

## CHAPTER ONE

# WHAT WOULD A ONE-STATE REALITY LOOK LIKE? THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

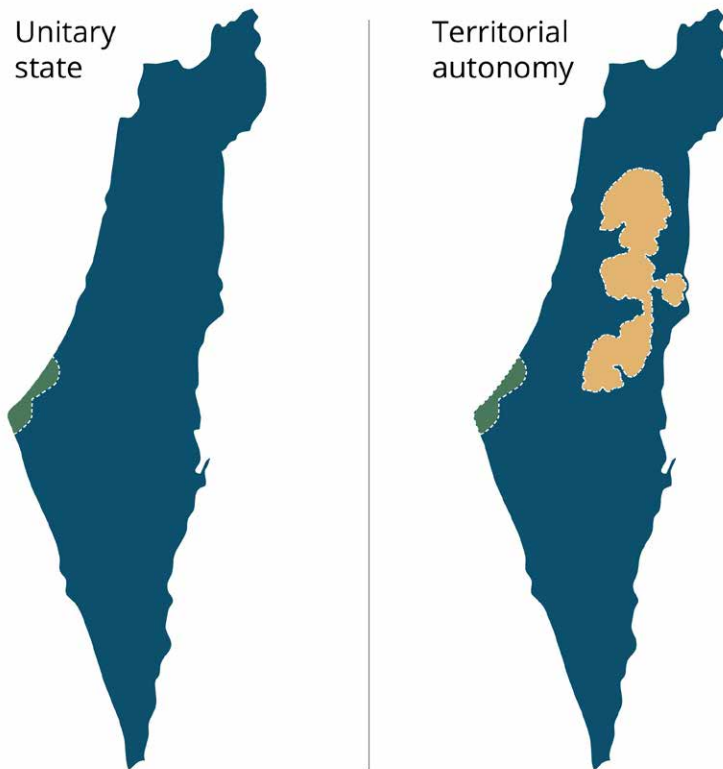
Theoretically, a one-state scenario could emerge as an agreed-upon solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, either through one side’s unilateral pursuit of this reality or due to the development of a single state in the territory, with both parties acquiescing to processes and actions that entrench this reality on the ground. It is possible to distinguish between two main patterns of a single state (see Figure 1):

- **A unitary state encompassing the entire territory**—namely, full annexation of all Judea and Samaria (following October 7, an approach advocating for the annexation of the Gaza Strip also emerged, which is not discussed in this paper) and the application of Israeli law to the territory and its residents. In this situation, two sub-alternatives may be possible:
  - **A state for all its citizens**—where full and equal rights will be granted to Palestinians.
  - **A state with Jewish superiority**—where full rights are granted to the Jewish-Israeli public, without full rights for Palestinians (similar to the situation in East Jerusalem: residency status for Palestinians, not citizenship).
- **Palestinian autonomy as an enclave within the State of Israel**—Most of the West Bank territories are annexed to the State of Israel—namely, annexation of extensive areas of Area C while leaving Areas A and B, possibly with the addition of adjacent territories essential for the existence of Palestinian civil and cultural autonomy, but without full sovereignty.

Over time, ideas combining the two definitions have been proposed. An example of this can be found in the “Decisive Plan” led by Minister Bezalel

Smotrich, according to which the State of Israel should annex all areas of Judea and Samaria. The Palestinians, who in this scenario would receive residency status rather than Israeli citizenship, would live their lives within autonomous cantons (regional municipal administrations). According to this plan, Israel's democratic nature would be damaged.<sup>5</sup> It is evident that the Israeli public does not support such solutions (this will be elaborated upon later in the paper, in the section discussing public opinion).

FIGURE 1.



5 Bezalel Smotrich, "The Decisive Plan: The Key to Peace Lies with the Right," [in Hebrew] *HaShiloach*, 6, (2017): 81–102.

Analysis of the complex implications of a one-state solution was summarized in Pnina Sharvit Baruch's study, *Resolving the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: The Viability of One-State Models*,<sup>6</sup> published by the Institute for National Security Studies. An important component in all the various (theoretical) configurations of a single state is that a broad consensus about it is required among the people and leadership in Israel, as its implementation would necessitate a significant regime change. The implementation of any political plan (both agreed and unilateral) that will significantly impact the character of the State of Israel will constitute a political earthquake and must pass the test of public opinion, either through elections or a referendum, and it will likely ignite an intense public debate. It is difficult to believe that a significant change in status, such as full annexation, the application of Israeli law to disputed territories in Judea and Samaria, or granting even partial rights to a population of approximately three million Palestinians would not spark a lively public protest focused on the democratic nature of the state.

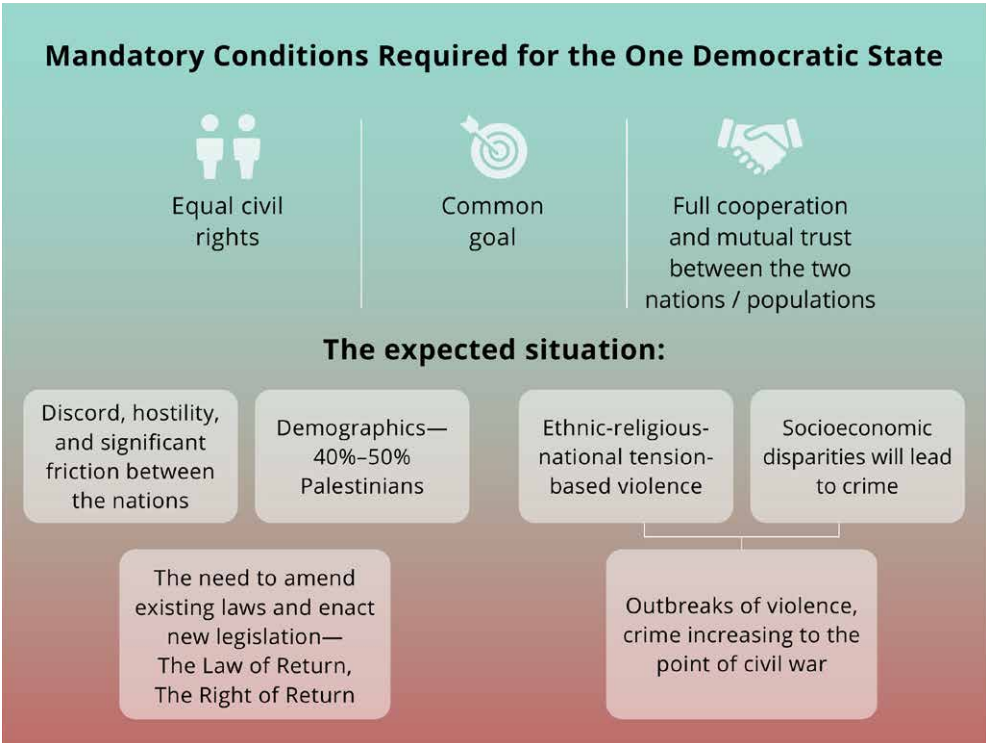
This study and the construction of scenarios for analysis and understanding of their implications further revealed that none of the one-state models would meet the three essential conditions for the existence of a democratic and functioning state: full civil equality for all its residents; a common goal for the two national groups that make up the one state; and full cooperation and trust between the two nations.

In a one-state scenario, the remnants of the past cannot be erased, gaps between populations will widen, and the challenges and negative trends that are already leading to increased friction between the two societies or nations will intensify, potentially culminating in civil war (see Figure 2). In focus groups that were conducted, participants defined the one-state situation as a “return to 1948,” when the state was declared and the War of Independence occurred.

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6 Pnina Sharvit Baruch, *Resolving the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: The Viability of One-State Models*, Memorandum 217 (INSS, 2021).

FIGURE 2.



**What Can Be Learned From Historical Precedents<sup>7</sup>**

There are historical examples of the negative outcomes of unnatural unions, where multiple nations coexist within one state without a shared purpose. These are characterized by inequality and an inability to achieve full cooperation and mutual trust between the nations and populations.

There are various examples of countries where populations with different ethnic, national, or religious identities were forced to live within a shared political framework—ranging from successful multicultural societies to those that experienced bloody civil wars. Yugoslavia is a prominent example:

<sup>7</sup> This section was compiled by Reem Cohen.

After the forced unification of different peoples (Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, and others) within a single federal state with equal rights for all its citizens, Yugoslavia managed to exist for decades under the oppressive regime of Josip Broz Tito. However, after Tito's death and the destabilization of the country's central government, old ethnic and religious tensions erupted and surfaced. The combination of cultural-religious disparities, the memory of World War II crimes, and the rise of nationalist factions all led to the decline of federal cohesion and the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The result was a series of brutal civil wars within and between the republics that comprised Yugoslavia, in which approximately 130,000 people were killed.

Rwanda is an extreme example of the consequences of ethnic separation within a state. During the colonial period, the Belgian administration favored the Tutsi minority over the Hutu majority, sowing deep seeds of resentment. Following Rwanda's independence, the Hutu majority ruled the Tutsi minority with an iron fist. In 1994, tensions reached their peak, and extremists among the Hutu carried out a systematic genocide against the Tutsi, following a generation of demonization that portrayed the Tutsi as a dangerous and subhuman race. Around 800,000 people were massacred within approximately 100 days. The Rwandan case highlights how demonizing a large group within a country and excluding members of that group from the government can escalate into uncontrolled violence. Only after the horrific outbreak did Rwanda stabilize under a new regime led by Paul Kagame, who implemented a policy prohibiting the mention of ethnic affiliation in the hopes of preventing a recurrence of the events, albeit at the cost of limiting political freedoms.

Lebanon is an example of a delicate and fragile model of partnership between various religious communities within a single state. Upon its independence, Lebanon established a sectarian power-sharing system based on the 1932 census: Senior government positions and the parliament were distributed according to a sectarian key (Maronite Christian President, Sunni Muslim Prime Minister, Shia Muslim Speaker of Parliament). This model ensured

representation for every community, yet at the same time entrenched sectarian division and hindered the development of a unified national identity. When the delicate sectarian partnership collapsed, tensions between the sectarian militias escalated into a civil war (1975-1990). Although the Taif Agreement (1989) ended the war, the sectarian system continues to cause governmental paralysis and incessant political struggles, leading to the rise of a Shiite organization—Hezbollah—as a tentacle of Iran, which has achieved a monopoly on power in the dysfunctional state.

Additional examples corroborate the pattern observed in the aforementioned cases. South Africa during the apartheid era was a country where the white minority ruled exclusively and unchallenged, while the black majority was relegated to separate territorial frameworks and deprived of civil and political rights. This regime was maintained through apartheid laws and violent suppression but encountered increasing popular resistance and international isolation. Finally, a combination of persistent internal struggle and external sanctions and pressure led to the collapse of the apartheid regime, and in 1994, the first multiracial democratic elections were held, with Nelson Mandela, the leader of the Black community, winning. South Africa demonstrates that a model of “residents without rights” under the rule of a single group may endure for several decades—but at a heavy cost of violence and social disintegration, accompanied by a high likelihood of collapse or forced regime change.

Nigeria and Sudan offer similar lessons: In ethnically and religiously divided Nigeria, the Biafra War occurred in the 1960s when an ethnic group (the Igbo tribe) attempted to secede from Nigeria and establish an independent state; although Nigeria remained united, it came at the cost of approximately one million lives. In Sudan, a bloody conflict persisted for decades between the Arab-Muslim north and the Black-Christian south, until 2011, when the south seceded and became the state of South Sudan. These cases illustrate that when a large group feels excluded from government institutions, it may aspire to secede or rebel, even militarily. Concurrently, separation based

on political-ideological or religious grounds has, in certain cases, created or exacerbated tensions between the states that were newly formed by territorial partition. Prominent examples include India–Pakistan; South Korea–North Korea; and China–Taiwan.

In contrast, there are few examples of relatively successful multi-group partnerships, such as Switzerland—with its diverse ethnic groups and languages united within a stable democratic federal framework; or Belgium—with the ethnic-linguistic division between Flemings and Walloons within a tension-filled but functioning federation; tensions between religious communities subsided in Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, after its civil war between Catholics seeking union with the Irish Republic and Protestants opposing the union ended with a peace agreement in 1998. The Basque region is integrated into Spain, although it is autonomous. These cases represent (relative) political stability within a one-state framework where distinct and diverse communities live **based on full equality of rights for all citizens**, establishment of integrated institutions, and a flexible federal identity. It is noteworthy that Switzerland and Belgium, for instance, are fundamentally different from the Israeli–Palestinian case, as they were formed through a mutual desire to unite, rather than a situation where one group imposes control over another.

### **Potential Impacts on Israel’s Political Structure**

Establishing a one-state regime where Palestinians live under Israeli rule without voting rights will fundamentally alter Israel’s character and identity. First, Israel will face the well-known dilemma of being a “Jewish and democratic state.” If a one-state entity exists west of the Jordan River, it will have to choose—either it will not be Jewish (if it grants rights to all) or it will not be democratic (if it leaves millions of Palestinians without voting rights). In light of the growing trend of Jewish superiority in Israel’s political and social spheres, it is likely that Palestinians will not enjoy full equality of rights; they will be recognized

as residents but not as citizens and without the right to vote for the Knesset. This effectively signifies a renunciation of the principle of democratic equality. This situation meets the definition of “apartheid” according to international law—governance by one group while systematically oppressing another group. As a result, the constitutional framework upon which Israel is currently founded will be severely undermined: A state that does not grant voting rights and provides almost no representation to approximately 40% of its population (if the West Bank is annexed) cannot be considered democratic. This may necessitate a regime change—a transition to a more authoritarian model—in order to maintain control over the marginalized population.

In the internal Israeli arena, such a model is expected to disrupt the existing political power relations. On one hand, nationalist right-wing elements supporting annexation without granting rights (who currently constitute a significant portion of the government) will tighten their grip on the political system and public arena, at least initially, as the concept of “Greater Israel” will outweigh democratic considerations. This group may later also revoke the voting rights of Israeli Arabs, who constitute more than 20% of Israel’s citizens. On the other hand, significant segments of the Israeli public who uphold a democratic-liberal approach may strongly oppose transforming Israel into a declared “apartheid state,” fearing irreversible damage to the state’s legitimacy and values. This could lead to a deep internal rift, manifesting, among other things, in widespread public protests. The stability of the Israeli democratic regime will be undermined if segments of the population are required to implement constant repressive measures against a large, disenfranchised population and possibly also against the groups of protesters among the country’s citizens.

The international community’s responses will be severe. Israel, which has always defined itself as the only democracy in the Middle East, may lose its legitimacy in the eyes of Western democratic nations if it openly adopts a governing regime that excludes millions of its residents. Its close allies, European

countries and the United States, will face internal and external pressure to isolate Israel internationally. Even now, international bodies claim that the situation in the Palestinian territories is equivalent to apartheid; if Israel officially declares sovereignty over the disputed territories without granting their residents citizenship, these claims will be officially valid. European countries, for instance, might freeze collaborations, and calls for a boycott will gain significant traction. There is a high likelihood that imposing an apartheid regime on the Palestinians would lead to freezing or even canceling peace relations between Israel and Arab states, due to pressure from Arab public opinion, which will not accept annexation without granting full civil rights to the Palestinians. Jordan has already clarified that the annexation of the West Bank constitutes a red line for it. The Kingdom views the stability of the West Bank and the preservation of Palestinian rights as key components of its national security, warning that annexation would nullify the peace agreement with Israel and even create demographic pressures on it (concern over waves of refugees from the West Bank into its territory).

Moreover, the internal balance of power within a single state will change in such a way that Israel will be compelled to govern millions of hostile subjects. The political implication is the encouragement of extremist forces on both sides: Among the Palestinians, the weakening of moderate elements and the strengthening of militant groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, who will perceive violent struggle as the only path to change and liberation. Israel will be required to allocate immense resources—in manpower and funding—to controlling the Palestinian population and suppressing uprisings, which could undermine its ability to focus on the functioning of its institutions and the welfare of its own citizens. The one-state model without Palestinian citizenship could therefore evolve into a regime of military oppression directed toward half of the territory's population. This is a historical change in the state's political nature and character.

### **The Social Fabric, Economy, and Coexistence**

From a socio-cultural perspective, the anticipated coexistence will be under immense pressure. Palestinians lacking citizenship will likely reside predominantly in enclaves and separate cities (similar to the current situation in the Palestinian Authority), with limited interaction with the Jewish population—perhaps primarily through manual labor or services. The phenomenon will resemble what occurred in historical apartheid regimes, where the oppressed majority group served as a cheap labor force but lived separately. The result could be extreme economic and social disparities: Even today, there are significant gaps between the standards of living, income, and infrastructure in Palestinian communities in Judea and Samaria compared to those in Israeli communities. In the absence of equitable investment and political representation, these disparities will only widen. Some Palestinians may be employed in the Israeli economy (as is the case today), which could provide a source of inexpensive labor for certain Israeli employers. However, the social cost of this structure will be the creation of a broad class of laborers without rights, which is usually accompanied by exploitation, resentment, and a sense of humiliation—fertile ground for internal social instability.

Remember that Israel, as a developed country, provides its citizens with extensive services (healthcare, social security, education, and so forth). If the Palestinians are not citizens, they will not automatically be entitled to these services, creating a genuine system of social apartheid: Population strata physically living in the same land but with different degrees of social rights. This will also challenge the internal morality of Israeli society, as some Israelis will revolt against the scenes of poverty and oppression. Others may adopt racist ideologies to justify the situation. Either way, trust and social cohesion—fundamental conditions for the existence of a state—will be lacking.

**In the economic dimension**, such a state would have severe economic repercussions. On one hand, Israel will control all areas of Judea and Samaria—thereby controlling valuable resources (land, water sources, tourist sites,

and the Palestinian labor force). However, on the other hand, it will bear responsibility (whether by choice or under international pressure) to provide the Palestinian population with basic needs. If Israel annexes these territories, it will have to decide whether to invest in infrastructure, education, health, and welfare for the Palestinians, or to neglect them. Extreme neglect may “save” budget in the short term but will lead to severe public health issues, crime, and extreme poverty that could spill over into Israeli society, not to mention human and moral considerations. Conversely, sufficient investment in the Palestinian population (without granting rights) will necessitate allocating vast sums from the state budget. The GDP per capita is expected to decrease by a third compared to the current situation in Israel. Additionally, severe indirect economic damages are anticipated: a decrease in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), as well as damage from potential sanctions and boycotts. Even partial annexation (such as Area C only) was assessed to incur an additional budgetary cost of more than two billion dollars annually, and in a scenario of widespread violent conflict, the damage to the economy would increase immeasurably. An economy in a constant state of conflict and internal strife will struggle to thrive: Foreign investors will be deterred, tourism will suffer, and there may also be a brain drain—educated young individuals (both Jewish and Palestinian) who will prefer to emigrate to more stable and equitable countries. Thus, the model of a non-egalitarian single state might transform from what initially would be perceived as the realization of the Israeli political right-wing faction’s vision (advocating for the implementation of the Greater Israel concept) into a significant economic and social burden on the general public.

### **Security Implications**

A scenario in which millions of Palestinians live under Israeli rule without political and civil rights poses a very high potential for security instability, both internal and regional. Firstly, one can anticipate an outbreak of violence and

uprising in the Palestinian territories. Under prolonged military occupation, but with some political prospects, two intifada events occurred (which began in 1987 and 2000) along with recurring outbreaks of terrorism and violence. If it becomes definitively clear that there is no prospect of establishing an independent Palestinian state or granting equal civil rights to Palestinians within a one-state framework, many Palestinians will likely turn to violent struggle, which they may perceive as the only way to change their situation. Armed organizations such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and groups of armed youth (as they organized, among other places, in Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nablus) will intensify their activities. A simulation to examine this scenario, conducted at the Institute for National Security Studies, showed that the unilateral annexation of Judea and Samaria would constitute a turning point, from which widespread and intense armed violence would erupt.

In this situation, Israel would be compelled to significantly increase the presence of security forces in the area in order to thwart terrorism and restore law and order. A full military government might be imposed on all Palestinian cities and villages. The implication would be daily confrontation between the IDF, the Israel Security Agency (ISA), and the Israel Police with a hostile and frustrated population. This confrontation will involve extensive arrests, increased checkpoints, and probably numerous casualties as well. A prolonged confrontation could escalate to the dimensions of an internal war: An extreme scenario is a general Palestinian uprising—a widespread third Intifada with a large number of casualties on both sides, severely impacting both the Palestinian and Israeli civilian populations (as a result of terrorist attacks, a breakdown of order, and the necessity of maintaining large reserve forces over an extended period of time). Without effective international intervention, the conflict may persist until the parties become weary and are forced to consider a resolution. However, the cost will be exceedingly high, potentially leading to a split into two states, as occurred in the Balkans during the 1990s, where violence, which claimed tens of thousands of victims, ceased only after the

international community intervened with force (including NATO bombings) and imposed a settlement.

Israeli internal security would also be at risk in this situation. The existence of a large and oppressed population within the state's territory may lead, among other things, to waves of terrorism along the Green Line borders. Some Palestinians (particularly frustrated youths) might resort to carrying out terrorist attacks in Israeli cities, like in the past. The unrest may also spread to the Arab population inside Israel. Arab citizens of Israel, who have voting rights but many of whom identify nationally with the Palestinians, may participate in the struggle that could develop among the residents of these areas. Already in May 2021, during Operation Guardian of the Walls in Gaza, severe clashes occurred in Israel's mixed cities. In a one-state reality, if it is based on discrimination, such incidents may become more frequent and violent, potentially escalating to the level of civil confrontation in cities. This scenario will pose a tremendous challenge to the police and the law enforcement system and may even lead to the organization of nationalist militias (Jewish and Arab) against each other—a dangerous situation of the disintegration of civil order.

A one-state reality without granting equal rights to Palestinians will be perceived globally as colonial conduct, and it could spark anger among Arab nations. Extreme elements, such as Iran-affiliated organizations, may increase activities against Israel in solidarity with the Palestinians. In an extreme scenario, should the internal conflict between Israelis and Palestinians escalate to a massacre of civilians or mass population transfer, it is not inconceivable that Arab or Muslim countries—and possibly even Western nations—might consider direct or indirect intervention.

## **Legal and Policy Implications of Unilateral Annexation**

A unilateral move to annex and apply Israeli sovereignty over territories in Judea and Samaria entails far-reaching consequences in the normative, legal, and political spheres- both domestically and internationally.

### *The Legal Status of the Territory*

Israel holds the territories of Judea and Samaria under the laws of belligerent occupation and is regarded under international law as an occupying power. Accordingly, occupation is defined as a temporary situation, in which the occupying power is prohibited from applying sovereignty over the territory or annexing it, in whole or in part. It is also prohibited from exploiting the occupied territory for its own national purposes or from altering the characteristics of the local population to its detriment.

### *Domestic Implications*

If Israel applies its sovereignty to the annexed territory and subjects it to Israeli law, it would be obliged to extend equal civil rights as well. Granting Palestinians a status of “permanent residency” without granting citizenship in practice would create a situation in which a large population lives under Israeli sovereignty while being deprived of basic civil rights, including the right to vote, political representation, and equality before the law. This situation would institutionalize a persistent structural gap between Jews and Palestinians on an ethno-national basis.

An attempt to delineate the boundaries of annexation while leaving Palestinian population centers outside Israel’s sovereign territory in isolated “enclaves” would likewise create a reality of deep legal and physical segregation. Residents of these enclaves would suffer violations of their basic rights, including freedom of movement, equality, and property rights, while their dependence on Israeli governance would increase- without any genuine ability to exercise civil rights.

In both scenarios- whether annexation without enfranchisement or the creation of disconnected enclaves- serious harm would be inflicted on the core values of Israeli democracy, and a substantial basis would arise for defining Israel as an apartheid state under international law. Such a move is also expected to trigger internal legal and constitutional disputes that would further deepen the social and political rift within Israel.

### *International Implications*

Annexation would be regarded as a blatant violation of international law, including the prohibition on the annexation of occupied territory and the infringement of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination- a right affirmed in multiple resolutions of the UN General Assembly and the Security Council.

Annexation accompanied by the denial of citizenship or the creation of enclaves would also constitute a violation of international human rights law and would strengthen the legal basis for allegations of apartheid. Any attempt to expel Palestinian residents from the annexed territory would constitute an additional grave violation, potentially amounting to a war crime or a crime against humanity under the Rome Statute.

Such a move would also violate the Oslo Accords and the Interim Agreements, which underpin security and political cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and from which Israel has not formally withdrawn.

Moreover, it would contradict the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued in July 2024, which determined that Israel's prolonged presence in the occupied Palestinian territories is unlawful and that Israel must bring the occupation to an end without delay. This advisory opinion was anchored in a UN General Assembly resolution adopted in September 2024, which stipulates that Israel must withdraw its forces from the territories within one year. Although this advisory opinion and resolution are not formally binding, and it is likely that any attempt to enforce them

in the Security Council would encounter a U.S. veto, their moral and legal weight in the international arena is highly significant.

In any event, a unilateral move of annexation and the application of sovereignty would be considered unlawful and devoid of legal validity. Such a move would not alter the status of the territories, which would continue to be regarded as occupied, nor would it absolve Israel of its status as an occupying power or of its obligation to ensure the human rights of the Palestinian residents.

Furthermore, this move would serve Israel's opponents and further reinforce the Palestinian narrative portraying Israel as a colonial, law-breaking state committing grave international crimes. It would likely entrench Israel's designation as an apartheid state- a determination the ICJ refrained from making in its advisory opinion. It can be expected that such a move would motivate various actors within the international community to pursue additional legal measures against Israel in international courts in The Hague. These measures could include, for example, charges of the crime against humanity of apartheid before the International Criminal Court (ICC), within the framework of the ongoing investigation concerning Palestine, under which arrest warrants were issued against the Prime Minister and the former Minister of Defense in November 2024.

The move would not receive broad recognition from the international community and is expected to intensify criticism of Israel. With the exception of a small number of states, most countries and other international actors would continue to regard the territory as occupied, in which Palestinians are entitled to various protections and are entitled to exercise their rights- including the right to self-determination.

Beyond anticipated condemnations by the international community, a unilateral annexation move could lead to the imposition of sanctions and the escalation of diplomatic measures that would further isolate Israel internationally. The move is expected to further undermine Israel's standing as a

legitimate partner within the alliance of liberal democracies- a central strategic framework that provides it with political, security, and economic anchoring.

At the regional level, the move is expected to increase mistrust and deepen alienation toward Israel in the Arab world. There is a tangible risk of a gradual deterioration in Israel's relations with moderate Arab states, foremost among them Jordan and Egypt. This reality would enable regional actors such as Turkey and Qatar to expand their influence in the region, further undermining strategic stability and increasing threats to Israel's security.

### **Possible Scenarios**

Looking ahead, several scenarios could develop in a deeply inegalitarian country, ranging between two opposing extremes: the collapse of the system on one hand, or a gradual shift toward equitable partnership on the other.

**Scenario A: Continuous deterioration and collapse of the system.** This is a pessimistic scenario, in which the single state fails to contain the tensions, leading to escalating violence and the paralysis of governmental institutions. In this situation, the Palestinian uprising may expand to permanent civil disobedience: General strikes, massive demonstrations, refusal to comply with state institutions, alongside terrorism and guerrilla actions. Israel will attempt to suppress these occurrences with force, employing harsh measures—mass arrests, police violence—which will intensify anger and resistance. A continuous cycle of bloodshed may emerge as Israel's iron fist fuels increasing determined resistance. A potential outcome of such a development would be the functional collapse of the regime: The economy would collapse, Israeli society would be fragmented due to the burden and moral cost, and some security mechanisms might struggle to continue supporting the ongoing oppression.

In an extreme scenario, the central government might lose control over certain areas—for instance, specific Palestinian territories could become uncontrolled enclaves or even a “no man's land,” or a process of structural

disintegration might commence. If the violence reaches a level of ethnic cleansing or attempts at mass expulsion, severe international intervention is expected. The conclusion of such a collapse scenario may result in the emergence of two paths: The Israeli–Palestinian system collapses into chaos (a highly problematic possibility for all parties), or an externally imposed solution is enforced—for instance, an international ultimatum for the establishment of general elections or a separation into two distinct entities. In either case, Israel, as we know it, will cease to exist; it will be compelled to change or cease functioning as a single unified state.

**Scenario B: Stable oppression.** In this scenario, the Israeli leadership will succeed—contrary to the expectations and concerns of many—in establishing order through force over time and preventing a major violent outbreak that would threaten the regime. This may occur through an especially sophisticated security mechanism: the use of mass surveillance measures, artificial intelligence technologies for early threat detection, and severe deterrence (e.g., collective punishment that instills fear among the Palestinian population). There may also be an attempt to maintain a cold peace through certain economic improvements for the Palestinians, such as freedom of movement and employment in Israel, or investment in infrastructure projects for them. Such a move could create a relatively temporary cold peace, similar to what occurred during the years when the Israeli occupation of the territories (1967–1987) was characterized by a relatively low level of violence, partly due to a certain improvement in the Palestinian standard of living, until the First Intifada erupted.

However, **even in this scenario, long-term stability would be questionable.** Stable oppression requires a highly authoritarian regime resembling oppressive regimes worldwide, and Israel would cease to be the enlightened democracy it once prided itself on being. The young Palestinian generation growing up in such circumstances may remain quiet for a while, but sooner or later it will likely erupt, similar to the first Intifada generation, which grew up under a

relatively “calm” occupation, until it erupted in rage. International pressure may also destabilize an oppressive regime that appears stable, similar to what occurred in South Africa, where the regime endured for decades but ultimately succumbed to domestic pressure and external sanctions. Therefore, this scenario will allow the status quo to be maintained for several years, but it will not bridge the growing gaps between the populations or nations; it will merely postpone the inevitable confrontation.

**Scenario C: Gradual shift toward a single egalitarian state.** Paradoxically, the ultimate outcome of a one-state model without equality for its citizens could, in the long term, result in the formation of a single state with equal rights for all, contrary to the original intent of those advocating annexation. History shows that for different nations living side by side and intermingling for many years, the oppressed and discriminated people’s struggle for recognition and rights may gradually bear fruit. In this scenario, the constant pressure—stemming from both the violent situation and international pressure—will convince significant segments of the public and the political elite in Israel that the cost of the discriminatory regime is too high and that reorganization is necessary. A new, pragmatic Israeli leadership may emerge, recognizing that perpetuating the situation is disastrous, and propose a deal to the Palestinians: gradual rights in exchange for a commitment to end the violence. From the Palestinian side, a young leadership might emerge and demand full equal rights, but without self-determination. The change may occur gradually. For example, initially granting permanent residency to all Palestinians (similar to the status of East Jerusalem residents today; however, the residency law allows for a citizenship application, certainly for future generations). Subsequently, there may be a provision for limited voting rights for certain institutions (e.g., in a separate parliament for Palestinian affairs). Finally, there may be unavoidable pressure to grant full and equal citizenship. This is essentially the vision of a “state for all its citizens” currently promoted primarily by Arab intellectuals, but it receives only limited support in Israel.

In any case, Israel will cease to be “the state of the Jewish people” and will become a binational state. For many, this is a difficult scenario to accept, but it may prove to be a necessity if the alternative is an endless conflict.

**Scenario D: International intervention and an imposed solution– a return to the notion of partition:** As the situation in the country deteriorates, descends into severe violence, and threatens regional stability, the international community is expected to actively intervene to impose a solution. Such a scenario might lead precisely **to a return to the notion of a two-state solution**—that is, immense external pressure would compel Israel to relinquish control over the territories and grant independence to the Palestinians. The pressure on Israel may manifest in painful sanctions and international isolation, potentially leading to a change in government in Israel, or through intervention by international forces on the ground, who will facilitate a separation. Although the two-state solution currently appears unsuccessful and unattainable, a historical irony might emerge: The realization of the one-state scenario may create a challenging reality that brings the partition idea back to the table, even if as a last resort. In the future, after years of being mired in a one-state reality filled with hostility, violence, and failures, both Israelis and Palestinians might become exhausted and agree to accept solutions that had previously been rejected.

**Most scenarios indicate that the inequitable one-state model would be unstable.** This model will disintegrate due to violence, or it will undergo fundamental changes due to internal and external forces of change. In any scenario, the conflicting elements will intensify to the point of explosion. The demographic competition will persist, and if the single state includes the Gaza Strip, then Israel will lose its Jewish majority between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. A situation in which the majority of residents lack voting rights would be too absurd for the international community, the Palestinians, or the Israeli public to accept for an extended period. Therefore, it is highly likely that sooner or later the situation will impose a choice: rights

for Palestinians and a profound change in the national character of the State of Israel, or separation from the Palestinians. A model of annexation without granting citizenship to the Palestinians may appear to be a convenient solution for certain policymakers in the short term, but it will not be sustainable in the long term.

### **A “Unified” Jerusalem as a Model for Life in a One-State Reality**

In 1967, the Israeli government applied Israeli law to East Jerusalem and incorporated Palestinian villages surrounding the city into its jurisdiction. Thus, the state annexed the eastern part of the city, significantly expanded its municipal boundaries, and created “one city for two nations.” The residents of East Jerusalem are classified as permanent residents; they hold Israeli identity cards and have voting rights for the mayor and city council, but not for the Knesset.<sup>8</sup>

A unified Jerusalem in its current state presents a complex and contradictory picture. On one hand, it is a single city from a political-administrative aspect, where over one million residents live together, including approximately 400,000 Palestinians; on the other hand, a social reality has emerged of two populations living separately, with deep disparities and inequality.

**The heart of the tensions—The Temple Mount:** A central issue in Jerusalem, which in the one-state reality will continue to be a source of friction and tension, is the struggle for control over the Temple Mount (Al-Haram Al-Sharif) and at its center, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, due to the pan-Arab-Muslim consensus rejecting Israeli control of it. Currently, incidents stemming from friction between Israel as a state and Israelis as individuals with Palestinians in the Temple Mount complex tend to ignite widespread tensions and clashes, including in the West Bank and the Arab-Muslim population within Israel.

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8 Udi Dekel and Noy Shalev, “On the Course Toward a Jewish-Palestinian One-State Reality,” Special Publication (INSS, November 10, 2022), <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/one-state/>

The Temple Mount complex is fraught with tension and prone to eruptions almost on a daily basis, especially during the holidays and observances of both religions. Moreover, Jerusalem exemplifies the complexity of a mixed city, including recurring terrorist attacks. The freedom of movement between the eastern and western parts of the city facilitates easy access and penetration for those intending to commit crimes and terrorist attacks. While the Arab public frequents the medical centers and shopping and commercial centers in the western part of the city, the Jewish public avoids the Arab neighborhoods in the eastern part, except for the Old City.

**Formal unity does not guarantee actual integration:** Fifty-eight years of unification have not blurred the Green Line in Jerusalem; it has only adopted new characteristics. Jerusalem in 2025 remains de facto divided in many respects: in the physical space (a separation wall between parts of the city and checkpoints), in the Palestinian economy dependent on the Israeli one. The sense of Israeli and Jewish identity and Palestinian identity has only strengthened. This is an important lesson for policymakers: A change in legal status (such as the application of law) is only a starting point, but without active policies of integration and equality, separations will persist and may even deepen.

**Hostility and animosity between the populations:** Since 1967, Jerusalem has experienced periods of tension and violent outbreaks, alongside periods of tense routine. The national conflict surrounding the city's future remains far from resolution, and shared traumas—from two Intifadas, through attacks, to riots—continue to fuel mutual suspicion and fear. A vast majority of Palestinians in East Jerusalem are convinced that there is a discriminatory policy against them by the Israeli authorities.<sup>9</sup> Additional surveys, such as the one conducted by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, indicate that Israelis perceive the residents of East Jerusalem (most of whom are not citizens) as a hostile

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9 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Public Opinion Poll, no. 90, December 13, 2023, <https://pcpsr.org/en/node/931>

entity, or at least as “not belonging.” These trends indicate that the underlying hostility has not dissipated but has been balanced due to a fragile status quo: There is mutual avoidance between the two communities and limited friction zones, possibly reducing daily confrontations but maintaining emotional distance and suspicion. In-depth surveys reveal that the overwhelming majority of the Jewish public in Jerusalem do not desire truly integrated lives with Palestinians and prefer separation—“they live in their neighborhoods, and we live in ours”; among Palestinians, many view the Israeli establishment as an occupying and illegitimate force, and their hostility prevents positive integration.

**A gradual improvement in living conditions is possible, but national hostility persists:** In recent years, certain improvements have occurred in East Jerusalem (infrastructure, services, educational initiatives); however, the roots of the conflict—issues of sovereignty, identity, and national aspirations—remain unresolved. The levels of hostility and suspicion between the populations in Jerusalem remain very high. This means that even a one-state model will not help resolve the conflict if the political issues are not addressed.

**Lack of representation and institutional disparities jeopardize long-term stability:** Palestinians in Jerusalem are almost entirely excluded from the decision-making centers that affect them. This situation is unsustainable in a proper democracy. So far, it has been maintained by force and due to the lack of alternative political prospects; however, there is no guarantee that this will remain the case over time, and certainly not indefinitely. A one-state model in which full political rights are denied to millions of people (as is the case in Jerusalem) could lead to harsh international criticism and deepen resentment among Palestinians.

**Partial Israelization processes are indeed occurring, but full assimilation is not:** The younger generation in Jerusalem is acquiring more tools for integration (Hebrew language, higher education in Israel) and its relative economic status has strengthened. However, most Palestinians still primarily

identify as Palestinians. In fact, their religious-national identity has intensified (as evidenced by the increased significance of the Al-Aqsa Mosque); in other words, winning over the residents through economic and educational integration is only partially effective. The lesson: Economic and social integration is important, but national identity may get even stronger under oppression, especially due to better education and standard of living. This increase may also heighten expectations and demands for equal civil rights.

**Land and planning issues:** From a municipal perspective, it has been demonstrated in Jerusalem that without equitable regulation of land rights and planning, all spheres of life will be adversely affected. A delay of several decades in the construction of housing, schools, and infrastructure has created immense frustration. Any political model (whether two states or one) aiming to provide a practical solution to the population's needs must begin with fair planning: allocation of land, systematic registration, and investment in public institutions within the Palestinian sector. If not, the physical inequality will join the other factors of frustration and only fuel the hostility.

**There is no shared vision or common goal, and therefore the future is subject to a battle of narratives:** In Jerusalem, there is no unifying narrative, as each side perceives the future differently. The conflict between the narratives impacts the one-state model: Without fundamental agreement between the nations on the form of governance, its values, and symbols, any governmental structure will be subject to being challenged.

The unified Jerusalem serves as a warning against the one-state scenario. This is how a single, inegalitarian state is expected to appear, rife with conflict and discrimination, with harsh police enforcement—a fundamentally unstable situation. Without a political compromise and appropriate arrangements addressing all aspects of life, territorial unification does not resolve a conflict but rather preserves it at varying intensities—frozen on the surface at best, simmering beneath the surface, threatening to erupt, and erupting at worst.

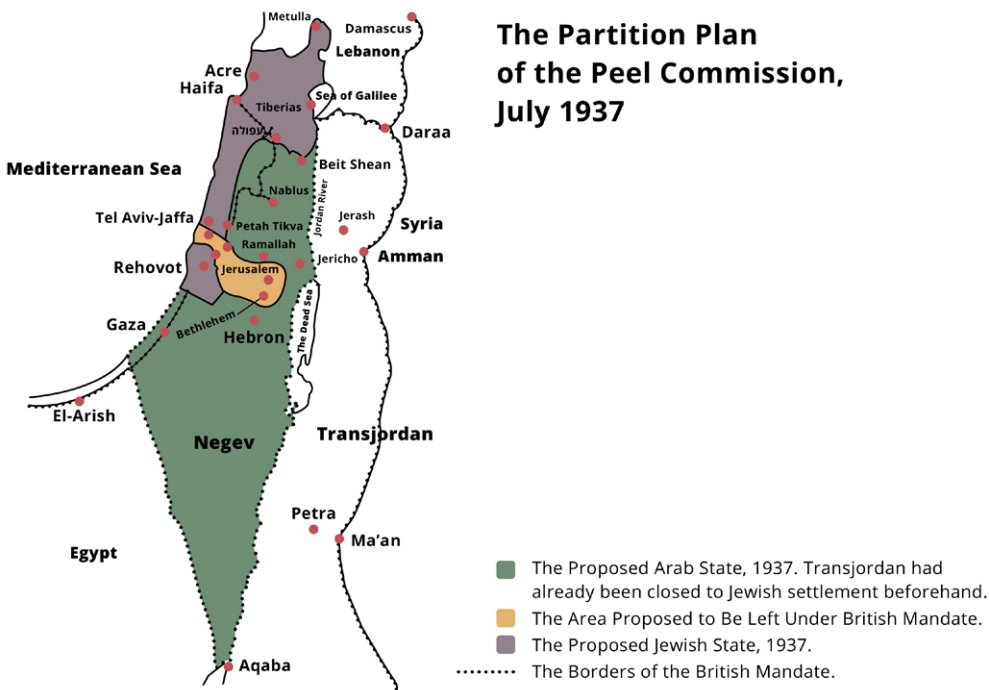
### **What Have We Learned and Already Forgotten?**

During the British Mandate for Palestine, the British government appointed a royal commission led by Lord William Robert Peel to examine the situation in the land, subsequent to repeated attacks by Arabs on Jews and their property. In July 1937, the committee published its report, which concluded with a recommendation to divide the land into two separate states: one Jewish and the other Arab, with Jerusalem and Jaffa remaining under British control and connected by a corridor (see Figure 3). The Jewish community in the Land of Israel accepted the plan, albeit with reservations, while the Arabs rejected it outright. The Peel Commission Report had already determined that there was no possibility of merging or assimilating Jewish and Arab cultures; the national home could not be half-national; Arab nationalism was just as strong as Jewish nationalism, and neither of the two national ideals would allow for integration into one state.<sup>10</sup> It would be absurd to assume that decades of bloody conflict have rendered this conclusion irrelevant to our times or dulled the edge of the problem that the implementation of the recommendation aims to resolve.

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10 The Peel Commission was a royal inquiry commission established in August 1936 by the Government of the United Kingdom, aimed at investigating the causes of the Great Arab Revolt in Mandatory Palestine and recommending steps for the future. See Palestine Royal Commission, *Report* (1937), [https://ecf.org.il/media\\_items/290](https://ecf.org.il/media_items/290)

FIGURE 3.



Note. D. Egozi, (Cartographer). The Partition Plan of the Peel Commission, 1937. Reprinted from “And They Divided My Land,” *Bamahane*, “Derech Eretz” series of articles, edited by I. Zaharoni.