

Is the failure of the two-state solution more of the responsibility of international players than either Israelis or Palestinians?



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Introduction

Since 1948, the state of Israel and Palestine have been at a constant plight of conflict. Though many international players, such as the United States or the Arab League have played a role in the conflict, I disagree with the claim that the failure of the two-state solution is more of the responsibility of international players than either Israel or Palestine. Using a pluralist analytical framework, I argue that the strategic blunders committed by the PLO and the violent nature of the Zionist approach to achieving its political will of a Jewish state have caused the failure of the two-state solution. In addition to this, I will address the failed attempts for Peace at the Oslo Accords and the issue of Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

Analytical Framework

The nature of the two-state solution is difficult to analyse through a single conceptual lens. As a result, I write this essay with a pluralist approach, combining both realism and constructivism. Realism in IR theory focusses on aspects such as security and power, viewing states as material actors that aim to maximise their strengths (Halliday, 2005). In this essay I will analyse the consequences of the pursuit of power and how it has exacerbated the tensions between Israel and Palestine. Also, I will discuss how the realist Clausewitzian approach to political intercourse and war relates to the research topic. Nonetheless, as Halliday (2005: 25) highlights, a limitation to realism is the theory's inadequate explanation for ideology and identity-based factors. Understanding constructivist influences of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism is critical when analysing

the failure of the two-state system. Constructivism is the belief that state behaviour in the international system is determined by the norms, values and ideas of the state (Halliday, 2005: 32). However, identities and interests of the state can also be influenced through either cooperative or confrontational interactions with other states (Wendt, 81: 1995). For example, Palestinian-American historian Rashid Khalidi (2010: 192-201) alludes to the paradoxical idea that successive failed interactions of the Palestinian leadership with the Ottomans, British, other Arab states and Israel is key to the resurgence contemporary Palestinian national identity. This resurgence of Palestinian identity heavily influenced events that have underpinned the failure of the two-state solution, such as the intifadas.

Failed Palestinian Leadership

The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) is a political and militant organisation set up by the Arab League to control Palestinian nationalism (Beinin & Hajjar, 2014: 7). The PLO is recognised as the only legitimate governing body of Palestine by most states, excluding Israel until 1993. The PLO suffered several failures that negatively impacted the chance of Palestinian self-rule in the two-state system. First in 1970, branches of the PLO tried to overthrow Jordanian King Hussein, in the hope to establish a radical Arab stance that would attack Israel (Smith, 2013: 254). What is known as Black September, Jordanian forces pulverised the PLO, who were unable to control their ranks, subsequently leading to the PLO's expulsion from Jordan (Khalidi, 2010: 197). The PLO's second major failure was allowing itself to be drawn into the Lebanon Civil War and for a second time found itself fighting against a fellow Arab force. To avoid a potential conflict with Israel, in the event of Palestinian dominance in Lebanon, Syria armed the Maronite Christians and conducted a military intervention to stem the power of the PLO (Smith, 2013: 258). PLO rocket attacks on Israel from within Lebanon also triggered Israel's later 1982 invasion of Lebanon, aiming to destroy the PLO's power structure from Beirut to the West Bank, forcing PLO leaders in Lebanon to flee across the region (Khalidi, 2010: 198).

As discussed here, international players such as Jordan and Syria have had a role in the failure of the PLO in the lead up to the first intifada. Despite this, I argue that the disintegration of the PLO's power was a direct consequence of their own actions. The disastrous Palestinian endeavour to overthrow King Hussein resulted in the PLO's leadership being forced to move from Jordan to Lebanon. This move helped to instigate the Lebanon Civil War due to the fact that the PLO in Lebanon frequently conducted rocket attacks on Israel (Smith, 2013: 255). This disintegration of the PLO's power weakened the

cause of Palestinian self-determination and unity. Also, this became a major factor in the establishment of Hamas, a Palestinian terrorist organisation committed to the destruction of Israel. Since its creation in 1987, Hamas have conducted several suicide bombings and rocket attacks into Israeli territory, further exacerbating the failure of the two-state solution.

The Intifadas and the Failure of Diplomacy

Furthermore, between 1987 to 1993, the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza conducted a mass uprising against Israeli occupation, an event known as the first intifada. The first intifada was mobilised, not by the PLO who were now exiled in Tunisia, but by institutions formed inside Israeli occupied territories of Palestine (Beinin & Hajjar, 2014: 8). This highlighted the growing discontent of the Palestinian people towards the PLO, for their failures in Jordan and Lebanon. Although, the spontaneous outbreak of the first intifada provided a substantial boost to Palestinian national identity and re-established “the inside” scope of Palestinian power rather than “the outside” control of the Palestinian people (Khalidi, 2010: 200). After years of protests, killings and civil disobedience, the first intifada concluded with the peace process of the 1993 Oslo Accords. Within the accords, the PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rubin agreed to mutually recognise the self-rule of both the PLO and Israel. Despite key flaws in the Oslo accords, such as the extent to which Israeli forces would leave Palestinian territory, the PLO was forced to agree due to their failed ventures in Jordan and Lebanon. These ventures left the PLO in a dire position, with little diplomatic support from other Arab states (Beinin & Hajjar, 2014: 9-10).

From a constructivist view, the role of national identity hampered the success of the Oslo accords. Hard lining nationalists from both Palestine and Israel failed to accept the peace accords, particularly Hamas’s anger with Israel’s recognition of the PLO but not Palestinian statehood (Smith, 2013: 260). During the negotiations, terrorist attacks on both sides were prevalent, with Hamas introducing suicide bombings for the first time in Israel and the 1994 Ibrahimi Mosque massacre of Palestinians by an Israeli gunman (Beinin & Hajjar, 2014: 10). Yitzhak Rubin was also assassinated by an Israeli right-wing extremist in opposition to the Oslo Accords. Many Palestinians were disappointed with the Oslo accords as Israel still occupied their lands and Palestinian statehood was still unattained (Khalidi, 2020: 103). Israel made it increasingly harder for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to cross the border into Israel for work and exporting goods, causing severe economic damage (Khalidi, 2020: 103). In 2000, further attempts for peace were made at the Camp

David Summit, however this again failed, and the increasing unlikelihood of Palestinian self-determination sparked a second and more brutal intifada (Khalidi, 2020: 104-105). Both the leaders of Israel and Palestine have moved away from the Oslo peace solution, highlighting the complete end of the accords (Turner & Hussein, 2015). Though international attempts, predominately by the U.S at the Oslo Accords to broker a peace deal were underwhelming, I argue the role of identity within radicals in Israel and Palestine significantly made peace more difficult to achieve. The failure of radicals from both Palestine and Israel to accept the legitimacy and even existence of the other state constantly derailed the possibility of a successful two-state solution.

Zionism

Zionism is a national movement for the establishment of a state for the Jewish people, coming into fruition in 1948. The establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine produced what was called the “Arab Question”, referring to the mostly Muslim Palestinians, who opposed the creation of a Jewish state on their land (Shlaim, 2012: 80). Israeli historian Ilan Pappé (2007) labelled early Zionist actions in Palestine as ethnic cleansing, due to the deliberate destruction of Palestinian homes and civilian massacres. This highlights how Zionist policy in Palestine was aggressive from the start and is a causation of the continued Arab-Israeli conflict (Shlaim, 2012: 80). What Shlaim (2012) calls the “iron wall” strategy, the Zionist’s have dealt with the “Arab Question” by relying on their military strength as a means to fulfil their political goals. This Clausewitzian perspective of war as a political instrument to fulfil a state’s will is evident in a series of Israeli military victories against Arab states. Additionally, the continued use of military forces to contain Palestinian opposition in Gaza and the West Bank further reinforces this argument. From this view, the notion of a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine was set up to fail from the beginning due to the policies of Zionist leaders. As the Arabs would not consent to a Jewish state in Mandatory Palestine, the use of greater military power was deemed as the conceivable way to fulfil a Jewish state, even before the creation of Israel (Shlaim, 2012: 86).

Israeli Settlers

The use of military force in a series of conflicts with Arab states also created the issue of Israeli settlers in the West Bank and Gaza. Israeli settlers are one of the biggest factors that sparked the intifadas and have made Palestinian statehood extremely difficult to achieve. In

the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel captured the West Bank from Palestine, and many Israeli citizens began setting up homes in the region. The UN issued Resolution 446 in 1979, stating that Israeli settlers in the West Bank “have no legal validity and constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East”. Nevertheless, since 1967 Israel have continuously forced Palestinians out of their homes in the West Bank, sometimes with severe police brutality, to build housing units for Israelis. According to the BBC, 600,000 Israelis live in the occupied West Bank, with Israeli government plans to build a further 3000 homes for Jewish settlers. Crucially, Israeli settlements in the West Bank cover most of the agricultural land and natural resources, having a devastating effect on the Palestinian economy (Vox, 2016). The growing settlements in the West Bank provide the Israeli government with a tightening chokehold on the prospects of Palestinian autonomy, in lands that many Zionists believe has deep cultural and spiritual significance to Jewish identity. As a result, the settlements reinforce the main argument of this essay, that it is the policies of Israel and Palestine that bear the responsibility of the failure of the two-state solution.

Conclusion

Using a pluralist analytical framework, this essay has argued that the responsibility of the failure of the two-state solution bears greater on Israel and Palestine than international players. Regarding Palestine, the strategic failings of the PLO in Jordan and Lebanon greatly hindered the ability of the organisation to effectively govern Palestine. The failings of the PLO weakened Arab unity, which forced the PLO to sign the flawed Oslo Peace Accords, providing Israel opportunities to further expand its control in the region. This also paved the way for the establishment of Hamas, a far greater belligerent to Israel, souring relations even further. Furthermore, though international attempts to broker a peace deal after the first intifada were underwhelming, attempts to secure peace were continuously derailed by radicals on both sides. From a Clausewitzian view of war, the Zionist relationship with Palestine can be described as a constant state of military conflict in the pursuit to fulfil its will of a Jewish state. Along with this, Israeli conflicts with Arabs created the problem of Israeli settlers occupying huge swaths of important agricultural Palestinian land in the West Bank. The illegal settlers and ever-growing Israeli investments in the West Bank continue to destroy the prospects of Palestinian self-determination. As a result, I reaffirm my view that the failure of the two-state solution is more of the responsibility of Israel and Palestine than international players.



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