

יחד
Yachad
Together for Israel
Together for Peace

Zionism Q&A

INTRODUCTION

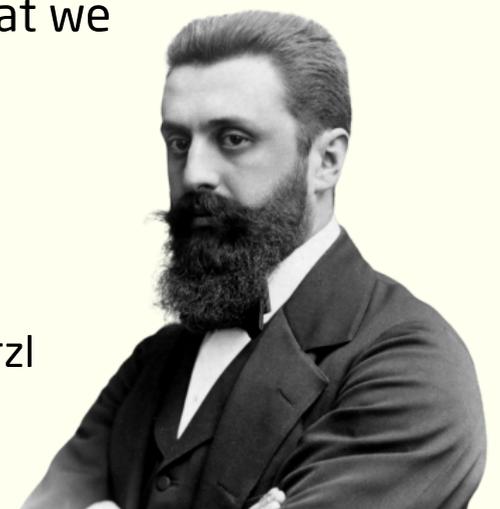
Zionism is a movement for the establishment, development and protection of a Jewish homeland in the historic Land of Israel. Like any ideology or movement, Zionism is a broad church with many competing strands to it.

The founders of modern Zionism and those involved in the creation of the State of Israel placed liberal democratic principles at the heart of their ideology.

Theodor Herzl, the father of modern political Zionism, saw a future Jewish state as a pluralistic democracy, where Arabs and Jews had equal rights. Ahad Ha'am, a key pre-state Zionist thinker, frequently warned that Jewish settlement in Palestine could not come at the expense of Palestinian Arab autonomy and wellbeing. Even Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the founder of the Likud party's right-wing Revisionist Zionism, placed equal rights for all at the centre of his vision.

Zionism, as this booklet explains, promotes democracy, equality and the rule of law - liberal values that we all hold dear. As supporters of Israel who want to see a safe, secure and democratic Israel, alongside a sovereign and democratic state for the Palestinian people, it is vital that we understand how Zionism can guide us.

Theodor Herzl



ZIONISTS SOUGHT TO ESTABLISH A JEWISH STATE, WITH A FUNDAMENTALLY JEWISH CHARACTER. ISN'T THAT A FORM OF RACISM TOWARDS NON-JEWS?

No. The Liberal-Zionism of Israel's founders rejects racism and supports liberal democratic principles. Remembering their experience as a persecuted minority in the diaspora, the Zionist founders enshrined these liberal democratic principals in the 1948 Declaration of Independence, which affirmed that the state will ensure "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex".

From Herzl to Jabotinsky, the most influential figures in modern Zionism have argued that any future Jewish state must guarantee equality before the law for all citizens, regardless of race or religion.

While factions on the religious-right increasingly aspire for Jewish supremacy over other groups, this trend goes against the liberal core of the Zionist movement.

WHEN JEWS MOVED TO PALESTINE, THEY FORCED OUT THE EXISTING PALESTINIAN ARAB POPULATION, SO ISN'T ZIONISM JUST A FORM OF COLONIALISM?

Zionism was a national movement of a persecuted people whose ties to the land have been part of their identity and culture for two thousand years. Jews who came to Israel didn't come from a colonial power with the intention of colonising land and people for economic purposes. They came from Czarist Russia, anti-Semitic Poland or Nazi Germany. Applying the term "colonialism" to such a situation empties this term of most of its moral and historical significance.

However, rejecting the label of colonialism also doesn't mean overlooking the tragic consequences of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, in which a displacement of about 700,000 Palestinians took place.



May 16, 1948 edition of Jewish newspaper The Palestine Post, soon renamed into The Jerusalem Post

We must also draw a distinction between the State of Israel that exists within the 1967 border (the 'Green Line') and West Bank settlements beyond it. The continued military occupation of the West Bank and steady growth of illegal Israeli settlements within this area in the aftermath of the June 1967 war has little to do with security and much to do with territorial expansionism based on ideological and economic motivations. This is very different from the motivations that drove the establishment of a Jewish state in 1948.

ISRAEL'S MILITARY OCCUPIES THE WEST BANK AND SUBJUGATES MILLIONS OF PALESTINIAN ARABS, SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH CALLING ISRAEL AN APARTHEID STATE?

The State of Israel is not an apartheid state, but its continued occupation of land destined to be a future Palestinian state excludes many of the people under its control. There are close to 5 million Palestinians who live under Israeli control in the West Bank and Gaza, without basic rights in the state that dominates their lives.

However, Israel's control of the West Bank and Gaza runs counter to the state's democratic foundations, as expressed in its 1948 Declaration of Independence which demands "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex". This democratic spirit is reflected in contemporary Israeli life, where all faiths vote, enjoy freedom of worship and have access to a free media.

Beyond the Green Line in the West Bank, Palestinians live under military occupation and are subject to martial law, while Israeli settlers live under the civilian judicial system. The situation here - in which Palestinians are denied their right to self-determination - is undemocratic and poses a serious threat to Israel's future as a safe and secure democratic state.

IF THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS THE OCCUPATION, THEN MOST ISRAELIS MUST ALSO SUPPORT IT, RIGHT?

The truth is that most Israelis support the two-state solution, with public opinion polls consistently showing majority support for this policy.

According to the 2017-2018 National Security Index, 55% of Israeli Jews support the two-state solution (as do 96% of Palestinian citizens of Israel). This is not empty support for a slogan, but true acknowledgement of what this would entail: 63% of Israelis support evacuation of settlements as part of a permanent agreement with the Palestinians, while only 27% are opposed.

In other words, the public wants a Palestinian state next to Israel, and is consistent in supporting this solution: a comprehensive survey from late 2016 found that 55% of Israelis supported the establishment of a Palestinian state; in April 2016, 52.4% responded that a Jewish majority in the state of Israel was more important to them than sole sovereignty over the whole historical Land of Israel - while only 21.9% gave the opposite answer.

In a 2015 Molad survey, 50% of respondents expressed support for an agreement with the Palestinians based on the 1967 borders, including land swaps, normalization with the Arab world and dividing Jerusalem, while only 39% objected.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, U.S. president Bill Clinton, and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat



IF YOU WANT TO END THE OCCUPATION, WHY DON'T YOU SUPPORT BDS?

Isolation will not bring peace to Israel-Palestine. Using boycott as a policy tool implies that the solution to the conflict can be imposed externally without a genuine negotiations process and that the responsibility for achieving peace in the region lies solely with Israel. Only a common drive on both sides towards finding a solution will result in peace.

Furthermore, BDS silences voices in Israeli society fighting for peace. Many Israeli peace organisations campaign tirelessly for an end to the Occupation and for the protection of Palestinian human rights. These voices must be empowered rather than silenced.

THE ISRAELIS HAVE OFFERED PEACE AND THE PALESTINIANS ALWAYS REJECT IT. SURELY THERE IS NO PALESTINIAN PARTNER FOR PEACE?

Whilst it's true that the Palestinian political leadership have rejected a number of peace proposals presented to them by the Israelis and the international community, they have also shown a willingness to compromise on key issues.

In 1993, the PLO recognised the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security and, in 2018, Mahmoud Abbas admitted that he wouldn't support a solution to the Palestinian refugee question which threatened to "destroy Israel".

In addition, the 'no partner for peace' argument is often used as an excuse to further entrench settlements and occupation. Many Israeli security experts consider settlement expansion and continued occupation as the main threat to long-term peace and security in Israel - more so than Palestinian rejectionism.

WEST BANK SETTLEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL TO ISRAELI SECURITY, SO WOULDN'T A WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WEST BANK THREATEN ISRAEL'S BORDERS?

The often-repeated idea that West Bank settlements provide a first line of defence and are therefore good for national security is false. In fact, Israeli security experts argue that the opposite is true.

The Israeli settlement of Kiryat Arba in the West Bank



Far from helping to defend the country, the scattering of Israeli civilians throughout the West Bank undermines the work of Israeli security forces, drains the defence budget, and complicates IDF work by lengthening lines of defence. Protecting Israeli civilians in the heart of Palestinian territory detracts from the IDF's ability to fight Palestinian terrorism against Israel proper.

Settlements do not promote national security, but rather they put Israel's security at risk. It has been estimated that over 50% of active IDF forces are deployed in the West Bank, with the primary goal of guarding Israeli civilians. This means that most of the soldiers positioned in the West Bank do not fight terrorism against Israel, but protect settlers instead.

THE 2005 WITHDRAWAL FROM GAZA WAS A DISASTER, SO WHY SHOULD ISRAEL DO THE SAME IN THE WEST BANK?

While the withdrawal from Gaza was less than perfectly executed and didn't lead to peace, there's no dispute that it actually improved Israel's security, defence capacities and international image. Crucially, Jewish settlements in Gaza didn't prevent any of the current problems from developing. Hamas gained significant popular support and developed rocket fire capabilities in the years prior to the withdrawal and evacuation of Israeli settlers.

The Gaza withdrawal process was unilateral rather than bilateral, meaning that there was no negotiated agreement between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership prior to the withdrawal. Giving up territory in return for peace is far more likely to succeed when it's accompanied by a bilateral negotiated agreement. For example, Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula in 1979, part of a wider Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, has been a historic success, with no further conflict arising between the two nations. Without a bilateral resolution in Gaza, Israel simply left a power vacuum.

Almost no one is advocating for a unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank. In order to be successful, Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank must follow on from a series of negotiated agreements between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership, accompanied by joint security cooperation.

SURE, WE ALL WANT PEACE IN PRINCIPLE, BUT ISN'T IT NAÏVE TO THINK THAT ISRAEL CAN PURSUE PEACE WHEN IT'S SURROUNDED BY ENEMIES?

While many attack the peace camp for being unrealistic in its aims, it's actually those maintaining the status quo of political stalemate and ongoing occupation who are the naïve ones.

The continuation of the conflict and consolidation of the occupation in the West Bank threatens Israel's long-term security and fundamental character as both a Jewish and democratic state. According to former Mossad heads Tamir Pardo and Danny Yatom respectively, maintaining the current state of affairs and extending the occupation would spell an "end of the Zionist dream" and pose an "existential danger" to Israel.

These warnings are important. If Israel continues in its current direction, it will end up annexing large swathes of the West Bank, making the state responsible for the daily lives of almost three million Palestinians living in the area. If this takes place, Israel would be faced with a stark choice. Either it grants full equality to all Palestinians living in the West Bank, transforming itself into a bi-national state without a Jewish majority, or it refuses to grant those Palestinians equal rights, turning itself into an undemocratic apartheid state.

It is therefore clear that peace should be pursued now, while there is still time to act and reach an agreement with the Palestinian leadership.

Former Mossad head, Tamir Pardo



WHY IS THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION THE ONLY OPTION FOR A SAFE AND DEMOCRATIC JEWISH STATE?

Israel's best hope for safety and security lies in a stable, enduring, comprehensive peace with its neighbours - and this means two states for two peoples fated to share the same small patch of land. Only a two-state solution can ensure a safe, secure and democratic national home for the Jewish people within internationally-recognised borders, alongside a viable, sovereign and democratic state for the Palestinian people, allowing both nations to exercise at last their right to live as free peoples.

In practice, that's likely to mean staying close to the pre-1967 lines, subject to minor adjustments through mutually-agreed land swaps, with a Jewish West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and an Arab East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state.

Moreover, despite the failure of previous attempts to establish two states, the two-state solution is still supported by a majority of Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

HAVING SEPARATE NATION STATES FOR ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS IS RACIST. WHY SHOULDN'T THEY ALL LIVE IN ONE SECULAR, DEMOCRATIC STATE (I.E. A ONE-STATE SOLUTION)?

After half a century of occupation and more than two decades of failed negotiations, it's sadly unsurprising that many people have lost faith in the two-state solution and are now turning to alternative peace proposals.

However, the idea of a binational Israeli-Palestinian state - the so-called 'one-state solution' - stretching from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea is totally implausible.

Firstly, continuous polling has shown that a majority of Israelis and Palestinians favour a two-state solution to the ongoing conflict.

Indeed, the idea of forming a single binational state has gained little traction amongst ordinary people, only attracting support from a clique of academics, journalists and activists.

Secondly, the one-state solution is politically impossible. After decades of bloody conflict, terrorist attacks, military occupation and violent uprisings, there remains little trust between the Jewish and Arab communities in the region. Therefore, the one-state vision of widespread assimilation between Jewish and Arab communities is simply not feasible, as neither side would risk placing its fate in the hands of the other.

Thirdly, there is a significant risk that a one-state solution would, in the long run, threaten the security and livelihoods of ordinary Israelis or Palestinians. Given the history of conflict, a binational Israeli-Palestinian state would likely be hijacked by the more powerful group, looking to promote their own collective interests. We would then be left with a state led by extremists with no interest in promoting a just and equal democracy.



WHAT CAN I DO TO BRING ABOUT PEACE?

Remember that the only thing necessary for the triumph of injustice is for good people to do nothing. Don't be indifferent: stand up for your values and fight for the Israel you believe in at home, on campus and in the wider community. Engage in debate and don't be afraid to push your vision for a lasting peace in Israel-Palestine.

When people who are fighting for peace on the ground are under attack - amplify their voices. At a time when an increasing number of pro-peace voices in Israel are being silenced, it is vital we stand in solidarity with these organisations and activists.

Bring your friends and join our movement for a secure and peaceful Israel - Yachad. If we fight together, we can win.

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