

Two-State Solution – Why It Is Not Worth Pursuing

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During the recent brutal and murderous attacks on Gaza by the Israeli regime, Malaysians, in general, were sympathetic to the Palestinians. The Malaysia prime minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin and foreign minister Hishamuddin Hussein issued very strong condemnations of Israel, which was gratifying but also quite unsurprising.

US president, Joe Biden, also issued a statement. In contrast, he was very supportive of Israel, stressing its right to defend itself from Hamas's crude rockets. Of course, he conveniently avoided mentioning the events that led to Hamas's actions, specifically the ethnic displacement of Palestinian families from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and the unprovoked attacks by Israeli police on worshippers at the Al Aqsa mosque. In other words, Joe Biden's statement is grossly unfair to Palestinians but also very predictably so.

What is more interesting to observe is, despite the contrasting positions between the Malaysian PM and the US president, there is a common phrase used by both leaders. Both stressed that the real settlement to the conflict lies in the two-state solution.

To hear those words coming from Joe Biden is disheartening to say the least, but again not surprising. But to hear them from the prime minister of Malaysia is both saddening and sickening. It clearly reflects either a lack of understanding of what has been happening in Palestine for the last seven decades or a desire to avoid a disagreement with the US on possible solutions to the sufferings of the Palestinians.

Israel will Never Accept It

The fact of the matter is the two-state solution will never come to fruition because Israel will never accept it and the US has never displayed any political will to force Israel to change its stance.

The basic reason why the two-state solution is unacceptable to Israel is simply that it is anathema to the very objective of Zionism set by its early founders and adherents when they decided to set up a homeland for Jews in Palestine. They were very clear from the beginning that their project in Palestine was not merely a colonial project but a settler-colonialist project.

The project, therefore, requires the demographics of the state to be of the kind where the population of the state is completely Jewish or predominantly Jewish. As a result, the Zionist leaders had always perceived the indigenous Palestinian population to be a major obstacle to the project. They were seen as 'aliens' who must eventually be removed from the land.

It has to be borne in mind that in 1947, Jews constituted only one-third of the population of Palestine. Moreover, most of them came to Palestine only 3 years before that from

Europe. The relatively smaller number of Jews compared to Palestinians, therefore, was a problem that needed to be solved.

Partition

Luckily for Israel, the UN came to the rescue by partitioning the land and giving almost 50% to the Jews even though they were the minority, and the rest to the Palestinians. The partition plan was a clever strategy to help ensure that Jews were still in control, besides also protecting the image of the Jews as being interested to implement a democratic system of governance there.

The 1948 attack on Palestinian villages by Jewish paramilitary gangs reduced the problem significantly for the Zionists because more than 750,000 terrified Palestinians were forced to flee their homeland.

But the Zionists were very clear that their project to set up a Zionist state which stretches from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea was not yet complete. Hence the premeditated attack on the Arab armies in 1967 which led to another war. The outcome of the 1967 war enabled Israel to control East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

But it presented another complication for Israel because the large number of 'aliens' there who did not flee the land has now re-created the 'demographics problem' again. The Zionists wanted the land but not the people and they could not possibly expel them from the land.

Continuous Occupation

The solution was to keep the Palestinians under continuous occupation. In this way Palestinians can never obtain their rights as citizens of Israel, thereby preserving the favourable demographics. For the Zionists, Arabs are allowed to exist but their existence in the West Bank is in the form of lesser human beings, confined to some bantustans or enclaves.

In the meantime, Israel continues to expand the number of settlements in the West Bank, which was the policy of all the governments of Israel whether they were on the left or right of the political spectrum. The fact is every single Israeli government since 1967 has built new settlements, which they always termed as 'Judea and Samaria' and which they consider to be an essential part of 'Eretz Israel'.

Even the government of Yitzhak Rabin, the left-leaning prime minister and co-signatory to the Oslo peace plan which emphasised the importance of the two-state solution, also accelerated the number of settlements. In fact, the number of settlements tripled during his leadership even though settlement-building is actually against international law.

In 1995, the Rabin government also spent US\$600 million on paved roads connecting settlements in the West Bank, which predictably were off-limits to Palestinians. If Rabin was

serious to let Palestinians control the West Bank under the so-called two-state solution, why the heck did he bother to spend so much money on the new roads?

No Serious Offer

The fact of the matter is after the Oslo accords, Israel has not made any serious offer that Palestinians can agree to. The 'Palestinian state' which was offered to them did not possess lands that are contiguous. Moreover, under the terms of the offer, Israel was supposed to be able to keep all the settlements intact in the West Bank. These encircle East Jerusalem cutting it off from the rest of the West Bank. These settlements are located on water aquifers thereby denying Palestinian control over the water resources on the land that was supposed to be their state. In addition, Israel also insisted on total control of the Jordan Valley and that the Palestinian state be completely demilitarized. Finally, Israel wanted full control over the new state's air space and borders.

Since those terms of the agreement to them were completely unacceptable, what should the Palestinians do? Go and seek help from the international community? Well, the reality is the international community has not done anything over the last five decades to make the two-state option a reality, not even after the Oslo accords were signed in 1993. Even now, the international community has not put any pressure on Israel to withdraw from the West Bank. In short, ever since the two-state solution was proposed in 1991 during the Madrid conference and included in the Oslo accords of 1993, the likelihood of it happening becomes bleaker by the day.

The Reasons for Mentioning It till Today

So why is the international community still mentioning it today? There are two possible reasons. The first reason and this applies more to the United States and Europe, is that these countries are simply not interested to come up with an alternative solution because such a solution will have to also deal with the human rights abuses that are currently being perpetrated on the Palestinians by Israel. In other words, they are simply not interested to stop Israel from continuing its present path of increasing its hold on the West Bank and confiscating more lands, thus leaving the Palestinians with nothing much in the form of a viable state in the future.

The second reason and this probably applies more to the Malaysian prime minister, is that he has been advised that the two-state solution will make Malaysia appear to be on the side of the Palestinians but without having to engage in any form of meaningful action that may result in the country coming into conflict with the United States and the western countries. He has likely been advised that trade and investment relations with the United States and other western countries are more important to the country's economy and the fate of the economy is, in turn, a more influential determinant of his future political fate.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the vacuousness of the two-state proposal is clear and factual given the realities of the situation. People of conscience around the world need to start insisting on

their governments to drop the idea immediately and to instead focus on meaningful actions to highlight the apartheid nature of the Zionist state and the need to boycott the country until it stops its systemic abuses of the human rights of Palestinians. Freedom, justice, and equality for Palestinians require a combination of sincere desire and strong determination. A half-hearted and hypocritical attitude will only prolong the miseries of all parties involved.