

Is there a way to achieve peace in Israel and Palestine? I believe there is

[Daniel Levin](#)



If the current tragedy offers any hope, it's a growing clarity on how Palestinians and Israelis could forge a brighter future for their children

Wed 7 Feb 2024 14.00 CET

In 1948, my father was severely wounded in the final days of the Arab-

Israeli war, referred to by Israelis as the [War of Independence](#), and by Palestinians as the [Nakba](#), or “catastrophe” in Arabic. The left side of his body was blown away, including his left arm. When I was a little boy, he often told me about his friends who had died in battle, and said that he dreamed of the day when there would be peace between Israelis and Palestinians, so that my generation would no longer have to fight these wars. In 1990, during the first intifada, I served in an Israel Defense Forces combat unit in Gaza. And here we are, all these decades later. So much for my father's dreams.

We are being inundated with commentary about the culpability for this conflict, with biased dissections of history, culture and religion, and with predictable posturing through the use of selective sources of information and disinformation. Despite maximalist demands from the Israeli and Palestinian camps, defended by religious endorsement and amplified at a time of war, neither side is going to self-deport and create another homeland elsewhere. What is missing, tragically, is a serious discussion of a vision and solution that might actually be acceptable to all sides. Before everyone dismisses this idea as naive, let's take a moment to revisit the prevailing choices.

1 The status quo. For decades, Israel believed that it had the military might and intelligence to manage the situation by systematically undermining and weakening the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank in order to drown any prospects of an independent Palestinian state. It also maintained a tacit

understanding with Hamas, interrupted by periodic wars and skirmishes, which Israelis referred to as “mowing the grass” in Gaza. This fallacy was finally shattered on 7 October.

2 A one-state solution. The idea of one binational, secular state for Israelis and Palestinians, with Jerusalem as its capital, is as appealing as it is utopian. Perhaps it might have been at least theoretically possible, had Israel been founded as a state for the Jews, rather than the Jewish state. But there has been too much hate and too much trauma to contemplate anything resembling a joint homeland for both nations.

3 A two-state solution. For decades, the idea of each nation living side by side in its own state was considered the gold standard of Middle Eastern diplomacy. Never mind that it was never really tried – first because no one could agree on the border, and second because neither side wanted to give up its aspirations to the whole land via an irrevocable commitment to peace and coexistence. Never mind that neither side was willing to compromise on Jerusalem, or that each side blamed the other for the breakdowns in the periodic negotiations, and treated those willing to make concessions as traitors. Yitzhak Rabin, the former prime minister of Israel, was murdered in 1995 by a Jewish rightwing zealot for having committed an unforgivable act of treason by signing the Oslo accords and [shaking the hand](#) of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat at the White House in 1993.

The only instance in which some form of a two-state solution was in fact implemented, with a hard separation between Israelis and Palestinians, was in Gaza following the 2005 dismantling of Jewish settlements and Israeli disengagement. Now imagine the same hard separation between Israel and the West Bank, with a collapsed economy, mass unemployment and poverty.

But if all these scenarios lead to the same nightmare, is there anything that could work, anything that could end the decades of killing and despair? Turns out, there is.

That something is a confederation of two independent states. This would combine the necessary elements of a two-state solution – the separation of Palestinians and Israelis – with the aspirational ingredients of a one-state solution: freedom of employment, movement and residency in the entire territory, subject to strict security stipulations, and a coordinated fiscal and economic policy. A confederation would acknowledge each nation’s deep connection to the whole land, but also make it clear that neither one could own it all. Citizens of each nation would only vote in their own state, but they could visit, reside, work or study in the other.

It would take time, and many interim steps, to make this future a reality. Right now, Israelis are too traumatised by the 7 October massacre to consider any form of coexistence. Palestinians are too traumatised by decades of occupation and the butchery in Gaza to feel anything other than

hatred and revenge. But if the tragedy currently unfolding contains any reason for hope, it lies in the growing clarity of what it would take for Palestinians and Israelis to have a future, next to each other and together.

Initially, there would need to be a hard separation, with a border demarcating each side's territory, possibly with a demilitarised zone during a transition period. Israeli settlers currently living illegally in the occupied Palestinian territories would be given a choice to move back to Israel with generous housing and relocation packages, or become residents of Palestine and subject to Palestinian law. While each party would be responsible for security in its own territory and on its side of the border, there would be increased security and intelligence cooperation between the two nations – something that has been quietly working surprisingly well for years between the Israeli and Palestinian security services in the occupied territories.

However, unlike with Gaza, this hard separation would be implemented together with measures to support the Palestinian population – not with cash-stuffed suitcases that only enrich corrupt leaders, but with education, employment, investment and trade. Arab states would have a vital role to play in this process. Furthermore, the separation would not last for ever; it would need a sunset target when the conditions for a more integrated form of coexistence between Palestinians and Israelis were ripe.

When those in power excel at ruling but fail at governing, [their incentives](#) are hardwired to escalate and perpetuate the conflict, rather than end it. Our support needs to go to those who understand the necessity of a livable, dignified and peaceful coexistence for future generations. We should support organisations that back the confederation vision, such as [A Land for All](#), with Palestinians and Israelis tirelessly working together, even as they are being attacked, ridiculed and ostracised by their own communities. Finally, countries with power and influence in the region – the US, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and European nations – should abandon their biased and self-interested support and instead promote a solution that could, in fact, be acceptable to Israelis and Palestinians. Stop being part of the problem, and start being part of the solution. No one will have everything. But at least no one will have nothing.

- Daniel Levin is a member of the board of the Liechtenstein Foundation for State Governance, which is engaged in track 3 mediation initiatives in the Middle East, including hostage negotiations