

# Political Views of a Two-State Solution

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Brief Analysis

**International organizations and various Israeli, Palestinian, and world leaders have made telling comments about the two-state concept over the past decade, providing insight into its prospects for ending the conflict.**

***This article examines the history of the two-state concept; to read about the recently begun Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, see PolicyWatch 2016 (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/pre-negotiations-and-political-realities-frame-israeli-palestinian-talks>).***

The two-state solution is the most widely endorsed diplomatic idea for Israeli-Palestinian peace since the passage of UN Resolution 242 in November 1967. That resolution, which became the basis for future Arab-Israeli negotiations, enshrined the idea of acknowledging "the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force."

In 1947, the UN General Assembly voted to create Arab and Jewish states in British mandatory Palestine, linked by an economic union and with a special regime established for Jerusalem. The proposed size of the Arab state was to be 11,700 square kilometers (44 percent of Palestine), while the Jewish state was to encompass 14,900 sq km (56 percent), the vast majority of which comprised areas in Beersheba and the south where very few land deeds were held.

At the time, however, members of the League of Arab States and the Palestinian leadership rejected a two-state solution in favor of a federal or one-state solution with an Arab majority and a Jewish minority. And beginning in 1948, Arab states and Palestinian irregulars engaged in a war with the new Jewish state that ended with Israel controlling 20,500 sq km, or 77 percent of the land, with no new Arab state created at all. Jordan annexed 6,070 sq km (the West Bank and east Jerusalem), while Egypt took control of 390 sq km (the Gaza Strip).

Arab League members briefly established an All-Palestine Government during the war, but it never controlled any portion of Palestine, and it collapsed after only a few months due to internal Palestinian and Arab bickering. From 1949 to the June 1967 war, no Palestinian state was created in either the West Bank or Gaza; then, as a result of that war, Israel took control of both territories. In 2005, Israel withdrew from Gaza. If a Palestinian state were created in the West Bank and Gaza today, it would likely encompass around 22 percent of former mandatory Palestine -- roughly the same amount of territory that an Arab state would have held if one had been created after the 1948 war.

## STATEMENTS BY KEY FIGURES

In recent years, various leaders have publicly remarked on the two-state concept, shedding light on the breadth of views regarding its prospects for ending the conflict.

### **U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, July 2013**

"We all understand the goal that we're working towards: two states living side by side in peace and security...Two states because the time has come for a lasting peace." —*Remarks at the opening of Israeli-Palestinian talks in Washington, July 30, 2013*

### **U.S. President Barack Obama, March 2013**

"In our discussions today, I reaffirmed to President Abbas that the United States remains committed to realizing the vision of two states, which is in the interests of the Palestinian people, and also in the national security interest of Israel, the United States, and the world. We seek an independent, a viable and contiguous Palestinian state as the homeland of the Palestinian people, alongside the Jewish State of Israel -- two nations enjoying self-determination, security and peace." —*Press conference, Ramallah, March 21, 2013*

### **French President Nicolas Sarkozy, February 2012**

"It is not enough to have two states; there must be two states for two nations. I know very well that there are two ways to destroy Israel: from without and from within. This is why the two-state solution is not enough. We need to have two states for two separate nations. One for the Jewish people and one for the Palestinians...France will never recognize a Palestinian state established unilaterally and unconditionally." —*Remarks to French Jewish community leaders, February 11, 2012*

### **Russian President Vladimir Putin, June 2012**

"We talked about ways of overcoming the dilemma of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. I point out here the responsible position of President Abbas and his endeavor to reach a peaceful settlement based on a two-state settlement." —*Press conference with Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, Bethlehem, June 26, 2012*

### **Nabil Shaath, Fatah Foreign Relations Chief, July 2011**

"[The French initiative] reshaped the issue of the 'Jewish state' into a formula that is also unacceptable to us -- two states for two peoples. They can describe Israel itself as a state for two peoples, but we will be a state for one people. The story of 'two states for two peoples' means that there will be a Jewish people over there and a Palestinian people here. We will never accept this -- not as part of the French initiative and not as part of the American initiative. We will not sacrifice the 1.5 million Palestinians with Israeli citizenship who live within the 1948 borders, and we will never agree to a clause preventing the Palestinian refugees from returning to their country. We will not accept this, whether the initiative is French, American, or Czechoslovakian." —*Remarks on ANB Television, July 13, 2011*

### **Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, May 2011**

"The peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan are vital. But they're not enough. We must also find a way to forge a lasting peace with the Palestinians. Two years ago, I publicly committed to a solution of two states for two peoples: A Palestinian state alongside the Jewish state. I am willing to make painful compromises to achieve this historic peace. As the leader of Israel, it is my responsibility to lead my people to peace." —*Address to a joint session of Congress, Washington, May 24, 2011*

### **Prime Minister Netanyahu, May 2011**

"[U.S.] commitments relate to Israel not having to withdraw to the 1967 lines, which are...indefensible and which would leave major Israeli population centers in Judea and Samaria beyond those lines. Those commitments also ensure Israel's well-being as a Jewish state by making clear that Palestinian refugees will settle in a future Palestinian state rather than in Israel. Without a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem outside the borders of Israel, no territorial concession will bring peace. Equally, the Palestinians, and not just the United States, must

recognize Israel as a nation state of the Jewish people, and any peace agreement with them must end all claims against Israel...The defense of Israel requires an Israeli military presence along the Jordan River." —*Statement by the Israeli Prime Minister's Office, May 19, 2011*

**President Obama, May 2011**

"The parties themselves...will negotiate a border that is different than the one that existed on June 4, 1967. That's what mutually agreed-upon swaps means. It is a well-known formula to all who have worked on this issue for a generation. It allows the parties themselves to account for the changes that have taken place over the last forty-four years. It allows the parties themselves to take account of those changes, including the new demographic realities on the ground, and the needs of both sides." —*Speech at the AIPAC Policy Conference, Washington, May 22, 2011*

**Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal, October 2010**

"We agree on the two-state solution, on a viable Palestinian state, and on Israel living in peace with all of its neighbors." —*Remarks at the Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference, Washington, October 22, 2010*

**Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, October 2010**

"We want an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital...a state that lives in peace with all of its neighbors, including Israel." —*Press conference with Finnish president Tarja Halonen, Ramallah, October 15, 2010*

**EU Foreign Relations Representative Catherine Ashton, March 2010**

"The parameters of a negotiated settlement are well known. A two-state solution with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. Our aim is a viable State of Palestine in the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, on the basis of the 1967 lines." —*Speech before the League of Arab States, Cairo, March 15, 2010*

**Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister Muhammad al-Sabah, April 2010**

"We need to bring about peace, a peace that is based on a two-state solution for an independent and viable Palestinian state with its capital, East Jerusalem, and a state that would live in peace and security with its neighbor." —*Press conference with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Washington, April 30, 2010*

**U.S. President George W. Bush, November 2007**

"In furtherance of the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, we agree to immediately launch good-faith, bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty resolving all outstanding issues, including all core issues, without exception, as specified in previous agreements." —*Speech at the Annapolis peace conference, November 27, 2007*

**Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, September 2005**

"I say these things to you because they are the essence of my Jewish consciousness, and of my belief in the eternal and unimpeachable right of the people of Israel to the Land of Israel. However, I say this here also to emphasize the immensity of the pain I feel deep in my heart at the recognition that we have to make concessions for the sake of peace between us and our Palestinian neighbors. The right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel does not mean disregarding the rights of others in the land. The Palestinians will always be our neighbors. We respect them, and have no aspirations to rule over them. They are also entitled to freedom and to a national, sovereign existence in a state of their own. I am among those who believe that it is possible to reach a fair compromise and coexistence in good neighborly relations between Jews and Arabs. However, I must emphasize one fact: There will be no compromise on the right of the State of Israel to exist as a Jewish state, with defensible borders, in full security and without threats and terrorism." —*Speech at the UN General Assembly, September 15, 2005*

**The Quartet, April 2003**

"Parties reach final and comprehensive permanent status agreement that ends the Israel-Palestinian conflict in 2005, through a settlement negotiated between the parties based on UNSCR 242, 338, and 1397, that ends the occupation that began in 1967, and includes an agreed, just, fair, and realistic solution to the refugee issue, and a negotiated resolution on the status of Jerusalem that takes into account the political and religious concerns of both sides, and protects the religious interests of Jews, Christians, and Muslims worldwide, and fulfills the vision of two states, Israel and sovereign, independent, democratic and viable Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security." —*"Roadmap" issued by the Quartet (i.e., the United States, Russia, UN, and EU), April 30, 2003*

#### **President Abbas, June 2003**

"Our goal is two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The process is the one of direct negotiations to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to resolve all the permanent status issues and end the occupation that began in 1967 under which Palestinians have suffered so much." —*Remarks at the Aqaba peace summit, Jordan, June 4, 2003*

#### **President Bush, June 2002**

"My vision is two states, living side by side in peace and security...The United States of America will support the creation of a Palestinian state whose borders and certain aspects of its sovereignty will be provisional until resolved as part of a final settlement in the Middle East...The United States will not support the establishment of a Palestinian state until its leaders engage in a sustained fight against the terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure...The world is prepared to help, yet ultimately these steps toward statehood depend on the Palestinian people and their leaders." —*White House speech, June 24, 2002*

#### **UN Security Council Resolution 1397, March 2002**

The council affirmed "a vision of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side within secure and recognized borders," and emphasized "the need for all concerned to ensure the safety of civilians." —*UNSCR 1397, adopted March 12, 2002*

#### **U.S. President Bill Clinton, January 2001**

"The fact is that the people of Israel dreamed of a homeland. The dream came through; but when they came home, the land was not all vacant. Your land is also their land, it is the homeland of two people. And, therefore, there is no choice but to create two states and make the best of it." —*Speech at Israel Policy Forum event, New York City, January 7, 2001*

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