



---

# The Present Day: Peacemaking Alternatives for Israeli Policy

Analysis and Policy Paper

February 2025

---

---

## Table of Contents

---

Key Points	04
Executive Summary	07
1. Introduction	11
2. The Day After and The Present Day	14
3. The Road to October 7	18
4. "Only the Right Can": The Misconception That Enabled October 7	21
5. Beyond Annihilation: Arab Regimes, the Islamic World, the Palestinians, and Israel	25
6. Toward a Peace-Oriented Policy	35
7. The Road Not Taken	38

In January 2025, the Forum for Regional Thinking, in collaboration with the "Israel in the Middle East" research cluster at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, published an extensive analytic paper on the road to the Gaza war, including recommendations for a way out of the war towards historic reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. Targeting the Jewish-Israeli audience, the paper was endorsed by more than 130 Jewish and Palestinian Israeli academics and intellectuals, many of whom from the disciplines of Islamic and Middle East studies, political science and conflict resolution, making it the most widely endorsed professional analysis of this subject in Israeli academia.

---

## Key Points

---

- The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at a crucial crossroads. De-escalation depends on a historical Israeli decision to stop "managing the conflict" and recognize Palestinian national rights.
- Years before the Hamas-led attack on October 7, the State of Israel had three options in its relations with the Palestinians: conflict management; striving for an "ultimate victory"; or a bold and honest attempt at reconciliation and peacemaking.
- The dominant approach presented by policymakers to the Israeli public reflected an unyielding belief in the possibility of long-term "conflict management". Maintaining this policy involved prioritizing military force over diplomacy, fostering division between the West Bank and Gaza, constant dispossession of Palestinians, daily military violence, reliance on technology as a substitute for political agreements, and overemphasizing the conflict with Iran to marginalize the Palestinian issue.
- Therefore, October 7 reflects not only a military and intelligence failure but also the failure of the conflict management policy. This decades-long policy ended with the unprecedented and brutal military attack by Hamas on southern Israel, which proved Israel's vulnerability and the persistence of the Palestinian armed struggle.
- Since the outbreak of the war, the Israeli government has chosen the path of "ultimate victory" that entailed large-scale war crimes, leading to the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from Gaza, while the opposition parties seek to return to the futile and dangerous path of "conflict management".
- Despite significant military gains of the war on several fronts, Israel paid unprecedented prices on the political, economic, social and moral levels. Under the most extreme rightwing government in its history, Israel is also unable to translate these gains into any kind of victory but remains trapped in a limbo.
- The peacemaking and reconciliation option has been rejected by consecutive Israeli governments over the last 25 years, since the failure of the Camp David process and the Second Intifada, based on the argument





that there was "no partner for peace" on the Palestinian side. Currently, once again, the Israeli public has not been presented with a viable alternative.

- On the other hand, in recent decades, most Arab governments have shown willingness to recognize Israel and promoted peace initiatives, including formal peace agreements and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. Nationalist Islamic movements, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and the revolutionary regime in Iran, have acted to derail political agreements using violence towards Israel. However, we argue that under certain circumstances, they may also be willing to accept a just Israeli-Palestinian agreement that would bring about Palestinian sovereignty and independence.
- We argue that the choice of peacemaking and historic reconciliation is viable and that a secure and prosperous future for Israelis and Palestinians depends on it. To move toward conflict resolution, Israel and its allies must assume responsibility for the longstanding occupation and the current crisis, notwithstanding the direct responsibility of Hamas for the October 7 attack.
- As basic principles for a peacemaking policy, we propose, among other things, an immediate end to the war in Gaza and regional de-escalation; security for all people between the river and the sea; an end to Israeli violence and Jewish settlements in the West Bank; Palestinian independence and sovereignty as a precondition for a political process; education for peace and tolerance in both societies; and international guarantees providing an organizational and financial envelope for a just resolution to the conflict.
- While various Israeli and international policy documents have discussed the day after the war, we believe this day would not arrive following an ultimate defeat of the Palestinian armed struggle. The day after is today.

**Editors (English version): Dr. Assaf David and Dr. Smadar Ben-Natan**

**Editors (Hebrew version): Dr. Eli Osheroff and Dr. Assaf David**

**Writing and consulting:** Fellows of the Forum for Regional Thinking: Dr. Ali al-Awar, independent scholar; Dr. Avi-ram Tzoreff, Open University; Dr. Smadar Ben-Natan, University of Oregon; Dr. Assaf David, Van Leer Institute and Hebrew University; Dr. Leena Dallahsheh, independent scholar; Dr. Ameer Fakhoury, Polonsky Academy, Van Leer Institute, and Haifa University; Dr. Dotan Halevi, Tel Aviv University; Dr. Shmuel Lederman, Haifa University and Open University; Liel Magen, group facilitator and political activist; Prof. Yoni Mendel, Van Leer Institute and Ben-Gurion University; Dr. Eli Osheroff, Tel Aviv University; Dr. Yaniv Ronen, independent scholar; Prof. Lior Sternfeld, Pennsylvania State University; Aviv Tatarsky, investigative activist; Dr. Eran Tzidkiyahu, geopolitical instructor, consultant and lecturer, Hebrew University; Dr. Limor Yehuda, Van Leer Institute and Hebrew University.

The Hebrew version of the paper ([available here](#)) includes selected bibliography in Hebrew and English. Hyperlinked references in the English version have been adjusted to sources in English, except for a few sources available only in Hebrew.

[Link to the full list of endorsements \(in Hebrew and English\)](#)

**Translation to English and Style Editing:** Ilana Gild and Ami Asher

**Photos:** Reuters

**Cover photo:** Pixabay

**Design:** Naomi Rozett Studio

**Press inquiries:** Daniel Jonas, Director of Spokesmanship and Public Relations, Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, [danielj@vanleer.org.il](mailto:danielj@vanleer.org.il), +972-54-6305101

**This paper was written by researchers affiliated with the Forum for Regional Thinking and the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. It does not necessarily reflect organizational views or positions.**

---

## Executive Summary

---

The attack led by Hamas on October 7 plunged the State of Israel into the most severe crisis in its history. This crisis involved unprecedented fatalities, physical injuries, collective and individual trauma, captives and hostages, de-facto evacuation of territory in southern and northern Israel, economic downturn, sociopolitical turmoil, and a deep sense of insecurity among Israeli citizens. The crisis also involved the unprecedented destruction that Israel inflicted on human life, property, and civilian infrastructure in Gaza and elsewhere in the region, followed by international condemnation and sanctions.

The attack and the ensuing war have bred a widespread discourse in Israel about the misconception that allowed the attack to happen. The government discourse seeks to persuade the Israeli public that the only way to survive and prosper is "ultimate victory" over Hamas. Coined and regurgitated by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, this notion has been presented under several titles, including the "plan of defeat" (2017) by the extreme rightwing politician and Finance Minister, Czar of the West Bank in the Defense Ministry, Bezalel Smotrich. The political opposition, on the other hand, aims to return to the conflict management policy. Both sides in the Israeli political map, then, reject the idea of conflict resolution and peacemaking.

A parallel discourse by Israeli experts has produced several policy papers discussing the day after the

war. These documents are replete with analogies between the Israel-Hamas war and the Second World War, suggesting that Israeli policies following its victory should resemble postwar reforms in defeated Germany and Japan. We find these comparisons irrelevant. Choosing 1945 Europe as a model hugely overstates Israel's power, ignores the Palestinians' statelessness and struggle for self-determination, and reenacts Israel's past and failed attempts to "reeducate" Palestinian society, partially integrate it into the Israeli economy, control it through local potentates, "encourage emigration", and other euphemisms.

The Forum for Regional Thinking, a group of Israeli scholars exploring Israel in its regional context in cooperation with the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, rejects the common Israeli perception that hostility between Jews and Arabs is an existential or inevitable condition. We believe that the conflict management policy has failed, and provide our own explanation for the October 7 failure in the Hebrew version of this paper. There, we further elaborate why the alternative is not a delusional victory but rather a serious, honest, and viable peaceful resolution with the Palestinians and Arab states.

October 7 was not only a result of tactical or military failure to provide timely intelligence, alert policymakers, or deploy enough troops. The long-term policy of conflict management

was fundamental to this failure: deepening the occupation in the West Bank while fanning the flames of a broad regional conflict with Iran and its allies and proxies. On multiple fronts, Israel used military violence in high and low intensities in lieu of political, internationally recognized political agreements. In the Occupied Territories, Israel over-relied on technologies for surveillance and oppression of the Palestinian population and pursued a divide-and-rule policy that strengthened Hamas over the Palestinian Authority. Regionally, over the past fifteen years, Israel's rightwing governments attacked Iran, Syria, and Lebanon either directly or indirectly (described by the former Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot as "the campaign between wars"), fueling a public panic in Israel about the "Shia Crescent." This was an integral part of conflict management vis-a-vis the Palestinian, as the military-security establishment tended to exaggerate Iran's interest in "annihilating" Israel, while underestimating the effects of the occupation on the Palestinians and Hamas' power and motivation to provoke a full-scale clash.

The Israeli focus on Iran's intentions to "eliminate Israel" ignores the fact that its overarching interest has been to buttress of its own deterrent power and ensure the survival of its regime. Ironically, the alarmist Iranian-threat discourse cultivated by rightwing governments is shared by the mainstream

political opposition; both supporters and critics of the Netanyahu regime believe that Israel should have launched a preemptive war in its southern and northern borders long before the recent Hamas offensive. Conversely, we argue that such an attack on Iran and its allies would have been inconsistent with Israel's conflict management policy, as it would have bolstered internal, regional and international calls to end the conflict, and thus was consciously avoided.

The October 7 offensive heralded a new era in the history of the Middle East by eliminating the option of ignoring the Palestinians. Today, Israel faces only two options: peace with the Palestinians and the region or eliminating any Palestinian national expression and protracted war and ethnic cleansing. As the Netanyahu regime pushes for partial or complete ethnic cleansing, Zionist opposition parties and Israel's international supporters delude themselves in thinking it is possible to turn the clock back to the previous conflict management policy.

Since the outbreak of the war, Israel has weakened Iran and its allies (Hamas, Hezbollah and, indirectly, the former Assad regime in Syria) militarily and politically. Apart from proving its rivals to be far less united and powerful to begin with, these achievements did not produce sustainable security for Israelis in the absence of a strategy for peace. They exacted unprecedented prices in life, limb, and the wellbeing of Israeli citizens, as Israel drifted further away from the liberal-democratic order. The protracted military campaign in Gaza without an exit strategy also meant abandoning Israeli hostages and prolonging their captivity, leading large segments of the Israeli public to lose trust in their government. This only deepened Israel's collective trauma and sociopolitical crisis, all the while turning Israel into an authoritarian Sparta.

The unprecedented destruction and indiscriminate killing of civilians in Gaza, regarded by the relevant academic milieu, the human rights community, and







the liberal international community as genocide, put Israel's international standing at risk despite the unwavering support of the United States. Israel escalated its military interventions in Lebanon and Syria and expanded ethnic cleansing policies in the West Bank, expecting the Trump administration to announce a plan to annex at least parts of the West Bank and deal a final blow to any viable Palestinian state. According to recent polls, almost all of Israel's Jewish population supports the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from Gaza, although there is a disagreement on the practicality of Trump's transfer plan.

In the full Hebrew paper, we argue that the opposite path must be taken – peace, justice, and historic reconciliation. We offer an alternative to the intimidation discourse of Israel's rightwing government by analyzing aspects of the relations between Israel and various Arab and Islamic powers in the region, including the Arab states, the PLO, Hamas, Iran and Hezbollah. We contend that since the 1970s, most Arab governments have come to terms with the existence of Israel and promoted conflict resolution based on UN Security Council Resolution 242, as reflected in the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. Some countries – Egypt, Jordan, and later Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco –

have signed formal peace agreements with Israel. Others, such as Saudi Arabia, are willing to enter into political agreements with Israel, subject to the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Nationalist Islamic movements, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and the revolutionary regime in Iran, have acted through military means and internal violence to disrupt political agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. However, they are also willing to accept a fair Israeli-Palestinian agreement. Militant Palestinian organizations have demonstrated the strongest opposition to any political agreement, due to the existential nature of their struggle under conditions of occupation, but their popular legitimacy and power rest on the occupation, deprivation of rights and continuous dispossession of Palestinians.

From the Israeli perspective, the past and current peace agreements have survived the present war. Indeed, some of their signatories have even offered Israel protection from Iranian attacks. From the Palestinian perspective, however, these agreements, especially the Abraham Accords, have normalized Arab states' relations with Israel while sidelining them. In 2023, the looming US-sponsored peace agreement with Saudi Arabia threatened to deal a

final blow to Palestinian aspirations, triggering the Hamas attack, among other factors.

We believe that the strategic defeat of Iran and its allies has eliminated the last pretext for the conflict management approach, enabling Israel to make historic decisions in favor of a fair and just peace with the Palestinians, which in turn will contribute to stabilizing the entire region. We therefore propose viable principles for a peacemaking Israeli policy that can be adopted regardless of the specific political solution to the occupation. These principles are based on our view that Israel's relations with the Palestinians are asymmetrical, and that it therefore bears responsibility for changing them. These relations are characterized by patterns of superiority and supremacy, occupation and control, which must undergo radical transformation.

The principles we espouse include an immediate end to the war in Gaza (rather than a temporary pause); an agreement to release Israeli hostages, military captives, and Palestinian prisoners; regional de-escalation; a complete halt to the Jewish settlement in the Occupied Territories; Palestinian independence and sovereignty as a condition for a political process

rather than its objective; education for peace and tolerance in both societies; Israeli accountability, acknowledgment, and compensation for past wrongdoing; Israeli and international responsibility for the prosperity of the Palestinian people; security for all the country's inhabitants; and international guarantees for peace in the Middle East.

Trapped in the misconception of "no partner for peace," many Israelis may consider these principles utopian, futile, or even dangerous. However, as Israeli scholars studying Israel/Palestine and the Middle East, we are convinced that they undergird a sustainable, judicious, and forward-looking policy, unlike those of the rightwing government or the centrist opposition, which are based solely on power. As opposed to other recent policy papers titled "The Day After," we argue that vanquishing the Palestinians or reoccupying Gaza and the West Bank would bring Israel no peace, stability, or prosperity to Israel. "The day after" is, in fact, the crisis unfolding before our very eyes. To turn this page, we must part with basic assumptions deeply rooted in Israeli politics and psyche. The path of peace has yet to be taken.

---

# 1. Introduction

---

The Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, plunged Israel into the most severe strategic crisis in its history. This new reality introduced several unprecedented aspects in the country's history: the hostage crisis that has shaken the foundations of social solidarity; the de facto loss of territory in the southern and northern parts of the country, extensive destruction in and internal displacement from these regions; the blocking of certain sea and air routes; an international and regional legitimacy crisis; and, finally, an economic crisis. To this we must add the dead and wounded, the deepening of social tensions, the erosion of the sense of security, and negative migration—all consequences of the ongoing war.

The internal crisis is also linked to the destruction Israel is unleashing on others. Since October 7, Israel has inflicted unprecedented harm on Palestinian society, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths, hunger, epidemics, and the near total ruination of the entire Gaza Strip. Most of the area's civilian infrastructure has been destroyed. Its residents have been deprived of basic necessities, including food and water, and for fourteen months, have endured exposure to harsh weather and disease in a besieged enclave with no way out. Although less severe, a similar destruction has been wrought in the West Bank and southern Lebanon. In the West Bank, settler militias and the IDF continue to push Palestinian communities into ever smaller enclaves. In Lebanon, approximately 3,000 people have been

killed, alongside widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure. Beyond its moral implications, a disaster of this scale poses a direct threat to Israel, as it fuels the cycle of violence and risks triggering health, environmental, and other crises that could have serious repercussions for Israeli society and for the entire region.

The severity of this crisis is evident, among other things, in light of Israel's traditional security doctrine. This doctrine rests on three principles: *deterrence*—the enemy's reluctance to initiate war due to Israel's strength; *forewarning*—intelligence capabilities to detect enemy war preparations in time to thwart or preempt them; and *complete defeat*—transferring the battle operations to enemy territory and achieving a swift resolution, necessary given Israel's small size and limited human resources. Recently, the element of defense has been added to the doctrine, albeit unofficially. The shortcomings of this traditional approach have been evident throughout the current conflict: by definition, deterrence has had a limited effect, warnings have not received or have been ignored, and a military full defeat of the Palestinians remains elusive. From a purely military standpoint, the consequences have been stark, with a sharp deterioration in the safety of Israeli citizens, who have faced continuous missile and drone attacks. Meanwhile, the prolonged war has placed an unprecedented burden on conscripts, reservists and career soldiers, leading to family,

psychological, and economic crises, as well as profound sociopolitical divisions.

The strategic crisis Israel is facing stems from the historical turning point encapsulated in October 7. Before the Hamas attack, Israel had three main options for its survival in the region: fully defeating the Palestinians, pursuing peace, or managing the conflict. Full defeat would mean expelling Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip and, ultimately, either expelling or at least revoking the citizenship of Palestinian citizens of the State of Israel (an idea advocated by politician such as Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, and former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman). Peace would involve reconciliation with neighboring countries and the Palestinians, fostering trade, tourism, and cultural ties. The third option was conflict management, which entailed a creeping occupation, maintaining "islands" of the status quo within the framework of "shrinking the conflict," discreet political agreements and security collaboration, limited and short-term use of force, and indirect or mediated negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians or the broader Arab and Muslim world. In practice, this approach meant indefinite control over the Palestinians.

## October 7 marked the beginning of a new era in the Middle East, eliminating the possibility of conflict management

Given the failure of Israeli–Palestinian negotiations in the 1990s, Israeli governments since 2000 chose the third option. Over time, conflict management evolved into an official policy, pursued even independently of Benjamin Netanyahu's longstanding rule. This was evident in Ariel Sharon's unilateral disengagement from Gaza, which was not based on a political agreement with the Palestinian Authority; Israel's



public facilitation of Qatari financial transfers to Hamas; former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's characterization of the Palestinians as a tolerable problem ("a thorn in the side"); and the work of civil society organizations and public intellectuals, who provided a favorable interpretation of this approach. As explained below, conflict management proved to be a profitable and effective strategy for its proponents and the State of Israel in general. It allowed Israel to grow stronger economically and gain unprecedented international legitimacy, as the conflict appeared to be "managed".

October 7 marked the beginning of a new era in the Middle East, eliminating the possibility of conflict management and leaving Israel with two undesirable paths: peace or a full defeat (i.e., perpetual war). The path of peace, which would entail Palestinian independence and historic reconciliation between Israel and its Arab and Muslim neighbors, currently lacks political representation in Jewish–Israeli society and is seen as less realistic than ever before. It is increasingly clear, on the other hand, that the Israeli government has, at least in practice, chosen the path of full defeat. Gaza is being subdued through the occupation of its northern region, the displacement of its civilian population, and preparations for renewed Jewish settlement. The survivors of war and displacement in Gaza are now confined to a small southern area without essential infrastructure, facing poverty, hunger and disease.

In the West Bank, the Israeli government, with the assistance of settler militias and the IDF, continues to push Palestinians into ever smaller enclaves, a step toward an eventual ethnic cleansing. Meanwhile, efforts have been made to undermine the Palestinian Authority both politically and economically. Similarly, the widespread destruction inflicted by the IDF in southern Lebanon is creating an empty buffer zone near the border, potentially obstructing a stable long-term agreement. And most recently, Israel has also violated the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement by invading Syria and maintaining a "buffer zone" on Syrian soil.

The chosen strategy of the government's opposition differs primarily in returning to conflict management—that is, to the reality that has existed under rightwing rule up to October 6 – and is backed by most of Israel's global and regional allies. However, managing the conflict within the familiar framework of Jewish supremacy and dominance is a sure recipe for advancing the right wing's full-defeat strategy. A key factor enabling this dynamic is the broad consensus between the conflict management camp (which includes the more moderate factions of the Jewish opposition) and the full defeat camp (the government) that Israel's major mistake has been its failure to launch a "preventive war" in both Gaza and Lebanon. Regret over this missed opportunity has led both camps to support the continuation of the war to disarm Hamas and Hezbollah (and, more recently, Syria), even if they differ regarding the ultimate political objective. Such a war has no end date and, with each passing day, further



strengthens the full defeat camp—in both Israel and the Occupied Territories.

The central premise of this document is different: we argue that the State of Israel could not and should not have launched a preventive war before October 7, but should instead have pursued a stable, negotiated existence in the region that could ultimately lead to reconciliation with its surroundings. This is not only because both the opposition and the coalition misjudge the feasibility and effectiveness of a preventive war, but also because the path of peace remains Israel's safest way to prevent a surprise attack. The main focus of this document is to explain why the path of peace is a more viable strategy than the path of war and how Israel's policies have contributed to the escalation of the conflict into a full-scale regional war. Finally, we outline key principles for an Israeli policy aimed at establishing lasting peaceful relations with the Palestinians and neighboring states.

---

## 2. The Day After and The Present Day

---

The authors of this document are members of the Forum for Regional Thinking (est. 2010), a group of experts and researchers specializing in the Middle East, political science, anthropology, sociology, law, and conflict resolution. We analyze the Middle East through a multidimensional lens, adopting a critical perspective on Israel's interactions with its surroundings, out of the belief that empathy for others and self-criticism are interconnected.

At the core of this document is a historical and sociopolitical analysis that positions the State of Israel as a powerful and influential actor capable of driving positive policy changes among the Palestinians and various Arab entities. In turn, these changes can help moderate the violence of substate militias such as Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as state actors such as Iran—or at the very least, weaken the support and sympathy they receive. We believe this approach is essential for the recovery of both Israeli society and its neighbors from the ongoing disaster and for their progress toward a better future.

In recent months, researchers and civil society organizations have put forward various plans addressing what has been termed "the day after". The Day After the War Forum suggested that Israeli integrate into a regional security alliance; Mitvim Institute proposed deradicalization and Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation; another team of experts

outlined a plan for Gaza's reconstruction post-Hamas, which was backed by Israel's National Security Council; and the Dado Center for Interdisciplinary Military Studies advocated Israeli leadership in "spatial design" incorporating ideological and political dimensions. While the authors of these plans aim to promote long-term stability and peace, we believe they fail to accurately account for the path that has led to the crisis, lack a comprehensive interpretive framework for understanding Israel's relationship with its surroundings, and ultimately enable Israel to continue managing the conflict for the foreseeable future. Even plans that envision a Palestinian state at the end of the process present it as an internal Israeli issue, disregarding the fact that Israel actively devotes resources to preventing its creation. As stated by Smotrich, who also serves as Minister Responsible for the West Bank in the



Defense Ministry, "All discussions of the day after look entirely different with full Israeli control" of Gaza. These "day after" plans fail to address the fundamental nature of Israeli-Palestinian relations and disregard Israel's global standing before and after October 7. They also completely disregard Palestinian claims recognized under international law and propose outsourcing Palestinian governance in Gaza to external forces tasked with "educating" them on values such as peace and tolerance.



The "day after" plans are inspired, directly or indirectly, from the lessons of World War II, as reflected in academic research and collective memory in Israel and the West. Their guiding principle equates Hamas in Gaza with Nazi Germany. Accordingly, the Allies' postwar de-Nazification programs serve as a model for the "reeducation" of Palestinians in Gaza. We believe this analogy to be ill-founded due to its internal inconsistency. On one hand, in analyzing Hamas' motivations for its attack, Israel is portrayed as the ultimate victim—akin to the Jews in Europe during World War II – a civilian minority without sovereignty or military power. On the other hand, future plans depict Israel as an empire with unlimited resources and the moral authority to impose an indefinite occupation while reshaping Palestinian society into one that seeks peace. This simultaneous self-presentation as absolute victim and regional empire is incoherent. It suggests that these plans are not intended to promote practical solutions, but rather to persuade the political camp that supports conflict management, both in Israel and internationally, that Israel's continued control over the Palestinians has a legitimate political purpose, whereas, in fact, it seeks to implement the total defeat plan, as its actions on the ground clearly indicate.

We believe the Israeli-Palestinian conflict bears similarities to other national, ethnic, and religious conflicts over contested territory that have escalated into extreme violence. Conflicts such as those in

Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and South Africa, for example, share some commonalities with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in their origins and trajectories, including power imbalances, historical grievances, the scale and intensity of violence, and the identities of the groups involved. Each has ended differently—often only partially—but the principles that foster stability, security, and, in some cases, reconciliation remain highly relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian case. These include mechanisms of transitional justice: power sharing, acknowledgment of past injustices, the incorporation of political prisoners in the process, and the presence of a supportive international framework.

Our "day after" plan, by contrast, envisions an orderly transition to an entirely different reality. However, we believe this day will not arrive through a consensual process in which the defeated party formally surrenders while the victor dictates the future governance of the occupied territory, as in the aftermath World War II. The primary reason for this is that Israel's rightwing government refuses to present any political plan that the Palestinians would accept or that would be considered legitimate from an international standpoint. There is no reason to expect the Palestinians to surrender while the opposing party openly states its intent to defeat them—that is, to expel them. Even if surrender were a realistic scenario, it would only serve to perpetuate the conflict, as it would not ensure

mutual respect among all inhabitants of the land from the river to the sea. We believe any plan failing to account for the entrenchment of an authoritarian rightwing regime in Israel whose stated strategy is the subjugation of the Palestinians is bound to fail. In practice, moreover, Israel is already operating in a new reality, where the so-called "day after" is not a future event but the present, preparing the ground for a Spartan-style perpetual war.

## **Israel is already operating in a new reality, where the so-called "day after" is not a future event but the present, preparing the ground for a Spartan-style perpetual war**

Our approach differs from the aforementioned plans in that we analyze Israeli-Palestinian relations before October 7 as a dynamic of settlement and resistance. This is particularly evident in Israel's long history of policies toward the Gaza Strip. Many of the "day after" plans, presented as political innovations, are merely reincarnations of past strategies already attempted in Gaza—without success. It is important to remember that nearly a third of all Palestinian refugees from 1948, primarily from the southern coastal plain and the Negev, ended up in Gaza. Israel first occupied Gaza in 1956, for four months, aiming to eliminate Palestinian guerrillas and annex the territory. During this period, Israel sought to "encourage immigration" from Gaza, "resettle" refugees in the Sinai Peninsula and other countries, and develop civilian infrastructure within the Strip. When Israel occupied Gaza again in 1967, it attempted yet another detailed plan to facilitate the migration of the entire refugee population to the West Bank, Jordan, and other countries. This effort also failed miserably, leading Israel to wage months of intense fighting against Palestinian guerrillas in 1971 and

1972. This conflict devastated large sections of refugee camps and triggered a second and third wave of displacement within Gaza. Over time, it became evident that intensified military campaigns only fueled further recruitment to Palestinian resistance. Relative calm was restored when Israel launched extensive rehabilitation programs for refugees and integrated Gaza into the Israeli economy by opening its labor market to Palestinian manual laborers—while simultaneously suppressing independent economic development in the Strip. During the Oslo period, Gaza was granted limited autonomy but became an impoverished enclave due to its severance from the Israeli economy. This economic isolation was fertile ground for Hamas, which opposed the Oslo Accords and positioned itself as an alternative by waging war against the Palestinian Authority's economic corruption.

Therefore, all the "day after" plans proposed in Israel thus far share a fundamental flaw: the failure to learn from history and the disregard for the Palestinian demand for independence and sovereignty. We believe that reconciliation or peace cannot be achieved through a policy of de facto Israeli sovereignty over the Palestinians, of managing their lives, or of "defeating" them. For this reason, rather than presenting a rigid, systematic plan—whose conditions for implementation are far removed from Israel's current political climate—we prefer to outline guiding principles for breaking the deadlock. These principles, whether adopted in full or in part, can serve as a compass for building political power at various levels and through diverse organizations.

At their core, these principles reject the notion that Arab culture or Islam is the root of the conflict. Instead, they recognize that the underlying issue is a long-standing pattern of inequality, violence, and power imbalance between Jews and Arabs—one that has predated 1948 and persisted after 1967. Furthermore, they are based on the understanding





that justice, acknowledgment of past injustices, collective and individual equality, fair resource distribution, and various forms of political partnership and mutual respect are the only path to achieving lasting stability and security—for the State of Israel, for Jews and Palestinians between the river and the sea, and for the entire Middle East.

In what follows, we address the failure of the conflict management concept and explain how it has contributed to the October 7 attack, the ensuing

war, and the current crisis. In light of this, we examine the positions and interests of key regional players, including Arab regimes, the PLO, Hamas, Iran, and Hezbollah. Finally, we propose political principles that should be adopted to help Israel escape the current strategic deadlock. We argue that reconciliation between Israel and the Arab and Muslim world remains the only viable path to resolving the ongoing crisis for Israelis and averting further catastrophes for Palestinians.

---

### 3. The Road to October 7

---

On October 7, the political and ideological framework of “conflict management”—which had shaped Israeli policy since the collapse of the Oslo process with the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000—collapsed. This approach was based on the belief that conflict management could provide long-term stability, allowing the State of Israel to maintain security and prosperity while keeping millions of Palestinians under military occupation and avoiding historical reconciliation with its neighbors. The conviction that conflict management was a viable strategy—and the corresponding rejection of reconciliation with the Palestinians—guided Israeli leadership for at least 25 years (and, in a broader regional context, even earlier), until October 7. This concept manifested in a policy, at times covert and at times overt, whose main tenets are as follows:

**1. The Divide-and-Rule Strategy** that fosters Palestinian political fragmentation under the assumption that a weakened Palestinian leadership serves Israeli interests. This long-standing policy dates back to the 1970s and 80s, when Israel supported the establishment of “Village Leagues” in the West Bank and promoted the “Islamic Center” in Gaza (the nucleus that later became Hamas) as “grassroots” alternatives to the PLO in the Occupied Territories. The separation of the Gaza Strip from the West Bank—enforced through a series of closures beginning with the Second Intifada and culminating in

the 2005 disengagement plan—was designed to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state. From 2009 onward, rightwing Israeli governments reinforced this strategy in an unprecedented manner, to the point of concluding an unofficial understanding with Hamas. A pillar of this approach was the concept of “quiet in exchange for quiet”—offering security for Israel in return for limited, non-sovereign governance for Hamas. In 2018, when the Palestinian Authority ceased funding Hamas, the Netanyahu government turned to Qatar to cover the shortfall, ensuring Hamas’s continued rule. This policy of money transfers persisted during Naftali Bennett’s brief tenure as prime minister (2021–22), and remained a central element of the broader divide-and-rule strategy.

**2. Unilateralism** is rooted in the “no partner” assumption, suggesting that any shift in the relations between Israel and its neighbors—including the Palestinians—must occur through Israeli action alone, with the other side compelled to accept it given Israel’s power advantage. In May 2000, Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon after giving up on the possibility of reaching a peace agreement with Syria that could have facilitated an orderly withdrawal and the disarmament of Hezbollah. The unilateral approach collapsed just months later with the outbreak of the

Second Intifada in September. Nevertheless, in 2005, Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in what became known as the disengagement plan. This approach also defined subsequent military operations in Gaza (in 2006, 2008-9, 2012, 2014, and 2021), all of which concluded with non-binding ceasefires, lacking an international framework and operating under the aforementioned patchy arrangement of "quiet in exchange for quiet". Similarly, Israel's prolonged campaign against Hezbollah and Iran—in both Syria and, unofficially, within Iraq and Iran itself—has been characterized by a continuous series of military strikes aimed at deterrence, with no effort or intent to translate tactical military gains into a broader strategic political resolution.

- 3. Fueling a Regional Conflict with Iran:** Years of rightwing rule have been accompanied by an alarmist discourse centered on the supposed imminent destruction of Israel by Iran and its allies, despite the fact that Iran's regional maneuvers have been largely aimed at preventing the collapse of its own regime. This persistent fearmongering intensified even as the conventional Arab military threat to Israel weakened, a process that culminated with the Arab Spring. A crucial distinction must be made between Iran's rhetoric about "eradicating the

Zionist regime" and its calls for the outright "destruction of Israel". Yet the constant warnings of an external existential enemy have become deeply intertwined with Israel's strategy of managing the conflict with the Palestinians. The so-called "campaign between the wars" (CBW), a term popularized by former Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot, manifested in repeated covert attacks inside Iran (according to foreign reports), thousands of military strikes in Lebanon and Syria aimed at disrupting or preventing Hezbollah's military buildup, and ongoing preparations for a potential unilateral Israeli strike on Iran. The CBW strategy emerged alongside broader shifts in Israel's military doctrine in recent decades, allowing the IDF to justify its role in an era of diminishing military threats while reinforcing the conflict management paradigm. Ideologically, the heightened warnings of "annihilation" by Iran served to validate the ongoing conflict management approach toward the Palestinians within Israeli society. At the same time, it helped reduce friction with the US, Western allies, and Arab states—many of whom demanded, due to their own tensions with Iran, that Israel resolve the conflict with the Palestinians.

- 4. Bypassing the Palestinian Issue in Agreements with Arab Countries:** The persistent warnings of an existential Iranian threat, coupled with the CBW policy, conflict management strategy, and divide-and-rule strategy paved the way to an emerging alliance that between Israel and Sunni Arab countries – primarily Saudi Arabia – that bypasses the Palestinians, as the former are engaged in their own regional struggle with Iran. Bolstered by what appeared to be a successful conflict management approach and supported by a sympathetic Trump administration, Israel embarked on an accelerated and unprecedented wave of diplomatic agreements with Arab nations. This reflected the perceived success of Ze'ev Jabotinsky's "Iron Wall" strategy, which





posited that the Zionist movement could achieve reconciliation with its neighbors without any concessions on its part. For the Israeli right, these agreements were seen as proof that the long-standing “land for peace” formula—previously central to negotiations with Egypt, the PLO, and Jordan—was defunct. The key milestone in this process was the signing of the Abraham Accords in late 2020, which normalized relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and, to some extent, Sudan. Later, during the Biden administration, behind-the-scenes talks emerged regarding a potential “normalization agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia. While the US administration harbored reservations about Netanyahu’s government, an agreement with Saudi Arabia—a major Sunni power—was seen as heralding a historic shift. It would have demonstrated that Israel could manage the Palestinian conflict, deter Iranian threats, and at the same time achieve broader regional peace under the framework of Pax Americana.

**5. Reliance on Technology:** Under rightwing governments, Israeli weapons systems—such as Iron Dome, cyber tools, and AI-driven surveillance—have become central to the country’s economic prosperity and international legitimacy. This technology is designed to make conflict management more cost-effective – and

ostensibly moral – by reducing the need for Israeli manpower while generating profits from systems tested in the Israeli “lab” on Palestinians and others in the region. Domestically, this reliance on technology is reflected in efforts to redesign the “Gaza envelope” as a perpetual combat zone, secured by sensors, electronic fences, and automated defense systems, with affected communities compensated through resilience centers and tax incentives. However, when put to the ultimate test, this investment in the geographic periphery—particularly in the south—collapsed in the most devastating way.

**6. An Imperial Self-Image:** The right wing’s successes in conflict management, economic growth, military-technological advancements, and historic diplomatic breakthroughs with the Arab world have fostered a narrative that portrays Israel as a regional, if not global power, fully in control of its destiny under Netanyahu’s leadership. This reflects a departure from Israel’s traditional security doctrine, which has been based on a realistic assessment of its strengths and limitations. It overlooks Israel’s small size, population constraints, and geographic vulnerabilities while downplaying its dependence on international and regional powers—a reliance that has repeatedly become evident during the current war. Moreover, this self-image obscures the reality that Israel’s strategic crisis is rooted in unchanging geographic and demographic factors. Iran, a regional power with a population of 90 million, continues to equip its allies with relatively advanced weaponry. Likewise, the demographic reality that Palestinians constitute roughly half of the population between the river and the sea means that any attempt to “defeat” them would ultimately drain the human and material resources of Jewish society.

---

## 4. "Only the Right Can": The Misconception That Enabled October 7

---

A common critique of the conflict-management concept argues that Israel should have launched a preventive war years ago. This argument ignores Israel's declining international standing due to the ongoing occupation, its intensified control and repression of the Palestinians—which fuel chronic regional instability—and the severe socioeconomic consequences of a prolonged war for a country with limited workforce and economic vulnerabilities. In 2009, the Likud government inherited an Israeli society yearning for stability after the Second Intifada, the disengagement, the Second Lebanon War, Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, and a global economic crisis. It is no coincidence that no Israeli government since has seriously considered reoccupying Gaza. Moreover, truly "eliminating terrorism" in Gaza or the West Bank would require Israel to abandon its conflict management strategy and pursue a genuine peace process—something it has been avoiding religiously. This is precisely why Smotrich and Netanyahu viewed Hamas rule in Gaza as an asset rather than a liability.

Israeli society's need for stability clashed with the worldview of the rightwing bloc, which fundamentally opposes compromise with the Palestinians. To achieve the desired stability, rightwing governments relied on informal alliances with Palestinian factions. However, only a rightwing prime minister could gain internal legitimacy for such an alliance—particularly with the most

reluctant elements in Palestinian politics, who also sought governmental stability. Over the years, this unlikely alignment of interests between the Israeli right and Hamas grew stronger, evolving from de-facto recognition of Hamas rule in Gaza to active efforts by Likud governments, led by Netanyahu, to ensure its financial stability. Eventually, the rightwing approach of managing the conflict alongside a declared and accelerated deepening of the occupation became hegemonic in Israeli political culture. It allowed the right to avoid political concessions to the Palestinians while also enabling the Zionist center and left to participate in rightwing governments or initiatives designed to preserve the status quo.

The retrospective criticism of Netanyahu for not overthrowing the Hamas regime before the October 7 attacks is unrealistic as it means attempting to extend full control over five million Palestinians deprived of civil rights. Rightwing governments, instead, presented Israel and the international community with an effective means of managing the occupation, at the cost of allowing the military buildup of a Palestinian force in Gaza. The rightwing alliance with Hamas was a tactical success until October 7: for years, Israel experienced a dramatic improvement in security, economic prosperity, and a strengthening of its international and regional standing while sidelining the Palestinian issue globally. In other words, the Israeli right was the only

political camp in Israel with the public legitimacy to propose a viable security strategy for a society that saw no value in ending the occupation or establishing normal neighborly relations.

## prioritizing the Iranian/ Shiite external threat was above all a political strategy

Over the years, many have overlooked the fact that this success was built on covert agreements, creeping occupation, and periodic outbreaks of violence—meaning conflict management rather than political agreements or peace. An occupation regime cannot remain static. It is deemed stable mainly in the eyes of the Israeli side and serves its interests. However, on the ground, it is constantly eroded, undermined, and ultimately prone to collapse due to factors such as the systematic abuse of Palestinians, the continuous expansion of settlements in the West Bank, efforts by far-right elements and Temple Movements to alter the status quo at Al-Aqsa/Temple Mount, the prolonged detention of thousands of Palestinian prisoners, and targeted assassinations of Palestinian activists and leaders—with increasing collateral damage. In response, Palestinians challenge the status quo through attacks by individuals or armed groups, prompting increasingly forceful Israeli reactions, perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Part of the success in managing the conflict with the Palestinians also stemmed from fueling tensions with Iran. As rightwing rule persisted and the divide-and-rule policy became entrenched, rightwing governments elevated Iran and its allies to the top of the threat scale while significantly downplaying the Palestinian threat. This perspective was largely adopted by the military, which never viewed the Palestinians as a significant strategic threat. With relative calm in Gaza and ongoing security

coordination in the West Bank, concerns about the Palestinians diminished even further. The tactical failure to defend the southern border on October 7 was due not merely to a localized diversion of forces to the West Bank, but also to broader military-security focus on a shadow war against Iran and its allies, coupled with extensive preparations for a full-scale regional war. However, prioritizing the Iranian/Shiite external threat—which, in hindsight, was not as imminent as feared—was above all a political strategy.

Iran's military buildup—including efforts to reach the threshold of nuclear capability—and its financial and military support for regional proxies are primarily aimed at deterring threats to the survival of the revolutionary regime. The events following the October 7 attack further support this claim: Iran and its allies (Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and Shiite militias in Iraq) were not privy to the attack, did not actively join it, and refrained from fully engaging in it throughout the war, despite what could have been a rare opportunity for the "Shiite axis" to inflict severe damage. In other words, Iran's primary concern remained self-preservation and deterrence of an Israeli or American strike. The strategic failure of rightwing governments was therefore twofold: they exaggerated the Iranian threat while underestimating the Palestinians' motivation to resist the occupation. At the moment of truth, Iran and its allies avoided a full-scale confrontation with Israel, while the supposedly negligible risk of a large-scale Palestinian attack became a devastating reality. Militarily, Israel distracted itself. Politically, framing Iran as the primary existential threat allowed Israeli-Jewish society to downplay the occupation and marginalize the "Palestinian problem" from its national discourse.

From the perspective of Hamas leadership, particularly in the Gaza Strip, the rise of a far-right government in 2022 created conditions that seemed



ripe for a major surprise attack. This government turned matters such as altering the status quo on the Temple Mount, accelerating settlement expansion in the West Bank, and abusing Palestinian prisoners into official policy. The appointment of Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich—who had previously outlined the “Full Defeat Plan” in 2017—as the Defense Ministry official responsible for the West Bank signaled to the Palestinians that mass displacement could be a real possibility. Moreover, the far-right government even threatened Hamas’s last remaining political achievement: maintaining its limited rule over Gaza. At the same time, Hamas observed that the government was disregarding the repeated warnings of Israel’s military-security establishment and deepening internal divisions within Israeli society—factors that created an opportunity for a severe blow.

Despite the deepening occupation, in 2020, Israel concluded normalization agreements with Arab states, facilitated by the US and tacitly approved by Saudi Arabia. From the Palestinian perspective, and particularly that of Hamas leadership, the possibility of Saudi Arabia formally joining the Abraham Accords in 2023—under an even more extreme right-wing Israeli government—was seen as the final nail in the coffin of Palestinian aspirations. Israeli

discourse often emphasizes the aforementioned internal societal rift, due to such factors as the judicial overhaul, as key factors behind the October 7 attack. While these issues may have exacerbated Israel’s internal vulnerabilities, they only offer a partial explanation. From Hamas’s perspective, the Israeli right’s success in integrating into the Arab Middle East—at the Palestinians’ expense and without making political concessions—made the gamble of a surprise attack seem worthwhile. The domestic political turmoil in Israel and operational considerations merely provided the opportunity.

After fifteen months of war, it is evident that the concept endures, albeit with one key difference: while the Netanyahu regime has abandoned it, the opposition echoes it, claiming that Hamas has brutally violated a political agreement with Israel—though, in reality, this has been merely a fragile alignment of interests between Hamas and rightwing governments. Meanwhile, the scale of Hamas’ attack, the horrific war crimes committed, and the profound trauma inflicted on Israeli society continue to reinforce the narrative that Israel faces an existential external threat. This persists despite the fact that neither Iran nor Hezbollah have launched an all-out offensive, and despite repeated assertions by the military-security

establishment and opponents of the Netanyahu regime that Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran have been dealt significant blows, allowing the war to be concluded (even before the fall of the Assad regime). In this way, the Netanyahu regime can actively implement the Full Defeat plan championed by its most extreme partners, while the alternative proposed by its opponents is merely a return to the pre-October 7 conflict management strategy. In other words, the opposition fails to present a viable political alternative and continues to escalate the regional conflict in a manner similar to rightwing governments.

The clearest indication of the Israeli-Jewish opposition's weakness is its near-unanimous rejection of the establishment of a Palestinian state and support for suspending UNRWA's services. At the same time, there is widespread criticism within the opposition that the Netanyahu regime is prolonging the war in Gaza instead of focusing on the



“real” threat—Iran. The opposition's unwillingness or inability to propose a political solution to the Palestinian issue, combined with its gung-ho attitude towards Iran, traps Israel in a cycle that harms its citizens and undermines its core security doctrine, which has historically relied on being a small nation capable of waging short wars. The way out of this conundrum lies in challenging deeply ingrained Israeli perceptions of the Middle East.



---

## 5. Beyond Annihilation: Arab Regimes, the Islamic World, the Palestinians, and Israel

---

One of the core arguments raised in this document is that Israeli discourse—particularly in the media and among military commentators and veterans of the security establishment—presents an oversimplified, one-sided view of the Arab and Islamic world. This discourse often portrays them as inherently fundamentalist—fanatic, militant, and radical—driven by a deep-seated desire to destroy Israel for religious and nationalist reasons. However, this perspective overlooks the actual power dynamics, historical context, and diverse strategic interests of various states and political movements. While it claims to be neutral and professional, this binary worldview aligns closely with the ideology and interests of the Israeli right, particularly the far right. In this section, we offer an alternative framework by examining three key aspects: the historical evolution of Arab and Islamic attitudes toward Israel, the complex interrelations between Israel and its regional surroundings, and the diverse strategic interests of regimes and movements in the region.

### **Arab Regimes: From War to Acceptance**

The establishment of the State of Israel triggered two major crises from a pan-Arab perspective: the defeat in the 1948 war and the Palestinian refugee problem. After 1948, Arab states occasionally considered proposals for peace with Israel, but

these were generally based on two conditions that Israel rejected: withdrawal from territories occupied during the war and the return of at least some Palestinian refugees. These demands conflicted with Israel's security doctrine and were never seriously entertained by any of its leaders.

Until 1967, during the height of the decolonization era, Arab regimes believed that Israel was an unsustainable project, and the pan-Arab ideology led by Egypt dictated a collective foreign policy of absolute rejection of Israel's existence. However, the Arab defeat in 1967, along with the growing emphasis on state sovereignty over pan-Arab unity, led to the gradual decline of this ideology and legitimized independent decision-making by individual Arab states, even when their interests diverged from the collective ethos. Despite this shift, solidarity with the Palestinians remained strong at both the popular and political levels, continuing to reflect the principles of pan-Arab nationalism and religious unity.

The shocking Egyptian surprise attack on Israel in October 6, 1973 – the reference point for so many comparisons made in Israel in the aftermath of October 7, 2023 – combined with President Anwar Sadat's strategic shift from Soviet patronage to an alliance with the US ultimately led to the 1978 Camp David Accords and Israel's withdrawal from Sinai. Egypt, once the leading proponent of pan-Arab ideology, took the first steps toward breaking away

from the Arab collective, a process that culminated in its separate peace with Israel. Though initially denounced and expelled from the Arab League for this move, Egypt was reinstated after roughly a decade. Jordan followed with its own peace treaty in 1994, while other Arab regimes, though not formally signing agreements, effectively withdrew from the cycle of war. In the 1990s, Syria engaged in prolonged negotiations with Israel based on the premise of a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. In 2002, amid the Second Intifada, Saudi Arabia introduced what would become the Arab Peace Initiative, proposing a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders and a mutually agreed-upon resolution to the refugee issue. Since then, this initiative remained the consensual pan-Arab and pan-Islamic framework for resolving the conflict.

For Israel's Arab neighbors, peace with the Jewish State has been primarily driven by internal considerations—namely, regime stability and international standing. During the Cold War, and even more so after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Arab states pursued peace to bolster their political and economic stability and secure the support of the Western bloc. In the post-1989 unipolar world, the need for such agreements became even more pressing. The willingness of Arab regimes bordering Israel to sign political agreements based on the principle of territories for peace stemmed from the fact that their conflict with Israel was not existential but territorial. However, these agreements largely remained the purview of governments and elites. What prevented them from maturing into full-scale reconciliation was the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. For the Arab public, solidarity with the Palestinians continued to erode the legitimacy of ties with Israel and, at times, even the legitimacy of the regimes that signed peace agreements.

Nevertheless, these agreements have endured various crises and escalations in Israel's relations with the

region, as well as the deepening occupation and oppression of the Palestinians. The Israel-Egypt peace treaty survived the First Lebanon War (including a nine-week siege of Beirut) and the First Intifada. The peace agreements with both Egypt and Jordan withstood the Second Intifada and Second Lebanon War. Similarly, the Abraham Accords have thus far held firm, despite the ongoing war in Gaza—even as it threatens the Palestinians with yet another Nakba.

### **From Acceptance to Anticipation: The Palestinians Under the PLO**

Unlike Israel's relationships with Arab regimes, its conflict with the Palestinians is not about borders—it is an intimate, local struggle over the same piece of land. This makes the mutual claims of both parties deeply entrenched and more difficult to reconcile. The Palestinians have been in conflict with Zionism since the arrival of the first Jewish settlers in the late 19th century, and have engaged in organized political resistance to it since the 1917 Balfour Declaration



and the subsequent British occupation. As Jewish immigration and settlement expanded during the Mandate period, this political struggle escalated into increasingly fierce armed resistance. In 1948, the newly established State of Israel expelled most of the Palestinian population from the territories it had occupied, and barred their return—a policy that created the Palestinian refugee crisis. As a result, only a small portion of the Palestinian people remained within the postwar borders of the State of Israel.

## The Jewish settlements in the West Bank provoke Palestinian resistance, which in turn is met with Israeli violence, and vice versa

In 1967, approximately one and a half million Palestinians came under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. From that point on, they and their property became central to an ongoing and expanding project of settlement and military control that restricted their movement, subjected them to humiliation, and deprived them of rights and resources. The expansion of Jewish settlements and the lack of a permanent agreement—the fragile and interim Oslo Accords notwithstanding—undermine both existing and future agreements with Arab regimes. The settlements provoke Palestinian resistance, which in turn is met with Israeli violence, and vice versa. Since 1967, Israel has held thousands of Palestinian prisoners—totaling around 800,000 over time—creating a persistent incentive for the abduction of Israelis as leverage for prisoner releases. Additionally, Israel has consistently assassinated leaders of Palestinian movements and organizations—first from the PLO and Fatah, later from Hamas and other groups—yielding questionable long-term strategic benefits. This ongoing policy of mass incarceration and “targeted killings” has

reinforced the perception among Palestinians that Israel's struggle against them is existential.

The process of Palestinian reconciliation with the State of Israel was painful and sparked far greater internal disputes than the political processes with Arab regimes. However, it unfolded in parallel with the broader pan-Arab shift described earlier. Until the 1973 war, the PLO's official political platform called for the liberation of all of Palestine, while expressing a willingness to coexist with Jews. A political shift occurred in November of that year when the PLO was compelled to align with the Arab summit in Algiers, which adopted a diplomatic approach to the conflict with Israel. This decision paved the way for Egypt and Jordan's participation in the Geneva Conference a month later. In June 1974, the PLO announced the “Ten-Point Program” advocating for the establishment of a Palestinian state on any liberated part of the homeland. This plan marked an initial and limited Palestinian acceptance of the partition principle. In exchange for this flexibility, the Arab Summit in Rabat later that year ratified the plan and recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians (instead of Jordan), bolstering the organization's political standing and international legitimacy. The PLO later endorsed the first Arab peace plan in 1982, which explicitly called for a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. At the Palestinian National Council meeting in Algiers in 1988, it formally accepted the two-state principle and recognized the State of Israel. Between 1993 and 1995, the PLO and Israel signed the Oslo Accords, leading to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in parts of the West Bank and Gaza.

Although the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is existential and more complex to resolve than that between Israel and the Arab states, since the 1980s, the PLO leadership has consistently pursued a path of agreement with Israel. As with the Arab states, this compromise has been driven by Palestinian interests shaped by power dynamics

favoring Israel, the heavy toll of refugee and prison life, and the desire for international recognition. The Ten-Point Program granted the PLO observer status in the UN, while the Oslo Accords enabled the return of exiled Palestinian leadership to their homeland and outlined the future borders of a Palestinian state. However, in Israeli discourse, this pragmatic approach has often been met with skepticism or disdain, with some arguing that the Palestinian agreement to partition is merely a tactic under a “phased plan” (with the purported final phase being the liberation of all Palestinian territory). While a minority of Palestinians are opposed to the Oslo process, and Hamas actively seeks to derail it through violence, Israeli suspicion of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority overlooks the broader reality of Israeli-Palestinian relations. This is not a stable status quo but rather a situation of deep settlement and occupation, characterized by ongoing civil, political, and military repression. It not only obstructs a political agreement with a legitimate Palestinian leadership but also fuels Palestinian violence and empowers opponents of the peace process.

### **Iran, Hezbollah, and the Rise of National Islam: Conservatism, Repression, and an Opening for Reform**

Since the 1970s, the rise of national Islam (a preferable term to the problematic “political Islam”) has presented a renewed challenge to reconciliation between Israel and its neighbors. The revolutionary regime in Iran, which took power in 1979, the Muslim Brotherhood movements in Sunni countries that grew stronger as a result, and the Hezbollah (est. 1982) and Hamas (1987), also affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, all use religious and blatantly anti-Western rhetoric. In Iran and Gaza, a pious and conservative lifestyle is enforced on Muslims, and national Islamic actors show limited interest in integrating into the global community

and international institutions. However, equating national Islam with rigid and uncompromising religious fundamentalism is analytically inaccurate and helps obscure Israel's share of responsibility for its current strategic situation.

A key moment in which Israel sought to bind national Islam with global jihad and with the concept of fundamentalism in general was 9/11. Israel exploited this event to portray its confrontation with Hamas, Iran, and Hezbollah as identical to that of the US with al-Qaeda and its affiliates. However, ideologically, culturally, and socially, the national Islam that encompasses Israel in the Middle East has very little in common with global jihad organizations, except for the pretense that they all act in the name of Islam. Furthermore, Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (ISIS) are global Sunni terrorist organizations that view the Muslim Brotherhood movements (Hamas included) as enemies.

They operate in the form of networks of small cells, are not committed to civilians, and until the establishment of the short-lived Islamic State, they lacked territorial sovereignty. Their ideological goals are unlimited, utopian, or nihilistic. They generally do not operate against Israeli or Jewish targets, and their elimination by military often fails by virtue of their own strategy, which includes creating chaos and disappearing.



The defining characteristic of national Islam, by contrast, is its conservatism, rooted in territorial sovereignty, popular support, and adaptability. The form of Islam prevalent in Middle East politics is a type of religious nationalism akin to political Christianity, Judaism, or Hinduism. Like many local national-religious movements worldwide, national Islamic movements are committed to a broad civilian public, running social support networks, cultural institutions, and economic enterprises. While they sometimes seek to take control of their countries' governments, they more often do so by shaping public sentiment rather than through violence. Their vision is, therefore, not fundamentalist—meaning utopian and nonnegotiable—but rather conservative. Although they suppress opposition when in power, much like “secular” regimes, and enforce religious conservatism through coercive and sometimes violent means, they also have reformist aspirations. They view the tension between ideology and practice as a source of evolution and growth rather than frustration, failure, and, ultimately, apocalypse.

Like the secular and religious Arab regimes of the past, national Islamic movements also find themselves in an asymmetrical conflict with the West, particularly the US. At the same time, they engage in sociopolitical struggles against progressive or secular forces within their own societies. When a government representing the Muslim Brotherhood took power in Egypt in 2012, it abused its authority (unlike the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia), faced widespread opposition, and was ultimately overthrown by the Egyptian military establishment.

Hezbollah, meanwhile, is not only a sub-state militia but also a movement representing Lebanon's Shiite community, historically the country's most impoverished and marginalized group. Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon served as a catalyst for Hezbollah's rise, providing both national justification and momentum for its consolidation of power.

While the group's military buildup primarily aims to strengthen its role as a political and military actor capable of deterring Israeli attacks on Iran, it is framed as necessary for protecting Lebanon from Israeli invasion.

Hamas similarly represents conservative forces in Gaza and the West Bank. Its refusal to join the PLO due to the organization's acceptance of the political process, along with its military actions to undermine the Oslo Accords, led to severe political repression by the Palestinian Authority. This contributed to the group's popularity, against the backdrop of the faltering political process and the widespread corruption within the authority, widely condemned in the West Bank as a corrupt tool operated by Israel.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran overthrew a secular dictatorship that had seized and maintained power for decades with the support of the US and later Israel, while brutally suppressing all opposition, including religious forces. Since the revolution in 1979, the Iranian regime has faced severe sanctions by the US and its allies. Despite Iran's significant regional influence, and contrary to its portrayal in Israeli discourse as an imperial power, it remains an economically and militarily weak global power, with regime survival being its primary goal. Its alliance with groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, and Iraqi militias—each with varying degrees of dependence and alignment—is primarily an insurance policy for its own stability against external threats and internal unrest. These challenges are exacerbated by Western sanctions and Israel's CBW, including bombings, assassinations, and cyberattacks. Former Mossad chief Meir Dagan even argued that the public insistence of Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on a military strike against Iran, even without US involvement, intensified Iran's offensive posture in the Middle East and strengthened its military support for Hezbollah and Hamas. Each of Iran's allies pursues its own interests in its relationship

with Tehran, balancing internal priorities with a stance that could be described as support or limited solidarity. Hezbollah, for example, has reportedly prepared a plan for an invasion of the Galilee, but launching such an operation unprovoked—rather than in response to an Israeli attack on Iran—would likely provide Israel with justification to devastate Lebanon and squander Hezbollah's value as Iran's "insurance policy" against an Israeli or US strike.

## National Islamic movements are internally authoritarian, culturally conservative, and often enforce strict control within their ranks

National Islamic movements are internally authoritarian, culturally conservative, and often enforce strict control within their ranks. Their external interests frequently diverge from their internal ones, and military confrontations with them tend to result in even greater internal repression. However, their willingness to implement gradual internal reforms suggests that de-escalation is possible. Since their primary goal is survival, they may be willing to accept an Israeli-Palestinian compromise and even act against their own religious ideology (see for example, [the congratulatory letter Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi](#), a Muslim Brotherhood leader, sent to the President of Israel). Iran, too, has officially endorsed the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative through its membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which formally supports the plan. Therefore, an Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation accepted by all Palestinian factions would likely foster shifts within national Islamic movements and strengthen alternative forces in Lebanon, Iran, and the broader region more effectively than continued direct or indirect military conflict.

### Hamas in the PLO's Footsteps

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) is a popular Palestinian movement that emerged from the living conditions of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip. It originated from the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, which established a branch in Mandatory Palestine in the 1940s. Its founder, Ahmed Yassin, served as the leader of the Brotherhood's Gaza branch and, in 1973, established the Islamic Center, which focused on religious and social activities, including preaching in mosques, charitable work, clinics, daycare centers, student groups, and trade unions. In 1978, the Islamic Center received official recognition from the IDF as a counterbalance to the PLO, and its registration as an NGO by Israel allowed it to raise funds legally.

When the First Intifada erupted in December 1987, Yassin and his associates founded Hamas as part of the broader Palestinian struggle. Hamas quickly outpaced earlier religious movements, becoming the dominant Islamist force in Palestinian politics. It leveraged the socio-religious infrastructure built in previous decades to consolidate support, shrink the Israeli peace camp through the use of mass terror against civilians (leading to the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin who signed the Oslo Accords and Netanyahu's rise to power in 1996), and establish a strong presence in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. By the time of the October 7 attack, Hamas had evolved into a multifaceted organization, encompassing a civilian infrastructure, a military wing, a political party, and a political bureau.

Hamas has diverse financial sources, including Iran, which has enabled it to arm itself extensively. However, just as Hezbollah is primarily a Lebanese movement, Hamas is not merely an Iranian proxy (as noted earlier, [Iran declined to attack as expected and requested by the planners of October 7](#)). Similar to Shiite Hezbollah and Iran's ruling regime, the national Islam of Sunni Hamas has, over the years,

demonstrated a willingness to delay utopian goals in favor of maintaining governance and long-term stability—at least until Yahya Sinwar consolidated his control in Gaza in 2021. One of the well-known religious concepts Hamas has invoked to justify deferring the complete “liberation” of Palestine is *hudna* (or *tahdi'a*), a term from Islamic tradition that signifies a ceasefire to allow for reorganization before resuming conflict. While *hudna* may seem informal, viewing it solely as a deception is misleading. From Hamas’s perspective, it serves as a doctrinal and even theological tool to legitimize a politically contentious compromise. The group’s leaders have repeatedly proposed a *hudna* lasting ten to thirty years, intended to defer difficult issues until they become irrelevant or until circumstances allow for either military conflict or a permanent political settlement. Like the concept of *maslaha* (مصالحة) in the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, which legitimizes political and social decisions that benefit the community of believers even when they conflict with religious ideology, *hudna* represents the opposite of fundamentalist thinking and allows for measured and gradual reform. Ironically, the success of rightwing Israeli governments in maintaining security stability through an unwritten arrangement with Hamas has, in fact, relied on Hamas’s adaptability and the central role of *hudna* in its political strategy.

Just as Israel does not engage directly with Hezbollah but communicates with the Lebanese government, it does not require formal recognition from Hamas or direct negotiations with it. Hamas can integrate into the Palestinian Authority (or the PLO), as it has after winning the Palestinian Authority elections in 2006. Following that victory, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was appointed head of a Palestinian unity government—a move consistent with the reformist approach characteristic of nationalist Islam. Hamas’s entry into the Palestinian Authority was an attempt to capitalize politically on Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza, which, due to the manner in which it was

carried out, was perceived as a Palestinian victory credited to Hamas. In other words, while Hamas did not formally recognize the Oslo Accords, its participation in the elections effectively signaled a de facto recognition of Israel, as well as an unprecedented level of cooperation with the PLO and integration into the international order. However, following the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit in June 2006, Israel imposed a partial blockade on Gaza, further weakening the Palestinian Authority’s governance in both the West Bank and Gaza. This, in turn, strengthened Hamas, which seized control of Gaza by force in June 2007. In the years that followed, repeated Israeli military operations targeted Gaza, yet Hamas continued to pursue political initiatives, including clarifying its charter in 2017 to propose a unity government and integration into the PLO. Further political agreements between Hamas and the PLO were reached ahead of the 2014 Gaza war (Operation Protective Edge), during the Great March of Return protests in 2019, and especially in 2021, ahead of the planned Palestinian elections. Israel sought to prevent the elections, and in response to rocket fire from Gaza during the Jerusalem Day flag parade in May 2021, launched Operation Guardian of the Walls.

Hamas’s brutal attack on southern Israel does not contradict the claim that, from the movement’s perspective—particularly by 2021—a political agreement, even a temporary one, was possible.



We believe that the attack was not inevitable and that significant de-escalation efforts by Israel, especially a genuine and serious political process with the Palestinian Authority aimed at establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, could have prevented it. Hamas chose its violent course of action after all avenues for lifting the blockade and integrating into the PLO and the Palestinian Authority had been closed to it—though the very existence of an independent Hamas military force was indeed a major obstacle to such a process. In fact, Hamas’s conduct in Gaza for *most* of its rule was notably pragmatic: engaging in an informal arrangement with Israel, including Israeli facilitation of financial support for its governance, would have been unthinkable for an organization like the PLO.

The peak of Hamas’s power-building efforts in Gaza occurred in 2018, when Yahya Sinwar engaged in negotiations with Netanyahu over a long-term arrangement. Sinwar urged Netanyahu to take a “calculated risk”, and in October of that year, he gave a comprehensive interview to Italian journalist Francesca Borri, also published in Israel’s leading daily, *Yediot Ahronot*, in which he stated that Hamas sought an agreement. Netanyahu, for his part, frequently claimed that the only concession he made to Hamas was ensuring the stability of its rule in Gaza. However, the de facto ceasefire between Israel and Hamas took place under a suffocating blockade, which exacted an increasing political toll on the movement.

**The peak of Hamas’s power-building efforts in Gaza occurred in 2018, when Yahya Sinwar engaged in negotiations with Netanyahu over a long-term arrangement**



Following Sinwar’s re-election as Hamas’s leader in Gaza in 2021 and the gradual rise of the Israeli right, culminating in the formation of Netanyahu’s far-right government at the end of 2022, the situation shifted. Hamas’s leadership had legitimate concerns that they might meet the same fate as the Islamic Jihad leaders assassinated with their families in November 2019 and August 2022 (Operations Breaking Dawn and Black Belt). Coupled with the political and economic developments described above, these factors accelerated the trajectory toward military confrontation.

The common Israeli interpretation of the motives behind the October 7 attack—religious fanaticism, nationalism, or personal ambitions such as lust for power or megalomania—is accurate but incomplete. It overlooks the futility of expecting stability and security while the civilian population on the other side remains impoverished and doubly oppressed—by both Hamas and Israel—while its leadership is under constant threat of death. For former Hamas leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar and his associates, Israel’s military superiority—including its ability to eliminate them unexpectedly—made the risk of delivering a decisive strike strategically worthwhile. If they were ultimately doomed after years of de facto cooperation with Israel, launching an unprecedented surprise attack became a logical course of action—not only to break the blockade but also to prevent the potential sidelining of the Palestinian issue



amid normalization efforts between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

### **Beyond Conflict Management: The Power of Agreements**

Like its neighbors, Israel has taken pragmatic steps to achieve temporary stability and prosperity. One example is the disengagement plan led by Ariel Sharon, followed by the decision to allow Hamas to consolidate its power in Gaza and even facilitate its financing and governance within the enclave. As noted earlier, only the Israeli right could have reaped the security and economic dividends of this unwritten alliance with Hamas—essentially a *hudna*—without facing significant political backlash domestically. However, the events of October 7 made it clear that a policy based on informal agreements and periodic cycles of violence may have provided medium-term stability but was ultimately unsustainable—and catastrophic.

To understand the power of international agreements between Israel and its neighbors, one can examine the most significant: Camp David with Egypt (1978), Oslo with the Palestinians (1993-1994), the peace agreement with Jordan (1994). These agreements brought Israel enormous benefits, the importance of which is only questioned by the very extreme right. This is evidenced, among other things, by their continued resilience, even in the face of active attempts to disrupt them, some of which have been initiated by Israel.

The greatest achievement of the 1988 Madrid Conference was the removal of most Arab boycott measures and the legitimization of Arab regimes and the PLO in moving toward normalization with Israel. The Oslo Accords facilitated peace with Jordan and the establishment of relations between Israel and several other Arab and Islamic countries—Oman, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania—including the



installation of an official Israeli mission in Doha (1996–2009). This served as further evidence of the centrality of the Palestinian issue in the Arab and Islamic world and enabled Israel to integrate into the globalization process. Security coordination with the Palestinian Authority allowed Israel to manage the conflict at a relatively low cost since the 1990s. Today, fifteen months into the Hamas attack and while Israel is killing tens of thousands of Palestinians, the Palestinian Authority continues to prevent the escalation of armed struggle against Israel in the West Bank. Gritting their teeth, the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories opt for restraint.

On the one hand, the PLO's commitment to the Oslo Accords is closely tied to Israel's policy of division: the more the Likud government nurtured Hamas, the greater the Palestinian Authority's need to secure itself by coordination with Israel. On the other hand, the PLO's adherence to the Oslo Accords also stems from the asymmetrical relationship between the Palestinians and Israel. The Palestinian struggle against the Zionist movement has persisted since the late 19th century, intensifying after 1948; therefore, an internationally recognized political agreement is a significant achievement for them. To this day, the PLO has preserved it at all costs, if only because of the heavy bloodshed endured to attain it.

The right wing in Israel seeks to obscure the immense importance of agreements with the Arab states (and



to undermine the agreement with the Palestinians) by portraying them as dangerous or worthless. In reality, these agreements are the last remnants of an era of positive interaction between Israel and its surroundings, which developed from the 1970s through the 1990s. For example, one can mention the military cooperation with Jordan in thwarting the Iranian missile attack of April 2024 and the stability and security cooperation between Israel and Egypt even after October 7. The mere fact that all Arab countries have effectively withdrawn from the cycle of military conflict, even without an agreement, has, over the years, become a force multiplier for Israel.

International agreements do not, on their own, produce reconciliation, stability, or lasting peace. Achieving this requires a profound cultural and social transformation, not only in Arab countries and societies but also within Israel. However, recognizing the power of these agreements is

crucial in challenging the narrative of existential threat that rightwing governments promote. The resilience of these agreements, even in the current reality, demonstrates that concepts such as regime stability, social reforms, integration into the international order, economic prosperity, and more – can effectively compete with nationalism and religious nihilism in Middle Eastern countries. Ultimately, true peace and historical reconciliation between Israel and the Arab world cannot be obtained without transitional justice.

---

## 6. Toward a Peace-Oriented Policy

---

**Instead of a “political plan” whose chances of being realized in the foreseeable future are slim, we propose principles for a peace-oriented Israeli policy that civil society and political actors can adopt.**

### **Security for All Between the River and the Sea**

Security is not solely an Israeli interest or an exclusive right of the citizens of Israel. A fundamental condition for progress toward reconciliation and peace is ensuring security for all residents of the land. The right of Israelis to sleep peacefully in their homes, go to work, and travel on roads without fear of small-arms fire, missiles, or explosives is equal to the right of Palestinians to leave their villages and cities without undergoing humiliating interrogations at military checkpoints, to sleep at night without fear of being awakened by IDF raids, and to live their lives free of violence by settler militias or the army. Israel must work toward a mutual cessation of violence to rebuild trust between the parties and facilitate a gradual transition of armed Palestinian organizations into civil and political engagement. Historical global experience demonstrates that

integrating resistance organizations—particularly political prisoners—into the reconciliation process is an effective path to ending violence.

### **Halting Settler-Colonial Expansionism**

The ongoing expansion of the State of Israel, both beyond and within its official borders, at the expense of Palestinian citizens, remains a major obstacle to stability and reconciliation. A political process cannot take place as long as settlement expansion and the displacement of Palestinians continue within Israel’s sovereign borders (as seen in Umm al-Hiran) and even more so beyond. Halting Jewish settlement is a necessary condition for any progress toward an agreement.

### **Palestinian Independence First**

Palestinian independence is not a “reward” for the events of October 7 but a fundamental right that should have been realized long ago. Sovereignty—manifested in freedom of movement, passports, sea and airports, control over the population registry, property rights, resource development and economic growth in the West Bank and Gaza—can serve as the foundation for negotiations on core issues of the conflict: the refugees, borders and settlements, and Jerusalem. Waiting for Palestinian independence

as a goal marking the end of a peace process would serve Israel's relentless territorial expansion at the expense of the Palestinians. In contrast, "Palestinian independence first" can facilitate the settlement of many mutual demands through negotiations. This approach is not tied to the Oslo framework and can align with political models more suited to the current reality (such as a confederation or a rights-based approach), particularly in the wake of October 7. Notably, federalist ideas are not foreign to Zionist history and have been considered at various points as potential solutions to ethnic and religious tensions—during the British Mandate, after the establishment of the State of Israel, and even following the 1967 occupation.

#### **Solving the Palestinian Problem: A Prerequisite for Regional Reconciliation**

Peace agreements between Israel and its neighbors cannot substitute for or lead to reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinians. On the contrary, lasting peace between Israel and the broader Arab and Islamic world is contingent upon the realization of Palestinian rights to independence and sovereignty. While the Arab and Islamic world can play a constructive role in achieving Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation through economic, political, and other forms of support, the starting point must be Palestinian independence.

#### **Negotiations with an Elected Palestinian Leadership**

A legitimate and independent Palestinian political leadership is another essential condition for reconciliation. Israel cannot determine the identity of Palestinian leadership through military actions (such as sieges, assassinations, and arrests) or diplomatic measures (such as boycotts and sanctions), just as the Palestinians cannot determine

the identity of the Israeli leadership. Concepts like "mowing the lawn" or "targeted killings," which are central to the conflict-management approach, must be abandoned, as they perpetuate cycles of violence, hinder the development of Palestinian leadership, harm innocent civilians, and ultimately undermine Israel's long-term security. As noted, mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority under the Oslo Accords have also allowed factions such as Hamas to integrate in the political framework, avoiding the need for direct negotiations between the parties.

#### **The Transformation of Violent Struggle into Political Dispute**

The Israeli demand for an end to claims or permanent security in a post-agreement reality has often hindered the path to reconciliation. The purpose of a political agreement is not to determine whether the aspirations of extremist groups within either Jewish or Palestinian society are legitimate. Rather, it aims to end violence, ensure fundamental rights for all, and shift disputes and their resolution from the military to the ideological or political arena.





### **Accountability and Cultural Transformation Among Israelis and Jews**

The relationship between Israelis and Palestinians is fundamentally unequal. While both societies must undergo educational, cultural, and other changes, no Palestinian transformation should be expected without being accompanied—and even preceded by—Israeli change. Israel must actively support the development of cultural and educational frameworks that promote religious tolerance, pluralism, mutual language learning, and coexistence between Jews and Arabs. Additionally, Israeli society should take concrete steps toward transitional justice, including material restitution and symbolic recognition of the Palestinian experience as part of addressing past injustices. None of these measures constitutes a “loss” or a “sign of weakness”; rather, they would contribute to a stronger society for all between the river and the sea.

### **A Key Role for the International Community**

Israel is a small state reliant on global powers and the international community. Its very establishment and legitimacy stem from international arrangements formulated after the world wars. The establishment

of the Jewish national home—later the State of Israel—was, among other things, a response to the “Jewish problem” and later seen as a form of “compensation” from the West for the Holocaust. The historical link between Western antisemitism and the establishment of a Jewish state in the Middle East underscores the international community’s responsibility for reconciliation between Jews and Arabs in the region. Providing Israel with unchecked support under the guise of self-defense while allowing unrestrained military violence harms both Arabs and Jews. A peace-oriented Israeli policy would legitimize calls for international pressure on Israel to halt both military escalation and settlement expansion. Western responsibility for the ongoing Jewish-Arab conflict also necessitates proactive international involvement—namely, fostering economic, cultural, and social frameworks to support and sustain a reconciliation process.

---

## 7. The Road Not Taken

---

The principles outlined above can be realized through various political frameworks: a two-state solution, a confederation, a single state, or a regional federation. What they all share is a political vision in which a tolerant and democratic Israeli society enables Jews and Palestinians to live with dignity, in security and prosperity while acknowledging national, linguistic, religious, and other differences. Today, such a vision is often dismissed as fantasy, but the opposite is true. The belief that unrestricted military force inflicting massive harm to others is the key to survival—or even an effective deterrent—is false. Israel’s long

history of conflict with the Palestinians and its neighbors, under the guise of conflict management, is proof of this failure. The war-driven policy that culminated in the October 7 attacks may allow Israel to persist, but it will not bring security and well-being to its citizens or stability and prosperity to the region. The road of peace—grounded in justice, equal rights, an end to Jewish supremacism, and Israeli and international responsibility for past and present injustices, including the destruction of Gaza—is not without risk. But it is one Israel has yet to take before it is too late.

הפורום לחשיבה אזורית  
منتدى التفكير الاقليمي



מכון ון ליר בירושלים  
THE VAN LEER JERUSALEM INSTITUTE  
معهد فان لير في القدس