

Chapter 1

A Unitary State

The model: Israel is a single undivided state established on the entire territory, encompassing the existing territory of Israel and the West Bank and potentially also the Gaza Strip (see Figure 1).

The main idea: Avoiding a division of the territory of greater Israel while preserving the state's identity as Jewish and democratic.

Figure 1. Unitary state



1. The Territorial division

In the model, the Green Line (the demarcation line set out in the 1949 armistice agreement's between Israel and its neighbors, which delimits the territories captured by Israel in 1967) will be erased and Israeli law will be applied to the entire territory and to all residents of the state. Israel's territory will be undivided.

2. The Status of the Settlements

The settlements will remain in place like any other town or city in Israel.

3. Jerusalem

Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel without any need to divide up authority. There will be a need to preserve access to the holy places of the various religions.

4. Citizenship and Residency

The Palestinians of the West Bank will become permanent residents of Israel, as residency is based on a factual basis of living permanently in the state. Residency will confer various rights, including the right to work anywhere in the state and social welfare benefits, such as National Insurance and participation in municipal elections.

In general, Israel's permanent residents have the right to request citizenship, although the citizenship process may include various criteria, including swearing allegiance to the state. If Palestinian residents are denied the possibility of obtaining Israeli citizenship, they will remain deprived of any citizenship. Such an outcome, as a permanent solution, will violate Israel's democratic character. Furthermore, a discriminatory regime will emerge with two types of residents, and that denies political representation to an entire group based on their ethnic identity. Apart from the impact on Israel's values, denying the right of citizenship from the Palestinians will leave them frustrated and hostile toward Israel, which could undermine its stability.

5. Governmental authority

Israel's official institutions, such as the Knesset and the government, will continue to operate in their current format. All citizens of the state will be able to vote and be elected to government.

On the operational level, it will be necessary to adapt government bodies to the significant addition of Palestinian residents. This includes establishing appropriate institutions, such as mechanisms for tax collection, licensing, and providing services to the residents of the territory added to the state. Language gaps will need to be addressed by enhancing the use of Arabic within the state, in order to provide an appropriate response for the requirements of the new Palestinian residents of Israel.

If the local Palestinian leadership refuses to cooperate, to the point of boycotting the state's government institutions, then the government of Israel will be forced to exercise its powers directly in the Palestinian territory. In the complete absence of cooperation, Israel might be compelled to appoint its own representatives to manage municipal affairs.

6. Palestinian involvement in government

As citizens of Israel, the Palestinians will have the right to vote and be elected to the state's institutions. Thus, the large Palestinian minority will have political influence and a possibility of being involved in the state's strategic decision making. This may have important consequences since the Palestinians will have significant electoral power—given the fragmentation among the Jewish public—particularly if they unite forces in the political arena.

Collective rights of the Palestinian minority in the state could be recognized. This includes nurturing Arab identity and culture and self-rule in domains such as education, religion, and culture. Such a move may enable the Palestinians to fulfill their national sentiments to a degree while residing in a Jewish-identified state; however, providing such rights is not a substitute for granting equal civil rights.

7. Freedom of movement within the state

As permanent residents in Israel, the Palestinians will enjoy freedom of movement within the state, including the right to choose their place of residence. Therefore, Palestinians will be able to move and live within the Green Line. In parallel, the citizens of Israel will be able to live anywhere the West Bank.

The government of Israel will retain full control of its borders and the international transit points, as well as full authority over entry and exit policy.

8. The refugee issue

The government of Israel will have the right to block the entry of Palestinian refugees from abroad into the country.

Descendants of the 1948 refugees who live in the West Bank (and Gaza Strip—if it is part of the state) could attempt to exercise the “right of return” to their families’ original homes. This may, for example, involve the physical “invasion” of these locations. Even if such an endeavor is prevented, there is, nonetheless, a major potential for tension.

As the sovereign in the entire territory, Israel will have to rehabilitate the refugee camps located in the West Bank (and in the Gaza Strip if it becomes part of the state).

9. Security aspects

The state security authorities will be responsible for internal security and public order in the entire territory, including the Palestinian territory that is added to the state. Although the Israel Police will assume the main responsibility, the Israel Security Agency (ISA) and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) will have the right to operate in their areas of responsibility, namely fighting terror and protecting the borders. The powers of the state will be as specified in Israeli law and therefore will be more limited than the powers that Israel currently has in the West Bank.

Violent armed groups and terror organizations in the Palestinian territory will continue to threaten security. Some members of the Palestinian security forces might choose to join such efforts and offer

to share their weapons and experience. This could pose a significant challenge, given their large arsenal of weapons and level of organization. The freedom of Palestinian residents to move throughout the country could pose security risks due to the friction between the different peoples. Obviously, some Palestinians will oppose the idea of their integration within a state that maintains a Jewish identity and they could resort to violent means. At the same time, some members of the Jewish constituency might oppose the idea of granting full rights to Palestinian residents and may also turn to violence. In addition, given the economic disparities within the state, crime originating from the Palestinian territory is also expected to increase.

The issue of whether to draft Palestinians into Israel's security forces will need to be determined. Even if they are not subjected to the draft, as currently is the case for Israel's Arab citizens, the question will arise of whether to refuse an individual's request to be drafted.

If Israel is dragged into a confrontation with the Gaza Strip—should Gaza remain outside the state—there is a concern that the Palestinians will support—and even try to assist—their brethren there.

10. Social aspects

Consolidating Palestinian and Jewish societies into a unitary state will lead to greater interaction between the two peoples, particularly given the freedom of movement that all residents will enjoy. To maintain stability, processes of reconciliation between the two peoples will be essential; this may pose a significant challenge, however, due to the deep hostility and huge divide between them. To the extent that the Palestinian residents feel that they are in an inferior position relative to the rest of the population, the process of reconciliation is less likely to succeed.

11. Economic and civil aspects

The government of Israel will be responsible for the economy and infrastructure of the entire territory of the state, including areas in the West Bank populated by Palestinians. This responsibility entails ensuring an adequate standard of living and providing a reasonable level of services for all residents.

The government will have to work proactively to narrow economic gaps between the regions of the state. Most of the Palestinian areas are poorer and have less developed infrastructure compared to other parts of the state. Narrowing these gaps will require significant investment. This becomes even more pertinent if the impoverished Gaza Strip becomes part of Israel.

To provide the full range of services to the Palestinian population, it will be necessary to create appropriate institutions and mechanisms. Even if it is possible to build on existing Palestinian institutions, they will need to be modified to ensure that they operate according to the relevant laws of the state.

12. Preserving the Jewish character of the state

The involvement of the Palestinians in the state’s political processes as citizens with equal rights may lead to an attempt to alter Israel’s Jewish character. Although it is possible to anchor the state’s Jewish identity so that it will be difficult to change, such as by enshrining it as a constitutional principle, guaranteeing the state’s Jewish character indefinitely will be impossible, given the demographic composition of the state and pressures for gradual change.

13. Preserving the democratic and liberal character of the state

As already mentioned, any attempt to deprive the Palestinians of full rights within the state is not compatible with maintaining Israel’s democratic character.

Moreover, the model might challenge the liberal character of Israel, given that the Palestinian population is characterized as more religious and traditionalist. The adoption of the model will increase the relative weight of the more traditionalist sectors in Israel, such as the Arab and ultra-Orthodox populations. This may have significant implications for various issues, such as ensuring equal rights for women and the LGBTQ community, as well as allowing freedom of expression on controversial issues, such as the artistic use of religious symbols.

14. Implications for Israel's Arab citizens

Israel's Arab citizens may serve as a connecting link between the various groups in the state. Under this model, they may also benefit from the possible recognition of the Palestinians' collective rights, as mentioned above. Nonetheless, while today most of Israel's Arab citizens have accepted living with a double identity, namely Israeli and Palestinian, the model may force them to make a choice between having a connection to Jewish Israeli society and the desire to integrate within it or having a national and religious connection to the Palestinian residents who will become part of the state.

15. Implications for the Palestinian Authority

The Palestinian Authority (PA) will be dismantled and its powers will be transferred to the state's institutions. Certain bodies of the PA, such as the welfare, health, and educational services, could continue to exist under either the umbrella of the state or the municipal government, on the condition that they are amenable to that arrangement.

The Palestinian security services will be dismantled, and all their equipment and weapons will be transferred to the state. This process can be expected to arouse opposition.

All the organizations that represent the PA (or Palestine) at the international level will cease their activities, unless otherwise agreed upon during the establishment of the unitary state or subsequently. The cooperation of international organizations on this issue depends on the extent to which the establishment of a unitary state is accepted by the international community.

16. The Gaza Strip

If the Gaza Strip is included in the state's territory, all of its residents will also become residents of Israel and will have the right to request citizenship. The implications described above will apply to them. The state will be responsible for what occurs in the entire Gaza Strip.

Applying the model in the Gaza Strip will require recapturing it, since Israel does not currently have control there.

17. Execution of the model

The creation of the unitary state will follow the annexation of the West Bank (and potentially the Gaza Strip) by Israel and the imposition of Israeli law in the entire territory. The Oslo Accords will be officially annulled and all of the mechanisms it created will be discontinued.

This is a process with important implications and one that constitutes a fundamental change in the structure of Israel. Therefore, it will be critical to obtain the direct approval of the people by means of a referendum or elections centered on this issue.

If the creation of a unitary state is based on Palestinian consent, it will be imperative to reach an agreement that specifies the details of the new reality, including interim arrangements and the formal transfer of power.

If the PA opposes the creation of a unitary state, then Israel will have to take control of the entire territory, strip the PA of its powers, and dismantle the Palestinian security forces. It can be assumed that the PA and many of the Palestinian residents will violently oppose such a move, and therefore, it will involve a major military confrontation.

If Israel has already taken control of the PA's territory, due to the collapse of the PA, for example, then transition to a unitary state will not require recapturing the territory, but rather a legal act will be required to annex the territory to Israel. With respect to the Gaza Strip, it will be necessary to retake control of the territory, as already mentioned, unless Israel has already done so.

The creation of a unitary state will lead to a major and comprehensive transformation of the legal situation in the territory to be added to the state, since Israeli law will then be fully applied there. Transitional arrangements will be necessary, in addition to steps to implement the new legal status, including, for example, a process of registering all the unregistered rights to land (which accounts for the majority of land in the West Bank).

It will be necessary to establish institutions in Israel, including a government ministry and executive bodies, which will be responsible for interfacing with the Palestinian areas that have been added to the

state. The use of the military administration in the territory will be discontinued.

18. The feasibility of creating a unitary state

If it is the intention to create a unitary state with the consent of the Palestinians, then it is difficult to see how this model will be implemented. It is unlikely that the Palestinians will consent to joining Israel and becoming part of a unitary state with a Jewish character while giving up their national aspirations and agreeing to dismantle the PA and its institutions, unless they feel that they can take control of Israel from within and change its character over time. Furthermore, if the state has no intention to grant full rights to the Palestinians, then the chances of gaining Palestinian consent to this model are nonexistent.

Establishing a unitary state without Palestinian consent will, as already mentioned, require retaking control of the entire territory. Such a move will involve a major confrontation with the Palestinians.

The creation of a unitary state in which the Palestinians have full equality will meet opposition from large segments of the Israeli public, due to the fear that it will eventually lead to the end of the country's Jewish character. However, some of the Israeli public will oppose the creation of a unitary state without equal rights as they will feel that it will lead to the loss of Israel's democratic character. In any case, such a process can be expected to create tension and division within Israeli society, which could result in internal disorder.

An attempt to create a unitary state without the Palestinians' consent is likely to result in substantial international pressure on Israel to refrain from such a move.

The chances of success as a permanent solution to the conflict

1. The unitary state model envisions Israel as a state with a significant Palestinian minority (which would become even larger if the Gaza Strip is included). In the absence of genuine reconciliation between the Jewish and Palestinian populations and given the divides between the populations—religious, cultural, and economic—the presence of this minority, which will have freedom of movement within the state and will be

able to reside wherever it chooses, is expected to cause persistent friction between the two populations, as well as potential security threats due to the presence of terrorist elements who do not accept the establishment of the state. This fear will be exacerbated should the Palestinians feel that they do not enjoy full rights in the state and should the gaps in their integration within the state and economic disparities remain significant.

2. If the Palestinians are granted full civil status and the possibility of influencing the political process, they may attempt to use that influence to weaken the Jewish character of the State of Israel and also to shift strategic decision making in directions that are not necessarily in line with the positions of the Jewish majority. Such efforts will lead to opposition among large swathes of the Jewish public, which will increase the tension between Jews and Palestinians in the state and could lead to civil war.
3. If the model does not provide equal status to the Palestinians, Israel will deviate from fundamental democratic principles and will not be able to maintain its democratic character. This is expected to affect all facets of life in the state since it has the potential to undermine civil liberties in general and to weaken—and perhaps even neutralize—the gatekeepers of democracy, such as the courts and the media.
4. Giving all Palestinians residency and including all the Palestinian territory within Israel will create a heavy economic burden, given the poverty in the Palestinian territory and the need to meet the needs of the new residents of the state. This problem will be exacerbated if the Gaza Strip is also included in the state. The major economic disparity between the Jewish population and the Palestinian residents could also increase levels of crime in the state.
5. Should the Gaza Strip not become part of Israel, and if Israel finds itself in a confrontation with the Gaza Strip, then the state’s Palestinian residents could support the other side in the conflict or be suspected of doing so, which could generate additional tension.
6. The inclusion of Gaza in the state will create a particularly problematic demographic situation, in which the Palestinians will constitute a sizable proportion of Israel’s population; this would essentially change

the character of the state. This is in addition to the other difficulties described above in absorbing Gaza into the state. Leaving Gaza outside the boundaries of Israel, however, means that the conflict will not be fully resolved as Gaza will remain a focus of instability and a source of tension in the relations between Palestinians and Jews within the state.

7. There is no precedent for successful unification of two entities with different national characters into one state—especially in the case of a long and bloody conflict between them—and all the more so into a democratic state. On the contrary, there have been cases of secession on the basis of nationality, such as Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Even in leading democracies and among peoples who are living in peace, there are still voices calling for secession. This includes, for example, Catalonia, which is trying to secede from Spain, and Scotland, which is considering secession from Britain.