

OPINION

It's great to hear talk of a two-state solution. Shame it's fanciful



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It's heartening to hear Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong talk about Palestinian statehood in the context of building momentum towards a two-state solution with Israel.

Heartening to know that the Australian government is in lockstep with much of the international community in recognising that such a solution is the only hope of breaking the “endless cycle of violence between the two people”.

“The simple truth,” [Wong](#) said on Tuesday night at an ANU National Security College conference, “is that a secure and prosperous future for both Israelis and Palestinians will only come with a two-state solution – recognition of each other’s right to exist.”

Wong’s comments echoed those of her British counterpart, [David Cameron](#), who said in February that Britain could officially recognise a Palestinian state without having to wait for the outcome of talks between Israelis and Palestinians on a two-state solution.

In the midst of Gaza’s endless horrors, the “two-state solution” appears to be now a three-word refrain on the lips of political leaders around the world. US [President Joe Biden](#) and his top national security officials have reasserted their belief in such a solution – i.e. two states for two peoples (Israel for the Jewish people; Palestine for the Palestinian people) living side by side – as the only way to secure an enduring peace. This has been echoed by the EU, Canada, much of the Arab world, China, Russia, India and the United Nations.

In other words, as Martin Indyk, the Australian-born former US special envoy for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, wrote recently in an essay for [Foreign Affairs](#) magazine, reports of the death of the two-state solution have been grossly exaggerated.

“The reason for this revival is not complicated,” he wrote. “There are, after all, only a few possible alternatives to the two-state solution. There is Hamas’s solution, which is the destruction of Israel. There is the Israeli ultra-right’s solution, which is the Israeli annexation of the West Bank, the dismantling of the Palestinian Authority (PA), and the deportation of Palestinians to other countries.

“There is the ‘conflict management’ approach pursued for the last decade or so by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which aimed to maintain the status quo indefinitely – and the world has seen how that worked out. And there is the idea of a binational state in which Jews would become a minority, thus ending Israel’s status as a Jewish state.

“None of those alternatives would resolve the conflict – at least not without causing even greater calamities. And so if the conflict is to be resolved peacefully, the two-state solution is the only idea left standing.”

Except that – with all due respect to Martin Indyk, Penny Wong and co – the idea is fanciful, and it is fanciful because it ignores some unfortunate realities on the ground.

One of those realities is that Gaza – which has always been envisaged as part of a future Palestinian state connected to the West Bank via a corridor – is a moonscape of horror and devastation following six months of Israeli bombardment.

True, in time, it could be rebuilt, but what of the estimated [750,000 Jewish settlers](#) living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem? What of the Palestinian lands stolen and the homes demolished, seized or confiscated? What about the settler roads, the settler industrial zones, the military checkpoints, the roadblocks, the fences, the walls, the bewildering number of permits that have come to govern Palestinian lives?

What flight of fancy might imagine that three-quarters of a million Jewish settlers – [many of them armed, most of them](#) possessed of a fervent belief in their biblical birthright to the land – would willingly leave that land voluntarily.

I’m old enough to remember when the Israeli settlement of Yamit in the northern Sinai was evacuated as part of the terms of the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty. The evacuation caused an earthquake in Israeli society, with opposition political figures preferring to revoke the peace treaty than give up land.

Some of those settlers barricaded themselves on rooftops before being dragged by Israeli soldiers on to buses. Political extremists from within Israel tried to subvert the evacuation by infiltrating the settlement. Disciples of the late ultra-Orthodox racist rabbi Meir Kahane – whom Israel’s current [National Security Minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir](#), channels with chilling exactitude – vowed to take their own lives. And this was 2500, not 750,000, settlers.

Then there was the national upheaval in 2005 when [Israel ordered 8500 Jewish settlers](#) to evacuate Gaza. A number of them were dragged from their homes and synagogues and although many ended up co-operating with soldiers, others remained wedded to confrontation with the slogan “Jews don’t evict Jews.”

“These are very special people,” one soldier told *The Guardian* at the time. “Taking people out of their homes is not easy. But we have a mission, and we will carry it out. And I think these

people understand that.”

For decades, Jewish settlers have been encouraged to create new lives for themselves and their families in the West Bank, on disputed land earmarked for the Palestinians, and they’ve done so with a raft of official and unofficial tax breaks and incentives, all in defiance of international law. These people are not going anywhere, certainly not without a fight.

And besides which, Benjamin Netanyahu has categorically ruled out a two-state solution, and even when the day finally comes that he is no longer prime minister because Benny Gantz, Naftali Bennett or Yair Lapid has replaced him, none of these men will likely dare implement, let alone impose, a two-state solution on a deeply traumatised and highly suspicious Israeli society.

In the three decades since Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination over this very question, [Israel has become more radicalised and the settler movement more unrestrained](#). According to polls, the majority of Jewish Israelis oppose the creation of a Palestinian state and at least half oppose a deal to end the war in Gaza if that means moving towards Palestinian statehood.

So, yes, by all means let’s talk about the two-state solution as the most viable option for achieving peace, but let’s not pretend it’s grounded in reality.

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