

# A LEASE COULD BREAK THE PALESTINE-ISRAEL DEADLOCK

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

A 10-year lease in which Israel recognized Palestinian sovereignty over hard-line Jewish settlements, paid rent, and ended further construction could do the trick. A decade of peace would change Israel's political orientation, diffusing the Jewish radicals' claims and injecting a dose of moderation. Palestinian territorial integrity would be recognized and secure, allowing Palestine to develop under stable conditions.

Such a leasing arrangement should be extended to the hard-line Jewish settlements blocking a peace deal. Israel should recognize the settler enclaves as part of a sovereign Palestine. Then, Palestinians could lease those pockets to Israel for a specified period of time. If Israel paid rent, accepted Palestinian sovereignty, and agreed to halt further settlement expansion, a comprehensive deal could be signed.

A Palestine-Israel lease could break the current negotiating deadlock. Israel already encompasses 70 percent of historic Palestine, and Palestinian negotiators are rightly unwilling to compromise over the remainder. West Bank settlers dismiss the notion of Palestinian territorial rights, however, regarding the entire region as Jewish patrimony. The Israeli government is weak and fearful of the settlers' lobby.

## FULL TEXT

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During the last Israeli Cabinet crisis, one unhappy minister alleged that Israeli and Palestinian negotiators had worked out a secret lease for parts of the Jordan Valley. Israel would recognize Palestinian sovereignty over specified areas that Palestine would then rent back to the Israeli military.

Such a leasing arrangement should be extended to the hard-line Jewish settlements blocking a peace deal. Israel should recognize the settler enclaves as part of a sovereign Palestine. Then, Palestinians could lease those pockets to Israel for a specified period of time. If Israel paid rent, accepted Palestinian sovereignty, and agreed to halt further settlement expansion, a comprehensive deal could be signed.

Leasing has a proven track record in unstable regions. Between 1994 and 1997, Russia drew up leasing agreements with Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Latvia, and Ukraine. The Russians ceded formal control over radar facilities, missile test sites, and ports, but then leased them back from its former imperial subjects.

Leasing afforded a way out to negotiators on all sides. In Russia, the military was furious over the loss of irreplaceable assets, but politicians in the new post-Soviet states were determined to safeguard their territorial

integrity. Leasing gave everyone a way of claiming victory, diffusing potential clashes.

The Ukrainian deal was particularly vital, as conflict over the port in Sevastopol and Russia's Black Sea fleet threatened to destabilize the entire region. Sevastopol was a key naval base as well as a symbol of Russian historical achievement, and the Black Sea fleet was a major military asset. To add fuel to the fire, the city was populated largely by ethnic Russians.

Throughout the early 1990s, Russian officers, communists, and nationalists bitterly protested Ukrainian sovereignty over Sevastopol. Ukrainian politicians refused to back down, however, arguing that the city was rightfully theirs. In 1997 a historic accord divided the fleet in two and granted Russia a 20-year, \$100- million lease over Sevastopol's port facilities.

The zero-sum nature of modern sovereignty has inspired many of the last century's wars. Nation-states enjoyed a monopoly over chunks of land to the exclusion of all others, and what one state owned, no other could have. This arrangement invariably created winners and angry losers, since many regions were claimed by multiple groups. Mutually beneficial deals were rare.

In a lease, however, sovereignty is shared according to clear, prearranged guidelines. One side retains formal ownership, while the other gains limited rights for a specified period of time. Conditions are worked out in detail prior to signing, including payment and limits to land use. Third-party arbitration can be arranged for future disputes.

A Palestine-Israel lease could break the current negotiating deadlock. Israel already encompasses 70 percent of historic Palestine, and Palestinian negotiators are rightly unwilling to compromise over the remainder. West Bank settlers dismiss the notion of Palestinian territorial rights, however, regarding the entire region as Jewish patrimony. The Israeli government is weak and fearful of the settlers' lobby.

A 10-year lease in which Israel recognized Palestinian sovereignty over hard-line Jewish settlements, paid rent, and ended further construction could do the trick. A decade of peace would change Israel's political orientation, diffusing the Jewish radicals' claims and injecting a dose of moderation. Palestinian territorial integrity would be recognized and secure, allowing Palestine to develop under stable conditions.

Leasing would have helped Serbs and ethnic Albanians out of last year's Kosovo imbroglio. Both sides demanded exclusive control over the province, and Western negotiators could persuade neither to back down. In a world in which sovereignty granted a total monopoly, compromise seemed foolish. Partition would only have provoked more ethnic cleansing and bloodshed. A leasing arrangement, on the other hand, would have been a viable alternative.

Mutually exclusive sovereignty has generated strife ever since it was foisted on the globe by Western powers. Leasing, by contrast, is a nonviolent form of territorial sharing. Let's give it a chance.

## DETAILS

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