

## PREFACE

# DRIFTING INTO A ONE-STATE REALITY— THE STRATEGIC PROBLEM

The central trend evident over the past decade in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is a consistent and increasingly accelerating drift toward a one-state reality—characterized either by Jewish supremacy or defined as binational—if not *de jure* then *de facto*, or a state for all its citizens. As this trend progresses and the complexity and intermingling between the Israeli and Palestinian populations expand, it is expected to become increasingly challenging to outline conditions for a political settlement based on political, geographical, and demographic separation between them, as well as escalating friction between the two nations vying for control over the same territory west of the Jordan River. Some argue that the two nations can coexist, but this assumption contradicts the two nations’ historical narrative, political logic, and common sense. This contrast was illustrated in the barbaric attack carried out by Hamas on October 7, 2023 against the western Negev communities—a further step in the bloody national and religious conflict.

Several key processes can be identified as occurring in both the Palestinian arena and Israel at present: decreased trust among both national communities in a settlement based on the two-state solution concept; an assessment in Israel that an independent Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria would certainly become a terrorist entity similar to the Gaza Strip under Hamas’s rule; Israel’s gradual annexation of Area C (constituting 60% of the territories of Judea and Samaria following the interim agreements<sup>2</sup>) and the expansion of

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2 An interim agreement regarding the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, known as the Oslo B Accord, was a central agreement in the Israeli–Palestinian peace process signed on September 28, 1995. The agreement addressed the establishment of a temporary Palestinian self-government and led to the division of Judea and Samaria into Areas A, B, and C, granting the Palestinian Authority powers in Areas A and B.

settlements in this area. All these factors and more lead to the emergence of a one-state reality, which undermines the Zionist vision of a Jewish, democratic, secure, and prosperous state.

This observation is supported by assessments that the two-state paradigm has become obsolete. In his book, *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality*,<sup>3</sup> Ian Lustick argues that the support for the two-state paradigm has become dogmatic; it is no longer connected to the reality that has developed on the ground over the years and therefore is not feasible. The demographic changes in Israel, the narrowing demographic gap between the number of Israeli citizens and Palestinians, the proliferation of settlements in Judea and Samaria, and the declining role of the United States in the Middle East are all irreversible changes that reduce the feasibility of implementing the two-state solution.

Fifty-eight years of Israeli control in the West Bank have led to changes in Palestinian society, including the prevailing perception regarding the state of affairs between it and the State of Israel. In his book, *Different Territories—The Palestinians: An Inside Look*, Ohad Hemo warns that Palestinian nationalism remains a central force, but at the same time, there is a noticeable longing for the situation that existed just prior to the First Intifada.<sup>4</sup> In 1987, from the Palestinian perspective, it was a seemingly idyllic reality in which the Green Line effectively did not exist—Palestinians could move freely between different parts of Israel and to the sea, there was job security, and many earned a respectable living. However, in recent years, due to prolonged political stagnation, Palestinian society has largely shifted from being mobilized for struggle to becoming fatigued and apathetic, while being internally introspective regarding its future: the path of negotiations has failed to advance

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3 Ian S. Lustick, *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality* [Translation: K. Vagshal]. Resling, 2022.

4 Ohad Hemo, *Different Territories—The Palestinians: An Inside Look* [in Hebrew]. Keter Books, 2020.

political independence, and the path of violent conflict has also failed to promote national aspirations for sovereignty. Therefore, the remaining path is the pursuit of attaining full civil rights, meaning the Palestinians do not aspire to erase the Green Line *per se* but rather to integrate into Israel, provided that full equality of civil rights is ensured. This poses a danger, among other reasons, because this aspiration will most likely not materialize due to the anticipated and resolute opposition of Jewish Israeli citizens. Furthermore, no security can be expected if there is formal or informal annexation of the entire Judea and Samaria to the State of Israel.

**Regarding Israel**—Over the past year (and further to slower processes observed in previous years), processes and developments accelerating the shift toward a one-state reality have been occurring, disregarding its tangible challenges and implications: The political deadlock persists, with neither the Israeli nor Palestinian sides possessing the political capacity to break it and advance options for a political settlement.

Following the October 7 attack, as emotions and anger rise, the demand to annex Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip to Israel increases. However, based on logical rather than emotional reasoning, the correct approach is to separate from the Palestinians rather than bring them into our midst. Several claims have gained traction among the Israeli public after October 7, such as:

- There is no chance of advancing an agreement with the Palestinians, and we are destined to manage the conflict indefinitely. This claim overlooks the fact that managing the conflict without striving for its resolution is among the factors that led to October 7.
- The Oslo Accords are the reason for terrorism. This claim is also incorrect; terrorism existed before Oslo and will persist beyond October 7 and the ensuing war.
- The Palestinian Authority supports terrorism and is fundamentally no different from Hamas; therefore, it is time to dismantle it. This claim overlooks the

fact that the Palestinian Authority is striving for a political settlement with Israel, has been relatively successful in stabilizing its territories during the Swords of Iron War, and also absolves us of civilian responsibility for 2.7 million Palestinians living in the West Bank. The prevailing perception in Israel over the past decade has been that the division between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas's rule in the Gaza Strip serves as evidence that there is no partner for a political settlement. To strengthen this claim, Israel has effectively weakened the pragmatic elements within the Palestinian camp while paradoxically strengthening Hamas.

The current Israeli government, both before and since October 7, has been working to expand settlements, double the number of Israelis living in Judea and Samaria, push Palestinians out of Area C, and accelerate the collapse of the weakened Palestinian Authority, eroding its role as an entity meant to be Israel's partner in negotiations leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. In Judea and Samaria, a complex and intertwined life between Jews and Palestinians has emerged, inevitably characterized by an increasing degree of friction, making it challenging, if not impossible, to outline a framework for resolution and separation. In other words, **the Israeli government is leading a revolution in how it controls the Judea and Samaria territories, aiming to solidify Israel's control over these areas and thwart any possibility of a political-territorial settlement with a Palestinian entity, centered on a separation from the State of Israel.**

Against this complex backdrop and in response to the challenge, **the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) identified the risk of drifting into a one-state reality as a strategic warning**, and a team was established to examine the factors influencing this drift and to assess whether it can be halted. Initially, it became necessary to conceptually clarify the implications of a one-state reality. Subsequently, a series of factors and domains influencing the drift toward a one-state reality were analyzed. Meanwhile, questions arose

such as: Is there a point of no return that can be identified, and is there a way to halt the drift into this reality?

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