

**No More 'Peace Talks,' Please  
The Arab-Israeli conflict has no clear  
parameters for resolution**

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The current round of Israeli-Palestinian meetings in Jordan ended with a Palestinian decision to leave. "The Israelis brought nothing new in these meetings," said one official, without bothering to note the obvious — neither did the Palestinians.

The talks were the result of a Quartet plan to have Israelis and Palestinians make proposals on territory and security in hopes of reaching a deal in 2012. Questions abound, but the most important is, "How many more times will this farce be played out without recognition of the *real and incompatible* bottom lines of the two parties?"

It is that fundamental incompatibility — not the lack of pressure or lack of bribes — that prevents the present creation of the mythical "two-state solution" embedded in the Oslo Accords, negotiated without U.S. participation, and signed in 1993.

From the Israeli side, Oslo had three underlying assumptions:

- That Palestinian nationalism could be understood as the mirror image of Jewish nationalism (Zionism);
- That Palestinian nationalism could find its full expression in a West Bank and Gaza Strip state; and
- That there is a price Israel, the United States, and Europe could pay to the Palestinians that would overcome any remaining Palestinian objection to Jewish sovereignty in the region.

All three assumptions have been proven wrong.

Jewish nationalism was based on the idea of "regularizing" Jews in their historic homeland. David Ben-Gurion is said to have wanted to see Jewish policemen arresting Jewish criminals because that's what "normal" people do. For most Zionists, statelessness was an impediment to normalcy; getting a state was the highest priority, even if that required territorial compromise.

Israelis projected their own definition of nationalism onto the Palestinians, reflected in the idea of territory for peace, i.e., a Palestinian state at peace with Israel.

Palestinian nationalism is not based on a passion for normalization through getting a state as quickly as possible, but rather on the idea that "their land" was usurped by Israel in 1948. Therefore it is more important for Israel to be wiped out than for a Palestinian state to exist. It is more important to get all of the territory than to achieve benefits by compromising to get part of it.

Oslo foundered over the fact that the most Israel could give to the Palestinians was short of what the Palestinians could accept. It was and remains inevitable — they are trying to solve different problems.

Since this assumption is false, that invalidates the other two as well.

Israel's essential requirements are:

- Recognition of the state of Israel as a permanent, legitimate part of the region (known as "end of conflict/end of claims");
- "Secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force"—the promise of UN Resolution 242.

For the Palestinians, the requirements are:

- International recognition of an independent Palestinian state without accepting a Jewish state of Israel and a continued effort to achieve total victory;
- The right of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to live in Israel if they wish in order to negate the Jewish majority and assist in achieving the first goal.

This in no way implies that there *shouldn't ever* be a Palestinian state, or that Israel must resign itself to permanent occupation. It simply recognizes that the misnamed "peace process" is an exercise in frustration and will make no progress at this time in the existing framework.

A better route than desperately and futilely seeking to satisfy Palestinian policies that refuse to be satisfied is for a different process that would highlight Israeli-Palestinian bilateral talks on local issues, economic issues, and day-to-day security. This would involve multilateral talks under American or Quartet auspices between Israel and the other states in the region with the aim of ending their states of belligerency with Israel and recognizing the legitimacy of the state of Israel.

It won't happen? OK, but it behooves the parties — particularly the outside parties — to be honest about the futility of alchemy when they persist in demanding that the existing dross be turned into gold.

The fact is that the Arab-Israeli conflict, of which the Palestinian quest for independence is only one part, has no clear parameters for resolution at this time. That is the best reason to stretch the parameters of our thinking.

In the interim, the U.S. can pursue those problems and issues that lend themselves to amelioration — including advancing economic and political development on the West Bank — and should continue to provide Israel with the security that comes from our long and close relationship.