Israel’s Security in a Two-State Reality
We thank the various experts who gave interviews for the study. We also thank Avishay Ben Sasson-Gordis and Shai Agmon for their insightful comments.

References are hyperlinked to improve readability. A comprehensive list of sources appears at the end.

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Introduction: Security Concerns as a Key Argument Against an Israeli-Palestinian Peace Deal

Since the Israeli-Palestinian conflict began more than 100 years ago, various solutions have been proposed to end it, some of which have also been attempted — yet all to no avail. The only coherent, detailed and applicable proposal is to partition the land into two states, for the two peoples who live on it: a Jewish state and a Palestinian state. Two states are the only solution that is internationally accepted, and which has been seriously discussed in every round of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. While competing ideas have gained some popularity over the last decade — all of them a one-state solution in one form or another — they are not as developed or detailed as the two-state solution. More importantly, none of the one-state suggestions resolve the problem that lies at the heart of the conflict: two warring peoples, each aspiring to self-determination, claiming ownership of the same land.

Israeli public opinion still views the two-state solution as the major proposal on the table, and by large prefers partition to the alternatives. This finding, consistent throughout decades of polling, was replicated yet again in May 2020, when Molad commissioned a broad survey of more than 1,000 Israelis. It recurred in the recent INSS National Security Index and in a joint poll carried out by the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR). These surveys, and many others, show that more than half of all Israelis support a two-state solution within the framework of an agreement. Over the last ten years, as talks have stalled and the government has grown less inclined to support a peace deal, vocal support for partition has diminished. Nevertheless, this solution remains vastly more popular than the alternatives.
Along with solid majority support for the two-state solution, another consistent finding is that Israelis are finding it harder and harder to believe the idea can actually be carried out. Among responders to our poll, 52% expressed support for the two-state solution, but only 33% believed it achievable in the foreseeable future. We call Israelis who support the two-state solution in principle, yet doubt that it can be implemented, ‘two-state skeptics’. This skepticism is naturally driven by factors such as the rise of Hamas in Gaza, the general instability in the Arab world, and the prolonged lack of communication between Israeli and Palestinian leaders (even as relations with several other Arab nations improve). According to recent surveys, including Molad’s, Israelis are troubled by three key concerns: lack of a ‘Palestinian partner’; inability to dismantle settlements; and the risk to national security of withdrawing from the West Bank. Molad’s survey found that some 44% of Israelis believe the major obstacle to a final-status agreement is the lack of a ‘Palestinian partner’, while 25% believe it is the security issue. As we show further on, these two elements are tightly linked. In any case, both proponents and opponents of the two-state solution share these views.
"No Partner" And Lack Of Trust In Palestinians Drives 2-State Doubts

Obstacles to Peace

Below are some things that some people say are obstacles to achieving a two-state solution with the Palestinians. Please indicate which one of these is the BIGGEST obstacle to achieving a two-state solution with the Palestinians. And which one of these things do you think is the SECOND BIGGEST barrier?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Dislike</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is no Palestinian partner for peace.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Palestinians will never end their claims against Israel, and there is no real benefit to giving them a state.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An independent Palestinian state alongside Israel will lead to Hamas taking over the Palestinian state and jeopardizing our national security.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dividing the land into two states would require removing at least 100,000 Jewish settlers, which is too complicated and divisive.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel’s presence in Judea and Samaria strengthens our security, and it is too dangerous to give this territory to the Palestinians.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli public opinion opposes a two-state solution, and the people will not support this kind of an agreement.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This paper focuses on the third obstacle – the security risk. In it, we unpack a common fallacy in Israeli political and public discourse: that establishing a Palestinian state is dangerous for Israel.

Naturally, national security is of paramount importance in Israel. This outlook has been shaped by decades of armed conflict since before the state was founded, and continues to capture the minds and hearts of Israelis more than 70 years on. The debate over security still shapes public opinion, defines political rivals and drives the national agenda. It is important to understand that in Israel, “security” refers not only to the measurable, tangible, physical protection the state affords its citizens. It is also a loaded term that connotes a sense of personal and collective safety. There is a great deal of subjective feeling involved, which cannot be quantified by statistics on casualties and damage.

Solid majority support for the two-state solution is coupled with another consistent trend: growing disbelief that the solution can actually be implemented. Over the last decade, Israelis have objectively enjoyed a relatively high level of personal and collective safety. In the West Bank, the IDF and ISA (Shin Bet) have effectively countered terrorism by working closely with the Palestinian Authority’s security forces. In the north, Hezbollah, the Assad regime and Iran have been held at bay – while Israel acts freely as part of its ‘War between Wars’ to ensure technology and intelligence superiority. The upheaval throughout the Middle East has strengthened Israel’s ties with Egypt and Jordan, and there are rare disturbances along these borders. At the time of writing, Israel is also tightening its formal and informal ties with Arab...
States. The peace deal with the UAE marks a breakthrough in Israel’s open ties with the Arab world. On the Gazan front, despite recurring bouts of fighting with Hamas and the unbearable daily life for residents, repeated agreements have created long lulls in the hostilities. This general picture clearly emerges from Molad’s survey: 68% of respondents were satisfied with the security situation, while only 43% were satisfied with the economic situation.

Majority Unhappy With State Of Economy, But Large Majority Satisfied With Security Situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Situation in Israel</th>
<th>Security Situation in Israel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excellent / Good</strong></td>
<td><strong>Excellent / Good</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good</strong></td>
<td>Not so well / Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not so well / Poor</strong></td>
<td><strong>Not so well / Poor</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poor</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given these findings, one would assume Israelis would be satisfied with relations with the Palestinians, and that most would prefer to uphold the policy of “conflict management” than seek ways to end it. Yet that is not the case. When asked whether they agreed with the statement “I prefer the status quo with the Palestinians to any new peace initiatives”, only 19% agreed and 11% strongly agreed.
When the status quo was presented alongside realistic alternatives, it received even less support. One question presented respondents with four future scenarios for the conflict: two states, one state with no vote for Palestinians, one state with equal voting rights for Palestinians, and maintaining the status quo. Only 26% preferred the last option, while 45% preferred the first (another 19% supported one state without voting rights for Palestinians, and 10% supported one state with those rights). When the option of maintaining the status quo was removed, a majority of 53% chose the two-state solution, with 31% in favor of one state without voting rights for Palestinians and 16% in favor of one state with voting rights for Palestinians.

**In Spite of Massive Pessimism About Current Prospects For Peace, Lack Of Support For Status Quo**

I prefer the status quo with the Palestinians instead of any new peace initiatives.

**2-State Solution Remains Top Option For Addressing The Conflict; When Status Quo Is Not An Option, Majority Support 2SS**

**Options**

When it comes to finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which of the following statements comes closest to your own point of view, even if none of these statements are exactly right for you? I support...

- A two-state solution that establishes a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza alongside the State of Israel.
- A one-state solution that annexes Judea, Samaria, and Gaza without giving Palestinians equal voting rights.
- A one-state solution that annexes the Palestinian territories, and gives Israelis and Palestinians an equal vote in a single state.
- The status quo with the Palestinians and prefer that things remain as they are.

**With "Status Quo" Option**

- 45 agree
- 19 somewhat agree
- 26 disagree
- 10 not sure

**Without "Status Quo" Option**

- 53 agree
- 31 somewhat agree
- 16 disagree
- 10 not sure
What can explain these results? Perhaps, that many Israelis understand the status quo is an illusion. Reality in the Middle East is continually changing, even if subterranean trends are not yet evident. That is also the consensus view among former top Israeli security officials interviewed for this study. They believe that the relative calm in the West Bank is not sustainable, so long as Israel continues to control a civilian population with military measures. Sooner or later, violence will erupt again, possibly on a larger scale than before. Many of these experts are also concerned that the Palestinians are on the verge of surrendering their dream of independence and shifting to support a single state with a non-Jewish majority between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

This combined trend, of general support for partition along with deep concern over security implications, is evident regarding the Gaza Strip. Unsurprisingly, 64% of respondents agreed that the withdrawal from Gaza weakened Israeli security (a position aggressively promoted by Israel’s leading media). Yet 74% stated they did not want Israel to re-occupy and resettle Gaza. The myth that the ‘disengagement’ was bad for Israel may have taken root, yet most Israelis do not want to go back there. The fact is that the ‘disengagement’ did not jeopardize Israeli security, but actually improved it, as we found in a 2016 study. This is yet another example of the disinformation or faulty assumptions informing the national security debate.

### Gaza Disengagement

Thinking about the Gaza disengagement that took place in 2005, do you think the Gaza disengagement strengthened Israel’s security or weakened Israel’s security?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengthened Israel’s security</th>
<th>Weakened Israel’s security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Returning to Gaza

Do you think Israel should or should not take over Gaza again and reestablish settlements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should take over</th>
<th>Should not take over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To engage in an educated, realistic discussion of possible solutions to the conflict, the public must know the facts and understand the implications of every option for national security. To that end, this paper reviews all the security repercussions of a two-state reality based on an Israeli-Palestinian agreement and backed by international guarantees. Our analysis draws on several sources: interviews with former senior security officials and with experts on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from various disciplines; material from negotiations over the last 30 years and from civil society peace initiatives; and dozens of studies — academic and otherwise — in addition to articles and interviews.

The clear picture that emerges from this research is that security concerns are not an obstacle to a two-state solution, but quite the opposite: Israel will benefit considerably, in terms of security and strategic advantages, from a neighboring Palestinian state established within the framework of an agreement.

It is clear that a Palestinian state will not be established in the foreseeable future. This study is not an exercise in wishful thinking, given the current prospects for peace. Rather, it stems from the conviction that it is imperative to discuss the only workable solution to the conflict, which is likely to resurface sooner or later. When that happens, it is crucial to understand that a Palestinian state will not be more dangerous for Israel than the current reality. Arguments against partition on the grounds that two states will be worse for national security must be laid to rest, once and for all.
1. The Illusion of the Status Quo

Israel’s governments over the last decade have instilled a doctrine of “conflict management” – a euphemism for maintaining the status quo. The guiding principle is that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians cannot be resolved, so the best we can do is preserve the current situation. Violence will erupt periodically, but that is a price worth paying since the alternatives are worse. Upholding this policy over time requires avoiding any dramatic measures – whether succumbing to an intifada or signing a peace deal.

The greatest danger this policy poses is that it may appear to succeed. The temporary success could foster the notion that the present situation can be prolonged indefinitely. In fact, the status quo is a disastrous illusion, and “conflict management” means stalling. Every single expert we interviewed – including several former top security officials – believes that the lull Israel has enjoyed in recent years is transitory and will end with a massive eruption of violence. Many critics of the two-state solution share this concern.

In an October 2020 interview with Yedioth Ahronoth, the outgoing head of the IDF Military Intelligence research department, Brig. Gen. Dror Shalom, said:

The Palestinian problem is lying at our doorstep like a ticking bomb. It's not going to happen tomorrow morning. But things may disintegrate there once Abbas is gone, and we cannot ignore that. They're facing a challenge in terms of economics, civics, governance... Strengthening the Palestinian Authority is in Israel’s security interests... We must not think the Arab world is suddenly ignoring the Palestinian problem. The Palestinian problem is the lowest common denominator of the entire Arab world, and at the end of the day, those normalization agreements (with the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan) were signed because the annexation was postponed.

Many opponents of the two-state solution share this pessimistic view. A combination of factors over the last decade has led to the relatively calm present. The harsh, effective oppression of the second intifada, alongside regional developments since the Arab Spring, have led many Palestinians to conclude that now is not the time to renew hostilities with Israel. Yet this lengthy hiatus is bound to end sooner or later, because one thing remains unchanged: Israel is still holding millions of people under military control and denying them basic rights while they seek independence. History, even in the last 100 years alone, has proven time and again that peoples and nations eventually rise up against military occupation. That leaves one question: when, not if, the violence will erupt again.
The more Israel stalls, the higher the chances it will lose the assets it gained during the lull. The empowerment of the Palestinian Authority’s security forces and their fruitful collaboration with Israel stem from Palestinian hopes for an independent state in the near future. The further away this vision grows, the greater the threats to the Palestinian Authority (PA) from other parties – chiefly Hamas – which offer an alternative approach to Israel: taking up arms again. That is why continuing to manage the conflict merely postpones the inevitable, inviting renewed violence down the line. “Maintaining the status quo” is a delayed-action mechanism.

History, even in the last 100 years alone, has proven time and again that peoples and nations eventually rise up against military occupation.
2. An Overview of the Proposed Security Arrangements

Over the last decade, and especially the latter half, Israel almost entirely cut diplomatic ties with the Palestinian Authority and US-Palestinian relations plummeted. To a certain extent, the Trump Plan undermined existing paradigms. Yet discussion of the two-state reality outlined in Israeli-Palestinian-American talks must be based on the agreed principles shaped over 20 years of negotiation.

During this time, Israel and the Palestinians engaged in several rounds of formal and informal talks, with US and international involvement. Some included detailed discussion of the security arrangements that would be part of a future agreement. The proposed arrangements are not identical and not all details were agreed. Nevertheless, a conceptual and practical framework has emerged over time whose key elements are accepted by both Israel and the Palestinians, and can therefore serve as a basis for discussion.

Following is a brief, schematic outline of the major security points that any agreement between Israel and the Palestinians will include. It is drawn from previous rounds of negotiations held by Israel, the PA, the US and other international actors with the goal of establishing a Palestinian state:

A. Demilitarized Palestinian State

The fundamental principle on which both parties agree is that the Palestinian state will not have a military. Whether a demilitarized zone, as Israel wants, a non-militarized zone, or a state with limited arms, as the Palestinians want, it is agreed that Palestine will not have a standing army. Also, based on the precedent set in the peace treaty with Jordan, the Palestinian state will not forge military alliances with states, organizations or other parties that are hostile to Israel; will not permit a foreign army to operate within its territory; and will not maintain military troops and arms outside its territory. The West Bank will provide ‘conditional strategic depth’ for Israel to act freely, subject to agreed criteria, in order to protect its regional security interests.

B. Limited Palestinian Security Forces

In lieu of a standing army, Palestine will have security forces with police features. The forces will maintain public order, defend the borders and counter terrorist acts originating in the country. They will also enforce demilitarization, prevent smuggling, supervise border crossings, collect intelligence, carry out search and rescue missions, and do community police work. The agreement will impose stringent restrictions on the arms and equipment they are allowed to bear. One option discussed is to form joint operations centers for Israelis, Palestinians and Americans for coordinating information-sharing and management of security in Palestine, within the framework of an agreement.
C. **Borders, Crossings and Early Warning Stations**

The partly-built security barrier separating Israel from the West Bank will be completed after the agreement is signed — subject to mutually-agreed changes — and will mark the border between the two countries. Border defense will consist of several elements, including advanced intelligence and alert technologies. The US will oversee a gradual, controlled handover of responsibility to the Palestinian security forces based on their performance. The same principle will apply to Palestine’s borders with Jordan and Egypt, which will serve as barriers vital to Israeli security. In addition to US and Israeli supervision, international forces may be deployed along the borders, as detailed further on. Special emphasis will be placed on Palestine’s international border crossings with Israel, and those between Palestine, Jordan and Egypt, including state-of-the-art security equipment and tight supervision. The land corridor between the West Bank and Gaza will be under Israeli sovereignty, with Palestinian management. Finally, Israel will have early warning stations on Mount Baal-Hazor and Mount Ebal, which will rely on advanced optical and electronic equipment.

D. **The Non-Ground Domain Security**

Israel will retain sovereignty of airspace and work with the Palestinians in full transparency, so there will be an independent Palestinian airspace within the Israeli one. The Palestinians will control the territorial waters off the shores of Gaza, but Israel will preserve maritime protection to defend its regional security interests, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. In the electromagnetic spectrum — which includes valuable resources that are vital to many systems, from civilian cellphone networks to military radars — both parties will operate simultaneously without disturbing one another, although Israel will come first when it comes to security needs.

E. **International Force**

An international force will be formed to help enforce the agreement, mediate between the parties and respond to Israel’s security needs with minimal incursion upon Palestinian sovereignty. The parties will agree in advance on the formation and tasks of the force. It will likely be a military force under US command, comprised entirely or mostly of American troops. It could also be a NATO force — in which case, Israelis may be included. The force will be deployed along Palestine’s borders with Jordan and Egypt.

F. **International Arrangements**

Changes in the Middle East over the last decade, and especially the Sunni campaign against Shiite Iran and Salafi-jihadist elements (ISIS, al-Qaeda), have created suitable conditions for interest-based collaboration between Israel and Sunni Arab countries. This has strengthened Israel’s security ties with its peace partners — Egypt and Jordan — and led to closer ties with the...
Gulf States. Since the conflict with the Palestinians is part of the broader Israeli-Arab conflict, it is understood that any bilateral agreement will include additional spheres of influence: a four-way agreement with Egypt and Jordan; a regional agreement with the Gulf States and northern Africa; and an international framework including the US, Russia and the EU. These broader agreements will bolster the signatories’ stability and help protect them against Iran and Salafi-jihadist organizations. In other words, an agreement with the Palestinians will ensure Israel a multi-layered security system including regional and world powers.

G. **Gradual, Supervised Implementation**

All the negotiated plans rely on a phased roll-out ranging from several years to 15, averaging at 10. The parties have yet to agree on the criterion for progress. So far, Israel has demanded that the Palestinians prove their ability based on predetermined measures, while the Palestinians have demanded a set timeframe for moving on to the next phase regardless of Israel’s approval. One solution may be a supervision, enforcement and control mechanism headed by the US or another international party and working with Israeli and Palestinian representatives, charged with examining the Palestinians’ performance while setting a deadline for the implementation of every phase in order to prevent Israel from blocking progress. One way or another, the process will involve a long period of mutual trust-building based on real-life developments – and not a sudden, unilateral move.
3. The Chief Concern: Can the Palestinians Be Trusted?

All the concerns voiced against a future agreement have one thing in common: deep mistrust of the Palestinians. Many Israelis believe that the Palestinians do not truly want an agreement and have no intention of upholding one. The assumption that there is no partner on the Palestinian side raises security fears: the Palestinians will violate the agreement, exploit their newfound freedom and endanger Israelis.

A reliable partner entails two things: intention and ability. Do the Palestinians really intend to commit to an agreement? And if so, can they uphold their commitment? Let us start with the question of intent. Many Israelis believe, given the past, that the PA cannot be relied upon – not to mention Hamas and other elements in Palestinian society. The Palestinians are seen as unreliable actors who will not hesitate to violate an agreement. This is a weak argument against an agreement. First, the mutual mistrust may lessen once major progress is made towards an agreement. Second, in all areas that rely on signed agreements – from peace treaties to business deals – the parties usually do not trust each other. That is precisely why agreements are needed: to enable suspicious parties to come together and cooperate, not because they fully trust each other, but because they do not. If they trusted each other in the first place, there would be no need for a formal guarantee in the form of a signed agreement.

What drives each party to uphold an agreement is not trust, but interests – and heavy penalties for violation. The fact that Israel and the PA still uphold the Oslo Accords, despite everything that has changed since they were signed in the 1990s, is a powerful example. That is why security arrangements discussed in previous talks always included guarantees, as well as supervision and defense mechanisms that will not rely on the goodwill of either party.

As for ability: what will happen if the PA wishes to uphold its obligations, but cannot? Critics argue that the PA is a corrupt, weak institution that lacks broad public support. President Mahmoud Abbas is elderly and unwell, and the predictable fight to succeed him may destabilize the West Bank. Hamas’ victory in the 2006 elections and its military takeover of the Gaza Strip a year later raise concern that the West Bank will meet with a similar fate once Israel withdraws.

Critics also argue that Palestine will necessarily be a failed state whose very existence will burden Israel and regional neighbors, creating severe problems that do not exist today. For instance, Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror wrote in a study titled “Israel’s Inelegant Options in Judea and Samaria: Withdrawal, Annexation, and Conflict Management” that the end of occupation will lead to an immoral, intolerable Palestinian state that will enslave its own people; to another occupation under the rule of a regime that will not respect basic human rights, certainly not.
for women, not for people of different sexual orientation, nor for non-Muslims, nor for Muslim political dissidents of any stripe. This likely to be the sad case whether Palestinians fall under the rule of Hamas, or ISIS, or even someone from the circle of Mahmoud Abbas and his would-be successors. The Palestinian state is going to be a dark and dysfunctional state that violates its citizens' rights. In all probability, it will also be unable to care for their welfare. There is no reason to assume that the new state will make for better government than any other of the very bad Arab governments in the region.

While these fears are understandable, there is nothing to indicate they are particularly realistic. In general, they are projections largely based on the assumption that the current reality will remain unchanged despite a tectonic shift in regional geopolitics and in domestic, bilateral and regional interests. That is why we must analyze the danger of a Palestinian state based on reasonable assumptions about how a state operates -- not a non-state entity under military occupation, in the context of an ongoing conflict.

As for the arguments themselves, comparisons to the withdrawals from Gaza and southern Lebanon ignore a crucial point: Israel acted unilaterally in 2000 and 2005, without putting in place mechanisms to restrain, control or supervise the areas from which the IDF withdrew, and without the other side undertaking any obligations towards the territory. Also, the withdrawals were not backed by international guarantees. The last 20 years have shown that, at least in the Middle East, unilateral moves are perceived as weakness and ultimately bolster radicalism. The withdrawal from Lebanon made Hezbollah stronger and shaped the narrative of an Israeli escape that influenced the outbreak of the second Intifada; the withdrawal from Gaza increased Hamas’ power.

The relevant analogy for discussing an agreement with the Palestinians is the peace treaty with Egypt. As part of that treaty, Israel carried out its largest territorial withdrawal to date, which has held strong over time: the country’s most hostile border has been peaceful for 40 years. That is true not only of Egypt. All the peace treaties Israel has signed are based on mutual interests. That is why the treaty with Jordan has endured regional and bilateral crises. It is also why an agreement between Israel and the PA is likely to be stable. Stability will be ensured by the structure of the agreement: phased, gradual implementation based on mechanisms that ensure violating the agreement will not be in the interest of either party.

A Palestinian state established as part of an agreement will enjoy economic, political and symbolic advantages. It will literally have much more to lose than before. The huge penalty
for violation will be the major incentive for upholding the deal. The situation is also likely to infuse Palestinians with hope, increasing support for long-term change and desire to fulfill the potential of their new state. This is naturally difficult to imagine in the current reality of stalled negotiations and the PA as a sub-state entity with no prospects on the horizon. A reality in which the Palestinians have their own state is very likely to change the existing rules and reshape the entire system of interests, incentives, checks and balances regarding Israel — especially given a series of regional and international commitments.

The debate over trusting the Palestinian side takes the form of two different approaches within Israel’s security establishment. One views the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a force majeure and assumes the Palestinians will always wish Israel harm, regardless of the circumstances. Any deal they sign will eventually be violated and used merely as a tactic to achieve their end goal: destroying the state of Israel. The other sees Palestinian policy as flexible and believes Israel can reach a sustainable long-term arrangement with the Palestinians. That would rely on providing various incentives, reshaping parameters and changing the circumstances that allow the conflict to continue.

These contrasting approaches informed the argument over the second Intifada in 2000. In keeping with the first, the official Israeli position relied on intelligence assessments that Yasser Arafat had planned the Intifada and used the Camp David talks as bait; once the talks failed, he set the plan of violent resistance in motion. Some members of the Military Intelligence (Aman) disagreed, claiming that Arafat had not planned the Intifada in advance but was dragged into it and lost control in the process. According to this approach, the Intifada broke out due to socioeconomic distress fueled by Israel’s tough policy and cannot be attributed solely to the failed talks. The Israel Security Agency (ISA, or Shin Bet) supported this analysis from the very beginning of the uprising, according to an interview we conducted with Admiral (res.) Ami Ayalon, who headed the agency at the time. Ayalon explained that the debate was resolved when intel collected in Operation Defensive Shield in 2002 proved that the eruption of violence had taken both Arafat and Marwan Barghouti by surprise, and that they certainly had no prior knowledge of it.

It is worth examining this debate in its proper context. The reality in which the second Intifada broke out was very different from the one we now live in. Then, negotiations had imploded and the fledgling PA was unstable and inexperienced. Now, the West Bank has been relatively peaceful for several years and the Palestinian security forces are effective and experienced. After an agreement is signed and a Palestinian state established, animosities are likely to diminish even further. That said, some threats will remain, which is exactly why risk management is needed. Opponents of a Palestinian state assume an agreement does not justify any security risk. However, this ignores the huge risk of prolonging the current situation, and the many potential benefits of an agreement. Supporters of the two-state solution — including many security officials over the last decade — do not underestimate the danger, but believe that weighed against the benefits, and given the slim chances of a war or a lethal conflict, a two-state reality is much better for Israel than the current situation.
Another consideration is the foreseeable costs of rejecting the diplomatic route to a solution. History shows that the price of hesitating due to mistrust may be much higher than the nightmare scenario driving the hesitation. The terms that Anwar Sadat proposed to Israel in the years prior to 1973, which were rejected largely due to mistrust of his intentions and his willingness to uphold obligations, took a heavy toll on Israel in the Yom Kippur war. In the end, Israel signed the treaty and agreed to the terms Egypt had demanded before the war.

The same is true of Syria. The current consensus is that former Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak was right not to sign a deal with Hafez al-Assad in the late 1990s, given where Syria is today. The argument is that a peace treaty, which would have included a withdrawal from the Golan Heights, would have brought the civil war in Syria far too close to home. Yet it is equally possible that a treaty would have tightened Syria’s ties with the US and the West, drawn it further away from Iran and Hezbollah and promoted stability. A popular uprising would then have looked more like the protest in Egypt, rather than the present outcome of a failed state. This is speculation, of course. The point is that despite legitimate concerns and deep-seated mistrust, missing historical windows of opportunity can have irreversible consequences.

When it comes to the supposedly bleak prospects of a Palestinian state, Israel is not a key actor. Israel’s strategic goal is to defend itself and minimize threats from its neighbors. Even if Palestine is an underdeveloped state — and there are no guarantees it will be — it is not Israel’s job to intervene. The Egyptian and Jordanian regimes are a far cry from Israel’s democratic, liberal ideals, yet Israel cooperates with them closely, especially on security matters, based on a realistic perspective and shared interests. This is the case with the UAE, and will be with the other Gulf States and with northern Africa in any future deal. In that sense, Israel must view its relations with Palestine through the narrow lens of security concerns. What kind of state Palestine will be is irrelevant to that discussion.

To address the Palestinians’ ability to uphold an agreement, we must examine how the Palestinian national security forces have functioned in recent years. While the weapons Israel provided the PA in the Oslo Accords may have been used against it in the second Intifada, the context must be taken into consideration: the power-happy recklessness of the heads of the Palestinian forces at the time, their lack of experience with wielding force, and the failed negotiations. The fact that the security arrangements in the Oslo Accords failed does not prove that the basic conception was wrong, but that the implementation was flawed on both sides. In any case, the more pertinent fact is that for the last 15 years, these weapons have not been used against Israel other than in isolated incidents, and the IDF and ISA’s close cooperation with the Palestinian security forces has been beneficial to both parties. That is the view of former top security officials who worked closely, for years, with their Palestinian counterparts and believe that these forces are reliable and cooperative.
The Palestinian leadership under Abbas has openly declared a war on terrorism, not support of it. This painful lesson was learned in the wake of the Oslo Accords and the second Intifada. The Palestinians paid a heavy price for the dysfunction of the security forces and for their active participation in terrorism. This policy has been strictly implemented since former prime minister Salam Fayyad’s term in office. The Palestinians’ major interest in preventing terrorism has nothing to do with liking or disliking Israel; it stems from the need to improve the lives of the population in the West Bank. The path of violence does not achieve that goal – as many Palestinians learned from painful personal experience, and as the PA understands full well.

In recent years, top Israeli security officials have stressed the advantages of cooperation. In a 2016 meeting of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, ISA chief Nadav Argaman described the tight security coordination with the Palestinian security forces and stated the latter were clamping down on Hamas operatives in the West Bank. Previous chief Yoram Cohen also repeatedly noted the close cooperation with the Palestinian forces. In May 2016, Cohen told the cabinet that when the forces receive intel from Israel, they take action to prevent terrorist attacks, and added that Israel takes their place when they cannot carry out a particular operation due to domestic sensitivity. This, he explained, is complemented by the forces operating in places and cases where Israel encounters obstacles.

According to top Israeli security officials in recent years, the Palestinian security forces are responsible for preventing about 30% to 40% of all terrorist attacks thwarted every year in the West Bank. They also say the forces can do much more but are restricted by Israeli policy. Their effectiveness and stability have also withstood crises. For example, in the summer of 2014, when Palestinian militants abducted and murdered three Jewish teens in the West Bank and Israel launched Operation Protective Edge, the forces continued to work with Israel. In the “Knives’ Intifada” in 2015, they made a concerted effort – guided by the IDF and ISA – to prevent terror attacks. The collaboration was a success and the violence subsided.

In October 2019, the IDF published an article on ISA counterterrorist activity against a spate of “lone wolf attacks”. Co-author Eric ‘Harris’ Berbing had previously headed the Jerusalem division and the cyber division in the ISA. The article stated that in order to avoid increased IDF and ISA activity in PA territory, the Palestinian security forces took action to help stop the terrorists. The PA and its forces took direct, active measures to stop the terrorists in advance. For instance, if an individual was suspected, or if young people were identified as being in distress and potentially capable of carrying out an attack – the PA worked with their families to get the older generation to influence them and dissuade them from an attack. Sometimes, if there was no other choice, the PA also made active efforts to stop a terrorist. The PA also scaled back its visibility in terrorists’ funerals and took measures to reduce friction along Israeli routes. These collected efforts, which often led to accusations of collaboration with Israel, led to a real shift in the wave of lone attacks.
According to a top Israeli security official in the last decade interviewed for this report, the Palestinian security forces have not received the credit they deserve for their massive contribution to stopping terror attacks since 2007-2008. Thanks to the PA’s efforts, the West Bank remains relatively quiet — despite recurring potential for escalation due to various developments. One expert who says this is Col. (res.) Michael Milstein, who served as an advisor on Palestinian affairs to the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) from 2015 to 2018 and headed the Palestinian desk in the IDF Military Intelligence. According to Milstein, the global pandemic has proven yet again that Israel’s security coordination with the PA is fruitful and helps both sides overcome various challenges, including health crises. In optimal circumstances, in which Israel would not constrain the activities of the Palestinian security forces and they would have much more to lose than at present, they could operate even more effectively.

The fact that Israel has been able to consistently rely on the work of the Palestinian security forces in the West Bank is a valuable case study. It is the result of a mutual interest in keeping the West Bank quiet and weakening Hamas. This interest is only likely to increase after an agreement is signed. On the other hand, steps that weaken the PA will undermine public trust in its institutions, increasing instability and strengthening Hamas. The PA already functions just as well as other countries in the area and in the third world. If Israel relies on the Jordanian and Egyptian security forces to uphold peace treaties, why not do so with forces it has already successfully collaborated with for years, like the PA security forces?

According to a former top Israeli security official, effective counterterrorism requires control over land and population, as well as the full commitment of security forces. That force is currently the IDF, but when the process is completed, the natural and proper next step will be to transfer this responsibility to the sovereign power – the PA. Will Israelis be willing to pay the price of holding on to the West Bank and its occupied population with another violent eruption looming? When it came to the buffer zone in southern Lebanon and to the Gaza Strip, the answer was no. In both cases, the unilateral withdrawal created a no-man’s-land in terms of security, ripe for Hezbollah and Hamas to take over. Nevertheless, as our analysis of national security following the ‘disengagement’ from Gaza shows, in both cases the withdrawal improved Israel’s security. This reinforces the claim that if the lessons of unilateralism are learned and Israel coordinates its withdrawal from the West Bank as part of an agreement, it can gain even more security benefits.

One way or another, time is not on Israel’s side. The relative stability in the West Bank is a testament to the intentions and abilities of the PA, but will not necessarily withstand the fragility of the current situation. Continuing the occupation will eventually lead to a popular uprising organized by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other militant factions, which will make it very hard for the PA forces to operate. That is why the close cooperation with these forces must be regarded as an important security asset to be constantly reinforced, as a relatively stable baseline for moving on to negotiations and a final-status agreement. Continuing the occupation — not to mention unilateral moves such as annexation — will undermine the PA’s ability to provide security for its subjects and cooperate with Israel.

Israeli security officials who have worked with the Palestinian forces view them as an effective partner that can be trusted over time — and as capable of managing security after Israel withdraws.
On the other hand, a gradual, supervised, coordinated process will enable a transfer of responsibility for security in the West Bank to the PA. Many Israeli security officials who have worked with the Palestinian forces view them as an effective partner that can be trusted over time. These forces are capable of rising to the task after Israel withdraws, if the handover is indeed controlled. As the agreement will include guarantees, supervision mechanisms and gradual implementation, it is a better alternative to the current situation, and no less safe.
4. Possible Threats and Responses

As we have discussed, many Israelis fear that the Palestinians will violate an agreement. That is the basis for several popular claims concerning the possible threats of a two-state reality. In this section, we analyze four key threats, assess their likelihood and propose ways to deal with them.

A. The Gazan Model ('Hamastan')

Since Hamas won the elections in 2006, Israel and the PA have gone to great lengths to curtail its activities in the West Bank. Meanwhile, Hamas continues to try and offer a governmental alternative to Fatah in the West Bank and carry out terror attacks against Israeli targets on either side of the Green Line. Despite the PA's efforts, Hamas remains popular. Therefore, one possible scenario after Israel's withdrawal is a Hamas takeover – whether by democratic means or through a military coup, as happened in Gaza.

If Hamas were to gain control of the West Bank – including scenarios in which it is not in power, but has free military rein – the Gazan model may recur. That would mean military capabilities that include comprehensive armament and rocket-fire capacity, underground operations (which would be more difficult than in Gaza, given the West Bank terrain), and more organized training of military wing operatives. All this would leave Israel's vulnerable center exposed to a tangible threat by Hamas, including strategic locations such as the Ben Gurion International Airport – much like the situation in southern Israel today vis-à-vis Gaza.

To estimate the likelihood of this scenario playing out, we can once again use the Egyptian precedent. Before Menachem Begin signed the peace treaty with Egypt, his opponents raised several objections. They argued that Sadat was a weak leader lacking support whose days were numbered; they warned of the possible rise of political elements hostile to Israel (the Muslim Brotherhood); and they cautioned against the evacuated territory becoming a staging ground for terror attacks. Their predictions came true: Anwar Sadat was assassinated, the Muslim Brotherhood rose to power, and Salafi-jihadists now operate throughout the Sinai Peninsula against Israel and the Egyptian regime. Yet although the worst case scenario played out, the peace treaty remains stable, and Egypt and Israel are cooperating more closely than ever before. How can that be? The answer lies, yet again, in Egypt's clear interest in upholding its side of the bargain.

The same is true of the Palestinians. Hamas is now part of the Palestinian political system and, despite its religious origins, is a national movement in terms of goals and priorities. This is evidenced by the movement’s charter, updated in 2017 to include effective recognition of the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders. When a Palestinian state is established, Hamas is likely to alter its strategy and its relationship with the Palestinian public. If Palestinians experience actual improvement and real hope for a better future, many will object to any attempt by Hamas to destabilize the young state they finally achieved after decades of struggle.

This will certainly be true if Hamas takes over the West Bank and takes on the burden of government (as Ariel Sharon put it when asked why he had changed his position on Gaza after becoming prime minister: “Things look different from over here”). The current leader of Hamas,
Yahya Sinwar, has proven since entering office that despite his hawkish approach and clear hostility towards Israel, he is willing to make pragmatic concessions. That was his guiding principle throughout the second Intifada, when he led Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jail. An appropriate Israeli approach that would insist on guaranteeing national security interests yet remain open to the needs of the other side would be able to reach the understanding with Hamas needed to maintain an agreement.

At the end of the day, while many Palestinians may be openly hostile towards Israel, their primary interest is maintaining their basic needs – being safe and earning a decent living. Even if Hamas were to take over the West Bank, it would be in the interest of ‘Hamastan’ to uphold a peace deal with Israel, for one simple reason: its leaders will have a lot to lose if they undermine it. The same goes for Gaza. Whether Israel instates PA control over Gaza as a precondition to signing an agreement or not, Hamas will face extremely strong incentives to work with the political system and change its strategy.

Understanding the system in which Hamas will operate requires an examination of the security conditions that will exist once there are two states. The establishment of the Palestinian state will be phased, with progress from one stage to the next contingent on the PA proving it can meet Israel’s security demands. Take US General John Allen’s plan, formulated as part of Secretary of State John Kerry’s peace initiative in 2013-2014. This is a particularly interesting example, as it is the last time a US administration addressed security issues by talking with both parties (the Palestinians were not invited to participate in the Trump administration’s formulation of the “Trump peace plan”). While the Allen plan was never officially made public, details that emerged indicated it included a long, phased process of transferring security powers to the Palestinians.

In 2016, the Center for a New American Strategy (CNAS), a major think tank in Washington DC, issued its own plan based on the Allen plan and on other security outlines from the last 20 years. The CNAS plan offers a detailed outline for a phased IDF withdrawal from the West Bank and transfer of security powers to the PA. It proposes that the process last 10 to 15 years, based on several contingent stages: establishing, training and guiding Palestinian forces by Americans; evacuating settlements; and transferring responsibility from Israeli to Palestinian forces gradually, by geographical area. All this will be carried out under ongoing supervision by Israel and the US.

These are only two of many examples showing that any future agreement with the Palestinians will include a series of maximal safety measures, meant to deny Hamas the ability to stage a coup or develop military capacity. These safety mechanisms did not exist in the ‘disengagement’ from Gaza, and they are largely the result of lessons learned from that withdrawal. The basic
principle is that Israel will only go ahead with the withdrawal if conditions on the ground allow it: the criteria are agreed in advance, and the entire process is fully coordinated between Israel and the PA. That is obviously a point of conflict – between the Palestinian interest to set an advance date for ending IDF presence in the West Bank and Israel’s interest to base the timeframe on the performance of the Palestinian forces. Whatever the chosen outline, the bottom line is that Israel will not withdraw overnight: not one serious political actor, in Israel or elsewhere, on the right or left, is calling to carry out the two-state solution in one go.

Any discussion of the security risks entailed in a Palestinian state must also take the alternatives into consideration. A 2020 study by Dr. Shira Efron and Evan Gottesman published by the Israel Policy Forum provides this comparison. The authors compare not only the security ramifications of the various alternatives, but a range of criteria such as ease of implementation, public support, political feasibility, international involvement and costs. The study compares the seven possible alternatives – two states, the Trump plan, continuation of the status quo, one democratic or binational state, one Jewish non-democratic state, the Jordanian option and an Israeli-Palestinian confederation. The conclusions are based on interviews with top Israeli, Palestinian and American security and government officials. By analyzing all the existing approaches, including maintaining the status quo, the authors unequivocally find that establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel as part of an agreement will not damage Israeli security – and in fact, will somewhat improve it. While this is merely an educated assessment, it does show that the status quo has no advantage over an agreement in terms of security, even taking into consideration the potential for Hamas to grow stronger. In fact, quite the opposite.

B. **Compromising IDF and ISA Freedom to Operate**

A major argument against an agreement is that establishing a Palestinian state will restrict the IDF’s and ISA’s freedom to act in the West Bank. In one scenario, the PA controls the territory but is challenged by terrorism primarily aimed at Israel. In another, Hamas seizes power and turns Palestine into an enemy state. Critics argue that in both cases, Israel will be unable to effectively fend off military threats as it will no longer have forces on the ground. In the previous subsection, we detailed the checks and balances that will make it difficult for these scenarios to unfold. Here, we address a hypothetical situation that will require Israeli military intervention.

According to all previous understandings between the two parties, the Palestinian state will be demilitarized and will not have military forces. It will only have security forces responsible for fighting terror, domestic policing and controlling the border crossings. The quantity, quality and type of weapons at their disposal will also be limited, so they cannot form a substantial threat to Israel. As for the primary security concern – terrorism and rocket fire from the West Bank – this reality already exists in Gaza and in other places, yet is not an existential, strategic threat to Israel. Rather, it is a matter of routine security measures (as opposed to “fundamental security” – a term relating to military threats that endanger the country’s very existence), with respect to which Israel enjoys absolute military superiority.

In any case, physical IDF presence on the ground will not ensure the rocket fire will stop, and the price may be higher than the threat it is meant to counter (recall that the rocket fire from Gaza started before the ‘disengagement’). In fact, many top security officials prefer remote technology over physical presence. The security barrier is central in this context. Since it was
built in the second Intifada, the number of terrorist attempts to cross into Israel from the West Bank has significantly and consistently dropped. There are now three unfinished sections of the barrier. An agreement will finally enable their completion, increasing Israel’s capacity to deal with terrorism coming from the West Bank.

Many security officials are emphatic that physical military presence is no longer needed. The concept of holding territory and creating civilian settlements to help national security is outdated. Thanks to its absolute technological superiority, Israel can maintain national security and sustain the public’s sense of security with various means that do not necessitate forces on the ground. To illustrate: the most serious conventional threat to Israel today is missiles, some of them precision-guided, held by enemies such as Iran and Hezbollah and covering the entire country. Deploying troops in the West Bank does nothing to address this threat.

The Palestinians are not an existential threat to Israel, as they have no unconventional or sub-conventional weapons that could challenge its military capacities. As for other armies, the West Bank no longer plays a crucial role in defending Israel from an eastern invasion. The Allon Plan was devised after the 1967 war, based on the assumption that there would be a security advantage to military and civilian presence in certain parts of the West Bank. That logic is no longer relevant. Controlling the Jordan Valley and locations west of it was important in order to block Iraqi and Jordanian tanks rolling in from the east. Not only are conventional wars with ground maneuvers a rare sight in the 21st century, but Iraq has no military power and Jordan has a peaceful relationship with Israel. Even Iran, should it wish to attack from the east, will probably not send in ground troops via Jordan. If it chooses to do so against all odds and predictions, the IDF is fully prepared to identify and destroy the troops while still in Jordanian territory – long before they near the border with Israel. In a two-state reality, Israel’s strategic depth will lie further away – in this case, in Jordan. In general, an Arab invasion is much less likely today, and that will remain true after a Palestinian state is established.

Dov Weissglas was Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s bureau chief and was close to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Weissglas, who was familiar with the details of the Annapolis talks, published an article in 2013 listing the reasons for removing Israel’s “dangerous and unnecessary” presence in the Jordan Valley:

Terrorism in the Jordan Valley has always been small in scale... Once Iraq ceased to pose a military threat to Israel, there is no state or other military force east of the Jordan River that could invade Israel... If, heaven forbid, the kingdom of Jordan collapses... it will not be the garrison force, limited in its scale and capabilities, which will engage in this. In general, past experience shows that sparse military forces, deployed along a long defensive line, do not contribute to security.

An agreement will finally enable the completion of the barrier to seal off the Palestinian state – further enhancing Israel’s capacity to deal with terrorism coming from the West Bank.

Thanks to its absolute technological superiority, Israel can maintain security and allow its citizens to feel safe with a variety of methods that do not require forces on the ground.
Usually they are busy defending themselves, as the IDF did in southern Lebanon and on Philadelphi Road (in Gaza).

In 2000, Israel’s Peace and Security Association wrote:

The assumption that the IDF’s physical presence is needed in the West Bank to fend off an attack from east of Jordan is no longer valid. Topographically, the fact it is a low-lying valley will, in modern battle conditions, turn it into a field of destruction for troops entering it. The settlements in the Jordan Valley add nothing to security. When the fighting begins, they will become a security burden.

As detailed, after the agreement is signed, the security arrangements will meet Israel’s ongoing needs. What happens if matters escalate and Israel has to employ military force and re-enter the West Bank? Hostile elements such as Iran or Salafi-jihadist organizations may undermine regional stability and Israel must prepare for this scenario, extreme as it may be. In such a situation, the might of the IDF – and its obvious advantage over the Palestinian forces – will enable Israel to reoccupy the West Bank within hours and address the threat. Israel is strong and independent enough to defend itself, and a specific military incursion to remove a threat will cost much less than continued presence on the ground – especially when that includes civilian settlements, as is currently the case. The ‘disengagement’ from Gaza demonstrates this point: since 2005, fewer Israelis have fallen victim to Palestinian terror attacks, including the three rounds of hostilities between Israel and Hamas in 2008, 2012 and 2014. Moreover, the international community will be much more likely to support Israeli military action than it is at present. The US and other countries are likely to increase their support for Israeli self-defense, and the matter will be enshrined in the agreement itself: Israel insisted on this clause in several rounds of talks.

In general, no policy implemented in the Israeli–Palestinian context is free of security risks. That is also true of Israel’s current policy in the West Bank. Taking all the considerations detailed above into account, the risk of reoccupying the West Bank, should that be necessary, is lower than the risk of remaining there – especially given the slim chances such an extreme scenario would play out. A 2018 study by Lieut. Col. (res.) Omer Zanany showed that even in extreme scenarios of escalation and collapse, a two-state reality is still better for Israel. The IDF’s superior capabilities, which will naturally increase after withdrawing from the West Bank as resources will free up, are a national insurance policy. In any case, the chances Israel will have to cash in on this policy are slender indeed.

To conclude: the reality of an agreement will not be the same as what happened in Gaza – i.e., an Israeli withdrawal leaving ‘scorched earth’ behind for militant elements to enter unfettered. Even if an agreed Israeli withdrawal is risky, that does not mean it is dangerous, certainly compared to the risks entailed in Israel’s continued presence in the West Bank. Risk and danger are not the same thing. There is one major question that should worry Israelis and their leaders: can the IDF effectively protect Israel from the threats that may emerge after a Palestinian state is established? According to the vast majority of top security officials in recent decades, the answer is: yes.
Israel from the threats that may emerge after a Palestinian state is established? According to the vast majority of top security officials in recent decades, the answer is: yes.

C. Risks Relating to Jordan

Jordan has always been integral to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Jordanian rule over the West Bank from 1948 to 1967, the number of Palestinians in the country compared to the entire population, and the historical context – all these make the Hashemite kingdom a major actor.

In terms of security, the major concern is that the country may fall into radical Islamist hands, which would have far-reaching implications given the border with Palestine. In that case, Israel would lose its strategic depth to the east and have two hostile countries along its longest border.

The fall of the Hashemite kingdom has been prophesied since the day it was founded. A British creation drawn with rough, artificial strokes on a map to serve imperialist goals, with no common history or distinct national identity – its capacity to stay stable in the face of threats from home or abroad has repeatedly been questioned over the years. Yet the Hashemite monarchy has ridden out many regional and domestic crises, including the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war. The regime’s balanced, pragmatic policy has helped assuage strife between tribes, Palestinian immigrants, the royal family and refugees from Syria and Iraq. At the same time, external support from the US and the West has kept national security stable. Jordan still faces considerable challenges. Yet the past 100 years show that the kingdom is stronger and more resilient than Israelis usually assume.

Jordan’s official goal, to which it has committed in practice since withdrawing its claim to sovereignty over the West Bank in 1988, is the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Therefore, leaving the Palestinian issue unresolved means leaving “the alternative homeland” or “the Jordanian option” on the table. As Jordan’s rulers do not wish it to become the Palestinian national home, they support a Palestinian state as a guarantee of stability. That is why the king and his top officials proclaim their support for the two-state solution and their objection to unilateral moves. The Jordanian logic is simple: establishing a Palestinian state will help keep Jordan stable and soothe Palestinian national aspirations that could threaten the monarchy.

At the same time, Jordan’s interests are backed by close security ties with the US and Israel, which provide the kingdom with a layer of defense against domestic and foreign threats. Israel’s relationship with Jordan is, in many respects, at a historical low after Netanyahu’s twelve years in office. An exception is the close security cooperation between the two countries, which has survived the general decline in the countries’ relationship. The purpose of this cooperation is to mutually protect the signatories to the peace treaty. The Israel-Jordan peace treaty contains two articles that provide Israel with guarantees for good reason. Article 4 forbids either party from forming military alliances with countries or military organizations that are hostile towards the other party, or from allowing these entities to operate on their territory “in circumstances which may adversely prejudice the security of the other party”. Article 5 includes a mutual undertaking to combat terrorism. Indeed, according to IDF commanders who served in the Jordan Valley in the last 30 years, since the peace treaty was signed, the Jordanian military has effectively prevented terrorism and smuggling along the border with Israel.
The US provides Jordan with another protective layer. Its commitment to the kingdom includes defense aid and sending in forces to help deal with the repercussions of the Syrian civil war and the Salafi-jihadist threat. For years, a side agreement between the US and Jordan has been on the table. Such an agreement would assist the enforcement of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement and include guarantees for Jordan’s stability. For example, the Olmert-Abbas 2007 understandings include a security agreement with Jordan. An important principle Israel must insist upon is that Jordan and Egypt take part in formulating any future agreement with the Palestinians. That will create a regional network ensuring Israel security and military aid, should the need arise. This network would bind the four parties in mutual dependence, reducing the motivation of any one party to violate the agreement.

As noted above, in wider spheres, other countries in the region could join the agreement. This would include a range of initiatives, not only on security matters but also regarding challenges such as refugees, crime, and food and water shortages. Going even broader, the international community will provide the agreement with economic and diplomatic backing. The multilayered structure of the agreement will help each party defend against external threats – and Jordan’s security will be a key strategic goal in any scenario. In any case, it is important to remember that Israel’s current policy destabilizes the Hashemite kingdom more than any future agreement.

D. Relying on Peacekeeping Forces

In most proposed outlines for an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, security arrangements in a two-state reality include foreign troops to help enforce the agreement, especially along the borders. Specifically, General Allen’s plan proposed US troops in the Jordan Valley, while the Annapolis process focused on NATO. The advantage of a multinational force is that it meets the Palestinian demand to do away with IDF presence. It also has certain benefits for Israel, which does not fully rely on the Palestinian security forces. A multinational force can include Israeli troops, which is important to Israel.

Nevertheless, Israel relies in principle on the IDF alone and holds that no other force will effectively protect Israeli interests. This mistrust is largely based on the performance of peacekeeping forces in Sinai (MFO), the Golan Heights (UNDOF) and southern Lebanon (UNIFIL): foreign soldiers are not eager to sacrifice themselves and enforce peace agreements in peace, let alone in wartime — when they are likely to abandon their posts and withdraw to safety. As for US troops, another claim is that the close ties between the US and Israel may be undermined by placing American soldiers at risk to defend Israel. Over the years, the US has increased its military aid to Israel, but it has always been clear that the alliance does not involve fighting in each other’s wars.

These fears may be well-founded, but they do not align with the dynamics that will evolve once an agreement is reached, or with the way the multinational force is likely to operate. Israeli security will remain primarily in the hands of the IDF. Within demilitarized Palestine,
the Palestinian security forces will be responsible for implementing the policies of a
government that, after signing the peace deal, will want to uphold its obligations. The role of
the multinational force will be largely symbolic, centering on mediation between the parties
and representing international efforts and involvement in implementation of the agreement.
No one expects troops that are not Israeli or Palestinian to put their lives on the line. Indeed,
despite Israel’s principled objection to relying on foreign troops, experience on other fronts
shows that once they are deployed, Israel does not want them gone. American troops have been
an important part of the multinational observer force stationed in Sinai since Israel and Egypt
signed the peace treaty – and this has not marred relations with Washington.

Measured involvement of US troops in the mechanisms for enforcing the agreement may do
more good than harm. In previous negotiations, the Palestinians were in favor of deploying
US troops along the borders of Palestine to stop Israel from crossing them. It is important to
remember that these troops are not supposed to replace the IDF and maintain regular positions
deep within Palestinian territory. They will be stationed along the border, in the Jerusalem
Holy Basin and at border crossings. While that does entail a certain risk, the process should be
gradual enough to ensure that the troops will be deployed in a post-agreement, two-state reality
that will allow it.
5. The Myth of the Settlements' Contribution to Security

A recurring argument in favor of the settlements is that they help national security. The origins of this idea are obvious, given Zionism’s formative conflation between settlement and security. The Allon Plan, which first outlined the settlement enterprise after the 1967 war, drew precisely on that notion. Today, the idea that settlements are crucial to security is voiced mostly by the settlement leadership and likeminded politicians. They argue that wherever Jewish civilians settle, the IDF follows — which improves national security. Where there are no Jewish civilians, they add, the IDF refrains from long-term activity — as in the Gaza Strip or in Area A in the West Bank.

In 2017, Molad published a comprehensive report examining the connection between the settlements and national security. The report presented data showing that civilian presence in the Occupied Territories does nothing to improve security, but quite the opposite — it creates a heavy burden for the IDF. In fact, Israel’s security chiefs almost unanimously agree that while the settlements may have been good for national security in the past, that is no longer relevant. Most of the operational assumptions that informed the Allon Plan have been strategically outdated for at least 20 years. That is the result of various geopolitical shifts in the Middle East, including Iraq’s loss of military power, the Israel-Jordan peace treaty and advances in IDF capacities. Along with the changing battlefield in the 21st century, Israeli communities no longer play the role they used to in wartime: civilians do not serve as an armed line of defense as they did in 1948, but are evacuated far from the front line. This means that civilian communities are now a military weak spot — a target easy to attack and difficult to defend.

The need to defend Israeli civilians living deep within Palestinian territory greatly increases the challenges with which the IDF has to contend, and makes it more difficult to protect Israelis from Palestinian terrorism. Understanding why requires a clear distinction between Israel’s civilian presence in the West Bank (settlements) and its military presence there (IDF and ISA military and intelligence operations). For years, the pro-settlement right wing has tried to conflate these two features, in order to create the impression that they are necessarily linked. In fact, the connection works the other way round: the settlements do not serve security; rather, the security forces serve the settlements.

Israel’s security chiefs almost unanimously agree that while the settlements may have been good for national security in the past, that idea is no longer relevant.

The settlements undermine Israeli security in two ways: strategically (broad government policy) and operatively (deployment of troops). First, the settlements force the IDF to deploy along a much longer line of defense. A very conservative estimate puts the current boundary between Israel and the West Bank at five times the length it would be without the settlements. This means that having to protect civilians living within Palestinian territory makes it massively
harder for the IDF to protect civilians within Israel proper. Second, the number of troops needed to control the West Bank takes a large chunk out of the IDF’s standing army, and is disproportionately larger than the troops defending all of Israel’s other fronts put together (Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and the border with Jordan).

The settlements also drain Israel’s limited security resources. They require an especially large number of troops, given the particular nature of the mission: defending civilians living in the very heart of hostile territory. It is a common misconception that most of the troops in the West Bank are busy staving off terror attacks aimed at Israel. In fact, an estimated 80% routinely secure settlements, while only some 20% focus on protecting civilians within the sovereign territory of Israel.

The settlements also hamper the IDF’s ability to respond to emergencies; add many points of friction between Israelis and Palestinians; generate an ongoing conflict between the interests of the settler leadership and the positions of senior security officials; force the IDF to deal with acts of sabotage by Jewish terrorists; and are a divisive element in Israeli society.

Some experts we interviewed suggested that routine engagement in the West Bank may keep soldiers ready and trained for combat. That claim does not hold water for two reasons. First, the immense resources poured into routine engagement in the West Bank could be diverted to building military capacity and preparing for security challenges on more complex fronts – which would improve the current balance of power between Israel and its enemies. Second, combat readiness requires strict, structured training. For example, the IDF trained most heavily from 1967 to 1973. This led to excellent performance in the 1973 war and to major achievements on the battlefield. As a result, Israel was able to win the war on two simultaneous fronts despite the intelligence failure. In contrast, the dearth of training during the second Intifada was painfully evident in the poor combat readiness of both troops and equipment in the second Lebanon war. In other words, building up military power and preparing for war does not require routine engagement, but multi-year planning.

As for the Jordan Valley – isn’t Israeli presence necessary there to defend the country’s eastern border? Again, while this may have been true in the past, it is no longer the case. Israel has never enjoyed strategic depth. From the moment it was established, its narrow center has meant that an invading force could cross the country from one end to the other in a very short time. As a result, Israel’s national security doctrine is based on the assumption that the country will never have physical strategic depth within its own territory. Over time, a series of solutions has compensated for this geographical disadvantage: using nuclear weapons as a deterrent, an operative doctrine of shifting combat into enemy territory and waging short battles, a close military alliance with a superpower and vigilantly maintaining superiority in intelligence and technology. Today, none of these strategic parameters depends on the existence of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. In a reality in which the major threats are rocket fire and terrorism – rather than large-scale wars with ground maneuvers – Israel’s strategic depth is hardly affected by physical presence on one hill or another.
To conclude: the settlements do not make any major contribution to national security. Israel has to ask itself what it is actually defending. If the answer is “the settlements themselves”, they are justified; any other reply leads to the conclusion that the settlements do nothing to promote Israeli security, and in fact detract from it.
6. Why a Peace Deal will Improve National Security

Thus far, we have addressed security arguments raised against the two-state solution. While allaying fears is important, it is also meaningful to examine the issue from a positive perspective. A post-agreement reality would have many aspects that are hard to quantify or even identify in advance. Yet, ultimately, they will be the greatest advantages to ending the conflict: a set of changes on the ground and in public perception that will reshape life on either side of the border.

For example, it is hard to imagine how perceptions will change once an agreement is signed. For more than 100 years, we have been living in the throes of a national and religious conflict that is never far from our daily lives and often erupts in violence. Even quiet periods are tense. It is natural to harbor suspicion towards the other side, whom we perceive through the mental lens of conflict. That powerful feeling at the very core of Israeli and Palestinian identity will not miraculously disappear. Yet a peace deal – which will involve a long, gradual process of mutual trust-building – can slowly change this relationship. Even if the historical hatred and narrative gaps remain, the way we think will change. The starting point is mutual interests; the outcome will be less and less overt expressions of conflict.

The peace treaty with Egypt is the most obvious example for this kind of change in public perception. In the first three decades of Israel’s existence, the idea of peace with Egypt – then the country’s worst enemy – was unthinkable. Yet since the treaty was signed in 1979, it has been strictly upheld and provided both countries with significant stability, despite bleak predictions. Over the years, the countries’ shared interests have repeatedly overridden other considerations the leaders faced – whether they belonged to the right or left wing and were religious or secular. The treaty has survived regional upheavals and dramatic leadership changes on both sides. The fact that it is considered a ‘cold’ peace has not marred the stability of the treaty – even in uncertain times such as 2011 to 2013 in Egypt. The same is likely to be true of the Palestinians: both parties will uphold the agreement, as violating it will exact a much higher price.

In addition, a peace agreement will establish a single Palestinian presence with which Israel can work. Israel has been working with the PA for almost 30 years and knows it well. Transferring more responsibilities to the PA, while weakening rivals such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, will give Israel a more effective interface for managing and enforcing the agreement and developing the relations between the two countries.

Another advantage of an agreement will be gradually diverting public attention and state resources to other major issues in on the national agenda. Israel will enjoy a range of new opportunities to invest in matters other than security, such as the economy, job development, welfare, education.

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health, the environment and technology. The regional framework of the agreement will open up new possibilities for cooperation with neighbors on a variety of issues – from energy and transportation to tourism and education. The entire international community will welcome Israel with open arms, with the danger of boycotts and sanctions finally removed. The security forces will be able to better prepare for the serious challenges they face on other fronts and devote more time to training and to adapting capacities to the changing reality. The IDF’s network of alliances and cooperative efforts will grow considerably thanks to closer ties with countries in the region – increasing Israel’s military power and its scope of action.

Finally, establishing a Palestinian state will end Israel’s military control over a civilian population. The occupation will be over. In addition to reducing the heavy toll on IDF resources and the risks of regular activity in occupied territory, Israel will be able to finally fulfill the moral vision laid out in the Declaration of Independence: the existence of a Jewish and democratic state that ensures equality, liberty and justice for all its citizens.

The security forces will be able to better prepare for the serious challenges they face on other fronts and devote more time to training and to adapting capacities to the changing reality.
Conclusion

The public opinion survey carried out for this study revealed a particularly interesting response to one question: “Regardless of your personal views, do you think most Israelis are for or against the two-state solution?” A majority of 62% respondents thought most Israelis are against the idea, while 38% thought the opposite. This conception of mainstream opinion entirely contradicts reality, as evidenced by dozens of surveys carried out over the last decades – including by Molad – which found a (varying) majority in support of the two-state solution. This means that while most Israelis want two states, a deep misconception has taken root that this solution is illegitimate and is supported only by a minority. This is the result of more than ten years of stalled negotiations, in which the idea of a Palestinian state has disappeared from Israeli discourse.

One consequence of this disappearance is that flawed assumptions concerning the dangers of a Palestinian state have flourished. Most Israelis, whether they are generally in favor of the two-state solution or against it, believe that an agreement with the Palestinians will jeopardize national security. Our analysis unpacked the assumptions informing this belief, some more well-founded than other, yet all representing genuine concern stemming, among other things, from the bloody history of the conflict. Analytically addressing these arguments reveals that security concerns are not an obstacle to a final-status agreement. In fact, establishing a Palestinian state within the framework of an agreement may improve Israeli security.

Concrete fears concerning security ultimately boil down to suspicion that the Palestinians cannot be trusted as partners. This formidable psychological barrier consists primarily of Israelis’ experience of security in the 21st century: the unilateral withdrawals from Gaza and Lebanon, and especially the former, left behind a ‘scorched earth’ that became the staging ground for armament and militant activity against Israel. Indeed, unilateralism has little to offer Israel. A peace agreement would be just the opposite: a mutual undertaking with many mechanisms in place to ensure that Israel’s security interests are protected. None of these crucial mechanisms exist in unilateral moves.

Unlike one-sided decisions, a signed agreement changes the conditions in which the signatories operate and their state of mind. Should a Palestinian state be established, it would have a very good reason not to harm Israel: it would have a lot to lose. The economic development, the material gains and the regional and international support it would receive as part of the agreement would all drastically lower Palestinian motivation to take up arms again — coupled with the knowledge that harming Israel could bring the IDF back into the West Bank. In any case, the IDF will not lose power as part of the agreement. On the contrary, Israel will retain military and technological superiority, which will enable it to address any security threat and re-enter the West Bank as needed.
Israeli security officials and diplomats who took part in negotiations over the years believe that the security forces can effectively protect Israelis after withdrawing from the West Bank. While Israel and the Palestinians disagree over some details of the security arrangements, they are considered solvable.

Any future agreement should be guided by asking what kind of country Israel wants to be and what solution to the conflict will best serve its interests. Based on the answers, the security establishment will know how to provide the appropriate security measures to enable normal, safe daily life for the citizens of both states. The policy this establishment is currently being asked to serve is Israel’s choice to continue settling its citizens deep within Palestinian territory. A future policy may be different – and the security forces will be able to adapt accordingly. Israel’s security conception will serve its policy goals and national vision.

Objection to the two-state solution is based on the view that prefers the current situation – the ‘status quo’ – over major changes in reality. This is a very dangerous assumption, as most top security experts believe that reality in the West Bank will sooner or later lead to a violent eruption. The Palestinians still aspire to achieve independence and still live under military occupation. This volatile combination will necessarily lead to recurring uprisings by the oppressed party. The first Intifada was preceded by twenty years of deceptive calm, and the same happened with the second Intifada. Even if one generation surrenders the fight against Israel, the next will take up arms again. Oppression cannot last over time, certainly not in the 21st century. The policy of “conflict management” means repeated rounds of violence and a heavy toll in life and limb on both sides.

Ultimately, Israel will have to choose between the reality of one state – which will change the lives of Israeli citizens entirely and may spiral into Yugoslavian-type bloodshed – and the solution of two states. The only proposal on the table that is fully detailed and enjoys broad public support is partitioning the land between the two peoples and establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel. It is not a perfect solution, nor will it be easy to carry out. Yet at the end of the day, there is no other alternative that clearly addresses the core problems of the conflict: sovereignty, territory and security.

Any path Israel chooses will entail risk. The challenge, therefore, is to manage the risks and minimize them – not try and avoid them altogether. Avoiding action based on the faulty assumption that the present situation will last forever overlooks the changes already taking place, and denies the growing danger. A reasoned, responsible decision to adopt the two-state solution means smart risk management in keeping with the geopolitical circumstances, which will serve Israel’s interests.
References

This study draws on a wide range of sources in order to provide a comprehensive basis for discussion. The sources, which help understand the security considerations pertaining to a final-status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, are listed below.

**Interviews**

Much of the research for this study consisted of in-depth interviews conducted between March and May of 2020 with a broad range of Israeli security experts, who can be divided into three areas of expertise:

- Persons who held the highest-ranking positions in the IDF and the ISA over the last decade, especially with operative and intelligence experience on the Palestinian front
- Chief representatives in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians in recent decades
- Experts from academy and think tanks who specialize in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, national security, military history, psychology, strategy and international relations

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