

Israelis unwilling to risk two-state solution, says new report

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Israelis across the political spectrum prefer the status quo to the two-state solution, and Palestinians are only willing to accept a two-state solution that Israelis will be unable to accept, according to a new RAND Corporation report that assesses whether there are any alternative solutions to the conflict that average Israelis and Palestinians would

support.

Derived from a series of innovative, structured focus group discussions, the report suggests that the Biden Administration's recent reaffirmation of U.S. policy to support a "mutually agreed two-state solution, one in which Israel lives in peace and security alongside a viable Palestinian state," will face a steep uphill climb.

The analysis focused on five plausible alternatives: two-state solution, one-state solution, confederation approach, Israeli annexation of the West Bank's Area C, and perpetuation of today's status quo. Almost all parties were extremely pessimistic about the feasibility of any. About 60% of Israelis said the status quo could feasibly continue, as it has for decades, and many others believed that it was manageable and preferable to the risk of other alternatives. Peace was considered a "romantic notion" that was simply not attainable at this time.

"One of our key goals was to determine if there were areas of overlap in opinions and feeling among Israelis and Palestinians that might offer avenues for negotiation, leading the parties closer to peace," said Daniel Egel, lead author of the report and an economist at nonprofit, nonpartisan RAND. "Sadly, the data show the opposite. The data highlight the deep distrust and profound animosity of each side for the other."

Resolving the crisis will likely require more holistic "peace deals" than have been previously offered, the researchers found. While previous deals have focused on economic dividends, the international community has shied away from the security guarantees that could help find common ground between these two peoples.

Researchers conducted four-hour-long discussions with 273 individual West Bank Palestinians, Gazan Palestinians, Israeli Jews and Israeli

Arabs in 2018 and 2019. The focus groups, based on RAND's Delphi method, aimed to complement extensive polling efforts by others on this topic.

One key finding is that getting Israeli Jews to support any alternative to the status quo will require a shift in both domestic and international politics. "It is hard to imagine a departure from current trends unless strong, courageous leadership among Israelis, Palestinians and the international community articulates a desire for a better future for all," said C. Ross Anthony, co-leader of the report and director of RAND's Israeli-Palestinian Initiative.

Researchers found that among Israeli Jews there are two major impediments to anything but the status quo: a lack of trust in Palestinian objectives and a general belief that none of the other alternatives are feasible. The lack of trust results in fear, xenophobia and a willingness to forgo basic principles of democracy when it comes to the rights of Palestinians.

Another key finding is that Palestinians will likely require international security guarantees for any peaceful resolution. Palestinians perceived all five alternatives as biased against them and primarily serving the interests of the more powerful Israelis.

Palestinians indicated they would be willing to accept a modified two-state solution, with an independent state with geographic contiguity, political autonomy, a standing army and control over the borders. While such a solution would be very difficult for Israel to accept, a two-state solution where the international community made credible commitments to guarantee Palestinian security could be more viable, researchers concluded.

The third key policy finding is that educating Israelis and the

Palestinians about the alternatives could help. Pre-testing showed that few focus-group participants started with a clear understanding of any of the alternatives, but receiving a brief overview allowed them to make a more informed decision and some changed their minds.

"An information campaign, educating individuals about all the alternatives, could be an important component of efforts to promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict," said co-author Shira Efron, a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) and special advisor on Israel for RAND.

"We hope that in the coming years Israelis and Palestinians and the [international community](#) will have the courage to make the commitments—and sacrifices—to resolve what has been one of the most enduring political challenges in the post-World War II period," said co-author Charles Ries, adjunct senior fellow at RAND.

More information: Charles P. Ries, *Alternatives in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021. www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA725-1.html.

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