Time to Abandon the Two State Paradigm and Move to Localized Self-Rule under Israeli Sovereignty

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Contrary to the claims of the current wave of states who seek to recognize the existence of a fictitious "State of Palestine," the Palestinians are in fact both undeserving and incapable of sovereign independence. The current political circus is however a sign that it is time to rethink the status quo and consider alternative arrangements for localized political self-rule

Gaza, May 2023. The key is a symbol for Arab houses supposedly left behind in Israel in 1948 (Shutterstock: Anas-Mohammed)

Executive Summary

- The Palestinians, divided and chronically rejectionist, have neither built viable institutions nor embraced peace. They must bear responsibility for their actions and poor decisions over the past century, prioritizing violent opposition to Israel over numerous offers for statehood.

- The PA is corrupt, unpopular, and financially dysfunctional, and continues to promote incitement and terror incentives and to educate the next generation in hatred and opposition toward Israel.

- The October 7 atrocities underscored that Palestinian statehood poses an existential danger to Israel. Given Judea and Samaria's strategic terrain, ceding security control would invite an even more extreme replay of October 7 and a severe rocket threat.

- A Palestinian state would constitute a first-order geopolitical disaster for moderate Arab states in the region, and for free nations around the world. It would align itself with America's greatest adversaries worldwide, would be an easy target for takeover by Islamist movements, and would destabilize U.S.-aligned Arab states in the region, including Jordan and Egypt.

- The most prudent alternative is localized self-governance for Palestinians as a permanent arrangement. Not an independent state with centralized authority, but a decentralization of control and self-administration at the municipal level. Local self-governance is the alternative to the failed model of the Oslo era, would increase accountability, and offer the best chance for Israeli security alongside a freer, more prosperous Palestinian society.

Introduction[1]

In recent months, France and several other nations have declared their intention to recognize a Palestinian state, invoking the principle of national self-determination. In response, Israeli officials have emphasized that this would be a reward for terror and incentivize further October 7th-like attacks. Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar said that unilateral recognition of an "fictional Palestinian state… will not bring peace, security and stability in our region closer — but the opposite: they only push them

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[1] A previous version of this article was published in Hebrew in *Hashiloach – An Israeli Journal for Thought and Policy,* September 2025.

further away," emphasizing that the path to peace is through direct negotiations and not external political coercion.

He is, of course, correct but the problem is much more fundamental than timing. If October 7th is to have any impact on the future of the Palestinian national movement, it's not that we must wait a bit longer before returning to the failed idea of Palestinian sovereignty. The proper response is that we must close that door once and for all, and instead advance alternative arrangements of decentralized self-government, conditional upon the abandonment of support for terror, education for peace, and an end to the perpetual refugee status.

The current Palestinian Authority (PA) regime simply cannot foster the growth of a society that desires life and peace with the Jewish State, nor is it capable of cultivating leaders who might seek such a future in coming generations.

For more than thirty years, American policymakers and European governments have invested immense diplomatic capital pursuing the dream of a two-state solution. From the Oslo Accords in the 1990s, through the Annapolis Conference in 2007, to Secretary of State John Kerry's negotiations in 2013–14, each effort was met not with compromise, but with rejection or violence. The devastating Hamas massacre of October 7, 2023, made clear to Israelis that the danger of granting sovereignty to a hostile Palestinian entity is not theoretical; it is existential.

The lesson is not that the world must wait for a better Palestinian leadership to appear, but that the very framework of Palestinian sovereignty is fatally flawed. The time has come for the world to acknowledge what Israelis across the political spectrum have already concluded: the two-state paradigm has failed.

At some point, the door must close. Only by closing it decisively can we begin to explore alternative political arrangements that provide Palestinians meaningful self-governance without endangering Israel's survival, destabilizing Jordan and Egypt, or handing a victory to Iran and its proxies.

Not every national community in the world today lives under conditions of full political sovereignty. And when compared with the other candidates, Palestinians should be last in line. Considered in this context, the very idea of a "State of Palestine" should be recognized as one of the most unjust initiatives of the second half of the twentieth century.

But not only would it be unjust, if an independent Palestinian state were to be established, it would constitute a first-order geopolitical disaster: for Israel, for the moderate Arab states in the region, and for free nations around the world. This must not be allowed to happen. Here's why.

The Right to Sovereignty Is Not Absolute

The current world order of nation-states is built upon the ruins of the previous organizing principle of empires. According to the imperial order, the rulers of a strong nation were entitled to expand across the globe and govern many different ethnic groups. Within that system, there was no necessity that the boundaries of political rule should coincide with the areas inhabited by any particular national community. An empire could accommodate multiples national communities within its realm.

However, world order underwent a profound transformation following the victory of the Protestant states and allies in the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648). The Peace of Westphalia, which ended the war, enshrined for the first time the organizing principle of nationalism. In contrast to imperialism, this principle held that every national community ought to govern itself and live alongside other national societies without seeking to rule over them.[2] Over time, this idea developed into a comprehensive world order based on sovereign nation-states. A new norm was established: territorial borders of states should, as much as possible, align with the geographic areas inhabited by national communities.

Yet, like every ideal, it is clear that the principle of congruence between borders and national communities cannot be fully implemented. Just as individual rights within states must sometimes yield to one another or to broader public interests, so too - indeed, all the more so - must the claims of national groups in the international arena.

There is simply no way to draw the world's borders in a manner that fulfills every demand for self-determination by all national communities.[3] Any attempt to do so would result in endless wars to either shift borders in order to include certain populations within their nation-state, or alternatively in massive, forced population transfers to align populations with state boundaries.

Moreover, many national communities are simply incapable of sustaining themselves within the framework of a fully sovereign state. This may be for numerous reasons, including weak national cohesion, internal conflicts, inability to

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[2] Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in sovereignty*, Princeton University Press, 2010; Yoram Hazony, *The virtue of nationalism*, Basic Books, 2018.

[3] David Miller, *On nationality*, Oxford University Press, 1995, 108; Ellie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, Hutchinson University Library, 1966; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Cornell university Press, 1983, 2.

bear the security and economic burdens of full political independence, lack of the geographical conditions required for a viable state, and more.

In practice, then, despite the popularity of the phrase "right to national self-determination," only a small fraction of the world's national communities actually live under conditions of full political independence. All the rest exist either as minorities within another community's nation-state, or as autonomous entities with various political arrangements within a larger sovereign state.

Today, there are 193 fully recognized member states in the United Nations, while the number of national communities in the world is estimated at around 9,000, of which more than 400 possess sufficient national cohesion to seek a greater degree of self-government.[4]

Ideals are important, and it is therefore appropriate to follow the general principle that, whenever possible, every national community should build institutions that allow it to make collective decisions on matters of major public concern to its members. However, the claim that the ideal of national self-determination means that there exists an absolute right to a sovereign state is greatly weakened by the fact that there is no practical way to implement it, or when exercising it would have clearly catastrophic consequences.

The first point to recognize, then, is that no national community has an absolute right to live under conditions of full political sovereignty, neither in theory nor in practice. Not every nation can find its expression within the framework of a full-fledged state.[5] Rights discourse may serve as a starting point for discussion, but it certainly cannot provide conclusions in the real world. Having recognized that, let us consider the strength of the claim of the Palestinian national community.

The Weakness of Palestinian Identity

According to the French philosopher Ernest Renan, one of the most eloquent formulators of the national idea, the concept of a nation is not limited to race, religion, language, or territory. Above all these, he states:

> "*A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided*

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[4] James Minahan (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Stateless Nations,* Greenwood Press, 2002, xii.
[5] Gellner, 1-2; Miller, 81.

form... To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people."[6]

Renan's words suggest that a nation is composed, on one hand, of a legacy of shared memories, such as the heroic deeds of the forebears and extraordinary achievements of the nation, and, on the other hand, of the ongoing, deliberate choice to live a collective life.

The Palestinian national community, it can be said, meets the first of these two criteria – the formation of a shared memory of the past – although that past is relatively short. Historian Rashid Khalidi emphasizes that Palestinian national identity was primarily shaped after World War I, when the Land of Israel was separated from Syria and established as a distinct political unit under the British Mandate.[7]

Palestinian identity emerged in reaction to the achievements of the Zionist movement. In terms of contemporary literature on nationalism, this represents a distinctly modern nation: a nation without deep historical roots, constructed by elites for political purposes.[8] The irony is that this modern nation has arisen out of its conflict with what is arguably the archetypal primordial nation, the Jewish nation.[9]

However, Palestinian nationalism does not satisfy Renan's second criterion: the desire to live together and share life in the present or the future. Today, the Palestinian people are divided between two political frameworks that are in a fundamental state of conflict: the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Judea and Samaria, and Hamas' rule in Gaza. And this situation is the result of internal Palestinian decisions, as when Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, it left the PA as the governing authority and certainly hoped it would stay that way.

Perhaps this should not be surprising given that even regarding the more basic characteristics that define national communities – such as ethnicity, religion,

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[6] Ernest Renan, "What is a nation?" (Translated and annotated by Martin Thom), in Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and narration*, Routledge, 2013, 19.

[7] Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian identity: The construction of modern national consciousness*, Columbia University Press, 1997

[8] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*. Cambridge university press, 1992.

[9] Steven Elliott Grosby, *Biblical ideas of nationality: Ancient and modern*. Eisenbrauns, 2002; Adrian Hastings, *The construction of nationhood: Ethnicity, religion and nationalism*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

culture, and language - an examination of the Palestinian community reveals significant weaknesses.

While all of these traits are indeed shared within this community, none of them exhibit any uniqueness that distinguishes it from the broader Arab world. Its ethnicity is Arab, its religion Sunni Islam, its culture Middle Eastern, and its language a dialect of Arabic that is no more distinct that any other regional Arab dialect.

The question of whether the Palestinian community constitutes a distinct nation separate from the Arab world has accompanied it from its inception. A 1946 report by the Arab Office in Jerusalem, submitted to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine, stated: "Geographically, Palestine is part of Syria; its indigenous inhabitants belong to the Syrian branch of the Arab family of nations; all their culture and tradition link them to the other Arab peoples."[10]

The Palestinian National Charter, adopted by the PLO in 1964, reflects a similar sentiment in its opening declaration: "Palestine is the homeland of the Arab Palestinian people; it is an indivisible part of the Arab homeland, and the Palestinian people are an integral part of the Arab nation."

In fact, many Palestinians played central roles in the pan-Arabist movement, which argued that the Arab world constitutes a single nation that should unite under a single political framework; a movement that dominated Arab politics in the mid-twentieth century. Today, there are 22 independent states that share the language, religion, and culture of the Palestinian community.

Up until the Six-Day War in 1967, neither Jordan, Egypt, nor Syria recognized the Palestinians as a distinct national identity, let alone one that would require a sovereign state to exercise self-determination. Gamal Abdel Nasser, the leader of Egypt, dreamed of a "Greater Egypt" that would dominate the entire region from its borders to Iraq. Hafez al-Assad, the leader of Syria, believed that the Land of Israel was part of a Greater Syria. Jordan occupied Judea and Samaria for 19 years and never for a moment considered that the Palestinians would have a separate state of their own. When Egypt and Syria established the United Arab Republic, it never occurred to them that the Palestinians constituted a distinct national community.

What, then, distinguishes the Palestinian community? The answer is as simple as it is grim: uncompromising opposition to Zionism, and a culture of victimhood and exile, as reflected in the works of Mahmoud Darwish and Ghassan Kanafani. The

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[10] Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin (eds.), *The Arab Israeli Reader*, 5th ed., Penguin Books, 1995, 81.

Palestinian collective memory is shaped primarily as a memory of suffering, but aside from a consciousness of collective victimhood – which forms its defining experience – there is little else. The fact that the Palestinian community's collective stories include ones of suffering and hardship is not unique. What is unique is that it contains no positive content aside from the cultivation of rage, deep hatred, and self-pity.

This helps explain how this community has allowed itself to refuse repeated offers of a sovereign state. No other national movement has consistently rejected proposals for independence presented on a silver platter. A national community whose highest aspiration is political independence does not forgo the opportunity to establish a state, even if not all its political aspirations are met.

For precisely this reason, the Jewish national movement accepted the principle of the Peel Partition Plan in 1937, while the Arab Higher Committee rejected it and launched acts of violence. When the Jewish national movement accepted the UN Partition Plan in 1947, which was far less generous than what had been allocated under the original mandate, the Arabs went to war.

Against the backdrop of other missed opportunities to move toward an independent state, we must ask ourselves honestly: do the Palestinians actually want sovereignty? The answer is that more than seeking national independence for themselves, their primary desire is to resist Jewish sovereignty.

The project of establishing a Palestinian state is not, in essence, a national independence movement, but rather a political and violent movement to oppose Jewish independence in any form. Therefore, as long as the creation of a state would require genuine acceptance of the legitimacy of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, the Palestinian community has given precedence to continuing the struggle against Israel over advancing its own independence.

Without Zionism, no element in the Arab-Muslim Middle East would have considered the local Arabs in the Land of Israel a separate national entity, nor would such self-consciousness have developed. Israel possesses identity, culture, and a reason for existence regardless of the Palestinian national movement, whereas the Palestinians have no unique political identity that is not entirely dependent on the Zionist movement.

The Weakness of Palestinian Institutions

The strength of a claim to sovereignty depends partly on the characteristics of the national community itself, but also on the demonstrated ability of this community to

function as a pre-state political entity committed to peace. To meet the conditions required for independent statehood, it must build autonomous institutions to serve as the foundation for a future state. Alongside this, it must develop the basis for a functioning economy and demonstrate that it can join the community of peace-seeking nations, willing to cooperate with its neighbors and respect their borders.

The Jewish national community built these capabilities despite unimaginable challenges and was therefore able to establish its state when the historic opportunity arose. In contrast, the Palestinian national community meets none of these conditions, even though it has had the most favorable circumstances and the most generous international assistance ever granted to a national movement.

The governing institutions of the Palestinian community are, of course, divided between the Judea and Samaria and Gaza. The institutions in Gaza failed completely with the rise of Hamas, who chose to prioritize building a terror state over fostering a prosperous state. This fact alone should cast a moral shadow over the entire Palestinian claim to independence.

For the portion of the Palestinian community located in the Judea and Samaria, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is meant to serve as the pre-state political institution. In practice, however, the PA has proven to be a failure in every conceivable respect since its establishment.

It is rife with corruption, the rule of law does not prevail in its territories, it is economically dependent on foreign aid, it lacks genuine support among the population it is meant to represent, and - no less than Hamas in Gaza - it educates the next generation in hatred and opposition toward its main neighbor, the State of Israel.

[Corruption within the Palestinian Authority](#) is a systemic, deep, and multi-layered phenomenon, encompassing nepotism, bribery, embezzlement of public funds, lack of transparency, and weak oversight, judicial, and rule-of-law institutions. [PA governance is based](#) on the concentration of power in the hands of a small group of senior officials - mostly Fatah members - surrounding President Abbas. Favoritism toward close associates and monopolization of key positions are widespread. Appointments, salaries, and benefits [are often granted](#) based on personal connections rather than professional competence.

International reports have [revealed](#) massive transfers of funds from aid, donations, and taxes into the pockets of senior officials, their families, and close associates. Some cases [involved](#) transferring money to private accounts abroad, purchasing personal property, and making private investments. Bribery is widespread within the

public system, accompanying the issuance of permits, the advancement of business deals, the provision of public services, and more.

Surveys indicate that approximately 25% of Palestinians, or their family members, have paid a bribe or given a gift in exchange for receiving a public service. For example, obtaining a permit allowing Palestinian businessmen entry into Israel for commercial purposes sometimes requires paying a bribe or providing favors to officials.

The lack of separation of powers, a weak judicial system, and the appointment of close associates to head oversight committees, all result in a situation where a significant portion of corruption investigations end without a genuine legal process, without the return of funds, and without penalties. In some cases, suspects were not investigated at all, or arrangements were made outside the legal system.

Most Palestinians believe that the PA is corrupt, and public distrust in its institutions grows by the year. Corruption hampers economic development, drives away investors, and deepens feelings of alienation from the leadership. Many donor countries have reduced or halted aid to the PA following the exposure of corruption cases, weakening its ability to provide basic services and pay salaries.

In response to international pressure, an anti-corruption commission was established in 2010. Although officially independent, its members are in practice appointed by presidential decree, and its work is often affected by political interference. Investigations tend to be selective, and public trust in the commission is low.

The judicial system of the Palestinian Authority is weak and not independent, and court rulings are sometimes ignored by the executive branch and security forces. This situation contributes to rising anarchy and lawlessness in PA-controlled areas, especially in the context of armed gangs. The Palestinian Legislative Council has been largely inactive since 2007, limiting oversight and public debate on issues such as corruption.

The international community, alarmed by the level of corruption within the PA, reduced aid particularly after Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip, and more recently due to continued payments to terrorists. Diplomatically, foreign powers have continued to recognize the PA as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, but in practice, most world leaders have already given up on it. Even France who is leading the charge for recognition, included a call for a reform of Palestinian governance in its statement of intent.

There is no free press under the PA, and its officials persecute their critics. Activists and political opponents are arrested or dismissed from public positions. Journalists fear reporting on corruption because they wish to return to Ramallah and fear for their lives. The persecution of activists and journalists, arbitrary arrests, and reports of torture and extrajudicial executions by PA security forces have further alienated the public and undermined the authority's legitimacy. As a result, there is no open public discourse and no transparency in public decision-making.

Economic Weakness

The PA faces a fragile fiscal situation, characterized by chronic deficits, dependence on foreign aid, and heavy reliance on tax revenues collected by Israel, which account for roughly two-thirds of its total income. Israel collects customs duties on imports destined for PA territories and transfers them to the PA. The remaining third of revenues comes from income and trade taxes collected directly by the PA.

Since 2021, the PA has only been able to pay partial salaries to its public employees, and as of October 2023, payments fell further to about two-thirds of its obligations due to Israel's deductions of payments to terrorists and a shrinking donor base. This fiscal crisis has led to a deterioration in public services, particularly in health, education, and social welfare, with some sectors on the brink of collapse.

In 2025, out of a budget of 20.6 billion shekels, the PA spends approximately 42% on salaries and wages for public sector employees. Compare this to an OECD average of 20% of public expenditure in public sector workforce compensation and nearly 30% in emerging markets and low-income and developing countries. This indicates an exceptionally large and inefficient public sector and reflects the use of public jobs as a means of social support or political patronage. Such a situation is fiscally unsustainable in the long term.

The deficit stands at 6.9 billion shekels, or roughly one-third of the budget. This is an extremely high rate by international standards, unsustainable, and indicative of a severe fiscal crisis. In recent years, foreign aid contributions to the PA have sharply declined, yet the 2025 budget still includes 1.7 billion shekels from aid.

Additionally, a large portion of the UNRWA budget goes to funding services that the PA is ostensibly responsible for providing. Overall, more than 10% of the PA's budget comes from foreign assistance.

Hatred and Incitement against Israel

In 2018, approximately 7% of the PA's total budget was allocated to payments to

imprisoned terrorists and their families. In 2019, Israel began deducting these amounts from its transfers of tax revenues. Despite the economic pressure this measure created, the PA remained committed to the policy, and in that year spending on financial incentives for imprisoned terrorists even rose to 517 million shekels, compared to 502 million in 2018.

Under pressure from Israel and the international community, in February 2025 Abbas implemented a maneuver in which an external body was created to channel these funds and evade Israel's deduction policy. In practice, this body is managed by a board of trustees appointed by the PA president – that is, by Abbas himself – and he has even declared his intention to continue transferring these sums as before.

Beyond providing financial incentives for attacks on Jews through payments to terrorists, the PA educates the next generation to hate Israel and delegitimize the existence of the Jewish state. The Palestinian education system does not teach coexistence with Israel but instead fosters hostility toward it, denial of its existence, glorification of imprisoned terrorists, and encouragement of violent 'resistance'. There is also explicit and implicit antisemitic content, including negative stereotypes and portrayals of Jews in a demonic or malevolent manner. There is no content promoting reconciliation, tolerance, or shared life alongside Israelis.

All official PA media outlets – television, print, and official websites – regularly echo similar messages, not to mention social media channels. Given this, it is not surprising that in the wake of the October 7 massacre, PA leaders did not openly and explicitly condemn it. PA diplomats even celebrated the event.

For nearly two years, Abbas and the PA government refrained from directly denouncing the mass killing of Israeli civilians that day, limiting themselves to general statements against harming civilians on any side. In June 2025, Abbas reportedly wrote a letter to French President Emmanuel Macron and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in which he for the first time explicitly condemned the acts, although it is clear that he did so under pressure before those country's attempt to promote a Palestinian State.

The position rejecting Israel's right to exist is not limited to PA officials and institutions but widespread among the Arab public under its governance and in Gaza. Opinion polls in PA controlled territory indicate broad support for Hamas and a preference for it over the ruling Fatah. A survey conducted in November 2023 found that 82% of Arabs in PA territory supported the October 7 attack; 44% supported Hamas as a political movement compared to 16% for Fatah; about 50% said they

would vote for Hamas if elections were held, compared to 19% for Fatah; and 68% believed that the preferred way to "end the occupation and establish a state" is through violent struggle, versus 20% who favored negotiation.

Follow-up surveys over the past year indicate similar trends. A survey conducted in the context of the 2013 negotiations mediated by John Kerry found that 62% reject recognition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people within the framework of establishing a Palestinian state.

The Palestinian national community has not demonstrated any intent to act with tolerance or to live in peace with its neighbors; on the contrary, it has shown a commitment to perpetual struggle against the State of Israel. This is unsurprising, given that the Palestinian national movement was founded on violent rejection of Jewish independence in any borders. The first political leader of what would become the Palestinian national movement was Haj Amin al-Husseini.

Al-Husseini was appointed Grand Mufti of Jerusalem in the 1920s and played an influential role in instigating the riots and massacres against Jewish communities in the decades preceding the establishment of Israel. During World War II, he traveled to Germany to support Hitler and advocate for the extermination of all Jews in the Middle East.

Al-Husseini was a central figure in shaping the line of absolute opposition to a Jewish state under any borders—a stance that still enjoys the support of the vast majority of Palestinians. The only criticism expressed by Palestinians regarding al-Husseini is that the war against Israel in 1948, which he supported, ended in the "Nakba," meaning the disaster of Jewish victory.

The United Nations Charter calls on all member states to "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors." Member states commit to "refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state." A Palestinian state, if established, would not be a peace-seeking state. Palestinian identity is tied to the rejection of Israel's right to exist, and it has never ceased to support this goal through its actions.

The Gaza Precedent: A Trial Run for an Islamofascist State

Faced with the Palestinians' refusal to accept generous offers of independence, in 2004 Israel decided to unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip and hand it over to

the PA, thereby creating a "trial run" for a Palestinian state. The Israeli public hoped to see Gaza prosper and become the "Singapore of the Middle East."

Gaza had a real opportunity to achieve this, if it had wished to do so. Unfortunately, while it is possible to unilaterally leave a disputed territory, it is not possible to determine what type of state those who remain there will choose to build. In this case, the choice was an Islamist-fascist terror state.

The result of the Gaza withdrawal experiment, along with the surveys mentioned above, indicates that if Israel were to allow the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the geographic heart of the country, it would very likely become a terror state under Hamas control.

Given the state of education and public consciousness over an entire generation since the imposition of the Palestinian Authority rule, the burden of proof rest on anyone who expects a different outcome. This is also why Abbas has refused to hold elections since 2006: he knows Hamas would win, and the Gaza experiment would repeat itself.

It is important to note that in terms of their ultimate goals, the Fatah and Hamas movements are not dissimilar. Fatah uses more sophisticated rhetoric and a wider range of tools, including legal warfare and the exploitation of corrupt international institutions. Yet, in the end, it is equally committed to opposing the Jewish state, including through violent means if it deems them likely to succeed.

Why, then, did the October 7 invasion occur from the Gaza Strip and not from the PA controlled territory? Not due to lack of support or absence of terror cells. The difference, of course, is that Israel maintains overall security control in the Judea and Samaria, whereas it relinquished such control in Gaza in 2005.

While the Gaza Strip lies on the periphery of Israel's borders, Judea and Samaria are in the heart of the country, encompassing mountain ranges overlooking major population centers. Relinquishing security control there would expose Israel to an invasion far more dangerous than that of October 7. From the mountains of Samaria, Benjamin, and Judea, one can see with the naked eye the power station in Hadera, the port of Ashdod, and Ben Gurion Airport. The threat of rockets launched from such vantage points would be incomparable in severity to the threat from the country's periphery in Gaza. And this is a very real threat, as evidenced by the rocket cache and production site [discovered recently](#) in Ramallah.

Hamas control over the central mountain ridge would constitute an existential threat to Israel, no less. A two-state solution would spell the final solution for Israel. It is no coincidence that Abba Eban referred to the Green Line as the "Auschwitz borders." Nor is it accidental that an analysis produced by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff in late

June 1967 concluded that in order to maintain militarily defensible borders, Israel must maintain control over the central mountain ridge.[11]

A Regional Geopolitical Disaster

The severe geopolitical consequences of a Palestinian state extend beyond the possible destruction of Israel. They would constitute a disaster for the moderate Arab world and the West as a whole. A Palestinian state would weaken Israel's two neighbors who have already signed stable peace agreements: Jordan and Egypt.

In the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, there is already competition between Islamist movements and the ruling pro-Western monarchy. A Hamas-controlled state in Judea and Samaria, situated along Jordan's long and open border, would be well-positioned to destabilize the pro-Western status quo in the Hashemite kingdom and potentially spark an Islamic revolution. Even if a full-scale revolution does not occur, the resulting instability would allow increased Iranian penetration into Jordan, similar to its current presence in Iraq and Yemen.

Even in Egypt, Islamist currents - the Muslim Brotherhood being the more moderate among them - constitute the main political opposition to al-Sisi's regime. The establishment of a Palestinian state would embolden Islamist currents across Egypt and undermine the continuation of its peace agreement with Israel, as already occurred under Morsi's presidency in 2012.

Even if a Palestinian state were established in which Hamas was somehow prevented from ruling, one should not expect such a state to have a pro-American or Western orientation. Anti-American sentiment is widespread among the Palestinian population, and the political leadership has recently turned to China as a mediator between the rivals controlling the Palestinian Authority, Fatah and Hamas. In June 2023, Abbas traveled to China to sign a "strategic partnership" agreement, and in August 2024, he visited Russia to receive renewed support from President Putin for a Palestinian state.

A Palestinian state, then - whether controlled by Fatah or Hamas - would be born politically and economically weak and would therefore become an easy target for takeover by Islamist movements. These movements would align themselves with America's greatest adversaries worldwide and destabilize current U.S.-aligned Arab states in the region.

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[11] Aryeh Stav, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff Map for Defensible Israeli Borders," in *Israel and a Palestinian State: Zero Sum Game?* Zmora-Bitan, 2001, 359.

The Alternative: Local Self-Rule under Israeli Sovereignty

If not a future Palestinian state, then what? What should Israel aim for in the long term?

The political reality in the PA is bitter and complex and the policy challenge it presents is real. The available alternatives all have flaws, each presenting its own set of challenges, advantages and disadvantages.

A realistic view dictates that in such a situation, Israel must determine its course of action not in relation to a distant ideal, but in relation to the actual situation today; not in relation to the Palestinian national community we might wish existed, but to the one that exists now, which rejects its existence and prioritizes continued struggle over improving its national condition or even its material welfare.

All this considered, the least bad option is for Israel to adopt the concept of localized self-governance for Palestinians as a permanent arrangement. Not an independent state with centralized authority, but a decentralization of control and self-administration at the municipal level.

Only within such a framework lies the potential to extinguish the Palestinians' collective hope of undoing Jewish independence. The Palestinians must lose their national struggle against Israel and understand that they have lost. Continuing to leave the door open to a Palestinian state preserves their hope - and therefore their motivation to continue the struggle against Israel.

Local self-governance is the way to build a healthy society, and it is the polar opposite of the Oslo accords model, which granted a group of terrorists centralized authority over the Palestinian population. From its inception, Oslo was a recipe for a corrupt, failed, and dangerous regime. Healthy institutions are built from the bottom up, through societal participation, with each level constructed on a stable foundation.

It is desirable and right that Palestinians manage their domestic affairs - such as welfare, an internal judicial system, and education - provided they cease indoctrinating for hatred and acts of terror. Local self-governance in internal matters will give the population a significant degree of self-determination, even if it does not reach the level of independent security and foreign policies.[12]

Israel's security control over the entire territory does not mean the negation of significant self-determination for the Arab residents. In this model, Palestinians living under Israeli security control actually benefit from the protection Israel

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[12] Miller, 101.

provides. Without Israel, these territories would be exposed to threats of invasion from Egypt, Jordan, and Syria who would seek to acquire them, just as they did in the 1940s and 1950s.

In terms of dividing responsibilities between an Israeli security framework and Arab domestic administration, the proposed model is not radically different from the current arrangement with the Palestinian Authority. However, the shift from centralized to decentralized governance is urgently needed, as the centralized PA regime continues to perpetuate the conflict by presenting itself as a state and seeking international recognition with the intent of eventually replacing Israel.

The fact that a Palestinian state will not be established does not mean that Israel must grant citizenship to the Arabs currently under PA control. Let us emphasize: the goal here is to find a fair political arrangement – far from perfect – between two separate political populations who should express their political will in separate arrangements: one under the sovereign State of Israel and the other under local self-governance that is **not** an independent state.

As explained above, not every national community in the world finds its expression in a fully independent state. There is no absolute, natural right to full sovereignty, especially for national communities who have passed up every opportunity and failed to build functioning pre-state institutions.

While fundamentally moral given the Palestinian's collective decisions over decades, the proposed model is not perfect from a democratic standpoint, as Palestinian self-governance would be limited to internal affairs only. Nevertheless, it represents a significant improvement compared to the current situation, even with respect to democratic ideals.

Today, the Arab public in Judea and Samaria does not even control its own internal affairs; power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of elites who disregard their human rights. Moreover, the Palestinian leadership does not enjoy broad popular support, and the gap between the authorities and the public grows wider year by year.

Transitioning from the centralized rule of the Palestinian Authority or Hamas to as much local autonomous governance as possible would actually empower the average Palestinian to define themselves, influence their community's daily life, and determine their future on everyday matters. This is a first step toward building stable, democratic institutions growing up from within the population.

Although we may wish for a democratic Palestinian society, it would be prudent to look briefly at the Arab world – from Kuwait to Morocco – and point to a single

functioning democracy. We will struggle to find one. A truly liberal-democratic culture has not taken root anywhere in the Arab world, not even among the moderate regimes. There is no reason to assume that the Palestinians will be the first.

So, before we demand from Israel the responsibility to create a system for Palestinians in which the people's voices are counted and heard, perhaps we should succeed in creating this in even one other society in the region. Localized self-governance under Israeli security control would be a step up in democracy relative to where they are today, and relative to virtually all the hundreds of millions of Arabs across the Middle East and North Africa.

Practically speaking, the idea of Palestinians living long-term under less-than-sovereign governing institutions has already been accepted by the United States, under Trump's 2020 "Deal of the Century." Its proposed Palestinian state would be extremely limited in its sovereignty: being demilitarized, lacking control over its airspace, borders, and electromagnetic spectrum, and subject to a host of other restrictions. While the plan uses the term "state," it is clear that there is no real difference between a state whose sovereignty is so severely limited and a highly autonomous governing body.

Whatever you call it, the Palestinian state envisioned in Trump's plan does not meet the basic definition of a state as an exclusive authority within its territory with a monopoly on the use of force. The model proposed here goes only one step further: instead of a single centralized government, it proposes decentralized autonomy.

On the surface, the idea of two states for two peoples sounds entirely reasonable. Its appeal and influence are understandable. However, at this stage, continuing to cling to an idea that has long lost its relevance is sheer folly. The Palestinians must bear responsibility for their actions and poor decisions over the past century, and this means finally shutting the door to a Palestinian state. No additional state will arise west of the Jordan River. Local self-governance is the only alternative to the failed model of the Oslo era, would increase accountability, and offer the best chance for Israeli security alongside a freer, more prosperous Palestinian society. This is the only appropriate response to the October 7 attack, and seeing to it is the duty of Israel's governments for generations to come.