

For the Biden-Harris Administration



# The "Halas" Deal

Solutions to the Israel/Gaza impasse

Freeing hostages  
and prisoners

Ending the war while  
accomplishing mutual  
goals

Achieving post-war  
security and  
normalization

Itai Kohavi, PhD | December 2023

Halas = **Enough already!** خلاص חלאס





**Itai Kohavi, PhD**  
**International Relations**  
Based on my PhD research  
on negotiations during  
Israeli-Palestinian conflicts

- *Executive Summary*
- *Plan*



Kellogg



Istanbul



Jericho



Harvard



Tel Aviv



Ramallah



Tel Aviv



# Executive Summary



## **ASAP: Offer the PLO and Palestinian Authority (PA) to take over Gaza, post war, as part of an agreement with Israel**

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- The PLO and PA would lead the way by appointing an appropriate leadership to govern the Gaza Strip.



**Israel would agree to any reasonable nominee from the PLO and PA who could gain the trust of Gazans and lead to stability and prosperity**

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*Marwan Barghouti*



*Husam Said Zomlot*



*Other nominees*



**Our recommendation is to quickly form a new professional Palestinian leadership for Gaza named "ProGaza" with the following guidelines:**

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- Fully professional leadership without politicians (a Technocracy)
- Palestinian professionals from Gaza, the West Bank and the diaspora
- A temporary leadership that will last for 4 years
- Under the wings of the UN and the PLO
- Formed by the Palestinian UN delegation to the UN with professional consultation from international entities



## Israel would release Palestinian prisoners

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- Palestinian prisoners would be released
- Based on certain criteria, some prisoners would return to the West Bank and/or Gaza and some would be released to Lebanon or other countries
- This has been done before – more than once
- Those released to other countries would be able to return to Gaza or the West Bank after a certain period of time – based on specific criteria, PA stability, and the security situation



# Hamas would **release** all hostages

The release would be simultaneous with the release of the Palestinian prisoners





## Hamas's **armed men** in Gaza

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- Would voluntarily disarm
- The leadership would relocate internationally
- Israel would commit to non-aggression against the disarmed Hamas militants and its leadership as long as they are not involved in planning or inciting violence against Israel or Jewish targets



## Hamas **military** power

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Following the disarmament, Israel would destroy all Hamas and Islamic Jihad military facilities in Gaza and all means of weapon production



## The PLO and Palestinian Authority would take over the Gaza Strip; the IDF would implement security measures

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- **The IDF would retreat to the Israeli border**
- **Security measures would ensure:**
  - The safety of the Israeli population adjacent to the border
  - No weapons are produced or smuggled into Gaza



# Immediately initiate an Israeli-Palestinian security and peace process

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## Goal:

Security and normalization, based  
on a two-state solution



## Sign a peace agreement with Saudi Arabia

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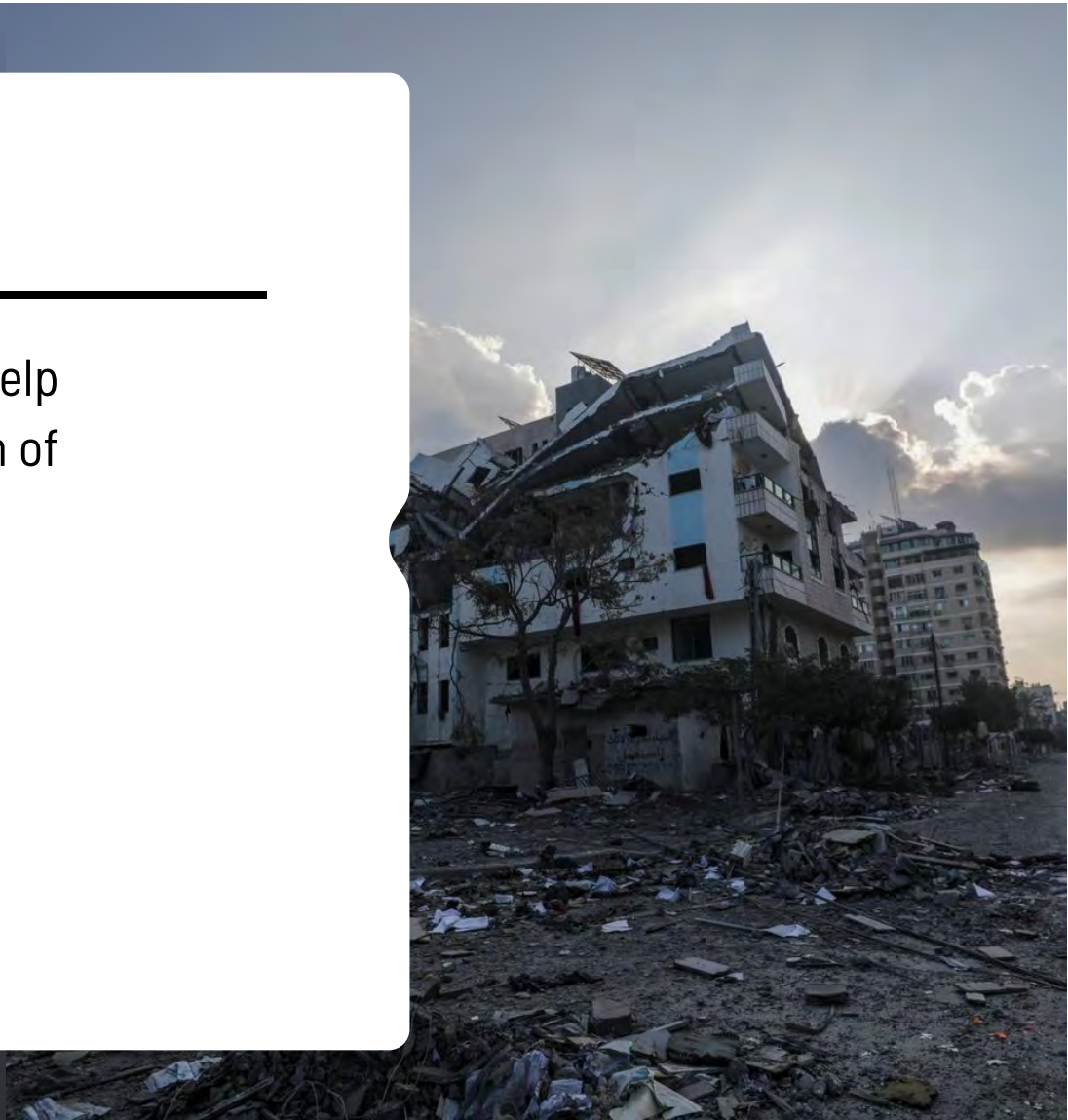
Immediately following the initiation of the Israeli-Palestinian security and peace process.



## Rebuild Gaza

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The international community would help rebuild Gaza and support the creation of a stable Palestinian state



## Initial Challenges

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- **Hamas may refuse to participate and/or have unrealistic demands**

The alternative for Hamas is to fight to the death in Gaza, during which time, Gazans will suffer. This will likely prevent Israel's release of most Palestinian prisoners from jail. This will also postpone the return of Palestinian control over Gaza.

- **Countries will not agree to host Hamas men**

It's a problem to overcome.



## Initial Challenges

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- **Israel may refuse to release some prisoners that Hamas insists on releasing**

In the past, Israel released 1,000 prisoners for 1 Israeli

- **Israel may refuse to stop the war before killing most of Hamas's armed men**

Israel is likely willing to stop the war for a serious deal

- **Israel may refuse to release Hamas's armed men to certain countries, such as Lebanon**

This issue will need to be resolved

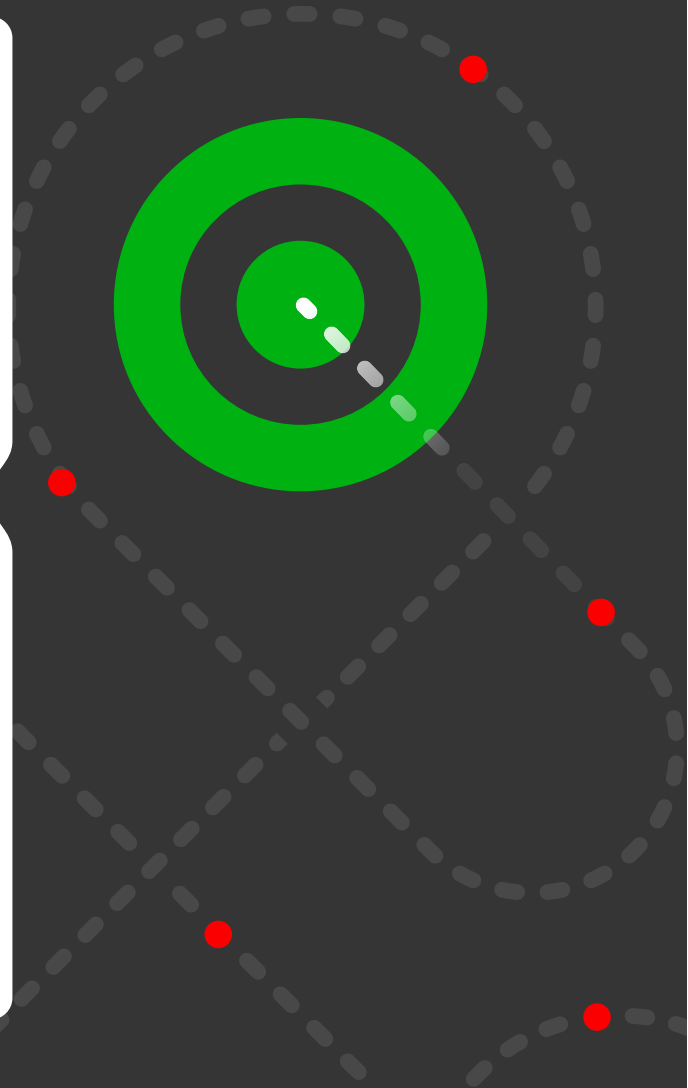




This plan is **risky**, but it's the least risky and the most **promising** of all the possible alternatives

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- **It's the safest way for Israel to achieve its two defined goals:**
  - Freeing the hostages while they are still alive
  - Eliminating the military and political power of Hamas in Gaza
- **It's the best and maybe the last opportunity for the Palestinians to reach a two-state solution and live a hopeful future**



## Peace has proven to provide the best security for Israel.

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- **The safest and most stable Israeli borders are the result of peace agreements:**
  - With Egypt: Since 1979
  - With Jordan: Since 1994

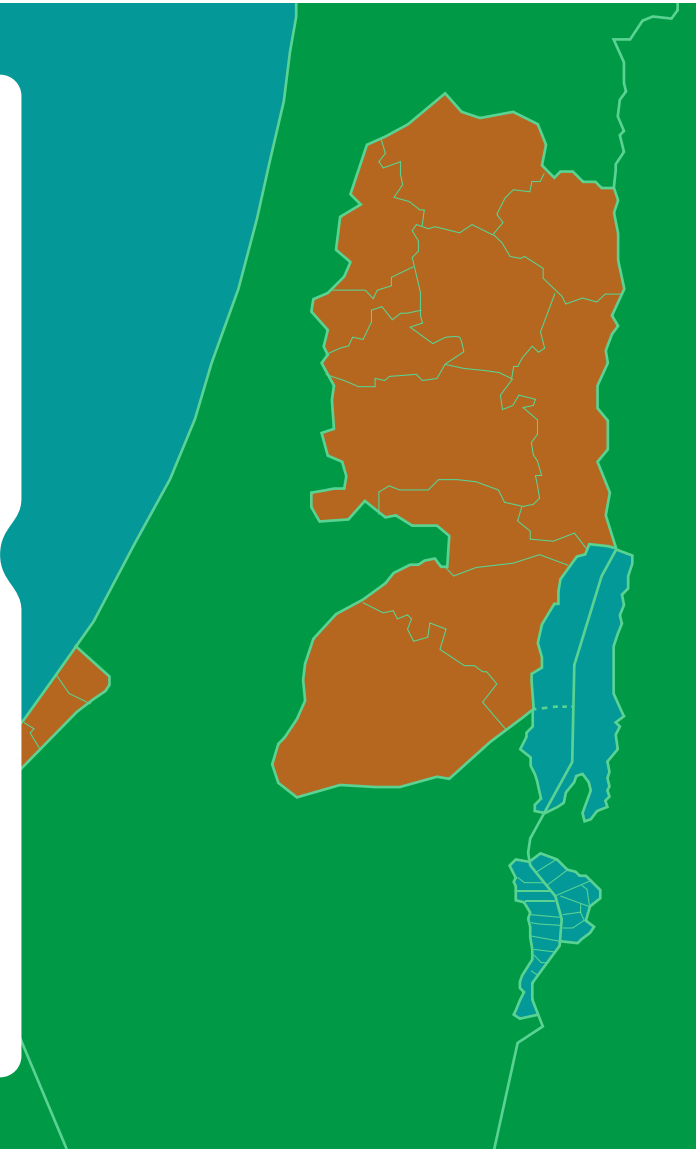
Peace and security have survived changes of governments, the Arab Spring, a flood of refugees into Jordan, intifadas, and wars in Gaza and Lebanon.



## **Peace through security** is the best way for the Palestinian people to secure land

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- **As part of peace agreements, Israel gave land to:**
  - Egypt: 60,000 km<sup>2</sup> including settlements
  - Jordan: 430 km<sup>2</sup>, larger than the area of the Gaza Strip



## Leaders should lead. The people will follow.

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- President Sadat of Egypt was rumored to be a fan of Nazism when he was young
- In Jan. 1978, 2 months after Sadat landed in Jerusalem, only 33% of Jewish Israelis believed that Israel should return Sinai for peace



## Leaders should lead. The people will follow.

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- In June 1978, only 41% of Jewish Israelis believed that Egypt would be willing to sign a peace agreement with terms realistic for Israel
- In Jan. 1979, 61% of Jewish Israelis believed it
- In Jan. 1980 (10 months after the peace agreement was signed), 74% believed that the peace agreement was the right decision





This concludes the  
**Executive Summary**

*Let's dig deeper*

**Part 1**

Solution for the hostages and prisoners  
while eliminating core Hamas power in  
Gaza

**Part 2**

Security and peace process:  
a different approach

- Stage 1
- Stage 2

# Part 1

# Solution

for the hostages and prisoners  
while eliminating core Hamas  
power in Gaza

# The win-win-win solution should be introduced ASAP to increase the number of hostages returned alive

- Exchange of hostages and prisoners
- Demilitarization of Gaza
- The PLO and PA would take over and appoint new leadership for Gaza
- Israel would commit to a two-state-based security and peace process







**A win-win-win solution is emotionally hard during wartime. Any other solution, however, will lead to a worse future**

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- **Exchange of hostages and prisoners**

Win for Israel. Win for Hamas. Win for the PLO and PA

- **Survival of the majority of the individuals behind the military arm of Hamas, but unarmed**

½ win for Israel; ½ win for Hamas; a win for the PLO and PA

Israel would rather destroy Hamas in Gaza and can't consent to Hamas remaining armed there. Hamas prefers to stay armed in Gaza, but also wants to survive and achieve its other goals for the Palestinian cause. The PA prefers having a weak Hamas in Gaza



**A win-win-win solution is emotionally hard during wartime. Any other solution, however, will lead to a worse future**

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- **The PLO and PA would take over and appoint a new governor for Gaza**

Gaza citizens need a trusted Palestinian governor who can rehabilitate Gaza. They also need hope. If they have both, they'll help build a better future. It will be a win for them, a win for the PA and a win for Israel

From Hamas's perspective, a new PLO and PA leadership in Gaza is better than a non-Palestinian governor



**A win-win-win solution is emotionally hard during wartime. Any other solution, however, will lead to a worse future**

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- **Israel would commit to participate in a two-state-based security and peace process**
  - It would be an immediate win for the PLO and PA.
  - Israel, with a diverse security cabinet, is likely to agree, albeit reluctantly
  - Qatar, Egypt, many other Arab states, and the international community would support this initiative
  - Hamas is not likely to break the deal because of such a process

## If Hamas, the PLO and PA, or Israel delay a solution it's likely to lead to a **lose-lose-lose future**

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- Israel is likely to eliminate 80% of Hamas's military power relatively quickly. Then Israel will stay in Gaza to hunt Hamas and Islamic Jihad until there is another solution
- Constant fighting is likely the future of Gazans and Israelis, similar to experience in other conflicts: Vietnam, Afghanistan, Lebanon
- Most Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners won't be released anytime soon
- The population of the West Bank (Palestinians and Israelis) will suffer from an increasing level of violence that will spill into Israel
- The relationships between Israel and Arab states are likely to deteriorate



# High-risk/high-profile leadership

Example | Marwan Barghouti

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## About

- Born in 1959 near Ramallah
- Convicted by Israeli court for murders; in prison since 2002
- Was a Palestinian leader in both the First and Second Intifadas
- Supported the peace process and then turned to violent resistance
- Possibly the most popular Palestinian who can unite the Palestinian people for peace or for war



# High-risk/high-profile leadership

Example | Marwan Barghouti

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## Challenges

- The PA may object because Barghouti has a lot of political power
- Israel may object because he is a convicted murderer
- Barghouti is not from Gaza
- Risk: If Israel and the PA don't pursue a security and peace agreement, Barghouti may lead the Palestinians to an intifada and war instead. He did it before.



# Low-risk/low-profile leadership

Example | Husam Said Zomlot

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## About

- Born in 1973 in Rafah, a Gaza Strip refugee camp
- A senior member of Fatah
- Head of the Palestinian mission to the UK, and led the Palestinian mission to the USA
- PhD in International Political Economy
- Was a professor at Birzeit University in Ramallah and a scholar in residence at Harvard



# Low-risk/low-profile leadership

Example | Husam Said Zomlot

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## Challenges

- Left Gaza long ago; hasn't suffered with the people of Gaza
- A diplomat appointed by the existing PA leadership
- Doesn't have the credibility or "street cred" of a freedom fighter who sacrificed himself for the Palestinian cause – in the eyes of the Palestinian youth
- Will need to build credibility with personal integrity and results





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## Main **challenges** of the new PLO and PA leadership in Gaza

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- **Guaranteeing the safety of both Gaza and Israeli residents**
  - Using PA armed forces in the right way
  - Coordinating with the IDF
- **Rebuilding Gaza: Health, infrastructure, construction, the economy, etc.**
- **Providing hope for a better future**



## Main **challenges** of the PA in Ramallah

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- Helping the new leadership in Gaza overcome its challenges
- Guaranteeing the safety of the Palestinian and Israeli populations in the West Bank
- Partnering in a security and peace process with Israel



## Israel's **commitments** to the PLO and PA

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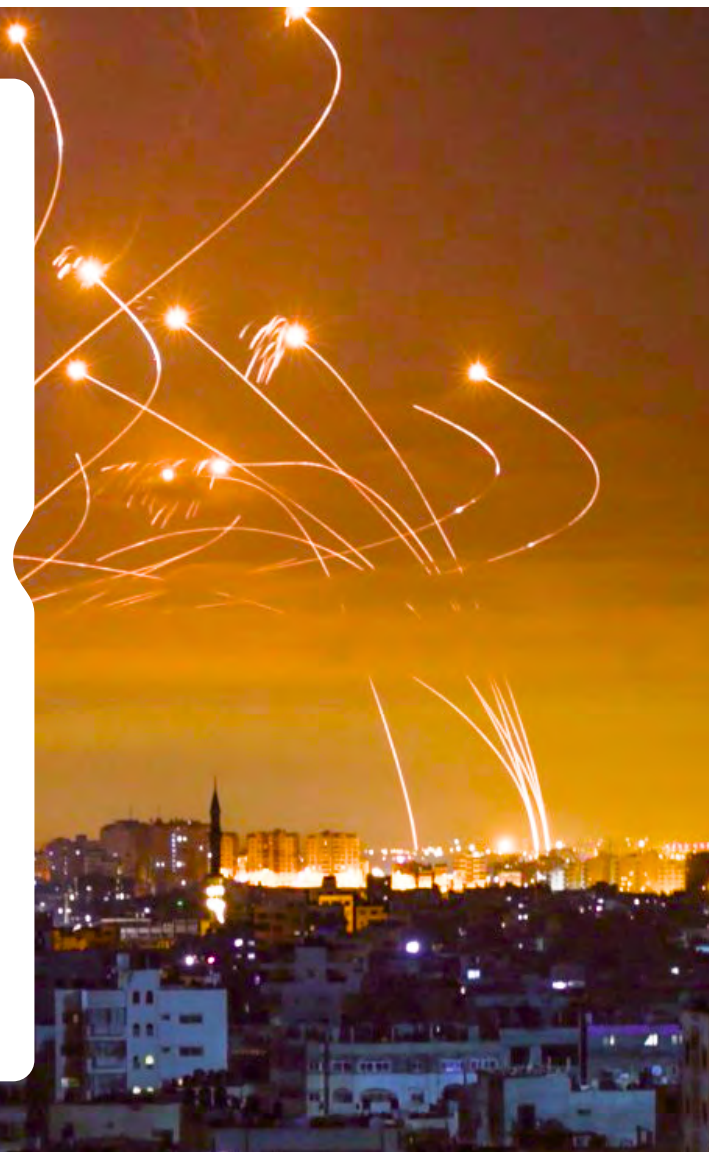
- Partnering in a security and peace process
- Stopping construction/expansion of settlements during the security and peace process beyond natural growth inside the main settlements
- Respecting and being especially diligent in maintaining the status quo of the Al-Aqsa Mosque during the peace process



## Timeline | While the war continues

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- Immediately: Initiate back-channel discussions between Israel and the PA
- Following initial consent of both parties, share the agreed-upon plan with the US, Egypt and Qatar
- Immediately thereafter, share this plan with Hamas via intermediaries
- Negotiate, sign, execute the plan



# Part 2

# Security and Peace Process

Stage 1

## Avoid the following mistakes:

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- Don't start by discussing the core issues: borders, security, right of return, holy places
- Don't start by discussing the secondary issues: water, radio frequency coordination, etc.
- Don't start by spending too much time on framing the process, trust-building measures, etc. Follow this plan, and trust will follow gradually



## Stage 1 - Focus on the following single goal:

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- Design together (Israel and the PA) a Palestinian state that will have a high probability of success:

### **Stable**

Population  
Governance  
Economy

### **Peaceful**

Security  
Education





# Building a successful Palestinian state is challenging and requires planning ahead

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## Example

- If a Palestinian state is formed, and one million refugees from Gaza and other countries wish to relocate to the West Bank, can the Palestinian state absorb them all at once while providing work, housing, education, etc.?



# Building a successful Palestinian state is challenging and requires planning ahead

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## Example

- What will be the pillars of the Palestinian economy? Tech? Services? Banks? Tourism? Other?
- How will the housing challenge be solved for a state that will be very crowded: Villages? Rawabi-like? Dubai-like? Manhattan-like?
- How can the international community help?



# Why planning a stable Palestinian state together is key to breaking the impasse

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- **If a Palestinian state becomes a failed state, then either:**
  - The regime will collapse, and Palestine will become a dangerous state; or,
  - The Palestinian central government won't be strong enough to control the radicals who will act against Israel. In such a case, Israel will eventually take over Palestine



## Why is Stage 1 essential?

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- If the PLO and PA and Israel can't jointly imagine a Palestinian state that is likely to become a success, there is no point in discussing the other issues
- The security risk of a failed Palestinian state is a risk that neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis would take on



## Showing good will

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### During the process:

- Israel would suspend all settlement expansions, apart from natural expansions inside the largest settlement blocks
- Israel would do its best to prevent provocative and illegal settler actions against Palestinians
- The PA would do its best to prevent Palestinian violence against Israelis
- The PA would do its best to build a new ecosystem in Gaza



## Form a Crisis Solution Team on day one

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- The Crisis Solution Team (CST) would include Israeli and Palestinian members
- The goal of this team would be to ensure that when crises are caused by hostile actions of radicals on either side, these hostile actions don't stop the security and peace process



## Form a Crisis Solution Team on day one

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- Violent actions by radicals seeking to stop the security and peace process are not an “if.” They will occur, and they will be terrible. Don’t let them influence the process
- Violent radical actions could include awful activities that kill civilians or affect holy places
- The CST should prepare ahead of time a protocol of responses for such actions



# Timeline

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- A kickoff meeting to initiate the security and peace process should be held immediately following the execution of an agreement between Israel and Hamas





# Part 2

# Security and Peace Process

Stage 2

## Stage 2: Solve the core issues and secondary issues

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- The core issues: borders, security, right of return, holy places
- The secondary issues: water, radio frequency coordination, etc.
- Start approximately where Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas stopped



**While Stage 1 is similar to dating,  
Stage 2 is similar to pregnancy.  
Make sure that you're ready for the  
results before you start**

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Unlike the collaborative Stage 1 effort to plan a viable state, the Stage 2 negotiation process on core issues will likely cause radicals from each side to fight it, both violently and politically



## Set the goal to be a definitive final agreement, not a multi-stage agreement

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- Theoretically, a multi-stage agreement is prudent because it limits the risk
- In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a multi-stage agreement won't work because the radicals will ruin it in the first stage
- The only way to (a) reach a security and peace agreement; and (b) be successful in implementing it, is by signing a definitive final agreement



## Overcoming the power of radical ideologists

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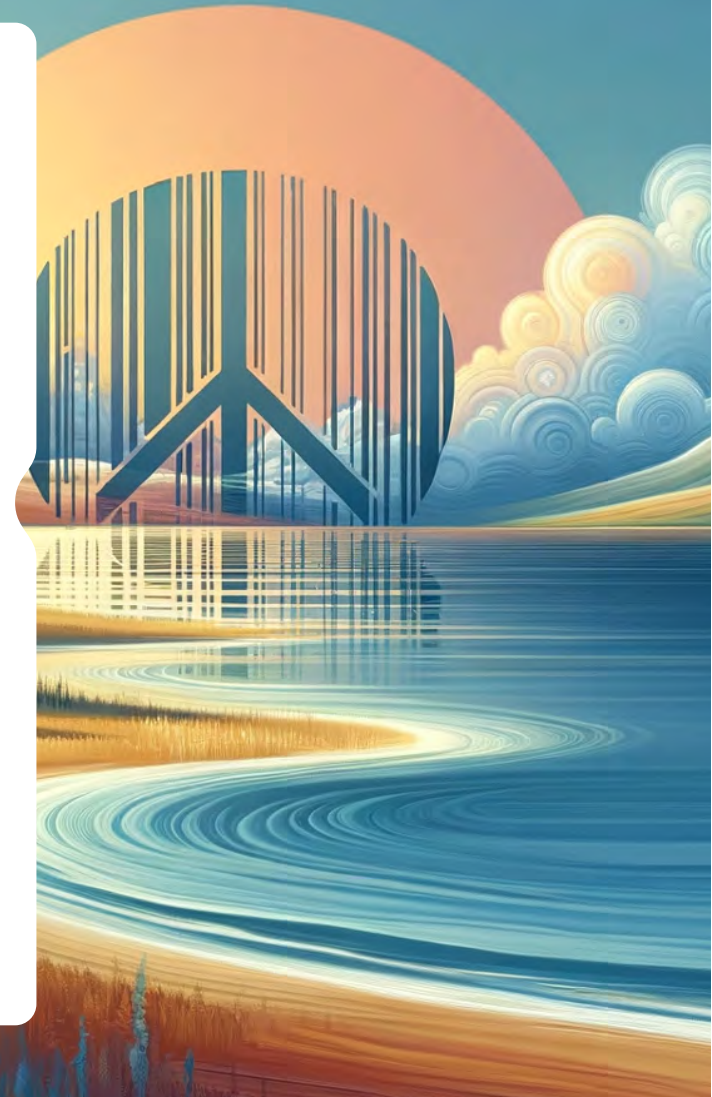
- Approximately 150,000 Israelis and Palestinians (combined) are actively radical in their struggle to stop any Israeli-Palestinian process that could lead to a two-state solution
- They won't change their minds, and they'll fight their leaders. Don't waste your time trying to convince them
- They will act! Get ready and focus on minimizing the impact of their actions



## **'Security and peace' are worth it**

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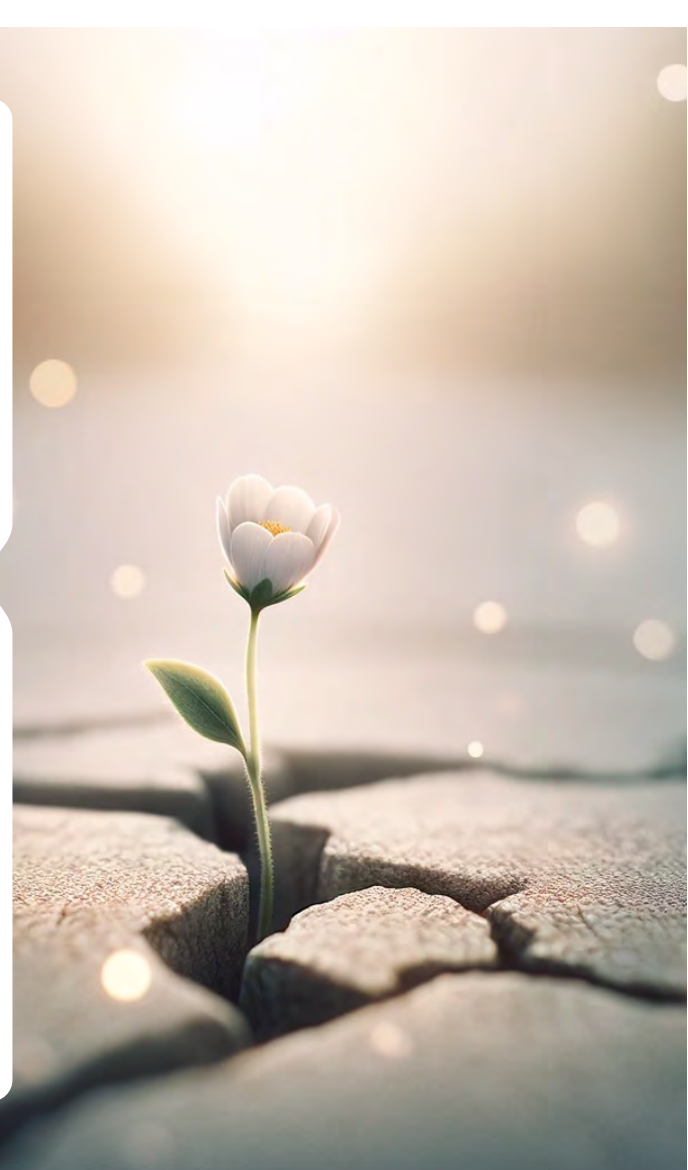
- Yes, people on both sides have to compromise on some of their dreams
- Yes, this strategy involves risks
- But, it's less risky than ongoing wars, and if successful, it will create a whole new future



## It's possible

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- Abu Mazen and Ehud Olmert almost reached an agreement (based on the leaders of the Israeli and Palestinian negotiation teams)
- The vast majority of Israeli security leaders have stated that:
  - Abu Mazen truly wanted to reach an agreement in 2007-8
  - Israel will be able to combine security and peace if a Palestinian state is formed alongside Israel. Detailed security arrangements were discussed in the 2007-8 peace negotiations
  - The two-state solution is the best long-term solution for the citizens of both sides





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Thank you