Book Review

Is the Two-State Paradigm Dead?

Ian S. Lustick, *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019)

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Ian Lustick's latest book, *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality*, is devoted to tracing and analyzing the causes for what he considers to be the failure of the two-state solution and the entrenchment of a one-state reality in Israel-Palestine today. As such, it predates and elaborates on what is now becoming the central debate over our political futures in the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Its importance and contribution, consequently, cannot be exaggerated.

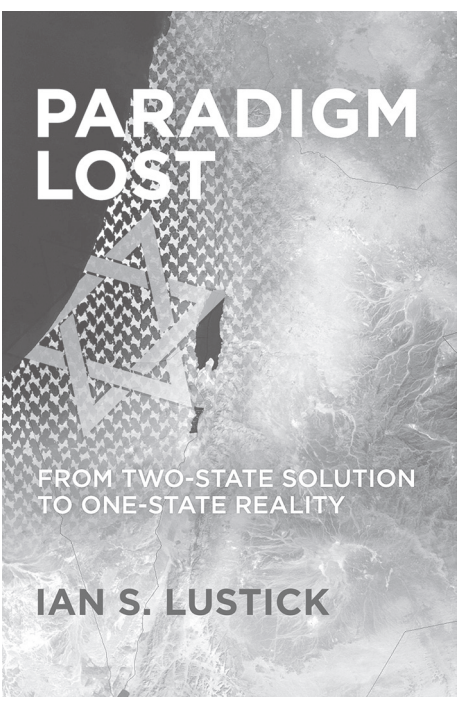
Lustick's main thesis is as simple as it is transformative: the two-state worldview that has served as the foundation of successive efforts to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict for over a century is no longer relevant. Its guiding vision — especially during the past two decades — has been jettisoned in favor of increasing direct and indirect Israeli control over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and their Palestinian residents.

Lustick attributes this development to the unintended consequences of three main factors, the first of which is the consistent disregard of Palestinian aspirations by past and present Zionist leaders — especially after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the Israeli victory in the 1967 war. Although both Arabs and Jews have played a role in the erosion of the two-state concept, Israel's military successes left it less — rather than more — inclined to reach a lasting compromise with its Palestinian neighbors.

Lustick ties this outcome not only to the hubris of the victors but also, secondly, to the lasting shadow the Holocaust casts over Israelis — especially as expressed in its growing salience as the yardstick for state policy and behavior. Although the memory of the Holocaust has been used for over 75 years in very different ways in Israel and elsewhere — from a vindication of Zionism or an asset in relations with the non-Jewish world, to a critical source for the growing emphasis on universal human rights — it has progressively become an ethnocentric template for contemporary Jewish

life. In Lustick's opinion, this particularistic, introspective interpretation has colored Israel's foreign and security policy and overtaken its already limited capacity to reach out to its immediate neighbors. The fear of another genocide has thus served to raise suspicions rather than promote compromise, leaving Jews in Israel today more concerned with controlling their Palestinian antagonists than with searching for ways to come to terms with their ongoing presence on the land and with the existential rights which come with this residency.

The ingrained recalcitrance, fueled by historical memories and ongoing incidents of violence against Israel and its citizens, has intensified, surprisingly, as Israel has become more secure. This is a byproduct not only of greater strategic confusion in the Palestinian camp after the collapse of the Oslo process, but also, third, of the demise of the role of the United States as an honest broker since the turn of the century. Indeed, the weight of the Israel lobby in the United States has been such that Israeli leaders have been given both the wherewithal to pursue expansionist policies and the American backing to do so (with very few exceptions) with impunity. This protective shield has enabled even unacceptable Israeli moves — especially during the Obama era — to continue with few, if any, consequences. The upshot has been that, ironically, the sweeping support for Israel in American political quarters weakened critical voices within Israel and thereby also undermined Israeli democracy, although it is useful to recall that the Trump administration not only reinforced U.S. support for the Israeli narrative and the Netanyahu government's quest for control but also undermined the bipartisan basis for past U.S. support for Israel.



Lustick's reading of the retrogressive trajectory of the two-state strategy is difficult to dispute, although some have placed differing emphases on the factors he highlights, while others have introduced other variables into the explanatory mix. Lustick, unlike other scholars, gives short shrift to economic arguments and especially to the close connection

between Israel's shift to extreme neo-liberalism in 2003 and the subsequent deepening of its control over Palestinians across the Green Line through settlement expansion and demographic segregation. Others insist that the systematic stripping of the liberal elements of Israel's democratic order during the Netanyahu decade provides powerful evidence of the correlation between democratic erosion, authoritarian tendencies, and the political collapse of the center-left in Israel. Yet most observers, including unwavering two-staters, are hard pressed to muster convincing arguments to debunk Lustick's (and an increasing number of his colleagues') claim that the two-state paradigm is dead.

But is it? Does the one-state reality of today — one in which Israel no longer just seeks to "manage" the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through a mixture of cooptation (mostly of the Palestinian Authority and its security forces) and continual repression — really mean that the entire set of premises, strategies, policies, and preferred outcomes associated with the two-state paradigm are no longer applicable? Has the absence of conditions that would make the creation of a viable and sustainable Palestinian state alongside Israel feasible now really imply that the only other equitable alternative is the replacement of Israel, warts and all, with a bi-national Israeli-Palestinian state—hopefully with advanced democratic characteristics?

The one-state reality depicted by Lustick and most keen observers of the situation today is a far cry from such an ideal. Indeed, as Lustick highlights in the final chapter of this volume, Israeli control over Palestinians across the Green Line has actually deepened in recent years, just as the assertion of Jewish hegemony over the identity of the state has been institutionalized in law ("The Basic Law: Israel: The Nation-State of the Jewish People") and in practice within Israel's official boundaries, where the gaps between Arabs and Jews persist, and friction has mounted. This is, by any account, an apartheid-like situation facilitated by the ongoing occupation, one which threatens to become permanent should the unilateral annexation of portions of the West Bank at the core of U.S. President Donald Trump's "Deal of the Century" be implemented. The basic asymmetry of the emerging one-state reality is the antithesis of the egalitarian vision parlayed by its advocates, including Lustick and a growing number of disillusioned two-staters.

Lustick admits that the one-state reality has not yet congealed into a distinct paradigm that embraces specific values, premises, strategies, and practices. Yet in the concluding chapter of this work, he comes very close to conflating an oppressive dominant one-state reality with a potentially egalitarian, beneficial, alternative solution. In fact, he goes out of his way to sketch the components of such a vision, based first and foremost on the normative foundation of equality between Palestinians and Israelis living in

the same geopolitical space. The logical contradictions inherent in such an argument aside (when do the frequently inequitable contours of the present situation become a solution to the problems they embody?), is this vision any more workable than the now discredited two-state model? Does it supply, even in the longer term, a common set of goals which can effectively bind together the majority of Israelis and Palestinians?

It is much too early to venture even the most preliminary answers to the questions posed by a close reading of Lustick's book, many of which have now been amplified in a not dissimilar direction by Peter Beinart in his articles in the *New York Times* and more extensively in *Jewish Currents* in July 2020. Both writers suggest the possibility of dissociating Jewish tradition and mores — as well as Jewish self-determination — from the specific experience of Jewish statehood and sovereignty as it has evolved since 1948. They and their growing number of cohorts also advocate a move from the two-state emphasis on shifting relations between Jews and Arabs to a joint effort of both peoples to build together a value-driven community based on equality for all. Both, indeed, pose — each in his own way — a serious challenge to the most fundamental beliefs of Israelis of a variety of persuasions and at the same time offer the prospect of a more principled, humane existence in a drastically altered political framework. Above all, they are united in their agreement that the status quo is humanely and morally untenable and that dramatic changes are in order.

The discourse on how to move forward, however, is still in its infancy. Lustick, Beinart, and many prominent intellectuals and activists are just opening the conversation which, at this stage, is still being conducted primarily within Jewish circles (as the heavy emphasis on the Holocaust illustrates). Palestinian voices have paralleled some of these perceptions and echo their guiding universal values, but interchanges on alternative futures are still exceedingly sparse.

As the debate evolves, proponents of a one-state option would do well to address some of the ramifications ingrained in the discourse regarding Israeli control over the Palestinians and their lands in recent years. First, it should grapple with the difference between diagnosis of the present situation and analysis of its roots on the one hand and the prognosis for a better future in the years ahead on the other. This involves not only presenting a detailed vision (and not just guiding principles) for an alternative future, but also a very lucid, concrete strategy for how this vision can be achieved.

Second, the discourse must shed some of the determinism that seems to characterize even the most astute critiques of the two-state solution. The working assumption that this paradigm is totally unworkable presumes a

stark linearity which entertains — references to unintended consequences aside — almost no possibility for either reversibility or divergent pathways. Even a cursory look at the COVID-19 context and the changes it has wrought to date suggests that such a presumption does not hold water in the immense fluidity of today's world. The two-state solution may have collapsed, but that does not necessarily mean that it is buried forever.

Third, the conversation on Israeli-Palestinian futures must accept that there are different definitions of the two-state solution (separation, partial opening, cooperation, confederation, and even federation), just as there are different forms of a one-state option (ranging from full civic and political equality embodied by the concept of "one person, one vote" to the reprehensible latter-day incarnation of the apartheid state). It is not the one-state versus the two-state dichotomy that is important but, as Lustick so skillfully reminds his readers, the values that propel their promoters.

Thus, it is important that any such discussion begin with values and people. The centrality of equality is, at this juncture, a *sine qua non* of any serious conversation on Israel-Palestine. But it is not enough. Much attention should now be given to justice, which addresses not only individual inequities, but also the need to rectify historical distortions that have impeded the bridging of what have become two competing holistic and contrasting collective narratives. Equality and justice also tend to exalt the fundamental norms of fairness and decency which are so essential for mutual recognition and greater tolerance — the building blocks of what is clearly an improved, intertwined destiny. How all these are configured into workable political arrangements, is not a foregone conclusion.

Finally, it might be wise not to predetermine the precise political architecture of Israel-Palestine in the wake of efforts to reorder the relations between the two peoples. The elimination of the domination of one people over another through protracted occupation and possible formal annexation does not dictate the exact form of its political replacement. By keeping minds open to the possibility that this may take the shape of a totally revamped two-state option, a confederal arrangement with substantial reciprocity (as foreseen by proponents of the concept of "two nations, one homeland"), or one of the many variants of a single state (federal, decentralized, unitary), it may, at long last, be conceivable to align human relations and collective aspirations with a political framework that can enable Israelis and Palestinians to share the land without sacrificing either their unique history, identity, or dignity.

By forcing us to confront these questions, Lustick has played an important part in furthering this essential and long overdue project.