

ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Middle East, no one believes in the fairy tale of two peoples in two states anymore

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Now Pope Francis, in the interview he gave on 1 November to the director of TG1, also indicated the goal of "two peoples, two states" as the only possible solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. But, the pontiff is only the latest in a long, indeed interminable, list. Every

time violence in the Middle East explodes once again, most of the world's political leaders, including Western ones, return to calling for the birth of a Palestinian national state that coexists with the Jewish one.

But, that formula is mainly used without specifying the ways in which the objective could be concretely achieved, nor the reasons why it has not been achieved until now. It is repeated like a mantra, almost as if it were a talisman, because it is useful to momentarily get those who pronounce it out of trouble with respect to the enormous problems of international politics, security, civil coexistence that arise for any government or country that is forced to put its hands inside this inextricable and poisoned thicket. In any case, over time it has increasingly lost references to content, and has essentially become a pure rhetorical device. None of the political actors who resort to it, and none of the parties directly or indirectly involved in the conflict to which it is addressed, believes in its actual feasibility.

In reality, it can be said that the solution of two peoples and two states historically represented not the solution, but the premise of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In fact, when the UN General Assembly in 1947 voted by a large majority Resolution 181 for the division of the region called Palestine, subjected to the British mandate after the end of the Ottoman Empire, between an Arab and a Jewish state - trying to put an end to a long dispute made even more dramatic by the Nazi extermination of European Jews and by the support of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem al-Husseini for Hitler - that resolution was rejected by the Arab countries under the pressure of rising pan-Arab nationalism. And when the birth of Israel was proclaimed in May 1948, it was militarily attacked by those countries, which intended to erase it and chase away the immigrant Jews.

The history of the so-called "Palestinian question" is first and foremost, for many decades, the history of the Arabs' obstinate refusal to recognise the legitimate existence of Israel. It was that refusal that inspired, out of political calculation, the choice of Jordan and Egypt not to assimilate the Arabs expelled or fled from Israel after the first war, but to keep them in the condition of refugees. And it is on that refusal that the Palestine Liberation Organisation was founded, and a "Palestinian people" (Arab) who had previously never had a specific national identity was "invented" ex post. Only after the Six Day War of 1967, with the searing preventive victory of the Israelis and the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and Sinai, and then after the Yom Kippur War of 1973 did people begin to speak out internationally - with the consent of some sectors of the Israeli and Arab political class - of a possible "peace for territories" exchange, and

therefore of a possible glimmer of hope for an Arab Palestinian state, right in the West Bank and Gaza, which would coexist with the Jewish one.

After exhausting events and negotiations, that glimmer of light was the basis of the Oslo Agreements of 1993 between Rabin and Arafat, and then of the Israeli proposal at Camp David in 2000 for a Palestinian state on 85% of the territories themselves. But that proposal - this is the fundamental point - was rejected by Arafat himself, while the PLO was by now pressed by much more radical positions no longer inspired by Arab nationalism but by Islamic fundamentalism/integralism, such as those of Islamic Jihad and Hamas, incited by destabilising powers such as the fundamentalist regime of the Iranian ayatollahs.

The subsequent, extreme attempt to once again channel a possible negotiation along the lines of a "two peoples, two states" track was undertaken in 2002 on the initiative of George W. Bush (desirous of extinguishing the conflict in the area at a time of much broader conflict with Islamic fundamentalism following the September 11 attacks) with the Road Map for Peace, supported by the "quartet" formed by the United States, Russia, the European Union and the UN. And it was in the spirit of this attempt at conciliation, as well as a growing convergence with Egypt and Jordan, that in 2005 Prime Minister Sharon unilaterally decided to withdraw Israeli troops from Gaza.

Unfortunately, as is known, that withdrawal was not the premise for the evolution of the Palestinian Authority towards a democracy animated by the desire for coexistence with the Jewish State, but on the contrary the beginning of the seizure of power by Hamas (whose statute provides for the the primary and non-negotiable objective of the destruction of Israel) with a largely majority electoral consensus, and of the armed settling of scores between fundamentalist extremists and Fatah. Today, it is precisely the prevalence of Hamas and the Islamist forces that aim to destabilise the entire area - which have increased enormously in the last twenty years - which has made the "two peoples, two states" solution completely impracticable. Coexistence between two neighbouring national states is logically impossible when the decidedly prevailing current in politics and public opinion of what should be one of the two, supported by a significant part of public opinion in Islamic countries, believes that the neighbour should not exist, and as soon as the practical possibility presents itself, to destroy it.

The tragic events of October 7th are not an accident but the inevitable consequence of this situation. As long as Hamas and other groups with a similar approach exist, as long as Islamist regimes such as Iran that use them exist, as long as Jordan and Egypt (and Saudi Arabia) do not assume effective political responsibility for

the territories, guaranteeing coexistence with Israel, speaking of "two peoples, two states" is just an inconclusive flatus vocis. Even assuming that international diplomacy miraculously managed to bring it into being, the eventual Palestinian Arab state would only be a larger version of what is now Gaza, or South Lebanon controlled by Hezbollah: a huge terrorist base always ready to set everything ablaze the Middle East and to destabilise the world.