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## Here's Why There's Real Hope for a Two-State Solution

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by Cary Nelson

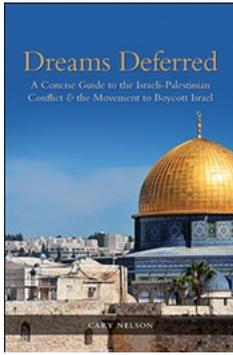
Cary Nelson's most recent book is *Dreams Deferred: A Concise Guide to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and the Movement to Boycott Israel* (400 pp. \$12 in paper), co-published by Indiana University Press in July.



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Although neither the current Israeli government nor the Palestinian Authority has been eager to pursue serious negotiations to reach a comprehensive peace agreement, a number of Israelis and Palestinians have worked hard to address the challenges a two-state agreement must meet. The stalemate at the governmental level has risked reducing the goal of two states for two peoples to a slogan without practical content. But much work among veterans of the military and security services on both sides, often coordinated within nongovernmental organizations, has been devoted to putting new flesh on a realistic plan to restore faith in the potential to honor both peoples' national aspirations.

Many of the professionals on both sides understand both the principles at stake and the answers to the core questions people have raised about the route to peace. Indeed some of those involved in recent dialogue, including the 2013-2014 John Kerry effort, report flexibility on the very issues misleadingly treated either as intractable or as major stumbling blocks by Israeli, Palestinian, and American publics. While the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, for example, notably insists that any solution to the conflict must fully honor a Palestinian right to return to Israel within its pre-1967 borders—and while members of the Israeli public continue to raise the issue



as a major concern—it is clear that leaders both in and outside government on both sides of the conflict understand that a full-scale right of return will never be approved. A limited right of return for the small number of Palestinians with relatives in Israel is possible, and there is wide support for compensation for those who lost homes in 1948. Those who continue to debate the issue in the US are thus engaging in a fruitless fantasy dispute.

The acrimonious debate over the security barrier—less than 10 percent of which is actually a wall—is yet another distraction from more fruitful discussion. All serious observers expect the large settlement blocs west of the fence to become part of Israel by way of land swaps. Settlement construction east of the barrier presents a serious impediment to realization of a Palestinian state, yet the even the US government refuses to draw the distinction and make it part of public US policy. Israeli settlers east of the barrier know well that they are on the wrong side of what, with appropriate adjustments, may become an international border. Interested Americans give up the opportunity to influence US policy by fighting over all settlement construction. Instead, an organized campaign should focus on urging the US administration to press the Israeli government to declare a formal halt to all settlement construction east of the barrier and announce it has no permanent territorial ambitions there. At the same time, those who want to promote a two-state solution should organize to withdraw tax-free status for US foundations that contribute to settlements east of the barrier. These are practical political strategies that could justify increased hope for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Thus hope for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is being undermined both by missed opportunities and by misguided agendas. Perhaps most painful among the latter is the BDS anti-normalization campaign that demonizes and rejects all Israeli-Palestinian dialogue conducted as between equals. BDS only tolerates such negotiation if it stipulates that Israel is in the wrong and the Palestinian pursuit of justice is the only valid one. Thus the Palestinian right to political self-determination trumps any comparable right that eight million Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel might possess. Unfortunately, the anti-normalization campaign not only undercuts efforts to build empathy and mutual understanding; it also makes it difficult to negotiate improvements in Palestinians' daily lives, improvements that are urgently needed. West Bank Palestinians need increased opportunities to work in Israel; passage through the checkpoints needs to be substantially eased; water resources and agriculture need to be upgraded with Israeli help and expertise; housing construction needs to be approved; economic opportunity needs to be enhanced; fragmented sections of Palestinian-controlled territory need to be combined. All this and more requires cooperation that the anti-normalization campaign seeks to criminalize.

The good news is that progress has been made despite the political forces arrayed against it. Plans have been outlined to complete the security barrier so as to block terrorist infiltration into Israel; retired Israel Defense Force generals and security officials have recommended that tens of thousands more Palestinians simultaneously be issued legal permits to work in Israel. A realistic plan has been detailed that would enable a Palestinian state to have an airport in the Jordan Valley, a goal long considered nearly impossible. It would be limited to government and commercial flights, and Palestinian sovereignty would be reinforced by control over 10,000 feet of air space over the West Bank. Good solutions have been proposed to provide security along the Jordanian border and to secure the eastern approach to Ben Gurion airport, another subject of historic concern in Israel. The Israeli government is finally giving serious consideration to approving construction of an offshore Island seaport for Gaza, a critical development that would increase export capacity from Gaza. What is distinctive about all these proposals is that they show how improvements in Palestinian life can accompany increased Israeli security. If Americans can be educated about these options and take the opportunity to promote them they could do more than hope for peace; they could contribute toward its realization.