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The Israeli Initiative

How to turn the ongoing tragedy into a
political-diplomatic turning point:
A Roadmap for Long-Term Security.

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This document sums up the work of the "Day After" taskforce established at the outset of the Gaza War. The taskforce, which includes leading Israeli security and foreign policy experts, has generated seven detailed policy papers to date. Its work serves as the basis for the plan presented here.

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Abstract

The shocking events of October 7, 2023 and the bitter war that has ensued require a fundamental change in Israel's national security and foreign policy approach. Such change, and the action plan it generates, is the only way to end the Gaza War with a significant achievement and advance the overarching Zionist vision of Israel as the safe and democratic state of the Jewish people, in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence. Faced with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's vision of "eternal war", and his allies' ambitions to annex Gaza and the West Bank, Israel's democratic forces must seize the opportunity emerging from the October 7 calamity to present an alternative. This gradual and feasible political plan is largely shaped by Israel's security needs and based on a decision to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a broad regional approach, based on the lessons of past attempts.

The Israeli Initiative is designed to offer a political horizon comprising the gradual establishment of a demilitarized, peaceful Palestinian state and the foundation of a US-led regional alliance of moderates. Its three-phase action plan (Roadmap) proposes an exit strategy for ending the war in Gaza and implementing its goals over a clearly delineated timeframe spanning three to five years.

Starting phase. A sharp transition from war to constructive political action. It entails convening a peace conference that sketches a political horizon based on the two-state vision, and forms an international-regional framework (a proper replacement of the paralyzed Quartet) to support its advancement. This move will be accompanied by declarations of commitment on the part of Israel, the Palestinians and other leading actors to implement the new roadmap. This stage is essential for moving the political process forward, strengthening moderate forces, and defeating Hamas and other extremist forces.

Transitional phase. Lasting two to three years, it will begin right after the conclusion of the conference and prepare the ground for the renewal of an Israeli-Palestinian-regional peace process. This stage will include international and Arab assistance in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip, and the building of Palestinian state institutions and mechanisms for a renewed Palestinian Authority (PA). These state institutions will enable the PA to effectively fight terrorism and serve as the basis for the demilitarized Palestinian state-in-the-making. Other components of this phase include deepening Israel's normalization processes and partnerships with Arab states; curbing the rapid de facto annexation measures advanced over the past year by Israeli government hardliners; agreed-upon global recognition of a demilitarized Palestinian state living peacefully alongside Israel; launching large-scale economic development projects in partnership with Arab states and the Palestinians; forming a regional defense coalition under an American security umbrella to confront threats from Iran and other regional extremists. These wide-ranging measures are designed to promote regional stability and partnership. This stage will culminate in Palestinian elections under conditions allowing the emergence of a legitimate new Palestinian leadership and promoting a suitable framework for negotiations on an Israeli-Palestinian-regional settlement.

Negotiating phase. Lasting one to two years, this stage will consist of simultaneous dialogue

Israel's democratic forces must present an alternative – a gradual and feasible political plan largely shaped by Israel's security needs

around two tables – one with the Palestinian leadership and one with Arab world partners. Its objective will be to promote a stable settlement by establishing a demilitarized and viable Palestinian state, while enlisting key Arab actors to assist both in the stabilization process and in resolving the core disputes through negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. At the same time, it will promote normalization between Israel and the Arab and Islamic world.

The State of Israel is at a historic crossroads. One path, led by the extreme religious right, seeks to take Israel on a course of eternal war and pave the way for establishment of settlements in Gaza and the gradual annexation of the West Bank. This path will severely harm Israel's security, and national resilience for years to come. In the months since October 7, no clear alternative has been presented to this destructive path. This, despite consistent polling data indicating that the Israeli majority strives for renewed security that is based on a stable political settlement with the Palestinians. Faced with the hopeless path on which Netanyahu and the extreme religious right are taking the country, the democratic camp must offer an alternative that recognizes resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the only path to ensuring Israel's security and existence as an egalitarian, Jewish and democratic state. **The Israeli Initiative** is that plan.

Introduction

In 1973, the idea that Israel would sign a peace treaty with Egypt and hand back the Sinai Peninsula seemed unimaginable. Forty-five years later, this stable agreement serves as a strategic security asset for Israel and Egypt

The cataclysmic events of October 7 were not the result of a specific military or intelligence failure. They were in some part the outcome of a paradigmatic, political failure of the national security doctrine espoused by Benjamin Netanyahu and his governments during the past decade, which failed its most basic mission of providing security for the State of Israel and its citizens.

The October 7 Hamas massacre was a particularly horrific and extreme expression in the chain of consequences born of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That is why, while striving to end the war and return all the abductees taken by Hamas, the State of Israel must address the root cause of this problem, which is not only about Gaza and its future, nor about Hamas and its eradication. It is about the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and unless it is resolved, Israel will never enjoy real security.

Deep security is based on arrangements providing long-term stability. It requires a policy that strikes a balance between improved military security that guarantees the state's capabilities, strength, and deterrence, and security that is based on a balance of interests with its adversaries. These two elements combined are the only way to minimize the motivation of Palestinian adversaries to violate the status quo. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, the overarching interest and goal of the Palestinian majority is the creation of an independent state. The combination of Israeli military might and improved capabilities with the establishment of secure, recognized and agreed borders with the Palestinians is, therefore, the only way to achieve deep security for Israel.

The idea of achieving an Israeli-Palestinian-regional settlement following the events of October 7 and the war in their wake may seem impossible, but Israel's short history provides a precedent suggesting the opposite may be true.

The Yom Kippur War of October 1973 was the culmination of the bloody rivalry between Israel and its worst enemy – Egypt, a rivalry that lasted from the establishment of the State of Israel and included five wars. The Yom Kippur War was one of the most traumatic events in Israeli history, an attack that surprised Israel and claimed the lives of nearly 2,700 Israeli soldiers, most of them on the Egyptian front.

No one imagined at the time that four years later, at the invitation of Prime Minister Menachem Begin, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat would stand on the Knesset podium and address Israel's leaders and citizens. In 1973, the idea that Israel would sign a peace treaty with Egypt and hand back the Sinai Peninsula seemed unimaginable. In the 45 years since, this stable agreement serves as a strategic security asset for Israel and Egypt both. The same goes for the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty.

Eternal war or initiated solution

Prime Minister Netanyahu's recently issued "Day After Hamas" plan demonstrates that the current government clings to its decade-long policy of avoiding decisions, as reflected in its opening words, "The IDF will continue the war." The document not only fails to propose an exit strategy, it attests to the desire to perpetuate the deeply flawed pre-war policy on the day after – that is, the so-called "conflict management" approach of reactivity and indecision rather than a path of initiative and political decision.

The "conflict management" approach stems from the perception that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is intractable, and therefore can be managed at a relatively low cost to Israel, rather than resolving it. This approach creates a false sense of security and control while, in reality, enabling the Hamas buildup and constant cycles of escalation that are harmful to Israel's security.

Netanyahu and his right-wing governments radicalized their conflict management policy over time. But while Netanyahu sought to perpetuate the conflict at more or less of an even level, he found himself facing a constantly escalating conflagration. Netanyahu locked the door to a political settlement, delegitimized PA President Mahmoud Abbas, and weakened Israel's only real partner for achieving security and resolving the conflict. This policy resulted, inter alia, in reduced security coordination with the Palestinian security forces, which for many years helped thwart terrorist attacks and thus saved Israeli lives. At the same time, Netanyahu deliberately and knowingly strengthened Hamas, his partner in the "eternal war" concept he espoused. He then tried to "minimize" the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Presenting it as a nuisance factor, he argued that Israel could integrate into the Middle East while bypassing the Palestinian issue by promoting normalization processes ("peace for peace" agreements) with Arab states.

Meanwhile, the right-wing governments under Netanyahu became increasingly radical and messianic. By constantly fueling the conflict, Netanyahu's current government is enabling de facto annexation of the West Bank, stirring unrest, increasing the risk of violent escalation, and encouraging terrorism. These moves, combined with the government's deeply controversial campaign to weaken the country's judiciary, undermined national resilience and military preparedness, and eroded Israel's deterrence, inexorably propelling the country toward the Oct. 7 massacre.

October 7 generated an earthquake not only in Israel but also among the countries of the region and in the West's perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially that of the United States. Thus, and given the stagnation of the Gaza War, President Joe Biden, in cooperation with regional allies is formulating a comprehensive political blueprint to achieve the same goals that Israel itself set – the return of the hostages, the collapse of Hamas in Gaza, and the achievement of security for the state and its citizens. The Biden outline is designed to promote a political process gradually leading to the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state and extensive normalization of relations between the countries of the region and Israel. The current Netanyahu government, however, rejects these guiding principles, opting instead for a future of constant war that undermines the vision of Israel's founders and its national interest

The current government has turned the conflict management policy into enabling de facto annexation of the West Bank, increasing the risk of violent escalation. Combined with the judiciary overhaul, these moves have weakened Israel and eroded its deterrence

Israel's democratic forces must offer a forward-looking roadmap based on a conflict resolution approach that is likely to win majority support and be translated into a feasible action plan

of ensuring a safe, egalitarian, Jewish and democratic state.

A safe state: One whose citizens enjoy safety and a sense of security allowing them to lead normal lives, both in the heart of the country and along its borders.

A democratic state: One offering broad solidarity between the government and citizens, allowing them freedom and equality, and providing effective government tempered by a full separation of powers. These principles are embodied in Israel's 1948 Declaration of Independence. Political separation from the Palestinians is a necessary condition for Israel to remain a democratic state governed by the rule of law that upholds equality among all its citizens.

The State of the Jewish People: In order to realize the Zionist vision and preserve the State of Israel as the home of the Jewish people and their ways, Israel must ensure a continued Jewish majority. Ongoing control of the territories will erode this majority for future generations, making political separation from the Palestinians crucial for ensuring Israel's Jewish identity.

Israel's long-term existence as a secure, egalitarian, Jewish and democratic state requires a profound conceptual change regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the feasibility of resolving it, and the way to do so. The collapse of the conflict management concept, combined with the renewed US engagement in conflict resolution, create a unique opportunity for Israel's democratic camp and its commitment to Israel's security and resilience as envisioned by its founders. Faced with the eternal war outlined by Netanyahu and the extreme religious right during his "Day After Hamas" speech, Israel's democratic forces must offer a forward-looking roadmap based on a conflict resolution approach that is likely to win majority support and be translated into a feasible action plan.¹

The Israeli Initiative

The Israeli Initiative is a concept centered on the idea that the two-state formula is the only solution to the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict that promises Israelis deep, long-term security. It offers three **innovations**.

Applying the lessons of past experience. The first intifada, a widespread grassroots uprising by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, erupted in late 1987. The IDF failed to suppress it and Chief-of-Staff Dan Shomron stated that a political solution was required, not solely a military response. Then-Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin reached similar conclusions. Subsequently, as prime minister, the realization that **a military solution alone cannot achieve security** and that military might must be coupled with political initiative, Rabin drove his search for an accommodation with the PLO. The second lesson to be derived from recent history is that a solution to the conflict cannot be guaranteed without defining a final goal on which the parties agree. **The Oslo Accords** were a courageous step toward a historic compromise between Israel and the Palestinians. However, the sides failed to agree on an explicit final goal, leaving the question of the conflict's termination to be decided in the future. This lack of clarity resulted in a gap of expectations and constant disagreements throughout the process, which fueled a substantial wave of Palestinian terrorism. The ambiguity of the agreement and the controversy it generated within Israel led to Rabin's assassination (1995) and allowed the extreme religious

right to sink it and gain power. The third lesson should be gleaned from **Israel's unilateral approach** to its disengagement from the Gaza Strip (2005), which failed to provide the hoped-for security because it created a vacuum of power that enabled Hamas to establish a quasi-state terrorist entity.

The second innovation of the Israeli Initiative is its feasibility and gradual implementation, constantly intensifying progress. For decades, Israelis have been unable to conceive of the term "peace," and of an agreement to achieve it, as anything other than an all-or-nothing process, which begins around negotiating tables in closed rooms and ends with the signing of a comprehensive agreement on the White House lawn.

But while the path to an agreement requires discussions around negotiating tables, it cannot begin or depend solely on this stage of the process. The Gaza War presents Israel with complex challenges and constraints to achieving stable security. Its objective of stripping Hamas of its rule and capabilities is constrained by the 134 Israeli abductees held in Gaza. What is more, the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip requires an orderly, long-term response. The Palestinian Authority in its current form cannot assume control of the Gaza Strip from the IDF, nor will it agree to do so without a clear political horizon. The international and regional community is trying to promote a political process, but is reluctant to commit to a physical presence in Gaza that would entail assuming responsibility for the enclave without political guarantees from Israel. These complexities make it incumbent on Israel to initiate an agreement rather than letting events dictate an uncertain future. Until such time as a political-security agreement is implemented, a new government that places long-term security as its overarching objective must promote political and practical measures leading to an inter-state reality. These measures must be designed to prevent a stalemate in the process between Israel and the Palestinians, help build the renewed Palestinian Authority as a security partner, support regional stabilization and rehabilitation processes, halt the de facto annexation processes, and prepare the ground for promoting a stable settlement.

The third innovation of the Israeli Initiative is the understanding that although the core of the conflict is between Israel and the Palestinians, its resolution can only be achieved through a broad regional approach leading to an Israeli-Palestinian-regional settlement.

In order to provide deep and long-term security for all its citizens, the State of Israel must become part of a broader system of alliances. The geopolitical map of recent years is increasingly delineated by a bipolar confrontation between liberal democracies – first and foremost the United States and the European Union – and countries under authoritarian regimes, headed by Iran and Russia. Israel's pro-Western allegiance should have been clear, but Netanyahu has led his governments to distance themselves from the West and its liberal-democratic values. He undermined the bipartisan principle that Israeli governments of all stripes were careful to uphold in relations with the United States, and tried to forge alliances with populist, authoritarian and anti-democratic leaders in Russia, Eastern Europe, and India. At the same time, the normalization measures promoted with moderate Arab states created an illusion amongst Israeli public opinion that peace and security with the Arab world, including a viable front against Iran and its proxies, could be achieved without addressing the Palestinian issue.

Until such time as a political-security agreement is implemented, a government that places long-term security as its overarching objective must promote political and practical measures leading to an inter-state reality

Cooperation with the countries of the region and the United States is also necessary to deal with Iran, whose transformation into a nuclear-threshold state was partially enabled by Netanyahu's failed policy. Israel cannot and should not act alone in the face of these threats

October 7 and the war that followed proved the illusory nature of this mindset.

Cooperation with the countries of the region, the United States, and the West is also necessary to deal with the broad threats that have now become more tangible than ever: Hezbollah in the north, the Houthis in Yemen, and behind them all Iran, whose transformation into a nuclear-threshold state was partially enabled by Netanyahu's failed policy. Israel cannot and should not act alone in the face of these threats that endanger regional and global stability. The Hamas attack on October 7 marked the end of the "peace for peace" era in which Netanyahu unknowingly endangered Israeli citizens. This era, presented as an alternative to the "territories for peace" policy mentioned in resolution 242, aimed to achieve peace through direct interactions without territorial concessions. Hamas' onslaught on Israel and the scale of destruction in the Gaza Strip discourage Arab countries, certainly Saudi Arabia, from seeking to advance the normalization with Israel without adequate political compensation for the Palestinians.

Current circumstances allow Israel to promote a **regional approach** conducive to a stable settlement, provide new opportunities for dealing with its challenges, and promote a more successful and effective response to a variety of regional threats and challenges within the framework of a regional and international partnership.

Components of the initiative

1. A political horizon. Setting a broadly supported political vision at the outset will provide impetus for a rapid transition from a state of conflict to a political process. This impetus will be based on a decisive policy shift and will include clear parameters for the final outcome (based on previous international decisions). The vision will illustrate the intentions of both sides, strengthen the moderate elements vis-à-vis the extremists, and generate a shift in the current mood among Israelis and Palestinians and throughout the Middle East.

The research conducted by Dr. Khalil Shikaki of the Palestinian Center for Survey and Policy Research in Ramallah shows that in the 1990s, with the Oslo era holding out hope of progress toward ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Palestinian public overwhelmingly supported the Palestinian Authority and a political settlement with Israel. Support for terrorism at that time was relatively low at 13%. In recent years, however, the data show that as right-wing governments in Israel torpedoed prospects of a political settlement, support for the Palestinian Authority declined significantly, whereas support for Hamas and terrorism soared to over 80%. These figures suggest that Palestinian public opinion vis-à-vis Israel depends on political-diplomatic developments and that a political horizon significantly affects support for terrorism.

2. An independent demilitarized Palestinian state living alongside Israel. The demilitarized state must be able to govern itself, assist Israel in effective counter-terrorism measures, enable political separation and thereby absolves Israel of the responsibility for more than 5 million Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority proved itself in the past both in terms of its security partnership with Israel and its basic ability to establish and run independent governmental institutions. Under Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, for over six years, it won praise

Israel's extreme religious right poses a major obstacle to advancing an Israeli-Palestinian arrangement. Its political leaders, who helped set in motion the judiciary overhaul, are currently promoting the reestablishment of settlements in the heart of the Gaza Strip and annexing it to Israel

on the part of Israel's defense establishment for enabling life-saving security coordination. In 2012, the World Bank commended the PA for its state-like capabilities. Investing in Palestinian institutional mechanisms, infrastructure, and governance capacity, along with implementing essential PA reforms, will enable the establishment of a capable Palestinian partner for a two-state future.

- 3. A US-led alliance of moderates.** Such an alliance would enable a more effective response against Iran and its proxies, underpinned by a deterrent American-Israeli security umbrella in the Middle East. It would also provide a tailwind for Israeli-Palestinian accommodation, facilitate the management and the financing of post-war measures, and enable the advancement of practical steps in Gaza and the West Bank. Going forward, it will contribute to appropriate solutions to core issues within the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.
- 4. A halt to settlements and annexation.** Israel's extreme religious right poses a major obstacle to advancing an Israeli-Palestinian arrangement. Its political leaders, who helped set in motion the wheels of a controversial overhaul of the country's judiciary over the past year, are currently promoting the reestablishment of settlements in the heart of the Gaza Strip, restoring Israeli control over the territory, and annexing it to Israel. Buoyed by the success of their rapid annexation measures in the West Bank since the establishment of the current government, their objective is to thwart all prospects of a peaceful agreement with the Palestinians. The settlements that are not adjacent to Israel's security fence, as well as the vast majority of the outposts established in the heart of the West Bank, serve as breeding grounds for Jewish terrorism and settler violence against Palestinians. They foment unrest, divert Israeli military forces and erode their preparedness for war, and severely damage Israel's international standing. A halt of the annexation moves is therefore vital, along with proactive steps signaling, both internally and externally, that Israel is headed for an agreement.

Action Plan – A Political Roadmap for Long-Term Security²

The innovations of the Israeli Initiative concept and its four component parts provide a platform for drawing up a feasible and immediate plan of action, starting with the end of the war and ending with an Israeli-Palestinian-regional political settlement. Defining in advance a timeframe for the phased implementation of the plan is important to allow its effective and realistic implementation, and avoid disruption of the process by hasty execution. Setting the timeframe is useful in preventing the erosion of the process and a decline of hope and trust among the various players. Timetables and a positive momentum will help prevent extremists from torpedoing the process. It will also allow time to execute the necessary change processes, on both sides, and avoid the collapse of the process right at its start.

The opening phase: ending the war and defining an agreed-upon political vision

Israel will advance an exit strategy from the war, while formulating a political vision that holds out hope of ending the cycle of violence and embarking on a path of arrangement, in

The conference will create the necessary link between defeating Hamas, advancing stabilization, demilitarization and rehabilitation in the Gaza Strip, and advancing the broader political vision

cooperation with the United States. The opening will include:

a. Convening an international peace conference. Launching the updated roadmap and bolstering external and internal legitimacy for its implementation process. The conference will create the necessary link between defeating Hamas, advancing stabilization, demilitarization and rehabilitation in the Gaza Strip, and advancing the broader political vision of a peaceful, demilitarized Palestinian state adjacent to the State of Israel. This vision will be affirmed by an updated UN Security Council resolution or implementation of the relevant ones already adopted - 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003), and 2334 (2016)³.

The peace conference will propose a hybrid model. The conference will include practical aspects, such as advancing a strategic plan to rebuild life-sustaining infrastructure in the Gaza Strip with international and regional assistance. At the same time, it will serve as the launch pad for the political process between Israel and the Palestinians, empowering and renewing the Palestinian Authority as a state-in-the-making. The model will constitute an expression of willingness to advance political negotiations eventually leading to the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state and normalization agreements established with Arab states such as Saudi Arabia.⁴

b. Establishing an international-regional framework. The framework – in essence, a reconfigured Quartet⁵ – will assist in and supervise implementation of the roadmap, and reflect the emerging global order led by the US and its allies, the European Union and leading Arab states (especially Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates). Russia, a member of the original Quartet, will not be included in the framework because it has linked itself with Iran and the “resistance axis”.

Despite the central role of the framework itself, the entire process will require American commitment and direct and ongoing involvement. The United States will serve as the controller in all matters related to the pace of progress and transition between phases of the plan. This is also a lesson learned from the failures of the 2003 roadmap, which allowed Israel and the Palestinians to halt progress whenever they wished.⁶

c. Declaring commitments to implement the roadmap.

Israel will declare its willingness to strengthen the Palestinian Authority as a state-in-the-making, to renew the connection between Gaza and the West Bank as a single territorial unit, to negotiate a final settlement, and to recognize a viable and demilitarized Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel.

The Palestinians will declare the 1967 territories (the Gaza Strip and West Bank) as the areas of the future Palestinian state. They will recognize Israel as a sovereign state in accordance with the principle of two states for two peoples, undertake to abandon the path of terrorism, lead de-radicalization and anti-incitement measures, and implement the principle of “one law - one weapon.”

The new international framework led by the United States, with the participation of European and Arab countries, will declare its willingness to assist in advancing and financing the roadmap framework, to promote normalization with Israel in the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative (see below), and to form a regional defense coalition, under US auspices.

The transition period: promoting Palestinian statehood, deepening regional partnership, halting settlements, laying the groundwork for a stable settlement

The transition phase will span two to three years, and begin immediately after the roadmap is launched. Its implementation will differ from that of the Oslo process, gradually shaping a two-state reality defined by a broad and agreed-upon political vision, with extensive regional assistance. This phase will include:

A new territorial approach. Measures will be taken to provide partial contiguity in the West Bank and gradually create a permanent connection between Gaza and the West Bank. The recognized division of the West Bank into Areas A, B and C will be changed as it serves the extreme religious right's efforts to assume control over most of Area C, which was originally intended to constitute the bulk of the future Palestinian state's territory.

Updated economic agreements. New agreements will be required to gradually advance an independent Palestinian economy integrated as much as possible into the surrounding Arab world, given that the 1994 Paris Protocol regulating the sides' economic relations perpetuates Palestinian economic dependence on Israel.

Promoting governance and internal security. The transition period will focus on a variety of reform processes in the Palestinian Authority and the establishment of a proper government system. This will also include a different security apparatus than the existing one, which will work in close coordination with the Israeli security establishment and be able to deal more effectively with the tasks of internal security and the fight against terrorism and incitement.

In parallel with the interstate measures, the regional arena will intensify its support during the transition period. The support and involvement of countries in the region and the international community will facilitate actions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, make it possible to promote rapid reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, provide guarantees to the Palestinians and Israel, and promote groundbreaking economic megaprojects. Contrary to the progression of events under the Oslo process, Israel will halt settlement measures in the heartland of the West Bank and the construction of illegal outposts during the transitional phase. This will block the accelerated annexation trend of the past year designed to prevent the territory's division into two states.

🕒 The sequence of actions in the transition period

a. Immediate measures: shaping external involvement, stabilizing security, addressing humanitarian issues, beginning reconstruction, and promoting a renewed and strengthened Palestinian Authority.

b. Measures to promote Palestinian statehood: international recognition of a future Palestinian state in agreement with Israel, promotion of confidence-building measures, return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip, and promotion of projects with regional aid.

c. Preparing the ground for a final settlement: Palestinian elections under appropriate conditions, and preparatory dialogue for negotiations.

The transition period will consist of ten main "building blocks" for construction of the envisioned political-security arrangement, that is, for deep long-term Israeli security.

The transition phase will gradually shape a two-state reality defined by a broad and agreed-upon political vision, with extensive regional assistance

The IDF's operations in Gaza will be limited in timeframe, with its residual presence confined to the outer perimeter of the Gaza Strip. A suitable alternative Palestinian government could eventually assume full control of the enclave in a gradual manner and with close international and regional assistance

1. Designing supportive international and regional involvement to assist in establishing a mechanism for the interim phase, towards the transfer of control over Gaza from Israel to an independent and effective Palestinian government. The situation in Gaza also requires immediate attention to humanitarian aspects and the promotion of a humanitarian-infrastructure strategy,⁷ which in itself will serve as an opportunity to integrate regional and international actors in Gaza on the day after the war. It is in Israel's interest to avoid a prolonged stay in Gaza. Reoccupying Gaza will require it to bear the civilian burden and prevent the rehabilitation and establishment of an alternative sustainable system of government. Therefore, Israel has two options:

The first is to support the establishment of a **multinational force** on the basis of a binding international resolution (by virtue of Chapter 7 of the UN Security Council). This peace-enforcing contingent will include combat troops from NATO frameworks, and hopefully also friendly Arab military forces. It would be designed to help establish a renewed Palestinian transitional regime, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and also lead the process of Gaza's reconstruction and the building of institutions for a future Palestinian state.⁸ However, even if Israel agrees to the deployment of an international-Arab force in the Gaza Strip (it has so far rejected the idea), other countries are unlikely to risk their soldiers, assume security responsibility for a simmering war zone, and defend Israel against Palestinian terrorism. Therefore, prospects of this alternative are low.

The second option is to shape an external mechanism, in cooperation with Arab countries, Europe and the United States, even without foreign feet on the ground. This would depend on Israeli willingness to accept a temporary Palestinian alternative to Hamas for partial control of the Gaza Strip, promote a clear outline for a political solution, and set a deadline for completion of its military activity to dismantle Hamas. Palestinian Authority agreement to such external involvement in addition to that of Israel will make it possible to advance the legal standing of the alternative regime and the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. Conditions for such moves must include limits on the timeframe of the IDF's operations in Gaza and its residual presence only within the outer perimeter of the Gaza Strip. A suitable alternative Palestinian government could eventually assume full control of the enclave in a gradual manner and with close international and regional assistance.

2. Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. The rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, which is essential for ensuring life-sustaining infrastructure, restoring some form of routine life, resettling the refugees, and building up resilience and a sense of security among Gazans as well, will be an international process and part of the overall political settlement process. The rehabilitation will be carried out from a state perspective, and will include the West Bank. Along with the massive planning and reconstruction of buildings and infrastructure destroyed in the war, it will also include infrastructure projects, employment and transportation and legitimize the economic connection between Gaza and the West Bank, as well as between Gaza and the Arab world, particularly the Gulf states. The rehabilitation process will also enable the connection of the Gaza Strip to existing regional economic projects and eventually advance independent Palestinian economic capabilities in order to reduce long-term Palestinian dependence on Israel.⁹

Israel faces the task of rehabilitating the western Negev communities, an effort that should be carried out with a comprehensive spatial perspective, while connecting to major infrastructure projects to enhance the region's resilience and its economic and security base

Israel, for its part, faces the task of rehabilitating the western Negev communities damaged or destroyed by Hamas. This effort should also be carried out with a comprehensive spatial perspective, while connecting to major infrastructure projects to enhance the region's resilience and its economic and security base.

- 3. Rebuilding a Revitalized Palestinian Authority as a basis for a state-in-the-making.** The Palestinian Authority will conduct an orderly process of security, institutional-structural and economic reforms designed to lay the foundation for a state-in-the making. A revitalized Palestinian Authority, imbued with renewed legitimacy, capacity and motivation, will rule the Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The PA reforms will be carried out under the leadership of the new international framework and in coordination with Israel and the existing Palestinian apparatuses. The reforms will be implemented in the spirit of the plans promoted in the past by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. The reforms will also include measures to promote de-radicalization of Palestinian society and profound change in the Palestinian security apparatus, and the education and judicial systems.¹⁰
- 4. International recognition of a Palestinian state.** The issue of global recognition of a Palestinian state has recently gained international support, particularly from the US administration and leading European countries. This idea is based on the understanding that recognition will create a dynamic that obliges Israel and the Palestinians to promote an inter-state reality at the present time, not necessarily after the signing of a final agreement between them. International recognition of a Palestinian state should not be implemented as a unilateral immediate move by the international system (as is currently shaping up). Instead, it should be orchestrated as a conditional and declarative move, under the leadership of the United States and other countries, to be implemented in coordination and agreement with the Israeli government. The recognition will relate to a demilitarized and viable Palestinian state living peacefully alongside Israel in accordance with a stable political settlement. In this framework, the recognition move could serve as a game changer. It could provide a tailwind to the momentum toward a two-state reality, significantly strengthen the moderate elements in Palestinian society, and deter attempts by the extreme religious right in Israel to implement West Bank annexation measures, resettle in the Gaza Strip, expand settlements located in the heartland of the West Bank and establish illegal outposts there.
- 5. Effective Palestinian counter-terrorism activity.** Along with the PA reform measures, the Palestinian security apparatus will be required to demonstrate effective action against terrorism and manifestations of violence and incitement. The PA will maintain extensive security coordination with Israel, round up illegally held weapons, and promote the de-radicalization of Palestinian society, including processes to establish interfaith tolerance and promote moderate Islamic education, with the assistance of Arab countries. De-radicalization of Palestinian society can succeed only under a significant political horizon.
- 6. Confidence-building measures by Israel.** Israel will advance steps vis-à-vis the Palestinian Authority on territorial and economic issues that will demonstrate its commitment to promote a stable political settlement based on the two-state solution. These will include:

 - the gradual resumption of passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip;

The Palestinian elections will exclude participation by candidates on behalf of Hamas or other terrorist organizations for the presidency or the Legislative Council, in accordance with the three principles set in the past by the Quartet and accepted by Israel

- ⦿ transfer of territories in the West Bank to Palestinian responsibility;
- ⦿ advancement of Palestinian master plans for construction and other projects;
- ⦿ convening of the Joint Economic Committee and updating the Paris Protocol to promote and nurture a Palestinian economy independent of Israel's;
- ⦿ release of Palestinian prisoners as a goodwill gesture conditioned on their commitment to abandon the path of violence and terrorism (in accordance with the successful model of the "wanted persons agreement" of 2007);¹¹
- ⦿ freezing construction in settlements deep inside the West Bank and evacuating illegal outposts in coordination with the US administration;
- ⦿ incentives to encourage settlers to evacuate homes deep in Palestinian territory and move to Israeli territory (preferably the Negev and Galilee) or to settlements near the Green Line (the settlement blocs) that are intended to remain in Israeli hands in any future arrangement;
- ⦿ promoting de-radicalization measures through a comprehensive government program (from the political echelon level down to field commanders) designed to prevent violence and terrorism by Jews against Palestinians in the West Bank;
- ⦿ a government decision designating a strengthened renewed Palestinian Authority as a vital Israeli national interest.

7. Establishing and integrating Gaza and the West Bank into regional mega-projects. Israelis and Palestinians have a shared interest in promoting regional projects, such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC),¹² employment and free trade zones, the Green-Blue Prosperity project,¹³ the EU's Southern Neighborhood program,¹⁴ plans to improve food security from a regional perspective, and more. Under an appropriate political framework, these projects offer transformational potential to promote stability and prosperity, as well as strengthen Israel's geostrategic status and pave the way to normalization. They will also facilitate the Palestinians' connection to the Middle East, thereby reducing their economic dependence on Israel. The Abraham Accords and arrangements with Saudi Arabia and other countries will enable leveraging the relative advantage of the countries in the Middle East – raising investments and Gulf capital, exporting knowledge and technologies from Israel, and promoting infrastructure and employment in Jordan, Egypt, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. A regional mechanism will be established to lead this aspect of the roadmap, serve as an advisory body to decision makers in the region, locate investors, recommend feasible projects, identify barriers and responses to them, and present guidelines for implementation.¹⁵

8. A joint mechanism to prevent escalation over the Temple Mount/Haram a-Sharif. A permanent mechanism for dialogue, coordination and cooperation on this sensitive and volatile issue will be established, consisting of representatives from Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority (perhaps additional Arab representatives, such as Saudi Arabia or Morocco). The mechanism will serve as a constant channel of communication for exchanging messages and information and building trust. Additionally, it will promote coordination and preparations for preventing crises on the Temple Mount/Haram a-Sharif and in the Holy Basin. This mechanism is intended to deal in advance with rising tensions rather than letting

Negotiations will be conducted simultaneously along two tracks: between Israel and the Palestinians, and between Israel, the Palestinians and Arab states. The latter will help the parties promote solutions to the core issues in dispute, while at the same time preparing the ground for normalization in the Middle East

them fester and erupt as is the case now. The mechanism will include experts and field officials familiar with the situation in the Holy Basin and Jerusalem, deal with the civilian fallout from various developments, not only with their security dimension, and include government echelons acting in coordination with decision makers.¹⁶

9. Palestinian elections. Elections in the Palestinian arena will be held towards the end of the transition period. They will be conducted under the terms of an advanced political process illustrating the achievements of a moderate political path, with American and Arab supervision and in coordination with Israel. The elections will take place in accordance with the three principles set in the past by the Quartet and accepted by Israel – participation will only be allowed by candidates committed to abandoning the path of terrorism, recognizing Israel as a sovereign state, and accepting the official agreements signed in the past by Israel and the Palestinians. These conditions will exclude participation by candidates on behalf of Hamas or other terrorist organizations for the presidency or the Legislative Council.¹⁷ At this stage, the parties will also begin a preliminary dialogue with senior members of the elected Palestinian leadership and with US-allied Arab leaders to determine a joint strategy for bilateral and regional final status negotiations.

10. A regional defense alliance led by the United States. In conjunction with the other milestones, a regional defense coalition will be launched, led by the United States and Israel and with the participation of Arab states – with an emphasis on Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE and Morocco. The coalition will ensure the presence of American deterrent forces in the region,¹⁸ and operate in military, intelligence, economic, and political partnerships between Israel and the countries of the region to deal with the Iranian threat as well as other strategic regional challenges, such as jihadi terrorism and the climate crisis.

The final phase: Negotiations on an Israeli-Palestinian-regional settlement

This final phase of the roadmap will last one to two years. It will include negotiations between a decisive Israeli leadership and a new, legitimate Palestinian leadership based on the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative, which will be updated according to current circumstances and informed by preliminary dialogue with the United States and Saudi Arabia. The negotiations will lead to a stable settlement and sustainable and multidimensional normalization in the region.

At this stage, negotiations will be conducted **simultaneously along two tracks**, one between Israel and the Palestinians, the other between Israel, the Palestinians and Arab states. The latter will help the parties promote solutions to the core issues (security, refugees, Jerusalem) in dispute, while at the same time preparing the ground for Israeli-Arab normalization in the Middle East. The results of the negotiations will provide the State of Israel with agreed, recognized and secure borders and boost its international standing, integration into the Middle East region, and peace and security for its citizens alongside a demilitarized and viable Palestinian state.

Addressing practical challenges to advancing the roadmap

The democratic camp must present a real counterweight to the radical forces, promoting instead a new leadership capable of adopting and implementing fateful decisions, and propose a shared new Israeli narrative that prevents further deepening of Israel's internal rift

The roadmap of the Israeli Initiative is a practical and feasible plan to provide Israel with deep and long-term security. In order to fully implement it and realize its potential, not only must Israel decide that it wants to resolve the conflict and is willing to adopt the relevant measures to that end, it must also deal effectively and continuously with four main challenges:

Preventing Hamas from regaining power. Israel must ensure that the plan is not torpedoed right from the start by Palestinian insistence on political participation of Islamist elements based on the argument that they are part of Palestinian society and expected to play a role in future Palestinian rule. To this end, Israel and the international community will set clear conditions to prevent Hamas empowerment, let alone its return to power. The Quartet's three conditions for Palestinian elections – recognition of Israel, recognition of agreements with Israel, and abandoning the path of terrorism – will allow Islamic political participation under these terms. Full compliance with these conditions will make it abundantly clear that none of the candidates are running on behalf of Hamas and that the elections are designed to lead to domestic unity and an arrangement-oriented approach paving the way to real change.

New Israeli leadership. A government whose leaders promote eternal war or refrain in every possible way from resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot lead Israel to deep and long-term security. Israel urgently needs a government that adopts the basic principles of this plan, first and foremost the vital necessity of the two-state solution. The life-affirming democratic camp must present a real counterweight to the radical forces taking the country hostage, promoting instead a new leadership capable of adopting and implementing vital and fateful decisions, and propose a shared new Israeli narrative that prevents further deepening of Israel's internal rift.

Extremists' attempts to sabotage the process. The expected attempts by extremists to sabotage the political process are a major challenge, especially given the gradual nature of the plan's implementation over several years. Iran and its proxies, Hamas and the Palestinian terrorist organizations all have a proven record of blocking political progress. In dealing with them, Israel will be required to combine deterrence and military response with political-diplomatic efforts, while combating radicalization and financing terrorist organizations with the assistance of countries in the region.

Building domestic Israeli trust in the process. Data compiled in recent decades suggests that most Israelis believed in the need for military might combined with a stable political settlement. Nonetheless, confidence must be nurtured in the feasibility of such a combination and in the Israeli leadership's ability to uphold it. This requires unequivocal and consistent enforcement of the law against acts of violence and terrorism by Jews against Palestinians, and a broad public process highlighting the benefits and practical advantages of the political vision – in the short and long term – as opposed to an "eternal war" concept centered on the reoccupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank annexation.

The Israeli Initiative

A Roadmap for Long-Term Security

Roadmap 2.0

Timetable: **3-5 years**

| Stage I Political Horizon | Stage II Transitional Period (2-3 years) | Stage III Negotiations (1-2 years) |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Convening an international-regional conference - Launching the roadmap - Establishing an international forum to monitor the roadmap's implementation - Issuing declarations of commitment | <p>Immediate steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishing international-regional mechanism to advance solutions on the ground - Starting the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip - Building a Revitalized Palestinian Authority <p>Advancing demilitarized statehood:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Global recognition of a demilitarized Palestinian state - Taking measures to strengthen the state-in-the-making - Proven Palestinian action to counter terrorism and incitement - Establishing regional mega-projects <p>Preparing ground for arrangement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holding Palestinian elections - Holding a preparatory dialogue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementing a regional blueprint based on the Arab Peace Initiative - Establishing a demilitarized and viable Palestinian State - Normalizing relations between Israel and the Arab world |
| <p>Establishing a US-Led Regional Defense Coalition</p> | | |

Summary

The catastrophe that befell Israel on October 7, can serve as an opportunity to advance a stable Israeli-Palestinian-regional settlement that will ensure the vital national and security interests of the State of Israel and realize the Zionist vision that underpinned its establishment as the safe, egalitarian, and democratic state of the Jewish people

The State of Israel stands at a historic crossroads. The events of October 7 and the war that followed have made clear that the conflict management concept that has dominated the political and public discourse in recent years cannot provide deep and long-term security for the citizens of the State of Israel. They demonstrate that only the fundamental resolution of the conflict can achieve that overarching objective. Prime Minister Netanyahu plans eternal war, as does the extreme religious right, which is leading practical and fateful steps to reconquering and resettling the Gaza Strip and annexing Gaza and the West Bank to Israel. Meanwhile, the Netanyahu government has also rejected all measures designed to promote a suitable governmental alternative to Hamas in the Gaza Strip. It has also undermined relations with Israel's closest friend the United States and with the moderate Arab states, and eradicated Israeli hopes for a different, secure and positive future.

The only way to avoid sliding down the steep slope to which these plans lead is to present a clear alternative shaped by Israel's democratic camp. This alternative vision is based on a decision to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and driven first and foremost by the need to guarantee security for the state and its citizens. It is designed to end the war forced upon Israel with a worthy achievement ensuring Israel's security and political standing.

The road map of the Israeli Initiative was written with a clear and coherent understanding of the conditions in which Israel finds itself, and the lessons offered by past experience. It addresses the constraints posed by the strategic environment, chief among them the need for a well-defined and clear political horizon and gradual and monitored progress toward it.

From a historical perspective, the catastrophe that befell Israel on October 7, like the disaster that befell Israel 50 years ago in the Yom Kippur War, and perhaps even more so, can serve as an opportunity to advance a stable Israeli-Palestinian-regional settlement. Such an arrangement will ensure the vital national and security interests of the State of Israel and realize the Zionist vision that underpinned its establishment as the safe, egalitarian, and democratic state of the Jewish people.

Notes

¹ A poll conducted in mid-February 2024 by the Accord Center shows that a majority of 53% favors a US-backed political-security agreement, which includes the establishment of a Palestinian state in exchange for Arab states' recognition of Israel and normalization agreements between Arab states and Israel. Additional surveys conducted during the Gaza War show that 67% of Israelis think advancing a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is urgent, while a solid majority of 58% believes that political-security arrangements combined with military might will provide security for Israel. In contrast, only 28% of Israelis believe that security will be achieved through the occupation and annexation of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip to Israel.

² The original 2003 roadmap in the era of Ariel Sharon and Yasser Arafat was not implemented and Israel expressed reservations regarding parts of the plan. However, it is accepted to this day as a constituent and final international document agreed upon by both sides. The original roadmap is also based on the two-state vision, and on the gradual creation of Palestinian statehood.

³ In the likely event of Russian and Chinese vetoes preventing the US from advancing an updated Security Council resolution, it will be possible to build on President Joe Biden's speech, similar to the model of President Bush's 2002 speech, which served as the basis for the original roadmap.

⁴ Kacowicz, Arie. 2023. "Getting Out of the Gaza Mud: A Proposal for a Political Solution." Mitvim Institute and Berl Katznelson Foundation.

⁵ Quartet for Middle East Affairs: An international framework comprised of the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia in order to oversee the implementation of the roadmap (since 2003) for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Given the decline of the political process, the framework has become irrelevant in recent years.

⁶ See: Weisglass, Dov. 2012. *Arik Sharon: Prime Minister – A Personal View*. (pp. 180-192). Weisglass describes the prime minister's support for the 2003 roadmap, which, in Israel's view, imposed draconian conditions on the transition between stages, and would not have allowed the Palestinians to achieve statehood.

⁷ In formulating a humanitarian strategy for Gaza, the core components (energy, water, sewage, health, food and shelter) must be considered. The strategy will be based on division into stages: the first phase will focus on humanitarian and health stabilization and ensuring the minimum needs required based on international indicators (such as the Sphere standard). The second phase will focus on developing the necessary infrastructure and restoring conditions to the pre-war situation. The third phase will promote well-being and independence, and involve the promotion of projects (infrastructure, institution building). The practical steps will be linked to shaping a leadership and professional echelon other than Hamas, supervising and implementing standards of

good governance, and promoting long-term solutions to enable the transition from refugee status to permanence.

⁸ Arieli, Nir; Stoil, Jacobs; Walters, Mary Elizabeth. 2023. "Multinational Force Deployment in Gaza: The Opportunities, Challenges and Conditions for Success." Mitvim Institute and Berl Katznelson Foundation.

⁹ Gal, Yitzhak. 2023. "The Day After the Gaza War: Building an Economic-State Infrastructure in Gaza as Part of an Israeli-Palestinian Settlement in the Context of Regional Cooperation." Mitvim Institute and Berl Katznelson Foundation.

¹⁰ Goldsmith, John. 2024. "What is a renewed Palestinian Authority?" Mitvim Institute and Berl Katznelson Foundation.

¹¹ In July 2007, an agreement was promoted between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to strengthen moderates opposed to the path of Hamas and terrorism. Under terms of the agreement, counterterrorism activities against about 170 wanted Fatah members in Judea and Samaria would be suspended on condition that they sign a commitment to abandon terrorism and surrender their weapons. Israel announced that it would consider expanding the list to include others under the same conditions. Attacks against Israel in the West Bank following the agreement almost completely ceased for an extended period, with the exception of stone throwing and petrol bombs.

¹² The IMEC was announced at the G20 summit (2023) in response to China's Silk Road project. It envisions the construction of a transportation corridor running by sea from the coast of India through the Strait of Hormuz to Dubai, continuing by railway to Haifa via Saudi Arabia and Jordan, via maritime transport to Piraeus, and from there to northern Europe. A memorandum of understanding was signed at the summit on building a railway and maritime network aimed at increasing trade, and enabling access to energy resources and digital communications between the participating countries.

¹³ <https://ecopeaceme.org/he/elementor-12455/>

¹⁴ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/programmes/southern-neighbourhood>

¹⁵ Zanaly, Omer. 2021. "Interstate Framework for the Advancement of Cross-Border Projects." The Israel Initiative.

¹⁶ Lehres, Lior. 2022. "All eyes on the Temple Mount and the match in hand." Mitvim Institute.

¹⁷ Lavi, Ephraim. 2024. "Elections in the Palestinian Arena: A Necessary Move to Achieve a Stable Political Settlement." Mitvim Institute and Berl Katznelson Foundation.

¹⁸ Murciano, Gil. 2022. "The road to alliance in the Middle East runs through Washington – Opinion". Jerusalem Post.



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