

Planned obsolescence: The slow death of the two-state solution

by [Alain Epp Weaver](#) in the [May 3, 2003](#) issue

A viable two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is dying; perhaps it is already dead. This reality should prompt new theological and political analysis among Christians and others who yearn for justice, peace and security for Palestinians and Israelis.

The Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO recently issued a policy analysis arguing that “Israel’s on-going colony construction and other unilateral measures in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are effectively preempting the possibility of a two-state solution of a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel” (at www.nad-plo.org/). If not reversed, these facts “will force Palestinian policy-makers to reevaluate the plausibility of a two-state solution.” Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat, in a December opinion piece in the *New York Times*, warned that the Israeli government, through its actions in the occupied territories, is preparing a “ghetto state” for the Palestinians, “surrounded by Israeli settlements, with no ability to defend itself, deprived of water resources and arable land, with an insignificant presence in Jerusalem and sovereign in name only.”

Since Ariel Sharon became Israel’s prime minister in March 2001, the growth of existing Israeli settlements (what Palestinians prefer to call colonies) and the construction of new ones have skyrocketed. Satellite imaging identifies 24 new colonies in the West Bank, the expansion of 45 more, and the establishment of 113 new “outposts”—that is, caravans placed on hilltops that are later developed into full-fledged colonies. The placement of new colonies and outposts is strategic and multifaceted. First, Jerusalem is being progressively encircled by rings of Israeli colonies which break up the contiguity of Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and which separate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank.

Second, the “separation” wall (what Palestinians call the Apartheid Wall) is reconfiguring the geographical terrain: the wall, whose construction is most

advanced in the northern West Bank, allows Israel to deepen the integration of its illegal West Bank settlements into Israel proper, thereby isolating Palestinian towns and villages from each other, solidifying control over water resources, and paving the way for future land confiscations by preventing farmers from reaching their farmland. The international media have often portrayed the wall as running along the Green Line separating Israel from the occupied territories. In fact, the wall cuts far into the West Bank; if the wall is completed along projected paths, it will mean the de facto annexation of at least 10 percent of the West Bank into Israel. (For more on the Apartheid Wall, see “Stop the Wall” at www.pengon.org/.)

These various developments leave Palestinian population centers separated from one another and will create various isolated “cantons” (what Palestinians, referring to South Africa under apartheid, call “Bantustans”) within 35-40 percent of the West Bank: the canton of Bethlehem, for example, or of Ramallah, Nablus-Jenin, Hebron, etc. These cantons might be left disconnected, or perhaps they would be granted what Sharon recently dubbed “transportation contiguity” in the form of bridges or tunnels to connect them.

The Israeli settlement enterprise over the past decades has been about establishing a matrix of roads and settlements by which Israel can, directly or indirectly, control all of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Journalist Amira Hass, writing in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* in January, highlighted the military significance of the settlements and their road networks: “Israel’s decision-makers, who over the last 20 years have carefully planned the location of every Jewish settlement in the West Bank and every water pipe and electricity pylon, also knew how to plan a ramified network of roads that would become a key weapon against the Palestinians. If you are good children and accept the dictate of the settlements, you can use the roads. If you are bad children we will lock you into the tiny prisons that these roads so cleverly created.” In the past decade these roads and settlements have made the prisons ever smaller and made exit from them ever more difficult.

Israeli colonial expansion, therefore, is putting the nails in the coffin of any plans for a viable two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Talk of “roadmaps” devised by the “Quartet” (United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia) for the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005 appear naïve at best and dangerous at worst. It is naïve because current Israeli colonial expansion is undermining the viability of a Palestinian state. It is dangerous, since Israel likely will offer to accept as a “painful compromise” a Palestinian “state” in the discontinuous

35-40 percent of the West Bank.

Palestinians assume that, following the U.S.-led war against Iraq, tremendous international pressure will be brought to bear upon them to accept a “provisional” state in less than half of the West Bank with, at best, a vague timetable for any further Israeli withdrawals. The current Israeli leadership has made it clear that it does not believe that the roadmap will lead to a full withdrawal from the occupied territories. Israeli journalist Akiva Eldar, for example, observed in *Ha’aretz* that Israeli defense officials “regard the road map as mere ‘lip service’ and expect it to eventually be shelved together with all of the [Bush] administration’s previous plans for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.”

How should advocates for justice, peace and real security for Palestinians and Israelis respond to this emerging reality? First, we should free ourselves from the conceptual bind of seeing “statehood” (be it Palestinian or Israeli) as an end in itself. Various Christian bodies—denominations, church-related organizations—have called for an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip and for the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. What is there to say, however, if Israeli colonial expansion has undermined a viable two-state solution?

Advocates for a just and lasting peace should not be ultimately concerned with whether or not a Palestinian state comes into being. After all, Israel (and the United States, and perhaps the European Union) might eagerly back the creation of a “provisional” state—doomed to indefinite provisionality—comprising discontinuous Bantustans. This would not bring justice and freedom for Palestinians, nor stability or security for either Palestinians or Israelis. Statehood, from a Christian perspective, is simply not an end in itself. What is a good in and of itself is the flourishing and the well-being of all who inhabit “Mandate Palestine”—that is, present-day Israel, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. If current realities have undermined a two-state solution, then those who care about the well-being and security of Palestinians and Israelis must dream of new ways for Palestinians and Israelis to be able to live side by side in justice, freedom and equality.

If a viable two-state solution is eclipsed, then Palestinians will need to struggle against an apartheid reality in the occupied territories and work for equal citizenship in a binational state, in which Palestinians and Israelis are equal citizens before the law, in all of Mandate Palestine. The vision of one binational state must not be

dismissed out of hand by advocates of a just peace, even though many will find it difficult to move beyond the language of “two states” to which they have become wedded.

Advocating one binational state will be perceived as being against the state of Israel and thus as anti-Zionist. Support for a two-state solution has allowed many Christians to avoid a theological reckoning with Zionism, not resolving the question of whether the creation of a sovereign state which denies Palestinian refugees from 1948 the right to return to their homes and insists on maintaining a “Jewish demographic majority” is a theological good. Some Christians, like those committed to dispensationalist readings of scripture, warmly embrace Zionism. If Zionism necessarily means the creation and preservation of a “Jewish demographic majority” at the expense of the rights and well-being of Palestinians, then advocacy for a binational state is indeed anti-Zionist. Other Zionisms, however, such as a “cultural Zionism” that looks for a revitalization of Jewish life in the land while not depending on sovereign and demographic control might emerge as possibilities compatible with a binational vision.

Perhaps the unexpected will occur and Israel will dismantle its colonies in the occupied territories, with a viable Palestinian state emerging next to Israel. If this happens, we will have cause for rejoicing. We must, however, soberly confront the possibility that the day of the two-state solution has already been eclipsed and start thinking through the consequent theological and advocacy implications.