

A One-State Solution Is Unworkable

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The road to two states is arduous, but the one-state path guarantees endless bloodshed and is not something the Biden administration intends to pursue.

The quote in question—that Israelis and Palestinians “deserve equal measures of security, freedom, opportunity, and dignity”—reflects the long-abiding interest of the U.S. to see the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians resolved peacefully, and it reflects the American desire to see a solution that provides dignity for both sides. It has been this U.S. determination that launched the Madrid process in 1991, hosted the Oslo process on the White House lawn between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat in 1993, and on three separate occasions sought to resolve the conflict. The three big efforts were done by Bill Clinton (July 2000 to January 2001), Condoleezza Rice (2007-08), and John Kerry (2013-14). The problem was not a lack of U.S. effort. (On the third round, I was involved in the U.S.-led drive and can attest to Kerry’s intensity of effort.)

It would be a major mistake to interpret the quote in question as stating that the U.S. is leaning in any way toward a one-state approach to delegitimize Israel. Anyone who thinks this should look at President Joe Biden’s comment at the end of the 11-day Gaza crisis. Biden declared, “Until the region says, unequivocally says they acknowledge the right of Israel to exist as an independent Jewish state, there will be no peace.”

The idea of a binational Israeli-Palestinian state will not work in the Middle East. It is a region where there are no democratic traditions; where the post-sectarian age has not arrived; where wars are fought without limits (witness Iraq and Syria); and where there remains no readiness to accept or respect minority rights. In the Middle East, wherever a central regime is imposed on different sectarian/ethnic groups, the consequence is ongoing struggle. Is the story of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Libya what we should be prescribing for the future of Israelis and Palestinians? The bloodiest wars tend to be civil wars.

Moreover, both Israelis and Palestinians have paid a heavy price to preserve who they are. Israelis have built a state

in an environment where they were rejected and wars were forced on them. Does a country that has ingathered Jews from Ethiopia, Syria, Yemen, and throughout discriminated communities in the Middle East suddenly yield that identity?

Palestinians, too, have persevered. In their dispersal, in the refugee camps and through two intifadas, they have not surrendered their identity. Ahmed Ghneim, a Fatah activist who remains close to Marwan Barghouti, once explained why he favored two states: “In one state, one of us [Israelis or Palestinians] will feel the need to dominate the other.” Ghneim is right.

A binational state would guarantee that the conflict would turn inward. For a country that does not share the same language, religion, or experience, this would turn into a nightmare very quickly. Yes, the road to two states is arduous, but the road to one state is a path that guarantees endless bloodshed.

David Makovsky is the Ziegler Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute, creator of the podcast [Decision Points \(https://shows.acast.com/decision-points/\)](https://shows.acast.com/decision-points/), and coauthor with Dennis Ross of the book [Be Strong and of Good Courage: How Israel's Most Important Leaders Shaped Its Destiny \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/be-strong-and-of-good-courage-how-israel-s-most-important-leaders-shaped-its\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/be-strong-and-of-good-courage-how-israel-s-most-important-leaders-shaped-its-destiny). This article was originally published as part of a debate series on the MEI website (<https://www.mei.edu/publications/debate-biden-administrations-approach-israelpalestine>). ❖

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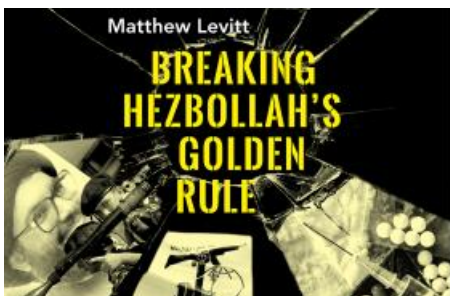
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