



Why Benjamin Netanyahu Rejects Palestinian Statehood

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Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rejection of a post-Gaza War Palestinian state spurred a predictable global response—with UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres calling it “unacceptable,” President Joe Biden reiterating support for the “two-state solution,” and the European Union threatening “consequences” if Netanyahu's government doesn't change its course.

But the back and forth between Jerusalem (which is fighting a gruesome war with a genocidal terrorist group) and the world (which watches it peacefully from afar) masks a far more complicated reality.

The question is *not* whether Netanyahu is wrong to reject the two-state solution for the foreseeable future. The question is whether he's wrong to say publicly what many in his position would think privately.

To be sure, Netanyahu can't seem to resist the temptation to portray himself as a Jewish “Horatius at the bridge”—the only thing standing between his people and their destruction. With Israelis outraged by intelligence failures that enabled the slaughter of October 7, a weakened Netanyahu will likely try to reinforce that image at home and not worry about the consequences abroad.

But set aside that it's the controversial Netanyahu who's presiding in Jerusalem. And set aside the conventional wisdom that hails the two-state solution as the obvious path to Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Let's consider the two-state solution through the eyes of a generic Israeli leader—one elected by the people and responsible for their safety.

The two-state solution is predicated on Israel and a new Palestine “living side by side in peace.” True peace, however, must not only emerge from the negotiating table but also infuse the hearts of the populace. Otherwise, pursuing the two-state solution is misguided and potentially dangerous.

Yes, Israelis are as split on this issue as they seem on everything else. Some 75 percent on the left support progress toward the two-state solution, compared to 45 percent in the middle and 21 percent on the right, according to polling from late November.

Opposition to peace, however, is far more deeply entrenched on the Palestinian side. In fact, 72 percent of Palestinians expressed support for Hamas' attack of October 7, and support for the group has risen in Gaza and surged in the West Bank. Even before October 7, just a third of Palestinians supported the two-state solution.

Since October 7, top Palestinian officials have applauded or justified the attack, rejected a two-state solution, and vowed to create a Palestine “from the river to the sea”—that is, destroy the Jewish state in between.

“People are saying now that the October 7 war has opened a new horizon for a vision of a political settlement,” Khaled Mashal, Hamas' leader abroad, told a Kuwaiti broadcaster this month. “[W]e have nothing to do with the two-state solution... because it means you would get a promise for a [Palestinian] state, yet you are required to recognize the legitimacy of the other state, which is the Zionist entity...”

Nor are more hopeful prospects emanating from the supposedly more moderate Palestinian Authority (PA), which runs the West Bank and which President Biden suggests should run Gaza after the war.

PA officials suggested Israel itself bombed the music festival where Hamas slaughtered Israelis and fabricated evidence to justify its attack in Gaza. Jibril Rajoub, an official of Fatah (the PA's political party) and possible successor to President Mahmoud Abbas, warned of “the next explosion, far more violent,” in the West Bank and said Hamas is part of the Palestinian “national fabric.”

Day to day, Palestinians are indoctrinated at school, in mosques, on TV, and on social media to hate Jews and reject Israel's legitimacy, virtually guaranteeing that they'll oppose the notion of two states “living side by side in peace.”

The PA continues to describe Palestinian terrorists who lose their lives as “martyrs” and portray them as innocent youth who are gunned down for no reason by Israeli forces. It also continues to pay monthly stipends to families of dead or jailed terrorists—the more murderous the attack, the higher the stipends. Among its latest libels, the PA has said Israel is stealing organs from dead Palestinians in Gaza and claimed the Talmud permits cutting open pregnant Palestinian women and stealing their fetuses.

At least eleven Palestinian schools, eight of them run by the PA, celebrated October 7, with children at one elementary school drawing pictures of terrorists paragliding into Israel and students at a high school holding a demonstration to praise Hamas.

“This conflict,” Netanyahu said, “is not about the absence of a state, a Palestinian state, but about the existence of a state, the Jewish state.”

He has a point. And, under these conditions, any reasonable leader in Jerusalem would be hesitant to risk Israel’s security by supporting a Palestinian state and assuming it wants to live “side by side in peace.”