

Netanyahu: Israel Must Have Security Control in Any Agreement With the Palestinians

For the second time in a month, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has informed the leader of a major Western power that Israel will retain full security control over all of the disputed territories in any future arrangement with Palestinians.

Netanyahu told Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop in a closed-door meeting that Israel would never give up its military presence in Judea and Samaria (commonly known as the West Bank), Israel Radio reported. The statement matches comments Netanyahu made in mid-February during his press conference with President Donald Trump.

While laying out his prerequisites for any peace deal, Netanyahu said at the White House that Israel “must retain the overriding security control over the entire area west of the Jordan River ... because otherwise we’ll get another radical Islamic terrorist state in the Palestinian areas exploding the peace, exploding the Middle East.”

Dr. Khalil Shikaki, director of the Ramallah-based Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), believes Netanyahu’s approach would make full Palestinian sovereignty impossible.

“I can’t possibly see that the same person would think this is a two-state solution. Where is the second state? There is only one state. There is a state and a protectorate, but there is not a two-state solution,” Shikaki told .

“But I am sure the prime minister knows fully that this is either a good bargaining position to take at the beginning of negotiations, or that he is obviously not interested in a two-state solution outcome,” he said.

Following the White House summit, rather than focusing on Netanyahu’s comments about retaining Israeli military over all of the disputed territories, most mainstream media chose to focus headlines on Trump’s ambiguous answer when asked if he is “ready to give up the notion” of two states. Trump had answered, “So I’m looking at two states and one state, and I like the one that both parties like.”

Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization for America (ZOA), said Trump’s comments brought an abrupt end to 16 years of carefully worded support—by both Republican President George W. Bush and Democratic President Barack Obama—for a two-state solution.

“It’s because of Donald Trump’s enormously important bully pulpit that he has single-handedly changed the conversation,” Klein told . “The issue now is whether we can get to peace, as opposed to whether we can get to a Palestinian state.”

Is a Two-State Solution Practical?

A recent poll by Shikaki’s PSR, together with the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research at Tel Aviv University, showed that 50 percent of Israeli Jews and 44 percent of Palestinians living in the West Bank support a two-state solution. Yet the same study showed that more than 80 percent of Israeli Jews and 72 percent of Palestinians do not believe a Palestinian state will be established in the next five years.

Shikaki explained that “the idea of a one-state solution is something that more and more Palestinians are turning to. There is a very strong tendency among Palestinians and Israelis to conclude that the two-state solution is no longer

practical. And as a result, they start looking for alternatives. But none of these alternatives seem to garner as much support as there still is for a two-state solution.”

ZOA’s Klein argued that it is easy for Palestinians to support a two-state solution because “Israel is already a state. So when they say they support a two-state solution, what that means is that they support a Palestinian state.” He contended that the inability of Palestinians to recognize Israeli sovereignty, and their unwillingness for any Jews to live in a future Palestinian state, underscore the dangers of making concessions on Israel’s borders.

Jews in Judea

Klein asserted that Palestinians “say they support a Palestinian state, but ask them whether they support Israel as a Jewish state. Ask them whether they support not allowing any so-called Palestinian refugees moving into Israel. Ask them if they support 800,000 Jews living within the confines of a Palestinian state, and you’ll get different answers.”

Shikaki noted that one past proposal that Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have floated for resolving the issue of Israeli settlements is “to ask [Jews in the disputed territories] to live under Palestinian sovereignty if they wish to stay.” He said, however, that the Israeli public has never favored such a plan.

“We no longer have a majority of Palestinians, as we once did, who endorsed the idea of settlers staying under Palestinian sovereignty, but we never had a Jewish majority for that anyway,” said Shikaki.

Yet removing hundreds of thousands of Jews from Judea and Samaria may garner even less public support. In his press conference with Trump, Netanyahu said that “Jews are called Jews because they come from Judea. This is our ancestral homeland. Jews are not foreign colonialists in Judea.”

Demand for a One-State Solution

By mentioning for the first time the possibility of U.S. support for a one-state solution, Trump has, in Shikaki's view, "contributed to making the two-state solution less viable, and thereby increasing the demand for the one-state solution."

"Trump's mere statement, therefore, has played essentially the same role [in the peace process] as the failure of negotiations, settlement construction, etc. All these things have in the past convinced the majority of Palestinians and Israelis that the viability of the two-state solution is questioned," Shikaki said.

Israelis may have arrived at the same conclusion, but from a different angle.

While on a recent trip to meet with Israeli policymakers, Klein said he observed that "almost no people are talking about supporting the establishment of a Palestinian state and criticizing Jews that live in Judea and Samaria."

"My sense," Klein added, "is that people now understand that a Palestinian state would be a Hamas-Fatah terrorist state and that the reason there is no peace has nothing to do with the Jews in Judea and Samaria. They now seem to understand that it is because the Palestinian Authority refuses to sit down and negotiate, and because they continue to promote hatred and violence in every element of their culture, and they pay salaries to families who produce killers." {eo}

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