

Opinion  
Israel

# Could this be the idea that secures peace for Israelis and Palestinians?

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The case for an Israeli and Palestinian confederation, from the co-founder of the A Land for All movement



▲ 'What's necessary isn't separation, but equality and partnership.' Photograph: Paulo Amorim/VW Pics/Zuma Wire/Rex/Shutterstock

“Peace for peace.” That’s how Benjamin Netanyahu described the Abraham Accords, the peace deals that [Israel](#) signed with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in September. No more “land for peace”, the paradigm that once governed diplomacy

with the Palestinians.

From Netanyahu’s perspective, these deals were proof that he was right the whole time in claiming that the way to regional peace isn’t through the Palestinians. The US and Europe lost interest in the “Palestinian question” some time ago, and so did the Arab world, much of which decided it would rather align with Israel than support the Palestinians, who seemed more isolated and fragmented than ever. It’s no wonder so many people believed that Israel had won, and the Palestinian national struggle was over.

A little more than six months have passed since that bout of euphoria, and the Palestinian struggle is as alive as ever. From Damascus Gate to Sheikh Jarrah, from the Al-Aqsa Mosque to [Gaza](#), from Lod to Haifa, Palestinians have made it clear to anyone who forgot or who had any doubts: we are here, throughout the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, we aren’t going anywhere, and we have a common identity and a shared history. The dispossession of Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah in Jerusalem mirrors the dispossession of Palestinians citizens inside Israel. The Palestinian struggle is a single struggle, and he who doesn’t like it, as Yasser Arafat used to say, may drink the water of the Dead Sea.

The recent violence, especially the intercommunal violence in the “mixed cities”, where both Jews and Palestinians live inside Israel, have predictably strengthened the voices that claimed there’s no hope for Jews and Palestinians living together in this land. “The chilling effect of the Nakba on the Arab enemy has dissipated a bit,” Ronen Shoval, an ex-associate of Netanyahu’s, [tweeted](#) in reference to the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948, in which more than 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their home. “We broke coexistence,” boasted the Hamas leader Khaled Mashal.

“There’s no real way to separate Jews and Palestinians. Palestinians and Jews live alongside one another throughout the entire territory. Unequally, but next to one another”

These events have seeded confusion and despair even among those who believe there’s a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For the last 30 years at least, the guiding paradigm has been separation between Israel and the Palestinians. Israeli Jews, especially, were sold this idea: two states, with us (the Jews) here, and them (the Palestinians), there, with a wall between us. Peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians have always been based on this premise.

But when Jews and Palestinians clash inside Israel in the streets of Lod and Acre, suddenly the notion of separation seems irrelevant. There’s no real way, barring ethnic cleansing,

to separate Jews and Palestinians in these cities and throughout Israel. You can’t divide the city of Haifa in two, or the city of Nazareth. And if you widen the lens, you’ll see that this impossibility extends to the entire territory between river and sea. Palestinians and Jews live alongside one another throughout the entire territory. Unequally, but next to one another.

So if separation is impossible, does that mean there is no solution? Does that mean we’re heading toward one state, which in the “best” case will require dismantling the state of Israel, and in the worst and more likely case, mean apartheid and even worse?

Although they are two peoples with distinct national identities, Jews and Palestinians are geographically intertwined. Both peoples view the entire land as their homeland. For the Jews, that extends to Hebron in the West Bank as much as to Tel Aviv; for the Palestinians, Jaffa as much as Ramallah.

Since neither group has any plans to leave, and since physical destruction or expulsion aren’t an option, the solution needs to be based on this fundamental understanding. What’s necessary isn’t separation, but equality and partnership; individual and national equality between all of the residents of this land - through an end to the occupation, dispossession, and unequal privileges - and real partnership between these two groups.

My view, and that of my Palestinian and Jewish partners in the [A Land for All](#) movement, is that there’s a way to reach that equality and that partnership: through an Israeli-Palestinian confederation, entailing the following principles:

- Two independent states, Israel and Palestine, along the 1967 borders.
- A federated structure with shared institutions governing human rights, security, the economy and other issues of mutual interest.
- Open borders and freedom of movement for the citizens of both states, who can live anywhere they’d like.
- Jerusalem will be an open city, the capital of both states, overseen by a joint municipal government.
- Restitution for all past wrongs, without creating new ones.

When we started out eight years ago, this idea seemed like a fantasy. Today, more and more Palestinians, Jews and others realize that the two-state solution is in crisis, and that we need to find an alternative that gives voice to the national aspirations of these two peoples on the one hand, and allows them to realize their connection to the land on the other.

A confederation wouldn’t be a panacea. It demands a lot of thought, education and consciousness raising. But the paradigm needs changing. Enough with the talk of separation. Partnership, on the basis of equality, is what’s needed. What’s happening now makes clear there’s no other way.

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