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To cite this article: Mandy Turner & Cherine Hussein (2015) Israel-Palestine after Oslo: mapping transformations and alternatives in a time of deepening crisis, *Conflict, Security & Development*, 15:5, 415-424, DOI: [10.1080/14678802.2015.1100019](https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2015.1100019)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2015.1100019>



Published online: 23 Dec 2015.



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# Introduction

## Israel-Palestine after Oslo: mapping transformations and alternatives in a time of deepening crisis

Mandy Turner and Cherine Hussein

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the world's most protracted, despite an over 20-year donor-sponsored peace process instituted after the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Initially perceived to have inaugurated a new era of hope in the search for peace and justice in Palestine-Israel, the Oslo peace paradigm of a track one, elite-level, negotiated two-state solution is in crisis today, if not completely at an end.<sup>1</sup>

While the major Western donors and the 'international community' continue to publicly endorse the Oslo peace paradigm, Israeli and Palestinian political elites have both stepped away from it. The Israeli government has adopted what appears to be an

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outright rejection of the internationally-accepted end-goal of negotiations, i.e. the emergence of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.<sup>2</sup> In March 2015, in the final days of his re-election campaign, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, visited the Jewish settlement of Har Homa in Palestinian East Jerusalem, which is regarded as illegal under international law. Reminding its inhabitants that it was him and his Likud government that had established the settlement in 1997 as part of the Israeli state's vision of a unified indivisible Jerusalem, he promised to expand the construction of settlements in East Jerusalem if re-elected.<sup>3</sup> And in an interview with Israeli news site, NRG, Netanyahu vowed that the prospects of a Palestinian state were non-existent as long as he remained in office. Holding on to the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), he argued, was necessary to ensure Israel's security in the context of regional instability and Islamic extremism.<sup>4</sup> It is widely acknowledged that Netanyahu's emphasis on Israel's security—against both external and internal enemies<sup>5</sup>—gave him a surprise win in an election he was widely expected to lose.<sup>6</sup>

Despite attempts to backtrack under recognition that the US and European states are critical of this turn in official Israeli state policy,<sup>7</sup> Netanyahu's promise to bury the two-state solution in favour of a policy of further annexation has become the Israeli government's official intent, and has been enthusiastically endorsed by leading ministers and key advisers. Just one month after the inauguration of the new government, ministers and advisers lined up to lend their support at the Herzliya conference, the annual gathering of Israel's political and security elite. Deputy Foreign Minister, Tzipi Hotovlev, stated that she 'negated the idea of a two-state solution', while Education Minister, Naftali Bennett, who has long called for the annexation of the occupied West Bank, repeated this position.<sup>8</sup> Ironically, this shift in official Israeli policy is linked by these cabinet ministers to their alarm at the growth in support internationally for the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. In fact, Bennett claimed that building settlements to further the cause of annexation 'is our answer to the boycott'.<sup>9</sup> This logic has been questioned by Israel's supporters and critics alike, given that the main cause for the rise in support for the BDS movement is the expansion of settlements and the continuation of the occupation.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, this position sets Israel on a collision course with the European Union, and its member

states, given its recent initiatives to boycott settlement goods, and statements in opposition to further settlement expansion.<sup>11</sup>

The Palestinian Authority (PA) based in the West Bank also appears to have rejected a key principle of the Oslo peace paradigm—that of bilateral negotiations under the supervision of the US. Despite a herculean effort by US Secretary of State, John Kerry, to bring the two parties to the negotiating table,<sup>12</sup> in response to the lack of movement towards final status issues and continued settlement expansion (amongst other issues), the Palestinian political elite have withdrawn from negotiations and resumed attempts to ‘internationalise the struggle’ by seeking membership of international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), and signing international treaties such as the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court.<sup>13</sup> This change of direction is part of a rethink in the PA and PLO’s strategy rooted in wider discussions and debates.<sup>14</sup> The publication of a document by the Palestine Strategy Study Group (PSSG) in August 2008, the production of which involved many members of the Palestinian political elite (and whose recommendations were studiously discussed at the highest levels of the PA and PLO),<sup>15</sup> showed widespread discontent with the bilateral negotiations framework and suggested ways in which Palestinians could ‘regain the initiative’.<sup>16</sup>

The ‘Palestine 194’ campaign—thus named because Palestine would have been the 194<sup>th</sup> state to be accepted into the UN—was a product of this rethink.<sup>17</sup> Launched in 2009, the campaign gained momentum and prominence in the run up to the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly (GA) held in September 2012, which passed GA resolution 67/19 that granted Palestine non-member observer state status.<sup>18</sup> This diplomatic initiative came in the context of the ‘completion’ of a two-year state-building programme instituted by the PA<sup>19</sup> that had been endorsed and praised by donors and the international institutions involved in peace-building in the oPt, many of which recommended in April 2011 that the PA was ready for statehood.<sup>20</sup> While the campaign has, until now, fallen short of its goal, the PA/PLO has continued with this strategy—despite opposition from the US, Israel and many European states—claiming that it is designed to preserve the two-state solution, not destroy it.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the guiding principles of the ‘Palestine 194’ campaign remained firmly within a traditional nationalist discourse with state elites and international diplomats as its target audience, and with the goal of creating support for a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders.<sup>22</sup> However,

Netanyahu's unequivocal statements during his 2015 election campaign, as outlined above, served to reinforce the suspicion amongst senior Palestinian officials that Israel would not allow a Palestinian state to emerge—and thus there was no basis upon which to negotiate.<sup>23</sup> In fact, in March 2015, Abbas officially stated that he no longer had a partner for peace process negotiations in the new Israeli government.<sup>24</sup>

And yet despite these changes in official Palestinian and Israeli political strategies that signal a deepening of the crisis, donors and the 'international community' are reluctant to accept the failure of the Oslo peace paradigm.<sup>25</sup> This political myopia has meant the persistence of a framework that is increasingly divorced from the possibility of a just and sustainable peace. It is also acting as an ideological straitjacket by shutting out alternative interpretations. This special issue seeks a way out of this political and intellectual dead end. In pursuit of this, our various contributions undertake what we regard to be two key tasks: first, to critically analyse the perceptions underpinning the Oslo paradigm and the transformations instituted by its implementation; and second, to assess some alternative ways of understanding the situation rooted in new strategies of resistance that have emerged in the context of these transformations in the post-Oslo landscape.

Section one of this special issue offers analyses of how certain, problematic, assumptions shaped the Oslo framework—and how the Oslo paradigm, in turn, shaped the political, economic and territorial landscape by their implementation.

Virginia Tilley's article thus kicks off our special issue with a critical exploration of the paradigm of conflict resolution upon which the Oslo Accords were based, and calls for an urgent re-evaluation of what she argues are the two interlinked central principles underpinning its worldview. The first of these principles revolves around internationally accepted notions of Israeli sovereignty, which are based upon several pillars of international law and involve the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory it occupied in 1967. The second principle revolves around the internationally accepted idea that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is essentially one between two peoples, the 'Palestinian people' and the 'Jewish people', each of which is argued by its advocates to hold the right to self-determination in territory marked out by the League of Nations in 1922 as Mandate Palestine. In interrogating these two common sense principles, Tilley argues that adhering rigidly to current constructions of Israel's sovereignty—holding that Israel is not the legitimate sovereign in Mandate Palestinian

territory it has occupied since 1967—has paradoxically proved ruinous to international peace and security, as well as to the rights, security and well-being of Palestinian civilians living under prolonged military occupation. This model in defence of universal international norms and principles has, she proposes, become morally unsupportable after nearly half a century of steadily worsening conditions for the people under occupation, and the transformation of the political geography of the land itself—through Israel's policies of illegal settlement and annexation. Tilley instead proposes that the 'conflict' be reinterpreted as an example of settler colonialism—and thus recommends an alternative conflict resolution paradigm based on political unification as opposed to separation as the only viable pathway to achieve a stable peace upon the land today.

Another central principle underpinning the Oslo paradigm—that of 'economic peace'—is unpacked and subjected to scrutiny in the article by Tariq Dana. While US Secretary of State John Kerry's US \$4 billion peace plan proposed in 2013—the main component of which was economic rather than political—is regarded as an example of this paradigm, Dana focuses on recent policies by both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government. He argues that there is a symbiosis between the Israeli strategies of 'economic peace' and Palestinian 'Fayyadism' predicated on the superiority of economic approaches over politics to solve the conflict. The article critically analyses this symbiosis in light of the recently revived theory of 'capitalist peace', which, despite numerous critiques of its applicability, entails considerable similarities with the basic assumptions of 'Fayyadism' and 'economic peace'. While two key dimensions express this symbiosis—security co-ordination and economic normalisation—Dana's article focuses on the economic dimension, particularly the case of joint industrial zones. While the article acknowledges that economic co-operation between the two sides stretches back way before this symbiosis, Dana argues that these recent examples of intensified economic co-operation represent an extension of the Oslo peace paradigm which has been conducive to the promotion of an unprecedented level of economic compromise between the two sides, while leaving the existing colonial dynamic unchallenged. He concludes that neo-liberal economic co-operation implemented in the context of a colonial framework cannot deliver a 'peace dividend'—rather, it acts as a mechanism of pacification and control.

The promotion of 'economic peace' has gone hand-in-hand with the international community's enthusiastic support for the Palestinian Authority, particularly its post-

2007 state-building strategy—popularly known as ‘Fayyadism’. Alaa Tartir’s article therefore focuses on the achievements and limitations of Fayyadism assessed through academic and practitioner literatures, and by drawing on the findings of ethnographic fieldwork conducted at two sites in the West Bank: Balata and Jenin refugee camps. Tartir argues that the ethnographic data reveals that despite the self-proclaimed institutional successes of Fayyadism, its achievements have failed to have a meaningful impact on the basic rights of Palestinians. These voices from the refugee camps articulate the detrimental effects that Fayyadism has had on their resistance against Israel’s occupation and, by extension, on their own protection and security. Criticisms focus on the absence of local legitimacy and accountability, and question the agenda of Fayyadism, its political basis and its trajectory as they relate to the Palestinian struggle for freedom. Tartir concludes that the main impact of Fayyadism on Palestinian lives has been to strengthen the Palestinian Authority’s authoritarian control, and to hijack any meaningful visions of Palestinian liberation.

Tartir’s analysis of the West Bank is complemented by the following article which explores the consequences of the Oslo Accords on the Palestinian resistance movement, Hamas, which has, since 2007, governed the Gaza Strip. Tareq Baconi maps and analyses the movement’s rhetorical shifts and transformations from outright opposition to the Oslo Accords and refusal to participate in the Palestinian political establishment created in its wake, to its success in the 2006 elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Baconi charts how initial opposition to the Accords and the Palestinian Authority forced Hamas into the role of offering an alternative path of resistance, particularly through what he refers to as a ‘balance of horror’ strategy. Through the use of primary Arabic archival material, he shows how Hamas was not opposed to democratic elections per se, just to the idea that participation in the PA would bind any party to the concessions made to Israel by the Oslo Accords. Hamas even initially advocated not holding the 1996 elections under the auspices of Oslo. Baconi argues that it was then the perceived ‘demise’ of the peace process following the collapse of the Camp David discussions that facilitated the movement’s entry into politics, and ultimately its success in the 2006 PLC elections. This set it on a collision course with Israel and the international community—who attempted to make Hamas accept the principles of Oslo—which ultimately led to conflict between Hamas and Fatah, and the eventual administrative division between the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Given the lack of alternative strategies at the elite level, section two of this special issue thus focuses on three diverse practices and strategies of resistance that have emerged within this transformed terrain residing in the realm of grassroots, civil society activists.

Cherine Hussein's article charts the re-emergence of the single-state idea in opposition to the processes of separation unleashed ideologically and practically in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords. Analysing it as a movement of resistance, Hussein reconstructs its intellectual and organisational emergence through a Gramscian-inspired lens, while also drawing on the anti-Oslo writings of Edward Said. Deploying a de-colonial approach to the politics of resistance—which centres the political practices of the oppressed in its analysis—Hussein seeks to understand the single-state alternative from within its own self-understandings, strategies and maps to power. In doing so, her article sheds light on a largely silenced pathway of resistance to the current peace process. She argues that the central role of the Diaspora in the movement indicates that its location lies between and within the 'local' and the 'global'. Through her analysis of how this political alternative re-emerged against the hegemony of Zionism and the demise of a viable two-state solution in Palestine/Israel, Hussein takes seriously its projection as a more just and liberating alternative to the status quo.

Mandy Turner's article highlights the work of activists inside Israel by focusing on anti-Zionist Jewish-Israelis involved in two groups: Zochrot and Boycott from Within. Both groups emerged in the post-Second Intifada period, which was marked by deep disillusionment with the Oslo peace paradigm. Turner unpacks the alternative—albeit marginalised—analysis, solution and route to peace proposed by these groups through a two-year engagement with their work, framed by the application of three concepts: hegemony, counterhegemony and praxis. In summary, these activists locate the origins of the conflict in the nature of Zionism (defined as preferential rights for Jews), the creation and extension of the state of Israel (through settler-colonial strategies), and the ongoing *Nakba* (the strategies used to remove the indigenous population, the Palestinians, from the country). The solution, they argue, lies in Israel-Palestine going through a process of de-Zionisation and decolonisation. And the route to achieving this is through critiquing Zionism and offering an alternative perspective, and through activities and actions in solidarity with Palestinians. These expressions of solidarity



include adherence to the principal demands of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which is analysed in the concluding article.

Suzanne Morrison discerns three main aspects of the BDS movement through an investigation of the ‘We Divest’ campaign. The first of these revolves around the BDS movement’s execution across borders through campaigns organised via networks of Palestinians and solidarity groups. The second concerns the framing of the movement by activists through the use of reoccurring themes of international law, Palestinian rights and corporate complicity for purposes of justifying action and gaining support. And the third relates to the organisational characteristics of the movement, i.e. that it is networked, decentralised, grassroots and horizontal. Morrison chose ‘We Divest’ for analysis because of its significance as the largest divestment campaign in the US. It targets the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association-College Retirement Equities Fund (TIAA-CREF), one of the largest retirement fund providers in the US, to divest funds held in companies identified as profiting from Israel’s violations of international law. Through an analysis of their activities and language—that is framed in terms of global justice—Morrison argues that the movement represents a new and different way of challenging Israel’s occupation and repression of Palestinian rights.

Taken as a whole, the articles in this special issue aim to ignite conversations on the conflict that are not based within abstracted debates that centre upon the peace process itself—but that begin from within the realities and geographies of both the continually transforming land of Palestine-Israel and the voices, struggles, worldviews and imaginings of the future of the people who presently inhabit it. For it is by highlighting these transformations, and from within these points of beginning, that we believe more hopeful pathways for alternative ways forward can be collectively imagined, articulated, debated and built.

## *Acknowledgements*

First of all, we would like to thank the contributors to this special issue—it has been a pleasure and privilege to work with you—as well as the numerous anonymous peer reviewers. This special issue grew out of two interlinked panels, entitled ‘Conflict Transformation and Resistance in Palestine’, at the International Studies Association annual convention in Toronto, Canada, 26–29 March 2014. Attendance at this event by many of the contributors was made possible by the generous financial support of the Council for British Research in the Levant. We would also like to thank the editors of *Conflict, Security & Development* who responded enthusiastically to our special issue proposal, and have been incredibly patient as we have coaxed it into existence.

Finally, but not in terms of lack of importance, we would like to thank Michael Pugh for helpful suggestions made on an earlier draft of this introduction, and Sai Englert for his painstaking and good-humoured assistance in preparing the manuscripts for publication.

## Endnotes

1. While the Oslo Accords do not mention a Palestinian state and do not refer to a two-state solution, since the Roadmap it has generally been accepted that this is what is underpinning the negotiations and will constitute the eventual conclusion to the conflict.
2. Various iterations include 'mutually agreed land swaps', but the general principle of a Palestinian state has underpinned the peace process since 2001 when US President George W. Bush endorsed the two-state solution in a letter to Crown Prince Abdullah. See Abrahms, *Tested by Zion*, 16–17.
3. Reuters, 'Netanyahu Vows to Keep Building at Event in Jerusalem Neighborhood beyond Green Line'. *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 March 2015. Available at: <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-Elections/Netanyahu-vows-to-keep-building-at-event-in-jerusalem-neighborhood-beyond-Green-Line-394075> [Accessed 18 August 2015].
4. Elliot C. McLaughlin, 'Israel's PM Netanyahu: No Palestinian State on my Watch'. *CNN*, 16 March 2015. Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/16/middleeast/israel-netanyahu-palestinian-state/> [Accessed 18 August 2015].
5. Israel's 'internal' enemies were defined as its Arab-Palestinian population and the left, in comments made by Netanyahu on social media on the day of the election. See Mairav Zonszein, 'Benjamin Netanyahu: "Arab Voters Are Heading to the Polls in Doves"'. *The Guardian*, 17 March 2015. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/17/binyamin-netanyahu-israel-arab-election> [Accessed 18 August 2015].
6. John Reed, 'Benjamin Netanyahu Pulled out all the Stops for Surprise Poll Win'. *Financial Times*, 18 March 2015. Available at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/5d730396-cd6e-11e4-a15a-00144feab7de.html#axz33irtyquYO> [Accessed 18 August 2015].
7. Peter Beaumont, 'Netanyahu Backtracks on Rejecting Two States, but Damage is Already Done'. *The Guardian*, 20 March 2015. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/20/netanyahu-backtracks-on-rejecting-two-states-but-damage-is-already-done> [Accessed 18 August 2015].
8. Allison Deger, 'Netanyahu Cabinet Ministers Reject Two-State Solution; Call for Annexation of Occupied Territories'. *Mondoweiss*, 9 June 2015. Available at: <http://mondoweiss.net/2015/06/netanyahu-annexation-territories> [Accessed 18 August 2015]; Lally Weymouth, 'Israel's Education Minister: "I Don't Believe in Giving Up Our Land"'. *The Washington Post*, 29 May 2015. Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/israels-naftali-bennett-i-dont-believe-in-giving-up-our-land/2015/05/29/0817d096-04f7-11e5-bc72-f3e16bf50bb6\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/israels-naftali-bennett-i-dont-believe-in-giving-up-our-land/2015/05/29/0817d096-04f7-11e5-bc72-f3e16bf50bb6_story.html) [Accessed 18 August 2015].
9. Deger, 'Netanyahu Cabinet Ministers Reject'.
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11. Calev Ben-David, 'Israel Risks EU Settlement Label Threat as Boycott War Heats Up'. *Bloomberg*, 4 June 2015. Available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-06-04/israel-risks-eu-settlement-label-threat-as-boycott-war-heats-up> [Accessed 18 August 2015]; Barak Ravid, 'EU Levels Veiled Threat of New Sanctions over Latest Settlement Expansion'. *Haaretz*, 5 June 2015. Available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.597242> [Accessed 18 August 2015].
12. Birnbaum and Tibon, 'The Explosive, Inside Story'; Pelham, 'The Final Fizzling'.
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15. A former member of the PLO Negotiation Support Unit told Turner in an interview that Saeb Erekat often referred to the options outlined in the PSSG paper. Interview with former member of NSU, East Jerusalem, July 2011.
  16. Palestine Strategy Study Group, *Regaining the Initiative*.
  17. See, for instance, Mansour, 'Towards a New Palestinian'; Sellwood, 'Statebuilding and Political Change'; Kattan, 'A State of Palestine'.
  18. See documents and newspaper articles on the specially-created website: <http://palestine194.org/?cat=3>; and Banko, 'Citizenship and the New', 210–214.
  19. PNA, 'Ending the Occupation'.
  20. UNSCO, 'Palestinian Statebuilding'; IMF and World Bank, 'Building the Palestinian State'.
  21. PLO, 'Road for Palestinian Statehood'; ICG, 'Curb Your Enthusiasm'.
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