

Palestinian State – A Security Threat?

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Israel and the Palestinians failed to reach a framework agreement at the Camp David II summit that would include all the principal components of a permanent settlement, but they did succeed in reaching agreement in some spheres and narrowed the gaps in others. One issue not in dispute is the establishment of a Palestinian state as an important element of a permanent status agreement and an expression of the Palestinian people's right for self-determination. This reflects the acceptance of the establishment of Palestinian state by most Israelis, once the interim agreement ends. The dispute between the sides now focuses on the character of the Palestinian state and the contractual limitations to be imposed on it.

Security considerations play a considerable role. In the past, the reservations regarding a Palestinian state held by most Israelis not committed to the "Greater Israel" ideology derived from the fear that such a state would constitute a grave security risk to Israel. Israel's consent to the establishment of such a state is contingent upon agreed security arrangements to prevent it from becoming a serious security risk to Israel. The quality of these arrangements will also considerably influence public support of a

settlement in a referendum.

This article examines only the security implications of a Palestinian state established under an agreement with Israel, not with the implications of a unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state.

Potential Threats

The fear that a Palestinian state could constitute a security risk stems partially from the basic characteristics of the anticipated relationship between Israel and the Palestinian state, and on the Israeli public's common perceptions of the Palestinians:

- **Fear of Palestinian irredentists.** The new state that will extend over a limited part of western historical Palestine will require the Palestinian people to accept the reality that has been forged over more than fifty years, and that its national aspirations will be realized only on this piece of land. It is feared that irredentist aspirations to expand the borders of the Palestinian state at Israel's or Jordan's expense could persist among various Palestinian sectors, and would have a negative effect on the policy of the Palestinian state. While a majority of Palestinians support the Oslo process and realize that its goal is the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside, not instead of, Israel, the

opponents of the Oslo accords, headed by Hamas, enjoy the support of a large minority. The expected socio-economic problems and the failed expectations in light of the high hopes of Palestinian independence may in the future widen the circle of support of Palestinian opposition. Two possible scenarios in which such Palestinian irredentists' aspirations may be expressed could take the form of a Palestinian attempt to influence Israel's Arab minority to undermine Israel from within, and a Palestinian attempt to use Jordan's demography to threaten, and ultimately, take over the regime.

- **Geographic vulnerability of Israel.** The agreement will transfer most of the West Bank to the Palestinian state, thereby again creating a situation where most of Israel's population will be concentrated in its narrowest territorial width. This will renew fears that a lack of strategic depth will render Israel vulnerable to attack by an eastern Arab front. This fear has long been at the heart of Israel's security concept, and has left a profound imprint on public defense and security concepts.

- **Likelihood of the Palestinian state joining hostile Arab coalitions.** The possibility that the Palestinian state may join a hostile Arab coalition could consolidate the threat to the vulnerable

center of Israel. The Palestinian state may agree to serve as the springboard for an attack on Israel by stronger Arab countries and to the deployment of their forces in its territory.

- **The Palestinian state's military forces.** While the Palestinian state's resources are obviously limited and it is incapable of being a genuine military adversary of Israel, it is feared that it could exploit its proximity to Israel's populated areas to cause serious damage even with the limited military means at its disposal.

- **Potential terrorist attacks.** Even if Israel is well able to deal with regular military threats originating in the Palestinian state, the latter could avail itself of its proximity to Israel and the difficulties of sealing the border between the two countries to launch terrorist operations and wage effective guerrilla warfare against Israel.

- **Demographic threat.** Many countries perceive illegal immigration as a security threat. Israel is sensitive to its Jewish character and considers the possibility of illegal emigration from the Palestinian state to Israel a grave potential risk. The economic gap between Israel and the Palestinian state is expected to maintain the urge for illegal migration to Israel in search of employment and a higher living standard.

Tools for Handling Potential Threats

The potential gravity of any threat is measured by the probability of its realization and its anticipated outcome. The correct way to deal with the threat is to reduce the possibility of its realization and minimize the anticipated damage to Israel if the threat is carried out.

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Israel must therefore strive to reduce the Palestinian state's motive to change the status quo by creating a system of good relations with the Palestinians, thus eliciting a constructive interest in continuing the positive relations between the two countries and changing the relationship from a zero-sum game to non-zero-sum game. This will also mitigate the handling of random, friction-causing incidents. Several essential components for consolidating

such a system of relations are:

- **A fair and balanced agreement.** A Palestinian state in which its citizens are convinced that Israel has exploited its superior might to enforce a humiliating and unfair agreement on them will inevitably be a country that strives to change the status quo. A non-balanced agreement will impinge on the validity of the regime that has signed such an agreement with Israel, and lead to domestic instability that will ultimately affect Israel. Magnanimity will pay off for Israel in the long term.

- **Cooperation between the two countries in most domains,** in order to create a network of mutual ties and interdependence, especially in economic spheres. Israel is an economic engine, and harnessing its wagons to this engine could be extremely beneficial to the young Palestinian state. However, if this is to be achieved, it is important that the Palestinians not feel any conflict between economic cooperation and their sovereignty and independence. It is important, therefore, that such cooperation be based on dialogue between equals, subject to mutual respect and advice, not on Israeli dictates and condescension.

- **Cooperation is particularly important between the security and**

defense bodies – both as an effective tool to handle direct threats and to create an interest on both sides for continued cooperation. The Israeli interest is clear, given the need to combat terrorism originating in the Palestinian state and the need to encourage a positive Palestinian policy vis-a-vis Israel. However, the Palestinian administration will also have a vested interest in such cooperation, in light of the threat to the regime exerted by the same terrorist groups that threaten Israel. Furthermore, Israel will pose the greatest potential existential threat to their state, and thus it will want to influence favorably Israel's policies. Since Israel possesses numerous means of pressure – military, economic and political – it can adopt a “carrot and stick” policy in the event that the Palestinian state fails to fulfill expectations in security realm.

With regard to potential regular military threats arising from the establishment of the Palestinian state, the political and strategic situation in the region and in the world as a whole enable the creation of a system of strategic relationships in which the danger of such threats is much lower. For at least decade Israel's eastern front has not been a real threat, existing only in the minds of some Israelis. Syria has failed to deal with Israel's military buildup, and its army has problems in maintaining its existing strength. Iraq, the strongest Arab military power east of Israel, sustained an extremely heavy

blow in the Gulf War, losing a large part of its strength. Under United Nations' imposed sanctions, Iraq has been incapable for the last decade of obtaining new weapons to compensate for its losses in the war. Even if sanctions are lifted, its economic situation will not enable it to return to its previous procurement level. Jordan has signed a peace agreement with Israel prohibiting it from allowing foreign forces into its territory. Any such act could serve as a *casus belli*, and Israel could take military action on Jordanian soil to remove this threat if Jordan is incapable or reluctant to do so. The peace agreement with Jordan has turned it into an effective buffer zone in face of any threat from the east.

On a broader note, schisms in the Arab world have led every country in the region to turn inwards, concentrating upon its own special interests and endeavoring to realize them. The vision of Arab unity has long since dimmed, albeit certain institutions such as the Arab League continue to espouse this ideal out of bureaucratic inertia.

Since Yigal Alon formulated the famed Alon Plan, many Israelis have held on to the assumption that total Israeli control, or even sovereignty, of the Jordan Valley is the paramount component for Israel's security in any agreement with the Palestinians. Given the political and strategic reality created in the Middle East, this concept is an anachronism that will only serve to perpetuate the struggle with the

Palestinians as well as the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Israel's real strategic depth on the eastern front does not lie in the Jordan Valley but in Jordan itself; it is not an outcome of physical rule of the territory, but of a strategic system of relationships with Jordan, based on strong mutual interests. This system prevents using Jordanian soil for a ground or aerial attack on Israel, and enables Israel to defuse any threat to its eastern front long before any enemy forces can reach the Jordan Valley.

Potential regular military threats emanating from the Palestinian state can therefore be achieved in the following ways:

- **Agreed Demilitarization of the Palestinian State.** Demilitarization means that the Palestinian state cannot maintain heavily armed forces. The Palestinians already possess, and the Palestinian state will certainly assemble over time, security organizations aimed at preserving domestic security and public order and protecting its borders. Israel has a vested interest in the presence of these forces to maintain stability, combat terrorism and prevent infiltration, even at the risk that a future deterioration in relations could turn their forces against it. Israel has an adequate military capability to cope with light forces such as these and a vast deterrent power vis-a-vis the Palestinian state, which has a great deal at stake.
- **Prohibiting the establishment of military ties between the Palestinian**

state and countries hostile to Israel in the framework of the Permanent Status Agreement.

- **The presence of limited IDF forces in strategic locations.** Until Israel is convinced of the stability of the strategic relationships created in this part of the Middle East, the limited presence of IDF forces will be necessary in specific locations within the sovereign territory of the Palestinian state, in the region between the Jordan Valley and in the populated areas of the West Bank.

- **Monitoring of border crossings.** The best practical method to implement arrangements for monitoring and verification of border crossings with Jordan and to ensure adherence to the limitations in size and equipment of Palestinian security forces may be via an international force.

Dealing with terrorism originating in the Palestinian state is a complex issue. Firstly, a distinction must be made between terrorism initiated or backed by the Palestinian state itself, and terrorism emanating from groups opposed to the Palestinian regime. Terrorism from the first source must be dealt with, first and foremost, by creating a situation to preclude it. This will entail the use of elements of positive and negative motivation to refrain the Palestinian administration from initiating a confrontation with Israel or using terrorism against it. Positive motivation includes a constructive system of relations, based on cooperation and mutual interest as

discussed above. Negative motivation will be prompted by deterrent threats on Israel's part, plus the fact that an independent Palestinian state has created a situation in which the Palestinians have a great deal to lose if they engage in violence.

Even if the Palestinian state refrains from terrorism as a means to pressure Israel, it is still safe to assume that the Palestinian public will continue to include opposition elements eager to use terrorism as a weapon. Dating back

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to the wave of attacks in 1996, the Israelis have been anxious to find a simple, immediate, miracle solution, which would render Israel totally immune to terror attacks emanating from the Palestinian territory. Some consider separation to be such a solution. The idea is, in effect, a simple one. If Israel seals off its border with the Palestinian entity, no attacker will be able to penetrate Israeli territory.

The problem is that such a solution is neither feasible nor desirable. It does not enable the formation of a constructive system of relations based on

mutual Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, which, as has been examined in this article, could, in the long-term, constitute the most effective contribution to Israel's security. Separation is not viable for numerous reasons:

- **Jerusalem.** Both sides accept that no solution will call for a physical partition of Jerusalem. There is no point to a physical partition of the Palestinian state and Israel given that Jerusalem will be a giant breach. Jerusalem is a continuous urban configuration linking Jerusalem to Ramallah and Bethlehem, with no practical possibility of sealing off passages between them.

- **A long, twisting border.** While the Gaza strip can be sealed off in a reasonable manner, the border between the West Bank and Israel is long and convoluted, frequently crossing difficult terrain. To seal it would involve huge investments. In any event, the problem is not confined to financial resources. It is impossible to seal the border effectively without the presence of military forces/border police nearby. The length of the border would entail a large investment in manpower. The IDF would change from Israel's defense forces to an army guarding the dividing line, having grave implications on its strength and combat efficacy. It is also safe to assume that the permanent status agreement will include the annexation of settlement blocs to Israel, while possibly some Jewish settlements will remain under Palestinian control. This

will extend and complicate the border even more, making a separation even less viable.

- **Inadequate response to terrorism.**

The principal types of terrorism that threaten Israel once the Palestinian state is established are sniping from the Palestinian state into Israeli territory and infiltration by suicide attackers. Separation is no solution to the first threat, and the efficacy in totally preventing penetration by isolated suicide attackers is questionable. No barrier is without its weak points and breaches. Even if Israel surmounts all practical hurdles and possesses all possible means to achieve effective separation, it would provide a response to the less severe threat of massive infiltration by job-seekers and reduce crime originating in the Palestinian territories, but it would not provide absolute protection against infiltration by isolated attackers. It would appear, therefore, that the solution does not lie in physical separation. There is nothing wrong with local barriers in specific places to make life difficult for car thieves and infiltrators, but they cannot be considered a solution to terrorism.

The proper handling of terrorism must be based on lowering Palestinian motivation to engage in it, and on mutual cooperation between the security organizations. Israel has made clear that the sovereign Palestinian state will bear full responsibility for incidents occurring on, or originating from, its territory, regardless whether they are caused by state or by

opposition elements. Furthermore, it will be incumbent on the Palestinian authorities to cooperate in the war against terrorism. In the absence of sufficient motivation for taking such action, Israel possesses adequate means to exert pressure on the Palestinian state and deter it from showing lenience toward terrorists. Since the wave of terrorist attacks in early 1996 experience in this respect has been extremely positive. Arafat realized that terrorism strikes him, first

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and foremost, and that security cooperation with Israel is vital. As a result, the two sides have effectively coped with attempted attacks, albeit there are no guarantees for a one hundred percent success rate.

This article is based on the assumption that any solution to the refugee problem agreed to within a permanent status agreement will not involve the return of a significant number of Palestinians to Israeli territory. This will considerably blunt the sharp edge of the demographic problem. The demographic threat and

the problem of the Palestinian state's ties with Israel's Arab minority are interrelated. Presumably there will be a certain amount of infiltration into Israel by Palestinian job seekers. Its extent will depend greatly on the unemployment rate and economic situation in the Palestinian state. Therefore, if the Palestinians engage in economic cooperation and hook themselves up to Israel's economic thrust, it will reduce such infiltration. A difference also exists between persons in search of work and those seeking permanent settlement in Israel. Preventing job hunters from turning into illegal residents will depend considerably on the situation of the Arab minority in Israel and its integration into Israeli society: the better its economic and social position, the greater its integration in Israeli society, the smaller the risk of permanent settlement by Palestinians from the Palestinian state in Israel. While an improvement in Israel's economic situation will increase the strength of its attraction, permanent Palestinian settlement is mainly possible through Arab towns and villages in Israel absorbing the newcomers. Israeli Arabs are already manifesting their resistance to having foreigners, Palestinian and others, settle in their midst. Such manifestations will presumably increase as Israeli Arabs become more integrated in Israeli society, and will form the most effective way to combat Palestinian settlement inside Israel,

despite the occasional pull of family ties. Integration of the Arab minority is moreover the most effective means to prevent the Palestinian state from inciting them against Israel. This is a difficult and complex problem, involving multi-year investments, with no immediate and full guarantees of success. However, its resolution is essential in any event, if we are to combat an important schism in Israeli society.

The sense of a joint threat to Israel and Jordan is one of the foundations of the strategic partnership, but a

situation should be avoided whereby this leads the Palestinian state to believe in the existence of an Israeli-Jordanian alliance that will constantly oppose it. To avoid this, the Palestinian state should be part of a trilateral strategic partnership, directed not against other Arab countries, but to deal with the complex strategic relations among the three countries, based on cooperation and the fostering of mutual interests.

In conclusion, the potential threat of a Palestinian state to Israel and Jordan requires us to address the

permanent status agreement and its aftermath with utmost gravity, but it need not constitute an impediment to an Israeli-Palestinian deal. There are ways of reducing the threat potential and converting it into a positive system of relations among the three countries, even if it is reasonable to assume that the partners will remain suspicious and apprehensive of one another in the foreseeable future. Mitigation of these mutual doubts and reservations is a process that will take time. It calls for great patience and forbearance.

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