

Two-State Illusion

By IAN S. LUSTICK, September 14, 2013

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/opinion/sunday/two-state-illusion.html?pagewanted=all&_r=2&&pagewanted=print

THE last three decades are littered with the carcasses of failed negotiating projects billed as the last chance for peace in Israel. All sides have been wedded to the notion that there must be two states, one Palestinian and one Israeli. For more than 30 years, experts and politicians have warned of a “point of no return.” Secretary of State John Kerry is merely the latest in a long line of well-meaning American diplomats wedded to an idea whose time is now past.

True believers in the two-state solution see absolutely no hope elsewhere. With no alternative in mind, and unwilling or unable to rethink their basic assumptions, they are forced to defend a notion whose success they can no longer sincerely portray as plausible or even possible.

It’s like 1975 all over again, when the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco fell into a coma. The news media began a long death watch, announcing each night that Generalissimo Franco was still not dead. This desperate allegiance to the departed echoes in every speech, policy brief and op-ed about the two-state solution today.

True, some comas miraculously end. Great surprises sometimes happen. The problem is that the changes required to achieve the vision of robust Israeli and Palestinian states living side by side are now considerably less likely than other less familiar but more plausible outcomes that demand high-level attention but aren’t receiving it.

Strong Islamist trends make a fundamentalist Palestine more likely than a small state under a secular government. The disappearance of Israel as a Zionist project, through war, cultural exhaustion or demographic momentum, is at least as plausible as the evacuation of enough of the half-million Israelis living across the 1967 border, or Green Line, to allow a real Palestinian state to exist. While the vision of thriving Israeli and Palestinian states has slipped from the plausible to the barely possible, one mixed state emerging from prolonged and violent struggles over democratic rights is no longer inconceivable. Yet the fantasy that there is a two-state solution keeps everyone from taking action toward something that might work.

All sides have reasons to cling to this illusion. The Palestinian Authority needs its people to believe that progress is being made toward a two-state solution so it can continue to get the economic aid and diplomatic support that subsidize the lifestyles of its leaders, the jobs of tens of thousands of soldiers, spies, police officers and civil servants, and the authority’s prominence in a Palestinian society that views it as corrupt and incompetent.

Israeli governments cling to the two-state notion because it seems to reflect the sentiments of the Jewish Israeli majority and it shields the country from international opprobrium, even as it camouflages relentless efforts to expand Israel’s territory into the West Bank.

American politicians need the two-state slogan to show they are working toward a diplomatic solution, to keep the pro-Israel lobby from turning against them and to disguise their humiliating inability to allow any daylight between Washington and the Israeli government.

Finally, the “peace process” industry — with its legions of consultants, pundits, academics and journalists — needs a steady supply of readers, listeners and funders who are either desperately worried that this latest round of talks will lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state, or that it will not.

Conceived as early as the 1930s, the idea of two states between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea all but disappeared from public consciousness between 1948 and 1967. Between 1967 and 1973 it re-emerged, advanced by a minority of “moderates” in each community. By the 1990s it was embraced by majorities on both sides as not only possible but, during the height of the Oslo peace process, probable. But failures of leadership in the face of tremendous pressures brought Oslo crashing down. These days no one suggests that a negotiated two-state “solution” is probable. The most optimistic insist that, for some brief period, it may still be conceivable.

But many Israelis see the demise of the country as not just possible, but probable. The State of Israel has been established, not its permanence. The most common phrase in Israeli political discourse is some variation of “If X happens (or doesn’t), the state will not survive!” Those who assume that Israel will always exist as a Zionist project should consider how quickly the Soviet, Pahlavi Iranian, apartheid South African, Baathist Iraqi and Yugoslavian states unraveled, and how little warning even sharp-eyed observers had that such transformations were imminent.

In all these cases, presumptions about what was “impossible” helped protect brittle institutions by limiting political imagination. And when objective realities began to diverge dramatically from official common sense, immense pressures accumulated.

JUST as a balloon filled gradually with air bursts when the limit of its tensile strength is passed, there are thresholds of radical, disruptive change in politics. When those thresholds are crossed, the impossible suddenly becomes probable, with revolutionary implications for governments and nations. As we see vividly across the Middle East, when forces for change and new ideas are stifled as completely and for as long as they have been in the Israel-Palestinian conflict, sudden and jagged change becomes increasingly likely.

History offers many such lessons. Britain ruled Ireland for centuries, annexing it in 1801. By the mid-19th century the entire British political class treated Ireland’s permanent incorporation as a fact of life. But bottled-up Irish fury produced repeated revolts. By the 1880s, the Irish question was the greatest issue facing the country; it led to mutiny in the army and near civil war before World War I. Once the war ended, it took only a few years until the establishment of an independent Ireland. What was inconceivable became a fact.

France ruled Algeria for 130 years and never questioned the future of Algeria as an integral part of France. But enormous pressures accumulated, exploding into a revolution that left hundreds of thousands dead. Despite France's military victory over the rebels in 1959, Algeria soon became independent, and Europeans were evacuated from the country.

And when Mikhail S. Gorbachev sought to save Soviet Communism by reforming it with the policies of glasnost and perestroika, he relied on the people's continuing belief in the permanence of the Soviet structure. But the forces for change that had already accumulated were overwhelming. Unable to separate freedom of expression and market reforms from the rest of the Soviet state project, Mr. Gorbachev's policies pushed the system beyond its breaking point. Within a few years, both the Soviet Union and the Communist regime were gone.

Obsessive focus on preserving the theoretical possibility of a two-state solution is as irrational as rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic rather than steering clear of icebergs. But neither ships in the night nor the State of Israel can avoid icebergs unless they are seen.

The two-state slogan now serves as a comforting blindfold of entirely contradictory fantasies. The current Israeli version of two states envisions Palestinian refugees abandoning their sacred "right of return," an Israeli-controlled Jerusalem and an archipelago of huge Jewish settlements, crisscrossed by Jewish-only access roads. The Palestinian version imagines the return of refugees, evacuation of almost all settlements and East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital.

DIPLOMACY under the two-state banner is no longer a path to a solution but an obstacle itself. We are engaged in negotiations to nowhere. And this isn't the first time that American diplomats have obstructed political progress in the name of hopeless talks.

In 1980, I was a 30-year-old assistant professor, on leave from Dartmouth at the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. I was responsible for analyzing Israeli settlement and land expropriation policies in the West Bank and their implications for the "autonomy negotiations" under way at that time between Israel, Egypt and the United States. It was clear to me that Prime Minister Menachem Begin's government was systematically using tangled talks over how to conduct negotiations as camouflage for de facto annexation of the West Bank via intensive settlement construction, land expropriation and encouragement of "voluntary" Arab emigration.

To protect the peace process, the United States strictly limited its public criticism of Israeli government policies, making Washington an enabler for the very processes of de facto annexation that were destroying prospects for the full autonomy and realization of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people that were the official purpose of the negotiations. This view was endorsed and promoted by some leading voices within the administration. Unsurprisingly, it angered others. One day I was summoned to the office of a high-ranking diplomat, who was then one of the State Department's most powerful advocates for the negotiations. He was a

man I had always respected and admired. "Are you," he asked me, "personally so sure of your analysis that you are willing to destroy the only available chance for peace between Israelis and Palestinians?" His question gave me pause, but only briefly. "Yes, sir," I answered, "I am."

I still am. Had America blown the whistle on destructive Israeli policies back then it might have greatly enhanced prospects for peace under a different leader. It could have prevented Mr. Begin's narrow electoral victory in 1981 and brought a government to power that was ready to negotiate seriously with the Palestinians before the first or second intifada and before the construction of massive settlement complexes in the West Bank. We could have had an Oslo process a crucial decade earlier.

Now, as then, negotiations are phony; they suppress information that Israelis, Palestinians and Americans need to find noncatastrophic paths into the future. The issue is no longer where to draw political boundaries between Jews and Arabs on a map but how equality of political rights is to be achieved. The end of the 1967 Green Line as a demarcation of potential Israeli and Palestinian sovereignty means that Israeli occupation of the West Bank will stigmatize all of Israel.

For some, abandoning the two-state mirage may feel like the end of the world. But it is not. Israel may no longer exist as the Jewish and democratic vision of its Zionist founders. The Palestine Liberation Organization stalwarts in Ramallah may not strut on the stage of a real Palestinian state. But these lost futures can make others more likely.

THE assumptions necessary to preserve the two-state slogan have blinded us to more likely scenarios. With a status but no role, what remains of the Palestinian Authority will disappear. Israel will face the stark challenge of controlling economic and political activity and all land and water resources from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. The stage will be set for ruthless oppression, mass mobilization, riots, brutality, terror, Jewish and Arab emigration and rising tides of international condemnation of Israel. And faced with growing outrage, America will no longer be able to offer unconditional support for Israel. Once the illusion of a neat and palatable solution to the conflict disappears, Israeli leaders may then begin to see, as South Africa's white leaders saw in the late 1980s, that their behavior is producing isolation, emigration and hopelessness.

Fresh thinking could then begin about Israel's place in a rapidly changing region. There could be generous compensation for lost property. Negotiating with Arabs and Palestinians based on satisfying their key political requirements, rather than on maximizing Israeli prerogatives, might yield more security and legitimacy. Perhaps publicly acknowledging Israeli mistakes and responsibility for the suffering of Palestinians would enable the Arab side to accept less than what it imagines as full justice. And perhaps Israel's potent but essentially unusable nuclear weapons arsenal could be sacrificed for a verified and strictly enforced W.M.D.-free zone in the Middle East.

Such ideas cannot even be entertained as long as the chimera of a negotiated two-state solution monopolizes

all attention. But once the two-state-fantasy blindfolds are off, politics could make strange bedfellows.

In such a radically new environment, secular Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank could ally with Tel Aviv's post-Zionists, non-Jewish Russian-speaking immigrants, foreign workers and global-village Israeli entrepreneurs. Anti-nationalist ultra-Orthodox Jews might find common cause with Muslim traditionalists. Untethered to statist Zionism in a rapidly changing Middle East, Israelis whose families came from Arab countries might find new reasons to think of themselves not as "Eastern," but as Arab. Masses of downtrodden and exploited Muslim and Arab refugees, in Gaza, the West Bank and in Israel itself could see democracy, not Islam, as the solution for translating what they have (numbers) into what they want (rights and resources). Israeli Jews committed above all to settling throughout the greater Land of Israel may find arrangements based on a confederation, or a regional formula more attractive than narrow Israeli nationalism.

It remains possible that someday two real states may arise. But the pretense that negotiations under the slogan of "two states for two peoples" could lead to such a solution must be abandoned. Time can do things that politicians cannot.

Just as an independent Ireland emerged by seceding 120 years after it was formally incorporated into the United Kingdom, so, too, a single state might be the route to eventual Palestinian independence. But such outcomes develop organically; they are not implemented by diplomats overnight and they do not arise without the painful stalemates that lead each party to conclude that time is not on their side.

Peacemaking and democratic state building require blood and magic. The question is not whether the future has conflict in store for Israel-Palestine. It does. Nor is the question whether conflict can be prevented. It cannot. But avoiding truly catastrophic change means ending the stifling reign of an outdated idea and allowing both sides to see and then adapt to the world as it is.

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Partition Skepticism and the Future of the Peace Process by Avner Inbar and Assaf Sharon, September 25, 2013 <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/09/25/partition-skepticism-and-the-future-of-the-peace-process.print.html>

Writing off the two-state solution is the latest trend in Israel-Palestine punditry. A surprising meeting point between left and right, the notion that historical Palestine can no longer be divided into two sovereign states is gaining popularity among former supporters of two states for two peoples. Even if at one time partition was both just and practicable, argue the recent converts to the church of the-hell-with-it, years of failure have

drained the last drops of reasonable hope from this now obsolete idea. The two-state solution, in other words, is not inherently wrong; it is simply passé. The controversy around Ian Lustick's recent "Two-State Illusion" article in The New York Times (http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/opinion/sunday/two-state-illusion.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&) offers an opportunity to analyze "partition skepticism," as we call it, and to submit its arguments to critical scrutiny.

1. Partition skepticism

Arguments against the two-state solution fall into two types. Some oppose partition on moral grounds, arguing that any solution that does not address the Palestinian right of return and redress discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel is inherently unjust. These objections are applicable regardless of the state of the peace process; they hold the same weight now as they did back when Lustick and other recent partition skeptics were still cheering for two states for two peoples.

The second type of argument against partition concerns practicability. Partition skeptics contend that even if the two-state solution is in principle desirable, it is no longer feasible; they argue that the peace process is failing because it is pursuing a dead end and they call for alternative solutions. It is no wonder that after 46 years of unrelenting occupation and three decades of failed negotiations, and amidst another round of precarious peace talks, the tendency to announce—or celebrate—the death of the two-state solution is making some headway among intellectuals and activists. It takes endless optimism not to give in to despair every once in a while, but those of us whose lives are inextricably implicated in this conflict do not have the luxury of allowing visceral reactions to stand in the way of clear-eyed engagement with reality. Fatigue is no substitute for analysis and frustration is no excuse for inadvertent argumentation.

The main argument of partition skeptics is that the two-state solution is dead due to irreversible "facts on the ground." This claim has been making the rounds for more than 30 years. In 1982, the prophet of irreversibility, Israeli historian and former deputy mayor of Jerusalem Meron Benvenisti, warned that it is already "5 minutes to midnight" with respect to the two-state solution

(<http://www.nytimes.com/1982/11/01/opinion/abroad-at-home-5-minutes-to-midnight.html>) due to Israel's de-facto annexation of the West Bank. Lustick recalls that in 1980 he detected that Israel "was systematically using tangled talks over how to conduct negotiations as camouflage for de-facto annexation of the West Bank via intensive settlement construction, land expropriation and encouragement of "voluntary" Arab emigration, arguing that this threatens the practicability of partition. But while Israel's bad faith cannot be denied, annexation is a legal term; land cannot be annexed de-facto because annexation requires the assent or at least the acknowledgement of relevant parties, and nobody—not the international community, certainly not the

Palestinians, and not even official Israel—regards Gaza and the West Bank as annexed.

The issue, then, is not the status of the occupied territories, but the physical reality, the notorious facts on the ground. When it comes to the vision of a bi-national democratic state, Lustick counts on the possibility of “radical, disruptive changes in politics.” Empires may rise and fall, but settlements are forever. Settlement construction has certainly been the major obstacle for peace and a constant source of frustration for those who seek it. But it is wrong to conclude that they are irreversible.

In truth, the idea that the settlements are physically irreversible is no more valid today, when settlers number more than 500,000, than it was in the early 1980's when they were no more than a few scores. To see this it is enough to note some basic facts about them. Note that 85 percent of settlers live in what is now known as settlement blocs (<http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/the-lies-about-the-settlements-1.467947>), which comprise less than 6 percent of the West Bank. Nearly all settlements outside these blocs have fewer than 2,000 residents. Moreover, the settlements rely for their subsistence on profligate funding and services provided by the state of Israel. The settlements have developed no substantial local industry, commerce or agriculture, and more than two-thirds of settlers work inside the Green Line. Of those who work in the settlements, the percentage of government and municipal employees is extremely high. While the Israeli welfare state goes to pieces, benefits and government subsidies to settlements are skyrocketing. Anything from transportation to education and housing is cheaper for Jews beyond the Green Line. Life in the geopolitical absurdity of the settlements is objectively costly, which makes it completely dependent on special subsidies.

Withdrawal of these benefits and services would make life in the settlements barely possible and quite possibly unbearable for most settlers. The fact that imagery of forced displacement still dominates discussions of settlement dismantlement is a triumph for the right, which the left grants gratuitously. Proponents of peace must overcome the tendency to self-destructively aggrandize the settlements. They should heed the words of Elisha Efrat, a leading Israeli geographer, who recently wrote in *The Two-State Solution* that “the settlement system established over many years through huge investments, is in fact geographically shaky, inconsistent with the logic of spatial planning, and therefore has little chance to maintain a lasting, independent existence... The collapse and disintegration of this system is only a matter of time.”

The issue, then, is one of political will, not of physical possibility. Undoubtedly, creating the political will necessary for removing settlements is a big challenge, but this should serve as a call for action, not as an excuse for despair. It is certainly no argument for giving up on partition in favor of a single state. The bi-national idea is anathema to the vast majority of Israeli Jews, whereas partition is consistently favored by a substantial—if tragically ineffectual—majority of the Israeli population. Public opinion polls also show that

most Palestinians prefer an independent state over its alternatives. To the extent that the problem concerns political will, then, there is no reason to ascribe better prospects to the single state option than to the two-state framework.

2. Negotiation fetishism

Lustick's main reason for doubting partition is the fact that “the last three decades are littered with the carcasses of failed negotiating projects.” The crux of this argument is that since all previous attempts to reach two states fell short, the solution itself must be unattainable. But here he falls victim to a prevalent fallacy: the confusion of means with ends. Repeated failures to reach a desired goal can cast doubt on its practicability only if the best means have been exhausted. Failing to make an omelet hardly proves that omelets are illusory if nobody has been willing to break some eggs along the way. In other words, the historical, and therefore contingent, failure of the peace process to reach its declared goal can only count as evidence of the impracticability of the two-state solution if we can guarantee that the process itself had been largely flawless. But few observers of Middle Eastern affairs can honestly avow to that, least of all Ian Lustick, who has been studying the region for 40 years. As a matter of fact, the peace process has been so flagrantly flawed that finding fault in the proposed solution—namely, the formula of two states for two peoples—amounts to de-facto exoneration of Israeli intransigence, Palestinian mistakes and American mismanagement of the peace process.

The full list of blunders, disruptions and accidents that made the very phrase “peace process” an object of derision in Israel and Palestine alike is beyond the scope of this article. But the issue at hand cannot be addressed without some consideration of one fundamental flaw—which brings us back to the means-end fallacy. Last April, a few weeks before he triumphantly announced the resumption of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, John Kerry reiterated the basic principle (<http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/D0BCBF7822F43EC385257B5D004CD63E>) underlying all endeavors by the international community since the inception of the peace process: “two states living side by side in peace and security brought about through direct negotiations between the parties.” This statement, and countless similar ones, shows how the international community, Israel, and sometimes even the Palestinians, tie together two projects which are in principle entirely independent: ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through partition of historical Palestine into two sovereign states based on the 1967 border, and achieving this by means of direct bilateral negotiations. It is because of this fusion of the end and the means in the political imaginations of relevant actors that the failure of the peace process is increasingly being construed as a breakdown of the two-state solution.

While more and more commentators seek alternatives to partition, few make any effort to develop alternatives to the negotiation fetishism that afflicts proponents of Israeli-Palestinian peace. This irrational

attachment to direct negotiations is responsible, among other things, for U.S. insistence to stymie the potentially game-changing Palestinian bid for U.N. recognition. Former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice said at the time (<http://www.jta.org/2012/10/16/news-opinion/united-states/rice-at-u-n-echoes-obama-on-palestinians-unilateral-statehood-bid>) that the initiative to recognize Palestinian statehood “would only jeopardize the peace process and complicate efforts to return the parties to direct negotiations”—an ironic statement when viewed against the utter failure of negotiations. But this failure is not incidental. It follows structurally from a setting in which the stronger party is not genuinely interested in closing the deal.

Israel’s incentives for entering negotiations—mainly mitigation of international pressure—are largely satisfied by the negotiations themselves. It is no wonder that Tzipi Livni, Israel’s chief negotiator, incessantly talks about the “negotiating room,” but remains evasive about what she intends to achieve there. It is only when Israel will no longer be able to secure its perceived interests by endless negotiations that negotiations might cease to be endless. The Palestinians themselves do not have what Israel seeks to gain from the peace process; it is therefore unclear what forcing the sides into a room can achieve without credible and powerful incentives to settle.

Accordingly, if the two-state solution will never be realized, it will not be because of some inherent unfeasibility or the often-overstated “facts on the ground.” It will be because alternatives to direct bilateral negotiations continue to be discounted in favor of the only route that has repeatedly and expectedly led to a dead end.

3. Strange bedfellows

Instead of analyzing the failures of the process, proposing and advocating better paths, Lustick, like other partition skeptics, urges two-staters “to rethink their basic assumptions.” Nowhere does he specify what those are. So let us spell out two of ours.

First, we assume that the national aspirations of both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs are genuine and entrenched. In this they are no different from Algerians, Serbs or the Irish. In fact, these examples cited by Lustick merely testify to the resilience of religious, ethnic and national identities. Ironically, almost all the precedents he mentions demonstrate the need for partition of one kind or another.

Second, we also assume that there are no clean slates in history. A century of bloodshed leaves a mark. Decades of hatred, humiliation, violence and dispossession are not washed away by political fiat. Deep-seated animosity, profound distrust, and fundamental religious, political and social divides cannot be wished away by utopian dreams.

Lustick’s own examples—Yugoslavia, Ireland, Iraq—demonstrate this with unnerving clarity. Lustick acknowledges in passing that with the evaporation of the two-state solution “the stage will be set for ruthless oppression, mass mobilization, riots, brutality, terror, Jewish and Arab emigration and rising tides of

international condemnation of Israel.” He is counting on Israel’s leaders to then realize “that their behavior is producing isolation, emigration and hopelessness,” at which point they will acknowledge Palestinian rights, address their grievances and assume responsibility for their suffering. The Arab side will then agree “to accept less than what it imagines as full justice.”

But this is the desperate logic of Leninist dreamers, not a reasoned plan. The belief that once the existing political order of the “Zionist project” is removed, democracy is sure to sprout is reminiscent of the juvenile idealism that led George W. Bush to promise a democratic “free and peaceful Iraq” as soon as Saddam Hussein bows out. Post-war Iraq is unfortunately a fitting example for the reality that might lurk behind one-state visions.

In fact, there is no need to draw on distant precedents. Although partition skeptics like to present their view as an unexplored, novel possibility, non-partition was a reality for much of the last century. The very idea of partition only gained prominence with the report of the Royal Palestine Commission appointed to investigate the riots of 1936. The commission admittedly could not meet its terms of reference—“to remove the grievances” of the rival communities and “prevent their recurrence”—because “The disease is so deep-rooted that in the Commissioners’ firm conviction the only hope of a cure lies in a surgical operation.” The Commission recommended partition because “There can be no question of fusion or assimilation between Jewish and Arab cultures. The National Home cannot be half-national, [...] Arab nationalism is as intense a force as Jewish” and “Neither of the two national ideals permits of combination in the service of a single State.” It would be absurd to suggest that decades of bloody conflict somehow mitigate this judgment. The thriving democracy conjured up by prophets of unification can quickly disintegrate into tribal war. Lebanonization is much likelier than reconciliation.

All this can certainly be disputed, but it cannot be ignored. Yet partition skeptics are almost always satisfied with stating the shortcomings of the two-state option while offering few concrete details about their esoteric alternatives. Unsurprisingly, the only one-staters who are happy to flesh out their plans are right-wing advocates of non-partition motivated by nationalist expansionism. Left-wing opponents of partition who fail to articulate concrete proposals run the risk of playing into the hands of their right-wing rivals. Given the balance of power in Israel, it is likely that if non-partitionist proposals are adopted and employed they will assume the non-democratic features devised by the right and not the democratic character desired by the left.

But regardless of the looming presence of Israel’s dynamic far-right, one cannot responsibly play around with one-state structures without laying out a plan. For given the history of animosity and bloodshed, the most probable alternatives to partition are apartheid and Lebanonization. And given the distribution of arms, the Palestinians are likely to fare worse in either scenario. Until they propose something resembling even the rudimentary elements of a stable bi-national institutional

arrangement, one-staters are merely playing with words. And with lives.

All of this becomes painfully clear when Lustick's piece reaches the predictable crescendo on the "radically new environment" waiting beyond the two-state horizon. As soon as this environment is specified, the claims become so out of touch with reality that they border on insult to Israelis and Palestinians genuinely interested in resolving the conflict in one way or another:

In such a radically new environment, secular Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank could ally with Tel Aviv's post-Zionists, non-Jewish Russian-speaking immigrants, foreign workers and global-village Israeli entrepreneurs. Anti-nationalist ultra-Orthodox Jews might find common cause with Muslim traditionalists. Untethered to statist Zionism in a rapidly changing Middle East, Israelis whose families came from Arab countries might find new reasons to think of themselves not as "Eastern," but as Arab.

Instead of belaboring the demographic and political marginality of some of these groups and the ideological, emotional and political rifts between them, here's an analogy illustrating just how far-fetched this vision is. Progressives in the U.S. have been dealing with an increasingly frustrating crisis around gun control. Despite a clear majority in favor of tougher regulation, elected officials are unable to overcome ideological differences and deliver a solution. Now imagine that an Israeli scholar of U.S. politics publishes a lengthy piece in a major newspaper advocating for a novel gun control policy based on the assumption that an emerging coalition can somehow break the political gridlock. Suggesting that Berkeley radicals, tea party libertarians and Mexican illegal immigrants "could ally with" Native Americans, this eminent scholar also surmises that Orthodox Jews "might find common cause with" Mormons and that given their common roots with Quakers evangelical Protestants "might find new reasons to think of themselves as" pacifists. But in order for all this to happen, we must first remove all gun regulations, perhaps even distribute semi-automatics to middle-schoolers. Our imagined scholar obviously recognizes that following the implementation of his proposal "the stage will be set for...riots, brutality, terror," but thinks it may all be worth it because maybe, just maybe, a fantastic new reality will emerge from underneath the ruins. Why? Because "politics could make strange bedfellows."

4. Beyond frustration

We can point out additional absurdities in Lustick's article, like the contention that the two-state solution is barely possible because "Strong Islamist trends make a fundamentalist Palestine more likely than a small state under a secular government," but that once we dispel the two-state illusion, "Masses of downtrodden and exploited Muslim and Arab refugees, in Gaza, the West Bank and in Israel itself could see democracy, not Islam,

as the solution." The two-state solution being the driving force behind Islamic fundamentalism, of course. But the crux of the matter is not inconsistencies in one specific article, but the fact that partition skepticism, and the one-state delusion it belies, almost inevitably leads to these absurdities.

The two-state solution can and should be questioned and debated; its moral critics raise serious issues that have to be, and we believe can be, sincerely addressed. We do not suggest that Lustick's frustration is unwarranted. It is true that much of the peace industry has become counterproductive, concerned more with maintaining access to power and protecting a legacy than with advancing a solution. American timidity towards Israel has certainly earned his criticism. And he is probably right to belittle the current round of talks.

But none of this justifies skepticism about partition. The pervasive dependency of settlements on government support means that, despite successful efforts on the right to create the opposite impression, their undoing is a matter of political will rather than of brute force. If Israel decides to pull the plug, the settlement enterprise will crumble like a house of cards. Indeed, the irony is that nearly everybody, including the vast majority of Israelis, knows the contours of the solution with singular clarity. The important debate concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not about the solution, but about how to achieve it. The efforts of intellectuals, activists and policymakers should be invested in fixing the process. That is what is broken, and that is where new ideas, innovative and radical as they come, can really make a difference.

The Danger of Two-State Messianism

by Ian S. Lustick, October 2, 2013

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/10/02/the-danger-of-two-state-messianism.print.html>

In high school I was a member of the modern Orthodox youth movement, the National Conference of Synagogue Youth. We sang and danced to scores of niggunim for hours on end. But the song I loved the best was one not danced to: "Ani Maamin" (I Believe). Almost all Jewish Israelis know the words, the powerful melody, and the deep emotion of its message: "I believe with a complete faith in the coming of the Messiah. And though he may tarry, yet I will wait for him. I will wait for him all the days of my life."

The deep meaning of the song is that whether or not the Messiah comes, and whether or not there really is a Messiah waiting to come, the yearning for what his arrival would mean, and the injunction never to lose hope for mankind, are values in and of themselves that help make life worth living. Much of the intelligent and passionate piece that Avner Inbar and Assaf Sharon have written ([/articles/2013/09/25/partition-skepticism-and-the-future-of-the-peace-process.html](http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/09/25/partition-skepticism-and-the-future-of-the-peace-process.html)) in response to my New York Times op-ed piece—"Two State Illusion"—is their own version of Ani Maamin. It is an anxious yet defiant song of resistance against despair by

professing against all odds “complete faith” in the coming of the two-state solution.

The reality is that God will not announce that the messiah is not coming. Nor, regarding a negotiated two-state solution, will he announce when the “point of no return” has actually been passed. But there is a great difference between the two. There’s really nothing to lose by declaring the Messiah son of David will come, even if he will not. But there is a tremendous amount to lose by continuing to advocate two-state plans that cannot be implemented when the evil designs of others can exploit that error.

The most important message in my article was not that two states are absolutely impossible—indeed I did not say that and do not believe it. Rather, my argument is that paths to political decisions in Israel and the United States that could result in that outcome via negotiations are so implausible that the negotiations themselves end up protecting and deepening oppressive conditions. In addition, by diverting energies from the difficult search for alternatives, however painful they may be, fixation on the tantalizing mirage of the two-state solution’s imminent arrival increases the likelihood that when transformative change comes, that change will be catastrophic.

Let me be clear: I am not claiming, and did not claim, that I have discovered a realistic path forward to satisfying the legitimate rights of Jews and Arabs in Palestine/the Land of Israel. Such a path may exist, but it may not. For several decades I believed, and I think correctly, that internationally brokered direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians had a good chance of achieving a real two-state solution that would both naturalize Israel’s presence in the region and provide Jews and Palestinians with limited, but democratic and satisfactory, outlets for their collective aspirations. Problems there would have been, but those problems would have been much preferable to those associated with any other course of action.

To be sure, neither its benefits nor its implementation were ever sure things. To have pulled off the two-state solution while it was available would have been in some ways more amazing than the establishment of the state of Israel itself. It would have made Israel the only European fragment society to have successfully institutionalized its presence in a non-European region without effectively eliminating the aboriginal population. The odds were always against the two-state solution’s success, whether because of the crippling hold that a blinkered Israel lobby has on American foreign policy in the region, the Islamicization of politics in the Arab world, or a cultural transformation of the Israeli political landscape driven by decades of siege, Holocaustmania, and triumphalism. The argument I’m making is not that I have a better plan for a nice future than two-state true believers possess. It is that if catastrophic scales of destruction can be avoided, ways to do so will not be found by those blinded by faith in an appealingly familiar but no-longer-available path. Why? Because as long as Israelis (and Palestinians) do not feel—immediately and concretely—that their very existence is threatened by the

absence of a way to live together, they will not question the assumptions that need to be questioned.

Inbar and Sharon ask me to say what assumptions must be questioned. I will.

For Israelis: Is statist Zionism the only framework for satisfying Jewish national and cultural ambitions? Can the fundamental inconsistency between “Jewish stateness” and principles of citizen equality be the actual basis for stable relations between equal and powerfully mobilized Jewish and non-Jewish communities? Can those who live in a villa survive in a jungle unless the jungle is transformed into villas or the villa becomes part of the jungle? Can the Jews of Israel ever expect to win an endless competition in brutality with the other peoples of the Middle East?

For Palestinians: Can Palestinians as a people survive an all-out struggle between a Muslim Middle East and a Jewish state capable of using weapons of mass destruction? Can a Palestinian Zionist movement, intent on achieving the “return” to its land generations after the loss of that land, be more successful, humane, or stabilizing in its effects than the Jewish version? Can the category of Palestinian embrace Jews in a way that the category of Zionist was unable to embrace Palestinians?

In my essay I suggest a variety of things that could happen in a radically changed Middle East. I do not offer those ideas as forecasts, but as examples of possibilities that may help two-staters understand the category of “theoretically possible but highly implausible”—a category which also now includes the negotiated route to a two-state solution. I agree that despite the fact that ultra-Orthodox Jews and Muslims do ally with one another in the Israeli parliament to support segregated schools and strict dietary rules in public facilities, it is a stretch to think of those two groups allying themselves more broadly. Certainly it is difficult to imagine the circumstances that would lead most Mizrahi Jews in Israel to identify, also, as Arab. On the other hand, if Germans and Jews could be close allies within two generations following the Holocaust, and if my own side of the Jewish world has no problem referring to itself as “Ashkenazi” (i.e. German), then why think a changing mix of challenges and opportunities cannot lead Jews from Arab countries to acknowledge their heritage in a parallel fashion.

Politics, as I noted, makes strange bedfellows, but only when circumstances demand it. That’s what rough politics does. Rough politics is not something that moves according to a plan. But rough politics is how history produces most of the “outcomes” to protracted struggles. Those outcomes are seldom the “solutions” that anyone planned for or sought systematically to bring about.

Right now, for example, there is no one-state solution. But there is a one-state outcome. Between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea there is one and only one real state—Israel. It has shown repeatedly that it can and will send its military forces into any corner of that territory whenever it deems it necessary. The Palestinian Authority’s nominal administration over some domains and Hamas’s position in Gaza notwithstanding, virtually nothing goes into or out of

this entire area that the State of Israel does not authorize. The question then is not whether there can be one state in Palestine/the Land of Israel. The answer to that question is obvious. There is. The question is what is that state like and can it be changed? Are there other outcomes available that are more compatible with principles of democratic and human rights for all the country's inhabitants and those with rights to live there?

Here's where I agree with the Inbar-Sharon argument that Lebanonization or apartheid are the two most likely medium-term outcomes. On the other hand, as we can see from the South African case, and to an extent in Lebanon, neither anarchy nor oppression are durable over the long run. What I have tried to do is draw attention to how the "dead plan walking" known as the two-state solution facilitates the integration of masses of disenfranchised Palestinians into the control system of the Israeli state, blunting pressures that otherwise would be brought to bear on the protagonists and discouraging new forms of mobilization and cultural change. In this way, with its prospects reduced from the plausible to the theoretically possible, a negotiated two-state solution and the discourse surrounding it remain key factors in the political equation. Indeed the fundamental reason for Netanyahu's embrace of the slogan, drained of all real meaning of course, is that the tantalizing image of its availability sucks all oxygen out of the political atmosphere. To be sure, the large-scale pressures, mobilizations, and psychological shifts necessary to make progress possible cannot be predicted in detail. But only thus can a situation featuring a single state that dominates life between the Jordan and the sea be transformed into a society within which more satisfactory confederal, unitary, regional, binational, or even, eventually, two-state arrangements could evolve.

An interesting dimension of the Inbar-Sharon piece, and one that is shared by many published critiques of my New York Times essay, is the extent to which the authors agree with the core of my analysis, even if accompanied by shrill attacks on my motives, knowledge, or bona fides. I believe they would probably also agree with me that the systematic efforts of Israeli annexationists and their supporters outside of Israel to destroy paths to the two-state solution constitute one of the greatest crimes ever committed in Jewish history. Like me, they find themselves unable to trace a series of steps that could lead from where we are now to a satisfying two-state solution. Like me they decry the "fetishization" of negotiations, and Washington's chronic failure to act decisively. Like me, they understand the negotiations as serving petty parochial interests rather than the objective of achieving peace. We also agree that neither the Kerry version nor any version of negotiations per se will be capable of bringing about a two-state solution. Some larger set of political forces will need to appear that will shake up the political landscape, especially in Israel, with sufficient force to produce a government ready to sign the agreement whose detailed provisions, they say, everyone already knows. I can fully accept this characterization.

The exact place where we differ is revealed in their mention of what they describe as the "potentially game-changing" option of Palestinians bringing their case to

the U.N. They imply that this is the kind of development that could jolt the two-state project back to life. I disagree. I do not argue, as they say I do, that the weight of sheer settlement, as "facts on the ground," is what is decisive. Not at all. There were nearly twice the number of settlers in Algeria as there are east of the Green Line and they were all evacuated. However, that evacuation was not produced by an FLN maneuver at the U.N. It was the complex consequence of the overthrow of the Fourth Republic, years of emergency rule in the hexagon, a horribly bloody revolution in Algeria, and the reconstitution of political life in France under a radically new constitution. My point is that it is not the settlements, per se, that are the problem, but the political constellation of power and purpose that produced them, that grows them, and that will protect them. What I am arguing is that the entrenchment of the forces in Israel that have destroyed every effort to achieve two states is so deep, and so firmly rooted in ideological, cultural, and American institutional political realities, that much bigger forces will be necessary to transform them than operate within the normal course of Israeli or United Nations politics.

My message is not a happy one. The whole situation is deeply tragic. While there were unavoidable contradictions buried in all Zionist plans for transforming Palestine, the post-1967 period did open up the spectacularly hopeful prospect of successful partition. It is with profound sadness that I find that prospect has effectively vanished as a political program. But my commitment to Jewish values, democratic principles of government, and the human beings I know and love on each side of the conflict's terrible divide, demand I face that sadness with the tools I have. I am not a prophet, nor am I a political leader. I am a political scientist. What I owe is no more and no less than the best analysis I can provide of a political situation that is turning the hard work of peace movement heroes into threats to what they themselves hold most dear.

I argued for the two-state solution beginning in 1969 and ironically for years was called a self-hating Jew because I supported two states. The passion I put into that effort was spurred by my certainty of the doom that intensive settlement of the territories would mean for the Zionist dream I embraced of a democratic, Jewish, and wonderful state. As I have said, God will not announce when pursuing that dream becomes or became an empty hope. But any advocate of that political project must judge how he or she will know when that time arrives. Otherwise, the illusion of its assumedly permanent availability will strengthen those ready to base Jewish life in the Land of Israel on systematic coercion and permanent oppression.