



A Post-Zionist Perspective on the Death of the Two-State Solution

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Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality

by Ian S. Lustick

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Prof. Ian Lustick of the University of Pennsylvania, who specializes in modern history and Middle East politics, analyzes the death of the two-state paradigm as a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since in its place, he contends, a one-state reality has been created, this must be the focus of the current debate. According to his approach, therefore, the emphasis should be on finding ways for Jews and Arabs to live together in full equality in the expanse between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

In the first three chapters of the book, Lustick presents three main factors that he believes preclude the opportunity to implement a two-state solution. In the first chapter, he analyzes the Zionist policy of the “Iron Wall,” intended to demonstrate power that will halt any attack on the State of Israel and create an understanding

among Arab states that they must come to terms with its existence. The next step is to leverage these achievements to conduct negotiations that will lead to the resolution of the conflict, taking into account the collective rights of the peoples. However, Lustick claims, the military successes led Israel to escalate its demands for territory, security guarantees, and recognition for the legitimacy of Zionism (pp. 22-23, 140). This impedes the chance of reaching the compromises necessary for a peace agreement. Instead, a policy of territorial expansionism was adopted, which led to denying the prospect of a two-state solution (p. 26).

In the following chapter, Lustick analyzes the second component, which he holds responsible for the rejection of finding a solution through compromise. He calls it “Holocaustia,” i.e., the Holocaust as a template for Jewish life that reveals the perpetual threat to the Jews and is a reminder that non-Jews must not be trusted (p. 37). This perception, which, Lustick claims, is the dominant perception of the Jewish public in the country, leads in his opinion to heightened feelings of fear, suspicion, and hatred toward Arabs, and to the fact that “compromise” has become a dirty word. This has thwarted the possibility of reaching a peaceful resolution of the conflict (p. 140).

In the next chapter, the author presents the third element that led to the death of the two-state solution, namely, the unqualified support by the US administrations for the State of Israel, due to the enormous power of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States. Consequently, the United States has not pushed Israel to make painful compromises to advance peace, and Israel came to believe that it could adopt any policy without undermining American support. Thus the right wing hawks and supporters of the policies of settlement and territorial expansion became stronger, while the moderate elements and the peace camp weakened, after their repeated warnings that Israel’s policy would lead to the loss of American support did not materialize (pp. 70-71, 140).

In the fourth chapter, Lustick describes the actual collapse of the two-state paradigm. The main reason, in his view, is the growing number of settlements and their residents, which has made the settlement enterprise irreversible. In tandem, the peace camp in Israel collapsed and the right gained strength. Lustick presents analyses of several supporters of the two-state solution who list in detail all the obstacles that prevent this solution from realization, yet who nevertheless adhere to this solution as the dominant paradigm due to the destructive implications for the State of Israel of a one-state alternative. In this, Lustick claims, confusion blurs the line between what exists and what is desired. The fear of the dire consequences of abandoning hope for two states cannot justify the continued existence of this unfounded hope (p. 118).

In the fifth chapter, Lustick presents his central thesis, namely, that the idea of two states has become a hopeless fantasy that must be converted into an analysis of the existing situation, which is a one-state reality. According to him, there is currently one country controlled by Israel between the Mediterranean and the Jordan. Six and a half million Arabs live in this country: one and a half million are citizens of the state and have full political and civil rights, but lag in terms of access to resources and opportunities to exercise their rights; 350,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem are residents of the state but not citizens; two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip live under Israeli control in a ghetto sealed from the outside world; and 2.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank live in an archipelago of cities, towns, and villages under a regime that allows Israel to restrict their movement. Alongside them, 620,000 Israelis live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in their own communities, enjoying unrestricted freedoms and the full political rights of “first-class” Israeli citizens. The Palestinian Authority, which is presented as an independent body, in fact functions as a body that helps Israel maintain security in order

to protect the privileges of those close to it, as well as a contractor of the Israeli government for tasks that Israel prefers not to perform directly (pp. 123-124).

Lustick argues that when one examines the reality of one state as a dominant paradigm and stops pursuing the false magic of the two states, there is no need to continue to engage in futile attempts to prevent the spread of settlements and find a way to produce a physical separation between the Jewish and Arab localities. Instead, the focus should be on the demand for full political equality, including equality in the allocation of resources, housing, and employment to all residents of the state (p. 131). In this context, Lustick praises the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which emphasizes the demand for equal rights while challenging Israel’s claim to be a legitimate member of the international community as long as it continues to discriminate against non-Jews (p. 129).

Lustick harshly criticizes Israel’s “managing of the conflict” policy, which he says is reflected in brutal treatment of Palestinians, while cultivating the notion that Palestinians are not a partner for peace and carrying out actions on the ground that ensure the failure of any two-state negotiations. This is enabled by the unconditional support of the United States, which defends Israel against efforts to consign it to international pariah status (p. 141).

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After this critical analysis, Lustick offers what in his view is an optimistic solution to the current situation. He notes that statements from the Israeli right support the one egalitarian state solution, although some support the granting of full civil rights under conditions designed to prevent the actual exercise of these rights.

However, he claims that as history shows, such moves eventually lead to full equality, for example in relation to African Americans in the United States (p. 146). This is partly because progressive Jews in Israel will join the Arabs' struggle for equality to ensure the preservation of democracy in Israel (p. 149).

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The main flaw in Lustick's book is the unequivocal focus on Israel's responsibility for the deadlock created in attempts to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This has substantial ramifications. Since Lustick looks at only one side of the conflict a distorted picture emerges. For him, the Palestinians are clear victims who played a passive role in the conflict. The historical description of the conflict presented in the book is adapted to this perception. For example, Lustick neglects to state that Israel accepted the partition plan in 1947, while the Arabs rejected it (p. 18); the Yom Kippur War is described as an attempt by Arab states to force Israel to negotiate (pp. 7, 21); the second intifada, the wave of Palestinian terrorism that led to attacks every two or three days in Israel's population centers, is mentioned several times without any details of the intensity of the casualties in Israel, and sometimes with reference only to the forceful Israeli response (pp. 25, 85). Similarly, Israel's attempts to resolve the conflict are referenced briefly, if at all. Thus the Camp David summit from 2000 is presented as an idle Israeli attempt to end the conflict (pp. 25, 101), although President Clinton himself stated that it was the Palestinians who caused the failure of the summit; the disengagement from the Gaza Strip, which led to Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip and continued rocket fire from there at Israel, is hardly mentioned; the Annapolis process, in which the Olmert

government presented far-reaching proposals rejected by the Palestinians, is also mentioned for the first time on page 102 without any details. Similarly, Lustick does not refer to the peace agreements that Israel has signed with its neighbors, including the fact that it agreed to give up the Sinai Peninsula under the peace agreement with Egypt.

As presented, the contents portray Israel as a forceful, predatory entity that indiscriminately suspects any non-Jew, suffers from paranoia resulting from post-Holocaust trauma, and ignores all the signals of peace from Arab states and peace-loving Palestinians. Even if we accept that Jews do feel that they are under constant existential threat in light of hundreds of years of persecution, then, as the saying goes, "the fact that you're paranoid doesn't mean that they aren't after you." The existential threat is not imaginary; it is quite real. The security concerns stem from a tangible threat: from actual enemies who do not recognize Israel's right to exist and from many rounds of violence and fighting. In addition, every time Israel withdrew from territory, handing it over to Palestinian control—in the West Bank, as part of the Oslo process, and in the Gaza Strip during the disengagement—it found itself under severe terrorist attacks and rocket fire. This is not to say that Israel's policy cannot be criticized and that there is no room for territorial compromises, but a complete disregard of this reality and the exclusive imposition of blame on Israel undermines the validity of the book's arguments.

Moreover, Lustick refrains nearly entirely from mentioning the Palestinian demands that make it difficult to reach a compromise solution, such as insisting on the right of return. It seems that in his view this is a justified demand. Thus, he criticizes those who expect the BDS movement to focus its criticism on the occupation of the West Bank and the settlements, and explains that the settlement policy is in fact a natural continuation of what the State of Israel essentially is: "an expansionist settler state" (p. 118). When this is the writer's

starting point and when his sympathy for the BDS movement—a movement whose main purpose is to dismantle the State of Israel—is clear (p. 129), then his critical analysis of Israel should be read cautiously, if not skeptically.

Beyond that, the utopian future that Lustick paints of one democratic and egalitarian state ignores the depth of the rifts and hostility between the parties. Given the passive role that the Palestinians play throughout the book, there is almost no mention of the existence of a large section of the Palestinian public that is not at all willing to accept the presence of Jews in the area, the religious background and worldviews of militant Islamic organizations such as Hamas, and the deep hostility that exists toward Israel and Israelis. Beyond these, the idea that a state with an Arab majority and a Jewish minority would be democratic and even liberal in nature seems no less detached from reality than the way Lustick paints the two-state solution.

Nonetheless, the book is important in that it allows us to see how Israel is portrayed in

the eyes of progressive Jews in the United States and in the eyes of liberals around the world. Beyond that, the analysis of the fading chance of implementing a two-state solution and regarding the dangers of further drift toward one state should serve as a warning sign to anyone who fears for the future of the country.

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