

MIDDLE EAST FORUM | POLICY PAPER

Shattering the Palestinians' Hope of Defeating Israel

Crushing the Palestinians' hope of imposing their will on Israel is the first condition for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

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Translated from the Hebrew. The original was completed on September 23, 2026.

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FOREWORD

Executive Introduction

SINCE 2017 THE MIDDLE EAST FORUM HAS ARGUED A SIMPLE PROPOSITION: THE Israeli-Palestinian conflict will end when the Palestinians conclude they have lost, and not before. Daniel Pipes made the case through the Israel Victory Project and in his 2024 book *Israel Victory*. The usual response was that no Israeli government would adopt the policy. The paper that follows is the reply to that answer. Its author ran Israel's National Security Council for four years and served three decades in the Shin Bet, including as head of the Southern District, the command responsible for Gaza. He helped bring about the Abraham Accords and managed Israel's strategic dialogue with the United States. When Meir Ben-Shabbat writes that Israel's war aims are necessary but not sufficient, and that the missing piece is a cognitive defeat of the Palestinian national movement, he is describing what the Israeli security establishment has learned since October 7, 2023, not offering a theory.

Three things make this paper worth an American reader's time.

First, it defines the objective. "Cognitive defeat" is not a slogan here. Ben-Shabbat builds it from the IDF's own definition of military decision, from the doctrine of the campaign for consciousness, and from the classic definition of strategic deterrence, and he insists that it cannot substitute for military victory. It is what a military victory must produce to be worth its cost. He then shows where Israel has achieved it before in 1967, in 1973, and in the Abraham Accords; why terrorist organizations are harder to defeat this way than states; and what the evidence from Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria since 2023 says about whether it is happening now.

Second, it puts the numbers on the table. About half of Palestinians told the leading Palestinian pollster they supported the October 7 attack. Seventy-two percent say Hamas should keep its weapons until Israel withdraws. In 32 years the Palestinian Authority has not prosecuted one Palestinian for terrorism against Israel, while paying terrorists and their families NIS 1.47 billion a year and growing a 30,000-man police force into 70,000 armed troops. On September 16, 2026, the U.S. State Department found for the second consecutive year that the PLO and the PA had failed the commitments they made under American law. Anyone proposing to hand Gaza to a "reformed" Palestinian Authority has to answer this record. The paper makes sure they cannot avoid it.

Third, it tells policymakers what to do, and in what order. Gaza first: disarm Hamas, demilitarize the Strip, keep security in Israeli hands, and let Gazans who want to leave do so.

No Palestinian elections in November 2026: the 2006 election, held under American pressure, gave Gaza to Hamas, and a second one would hand the international community its pretext to demand the keys. Municipal self-government for the Palestinians, security for Israel alone. No more passes for the PA's violations. Turkey and Qatar out of Gaza's future. UNRWA out of the Palestinian arena. Settlement that makes the new reality in Judea and Samaria permanent. A clean separation between the PA and Israel's Arab citizens. Readers will not agree with every line, but they will not find a vague one.

The American stake is direct. The United States drafted Security Council Resolution 2803, leads the Board of Peace, will shape the force and the committee that run Gaza, and will decide whether to press the Palestinian Authority into elections on November 28. Every one of those decisions either feeds the Palestinian hope of outlasting Israel or ends it. Resolution 2803 promises a "credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood" once the PA reforms. Ben-Shabbat explains why that promise, made to an Authority that has never met a test set for it, is the surest way to keep the conflict going. An American policy that conditions Gaza's reconstruction on Hamas's disarmament, keeps Ankara and Doha out of the arrangements, ends the registration of PA residents as refugees, and withholds statehood until it is earned serves American interests. It is also the only policy that offers Israelis and Palestinians an end to the conflict rather than another round of it.

A word on this edition. The Hebrew original was completed on September 23, 2026, for Middle East Forum Israel. This English edition is a full translation, with the author's footnotes, and quotations from English-language sources are given in the original. The views are the author's. The Forum's job is to put them in front of the people in Washington who will decide, in the next few months, whether the lessons of Oslo have been learned. That is why the paper is being published now, before the November elections and before the Board of Peace's framework hardens into policy, and not after.

Gregg Roman

Executive Director, Middle East Forum
Philadelphia, September 2026

AT A GLANCE

Executive Summary

SINCE OCTOBER 7, 2023, ISRAEL HAS STRUCK ITS ENEMIES IN SEVEN arenas and regained its standing as the regional power. It has not yet won in the minds of its enemies. This paper argues that a sustainable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will come only when the Palestinians lose the hope of subduing Israel and imposing their will on it by force. Until that hope is shattered, every political process will lead Israel back to an “Oslo 2.”

THE PROBLEM

The Oslo Accords were meant to end Palestinian terrorism and set the conflict on a path to resolution. They did the opposite. They taught the Palestinian public and its leaders that pressure extracts concessions from Israel, and they read Israel’s readiness to compromise as weakness. The 2005 disengagement from Gaza deepened that lesson. Thirty-three years later, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has violated nearly every commitment it made at Oslo: it has never prosecuted a single Palestinian for terrorism against Israel; it pays terrorists and their families about NIS 1.47 billion a year, about 7.6 percent of its budget; its schools teach the October 7 massacre as a model; its security forces have grown from a 30,000-man police force into an estimated 70,000 armed troops; and it has internationalized the conflict through the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, and a campaign for unilateral recognition. On September 16, 2026, the U.S. State Department found that the PLO and the PA had “once again” failed to live up to their commitments and extended visa sanctions against their officials.

Palestinian public opinion mirrors the leadership. A May 2025 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) poll found that about half of Palestinians supported Hamas’s decision to attack on October 7, with higher support in Judea and Samaria than in Gaza. In August 2026, 72 percent of respondents told PCPSR that Hamas should not disarm before a full Israeli withdrawal. Support for Hamas has fallen and 79 percent want Mahmoud Abbas to resign, but the belief that Israel can be defeated has not.

Meanwhile, 161 of 193 U.N. member states now recognize a Palestinian state. Hamas calls that recognition “one of the fruits of the October 7 attack.” Not despair but hope is what feeds terror and violence.

WHAT "COGNITIVE DEFEAT" MEANS

The paper defines cognitive defeat by combining three concepts from military strategy: decision (breaking the enemy's ability to act effectively against us), the campaign for consciousness (changing the target audience's perception of reality), and strategic deterrence. Cognitive defeat is a deep and lasting change in the enemy's perception that leads it to understand that it cannot achieve its goals by force, and that trying will cost more than it is worth. It does not replace military decision. It requires a military decision so unequivocal that it changes the enemy's mind.

Israel has achieved cognitive defeat before. The Six-Day War, the Yom Kippur War, and the Abraham Accords each shifted the Arab world's assessment of whether Israel could be destroyed or isolated. Terrorist organizations are harder targets: they are less sensitive to damage, count survival as victory, and hold an ideology that treats every setback as temporary. Yet the Swords of Iron war shows the first signs of cognitive defeat even among these enemies. A senior Gaza cleric, Salman al-Dayah, ruled that Hamas violated Islamic law on October 7. Hassan Nasrallah admitted an "unprecedented" blow before Israel killed him and dismantled Hezbollah's strategic infrastructure. Egyptian, Lebanese, and Palestinian commentators, from Abdel Moneim Said to Majed Kayali, now write that the "unity of the arenas" was an illusion and that the military option against Israel has collapsed. Israel's own society proved it is not the "spider web" Nasrallah described.

"Not despair but hope is what feeds terror and violence."

THE TWO-STATE PARADIGM HAS LOST ITS RELEVANCE

Support for two states is at a record low on both sides. Israel's public and leadership absorbed the lesson of a hostile, weapons-saturated entity next to Israeli communities. Settlement in Judea and Samaria has created an Israeli territorial contiguity that partition cannot undo. The Palestinian polity is split between Ramallah and Gaza and cannot sign or enforce an agreement. The paper reviews four alternatives (one binational state, one Jewish state with Arab municipal self-government, confederation, and managed status quo) and ranks two highest: a regional multilateral framework producing a loose, non-contiguous federative structure that could evolve into a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation, and a system of local governments on a geographic and clan basis. Every option begins in the same place: the elimination of Hamas as a governing and military entity in Gaza and the demilitarization of the Strip.

EIGHT POLICY LINES

- 01 Gaza first.** Disarm Hamas, demilitarize the Strip completely, keep security control in Israeli hands, outlaw Hamas in the PA as well, and allow emigration for Gazans who want to leave. Israel must use the wide room for manoeuvre left by U.N. Security Council

Resolution 2803 so that the Board of Peace framework does not become “Oslo 2.0.” Postwar Gaza should stand as lasting testimony to the price of attacking Israel. Any comprehensive plan with binding timetables for Gaza is lip service until Hamas is gone.

02 No PA elections now. The Legislative Council vote scheduled for November 28, 2026, and the presidential vote in early 2027, are too early and too dangerous. Whatever the results, elections will give international *kasbrut* to an unchanged entity and produce one demand on Jerusalem: hand over the keys to Gaza. Hamas intends to run inside a “broad national coalition.” The 2006 precedent is the warning. Israel should oppose the elections openly rather than wait for Abbas to postpone them.

03 Redivide the powers of control. Municipal administration to the Palestinians, on a district model with full civil powers; security administration in Israeli hands only, without outsourcing to PA forces. This requires three internal Israeli decisions: stop deepening Israel’s commitment to the Oslo framework, including the Board of Peace’s “15-point framework”; exploit opportunities for a gradual exit, such as the Hebron sheikhs’ initiative, an end to ammunition permits for PA forces, and the end of Israeli guarantees for the banks that clear PA funds; and prefer Israeli security action over reliance on Palestinian apparatuses.

04 Stop giving the PA a pass. Israel must document every violation and demand its correction, both to establish legitimacy for its own steps and as a core element of its legal and public diplomacy against the PA’s lawfare campaign.

05 Cut Turkish and Qatari involvement. Turkey shelters Hamas’s leadership and its “West Bank headquarters,” funds a foothold in Jerusalem through TİKA, and seeks a role in the “day after.” Qatar mediates to keep Hamas alive, amplifies the Palestinian narrative through Al Jazeera, and funds Muslim Brotherhood networks. Israel should keep both out of any task force, stabilization force, or supervisory mechanism for Gaza, prefer the United Arab Emirates as a mediator where one is needed, and run a systematic, low-profile campaign against their institutional presence in Jerusalem.

06 Remove UNRWA from the Palestinian arena. UNRWA is the mechanism that preserves the “right of return,” and therefore the mechanism that preserves the Palestinian hope. Israel should insist on erasing every resident of the PA from UNRWA’s rolls and require the PA to recognize that no one has a right of return to Israel.

07 Settlement momentum in Judea and Samaria. Facts on the ground change consciousness. Since late 2022, more than 100 communities and outposts have been approved, E-1 is being marketed, and about 130 farms hold more than a million dunams. Jewish settlement that makes a new reality irreversible is the central component of the Palestinians’ cognitive defeat. The risks are real and require preparation, not retreat.

08 **Separate the PA from Israel's Arab citizens.** Enforce the original purpose of the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law and halt family-unification residency; curb illegal Palestinian residence in Israel; and address the flow of Israeli Arab students to PA universities and of PA-trained teachers into Israel's Arab schools, where they made up about 15.5 percent of new Arab teachers in 2023. The damage from these processes is slow and cumulative, like a chronic disease, and it is not a decree of fate.

BOTTOM LINE

Full achievement of Israel's war aims is necessary but not sufficient. Without a Palestinian recognition that Israel cannot be defeated, and without a deep Palestinian acceptance of Israel's right to a Jewish nation-state, no settlement will hold. The international campaign for a Palestinian state and the Gaza initiatives that bring the PA in through the back door are strengthening the Palestinian hope, not weakening it. The pressures on Israel will come soon from Washington, Riyadh, Ankara, Doha, and Cairo alike. There is no shortcut to deep change, and Israel had better be ready.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: As Long as the Palestinians Hope to Subdue Israel, There Will Be No End to the Conflict



A burned house in Kibbutz Be'eri, photographed on October 11, 2023, four days after the Hamas attack.
Photo: Kobi Gideon / GPO

ON OCTOBER 7, 2023, THE GROUND SHOOK.

Hamas, the Islamist terrorist organization, launched a surprise attack from the Gaza Strip on the communities of southern Israel and on IDF bases. Thousands of terrorists, equipped with enormous quantities of weapons and ammunition, crossed into Israel in trucks and on motorcycles and committed atrocities that defy description. They brutally murdered 1,200 people, raped and mutilated women, and beheaded men. They burned babies alive and wiped out entire families: children, parents, grandparents. They abducted 251 people, among them the elderly, women, and small children, Jews and non-Jews, Israelis and foreign nationals, and carried them off to tunnels and hiding places in Gaza.

These events ignited a hard, multi-front war that had not ended as these lines were written. The calamity, grief, anxiety, humiliation, and horrific images seared every soul in Israel. The courage, heroism, unity, and self-sacrifice revealed in the course of the war filled every heart.

Israeli society passed directly from the inferno in the southern communities to the battlefields of Gaza and the north, and later to arenas far beyond the territories bordering Israel. Out of the horror, and still reeling from grief at its scale, the people of Israel rose like a lion to fight for its life and struck its enemies in seven arenas: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Gaza,

and Judea and Samaria. The arms of the Iranian octopus were struck, and some were broken. Hezbollah became a broken reed for the evil Syrian regime, which collapsed and was replaced; in Lebanon, too, the new government changed its attitude toward the organization. The Shiite militias in Iraq stopped attacking Israel. The Iranian empire of evil absorbed a heavy blow, lost its supreme leader and its top echelon, and was set back significantly in its nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities. Israel regained its standing as the regional power. That the journey began from the low point of October 7 magnified the achievement.

The war shook, at a stroke, a series of basic assumptions and historical paradigms: not only the assumptions of Israel's enemies about its resilience and its ability to withstand a prolonged or multi-front war, but also assumptions held by citizens and the establishment in Israel. It prompted many to think deeply about our existence and about the essence of the state, and it renewed the understanding that even in the eighth decade of its independence, Israel is still forced to fight for its existence.

Israel will never again be what it was before the war. It will be wounded, hurting, and scarred, but more connected to its founding values, aware of the fragility of its existence, more sober and more careful about the risks it can take in its security policy and in its attitude to the dangers emerging against it from states and other actors, in the region and beyond.

While Israelis' bodies bled and their hearts were torn by the images of starving hostages held by Hamas in its tunnels in Gaza, the media reported remarks by the prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, Mohammad Shtayyeh, about the October 7 massacre:

What happened on the seventh of October was a bold and unprecedented act in history. It is an important turning point in the history of the Palestinian struggle.¹

Shtayyeh, it turns out, was not expressing only his private view. A survey conducted in May 2025 by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR), headed by Khalil Shikaki, found that about half of the Palestinian public supported Hamas's decision to launch the attack on Israel. Support among Palestinians living in Judea and Samaria was higher than that measured in Gaza. The same survey found that about 48 percent of Palestinians in Judea and Samaria saw armed confrontation with Israel as the most effective means "to end the occupation and establish a Palestinian state."²

¹ Filmed documentation with Hebrew translation: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DNLnr8oFI>

² Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, "Press Release: Public Opinion Poll No. (95)," May 2025, <https://www.pcpsr.org>

FIGURE 1

October 7 and the Palestinian public

1,200people murdered on
October 7, 2023**251**people abducted and
carried off to Gaza**About half**of the Palestinian public
supported Hamas's
decision to launch the
attack (PCPSR, May
2025)**About 48%**of Palestinians in Judea
and Samaria saw armed
confrontation as the
most effective means "to
end the occupation and
establish a Palestinian
state"

Sources: PCPSR, Public Opinion Poll No. 95, May 2025 (note 2), as cited in the paper; October 7 casualty figures as stated in the paper.

The events of October 7 and the trends in the Palestinian public did not stop Western leaders from singing their old tunes as though nothing had happened. French President Emmanuel Macron, together with other leaders, launched a diplomatic campaign to advance international recognition of a Palestinian state. At the U.N. General Assembly in September 2025, other states joined him, among them Britain, Canada, and Australia. That brought the number of states recognizing a Palestinian state to 157 of the 193 U.N. member states.

Unsurprisingly, Hamas claimed the credit for this achievement.

Ghazi Hamad, one of the movement's leaders based in Qatar, defined the move as "one of the fruits of the October 7 attack," and made clear that "the weapon of the resistance is the essence of the Palestinian cause. We [in Hamas] are committed to it and will not hand over even a single empty cartridge."³

"Israel will never again be what it was before the war."

This is the same Hamad who, a few days after the Shemini Atzeret massacre, explained to the press that Israel is "a state we want to bring down," and promised: "The Al-Aqsa Flood is only the first time. There will be a second, a third, and a fourth. We have the fortitude and the ability to fight and to pay the price."⁴

While the top political echelon of the Palestinian Authority tried over time to present a balanced diplomatic position on the massacre, or even to condemn it, if only for appearances' sake, many senior figures within the Authority and in the Fatah movement did not hesitate to express their support for it, to justify it, or to praise it.⁵

And that is not all. An investigation by the research institute Palestinian Media Watch (PMW), published in August 2026 in the *Washington Free Beacon*, found that schools run by the Palestinian Authority in Judea and Samaria have made the atrocities of October 7 part of

³ <https://www.c14.co.il/article/1285372>

⁴ <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/byaw1gxqp>

⁵ "'Commentary / A Natural Response to Israeli Terror': Senior Palestinian Authority Officials Justify the October 7 Attack," *Davar*, updated December 10, 2023, 18:57.

the regular curriculum.⁶ Among other things, it was reported that at least 11 schools held assemblies at which pupils recited poems glorifying the massacre. At an elementary school in Tulkarm, a girl was filmed reciting: “We came to you in our masses, open the door, we are death ... we will cool the fire in our hearts with body parts and the screams of the soldiers.” In the town of Kharas near Hebron, a pupil described the morning of October 7 as “a beautiful dream we did not want to wake up from.”

* * *

In July 2023, some three months before the terrible massacre, Israel’s current president, Isaac Herzog, visited Washington. In his address to a joint session of Congress, he said:

Notwithstanding the deep political differences, and the numerous challenges that surround Israeli-Palestinian relations, and I do not ignore them, it should be clear that one cannot talk about peace while condoning or legitimizing terror, implicitly or explicitly. True peace cannot be anchored in violence. Palestinian terror against Israel or Israelis undermines any possibility for a future of peace between our peoples.

Israelis are targeted while waiting for busses, while taking a stroll on the promenade, while spending time with their family. At the same time, successful terror attacks are celebrated, terrorists are glorified, and their families are financially rewarded for every Israeli they attack. This is inconceivable. It is a moral disgrace. Terror is not a bump in the road. Terror is hatred and bloodshed. It contradicts humanity’s most basic principles of peace. Israel cannot and will not tolerate terror, and we know that in this we are joined by the United States of America.

The younger generation of Israelis and Palestinians deserve better. They are all worthy of a future to look towards, a future of peace and prosperity. A future of hope. I am wholeheartedly committed to this vision, a vision of hope and peace, true peace, without any terror.⁷

The Oslo Accords, signed in September 1993 on the White House lawn under the Clinton administration and before the eyes of the world, were meant to put an end to Palestinian terrorism in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, to remove the incentives for terror created by Palestinian institutions, to bring about a turnaround in education and in the culture of hatred, to halt the Islamic radicalism spreading through Palestinian towns and refugee camps, and to set the conflict on a path to its end. The irony is that they produced the opposite result.

The message they conveyed to the Palestinian public and its leaders did not encourage the path of reconciliation but the reverse: concessions can be forced on Israel through pressure. Israel’s willingness to compromise for the sake of true peace was read as a sign of weakness. Israel’s “disengagement” from the Gaza Strip in 2005, in which the region’s Jewish residents were expelled from their homes, amplified that message.

⁶ Josh Aronson, “Washington Is Shaken: How the October 7 Massacre Became Part of the Curriculum in the Palestinian Authority,” *Maariv*, August 30, 2026, <https://www.maariv.co.il/news/world/article-1360972>

⁷ Address by President Isaac Herzog to a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress, July 19, 2023; official text on the website of the President’s Residence.

In recent years, and all the more so after October 7, 2023, most Israelis have sobered up from the blindness that gripped them regarding the costs of the “Oslo process.” They have recognized that the Palestinian Authority is not a partner for a peace that could guarantee Israel’s security. Their belief that economic and political gestures, together with turning a blind eye to Palestinian violations, would bring positive change in the areas that matter to Israel has been disappointed.

Many surveys by different research bodies present a sharp and unambiguous picture: the overwhelming majority of the Israeli public opposes the existence of a Palestinian state.⁸ A survey by the Israel Democracy Institute in September 2025 found that 72 percent of Israel’s Jewish public even holds that the Palestinian people has no right to a state of its own.⁹

It is hard to escape the feeling that in the Palestinian camp, the time for peace has not ripened. The assumption still prevails there that Israel can be defeated, and the Palestinians’ will imposed on it, through armed struggle, political pressure, or a combination of the two. That assumption has not weakened over the years. It may even have grown stronger.

Drawing the lessons of 33 years of Oslo requires a fundamental reexamination not only of the “two-state paradigm” but also of the idea of the “Palestinian Authority” as a whole.

Voices calling for this are heard not only on the right of Israel’s political map but even among Palestinians. Not long ago, senior sheikhs and clan heads from the Hebron area approached Economy Minister Nir Barkat and asked, in the name of many of the area’s residents, to break away from the Palestinian Authority and join the “Abraham Accords” with Israel as an independent administrative framework called the “Emirate of Hebron.”¹⁰ It is hard to assess what will become of this initiative, but it reflects authentic voices that have had enough of the Palestinian Authority and the Oslo Accords, and that sought, and still seek, other models for living side by side.

This paper rests on the assumption that a sustainable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be achieved only when the Palestinians lose the hope of subduing Israel and imposing their will on it by force and violence.

“It is hard to escape the feeling that in the Palestinian camp, the time for peace has not ripened.”

This paper proposes directions that can help achieve that goal and lead to a cognitive defeat: a decisive change in the way the Palestinians understand their prospects. This objective is not easy to attain. Some will say it is easier to reach a political agreement than to reach this objective. That is probably true, except that a political agreement that does not rest on

⁸ See, for example, the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs survey of June 2024, according to which 79 percent of Israel’s Jewish public opposes a Palestinian state, <https://he.jcfa.org/%D7%A1%D7%A7%D7%A8->

⁹ <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/61846>

¹⁰ For further details on the Hebron sheikhs’ initiative, their positions, and their contacts with Minister Barkat and other Israeli figures, see <https://www.ynet.co.il/topics/ynet> and <https://www.kan.org.il/content/kan-news/politic/928385>

a foundation that includes a change in consciousness will lead Israel to an “Oslo 2.” Palestinian recognition that victory over Israel, or forcing Israel’s hand, is hopeless is a necessary condition for any agreed settlement.

This is a complex challenge, an objective that is hard to achieve and hard to measure, on a subject that these days is far from the focus of action and attention of the political echelon and the public. That is no reason to lose heart. We have proven that we can achieve even what was considered beyond reach, especially when the matter concerns our existence.

CHAPTER 2

Israel-Palestinian Relations: Main Features of the Current Picture



Nahal Brigade troops in the eastern neighborhoods of Rafah, May 10, 2024. Photo: IDF Spokesperson's Unit

AS OF AUGUST 2026, RELATIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINIANS ARE marked by a deep rupture, political stalemate, and continuing confrontation, which escalated after the October 7 attack and the Swords of Iron war. The picture reflects a structural disconnect, a severe political split between Judea and Samaria and Gaza, and an unprecedented crisis of trust accompanied by high security tension and deep disputes over the core issues.

Central features of the current picture

A. Intra-Palestinian geographic and political split: The rift between the Fatah movement (which controls the Palestinian Authority in Judea and Samaria) and Hamas (which still effectively controls the population of the Gaza Strip and about 40 percent of its territory) continues to leave the Palestinian leadership shattered and without a single address.

B. Political stalemate: Israel's current government has made clear that a Palestinian state will not be established,¹¹ but it has not abandoned its commitment to the Oslo Accords and continues to preserve the Palestinian Authority and its apparatus, as well as the framework of security and civil-economic relations with it under the Oslo Accords. This approach apparently

¹¹ As Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared, most recently on August 9, 2026: <https://www.gov.il/he/pages/spoke-start090826>

stems from apprehension about the consequences that abandoning the Oslo track might carry and the political, legal, security, and economic costs that might accompany such a step. The result in practice is a reality of “neither swallow nor spit out.” The Oslo Accords continue to dictate formal relations, the division of territory, and the division of powers, but with a creeping erosion of commitment to them and violations on a daily basis, on the Palestinian side and the Israeli side alike.

C. Political confrontation and “lawfare”: The PA invests great effort in internationalizing the conflict, exerts heavy pressure, and gives a tailwind to legal proceedings against Israel’s policies and its leaders in the two central institutions in The Hague:

The International Court of Justice (ICJ): The high point came in July 2024 with the publication of the advisory opinion, which determined that Israel’s presence in Judea and Samaria and in eastern Jerusalem is unlawful and called for a rapid withdrawal. The PA uses this ruling as diplomatic leverage to encourage states to impose sanctions on the settlement enterprise.

The International Criminal Court (ICC): The PA, which joined the court as a member state, promotes and supplies material for investigations by the prosecutor, which has led to requests and warrants against senior Israelis. Israel completely rejects the institution’s jurisdiction and accuses it of total politicization.

The “legitimacy” campaign: The Palestinians conduct a persistent campaign in the U.N. General Assembly and in international institutions (such as Interpol and professional organizations) to obtain the status of a full member state.

The State of Israel does not remain indifferent, and it applies sharp sanctions in response to the PA’s international moves:

- *Financial strangulation and offsetting of clearance revenues:* Israel withholds and offsets hundreds of millions of shekels from the tax revenues it collects on the Authority’s behalf (the clearance revenues), which make up about 65 percent of its income. The deductions are made on account of payments to prisoners and to terrorists’ families (“terrorists’ salaries”), alongside a legislative initiative to offset funds the Authority transfers to the Gaza Strip.
- *Denial of legal immunity in Israel:* Israeli courts have ruled in a series of decisions that the Palestinian Authority has no sovereign immunity, which allows civil damages suits against it for involvement in terrorism, and the attachment of its assets.
- *Cancellation of permits and restrictions on movement:* Movement restrictions (revocation of VIP cards) on senior Palestinians who lead the legal campaign against Israel abroad.

D. Heightened security friction in Judea and Samaria: Continuing erosion in the indices of security and stability in Judea and Samaria, alongside a rise in violent incidents, intensive IDF military activity, and friction around civil issues.

E. Perpetual disputes over the core issues: Polarization over the status of Jerusalem and the holy places, permanent borders, the refugee issue, and control of resources continue to mirror the inability to bridge the gaps.

F. Regional and international involvement: Humanitarian aid mechanisms, along with unceasing diplomatic pressure from actors such as Jordan and the international community over preserving the status quo at the holy places.

The reality in the Gaza Strip

The Gaza Strip is at a critical transitional stage: it is no longer under total war, but it is not yet under a stable framework either. The situation is marked by a constant race between international attempts to build a functioning alternative government and the security dynamic of direct military friction with Hamas, which still remains the main power on the ground. Its main features:

A. A fragile reality after high-intensity combat: Extensive Israeli military control, a deep humanitarian crisis, and complex international efforts to shape the day after. The situation on the ground reflects the consequences of the Swords of Iron war and the partial implementation of the ceasefire agreement based on international frameworks.

B. Division of territory and Israeli control: IDF forces have withdrawn to fixed positions and continue to enforce the “Yellow Line,” a security line that leaves Israel in direct control of more than 60 percent of the Strip’s territory. The territory under Israeli control includes strategic east-west corridors and buffer zones, and it denies Palestinians access to most of the agricultural land.

C. A fragile ceasefire: Despite a formal ceasefire (which began in late 2025 under an international framework), the fighting has not stopped entirely. Hamas and other organizations commit regular violations, while the defense establishment continues to carry out targeted killings among their operatives, responds with targeted strikes, and preserves operational freedom of action to thwart emerging threats.

D. The demilitarization question: Hamas has indeed absorbed a heavy blow and lost many military capabilities, but the organization is far from complete disarmament. It exploits the ceasefire and the humanitarian aid to rebuild capabilities, including smuggling and self-production of weapons. Its efforts to reestablish itself, beneath the surface, pose a continuing security challenge to Israel.

E. Humanitarian and civil distress: Electricity, water, sewage, and transportation infrastructure suffered crippling damage, and their rehabilitation depends on progress in the political-security framework. Added to this is extreme crowding: because of access restrictions in the areas under Israeli control, most of Gaza’s population is compressed into a narrow strip of territory that makes up less than half of the Strip’s total area, which puts an enormous load on temporary infrastructure. The Rafah crossing has reopened to limited, supervised movement of people, but the main goods crossings in the north and center of the Strip remain closed or operate under strict security restrictions.

F. Governmental and political crisis: As part of international agreements (with American backing and Security Council resolutions), a Palestinian technocratic committee was established that is supposed to administer the Strip’s civil affairs and coordinate reconstruction efforts. The

body supervising the committee and the political framework is the international “Board of Peace,” which attests to the internationalization of the conflict’s management: decisions on the Strip’s future are no longer made exclusively by Israel or Hamas. In practice, an alternative government has yet to take root, and Hamas continues to run the civil sphere as well.

In an interview Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave to journalist Kalman Liebskind for the Sukkot holiday, published in *Makor Rishon* newspaper on September 25, 2026, he was asked whether Israel has an interest in the continued existence of the Palestinian Authority in Judea and Samaria. His response was: “No. Ultimately, it is a hostile force whose goal is to bring us down. The differences between the ‘Authority’ and Hamas are not over the goal, but over tactics. Hamas believes in a terrorist attack, a direct military attack, while the Authority advances our political strangulation and works to push us out through diplomatic means. This Authority will not survive, for various reasons.”¹²

The indifference with which these remarks were received by the international community can probably be attributed only to the fact that they were drowned out by the noise of the war in the Middle East and Israel’s election campaign. Nevertheless, Netanyahu’s statement should also be understood in the context of the profound change that has taken place in his thinking, as it has among most Israeli citizens, in the wake of October 7.

There is relatively broad agreement among opposition leaders as well that the current Palestinian framework cannot simply continue unchanged, although there is significant disagreement over the alternative. Avigdor Lieberman calls for dismantling the Palestinian Authority¹³, Naftali Bennett opposes a Palestinian state and transferring Gaza to the PA in its current form¹⁴, Gadi Eisenkot opposes a Palestinian state at this time but also opposes dismantling the PA¹⁵, while Yair Lapid and Yair Golan see a possible future role for a reformed PA or another reformed Palestinian governing body^{16,17}. Thus, criticism of the current framework extends well beyond Netanyahu and the governing coalition, even though the proposed alternatives differ substantially.

The Israeli public is no longer willing to accept arrangements that leave the enemy standing

Growing public pressure in Israel over security policy in Gaza is one expression of the deep change in Israeli public opinion. Since the events of October 7 and the Swords of Iron war, the

¹² Kalman Liebskind, “Netanyahu in a Holiday Interview: ‘Israel’s Greatest Victory, Certainly Since the Six-Day War,’” *Makor Rishon*, September 25, 2026, <https://www.makorrishon.co.il/news/political/article/373619>

¹³ Shir Perets, “Lieberman Warns Palestinian Elections Could Repeat 2006 Hamas Victory, Calls to Dismantle PA,” *The Jerusalem Post*, September 28, 2026, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/article-909932>

¹⁴ Moran Azulay, “Bennett: ‘I’m with Lapid All the Way; I Won’t Sit with Netanyahu,’” *Ynet*, July 3, 2026, <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/120andone/article/s100tqclqmg>

¹⁵ Moran Azulay, “Eisenkot: Without a Zionist Majority, We Will Call on the Haredim to Understand the Gravity of the Moment,” *Ynet*, July 27, 2026, <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/b1lbrvrme>

¹⁶ Dafna Liel, “Yair Golan’s Diplomatic Plan: First Publication,” *N12*, June 29, 2026, <https://www.mako.co.il/news-israel-elections/2026/Article-53c6ffa50321f91027.htm>

¹⁷ Sharon Kidon, “Lapid: I Have No Problem with the Palestinian Authority Being Involved in Gaza,” *Ynet*, 2026, <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/bkepkjp11g>

government and the military echelon have been under a strict public magnifying glass. Any arrangement or move that does not promise a fundamental change in reality is seen as a threat to the achievements of the war. The feeling among wide parts of the public is that temporary arrangements are nothing but a lifeline that allows the enemy to survive and to rebuild its forces ahead of the inevitable clash to come.

A survey conducted at the end of July 2026 by the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) found that only 3 percent of Israelis believe that the “15-point framework” based on the Trump plan for Gaza will bring about Hamas’s disarmament of all its weapons and the IDF’s withdrawal from Gaza, two of the plan’s declared objectives.¹⁸

A later survey, on August 20, 2026, after President Trump’s envoys discussed with Prime Minister Netanyahu his opposition to the plan, pointed to the same trend. About 74 percent of Israel’s Jewish public is skeptical about the chances of the “Trump plan” bringing about the removal of all weapons from the Gaza Strip and the complete dismantling of Hamas.¹⁹

In that survey, conducted for the Misgav Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy, respondents were presented with different alternatives for solving “the Gaza problem.” Thirty percent favored the alternative of Israel stepping up the fighting until the military objectives are achieved; 24 percent supported the alternative under which Israel should establish an Israeli military government in the Strip. Only 10 percent supported handing over rule of the Strip to the Palestinian Authority.

¹⁸ JPPI Israeli Society Index, August 2026, <https://jppi.org.il/he/%D7%9E%D7%93%D7%93-%D7%94%D7%97%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%94-%D7%94%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%AA%D7%9C%D7%90%D7%95%D7%92%D7%95%D7%A1%D7%98-2026>

¹⁹ Ariel Kahana, “Consensus: Three-Quarters of Israelis Do Not Believe in the 15-Point Plan...,” August 23, 2026; also on the website of the Misgav Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy.

FIGURE 2

What Israel's Jewish public thinks

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR "THE GAZA PROBLEM"

Step up the fighting until the military objectives are achieved

30%

Establish an Israeli military government in the Strip

24%

Hand rule of the Strip to the Palestinian Authority

10%

ISRAELI SETTLEMENT IN GAZA

Oppose

47%

Support

42%

72%

of Israel's Jewish public holds that the Palestinian people has no right to a state of its own (Israel Democracy Institute, September 2025)

About 74%

of Israel's Jewish public is skeptical the "Trump plan" will remove all weapons from Gaza and dismantle Hamas (August 20, 2026)

3%

of Israelis believe the "15-point framework" will bring Hamas's disarmament and the IDF's withdrawal (JPPI, late July 2026)

Sources: bars and 74% figure, survey of August 20, 2026, for the Misgav Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy (note 19); Israel Democracy Institute, September 2025 (note 9); JPPI Israeli Society Index (note 18). As cited in the paper.

Skepticism about the chances of the "15-point plan" bringing about the removal of all weapons from Gaza and the complete dismantling of Hamas amounts to a consensus. An absolute majority of the Israeli public, left and right alike, holds a nearly identical position on this.

By contrast, the survey found the Jewish public in Israel divided on the question of Israeli settlement in Gaza: 47 percent oppose the idea, while 42 percent support it.

CHAPTER 3

The Palestinian Authority and Its Maladies



Mahmoud Abbas receives U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the Muqata in Ramallah, November 5, 2023.
Photo: Chuck Kennedy / U.S. Department of State

SINCE THE SIGNING OF THE OSLO ACCORDS, THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY HAS waged a continuous campaign against Israel that includes the systematic and deliberate violation of its political commitments.

At the root of this conduct lies the Palestinian Authority's deep commitment to the narrative of the Palestinian struggle, and its recognition that Israel will not agree to a permanent settlement that fulfills the Palestinians' true national aspirations.

In a statement issued by the U.S. State Department on September 16, 2026, following its refusal to allow the PA chairman and his entourage to travel to New York for the U.N. General Assembly, the department reported that "the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Palestinian Authority (PA) have, once again, failed to live up to their commitments as described in the PLO Commitments Compliance Act of 1989 (PLOCCA) and the Middle East Peace Commitments Act of 2002 (MEPCA). This includes **initiating and supporting actions at international organizations** that undermine and contradict prior commitments in support of

Security Council Resolution 242 and 338, **taking actions to internationalize the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict** including through the International Criminal Court (ICC) and International Court of Justice (ICJ), **seeking to bypass negotiations through seeking unilateral recognition, and continuing to pay stipends to terrorists and to glorify acts of terrorism and terrorists in public pronouncements and school textbooks.”**

The State Department made clear that this was the background for extending the sanctions that deny visas to PLO members and Palestinian Authority officials seeking to enter the United States, and it closed its statement with the words: “It is in our national interest to impose consequences and hold the PLO and PA accountable for glorifying terrorism.”²⁰

From the broad picture of the Palestinian Authority’s conduct, blatant and persistent violations of the Oslo Accords can be identified in the following areas:

1. The attitude to terrorism: As far as is known, in all 32 years of its existence there has not been even a single case in which the Palestinian Authority prosecuted a Palestinian resident for committing terrorist offenses against Israel.²¹ This is no small matter. Prosecution and punishment are among the ways in which a properly run state makes clear what is forbidden and what is permitted, and with regard to Palestinian terrorism against Israel they are essential means of denying the legitimacy of such activity and setting norms in this area. When the Authority neither prosecutes nor punishes such offenses, it not only fails to deny their legitimacy; it also conveys a message of consent, with a wink or a blind eye.

2. Encouraging and financing terrorism: Not only does the Palestinian Authority refrain from fighting terrorism systematically,²² it also continues to reward terrorists and their families financially. According to a U.S. State Department report issued in April 2026, the PA paid approximately NIS 488.5 million (\$156 million) in such payments in 2025. Palestinian Media Watch (PMW) estimates that an additional NIS 986 million (\$315 million) was paid through pension and civil-service channels. Together, these payments would amount to approximately NIS 1.47 billion, or 7.6 percent of the PA’s actual expenditure in 2025.²³

The salaries are paid to terrorists, including Arab citizens of Israel and residents of eastern Jerusalem, and increase with the severity of the attack. In practice, the Authority not only rewards acts of terror but also creates an incentive for more serious attacks. Upon their release,

²⁰ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, September 16, 2026: “Sanctioning Officials of the Palestinian Authority and Members of the Palestine Liberation Organization,” <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/09/sanctioning-officials-of-the-palestinian-authority-and-members-of-the-palestine-liberation-organization-2>

²¹ In the isolated cases in which the Authority arrested terrorist operatives for involvement in incidents against Israelis, the indictments were filed for general criminal offenses or internal offenses such as “harming public order” or “breach of the peace,” and not for an act of terror or murder.

²² The “chain of prevention” includes every component of the prevention process: collection of information, arrest, interrogation, arrest of additional suspects, seizure of weapons, and prosecution. This is in addition to systematic action against the infrastructure that supports terrorism: organizations, associations and bodies, sources of funding, and mechanisms of management and execution.

²³ U.S. Department of State, “Report to Congress on Palestinian Payments for Acts of Terrorism and Limitation on Assistance to the West Bank and Gaza,” April 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/bureau-of-near-eastern-affairs/2026/04/report-to-congress-on-palestinian-payments-for-acts-of-terrorism-and-limitation-on-assistance-to-the-west-bank-and-gaza>; Palestinian Media Watch, “Hiding Pay-for-Slay,” February 8, 2026, <https://palwatch.org/page/41889>; Palestinian Authority Ministry of Finance, “2025 Citizens’ Budget,” <https://citizenbudget.ps/en/2025-Citizens-Budget-en>. The combined amount and percentage are calculated from these reported figures.

terrorists receive a release grant from the Authority. The size of the grant is determined by the number of years of imprisonment served, according to the same system of categories used to calculate salaries during imprisonment²⁴.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) has said on several occasions that if he were left with only a single last penny, he would give it to the prisoners because “we sent them.”²⁵ In a speech in February 2018, broadcast on official Palestinian television, he said that these payments are “our national, humanitarian, and moral duty, and the duty of the struggle. This is supported by the leadership and by the Palestinian government.”²⁶

In February 2025, Abu Mazen signed a presidential decree ordering the cancellation of the sections of law dealing with the payment of allowances to terrorists, and transferred the financial assistance program and its database from the Ministry of Social Development to the Palestinian National Institute for Economic Empowerment, in a way that allows the funds to be transferred without exposure to payment offsets by the Israeli government or to international sanctions.²⁷

In addition to the direct payments, the Palestinian Authority’s amended “Prisoners Law” No. 19 (2004) provides that “prisoners” who served a year or more in an Israeli prison are entitled, after their release, to significant further benefits such as funding of health insurance and exemptions from tuition at schools, universities, and vocational training institutions.²⁸

In April 2022, Israel’s Supreme Court ruled that the payment of funds by the Palestinian Authority to security prisoners and their family members constitutes ratification of the acts of terror the prisoners committed, and therefore, under the Civil Wrongs Ordinance, the Palestinian Authority is a party to the wrongs committed by the prisoner-terrorists and bears tort liability toward the victims. The court qualified this by holding that the Palestinian Authority would be liable for tort damages but not for punitive damages. The main significance of the ruling is declaratory: the determination that the Palestinian Authority is a party to the wrongs.²⁹

3. Incitement to hatred: The Palestinian Authority violates its commitments under the peace accords and conducts institutionalized antisemitic incitement against Israel. This

²⁴ Yossi Kuperwasser, “A Reward for Terror: The Palestinian Authority’s Payments to Terrorists and Their Families,” Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs website.

²⁵ Nurit Yohanan, “Abu Mazen: I Will Not Allow a Penny to Be Cut from the Payments to Terrorists,” Kan, Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, February 23, 2025.

²⁶ “Payment of Salaries to Terrorists and Their Families,” Palestinian Media Watch website.

²⁷ Barak Ravid, “Abu Mazen Canceled the Salaries for the Families of Prisoners and Terrorists Killed While Carrying Out Attacks,” Walla, February 10, 2025; Nurit Yohanan, “Spin? The Palestinian Authority Canceled the Payment of Salaries to Terrorists,” Kan, Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, February 10, 2025; Dalit Halevi, “Abu Mazen’s Lie: The Palestinians’ New Way of Paying Terrorists,” Channel 7, February 10, 2025.

²⁸ Douglas Feith, “The Department of Pay for Slay,” March 15, 2017.

²⁹ In 2024, the Exemplary Damages for Victims of Terrorism Law (Legislative Amendments), 5784-2024, entered into force in Israel. This law completely changed the “tort damages only” limitation set in the 2022 ruling. In a precedent-setting ruling handed down on March 8, 2026 (Civil Appeal 15278-04), the Supreme Court applied the provisions of this law for the first time, ordering the Palestinian Authority and the PLO to compensate the family of a terror victim in the amount of about NIS 32.8 million. Because of the Authority’s lack of cooperation, the State of Israel operates active collection mechanisms such as attachment and deduction of the funds from the tax revenues (clearance revenues) it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.

phenomenon encompasses the education system, the media, culture, and the Authority's leadership under Abu Mazen, and it is concentrated along several central axes:

The Palestinian Authority's official education system works persistently to undermine the legitimacy of the State of Israel, to deny Jewish history in the Land of Israel, and to demonize Israel and the Jews. The Palestinian Authority glorifies terrorists and the leaders of terrorist groups by naming schools after them.³⁰

And that is not all. An investigation by the research institute Palestinian Media Watch (PMW), published in August 2026 in the *Washington Free Beacon*, found that schools run by the Palestinian Authority in Judea and Samaria have made the atrocities of October 7 part of the regular curriculum.³¹

Among other things, it was noted that at least 11 schools held assemblies at which pupils recited poems glorifying the massacre. At an elementary school in Tulkarm, a girl was filmed reciting: "We came to you in our masses, open the door, we are death ... we will cool the fire in our hearts with body parts and the screams of the soldiers." In the town of Kharas near Hebron, a pupil described the morning of October 7 as "a beautiful dream we did not want to wake up from."

4. Incitement to terrorism: Encouraging violent struggle, justifying acts of terror, and glorifying terrorists.

5. Delegitimization and demonization: Denying Israel's right to exist, accusing the Zionists of crimes against humanity, and portraying them in a monstrous light.

6. Entrenching historical and political distortion: The Authority invests tireless effort in entrenching the notion that Israel is an apartheid state, with the aim of erasing the Zionist narrative and replacing it with a Palestinian narrative that has no grounding in reality, in a continuing attempt to present Israel as an apartheid state and to erase Zionism's historical record.

7. Support for boycotts and sanctions against Israel,³² while denying its identity as a Jewish state. This is done, among other means, through cooperation with the BDS movement, whose purpose is to bring about the end of the State of Israel's existence and its replacement by a Palestinian state in all of the Land of Israel.

8. Unilateral activity to advance the Palestinian narrative in the international system, in disregard of the PLO's commitment under the Oslo Accords that the Authority would refrain from unilateral activity and from international activity in general.

One of the high points of this phenomenon was the Authority's decision to declare itself a "state" and its success in advancing a U.N. General Assembly resolution recognizing it as an

³⁰ See the detailed report of the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs on this subject, which also contains examples: <https://govextra.gov.il/mda/education/palestinian-education>

³¹ Josh Aronson, "Washington Is Shaken: How the October 7 Massacre Became Part of the Curriculum in the Palestinian Authority," *Maariv*, August 30, 2026, <https://www.maariv.co.il/news/world/article-1360972>

³² This paragraph, through the end of the chapter, is drawn from the review by Brig. Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser, former head of the Research Division of IDF Military Intelligence and director-general of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, "Israel Must Reexamine Its Conciliatory Policy toward the Palestinian Authority, Which Violates Its Commitments," Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, August 14, 2023.

“observer state.” On the basis of that resolution, the Authority joined many international organizations, such as UNESCO, and in all of them it initiated resolutions against Israel. It should be noted that not only is this unilateral move a violation of the agreements, but the agreements also contain no statement whatsoever that refers to the establishment of a Palestinian state as an outcome of the talks on the permanent settlement, which is supposed to be negotiated between the parties.

9. Construction in Area C without Israel’s approval or consent, despite the fact that the Oslo Accords made clear that the authority to permit construction in these areas rests with Israel alone. The Authority acts in this regard in cooperation with the U.N., the European Union, and many European states. The Authority’s policy reflects complete disregard for the determination that Area C was defined in the agreements as “disputed territories” and not as Palestinian territory.

10. The size, composition, and armament of the Palestinian security apparatus: Under the Interim Agreement signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1995,³³ the Palestinian Authority’s “police,” originally the Palestinian Authority Police Force, was supposed to be a small policing force whose role was to maintain local order. That police force was supposed to consist of a policing force and an intelligence force, which together were to fight ordinary Palestinian crime and the terrorist organizations. The agreement set that the Palestinian police would number no more than 30,000 personnel: 12,000 in Judea and Samaria and up to 18,000 police officers in the Gaza Strip. The agreements expressly defined it as a civil policing force only and limited the types and quantities of weapons permitted (among other things: up to 4,000 rifles and 4,000 pistols in Judea and Samaria, alongside a strict limit on the number of machine guns and off-road vehicles).³⁴

Over the years, the Palestinian Authority turned the small “police” into large, sprawling bodies under the umbrella name of the PA’s “security apparatuses.” Instead of a small force limited in scope, these security apparatuses today number, by estimate, some 70,000 troops. From a limited force holding a limited quantity of weapons grew a force that holds tens of thousands of rifles and pistols, undergoes real military training, and is equipped with dozens of armored vehicles. Some of the weapons were received with the approval of the Israeli government, while others were smuggled into Judea and Samaria or are locally produced.³⁵

³³ The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Washington, September 28, 1995 (hereinafter: the Interim Agreement).

³⁴ Annex I (Protocol Concerning Redeployment and Security Arrangements), Article IV, The Palestinian Police, available on the website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs: <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/the-israeli-palestinian-interim-agreement-annex-i>

³⁵ Lt. Col. (res.) Adv. Maurice Hirsch, “22 Kilometers: The Threat Posed by the Palestinian Authority’s Terror Army,” Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, July 15, 2026, <https://he.jcfa.org/22-km-the-threat-posed-by-the-palestinian-authoritys-terror-army/>

FIGURE 3**Palestinian security forces: permitted under Oslo and estimated today**

Ceiling for the Palestinian police under the 1995 Interim Agreement

12,000 in Judea and Samaria and up to 18,000 in the Gaza Strip

 30,000

PA "security apparatuses" today (estimated)

 some 70,000 (estimated)

Sources: Interim Agreement, Annex I (note 33); Hirsch, Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, July 15, 2026 (note 34). As cited in the paper.

11. The integration of the Hamas movement into elections for the Palestinian Authority's institutions, even though it does not meet the conditions that would allow this, first among them acceptance of the agreements themselves.

In practice, the integration of Hamas into elections for the Palestinian Authority's institutions while it engaged in terrorism, opposed the Oslo Accords, and was committed to the destruction of the State of Israel paved its way to seizing the reins of government in the Gaza Strip and from there, in time, to the October 7 attack as well.

The Palestinian Authority is preparing to hold elections for the Legislative Council (the Palestinian parliament) on November 28, 2026, followed by elections for the presidency of the Authority at the beginning of 2027. An official presidential decree on the matter was issued by the Authority's chairman, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), in July 2026.

In this connection, senior Hamas official Husam Badran declared that his movement intends to run within "as broad a national coalition as possible." To that end, Hamas representatives are conducting intensive contacts and meetings in Cairo with various Palestinian factions, including Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front, and also Mohammed Dahlan's Democratic Reform Current.³⁶

Hamas spokesmen make clear that the movement opposes the setting of political preconditions for its participation, such as a demand that it recognize the agreements with Israel.

Will the Palestinian Authority once again approve Hamas's participation in elections? Will Israel allow it to? If Israel wants to prevent it, it has no shortage of arguments and justifications, from the continuing war in the Gaza Strip to its position rejecting the holding of elections in Jerusalem. But it must not hang its case on these. Stronger than all these arguments is the simple truth: as long as Hamas is a terrorist organization, a war of annihilation must be waged against it until it is completely dismantled, and it must not be allowed any foothold in the institutions of government. We will return to this below.

³⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/19/palestinian-factions-explore-broad-alliance-for-november-elections>

CHAPTER 4

Prominent Current Trends in Palestinian Public Opinion



Portraits of Hamas founders Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi at a Hamas campaign rally in Ramallah. Photo: Hoheit

MOST PALESTINIANS ARE FED UP WITH THEIR CURRENT LEADERSHIP AND ARE LOOKING for another according to a survey conducted in August 2026 by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR), headed by Khalil Shikaki.³⁷ The survey was conducted after the announcement of the intention to hold elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council in November 2026 and elections for the presidency of the Palestinian Authority at the beginning of 2027.

About a third of the survey participants said that the character of Fatah's leadership has not changed; 44 percent of respondents held that neither Hamas nor Fatah is fit to lead the Palestinian public.

Seventy-nine percent would like Mahmoud Abbas to resign, a figure similar to the one that emerged in the previous survey as well. On the question of Abbas's successor, clear support was recorded for Marwan Barghouti (39 percent), who is imprisoned in Israel. He was followed by Khalil al-Hayya (16 percent), Mohammed Dahlan (15 percent), and Mustafa Barghouti, head of the Palestinian National Initiative (6 percent).

Asked which Palestinian faction they support, 24 percent of respondents answered Fatah, and an identical share supported Hamas. In a similar survey held ten months earlier, 35 percent

³⁷ PCPSR statement of August 12, 2026, Public Opinion Poll No. 97, <https://www.pcpsr.org>

said they support Hamas, while 24 percent supported Fatah. The decline was especially marked in Judea and Samaria, where support for Hamas plunged from 32 percent in October 2025 to 18 percent in the current survey.

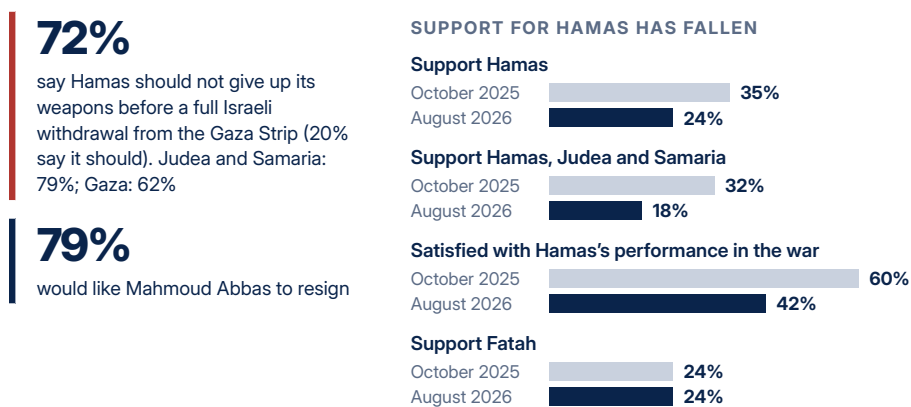
General satisfaction with Hamas stands at 42 percent, with 45 percent of respondents in Judea and Samaria and 38 percent in the Gaza Strip saying they are satisfied with the terrorist organization's performance during the war against Israel. That compares with 60 percent overall, 66 percent in Judea and Samaria and 51 percent in Gaza in the previous survey, conducted 10 months earlier in October 2025.

Despite the decline in support for Hamas, 72 percent of respondents said the terrorist organization should not give up its weapons before a full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, while 20 percent answered that it should do so.

It should be noted that opposition to Hamas's disarmament before an Israeli withdrawal was higher in Judea and Samaria, where it stood at 79 percent, compared with 62 percent in Gaza.

FIGURE 4

Palestinian public opinion, August 2026



Source: Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR), Public Opinion Poll No. 97, August 12, 2026 (note 36), compared with its October 2025 survey. As cited in the paper.

According to the analysis of the PCPSR researchers, the survey's findings reflect "a Palestinian political landscape in transition." Hamas has lost significant public support, while Marwan Barghout emerges as the strongest potential presidential candidate, and dissatisfaction with the existing leadership remains especially high. At the same time, Palestinians increasingly doubt whether the armed struggle produced meaningful results after the destruction of Gaza, and this has contributed to a marked rise in support for negotiations. Yet this shift remains fragile: most Palestinians still oppose the disarmament of Hamas before a full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, see the expansion of settlements as damaging the two-state solution, and display deep skepticism toward both the Palestinian and the Israeli leadership.

CHAPTER 5

Can Israel Achieve a Cognitive Defeat of Its Enemies?



Iron Dome intercepts rockets fired from Gaza at Ashdod, July 8, 2014. Photo: Israel Defense Forces

TO CLARIFY WHAT WE MEAN BY THE TERM “COGNITIVE DEFEAT,” WE WILL DRAW ON three other concepts from the world of military strategy, whose synthesis may lead to it.

The first is “decision” (*bachra’a*), the decisive defeat of an enemy. The theoretical discussion of this concept is decades old and among the most dynamic in the field of military strategy and the theory of war.³⁸ The IDF dictionary defines “military decision” (without any particular focus on the cognitive aspect) as “breaking the enemy’s power of resistance so that it cannot act effectively against us, by creating a situation in which (in the assessment of the decision-maker) the conditions for achieving the assigned mission exist. A state of decision is usually recognizable in that the enemy has lost its ability to act effectively against us.”³⁹

³⁸ See Avi Kober, *Decision: Military Decision in the Arab-Israeli Wars, 1948-1982*, Maarachot, 1995; and Col. (res.) Yuval Bazak, “Between Decision and Victory, Between Maneuver and Attrition,” Maarachot, 2018, available at <https://www.maarachot.idf.il/media/z5epquno/%D7%91%D7%99%D7%9F%D7%94%D7%9B%D7%A8%D7%A2%D7%94-%D7%9C%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%A6%D7%97%D7%95%D7%9F.pdf>

³⁹ *The Dictionary of IDF Terms*, 1998, p. 136.

The second is “cognitive change.” The IDF defines “the campaign for consciousness” as “the set of actions intended to change the target audience’s perception of reality, positions, feelings, and behavior.”⁴⁰

The third concept we will draw on is “strategic deterrence,” whose classic definition in the research literature is bringing the enemy to understand that the price it will pay for achieving its goals by force will be too high to be worthwhile.⁴¹

“Cognitive defeat” will be defined, on the basis of the combination of these three components, as the creation of a deep and lasting change in the enemy’s perception, which leads it to understand that it cannot achieve its goals by force, and that the price of an attempt to achieve them in that way will be too high to be worthwhile.

To remove any doubt, the joining of “consciousness” to “decision” must in no way be read as moving the decision solely to the cognitive plane, or as opening the door to claims such as “there is no military way to deal with terrorism in order to defeat it.” The opposite is true. **The joining of the two concepts is meant to emphasize that the decision achieved by military means must be so unequivocal that it also brings about a deep cognitive change in the enemy, in addition to its tangible military achievements.**

Against the Arab states, Israel several times achieved a clear cognitive defeat, which in time led to recognition of its existence and the signing of peace agreements.

- **The Six-Day War (1967):** It stunned the entire world, created a deep cognitive shock in the Arab world, and cracked the belief that Israel could be militarily destroyed in the foreseeable future.
- **The Yom Kippur War (1973):** Despite the hard surprise Israel experienced at its outset, it ended with Israeli forces across the Suez Canal and close to Damascus, which brought Egypt (and later other states as well) to the conclusion that a military solution to the conflict could not be imposed on Israel, and paved the way for Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem (1977) and the peace agreements.
- **The Abraham Accords (2020):** Although they were not the direct result of Israeli military action, they are a further expression of a long-term cognitive defeat, in which states in the region prefer cooperation with Israel over boycotts and struggles, even political and economic ones.

In Israel’s efforts against terrorist bodies, by contrast, cognitive defeat has been harder to achieve.

First, because of their low sensitivity to damage: unlike states, such bodies have less commitment to civilian infrastructure or to the welfare of the population. They are willing to

⁴⁰ This is the definition as it appears in the army’s foundational documents and in the professional literature of the Center for Consciousness Operations. See the entry on it in Wikipedia.

⁴¹ The formulation reflects the classic theoretical definition in political science as shaped by leading scholars such as Thomas Schelling in his book *The Strategy of Conflict*.

absorb severe blows, and even to hide behind a civilian population and operate from within it, in order to preserve their resistance.

Second, because of such an enemy's conception of victory: for a guerrilla or terrorist organization, the very fact that it is still standing in a campaign waged against it counts, in its own eyes and those of its supporters, as a cognitive victory.

Third, because of its extremist ideology. In the current era this is especially prominent in organizations with an extremist religious consciousness. The struggle is perceived as eternal and as a divine command, so tactical losses or physical destruction are not perceived as a rout or a defeat.

“The joining of the two concepts is meant to emphasize that the decision achieved by military means must be so unequivocal that it also brings about a deep cognitive change in the enemy, in addition to its tangible military achievements.”

The achievements in these struggles have mostly been temporary, also because of the religious conception that in situations of military inferiority it is right to obtain a truce in order to build up strength until the moment the balance allows it to be brought into play again.

Thus the Second Lebanon War (2006) created strong deterrence (as Hassan Nasrallah admitted in his famous speech of regret), which led to a prolonged quiet on the northern border, but it did not stop Hezbollah from continuing to arm for the next campaign.

Although it is too early to draw settled conclusions, signs can be pointed to that Israel may achieve a cognitive defeat in the Swords of Iron war, in the Gaza Strip, in Lebanon, and in Syria as well.

In Gaza, apart from Israel's military and political achievements, it is worth looking also at the lessons drawn by renowned thinkers such as Professor Salman al-Dayah, known as “the Mufti of Gaza.” In a religious ruling (fatwa) he published in November 2024, al-Dayah determined that in the October 7 attack Hamas violated the principles of Islam regarding jihad. In his view, from a religious-legal standpoint, fighting must be avoided when there is significant military inferiority and when there are no sufficient conditions and support infrastructure to protect the civilian population. “It is an absolute duty to refrain from jihad if the assessment grows that something contrary to its purposes will occur, such as increased harm to religion, to life, to honor, to offspring, or to property, or the seizure of land, and all the more so the destruction of the foundations of life.”⁴²

⁴² <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj4vw1l8xvdo>

Although the ruling did not come from the religious leadership of Hamas or of its parent movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, and although the latter gave full and firm backing to Hamas's decision on the Al-Aqsa Flood attack,⁴³ al-Dayah's criticism of Hamas and the criteria he laid down for granting religious permission for an initiated war are unprecedented on the part of the most senior Sunni authority in the Gaza Strip.⁴⁴

The ruling challenges the monopoly on legitimacy of Hamas, which was careful to base its actions on "the duty of jihad" and enjoyed the support of its Shura Council. When such a religious authority casts doubt on the legitimacy of the decision to attack Israel, that is a cognitive blow to the organization's narrative of "divine victory,"⁴⁵ and a message that will surely echo beyond the borders of the Gaza Strip as well.

Moreover: the fatwa was not born in a vacuum. It reflected the enormous frustration on the Gaza street at the heavy price of the war. It attests that within Gazan society, the recognition is beginning to stir **that Hamas brought total disaster upon it without justification, and that in itself is a significant component of the concept of cognitive defeat.**⁴⁶

If at the end of the campaign Hamas is completely dismantled and the Gaza Strip is fully stripped of the weapons in it, that will be clear and conclusive evidence of Hamas's defeat and the completion of the process of decision on the cognitive plane as well.

Israel achieved a cognitive defeat also in the collapse of the Iranian "axis of resistance" in Syria, although it is hard to say the same of the new Syrian entity, which is still in the midst of a process of formation, marketed by interested parties as pragmatism but possibly a disguise and a deception.

One way or another, Iran's conception of Syria as Tehran's "backyard" has been completely broken. The Iranian presence in Syria, in its various expressions, has been greatly depleted, and so has its influence. Hezbollah, which was the military crutch of the Assad regime in its hard days, has become a hunted organization under his successor.

"There is no doubt that we have suffered a great and hard blow, in security and in human terms, one without precedent in the history of the resistance in Lebanon," said Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in a speech on **September 19, 2024**, two days after the pager and radio attack Israel carried out in Lebanon.⁴⁷ Eight days after that speech, Nasrallah himself was killed by the IDF in Operation "New Order," when air force planes bombed the organization's underground headquarters in the Dahiyeh in Beirut.⁴⁸ The man who never stopped boasting of his deep familiarity with Israeli society, and who contemptuously called it a "spider web," did not imagine its daring or the depth of its determination to fight for its life. In

⁴³ See the MEMRI report of December 2, 2025, on "A Conference of Muslim Clerics under the Auspices of Qatar and Turkey: Firm Support for Hamas and Opposition to Its Disarmament."

⁴⁴ For a translation of the full ruling, see <https://tinyurl.com/2s4a6fv5>

⁴⁵ <https://www.mako.co.il/news-military/036814c74a0e1910/Article-22576d90be92391027.htm>

⁴⁶ For more on the ruling and its implications, see the publications of the Forum for Regional Thinking, Van Leer Institute website, <https://www.regthink.org/stop-the-drift/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/byv1sifpc>

⁴⁸ idf.il/nasrallah-elimination

his descent to the depths of the underworld he took with him the “spider-web conception” as well.

The operation the IDF carried out over the months of June to September 2026, which led to the destruction of the fortified and sprawling underground strategic headquarters and infrastructure that Hezbollah had built on the Ali Taher ridge in southern Lebanon, dealt a further blow to the battered organization, military, moral, and political. That even Iran’s threats to respond did not deter Israel from acting added to the scale of the achievement.⁴⁹

The intensity of the criticism of the organization from within the Lebanese system reached new peaks.⁵⁰ Hassan Ezzeddine, a Lebanese member of parliament for Hezbollah, admitted in its wake that Hezbollah will find it hard to return to the standing it had in 2023.⁵¹ The researcher and commentator **Hussain Abdul-Hussain**, a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and a writer on Lebanon and the Arab arena, argued in a sharp column that **Hezbollah has been strategically defeated**, but continues to refuse to acknowledge this and to bear responsibility for the price Lebanon has paid.⁵²

Following the heavy blows Israel inflicted, from Operation “Northern Arrows,” through the killing of Hassan Nasrallah and the organization’s top echelon, to the ceasefire agreements and the framework agreements, the historical conception of the “deterrence equations” that Hezbollah tried to impose since 2006 has been broken. Yet the organization’s political survival and its refusal to disarm prevent a definition of full cognitive defeat. Hezbollah today is deterred, battered, and sunk in self-defense and political survival. For its defeat to become permanent, however, the complete dismantling of the organization’s political and military infrastructure is required, a process that still lies at the heart of a complex intra-Lebanese and international dispute.⁵³

As for Syria, the state’s new political and military leadership understands well the limits of its power. The massive military campaign Israel conducted to destroy the strategic weapons remaining in the country, the IDF’s seizure of commanding terrain on the summit of Mount Hermon, and the clarification of Israel’s “red lines” have fixed in the consciousness of the government in Damascus that confrontation with Israel is not a scenario worth reaching if it wishes to survive.

If in the past cognitive defeat of Syria meant making Assad understand that starting a war would not pay, **today Syrian consciousness is decided by the fear of moves that would lead to further internal collapse**. The new government is deterred by Israel and acts under the constraints of political survival, but mutual suspicion remains high, and Israel is forced to enforce its red lines by military force from time to time in order to preserve that deterrence.

⁴⁹ https://www.mako.co.il/news-military/2026_q3/Article-6706836da9b90a1026.htm

⁵⁰ <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DdL7srVCAYu/>

⁵¹ <https://www.kan.org.il/content/kan-news/defense/1096290/>

⁵² <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/op-eds/2026/09/07/hezbollah-has-lost-now-it-must-admit-it/>

⁵³ <https://www.maariv.co.il/news/world/article-1360674>

Israel's conduct in the Swords of Iron war shook several of its enemies' central basic assumptions about it, not only regarding its determination and its room for action but also regarding the resilience of the Israeli home front.

In a series of opinion articles by **Abdel Moneim Said, a member of the advisory council of the Egyptian Center for Strategic Thought and Studies**, in the newspaper *Asharq Al-Awsat*, and in his appearances on the political commentary programs of the Egyptian networks eXtra News and TEN, he identified two conceptual failures that undid the leaders of Hamas and the Iranian axis of resistance. The first was a failure in assessing the effect of the internal rift in Israeli society. The assumption that a divided Israel would find it hard to cope with an attack on it, and that its military response would be limited or containable, was refuted at the moment of truth. Israeli society closed ranks and displayed a fortitude that surprised the decision-makers in Gaza and Tehran and enabled a powerful, wide-ranging response that changed the face of the region.⁵⁴

The second failure Said identified was the illusion of “unity of the arenas” and the reliance on regional actors. In his words, the axis counted on a flare-up in one arena automatically activating a comprehensive regional front that would defeat Israel. In practice, the leading Arab states chose to protect their own national interests and left Iran and its proxies to cope alone with the blow that fell on them.

One of the central conclusions of an analysis prepared by the **Mada al-Carmel** institute (the Arab Center for Applied Social Research), based in Haifa, and published in September 2026 is that the assumption that a Western, divided society like Israel would collapse under three years of missile attacks proved to be wrong. The data show that Israel's Jewish public displays sustained resilience, supports in its majority the continuation of the military campaigns, and shows a willingness to bear the cost in blood and treasure out of a shared perception of an existential threat, regardless of its degree of satisfaction with the government.⁵⁵

Israeli society has thus proven that it is not fragile or lacking in the capacity to stand up to pressure, as Nasrallah called it in his “spider web” speech.⁵⁶ This society displayed fortitude even after the heavy blow of October 7, stood up well in a prolonged multi-front war, and despite the war and its consequences it delivered impressive performance in economic productivity and in the economy, and it remains determined to fight until its enemies are defeated.

One may assume that these conclusions about Israel also reflect the current thinking of those who remain to lead the axis of resistance, or of other actors in the region, who for understandable reasons do not give it explicit expression.

⁵⁴ <https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=18012024&id=888ff04-8212-475f-acae-7cb03ff8b013>; and “Abdel Moneim Said: The Conflict between Israel and Hamas Is Complex, and Forces Are Trying to Heat Up the Situation,” May 9, 2024 (egypt/details/2024/5/9/2579848); for a list of his articles see <https://english.aawsat.com/writer/dr-abdel-monem-said->

⁵⁵ <https://mada-research.org/storage/PDF/2026/> (Position Paper No. 77, “Position Assessment Papers” series)

⁵⁶ See the detailed Wikipedia entry on this speech.

“The Collapse of the Military Option against Israel, among the Palestinians and the Arabs Alike”

In January 2025, the veteran researcher and political writer Majed Kayali wrote an article whose title supplied the essence of the story: “The Collapse of the Military Option against Israel, among the Palestinians and the Arabs Alike.” In the article, published in the respected magazine *Al Majalla*, he described the crash of “the spider-web illusion” and “the lie and deception of the term ‘unity of the arenas.’” Kayali’s conclusions were far-reaching:

October 7, he assessed, closes the current era in the Palestinian national movement, an era that in his view began with Fatah’s first act of sabotage in 1965, which marked the starting point of the armed Palestinian struggle.

Kayali further assessed that **resistance in the framework of armed struggle has run its course**. In his view, if the October 1973 war marked the end of the military option in the Arab-Israeli conflict on the state level, then “Tufan al-Aqsa” and the war in Gaza, and in particular the severe damage to Hezbollah’s capabilities in Lebanon, **herald the end of the military option in the non-state, or militia, conflict against Israel.**⁵⁷

Here, then, even if the processes have not yet been completed, no little evidence can be found that in the current era, too, Israel can bring about a cognitive change regarding itself among its enemies, rivals, and competitors, whether states or “non-state actors.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ <https://en.majalla.com/taxonomy/term/246141>

⁵⁸ For more, see also the article by Brig. Gen. (res.) Erez Winner and Col. (res.) Prof. Gabi Siboni at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, <https://jiss.org.il/en/siboni-winner-determination-and-resolve-are-required-in-lebanon/>

Not Despair but Hope Is What Feeds Terror and Violence



Arabic graffiti on a house in Kibbutz Be'eri, photographed on October 12, 2023. Photo: Kobi Gideon / GPO

WHILE RECOGNITION OF A PALESTINIAN STATE BY THE WORLD'S STATES EXPANDS, rates of support for the two-state solution among the two direct parties to the conflict are reaching an unprecedented low.

While the international community continues to see it as the preferred framework, **the two-state idea is losing its remaining support on the ground, owing to deep geopolitical, demographic, and security changes.** A series of factors has led to the practical erosion of the idea:

“Even if there are those in the international community who try by every means to revive it, the paradigm of two states living in peace side by side has lost its relevance at this time.”

- **A change of perception in Israel after October 7:** The extreme terrorist attack from the Gaza Strip and the war that followed it fixed, among most of the public and the leadership in Israel, the risks of the existence of a hostile entity in territory saturated with terrorists and weapons, within and next to which lie Jewish communities, infrastructure, and vital Israeli centers. Beyond that, the attack and the war brought Israel's Jewish public back to the roots

of the conflict and strengthened among many the realist approach and the national security significance of settlement, control, and a hold on the ground.

- **An irreversible reality in Judea and Samaria:** The expansion of the settlement enterprise, the construction of dedicated road infrastructure, and the growth of the Israeli population beyond the Green Line have created an Israeli territorial contiguity that makes a physical partition of the land, or the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of residents, very difficult.
- **The Palestinian political and territorial split:** The prolonged disconnect between the Palestinian Authority's administration in Judea and Samaria and Hamas's rule in the Gaza Strip prevents the existence of a unified leadership capable of signing a binding agreement or representing a single political entity.
- **The erosion of the Palestinian Authority's legitimacy:** The Palestinian Authority suffers from deep structural weakness, corruption, and unpopularity on the Palestinian street, which undermines its standing as a stable partner that could enforce order and security on the day after.
- **Total mutual distrust:** The decline in public support for the two-state idea on both sides, alongside the absence of direct and meaningful negotiations for years and a political and international legal struggle, has widened the distance and the distrust between the parties.

In historical perspective, the Palestinian leadership failed to make the transition required from a violent nationalist movement to a functioning and responsible leadership of an autonomous political entity living in peace alongside the State of Israel. The Palestinian leadership invested the bulk of its efforts in an attempt to thwart and dismantle the Zionist project. The Palestinian ethos of resistance and the PLO's patterns of action were copied and replicated into the operating code of the Palestinian Authority.

Even if there are those in the international community who try by every means to revive it, the paradigm of two states living in peace side by side has lost its relevance at this time.

This reality, together with the turning of Israeli attention to other issues, has led the political echelon and the public in Israel to focus on shaping reality on the ground rather than on sterile debates and futile political discourse.

That is not to say that no thinking is taking place on the Palestinian question. Researchers and statesmen alike continue to examine four alternative models to the two-state idea, each of which poses complex challenges of its own:

A. One binational state: The establishment of a single state between the Jordan and the sea with equal rights for all. The idea attracts growing interest in Palestinian discourse but is rejected by the absolute majority in Israel because of the loss of the Jewish majority and the Zionist character of the state.

B. One Jewish state: A cognitive, practical, and political determination that west of the Jordan there is room for only one national self-definition: the Jewish one. Accordingly, there is not, and there will not be, an Arab state in the heart of the Land of Israel that would allow the realization of Arab national aspirations there. Shelving that dream will reduce the motivations

to realize it, and with them the terrorism. The self-government of the Arabs of Judea and Samaria would be divided into six regional municipal administrations, chosen in democratic elections (Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Jericho, Nablus, and Jenin), which would be charged with civil administration, in coordination with Israel and detached from the Palestinian Authority.

C. Confederation: A model proposing two separate sovereign entities (Israeli and Palestinian) with open borders, freedom of movement, and joint management of infrastructure, security, and the economy, without the need for a mass evacuation of population.

D. Conflict management and a prolonged status quo: Continuation of the existing situation, with attempts to lock in settlement and political advantages, as well as economic improvement and the strengthening of local security coordination, but without a comprehensive political solution.

In assessing the prospects of each of the alternatives and analyzing their balance of advantages and disadvantages, two alternatives rank higher than the rest. The first is a response to the Palestinian question within a multilateral regional framework, under the new regional architecture that will take shape. Within the regional system, new spaces of opportunity are emerging for a limited and restrained Palestinian independence, in a configuration that is not necessarily a state as the Palestinians expect, but a loose federative structure of two autonomous provinces without geographic contiguity between them, which could serve as the basis for a future solution in the form of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation. The second alternative is an array of local governments across the Palestinian space on a geographic and identity, tribal, or clan basis.

In any case, the elimination of Hamas as a governing and military entity in the Gaza Strip, and the demilitarization of that territory of all weapons, must be the starting point of every process and every discussion that deals with the Palestinian question.

How to Achieve the Decision? Outlines of the Required Policy



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Donald Trump at the White House after announcing the U.S. peace plan for Gaza, September 29, 2025. Photo: The White House

1 Gaza First: Disarming Hamas, Complete Demilitarization of the Territory, Israeli Security Control, De-radicalization, and the Option of Emigration

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2803, adopted on November 17, 2025, by a majority of 13 states in favor and none opposed (with Russia and China abstaining), gave international force to “the peace plan of U.S. President Donald Trump for Gaza.”

The resolution welcomed the establishment of the “Board of Peace,” the body that will “set the framework, and coordinate funding for, the redevelopment of Gaza,” until such time as “the Palestinian Authority (PA) has satisfactorily completed its reform program” and “can securely and effectively take back control of Gaza.”

The resolution further provided that “after the PA reform program is faithfully carried out and Gaza redevelopment has advanced, the conditions may finally be in place for a credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood.”⁵⁹

⁵⁹ See Security Council Resolution 2803 of November 17, 2025, on the official U.N. website, and the Wikipedia entry “United Nations Security Council Resolution 2803,” <https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

It may be assumed that Israel was forced to agree to this wording in order to advance what was truly important and urgently needed in those days: a comprehensive deal for the release of the hostages then held in the Gaza Strip.

The slippery wording, with its reservations and conditions and without a binding timetable, may attest to Israel's intention to secure an escape hatch for itself. But we have already learned that the international community does not judge the Palestinian Authority as we do for failing to meet its commitments. No less serious is the explicit vision: self-determination and a Palestinian state.

Israel will have to make full use of the wide room for maneuver it was given under the conditions set out, so as not to embark on a path that leads to "Oslo 2.0."

In addition to fully achieving the military objectives that Israel defined for the Gaza Strip, **the State of Israel should have a clear interest in ensuring that the area in which the cruel monster that carried out the October 7 massacre grew up provides eternal testimony to the price that anyone who contemplates attacking Israel will pay.**

This applies both to the reconstruction ideas included in the "Trump plan" and to the demand by part of the Israeli public to renew Israeli settlement in the Gaza Strip.

Gaza after the war will be conclusive testimony to the result of the failed attempt by Hamas, by the Muslim Brotherhood, and by the states that support them to establish an Islamic state in this region. It will be a flashing warning to anyone, anywhere, at any time, who contemplates handing the reins of government to Hamas or to its parent movement, the Muslim Brotherhood.

Such an outcome will complete the cognitive defeat and influence the consciousness of our enemies and of those who wish us ill in the other arenas as well.

A real, practical discussion of the future of this region can be conducted only after the Gaza Strip has been stripped of the weapons in it, including those in Hamas's hands, and after the collapse of Hamas's governing capabilities and its removal from any role in the system of government. Such a discussion will also have no choice but to take into account the positions of the public in Gaza, more than half of which was born into a reality in which Hamas is the government, absorbed the Hamas ideology in educational institutions controlled by Hamas, consumed Hamas's media, prayed in Hamas's mosques, and was wrapped from head to toe in Hamas propaganda.

It is hard to be optimistic about the chances of bringing about a significant cognitive turnaround in such a public in the foreseeable future. The case of Gaza is unlike other cases we have experienced through history in which the international community's de-radicalization efforts in various states or publics met with success. First, because the Hamas ideology is woven into the religious identity of Hamas's supporters. Second, given the high proportion of Hamas supporters within this public, they will continue to preserve the Hamas ideology and to win converts to it among the rest of the public. Third, because this public will continue to live in a region with a dominant presence of the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, and in an open environment through

which that ideology will continue to flow via the media and by other means in a way that offsets the effect of counter-efforts.

Outlawing Hamas, in the Palestinian Authority as well, is essential as a first step toward delegitimizing this terrorist organization, and all the more so toward preventing its participation in elections for the Palestinian institutions, whether under its own name, under cover names, or in partnership with others.

In any case, in the circumstances described here, any attempt to define a comprehensive action plan for the Gaza Strip, with binding timetables, will amount to lip service. Leaders will have to curb their inclination to present a rosy vision and to market success, even imaginary success, in advancing toward it. It is better to look at reality with open eyes, to recognize the scale of the challenge, to remember that in 4,000 years of existence the Gaza Strip has known no respite from struggles, conquests, and geopolitical upheavals, and to understand the necessity of dismantling Hamas, completely demilitarizing the territory, maintaining Israeli security control, and enabling emigration for those who want it and are at present forced against their will to remain inside Gaza.

2 Elections in the Palestinian Authority: Too Early and Too Dangerous

The holding of elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (scheduled date: November 28, 2026), regardless of their results, is liable to bring heavy pressure on Israel to transfer control of Gaza, and even the task of collecting weapons, to the “new” Palestinian Authority at a time when Hamas is still the central power in the Strip, effectively controls the various apparatuses, and its people are expected to be part of the systems of that same “new Palestinian Authority.”

Contrary to the prevailing view, the danger in holding the Palestinian elections lies not only in the identity of the winners at the ballot box or in the balance of party power that will emerge the day after, but in the international expectation that will be created in their wake. The political pressure that will envelop Jerusalem will focus on a single demand: “hand over the keys.”

The Western illusion and the historical lesson

The Western illusion, which sees the ballot box as everything, tends to ignore the substance, the content, and the internal dynamics in the areas where elections are held. Anyone seeking a fresh example can easily find it in the new Syria, where a pseudo-democratic election process and a tailored suit managed to cover up the crimes of the jihadist from Damascus. Egypt, our neighbor to the south, also experienced this firsthand in June 2012 with the election to the presidency of Mohamed Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood man. The White House then hastened to congratulate the victory and dramatically defined the event as “a milestone in Egypt’s fair transition to democracy.”

That happened when, in 2006, the United States applied heavy pressure to hold elections for the Palestinian parliament. A proper procedural process, they then believed, would bring stability and democratization. There is no need to elaborate on the destructive consequences of those elections.

“The Palestinian Authority has never once met the tests set for it, yet it has always won considerate and lenient judgment from the international community.”

This time too, the very holding of elections will confer a stamp of international *kashrut* on an entity in which nothing substantive has changed. An “elected” or “renewed” Palestinian Authority will immediately be presented as an entirely legitimate partner for managing Gaza’s affairs, and, absurdly, it may even be presented as the body to be charged with collecting the weapons and dismantling Hamas.

The political trap disguised as reform

The groundwork for this was already laid in the Security Council resolution of last November that adopted the “Trump plan.” The resolution welcomed the establishment of the Board of Peace and endorsed its mandate: managing the framework and funding for the redevelopment of Gaza, **until such time as “the Palestinian Authority (PA) has satisfactorily completed its reform program” and “can securely and effectively take back control of Gaza.”** It further provided that **“after the PA reform program is faithfully carried out and Gaza redevelopment has advanced, the conditions may finally be in place for a credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood.”**⁶⁰

As noted above, it may be assessed that Israel was forced to agree to this wording in order to advance what was important and urgently needed in those days: a comprehensive deal for the release of the hostages held in the Gaza Strip. The slippery wording, packed with reservations and conditions and without a binding timetable, may attest to its intention to secure an escape hatch for itself.

The Palestinian Authority has never once met the tests set for it, yet it has always won considerate and lenient judgment from the international community. There is no reason to assume that this time will be different. In days when French President Emmanuel Macron declares from the U.N. podium that “Hamas never operated in the West Bank,”⁶¹ only two days after the murder by a Hamas terrorist of an Israeli Jew with French citizenship who lived in Judea and Samaria,⁶² there is no need to guess which side he will choose in any dispute between Israel and the Palestinians. **The holding of the elections in the Palestinian Authority will be**

⁶⁰ See Security Council Resolution 2803 of November 17, 2025, on the official UN website, and the Wikipedia entry “United Nations Security Council Resolution 2803,” <https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

⁶¹ <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/syrnw8eczx>

⁶² <https://www.maariv.co.il/breaking-news/article-1369733>

the step that the international community will want to present as the PA's reform. That is the card it will use in pressuring Israel to transfer control of Gaza to the Authority and even to entrust it, with all the absurdity involved, with dismantling Hamas and collecting the weapons, and to withdraw the IDF's forces from the Strip.

The elections, which in the eyes of the international community are supposed to symbolize processes of change and the start of a new path, are liable not only to save Hamas but even to preserve its *de facto* standing as the strongest power in the Strip—and that is before we have addressed the risks in Judea and Samaria.

In the Palestinian camp, some assess that the Authority's chairman, Abu Mazen, will in the end postpone the elections anyway and lay the blame on Israel, whether because of its refusal to allow voting in eastern Jerusalem or because of IDF activity in the Strip. For that reason, voices can be heard in Israel recommending "letting Abu Mazen pull the chestnuts out of the fire for us" so that we do not pay the political price for our opposition.

But history teaches otherwise. In 2006, too, Abu Mazen had many good reasons to postpone the elections. The pressures to hold them overcame him, even at the price of the defeat that handed Gaza to Hamas. Therefore, even if it is required to pay certain prices for it, it will be right for the government of Israel to be the one standing at the front, voicing a principled and sane position, without looking for excuses and without hiding behind anyone's back. Israel cannot afford another failed experiment in the 2006 mold.

3 A New Division of the Powers of Control in Practice: Municipal Administration to the Palestinians, Security Administration in Israeli Hands Only!

Encourage the establishment of municipal administrations on a district model, which would receive the powers for full civil administration within their jurisdictions, including in the fields of economic development and prosperity, education and society, and maintaining law, order, and public safety, but without security powers. These administrations would maintain economic and other reciprocal relations among themselves and between themselves and the various authorities in the State of Israel.

The transition from the "Oslo conception" to this conception need not be carried out at a stroke, and it does not necessarily involve military confrontation. Above all, it requires an internal decision by the political echelon in Israel that includes three main components:

A. Do not deepen Israel's commitment to the "Oslo framework," whether through agreement to political plans that require it and even declare an intention to pave a path to a "Palestinian state," such as the "15-point framework" presented by the "Board of Peace,"⁶³ or

⁶³ Itamar Eichner, "The Board of Peace's 15-Point Framework for Gaza Was Presented at the UN, and Tempers Are Flaring," *Ynet*, May 22, 2026.

through agreement to elections for the Palestinian institutions, with implicit advance recognition of their results.

B. Exploit opportunities for a gradual exit from the commitments to the “Oslo framework,” for example by encouraging the “Hebron sheikhs’ initiative” to establish an independent district that would manage municipal affairs detached from the Palestinian Authority, while maintaining direct relations with the Israeli authorities; by refraining from permits for the supply of ammunition or the maintenance of the weapons of the Palestinian security apparatuses; by ending the Israeli guarantees to the Israeli correspondent banks that enable the clearing of the PA’s funds and the like; and also by making use of Abu Mazen’s departure from us when his day comes. Today, the Israeli system acts in the opposite way and in practice perpetuates the Israeli commitment to the “Oslo framework.”

C. Entrust the security missions to Israeli hands without “outsourcing.” That is: give priority to Israeli activity over the operation of the Palestinian apparatuses (contrary to the approach that Israel will act only when the Palestinian apparatuses do not do what is expected of them). In this way Israeli dependence on the Palestinians’ motivation and capabilities will be removed entirely. This matter will no longer be a lever of pressure on Israel, and most important of all: the security response will be better and will also include Israeli security control and presence, similar to the period after “Defensive Shield” and to the operations the IDF has carried out in the last two years in the refugee camps of northern Samaria.

4 Stop Giving the “Palestinian Authority” a Pass

Over the years, the Palestinian Authority has violated nearly every one of its commitments under the Oslo Accords. The international community showed understanding for this and demanded that Israel show a similar attitude, using various arguments along the lines of “the Authority is still in the process of being built,” “the Authority is weak, let it get stronger,” “the internal challenges are complex,” and so on. Over the years Israel came to terms with this reality. It seems to have contented itself with the fact that the “Authority” manages civil affairs, does not use its apparatuses to carry out acts of terror, and maintains civil and security coordination with Israel at various levels.

The Palestinian Authority continued to enjoy all the benefits of the Oslo Accords without paying a price for its non-compliance with the agreements. The national order of priorities, which required turning attention to other issues, and the Israeli response to the challenges of terrorism in Judea and Samaria pushed the handling of the “problems” the Palestinian Authority created to a low place. The Israeli approach was interpreted by the Palestinian leadership itself as Israeli acceptance of this reality. The contrast between Hamas’s rule in the Gaza Strip and that of Ramallah contributed to the latter’s positioning in world public opinion as a moderate actor compared with the alternative, and invited pressure on Israel not only to ignore the “violations” but even to “strengthen Abu Mazen.”

Even if the hope of bringing the Palestinian Authority to meet its commitments has vanished, Israel must consistently present the violations and demand their correction. This is essential in order to establish legitimacy for its steps, including those recommended above. **It is also a central component of Israel's public diplomacy and legal policy**, especially in light of the legal and political campaign the PA is waging against Israel in international forums such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

5 Reducing Turkish and Qatari Involvement

Qatar and Turkey work to weaken Israel and to protect Palestinian interests through political support, humanitarian funding, the provision of refuge to the Hamas leadership, and the management of international mediation efforts that serve to preserve Palestinian power. The definition of “the Palestinian interest” in the eyes of the two states is largely identified with strengthening the Hamas movement and the Islamist current, out of a conception that they are the authentic representatives of the Palestinian struggle.

Under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's leadership, Turkey pursues a firm and active ideological line in support of the Palestinian struggle, which includes:

- **Economic boycott and lawfare:** Turkey has halted trade with Israel entirely and joined international suits (such as at the ICJ in The Hague) in order to apply legal and political pressure to stop Israel's fighting.
- **Strengthening the Palestinian and Muslim hold on Jerusalem:** The Turkish government's TİKA agency is its central executive arm in this regard. It funds projects to rehabilitate and renovate buildings in the Old City, the purchase of equipment for Muslim schools, support for populations with disabilities, and the funding of Palestinian cultural institutions. Turkey also works to undermine the status quo on the Temple Mount, consistently tries to dislodge Jordan from its historical and legal standing as the waqf responsible for the holy places, encourages the mass arrival of groups of Turkish tourists to the Temple Mount, with a conspicuous show of presence on the mosque plaza, and creates deliberate friction with the Israeli security forces.
- **Providing refuge and moving Hamas's activities into its territory:** Following pressure on Qatar and targeted strikes, Turkey has become the central home base of the Hamas leadership. It allows them to hold official meetings, organize internal elections for the political bureau, and move cyber and planning departments into its territory.
- **Fortifying the operational arm in Judea and Samaria:** Turkey turns a blind eye to (and even implicitly enables) the activity of Hamas's “West Bank headquarters” from its territory, which directs the transfer of funds, weapons, and means into the territories of Judea and Samaria.

- **Support and backing from Islamic institutions**, such as we saw at the conference of religious scholars held in Istanbul.⁶⁴
- **A role in the “day after”**: Turkey is working with the Trump administration and the international community to become part of the official task force that will administer and rebuild Gaza, while opposing the complete disarmament of Hamas.

As for Qatar, it leverages its economic wealth and its political standing to assist the Palestinians in their struggle, along four central axes:

- **International mediation that prevents Hamas’s collapse**: Qatar serves as a central mediator (alongside the United States and Egypt) in the ceasefire negotiations. It works devotedly to secure agreements that include an Israeli withdrawal, the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, and the preservation of Palestinian rule.
- **A media safety net and legitimacy**: Through the Al Jazeera network, Qatar gives the Palestinians a broad global public echo, amplifies the Palestinian narrative, and applies heavy international pressure on Israel.
- **Patronage of religious frameworks that supply legitimacy to the Muslim Brotherhood line**, such as the “International Union of Muslim Scholars.”
- **Funding**, directly from state funds or through “charitable foundations.”

Above all, Israel should act to limit the role of Turkey and Qatar in arrangements that give them legitimacy to intervene and to exert influence, including by opposing their inclusion in international task forces, stabilization forces, or supervisory mechanisms for the Gaza Strip.

Israel should prefer the United Arab Emirates over them as a mediator, to the extent that one is needed, and give priority to local Palestinian actors who are not identified with Qatar or Turkey in managing civil life and in distributing humanitarian aid on the ground.

Israel needs to conduct a systematic, low-media-profile campaign against the institutional presence or influence of Turkish and Qatari actors in matters concerning Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. A series of further actions can be identified whose execution would serve the Israeli interest in reducing this influence on Palestinian issues. This is not the place to detail them. What is clear is that Israel needs a coordinated plan with a defined objective that integrates political, security, and preventive measures, supported by a multi-agency executive mechanism responsible for implementation.

⁶⁴ Nadav Shragai, “Under Turkish Auspices: The Conference That Encourages Another Massacre against Israel,” *Israel Hayom*, July 17, 2025.

6 Removing UNRWA from the Palestinian Arena⁶⁵

At the heart of the Israeli-Arab conflict stands the Arab, and especially the Palestinian, rejection of the Jews' right to a sovereign state in their historical homeland. This rejection is expressed in many ways, but the most significant of them are the distorted registration of millions of Arabs as "Palestine refugees" for five generations now, and support for their belief that they have a right to settle in Israel in the name of the idea of "return." All of this is enabled by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which has worked for nearly eight decades to fuel, fund, and lend a legitimate cover to the Arab idea. Every attempt to reach a settlement in the Middle East has shattered in the past against the sweeping ideology that unites the Arabs of Gaza, the West Bank, and millions in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and around the world around continuing opposition to the existence of sovereignty for the Jewish people within any borders in the Land of Israel. Thus in Lebanon about half a million Arabs are registered as "Palestine refugees." The overwhelming majority of them were born and educated in Lebanon and never fled to it from a war. A population census taken a few years ago showed that about two-thirds of them had left Lebanon, and most likely had already obtained citizenship in other countries. Such a situation should have ended their refugee status, but not so for "Palestine refugees," whose registration is a political act.

In Syria about half a million "Palestine refugees" are registered, who also, in their overwhelming majority, were born and educated in Syria and did not flee to it from a war. Syria's treatment of the Palestinians was more favorable, and they can be seen as having in practice been naturalized in Syria.

Some 2.5 million Jordanians who were born and educated in Jordan, and who are moreover Jordanian citizens, are registered with UNRWA as "Palestine refugees."

More than two-thirds of the residents of the Gaza Strip continue to be registered as "Palestine refugees," despite the fact that they were born and educated in Gaza and never left it. An entire apparatus continues to convey to them the message that they have a "right of return" into the State of Israel.

Israel must insist on the complete erasure of the Arabs of the Palestinian Authority from UNRWA's records. Whoever lives between the river and the sea is not a "Palestine refugee." Moreover, whoever lives under the Palestinian Authority, which is constantly engaged in obtaining recognition as the "State of Palestine," and even enjoys such recognition from 161 of the world's states, is not a "Palestine refugee." Any arrangement, promise, or declaration that would allow the Authority to continue receiving funding from the West while it continues to catalogue its residents and citizens as "Palestine refugees" will contribute nothing to peace. On the contrary, they will continue to fuel the Palestinianism that has prevented any settlement for

⁶⁵ Based on an article by Adi Schwartz of the Misgav Institute for National Security, written with Einat Wilf, "Not Just Closing UNRWA: The Solution to the Palestinian Refugee Problem," Misgav Institute for National Security website, July 10, 2025, <https://www.misgavins.org/schwartz-the-solution-to-the-palestinian-refugee-problem/>

a hundred years now. The Palestinian Authority must also be required to recognize officially that no one has a “right of return” to the territory of the State of Israel.

The fight against this lie runs through the removal of UNRWA from the regional arena. It is the mechanism that preserves the “right of return”; it is the mechanism that preserves the Palestinian hope.

7 Settlement Momentum in Judea and Samaria: Facts on the Ground Change Consciousness

In an article published by Bezalel Smotrich in the journal *Hashiloach* in September 2017 under the title “Israel’s Decisive Plan: The Key to Peace Lies with the Right,” he identified the central role of Jewish settlement as a component in the cognitive, and not only the practical, defeat of the Palestinians. He wrote:

This stage will be realized via a political-legal act of imposing sovereignty on all Judea and Samaria, and with concurrent acts of settlement: the establishment of cities and towns, the laying down of infrastructure as is customary in ‘little’ Israel and the encouragement of tens and hundreds of thousands of residents to come live in Judea and Samaria. In this way a clear and irreversible reality on the ground can be created within a few years.

Nothing would have a greater and deeper effect on the consciousness of the Arabs of Judea and Samaria, deflating their illusions of a Palestinian state and demonstrating the impossibility of establishing another Arab state west of the Jordan. Facts on the ground deflate aspirations and defeat ambitions. Let the settlement blocs attest to this.⁶⁶

During the term of the current government, starting at the end of 2022, an unprecedented leap has been recorded in the establishment, approval, and regularization of communities, outposts, and agricultural farms in Judea and Samaria. Between 102 and 104 communities and outposts have been approved by the cabinet and the government for establishment or official regularization. Of these, 34 are new communities (24 entirely new communities and 10 veteran outposts that were regularized).⁶⁷

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Housing has advanced and is publishing marketing tenders for the construction of **thousands of housing units in the E-1 area** (also called “Mevaseret Adumim” in the ministry’s plans), an area of about 12 square kilometers **located between eastern Jerusalem and Ma’ale Adumim** that has been at the heart of an extensive political and security controversy for decades. The development of the area is meant to create a secure Israeli settlement continuum between Jerusalem and Ma’ale Adumim and to strengthen Israel’s hold on Highway 1, the main road leading east toward the Jordan Valley. As the project’s opponents

⁶⁶ Bezalel Smotrich, “Israel’s Decisive Plan: The Key to Peace Lies with the Right,” *Hashiloach*, No. 6, September 17, 2017 (English translation on the Hashiloach website).

⁶⁷ Matan Golan, “103 Nails on the Map: How the Government Is Burying the Two-State Solution in a Systematic, Planned Move,” *Haaretz*, June 30, 2026.

argue, it could also prevent the territorial contiguity of “the future Palestinian state” and sever the northern part of the Palestinian territory in Judea and Samaria from its south.

“Jewish settlement, which fixes a new and irreversible reality in the territories of Judea and Samaria, is the central component in the cognitive defeat of the Palestinians.”

It is further worth noting, on the subject of Jewish settlement, that as of August 2026 **about 130 agricultural farms and herding farms** operate in Judea and Samaria, controlling a cumulative grazing area of more than a million dunams (state land and survey land).

In addition to these, in the last two and a half years **about 30 new outposts and herding farms** have been established (some of them even operating as pioneers in Area B) in order to cut off the continuum of the Palestinian takeover.⁶⁸

FIGURE 5

Settlement momentum in Judea and Samaria



Sources: Haaretz, June 30, 2026 (note 66); farm figures as stated in the paper. As cited in the paper.

The question of establishing Israeli agricultural and herding farms in open areas in Areas A and B is directly bound up with the position of the government of Israel toward the “Oslo Accords” and the “Palestinian Authority,” which by virtue of those agreements received civil authority in those areas (and security authority in Area A as well). The current government has indeed made clear that a Palestinian state will not be established, but on the other hand it has not abandoned its commitment to the “Oslo Accords,” apparently out of apprehension about the costs of such a decision.

It is easy to identify the security advantages inherent in the establishment of such farms in the open areas, especially in a situation of continuing uncertainty like the one we are in, and in light of the trends in the Palestinian population described at length in the previous chapters. It may be assumed that these trends in the Palestinian system, and further processes in Israel and in the international system, will narrow the government’s room for maneuver and will no longer allow it to keep straddling the fence. Then it will be required to declare its policy.

⁶⁸ Matan Golan, “With the Government’s Encouragement and the Army’s Protection, Settlers Are Penetrating Area B and Establishing a Foothold,” *Haaretz*, August 26, 2026.

Despite their political implications, it will be right to see the agricultural farms as a central tool for protecting the open spaces and for preserving a continuous Israeli presence on the ground, which will also guarantee an appropriate security presence.

Jewish settlement, which fixes a new and irreversible reality in the territories of Judea and Samaria, is the central component in the cognitive defeat of the Palestinians. The risks this approach creates, and its negative effects on the Palestinians' motivation to act against Israel politically, legally, and in the security sphere must in no way be ignored. It is also hard to determine the boiling point at which the Palestinian Authority might use its apparatuses, its means, and its residents to conduct a broad struggle, armed or combined (popular and armed), against Israel. That does not mean one should flinch or retreat because of it. It mainly requires appropriate preparation in every field, especially the security field.

8 Deepening the Separation between the “Palestinian Authority” and Israel’s Arab Citizens

A. The “family unification” procedure: Palestinian seepage into Israel, damage for generations, and the “right of return” realized in practice

About 20 years ago, I took part in one of the routine working meetings of the late Prime Minister Ariel Sharon with the head of the Shin Bet at the time, Avi Dichter, who was my superior in those days. The meeting took place at the “Villa” in the Kirya compound in Tel Aviv, and the military secretary of the time, Maj. Gen. Yoav Gallant, also took part.

Dichter and I presented data on the scale of the residency permits Israel grants to Palestinians and foreign nationals under applications for family unification. The prime minister was stunned by the dimensions of the phenomenon. “This cannot go on,” he ruled, and instructed that a response be formulated, together with the Ministries of the Interior and Justice.

The “Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law,” which was amended as a temporary order in 2003 and has been consistently extended every year since,⁶⁹ was supposed to reduce the phenomenon. It limited the possibility of granting Palestinians the status of Israeli residency and residence permits in Israel by way of family unification.

The main foundation on which the law rested was the security argument. It was easy to point to the high share, in terrorist activity, of those who received residency this way or of their children (the “second generation” of family unification), compared with Israel’s Arab citizens.

⁶⁹ The law is currently in force until March 2027.

“Human rights are not a prescription for national suicide”

The phenomenon stood out sharply in the suicide bombings of the Second Intifada period, but it continued in the years that followed, down to the present day. The “family unification” population is involved in terrorism at a rate out of all proportion to its share of the Arab population.

The High Court of Justice justices who rejected the petitions against the law held that in the reality prevailing in Israel, its infringement of constitutional rights is proportionate. “Human rights are not a prescription for national suicide,” Justice Asher Grunis wrote in his ruling.⁷⁰ Justices Elyakim Rubinstein and Miriam Naor, who joined him, made clear that the right to family life is indeed constitutional, but its realization need not take place specifically within the territory of the State of Israel.⁷¹

Over the years, however, the holes in the sieve through which residency applications were examined widened: the scope of the restrictions narrowed and the number of approvals gradually rose.

In practice, a route was created for the realization in practice of the “right of return,” in a way that affects demography, security, and the delicate fabric of relations between Israel’s Arab citizens and the State of Israel and its authorities.

Many among the family-unification population continue to maintain ties with their areas of origin in the territories of Judea and Samaria or in the Gaza Strip. Life in Israel has not erased their attachment to those areas. They are attuned to what happens there, emotionally involved, influenced, and, regrettably, also influencing their current surroundings.

In a follow-up report by the State Comptroller on aspects of governance in the Negev,⁷² in April 2026, he warned that against the background of processes of “Palestinization,” and the fact that more and more Bedouin men are marrying Palestinian women, many Bedouin in the Negev feel a closer attachment to Palestinian society than to the State of Israel.

The need of the hour is to realize the original purpose of the Citizenship Law and to halt the granting of residency permits. Alongside this, it is right to remove economic incentives, step up enforcement, apply administrative sanctions, and stiffen criminal penalties. Curbing the phenomenon will serve not only Israel’s national security but also the aspiration of many of its Arab citizens, who are troubled by the radicalization among them and suffer from its destructive consequences.

B. Palestinians residing illegally in Israel

The family-unification population is not alone in this. Palestinians residing in Israel illegally are employed, and at times live, in Arab communities or in the mixed cities, and they contribute to

⁷⁰ Aviad Glickman, “Green Light: High Court Rejects Petitions against the ‘Citizenship Law,’” *Ynet*, January 11, 2012.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² “Aspects of Governance in the Negev: Expanded Follow-up Audit,” State Comptroller website, April 28, 2026.

the processes of Palestinization. The expansion of trade and labor ties between Israel and Judea and Samaria before October 7, and lax enforcement on this issue, have brought about a marked increase in their number. It is essential to renew the efforts to curb this phenomenon.

C. Studies in Judea and Samaria

A report published by the Chief Economist's Division of the Ministry of Finance in January 2024⁷³ noted that in the last decade a sharp rise was recorded in the number of young people from Arab society in Israel turning to study at institutions of higher education in the Palestinian Authority. Thus, in 2017 about 7,600 Israeli Arabs studied at Palestinian institutions, more than 10 times the level recorded in 2010, then about 620. At the same time, it was reported that in recent years this trend has reversed: between 2017 and 2020 a decline was recorded in the number of Arab students studying in the Palestinian Authority, to about 6,900. In parallel, a rise of a similar order of magnitude was recorded in the share of the relevant age cohort entering Israel's higher education system.

D. Who teaches in Arab education in Israel?

A report written by the Knesset Research and Information Center in February 2024 on the subject of "New Teachers in the Education System Holding Bachelor's Degrees from Institutions in the Palestinian Authority"⁷⁴ noted that in the years 2010 to 2023, 30,339 new Arab teachers entered teaching in Arab education in Israel, of whom 4,920 held bachelor's degrees from foreign institutions (about 16 percent of the new teachers in Arab education in those years). **About 70 percent of the new teachers holding bachelor's degrees from foreign institutions (3,447 teachers) received their degrees from institutions in the Palestinian Authority**, and they made up about 11.5 percent of the new teachers who entered teaching in Arab education in 2010 to 2023. It further emerges that over the years presented there was an uneven rise in the number of new teachers holding bachelor's degrees from institutions in the Palestinian Authority who entered teaching in Arab education, as well as an uneven rise in their share of all new Arab teachers entering teaching in Arab education (about 15.5 percent in 2023, compared with about 5 percent in 2010). There is no need to belabor the implications of this reality. While the official State of Israel complains of the hostility, animosity, and incitement in the Palestinian Authority's educational institutions, it may be enabling their import into the institutions of Arab education in Israel by the route described here.

⁷³ weekly_economic_review_periodic-review-21012024.pdf, of January 17, 2024.

⁷⁴ Asaf Weininger, "New Teachers in the Education System Holding Bachelor's Degrees from Institutions in the Palestinian Authority," Knesset Research and Information Center, February 5, 2024.

FIGURE 6**Teachers trained in the Palestinian Authority in Israel's Arab schools****SHARE OF NEW ARAB TEACHERS WITH PA DEGREES****2010**

about 5%

5%**2023**

about 15.5%

15.5%**3,447**of 30,339 new Arab teachers in 2010
to 2023 held PA degrees: about 11.5%

Source: Knesset Research and Information Center, February 2024 (note 73), as cited in the paper.

The common denominator of the three subjects in this chapter is that, for the most part, the damage from the phenomena described is not immediate. That is why no drastic steps have been taken so far to prevent them. The legal and bureaucratic complexity has contributed to this as well. Like chronic diseases that develop slowly, and often cause no pain or noticeable symptoms for years, they can cause cumulative and irreversible damage. It bears emphasizing that this is not a decree of fate.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion: There Is No Shortcut to Deep Change



IDF paratroopers in a Hamas tunnel shaft in the Gaza Strip, July 20, 2014. Photo: Israel Defense Forces

ISRAEL HAS NOT GIVEN UP ITS ASPIRATION TO PEACE, BUT IT IS NO LONGER WILLING to indulge in illusions of peace, to pay prices, or “to embark on political moves in order to wean itself off the perpetual war.”⁷⁵

In this paper we have sought to argue that the full achievement of the objectives Israel defined for the war is necessary but not sufficient to guarantee fundamental change. For that, a cognitive defeat is required as well. Achieving it is not easy, but neither is it unattainable. Signs from the various arenas of the campaign give grounds for optimism on this score. In this paper we have presented directions and milestones in the process of achieving it.

There will be no chance of a sustainable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as long as there is no deep Palestinian recognition of Israel’s right to a Jewish nation-state and of the futility of the struggle and confrontation with it. Israel’s achievements in the war have cracked the Palestinian ethos of victory, but the Palestinians’ hope of reversing the trend remains intact. The broad international recognition of a Palestinian state, and the political initiatives around the Gaza Strip that bring the Palestinian Authority into it through the back door and seek to pave an agreed path to a Palestinian state, strengthen their hope.

⁷⁵ This sentence was written in a different context by Ofer Shelah, in his article “Not Counting the Cost: Security, Security, Security, Security, Security, Security,” published in *Haaretz* on September 1, 2026.

Whoever assesses that the continuing campaign against Iran will take the Palestinian question off the agenda may be proven wrong. In the regional system, actors are waiting for an opportune moment to accelerate engagement with it. The link Saudi Arabia has created between its agreement to normalization with Israel and the opening of a political channel for discussing a Palestinian state is only one example. Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and other states are stirring the Palestinian pot and see the reality in Gaza as an opportunity to renew engagement with the Palestinian state. The pressures on Israel will come, and not long from now. Israel had better be ready.

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Photo: U.S. Embassy Jerusalem

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