

Executive Summary

In recent years, there has been increasing talk of the “demise of the two-state solution” and its replacement with a one-state framework. This single state, which would span the area from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, is posited as a solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Proponents of this idea claim that the two-state solution is no longer feasible, given that the Green Line has been blurred and Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) is inextricably connected to the State of Israel by extensive Israeli military and civilian activity. From a demographic perspective, adding the Palestinians living in Judea and Samaria to Israel’s population would mean that almost 40% of Israel’s residents would be Palestinian, doubling the current number of Israeli Palestinians residing in the state (including East Jerusalem). If the Gaza Strip is also included, then almost half of the state’s population would be Palestinian.

In the past, most of the supporters of the one-state idea were from the Israeli radical left or the Arab community in Israel and proposed a binational or a nationless state. Today, the idea of having one state as the preferred solution to the conflict has become increasingly prevalent among a considerable part of the political right in Israel and even among the political center. However, their idea refers to a state that preserves its Jewish character. At the same time, they contend that there is no intention to violate the democratic character of the state. Accordingly, various models seek to provide the Palestinians with a certain level of self-rule within the one-state framework.

The unfolding developments that are making the one-state idea more prominent, potentially erasing the two-state paradigm as a solution to the conflict, demand an in-depth analysis of this idea. It is particularly important to identify, as soon as possible, whether a one-state framework is indeed a viable solution to the conflict. This is the aim of this study.

The models for a one-state solution between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River include:

1. A unitary state: A single state in the entire territory with no internal borders.
2. A state with a Palestinian autonomy: A state in which the Palestinians have self-rule within a Palestinian autonomous area.
3. A federal state: A state divided into Jewish and Palestinian districts, in which the districts have broad powers at the district level, but the central government has authority at the national level.
4. A confederation: A model with two states—one Palestinian and one Jewish (Israel)—with a defined and open border between them. A joint Israeli and Palestinian government would function at the confederate level in specific areas of authority, such as external security and foreign trade.

This memorandum attempts to go beyond the basic question of whether it is possible to have a single state that is both Jewish and democratic, an issue that has been at the center of the public discourse. Instead, the goal here is to examine the feasibility of the one-state models from a practical perspective. The analysis is conducted from an Israeli perspective, focusing on the interests of Israel and the concerns of the majority of the Israeli public.

Each model is examined according to an array of parameters: the territorial division; the status of the settlements; the status of Jerusalem; aspects of citizenship and residency; governmental authority; the involvement of the Palestinians in government; freedom of movement within the state; the refugee issue; security aspects; social aspects; economic and civil aspects; preservation of the state’s Jewish character; preservation of the state’s democratic and liberal character; the implications for Israel’s Arab citizens; the implications for the Palestinian Authority; the status of the Gaza Strip; and the execution of the model and its feasibility. After analyzing these factors, the likelihood of the model’s success as a permanent solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is assessed.

Based on the insights of this memorandum, it becomes apparent that none of the models have any genuine prospect of being a permanent, stable, and successful solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. One main reason is the high potential for friction due to the free movement that is allowed by all the models. Given the deep-seated hostility between the two populations over the past decades and their religious, cultural, social, and economic differences,

the models raise the concern that tension between the populations will lead to violent internal confrontations and ultimately to the state's instability.

The hostility between the peoples is prone to increase in the future in all the models in which the Palestinians become part of a state that has a Jewish identity without being able to realize their national identity. The confederation gives an adequate solution to this aspect; hence, friction might decrease with time in this model.

Denying the Palestinians full rights in the state, besides being a fatal blow to the democratic nature of Israel, will deepen feelings of animosity, leading to inevitable violence that could deteriorate into a full-fledged civil war. Granting the Palestinians full and equal civil rights could lead to their altering the Jewish identity of the state. Additionally, national tensions will continue to exist and could destabilize the state. The confederation is the only model that offers a solution to these concerns since each nation controls its own state.

All the models also impose a heavy economic burden on Israel, due to the imperative to provide for the needs of all the new Palestinian residents in the state. Although in the confederation the residents of the Palestinian state are not Israel's direct responsibility, their economic situation is of critical importance. Indeed, bridging economic gaps within the confederation is crucial for its stability. In addition, dividing the state into districts and regions, as suggested in the federation and autonomy models, creates duplication, complexity, and excess, especially given the small size of the country.

Furthermore, in order to implement the models, the consent of the Palestinians is required, and the two sides must manage to settle numerous controversial issues. It is difficult to see how this can be achieved. Moreover, all models (except, perhaps, the unitary model) require reaching agreement with the representatives of the Palestinians in a continuous fashion as part of the implementation of the model. This entails endless disputes.

In contrast to the models analyzed in this study, which are based on the idea of a continued connection between the Jewish and Palestinian peoples in the area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, the two-state solution is based on the idea of separation. This model is not explored in this document but has been extensively analyzed over the years, including by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). This solution has significant shortcomings, as it requires dividing the land

and evacuating settlements, in addition to creating certain security risks. Nevertheless, the impossibility of a model based on the union of both peoples as a stable solution to the conflict—as the analysis in this document clearly demonstrates—inevitably leads to the conclusion that a solution based on separation, despite its shortcomings, is indeed the preferable solution for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.