

“A Land For All” Is Possible: Lessons From Around the World

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Introduction

For many Palestinians and Israelis, a just and peaceful future feels today further away than ever. Decades of occupation, colonization, terror, wars, failed negotiations, and deepening mistrust have created a powerful sense that there is no realistic alternative to permanent conflict. Yet history shows that political realities that appear fixed can change, and that new political possibilities can emerge.

A Land for All (ALFA) proposes such a framework: two sovereign states, connected through shared institutions and a common homeland. The vision recognizes the equal right of both peoples to self-determination, while also acknowledging that their lives, histories, economies, security, and attachment to the land cannot simply be separated by a hard border.

This proposal is ambitious, but it is not detached from experience. Around the world, societies shaped by conflict and, in many cases, by histories of colonial domination, settlement, and dispossession have developed arrangements based on power-sharing, cross-border cooperation, freedom of movement, layered governance, minority protection, and greater political equality.

None of these cases provides a ready-made solution for Israel and Palestine. Together, however, they show that many of the principles underlying ALFA’s vision have worked elsewhere. And what appears politically impossible today may become possible when new ideas, institutions, and political conditions emerge.

ALFA’s Vision in Comparative Perspective

The following are six key principles underlying ALFA’s vision, each illustrated by examples from around the world and followed by a brief reflection on its relevance to Israel–Palestine:

01

Seemingly intractable conflicts have undergone dramatic political transformation, enabling mutual recognition, coexistence, and historical reconciliation.

South Africa

South Africa’s transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994 was long considered unlikely due to entrenched racial segregation, systematic repression, and fears of large-scale civil war. Yet negotiations between the apartheid government and the African National Congress led to a peaceful

political transition based on universal citizenship, constitutional protections, and reconciliation mechanisms. Although socioeconomic inequality and racial tensions remain significant, South Africa illustrates how a deeply divided society can undergo dramatic political transformation without mass violence, expulsions or partition.

Northern Ireland

For decades, Northern Ireland was marked by violent conflict between Protestant unionists and Catholic nationalists, rooted partly in the legacy of British settler colonialism in Ulster-Ireland. The conflict involved mass human rights violations and deep mutual distrust between communities identifying with competing national projects. The 1998 ‘Good Friday Agreement’ transformed this reality through mutual recognition and cross-border institutions linking Northern Ireland to both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. While tensions persist, they are dealt by through normal political tools rather than violence.

Colombia

Colombia experienced more than five decades of armed conflict involving the state, guerrilla movements, paramilitary and drug-related groups, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of displaced people. Despite repeated failures and widespread skepticism, the Colombian government and the FARC eventually reached a peace agreement in 2016 that combined disarmament, political integration, rural reform, and transitional justice mechanisms. The process remains incomplete and contested, yet it demonstrates that prolonged cycles of violence and mutual demonization do not necessarily prevent negotiated political transformation.

France–Germany

Following three devastating wars between 1870 and 1945, hostility between France and Germany appeared deeply entrenched and likely permanent. Yet within a few decades, the two countries became the core of European integration through economic cooperation, shared institutions, open borders, and sustained political reconciliation. The transformation of the Franco-German relationship from one of recurring warfare into one of strategic partnership remains one of the clearest examples of how former enemies can gradually construct relations based on interdependence, coexistence, and mutual legitimacy.

For Israel–Palestine, the relevance of these cases lies not in their direct comparability, but in demonstrating that relations shaped by prolonged violence, mutual non-recognition, and apparently irreconcilable claims can undergo profound political transformation.

02

Ethnic and national communities with long histories of conflict can preserve their distinct identities within common political frameworks based on power-sharing.

Good Friday Agreement

The 1998 ‘Good Friday Agreement’ established a power-sharing framework enabling unionist and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland to preserve competing British and Irish identities within shared political institutions. Rather than forcing a resolution of the sovereignty question, the agreement institutionalized coexistence through joint governance, cross-border cooperation, and mutual recognition. Residents of Northern Ireland were granted the right to identify as British, Irish, or both, illustrating how deeply divided national communities can share political frameworks without abandoning distinct collective identities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the ensuing conflicts of the 1990s, the Dayton framework established a constitutional framework for Bosnia and Herzegovina aimed at enabling (Muslim) Bosniaks, (Orthodox) Serbs, and (Catholic) Croats to coexist within a single internationally recognized state. The system combines territorial decentralization, collective institutions, and guaranteed political representation for the three constituent peoples. Although the arrangement remains complex and frequently dysfunctional, it demonstrates that even societies emerging from severe ethno-national violence (including ethnic cleansing and genocide) may preserve coexistence through power-sharing rather than partition or population transfer.

Belgium

Belgium developed a highly decentralized federal system designed to manage tensions between Dutch-speaking Flemish and French-speaking Walloon communities. The country combines shared national institutions with extensive regional and linguistic autonomy, including separate political parties, education systems, and cultural institutions. Despite periodic political crises and strong nationalist movements, Belgium demonstrates that communities with distinct identities and competing political aspirations can maintain a common political framework through negotiated power-sharing and institutional compromise.

Switzerland

Switzerland is composed of three main linguistic and religious communities (German, French, and Italian), which historically experienced significant political and sectarian tensions and violence. Over time, the country developed a federal and highly decentralized political structure combining strong cantonal autonomy, collective decision-making, and power-sharing mechanisms. Swiss governance illustrates how diverse communities can preserve distinct identities, languages, and local institutions while participating in stable common political structures grounded in consensus and mutual accommodation.

For ALFA, these experiences reinforce the proposition that Israeli and Palestinian national identities need not be dissolved in order to build shared institutions: cooperation can be built on the reality of interdependence, mutual interests, and a shared sense of belonging to the homeland, while preserving distinct forms of national self-determination.

03

Open borders and freedom of residence can coexist with effective security arrangements, even between societies marked by conflict or mistrust.

European Union

The European Union, which began to take shape in the late 1950s and developed gradually over subsequent decades, shows that borders need not be barriers to either freedom or security. Twenty-seven states, many shaped by centuries of war, territorial rivalry, and nationalist conflict, have built a system that allows hundreds of millions of people to travel, work, and live across borders with minimal restrictions. At the same time, governments continue to cooperate closely on policing, intelligence-sharing, and border management. The EU experience demonstrates that greater freedom of movement does not require abandoning security; with strong institutions and sustained cooperation, the two can reinforce one another.

Mercosur

Mercosur developed a framework connecting nearly all South American states as either members or associates. The agreement, reached in 2002, reflected the understanding that mobility is essential for economic integration, while seeking to regularize the extensive informal cross-border mobility

that had long characterized the region. Through simplified procedures, citizens can travel and access legal residence, employment and social rights across borders. These arrangements are effectively implemented despite recurring political tensions, economic asymmetries, and security challenges, including organized crime, drug trafficking, smuggling networks, and concerns regarding terrorism in border regions.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

Since 1979, ECOWAS has established a series of protocols supporting free movement across 12 member states in Western Africa, a region affected by political instability, insurgencies, smuggling networks, and weak state capacity. The framework guarantees visa-free entry and short-term mobility rights, with residency rights (the latter are still only partially implemented). It combines regional travel documents with increasing cross-border security cooperation and joint border-management initiatives. ECOWAS demonstrates that mobility and security do not contradict one another and may even reinforce state capacity to regulate and monitor movement more effectively.

For ALFA, these experiences point toward a model in which movement between Israel and Palestine is facilitated as a normal feature enabling normal life for the bulk of the population, while security risks are addressed through targeted, cooperative, and institutionally grounded mechanisms rather than sweeping restrictions on mobility.

04

Contested and divided cities have developed layered and shared governance arrangements that encourage coexistence and greater equality among all inhabitants.

Brussels (Belgium)

Brussels developed into a complex shared capital within Belgium’s deeply divided federal system, serving simultaneously as the capital of the Belgian state, the Flemish and French-speaking communities, and the European Union. Although historically marked by linguistic and political tensions between Flemish and Walloon communities, the city operates through layered governance arrangements, bilingual institutions, and negotiated power-sharing mechanisms. Brussels demonstrates how a city claimed symbolically and politically by different national communities can function through institutional compromise rather than exclusive control.

Brčko (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Following the Bosnian war, Brčko became one of the most sensitive territorial disputes between Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats due to its strategic location connecting different parts of the country. Rather than assigning the city exclusively to one side, the Dayton framework established the self-governing Brčko District under international supervision, formally belonging to the two entities composing Bosnia and Herzegovina simultaneously. The district successfully encouraged refugee return and developed shared institutions, integrated public services, and multiethnic governance structures, illustrating how contested urban spaces can be administered through hybrid and power-sharing arrangements.

Belfast (Northern Ireland)

Belfast was long characterized by violent sectarian division, segregation, and competing British and Irish national claims during the Northern Ireland conflict. Following the ‘Good Friday Agreement’, the city gradually underwent political and spatial transformation through power-sharing institutions, cross-community governance, and increasing efforts to create shared public spaces. Although residential segregation and tensions remain significant, Belfast illustrates how contested cities marked by deep national and historical divisions can move toward coexistence through negotiated political frameworks rather than partition or exclusive sovereignty.

Chandigarh (India)

Chandigarh was created after the partition of British India as a planned capital for the Indian state of Punjab. Following the ethno-linguistic reorganization of Punjab in 1966, which created a Sikh-majority Punjab and a Hindu-majority Haryana, Chandigarh became the shared capital of both states while also functioning as a federally administered union territory under the Indian central government. The arrangement illustrates how contested urban spaces claimed by different political communities can operate through layered administrative authority and shared institutional arrangements rather than exclusive territorial division.

These experiences cannot provide a model for Jerusalem, whose political, religious, and symbolic significance is unique. However, they do demonstrate that competing claims to the same city need not necessarily be resolved through exclusive sovereignty or physical partition, and that layered forms of authority and shared governance are possible.

05

Post-conflict and post-colonial transitions have often enabled populations associated with former dominant regimes (settlers) to remain under new indigenous-led regimes.

Baltic states

In 1991, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania restored independence after decades of Soviet occupation, characterized by the large-scale and organized settlement of Russian speakers. Despite strong nationalist reactions and clashes surrounding citizenship, language, and political loyalty, most Russian-speaking settlers remained in the newly independent states. Despite tensions and social distancing, these former settlers coexist peacefully with the local populations and enjoy basic social and political rights. They combine a dual sense of belonging to the new states, on the one hand, and to their ethnic group and historical homeland (Russia), on the other.

Namibia

After liberation from the South African regime in 1990, Namibia did not expel the white settler population (mostly Afrikaners) that had benefited from colonial domination and apartheid. Despite fears of violent retribution, most settlers remained in the newly independent country. The transition combined majority rule with constitutional protections. While the community maintains strong links with the wider Afrikaner population in South Africa, most members consider themselves proud Namibians. Despite economic inequalities and tensions, like the Baltics, Namibia demonstrates that decolonization does not necessarily require the removal of settler populations.

South Tyrol

Following decades of fascist Italianization policies and state-sponsored settlement aimed at altering the demography of South Tyrol, during the 1970s, the province underwent significant decolonization. In this context, the indigenous German-speaking population gradually secured extensive autonomy, which granted broad protections for the German majority, including linguistic rights, proportional representation, and far-reaching local self-government. Despite concerns among the Italian-speaking settlers regarding the shift in political power and identity of the region, most remained in South Tyrol, where both communities continue to coexist within a negotiated autonomy framework.

Cyprus

Although the Cyprus conflict remains unresolved, multiple UN-backed peace proposals have accepted that a significant portion of Turkish settlers who arrived in Northern Cyprus after 1974 would remain under a future federal arrangement. Rather than envisioning large-scale population removal, proposed frameworks generally combined territorial compromise, property restitution and compensation mechanisms, citizenship arrangements, and power-sharing institutions. The Cyprus case therefore illustrates that even in highly contentious territorial conflicts, negotiated settlements may prioritize pragmatic coexistence over complete demographic reversal.

For ALFA, the central lesson is that under appropriate legal and political arrangements, Israeli settlers could remain as residents of a Palestinian state while relinquishing the privileges and accepting Palestinian sovereignty.

06

Political systems and conflicts widely perceived as permanent have often undergone surprisingly rapid transformation, once new political constellations emerged.

South Africa Apartheid

For decades, apartheid in South Africa appeared deeply entrenched, backed by powerful security institutions, racial segregation, and strong Western support, partly driven by Cold War considerations. Yet the end of the Cold War altered the international and regional constellation, weakening its strategic importance to the United States and the West, while increasing diplomatic and economic pressure for change. Within a relatively short period between 1990 and 1994, negotiations led to the dismantling of apartheid and the establishment of democratic majority rule.

Fall of the Berlin Wall

For much of the Cold War, the division of Germany appeared stable and irreversible, symbolized by the heavily militarized Berlin Wall separating East and West Berlin. Yet in 1989, a combination of political reforms, economic pressures, public mobilization, and weakening Soviet control triggered the rapid collapse of the East German regime, the opening of the border, and the unification of the two Germanies.

Syria

For years, the Assad regime in Syria appeared remarkably resilient despite civil war, international isolation, and territorial fragmentation. Yet the dramatic weakening of state institutions, shifting regional dynamics, economic crisis, and military developments gradually undermined it, ultimately prompting the rapid fall of the regime in December 2025. Regardless of Syria's uncertain future, the case illustrates a broader historical lesson: political realities and regimes often perceived as immovable may change unexpectedly once accumulated pressures reach a critical point.

Oslo Accords

By the early 1990s, direct negotiations between Israel and the PLO still appeared politically improbable after decades of occupation, violence, and non-recognition, although in 1988 the PLO had already moved toward acceptance of a two-state solution. The Oslo process built on that shift: secret negotiations facilitated by Norway led in 1993 to reciprocal recognition between Israel and the PLO and to the Declaration of Principles, opening a new phase of direct political engagement. Although the process ultimately failed to produce a final-status agreement, the Oslo breakthrough demonstrated how significant political openings can emerge even in conflicts widely perceived as irreconcilable.

For Israelis and Palestinians living amid conditions that make a political breakthrough appear increasingly implausible, these cases offer a more modest lesson: political possibilities are not fixed, and changes in domestic, regional, or international conditions can rapidly make previously unimaginable arrangements politically relevant.

Conclusion

While the conflicts, institutions, and historical circumstances described are not analogous to those of Palestine and Israel, they do demonstrate that many of the principles at the heart of ALFA's vision are neither unprecedented nor inherently unrealistic. Societies divided by competing national identities have built shared institutions; former enemies have developed relations based on cooperation; freedom of movement has been reconciled with security; contested spaces have been governed through layered arrangements; populations associated with former dominant regimes have remained after political transformation; and political realities once considered permanent have changed unexpectedly.



None of these lessons can be simply reproduced in Israel-Palestine. However, current political realities should not be treated as defining the boundaries of what is possible. ALFA’s vision offers one way of imagining how two peoples, deeply interconnected and attached to the same homeland, might exercise distinct national self-determination while building the institutions needed to live within it together.