

YES to the Establishment of a Palestinian Entity with Limited Sovereignty (PELS)

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Main Points

Although the concept of conflict management led to the events of October 7, Israel is still entrenched in the approach of “indefinite conflict management.” Its conduct results in control over all dimensions and aspects of the Palestinian population in the West Bank (and possibly also in the Gaza Strip), which in practice would constitute a “one-state” reality between the Jordan River and the sea.

Since the “two states for two peoples” framework, which includes a fully sovereign Palestinian state, is not feasible in the foreseeable future, and in order to prevent the emergence of a “one-state” reality, it is in Israel’s interest that the Palestinian Authority be granted self-governing powers. After all, the PA is currently the lesser evil in terms of Palestinian leadership and the only relevant alternative to Hamas.

We suggest a model of expanded Palestinian autonomy/limited Palestinian sovereignty in which Israel would retain control over essential areas, with an emphasis on security and border protection. This model (PELS -Palestinian Entity with Limited Sovereignty) is intended to be implemented for a transitional period; it will address Saudi Arabia’s demand for a political pathway toward the establishment of a Palestinian state as part of normalization with Israel; and it will serve as a test of both sides’ readiness to discuss the details of full Palestinian sovereignty, which in any case will not include military forces or capabilities.

Israel adheres to the concept of “indefinite conflict management” with the Palestinians. Israel’s actions lead to a situation of control over all dimensions and aspects of the Palestinian population in the West Bank (and possibly also in the Gaza Strip), which in practice would constitute a “one-state” reality between the Jordan River and the sea. Therefore, it is necessary to explore alternative models that would prevent Israel from bearing full responsibility for the Palestinians in the West Bank (and also in the Gaza Strip, which Israel appears to be on the path to reoccupying). One such model is autonomy—a political arrangement that allows a distinct group within a state to express its unique identity, particularly when it constitutes a majority in a specific and defined territory. Autonomy is not equivalent to full sovereignty but rather focuses on granting a group defined governing powers while maintaining the

integrity of the state (according to Prof. Ruth Lapidoth). The problem with the term “autonomy” is that it implies a linkage between the entity and the State of Israel, whereas Israel seeks to distance itself from a “one-state” reality. Therefore, it is preferable to use the term “Palestinian entity with limited sovereignty.”

Limited Palestinian sovereignty in the West Bank, meaning a political-territorial arrangement, may currently be a reasonable security solution for Israel, as it faces increasing international and regional pressure to propose a framework for an arrangement with the Palestinians. Both sides—Israeli and Palestinian alike—lack the conditions and confidence for resuming negotiations for a comprehensive settlement. In Israel, there is a widely held (and well-founded) understanding that full Palestinian sovereignty could pose a serious security threat. The situation in the region is tense, and beyond the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank also shows increasing likelihood of a large-scale flare-up.

The PELS model: Israel would not control the Palestinian population and would shape a reality of political, geographical, and demographic separation from the Palestinians, but not a security separation. The Palestinians would govern themselves, while Israel would preserve its identity as a Jewish and democratic state.

The Territorial Aspect: The area of territory of limited Palestinian sovereignty would cover the existing Areas A and B, with the possibility of expansion by transferring up to 8% of Area C to the Palestinian Authority in order to consolidate Palestinian control in several areas. Such an arrangement would encompass an overwhelming majority (over 99%) of the Palestinian population residing in the West Bank. It would create transportation continuity and include designated production zones, agricultural lands, and quarries. Territorial delimitation and continuity would enable the marking of a physical border and a security barrier between the area controlled by the Palestinian entity and the rest of Israel, while also establishing crossing points with controlled entry and exit of people and/or goods.

Authorities: The Palestinian administration would be granted the broadest possible powers, including: Governance and governmental institutions; legislative, executive, and judicial authority over all aspects of life within the autonomous territory; powers related to infrastructure matters; internal security aspects, including a law enforcement system consisting of police, inspectors, and judicial courts. The Palestinian administration would be elected by the Palestinian population residing within its territory.

Implications for the Palestinian Authority: The status of the Palestinian Authority would remain unchanged as an independent entity representing the Palestinian people, despite the fact that it presents itself as a “state” in the international arena. The likelihood that the Palestinian Authority will agree to limited sovereignty as a permanent solution to the conflict, thereby renouncing full sovereignty, is very low.

Therefore, its leaders will need to be persuaded that this is a transitional period, accompanied by improvements in the living conditions of the Palestinian population.

Gaza Strip: The Gaza Strip would be considered a separate territory, governed by a technocratic administration connected to the Palestinian Authority and backed by inter-Arab support. This arrangement would allow for the establishment of different agreements regarding Gaza. In the future, once the Palestinian Authority implements necessary reforms and demonstrates effective governance in the West Bank, Gaza could become a province within the framework of PELS.

Israeli Security Response: The current operational doctrine would continue, based on:

1. Comprehensive and multi-disciplinary intelligence monitoring—to thwart terrorist activities, prevent Hamas and other extremist elements from taking over the Palestinian entity.
2. Continuous security control—maintaining full operational freedom for the IDF throughout the area west of the Jordan River to prevent the growth of terrorist infrastructure and threats, neutralize national uprisings, and reduce crime.
3. Israel will have the right to enforce security arrangements, primarily the demilitarization of the Palestinian territory from military capabilities.
4. Supervision and prevention of arms smuggling—through Israeli control over borders and crossings.

Support from Moderate Arab States: Moderate Arab states may be more open to the idea of limited Palestinian sovereignty, especially in the post-October 7 reality, as long as the prospect of a “two-state solution” remains intact. As part of normalization talks between Saudi Arabia and Israel, this model could serve as a response to Saudi Arabia’s demand for a practical political pathway to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and establishing independent Palestinian governance.

The implementation of this model could achieve an optimal balance under current conditions between Israel’s security needs and what Israel is willing to grant the Palestinians, in order to relieve itself of the burden of civilian control over the Palestinian population while also outlining a political horizon. However, its implementation is expected to involve significant challenges in terms of political, social, and security stability.

Principles of PELS

Israel would maintain full security control, within which there will be:

- A. No Palestinian Army:** The establishment of a Palestinian military or independent militia would not be permitted. Palestinian security forces would have authority only over internal security, civilian policing, and maintaining public order.

- B. Israeli Operational Freedom:** Israel would retain the right to operate in all areas of the Palestinian entity to counter terrorism, dismantle terrorist infrastructure, and prevent hostile organizations from forming.
- C. Israeli Control Over the Perimeter:** Israel would maintain security control over the external perimeter of the Palestinian entity, including its borders with Jordan and Egypt; Israel would also have full control and security screening at all land, air, and sea border crossings.
- D. Israeli Control Over Airspace:** Israel would maintain control over Palestinian airspace to prevent the infiltration of hostile aircraft or the misuse of drones, UAVs, and other aerial vehicles. Israel may allow the establishment of an airport for the Palestinian autonomy (e.g., in the Horkania Valley east of Jerusalem), subject to security and safety considerations, with full Israeli oversight and security screening at the airport, treating it as an international border crossing.
- E. Control Over Maritime Space:** The Palestinians would not be permitted to maintain an independent naval force or coast guard. All maritime activities would be conducted under the supervision of the Israeli Navy, including movement of goods and people via the sea and regulation of designated fishing zones
- F. Control Over the Electromagnetic Spectrum:** Israel would maintain control over cellular and internet networks within the Palestinian entity's territory. Israel would allocate frequencies for Palestinian use.
- G. Restriction on Military Alliances and International Agreements:** The Palestinian entity would not be permitted to sign security or military agreements with foreign countries without Israeli approval.
- H. Judicial System:** The Palestinian entity would be allowed to operate an independent judicial system but would be obligated to enforce principles of counterterrorism. The Israeli security system would retain the authority to prosecute Palestinians for serious security offenses.

Advantages of the Model:

- Preserving Israel's Security Needs – Israel will control all security areas, be able to thwart terrorist and military threats, and enforce demilitarization within the Palestinian entity.
- Palestinian Self-Governance – Palestinians will have full management of civilian life.

- **Stability** – Israel will be able to prevent the establishment of a hostile Palestinian state, Hamas takeover, and its use as a base for aggression against Israel.
- **Political Horizon** – Israel demonstrates that it does not intend to control the Palestinian population, collapse the Palestinian Authority, or annex its territory to Israel. This removes the obstacle to advancing normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia and expanding the Abraham Accords.

Disadvantages of the Model

- **Palestinian Dissatisfaction** – The Palestinians believe in and adhere to their right to full sovereignty and may continue their political and legal struggle, as well as resort to violence and terrorism, to advance their goal of political independence.
- **Friction Between Populations** – Potential friction between the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Israeli settlers will persist, as separation between them remains difficult under current conditions.
- **International Pressure** – Sooner or later, the international community will exert pressure on Israel to allow full Palestinian sovereignty.
- **Economic Dependence** – It is likely that the Palestinian entity will remain economically dependent on Israel.

The Strategic Rationale PELS

The PELS model supports the vision of the State of Israel as Jewish, democratic, secure, and prosperous and should be presented and understood as a transitional arrangement on the way to a comprehensive agreement. To ensure its implementation, Israel would need to:

- Continue strengthening security cooperation with regional actors.
- Significantly improve living conditions and the economic situation within the Palestinian entity.
- Cooperate with Palestinian internal security and policing apparatuses.
- Present the model as a transitional phase that promotes long-term stability, until both sides are ready to discuss the details of full Palestinian sovereignty, which in any case will not include military forces or capabilities.

At this time, it is appropriate to promote a **dialogue with Arab states** to assess the feasibility of their support for the model, as it could **facilitate normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel** and expand into a **regional coalition of moderate Arab states**,

the United States, and Israel, in which it would be integrated. In the background, there is an **expectation that moderate Arab states will support the Palestinian entity**, assisting it **economically, functionally, and in promoting education towards tolerance and the eradication of extremism**.

