of construction materials.

2

Strengthen the Palestinian Authority: This will require Israeli cooperation, including measures to improve the economic and security situation in the West Bank and clamping down on extremist settler violence. Over the medium term, as part of coordinated trade-offs including regional states, Israeli steps should include removing illegal settlement outposts; halting construction outside the settlement blocs; and transferring parts of Area C to Area B, thus improving Palestinian territorial contiguity and make it far easier for new Palestinian homes to be built.

“There needs to be tougher action to stop Iran and its proxy armies, including Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Houthis, from their efforts to spread violence and terror and stifle any new peace process”

3

Reform the Palestinian Authority: Polls show corruption, poverty and unemployment top the concerns of ordinary Palestinians. Confidence in the judiciary and public services is low. There have been no presidential or parliamentary elections in the West Bank and Gaza since 2006. Human rights groups have raised multiple concerns about the use of torture, arbitrary arrests, and restrictions on peaceful opposition and media freedom. Aside from its payment of salaries to convicted terrorists (see above), the PA's school curriculum teaches the virtues of martyrdom, describes terrorists as “heroes” and repeats antisemitic tropes. As part of an agenda of state building, international donors should demand institutional reform – especially those designed to introduce and safeguard the political neutrality of the judiciary and anti-corruption bodies – and the modernisation of the public and security services.

4

Enhance Palestinian economic independence: A first step could be the establishment of a new International Development Bank of Palestine. Modelled on the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which was founded in 1991 to aid the economies of central and Eastern Europe during the post-Cold War era, it would work to provide the Palestinian economy with expertise and assistance, as well as helping to raise investment and oversee a spectrum of ventures.

5

Promote a regional agenda for peace and prosperity: The Hamas attacks of 7 October were, in part, intended to disrupt the Abraham Accords process which has seen Israel and its regional neighbours begin to normalise their relations. A wider regional process – leading to the establishment of a negotiated Palestinian state and the normalisation of relations between Israel and its regional neighbours – should be launched and accompanied by tougher action to stop Iran and its proxy armies, including Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Houthis, from their efforts to spread violence and terror and stifle peace, prosperity and progress.

9. WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN IN GAZA?



Parade of Hamas fighters who have controlled the Gaza Strip since 2007

The tragic conflict in Gaza must be brought to an end. LFI supports a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. Hamas must be disarmed and can have no role in the future governance of Gaza; all Israeli hostages must be released; and there must be a massive increase in humanitarian aid and Palestinian civilians must be protected.

“Hamas must be disarmed and can have no role in the future governance of Gaza”

The removal of Hamas is an essential first step in bringing long-term peace and security to both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

Throughout its 16-year-rule, Hamas has prioritised its genocidal aspirations against the Jewish people over the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the Palestinian people.

Hamas has used the civilian population as human shields and weaponised civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals. Hamas has opposed all previous peace initiatives; broken every previous ceasefire; subjected the Palestinian people to a brutal and authoritarian rule; and vowed to carry out attacks like those of 7 October “again and again” as part of its long-running campaign to destroy the Jewish state.

Ending Hamas’ brutal and destructive rule in Gaza is but a first step. It must be the prelude not just to a massive Marshall Plan-style reconstruction effort, but a multi-pronged political effort involving Israel, the Palestinians and regional powers. This will encompass the restoration in Gaza of the authority of a reformed and strengthened Palestinian Authority; the political reunification of the West Bank and Gaza; and the launch of a revitalised regional peace process leading to the establishment of a negotiated Palestinian state and the normalisation of relations between Israel and its regional neighbours.



Hamas poster in Nablus, 2007, celebrating the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit

“Hamas has prioritised its genocidal aspirations against the Jewish people over the safety, welfare and wellbeing of the Palestinian people”

A PLAN FOR A REVITALISED ISRAELI PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS

- Introduce a new international framework by passing a flexible and balanced UN Security Council resolution, which endorses a roadmap to Palestinian statehood, conditioning it on measures including Palestinian commitments to Israeli security.
- Establish a Marshall Plan to oversee the reconstruction of Gaza.
- Promote a culture of peace through massive investment and the establishment of an International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace (see below).
- Reunite Gaza and the West Bank under a radically reformed and strengthened Palestinian Authority. Despite its many flaws and weaknesses, only the PA has the legitimacy and authority to assume responsibility for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Gaza.
- Launch a regional peace process which leads to a negotiated and demilitarised Palestinian state; the normalisation of relations between Israel and its regional neighbours; and a security framework to tackle Iran’s proxy armies, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, to ensure the Israeli people are confident the Jewish state is genuinely safe and secure within recognised borders.

10. WHY WE SHOULD LEARN FROM NORTHERN IRELAND AND PROMOTE RECONCILIATION AND HOPE IN PLACE OF DIVISION AND DEMONISATION



Protesters promoting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement in Germany

Like the Labour party, LFI strongly opposes the BDS movement's calls to boycott Israel. BDS is not about ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, but about eliminating Israel as a Jewish state. Such calls are morally wrong; undermine the Israeli-Palestinian peace process; stoke antisemitism and damage community cohesion in the UK; and are economically damaging to both Britain and the Palestinian people.

Israel is the only country in the world to face a sustained, high-profile and international campaign aimed at introducing a comprehensive boycott, divestment and sanctions regime against it. This, despite the fact that there is a long and dark history of boycotts – epitomised by both Nazi Germany and Stalin's Russia – directed at the Jewish people.

The leaders of the BDS movement oppose a two-state solution, negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, and the existence of the Palestinian Authority. The BDS campaign promotes the idea of anti-normalisation, encouraging the notion that there should be no dialogue, contact, or negotiation with Israel.

The BDS movement falsely seeks to equate its campaign with the legitimate effort to boycott South Africa's apartheid regime during the 1980s. As the historian Simon Schama and lawyer Anthony Julius have set out: "The parallel ... between Israel and apartheid South Africa is false. The Palestinian, Druze and other minorities in Israel are guaranteed equal rights under the Basic Laws. All citizens of Israel vote in elections. There are no legal restrictions on movement, employment or sexual or marital relations. The universities are integrated. Opponents of Zionism have free speech and assembly and may form political organisations. By radical contrast, South African apartheid denied non-whites the right to vote, decreed where they could live and work, made sex and marriage across the racial divide illegal, forbade opponents of the regime to express their views, banned the liberation movements and maintained segregated universities."

“Successful peace processes, such as those in Colombia and Northern Ireland, reveal that civil society peacebuilding played a key part in each instance”

The BDS movement has had very little impact economically in Israel. Instead, any impact thus far has been limited to the Palestinian people.

Moreover, BDS could have negative economic and security consequences for the UK. Nearly 10,000 UK businesses export and import goods to and from Israel; UK-Israel trade supports around 39,000 jobs in the UK; and Israeli firms provide up to 1 in 7 of the NHS' drugs, saving the health service an estimated £2.9bn annually. Our defence and security ties in the region are, in the words of the former head of MI6, Sir Richard Dearlove, “immensely important”.

At home, BDS stokes antisemitism and damages community cohesion in the UK. As a 2019 report found, the BDS' movement's “relentless delegitimisation and demonisation” of Israel “invariably results in the stigmatising of Jews worldwide and in Israel”.

Finally, within Israel, the BDS movement, which is strenuously opposed by Israeli Labor, damages those who advocate for two states and negotiations with the Palestinians. It encourages the Israeli right's “us against them” mentality and undercuts the left's attempts to promote diplomacy and reconciliation. The BDS agenda thus empowers extremists in Israel and Palestine who seek to perpetuate tension, rule out compromise, and cultivate a siege mentality among both peoples.



British prime minister Tony Blair listens as Ireland's taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, addresses the media on the outcome of the Northern peace process

Instead of BDS, let's bring people together as they did in Northern Ireland. The international community must work together to empower moderates and peacebuilders on both sides, recognising their central role in a renewed diplomatic process.

Successful peace processes, such as those in Colombia and Northern Ireland, reveal that civil society peacebuilding played a key part in each instance. It had a major impact on both the attitudes and political context which are the oxygen that real peace processes depend upon; proved critical for societal resilience; transformed the political incentives within conflicted societies, creating constituencies – and indeed leaders – who support peace and reconciliation; developed many of the ideas that leaders ultimately borrowed and presented as their own; and helped to create a counterweight to the spoilers that exist in every conflict.

Established in 1986, 12 years before the Good Friday Agreement, the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), built the civic foundations and capacity that successful diplomacy needs. The UK's chief negotiator, Jonathan Powell, rightly called the IFI “the great unsung hero” of the agreement. The IFI began its work when Northern Ireland's Troubles were, within their own context, in a place that elicited similar levels of pessimism and despair to that which we have seen in Israel and Palestine in recent years. The IFI catalysed a sustained, long-term effort to build relationships and trust.

Inspired by the IFI, and pioneered by the Alliance for Middle East Peace, there is a huge opportunity for the creation of an International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace - an initiative bolstered by the success of the bipartisan 2020 US Middle East Partnership for Peace Act which is already investing an unprecedented \$250m in peacebuilding work. Initiatives such as these, which bring Israelis and Palestinians together, offer a brighter future for the region.

Keir Starmer, Rachel Reeves and David Lammy have endorsed an International Fund for Israeli Palestinian Peace. In government, Labour should make the realm of civil society its priority, and position the UK as the leading voice, convener and architect for civil society in the region, working to position this agenda at the core of a wider diplomatic process that it works to shape, alongside its closest allies.

Toward the end of his term, the US secretary of state, John Kerry, reflected on his energetic, quixotic and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to secure an Israeli-Palestinian agreement in 2014: “In the end, I believe the negotiations did not fail because the gaps were too wide, but because the level of trust was too low. Both sides were concerned that any concessions would not be reciprocated and would come at too great a political cost. And the deep public scepticism only made it more difficult for them to be able to take risks.” Bill Clinton's former ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, who also served as Kerry's special envoy in 2014, similarly concluded: “The difficulties we faced were far more because of the 20 years of distrust that built up than because of the core issues that divide the two sides.”

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