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Questions and Answers on the INSS Plan:
A Strategic Framework for the Israeli-Palestinian Arena
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In early October 2018, the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) presented a strategic framework for the Israeli-Palestinian arena, with recommendations for Israeli policy at the present time. One important purpose of presenting the framework was to stimulate thought and public debate, and the plan indeed aroused much interest and received a wide variety of responses, some supportive and some critical. The range of responses indicates that the public is open to new ideas and understands that Israel can and must work to create a better strategic reality. This paper presents the responses we received, and clarifies the positions in the framework.

In early October 2018, the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) presented a strategic framework for the Israeli-Palestinian arena, with recommendations for Israeli policy at the present time. The purpose was to reinforce the mission of Israel as a Jewish, democratic, secure, and moral state; to block the slide into a situation of one Israeli-Palestinian state; to promote moves toward political, demographic and territorial separation from the Palestinians; and to shape a future reality of two states. The framework is the product of in-depth research, which examined various scenarios in detail to illustrate the consequences and how the scenarios affect policy options for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The research process included discussions involving former senior figures from the security establishment and public service, as well as individuals with many years of experience in the Israel-Palestinian relationship.

Publication of the framework was accompanied by an invitation to the public to respond, and we are delighted that it indeed aroused much interest and received a wide variety of responses. Many supported the ideas presented in the plan; others conveyed their criticisms and reservations. Based on this feedback, we would like to clarify our positions on several central issues.

Contention: *“This framework is a second disengagement, this time from Judea and Samaria [the West Bank]”*

On a conceptual level, the framework supports a political, territorial, and demographic separation from the Palestinians in the West Bank. However, the actual process intended here is completely different from the disengagement from the Gaza Strip. The primary weakness of the Gaza disengagement lay in abandoning the area to terror and returning to the June 4, 1967 border line with no reciprocity from the Palestinian side. In the INSS framework, apart from the fact that it does not include evacuating settlements and is not a return to the Green Line, the IDF will retain freedom of action in the entire area and sole control of the security perimeter – the Jordan Valley and the crossings (unlike the Philadelphi Corridor - between Egypt and the Gaza Strip). This will prevent smuggling of weapons, infiltration by terrorists and extremists, and expansion of terror infrastructures, and will allow the security forces to continue to counter terror attacks. In addition, the framework is intended to motivate the Palestinian Authority (PA) to continue its security coordination and cooperation with Israel, against terror and Hamas in particular. The framework also includes an economic plan to improve infrastructures and the fabric of life of the Palestinian population in the West Bank, based on an understanding that such improvement will help stabilize the area.

In joint working groups with the Palestinians we learned that a demonstration of Israel's commitment to promote a reality of two separate, distinct political entities, together with Arab and international support, will encourage the PA to adopt a positive approach to the framework.

Moreover, unlike the disengagement in Gaza, which was a unilateral Israeli move, the outline proposes expanding the circle of cooperation between Israel and the PA, to Egypt, Jordan and other pragmatic Arab states as well. Their special role in the framework is to provide political support for the PA and assist in building independent and effective capabilities, while giving Israel something in return in the form of closer relations and enhanced cooperation. Our discussions in Arab capitals and among leaders of the international community found that they are ready to help in implementing the framework, if it opens up the possibility of a future political settlement that is based on a two-state solution and the trend toward separation creates the right conditions and a positive political atmosphere. Therefore, the relevant parties should have an interest in providing support and cooperation.

Regarding independent Israeli moves – even without consent or cooperation from the PA - we believe that Israel should take steps that promote political, territorial, and demographic separation from the Palestinians without involving any security risk, in order to reduce Israel's direct control of the Palestinian population. This is a material Israeli interest, designed to strengthen Israel and ensure its long term security, and

therefore Israel should promote these steps in a way that is not dependent on the willingness of others to provide support or cooperation.

Contention: *“The outline includes Israeli concessions to the Palestinians, with nothing in return”*

A comprehensive study of a wide range of political options in the Israeli-Palestinian arena with reference to possible future scenarios shows that the only option that survives most scenarios and ensures a Jewish, democratic, secure, and moral State of Israel is the one of separation and the creation of a two-state reality. In the course of our research we gleaned additional insights, including: in order to ensure Israel’s long term security, there should be a stable, functioning, and responsible PA. Therefore the framework proposes steps that can reinforce the PA’s governance and performance. One of the causes of the ongoing stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian arena is the widespread perception that the situation is a “zero sum game”; in other words, any gain by one side necessarily means a loss by the other side. The actual situation is the reverse – a loss by one side is also a loss by the other side. Moreover Israel, which is currently in an unquestioned position of strength, can take actions that will benefit both itself and the other side. It has a rich and complex range of tools at its disposal with which it can promote a situation that will ensure its future security, while also improving the fabric of life of the Palestinians.

Adoption and implementation of the framework, even if only partially, will change the existing trend and grant Israel numerous benefits, including: reinforcing the formative idea of a Jewish, democratic, secure, and moral state; taking the initiative to shape an improved political-security reality, by exploiting Israel’s strategic advantages; advancing political separation from the Palestinians and thus reducing the demographic burden and Israel’s control of the Palestinian population; providing security for its citizens; improving Israel’s regional and international standing; realizing the potential of cooperation with the pragmatic Arab states; opening future political options toward a two-state reality, living side by side in peace and security.

Contention: *“This means freezing construction in isolated settlements”*

Yes, that is part of the plan, but it is joined by ongoing construction in settlement blocs and their definition as essential to Israel in any future situation. The goal is the combined demonstration of the determination to advance toward separation, reduction in the friction and dangers arising from expansion of settlements deep in the Palestinian territories, and allocation of space for Palestinian territorial contiguity. However, the framework does not propose evacuating settlements. This is an issue to be discussed in negotiations over a permanent status agreement with the PA.

Contention: *“The framework is in fact a ‘conflict management’ plan that will transform what is currently defined as temporary into a permanent situation”*

First, the framework states that Israel should adopt a policy that clearly announces its goal of seeking a future solution of two states for two peoples and its preference for a permanent status agreement or transition arrangements with the Palestinians. At the same time, it should work toward crafting a reality of separation even if the Palestinians refuse to cooperate with actions in this direction. The framework deprives the Palestinians “right to veto” for any political progress, and also challenges the concept of “all or nothing.”

Second, the basic assumption of those who support managing the conflict is that the current situation, defined as the status quo, is sustainable in the long term. However, the scenarios we examined show that the current situation is not static, but represents a slow and steady slide toward a one-state reality. Another drawback of the status quo is that Israel fails to take the initiative to shape a better strategic reality, and simply reacts to events in the Palestinian and regional environment.

If Israel continues to mark time, based on an assessment that the existing situation is preferable to any initiative, then in future, in view of the current trends toward heightened Israeli control on the ground – led by initiatives to apply Israeli law in Judea and Samaria and annex territory, and the overwhelming skepticism regarding the two-state option among both the Israeli and the Palestinian publics – Israel will find itself in a dilemma, unable to separate from the Palestinians even if it wishes to do so. This means the existence of one political entity that will have to be either not Jewish or not democratic.

Therefore, the framework proposes a policy and actions whose purpose is to change the current trend, to return to the Zionist idea of taking the initiative to strive to achieve a Jewish and democratic state, and move toward separation. The framework does not propose “managing the conflict,” but on the contrary, taking the initiative and striving to change the situation.

We are not unaware of the difficulties and the huge gaps between the Israeli and Palestinian approaches and positions. In fact, that is why the framework proposes measured and controlled steps. For example, in the current reality it is not possible to curb the operational freedom of the IDF west of the Jordan and transfer the responsibility for security to the PA security apparatus. Therefore, the framework preserves the IDF’s security control of the entire area, but seeks to limit friction between it and the Palestinian population. The steps we have formulated look to the future – while seeking to lay the foundations today that will enable resolutions to outstanding issues between the parties and solutions to the future challenges.

Contention: *“The framework avoids dealing with the core issues of the conflict”*

Indeed, the framework does not deal with conflict resolution, but proposes a course of action that will subsequently enable the sides to reach understandings and even peaceful relations. It does not deal with the question of the Palestinian refugees, except for maintaining that they should be barred from returning to the territory of State of Israel. It anchors Israel's security, territorial, and settlement interests, and reinforces them in the framework of a reorganization of the West Bank areas. As for Jerusalem - if the PA responds positively to the framework - the plan includes three steps: (1) maintaining the existing situation, while strengthening Israeli sovereignty over places that are essential to it, particularly in the Holy Basin; (2) transferring the Arab neighborhoods and villages outside the security fence to PA control; (3) setting up a separate municipal authority for metropolitan East Jerusalem (excluding the Old City, the City of David, the Mount of Olives, Sheikh Jarrah, and the Jewish neighborhoods), managed by East Jerusalem residents but under Israeli sovereignty and the Minister of the Interior. Israel thereby indicates that in future, in the framework of a permanent status agreement, this new municipal authority – Metropolitan East Jerusalem – can be transferred to the PA.

Contention: *“There is nothing new in the framework; it raises ideas and solutions that have already been presented”*

Yes, some of the ideas in the outline and its conclusions have already been sounded. However, the innovation lies in the combination of various tracks of action and a presentation of principles for a practical plan, which can be realized rather than remaining as a theoretical idea. In recent years, former senior members of the security establishment – chiefs of staff, heads of the GSS, heads of the Mossad, and former generals believe that the way to ensure the future and security of Israel is to promote separation from the Palestinians.

The main innovation here is that the framework does not propose the same track for resolving the conflict that has been tried time after time without success – direct negotiations between the parties in order to achieve total agreement on all the core issues (security arrangements, Jerusalem, refugees, permanent borders, future of the settlements, end of all claims). It is impossible to reach total agreement in one swoop in the foreseeable future, since the parties are not ready for it and the conditions on the ground prevent it. It is only by taking the initiative and making moves towards separation, even before agreement is reached, that the State of Israel will be able to define its character and shape a situation that will support a future effective political process.

The framework combines the benefits of three tracks – the negotiations route will be expressed in transitional arrangements, which are partial and sometimes very specific agreements, subject to the logic that any agreement in the course of negotiations is implemented immediately (unlike the failed formula that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”); sometimes they will be simply understandings as part of the cooperation with the PA (moves that are acceptable but do not have to reach a signed agreement). At the same time there will be a regional track, to provide legitimacy to both sides, together with guarantees and collateral for political progress and aid to the PA on the economy and infrastructure. In any case, Israel will retain the ability to promote the separation through the track of independent steps in order to prove the seriousness of its intentions and create the conditions for further advances toward agreed separation, while depriving the Palestinians of the veto over moves that in Israel’s view serve its clear long term political and security interests.

We would like to thank all those who read the framework and responded. One important purpose of the framework was to stimulate thought and public debate, and in this case, to persuade others that there are ways of promoting a better strategic reality for Israel. This contradicts the current widespread perception that there is no way to break the impasse in the Israeli-Palestinian arena, and that the risks involved in any move to change the current political-territorial situation outweigh the benefits.