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It is time for European leaders to say what they know: The two-state solution is over

A Palestinian bicycle rider rides past the separation wall, in al-Aizaria neighborhood near Jerusalem on March 01, 2013. Photo by Issam Rimawi/Flash90

The global COVID-19 pandemic appears to be a suitable vehicle for politicians of the more autocratic kind to give shape to long cherished wishes. In Hungary, Prime Minister Orban pushed “government by decree” effortlessly through parliament. In the US, President Trump intends to restrict immigration even more rigorously, “for the next two months.”

In Israel, the pandemic, after three consecutive elections and extensive political upheaval, has brought together the leaders of Likud and Blue White into a “government of national unity”. Benjamin Netanyahu has thereby neutralized Gantz’s “principled opposition” to the continuation of his leadership. Israel’s longest-serving prime minister is allowed to head the government for another 18 months and will in all probability find ways to escape conviction based on corruption charges. If not, he could choose to topple the government.

But most significantly, Netanyahu and Gantz believe they can now annex the Jordan Valley. This annexation is being prepared in close coordination with the US administration, and has meanwhile been given a green light by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. There is some haste, for if theoretically Trump were to leave office in November, the facts on the ground should be completed by then.

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Gantz has not been opposed to annexation. During his election campaign he squabbled openly with Netanyahu over who first conceived the idea of annexing the Jordan Valley. He has also made no mention of a “two-state solution” during that same campaign. He would only have preferred to have the annexation performed in slow motion, “in consultation with the international community”.

Gantz trusts – perhaps rightly so – that there would be some rhetorical objection on that front, as with all similar developments over the past seventy years, but at the end of the day no concrete measures would be taken by the international community to prevent an annexation. Netanyahu is bolder: if America likes it, that will do. The EU and the rest of the international community are irrelevant from his perspective.

The imminent formal annexation of Palestinian territory is the terminal blow to any viable “peace process” based on a “two-state solution”, which has in fact been an illusory mantra for years. It is now far from realistic and actually absurd to speak of a “peace process” and a “two-state solution”. It’s as if the tender for the horse tram is being prepared, while the rails are already in the street.

The “new” reality is a one-state reality, in which rights are allocated to populations and citizens on the basis of ethnicity or religion. However one wants to name it – inequality, discrimination, apartheid – this reality is grounded in the permanent denial of anything resembling a constitutional, democratic state.

The question arises as to what conclusions the international community in general, and the EU and the United Kingdom in particular, will draw from this latest dramatic development. Is there a willingness now to face reality and explore, formulate and adopt alternative scenarios for a solution and let go of the negotiated two-state settlement mantra? While many might consider such change should come from the Palestinian Authority, this is not likely given its dependence on Western financial support and Israeli approval on the ground, and given that its *raison d’être* is based on the fiction of the Oslo process.

Behind closed doors, EU politicians and diplomats, across national and political divides, recognize the failure of the Oslo process and the two-state solution. Formulating a different solution, one based on fundamental concepts of equal rights for all, and

recognition and repair of past and present injustices, has, however, been a bridge too far for virtually every European politician and political party. The fear of being labelled “anti-Israel” or even worse, “anti-Semitic”, is very much alive across Europe and particular in the UK where this labelling has harmed politicians beyond repair.

Will politicians and public figures step forward courageously and break this spell by speaking out against the continuation of the obviously failed policy and for the basic, fundamental concept of equal rights for all? If they do so, they will merely be recognizing actual reality, and would also have the moral high ground.

The old mantras of the Oslo process have lost all credibility. Even Dennis Ross, former US diplomat involved in several rounds of negotiation in the Oslo process, now recognizes, that a one-state solution based on the concept of equal rights for all is the most likely outcome.

If European politicians are wary of speaking out directly and personally, they could still adopt a strategic approach and seek independent expert advice, for example from The European Union Institute for Security Studies or from one of the many other advisory bodies available. Leave it to independent experts to review policy, and use their advice as a basis for political choices.

In addition, European parliamentarians, political leaders and parties could jointly and independently investigate other possible solutions. Albeit not easy, this is only logical given that virtually all recognize the bankruptcy of the current policy line.

One should also note that there is already substantial support for alternative solutions based on equal rights for all and repair of past and present injustice among both Palestinians and Israelis. This is not about developing a new EU approach in ‘splendid isolation’, but about developing new policies that already have support locally. The EU and the UK could build on such support and get inspired by it.

More than possibly ever before, the current Palestinian-Israeli reality is disheartening. At the same time, it is also clear that ongoing further institutionalization of inequality is unsustainable. Permanent apartheid is not an option. Change is possible. To quote Nelson Mandela, “it always seems impossible until it’s done”.

What role will the European Union and the United Kingdom choose? Will they opt for *de facto* acceptance of the current situation, while muttering some objections, or will they develop and endorse an alternative approach based on their foundational democratic concepts of justice and equal rights for all? That is a political but also very much a moral choice.

By [Hamada Jaber, Ofer Neiman, Angélique Eijpe, and Jaap Hamburger](#) [May 18, 2020](#)

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