

## Opinion

**Opinion | And Now, the Nakba of the Two-state Solution**

To secure his coalition, Netanyahu is ready to allow settler violence and other moves that will expand the conflict

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Escalation in the West Bank, the election that is behind us and the expected government headed by Benjamin Netanyahu are breathing new life into some laundered concepts used in the political discourse concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Prominent among them is “shrinking the conflict” in its various versions – from “managing the conflict” through “economic peace” to “upgrading the conflict.”

In their election campaign promises, representatives of most of the political parties gave great weight to these terms, as though offering a wonder drug concocted professionally to treat the bleeding conflict. Netanyahu will once again be caught in the diplomatic pincers between the Religious Zionism demand to advance annexation of the West Bank and his commitment in the Abraham Accords to refrain from doing that, in addition to expected pressure from the current American administration and Congress. He will try to wriggle out of the trap by reviving the myth of “economic peace” and “shrinking the conflict,” even if on the ground opposite things are happening that will expand the conflict.

In both political camps there is support for “shrinking the conflict”: Many supporters of the two-state solution believe it is not practicable at the moment and therefore it is

necessary to shrink the conflict and prevent its escalation, until the reality changes, while those who negate the two-state solution believe that shrinking the conflict is the right way to act. This is Netanyahu's position, who wrote in the 1995 Hebrew version of his book, "A Place Among the Nations, Israel and the World": "A Palestinian Liberation Organization state planted 15 kilometers from the beaches of Tel Aviv will constitute an immediate mortal danger for the Jewish state." And therefore, "The autonomy plan under Israeli control is the only option."

And as Defense Minister Benny Gantz said this week in an interview on October 30 to the Srugim website, "The left in Israel thinks the solution is two states for two peoples. I am against this. Instead of degenerating into a binational state, we will shrink the conflict." And these are just two examples. It is not surprising that no politician feels committed to explain, first of all, what the conflict is all about prior to setting forth his theory about ways to limit it. And the public is not clamoring to clarify this. Were there attention being paid to the issue, it would be possible to see that there is no connection between the operative measures they are proposing and the aim of "shrinking the conflict," and most those measures are damaging in the long term.

The basic assumption of the routine mantra in the mouths of politicians is that a satiated neighbor is less hostile and there are those who also believe he will give up his national aspirations or at least shrink them. In their view, the emphasis on "shrinking the conflict" must be on economic measures that will benefit the Palestinians. This is contrary to all the historical lessons that have proven the opposite, whenever the pre-state Jewish community here and the state of Israel operated on this mistaken assumption. When

exactly was the conflict between us and the Arabs here about economic welfare?

The conflict is over this land and the right to establish a state here. This is mainly a territorial-national conflict, even if it is accompanied by religious aspects. Any attempt to shrink the conflict must deal with the territorial issue. Shrinking the conflict means shrinking the disputed area between the sides. The gradual stages of the peace process with Egypt and the evacuation of Sinai – the separation of forces agreement (1974), the interim agreement (1975), the framework agreement (1978), the permanent status agreement (1979) and the withdrawal from Sinai (1982) – must stand at the base of the correct rationale and implementation of the "conflict shrinkage" thesis. The [Oslo Accords](#) were also constructed in this way: In the first stage, there was an interim agreement whereby Israel would transfer all the occupied territories to the control of the Palestinian Authority, excepting issues that would be discussed in negotiations for a permanent settlement: Jerusalem, military sites and the settlements, and at the second stage – a permanent status agreement. The transfer of Areas A and B to Palestinian control shrank the conflict, because Israel is (usually) not present in those areas and it does not directly administer the lives of the Palestinians in them.

The [disengagement plan](#) from Gaza was implemented in a similar way. Israel does control the boundaries of the Gaza Strip, but it does not administer daily life there, and it conducts the war against Hamas and Islamic Jihad in conventional military ways and not as an occupying police force. This explains the fact that in the five years prior to the disengagement Israel incurred 147 fatalities, whereas since the 2005 disengagement to this day – a total of 17 years –

there have been 122 fatalities resulting from escalation connected to the Gaza Strip.

So too were steps taken by the Arab side to shrink the conflict, for example revocation by King Hussein in 1988 of the annexation of the West Bank to Jordan, which paved the way to the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan in 1994, in the framework of which Israel returned to Jordan the territories of which it had taken control in the Arava. The recognition of the PLO in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 in 1993 and its official reciprocal recognition of Israel in 1993 shrank the disputed area that previously had been the entirety of Mandatory Palestine “the Land of Israel,” leaving for negotiation in the Permanent Status agreement only the territories that were occupied in 1967.

### **Shrinking the conflict**

To shrink the conflict today, in the true and correct sense of the concept, it is necessary to hand Areas C to the Palestinian Authority, as Netanyahu did in the “framework of the “phases” in 1998 (as part of the Wye River Memorandum) and proposed doing again in 2014, according to the American envoy at the time, [Martin Indyk](#) (Srugim, October 31). This logic was also at the base of the master plan for Ariel Sharon’s disengagement and Ehud Olmert’s realignment in the West Bank – which proposed transferring Areas C and evacuating isolated settlements on the mountain ridge to give the Palestinians territorial contiguity in Areas A and B, thereby enabling implementation of development plans in various areas and the capacity for governability.

What does “shrinking the conflict” include according to Netanyahu and others who support the approach?  
Increasing the number of work permits from the Gaza Strip,

granting to Palestinians from the West Bank permission to look for work in Israel, increasing the fishing zone off the shores of Gaza and the like. These measures could have helped had they been accompanied by the territorial measures that have been mentioned. In the short term they indeed will contribute to the welfare of tens of thousands of Palestinian families, but this has no connection to shrinking the conflict. On the contrary, the presence of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in Israel, in the absence of a significant diplomatic process, in fact increases the potential for escalation and violence on both sides at innumerable points of everyday friction (as happened in the first intifada).

In the long term, the consequences will be even graver. Implementation of the policy that began in the days of Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, in the context of which the Palestinians sustain their economy by means of Israel – they work there, they receive some of their medical services there (for which they pay), they buy their electricity there, import and export, collect the indirect taxes and so on – all preserves their dependence on Israel and prevents the development of the institutions of the state-to-be.

Netanyahu cannot be expected to bring up the idea of territorial shrinkage. And as palm grease for the existence of his new government, in the absence of the ability to annex territories, Netanyahu will allow Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir to strengthen and accelerate moves that contradict the thesis of “shrinking the conflict.” These moves, which happen day by day in the territories, include expansion of the settlements, ignoring illegal outposts, “laundering” existing outposts, granting permits for Jewish farms, settler violence towards Palestinians, Israelis and Israel Defense Forces soldiers, the takeover of lands, paving

a system of fast roads to the isolated settlements and more. These moves increase the “surface area” of the friction, lead to reciprocal violence and compel the IDF to invest no less than 55 percent of its fighting forces there in routine times, and more at a time of escalation.

It appears that the government that will be formed will reach new peaks in the adoption of the laundered concepts, first and foremost “shrinking the conflict” and “economic peace.” The public must know these and understand their significance. “Shrinking the conflict’ is a territorial issue and aiming for it is the rationale that guided all of Israel’s agreements until now. The use of these terms by the expected Netanyahu government is nothing but a smokescreen, aimed at concealing the continuation of the conflict and the continuation of the creeping annexation until the creation of one non-egalitarian state. Possibly the 2022 election will be remembered as the Nakba – catastrophe, in Arabic – of Israeli democracy.

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