

## Walt and Siegman urge Washington to imagine a future without the two-state solution

*On April 26 in Washington, the Middle East Policy Council held a discussion about the "Future of the conflict: Opening the Debate," in which Steve Walt, Henry Siegman, and I argued that the two-state solution is over, one side controls all the territory, and we have to imagine a new future for Israel and Palestine. Below are excerpts of that conversation, focusing on Siegman and Walt's statements. (I'm going to be excerpting my comments at that forum on Zionism in days to come).*

**WALT:** I'm going to argue that the two-state solution is either dead or on life support, and that its failure is going to require us to start thinking about alternatives...

[L]et me start by why I think we're going to need a more open discussion. For the past 15 years or so, the idea of a two-state solution has been the consensus goal of the foreign policy establishment. And just remember, this was not true before then. The Oslo Accords do not mention a Palestinian state. First Lady Hillary Clinton got into trouble in 1998 when she openly called for the creation of a Palestinian state. She was too early.

Since Camp David in 1999, however, the two-state solution has become the default. This is a convenient fig leaf for politicians. Even if we aren't making any progress, they can always say that our ultimate goal is two states for two peoples. I might add, I've been a consistent advocate for a two-state solution as well.

But the problem, as you all know, is that this goal is further away than ever. Indeed, many serious analysts in the United States and in the Middle East, including Israel, believe it is now impossible. The number of settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem exceeds 600,000. Settlements like Ma'ale Adumim cut the West Bank into separate enclaves. The Palestinians themselves remain weak and divided, cannot put meaningful pressure on Israel or negotiate in an even way.

The current Israeli government is dead set against the creation of a viable Palestinian state, and politics there have been drifting to the right for a couple of decades. Moreover, Israel is now dependent on water from aquifers in the West Bank, which makes it harder and harder to imagine how a viable, genuine Palestinian state could be created. Obama's failure to make progress on this issue or to slow the expansion of settlements has made it clear that the United States will never be a truly honest broker.

And you put all that together, and it's why Secretary of State Kerry recently told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that, quote, "The window for a two-state solution is shutting. We have a year to two years and it's over."

If Kerry's right, then we're going to need to start thinking about alternatives. At some point, you won't be able to say you support a two-state solution without making people laugh. It just won't be credible any longer. And sooner or later, that will be true for members of Congress and secretaries of state and for presidents. The fig leaf of a two-state solution won't cover them up anymore. When that day arrives, people will want to know what the United States is in favor of instead, which in turns we need — means we need to be able to have that kind of honest discussion of where we're headed.

And remember, if the two-state solution is gone, there are only really three alternatives: A one-state democracy, one person, one vote in the entire area; or ethnic cleansing, to remove both Palestinians from greater Israel; or some form of permanent apartheid, as Jimmy Carter, Ehud Olmert and Ehud Barak have all warned about. Although it would have been better if discourse on this subject had been more honest and open long ago, we are

now facing a situation where a more open discussion is really going to be imperative. And the problem is, it's still very hard to have that conversation here in the United States...

**SIEGMAN:** [I]f one asks: Why have — why has the peace process failed, why are we facing the situation we're facing today? It's simply because the policy of Israel has been from the outset not to permit a genuinely independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian state to ever come into being. And I believe they have succeeded in that.

I don't think the two-state solution is on life support. I think it is history; it is gone. And the reason it is gone is because the settlement project has succeeded...[O]ne of the reasons we do not have an honest discussion in this country about these obvious issues is because we always feel that even when we finally recognize the gross injustice and unfairness of the situation, we cannot state that truth without first embedding it in a critique of what Palestinians are doing.

And even in his latest column, Tom Friedman first says why the Palestinians, of course, are so inept and responsible for their own problems... because it's unsafe even for someone of his popularity to say such things in a straight, unvarnished way.... [T]he American public has bought a particular narrative of the situation, which is totally dishonest and completely misrepresents the obvious facts. I mean, what could be more obvious that you cannot have a peace process even as you systematically steal the territory underneath the ground that the Palestinians are standing on and living on and discussing in terms of statehood? A six-year-old would understand that you can't be serious if that's what you're doing.....

[T]here was one possibility that this Israeli determination to prevent a Palestinian state from emerging might be stopped, and that was the one power that had the ability to do it — the United States. And it was always assumed that at some point, because of America's generous support to the state of Israel, because of its deep friendship to the state of Israel and because the state of Israel has no other such powerful support in the diplomatic world, militarily and so on, that at some point the U.S. would leverage the credits it accumulated over the years and turn to its friend and say, enough; there are certain lines you cannot cross, because if you do, then we can no longer invoke our common values as the foundation for this relationship because apartheid is not a common value.

So, the second reason there won't be a two-state solution: because America, the White House and the Congress never had the political and moral courage to act on that expectation. And despite some of the encouraging phenomena mentioned by others, by my previous speakers, the fact that our president went to Israel and said to them — and competed with some of those from his administration who visited Israel before — competed with them in finding adjectives that adequately express our unconditional support and commitment to the state of Israel, and assuring Israel that only its own government can decide how to protect its security — no matter how it affects a neighboring country, American interest — but only they can decide. This is after an initial start in his first administration that raised hopes that finally America would act on what was expected of it.

So, the trajectory in terms of the one power that can make a difference because my dear friends on the left here, J Street — an organization I helped get started — and all the other wonderful people, they will not make the difference. They won't change even the direction of the American Jewish community. Not in our lifetimes. The U.S. could have done it, but how can anyone expect the United States to turn now on a government that incidentally, despite what the media said, is even more reactionary in its composition than the previous government?...

And anyone who expects after the promises and repeated adulation expressed by our president in Jerusalem, the

unbreakable nature of our relationship, of its eternal character and only you can decide what which — what security you need and how to act in achieving that security — that he will then turn around and say, No more? I wish that were true and I could share in that expectation. I don't... [T]he prospect of his doing so is virtually nil. And to the word "virtual," that adjective may not be necessary. (Laughter.)...

If, in fact, the two-state solution is gone — and I believe that that's the hard reality facing the Palestinians — I have suggested — and I've discussed with Palestinian leadership, and more importantly, I think, I've discussed it with Palestinian activists, who do not admire greatly their own leadership — the time has come for Palestinians to shut down the Palestinian Authority because the Palestinian Authority is an instrument of the occupation and perpetuates the occupation. And what that makes the leaders of the Palestinian Authority, I leave to your imagination. But certainly that is — that is the reason they virtually have no respect and enjoy virtually no support among the Palestinian public these days.

But what I have suggested to them is that they shut down the Palestinian Authority and say to the international community and to Israel, you have succeeded in denying us a state; we have fought for the agreements, called for it, international calls for it, but you have denied that to us; it's no longer possible; you have succeeded, with your settlement project, in ending that; consequently, what we — we are changing — we are altering our national struggle from statehood to equal rights in that single state that you have created. And if it is done in a way that is credible to the Palestinian — to the Israeli public, there are then only two possibilities, because the one thing that Israelis — the one price that the Israeli public will not pay for greater Israel is a state that, in time, will no longer be Jewish.

So if they believe that this is — now is an apartheid struggle and that what Olmert predicted, if it turns into that struggle — he said, quote-unquote, "Then Israel is lost." They may very well rethink this idea of greater Israel and their opposition to a Palestinian state. But if they don't — then there's no guarantee, of course, that they will, but if they don't, then this kind of a struggle could not be more timely for their rights. It'll be a bitter struggle. Palestinians will suffer. Israelis will suffer as well. But in the long term, an apartheid situation in the state of Israel is not sustainable. And there is, at this point, very considerable support for this change in direction among the most important political activists in the West Bank...

Settlers — the most powerful and dominant political influence in Israel today is provided by the settlers. They are, if you will, the AIPAC within Israel, and they exercise precisely the same kind of influence on Israeli governments and Israeli policy. So the notion that they're going to pick up and move back is highly unlikely.

Most settlers believe that the game is over; they've accomplished what they set out to do. They laugh — they find it humorous that there are people who are still discussing a two-state solution, and they believe that there is, in fact, today, only one state. How many of you are aware that the official policy of the Likud government, which is the government that forms this — the party that forms this government and the last government; in fact, there were three such — or five such governments in recent years — to this day, its official platform is there is no room in Palestine for a Palestinian state, and we are unalterably opposed — this despite the speech that the prime minister made several years ago saying yes, I'm in favor, which, of course, no one believed.

That remains the official — and yet — and this says something about the integrity of American Middle East policy — and yet we are telling Hamas that as long as you do not recognize the state of Israel, you cannot be part of a government that Israel can deal with. Israel can have its major government — its main government — its ruling government have on its official banner opposition to a Palestinian state in even one inch of Palestine, but if there

is a political party on the Palestinian side, they're out of the game, they are boycotted and, you know. So that's the reality — or one of the many realities that one has to deal with....

**WALT:**

If we're basically right here, we're suggesting that there is not likely to be anything that will change things in a year or two or three, right?

Don't expect a miracle; don't expect a breakthrough in the second Obama term, et cetera, like that, that'll vindicate the Oslo process finally, and then we'll just be in the business of trying to implement that long-illusory two-state solution. This is going to be a longer-term problem, right? And that means that social mobilization, political mobilization here in the United States will matter over time.

What individuals ought to do I think depends very much on the kind of person you are and what you're comfortable doing. I'm not going to prescribe to — you know, this person should go lead a sit-in and this person should organize a divestment petition at their — for TIAA-CREF. And people do what they're comfortable doing.

But it seems to me that existing organizations are always a good place to start. So, as you said, churches are very powerful because they exist already. They are an existing social organization. I think what Phil [Weiss] is trying to do within the American Jewish community and what Mitchell [Plitnick] and others have done is very important to sort of keep pushing that particular dialogue.

And then there are still places within American society where it's easier to have these conversations. It is easier to have these conversations at universities because we have a tradition of open discussion and bringing unpopular opinions in. And some of us do have the luxury of being able to say what we think without professional risk — or as much professional risk.

So that's another place where one can organize. And the nice thing about that is in schools and universities there are lots of young people whose minds can be altered more easily, sometimes, than people who are really entrenched. So I think all of those things are going to be part of a process that is likely to take a while and whose destination is not certain, right?

It's not quite like the Oslo process where we thought we knew where it was supposed to end up and we knew what it was going to look like. I think we're now, as I was suggesting, kind of in terra incognita, where we don't know what the end result is going to be, which means we're going to have to be able to talk a lot about alternatives and how to get there and what the strengths and weaknesses of those alternatives might be.

And if you want to be able to understand that intelligently, you have to be able to talk openly and honestly and make mistakes and get corrected without feeling like your head's going to get taken off if you even voice a slightly out-of-the-box opinion.